L'ABBÉ GRÉGOIRE AND THE METZ CONTEST:
THE VIEW FROM NEW DOCUMENTS *

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The history of the Metz contest of 1785-8 and its impact on the history of Jewish emancipation is well-known to students of French-Jewish history. Indeed, this contest (which asked “*Est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus utiles et plus heureux en France?*”) was analyzed in detail in the first issue of the *Revue des études juives*, in a now-classic article by Abraham Cahen.¹ The names of the men who shared first prize have long since become familiar: alongside the Polish Jew Zalkind Hourwitz and the Protestant lawyer Claude-Antoine Thiéry was the young curé of Emberménil, Henri Grégoire. Historians have often told the story of the Metz contest in the following way: in the wake of a debate in the German states about the status of the Jews, and following the death of the esteemed Metz rabbi Lion Asser, Pierre-Louis Roederer and the members of the Royal Academy of Metz decided to import this discussion into France. Using a standard device of eighteenth-century academies, they held an essay contest to ask how the treatment of the Jews might be altered in light of Enlightenment ideas. The contest is seen as a landmark in French-Jewish history, a seminal event calling attention to the

*I am indebted to Mlle. Martine MATHIAS and the staff at the Musée lorrain for kindly granting me access to the manuscript discussed below; to the BUBENICEK family for their repeated hospitality during my stays in Nancy; and to Frances MALINO and Jennifer HEUER for their valuable suggestions on earlier versions of this essay.

¹Abraham CAHEN, “L’émancipation des Juifs devant la Société royale des sciences et des arts de Metz en 1787 et M. Roederer,” *Revue des études juives* 1, no. 1 (1880): 83 – 104.

problems faced by Jews on the eve of the French Revolution and thus putting their fate on the national agenda.

The crowning of Grégoire is seen as a particularly important element of the story. Several scholars have claimed that Grégoire's Metz contest entry was written with help from – and in the interest of helping – various Jewish friends.² His activity is seen as particularly noteworthy because he was a priest, and because his fame from winning the contest would help him become one of the most prominent revolutionaries in France, with a reputation as Jews' emancipator.

Though the Metz contest was indeed an important moment in prerevolutionary discussions of Jews, newly discovered documents call certain elements of this story into question. For one thing, the Metz contest was not the first one held on the Jews in late eighteenth-century France, and especially not in the East. Indeed, a similar contest on the Jews, sponsored by the *Société des Philantropes* of Strasbourg (SPS), was held in 1778. Though that contest apparently failed to award a prize after the organizers ran out of money, it would nevertheless have notable consequences. Grégoire would later claim

²See for instance attributions of co-authorship to Simon von Geldern in Fritz HEYMANN, *Der Chevalier von Geldern: Eine Chronik vom Abenteuer der Juden* (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag N.V., 1937), 110-5; Ludwig ROSENTHAL, *Heinrich Heines Grosseheim Simon von Geldern. Ein historischer Bericht mit dem bisher meist unveröffentlichten Quellenmaterial* (Kastellaun: Aloys Henn Verlag, 1978), 24, 65-6 and passim; "Simon von Geldern" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971-2), 7: 364-5; and Antoine SUTTER, *Les années de jeunesse de l'abbé Grégoire: son itinéraire jusqu'au début de la Révolution* (Sarreguemines: Éditions Pierron, 1992), 47. Michel BERR's *Appel à la justice des nations et des rois . . . au nom de tous les habitants de l'Europe qui professent la Religion juive* (Strasbourg: Levraut, 1801), 59, spoke of Isaiah Berr Bing as collaborating with the abbé on the essay. Meanwhile, Moses Ensheim is named as Grégoire's Jewish assistant in Arthur HERTZBERG's *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 175, and in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* entry on Ensheim (*EJ* 6: 800-801).

that he was to have been named the winner; moreover, he would later say that it was this very contest which had made him interested in the Jews.

In addition to the information revealed in new documents on the SPS contest, new evidence has surfaced on Grégoire's participation in the Metz contest and on the development of the ideas which would appear in his famous *Essai sur la régénération*. As scholars have long known, there were actually two stages of the Metz contest; after the original 1787 deadline, the academy felt that none of the entries merited the prize. They therefore invited a few entrants to revise their essays and set a new deadline for 1788; at that time, they named Grégoire, Thiéry and Hourwitz as co-winners. All of the entries from the first and second rounds of the contest have remained in the Bibliothèque de Metz for scholars who wondered about them, except for Grégoire's. The only hint of it came in a little-known 1886 article by the nineteenth-century Lorraine historian Louis Maggiolo; he claimed to have come upon a "manuscrit primitif" of Grégoire's *Essai*, and he included some excerpts from it. Most notably, Maggiolo quoted Grégoire as saying that his Metz entry was simply a shortened version of his SPS entry. Maggiolo's account was impossible to verify, however, since he did not specify the location of this manuscript. Indeed, scholars have long assumed that it was lost.³

The manuscript does in fact exist, however; it has been lying quietly in the storerooms of the Musée lorrain in Nancy. Though it seems to have been donated by the

³Louis Edmond Henri MAGGIOLO, "La vie et les oeuvres de l'abbé Grégoire, 1750 à 1789," *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques et compte rendus de ses séances*, nouv. sér. 25 (1886): 252-3. MAGGIOLO's three articles on Grégoire in the *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas* (1873, 1883, and 1884) do not refer to this manuscript. On the other entries and the idea that Grégoire's first one is missing, see David FEUERWERKER, *L'Émancipation des Juifs en France de l'Ancien régime à la fin du Second Empire* (Paris: A. Michel, 1976), 86-7.

descendants of Lucien Wiener in the early twentieth century, its existence did not receive much notice until the 1970s, when Henri Tribout de Morembert mentioned that the Musée lorrain had “le manuscrit” of Grégoire’s contest entry. The few scholars who have alluded to this manuscript, however, have assumed that it is simply that of Grégoire’s second entry, with the first one no longer extant. Indeed, while Rita Hermon-Belot’s recent biography of Grégoire mentioned in its bibliography that the Musée lorrain had “le manuscrit de l’*Essai sur la régénération des juifs*,” the author did not analyze this manuscript anywhere in the text, presumably out of a belief that it was the second entry and therefore not in need of scholarly attention.⁴

Careful analysis, however, reveals the Musée lorrain’s manuscript to be the first contest entry, with key differences from the published *Essai*.⁵ The manuscript can consequently offer important correctives to assumptions about Grégoire’s participation in the contest. Indeed, using this manuscript along with other newly discovered documents, we can see that, rather than writing his essay in conjunction with Jewish friends, Grégoire wrote his initial entry on his own. His motivations stemmed more from a desire to protect his Emberménil parishioners from Jewish usury than to help preexisting Jewish friends. Indeed, though there were certainly Jews in the East active in efforts to improve

⁴See Henri TRIBOUT DE MOREMBERT, “Est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus utiles et plus heureux? Considérations sur les concours de l’Académie Royale de Metz de 1787 et 1788,” *Mémoires de l’Académie nationale de Metz* CLIV (VIe sér., t. I) (1974): 197-9; SUTTER, 56; and Rita HERMON-BELOT, *L’abbé Grégoire, la politique, et la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 475. See also *L’abbé Grégoire, révolutionnaire de la tolérance. Exposition Nancy 1989/Exposition Blois 1989. . . Texte biographique de Richard Figuiet*. ([Nancy/Blois]: Conseil général de Meurthe-et-Moselle et Conseil général de Loir-et-Cher, 1989), 19, which refers to the manuscript as the “original du second mémoire de 1788.”

⁵GRÉGOIRE, manuscript labeled as “Mémoire sur les juifs,” Musée lorrain, ex-libris Lucien Wiener.

their lot, Grégoire seems to have befriended them only during his revisions for the second contest, as he sought to make his entry more appealing to the prize committee. This new information helps us to better understand Grégoire's motivations in becoming involved with Jews, his later efforts in the campaign to emancipate them and his frustrations with them in the nineteenth century. It also gives us a more complicated picture of the relation between Grégoire and his Jewish friends than that of assistants who tacitly approved the entire text of the *Essai*.

Before Metz: The SPS Contest

Born in 1750, the abbé Grégoire was already in his late 30s by the time of the Metz contest and the Revolution; his education and clerical postings had taken him to many parts of Lorraine, and he had also traveled extensively in the Vosges and Alsace. What kinds of circles did he frequent in these years? From where would he derive the ideas he would use in the Metz contest and propound during the Revolution? While some recent scholarship of Grégoire has suggested that Grégoire's primary influences in these early years were Jansenist, evidence is stronger for Grégoire's retroactive identification with the Jansenists after Thermidor.⁶ Instead, Grégoire had a multiplicity

⁶Cf. HERMON-BELOT, who has asserted that Grégoire's strongest early influences were Jansenist ("Préface," in GRÉGOIRE, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs*, ed. HERMON-BELOT [Paris: Flammarion, 1988], 17-8; "Introduction," in GRÉGOIRE, *Les Ruines de Port-Royal des Champs en 1809* [Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995], 7 – 25; *L'abbé Grégoire*, ch. 14); and Catherine MAIRE, who has argued for Grégoire's coming to identify with Port-Royal after the Revolution ("Port-Royal. La fracture janséniste," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre NORA [Paris: Gallimard, 1992], 471 – 529; and *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la Nation: le jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* [Paris: Gallimard, 1998]). For further evidence supporting Maire's position, see Alyssa Goldstein SEPINWALL, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), esp. chs. 1 and 2.

of associations and influences in the prerevolutionary years, not only within the seminary, but also in enlightened and Protestant circles in Nancy and Strasbourg.

One of his most cherished sources of friendships was the *Société des Philantropes* of Strasbourg, a quasi-masonic society formed by the Turckheim brothers in the late 1770s. Though a handful of scholars have alluded to the SPS's contest on the Jews, they have not recognized the capital influence which membership in this society had on Grégoire.⁷ The society included much of Strasbourg's intellectual elite; its leaders and their associates, many of whom were Protestants, would become Grégoire's lifelong friends. While many of the society's records have vanished, enough evidence exists to reveal its centrality in the development of Grégoire's worldview, particularly his ideas about Jews. Several traces of his membership in the society also remain, from his signature on a document aiming to found a Nancy branch of the society, to his later references to having been a member of the Strasbourg headquarters and his regret over its dissolution.⁸

A newly discovered note in a volume in the Bibliothèque nationale (the SPS's *Mémoires*) gives even more information about the importance of this society to Grégoire, particularly in sparking his interest in the Jews. In it, the abbé wrote:

La société des philanthropes dont j'étois membre avoit été créée à Strasbourg surtout par les soins de mon ami Turckheim l'ainé alors ammeister, puis député aux états-généraux et ensuite envoyé de Darmstadt à Ratisbonne. Cette société a eu

⁷MAGGIOLO, 243; SUTTER, 37 - 40; and HERMON-BELOT, *L'abbé Grégoire*, 43-4.

⁸Société des Philantropes, *Statuts généraux de la Société des Philantropes, rédigés dans les comices de 1776* ([Strasbourg]: n.p., 1776) (1932 facsimile edition with signatures including Grégoire's, at Hollins University, South Carolina); and GRÉGOIRE, *Motion en faveur des juifs* (Paris: Chez Belin, 1789), iii ("J'ai toujours pensé qu'on pourroit récréer ce Peuple, l'amener à la vertu, & partant au bonheur. Un Mémoire que j'avois fait sur ce sujet, circula parmi mes confrères de la Société philanthropique de Strasbourg; Société actuellement dissoute, à mon grand regret").

quelques années d'existence, elle n'a publié que ce volume de mémoires. elle avoit ouvert un concours sur l'amélioration du sort des juifs, c'est ce qui me fit naître l'idée de traiter cette question proposée ensuite par l'academie du Metz qui couronna mon ouvrage.⁹

As the abbé himself admitted, the SPS's contest was what had made him interested in the Jews, and what had prompted him to enter the Metz contest – not Jansenist ideas, and not Jewish friends. Entering such a contest offered the young cleric a chance not only to gain the respect of his fellow members, but also to attract acclaim from people far beyond, since essay contests were a promising springboard to a career in letters for ambitious young men in the late eighteenth century. Indeed, by the late 1770s, Grégoire was a regular entrant in essay contests.¹⁰

What was the precise subject of this important contest? While the abbé's own entry seems not to have survived the centuries, the contest program still exists, conserved by Grégoire in his private library.¹¹ The program yields crucial insight into the SPS's

⁹Ms. note by GRÉGOIRE in *Mémoires de la Société des Philantropes* (Berne: Chez la société typographique, 1778) [BN Z-28454; spelling as in original]. This volume seems to have surfaced only during the move to Tolbiac. Indeed, Jürgen VOSS ("Die Strassburger 'Société des Philantropes' und ihre mitglieder im Jahre 1777," *Revue d'Alsace* 108 [1982]: 65 – 80) noted in 1982 that he had not found a copy of the *Mémoires* at the BN, nor anywhere else in Europe. Neither the BN's print nor computer catalogues showed it there in the mid-1990s, and the copy I located in New York in 1998 (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NYPL, call no. F306-S), seemed to have been the only one extant. By 2003, however, the volume had entered the BN's Opale-Plus catalogue, and the *Notes* section of the record now announces that it contains "une note manuscrite de l'abbé Grégoire." This volume does not contain any of the entries from the contest on the Jews.

¹⁰See GRÉGOIRE, *Éloge de la Poésie, discours qui a remporté le prix des belles lettres, au jugement de MM. de la Société royale des Sciences et Belles-lettres de Nancy* [Nancy: les Frères Leseure, 1773]. On his likely entry into that Academy's 1774 contest, see Christian PFISTER, "Histoire de l'Académie de Stanislas," in *Table alphabétique des publications de l'Académie de Stanislas [1750- 1900]*, ed. Justin FAVIER (Nancy: Imprimerie Berger-Levrault & Cie, 1902), 25.

¹¹*Programmes de la Société des Philantropes* ([Strasbourg]: n.p., n.d.), Bibliothèque de la Société de Port-Royal, Collection Grégoire (BSPR-G), Rév. 86/6. Jean TILD referred to Grégoire's entry as *Mémoire sur les moyens de recréer le peuple juif et, partant, de l'amener à la vertu et au bonheur (L'abbé Grégoire d'après ses Mémoires recueillis par Hyppolyte Carnot* [Paris: Nouvelles éditions latines, 1946], 11), but he seems to have created this title based on Grégoire's description of it in his 1789 *Motion en*

view of Jewish issues. Jean de Turckheim, who was the president of the society and likely wrote the program, was a Protestant and also a devoted follower of Voltaire. At the time of the contest, Jews were still banned from residence in Strasbourg, and could enter the city only during the day, upon payment of a tax. Turckheim's call to reconsider Jews' status seems to have been inspired not only by debates among *philosophes* but also by the violence in Alsace of 1777-9, when François-Antoine-Joseph Hell coordinated the mass fabrication of receipts suggesting that peasants there had paid off their debts to Jews. During this "forged receipts affair," mass riots erupted against the Jews, and the government decreed the reduction of all debts owed to them.¹²

In the midst of this turmoil, the SPS asked men of letters to consider whether and how Jewish status should be changed. For the most part, the contest program adopted the point of view of anti-Jewish peasants; it framed the problem as one of helping them escape the scourge of Jewish usury rather than of rescuing Jews from prejudice and oppression. It suggested that Jews, through religious pride and cruel business practices, bore the responsibility for their outcast status: "Depuis près de dix mille ans, la nation juive, séparée de toutes les autres par des cérémonies singulières et un culte exclusif, auquel elle tient avec enthousiasme, est dispersée sur le globe." In trying to eke out a living in their admittedly precarious situation, Jews had made themselves "onéreuse aux peuples." The program cited -- without contesting -- arguments that "leur industrie était ruineuse & calquée sur la fraude, que dans les villes ils recelaient les effets volés &

faveur des juifs. On this point, see also Jean-Michel LENIAUD ("Introduction," in *Mémoires de l'abbé Grégoire*, ed. J.-M. LENIAUD and preface by J.-N. JEANNENEY (Paris: Éditions de Santé, 1989), 29n17.

¹²HERTZBERG, 118, 120-1, 287-8.

rongeaient les patrimoines par l'usure . . . ; que dans les campagnes ils dévoraient la substance des cultivateurs par des avances faciles, des remboursements extorqués à contretemps” Jewish usury, the society’s program intimated, posed terrible dangers for the social, economic and moral order of the French countryside. Whereas the SPS’s overall charter contained lofty principles about “éclairer & soulager les hommes” and fostering “félicité publique,” its position on the Jews displayed many of the anti-Jewish prejudices common in the East.¹³

Still, the SPS program was ambivalent; despite these many sins, the members held out the possibility that the Jewish condition should be improved. One of the reasons Jews were so onerous to others, the members suggested, was because “les fonctions ordinaires de citoyen, l’exercice des arts & métiers, [et] presque tout moyen honnête de gagner sa subsistance” had been forbidden them. The program recognized that Jews were humans and had greatly suffered from prejudice: “On lui a souvent disputé par le fanatisme les droits imprescriptibles de l’humanité, dans les siècles ténébreux du moyen âge, on lui a imputé tous les maux physiques qui désolaient la terre”¹⁴

The question posed by the society was thus how to reconcile these opposing considerations -- humanity and the corruption of the Jews -- to best protect peasants. Indeed, fostering morality among *le peuple* and improving its lot were the central concerns of the society. Alongside the program on Jews, the society sponsored a contest on rural economy, and searched for ways to make it easier for peasants to grow enough to

¹³*Programmes de la Société des Philantropes*, BSPR-G, Rév. 86/6, 1-2; Société des Philantropes, *Précis instructif sur la Société des Philantropes* ([Strasbourg]: n.p., n.d.), 11, 16-7 [Bibl. Nat. et Univ. de Strasbourg, M 701.674].

¹⁴*Programmes de la Société des Philantropes*, 1.

sustain themselves. They also pledged to create festivals like the *rosière* ceremonies to foster moral behavior among the populace.

The SPS's framing of the Jewish question, with its emphasis on protecting peasants while treating Jews more humanely, would have a profound effect on Grégoire's view of the issue. Though we can no longer examine his contest entry, if he were correct in saying that the founders were ready to give him the prize, that would suggest that he probably did not depart too radically from the problematic as Turckheim and the others had posed it. Grégoire's SPS entry also had a more direct link with the Metz contest, since his note in the SPS *Mémoires* confirms that he had not thought to write about the Jews until the opportunity to enter the SPS contest spurred him to think about their status. While Hermon-Belot has suggested that Grégoire's interest in Jewish conversion (the *retour des juifs*) derived from the Jansenists, it may instead have become a preoccupation of his through the pietism of SPS-affiliated Protestants, for whom such hopes occupied a central place in the eighteenth century.¹⁵

The passage cited by Maggiolo, in which Grégoire claimed that his first Metz entry was nothing more than an abridgement version of his SPS essay, has also resurfaced. In it, the abbé was particularly insistent about his Metz entry's having been drafted years earlier because of the success of Christian Wilhelm Dohm's essay on the Jews, published in the interval between the SPS and Metz contests. Given certain

¹⁵Grégoire's dear friend Jean-Frédéric Oberlin, a Protestant pastor with close ties to SPS leadership, was interested in the "conversion finale des Juifs" as early as 1767 (see OBERLIN, "Judaei. Conversion finale des Juifs," 1767 and 1770, Archives municipales de Strasbourg, Fonds Oberlin [15 NA], no. 314, fols. 69-77). On the centrality of the idea of the conversion of the Jews in German pietism and in Alsace, see Christopher M. CLARK, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia, 1728 - 1941* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], and John F. KURTZ, *John Frederic Oberlin* [Boulder: Westview Press, 1976], 122-3).

similarities between Grégoire's and Dohm's ideas, Grégoire wanted to ensure that the Metz judges knew he had written and circulated his essay before Dohm's work had even been published.

L'ouvrage que j'ai l'honneur de presenter à l'Academie de Metz n'est que l'extrait d'un plus considerable, fait il y a huit ans, et depuis cette epoque renfermé dans mon portefeuille. Il n'est point calqué sur l'édit de Joseph ni sur l'ouvrage de Mr. Dohm par une raison fort simple [:] c'est qu'il existoit avant l'émission de la loi et la publication du Livre, c'est un fait que je puis prouver par le témoignage de plus de vingt personnes tous gens de Lettres, car mon écrit a été lu ainsi que plusieurs autres sur le même sujet dans un comité litteraire, qui avoit proposé le meme objet à traiter et qui vouloit couronner celui-ci; lorsque des evenemens imprevus aneantirent les fonds destinés aux prix. J'avance ces faits bien sûr qu'ils sont ignorés de tous les membres de l'academie de Metz et que par consequent, je ne viole pas la loi du secret imposé aux concurrens. On trouvera cependant quelques articles surajoutés posterieurement a mon ouvrage dans lesquelles j'ai cité M. Dohm, mais ils sont en petit nombre, je n'avois pas la traduction de la premiere partie de son ouvrage, la seconde n'est pas traduite. Je commence a peine a comprendre l'idiome allemand, et j'en appelle à la comparaison de son ouvrage avec le mien comme preuve evidente que je ne lui ai fait aucun larcin.

Interestingly, Dohm also had been an SPS member, though there is no evidence that he was present when Grégoire read his essay to the society during the 1770s.¹⁶

A Manuscript Recovered: Grégoire's First Metz Entry

With this new information on the importance of the SPS to the young Grégoire, it is possible to read the published *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique*

¹⁶GRÉGOIRE, "Mémoire sur les juifs," pp. 1-1v (page numbering from bottom of text, spelling as in original); and VOSS. To further support his argument about having written his essay even before the call for the Metz contest, Grégoire also added that, because he had been ill, he had had time neither to revise his old SPS entry nor to copy it all himself; instead, he had someone else copy sections directly from the earlier work. Notably, Grégoire would delete at least one footnote referring to Dohm in the second entry, even as he preserved the material to which the footnote alluded (see passage beginning "déjà dans le Talmud et dans Maimonides" in "Mémoire sur les juifs," 46n3 v. in *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs; ouvrage couronné par la Société royale des Sciences et des Arts de Metz, le 23 août 1788* [Metz: Claude Lamort, 1789], 123) [NOTE: all citations below are from this edition, which is reprinted in *La révolution française et l'émancipation des juifs* (Paris: EDHIS, 1968), t. 3, and in *Oeuvres de l'abbé Grégoire* (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1977), t. 9].

des juifs (his second contest entry) in new ways. The influence of the *Société des Philantropes* on Grégoire's thinking about Jews can be seen in many places in the *Essai*. Reflecting the 1778 contest program, the *Essai* is filled both with pleas for tolerance and with highly unfavorable depictions of Jewish character and physique. Alongside denunciations of anti-Jewish persecutions and expressions of Jews' humanity are chapters with titles such as "Danger de tolérer les Juifs tels qu'ils sont, à cause de leur population," "Danger de tolérer les Juifs tels qu'ils sont, à cause de leur aversion pour les autres peuples, & de leur morale relâchée" and "Danger de tolérer les Juifs tels qu'ils sont, à cause de leur commerce & de leur usure." In the chapter on "Population prodigieuse du peuple juif," Grégoire makes a more direct link to the SPS, citing Turckheim's warnings that the Jewish population might triple within a century, and thanking him and other friends for their input into the *Essai*. That Turckheim's worry about Jews' fecundity haunted Grégoire too – and helped drive his anxiety about the need to regenerate them physically, morally and politically -- can be seen from the detailed Appendix he included with the *Essai*, titled "Observations sur l'Etablissement et la Population des Juifs, à Metz"; it was included as a subtle warning about their "accroissement progressif."¹⁷ This appendix is not included in either the Hermon-Belot or Badinter editions of the *Essai*.¹⁸

¹⁷GRÉGOIRE, *Essai sur la régénération*, 55, 214, 257 – 262; see also SEPINWALL, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution*, ch. 3.

¹⁸*Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (edition HERMON-BELOT/Flammarion); *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs*, ed. Robert BADINTER (Paris: Stock, 1988).

Fortunately, the published *Essai* is no longer the only version of Grégoire's Metz entry which we have, and further information on his prerevolutionary ideas about Jews can be seen in his first entry. That the Musée lorrain's manuscript is of Grégoire's first rather than his second entry is indicated in several ways. First, as noted above, the manuscript made reference to his SPS entry as having been written "il y a huit ans" -- that is eight years since 1778, or 1786, during the first Metz contest, rather than 1787-88, the period of the second Metz contest. Further confirmation comes from Pierre-Louis Roederer's descriptions of the first contest entries; the Musée lorrain's manuscript conforms well to Roederer's description of Grégoire's first entry, particularly in its poor organization. Thirdly, the manuscript has only sixteen chapters, as opposed to the twenty-seven in the published *Essai*. Since Grégoire would receive government permission to publish the second entry only in the exact form crowned by the Academy, the manuscript of the second entry would have to have been identical to the published *Essai*, aside from typographical errors. This is not the case with the Musée lorrain manuscript.¹⁹

With the first entry located and identified, we can gain further insight into Grégoire's ideas about Jews in the years preceding the Revolution. Technically speaking, if Grégoire were correct in saying that his first Metz entry was mostly a shortened version of his SPS entry, it also included some updating; the manuscript contains some references to works published in the 1780s (notably Dohm's 1781 essay and Johann David

¹⁹See [P.-L. ROEDERER], *Prix proposés, en 1788, par la Société royale des sciences et des arts de Metz, pour les concours de 1789 et 1790* (Metz: Veuve Antoine & fils, 1788), AN 29 AP 6 (Roederer Papers); Roederer's manuscript notes on the entries, AN 29 AP 101; and FEUERWERKER, 102, 126.

Michaelis's 1783 critique of it). It is also evident that much of the essay remained the same from the first version to the second: most of the passages in the first reappear in the second, though often in a different order and sometimes reworded. This suggests again that his second entry, the famous published *Essai*, was basically a reworking and updating of his original SPS entry. Most changes involved reorganization; another important change was the title. *Régénération*, the key concept of the second entry, was not part of the title of the first, and hardly appeared in the first entry at all.²⁰

There is another area, however, in which there is a significant difference between the first and second entries: material drawn from Jews themselves does not appear in the former. When scholars have made the argument that certain Jews (alternatively, Isaiah Berr Bing, Moses Ensheim, and Simon von Geldern) helped Grégoire to write the essay – or co-authored it with him – they have generally referred to notes in the published *Essai* in which Grégoire referred to these men or thanked them for certain material. However, mention of these men – and the material later attributed to them – was absent in the first essay. Other evidence suggests that Grégoire met Bing only in 1787 – not in the 1770s, as some other studies have claimed.²¹ This suggests that Grégoire sought friendships

²⁰The only title in the first entry was its inscription, from Psalm 43: *Dedisti nos tanquam oves escarum et en gentibus dispersisti nos*. Nevertheless, Grégoire referred to it in his entry letter as “Mémoire sur les juifs” (quoted in TRIBOUT DE MOREMBERT, 197-8), the same name used on the manuscript's binding. On the increased use of *régénération* in the second entry, compare “Mémoire sur les juifs,” 54v and 57, to *Essai sur la régénération*, 171, 177 (*corriger* and *civiliser* turn into *régénérer*).

²¹See “Isaïe-Beer Bing,” in *Biographie de la Moselle, ou, Histoire par ordre alphabétique de toutes les personnes nées dans ce département, qui sont fait remarquer par leurs actions, leurs talents, leurs écrits, leurs vertus, ou leurs crimes*, ed. Émile Auguste Nicolas Jules BÉGIN (Metz: Verronnais, 1829 - 1832), 90-4. The entry notes that Bing met Grégoire only after 1787 (two years after the Metz contest was first announced), when Bing began to receive public attention because of his pamphlet *Lettre du Sr. I. B. B. Juif de Metz, à l'auteur anonyme d'un écrit intitulé: Le cri du citoyen contre les Juifs* (Metz: Jean-Baptiste Collignon, 1787). Though this article is unsigned, it would not be surprising if Grégoire were the author. He contributed at least three other entries to this biographical dictionary (see S. POSENER, “Essai d'une bibliographie critique des oeuvres de l'abbé Grégoire” [1946], Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 14045), and

with Jews once his essay had failed to win in the Metz contest's first round, and while he worked on revisions for the second. He sought material from these new Jewish friends to lend his essay a greater air of authenticity, but was also inspired by them to modify some of the first entry's harsher appraisals of Jews, even if he did not eliminate these passages completely.

Elsewhere, I have chronicled in more detail the material which these men provided Grégoire and reflected about their motivations for doing so. I have noted that the material which he added to the second entry on the basis of his interactions with them was limited in scope. It is also evident that their sharing information with him did not mean that they agreed with every aspect of his text; their reasons for helping him ranged from hopes that their view of the Jewish question would influence him to feelings of gratitude that a Catholic priest was even interested in their problems.²²

The fact that Grégoire's Jewish friends were not unaware of the negative aspects of his view of Jews can be seen in a few examples related to Isaiah Berr Bing. Hermon-Belot has suggested that criticism of Grégoire's ideas about Jews dates not from the eighteenth century, but only from the mid-twentieth, arising first in the United States and then crossing the Atlantic to France in the 1960s.²³ The interactions of Bing and

had earlier pushed for Bing's inclusion in a similar biographical dictionary (see Bibliothèque municipale de Nancy, Ms. 957 [533], fol. 546). Cf. SUTTER, 27.

²²See SEPINWALL, "Strategic Friendships: Jewish Intellectuals, The Abbé Grégoire, and the French Revolution," in *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From Al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, eds. Ross BRANN and Adam SUTCLIFFE (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 189 – 212.

²³HERMON-BELOT, *L'abbé Grégoire*, 255, and idem, "L'abbé Grégoire et les juifs, réforme sociale et attente spirituelle," in *L'antisémitisme éclairé : inclusion et exclusion depuis l'Époque des Lumières jusqu'à l'affaire Dreyfus/Inclusion and Exclusion. Perspectives on Jews from the Enlightenment to the Dreyfus Affair*, ed. Ilana ZINGUER and Sam W. BLOOM (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 151. This claim is weakened not only by the reservations expressed by Jews during Grégoire's time, as discussed below, but

Grégoire suggest friction, however, over the latter's depiction of Jews as usurers and Judaism as spiritually bankrupt. Though Bing never spoke publicly of this tension, the abbé himself revealed it in the *Essai*'s footnotes, which offer a surprisingly frank glimpse into their conversations. In these notes, Grégoire offered a running apology to Bing whenever he made a particularly negative comment about Jews. Indeed, nearly every time Grégoire cited Bing, it was to beg his friend's forgiveness for some disparaging remark he was making about Jews or Judaism. This highly unusual string of apologies suggests that Grégoire felt guilty at having heard, and ignored, his new friend's advice.

One such footnote came on the heels of a story about Ashkenazi prejudices, and after the abbé's own attacks on "rêveries talmudiques." Grégoire seems to have feared the reaction of Bing to his condemnation of Jewish traditions and purported bigotry:

La crainte de calomnier m'oblige à dire qu'en avançant ces graves inculpations, quelques ouvrages n'ont été cités que sur des traductions dont je ne garantis pas la fidélité. M. Bing, savant Juif de Metz, et mon ami, prétend que ces décisions dignes d'un habitant de Bedlam, ne se trouvent pas dans les Rabbins; mais dans les fatras ignorés, ou même ne se trouvent aucunement. Il accuse nos auteurs de méprise, et feroit presque grâce à leur ignorance pour attaquer leur bonne foi. Je sais qu'en isolant des phrases, en mutilant des passages, on dénature quelquefois le sens des écrivains; on leur impute des conséquences qu'ils désavoueroient; quoiqu'elles dérivent immédiatement de leurs principes. Par amour des Juifs, je souhaite que M. Bing ait raison, et j'engage cet écrivain à cribler toutes mes assertions. Du choc des discussions, on verra jaillir la vérité.

This extraordinary passage suggests a scene in which Bing had vigorously contested the accuracy of Grégoire's representation of Jewish tradition.²⁴

also by the existence of French critiques of Grégoire written long before any such North American writings (see especially André SPIRE, *Quelques juifs et demi-juifs* [Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1928], II: 215, and Mëir LEVIAH, "L'abbé Grégoire contre la synagogue," *Chalom: Revue juive mensuelle* 10, no. 58 [1931]: 4 – 7).

²⁴*Essai sur la régénération*, 65, 217-8.

Another request for forgiveness from Bing followed soon afterwards. In the chapter on “Danger de tolérer les Juifs tels qu’ils sont, à cause de leur commerce & de leur usure,” Grégoire gave an emotion-filled account of hapless peasants destroyed by Jewish usurers. “Que deviendra cet honnête Labourer,” he asked, “ruiné par les Juifs?” Immediately afterward, Grégoire appended this apologetic footnote:

Pardon, mon cher Bing, comme Mendelsohn, c’est par des vertus que vous voudriez faire l’apologie de votre nation, je sens que cette tirade agitera tous les ressorts de votre ame; je l’écrivis en Alsace lors des événements dont il est question; elle est peut-être trop véhémence; mais mon coeur étoit saignant, j’écrivois sous sa dictée.²⁵

Grégoire seemed certain that Bing would object to this passage, and atoned in advance – if not to the point of removing his charges.

A few chapters later, Bing again appeared in the footnotes, when Grégoire denounced the “maximes féroces” of certain rabbis. Immediately after making this assertion, Grégoire modified it somewhat in the footnotes -- noting that he was doing so on the advice of his Jewish friend. Citing an “observation fournie par M. Bing,” the abbé admitted that not all rabbis were hate-filled. Based on Bing’s counsel, Grégoire acknowledged that Maimonides had prescribed love for all nations and that Jews continued to revere the great rabbi.²⁶

These passages make clear that Bing challenged Grégoire about the content of the *Essai*. Bing, citing Maimonides and other Jewish sources, wanted to convince Grégoire that Jewish tradition was beautiful and universalist. Instead of throwing this tradition

²⁵ Ibid., 78, 219.

²⁶ Ibid., 104, 223.

away, he suggested to the abbé, it should be preserved – if not in the inward-looking form espoused by many contemporary rabbis, at least in the universalistic form of Maimonides and other Golden Age thinkers.²⁷ Though Bing maintained a friendship with the abbé for a variety of reasons, he would continue to object to aspects of Grégoire's views on the Jewish question. In a 1789 address to the National Assembly on behalf of the Jews of Metz, Bing criticized the whole premise of the Metz contest. After recounting a list of wrongs Jews had suffered at Christian hands, he noted indignantly, "Tel est le peuple dont on a mis en problème, s'il est possible de le rendre utile. Peut-être eût-il mieux valu mettre en question comment, sous tant d'abus contraires à l'humanité & au bon ordre social, il a pu conserver son existence."²⁸

Ensheim, who provided Grégoire with at least one anecdote, had similar reservations about the way the abbé ended up portraying Jews in the *Essai*. Ensheim was grateful for Grégoire's interest in helping his coreligionists, and he was also honored to count such a prominent Gentile as his friend. Nevertheless, an unpublished 1792 letter shows him giving a veiled reminder to Grégoire not to depict Jews so negatively. Whatever his own disagreements with more traditionally minded Jews, Ensheim remained fiercely protective of how they were portrayed by Gentiles.

Oui, Citoyen & ami, j'ose penser qu'en général les mœurs de mes confrères en foi ne sont pas aussi depravé qu'on vous veut faire croire, & si les auteurs nous ont décriés, on pourrait appliquer la reponse donné à l'homme qui soutenait la supériorité de son espece sur celle d'un lion en produisant un tableau où l'on

²⁷See also the long excerpts from Bing's translations of Jedaiah HA-PENINI's *Behinat olam* and Judah HA-LEVI's poem *Zion ha-lo tishali* which he persuaded Grégoire to include in the notes (Ibid., 249 – 251).

²⁸BING, *Mémoire particulier pour la Communauté des Juifs établis à Metz, rédigé par Isaac Ber-Bing [sic]* (n.p.: [1789]), 13. Compare this to Bing's more hopeful reference to the contest, expressed before the winning entries were made public and before he met Grégoire (*Lettre du Sr. I. B. B.*, 55-57).

voyait un hercule déchirant un lion; le lion lui disait pour toute réponse: c'est que nous autres nous n'avons point à peindre.²⁹

Despite negative literary depictions of Jews, Ensheim suggested, Jews were superior to Gentiles in many ways, just as actual lions (in contrast to painted ones) surpassed humans in strength. Other Jews, such as Michel Berr, Berr-Isaac-Berr and Zalkind Hourwitz also evinced some discomfort with the framework which Grégoire used to discuss Jews' status, even as they were grateful for his sympathizing with their plight.³⁰

This new material therefore offers important modifications to the traditional narrative about the Metz competition. First, it reminds us that there was another contest held in eastern France about Jews on the eve of the Revolution, that organized by the *Société des Philantropes* in 1778. While the SPS contest failed to award a prize, it had an important legacy, on the basis of Grégoire's membership in the society and the way it raised his interest in the issue.

Second, Grégoire's first Metz entry offers greater insight into his prerevolutionary thinking on Jews. This manuscript suggests that Grégoire wrote his first entry without help from Jews, and before he really knew any; he added only small sections to the second entry on the basis of his new Jewish acquaintances. These new friends did to

²⁹See *Essai sur la régénération*, 217; and Ensheim to Grégoire, 10 novembre, l'an 1 (1792), BSPR-G, dossier "Moselle."

³⁰See SEPINWALL, "Strategic Friendships"; also Martine LEMALET, "Berr Isaac Berr: Un bilan contemporain de l'émancipation," in *Les Juifs et la Révolution française : histoire et mentalités: actes du colloque tenu au Collège de France et à l'Ecole normale supérieure, les 16, 17 et 18 mai 1989*, ed. Evelyne OLIEL-GRAUSZ and Mireille HADAS-LEBEL (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1992), 119 – 138; and Frances MALINO, *A Jew in the French Revolution: The Life of Zalkind Hourwitz* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), esp. chs. 1 and 2.

some extent soften his assessments of Jews and make him sympathize more fully with their predicament. He nevertheless retained many of the caustic comments he had made in his first entry, which were inspired both by the SPS and by perceptions of Jews generated in his parish. Moreover, he added some crueler remarks about the Jews and Judaism which were not present in the first essay.³¹ Even as the abbé hoped to help Jews, his interest in them thus grew from issues external to their own anxieties, such as his literary ambitions and his belief that Jews needed to find honest occupations so that poor Christians would not fall prey to their usury. His defense of Jews – and his later frustrations with them in the nineteenth century as he felt they had failed to regenerate themselves enough -- can be understood only in this context.³²

These documents also point the way to a richer understanding of the relations between Grégoire and his Jewish friends. Jews in nineteenth-century France no doubt derived pride from the idea that certain of their ancestors had co-written such a famous text, and this story of the *Essai*'s birth seems to give a greater role to Jewish agency than the idea that Grégoire first became interested in Jews to protect his parishioners and to win a contest. In the end, however, this new understanding of the *Essai*'s development offers us more complex and realistic images of these Jewish figures than their simply being Grégoire's uncredited assistants. It suggests autonomous Jewish thinkers having a

³¹See his gratuitous defense of Hell in *Essai sur la régénération*, 219 ("On connoit l'ouvrage intitulé: *Observations d'un alsacien sur l'affaire présente des Juifs d'Alsace*. On a contesté à l'auteur la vérité de ses inculpations, et je ne voudrois pas avec lui reprocher aux Hébreux actuels le mort du Sauveur. Mais a-t-on prouvé qu'il dit faux en tout?"), absent from "Mémoire sur les juifs"; and the sarcastic new footnote on "great men" among the Jews (*Essai sur la régénération*, 233-4; absent from "Mémoire sur les juifs," 55v).

³²On the role of Catholic apologetics in Grégoire's writings on Jews and on his later frustrations with Jews, see SEPINWALL, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution*, chs. 3 and 9.

meeting of the minds with a priest who had his own ideas about their situation; they labored to make him understand Jews' own perspectives as he purported to speak for them. Though men like Bing and Ensheim had only partial success, Grégoire's second contest entry, the *Essai sur la régénération*, is a testament to their efforts – and part of a struggle that is still ongoing today, as Jews strive for equality and empathy while retaining their religious distinctiveness.