The Port Jew:
Notes Toward a Social Type

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In Memory of Jacob Katz

As the late Jacob Katz amply demonstrated in his long and eminent career, social types are an important heuristic device that aid us in thinking about the ways in which historical processes are embodied in individual and group experience, as well as enabling us to distinguish meaningfully between the numerous life experiences that emerge in any given period and place, or among those that appear in different times and locations.1

Our understanding of the Jewish experience in Western and Central Europe in the early modern period, and the subsequent transition to 'modernity', however we grasp that much abused term, has long been dominated by two social types: the court Jew and the maskil. These two types invariably inform and often dominate the discussion devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in most textbooks of Jewish history.2 The court Jew represents the new economic relations, demographic patterns and social experience following the Peace of Westphalia, while the maskil represents the formation of a new ideology in the eighteenth century which eventually yielded new social relationships as well. Yet these two types have a common lineage which, albeit consistently taken for granted, in fact deserves reflection: both derive from the ashkenazic Jewish experience in early modern Europe. The court Jews were the creation of the age of absolutism and the policies of mercantilism or cameralism in the German states. Similarly, the maskilim were associated in the first instance with the city of Berlin, which served as a magnet for Jewish intellectuals from the German states and Eastern Europe.

It is by now belabouring the obvious to lament the 'ashkenazification' of modern Jewish history—less in the sense that the writers have been predominantly of ashkenazi origin, though this was also the case, and more that they focused on the ashkenazim as subjects.3 There is nonetheless much work to be done to redress the problem by rethinking prevailing categories, and especially the available stock of social types. The textbook understanding of early modern Jewish history tends to marginalize the sephardim. While conversos and the emigration from the Iberian peninsula are mentioned, that experi-

1 For a striking example see Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish–Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times (New York, 1962).
3 I am indebted to my former teacher, Richard Webster, for this sage formulation.
ence is not integrated into the overall conceptualization of the early modern period and the transition to modernity. The understanding of emancipation, for example, still centres on the experience of Ashkenazim. Recent attempts to introduce the category of a 'western Sephardi diaspora' or to emphasize the self-understanding of the 'men of the Nation', while of incontrovertible scholarly value, have not been able to rectify this situation, for those categories are primarily ethnic and are therefore of limited heuristic value. Instead, we need to extract from the experience of the 'men of the Nation' in that Sephardi diaspora a social type that can be placed alongside the court Jew and maskil and that will enable us to reconceptualize the process by which Jews entered the modern world.

I would propose the social type of the port Jew, that is, merchant Jews of Sephardi or, to a lesser extent, Italian extraction who settled in the port cities of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic seaboard and the New World. These were cities, polities or colonies that were built upon and valued commerce. In many cases these Jews founded either new settlements or resettlements that were constituted not as autonomous communities subject to special Jewry laws but as merchant corporations (Trieste, Bordeaux) or voluntary religious associations (London, Amsterdam). These communities often enjoyed extensive

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5 For the now classic work of Jacob Katz, see Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages (New York, 1993), and Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870 (New York, 1978). For a more recent discussion see, for example, Jacob Katz (ed.), Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model (New Brunswick NJ, 1987).

6 For the concept of the 'western Sephardi diaspora' see Yosef Kaplan, 'Die portugiesischen Juden und die Modernisierung: Zur Veränderung jüdischen Lebens vor der Emanzipation', in Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and Edward van Voolen (eds.), Judische Lebenswelten. Essays, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1991), pp. 303-17; idem, Ha-Pe'ura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma'aravit (The Western Sephardi Diaspora) (Tel Aviv, 1994). Jane Gerber uses the term 'diaspora' in her The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience (New York, 1992), pp. 177-211. Gerard Nahon uses the notion of an 'occidental Diaspora' in his interesting study of the relationship between the metropolis (Constantinople, Amsterdam), the provincial periphery (Bordeaux, Bayonne) and the 'holy land'. See Métropoles et Périphéries Sefarades d'Occident: Kairouan, Amsterdam, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Jerusalem (Paris, 1993). For recent work on the ethnic self-understanding of the 'men of the nation', see Miriam Bodian, 'Men of the Nation': The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe, Past and Present 143 (May 1994), pp. 48-76; and idem., Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam (Bloomington IN, 1997). An English translation of Kaplan's lucid survey Ha-Pe'ura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma'aravit would be highly desirable.

7 The concept of the port Jew emerged in conversation with my colleague Lois Dubin. She will offer a detailed case study in her forthcoming The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture (Stanford University Press). I have previously discussed the concept of the port Jew in 'Enlightenment and Emanicipation: German Jewry's Formative Age in Comparative Perspective', in Todd Endelman (ed.), Comparing Jewish Societies (Ann Arbor, 1997), pp. 104-05; and 'Into the Modern World', The Illustrated History of the Jewish People, ed. Nicholas De Lange (New York, 1997), pp. 201-09. In this article I have drawn freely upon my earlier formulations. Yosef Kaplan identifies the importance of port cities for the western Sephardi diaspora but does not develop the implications. See Ha-Pe'ura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma'aravit, p. 28.
privileges (Venice was the exception), and some were among the first to attain the rights characteristic of emancipation. The cultural configuration of these Jews was essentially different from that of the court Jews and the maskilim. For conversos and Italian Jews acculturation was a fait accompli. While the Italian Jews had a flexible notion of Jewish tradition which they balanced with secular culture, conversos usually had to reappropriate the Judaism they had lost. Thus neither needed a self-consciously reforming Hebraist ideology like that of the Berlin Haskalah (which aimed to broaden a highly circumscribed Jewish intellectual curriculum and to acquire elements of secular culture). Rather, both could be said to have possessed, if in different forms, Haskalah avant la lettre.8

To be sure, not all sephardim were port Jews, just as not all ashkenazim were either court Jews or maskilim: the port Jews were the elite of the community. At the same time, since Italian Jews are to be numbered among them as were some ashkenazim who became members of these communities, not all port Jews were sephardim. The experience was, however, predominantly sephardic, and it represented an important aspect of Jewish history in early modern Europe in proffering a different path to modernity.

The social type of the port Jew may be defined in five points.

(a) Migration and Commerce

The exile of the Jews from Spain and Portugal played a central part in the Jews’ resettlement of Western Europe as well as the settlement of the New World (in comparison, their role in resettling Central Europe was minor). Since conversos and crypto-Jews did not leave the Iberian peninsula immediately after 1492 but continued to emigrate from the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries, those who did not choose to seek their fortunes in the east (Ottoman empire) became part of the Jews’ larger westward migration.

Many of the conversos and crypto-Jews who left the Iberian peninsula moved to the Mediterranean ports of Venice and Livorno, the Atlantic ports of Bordeaux, London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, and the New World ports of Jamaica, Surinam, Recife and New Amsterdam. Many of those who remained in Spain and Portugal were active in commerce as well. The result was a sephardi trade network which connected the old Mediterranean routes with the new Atlantic economy. In an age without a developed banking system, these merchants had the great advantage of being able to do business with, and to draw bills of exchange on, relatives, friends or business associates whom they could trust or, if need be, could bring to justice in Jewish courts. They traded in such goods as sugar cane and silk, tobacco, diamonds and wool, importing raw goods from the Dutch and Portuguese colonies and distributing the finished products throughout Europe.9


9 H. I. Bloom, The Economic Activities of the Jews of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Williamsport, 1937); Jonathan Israel, ‘The Changing Role of the Dutch
The Gradis family of Bourdeaux may be used to illustrate the commercial success of the port Jews. Diego Gradis arrived in Bordeaux from Portugal sometime in the 1660s and became active in the textile trade as well as in exchange and banking, making use of his sephardi contacts in the Iberian peninsula as well as other Atlantic port cities. In the second decade of the eighteenth century his sons ventured into the new colonial trade and made their fortunes. David Gradis (1665–1751) established contacts in northern Europe and the colonies that he reinforced through marriage. At his death in 1751 he had achieved considerable success, living in comfortable quarters in town. His son Abraham (1695–1780) subsequently built the business to the point where he treated the firm Gradis et fils as a surrogate noble title and lived ‘nobly’, maintaining a splendid city residence as well as a country estate replete with exotic gardens.¹⁰

(b) The Valuation of Commerce

Although the emigres from the Iberian peninsula were admitted under a variety of guises, the authorities often knew or suspected that they were Jews, yet preferred to turn a blind eye. The port Jews thus gained admission for the same utilitarian reasons as did the court Jews: the wealth they could generate convinced rulers to act on considerations of raison d’état rather than religion. Yet there was also a fundamental difference. The northern settlements that the court Jews founded or refounded, e.g. Berlin and Vienna, and which were a significant part of the Jews’ resettlement of Central Europe after the expulsions of the Reformation and post-Reformation period, were located in agrarian societies attempting to absorb or adjust to commerce. In those societies important if not dominant social groups still regarded commerce with disdain, if not outright contempt. In contrast, the port Jews were located in areas in which commerce was seen in a favourable, if not entirely positive, light: either societies in which powerful groups had wholeheartedly adopted commerce (England, Holland) or else cities built on commerce (Venice, Livorno, Bordeaux, Trieste). It is thus not surprising that a port city (Venice) was the provenance of the first book to make the sustained argument that the Jews’ commercial utility should gain them admission to, or continuing residence in, a polity.¹¹

(c) Legal Status

The sephardim fleeing the Iberian peninsula founded settlements (in the old world: Amsterdam, London, Bordeaux; in the new: Jamaica, Surinam, Recife and New Amsterdam) which were never constituted as ‘autonomous commu-

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¹¹ See Simone Luzzatto, Discorso circa il stato de gli hebrei et in particolar dimoranti nell’inclita citta di Venetia (1638).
nities': they were not subject to a developed body of Jewry laws through which the temporal powers, in exchange for the remission of taxes, vouchsafed the Jewish community wide-ranging legal authority over its members. Instead, the communities were constituted as merchant corporations or voluntary associations. Thus in these communities an established legal structure did not have to be dismantled or fundamentally reformed in order for the Jews to attain a new legal status. These communities were among the first to enjoy forms of legal equality usually considered as the harbingers of emancipation.

Jews came to Bordeaux, for example, as new Christians who enjoyed the privileges extended to a merchant corporation (marchands portugais). Until late in the seventeenth century these converso emigrés maintained this religious fiction by baptizing their children, marrying in churches and burying family members in Christian cemeteries. Thereafter they emerged publicly as Jews. They ceased baptizing their children in the 1690s, and after the turn of the century registered their marriages but did not hold them in Church. In 1723 the Jews were officially recognized when their former privileges were confirmed for them as Jews. The sephardic Jews of Bourdeaux retained their original status of a merchant corporation; they were never constituted as an autonomous community.

The port Jews of Amsterdam were among the first to receive legal declarations of a new status. The United Provinces (Holland) had been a major destination of conversos, who settled in Antwerp in the 1570s and then in Amsterdam from 1595. From the end of the sixteenth century (1598) the Portuguese were allowed to purchase the rights ofburghers of Amsterdam. As was also to be the case in England, the authorities (here the States of Holland) considered the Jews' status in 1619 but did not promulgate any laws. Instead, the Jews in Amsterdam were governed by a municipal law (1616) which concerned only their relationship to Christianity. In 1619 the Estates General of the Republic declared that each municipality had the right to decide whether or not to admit Jews, thus legitimating the situation in Amsterdam. Furthermore, in the mid-seventeenth century Spain challenged that status (over the question whether Jews resident in Holland had the right of other residents to engage in trade and reside in Spain and Portugal). In response, the Estates General of the Republic of the United Provinces declared (13 July 1657) that the 'Jewish nation are truly subjects and residents of the United Netherlands ...'.

The Jews of London were from the start a voluntary community. Conversos

14 The municipal law, which was minimal, prohibited the defamation of Christianity and conversion to Judaism as well as sexual relations between Jews and Christians. See Bodian, Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation, pp. 53-63; and Salo Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 18 vols. (New York, 1952-83), vol. 15, pp. 29-33.
15 Kaplan, Ha-Pezura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma'aravit, pp. 58-59.
who had settled in London in the 1520s and 1530s and again in the 1580s and 1590s had been dispersed not long after being discovered. In the mid-seventeenth century a new group appeared yet, once discovered, was allowed to stay. The Puritans were willing to tolerate the group for political and economic as well as millenarian religious reasons. Cromwell convened a conference in Whitehall (December 1655) to deal with the Jews’ status, which he dissolved before it had made a recommendation. The Jews were thus allowed to remain without a formal decree being issued or a Jewry law being promulgated (medieval Jewry laws of course remained on the books, and the validity of those laws was tested in the course of time). In consequence, the sephardi Jews did not live under special laws or as an autonomous community but organized themselves as a voluntary, synagogue-based association. Some of the most prominent of the foreign-born among them were endenized, while the native-born enjoyed basic commercial privileges.

In the Dutch and British colonies of the New World, port Jews enjoyed a similar new status. In the short-lived Dutch colonies of Brazil, the Jews in Recife and Mauricia enjoyed religious and commercial freedom but also, some would contend, virtually full rights. In Surinam the Jews were granted equal privileges in 1665. In the interest of populating the English colonies, the Houses of Parliament passed the Plantation Act (19 March 1740) that recognized as a ‘natural born subject of this kingdom’ anyone who resided in the colonies for seven years. The Act allowed Jews to take the necessary oath by allowing them to omit the words ‘upon the true faith of a Christian’.

(d) Re-Education and Haskalah avant la lettre

The political advantages of the former conversos cannot conceal the vicissitudes they faced. In addition to the threat of the Inquisition, the trauma of emigration and the difficulties in finding a safe haven, they suffered the anguish of having to feign a faith they did not believe, while not practising,

18 The Jews did receive a formal letter from the Secretary of State (1664) acknowledging their toleration, as well as a royal order by James II that amounted to a virtual declaration of indulgence (1685). See Katz, The Jews in the History of England, pp. 142–43, 149–51.
22 Quoted in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World, pp. 21–22. Some 149 Jews, the majority in Jamaica, benefited from the Act. See Katz, The Jews in the History of England, p. 242. The formula used in the Plantation Act was the same one used a century later in the ‘Jewish Relief Act’ (23 July 1858), which accorded the right of political participation by allowing Jews to sit in the House of Commons.
and often not truly knowing, the faith they did.²³ Wracked with guilt and uncertainty, they begged the Lord for compassion and mercy. They expressed these feelings as they emerged again as Jews, as was the case with the marrano poet Joao Pinto Delgado (1580?–1653), who fled Portugal for Rouen, and subsequently moved to Antwerp and Amsterdam:

When the humble man whose face was covered by the affronting veil, in that moment receives a goodly portion of rare glory; An ancient pact which for the loving lover was the recompense for his faithful zeal, for his saintly fear and for his constant faith. If you promised us a heaven of metal, for our sin’s sake, forget all our forgetting and let your mercy cast aside all our fearing. The heart that has been the most cut off from you gather to yourself, so that it may remain purer than gold drawn from the crucible: 0 happy he who can such a blessing gain!²⁴

Once they had emerged as Jews, the former conversos had to be re-educated. In the Iberian peninsula they had been deprived of the sources of Judaism: although much could be learned by reading Christian polemics or even Christian classics against the grain, or through attentiveness to the pronouncements of the Inquisition (which often enumerated the practices and beliefs of the accused), direct encounter with the key texts of Judaism was usually impossible. In consequence, Judaism was preserved primarily through oral transmission.²⁵ As the conversos reached safe ports they produced a vernacular literature (primarily Spanish, but also Portuguese) of translations, compilations and analytical treatises to re-educate themselves and future emigrés.²⁶ They also engaged in polemics with Christian theologians, and in some cases their pointed criticisms of Christianity fueled later deist critiques.²⁷

²³ Carl Gebhardt captured this in his definition of a converso as ‘a Catholic without belief and a Jew without knowledge, yet in will a Jew’. See Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa (Amsterdam, 1922), p. xix.


²⁵ Kaplan, Ha-Pezura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma’aravit, pp. 24–25.

²⁶ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, The Re-Education of Marranos in the Seventeenth Century, Feinberg Memorial Lecture (Cincinnati, 1980); and Bodian, Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation, pp. 96–131. For examples of the return to Judaism, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics (New York, 1971); and Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro.

Yet the former *conversos* maintained their experience of the larger culture by understanding Judaism to be fully compatible with it. The famous Etz Haim Yeshiva in Amsterdam, for example, integrated secular subjects such as vernacular language, arithmetic and geography into a curriculum of Jewish subjects that included the independent study of the Bible and Hebrew language alongside study of the Talmud. The Yeshivah was the envy of many ashkenazi visitors because of the curriculum's breadth.28

The port Jews therefore neither needed nor developed a Haskalah. Rather, many of the elements that were to constitute the Haskalah (e.g. knowledge of vernacular languages and secular studies, study of Hebrew language and the Bible), were part of the culture of these communities. For the refugees from the Iberian peninsula who had lived outside Judaism as *conversos* or crypto-Jews, and were thus accustomed to being integrated into the larger society, or for the Italian Jews who had a flexible understanding of Judaism which allowed for an unbroken connection to European culture, it was possible to have Haskalah *avant la lettre*, that is, a broad Jewish textual curriculum and secular studies without an articulated ideology.29

In Trieste, for example, which was the free port of the Habsburg Empire, the Jews had long before accepted the premise that secular and sacred studies were complementary. This notion of acculturation was embodied in the Italian tradition of the rabbi-poet-doctor. The Jewish community of Trieste was thus able to participate in the Enlightenment that emanated from both Vienna and Italy, yet it did not produce a Haskalah.30

28 The school was also an object of envy because of its organization: in contrast to the Jewish schools of Eastern Europe, the school was graded, with students divided by age and ability and progressing each year to a new classroom. For the Ashkenazi view of the school see, for example, Shabbetai Bass, *Sefer Siftei Yesheinim* (Amsterdam, 1680); and Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz, *Sefer Vav ha-Amudim* (Amsterdam, 1653). See also Ismar Schorsch, 'The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34 (1989), pp. 47–53; Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, pp. 107–10.

29 Kaplan compares the culture of the sephardim to the Central European Haskalah, and thus sees the lack of an ideology as a weakness which prevented this culture either from sustaining future generations of sephardim or from serving as a model for other Jews. His chapter is entitled 'The Haskalah that Did Not Mature'. See *Ha-Peza ha-Sefardit ha-Ma'aravit*, pp. 100–08. I think this approach is mistaken in tacitly elevating the experience of one community to normative status by judging different communities according to it. I prefer Kaplan's earlier formulation, where he saw these developments appearing 'organically, as part and parcel of their [the sephardi Jews'] unique form of Jewish social and spiritual life'. See From *Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobo de Castro*, p. 382.

(c) Identity and belief

Some of the former *conversos* also manifested their past experience of living outside of the authority of Jewish law by being lax if not altogether neglectful in observance, yet at the same time remained identifiable Jews through their loyalty to the community. The Portuguese Jews in particular had a developed ethnic identity as the ‘men of the nation’ of which they were fiercely proud.31 That ethnic identity could express itself through non-religious forms of solidarity with the community, such as philanthropy and political intercession.32

This pattern is evident, for example, in the Gradis family. David Diego (1665–1751), who belonged to the first generation allowed to profess Judaism openly, served as a syndic (*gabai*) of the community, purchased the land for a cemetery, encouraged other *conversos* to return to Judaism and disowned a niece who converted to Christianity. The extent of his observance remains an open question. In the next generation, in contrast, it is clear that Abraham (1695–1780) did not keep the dietary laws, selectively observed the holidays and in general questioned the authority of the Oral Law. Nevertheless, he remained active in the Jewish community, always being ready to contribute funds and to intercede with the authorities. He also acted as a reforming philanthropist, helping to shape a new curriculum for the Jewish school that included vocational subjects (French, arithmetic) as well as the study of the Bible according to grammar rather than rabbinic tradition (midrash).33

One can see similar behaviour in London. Wealthy sephardi merchants lived like Christian gentlemen, maintaining country estates as well as town residences, and supporting in the appropriate style mistresses as well as wives. While these grandees often lived at a distance from the synagogue in town or out of reach of one in the country, they still continued to identify themselves as Jews and to support the community with their wealth and influence.34

The *converso* experience also fed into Jewish versions of the deism current in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There were Jews who, by actively questioning the authority of the Oral Law and/or embracing the ideal of Karaism, formulated a Jewish ‘Protestantism’, that is, an effort to purify Judaism of the corruptions of the rabbinic tradition.35

The *converso* experience could also lead altogether beyond belief in revealed religion. At one end of the spectrum of *converso* identity was the scepticism of an Uriel Da Costa (1585–1640), who after returning to Judaism was twice excommunicated, the first time for doubting whether the Mosaic Law had divine sanction and wondering if all religions were human inventions, and the

31 Bodian, ‘“Men of the Nation”: The Shaping of *Converso* Identity in Early Modern Europe’, pp. 48–76.
32 There were also those who joined the community for purposes of expediency or others who remained at a distance. For this variety see Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation*, pp. 30–43.
second time for questioning whether the idea of the immortality of the soul was derived from the Bible. Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), who was also excommunicated by the Jewish community of Amsterdam (1656), questioned the authority of the Bible and offered a rationalist ethics entirely free of revealed religion. Although he was clearly a theist he became the symbol of atheism, and his books were long banned from publication in many countries.

While port Jews and court Jews were two distinct types, there was considerable overlap. Port Jews also served sovereigns as bankers and diplomatic representatives. The Curiel brothers, whose families had suffered at the hands of the Inquisition, had migrated to Hamburg and Amsterdam where they became pillars of the community. They served the Portuguese crown in various capacities, and Jacob Curiel was made a knight of the royal household. A consortium of Dutch sephardim, for example, provisioned the armies of William III (1672–1702) in Holland and later, when he became King of England, floated enormous loans. Yet the port Jews remained distinguishable from the court Jews in their legal status (merchant corporations, voluntary communities) and the commercial societies in which they lived.

The experience of the port Jews demonstrated the extent to which ancien régime polities could grant Jews privileges and rights. In an era when equal rights were still largely a theoretical issue, many port Jews enjoyed an extensive array of rights. At the same time, the port Jews were also largely able to integrate their Judaism and secular culture, not without tensions to be sure, but certainly without the conflicts and contradictions that were the case for ashkenazi Jews in the late eighteenth and certainly the nineteenth centuries. In addition, some port Jews pioneered a new form of identity in which Judaism was comprised not of religious practice or belief but a form of ethnic loyalty manifest in solidarity with a community.

Thus the ‘origins of the modern Jew’ can also be traced to the experience of the port Jews in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Virtually all those developments thought to be characteristic of the modern Jew can be found among the port Jews a century or two earlier: the reduction of Judaism to a synagogue-based religion with a growing emphasis on faith as opposed to

38 Bodian, p. 11 n. 40.
39 Jonathan Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 1550–1750, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1989), pp. 123–44. While Israel is correct in showing that there were Jews elsewhere in Europe who performed similar functions to the court Jews in Central Europe, he fails to consider whether these Jews (especially in Amsterdam and London) might have had a different legal status.
40 For the use of this expression in regard to the German-Jewish experience in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany*, 1749–1824 (Detroit, 1967).
practice; immersion in the larger Christian culture; the emergence of various forms and degrees of assimilation; and, as a consequence of all of these, the development of a segmental Jewish life and identity.41

The port Jew can therefore be said to represent a particular experience of early modern Europe and a particular path to modernity. Like the court Jew and the maskil, the port Jew emerged from the westward migration. Yet unlike those two ashkenazi types, the port Jew benefited from the economic and political freedoms of commercial cities and societies. While the court Jews strained the boundaries of the autonomous community (characteristic of medieval Jewish life), the port Jew was already living beyond the autonomous community in merchant corporations or voluntary communities.

The relationship of the port Jew to emancipation begs for reconsideration. The fact that the sephardi Jews of south-western France gained emancipation through a confirmation of their existing privileges, while English Jewry had only to remove a number of political disabilities (e.g. holding political office, being called to the bar), suggests that the attainment of equal rights for some port Jews was not a rupture or radical departure but merely the completion of a process that had begun two centuries before. Some scholars have seen emancipation as a necessity for the state in order to centralize and consolidate.42 Others have seen it as an unavoidable by-product of the emergence of bourgeois society.43 The experience of the port Jews suggests that emancipation could also be regarded as the outgrowth of developing commercial cities and societies.44

By giving us a more useable means by which to grasp the predominantly sephardi experience of the early modern period, the social type of the port Jew will enable us to revise our hitherto ashkenazi-centred view of those centuries and thereby reach a fuller understanding of the multiple Jewish paths to the modern world.

41 For a lucid survey see Kaplan, Ha-Pesura ha-Sefardit ha-Ma’aravit, pp. 7–8, 130–34. For the ways in which some of the new communities exempted various aspects of life from the rule of Jewish law, see Rosenberg, ‘Emunat Hakhamim’, pp. 313–21.
44 Ellis Rivkin discussed the connection of the 'marranos' to capitalism but focused on the Ottoman Empire. See The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical Reinterpretation (New York, 1971), pp. 140–58.