



The Jews of France: A History from Antiquity to the Present

Esther Benbassa

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In the first English-language edition of a general, synthetic history of French Jewry from antiquity to the present, Esther Benbassa tells the intriguing tale of the social, economic, and cultural vicissitudes of a people in diaspora. With verve and insight, she reveals the diversity of Jewish life throughout France's regions, while showing how Jewish identity has constantly redefined itself in a country known for both the Rights of Man and the Dreyfus affair. Beginning with late antiquity, she charts the migrations of Jews into France and traces their fortunes through the making of the French kingdom, the Revolution, the rise of modern anti-Semitism, and the current renewal of interest in Judaism.

As early as the fourth century, Jews inhabited Roman Gaul, and by the reign of Charlemagne, some figured prominently at court. The perception of Jewish influence on France's rulers contributed to a clash between church and monarchy that would culminate in the mass expulsion of Jews in the fourteenth century. The book examines the re-entry of small numbers of Jews as New Christians in the Southwest and the emergence of a new French Jewish population with the country's acquisition of Alsace and Lorraine.

The saga of modernity comes next, beginning with the French Revolution and the granting of citizenship to French Jews. Detailed yet quick-paced discussions of key episodes follow: progress made toward social and political integration, the shifting social and demographic profiles of Jews in the 1800s, Jewish participation in the economy and the arts, the mass migrations from Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, the Dreyfus affair, persecution under Vichy, the Holocaust, and the postwar arrival of North African Jews.

Reinterpreting such themes as assimilation, acculturation, and pluralism, Benbassa finds that French Jews have integrated successfully without always risking loss of identity. Published to great acclaim in France, this book brings important current issues to bear on the study of Judaism in general, while making for dramatic reading.

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