Crisis and lachrymosity: on Salo Baron, Neobaronianism, and the study of modern European Jewish history

David Engel

Abstract Salo Baron (1895–1989) remains an iconic figure among historians of the Jews, who routinely cite his dissent from the 'lachrymose conception of Jewish history' as a ideal to be upheld. Contemporary historians have generally understood the Baronian imperative to favor a historiography that seeks continuities instead of ruptures, deemphasizes Jews' victimhood in favor of their achievements and successful integration, and affirms diaspora creativity in opposition to Zionist disparagement of exile. They have also affirmed that imperative equally for all periods and places in Jewish history. Close analysis of Baron's corpus suggests that such a reading is better termed 'neo-Baronian,' for Baron himself employed his injunction against lachrymosity in reference to the middle ages only, whereas his depiction of the modern era stressed sustained crisis, conflict, and insecurity throughout the Jewish world. Such a depiction is fully consistent with his conception of the conditions under which Jews were most likely to find safety and prosperity. That conception, which posited the preferability of 'states of nationalities' to 'nation-states' and stressed the need for a strong international order capable of checking unrestrained state sovereignty, was evidently born out of Baron's own experience as a refugee in Vienna during and after the First World War.

Keywords Historiography · Baron, Salo (1895–1989) · Poland · Austria

Few historians in any field have achieved the iconic status that Salo Baron commands among scholars of the history of the Jews, and even fewer have held that status as long as he has. Indeed, it is remarkable that Baron, born at the end of the nineteenth century, continues to be cited at the beginning of the twenty-first not only as a great innovator in his own day but as a source of authority and a model for current historians of the Jews to emulate. Consider, for example, the following selection from the introduction to a path-
breaking book on the Jews of late imperial Russia published in 2002, among the most astute and challenging works of modern Jewish history to appear in recent years:

Crisis... has long been the central motif and the leading explanatory mechanism in the historiography of East European Jewry. Like the examiner’s question of naming a period in British history when the middle class was not rising, the historiography of East European Jewry, taken as a whole, leaves one wondering when the Jews were not in a state of crisis.... “Crises” of the “traditional Jewish community” have been located in the mid-seventeenth century (in the wake of the Chmielnicki massacres), the mid-eighteenth century (a result of the Hasidic schism, the Haidamak uprising, and/or the decline of the Polish monarchy), the early nineteenth century (with the extension of compulsory military service to Jews in the Russian Empire and the subsequent abolition of communal executive authority by the tsarist government), in the 1880s (after the wave of pogroms), during the First World War (due to massive expulsions of Jews from Russia’s western borderlands), the early Soviet years (a product of revolution, pogroms, and rapid assimilation), and finally – and most emphatically – in the Holocaust.... The reluctance to conceive of any path away from tradition other than that which leads through crisis threatens unwittingly to return the historiography of Russian and East European Jewry back to what the historian Salo Baron famously disparaged as the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history.”

There is an inherent tension in this passage, for while it calls for fundamental revision of the paradigm through which the history of east European Jewry is generally analyzed, it does so by reaffirming the validity of an older paradigm that Baron is supposed to have articulated over 70 years before. It represents Baron as a signpost of historiographical progress, while the ‘lachrymose conception’ that he ‘famously disparaged’ figures as an antediluvian outlook to which no right-minded historian of the Jews would ever wish consciously to ‘return’. To be sure – so the argument runs – historians after Baron who have described and analyzed the Russian-Jewish encounter have generally adopted an ‘explanatory mechanism’ that does not chime with the Baronian paradigm, but the adoption has been ‘unwitting’, the result of historical processes in which the historians themselves have been caught up. The resolution of the tension is thus to be found in the rhetorical purpose the mention of Baron serves – invoking the Baronian icon helps the

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1 Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley, 2002), 8.  
2 Among the processes enumerated in the introduction are the ultimate disappearance of liberal integrationism as a politically significant program among east European Jews, the seemingly abrupt passage from autocracy to socialism in Russia itself, and the failure of east European Jewish integrationists to leave ‘important institutional and archival legacies outside the Soviet Union’. In the author’s view, all of these developments have led historians to conceptualize the experience of late imperial Russian Jewry as a ‘dramatic leap across historical epochs’, in which Russian Jews en masse chose ‘autonomous national renewal’ as the preferred model for their ‘passage to modernity’, rejecting liberal ‘emancipation and assimilation’ without ever giving it a serious try. In attempting to explain this purported leap, historians have, according to his depiction, fixed upon a set of concrete historical events – “the explosion of anti-Jewish violence that swept across much of the [Russian] Pale [of Settlement] after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881” – which, together with “the Russian setting in general... produced a crisis that transformed the idea [of autonomous national renewal] into mass movements.” Hence the adoption of crisis as an ‘explanatory mechanism’. Ibid., pp. 7–13 passim. The accuracy of this critical representation of recent historical writing on late imperial Russian Jewry is not at issue here. Nor is the book’s overall scholarship, which is of the highest quality, or, for that matter, the validity of its affirmative thesis about the relevance of liberalism for Russian Jews. All that matters with regard to what follows is the use made of Baron in the critical discussion.
author establish a receptive climate for his challenge to the ‘leading explanatory mechanism’ even before he has adduced any evidence in its support. It is good, it seems, for historians of the Jews to wrap themselves in the master’s mantle whenever they can, especially if doing so might save colleagues from the ‘threat’ of accidental regression to a pre-Baronian state.

The author of the passage is hardly alone in his desire to identify with Baron. Nor is he alone in reading Baron as he does. In the event, the success of his rhetorical strategy depends upon widespread acceptance of a particular understanding not only of what Baron meant by lachrymosity but of how he envisioned a historiography that overcame it. The move makes sense only if Baron’s denigration of lachrymose history is read as incorporating a blanket injunction to minimize reference to ‘crisis’—conflicted more often than not with violence and persecution—through concentration on ‘subtler forms of change and continuities that bridge the moment’ of rupture.3 And indeed, this interpretation pervades much contemporary writing on the history of the Jews in the modern period.4 So, too, does the association of anti-lachrymosity with a skeptical attitude toward the claims of Zionist historiography and an affirmation of the historical relevance of liberal integrationism as an ideological platform for modern Jewish life5—both of which are central to the book in question.6 In fact, 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 stress upon 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, one committed to demonstrating and valorizing how various diaspora communities, both during the struggle for emancipation and following its completion, carried on a creative dialogue both with their surrounding societies and with Jewish traditions that resulted in the fashioning of new, positive Jewish identities and a growing sense of being truly ‘at home’ in their places of residence.7

3 Nathans, Beyond the Pale, 9.


5 Bartal, “Tsiyonut u-vachyanut,” 85, represented Baron as “the great opponent of the [Zionist] Jerusalem school [who] disagreed sharply with its fundamental assumptions.” Schorsch, “Lachrymose Conception,” 380, went so far as to speculate that Baron might have chosen “to come to America in 1926 because it gave promise of a Jewish existence that would better accord with his own paradigm.”

6 See, for example, Nathans, Beyond the Pale, 10: “I contend that an emphasis on crisis and revolutionary rupture has obscured an important dimension of Russian Jewry’s experience...[T]he historical trajectory of Russian Jewry was profoundly shaped by aspirations for civic emancipation and social integration. Indeed, the post-liberal movements that arose among Jews in fin-de-siècle Russia cannot be fully understood without reference to their explicit self-distancing from the hopes and perils of integration.”

7 Todd M. Endelman, “The Legitimization of the Diaspora Experience in Recent Jewish Historiography,” Modern Judaism, 11 (1991), 195–209, has identified a similar school without noting the symbolic role it assigns to Baron. Since the publication of his article landmark works incorporating the neo-Baronian message have continued to appear and to attract (usually well-deserved) acclaim. Among the most notable are Marion Kaplan, The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany (New York, 1991); Michael Brenner, The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany (New Haven, CT, 1996); Marsha L. Rozenbitt, Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I (New York, 2001); Gershon David Hundert, Jews in Poland–Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity (Berkeley, California, 2004).
Traces of this school's self-identification with Baron are manifold. According to one of his former students, now an outspoken devotee, Baron's signal contribution to Jewish historical writing was that "he alone dared to forge a long-term view of Jewish history that was based on pride rather than on persecution." That historian's own seminal work – a pioneering study of Jewish responses to expressions of hostility in late Imperial Germany that portrayed a community vigorously 'demand[ing] full integration into German society as well as the right to preserve [its] unique religious heritage' – was modeled consciously, by the author's own testimony, after what he took to be his teacher's call to produce "not an indictment of non-Jews for what they had inflicted on Jews throughout the ages, but rather a celebration of what Jews had done for themselves." Another leading historian of modern European Jewry, who has criticized a historiography centered about the binary opposition of 'emancipation/failure of emancipation' for neglecting 'the history of most Jews who lived in Europe in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries' and has blamed that neglect in part on the determination of 'Israeli historians of the modern Jewish experience...[to] force the diverse trends found in the modern Jewish world into a Procrustean bed of Zionist analysis', has portrayed Baron as a notable exception to this trend: "In his battle against 'the lachrymose conception of Jewish history,' he has pointed out that the relations of gentiles and Jews cannot be reduced to those of oppressor and victim...[and] has illuminated elements of mutual, and beneficial, influence." In this spirit this scholar has held up 'young [French] Jewish leaders of both native and immigrant origin', who between the two world wars 'moved in the direction of accommodating an ethno-cultural Jewish identity with the reality of French social and political norms' and worked toward a 'mutually-beneficial French–Jewish symbiosis', as evidence of 'change, diversity, and vigorous attempts to find appropriate socio-cultural and political forms of self-expression' in a community normally derided by Zionists for 'simply stagnat[ing] after achieving its emancipation.' Yet another prominent senior scholar who has argued cogently for the existence of a continuous tradition of successful negotiation by Jews in the political arena extending from antiquity to modernity has cast his approach as an application of Baron's admonition against the lachrymose theory of Jewish history, "a theory that found achievements in [the medieval] period only on the intellectual plane and considered the political and social realms a disaster."

9 Ismar Schorsch, Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–1914 (New York, 1972), 205.
13 Ibid., p. 146.
To be sure, there are many differences in the intellectual concerns and approaches of these historians, who may well be surprised to find themselves grouped together in a single historiographical school. Nevertheless all appear to read Baron as one who sought continuities instead of ruptures in Jewish history, stressed Jews’ achievements over their suffering, and professed the advantages and creative possibilities of diaspora existence; and all portray themselves as carrying on his historiographical agenda. No doubt much support for their reading can be adduced in Baron’s voluminous writings. But on the other hand, significant parts of Baron’s scholarly corpus, as well as his personal history, suggest that he might have differed substantially with those who claim his legacy at several crucial points. Moreover, his personal history appears to provide an important clue concerning the origins of the anti-lachrymose approach and his own initial understanding of it – an understanding from which neo-Baronians appear to have deviated. It seems fitting to ask, then, to what extent the rhetorical use routinely made of Baron by many contemporary historians of modern Jewry is justified.

Although Baron used the word ‘lachrymose’ in passing in the final sentence of his seminal 1928 essay, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” the phrase ‘lachrymose conception of Jewish history’ appeared for the first time only in the initial edition of his Social and Religious History of the Jews, published in 1937. There Baron defined the lachrymose conception as a disposition to “view...the destinies of the Jews in the Diaspora as a sheer succession of miseries and persecutions,” complaining that “Jewish historiography has not been able to free itself [from its grasp] to this day.” A few pages later he offered an alternative model:

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 the ordinary flow of life. A community which 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 much more than stories of sanguinary clashes or governmental expulsions... Normal relations between Jews and Christians were generally amicable, or at worst characterized by mild mutual suspicion.

To be sure, it is easy to see how this passage could be read as a fiat to shift the focus of research on the history of the Jews away from moments of crisis toward longer-term continuities. It is also not difficult to imagine how a view based upon attention to the continuous constructive interaction between Jews and their neighbors could be understood to define an alternative to the catastrophic interpretation of Jewish history usually associated with Zionist historians like Yitzhak Baer and Ben-Zion Dinur. Indeed, the Zionist historians themselves perceived a fundamental disagreement with Baron on this point: as Baer wrote in his oft-cited review of the Social and Religious History, although “when we examine documents [we find] that there is a basis” for Baron’s assertion that

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16 Salo Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?” Menorah Journal, 14 (1928), 526.
18 Ibid., p. 40.
“galut (exile) is not so terrible..., still, when all is said and done, the fact remains that Jewish history in the Middle Ages was an unending series of persecutions, and the insecurity of Jewish existence was palpable” everywhere and at all times.19 Ironically, though, both Baer’s rejection and the neo-Baronian embrace of anti-lachrymosity as a general historiographical platform take Baron’s observations about the Middle Ages as a synecdoche for diaspora as a whole; they infer that Baron regarded what he wrote about Judeo–Christian relations in medieval Europe as applicable to all diaspora communities in all periods. Such a reading, though, appears highly dubious; the textual evidence in its favor is scant, while evidence that undermines it is manifold.

Although it is true that Baron did consistently represent the lachrymose conception he condemned as a view of exile overall, it was precisely the sweeping manner in which the conception was employed, its flattening of nuances that varied widely over time and space, that he identified as one of its great weaknesses.20 Indeed, in the very passage in which he warned of the distortion introduced by excessive lachrymosity into perceptions of medieval Jewish–Christian interactions, he observed that “compared to the almost incessant wars which ravaged Europe in the late Middle Ages and early modern times, the pogroms, even of those most tragic three centuries from 1096 to 1391, were but sporadic outbreaks.”21 To his mind the period generally known as ‘the Middle Ages’ was hardly all of a single piece: already in “Ghetto and Emancipation” he argued that although “the Middle Ages” was hardly all of a single piece: already in “Ghetto and Emancipation” he argued that although “the ‘Dark Ages’ of Europe were really a time of relative prosperity and high civilization for the Jew,” the Jews experienced a ‘Dark Age’ of their own during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.22 Thus what he regarded as the regrettable tendency of emancipated nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jews to posit a “complete contrast between the black of the Jewish Middle Ages and the white of the post-Emancipation period” was for him but a mirror image of the blindness to varying shades of Jewish experience that the lachrymose tendencies of late medieval writers had bequeathed to subsequent generations.23 Such a contrast, he claimed, was untenable “in the light of present historical knowledge,” which to his mind demonstrated that for Jews the Middle Ages were not so uniformly and irredeemably bleak nor modern times so unreservedly salubrious as was common to think

19 Yitzhak Baer, “‘Ha-historiyah ha-hevratit veka-datit shel ha-yehudim’ (he’arot le-sifro shel Sh. Baron),” Zion, 3 (1938), 291. Emphasis added.
20 There is thus much irony in Simon Dubnow’s comment in his review of the Social and Religious History: “In a few places...the author accuses all historians of depicting the Middle Ages as a vale of tears, a chain of troubles and punishments. The charge is valid only for those who do not make any distinction between countries and periods within the Middle Ages.” Simon Dubnow, “A bukli vegn problemen fun der idisher geshikhte,” Di Tsukunft, December 1937, p. 766.
21 Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:40.
22 Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” p. 516.
23 Ibid. For Baron’s thesis concerning the medieval origins of the lachrymose conception see Baron, Social and Religious History, (1937), 2:31. This thesis does not appear to have been developed when “Ghetto and Emancipation” was written; there “the exaggerated historical picture of the horrors of the ‘Dark Ages’” was attributed entirely to modern factors (p. 525). In later writings, in contrast, Baron located the roots of lachrymosity in martyrological traditions “fully developed already in the Maccabean age.” Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 2nd ed. (New York, 1952–83), VI, 194. In his words, “most Hebrew chroniclers of the Late Middle Ages and early modern times” exemplified the lachrymose conception, which “also found eloquent representatives among leading modern Jewish historians, including L. Zunz and H. Graetz.” Ibid., XI, 388, n. 24.

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in his day. Hence, he cautioned, if prevailing views of the Middle Ages were marked by an excess of tears, current depictions of the modern era could well bear a judicious admixture of melancholy. The injunction against lachrymosity thus applied to representations of the Middle Ages only. In fact, his admonition’s original incarnation called not for abandonment of ‘the lachrymose conception of Jewish history’ altogether but specifically for revision of ‘the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe’.25

Not surprisingly, then, Baron’s own representations of what he often called the “period of emancipation,” whose first stirrings he located in the seventeenth century in the context of general European state centralization and the concomitant abolition of the autonomous Jewish corporation,26 hardly stressed continuity and placid relations with surrounding society. Quite the contrary: according to Baron, emancipation unleashed a host of “conflicting forces” that became “a permanent source of new conflicts” both within the Jewish world and between Jews and non-Jews.27 The result of such ongoing friction over the following two centuries was, in his depiction, a very different situation from the one he claimed prevailed in medieval times; indeed, it hardly chimed with the anti-lachrymose paradigm that he believed fit the earlier period so well:

Having noted the millennial flow of the broad streams of religious and social history constantly intermingling in one living totality, from time to time separating to produce fateful discord, only to reunite in a new harmony, we might conveniently terminate our investigation at this point. Today, discord appears most intense, and a new harmony far from discernible.... The Jewish people are passing through one of the greatest of their historical crises. Not the upheavals of early modern times, nor the rise of Islam, nor, perhaps, even the simultaneous loss of national independence and the maturing of the great daughter religion in the first century, were fraught with more dangers for Jewish survival than are contemporary developments. One must go back perhaps to the First Exile to find a situation equally threatening.28

It should not be supposed that because his words were published in 1937 the crisis to which Baron referred was one instigated by the rise of Nazism. In the event, the general thesis of the Social and Religious History, including the characterization of Jewry’s post-emancipation situation as ‘abysmal and terrifying’,29 was formulated by 1931, before the Nazi rise to power, and the full manuscript was submitted for publication prior to the promulgation of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935.30 Indeed, in the final chapter of the work Baron strongly implied that contemporary events in Germany were only one

26 See, for example, Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” p. 524; Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:260–61.
27 Ibid., 2:364–65.
28 Ibid., 1, 21.
29 Ibid., I, 21.
30 Robert Liberles, Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History (New York, 1995), 125–28. The first chapter of the work, containing the unencouraging observations about the situation of the era following the dissolution of the ghetto, was published in 1933 in a Polish journal for which Baron served as contributing editor: S. Baron, “Żydzi a żydostwo,” Miesi?cznik żydowski, 3 (1933), 193–207.
among his concerns and not necessarily the most pressing of them, at least for the moment. Rather it was emancipation itself, or more precisely certain fundamental features of modern social relations of which emancipation was a reflection, that had generated a series of crises for Jews throughout the world, touching every aspect of their lives. Among the most dangerous effects of those features he counted the slowing rate of natural increase among Jews vis-à-vis the surrounding non-Jewish population (a symptom, at least in part, of widening Jewish despair for the future coupled with diminished adherence to traditional rabbinic norms); the evaporation of traditional Jewish means of livelihood in the wake of industrialization and the spread of corporate capitalism (processes that rendered masses of Jews economically superfluous and induced a concomitant erosion of Jewish political status in newly-industrializing countries); the weakening of religion as an internal unifying force in Jewish life (a reflection of “the general intellectual and religious unrest in the Western world, [which] is inordinately magnified in the case of the Jews, through the perennial conflict between their necessary adaptation to western life and thought and the equally inescapable preservation of their Jewishness”); and the absence of a clear conviction among growing numbers of Jews that Jewishness provides them with something of value (a result of emancipation turning affiliation with Jewish institutions into a voluntary practice). In short, Baron viewed modern European Jewish history, unlike the history of European Jewry in the Middle Ages, as a story of continuous upheaval engendered by ubiquitous deep ruptures in the fabric of Jewish society, culture, and relations with others. Moreover, he strongly suggested that a primary task of contemporary Jewish historical study, far from directing attention away from that upheaval, was to probe all of its manifold dimensions, with a mind to clarifying what Jews might do to extricate themselves from it.

Such a perspective permitted him to produce works on the modern period that were hardly free of lachrymosity as he defined it — works that placed their primary ‘emphasis... upon afflictions and violent episodes’ at the expense of ‘the pretty aspects of [Jewish] history, especially the pioneering contributions of the Jews to social and economic relations

31 See Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:418–19, 421–22: “The anti-Jewish preachment of German national socialism must not conceal the fact that it is not necessarily the new social order sought by the Nazis that is overtly hostile to the Jewish people. This revolt of the German petty bourgeoisie...raged against the Jews much more because they had furnished a number of distinguished leaders to the proletarian groups...than in their capacity of capitalists. But this is more in the nature of a historical accident.... In this struggle the Hitlerites have long drawn their major financial support from capitalist circles, and reciprocated by constantly toning down their anticapitalistic exhortations. Even Jewish capitalists have been treated with comparative mildness. Thus a movement which started out to destroy ‘Jewish’ finance capital and ‘interest servitude’ has concentrated all its implacable ire upon middle-class Jewish doctors, lawyers and shopkeepers.... Economic realities, however, reassert themselves,... and various decrees of the cabinet ministers for Economics and the Interior, Schmitt, Schacht and Frick, were issued to preserve, at least temporarily, Jewish big business. Whether and how soon these economic and expansionist considerations will put an end to the excesses of racial and nationalist frenzy, it is too early to judge.”

32 Ibid., 2:388.
33 Ibid., 2:365–97.
34 Ibid., 2:457–61.
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and to matters of the spirit'.35 His brief 1930 study of the situation of the Jews in Romania, for example, was full of lugubrious phrases such as "economically the Jews in Roumania are on the verge of ruin," "the poor Jewish traders suffer in a still higher degree than their Christian neighbors," and "the Jews are worse off [politically] than even the other minorities."36 These observations were particularly telling in light of Baron's insistence only two years earlier in "Ghetto and Emancipation" that in the Middle Ages, European Jews virtually everywhere had been better off economically and politically than the large majority of the non-Jewish population. Similarly his 1964 work, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets, began with a comment that "rarely was a people subjected to such sustained, unrelenting pressures as were the Jews under the tsarist regime," noting too that "even under the totally changed [post-revolutionary] social structure, the anti-Semitic feelings of the Russian masses could reassert themselves under various guises."37 The book's principal story was one of a modernizing bureaucratic state regularly exacerbating tensions between Jews and their neighbors, preventing the development of mutually beneficial relations, and degrading Jews so greatly that their considerable intellectual and spiritual resources were hard pressed to sustain them.

Baron's biographer took the fact that "suffering fills the pages of...The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets" as an indication that "Baron was not always consistent regarding the place of tragedy and persecution in Jewish history."38 However, if Baron's strictures against lachrymosity are understood as applying not to 'the place of tragedy and persecution in Jewish history' overall but specifically to their place in the history of medieval European Jewry, the charge of inconsistency fails. In the event, the tenor of The Russian Jew is entirely consistent with Baron's view that modernity, for all its "celebrated victories," tended in many ways to magnify Jewish physical and material insecurity, ultimately generating forces that "threatened to destroy not only the Jewish people but all of Western civilization."39 Unlike his predecessors Simon Dubnow and Louis Greenberg, who depicted Imperial Russia's Jewish policies largely as medieval anachronisms, Baron found the root of those policies in the dialectical tension between enlightenment rationalism and romanticism, both thoroughly modern phenomena. In much the same vein he criticized those who "spoke of the revival of the 'medieval' status of Jewry" under the Nazi regime. In his view, Nazism opposed medieval Christian notions of the proper moral order with a

35 The phrases are from Baron to Y. Amir, 21 March 1960, Stanford University Libraries, Department of Special Collections, M580 (Salo Wittmayer Baron Papers), box 83, folder 1 (henceforth Stanford-Baron). The letter responded to a request from Amir, who was translating the second edition of the Social and Religious History into Hebrew, for clarification of the meaning of 'the lachrymose conception of Jewish history'. The translator was concerned that rendering the phrase as 'tefsah bachyanit shel ha-historiyah' (which has indeed become the most common Hebrew translation) would not convey the proper semantic register; Amir to Baron, 14 Adar 5720 [=13 March 1960], ibid. Baron replied that "the adjective bachyani is too strong." He preferred a translation related to the word yisurim (afflictions), which he related to the German Leiden, explaining that for him lachrymosity meant primarily the writing of Leidensgeschichte in the manner of Graetz. His method differed from that of Graetz, he added, not in its denial of "violent episodes, expulsions, and other punishments" but in its greater emphasis upon "the pretty aspects" (ha-isedadim ha-yafim). In the end, Amir's translation was never published.
36 Salo Baron, The Jews in Roumania (New York, 1930), 4, 8.
38 Liberles, Salo Wittmayer Baron, p. 344.
"new 'religion of blood and honor'" based upon modern pseudoscientific race theory. Therefore, he complained, representation of the Holocaust as a throwback to a pre-modern era ultimately meant "maligning the Middle Ages."\(^{40}\)

In short, Baron’s criticism of the lachrymose theory of Jewish history was applicable to a particular period in Jewish history, not to Jewish history as a whole. As a historiographical platform, moreover, it was more descriptive than prescriptive. For Baron, lachrymose evocations by scholars of Jewish suffering in medieval times were to be disparaged in the first instance, because they were not "in accord with historic truth."\(^{41}\) The same was not the case, he thought, regarding many aspects of the era of emancipation. In discussing those aspects he thus felt no compunction about stressing crisis, persecution, and pain, nor did he exhort other scholars to refrain from doing so. Implicit in his approach was a sense that each period in Jewish history and each Jewish community in every part of the world needed to be grasped first of all in its own particularity, so that it could be represented in detail rich enough to "open the eyes of contemporaries...to...neglected facets and nuances in the lives of earlier generations."\(^{42}\) Tropes appropriate to one time or place were not necessarily so for others, and Baron did not employ them uniformly. Thus if Baron appears today to have deviated on occasion from his own prescription to turn historiographical attention away from catastrophe and suffering and toward continuities and beneficial interactions with the surrounding society, the appearance reflects an interpretation that is inconsistent with Baron’s own work. A prescription to do so in all cases is a product of his latter-day votaries, not of Baron himself.\(^{43}\)

Not that Baron’s historical writings contained no prescriptions of their own; the prescriptions were simply directed to a different audience, not primarily to historians. As he made clear in his article "Emphases in Jewish History," which appeared in the inaugural issue of the journal *Jewish Social Studies*, he viewed history as "an applied social science, which is of practical significance to statesmen, men of affairs, and the intelligent public at large."\(^{44}\) It was to such people that his work, including his attack upon lachrymosity, was primarily aimed, and the attack was justified not merely by its truth but by its usefulness. In his words, "the removal of outworn historical conceptions is not only dictated by the scientific conscience of the investigator and by the quest for truth of the genuinely interested public, but may also, in the long run, pave the way towards the formulation of a new philosophy of Jewish history which would more closely correspond to our own modern social needs and our new intellectual requirements."\(^{45}\) In the epilogue to the *Social and Religious History*, too, he proclaimed his hope that "the interpretation and reinterpretation of the history of the [Jewish] people, a kind of historic Midrash," would restore to the Jews their unity and sense of collective purpose now that "traditional theistic

\(^{40}\) Ibid., pp. 316, 347.

\(^{41}\) Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” p. 526.


\(^{43}\) Baron appears to have held his skeptical attitude toward the efficacy of emancipation as an exordium for Jewish life for at least the better part of his active teaching career. His most comprehensive statement on the modern period following the first edition of the *Social and Religious History* was published in 1956; in it he vociferously argued, as he had in 1928, that "only after a protracted uphill struggle did the modern Jewish communities salvage some of the prerogatives they had enjoyed in the pre-emancipation era" and that legal equality had proved an unreliable guarantee of security. Baron, “The Modern Age,” pp. 315-484, esp. pp. 315–21.

\(^{44}\) Salo W. Baron, “Emphases in Jewish History,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 1 (1939), 15.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 38.
sanctions” had become “weaker...in the modern world.” Historical study, he thought, would have to replace “the traditional way of reinterpreting older scriptural authorities” if Jews were ever to find their way out of the spiritual aspects of their present crisis.

Baron’s history also addressed the material aspects of that crisis. Though on the descriptive level his view of those material aspects actually shared much with contemporary Zionist depictions of the tenuousness of European Jewish existence, Baron broke with the Zionists in refusing to regard that tenuousness as endemic in the situation of exile. He was convinced that even though emancipation had at times magnified Jewish physical and material insecurity, there were actions that both Jews and non-Jews could take that would produce a more stable diaspora Jewish existence than Zionists thought possible. This fundamentally ideological conviction became a regular theme throughout his historical corpus. It was manifest, *inter alia*, in the suggestion he offered at the outset of the Social and Religious History that what distinguished Jewish history from the history of all other peoples and endowed Jews with “the religious and ethnic power of perseverance” was in the first instance the fact that after “a very short time [in which] the Jews had a state or states of their own[,] gradually the [Jewish] nation emancipated itself from state and territory,” learning to live *in despite of nature* thanks to an extraordinarily well-developed historical consciousness. It also underlay his initial foray against lachrymosity, as is evident in the concluding paragraphs of “Ghetto and Emancipation,” where he explained that the legacy of the Middle Ages had much to offer Jews seeking release from the sustained conflicts of emancipation:

Particularly among the younger intellectual leaders of national Judaism one discovers a note of romantic longing towards the Jewish Ghetto, its life, and its culture.... The establishment of national Jewish minorities in Eastern Europe has done much to reverse former animosity to Ghetto ideas of Jewish self-government.... Thus...the old need for rejection of all that preceded the Emancipation disappears.... Such revaluations of the Middle Ages are part, perhaps, of a general modern tendency.... Liberal *laissez faire* is being more and more supplanted by a system of great trusts, protectionism, Fascism, Sovietism. Growing dissatisfaction with democracy and parliamentarianism has brought about a movement back to a modified medievalism. This is a medievalism on a higher plane, perhaps, but a medievalism just the same, of organization, standardization, and regulation.... Autonomy as well as equality must be given its place in the modern State, and much time must pass before these two principles will be fully harmonized and balanced. Perhaps the chief task of this and future generations is to attain that harmony and balance. Surely it is time to break with the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe, and to adopt a view more in accord with the truth.

In other words, Baron believed that the Middle Ages, pejoratively symbolized for modern Jews by the concept ‘ghetto’, actually offered usable models for counteracting the disintegrative effects of liberal individualism and the perils of exposure to popular judgment and caprice that were part and parcel of the positively-charged concept ‘emancipation’. Those models embraced corporate forms of sociopolitical organization that permitted the relations between states or publics and individuals to be mediated by collective bodies possessing

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48 Ibid., 1, 17–23. Emphasis in source.
powers and prerogatives in their own right, a mediation that he claimed the Jewish community had experienced before emancipation effectively destroyed it. Moreover, he was encouraged that some Jews and non-Jews were already experimenting with ways to adapt such medieval forms to modern socioeconomic conditions requiring “organization, standardization, and regulation.” Thus, although a critic of Zionism, he was hardly committed to adjusting the relations between Jews and non-Jews along liberal integrationist lines. Indeed, he presented both fascism and communism as promising alternatives to the liberal order, not only generally but perhaps even for Jews as well. Hence his prescription to “statesmen, men of affairs, and the intelligent public at large”: in order for the necessary development and testing of alternatives to continue, the general modern disparagement of the Middle Ages as a ‘dark age’ must be overcome. The lachrymose conception of Jewish history was simply the name he gave to the Jews’ own particular form of disparagement; by denouncing it, he warned that as long as Jews persisted in it, they were turning their backs upon serious possibilities for improving their contemporary situation. Opposition to lachrymosity thus suggested a particular approach to the Jewish question in post-revolutionary Europe – one that synthesized the revolutionary ideal of civil equality with the autonomy of the Jewish community under the old regime.

Of course, Baron was not the only Jew or non-Jew to look to the medieval corporation for inspiration in developing a new model of sociopolitical organization that would enhance Jewish wellbeing, both material and spiritual. More than two decades before he raised the banner of ‘modified medievalism’, Simon Dubnow, for one, had formulated an autonomist political program that explicitly sought to recast the medieval Jewish kehillah in modern, secular form. Like Baron, moreover, Dubnow assigned a central role to historical study in the cultivation of Jewish communal solidarity in modern times. Nevertheless, there were at least two significant differences in the way each thought about their respective corporatist ideas, one concerning the purpose of the reconstituted corporation, the other about the way in which their ideas could be implemented under twentieth-century European political conditions. As it turns out, these differences disclose a key to understanding both what

50 Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” pp. 516–20, 524. He repeated this argument in 1956; Baron, “The Modern Age,” p. 317: “[O]nly after a protracted uphill struggle did the modern Jewish communities salvage some of the prerogatives they had enjoyed in the pre-emancipation era – a struggle which must be renewed in every generation under changing environmental pressures.”

51 This was his position in 1928. By 1937 he had become somewhat more skeptical toward each, although he was still not prepared to give up on either. Of communism he wrote that “the Russian experience has been too short to allow for legitimate generalizations.” On one hand he observed that “the communist policy does not justify the belief that the proletariat as a class is necessarily friendly to the Jews,” but on the other he noted that “communism, with its messianic dream of the ultimate disappearance of all states, is at least theoretically less inimical to the stateless ideals of Judaism [than fascism].” Indeed, he worried that “fascism, glorifying the state above all human institutions..., seems hardly reconcilable with the Judaism of the last two millenia.” But nevertheless he concluded that “neither is...the fascist state, as such, necessarily antagonistic to the survival of Jewry.” This generalization applied not only to Italy, which ‘furnishes a classical illustration of a tolerant brand of fascism, as far as Jews are concerned’, but also to Nazi Germany. Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:416–22. On Baron’s assessment of the Nazi regime’s intentions with regard to Jews see n. 19, above.


Baron’s rejection of lachrymosity implied for his own historiographical agenda and why he found the medieval corporate model so appealing.

Both Dubnow and Baron held that the primary purpose of corporate political organization was to place a check upon the power of the modern centralized state. Each, however, concentrated his attention upon the need to check a different aspect of that power. For Dubnow, the principal danger posed by modern states to Jews lay in their inclination to press for the assimilation of ‘subject nationalities’ culturally: as he put it, “for the [medieval] principle of cuius regio, eius religio (whoever owns the region, his is the [ruling] religion), [many contemporary states] have substituted the doctrine of cuius regio, eius natio (whoever owns the region, his is the [ruling] nationality).” In “Ghetto and Emancipation” Baron, too, expressed concern primarily about the tendency of such states to force sweeping changes in “traditional Jewish ideology” regarding “the inseparability of nationality and religion” and to compel Jews “to avow allegiance to the national ambitions and culture of the land in which [they] lived.”

Over the next decade, though, the object of his apprehension appears to have shifted to the propensity of a particular kind of modern political form, the nation-state, to oppress Jews physically and materially. The danger posed by the nation-state to Jewish physical well being, he claimed, had already been adumbrated during the Middle Ages, to the point where he actually “ventured to formulate a historical law”:

[T]he status of the Jews was most favorable in pure states of nationalities (i.e., states in which several ethnic groups were included, none having the position of a dominant majority); least favorable in national states (i.e., where state and nationality, in the ethnic sense, were more or less identical); and varying between the two extremes in states which included only part of a nationality.... The state of many nationalities found the “foreignness” of the Jews less objectionable, since its major elements were ethnically differentiated among themselves. Such a state could even use the ubiquitous Jewish group as a link binding the disaffected elements in the population to the ruling authority.... Examples of such pure states of multiple nationality were the early medieval states after the Teuton invasions; Muslim Spain from the eighth to the tenth centuries, as well as Christian Spain in the thirteenth century; the Carolingian Empire; early Angevin England; Poland, and Turkey. The more ethnically homogeneous these states grew through the process of mutual assimilation, the less favorable became the position of the Jews.... Finally, when a state achieved complete homogeneity, there usually came the climax: a decree of banishment.

That precedent led him to look with alarm upon the growing entrenchment of the nation-state as the foundation of the twentieth-century international order and to speculate about its potential adverse effects upon the security of European Jewry:

At this juncture [in time] there arises another menacing question: Will not the age-old intolerance of the national state toward the Jews reassert itself once more? The nineteenth-century attempt to reduce Judaism to a creed only, and to allow the ruling

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54 Dubnow, Nationalism and History, pp. 140–41.
55 Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” p. 524.
56 Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:39. Baron reaffirmed the ‘law’ almost 40 years later; Salo W. Baron, “Changing Patterns of Antisemitism,” Jewish Social Studies, 37 (1976), 15. His opposition of the terms ‘states of nationalities’ and ‘national states’ clearly reflected the German and Polish political vocabulary of late Habsburg Galicia in which he grew up (“Nationalitätenstaaten” or “państwa narodowościowe” versus “Nationalstaaten” or “państwa narodowe”).
ethnic groups completely to absorb the Jews in all other respects, without the crudity of enforced baptism, appears to have definitely failed. Are the outbursts of anti-Semitism in Germany, which has elevated ethnic homogeneity to the place of an all-pervading social and political philosophy, merely a beginning of a long chain of developments toward dissimilation and disfranchisement? Will other states, similarly nationalistic, likewise despair of the feasibility of absorption, and insist on peremptory dissimilation, and, perhaps, ultimate elimination?57

Thus it was the ability of nation-states to dissimilate Jews physically more than their ability to assimilate Jews culturally that Baron thought needed most urgently to be checked in 1937.

The replacement of the large multinational empires that ruled eastern Europe before the First World War, when Dubnow initially formulated his ideas about the political order that would bring Jews the greatest benefit, by their successor nation-states after 1919, the gestation period for Baron’s views on the same matter, no doubt explains their respective understandings of how the necessary corporate order might be brought to fruition. Dubnow foresaw a situation in which the various ethnic groups of the Russian and Habsburg empires would join together to force from below a new federal state of culturally autonomous nationalities within the old imperial boundaries. “A policy based on the suppression of national minorities and their forced assimilation,” he explained, “can lead only to... permanent turmoil...or...the breakup of the state into individual national states.” Hence, he predicted, imperial leaders would “finally come to understand that...it is in the interest of the maintenance of peace and of political security that the multinational state must give a certain measure of autonomy to all its nationalities.”58 Baron, in contrast, was convinced that effective checks upon the power of nation-states would have to be imposed from above, by the international community. Like his view of the advantages a corporate system would bring to Jews, this conviction too was buttressed by a historical analogy:

Just as in the early Roman Empire a measure of equality could be combined with extensive Jewish autonomy only through the strenuous efforts of the super-national power of Rome, so also today only a League of Nations or another such international body may insist upon a similar equilibrium between equality and minority rights. Even the short postwar perspective permits the conclusion that international intervention alone may sustain this great positive achievement of the peace treaties and, through the gradual extension of minority rights to all ethnic-cultural groups in the world, eliminate a constant source of friction in our civilization.59

In fact, as he explained in a 1938 Journal of Modern History article on “The Jewish Question in the Nineteenth Century,” not only the ancient past and “the short postwar perspective” demonstrated the vital importance of the international order in achieving the necessary balance between equality and autonomy. Fully half of the article explored how the international system established at the Congress of Vienna had worked to the Jews’ benefit and detriment over the following hundred years. Already at the beginning of the century, he claimed, “far-sighted observers...noted that international action would be required to eliminate” the “eternal source of friction” presented by the problem of

58 Dubnow, Nationalism and History, p. 141.
59 Baron, Social and Religious History (1937), 2:424.
“emancipation versus corporate status” for Jews. He pointed out that because “there were certain complicated problems of reciprocity which enabled some states with emancipated Jewries to protest against the discrimination among their nationals by states whose Jewish subjects had not been emancipated,” the nineteenth century had witnessed several instances of international action aimed at improving the civil status of Jews in certain countries, most notably Switzerland and Romania. Nevertheless, he warned, “the successful evasion of [its] international obligation by the Rumanian government...demonstrated the futility of sporadic international action unsupported by a permanent international agency.” Quoting a British diplomat who had commented in 1867 that “the peculiar position of the Jews places them under the protection of the civilized world,” he concluded his article with the admonition that the failure to solve the manifold difficulties posed by Jewish emancipation “was most pronounced in fields in which the lack of a permanent international agency prevented international action to cope with a problem essentially transcending in scope the respective national boundaries.”

Thus one of Baron’s central historiographical concerns involved exploring how various past international orders had affected Jewish life and how Jews had interacted with changing international orders over the generations. Indeed, one of the longer sections in the initial version of the Social and Religious History outlined the history of changes in the international order and the effects of those changes upon Jewish security and well being, emphasizing the nineteenth century, when, he claimed, the European powers had retreated fully from an earlier understanding that it was possible to “recognize the international import of the Jewish question without prejudice to sovereignty.” The thesis of that section was that “the Jewish question could never be solved by action within a single state:"

The Jewish question has always been international. During the Middle Ages, Islam and the Church determined the position of the Jews much more than any individual country. The state could withdraw its tolerance and forcibly baptize or expel the Jews, but, once admitted, the Jews had to live in accordance with the fundamental policies of the dominant religion. Little room was left for variations necessary to a locality. Caliphs and popes, Muslims and Canonical schools of jurisprudence, were much more decisive in molding the Jews’ legal status than were the respective monarchs or states. It was the late-developing, medieval national state which gradually undermined the prevailing uniformity. Even in the modern period, however, when the unity of Christendom had been rent, the Jewish question retained many international features.... In the cosmopolitan and humanitarian seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the great international jurists, Bacon, Grotius and Pufendorf, expounded the right of armed intervention in a neighboring country to eliminate misgovernment or oppression.... [T]he more nationalistically oriented European “Concert of Powers” gradually abandoned this principle in the nineteenth century.
One of the lessons Baron drew from his historical survey (although he did not formulate it explicitly as a historical 'law') was that generally Jews would do better when their status was governed by universally accepted international norms and worse when individual states
were left to construct their relations with their Jewish populations according to what they took to be their own particular circumstances. Although he acknowledged that both the Middle Ages and the modern period had known intervals of both situations, on the whole he clearly regarded the Middle Ages as one in which the former situation had prevailed far more than in recent times. He even employed this distinction to highlight why he regarded the Nazi attack upon Jews as unprecedented. "Medieval civilization," he explained, "was essentially an era of law and order; one need not be a romantic of the neo-Thomist schools of philosophy to realize the genuine values of that hierarchic civilization, which at least formally was based upon the acceptance of a moral order and the quest for justice." To his mind, such general acceptance served as an effective check upon anti-Jewish violence. The Nazis, in contrast, unrestrained by enforceable moral norms, were left free, in Baron's words, to "single out one minority, of one percent, and put it outside the frame of an otherwise uniform society," marked for violent attack "executed by government and party officials." He offered this distinction for the first time in 1935, arguing that "a mere perusal of the basic privileges of medieval Jewry (enacted by Henry IV, Frederick I, Frederick II, etc.) and of the recent Nazi laws reveals the difference between a primarily positive and constructive and a purely negative type of legislation."

The fight against the lachrymose conception of Jewish history thus appears to have been intimately connected with Baron's specific concern with the international contexts in which Jews lived their lives. It was not only for its ability to provide a framework for autonomous Jewish cultural development that Baron hailed the virtues of the medieval corporate system; it was even more for the physical and material protections it afforded Jews. Those protections were effective, Baron believed, because they were underwritten by international norms and institutions. Hence he regarded the prejudice against the Middle Ages embodied in the lachrymose conception of Jewish history as particularly dangerous because it obscured this fundamental truth.

Baron's interest, both academic and public, in international systems and their influence on Jewish life substantially predated his condemnation of lachrymosity. It manifested itself initially in his 1917 doctoral dissertation on the Jewish question at the Congress of Vienna, which he published as a book three years later. In that work he termed the willingness of the Congress to pay attention to the Jewish question in the German territories "a powerful weapon" for Jews seeking equal civil rights. "With the assistance of the Congress of Vienna," he wrote, "the Jewish question in Germany took on pan-European significance; after that time it was impossible to remove it from the ranks of the most important [European] questions, until [German Jewry]...obtained full equality." In 1925 he gave personal expression to his internationalist commitments by taking on an assignment from the Permanent Minorities Commission of the League of Nations. After coming to the United States in 1926, he undertook research projects on behalf of the American Jewish Congress,

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65 Baron, "The Modern Age," p. 316.
67 Ibid., 37, 39.
68 Salo W. Baron, "Germany's Ghetto, Past and Present: A Perspective on Nazi Laws against Jews," Independent Journal of Columbia University, 3, no. 3 (15 November 1935), 3–4; also quoted in Ibid., 37.
69 Salo Baron, Die Judenfrage auf dem Wiener Kongreß (Berlin, 1920), 206.
whose guiding spirit, Stephen S. Wise (head of the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, where Baron taught from 1926–1930), was also a leader in organized efforts to promote the interests of European Jewish communities in the international diplomatic arena.70

His affirmation of internationalism not only in word, but in deed as well, was no doubt motivated in significant measure by his own personal experience of the breakdown of international order, especially by his worries as a war refugee from 1914–1918 and even more by his precarious civil status in Austria until he left the country for the United States. Born in the west Galician town of Tamów in 1895, Baron began his academic studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 1913, matriculating in the Faculty of Philosophy, but also enrolling in several history courses.71 However, the First World War broke out before the beginning of the 1914–1915 academic year, and in mid-September 1914, Russian troops crossed the San River on a westward march toward Kraków, sending hundreds of thousands of Galician residents, Jews and non-Jews alike, fleeing toward less threatened regions of the Habsburg Empire.72 Baron, his parents, and his siblings were part of the refugee stream, settling in the imperial capital, where Baron continued his studies at the University of Vienna. Although Austrian forces recaptured Galicia in mid-1915, a significant number of Jewish refugees, including Baron, chose not to return home, but to remain in Vienna without the right of legal residence.73 Baron remained a student throughout the war. Initially his primary area of concentration continued to be philosophy, but during the second half of the 1915–1916 academic year he switched to history, the field in which he completed his first doctoral degree in 1917.74 He subsequently continued to study even beyond the end of hostilities in the faculties of political science and law.

His move to history and his choice of dissertation topic were surely influenced, at least in part, by a sense that the war and the peace negotiations that were expected to follow were about to remake fundamental European geopolitical arrangements as they had not been remade since 1815 and that the status of Jews might well be profoundly altered in the process. A keen observer of European politics and diplomacy since his youth (as a teenager he had even published regular political commentary in the Kraków Hebrew weekly Ha-mitspeh),75 he must have anticipated that the political status of his own home region was particularly liable to be affected, especially following the German–Austrian proclamation establishing a client Kingdom of Poland in November 1916 and the simultaneous promulgation of a statute concerning the organization of Jewish communities in the new

70 His 1930 work on the Jews of Romania (above, n. 25), was commissioned by the American Jewish Congress, with Wise serving as catalyst. See Wise to Baron, 7 July 1930, Stanford-Baron, box 72, folder 18; Emanuel Deutsch, President, American Jewish Congress, to Baron, 30 July 1930, Wise to Baron, 7 July 1930, Stanford-Baron, box 139, folder 13.
71 Index Lectionum no. 13529, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, 8 October 1913, Wise to Baron, 7 July 1930, Stanford-Baron, box 141, folder 1. His studies were conducted in Polish, of which he possessed native command.
72 A 1915 report by the Austrian interior ministry counted 340,000 refugees from Galicia who found temporary shelter in other Austrian Habsburg areas, of whom somewhat more than half were Jews. Arie R. Tartakower and Kurt R. Grossman, The Jewish Refugee (New York, 1944), 14.
73 Their number has been estimated at anywhere from 35,000 to 185,000. For various estimates see Ibid., p. 15: J. A. C. Tilley to Eyre Crowe, 18 September 1919 (48/2/2/19033), Public Record Office, London, FO 608/16; “Report on Expulsion of Foreigners by Headquarters of Vienna Police,” December 1919, United States National Archives (henceforth USNA), M695/22; David Rechter, The Jews of Vienna and the First World War (London, 2001), 74–83.
74 He continued to use the Index Lectionum from Kraków (above, n. 59) to record his studies in Vienna.
kingdom. Studying the treatment of the Jewish question at the Congress of Vienna (a topic that could be pursued at his present location with relative ease) no doubt offered him a ready framework for thinking about the coming changes and about how Jews might best organize to meet them.

Such an opportunity to study and think was unusual for the Galician refugees who stayed in Vienna throughout the war, most of whom found themselves in an increasingly dire material situation. Being from a family of considerable wealth, Baron was spared most of their misery. Instead of crowding into the tenements of the Brigittenau or Leopoldstadt, where the bulk of the refugees sought shelter with relatives or friends, he found accommodations of his own near the university, on Mosergasse in the largely middle-class Alsergrund. Nevertheless, his stay in Vienna was not entirely free from anxiety. In January 1916 he was required to produce a certificate attesting to his legal residence in Tarnów, presumably in order to demonstrate Habsburg citizenship. One year later he was ordered to report to the Austrian military authorities for possible conscription, but he was found medically unfit for service. He was also subject to general wartime rationing, which became increasingly more severe as the war dragged on.

Once the fighting ended, though, his situation became precarious. The truncated German Austria that emerged from the war, besides facing imminent economic collapse, suffered from a severe shortage of foodstuffs and basic raw materials. For 10 months after the November 1918 armistice, the victorious Allies took upon themselves the task of providing the country with food and fuel. Once the Treaty of St. Germain was signed in September 1919, however, Austria was left on its own; lacking hard currency to pay for imports, the country proved unable to provide for its basic needs. In the atmosphere of crisis surrounding what seemed like impending famine, government officials began casting about for ways to make available supplies go farther. One obvious strategy for reducing domestic demand was to reduce the number of mouths waiting to be fed. Those whose claim on the country’s resources could be most easily de-legitimized, like recent refugees whose home was supposed to be somewhere else, became conspicuous targets for both public hostility and attempts to deport them. Indeed, within a month of the conclusion of the St. Germain treaty, pogrom agitation was noted in the Austrian capital, to the point where the legate of the United States in Vienna felt it advisable to admonish the Austrian authorities that “any mistreatment of the Jews in Vienna would have an unfortunate effect on public opinion in the United States.”

The exceedingly difficult economic situation in German Austria makes it imperative that persons who do not have the right of domicile in German Austria should be

76 See Rechter, *Jews of Vienna*, pp. 88–89.
77 His father was a banker with holdings in land and oil; his mother came from a family of large-scale retail merchants. Liberles, *Salo Wittmayer Baron, 17; Under Two Civilizations: Tarnów, 1895–1914: Selected from the Memoirs of Salo Wittmayer Baron* (Stanford, 1990), [4]–[5].
80 See his ration books in Ibid., box 141, folder 9.
81 “Memorandum of Conversation with Dr. Renner regarding Pogroms in Vienna,” 26 September 1919, USNA M695/22. The U. S. intervention was reported the next day in the Vienna press.
removed from her territory. The foodstuffs at the disposal of German Austria for her own population are utterly insufficient.... It is...impossible, in view of the state of our finances, that these food supplies should be drawn upon to improve the rations of foreigners, all the more as these persons can live better and cheaper in their homes.... All these considerations make it appear desirable that all those persons now residing in German Austria in consequence of the extraordinary conditions caused by the war and whose presence here is not eminently necessary should be requested to leave the territory of the German Austrian state.... All former citizens of the Austro–Hungarian monarchy who do not possess the right of domicile in a commune or municipality of German Austria...are requested to leave...before 20 September 1919. Those who have not left of their own accord by that date will be subject to expulsion.... In exceptional cases, individuals whose...circumstances are particularly worthy of consideration may send a written request to the...State Police begging that their stay be prolonged.82

With regard to the Galician refugees, the Austrian authorities insisted that they were now citizens of the newly-created Republic of Poland, which had already assumed sovereignty de jure over the former Habsburg regions of west Galicia and exercised sovereignty de facto over the east Galician area as well. They based their argument on Article 70 of the Treaty of St. Germain, which stated that “every person possessing rights of citizenship (pertinenza) in territory which formed part of the territories of the former Austro–Hungarian Monarchy shall obtain ipso facto to the exclusion of Austrian nationality the nationality of the State exercising sovereignty over such territory.” Yet few Galician Jews who fled to Vienna during the war demonstrated much eagerness to return to their former homes; for all of the difficulties in Austria, the situation in Galicia – especially in east Galicia, whose international status remained uncertain and which was still contested militarily – evidently seemed even less desirable. Thus, in an effort to forestall the decree, spokesmen for the refugees called attention to other articles of the treaty that appeared to allow them to claim citizenship in the new Austria. In particular, Article 64 provided that “Austria admits and declares to be Austrian nationals ipso facto and without the requirement of any formality all persons possessing at the date of coming into force of the present Treaty rights of Citizenship (pertinenza) within Austrian territory who are not nationals of any other State,” while according to Article 78, “persons over 18 years of age losing their Austrian nationality and obtaining ipso facto a new nationality under Article 70 shall be entitled within a period of one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty to opt for the nationality of the State in which they possessed rights of citizenship before acquiring such rights in the territory transferred.”

In the event, the expulsion did not take place on the threatened date or during the following months. The delay occurred mainly because the Austrian authorities did not control sufficient rolling stock to carry it out. Nevertheless, the threat of deportation continued to hang over the refugees’ heads for years to come, especially after the ruling Social Democratic Party, which had initially promulgated the decree, was replaced in October 1920 by the Christian Social Party, an organization known for its indictment of the allegedly excessive role played by Jews in Austrian life. It thus became increasingly clear to those representing the refugees’ interests that only intervention from abroad was likely to dissuade the Austrian government from

82 “Proclamation of Lower Austrian Provincial Government concerning Departure of Aliens,” 9 September 1919 (VIlc-3698), ibid. This decree formed a part of the background for the 1923 novel by Hugo Bettauer, Die Stadt ohne Juden.
carrying out its plan. In particular, they placed great hope upon the League of Nations, noting that the Treaty of St. Germain contained eight articles relating to the protection of minorities (including Article 64 governing citizenship) and that Article 69 specifically named the League the guarantor of the minorities protection clauses.

As a refugee without legal status in Vienna, Baron was vitally concerned with these developments. Unable to obtain Austrian citizenship and evidently unwilling to forego periodic visits to his family home, he applied to the Polish Legation in Vienna for a Polish passport. The passport, issued on 16 August 1919, was valid for six months and permitted travel only between Austria and Poland via Czechoslovakia. For the next seven years, he would have to reapply for successive passport extensions. He also had to appeal periodically to the Austrian police to exempt him from the deportation order as provided in the September 1919 decree. Thus both the Austrian and Polish authorities could force his return to Poland whenever they saw fit – a move that would, among other things, have made it virtually impossible for him to pursue an academic career. The Poles also possessed the power to render him Staatenlos, which, it appears, they might well have done had Baron ever declared his intention to opt for Austrian citizenship in accordance with Article 78. Not until January 1924 did he manage to obtain the right of permanent residence in Vienna. Even then, however, he was not an Austrian citizen, and his Polish passport did not permit him to travel freely. This restriction presented a serious difficulty when Baron was offered employment in the United States in 1926. Eventually, Stephen Wise, a man of considerable political influence, had to persuade the United States ambassador in Vienna to intervene with the Austrian authorities to issue a document that would allow Baron to accept the employment offer. Baron obtained an Austrian passport only in August 1926, on the eve of his departure for his new position.

In the end, Baron succeeded in resolving the personal difficulties that stemmed from protracted uncertainty over his civil status. However, the League of Nations and international diplomacy more generally had not lived up to the expectations Jewish spokesmen had placed upon them, whether with regard to Baron himself or for all Galician refugees. On 1 March 1921, the League Council determined unequivocally that “there is no rule of international law nor any treaty stipulation to prevent Austria from expelling from

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83 Passport no. 26225, Stanford-Baron, box 141, folder 6. Upon receiving the passport, Baron appears to have applied to the transportation division of the Polish Legation in Vienna for assistance in arranging passage to Tarnów, presumably because of the scarcity of trains between the two cities. See the endorsement in the lower left corner of “Swiadectwo przynalezności” (above, n. 66).

84 See Baron’s Polish passport no. 024989, issued at Vienna on 24 March 1921, with successive renewal endorsements through 2 March 1924, ibid., box 141, folder 1. The passport stated explicitly that it was valid for residence in Austria only. Visa stamps indicate frequent travel between Austria and Poland via Czechoslovakia but no trips to any other countries. See also “Poświadczzenie zarejestrowaniu,” 24 March 1921, Ibid., box 141, folder 3.

85 See “Dr. Baron Salo, Abschaffung” (G. 4439/Fb.), 3 August 1921, Ibid., box 141, folder 3.

86 Among the documents Baron had to submit in order to renew his Polish passports was a certificate from the Vienna municipal authorities that his name did not appear in the lists of those who had applied to exercise the citizenship option of Article 78. “Amtsbestätigung,” 20 March 1921, Ibid., box 141, folder 6.


88 See Wise to Baron, 29 May 1926, ibid., box 72, folder 4: “[I]f there is anything I can do in the matter of your passport, please let me know. You might take this letter to His Excellency, the American Ambassador, whom I have the privilege of knowing, and I am sure all facilities will be granted you for the passport.”

89 Austrian Embassy, Paris, to French Foreign Ministry, 20 June 1928, ibid., box 1, folder 5, indicating that Baron held a valid Austrian passport, “délivré le 2 août 1926 par la Direction de Police de Vienne, sous le NO. 093216.”
her territory persons not possessed of Austrian nationality” and refused to recognize the applicability of either Article 64 or Article 78 to the case at hand. Over the next year, international Jewish organizations worked assiduously, but in vain, to bring the issue to a second hearing. Among other consequences, this failure of Jewish diplomatic efforts raised concretely the question of the limits of citizenship as a guarantee of Jewish physical security. Throughout the previous century, liberal Jewish leaders had viewed citizenship rights – a concept rooted in the French revolutionary ethos – as the key to including Jews among those with a legitimate claim upon the resources of the states in which they resided and to protecting Jews from the caprice of potentially hostile regimes. Admit Jews to the ranks of citizens, it was reasoned, and they would have at their disposal all the means necessary to assure their well being in their countries of residence. For the Galician refugees in Vienna, however, the institution of citizenship had proven a broken reed. In their eyes, they were already citizens of the Habsburg Empire; in fact, their spokesmen argued, it was on the basis of their Habsburg citizenship that they had been permitted to settle in the imperial capital in the first place. The Austrian authorities, on the other hand, drew what seemed to them to be an unwarranted distinction between citizenship rights and rights of domicile, which were under the control of local jurisdictions and not an automatic consequence of being an imperial citizen. After the war the authorities had succeeded in using this distinction to deprive large numbers of people of the citizenship rights they had formerly enjoyed. In effect, they had turned the institution of citizenship from an instrument of inclusion for Jews to one of exclusion. Moreover, the international community had declined to exercise its treaty-backed prerogative to annul their decision, citing the absence of any overarching principle that would justify encroaching upon state sovereignty. The international community thus seemed to many Jewish leaders still too weak in relation to individual sovereign nation-states to provide an effective barrier against the arbitrary exercise of sovereignty in a manner inimical to Jewish interests. Hence the question of how to build an effective method of international checks upon the power of nation-states assumed a prominent place on the political agendas of many Jewish organizations in Europe and the United States throughout the interwar years. Those leaders hoped to turn the international diplomatic arena into a resource upon which European Jews could draw in enhancing their own physical security and material prosperity.

That the question was also central to Baron’s own agenda, both scholarly and personal, is not surprising. Nor is it surprising that his experience, first as a war refugee from Galicia, then as a Polish citizen in Vienna, subject to expulsion and unable to draw upon any force other than his own personal resources to mitigate the threat, would impel him to question the efficacy of the revolutionary legacy altogether. His criticism of ‘the lachrymose theory of pre-Revolutionary woe’ may not have sprung forth fully formed during this period of his life, but there can be little doubt that this period constituted the crucial matrix for its formation.

92 See James Headlam-Morley to E. H. Carr, 18 September 1919, Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, ACC 688, box 1a; Tilley to Crowe, 18 September 1919, and accompanying minutes (above, n. 61); “L’Autriche devant le tribunal de la Société des Nations,” 17 February 1921, YIVO Archives, New York, RG 348, box 8, folder 84.
Today Baron’s vital concern with the international context of Jewish history is hardly noted. Nor is his skepticism toward the efficacy of liberal integrationism for Jews widely acknowledged. On the contrary, the dominant representation of his historiographical agenda by those who, today, claim his mantle portrays him as one who embraced with little reservation the possibilities for Jewish creativity in the diaspora, especially those offered by open, liberal societies.

This neo-Baronian representation of the master may well reflect the fact that Baron’s impact as a historian of the Jews was felt most powerfully in the United States. Perhaps what resonated most with his American Jewish devotees was his rejection of the negative Zionist prognosis concerning the possibilities of diasporic Jewish life, a rejection important for legitimizing the American Jewish project. This Americanization of Baron’s message, as it were, was facilitated no doubt by Baron’s own success in integrating himself and his work into the American academy and by his increasingly enthusiastic identification with the American and American Jewish environments beginning in the 1940s. However, it would be a mistake to assume on this basis that his disparagement of lachrymosity in the writing of Jewish history was born in America or reflected especially American sensibilities. Baron’s frame of reference in voicing that disparagement seems rather to have been primarily European. It reflected first and foremost his experiences as a Jew from east central Europe whose critical perspectives on Jewish history, contemporary Jewish life, and the world as a whole were shaped during the first third of the twentieth century.

Whether those perspectives, which generated considerable hesitation regarding the usefulness of liberalism as an exordium for modern Jewish life, provide the basis for a historiographical agenda superior or inferior to the neo-Baronian platform is, of course, a question for debate. Perhaps the purposes for which historians of modern Jewry undertake their work — whatever those are or ought to be — are indeed best served by an agenda focusing attention upon continuity instead of crisis, mutually fructifying interactions between Jews and their surrounding societies, instead of conflict. Perhaps liberal Jewish leaders and the communities they led ought indeed to be celebrated for promoting and embodying an uplifting vision of the possibilities for secure and creative Jewish existence. These propositions deserve calm, careful, reasoned consideration, informed by broad erudition, detailed knowledge of specific episodes, and sophisticated analytical approaches. But such consideration is ill served by a rhetoric that prejudices its outcome through assignment of iconic status to one historian presumed to have considered those propositions long ago and to have formulated definitive positions on them and how much the greater is the damage to productive discussion when those presumptions turn out to be false!

Those who would affirm a liberal integrationist historiographical agenda need to argue their affirmation on its merits. Baron would not necessarily take their side.

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93 On this process see Liberles, Salo Wittmayer Baron, pp. 306–16, 336–37.
94 Regarding Schorsch’s speculation concerning Baron’s prior affinity for America and its possibilities for a Jewish life in sympathy with his antilachrymose outlook as the reason for his migration, it seems more plausible that the possibilities for work at the Jewish Institute of Religion and in particular the connection with Stephen Wise, which offered him a way out of his difficult personal and professional situation in Vienna, played a greater role in his decision. See above, n5.