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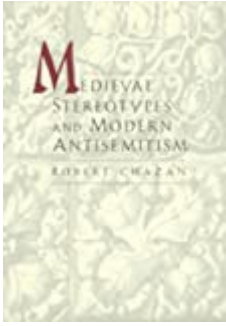


**Robert Chazan.** *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. xiv + 189 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-20394-5.

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In this short book Robert Chazan discusses what he sees as a pivotal shift in the negative image of Ashkenazic Jews created by twelfth-century European Christians. In Chazan's argument there are essentially three phases in the evolution of negative Jewish imagery in the Middle Ages. The first phase, the tenth century, saw new immigration of Jews into western Europe (here his focus is France and Germany). The negative imagery associated with this early immigration revolved around Jews during this first phase had to do with the "newness" of early Ashkenazic Jewry, its relatively limited economic outlets, as well as the broadly hostile view of the Christian majority, general lawlessness of the times, and common antipathy against urban traders.

In the second phase, the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Chazan finds a rapid economic and creative development of Ashkenazic Jewry. The broader commercial revolution forced Jews into a new economic specialization, money lending instead of trading, and simultaneously strengthened the dependence of the Jews upon ruling elites. For Chazan, the violence of the crusades did not indicate the demise of the Ashkenazic Jews. On the contrary, he claims that since the crusade violence against Jews was of limited scope and duration, and since the Jewish communities in the Rhineland were quickly repopulated, the eleventh and early twelfth centuries were still a favorable period for them. Through this second period he identifies five anti-Jewish themes, divided into two categories. First, Jewish Otherness: including negative imagery of Jews as newcomers and religious dissidents. Second, Jewish harmfulness, as reflected in images of Jews as [economic] competitors, allies of the barony, and historic enemies. For Chazan the latter grouping was most potent and held the greatest potential for further development in negative images of Jews. These he places in the third phase.

Beginning in the twelfth century and continuing through the thirteenth century, Chazan describes a sharp decline in the fortunes of Ashkenazic Jewry. The central shift took place in the Christian sense of Jews, from historic enemies to both historic *and* contemporary enemies. He traces this transformation to the middle of the twelfth century and the writings of Peter the Venerable. It is the emergence of the stereotype of Jews as physically harmful that makes possible both accusations of blood libel and host desecration that begin to surface in the twelfth century. Strikingly, it was precisely the renaissance of the twelfth century (in its philosophy, biblical interpretation, and consideration of the human psyche) that heightened Christian awareness of Others. For Chazan, it was because the twelfth century was a time of great change and anxiety in Europe, both internally and

externally, that new negative images of Jews were fostered. The new, and according to Chazan, deteriorated image of the Jews eventually influenced the Church and the state in their treatment of the Jews.

In sum, Chazan argues that "an earlier period of significant change and dislocation in the West–the dynamic and creative twelfth century–saw the interaction of new societal circumstances and a prior ideational legacy. This interaction produced an innovative view of Jews fated to influence anti-Jewish perceptions down into our own century (p. xi)." His point is further elaborated in his conclusion: "in fact every new stage in the evolution of anti-Jewish thinking is marked by dialectical interplay between a prior legacy of negative stereotypes and the realities of a new social context. Out of this interplay emerge novel anti-Jewish perceptions, which in turn become part of the historic tradition of anti-Jewish sentiment. In this way, anti-Jewish thought maintains a measure of stability and continuity, while in fact evolving considerably over the ages (p. 135)."

Such a broad summary of Chazan's argument, however, neglects to consider the important theoretical and methodological issues also evident in the work and discussed throughout the text. For the purpose of this review, I would like to consider the following areas discussed by Chazan: the renaissance of the twelfth century (including recent scholars, particularly Bob Moore, who have investigated the "underside" of the renaissance, i.e., the increased marginalization of outgroups); the question of normalcy and disruption of Jewish and Christian relations, and Jewish development, as evidenced, for example, in the effects of the crusades; the construction of "majority" perceptions, and Chazan's subsequent utilization of a variety of both Christian and Jewish sources; the distinction of secular and ecclesiastical attitudes; geographical/regional variation; and the theoretical discussion of the terms and concepts of antisemitism and anti-Judaism.

Before reviewing these central issues I should acknowledge that Chazan's reading of the sources and engagement with the secondary literature is very thorough and nuanced. His notes are particularly full and often discuss meaningful issues of theory and interpretation. Despite occasional repetition, the argument moves forward logically and lucidly.

Chazan, noting the pioneering opinion of Charles Homer Haskins, argues that the twelfth century was a period of great development in European economy, intellect and spirituality. The broadening of human knowledge and experience, however, was not necessarily "liberating." Chazan notes that "as often happens, increased awareness of diversity gave rise during the twelfth century to defensiveness and fear. Moreover, some of the exciting new cultural directions heightened negative attitudes toward others in general and toward the Jewish other in particular" (p. 85). Along this line, he goes on to discuss the work of Bob Moore in great detail. Moore and others note the parallel deterioration in the image of outgroups, such as Jews, heretics, lepers and homosexuals. Given such parallels, many scholars have argued that the transformations within the majority, persecuting, society are therefore more important in understanding prejudice and persecution than the behavior of the minorities themselves (p. 77). Moore adopts a Weberian sociological framework, and places the persecution of collective outgroups within the process of transition from a segmentary society to the state. Persecution is created by those in power for their own use, and the persecuted minorities can be simply interchanged. Chazan objects to this analysis on at least two counts: first, he suggests that Jewish sources indicate that negative perceptions of Jews were manifested at every level of society and furthermore that they flowed particularly from the lower classes (after all, the Jews saw the upper classes as their primary protectors); second, outgroups were not interchangeable–the way that neighbors viewed Jews was different than the way they viewed heretics, for example. Chazan concedes that it makes sense that a society in transition would seek to maintain its cohesion by ostracizing various outgroups; however, one need not conclude therefore that all ostracized outgroups were perceived and represented in the same way. Instead, Chazan argues that the deteriorating images of all these outgroups combined real aspects of their existence as well as the needs of the persecuting majority (with, he adds, a "considerable emphasis on the latter" [p. 83]). The negative images of the Jews were a combination of the fact that Jews were forced into a new economic position and political dependence and the fact that a prior and long-standing anti-Jewish legacy existed throughout Christian Europe.

But, Chazan offers only two paragraphs (and no citations, only reference to the chronicle of Ephraim of Bonn which seems to be his primary source material) to support his key assertion that Jewish writers saw the source of anti-Jewish imagery in the common masses as opposed to the ruling elite. Without more substantial documentation and analysis a number of questions arise: are these statements representative?; are they rhetorical?; did the Jewish authors assume that their work would

become known to the authorities?; for whom were the Jewish authors writing?; what exactly did they mean by "masses" or "commoners"?; do the sources betray religious issues that Chazan overlooks? In this light, regular Jewish dependence upon the ruling authorities does not prove that the ruling authorities were completely loyal to the Jews; Chazan does, after all, note the tensions in both ecclesiastical and secular policies regarding the Jews. Also, although it seems reasonable to argue that negative imagery is the result of a combination of reality and ideational legacy, it is not entirely clear how one measures and assesses the combination of these forces. To the extent that the negative imagery described by Chazan is popularly motivated or constructed, how significant is this reality? One might make the argument that in much of Europe today popular antisemitism has nothing at all to do with reality since there are no Jews in many of the most antisemitic places. In some cases, therefore, one might assert that the ideational legacy does indeed dictate antisemitic discourse to a very large extent.

Much of Chazan's discussion of phase two in his schema revolves around his earlier research into the First Crusade (1096-99). For him it does not represent the watershed that many have seen. He notes that the early stages of the First Crusade do not reveal any "serious evidence of aggression [against Jews] perpetrated by the established authorities of northern Europe" (p. 3). The turmoil associated with the crusade, therefore, did not occasion a shift in the protective stance of the authorities. Instead, Chazan argues that popular anti-Jewish violence was "somewhat more widespread during the late tenth, the eleventh, and the early twelfth century" (p. 4). On the other hand, he also notes that Jews often found refuge with their neighbors, suggesting that the mass imagery of the Jew had not yet undergone the negative transformation he and others have found in the twelfth century. This insight leads him to postulate that there were of course normal relations between Jews and Christians in the period. "We can only speculate as to common and positive views," he notes, "that individual Christians held of individual Jews whom they had come to know and respect, just as Jewish behavior reflects common and positive images (similarly unavailable to us) of Christian neighbors" (p. 9). But, he cautions, the description of negative relations, of death and destruction, pervade the sources we do have. These assertions again raise some important questions: are there other sources that might shed light on the more normal or positive relations, such as rabbinic responsa, other Christian sources, or artistic depictions?; how do we distinguish between individual and "mass" perceptions?; how should normal and disruptive relations be defined?; to what extent does the focus on disruption (whether that is what we have sources for or not) distort the picture of negative, neutral or positive imagery?; what can disruptive relations themselves reveal about normal relations?

Since Chazan later argues that negative imagery was not produced and then disseminated by the ruling elites, he is forced to examine the "majority" perception of the Jews. Chazan admits that any precise reconstruction of majority perceptions is impossible for the tenth through the twelfth centuries; the sources are simply too limited. Instead, he maintains that "the best we can do is establish loose approximations of majority views of Jews during this period through the examination of significant forms of majority behavior toward the Jewish minority, medieval depictions of the motivations for such behavior, and recurring imagery in those literary sources that have survived" (pp. 6-7). His analysis involves no attempt to distinguish views in diverse economic and social classes (p. 7) or differing secular and ecclesiastical attitudes. But who was affected by the "real" conditions described by Chazan–everyone, urban artisans, peasants? And who is representing the majority? It does not seem sufficient to say that we will focus on behavior, for the behaviors we know about are all described by individuals, and of course those individuals may not form part of the all-encompassing "majority" that Chazan posits. While it is indeed difficult to get at "common" perceptions, there are additional source materials to which one might turn, at least to broaden the study. Again, however, the concept of "common" or "majority" needs to be delineated or else it remains fairly useless, and as I question above, it seems more rhetorical than real. Of course one of the underlying issues here is of great significance and that is the relation between thought and action. More theoretical discussion of this subject might help Chazan give this piece of his argument more substance.

If the definition of "majority" is problematic in terms of economic or social distinctions, then I wonder if the lumping together of secular and ecclesiastical is equally problematic. At times Chazan notes the futility of distinguishing between secular and ecclesiastical in the high Middle Ages: "The church pervaded every nook and cranny of society; churchmen were vitally involved in the general life of society and shared broadly held perspectives of the period. Thus, the best we can hope to achieve is delineation of diverse images of Jews, without attempting to associate these views with particular elements in

society" (p. 7). Chazan is at times apt to lump secular and ecclesiastical authority together and label them broadly as the ruling elite (as opposed to his shapeless "majority"). At other times, however, he argues that the new negative stereotypes of Jews penetrated both the Church and the secular authorities–and here, he seems to want to draw a distinction. He notes that both secular and ecclesiastical authorities walked a thin line between tolerance of and strict discrimination against Jews. In general, however, the new negative images of Jews seem to have affected the Church before the state. In his discussion of King Philip Augustus of France (ruled 1180-1223), for example, Chazan notes the increased Church pressure against usury, which eventually influenced Philip's policies as well. I agree that the matter is complicated and must certainly have varied from region to region and been dependent upon individual ruling personalities. On the other hand, this lack of clarity signals an important question of causality. Often times, Chazan's presentation of cause and effect presupposes his schematic order of mass imagery influencing the ruling elite: it was the new stereotypes that prompted the lords to anti-Jewish action (p. 123).

Throughout the text Chazan discusses Ashkenazic Jewry but seems really to be talking mostly about English and French Jewry. Many of his central examples concern England and France in the late twelfth century. He explains this by noting the slowed economic and political development of Germany and maintains, nonetheless, that in the thirteenth century, particularly in Austria, one finds the same issues and resolutions as in England and France. If we concede his point that there were fundamental differences in the political organizations of England and France on the one hand and Germany on the other, he invites the assumption that what was central in anti-Jewish behavior was the centralization of the state. Negative Jewish imagery may have existed in twelfth-century Germany; but if it did not lead to the same practical consequences there because of a lack of centralization, to what extent did the popular imagery actually create anti-Jewish behavior or legislation?

Along these lines, Chazan also rejects (in the footnotes) the arguments of Jeremy Cohen, and chooses to depict the Church instead as more traditional than revolutionary in its ideology. This rejection allows him to paint a broadly traditional and uniform European culture, one in which mass representation was more central than the dissemination of religious reform by the ruling Church. Challenging this premise with regard to evident regional variation, however, again weakens Chazan's argument.

Terminology comes in for considerable attention in the book. He outlines and then analyzes the work of Gavin Langmuir very closely and in the end opts for a compromise. *Antisemtism* he reserves for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Anti-Judaism* he finds useless. Thus, he decides upon language like "anti-Jewish sentiment." The benefit for Chazan in throwing out the term anti-Judaism is that he diminishes the religious components of anti-Jewish behavior, while noting the more significant increase in the image of Jews as physically harmful, which is central for his argument. Of course if one takes Jeremy Cohen's argument seriously, anti-Judaism does have real meaning and fosters anti-Jewish sentiment. For Cohen it is far more than simply a none-too-important part of the ideational legacy.

Despite the brevity of the book, Chazan raises many crucial issues and offers a unique spin on many accepted traditions. His work represents sound scholarship that asks us to explore a number of important and interrelated issues. At the same time, Chazan's richly suggestive works force us to realize that developments within medieval history must be incorporated into the history of the Jews in the Middle Ages. It is to be hoped that the issues outlined here, as well as others raised in the book, will receive further and more fully-developed attention in the near future.

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