

Protestant dissenters, and so it is perhaps no surprise that the first purpose-built synagogue in London, Bevis Marks (1699–1701), designed by a Quaker architect, had the façade of a dissenting chapel and was located on a lane rather than on a public street. It seems that in the case of London, too, the term “civil inclusion” is probably more appropriate: Jews appeared to have freedom of residence and occupation (except where excluded by an oath, as in the case of becoming a freeman of the City of London), individuals paid their own taxes, and the community, the *Mahamad*, arrogated to itself the same powers as its mother community in Amsterdam, established on a similarly ambiguous foundation as a historically unprecedented voluntary community. Moreover, the English colonies also granted “equality” in charters, either following the Dutch precedent or the privileges the Dutch had extended to Jews.³⁷

Although in his groundbreaking studies Baron successfully removed many of the larger obstacles that precluded the careful study of emancipation, in discussing the Jews’ legal position in the early modern era he remained trapped in the language that implied a teleological quest for equality in using such phrases as the “progress of emancipation” or “the halting historic progression toward Jewish equality of rights.”³⁸ These terminological problems are probably inherent in the study of emancipation since it is by definition teleological, as it traces the history that leads to the pre-determined goal of equality. It is thus difficult to avoid applying a retrospective terminology such as “fundamental equality minus a few disabilities.” Yet this is precisely what historians should attempt to do, however difficult or, if one is striving to construct a suspenseful or lively narrative, self-defeating. Rather than peering backward through the long-distance telescope of a desired “equality,” we should peer forward by putting a microscope to the multiple situations, many of which resist easy definition because they were unprecedented, fluid or mercurial, in which Jews found themselves and functioned. After all, Jews in seventeenth-century Amsterdam and London would not have measured their status against an abstract goal of “equality.” What is necessary is to recover, and define precisely, the pertinent categories and concepts of the time before integrating them into a comprehensive schema of emancipation.

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REVISITING BARON'S "LACHRYMOSE CONCEPTION": THE MEANINGS OF VIOLENCE IN JEWISH HISTORY

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In a paper entitled, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” published in 1963, Salo Baron wrote: “All my life I have been struggling against the hitherto dominant ‘lachrymose conception of Jewish history’ ... because I have felt that an overemphasis on Jewish sufferings distorted the total picture of the Jewish historic evolution....”¹ Indeed, if one was to choose a single idea that encapsulated the legacy of Baron, perhaps the pre-eminent Jewish historian of the twentieth century, it would probably be this: Jewish history is not to be seen simply as a series of persecutions, which determined its nature and its course, but rather as a process of ongoing engagement between the Jews and their surroundings.²

It would be hard to overstate just how influential this viewpoint has become—even despite the withering attacks initially mounted upon it by the Israeli academy, particularly Yitzhak Baer.³ Today, Baron’s approach is almost universally accepted, and academic students of Jewish history are warned off “the lachrymose conception.”

The shift away from lachrymosity has shaped Jewish historical writing in fundamental ways, particularly in the last two decades. In fact, so pronounced has this become that in a 2006 study, David Engel identified what he termed a “neo-Baronian school” of Jewish historiography, which has sought “continuities instead of ruptures in Jewish history, stressed Jews’ achievements over their suffering, and professed the advantages and creative possibilities of diaspora existence.”⁴ Though attacks on Jews are not totally ignored, their significance is downplayed in favor of other factors. In recent years, this has become even more dominant in Jewish historical research, with medieval Jewish life in Germany described almost as a “convivencia” of Jewish and Christian shared

1. Salo W. Baron, “Newer Emphases in Jewish History,” *Jewish Social Studies* 25 no. 4 (1963): 245–258. Reprinted in Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1964), 90–106. Here, 96.

2. This is discussed at length in the epilogue to Robert Libertes’ biography of Baron: Robert Libertes, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York: New York University Press 1995), 338–359. See also Ismar Schorsch, “The Lachrymose Conception of Jewish History,” in *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 276–388.

3. Yitzhak Baer, “Ha-histories ha-danti ve-ha-hevratit shel ha-yehudim (He’aret la-sifro ha-hadash shel Sh. Baron),” *Zion* 3 (1936): 277–299. For a discussion of this polemic, see Yisrael Bartal, “Ziyonut u-bakhyanut,” *Zemanim* 60 (1997): 85–86.

4. David Engel, “Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron, Neobarbarism, and the Study of

37. Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, “Between Amsterdam and New Amsterdam: The Place of Curaçao and the Caribbean in Early Modern Jewish History,” *American Jewish History* 2 (1982): 188.

38. Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 2:228; and Baron, “Newer Approaches,” 80.

values and social experiences, the 1492 expulsion from Spain given as an example of Jewish migration, and the history of the Jews in late Tsarist Russia discussed largely without reference to antisemitism.⁵

Perhaps the time has come to re-examine Baron's interdiction and ask what the focus—one might almost say fetish—on avoiding the lachrymose conception might have caused us to lose in our understanding of the Jewish past. To do this, a first step should be to try to clarify what Baron himself meant by the lachrymose conception and to examine the assumptions that underlay his view of Jewish history. Once these have become clear, it should be possible to assess the extent to which adopting them unquestioningly might prevent us from grasping the full significance of persecution and violence in the Jewish historical experience.

Baron gave the clearest formulation of his outlook in the first edition of his *Social and Religious History of the Jews*:

It would be a mistake... to believe that hatred was the constant keynote of Judeo-Christian relations, even in Germany or Italy. It is in the nature of historical records to transmit to posterity the memory of extraordinary events, rather than of the *ordinary flow of life*. A community that lived in peace for decades may have given the medieval chronicler no motive to mention it, until a sudden outbreak of popular violence, lasting a few days, attracted widespread attention. Since modern historical treatment can no longer be satisfied with the enumeration of wars and diplomatic conflicts, the history of the Jewish people among the Gentiles, even in medieval Europe, must consist of more than stories of sanguinary clashes or governmental expulsions.⁶

Baron was here positioning himself against Heinrich Graetz, whom he considered as having written a history focused mostly on "Sufferings and Scholars"—a *Leidens und Gelehrten-geschichte*.⁷ What Baron was looking for was a social history of Jewish experience, privileging the flow of everyday life over the ruptures of violence.⁸ It is worth noting, however, that, as his biographer, Robert Liberman, argues: "Baron was far from negating the extent of medieval persecution as demonstrated by pogroms and expulsions. But [he]... sought to emphasize that there was more to Jewish history than suffering and tragedy and that daily life

revealed a more positive perspective."⁹ So, antisemitism was no longer to be seen as a moving force in Jewish history. Instead, it was the ways in which Jewish society interacted with the world around it (and, of course, vice versa) that shaped the course of Jewish history. Baron also never negated the importance of creative forces within Jewish culture, but always saw them as acting within a Jewish society embedded in the structures of the wider world.¹⁰

Two aspects of Baron's formulation are particularly important. The first is the emphasis on the medieval period, the second his usage, "the ordinary flow of life." As David Engel has shown, Baron was specific about periodizing his attack on the lachrymose conception. For him, it was the pre-emancipatory age that needed to be recast in much more stable terms. The emancipation of the Jews, he felt, actually plunged Jewish society into a period of instability and persecution. Thus, what he was calling for was not a total abandonment of the lachrymose conception, but a revision of "the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe."¹¹ As for the second point, more significant here, Baron's view of the past juxtaposed two different, even diametrically opposed states—what he termed, "the ordinary flow of life," and "extraordinary events," by which he meant outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence. The first, he posited, was a long-lasting norm, while the second was a short-lived exception, going on, in his words, for "only a few days." It was these two assumptions—that the "ordinary flow of life" was a realm full of the calm of neighborly living and that violence was essentially an extra-ordinary and short-term phenomenon—that allowed him more-or-less to bracket out persecution from the historical processes he described.

As to the chronological extent of persecution, Baron contended that this was a phenomenon that was essentially limited in time. Such was, of course, not necessarily the case. Though a single act of violence, a scuffle, or a riot, might take only a few minutes, hours, or days, attacks that took place during wartime could last on-and-off for years. The Chmielnicki uprising, with its widespread massacres of Jews, popularly known as *Gzeires Tah ve-Tat*, began in the spring of 1648 and lasted to 1654.¹² It was immediately followed by two other wars that ravaged Poland-Lithuania and its Jews until 1667.¹³ Clearly, Jews were not attacked on a daily basis for a period of nineteen years, but throughout the

9. Liberman, *Salomon Wittmayer Baron*, 347.

10. Salo W. Baron, "World Dimensions of Jewish History," in *History and Jewish Historians*, 23–42.

11. Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 63. He was, of course, referring to the French Revolution.

12. The full history of this period in Jewish history still remains to be written. For a detailed survey and discussion of its treatment in the existing historiography, see Joel Raba, *Between Remembrance and Denial: The Fate of the Jews in the Wars of the Polish Commonwealth during the Mid-Seventeenth Century as Shown in Contemporary Writings and Historical Research*, (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1995). A brief summary of the main events can be found in the entry "Gzeires Takh Vetai" by Shaul Stampfer in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Gzeires_Takh_Vetai (accessed 04/11/14).

5. Engel expressed his views on the phenomenon thus: "... these elements—the search for continuities, especially between the modern age and earlier eras; the turning away from themes of Jewish victimhood and insecurity in favor of... achievements and successful integration; and the affirmation of the possibilities for creative Jewish existence in a diaspora—appear to define what might well be labeled a 'neo-Baronian' school in contemporary Jewish historiography...." Engel, "Crisis and Lachrymosity," 245. Engel focused his critique on those writing modern Jewish history. His criticism is equally valid for works focusing on other periods.

6. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 40. The emphasis is mine.

7. Salo W. Baron, "Heinrich (Hirsch) Graetz, 1817–1891," in *History and Jewish Historians*, 267.

period they suffered not only from an extended series of targeted attacks, but also from heightened levels of daily violence on the part of soldiers and their neighbors.¹⁴ In this case, Baron's sharp distinction between violence and normalcy simply does not hold up.

However, it was not just in the case of wars that the effects of persecution could be felt for long periods of time. The violent attacks on the Jews of Spain in 1391, though they themselves lasted only a couple of months, sparked processes of religious change, tension, and further persecution, whose effects were felt in Spain itself for over a century—and elsewhere for considerably longer.¹⁵ Once again, though the physical acts of violence might have been limited in scope and time, their consequences reverberated, affecting the daily life of Spanish Jewry, long after the mobs themselves had dispersed.

The same is true of another of the persecutions, whose significance Baron wanted to downplay—expulsions of Jews. His message was clear: if Jews and Christians had lived together in one locality for centuries, why should we characterize those relations solely (or even largely) on the basis of their tragic end. That is, of course, a point well taken. It ignores, however, the consequences of the expulsion. In material terms an expulsion involved a loss of property and earning capacity, leading to impoverishment. Not only the period of the expulsion itself, but also the relocation to a new community was fraught with physical danger and often involved great expense. Finally, we should remember that such dislocation could have psychological implications, too. These were consequences the Jews had to deal with in their new homes for years and even decades to come.

For example: when some 4,000 Jews were expelled from Vienna and its surroundings in 1669/70, they had to leave their private homes and communal property, such as the synagogue, all of which were expropriated by the Emperor and sold to the city. The refugees were forced to fan out across central Europe, and the wealthier ones finding a place in Prague, Fürth, and Berlin, and the rest settling where they could—in small communities in the German lands, Bohemia, Moravia, and even Hungary. This was a hugely traumatic moment in the history of early modern European Jewry, deeply etched on the memory of the local communities where the refugees settled, probably because these communities, too, were called upon to devote resources and energies to helping them.¹⁶

The price for helping refugees could be very high. In her memoirs, Glikl of Hameln describes the efforts made in Hamburg to help a different group of Jewish

refugees—those from the Muscovite invasion of Vilna in 1655: "... many of them came to Hamburg, suffering with contagious disease.... At least ten of them were sent to rest in our attic. Father... was to look after their needs. Some of them recovered, others died. My sister, Elkele, and I also contracted the disease. My pious Grandmother... tended to the sick and ensured that they had everything they needed... she would visit them in the attic three or four times a day. Eventually, she also caught the disease and languished for ten days before she died."¹⁷

When those anxious to avoid the lachrymose approach consider the expulsions of Jews from their homes, they do not concern themselves much with such stories of human suffering, preferring to take a long perspective that allows them to view the events as important—often positive—moments of change. The expulsion of 1669 from Vienna is thus seen as giving an important boost to the development of Central European Jewry, the expulsions from Spain and Portugal create not only the vibrant communities of the Ottoman Empire but also the hugely dynamic Sephardic diaspora, and the series of expulsions from the German lands from 1348–1520 lay the foundations for the development of the cultural powerhouse that was to become Polish Jewry.¹⁸ Of course, this perspective is not wrong; it just ignores the costs—economic, physical, and psychological—that were involved in bringing these changes about.

Overcoming disaster was not just communal in nature—it had significant psychological implications, too. Those who had survived extreme violence or expulsion had to deal with the traumas of their past in order to rebuild their lives. This is not an insignificant issue, though one which it is hard for an historian to come to grips with.¹⁹ A major problem is that of sources: most of the testimonies that we have were written by rabbinic authors as autobiographical fragments in the introductions to their books. Here is an example from a survivor of the 1655 massacre of Lublin:

... I remained alone, languishing with a broken leg, lame and crippled when God destroyed the Polish and Lithuanian communities.... Everything I valued

17. Hava Tumiansky ed., *Glikl Zikhronot 1691–1719* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2006), 76.

18. The best—and probably most influential—example of this approach to early modern Jewish history is: Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism* (Oxford; Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998).

19. The field of "Trauma Studies" has tended to use a sanitized and rather abstract approach to traumatic experience in order to develop new forms of cultural critique. This seems to distance them from the actual cases they purport to study. See Wulf Kansteiner and Harald Weinböck, "Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others without the Help of Psychotherapy," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 229–240. What I am suggesting here is not the exploitation of trauma in the pursuit of a critical approach to culture but an attempt to understand it as an historical phenomenon. Doing this without the tools of psychotherapy is an extremely complex and difficult process, which means that any conclusions reached must be highly tentative. On some of the issues involved, see Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War, and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14. The best description of these events remains Majer Balaban, *Historja i literatura żydowska*, vol. 3, (Łwów; Warszawa; Kraków: Ossolineum, 1925), 266–272.

15. This process is dealt with at length in all histories of Spanish Jewry. For a brief summary, see Yom Tov Assis, "Spanish Jewry—From Persecution to Expulsion (1391–1492)," *Studia Hebraica* 4 (2004): 307–319.

16. The most comprehensive treatment of this is still David Kauffman, *Die letzte Vertreibung der Juden aus Wien und Niederösterreich. Ihr Vorgeschichte (1625–1670) und ihre Opfer*, (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1889). For a more modern approach, see Peter Rauscher "Auf der Schipp: Ursachen und Folgen der Ausweisung der Wiener Juden, 1670," *Aschkenas* 16 no. 2 (2006): 421–438, and the literature he brings there.

Sifrei Eivonot—from that period, Elisheva Carlebach has identified and analyzed the short chronographs (lists of important dates) that the authors often inserted into their manuscripts.²⁶ These were, by their nature, personal documents reflecting the historical understanding of the individual authors. However, such chronographs were also a permanent fixture in the small calendars, printed up and sold cheaply to Jewish merchants. These calendars allowed the calculation of the Jewish date and its comparison with the Christian calendar, and made particular show of the different fairs frequented by Jewish businessmen, together with their dates. These were neither personal, nor genuinely local documents. The chronographs they included were meant to make them more interesting and attractive to the broad market of Jewish merchants. Typically, these were short lists of dates, calculated back from the present. Until the nineteenth century, they included mostly events of Jewish interest, starting from the Bible and continuing more or less to the present.

Of interest to us here is the choice of important dates following the destruction of the Second Temple that were included in the chronographs.²⁷ These fell into two broad categories: the dates of the composition of the great rabbinic works—the Mishnah, the two Talmuds (Jerusalem and Babylonian), and the Mishneh Torah of Maimonides, and those of great disasters that had befallen the Jewish people. Particularly popular in the second category were expulsions: from France in 1306, from Spain in 1391 and 1492,²⁸ and from Portugal in 1497. The Chmielnicki massacres of 1648 were also universally mentioned. From events of the eighteenth century, it was mostly community-destroying fires that were given prominence, with the 1749 explosion in Breslau, in which 39 Jews were killed, also finding a place. More positive occurrences—even returns from exile when they happened (for example, following the expulsion from Frankfurt a.M. in 1616)—were not mentioned. These could find their place in more local or personal chronographs, but when the focus was widened for the mercantile calendars, it was the catastrophes not the victories that were chosen.²⁹

26. Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 189–206.

27. For the purposes of this paper, I examined a dozen or so Jewish calendars from the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. They were printed in Kraków 1641/2, 1648/9, Frankfurt a.M. 1736/7, Berlin 1737/8, Dyrenfurth 1740/1, Fürth 1784/5, Nowy Dwór 1786/7, Kassel 1786/7, Prague 1805/6, Białystok 1807/8, Poryck 1810/1. My thanks to Ilya Vovshin for helping me gain access to these materials. Though not all of them contained usable chronographs, the level of uniformity displayed by the others was so high as to suggest that this is indeed a representative sample for the period in question. I hope, in the future, to make a more detailed study of these important sources for Jewish cultural and economic history.

28. Often one of these two events was chosen at the expense of the other. When both were mentioned, the first was called “geirush Shpaniye” and the second, “geirush Sepharad” (Poryck, 1811). Though the events of 1391 were essentially anti-Jewish riots and not a formal expulsion, many Jews did leave Spain at that time.

29. These documents might, therefore, lead us to reconsider Yerushalmi’s bald statement that only those events commemorated in the Jewish liturgical calendar entered the Jews’ collective memory. Catastrophes could clearly be commemorated in different ways. See Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 52.

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When asked to pick the most important events, then, pre-modern Jews seem to have viewed their own recent history simply as a series of catastrophes. This suggests that we need to think of the lachrymose conception not just as a modern historiographical strategy, but rather as an historical phenomenon in its own right.³⁰ When pre-modern Jews thought about themselves and their place in the world, they did so not in liberal, but in lachrymose terms. And if those were the terms in which they understood their own “normality,” then when we try to do the same, we should not dismiss them, but take them very firmly into account.

In conclusion, it needs to be made clear that my comments do not advocate a return to an old model of Jewish history whose outlines are determined by persecutions of Jews and whose moving force is antisemitism. Baron’s conception of Jewish history as embedded in a range of broader contexts, all of which need to be studied and understood, is so obviously correct that it needs no restatement here. What this paper is suggesting, however, is that the dichotomy Baron drew between normalcy and persecution, which allowed him to downplay the significance of violence and antisemitism as factors in the historical process, was too sharp. The everyday life that he wanted to understand in order to assess the complete range of factors that shaped Jewish history was not an arena free of violence and persecution—and certainly not of their consequences. In almost every time and place, Jewish societies found themselves dealing with difficult and troublesome issues of persecution and its after-effects. These shaped their view both of their history and place in the world, and of their status in non-Jewish society and relations with their neighbors. What this re-examination of Baron’s opposition to the lachrymose conception seems to be pointing towards, therefore, is the need for the balanced re-insertion of hatred, persecution, and violence as factors in the way “normal” Jewish life is understood in its various historical settings. Baron, who was nothing if not a balanced historian, would probably have found much to agree with in this point of view.

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30. Liberles points out that Baron understood this point, which he even used on one occasion to excuse Graetz’s *Leidens und Gelehrten-geschichte*, which he otherwise excoriated. Liberles, *Salm*.