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Book Review

David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Five Centuries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. vii + 528. $35.00 (hardcover).

David Sorkin's *Jewish Emancipation* is a wide-ranging study concerned with the multidirectional process of emancipation - an elastic term that encompasses both civil and political rights - for Jews from the late medieval period to the present. His aim is to broaden our conception of emancipation, and to do so in a way that goes beyond the "east-west binary" that has dominated and obscured scholarship on the political status of Jews for the last half century. To do so, he structures his book both chronologically and across three zones of emancipation: Western Europe (largely France and England and their colonies), Central Europe (states that were part of the Holy Roman and Hapsburg empires), and Eastern Europe (Poland and Russia). Sorkin also includes a chapter on the Ottoman Empire, though its inclusion feels a little more disconnected than others centered in his tripartite scheme. Central to this transnational study is the controversial claim that emancipation, not the Holocaust or the foundation of the state of Israel, is crucial to understanding modern Jewish history.

During the seventeenth century, Jews in Western Europe gained civil rights as inhabitants of merchant colonies due to the growth of mercantilist policies. Commercial success also put Jews on equal footing with Christian burghers in the private, magnate-controlled towns of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In the Holy Roman Empire, however, Jews did not gain corporate or collective political status. Instead, some individuals (known as Court Jews) were granted privileges such as permission to buy and sell real estate and the freedom of travel so long as they generated revenue for the emperor. Privileges and favorable status were tenuous: Jews could face extreme taxes or be expelled from the empire if revenues suffered.

In part two, Sorkin focuses on the ideological and legal underpinnings of emancipation that grew out of the Enlightenment. In Central Europe, he contends that Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II's edicts of toleration for religious minorities had the most significant impact on the creation of conditional emancipation. Tuscany and Lombardy became the "laboratory" for early reforms. Jews were allowed to worship freely and

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became property owners. In some instances, they were even allowed to participate in municipal government. Their integration, though, was contingent upon increased economic productivity and their adoption of German language and education. Conditional emancipation had limited success in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Following the first partition of Poland in the 1760s, the private magnate towns that had granted favorable civic status to Jews came under the rule of the Hapsburg Empire, Prussia, and Tsarist Russia. Both Joseph II and Catherine II attempted to centralize control by placing Jews on equal footing alongside Christians (what Sorkin calls integration "into estates," an argument introduced by the Prussian journalist Christian Wilhelm von Dohm) but, surprisingly, these autocratic edicts were not followed at the local level.

The French Revolution and the dissolution of the Estates General led to a second form of emancipation ("out of" estates). Informed by the ideals of natural rights in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the National Assembly granted equal rights for the Jews of Bordeaux "by virtue of their *lettres patentes*" and, after significant wrangling over the meaning of the constitution, granted citizenship to Jews in the Alsace region. Nevertheless, Sorkin argues that Joseph II's model of conditional emancipation became standard across Europe with Napoleon's rise and France's victories over Prussia. In fact, Napoleon's reign "turned back the clock" for many Jews. In Galicia and the Duchy of Warsaw, for example, nobles exploited the Code Napoléon to deprive Jews of their rights (135).

Sorkin devotes the most significant section of the book (ten chapters) to three seismic events in the nineteenth century that shaped the struggle for Jewish emancipation. As the Congress of Vienna redrew Europe's borders and brought in new states, western and eastern European governments maintained the status quo regarding civil and political rights for religious confessional states. In the newly constituted German states, however, emancipation became a "haphazard affair…of one-off concessions" and reversals (149). The revolutions of 1848 created opportunities for widespread Jewish political participation, along with temporary concessions from liberal authorities, but he contends that it was only with the unifications of German and Italian states and the formation of the "Dual Monarchy" of Austria-Hungary that Jews ceased to be a medieval corporation separated from the community but equal members of society.

In the last third of the book, Sorkin highlights the "post-emancipation" period brought about by mass migration and growing anti-Semitism. Two interesting chapters examine how Jewish social welfare programs and civil rights organizations paved the way for Jewish nationalism in the late 1800s. Sorkin recounts the familiar Zionist challenge toward emancipation but simultaneously demonstrates the challenges that Zionism faced in the new state of Israel as it created "a de facto hierarchy of citizenships" (335).

In the twentieth century, the Paris Peace Conference played a central role in the restitution and revocation of rights within Europe and beyond. The Great Powers negotiated rights for religious minorities, but these proved short lived for Jews during the interwar period. Hungary was first to violate rights through legislation such as the "First Jew Law" quotas in education and occupation (298). Austria denied rights based on race, and many states maintained the dualism of state and local citizenship, so Jews could be recognized on one level but denied rights on another. The repudiation of emancipation came to a head when Nazis took power in 1933. Sorkin details many of the hundreds of legislative acts, including the famous Nuremberg Laws, which deprived Jews of political and civil rights and segregated them within society. Nazi Germany subsequently provided a "legal" template for authoritarian and fascist regimes to abrogate the rights of Jews. Fascist Italy introduced a new inferior category of state membership while in Vichy France, Jews were excluded from public positions and subjected to roundups and deportations. As in Europe, Jews living in the Maghreb (North Africa) and Mashreq (Middle East) lost their status as *dhimmi* (protected minorities) following post-colonial independence movements and fled in four waves, primarily to Europe and the new state of Israel. Sorkin ends his chronological sweep of Jewish emancipation by looking across geographic boundaries to Israel and the United States, two countries where Jews' political status should have been equal to that of other citizens but suffered from similar inequalities and disabilities of heterogeneous states, though some scholars might quibble with his position that Jews in these states "engaged in a larger and even more challenging emancipation process" (345).

Like any book of its scope, *Jewish Emancipation* moves between broad generalizations and focused case studies to demonstrate the protean struggle of gaining, defending, losing, and recovering rights. For this reason, his book might prove too challenging in AP courses and introductory undergraduate courses. Nevertheless, Sorkin has done more than other scholars to utilize sources from many countries and in many languages, and he raises important, if unsettled, questions about the ambiguous process of emancipation. For this reason, the book should be essential reading for those interested in the *longue durée* of modern Jewish history.

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