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Glorious, Accursed Europe

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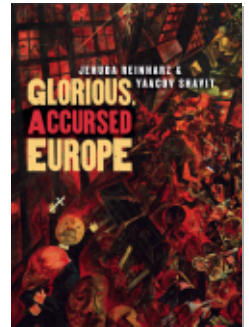
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EUROPE DISCOVERS ITSELF, JEWS DISCOVER EUROPE

Ah, Europe, Europe!

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,
*Beyond Good and Evil*¹

*There will be a time when no one in Europe will ask any longer,
who is a Jew and who is a Christian.*

JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER,
*Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*²

For hundreds of years, the word “Europe” denoted a geographical location whose borders were not precisely defined; it did not appear to describe a specific, well-defined human or social entity. Jews who read Greek encountered the word “Europe” as a geographical reference in Jewish literature from the Hellenic period—for instance, in Flavius Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities*,³ in *The Book of Jubilees*, and in *The Sibylline Oracles*. Jewish literature borrowed the word and the geographical area it denoted from contemporary Greek geographical and ethnographical literature, which devoted special treatises to descriptions of Europe and defined it in opposition to the external world.⁴ Furthermore, it borrowed the Greek division of the world into three continents. Within Jewish Hellenic literature, there was an effort to apply the three-continent model to the description of the world in Genesis 5.⁵

The Jews who lived in Europe during the Middle Ages were not aware that they lived in the part of the world labeled Europe. The tenth-century *Book of Josippon* does not mention Europe in its geographic descriptions; as far as we know, the name does not appear in any Jewish text from that period. This is not a consequence of limited geographical knowledge on the part of the Jews; Europe’s Christians were also unaware that they resided in Europe, and they defined themselves in terms of provinces and

countries that were part of the Christian world. To be sure, Europe as a geographical concept did not, over the course of generations, disappear from descriptions of the world in literature and cartography, and at times it was also used for rhetorical purposes. However, it was known primarily to the intellectual elite. Scribes in Charlemagne's court thus used the terms "European" and "Europeanness" as synonyms for "Christian" and "Christianity," and in the poem "Karlus Magnus et Leo Papa" (Charlemagne and Pope Leo), an anonymous court poet described Charlemagne as "*rex, pater Europae*" (king, father of Europe) and "*regnum Europae*" (king of Europe—that is, from the Pyrenees to the Elbe River).⁶

THE BIRTH OF EUROPE AS REALITY AND CONCEPT

In reality the correspondence between Europe as a geographical region and the region controlled by Western Christianity was not precise, and local geographical consciousness was far stronger than any regional consciousness. Until the seventeenth century, it was primarily the Muslim enemy at the gate that inspired a pan-European rhetoric: the battle of Poitiers was portrayed as a critical confrontation between the inhabitants of Europe and the Arabs (then called Saracens). The Ottoman Empire was described as a foreign, threatening force encroaching on Europe, and hence it was necessary—as Pope Pius II declared in 1464—"to drive the Turks from Europe." Not only did the humanist pope (né Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini) use the word "Europe," but he also coined the adjective "European" to widen the gulf between the inhabitants of the West and the "Asiatic," "barbaric" Turks, and in order to present Europe as "coherent" and "collective."⁷ However, this was not merely rhetoric for the purpose of uniting the Christian world against the enemy. The Roman Catholic Church created Europe as a region composed of a many-branched family tree of nations,⁸ and the classic Christian heritage endowed it with a common background and with characteristics of a shared identity, both spiritual and physical. Both during and after the Renaissance, writers, thinkers, and scholars preferred the term "Europe" to "*Christianitas*," cultivated a cross-European consciousness (*nostra Europa*), and searched for kernels of a culture and consciousness common to all the continent's nations, past and present. Humanists—part of the *Gelehrtenrepublik* (republic of scholars) who, like the scholars and students of the Middle Ages, traveled without difficulty from country to country—spoke a common language (French, rather than the Latin of medieval times), and exchanged ideas;

they transformed the word “Europe” from a geographical concept and lexicographical entry into an idea and a vision.⁹ They were the first to speak of Europeanness and “the European,” emphasize cross-European identity, and highlight the affinity among Europe’s various regions. They considered Europe the center and crowning jewel of the known world.

Voltaire expressed the consciousness of this new identity thus: “Today there are no more French, Germans, Spanish, or even English. There are only Europeans.” Europeans, wrote Voltaire, did fight among themselves, just as the Greeks had fought each other; but individual Europeans from different countries behaved so politely when they met, that an observer would think they were compatriots. Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserted that individual cultures no longer existed; there were only Europeans, “all [with] the same tastes, the same passions, the same manners.”¹⁰ The conservative British historian Edmund Burke wrote in 1796 that “no European can be a complete exile in any part of Europe.”¹¹ Voltaire, Burke, and others saw Europe—at least, Western Europe—as a blessed region and the cradle of intellectual development, enlightenment, science, and art, which made it the most developed and enlightened civilization of all: *ex Europae lux* (the light comes from Europe).¹² The conservative idealist writer Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), in contrast, looked forward in his 1799 essay “Europe or Christianity” to a reunification of Western Christianity accomplished through the merger of the Catholic and Protestant churches.¹³ Others, like Heinrich Heine, looked forward to the harmonious melding of biblical Judaism and Hellenism—that is, of the traditional spiritual and aesthetic foundations of European civilization. Such a merger would bring Europe to a full realization of its calling. The Europeans, in this idealistic worldview, were of the same utopian cut as the Greeks—though, according to the classification laid out in the *Panegyricus* by the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates, their name attested not to a common origin (genus) but to a shared mentality (*dianoia*) and similar culture and education (*paideia*).¹⁴

Recognition of Europe’s unity, not only in theory but in practice, increased after the Napoleonic wars. The French historian and statesman François Guizot was the first to write about the history of Europe, in his 1828 *Histoire générale de la civilisation en Europe*,¹⁵ which Heine later described as a cultural Tower of Babel, with many nations having taken part in its construction over the course of hundreds of years. Nietzsche wrote that “morality in Europe today is herd animal morality,”¹⁶ but elsewhere he prophesied that trade and industry, postal communication, the

distribution of books, and increased mobility would necessarily blur the divisions between nations and finally obliterate those divisions to give birth to a new, mixed race—a strong race “of European man.”¹⁷ In truth, Nietzsche maintained, a common European background had existed for a long time, since in every aspect of morality, Europe spoke a single language, which was expanding outside of Europe as well. In any case, the accepted view was that Europe possessed a common set of basic principles and a unique understanding of the world—a Western worldview. In the mid-nineteenth century, another shared factor appeared. The Industrial Revolution created a cross-European working class whose universal interests were expressed in the opening declaration of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 that a specter—that of Communism—was haunting Europe. In contrast to the opinion of Otto Bismarck, the German chancellor, Europe was far more than a geographical term. During the calm between the two world wars, José Ortega y Gasset described “the common property of Europe” as deeper and more rooted than any of these differences of opinion.¹⁸

Many of these images of Europe were the fruits of imagination, utopia, and delusion, and were the province of a small community of intellectuals.¹⁹ In reality, Europe’s inhabitants did share a common religious background, philosophical framework, and cultural heritage. But the idea of a universal Europe, which arose as an attempt to obscure differences and disputes, was not fully realized. Reading even a fraction of European travel literature shows that a Frenchman did not need to stray as far as the Balkans, Poland, or Russia to comprehend the cultural differences between himself and the inhabitants of other nations. Madame de Staël, one of the originators of the concept of Europe, asserted that “in these modern times, one must be European,” but in her *Littérature du Nord et littérature du Midi* (Literature of the north and literature of the south, 1800), she followed in Montesquieu’s footsteps²⁰ and divided Western Europe into north and south—two regions with profound differences in cultural mentality, each embodying a separate side of Europe’s character.²¹ Germans or Englishmen who traveled south in order to discover classical Italy or Greece imagined meeting people with character traits different from theirs and did not always grant them a flattering characterization.²² Climatic theories differentiated not only between the character traits of Europe’s inhabitants and those of other continents, but also among the character traits of inhabitants of different parts of Europe characterized by different climates.

Needless to say, the eastern part of Europe—part of the Hapsburg Empire and all of the Russian Empire—was perceived by the West as a part of the world characterized by barbarism, fanaticism, and ignorance, light years away from cultured Europe. This image emerged during the Enlightenment, which “invented Western Europe and Eastern Europe together, as complementing concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency.”²³

At the same time, an opposite process was taking place. In parallel with their growing particularistic consciousness, the broadening of Europeans’ geographic horizons in the wake of geographic discoveries exposed them to new worlds and new cultures.²⁴ This development prompted Europe’s desire to define the cultural borders that separated it from the pagan civilizations—several of which, such as India and China, could claim numerous impressive achievements in various cultural and scientific fields, as Europe discovered to its surprise. Thus in parallel to the appearance, in the late eighteenth century, of an outlook in which nations and people (*Volk*) were considered organic entities—and in which Europe itself was composed of such separate entities—there also appeared a perspective in which Europe was a single civilization that had developed and crystallized according to its own rules and principles. Up until the nineteenth century, the European sense of superiority was based not on racial advantages but on the achievements of the Renaissance, the scientific revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Enlightenment.²⁵ In Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759), the prince’s companion Imlac, who has seen the world, explains that the peoples of Northern and Western Europe are “almost another order of beings” who are “in possession of all power and all knowledge.” They are more intelligent and stronger; “in their countries . . . a thousand arts, of which we never heard, are continually labouring for their convenience and pleasure; and whatever their own climate has denied them is supplied by their commerce.” These traits were God-given gifts.²⁶ Similar but more authentic words came from the East. Mustafa Sami, a former chief secretary of the Ottoman embassy in Paris, wrote in 1840: “thanks to their science, Europeans have found ways to overcome plague and other illnesses, and have invented many mechanical devices to mass-produce various items.” His and other Turks’ expressions of wonder were accompanied by astonishment about how “the smallest of the continents” had attained such power and influence.²⁷ The collective European genius—its vibrant creative spirit—was later explained in other ways. Some theories claimed it originated in the nature of the

relationship between human society and the natural properties (that is, environmental conditions) that were unique to Europe. Montesquieu, for example, believed that the origin of the European spirit of liberty lay in the continent's topographical structure, which did not lend itself to the creation of (necessarily despotic) large empires. Anthropological theories maintained that the source of Europe's unique nature and of its superiority over all other peoples was its population's racial heritage, Caucasian or Indo-European. The result of all these explanations was that predictions regarding the future also dealt with the destiny of Europe—both in its own right and in relation to other civilizations—not as a collection of empires and states, but as a single entity with a common past and for which a common future was expected.

Thus two opposing views appeared and matured during the nineteenth century. According to the first, the concept of a unified Europe was a cloak obscuring the reality of a Europe whose individual nations and peoples each cultivated and broadened their own sense of self and uniqueness, among other means by emphasizing their differences and contrasts with all the others. According to the second view, cross-European cooperation was the reality, and the nations' emphasis on their differences and their attempts at individuation were a result of the fact that they were but newly born and were thus obliged to invent a distinct identity for themselves. Nietzsche wrote that in Europe a "nation" was more a *res facta* (product) than a *res nata* (natural phenomenon); in fact, the European nations were almost a *res ficta et picta*—an imaginary and thoroughly new entity. In contrast, he wrote, the Jews were an ancient and everlasting people.²⁸ José Ortega y Gasset wrote in a similar spirit that France and Spain did not exist "as unities in the depths of the French and Spanish soul . . . before France and Spain came into being"; Frenchmen and Spaniards were "things that had to be hammered out in two thousand years of toil." Nationality was a product, not a cause. As a result, Ortega y Gasset believed that an annulment of particularistic nationality would not be a change of earth-shaking proportions, and that the creation of a Europe without nationalities was entirely possible;²⁹ it was not a matter of establishing an artificial structure, but one of returning to the reality that existed before the nineteenth century:

The souls of the French and English and Spanish are, and will be, as different as you like, but they possess the same psychological architecture; and, above all, they are gradually becoming similar in

content. Religion, science, law, art, social and sentimental values are being shared alike. Now these are the spiritual things by which man lives. The homogeneity, then, becomes greater than if the souls themselves were all cast in identical mould . . . To-day, in fact, we are more influenced by what is European in us than by what is special to us as Frenchmen, Spaniards, and so on.³⁰

In any case, even before the age of nationalism, Europe was factious, split, and dissentious; it possessed no consciousness of any sort of unity that was not based on religion.³¹ The deciding role in the creation of modern Europe was played by the French Revolution and Napoleon's campaigns.³² These were the driving force of nationalistic awakening and of the myth of nation and homeland, but at the same time they turned Europe into a stage for events that would create a profound impulse toward reciprocity between the nations. From this point on, the discussion of Europe, its common future, and European civilization became a matter of course.

This development was not lost on Jewish *maskilim* (proponents of the Enlightenment). Even from their provincial vantage point, the great changes taking place in Europe were very clear.³³ The *maskil*, historian, and popularizer Kalman Shulman of Vilna inaugurated the description of the new era in his *Sefer Divrei Yemei Olam*, which was the first universal history (*Weltgeschichte*) written in Hebrew. He cited two events that, according to him, shook "the foundations of the world": the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Both of them, wrote Shulman, "flew as a spark" from "one end of Europe to the other." The result of these earth-shaking events in France would be that "the rest of Europe too would stir and take up arms." The widespread assumption was that the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars had begun a process that would weaken Europe's religious background and, as a result, would lead to the crystallization of the concept of a universal European identity based not on religion but, as we have stated, on values, tastes, lifestyle, shared historical consciousness, and common cultural background. From the Jewish perspective, it seemed that "the universe, with all its old laws, had turned upside down, and a new land [Europe] and new order were created under Heaven," and that the "iron wall" of religious hatred had collapsed.³⁴ It was in this spirit that the Russian Jewish *maskil* Isaac Baer Levinsohn (known by the acronym "Rival") wrote in 1834: "But like the passing of night and its heavy clouds, so will the thickness and foolishness which have obscured Europe until now disappear, and the sun of wisdom and enlightenment will rise

from the East . . . until even the nations' throngs who walked blindly in the dark will see a great light . . . and all nations of Europe, large and small, will strive to correct their manners and desire the love of Mankind."³⁵

JEWES DISCOVER EUROPE AND THEIR OWN EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and especially after the Napoleonic wars,³⁶ the modern Jewish intellectual elite began to realize that events taking place in one part of Europe had an effect on developments in every other part, as well as on the situation of the Jews who lived there. The elite insisted that cross-European phenomena consisted not only of policies and wars, but of developments in economics, society, culture, and technology as well. The elite realized in addition that modern Europe had a cultural identity as well as a religious one, and that as a result it was important to examine Europe's nature carefully. In other words, Europe was transformed in the eyes of this elite from a geographic concept and a political reality into a cultural entity, and therefore a subject for discussion and consideration in that light.

In his January 1770 response "An einen Mann von Stande" (To a man of high rank), Moses Mendelssohn wrote about "the great kingdoms of Europe" that might, Heaven forbid, become involved in a general war.³⁷ The Sanhedrin, which gathered in Paris in 1806 on Napoleon's orders, discussed "European policy" and referred to the Jews as "Children of Israel and residents of Europe," who were promised a better future and a more secure existence under Napoleon's regime than they had had in the past.³⁸ There is no hint in either of these two texts of a perception of Europe as a single cultural entity. But that perception was expressed in a speech made by Josef Mendelssohn (1770–1848), Moses Mendelssohn's son and a wealthy banker, at the 1792 meeting that established the Society of Friends (Gesellschaft der Freunde), a society of educated Jewish bourgeois. The younger Mendelssohn spoke—in the spirit of optimistic rhetoric that characterized the *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment—about the "light of enlightenment that has shone on all of Europe in our century [and] has also cast its blessed influence on our nation for the last thirty years." In his opinion, this universal European "light of enlightenment" was expressed in a desire for religious reform, in whose wake the Jews would be able to separate "the kernel from the husk in the religion of our forefathers."³⁹ The intellectual members of the Society for Culture and Science of the

Jews (Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden), which was founded in 1819, also believed that Europe was not merely a political concept, but an embodiment of the universal spirit (within European borders, naturally) and of “universal reason.” Eduard Gans, one of the founders of the society, declared in October 1822 that Europe was not born by chance, “but is the necessary result of thousands of years of effort by the rational spirit, which can be observed throughout world history.” According to this view, European life and the universal Europe were not identical to German national and *Volk* culture, to the idea of the *Deutschtum* (Germanness), or to the seemingly authentic and autochthonic attachment to the German *Vaterland* (fatherland).⁴⁰ The idea that Germany’s unification was inseparable from the cosmopolitan nature of German culture was widespread among various circles at the start of the nineteenth century. August Wilhelm Schlegel, for example, a historian of literature who translated Shakespeare’s works into German, saw the German nationalistic patriotism that sprang up after the Napoleonic wars as no more than passing childishness and provincialism, and opined that Germany’s destiny was to become the *Mutterland* (motherland) of Europe.

In 1864, in Eastern Europe, the radical *maskil* and poet Y. L. Gordon described Jews’ integration into European society and culture as follows: “How many of Israel’s nobility and of its wealthy, who are Jewish in their hearts and faces and appearance and clothing and manners, will you find respectable in the eyes of the government as children of Europe? Now let us be calm and trust in our God, because there is hope for the last of us, and we have a future.”⁴¹

Jewish intellectuals’ allegiance to the universal European idea at the start of the nineteenth century was in part the result of a desire to consolidate a supernational framework for Jewish belonging—a theoretically universal framework similar to European civic society, which would be superior to any national culture. If Jews could not be natural Germans because they were born without any feeling of German nationalism (*volkstümlich*), there was nothing to prevent them from being European bourgeois or intellectuals, because they were citizens of the new European civilization. In this way, the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder’s dream might be fulfilled—that “there will be a time when no one in Europe will ask any longer, who is a Jew and who is a Christian; because the Jew will also live by Europe’s laws and contribute to the good of the nation.” In other words, Jews would become part of European humanity (*Humanität*).⁴²

Gans wrote: “the good fortune and significance of the European lie in the fact that he may freely choose his own status for himself from the multiplicity of positions available in bourgeois liberal society, and in the fact that he will sense every other social status in the status that he chose.”⁴³ The Jews would not disappear, but they would be absorbed into the European world. Despite this, Jewish values would not die out and would continue to contribute to Europe: “only the bothersome independence” would be destroyed, not the independence necessary for wholeness. Judaism could integrate with the European unity, wrote Leopold Zunz, because it was a culture that originated from an ancient common spirit.⁴⁴ When a Jewish writer wrote about his feeling of belonging to humanity, or to the general culture, he meant the culture of Western Europe. It is no wonder that from the conservative Orthodox perspective, “enlightened Europe” seemed like a “desert wasteland”—a world of atheistic heresy, in which Voltaire played the part of the seducing serpent and which opened its gates to the Jews in order to bring about the end of Judaism.⁴⁵

These semantic and ideological shifts reflected changes in worldview and historical recognition. The intellectuals and men of letters of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally spoke of the kingdoms of Europe because the model on which their thinking was based was that of the state—that is, enlightened absolutism. They also spoke occasionally of the peoples of Europe, because they were aware that the French Revolution and Romanticism had raised the people to the historical center stage as an active historical subject, and also moved the homeland to center stage as the object of belonging and attachment. The Jewish elite of the following generations, by contrast, also began to speak of European culture, or the culture of Europe.⁴⁶ Thus at the start of the nineteenth century, the word “Europe” primarily symbolized institutions of power and sociopolitical ideas, while later Europe would signify culture (*Kultur*)—that is, language, literature, free inquiry, music, art, theater, and the values and customs of urban bourgeois society.⁴⁷

Jewish awareness of identification with Europe, or at least declarations of that identification, increased at the end of the nineteenth century, and the trend continued with vigor during the twentieth century. Jews described Judaism as a central partner in the historic creation of Europe and, moreover, described themselves as bearing a responsibility for Europe’s destiny and future—and as holding the keys to its salvation in their hands. Thus, for example, the Jewish German journalist and author Moritz Goldstein wrote in a 1912 article titled, very typically, “Wir und Eu-

ropa” (We and Europe), that ever since Moses Mendelssohn’s generation, European Jews had seen themselves as “possess[ing] European culture in all respects” and “instinctively [had felt] entirely at home in Europe.” This was a spiritual belonging (*geistige Zugehörigkeit*). Not only that, but it was they who endowed Europe with its moral pathos—its spiritual dimension. At the same time, the Jews had learned from Europe to develop their own nationalism and understood that they would be able to realize their individualism only outside of Europe.⁴⁸ The final conclusion of the European doctrines was that the Jews must become hyper-Europeans (*hypereuropäisch*) so that world redemption (*Heil*) would once again come to the world from Judah. Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Ehrenpreis, who traveled frequently throughout Europe between the two world wars, wrote that his understanding of “the innermost core of the essence of Western life” and his “very great [affinity] to the European spirit,” was a result of his visits to Europe’s small nations and their capitals. That was where he discovered “the average European man, with all his nationalistic limitations, virtues, and shortcomings,” and where his “comprehensive view of today’s European citizen” matured. In a trip to Prague, Lisbon, Czernowitz, and Geneva he found a looking glass to the European world and discovered “the inner soul of our [European] generation.”⁴⁹ In discussions of Palestinian Jews’ attachment to Europe, emphasis was also placed on their direct spiritual attachment to Europe’s natural (local) landscape, because their distance from it prompted a yearning for it and a search for a worthy replacement. Meir Yaari, the spiritual leader of the Hashomer Hazair group, wrote the following in the same spirit in 1920 from Galilee: “While we dug holes to plant trees, we never heard the sounds of the forest around us. There are those who sometimes discourage yearnings for the faraway specter of the forest, to its mists and nectar, to the satyrs of the forest. But we planted young olive and nut trees, and are already dreaming of forests and moss, of mushrooms and bubbling swamps.”⁵⁰

Moreover, identification with Europe led to identification with the idea that Europe had a civilizationist mission. In December 1858, the maskilic newspaper *Hamagid* published a series of articles called “The Spirit of the Time,” glorifying and praising Europe, which had disseminated its culture throughout the world: “Europe’s actions are not miserly ones; it does not hide the seeds of knowledge in its own deep soil alone, but by the fruit of its actions it may be said to feed the whole world; it sends the springs of knowledge to water even strange lands at the edges of the world and corners of the earth. In the spirit of wisdom they destroyed the borders

of India, China, and Japan, in order to serve as dew to those lands as well, and revive even faraway fields.”⁵¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were Jews who identified with the West’s universalist mission and saw themselves as representatives of European civilization and as taking part in its design, just as they considered themselves full partners in Europe’s consciousness of its superiority. The bitter irony was that not only did Jews identify themselves as Europeans; so did those who were not overly sympathetic toward the Jews. In 1793 the German nationalist philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte had described the Jews as forming a “nation within a nation” throughout Europe: “in almost every country in Europe there sprawls a giant nation with hostile intentions which is engaged in an eternal war against all the rest . . . that nation is Judaism.”⁵² Almost eighty years later, in September 1870, Bismarck described the Jews as having “no real home, they are generally Europeans, cosmopolitan, nomad.” (But he noted in 1892 that “the Jews bring to the mixture of the different German tribes a certain *mousseux* [sparkle], which should not be underestimated.”)⁵³ Statements of this sort taught Moshe Leib Lilienblum the fact that—as he wrote in his article “The Revival of Israel in the Land of our Fathers” in 1882—“we were regarded as strangers in Europe . . . against our will we were exiled from our land to Western Europe and from there to Poland.”⁵⁴ Europe was merely the place where Jews resided. It was not a permanent home for them, but a place through which they wandered—sometimes of their own free will, sometimes not—without belonging to any place at all.