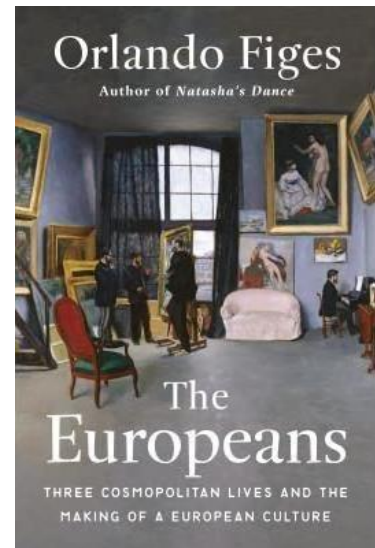


18FORTY: THE END OF RELIGION OR JUST THE BEGINNING?

Imagine a society where, within the space of a single generation, human innovation all but collapses the most formidable geographic distances, allowing individuals and information to travel the globe with unprecedented swiftness and ease. Where new platforms radically transform the ways in which news, music, books and art are created and consumed. Where media-driven celebrity trumps older modes of authority and forms new elites, endowing famous artists and performers with peerless cachet. Where audiences converge in a worldwide culture of “sharing,” and diversity and connectedness join equality and freedom as the shibboleths of Western liberalism. Where, at the same time, legislation struggles to keep pace with technological change; capitalism and consumerism destroy even as they enrich; and nationalism, racism and xenophobia poison the public discourse, threatening disaster.



This is the society Orlando Figes examines in “The Europeans: Three Lives and the Making of a Cosmopolitan Culture,” and it is the world of mid-19th-century Europe, “an international culture that vanished on the outbreak of the First World War.”...“The Europeans” begins by discussing the inauguration in the 1840s of Europe’s first international railroad lines.

Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society

AN AMERICAN JUDAISM

Initially attempts were made to fashion an American Judaism. The first attempt at a national religious union had its roots in a far-off anti-Jewish outrage, the so-called Damascus affair. Following the disappearance of a Catholic priest there in February 1840, the Jews of Damascus were accused of his murder “in order to take his blood for use in their unleavened bread.” Scores were imprisoned, children were seized and held as hostages, and a wide-scale massacre was imminent. Jewish communities the world over were shocked and aroused, and those who dared organize and speak protest did so. The news from Syria in 1840 galvanized the Jews of America into action. The Jews of New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Richmond united in communal expression of hor-

ror, sympathy, and indignation. Participation in a common cause that so excited the emotions brought the scattered and disparate elements of the American Jewish community together in a communion of spirit and concern. It has been suggested that modern Jewish history dates from the Damascus affair. Certainly the American Jewish community had its beginnings as a self-conscious entity in the activity precipitated by “the massacre of Damascus.”

Messianism and nationalism: Liberal optimism vs. orthodox anxiety

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A new age began for our nation in the year 5600, with both its material and spiritual events. Those who reckoned the end of days had been waiting for that year. That year had already been singled out – precisely as if in a prophecy – in the holy Zohar.¹

Thus did Jacob Lipschitz (1838–1921), one of the most prominent Orthodox activists in the Russian Empire, the author of *Zikhron Ya'akov: The History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, and a consistent opponent of Haskalah and Zionism, begin his description of the seventh century of the sixth millennium following the creation of the world. On the basis of a passage in the Zohar, Lipschitz, associated the end of the fifty-sixth century in the year 5600 (*Ha-TaR*, 1839/1840) with hopes for redemption. According to Lipschitz:

The apocalypics calculated that this year was the “time set for the redemption” according to tradition. As with every other year concerning which there were allusions to the end of days and redemption (such as 5408 [1648]), which, because of the sins of a generation that did not merit redemption, became a time of untoward events, disasters, and evil decrees (from which Heaven protect us), so too they calculated that the year 5600 was a set time – and its many untoward events and disasters are well known.²

The Zohar also alludes to the era that began in 1840 as the age of modern scientific and technological discoveries. In Lipschitz' words:

Starting in the year 5600, the vision of the holy Zohar – that at that date the gates of wisdom would be opened, – was realized. The construction of railroads and steamships proliferated from that

epoch, along with the invention of matches, the telegraph, gaslights, and electricity, and later the telephone and phonograph, as well as many other inventions in every branch of technology and scientific disciplines. ... In our country, too, which was then in a wild state, the government began to pave the first highway from Petersburg to Warsaw in the year 5600. Many associated this with a biblical verse: “Build up, build up the highway” etc. (Isa. 62:10). The construction of this road was a great marvel for many.³

Nevertheless, the beginning of the new age of technology, of which the author was well aware and which he associated in his book with the vast social and economic changes that took place in the Russian Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century, also marked the inception of the two great evils that would chart the course of the Jews in the modern age: the birth of Haskalah and the rise of modern anti-Semitism:

The year 5600 was the start of a new age of harsh servitude for our people, both inwardly and outwardly. Many and incessant troubles beset the Jews, terrible decrees and persecutions, wreaked by our enemies without, along with the material and spiritual assault and decline instigated by our “beneficiaries” within, those who followed the path of the Berlin Haskalah. These two sources of damage depressed our people, both materially and spiritually.⁴

ספר שער האמונה ויסוד החסידות והוא הקדמה ופתח שער לבית יעקב

מאת רבינו גרשון חנוך העניך זצוק"ל מראדזין בהרב הגאון מרן רבי יעקב זצוק"ל זי"ע מאיז'ביצא

ואאזמו"ר זללה"ה הוא היה המיוחד בחדר רבינו שמחה בונם זללה"ה,
ששימש כל צרכו ולא מש מאהל התורה. ואחר הסתלקות רבינו
שמחה בונם זללה"ה, שלש עשרה שנה סבל צער החבאת מערת עדולם, לה
שלא הגיע העת עדיין ללמד תורה ברבים כפרהסיא, ונפשו בתוך לבאים שכנה
ולימד תורה בצנעה ואת צנועים חכמה. עד עת בא דבר ה'. והגיע הזמן ורוח
ה' החל לפעמו בשנת שש מאות לאלף הששי, הוא העת אשר עליו רמז רבי
שמעון בן יוחאי בווה"ק (וירא קטו:) וכד ייתי אלף שתיתאה דאיהו רזא דוא"ו
וכו'. ושם (ק"ה).

ובשית מאה שנין לשיתא יתפתחון
 תרעי דחכמתא לעילא ומבועי
 דחכמתא לתתא וכו' וכדין יתחוי
 קשתא בעננא בגווי נהורין וכו'.

וכאשר יבא אלף השישי שהוא סוד הוא"ו
 וכו', ובשש מאות שנה לאלף השישי,
 יפתחו שערי החכמה למעלה, ומעיינות
 החכמה למטה וכו', ואז יהיה נראה
 הקשת בעננים, בצבעים מאירים וכו'.

ושם (ק"ה).
 אמר להם רבי שמעון, אין רצוני של
 הקדוש ברוך הוא בזה, שיתגלה יותר
 מדאי, וכשיהיה קרוב לימות המשיח,
 אפילו תינוקות שבעולם, עתידים
 למצוא סודות התורה.

אמר לון רבי שמעון לית רעותא
 דקוב"ה בדא דיתגלי כל כך לעלמא,
 וכד יהי קריב ליומי משיחא אפילו
 רביי דעלמא זמינין לאשכחא טמירא
 דחכמתא וכו'.

והיינו שיתקרבו הדברי תורה להשגת האדם ותפיסתו, על ידי שיבין, שכל
 הדברי תורה הם צריכים לכל ישראל לעבודת השי"י. וכדאיתא בגמרא חגיגה
 (ד':) שגם במעשה מרכבה יש נאה דורש ונאה מקיים, היינו שיבין האדם

שצריך ליסוד נפשו הדברי תורה היותר יקרים, שיעבוד את השי"י על ידי
 הדברי תורה, ואז שלח ה' מן השמים ויושיעו ושלח לו חסדו ואמתו. והענין
 שרמו רבי שמעון על העת הזאת שיתפתחו מבועי דחכמתא, אף שמצינו כמה
 פעמים בזה"ק, וכן הבאתי לעיל מכמה מקומות, מה שהזהיר רשב"י שלא
 לגלות סתרי תורה. אכן זו העת גרמה כמו שרמו עליה רבי אלעזר בן ערך
 במדרש הנעלם (תולדות קמ).
 מאן יזכה להאי ארכא מאן יתקיים מי יזכה לאריכות הזו, מי ישאר
 בקיום דתיה בין האי זמנא וכו' בשמירת דתו בזמן ההוא וכו'.

היינו אחר שנת ת"ח לאלף השישי כדאיתא שם:

“As robots and AI push humans out of the job market, the ultra-Orthodox may come to be seen as the model of the future rather than as a fossil of the past. Not that everyone will become Orthodox Jews and go to yeshivas to study Talmud. But in the lives of all people, the quest for meaning and for community might eclipse the quest for a job.”

-Yuval Harari, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century, pp. 42-43