

“Napoleon and the Jews”

by :

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*Napoleon was the first leader in Europe to grant liberty, equality and fraternity to all religions.
In this lithograph of the period, Napoleon is granting liberty to the Jews.*

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NAPOLEON

If ever a ruler owed his position to what is called the "will of the people", Napoleon did. Napoleon won it by his success with the sword, not the sword of execution, nor the sword of the guillotine, but the sword of battle against the enemies of France.

The people of France elected Napoleon as the Emperor, because he saved France from its enemies and he defended the gains of the Revolution at home.

Napoleon established both the Bank of France and the French bourse (stock exchange) as well as National and Departmental Tax Boards, to insure equitable taxation for all. Consequently, the income of the French peasants skyrocketed.

Napoleon established awards such as the "Legion of Honour" to reward those whose services to the nation merited special recognition; the recipient could be scientist, composer, legislator, clergyman, writer, as well as a soldier.

In the area of public works, over 20,000 miles of imperial and 12,000 miles of regional roads were completed, almost a thousand miles of canals were built, the Great Cornice road was constructed along the Mediterranean coast, mountain roads were constructed across the Alps by ways of Simplon Pass and Mont. Cenis, and harbors were dredged and expanded at many ports, including Dunkerque and Cherbourg.

Not only was Paris beautified with the construction of boulevards, bridges and monuments, but the National Archives received a permanent home. Napoleon also saved the Louvre.

Monument buildings were constructed throughout the Empire and structures, such as the Imperial Cathedral of Speyer, made famous by Luther, were preserved while work on the spires of the great cathedral of Cologne were continued on Napoleon's orders. In fact, Napoleon's architectural handiwork can be found scattered across Europe, from Rome to Vienna.

"Think tanks" and research centers were established in France to work on projects vital for national economy. An Industrial Board was organized to provide data and information to French Industry, as exemplified by the success of the sugar beet farming and the tanning industry.

For religion, Napoleon ended the schism and restored the Catholic Church to France by the Concordat in 1801. He insured freedom of religions and equality to the Protestant sects, and he declared France the homeland of the Jews, after it became obvious he could not establish their national home in Palestine.



The Code Napoleon established equality before the law, emphasized the sanctity of the family, and assured the legal gains of the Revolution. The Code of Civil

Napoleon as Emperor at the moment of his coronation, wearing the collar of the Legion of Honour, which he founded in 1802.

Procedure insured widespread user of mediation in the courts and the laws, and the courts were secularized. insured widespread user of mediation in the courts and the laws, and the courts were secularized.

Napoleon created the Imperial University to administer French Education. Specialized engineering and technological schools were established along with the famous lycées to insure a scientific education. The establishment of a Professional School of Midwifery and first School of Obstetrics were formed during the consulate and the School of Veterinary Science was professionalized under Napoleon.

In the military, Napoleon pioneered in what we describe today as the "principles of war" which are studied by almost every military academy in the world. The armies of today are based on the organization created by

Napoleon for his Grand Army and it has been used ever since.

Many historians claim that Napoleon created his own legend on St. Helena. The truth is that his legend started in Toulon in 1793.

Lord Holland, speaking in the British House of Peers, spoke about the deceased Emperor in August 1833. He stated: "The very people who detested this great man have acknowledged that for 10 centuries there has not appeared upon earth a more extraordinary " character"."

This is indeed a tribute to the Emperor.

THE TRUTH GOES THROUGH THREE STAGES:

First, it is ridiculed;

Second, it is violently attacked;

Finally, it is accepted as self-evident.

It is easy to succumb to the temptation of quoting recognized authorities and obtain information from secondary sources rather than do primary research. A quote from a written document made by one historian and uncritically repeated by another soon acquires the authority of "Common Knowledge". This research did not rely on accepted HISTORIAN EVALUATION, but on primary research.

After having completed years of research, basically on primary sources, and having access to the archives in Cairo, Alexandria, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and researching Jewish literature that deals with Napoleon, I am pleased to present this part of napoleonic history that is not very well known.

**THE PURSUIT OF FACTUAL DETAIL IS
THE RELIGION OF PERFECTION**

**THE TRUTH IS INCONTROVERTIBLE
MALICE MAY ATTACK IT AND IGNORANCE
MAY DERIDE IT, BUT IN THE END IT IS
ACCEPTED.**

**THE ONLY TRUE CONQUESTS,
AND THOSE WHICH AWAKEN NO REGRET,
ARE THE CONQUESTS OBTAINED
OVER IGNORANCE.**

NAPOLEON

The Grand Sanhedrin

“Not since the capture of Jerusalem by Titus have so many enlightened men belonging to the religion of Moses been able to assemble in one place. Dispersed and persecuted, the Jews have been subjected either to punitive taxation, or to enforced abjuration of their faith, or to other obligations and concessions equally opposed to their interests and religion. Present circumstances are in all respects unlike those prevailing in any other age. The Jews are not expected to abandon their religion or to submit to any change that would violate it either in the letter or in the spirit.”

“During the persecution of the Jews and during the periods when they went into hiding in order to escape persecution, various kinds of doctrines and customs came into existence. The rabbis took it upon themselves to interpret the principles of their faith whenever there was a need for clarification. But the right to religious legislation cannot be exercised by individuals; it must be exercised by a general congress of Jews legally and freely assembled, including members of the Spanish and Portuguese, Italian, German and French communities and representing the Jews of more than three-fourths of Europe.”

23 August, 1806 Napoleon to his Minister of the Interior

From *The Mind of Napoleon: A Selection of His Written and Spoken Word*, edited and translated by J. Christopher Herold.

“It is an unusual thing that the Jewish race has spread through the entire world, always having the same customs and keeping the same type of features. Before the Revolution of 1789, the Jews of the County of Venaissin (Enclave of Papal territory near Avignon, France) led a sad existence. The Christians of that area did not believe that a

child of Israel was a human being like themselves. The Jews were restricted to a certain section of the town and could leave it only during designated hours. If by mischance they found themselves on the street while a religious procession was passing (which happened frequently) they had to flee at once to escape the stones which were thrown at them from all sides.”

*“They were always required to wear a yellow hat; Jewesses wore a scarf of the same color across their breast. Woe to those who left their district without those distinctive badges. All Jews were required to bow to any Christian vagabond, who would tell them, ‘Make an offering.’ The Jew had to obey and give him five sous. God alone knows how many twenty-five centime coins a rich Jew might have to pay every time he left his house” (Elzéar Blaze, *Military Life Under Napoleon*, trans. by John R. Elting).*

One of the many contributions that Napoleon has made to improve the quality of life of the people, and perhaps one of his most important and lasting one, was his Civil Code. He felt a personal responsibility for its realization.

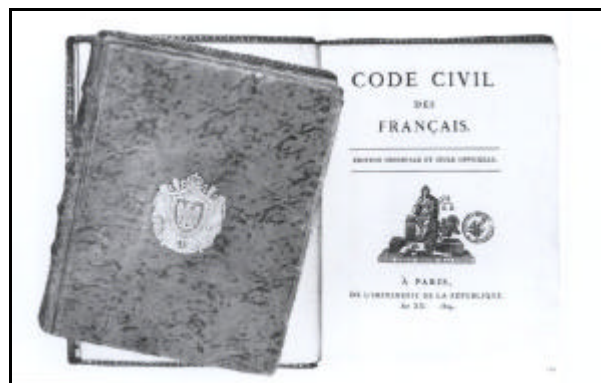
This at a time in history when discrimination was rampant. It was then that Napoleon decided to liberate and offer, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to Jews, Protestants and Free Masons. He also opened the churches that were closed for years.

Not since before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. had Jews been full citizens of a state anywhere in the world, and now in France they were just that. The human leap forward represented by the ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity” proves the authenticity of Napoleon.

The Civil Code of 1804 was to grant religious freedom to all of them. At that time, there were about 480,000 Calvinists and 200,000 Lutherans living in France.

The Napoleonic code eradicated old barriers of social rank, religious supremacy and racial distinction. Wherever Napoleon’s armies went across the continent, they broke down the ghetto walls, behind which the Jews had been confined, even in Rome.

In 1804, Napoleon arranged for the public regulation of the Protestant communities and then decided that the State would assume the responsibility for the salaries of their pastors.



The Civil Code, also known as the Napoleon Code, promulgated on March 1804, contains 36 laws and 2281 articles. It was elaborated in 4 months of daily sessions, of which half were presided by the First Consul in person. The Napoleon Code served as an example to all the Jurists of the of the XIXth Century.

HOW DID NAPOLEON'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE JEWS COME ABOUT?

Napoleon Bonaparte had not met any Jews in his youth, and perhaps not even during his school years in France. His first contact with the organized Jewish community probably took place on the 9th of February 1797 in Italy during the Italian campaign.

When Napoleon and his army entered Ancona, the Jewish community was living in a small ghetto. Napoleon, at that time, remarked that certain people were walking around with yellow bonnets and a yellow arm band with the “Star of David” on it. He asked one of his officers, what was the purpose of the yellow bonnet and the arm band. The officer replied that these were Jews who had to be identified in order that they return

to the ghetto every evening. Napoleon immediately ordered that the arm bands and the yellow bonnets be removed and replaced them with the tricolor rosette. He closed the ghettos and gave instructions that the Jews could live wherever they wanted and they could practice their religion openly. The Jews of Ancona were overjoyed when they discovered that the first French soldiers who entered the ghetto were Jewish!

As the church, dating to the Fourth Lateran Council, which took place in 1215, had used laws requiring special badges and clothing to dramatize its authority over the Jews, so now, Napoleon, abolished the yellow badge which Roman Jews had to wear. He sent his engineers to batter down the gates of the ghetto, freeing its residents.

The ghetto, which was established by Pope Paul IV, applied very harsh restrictive conditions to force the mass conversion of Jews. Although the ghetto was planned to be temporary, it was, however, extended over a long time and it led to the complete abasement of the Jews of Rome.

Later, Napoleon also closed the “Jewish Ghetto” in Rome. He liberated also the Jews of Venice, Verona and Padua.

Ghetto Jews were the most degraded people in Europe.

The “liberator of Italy” abolished the Laws of the Inquisition, and the Jews felt free at last.¹

WHY DID NAPOLEON DO THIS?

DID HE HAVE A MOTIVE?

¹ See Appendix 1

And yet, here is another incident of interest. On the 12th of June 1798 when the French occupied Malta, Napoleon learnt that the Templar Knights did not allow the Jews to practice their religion in a synagogue. The Knights enslaved their Jewish prisoners and mercilessly used them or sold them. He immediately gave permission to the Jews to build a synagogue.

AGAIN I ASK- WHY DID NAPOLEON DO THIS?

WHAT COULD BE NAPOLEON'S MOTIVE?

Now here is an amazing incident which is not generally known.

When the French troops were in Palestine, and besieging the city of Acre, Napoleon had already prepared a Proclamation² making Palestine an independent Jewish state.

He felt confident that he could occupy Acre and the following days he would enter Jerusalem and from Jerusalem he would issue his proclamation. He was unable to realize this project because of the intervention of the British.

² See Appendix 2

This proclamation was printed and dated the 20th of April 1799, but his unsuccessful attempt to capture Acre prevented it from being issued. The Jews had to wait more than 150 years before their state was proclaimed.

The proclamation, however did bear fruit. It was a precursor to Zionism, heightening awareness of the cause of Jewish statehood. The ideas Napoleon expressed found the admiration of many who saw Napoleon's gestures as a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, which foretells of the restoration of the Jews to their land. The idea drew many adherents, especially in England.

One hundred and eighteen years later, the British would issue the "Balfour" declaration which called for a Jewish homeland and ultimately - 31 years later in 1948 - Israel would be recognized as a sovereign state by popular vote in the United Nations General Assembly. Perhaps it can be said that Napoleon's premature announcement on that first day of Passover in 1799 played an important role in the creation of the state of Israel.

In the Paris *Moniteur Universel*, on 3 Prairial of the year VII (22 May 1799). It was announced: "*Bonaparte has published a proclamation in which he invites all the Jews of Asia and Africa to gather under his flag in order to re-establish the ancient Jerusalem. He has already given arms to a great number, and their battalions threaten Aleppo.*"

On the 16th of August, 1800, Napoleon declared : "*If I governed a nation of Jews, I*

should reestablish the Temple of Solomon".

WHY DID NAPOLEON DO THIS?

It just does not make sense, because he had nothing political to gain. However, the answer could be discovered in a private conversation that Napoleon had with Dr. Barry O'Meara, which took place on the Island of St. Helena.

On the 10th of November 1816, Dr. O'Meara (who was Napoleon's personal physician at the time) asked the Emperor point blank as to why he was encouraging and supporting the Jews.

The Emperor Napoleon replied, and I quote,:

"My primary desire was to liberate the Jews and make them full citizens. I wanted to confer upon them all the legal rights of equality, liberty and fraternity as was enjoyed by the Catholics and Protestants. It is my wish that the Jews be treated like brothers as if we were all part of Judaism. As an added benefit, I thought that this would bring to France many riches because the Jews are numerous and they would come in large numbers to our country where they would enjoy more privileges than in any other nation. Without the events of 1814, most of the Jews of Europe would have come to France where equality, fraternity and liberty awaited them and where they can serve the country like everyone else."

During the different periods of Napoleon's career, his sympathy for the Jews were clearly noted. He did everything he could to assure that the Jews were treated on an equal basis as Catholics and Protestants.

The French Revolution in 1789 was to change all the various restrictions that Jews had to face in France. It was on the 27th of September 1791 that France adopted a decree which accorded the Jews of France full citizenship.

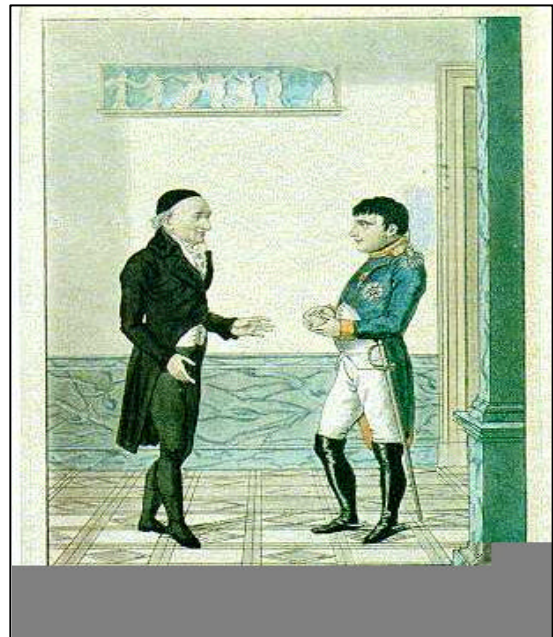
However, the Legislative Assembly did not take any specific measures to apply this new freedom that was granted to the Jews. The National Convention closed the synagogues, forbid the use of the Hebrew language and in general made their lives difficult.

Under the Directory, the synagogues were opened again and Jews got involved in business and in political life. But, in general, the Jews were barely tolerated.

Before Napoleon took over the leadership of the French government, the political situation of the Jews was precarious, unstable, and had to submit to negative laws, and according to specific regions of France, they were some times treated in a liberal manner and some times in a tyrannical manner.

Napoleon's religious opinions were the height of modern philosophy; he was completely given to tolerance. Everywhere that Napoleon went, he led tolerance by the hand; everywhere that he found several religions, he ended the domination by which one took precedence over the others. "Faith," Napoleon would say, *"is beyond the reach of the law. It is the most personal possession of man, and no one has the right to demand and account for it."*

He wanted the Jews to have their Jerusalem in France.



One of the most respected Jewish poet and philosopher was Christophe Martin Wieland. Napoleon made a point of meeting with him when he was in Germany.

Metternich-Winneburg, who was the Austrian consul in Paris in a letter to Count Standion, Austria's foreign minister, on September 1806 stated: *"All Jews look upon Napoleon as their **Messiah**"*

Napoleon was the only government leader that gave Jews equality when most other nations kept them in bondage. He also abolished the special taxes on Jews in Germany and gave them, for the very first time, civic and political equality. When strong opposition in France manifested itself, Napoleon stood firm in his support of Jewish equality.

When Napoleon came to power, he did not liberate the Jews for political reasons because there were not much more than 40,000 in all of France, and they were living in various provinces.

The province where Jews were most persecuted was Alsace, where half of the Jewish population of France was living. In Paris, there were approximately 1,000 Jews. They were excluded from doing business, excluded from government positions and from the purchase of property.

The principle leader of the new law dated the 8th of April 1802, which dealt with the organization of various religions was Jean-Etienne Portalis, the Minister of Religion. He said: "*Jews should participate as equals, like all other religions, as permitted by our laws.*"

Although there was tremendous opposition by the anti-Semites, one of the leading Jewish citizens, Isaac Cerf-Berr, presented to Minister Portalis, a specific plan that would ensure Jewish integration into the population. The plan was brought to Napoleon at his camp in Boulogne in 1805. He approved it and instructed Portalis to implement it as quickly as possible.

As far as the Jews are concerned, it can hardly be doubted that Napoleon's laws regulating the life of the French-Jewish communities were a turning point in their development in modern free-society.

Cerf Berr has been instrumental in securing the abolition of the poll tax which was required of any Jew wishing to spend the day in Strasbourg.

It was in 1806, after the Austerlitz campaign, that Napoleon aggressively supported total liberty for the Jews. Notwithstanding this, the

French newspaper, the *Mercure de France*, published a violently anti-Semitic article stating that the Jews could have freedom in France, provided they all converted and became Catholics.

Great opposition to Napoleon's plan to make equal citizens out of the Jews living in France was led by Molé, Beugnot, Segur, and Regnier.

Notwithstanding this heavy opposition, including anti-Semitism generated by numerous newspapers, Napoleon was quoted as saying, I quote, "*This is not the way to solve the Jewish question. I will never accept any proposals that will obligate the Jewish people to leave France, because to me the Jews are the same as any other citizen in our country. It takes weakness to chase them out of the country, but it takes strength to assimilate them.*"

The decree issued on the 30th of May 1806 requested that a Special Assembly of Jewish leaders and Rabbis, from all of the French departments, would meet in Paris to discuss all outstanding matters, including answering questions dealing with accusations against the Jews made by the anti-Semites.

It was on the 23rd of July 1806, when all of these representatives met in Paris, at which time Napoleon stated:

"My desire is to make Jews equal citizens in France, have a conciliation between their religion and their responsibilities in becoming French, and to answer all the accusations made against them.

I want all people living in France to be equal citizens and benefit from our laws.”

One hundred and eleven representatives of the Jewish community, representing all the departments of France and Northern Italy met at City Hall. Napoleon had requested answers to accusations made against the Jews so he could understand their position clearly. The reunion of so many Jews from the different parts of France represented the renewal of the famous “Sanhedrin” which ruled Israel from 170 BC to 70 AD.



The Grand Sanhedrin, was the Supreme Assembly of the Jewish nation, and had not been reunited for 18 centuries. Napoleon had the idea of assembling the principal Jewish notables of all of Europe, in order to permit them to solve the problems that concerned him. Convened by decree on the 23rd of August 1806, the Grand Sanhedrin met from the 9th of February to the 9th of March 1807. At the time of their last reunion, Napoleon was proclaimed the modern ‘Cyrus’. Napoleon was warmly and unanimously praised.

The Sanhedrin continued to be an important force in Israel until 70 AD when the Roman General Titus destroyed Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin replaced the monarchy in Israel in those days and it was their authority that administered the country.

They interpreted the law, and sat as judges in major cases. This was the first time since the Sanhedrin was disbanded in Israel that it was reconvened, by the great liberator “Napoleon”.

The reconvening of the Sanhedrin drew a historical comparison between Napoleon and the ancient heroes, one of whom was “Cyrus the Great”. Cyrus, the King of Persia, was the initiator of Israel’s first restoration.

The Jews greeted the Napoleon armies as liberators, and in the Campaign against Moscow, he drew great support from Polish and Russian Jews.

Tsar Alexander of Russia, protested violently against the liberation of the Jews and encouraged the Orthodox Church in Moscow to protest aggressively. He called Napoleon the “Anti Christ and the enemy of God” because he liberated the Jews. Austria also protested. In Prussia, the Lutheran Church was extremely hostile towards Napoleon’s decision and reaction in Italy was also not favorable but not as aggressive.

A most venomous attack on the Sanhedrin came from the “Holy Synod” of Moscow, which issued an open manifesto against the Sanhedrin. This proclamation dated December 1806 states: In order to bring about a debasement of the Church, he

(Napoleon) has convened to Paris the Jewish Synagogue, restored the dignity of the Rabbis and founded a new Sanhedrin."

Napoleon was concerned about these protests, which also included some leading personalities in France.

Therefore, in 1806, after the campaign of Prussia, and shortly after the victory at Jena, he made a speech in the city of Posen on the 29th of November 1806, where he gave the results of the deliberations of the Sanhedrin, which pleased him very much.

The Sanhedrin was convened again on 31st of January 1807 for two months, in order to fine-tune the law that would make the Jewish religion equal. The special decree of 1806 liberated the Jews from their isolation.

Judaism became the official third religion of France and the method Napoleon implemented to have Rabbis serve the nation is still in effect today and is the basis of the government's relation to the Jewish population.

Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Fesh, also got involved. He told Napoleon, "Sire, so you wish the end of the world to come with your Laws to give the Jews equality like the Catholics. Do you not know that the Holy Scriptures predict that the end of the world will happen when the Jews will be recognized as a corporate nation."

Even Marshall Kellermann supported by Mole mobilized opposition to Napoleon's

laws about the Jews and recommended strongly that the Jews be prohibited from dealing in commerce. The Emperor replied formally and strongly, "*We must prevail in encouraging the Jews who are only a very small minority amongst us. In the east departments, we find a great number of Jews that are very honest and industrious.*"

Because of the tremendous amount of criticism that Napoleon was receiving from such famous personalities as Chateaubriand, Cardinal Fesh, Marshal Kellermann, Tsar Alexander and numerous others, Napoleon felt obligated to introduce a "Restrictive Decree".

On the 17th of March 1808, this Decree limited the freedom given to the Jews. His plan was to reduce criticism to a manageable level and then gradually, over time, remove the restrictions one-by-one.

On the 11th of April 1808, Napoleon received into a special audience, Mr. Furtado and Maurice Levy of Nancy, who wanted to express the emotions of their co-religionists about the Restrictive Decree. After hearing them out, he immediately ordered 13 departments, including those of Le Midi, The Southwest and Les Vosges to eliminate the Decree. In June of that same month, Livourne and the lower Pyrenees were also ordered to remove the "Restrictive Decree".

Therefore, within three months of this Restrictive Decree, more than half of the

departments involved were able to reinstate the liberty extended to their Jewish citizens. The last hold-out was Alsace. This province eventually removed the restrictions.

Therefore, in 1811, all restrictions were removed and nothing from a political or civil activity distinguished the Jews from non-Jews in France.

Here is a true anecdote that proves how Napoleon was sympathetic to his Grogards. A young member of the Army served with exceptional bravery. He was from Alsace. The Emperor decided to decorate him with a medal in front of his troops. The Emperor said, "*David Bloom, you are a brave soldier. Your place with the Old Guard is inevitable.*" Then he took off his own silver medal, which he wore proudly, and pinned it on David Bloom's uniform.

David Bloom responded by saying, "*Sire, I am from Alsace and I find it difficult to accept this decoration as long as my family is being dishonored by French laws that limit their equality and freedom.*" Napoleon was visibly upset and was reported to have said, "*They have lied to me again, and I will correct these unfair restrictions immediately.*"

Due to the close collaboration between the administration officials and the local Rabbis and leaders, the Jews were able to leave the ghettos where they were confined and to participate freely in the life of France.

Jews were able to enroll in the universities, participate in whatever professions they wanted and were able to work for various

government agencies. Nothing was prohibited any more.

The Imperial Almanac of 1811 reported that the Jewish religion was now one of three religions accepted by the French government. The efforts of Napoleon to liberate the Jews was effective, not only in France, but in all the other countries where France ruled. The new Civil Code, which Napoleon created, assured liberty, fraternity, and equality of all peoples regardless of their religion or station in life.

In 1811, thanks to Napoleon's efforts, Portugal allowed Jews complete freedom and permitted them to open their synagogues that were closed for over 200 years.

The Napoleonic period brought to the Jews of France, the Netherlands, Western Germany and Italy the first intimations of modernity. It brought equality before the law, an end to oppressive taxation and enforced residential restrictions, and the opportunity to participate as free men in public and political life.

When Napoleon applied the laws of equality, fraternity and liberty to Southern Germany, all the restrictions against the Frankfurt Jews were also removed. Even after Waterloo, the politicians of Frankfurt tried to reapply the

restrictions against the Jews, however they were never wholly successful.

In those parts of Spain to which French authority did not reach, the Inquisition continued to function. The sovereigns of the post-Napoleonic era had a weakness in learning nothing and forgetting nothing.

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the Holy Alliance was convened at the Congress of Vienna; then emancipation suffered its greatest setback. At that time the laws permitting equality, liberty and fraternity were retracted and were not applied again until 1830, when the principles fixed by the French Revolution and the First Empire, were re-instated.

Prussia retracted the liberal laws in 1815 after the Battle of Waterloo. The worst setback was inflicted upon the Jews of the Papal states. It would almost seem as if Pius VII had taken revenge on the Jewish population of his territory for the humiliation he had suffered at the hand of Napoleon. He was not content with their confinement behind the walls of the re-erected ghetto but he obliged the Jews to wear the "Yellow badge" again. In Sardina, the Jews were thrown back into ghettos and not allowed to build synagogues.

Although ghettos were re-established in other cities, only in Rome and a handful of

other places were the walls, that Napoleon had demolished, actually rebuilt.

Much later some European nations assimilated the Jews between 1824 and 1867. Notably, Holland in 1830, Sweden in 1834 and Switzerland in 1838.

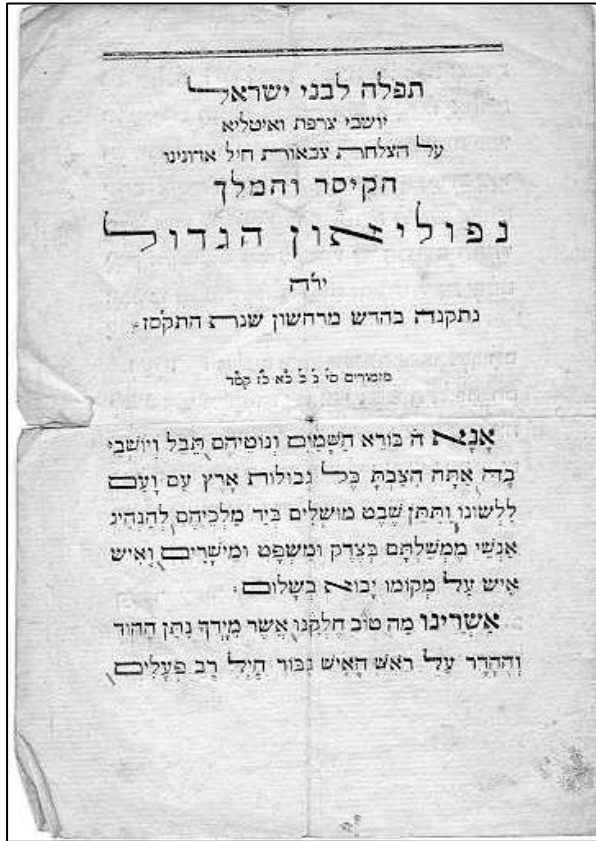
It is remarkable that in England, it was only in 1858, after Lord Lionel Rothchild was elected five times, that he was permitted to take his seat in parliament. It is also interesting to know that the laws that were passed in France, in 1808, are still in existence even to this day.

Bitter irony covers the historical fact that Napoleon's defeat stopped Emancipation and plunged the Jewish youth into utter disillusionment and despair.

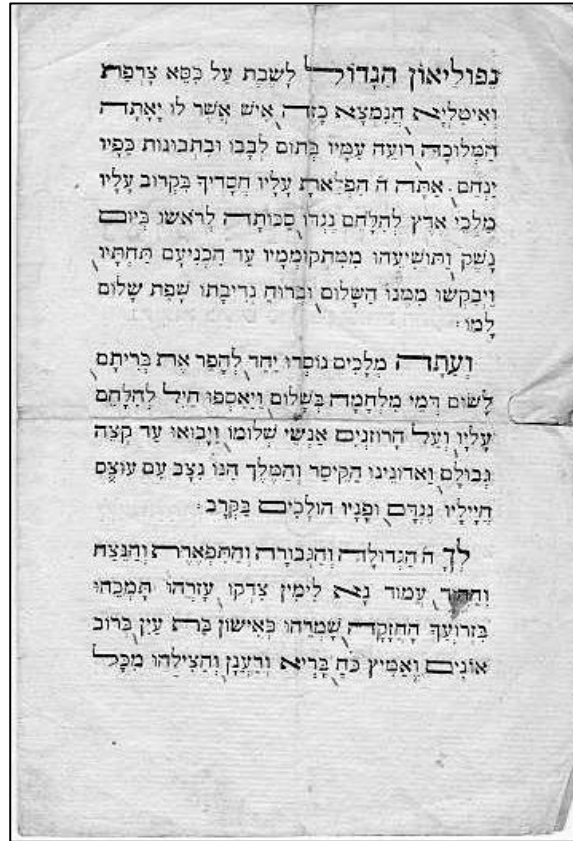
The encounter of the Jewish people with Napoleon was a turning point of Jewish history. For the first time, a modern statesman had envisaged the Jewish problem as a fundamental issue of international politics.

Napoleon did more than any other leader prior to his time, to give security and religious freedom to the Jews in nations under his control. He had little in the way of political motivation for his policy, as there were no more than 40,000 Jews living in France at that time.

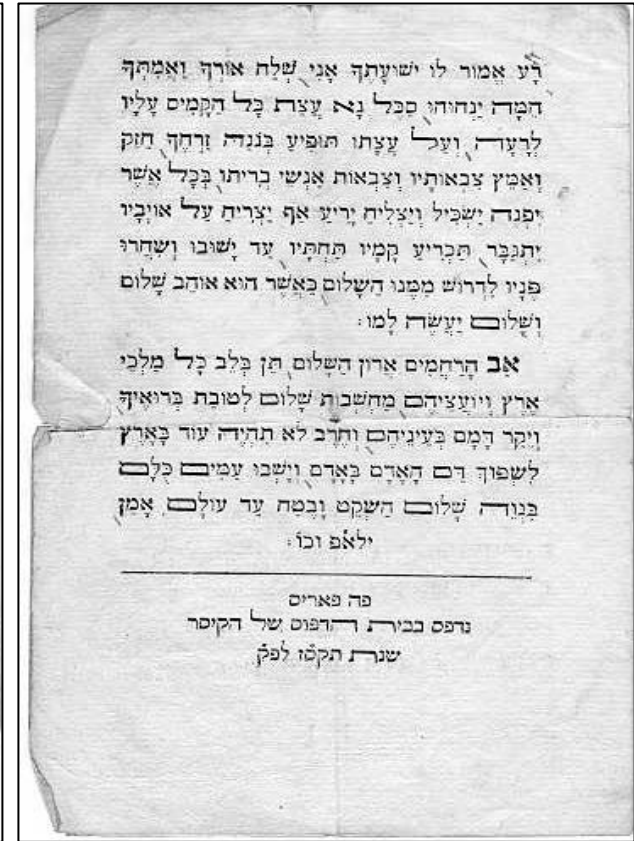
The Jews of France and the Empire recognized that this was a reflection of his humanity towards mankind and his respect for other nationalities and religions. They were so thankful to him for having granted them equality and religious freedom, that they offered a special prayer in his honour. This prayer was inserted into the prayer books in every synagogue in countries under Napoleon's control. As a result, all Jews who attended prayers in these synagogues would recite this prayer.



PAGE 1
Ben Weider collection



PAGE 2



PAGE 3

THE ABOVE IS A REPRODUCTION OF THE ORIGINAL HEBREW PRAYER, FOR ITS ENGLISH TRANSLATION SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE.

APPENDIX I

Prayer of the Children of Israel
Citizens of France and Italy
for the success and prosperity of our Master's Army
The Emperor, the King Napoleon the Great
(may his glory shine)
Composed in the month of Cheshvan, year 5567 (1807)

Psalms chapter 20,21,27, 147

I implore Thee, Creator of Heaven and the Universe and all who inhabit it. Thou hast established all boundaries and limitations of the world and each nation with its respective language. Thou didst give the Sceptre of power into the hands of their kings to lead the people under their reign with righteousness, justice, an uprightness; that each person in his own place should live in peace.

How fortunate we are, how good is our lot, that from Thy hand glory and beauty were poured out upon the head of a powerful man, full of vibrancy, NAPOLEON the Great, to sit on the Throne of France and Italy. Could another be found as worthy as NAPOLEON deserving of such honours and kingship, who shepherds his people with sincerity and with the understanding of his heart? Thou, GOD, hast wondrously bestowed Thy kindness upon him. As other Kings of the world approached to fight him, Thou didst protect him on the day of war, Thou didst save him from those who stood up against him, until he subdued them and they sought peace from him. With his kind spirit, he spoke words of peace to them.

Kings have now united to break their treaty and replace peace with the blood of war. They have gathered armies to fight against him and

against all those who admire him. They have come to our borders, and our master, the Emperor, the King, is standing with the might of his army to confront them.

O GOD, master of greatness, strength, power and beauty, we implore Thee to stand next to his righteousness; help him, support him with Thy mighty arm: guard him as the apple of Thine eye with an abundance of strength and health. Save him from all evil and tell him "I am your salvation."

Send Thy light and truth, that they may lead him. Render foolish all those who rise against him for evil. Let Thy light shine upon his plans. Strengthen his armies and those of his allies.

May he succeed in all his endeavors and reign over his enemies. May they seek peace from him, for he is a man who loves peace, and peace he will exercise among his nation.

Father of compassion, Master of Peace, implant in the heads of all Kings and their advisors thoughts of peace and tranquility for the benefit of all mankind. Let the Sword not pass through our land and spill the blood of our brethren. Let all nations unite in total peace and tranquility forever. Amen.

(May the words of our prayers be acceptable to
Thee.)

APPENDIX 2

Letter to the Jewish Nation from the French Commander-in-Chief Buonaparte (translated from the Original, 1799)

General Headquarters, Jerusalem 1st Floreal, April 20th, 1799,
in the year of 7 of the French Republic

BUONAPARTE, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMIES OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC IN AFRICA AND ASIA, TO THE RIGHTFUL HEIRS OF PALESTINE.

Israelites, unique nation, whom, in thousands of years, lust of conquest and tyranny have been able to be deprived of their ancestral lands, but not of name and national existence!

Attentive and impartial observers of the destinies of nations, even though not endowed with the gifts of seers like Isaiah and Joel, have long since also felt what these, with beautiful and uplifting faith, have foretold when they saw the approaching destruction of their kingdom and fatherland: And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35,10)

Arise then, with gladness, ye exiled! A war unexampled in the annals of history, waged in self-defense by a nation whose hereditary lands were regarded by its enemies as plunder to be divided, arbitrarily and at their convenience, by a stroke of the pen of Cabinets, avenges its own shame and the shame of the remotest nations, long forgotten under the yoke of slavery, and also, the almost two-thousand-year-old ignominy put upon you; and, while time and circumstances would seem to be least favorable to a restatement of your claims or even to their expression, and indeed to be compelling their complete abandonment, it offers to you at this very time, and contrary to all expectations, Israel's patrimony!

The young army with which Providence has sent me hither, let by justice and accompanied by victory, has made Jerusalem my headquarters and will, within a few days, transfer them to Damascus, a proximity which is no longer terrifying to David's city.

Rightful heirs of Palestine!

The great nation which does not trade in men and countries as did those which sold your ancestors unto all people (Joel,4,6) herewith calls on you not indeed to conquer your patrimony; nay, only to take over that which has been conquered and, with that nation's warranty and support, to remain master of it to maintain it against all comers.

Arise! Show that the former overwhelming might of your oppressors has but repressed the courage of the descendants of those heroes whose alliance of brothers would have done honour even to Sparta and Rome (Maccabees 12, 15) but that the two thousand years of treatment as slaves have not succeeded in stifling it.

Hasten! Now is the moment, which may not return for thousands of years, to claim the restoration of civic rights among the population of the universe which had been shamefully withheld from you for thousands of years, your political existence as a nation among the nations, and the unlimited natural right to worship Jehovah in accordance with your faith, publicly and most probably forever (Joel 4,20).

NAPOLEON IN THE HOLY LAND

There is a story that when Napoleon went to the Holy Land after his Egyptian campaign, he heard the sounds of weeping and wailing echoing from one building to another. He demanded to be informed of what was happening. After investigation, his officers reported : “They are Jews lamenting the loss of their land, which is now occupied by others. They are weeping because their Temple was destroyed, their brethren were massacred and they were forced into exile.”

Indignantly, Napoleon declared, “How could a people be attacked in such a manner without my being aware of it?”

The Emperor could not believe his ears: “A people that remains so attached to its roots and to its past and continues for so many centuries to mourn its loss, will surely finish by regaining what has been taken away from it.”

**NAPOLEON'S PREDICTION CAME TO PASS
WITH THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL ON MAY 12TH 1948**

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Prayers offered by the French and Italian Hebrews for Napoleon

Brethren! Cast your eyes on the joy of this immortal day! Who guided our victorious armies? Who vanquished the approaching enemy and who pursued him? Who scattered him, confounded him and subjected him to utter defeat? Was it not our dear sovereign, the great NAPOLEON, our Emperor and King, whom God crowned, with all his virtues, his sacred head, and his glory? Is it not he, generous in the midst of battle, magnanimous in victory, he whose very name makes the most warlike heroes tremble, yet whose blood he spares? It is indubitably he who is the Elected of the Most High, he whose just deeds the Lord ceaselessly protects.

Eternal GOD, Master of the Universe, thou whose providential gaze shines upon the heaven and the Earth.

Strength and power are thine; it is through thee alone that everything flourishes, everything is strengthened; it is through thee that Kings reign; it is thou who givest them the Sceptre to govern the nations.

Cast from thy holy domain a favourable glance, bless, protect and assist our august sovereign, NAPOLEON THE GREAT, Emperor of the French, King of Italy.

Amen.

Lavish upon him the treasure of thy benedictions; prolong the length of his reign to the most distant future day.

Amen.

May thy divine eye ever watch over him and may his brow be forever adorned with a crown of glory.

Amen.

May his enemies bend before him, may honour, peace and tranquillity attend his reign.

Amen.

May the rays of thy divine light guide him and protect him; may thy grace and mercy serve as his shield.

Amen.

May LOUISE, his dear companion, that model of Queens, share in his glory and his felicity.

Amen.

Ever more increase the power, grandeur and nobility of our Sovereign and of his illustrious family.

Amen.

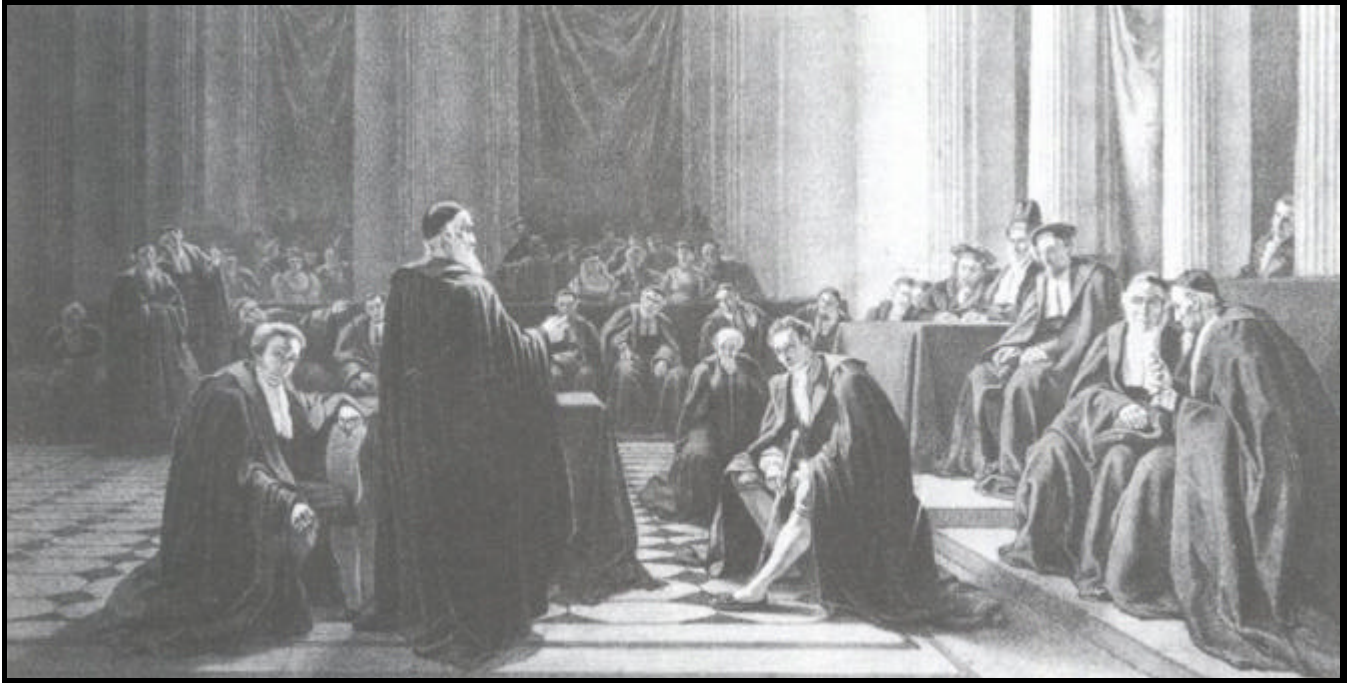
Assure the happiness of Israel by making us worthy of his benevolence, that we may be pleasing in the eyes of all who approach him.

Amen.

Look favourably upon our prayers and the wishes of our hearts; grant them, we beseech thee, Lord God our Creator and our Liberator.

Amen.

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The Grand Sanhedrin of the Jews of France (February 5, 1807)

NAPOLEON THE GREAT

Restores the right of worship to the Jews on May 30, 1806

This ancient nation to which the will of the Most High was first entrusted, governed by the divinely inspired Mosaic Law, had been scattered over the face of the earth for seventeen hundred years. The Israelites came into contact with every other people, yet mixed with none, seemingly existing just to witness the torrent of centuries that carried them inexorably along. Such a phenomenon would have been inexplicable had the Jews been a purely political entity, since it was virtually impossible for them to have existed for so long faced with all the vicissitudes and persecutions they encountered in the many countries where they resided. How often was banishment inflicted upon them? Who can measure the hate, the contempt, the outrage, the deprivation, the isolation and the torture they had to endure in France alone? So much cruelty and humiliation were heaped upon them that one could be forgiven for thinking that our ancestors did not consider them to be fully human. It was in vain that a few eloquent voices were raised against such glaring injustices; their pleas fell on deaf ears, and the unfortunate Israelites seemed forever doomed to be reviled and shunned. A new Cyrus then appeared, one who was destined to do even more for them than the Persian king of old. While he did not reconstruct their temple, he gave them a country and protective laws that restored their honour and enshrined their values

so that they would be forever shielded from the hateful among his subjects. Overcome with gratitude for these precious gifts, the children of Israel bowed low before the throne of the **Great Napoleon**, and the daughters of Zion made the walls of the temples ring with the immortal canticles that had once echoed across the river Jordan when, on their return from Egypt, the Hebrew people sang the praises of the Lord. The gratitude of the French Israelites was not limited to simple demonstrations, however; they proved every day that they were worthy of the favours of the Sovereign, through their allegiance to his august person and their subjection to his laws.

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS ABOUT KING JÉRÔME

When Jérôme, the brother of Napoléon, became king of Westphalia (1807-1813), he set up a constitution, which included the complete equality of the rights of the Jews. King Jérôme adhered to the application of equality of all religions in law.

On the 10th of December 1807, when he entered the city of Kassel, he stated : "It is my intention that the Jews shall not only be citizens but shall also hold public offices."

These words caused much happiness amongst the Jews everywhere in Germany. The population in general reacted with satisfaction to the equalization of Jewish rights.

On the 27th of January 1808, Jérôme issued a manifesto where the principles of civic equality were laid down. This "Magna Carta" of the Jewish community of Westphalia was announced on the 9th of February 1808.

An Israelite Consistory was founded with the Imperial Decree, dated the 17th of March 1808, to confirm the nomination of Rabbis and to control the administration of the community. King Jérôme announced that he was glad that the Constitution of his kingdom, in regard to the equality of all other religions, was in accordance with his heart.

It was during this period that numerous Jewish schools were built in many German cities.

On the 27th of January 1808, King Jérôme of Westphalia created the first comprehensive law on the equality of the Jews on German territory and abolished special Jewish taxes.



The Royal Decree, dated the 27th of January 1808, which abolished taxes imposed on Jews, read in part, as follows :

Our subjects who adhere to the religion of Moses shall enjoy in our states the same rights and liberties as all our other subjects.

Consequently, all special taxes, which were imposed on the Jews, regardless of the occasion at which they were introduced and under whatever designation they may have come up, are hereby completely abolished.

Without requiring a special permit, as before, they may marry, arrange for the proper education and establishment of their children, transfer to them their assets, under the obligation to do what is necessary, in accordance with the rules of the Code of Napoleon.

They are also free to establish themselves in any city, or in any other place, in any commerce they desire.

Our Minister of Justice and of the Interior has a mandate to execute the present Decree.

Issued in the Royal Place at Kassel, on the 27th of January 1808.