

# Zoroastrian Iran's unique relations with the Jewish race

Dr. Kersey Antia, May 11, 2019

The Zoroastrian Iran's unique relations with the Jewish race since 500 B.C. can be best appreciated by how the Jews were treated in the civilized Europe in our own times. In *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong (why we love France, but not the French)*, what Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow, (Sourcebooks, 2003, pp. 92-99) note about how the French (and not just the Germans) treated the Jews when France was under German occupation is so appalling to say the least: "The resistance myth was a healing balm that raised French morale and consolidated de Gaulle's own power. It wasn't until after de Gaulle's death in 1970 that French historians began questioning the myth. Books and documentaries during that period revealed that many of the evil acts attributed to the occupying Germans were actually the doing of the French administration. And that's the question France is still struggling with to this day." France's national rail service, which shipped Jews to Germany, is still operating.

There is no doubt any more that France persecuted Jews on its own. After Petain came to power in July 1940, racial segregation began almost overnight, but most of the background thinking for this had been done in anti-Jewish circles over the previous fifty years. The new government did not need much help from the Germans to strip Jews of all their rights. As early as August 1940, the Vichy government defined Jewish status, barring Jews from public offices and all state jobs, even teaching. The government went on to produce 168 anti-Jewish laws and regulations.

The fact that many French collaborated with the Germans was bad enough, but the truth is that many took advantage of the situation to deprive Jews of their civil rights, their property and their lives.

Then the Law for the Exclusion of Jews from the Economy instructed officials to confiscate Jewish businesses. Jews' bank accounts were frozen and they could not work. Eventually, any gentile who wanted the shop of a Jew could ask city hall for a paper that gave them the right to call it their own. The government began establishing quotas for Jewish students, and Jewish lawyers, and Jewish doctors. And they all had to wear the yellow star.

After the war, Jean-Jacques believed, like many French Jews, that the Germans alone were responsible for persecuting Jews. Unlike most French Jews, he changed his mind rather abruptly when he discovered a

suitcase in his grandparents' house, miraculously saved from the ruin of this family. The suitcase, containing papers and documents gathered by his mother between 1940 and 1941, showed how the French government had methodically despoiled the Fraenkels and all Jews, making them defenseless against the threat of deportation—and extermination, as it turned out. Jean-Jacques wrote his story in a book titled *Abus de Confiance (Breach of Trust)*. “My sister and I survived the war because of the Resistance, because of the dedication of those who hid us, because of Catholic schools,” he explained, “but the whole time we were being chased not only by the Germans, but by our own government.”

In all, seventy-six thousand of the three hundred thousand Jews in France died in Nazi death camps—a low estimate, which doesn't account for those who died in French camps as hostages or resistance fighters. Outside of Germany, this is the highest number of Jews from any Western European country killed. However, the proportion of French Jews saved in France is also the highest of Western Europe. Three quarters of France's Jews survived; the survival rates in Belgium and Holland were below 25 percent. Despite the anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy government and the collaboration of the French administration in persecuting Jews, it's clear a great number of people did not do what the State asked. As Jean-Jacques Fraenkel says himself, the massacre would have been much greater without the secret support of thousands of French people, the Resistance, and the lower Catholic clergy.

Yet there is no doubt that French anti-Semitism was official in character. It came in the form of directives from the State, and many civil servants applied the regulations blindly, sealing the fate of thousands of Jews. The first large-scale roundup of Jews in summer of 1942 was carried out by no fewer than six thousand French police. French Jews were treated the worst of all in French Algeria, where German soldiers never even set foot.

It is tempting to attribute France's behavior to the fact that it was Catholic, but Italy—which was not only Catholic but fascist—refused to deport Jews, and only eight thousand Italian Jews died in the camps. The French government did what it was told—and more. The French Bar never protested at the treatment of Jewish lawyers, like the Belgian Bar did. When French banks were asked to turn over names and account balances of Jewish clients, they froze and confiscated sixty-eight thousand Jewish accounts.

Jews in France became a general source of unearned income during the war, and the State showed citizens the way; there was a violent legal battle between Vichy and the Germans over who would get the monopoly on the confiscation of Jewish goods. The Germans settled for 10 percent. The rest went into the French treasury or was distributed to

individuals. Many French citizens just helped themselves to the spoils. People took all the Jewish possessions they could get their hands on—from furniture and sewing machines to children's books.

More than fifty years after the war, is it fair to accuse the French of still being fundamentally anti-Semitic? In 2001, during the second Intifada in Israel, the number of hate crimes in France doubled, from 150 to about three hundred per year. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon declared that the French were the most anti-Semitic people in the world. Dozens of articles we read in the American, British, and Canadian media echoed him, concluding that anti-Jewish sentiment was still the norm in modern France.

Historically, France was a model of integration for the Jewish community, having granted civil rights to Jews in 1794, a good century before any other European country. France has had three Jewish presidents and two Jewish prime ministers. In his book *The French*, author Theodore Zeldin goes as far as saying that the French Jewish community is the most integrated in the world. It is also false to accuse the French of refusing to face their past. While we lived in France, not a week went by without the release of a major new report, book, or film on the behavior of the French during the war.

As head of the provisional government from 1944-46, Charles de Gaulle's first job was bringing France's war criminals to justice. Nearly half a million people in France were tried for collaboration and received sentences ranging from death (3,700 executions) to loss of all civic rights (150,000). One hundred and eight members of the government were tried and sentenced along with many others among local politicians. High-ranking civil servants, officers of the army, and even bishops were punished. It was not complete—many escaped any judgment or were wrongly acquitted. But de Gaulle closed the door on the period with his famous declaration that “Vichy was not France.”