Robert Chazan studied with Salo Baron, and much of his work has built upon foundations first laid by that central figure in twentieth-century Jewish historiography. Recently, Chazan has explored the evolution of modern Jewish representations of the Middle Ages, an evolution in which Baron, who famously enjoined against depicting “the destinies of the Jews in the Diaspora” during the millennium preceding the French Revolution as “a sheer succession of miseries and persecutions,” occupied a pivotal position. Indeed, Baron himself portrayed his injunction against “the lachrymose conception of Jewish history” as a radical departure from the tendency of earlier historians of the Jews to limit their treatment of the medieval period to “stories of sanguinary clashes or governmental expulsions.”

Baron insisted that greater emphasis be afforded “the beautiful aspects (ha-tsedadim ha-yafim) of [medieval Jewish] history, especially the pioneering contributions of Jews to social and economic relations and to matters of the spirit” than to “afflictions and violent episodes.” Chazan, for his part, has hardly ignored the existence of a centuries-long history of Jewish-Christian acrimony, but, like his teacher, he has refused to allow that history to overshadow what he has consistently termed the vibrancy of medieval Ashkenazic and Sefardic Jewish life.

If Chazan’s conception of the Middle Ages clearly owes much to Baron, the sources of Baron’s own conception are less clear. Most commentators have associated his historiographical revisionism with

2 Ibid. Cf. idem, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?” Menorah Journal 14 (1928): 515–26, in which he explicitly ascribed “the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe” to Heinrich Graetz, Ludwig Philippson, and Simon Dubnow.
3 Baron to Y. Amir, 21 March 1960, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, M580, box 83, folder 1.
“an optimistic view of Exile”\textsuperscript{4} reflecting “the historical consciousness of several generations of American Jews” who have “pursued and defended an expanded Jewish role within the surrounding society.”\textsuperscript{5} In other words, Baronian antilachrymosity is commonly understood as an expression of a quintessentially American perspective. One of Baron’s students even went so far as to venture that his teacher might have chosen to migrate from Vienna to New York in 1926 because “America . . . gave promise of a Jewish existence that would better accord with his own paradigm.”\textsuperscript{6} On the other hand, the possibility that Baron, who was raised in the west Galician town of Tarnów and began his academic studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 1913–1914 before fleeing invading Russian troops and transferring to the University of Vienna at the outset of the First World War, absorbed significant aspects of his outlook from Polish or Austrian sources has not been seriously explored.\textsuperscript{7} Yet his earliest works, published before he left Europe (some even before leaving his Polish birthplace) contain tantalizing hints that many of the arguments he would eventually marshal in the service of his antilachrymose program figured in his assessment of aspects of the Jewish past from an early stage in his intellectual development. Moreover, those early traces suggest that debates among historians of Poland during the decade and a half before the outbreak of war in 1914 played a formative role in the crystallization of his historiographical approach.

Fundamental to that approach was Baron’s call to reevaluate the relative standing of the Middle Ages and the modern era in Jewish

---


\textsuperscript{7} Baron’s connections with Poland in particular have not been widely noted, even though following his migration to the United States and throughout the 1930s he retained close connections with colleagues and former students in that country. In 1933 he published an early version of what would eventually become the first chapter of his signature \textit{Social and Religious History of the Jews} in the Polish Jewish intellectual journal \textit{Miesięcznik żydowski}, of which he served as a contributing editor. See S. Baron, “Żydzi a żydostwo,” \textit{Miesięcznik żydowski} 3 (1933): 193–207. On his contacts with Poland, see David Engel, “Sefer nolad: Min ha-hitkatvut bein Philip Friedman ve-Shalom (Salo) Baron,” \textit{Gal-Ed} 21 (2008): 142–56. See also Zwi Ellenberg to Baron, 25 July 1930, Stanford, M580, box 1, folder 5; Baron to Majer Bałaban, 30 July 1939, ibid., box 22, folder 11.