Tradition and Revolution: Jewish Polity and Politization in Europe, 18th–20th Centuries.

Introduction

This thematic section in this issue of *ZUTOT* originates from a European Association for Jewish Studies workshop that I organized on 14 May 2019 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. The meeting bore a challenging title with a big question mark: ‘Political Jews? Rhetoric and Politicization among Jews in Enlightened and Revolutionary Europe.’ Some of its participants had already met and worked together at the 17th World Congress of Jewish Studies held in Jerusalem from 6–10 August 2017, in a panel dedicated to ‘Jewish perceptions of the Revolutionary transition.’

Some of the best contributions from the Paris workshop are gathered here under a new title following an improved thematization and an expanded periodization. The first three articles of the section form a contribution to the history of Jewish polity as revealed by community leaders’ involvement in institutional building, statecraft and diplomacy, whereas the last three articles are focused on the consequences of politicization on the Jewish individual, as disclosed in both experiences of assimilation and in forms of resistance and adaptation, combining messianic and revolutionary ideas.

Throughout the section, a particular emphasis is given to the concept of politicization, considered here as a valuable tool in addressing the question of the *political* within Jewish life. As a matter of fact, in Jewish history, the revolutionary and emancipatory transitions marked the beginning of the political polarization of Judaism, with direct consequences on communal life, customary practices and rites, on self-representation, diplomacy, and petitioning, as much as on individual experiences and intellectual itineraries.

Accordingly, the thematic section presented here adopts a general organizing perspective going from the communal to the individual: the topics range from Jewish apologetics and institutional diplomacy to political engagement and assimilation. The first two contributions by François Guesnet and myself, offer new historical insights into Jewish polities at Napoleonic times, through the analysis of previously unknown archival sources from Russia and Italy, whereas the political-sociological article by Danny Trom proposes a theoretical reflection on Jewish politics of exile and the disenchanted relationship.
with non-Jewish sovereignties. One further study by Nils Renard deals with Jewish soldiering, assimilation, and identity problems during the Napoleonic wars, while the enigmatic figure of Moses Dobruska is the object of the two last contributions, including a presentation of Dobruska as a pioneer of sociology by Silvana Greco, and a study of his legacy up to Gershom Scholem's political Zionism by Saverio Campanini.

The authors in this section adopt different historical, philosophical, sociological, and philological approaches, that converge toward a more comprehensive acquaintanceship with the multiplicity of situations, temporalities, and developments of Jewries and Jewish-Christian debates across Europe. At the same time, they implement a multidisciplinary understanding of the potential coexistence of both markers of tradition and revolution in Jewish societies at their encounter with modernity.

In the general title as well as throughout the six articles, the terms of ‘Tradition’ and ‘Revolution’ are not simply seen as conflictual, but rather are presented in a dialectical relation, that is to say, as a couple fit to convey the mirroring effects of the new political scene. Instead of viewing the two poles as irreconcilable standpoints, the contributions of this thematic section propose a new interpretation, in accordance with contemporary sources. As a matter of fact, Jewish historical discourses evoking equidistance, combination, or even harmonization between the two poles, show how much tradition and revolution were both constitutive of the ongoing shaping of Jewish polity in Europe, all along the spasmodic path toward full emancipation.

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