



Enlightenment and Emancipation: From Outcasts to Equals

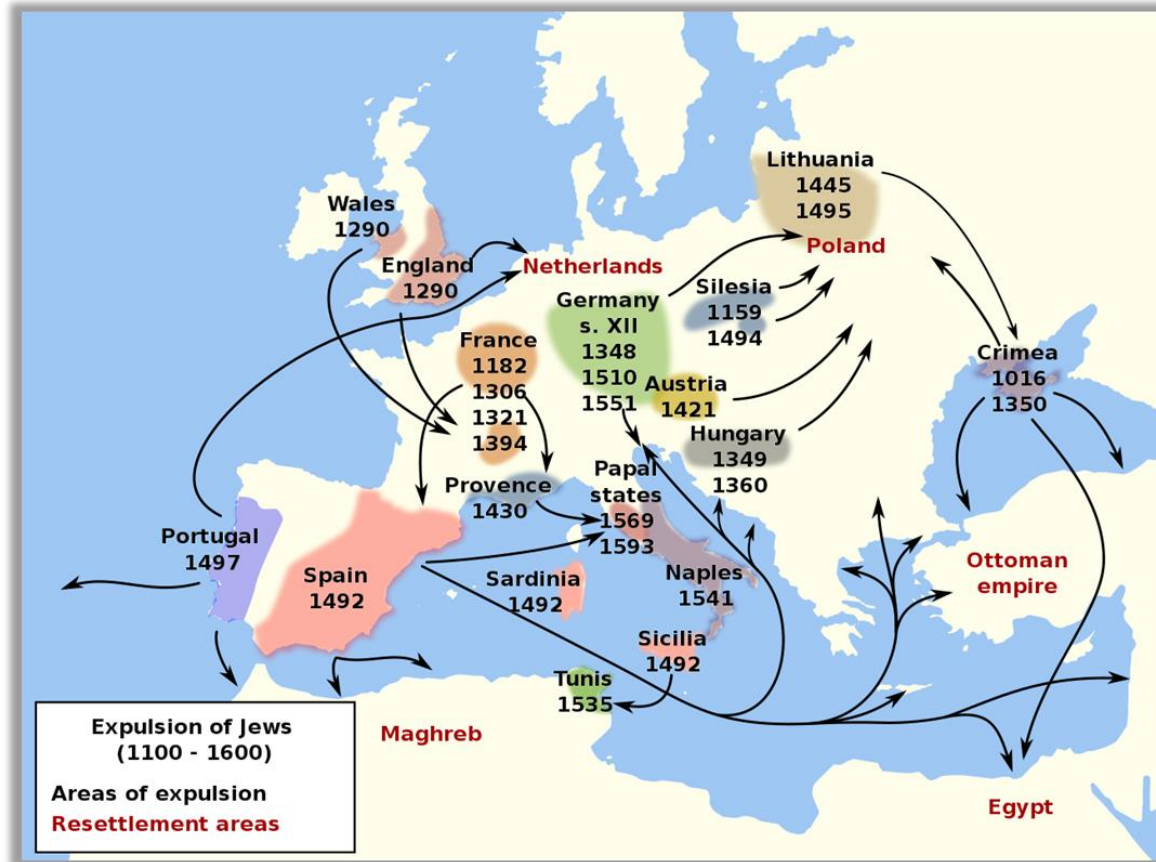
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Session Outline



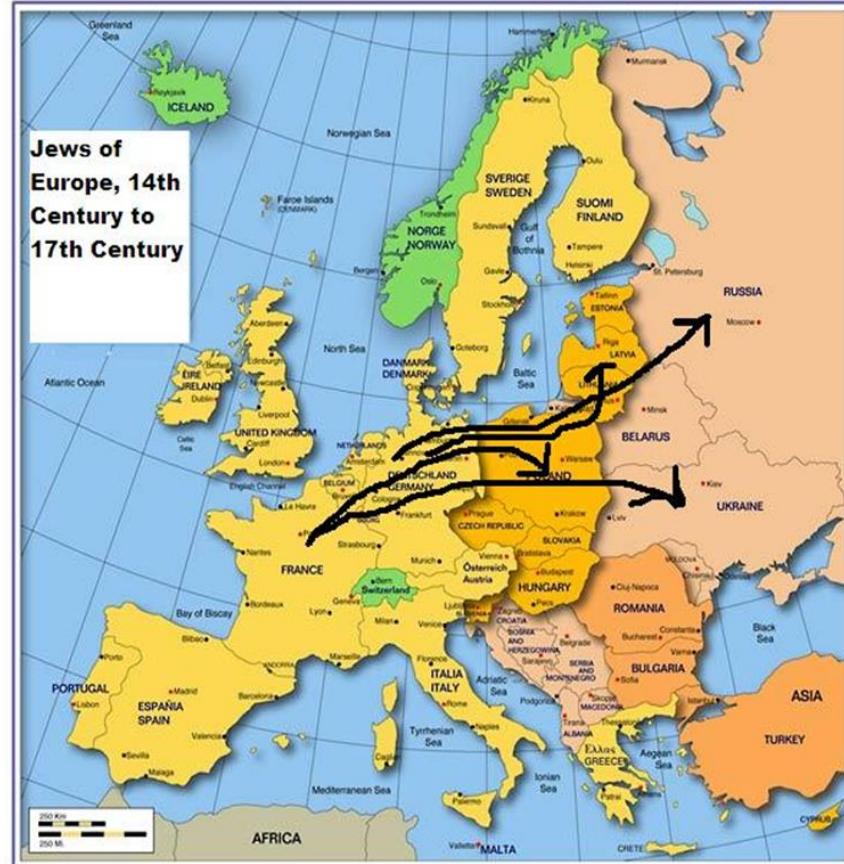
- Jewry in Europe before the Enlightenment
 - The Jewish Emancipation
 - The Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*)
- The influence of Moses Mendelssohn and the *Maskilim*

The Historical Context: Persecution and Expulsion



Jewry in Eastern Europe before the Enlightenment

- The rulers of Poland and Lithuania provide a relatively secure basis for Jewish communal existence.
- 1264 – Prince of Kalisz issues a charter granting legal protection to Jews.
- 1388 – Grand Duke of Lithuania extends similar rights to the Jewish population.
- But Jews still subject to discrimination and violence (see, for example, the massacres during the Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648-59).



Jewry in Eastern Europe before the Enlightenment

- Vilna (Lithuania) a particularly important centre of rabbinic scholarship.
- From 1795, Eastern European Jews confined to the *Pale of Settlement*, a specified territory in western Russia.



Jewry in Western Europe before the Enlightenment

- Where they were permitted to settle in Western Europe, Jews were forced by law to wear distinctive clothing and to live in walled enclaves or 'ghettos'.
- Jewish community forced to become self-reliant as a result of this maltreatment.
- Some 400,000 Jews in Western Europe at the beginning of the 18th century, segregated from non-Jewish society, but with more or less complete autonomy within their own communities.

Jewish Emancipation

- Enlightenment thinkers advocated reason and science as more credible alternatives to faith.
- Emphasis on reason and science led to the creation of democratic societies and the extension of civil rights to all – even to the Jews.
- Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, *Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews* (1781)

Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews (1781)

‘The Jews of each state are already more at home there than strangers can become in a long time. They know no other fatherland than the one given to them now and do not long for a far-away homeland. They are not uncivilized and savage gypsies, nor ignorant and unmannerly refugees...If it is permissible to draw conclusions from the majority of a nation about its essential qualities, no one can deny that the Jews possess excellent intelligence, industry, and the capability to adjust to all kinds of situations.’

‘I dare now, after these remarks, to submit my ideas as to the manner in which the Jews could become happier and better members of civil societies. To make them such it is FIRST necessary to give them equal rights with all other subjects, since they are able to fulfil the duties they should be allowed to claim the equal impartial love and care of the state. No humiliating discrimination should be tolerated, no way of earning a living should be closed to them, none other than the regular taxes demanded from them.’

The Emancipation: Some Key Dates



1781 – The Jewish badge, as well as taxes imposed on Jewish travellers, abolished by Joseph II.

1782 – Jews of Vienna granted the freedom to trade and the right to live outside the Jewish quarters. Jews also permitted to send their children to state schools.

1784 – Jewish judicial autonomy abolished within the Holy Roman Empire.

1791 – citizenship rights granted to all Jews in France following the outbreak of the French Revolution.

1796 – Dutch Jews granted full citizenship rights.

1797 – ghettos of Rome and Padua abolished.

1812 – Jews of Prussia declared equal citizens.

The Jewish Question

- Jews expected to give up their communal identities upon receiving civil and political equality.
- Religion now a matter of individual conscience for Jews. A matter of choice rather than birth.
- To what extent should they turn their backs on their communal, cultural, and religious identities in order to 'blend in'? Could they keep their identity as Jews whilst becoming members of civil society?
- Antisemitism had not gone away!

The Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*)

- Broadly speaking, an adaptation of the European Enlightenment.
- An attempt to modernize Jewish life and thought.
- These changes seen as necessary for achieving political and social integration.



The Influence of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)



- ❖ Considered the father of the *Haskalah*.
- ❖ Born in Dessau in 1729.
- ❖ Studied in Berlin where he met the acquaintance of many Christian thinkers.
- ❖ Involved in defending the legitimacy of Judaism on the one hand, and in reforming Judaism on the other.

Mendelssohn: Defending the Legitimacy of Judaism

- Mendelssohn challenged by Swiss theologian Johann Lavater with the argument that a Jew could never be truly 'enlightened'.
- *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* (1783).
- In the work, Mendelssohn states his commitment to Judaism and his pride in his Jewish identity.



Lessing und Lavater zu Gast bei Moses Mendelssohn, Moritz
Daniel Oppenheim (1856)



Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism (1783)

- Judaism more consistent with modern values than Christianity.
- Advocates religious tolerance: ‘According to the tenets of Judaism, all inhabitants of the earth have a claim to salvation, and the means to attain it are as widespread as mankind itself.’
- Argues for the integration of Jews into wider society: ‘Even now, no better advice than this can be given to the House of Jacob: Adopt the mores and constitution of the country in which you find yourself, but be steadfast in upholding the religion of your fathers, too. Bear both burdens as well as you can.’

Mendelssohn: Reforming Judaism

- ❖ Advocated extensive reforms and educational projects within the Jewish community itself.
- ❖ Translated the Torah into literary German.
- ❖ Initiated a new commentary on the Torah (the *Biur*) which combined Jewish scholarship with secular thought.
- ❖ Helped to found the Jewish Free School in Berlin in 1778.



The (Reconstructed) Grave of Moses Mendelssohn, Berlin



The *Maskilim*:

The Adherents of the *Haskalah*

- Following the example of Mendelssohn, and in spite of opposition, the *Maskilim* pushed forward with their reform of Jewish society.
- Huge emphasis on education; the *Maskilim* established a number of new Jewish schools that taught secular subjects and they produced new textbooks for study.
- The first Jewish literary journal, *Ha-Me'assef* ('The Gatherer'), published by the *Maskilim* in 1783.

The Legacy of the *Haskalah*

- The ideas of Moses Mendelssohn and the *Haskalah* had far-reaching consequences for Jewish society.
- The transformation of Jewish life led many Jews to seek the modernization of Jewish worship.
- The stage now set for divisions within Jewish culture and society!

Summary

- From the late 18th century, Jews able to become full citizens of the countries in which they resided and given the same rights as non-Jews.
- Jews now had to choose how Jewish they wished to be.
- In order to aid social and political integration, Moses Mendelssohn and others sought to modernize Jewish life and thought.
- Thanks to the effects of the Emancipation and the Enlightenment, Judaism would not be the same again!