

Jews and Christians in the Marketplace: The Politics of Kosher Meat in Metz.

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Long before the state fully acknowledged it, Jews in France became an integral part of various local economies. Whether as importers in Bordeaux, livestock dealers in Languedoc, or cloth merchants in Metz, Jews interacted with Christians, and on a daily basis, in that most pragmatic hub of social change - the marketplace. Restricted from many professions throughout the early modern period, Jews nonetheless carved out an economic niche - or rather a variety of highly-localized economic niches - in the decades before they were officially extended the basic rights of citizenship by the post-revolutionary government. As with so many other issues, then, the state's eventual decree not only produced change, it also reflected changes which had already occurred.

Those studying European and French Jewry of the eighteenth century have taken up the call to consider Judeo-Christian economic interaction with particular brio, finding that, despite both negative and positive contacts between Jews and gentiles, there is much to support Willy Bok's assertion that social emancipation preceded political emancipation.¹ In this sense, even negative or contentious dealings between Jews and Christians can be said to have contributed to the overall deepening of Jewish roots in France. And scholars including Gérard Nahon, René Moulinas, and others have observed that such quarrels, by the eighteenth century, had taken on a distinctly economic tone. Gone were many of the religious references of medieval Christian complaints - substituted with new complaints, it is true, but complaints more firmly bound up with secular economic issues. Hence those who competed with the Jews, in some way, were the most likely to oppose their continued residence in a given locale, and they expressed their opposition in economic terms: the Jews were selling inferior or stolen items at lower prices; Jews were benefiting from an infrastructure of roads and bridges which they did not pay for - ironically because of their official outcast

¹ Quoted by Gérard Nahon in *Les Juifs à Montpellier et Dans le Languedoc à Travers L'Histoire du Moyen Age à nos Jours*, ed. Carol Iancu. (Montpellier: Centre de Recherches et d'Études Juives et Hébraïque, 1988), p. 416.

non-guild status - or Jews as 'foreigners' would not reinvest their profits in the kingdom.²

My own contribution here is to pull this discussion briefly back to the seventeenth century, and to the town and diocese of Metz, on the northeastern frontier. My sources - local police ordinances and records of the *Hotel de Ville* and appeals heard before the *Parlement* of Metz - do not refute the basic notion that social interaction between Jews and Christians pre-dated political citizenship for the Jews. If anything, my research only suggests that economic contact had an even longer and more pervasive history in the limited Jewish centres of the North.³ Further, this contact had its own complexities.

² Rene Moulinas, "Les Juifs à Montpellier au XVIIIe Siècle," in Iancu ed., pp. 272-274. Other scholars considering the position of Jews in France during the eighteenth century include Frances Malino, Francois Job, Arthur Hertzberg, and Bernard Blumenkranz. The topic of the Jews' utility to the nation figures prominently in most studies, since Jews themselves proclaimed their usefulness as a central reason for deserving emancipation at the end of the century. Sephardic Jews in the South even argued as part of their petition for emancipation, that Ashkenazic Jews (primarily, but not solely, living in the north of France) would have to reform and become more clearly useful to the state before they received citizenship rights as well.

This feud within the Jewish community in the eighteenth century seems to have prompted Roland Mousnier, among others, to mis-characterize northern Ashkenazic Jews as poorer, less educated, and of a lower social class than their co-religionists in the South (Mousnier in essence accepted the Sephardim's view of the Ashkenazim in the eighteenth century, and projected it backwards, as fact, to the seventeenth century). See his *The Institutions of France under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598-1789*, trans. Brian Pierce, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), particularly p. 417 on which he states that Jews in northeastern France were "lower-class people of no great education."

In fact, the Jewish community of Metz was known among other Ashkenazic Jews as quite prosperous, and Metz served as a centre of religious learning in the region. In her memoirs, for example, Gluckel of Hameln (whose second husband Cerf Levy was a banker in Metz) described the Jews of that city as relatively well-off, at least for sporadic periods of the later seventeenth century. She also wrote of the Messin Jews as very pious and learned, but generally along traditional religious lines, not in terms of the secular French education more common among prosperous Jews in the South (she did, however refer to the difficulties she had when moving to Metz because she could not converse in the French used by her new in-laws). Gluckel's experience and observations are not, of course, reliably objective, but the picture she gives at least casts serious doubt on Mousnier's generalization. It seems fairest to say that the northern Jews were less assimilated than those in the South. See *The Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln*, trans. Marvin Lowenthal (New York: Schocken 1977), pp. 222 and ff.

³ Material for this article is drawn largely from the collections of the *Archives Départementales de la Moselle (A.D.M.)* in Metz, particularly Series B, vols. 1-13 (*Parlement de Metz*); vols. 2564 and 2565 (*bailliage de Metz*); vol. 2572 (*jugements du bailliage*); and vol. 3031 (*minutes de l'Hôtel de Ville*); and from Series J and Sub-series

Looking specifically at disputes between Jewish and gentile butchers, and between Jews and gentiles in the cloth trades, we see that local leaders in Metz knew, and took advantage, of the Jews' special place in their economy. Jews, in short, could be exploited and manipulated not just for money itself, but for leverage over Christian tradesmen as well. Finally, I would argue that in the seventeenth century religious hostility toward the Jews was still openly and regularly expressed by Christian tradesmen. And even ostensibly secular complaints about Jewish commerce were steeped in religious imagery, because religious animus still lay at the core of such complaints. Hence the seventeenth century must be seen, at most, as a bridge between medieval religious tension and more modern economic hostility. I would even suggest that religious concerns continued to inform modern 'economic' complaints, long after overt religious references had atrophied from gentile rhetoric.

Let us proceed to discuss the Jewish butchers of Metz in the seventeenth century.

Like others among the roughly 350 Jews living in Metz in 1633, Jewish butchers were part of a population allowed residence under special privileges granted by the King. While epidemic disease and the vagaries of intermittent warfare continued to reduce the general population of Metz, Jewish numbers increased unevenly, but generally, over the century, so that by 1700 almost 1,500 Jews resided there. This increase should be attributed to immigration as well as natural population increase. Most in this century were restricted to renting property, and in the St. Ferroy quarter, away from the centre of town. Metz's medieval Jewish community, it should be noted, which gave its name to the more central *rue des juifs*, had been wiped out centuries before by crusading armies or plague-crazed mobs.⁴

Kosher butchers *per se* were not among the first four Jewish families allowed in under special letters-patent in 1564. Those first Jews had been admitted specifically as money lenders and livestock dealers, meant to help support royal troops fighting the Spanish and their mercenaries in the region.

17J (*Archives du Consistoire Israélite de la Moselle*), vols. 2-5, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23-25, 31-33, and 38. Also in Paris, some information was drawn from the holdings of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, (B.N.) particularly from the *Collection Emmercy* in the *Nouvelle Acquisitions Françaises (N.A.F.)*, vol. 22711 (*Ordonnances du bailliage de Metz, 1640-1758*). But see individual notes following for precise citations. I have also considered this topic in a paper of the same title presented orally at the American Historical Association's Annual Meeting, Washington D.C., 1992.

⁴ *A.D.M.*, 17J, (Lap 4), fol. 20-21. Other restrictions on Jews (including the provision that they rent houses only in the St. Ferroy Quarter) can be found in *B.N.*, *N.A.F.*, vol. 22705, fol. 10. Further information regarding Jewish population and household size can be found in *A.D.M.*, 1 Mi 191 (B1), on microfilm, "*Rôle des habitants de la paroisse St. Ferroy*," for 1621 and 1637. For a fuller treatment of Jews in Metz see Roger Clément, *La Condition des Juifs de Metz dans L'Ancien Régime*, Paris: Imprimerie Henri Jouve 1903.

Butchers catering to the specific kosher needs of Jewish inhabitants came later, probably about 1602, when the more established needs of a resident community had to be met. As part of the general Jewish community of Metz, butchers contributed to the stiff head taxes imposed by the crown, as well as to various local assessments on them, in part to support charity for indigent Christians, both Protestant and Catholic.

Like other Jews, the butchers were subject to the sporadic local enforcement of a carry-over from medieval times - the law that they wear distinctive yellow hats when inside the city walls. And they might have been forced, along with their co-religionists, to lodge troops in their homes, or provide extraordinary sums toward the occasional maintenance of visiting dignitaries. We know of such impositions largely from the Jewish community's complaints, often to the royally-appointed military governors of Metz. In 1644, for example, Jews complained to the then governor the Duc de Schomberg that the *Hôtel de Ville* had ordered them to provide furnishings (including furniture, linens, and kitchen utensils) for the home of the newly-arrived lieutenant, the M. de Serignan. Despite an initial attempt to block the *Hôtel de Ville* in this matter, Schomberg ultimately gave in to local pressure and agreed that the Jews must furnish the supplies. In this, as in the universally unwelcome billeting of troops, local authorities seem to have imposed on the Jews first, with Christian citizens inconvenienced only if absolutely necessary.⁵

⁵ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 4 (Lap & b). The Jews complained to Schomberg in 1644 that requiring them to furnish goods for Serignan imposed an extraordinary and unjust charge on their community, exceeding as it did the 150 *livres messins* they already were forced to pay to the local government each month. Schomberg agreed and forbade anyone to exact such extra fees from the Jews. His order, however, apparently had little effect. Taking advantage of the governor's absence not long afterward, local officials seized the property of several Jews in order to outfit Serignan's home: The Jews then complained of the seizures to the *bailliage* (Schomberg being then absent from Metz), which in turn referred the case to the King's recently-established *Parlement* of Metz, then sitting at Toul. *Parlement's* handling of the case is unclear. Regardless, the Jews, who finally succeeded in contacting Schomberg in Languedoc, denounced the seizures as unjust and cruel, and they reminded Schomberg that such neglect of his orders defied his authority, and by extension royal authority as well. Schomberg, writing from Narbonne on 8 February, 1645, reiterated his decree against the imposition on the Jews, condemned the seizures, demanded the return of the Jewish property, and threatened fines, including damages and interest, for any who continued to rob the Jews in this way. And yet, as mentioned, the governor eventually reversed himself and agreed that the Jews must provide the supplies. There is no detailed explanation for the governor's change of heart.

In 1675, similarly, the *Hôtel de Ville* ordered the Jewish community to equip the home of the visiting Marquis de Rochefort. Included in the record of this transaction is a receipt for 6 dozen napkins, 1 tablecloth, and 3 additional tablecloths of lesser quality required of the Jews. See *A.D.M.*, 17J, 4, (Lap 2).

Given their specialized work, Jewish kosher butchers might be expected to have had far less contact with gentiles than Jews in other permitted trades, such as those peddling *fripérie*, or used clothes and textiles, or money lenders allowed to do business with gentiles, but under strict guidelines. In fact, kosher butchers came during the seventeenth century to be at the centre of an interesting 11-year controversy in local economic politics.

First we must acknowledge that Christian butchers had placed themselves in the vanguard of a group of local Christian tradesmen - including cloth merchants, tanners and cobblers - pleading with a newly establishment *Parlement* for all the Jews' expulsion in 1633, and periodically throughout the century. And gentile butchers may have been behind a ritual murder accusation against a Jewish peddler in 1670.⁶ Also, most *messin* townspeople seem to have been wary of Jewish butchers, fearing the assumed proclivities of a group of Jews who made their living through slaughter and whose work lay at the heart of the Jews' mysterious dietary practices - among the most blatant distinctions between Jews and Christians, and a distinction which remained one of the first differences between Jews and gentiles known to most non-Jews. But even beyond general uneasiness with Jewish butchers, Christian butchers were clearly particularly hostile. And their hostility was only exacerbated after 1636, when local officials (the mayor and magistrates or *échevins* of Metz) formalized new arrangements for Jewish slaughtering of animals in the city.

In an *ordonnance de police* of that year, local officials reiterated the permission for Jews to kill animals for their own consumption, but this same order also allowed Jewish butchers to sell those cuts of meat forbidden to Jews under kosher laws to the general Christian population in Metz.⁷ According to biblical proscriptions found primarily in Leviticus, kosher slaughtering followed precise rules, and Jews were also forbidden meat from certain portions of the animals they killed. Hence, once given permission to sell these cast-off cuts of meat to Christians, Jews could, and did, sell at a lower price than their Christian counterparts.

Predictably, the members of the butchers' guild set up a huge outcry against the Jewish butchers. And, frustrated in their early attempts to reverse the order, they embarked on a campaign of petty harassment. In 1646, officials of the king's newly-established *bailliage* demanded that the Christian

⁶ For a treatment of this ritual murder accusation, see Patricia E. Behre, 'Raphael Levy: 'A Criminal in the Mouths of the People,' *Religion*, vol. 23, no. 1, January 1993, pp. 19-44.

⁷ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 9, (Cc 4); this order also stipulated that Jewish slaughterers could only kill their animals in places designated by the city; Jewish butchers could not physically impede the business of Christian butchers, and Jewish butchers were required to promptly and scrupulously pay the *maltôte* on the sale of meat. The exact amount of the tax was not given.

butchers desist in their attempts to block Jewish privileges (the exact nature of the harassment is not clear from the records).⁸ And in the following year, Christian butchers appealed to the *Parlement* to reverse the local order. Jews did not deserve to be able to sell their cast-off cuts of meat to Christians, they argued, because Jews already enjoyed other privileges (such as the permission to loan money at up to 12 percent interest). It was not right, therefore, that the Jews should also profit, they claimed, from selling meat to Christians. Beyond this, they stressed, "the Jewish nation is abominable and their hands contaminate the meat."⁹ The Christian butchers' complaints thus included vague but sweeping assertions of the Jews' religious inferiority, contending that their lowly status justified restricting their commerce. Any other course, according to the butchers' guild, was "an affront to Christian liberty," by which of course they meant a threat to Christian privilege.

This position is perhaps not so surprising in a group of Christian tradesmen in the mid-seventeenth century. But the defence of the Jewish butchers by local officials is noteworthy. In general, and with good cause, Jewish *Messins* of this era looked to the increasingly powerful central government for protection from local ordinances and restrictions. The King, and his appointees, while not exactly friends of the Jews, were at least willing to hear Jewish complaints and sometimes to act on them. Royal government represented a meagre defence, but it was usually the best defence the Jews had. And their adversaries, typically, were members of the local magistracy or other local authorities.¹⁰

⁸ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 25, (Pr3).

⁹ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 3, (Co1).

¹⁰ Examples of the Jews' problems with local authorities abound. One way local officials harassed the Jews was to reimpose unpredictably older restrictions which had fallen into abeyance, or suddenly begin to enforce old laws with new vigour. For example, the law requiring Jews to wear distinguishing yellow hats when in the city of Metz obviously derived from similar legislation born in much of Christian Europe during the Middle Ages. And yet, by the early modern period, it seems to have been enforced with varying degrees of zeal. In 1657, Louis XIV issued an order allowing the Jewish community's rabbi and seven community leaders to wear black hats in the city, and allowing all Jews to relinquish the yellow hats when outside of the city walls (cited by Clement, pp. 129-130; see also Emmanuel Michel, *Histoire du Parlement de Metz*, Paris: J. Techener 1845).

In 1694, similarly, the leaders of Metz's Jewish community complained to the royal intendant that Jean Bassé, farmer of the toll at the *Porte Serpenoise*, was requiring all Jews to wear the yellow hats when passing through the gate, and that he was using this easy method of identification to overcharge Jews. See *A.D.M.*, 17J, 4 (Lap 31a-31g).

For a fuller treatment of this topic, and of the larger issue of local-central competition, see Behre, *Religion and the Central State in Metz, 1633-1700*, Dissertation, Yale University, 1991.

Why, then, did the local judges side here with the Jews? There is some temptation to ascribe the officials' defence of the Jewish butchers to a new post-Reformation secularism - a growing immunity to religious arguments. But actually, the officials acted more from their devotion to a very old tradition - cupidity. Local magistrates made clear in a response to the *Parlement* that they had, in their 1636 order, granted permission for Jewish slaughtering and sale of meat to Christians specifically in order to break the gentile butchers' monopoly in Metz. That monopoly, they claimed, had allowed these butchers to overcharge the general Christian population. Therefore, to relieve the Jews' oppression and to aid the public welfare, the magistrates wrote, they cautiously opened the meat market to Jewish butchers. To justify their action, the judges cited precedents, including freedoms for Jewish slaughterers in Italy, as well as earlier permission for Jews to operate in Metz. No guardians, as a rule, of the Jews' privileges, they nonetheless argued that the high prices charged by gentile butchers, and their harassment of the Jews, amounted to an offence against those privileges.¹¹

The judges also, tellingly, accused the gentile butchers of not complying with local taxes on the sale of meat. This tax evasion, along with the Christian butchers' uncontrolled raising of prices, justified allowing Jewish butchers to compete, they wrote. They were careful, however, not to align themselves too closely with the Jewish community, making clear that granting the permission to Jewish butchers did not alter the status of the minority as a whole, nor end its separation from the general population.¹²

Taken in sum, local magistrates' defence of Jewish interests in this case reveals itself as less a move to protect that minority than as first and foremost a means of punishing the gentile butchers' guild. The magistrates used the Jews to control that trade group and to force its compliance with their rules. The Jewish butchers were a group which could, from the local officials' point of view, serve as a weapon against an intractable body of local businessmen. Thus the Jews held an odd, but still integral, place in Metz's economy.

A second testament to the Jews' position is worth recounting briefly, if only as a qualification that not all contacts between Jewish and Christian tradesmen were negative. Cloth merchants were also among the most persistent opponents of the Jews in Metz during the seventeenth century, and their hostility brought them before local courts and the *Parlement*. Their efforts to block Jewish competition had borne some fruit, including the registration in 1634 of a traditional ban on Jews dealing in new goods, or re-selling locally produced wares. Particularly with regard to clothes and textiles, Jews were only to sell used items.

In 1656, this situation began to change, as the *Parlement* relaxed some of the restrictions and extended to Jews the right to buy new, as well as old,

¹¹ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 4, (Lap 7), fol. 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, fol. 19.

clothes locally, and to re-sell them. In the following year, Louis XIV issued new letters-patent allowing Jews to buy, sell or trade all sorts of merchandise. The Jews apparently lost no time in taking advantage of this permission. And cloth merchants, the merchant *merciers*, joined other gentile tradesmen in immediately objecting. Steeping their complaints in quotations from the New Testament, they demanded that the permissions be rescinded, arguing that such actions by the Jews would prove detrimental to the town, and particularly to a third group - the *drapiers drapants* or cloth makers of the town.¹³

And yet when this case surfaced, these same gentile clothmakers came forward to refute the cloth merchants' assertions. Nicholas Gaillard and a group of the clothmakers defended the Jews' right to deal in local merchandise. Denouncing the cloth merchants' monopoly over retail sales of cloth, the clothmakers insisted that the Jews' business was crucial to them. They explained that the Jews had developed the practice of buying wool from Germany and other regions and selling it to them on credit. The Jewish merchants then bought back finished cloth from the cloth makers "at a reasonable price" and re-sold it, resulting in a greater profit for the clothmakers than when they dealt with the cloth merchants' guild. The Jews also occasionally advanced money to the clothmakers which, they proclaimed in a written petition, "not one of the merchant *merciers* has ever done." Prohibiting the Jews from dealing in local goods, the *drapiers* added, threatened to effect "the ruin and detriment of the undersigned (*drapiers*), who will not be able to support themselves, and who will be obliged to abandon the city if the said prohibitions are not lifted by the court." Their statement ended with a final attestation above their respective signatures and crude marks: "I the undersigned hereby declare that it is of great benefit to the *drapiers* that the Jews buy their cloth and that this has never been the cause of complaint."¹⁴

The clothmakers' declaration failed in its main objective. *Parlement* reasserted the ban on Jews dealing in local cloth goods.¹⁵ Nonetheless, it points out that the Jews' relationship with tradespeople in Metz was far more complex and variegated than one might conclude from the most obvious documents on the topic - such as the continuing opposition of many trade groups. Like the controversy surrounding the butchers, this petition of cloth makers shows that the Jews had, by the seventeenth century, become notable, if not powerful players in the local economy, competitors to many, but also allies to a few. And on occasion, some elements in Messin society were willing to defend the Jews, if it suited their own economic interests. As

¹³ *A.D.M.*, 17J, 4, (Lap 16b). See also Clément, pp. 147 and ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Presumably this trade between the Jews and the clothmakers had only been carried out legally after 1656.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

payers of special taxes, Jews had been useful to the Crown and to local authorities for decades. But as importers and money lenders - and as businessmen accustomed to making *ad hoc* arrangements in which they sometimes combined these functions - they had made themselves useful to other local tradesmen as well. And even those with highly-specialized communal jobs - like the kosher butchers - could be made to serve a function. Hence the *utilité* of the Jews of Metz was a peculiar one in the seventeenth century - a utility based as much at this point on their separate status as on their increasing integration into the general marketplace. It was not as fully developed as that utility which won Jews citizenship rights at the end of the eighteenth century. No one among Christians in Metz much liked Jews. But they were learning to use Jews in subtler ways - a strange form of progress, perhaps, but a kind of progress nonetheless.

