Introduction

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ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE PRE-CHRISTIAN WORLD

Antisemitism is a late 19th-century (1870) term based on pseudo-scientific racial theory that was coined to describe in a new way opposition to, and hatred of, the Jewish People and their form of life. Though a relatively recent linguistic and ideological construction, it draws on and extends a much older tradition of anti-Jewish enmity that has its roots in the pre-Christian world of Greece, Rome, and Hellenistic Egypt and was then reinterpreted and radically reconceived in early Christianity beginning with the writings of Paul and the four Gospels that form the core of the New Testament.

Even before the rise of Christianity and its intense anti-Jewish polemic, Jews were presented in the Hellenistic world, and especially in Roman [Latin] and Egyptian literature, as being “strange,” primarily due to their religious beliefs that included having only one God who could not be seen, taking off every seventh day – the Sabbath – from labor, and eating only restricted types of food that excluded pork, shellfish, and birds of prey. In addition, as historian Salo Baron has pointed out:

The ever-noisy and quarrelsome citizenry of a Graeco-Oriental municipality resented, in particular, the peculiarities of the Jewish way of life. The segregated life of the Jewish communities injected further venom into the strained relationship. Already the Jews had a sort of ghetto. At least in Alexandria, Sardes, and Apollinopolis Magna (Edfu), perhaps also in Rome, Oxyrhynchus, Hermopolis and Halicarnassus, there existed predominantly Jewish quarters... Life

1 In this volume, the word “antisemitism” will appear in this form, following the recent trend in scholarly publications. The older spelling – anti-Semitism – is rejected because it suggests that there is such a thing as Semitism, meaning a particular Jewish racial character and distinguishable set of attributes.
within these quarters, proceeding in strange and incomprehensible ways, filled the superficial Gentile observer with awe and suspicion, or with abhorrence and contempt.²

That is, Jews were perceived, for many different reasons, as aliens who were destroying local social customs, pagan family life, and local religious tradition.

This led to a widespread view that Jews were misanthropic, superstitious, and arrogant, believing themselves to have a special covenantal relationship with their unseen Deity, while the gods of the pagan traditions were idols. (See Erich Gruen’s essay for full details.) This negative view is present, for example, in Haman’s critique of Jews in the Book of Esther 3:8–9:

Haman then said to King Ahasuerus: “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore, it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king’s treasuries.” [New King James Version, Esther 3:8–9]

This paradigmatic statement, representative of pre-Christian anti-Judaism, is not only significant in itself but also important because its employment in the Book of Esther suggests that this theme was well known to the contemporary readers of the story [between 400 and 300 BCE is the probable date of composition]. It would appear that this negative appraisal was a common idea among non-Jews, as indicated by the fact that one finds it in the writings of the Egyptian priest Manetho [early 3rd century BCE], who criticized Moses and the Jewish version of the Exodus story; in the hostile accusations made by Cicero; and in the critique of the Roman historian Lysimachus, who argued that the Jews “have no good intentions towards any man, to give not the best but the worst advice, to tear down the temples and altars of the gods.” Similarly, Tacitus [c. 56–120 CE] asserts that Jews are so hostile and perverse that, “although as a race [Jews] are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women.”³ It was, thus,

³ Ibid., 194.
not surprising that a major pogrom took place in Alexandria in 88 BCE, and another occurred in 38 CE.⁴

CHRISTIAN ANTI-JUDAISM

On reflection, it is evident that this hatred, while genuine and destructive, can reasonably be labeled “sociological” and “anthropological.” That is, it operates in our world, appeals to human characteristics and actions, and explains the offenses of the “other” in terms that make no appeal to transcendental forces. This situation changed with the momentous shift introduced by the coming of Christianity and its powerful, metaphysical polemic against Judaism.

To begin to understand the profound and pervasive legacy of premodern anti-Judaism requires that one turn to early Christianity, which supplied the religious foundation of this tradition. For despite the various competing and supporting ancillary theories of the causes of this malignancy, its base, its strength, its endurance, and its dissemination in Western culture are primarily, though not solely, rooted in religious claims.

It is impossible to read the Pauline epistles, the synoptic Gospels, and later patristic sources, that is, the writings of the Church Fathers, without seeing them as affirming two salient claims: (1) Judaism is, since the coming of Christ, a spiritual cadaver, and (2) Jews and Judaism stand in dishonoring opposition, at least since the first Easter, to God’s salvific plan for humankind. In these two theses lie the roots of that religious anti-Judaism that has reverberated through the last two millennia and that has laid the basis for modern antisemitism.

To appreciate what this denigration of Judaism signifies and why its civilizational legacy is so wounding, one must grasp the dynamics of early Christian anti-Jewish writings. The struggle between the nascent church and the established Jewish community was over the entitlement to the “promises” of the Torah and their meaning. Who are the “children of the promise,” the “Israel” in whom “all the nations will be blessed”? Was it the “Israel of the Flesh,” the biological descendants of Abraham? Or was it the new messianic community of those faithful to

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⁴ Readers need to remember that criticism of Jews in different times and places is influenced by the context, that is, the intellectual and religious civilization, of the period in question. Thus, the “Jew” criticized by Cicero and Tacitus is not exactly like the “Jew” of Paul, or Matthew, or the Quran. Nor is Luther’s “Jew” the same as the “Jew” imagined in the current BDS movement or by contemporary white, right-wing nationalists.
Jesus? Self-evidently, it was the second, and accordingly, in self-justification, it was necessary to impugn the religious integrity of Judaism for were the “Israel of the Flesh” faithful, the Jewish reading of Torah valid, the Hebraic account of salvation correct, then what reason would there be for the “promises” passing to a new, gentile Israel? Only if the Torah were not a source of “righteousness,” of “justification,” and the “Old” Israel found unfaithful and guilty, could there be cause for God to seek a new covenantal partner. As Paul famously insists: “If justification were through the law [Torah], then Christ died in vain... For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Galatians 3:10–14 and see also 3:21).

As a consequence of the spiritual darkness in which Jews live, due to their rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah, they are, according to Paul, “a rebellious and apostate people” (Romans 10:21). He has God say, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people” (ibid.). Stephen in Acts of the Apostles is still more explicit: “You stiff-necked people uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those that beforehand announced the coming of the Righteous One” (Acts 7:51–53). Not only is the “Israel of the Flesh” corrupt, but it consciously chooses its corruption. Not only does it fatally follow a law that is dysfunctional, but it persists in maintaining this rebellious course even when God would open the eyes of the Jewish People and return them to Himself. Israel is not only blind but radically disobedient; not only does it not know God’s true purpose, but it wills not to know it. So “the Jew” becomes the enemy of man and God, and the main root of the development that leads to medieval and modern antisemitism is set in place.

This heinous tradition of apostasy, according to the synoptic (Gospel) authors writing in the decades after Paul’s death, reaches its climax in the key role that Israel is said to have played in the Crucifixion. According to Mark:

And Pilate again said to them, “Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?” And they cried out again, “Crucify him.” And Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him.” So, Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. (Mark 15:12–15)

Matthew retells this same sinister tale nearly exactly but adds the pregnant, enduring phrase, so costly in Jewish lives, “[Pilate said] I am
innocent of this man’s blood … and all the [Jewish] people answered, ‘His blood be upon us and our children’” (27:15–26). John, writing most probably in the early 2nd century, goes even further, emphasizing that the Jews themselves crucified Jesus: “Then [Pilate] handed him over to them [the priests] to be crucified” (19:16). The full perversity, the unrestricted obstinacy of Israel as manifest in this titanic act of treason against heaven, must be properly and completely understood. When the Almighty, in his great mercy, sent the prophets to call the Jews to keep the law, they persecuted and killed them. Now, when God, in his infinite graciousness, sends his only Son to free the Jews from “the curse of the law,” perverse community that they are, they kill him and continue to keep the law. Whatever Heaven wills, the Jewish people will choose the opposite. The consequence of this final, overwhelming act of disobedience, of deicide, is the rejection of the Jews by God. The “new covenant,” therefore, is with the gentiles.

This censure reaches a climax in the metaphysical revaluations of the Gospel of John. Here “the Jew” is seen as a wholly negative “other.” “You [Jews] are of your Father, the devil,” John affirms, “and your will is to do your Father’s desires” (8:43–44). However one reads this Johannine description of the tragic encounter of Christ and “the Jews,” there can be no denying that in John’s harsh rendition the clash has come to be seen as the temporal locus of more than historical actualities. The unconscionable role that the Jews, as the Devil’s henchmen, play in the Crucifixion proves, as John has Jesus say, “[The Jews] do not belong to God” (8:47).

One, therefore, discerns in the New Testament – in this anti-Jewish theology of fulfillment, displacement, and negation, in these accusations of apostasy and deicide (deciphered more completely in the essay by Adele Reinhartz) – the origination of the abiding and tragic conflict between Judaism and Christianity.5

The early, post–New Testament Christian sources – primarily the product of gentile authors unconnected to Jews and Judaism by ties of biology, family, sociology, or common political needs – continued to amplify the anti-Jewish critique that they had inherited. The famous

Church Father, Justin Martyr (d. c. 165), chastised Israel in what became paradigmatic terms:

For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem.⁶

“Accordingly,” claimed Justin, “these things have happened to you in fairness and justice, for you have slain the Just One.” What transpires, what has transpired, is a new revelation through which the Jewish people are recognized as God’s enemies, their outcast political status a sign of rejection: “The city where Jesus suffered was necessarily destroyed, the Jewish nation was driven from its country, and another people called by God to the blessed election.”⁷

By the patristic era – as analyzed in the contributions by Joshua Garroway, Andrew Jacobs, and Steven Bowman – the encounter between Jew and Christian, between synagogue and church, was perceived as the embodiment of Satan’s clash with Jesus, of Evil’s rebellion against the Good, of the assault of the Sons of Darkness against the Sons of Light, of the Powers of Hell arrayed in deadly opposition to the Powers of Heaven. “If a person,” John Chrysostom wrote in the 4th century, “should call the Synagogue a brothel today, or a criminals’ hangout, or a resort of demons, or a citadel of the Devil, or the ruin of souls, or a cliff and a pit of complete destruction, or any other name whatever, he would speak more kindly than the place deserves,”⁸ “The Jews” had become and were to remain pernicious, more than human, opponents of God Himself. “The demons inhabit the very souls of the Jews.”⁹ They are the very “devil’s teeth” who snatch away God’s people and make sacrifice of them to the Devil.

What is all-important about these theological caricatures is that they continue to consign the conflict between synagogue and church to the realm of myth and metaphysics. Though the patristic writers did

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⁹ Ibid., 2:3.
not invent this interpretive form – the authors of the New Testament already spoke in these idioms, for example, John on the link between Jews and the Devil – they gave it extensive room for growth, heartily nurtured its most unsavory elements, and consciously assured that it would become the fixed pattern for all subsequent readings of the Jewish–Christian encounter. After the combined hermeneutical assault of the New Testament and the patristic writings, the Jew is never again to be “a man like other men.” He has become a mythic creature. (See the essay by Pierluigi Piovanelli.)

These theological images and understandings, not surprisingly, would come to have weighty and enduring practical and legal consequences with the conversion of Constantine the Great in 312 CE and the Christianization of the Roman Empire in the first quarter of the 4th century. Jews now were legally defined as theological enemies and “outsiders” relative to all the main private and communal areas of life, as explained in Chapter 5 by Andrew Jacobs.

As the Church expanded significantly in the first three centuries after the Crucifixion of Jesus, and eventually gained real power with the conversion of Constantine, its hostility toward Jews and Judaism grew in every direction, including, most importantly, in its political influence within the Roman Empire. Now the Jewish–Christian conflict was not simply rhetorical. The Church had the power to translate its anti-Jewish views into concrete legislation that increasingly marginalized the Jew. Accordingly, Jews were pushed out of the mainstream of the social, economic, and political order.

Among the Church Fathers there is one whose understanding of Jewish–Christian relations requires separate consideration given its historical consequence in limiting anti-Jewish violence. This, of course, is Augustine (354–430 CE). Over against the extremism of John Chrysostom and other Christian writers of the 2nd to 5th centuries, Augustine’s position was more constrained and his revisionist position significantly influenced the Church’s official teaching on the Jews from the 5th century onward.

Augustine’s analysis of the Jewish situation represents a creative conservative innovativeness. Its conservatism is reflected in its doctrinal Paulinism and in its inherited, shared anti-Judaism. His representative tract, Contra judaeos, his derogatory pronouncements in Contra faustum, and his eschatological observations on Jewish apostasy and its eventual overcoming in the City of God (books 18 and 20), are all, on one level, unoriginal recyclings of the unforgiving patristic idiom.
On a second level, however, amid this dogmatic continuity, Augustine contributes an important innovation as to how the Church should understand and correspondingly react to the Jewish people. He does this by emphasizing in a new and central way the meaning of the seminal doctrine of the “wandering Jew.” Though he does not invent this idea, his ideological reinterpretation of it proves historically consequential for the actual practices embodied in Christian anti-Judaism. According to Augustine’s ironic reading, “the Jews,” above all else, are seen as a people who, in their homelessness, constitute the strange, theologically fertile, “witness of unbelief.” Furthermore, he interpreted the Cain and Abel story (Genesis 4:1–16) as an allegory of the relationship that obtains between “the Jews” (Cain) and Christ (Abel) – “the Jews” (Cain) find their offering to God rejected, whereas the faith of Abel is preferred on high. But in the same way that God warned the generation of Cain and Abel that Cain was not to be harmed by man as God would supply the retribution, so, too, Christians should not do evil to the Jews.

Moreover, the rejection of “the Jews” is, in some mysterious way, a gift that makes it possible for the gentiles to become part of the covenantal community of the elect. Israel’s apostasy and subsequent punishment, as well as its continued proclamation of the Torah – even though blind to its supreme meaning (Christ Jesus) – reveal important lessons for Christian society. Just as Cain’s treachery verified and exalted Abel’s faithfulness, so the skepticism of “the Jews,” their consequent fall from favor, the destruction of their Temple, and their exile, reinforce the truth of Christianity in an overwhelmingly visible and experiential way. Accordingly, “the Jews” (real Jews) are not to be harmed by Christians but, rather, are to wander the earth as proof of their rejected status. In God’s good time, as part of the eschaton, in conjunction with the return of Christ in glory, this exilic status will end as the ultimate sign of Christ’s power and graciousness. In this accounting, Jewish survival thus becomes, paradoxically, a Christian theological imperative. Both Jewry’s present exile and its final redemption play central, inescapable roles in this influential version of Christian belief. Until today, as seen among Christian fundamentalists, though no less part of the dogmatics of mainline Protestants and the Catholic and Orthodox churches, this connection of Jewish wandering, Jewish survival, and Christian eschatological hope remains alive.

11 The scenario is described in Augustine’s The Reply to Faustus, ed. and trans. Frank Talmage in his Disputation and Dialogue [New York, 1975].
The Theodosian Code created in 438 CE, and the Justinian Code, or *Corpus juris civilis* of 534 CE, formalized this exclusion of Jews from the main centers of civil society and set the foundations for the anti-Judaism – social, economic, political, cultural, and theological – of the medieval and modern eras. (The many crucial developments in the Christian medieval period are discussed in chapters by Robert Chazan, Emily Rose, Julie Mell, Miri Rubin, and Debra Higgs Strickland.) By the 6th century CE, disabilities and exclusions vis-à-vis Jews were the norm in the Roman Empire and then in the Byzantine era (described by Steven Bowman). And this became the common existential and political circumstance of Jews in Christian society until the 18th century.¹² (See the essay by Jeremy Cohen.)

Christianity’s anti-Jewish understanding, along with its state power, would continue to grow, especially with the encouragement of Martin Luther (as explained by Debra Kaplan) until the Age of Enlightenment and the late 18th-century debate over Jewish Emancipation (analyzed by Allan Arkush). But even in the post-emancipation era, as fundamental changes in the status of Jews and Judaism were inaugurated, the toxic teaching of the “Jew” as diabolical and more than an ordinary human enemy remained – and still remains – within segments of Western cultural and political traditions. So powerful was this antisemitic inheritance that it ultimately generated new social and economic doctrines that, for example, explained the older anti-Jewish restrictions by the conception of *racial* antisemitism. According to this new explanation, race not only decided one’s physical features – tall or short, black or white – but also predetermined one’s character and moral virtues, as well as the rise and fall of nations. Moreover, while the earlier, theological anti-Judaism allowed for conversion and hence a change in political and theological status, race was immutable and allowed no escape. This eventually became the doctrine that led to and supported antisemitic political parties and state actions, and, ultimately, Nazi Death Camps. (This crucial issue is analyzed in my “Weimar” essay and in the essays of Shulamit Volkov and Laura Engelstein.)

Consider as evidence of this “staying power” the following facts:

1. Jews in the modern era, as was widely believed in the medieval era, are negatively associated with disease. Today, in 2021, the internet

is saturated with articles linking the medieval myth that Jews caused the Black Death in 1348–1349 with the claim that Jews are the cause and prime spreaders of COVID-19. There are thousands of items on the Web spreading this lie.

(2) Jews are said to be continuing their practice of killing non-Jewish children for their blood, especially using it in the making of Passover matzoh ( unleavened bread ). This falsehood continued to circulate in modern, that is, post-1800, history in famous cases like those in Tiszaeszlár, Hungary (1882–1883), and Damascus, Syria (1840). It was recycled in Czarist Russia in the notorious Beilis trial in 1913, and again in Poland after the Holocaust – in Kielce on July 4, 1946, in Rzeszow on June 12, 1945, and then in Krakow shortly thereafter. Today, this idea has been recycled in the libelous claim that Israeli soldiers are killing Palestinian children in order to harvest their organs.

(3) The blood libel was the theme of a fifty-two-part series on Syrian TV sponsored by the Syrian government.¹⁴

(4) The belief that Jews are physically misshapen, understood as a sign of their moral and spiritual degeneracy, played a part in the hotly contested, January 5, 2021, US Senate runoff in Georgia. Some political advertisements against the Jewish Democratic Party candidate, Jon Ossoff, pictured him with an elongated “Jewish” nose.¹⁵

(5) The continual emphasis on the connection between Jews and money that began to circulate in the medieval era, centered around usury, received a major boost in the mid-19th century from Karl Marx (whose controversial position is deciphered by Jack Jacobs). Marx wrote: “What is the object of the Jew’s worship in this world: Usury. What is his worldly god? Money.” This theme has reverberated in both left-wing and right-wing circles: see, for example, the caricaturing of candidate Ossoff with the theme of “buying Georgia” employed by his rival, Republican Senator David Perdue, in political advertisements. Similarly, Louis Farrakhan, in a speech in Dallas, asked his audience: “Is the Federal Reserve owned by the


Here myth manifests itself as extreme paranoia.

In both Europe and America this same theme has been widely used to smear George Soros, whose liberal views are anathema in his native Hungary, as well as in Poland, and also in 2021 antisemitic circles in the United States. Some examples of recent Web postings:

- Soros owns company where Coronavirus broke out.
- Israel-linked Dr. Charles *Lieber* arrested for receiving payment and smuggling biomaterials to Wuhan University.
- Israel was “already working on a vaccine”
- That’s some MIGHTY BIG COHENCIDENCES.

Then there is the accusation made by former Wisconsin Sheriff David A. Clark, Jr., who, without evidence, tweeted that George Soros was involved with the spread of the coronavirus: “Not ONE media outlet has asked about George Soros’s involvement in this FLU panic. He is SOMEWHERE involved in this.” Conservative commentator Candace Owens has accused Soros (via tweets on May 28, 2020) of “funding the chaos” in Minneapolis following the death of George Floyd by hiring protestors to demonstrate. He has also been accused of fomenting the violent riots in Washington on January 6, 2021, in order to discredit President Trump. The Network Contagion Research Institute at Rutgers University reports that on an average day there are between 2,000 and 3,000 postings attacking George Soros. In May 2020, when the George Floyd racial protests were at a height, according to the Rutgers Institute there were 500,000 hostile protests against Soros in one day. [For more on the issue of antisemitism in America, see the chapter by Jonathan Sarna.]

**ISLAMIC ANTISEMITISM**

The majority of the essays included in this collection discuss various anti-Jewish elements in Western Christian tradition that run from the New Testament to the Holocaust and that color, with a unique depth and intensity, almost every aspect of social, cultural, political, and

economic life in the countries of Europe (and was then carried to colonies in the Americas, Australia, and South Africa). It is essential, however, to recognize that the phenomenon of Judeophobia also existed centrally in Islam.

Contrary to the invented image of a “golden age” that is said to have existed between Jews and Muslims before the intrusion of Zionism, the reality is that since the initial period of the emergence of Islam, which came about through the preaching of Mohammed (571–632 CE), the relationship between the two religious communities has been unequal and distorted and led, in most Muslim societies, from the medieval to the modern era, to the articulation of an anti-Jewish theology, the passage of anti-Jewish social legislation, and the practice of taxing Jews unfairly.

The encounter between Jews and Mohammed that the new Prophet thought would lead Jews to accept his revelation led, instead, to anti-Jewish violence in Mecca and Medina. The height of this action is described in Islamic tradition as resulting from the angel Gabriel’s command to Mohammed: “The [Jewish] men [of the Banu Qurayza tribe] should be killed [then], the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives.” In response, Mohammed, in 627, “sent for [the Jews] and struck off their heads ... There were 600 to 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 to 900.”17 Because they rejected the new teaching and were repeatedly described as plotting against Mohammed, the Jews were, according to Quranic tradition, punished by Allah. In a statement that essentially repeats Acts 7:51–53, the Quran states: “humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they [the Jews] were visited with God’s wrath” (Quran 2:61).

As the Muslim forces created by Muhammed began to conquer the Middle East, including Jerusalem in 636–637 CE, Islam, from its position of dominance, formulated rules as to how non-Muslims were to be treated. Jews, like the Christians and Zoroastrians, were defined as “people of the book” (Ahl al-Kitāb), that is, as having a true, but inferior religion. As such they were not to be forced to convert to Islam. Defined as dhimmis (“protected minorities”), they were permitted to continue to practice their own religious traditions but, in return for this privilege, were required to assume a status as second-class members of Islamic society and to pay a special tax known as the jizya.

The overall result of this arrangement established by Islamic law, most prominently set out in the Pact of Omar formulated about 637 by Omar I, after the conquest of Jerusalem, produced a culture and tradition, including a theological teaching, that while discriminatory was far less lethal than that dominant in Christian Europe.18 There were instances of violence and the intensification of anti-Jewish actions, but these were not common. The myth of the “diabolization” of the Jew, and the claim that Jews represented a special, negative, subclan of humanity, was not developed and widely taught. Yet the relationship of Jews and Muslims was continually affected by anti-Jewish teachings in the Quran and the extra-Quranic traditions linked to Muhammad known as hadiths.

The status of Jews in medieval Muslim societies continued this nonviolent tradition – relative tolerance of Jews under conditions dictated by Islamic law. Over time, the financial demands made on dhimmis became exceedingly important to the fiscal health of various Muslim caliphates, assuring that Jews (and others) would neither be murdered en masse, nor even sought as converts because each act of apostasy entailed a decrease in much-needed state revenue. There were local persecutions of Jews in Islamic lands in violation of Quranic teaching, including occasions of forced conversion and the public mistreatment of Jews, even including the instigation of pogroms – as took place in Egypt in 1008 under the ruler al-Hakim, in Granada in 1066 following the death of the famous courtier Joseph ha-Nagid (son of the great Samuel ha-Nagid), during the Almohad persecutions in 12th-century Spain and North Africa, and the more stringent restrictions placed on dhimmis in 1301 by the Mamluk state. Nevertheless, such occurrences do not force any major revision of this comparative judgment regarding Islam and Christianity. In each of these [and other] cases, the causes of the antinomian atrocities are to be located in anomalous and provincial conditions and are, even then, to be viewed as temporary aberrations that never entailed genocidal-like violence.19 In sum, Muslim policy toward Jews was demeaning


19 Norman Stillman reports that “There is no more than half a dozen [instances of organized, collective acts of forced conversion of Jews to Islam] over a period of thirteen centuries – [and] all occurred under heterodox fanatics” [Jews of Arab Lands [Philadelphia, 1979], 76]. Also see Bernard Lewis’s pioneering work, Semites and Antisemites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice [New York, 1987].
and abusive, calculatedly exploitative, and socially debilitating – at times even deadly – but it operated under theological (as well as socioeconomic) restraints.

The details of this history are discussed in the essay by Reuven Firestone, so I will not extend this summary description of the medieval and early modern era relative to Jewish–Muslim relations. However, when continuing the discussion of this history it is necessary to note that Islamic antisemitism entered a new phase in the late 19th and early 20th century with the coming of modernization and the improvement of Jewish life in Muslim countries, a circumstance that resulted from the assistance of European countries and the rise of political Zionism. Now, borrowing from the antisemitic discourse of Christianity, Muslim culture began to import and circulate canards such as the blood libel and saw the translation of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion into Arabic. Under the influence of these mythic teachings, Islamic anti-Judaism took on a new, more extreme, character.

Today these accusations are standard fare in the Muslim campaign against Israel, most notably in Iran and among the Palestinians. Israel is again said to be practicing the blood libel, and Jewish doctors are accused of intentionally infecting and killing their Palestinian patients. Then, too, Abu Mazen (Mohammed Abbas), the leader of the Palestinian National Authority, did his doctorate on The Protocols at the University of Moscow, and the historian Dr. Attalah Abu Al-Farah, believing the lies, has asked: “Can there be, in practice, co-existence on Palestinian land between ourselves and the Jews, in light of their mentality which stems from The Protocols of the Elders of Zion?” In addition, Israel (and the Jews) are said to control the banks, the world’s stock markets, the media (especially in America), and Hollywood. A conference of Muslim scholars and clerics, held at the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo, defined Jews as “the worst enemies of Islam” and “the best friends of Satan.”

20 Egyptian TV produced a series entitled Rider without a Horse based on the Protocols in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In 1988, Hamas’ Charter stated that the Jews were behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, World War II, Rotary Clubs, and Freemasons [Clemens Heni, Antisemitism, a Specific Phenomenon: Holocaust Trivialization, Islamism, Post-colonial and Cosmopolitan Anti-Zionism Antisemitism [Berlin, 2013], 489–491].


Though there is much more to say on this crucial contemporary issue, I will not continue the discussion here as the topic is well covered by Esther Webman’s contribution to this collection. I would, however, add that in the 21st century anti-Israelism is the most fertile and continuous source of antisemitism in the world.

**DEFINING ANTISEMITISM**

Each chapter in the present collection has been written by an expert and represents the best contemporary scholarship regarding all the main issues. There is only one major topic that has not been adequately covered relative to the study of antisemitism in the Western and Islamic world and that is the definition of antisemitism.

The term “antisemitism” was coined in 1870 by Wilhelm Marr, a German Jew-hater; it drew on the rising racial theory that posited that different groups were defined by their biological racial characteristics. According to this new thesis there were many different racial communities, the two most prominent in modern Europe being defined and divided as Semites and antisemites. The latter were primarily identified with Northern Western Europeans – Germans, Austrians, Dutch, Norwegians, and Swedes – and the former with Jews.23

Over the years, many learned efforts have been devoted to framing a coherent and broadly inclusive determination of the word – and concept of – antisemitism, but none has fully succeeded in providing a definition that is adequately comprehensive. The difficulty in supplying an explanation was already recognized by the rabbinic sages of the Roman era, who were reduced to simply saying that anti-Judaism – and what we today, recognizing needed nuances, would label antisemitism – is akin to natural events: “Esau hates Jacob.” The great Jewish historian Salo Baron did only little better when he defined Judeophobia as “the dislike of the unlike.” This is true but is far from being an adequate deconstruction. A more recent account provides more substantial pointers regarding its meaning:

[antisemitism] is a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political

23 Though the term also correctly applies to Arabs, this is not how it was ever employed.
mobilization against Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews. [some emphases omitted]24

This version provides a complex mix of sociology and psychology that emphasizes that hatred of Jews is a social construction rather than a response to individual Jewish behavior. However, the question of this definition’s usefulness as a practical tool is not altogether clear.

A more recent effort by Kenneth Marcus proposes the following understanding:

Following the work of Theodor Adorno and Helen Fein, we may define anti-Semitism as a set of negative attitudes, ideologies, and practices directed at Jews as Jews, individually or collectively, based upon and sustained by a repetitive and potentially self-fulfilling latent structure of hostile erroneous beliefs and assumptions that flow from the application of double standards toward Jews as a collectivity, manifested culturally in myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and urging various forms of restriction, exclusion, and suppression. This definition builds on Adorno’s formulation: “This ideology [of antisemitism] consists... of stereotyped negative opinions describing the Jews as threatening, immoral, and categorically different from non-Jews, and of hostile attitudes urging various forms of restriction, exclusion, and suppression as a means of solving ‘the Jewish problem.’” [emphasis omitted].25

This proposal is better than its predecessors, having the virtues of increased clarity and more contact with concrete cultural phenomena, though it, too, is not free of conceptual ambiguity.

In further work, Anthony Julius, the English barrister and historian of antisemitism, has added necessary nuance to the issue of definition. He tells us that English antisemitism – some of the character of which can be extrapolated to modern European states more generally – has four different types: “radical antisemitism of defamation, expropriation, murder, and expulsion; a literary antisemitism, or antisemitic discourse; a modern quotidian antisemitism of insult and partial exclusion;

24 This is Helen Fein’s definition, cited in Alvin Rosenfeld, ed., Deciphering the New Antisemitism [Bloomington, IN, 2015], 21. See also Deborah Lipstadt’s comments on this definition in her essay in this collection.

25 Ibid., 23. Note that not all anti-Zionist and anti-Israel writing is antisemitic. The complexity of when it is and when it isn’t poses one of the main contemporary scholarly challenges.
and the new configuration of anti-Zionism.” All of these types are clearly evidenced in modern culture and literature and continue to exert influence, as evidenced by the essays of Maurice Samuels, Michael Mack, and Bryan Cheyette dealing with French, German, and English literature, respectively.

A more traditional construal can be found in the 2004 “Working Definition of Anti-Semitism” produced by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The definition reads:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

... The Centre also made clear that manifestations of antisemitism “could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity.” It continues: “Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity and it is often used to blame Jews for ‘why things go wrong.’”

Alternatively, far removed from earlier efforts, as recently as 2015, Bernard Harrison has defined the elusive subject this way:

as I see it – antisemitism is not, at least intrinsically, an aberration of the individual mind, but an aberration of Western civilization. Killing every antisemite, were such a thing possible, would not, in other words, rid the world of antisemitism, because vast and influential tracts of Western literature and public debate, sometimes openly, more often in thoroughly opaque and whitewashed ways, stink of it. Antisemitism, in other words, understood as I understand it, is not, or not primarily, a pathological disposition or function of the individual mind, but rather a type of social or cultural pathology: a self-replicating structure of temptations and apparently explanatory delusions embodied, independently of the individual mind, in a multitude of enduring written and quasi-proverbial forms, that stands permanently ready to introduce itself, like the scrap of

26 I here cite Elhanan Yakira’s summary of Julius’s view, “Virtuous Antisemitism,” in Rosenfeld, Deciphering the New Antisemitism, 98 n. 4.
27 R. Amy Elman, “The EU’s Response to Contemporary Antisemitism: A Shell Game,” in Rosenfeld, Deciphering the New Antisemitism, 413–414. The Centre referred to is the European Union Monitoring Centre, now known as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the EU.
self-replicating genetic material that constitutes a virus, into the minds of people struggling to define their relationship to society, and of society to them, in moments of political crisis. It is so deeply embedded in the culture that the only way to damage it, and perhaps in time get rid of it, is to attack it at the cultural, [and legal, SK] rather than the individual, level.\textsuperscript{28}

This more philosophical reflection, concentrating on communal and societal factors rather than hatred of individuals, is important to keep in mind. Then, too, there is Jerome Chanes’s streamlined definition: “antisemitism is all forms of hostility manifested towards the Jews throughout history that results from no legitimate cause.”\textsuperscript{29}

The recent definition, that today is the most widely used and has been adopted by many national governments (including the United States\textsuperscript{30}) and international agencies, is the one formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016. (See the Appendix.) The particular value of this version is that not only does it provide an explanation, but it also supplies informed examples of the concrete forms in which antisemitism manifests itself in our time. These include both traditional Judeophobic themes as well as newer forms related to the State of Israel. Though it has aroused opposition\textsuperscript{31} because of its delineation of certain forms of anti-Israel criticism as antisemitism, it is, on the whole, persuasive, and its wide adoption – by the thirty-four member nations of the IHRA and by over twenty-five other countries and international organizations such as the UN – is evidence of this. Readers can see a detailed explanation of this definition in Dina Porat’s discussion of anti-Zionism as antisemitism.

All of these efforts provide insight into the phenomenon of antisemitism, personal and societal, and throw light on its social, economic, and psychological causes and effects. But, as readers can appreciate, this is a very complex matter on which still further reflection is required.

\textsuperscript{28} Bernard Harrison, “The Uniqueness Debate Revisited,” in Rosenfeld, Deciphering, 318. See also Bernard Harrison, Blaming the Jews: Politics and Delusion [Bloomington, 2020].

\textsuperscript{29} Jerome Chanes, Antisemitism: A Reference Book (Santa Barbara, CA, 2004), 2. This definition, however, leads to the always difficult but unavoidable issue of who decides what is legitimate.

\textsuperscript{30} Reaffirmed February 1, 2021, on behalf of the Biden administration by Kara McDonald, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

\textsuperscript{31} As represented, for example, by the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism published on March 25, 2021. Available at https://jerusalemdeclaration.org.
THE PRESENT IMPORTANCE OF THIS VOLUME

The contributions to this volume are arranged chronologically according to era covered. This was the most reasonable approach to adopt given that each generation draws on, and is influenced by, its predecessors. As to the work’s content, there was a pressing need to include essays on our contemporary situation as rabid antisemitism has again been let loose in our 21st-century world. The belief, widely held since 1945, that the Holocaust had “cured” the world of antisemitism is now seen to have been a tragic illusion, as is made evident by Deborah Lipstadt’s essay on “New Issues” and Mark Weitzman’s analysis of the role of the internet and social media as main disseminators of anti-Jewish hate. Antisemitism is again a daily experience in many parts of the globe, including America [as considered also by Jonathan Sarna]. Contemporary manifestations include anti-Israelism, through which anti-Israel groups propagate antisemitism under the guise of anti-Zionism; Holocaust denial; and, not least, the dissemination of hate by political elites such as the British Labour Party under its former leader, Jeremy Corbyn, and the present Hungarian and Polish governments, not to speak of Iran and many Muslim states. False anti-Jewish claims appear daily in the fabrications propagated by Iran, Jihadists, right-wing activists, white supremacists, certain groups of Christian fundamentalists, and the Nation of Islam. It appears at even United Nations–sponsored events like the UN World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in September 2001. As Joëlle Fiss of the European Union of Jewish Students wrote, reflecting on the outpouring of the vilest forms of Jew hatred at this event, “Durban reminded [us that] hatred can surface with no prior notice.”

As discussed, the completely fictional conspiracy theory propagated by The Protocols of the Elders of Zion continues to circulate widely. Take as an example: “In January 2002 the New Statesman, an august journal of the British Centre-Left, published a cover story about the ‘Zionist lobby’ in Britain. The magazine’s cover displayed a golden Star of David stabbing a pliant Union flag and carried the legend: ‘A Kosher Conspiracy?’”

This same conspiracy myth of Jewish world domination also provided the basis of the lie that “the Jews” – or perhaps more specifically

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32 Joëlle Fiss, The Durban Diaries (New York, 2008), 43.
33 Efraim Sicher, Multiculturalism, Globalization and Antisemitism: The British Case (Jerusalem, 2009), 40.
Mossad, the Israeli secret service – had planned and carried out the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. This fantasy required no real evidence as *The Protocols* had laid the foundation for such accusations. *The Protocols* could even be found for sale in Walmart stores in 2004. In reply to criticism, Walmart put out a justification that its executives had not seen “a clear and convincing” argument that *The Protocols* was a lie. In effect, Walmart was endorsing the conspiracy theory articulated by this hoax. The same occurred regarding a UNESCO-sponsored exhibit organized in connection with the new library in Alexandria, Egypt. The theme of the exhibition was monotheism; to represent Jewish monotheism the organizers displayed two items, a Torah scroll and a copy of *The Protocols*, both described as sacred books of Judaism. Finally, I cite a posting of June 2, 2020, explaining the violence and lawlessness then unfolding in American cities as a protest against police brutality and the killing of George Floyd. The posting read: “White buses marked ‘Soros Riot Dance Squad’ spotted in Michigan: Its official, the riots are staged.”

All of these examples are fabrications. But even when one recognizes that these are lies, there is a pernicious twist, as Michael Barkun has explained:

> There is a subculture of those for whom stigmatized knowledge claims are considered authoritative precisely because they have been stigmatized. To be rejected, to be denied access to university curricula, to respected newspapers, to the pulpits of major religious organizations, to scientific and medical text-books – for some, it is precisely such rejection that confers the ultimate form of validation. To those already disposed to suspect authority, what could be more persuasive than the cultural products that authority itself rejects? For them, the *Protocols* is compelling because it has been rejected, not in spite of it.

One of the most famous philosophers of the twentieth century, the Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger, when told that the *Protocols* were a forgery, still did not give up his false beliefs about them, replying instead: “But the dangerous international alliance of the Jews still exists.”

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TOPICS THAT STILL REQUIRE CONSIDERATION

In concluding these introductory remarks, I will add only that, in spite of all the empirical and theoretical research done on the subject of antisemitism, there is much that we do not wholly understand about this phenomenon and all of the kaleidoscopic forms that it takes. These unresolved issues include three that are of primary importance. First is the provision of a really convincing explanation of the causes of contemporary Judeophobia in a world that has moved on from traditional Christian anti-Judaism. [For more on this, see the discussion of Bruno Chaouat.] Second is providing a way to accurately measure this phenomenon in any given society at any given time. In taking up this question, one enters the extremely complex area of trying to discern what people think and feel – not only what they do. Third is the problem of replying to, and fighting against, antisemitism – that is, finding ways and actions that work to counter and reduce antisemitism in general as well as within individual cultures and/or traditions. The attempt to respond to anti-Jewish assaults is already found in the classical world in such famous defenses as Philo’s *Contra Flaccus*[^37] and Josephus’s *Contra Apion*.[^38] This tradition continued in the rabbinic and medieval eras, most famously represented in Moses Ben Nahman’s [Nahmanides] debate with Jewish converts to Christianity in Spain in 1263. Unfortunately, such efforts swayed neither ancient Egyptians nor Romans nor medieval Spanish friars and political elites. What steps would be effective in today’s world is a subject of intense debate. So one asks: Is pointing out the falsehoods uttered by antisemites sufficient to disabuse others of the false views they express? Can hate be falsified so that it loses its potency? Is the recent push to seek relevant legislation and resolution in the courts a successful defensive response?

There is also the difficult question of how this poisonous attitude is translated into sociopolitical movements. This concern is of major importance in that the employment of antisemitism is meant to bring about meaningful change in the socioeconomic and political landscape. But how exactly does the relationship between ideas and mass movements take form, and how are concepts, especially those that are so

[^37]: With his usual broad learning, S. Baron fully describes Philo’s defense of Judaism in his *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 12, 199–209.
dark, propelled forward? Moreover, why do some ideas continue to resonate while others disappear without consequence?

Last, for now: Why do otherwise rational people believe in the absurdities that make up the inventory of antisemitic claims? What psychological processes cause individuals, even well-educated ones, to act on bizarre claims and become mass killers? What makes it possible for usually sensible men and women to believe absurdities like the following: that Jews have a particular odor that can be eliminated only through baptism; that Jews do not need to drink water and therefore can poison the public water supply (the explanation of the Black Death); that Jewish bodies are fundamentally different from non-Jewish bodies, for example, they have horns; that Jewish men menstruate; that Jewish doctors murder one out of ten of their non-Jewish patients; that while Jews give off a noxious odor, the cadavers of Christians killed by Jews for ritual purposes give off an unusually sweet smell; and that Jews kill Christian children for their blood?

There are still other substantial issues that could be added to this list, but space precludes doing so. I will, therefore, conclude by noting the obvious: antisemitism is a heinous, irrational phenomenon that has plagued, and continues to plague, Western, Muslim, Asian (in parts), and New World civilizations. It is a diseased ideology that should be of concern to all who value liberal, democratic, and just societies.