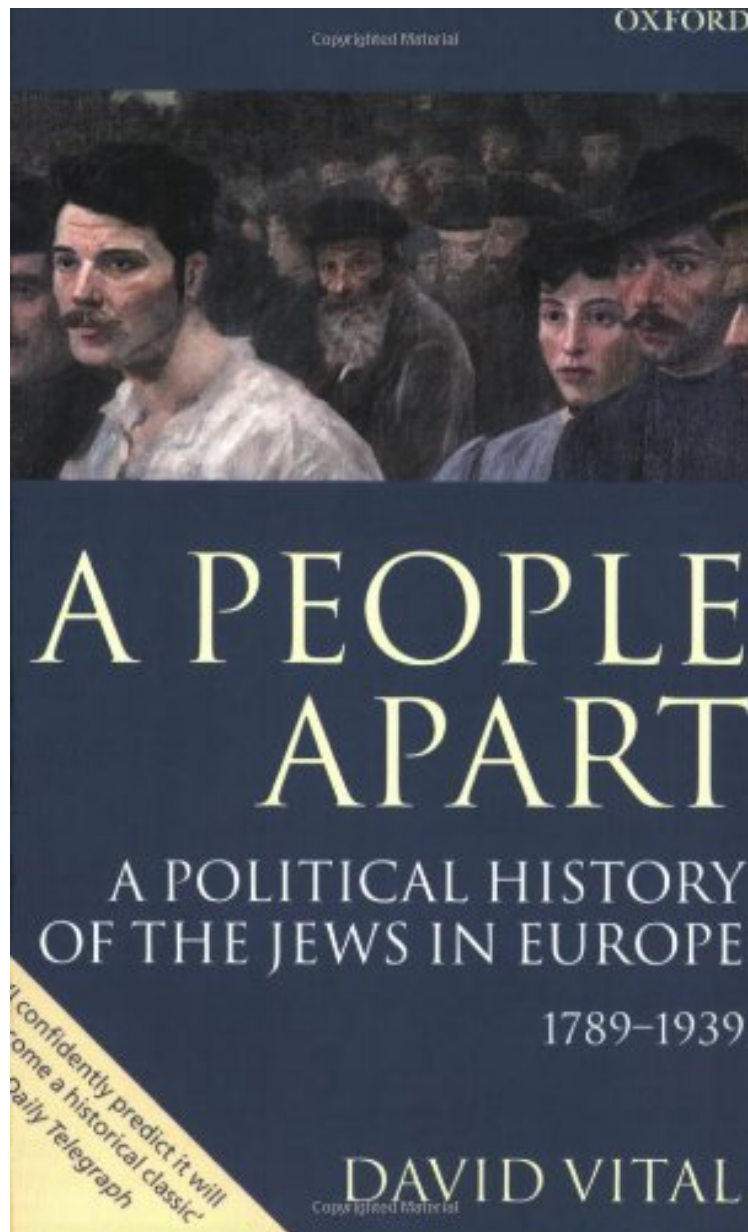


(Online library) A People Apart: A Political History of the Jews in Europe 1789-1939 (Oxford History of Modern Europe)

A People Apart: A Political History of the Jews in Europe 1789-1939 (Oxford History of Modern Europe)

David Vital

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David Vital : A People Apart: A Political History of the Jews in Europe 1789-1939 (Oxford History of Modern Europe) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A People

Apart: A Political History of the Jews in Europe 1789-1939 (Oxford History of Modern Europe):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Powerful and depressing
By Ralph Blumenau
Can a one-volume History of the Jews in Modern Times add anything significantly new to the many similar books that have already been published? This book certainly does. In the first place, it contains quite a number of facts that I had not found in any other history. The footnotes show that Professor Vital, who has lived for most of his life in Israel, has drawn extensively on research published in Hebrew and not yet translated into English. In the second place, although the book has a narrative framework, it is infused by a consistent vision and interpretation of the history of that time which is as powerful and all-embracing as it is depressing. As the title implies, Vital's view is that the Jews have throughout this time been a people apart, not only in Eastern and Central Europe, but even in the liberal West. The emancipation project throughout Europe is presented as one that was never primarily motivated by a feeling of justice, but by the perception that the states granting emancipation would benefit thereby. Everywhere Jews laboured under the feeling that what the State had granted, it could take away; everywhere therefore the Jews felt that they had to ingratiate themselves with the State - even the Zionists often felt this; and perhaps the only exception was the Bund, which specifically opposed the State as Jews and as Socialists. Vital explains the escalation in Russia from state harassment to the state-inspired murderous ferocity after 1906 to the perception of the Right that the Jews had at last dared to organize themselves to fight back against the Autocracy. In Vital's interpretation, the Jews of England and France were terrified of crossing their governments on behalf of Jews elsewhere. When, as in the Damascus Case, they seem to have been an effective pressure group for their co-religionists, it was largely because their interests and the interests of their governments coincided. Once governments felt that they had done "enough" in protesting to anti-semitic regimes about their illiberal policies, Jewish representative organizations became cautious in pressing them to do more, lest their own patriotism were called into question. Typically, in France Jewish congregations offered up prayers for the health of Alexander III while that Tsar, allied to France, was presiding over the harassment of their co-religionists through the May Laws. In 1933 the British Board of Deputies and the French Consistoire even refused to be identified with the campaign to boycott goods from Nazi Germany: a hint from the Home Secretary that the British Government regarded the boycott as undesirable was quite sufficient. When the World Jewish Congress was being prepared in September 1933, the Board of Deputies, the Alliance and the Hilfsverein all refused to attend in case they gave "substance" to the antisemites' claim that there was such a thing as powerful International Jewry. All this bespeaks an awareness that, so far from there being a "symbiosis", the Jews throughout Europe felt insecure as a People Apart. The book ends with the impotence of the Jews at the Evian Conference of July 1938: the liberal democracies refused to accept significant number of refugees from Nazi Germany. The Evian Conference "confirmed the general disposition to edge the Jews out of the international political arena into which they had so very recently (historically speaking) gained admission. Evian signalled the onset of the final stage of the process by which the long march of the Jews of Europe to legal emancipation and social acceptance had first been arrested and was now, corners of the western world apart, being rapidly reversed." There is of course an extensive treatment of the sufferings of the Jews in Russia and in the successor states after the First World War. The gloom of this book is unrelieved. Vital obviously felt that the enormous achievements of the Jews once they had been emancipated had so little bearing on his theme that they do not figure in his book at all. One must also add that Vital's editors at the OUP should have taken more trouble: the index, though long, is inadequate; footnotes referring back to earlier passages give chapters but not page numbers. Above all the style of the book is quite dreadful: immensely long and ponderous sentences and sententious expressed reflections made this reviewer feel that sometimes he was wading through treacle. But the effort is worth it.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Unsurpassed Concinnity
By D V David Vital begins his history at the moment in time when the relative unity of European Jewish life and identity began to unravel and fragment under internal and external pressures. He traces the various political trajectories down which different Jewish communities and groups travelled with unique elegance. He also, however, provides a more coherent grand narrative, drawing attention to the many ways in which European Jews, East and West, knew a common experience in their interaction with gentile society. Vital regards the modern Jewish experience in Europe as a long process of extrusion and ostracism, a drawn-out rearguard action by Continentals against initial overtures towards emancipation. He describes this process with unsurpassed concinnity. He also intimates his view of Zionism as the proper, dignified, and perhaps only communal response to European repudiation. His intimate sympathy for the subject matter does not hinder Vital from imparting criticism of the varied Jewish leadership, Zionists included, with regards to, above all, their woefully disorganized and disunited efforts to save themselves from what was ultimately a common fate. Some may find Vital's dense and quirky language difficult, but there is a certain artistic flair to the prose as a result.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Research
By Dennis S. Ross "Why can't Jews take `yes' for an answer?" asks Jerome Chanes about a people so well assimilated into American life but remains so anxious about its security and future. The response to the paradox of Jewish spiritual discomfort amidst social integration and material plenty is found in Jewish history. A People Apart: The Jews of Europe, an elegant, breathtaking history of European Jewry from 1789 to 1939 by Israeli scholar David Vital sheds light on the paradox. A decade in the making, a probing and

comprehensive political and historical study of 900 pages, Vital's work reads as polished literature. The epic is an artful weaving of detail and big picture, documenting the contorted and at times painful history of a people, masters neither of their situation nor their destiny. We see two and a half centuries of tenuous peace and outright conflict within the Jewish community -- over a longing for inclusion and a shunning of full integration -- and within the larger society that, on one hand, seeks Jewish integration for the resulting efficiency and economic benefits, but on the other hand, still wants Jews kept at a distance, if kept around at all. It is hard to "take `yes' for an answer" in the face of such difficult history. Rabbi Dennis S. Ross serves at Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts. His latest book is *God in Our Relationships: Spirituality between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber*. *God in Our Relationships: Spirituality Between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber*

In the twentieth century, the world saw both the greatest triumph of Jewish history--the birth of the nation of Israel, and its greatest tragedy--the state-sponsored genocide of the Holocaust. *A People Apart* is the first study to examine the role played by the Jews themselves, across the whole of Europe, during the century and a half leading up to these momentous events. David Vital explores the Jews' troubled relationship with Europe, documenting the struggles of this 'nation without a territory' to establish a place for itself within an increasingly polarized and nationalist continent. This powerful new analysis represents a watershed in our understanding of the history of the Jews in Europe, and as a result, in the whole history of the continent.

"A fascinating story, and one that hasn't been told before in such detail--and with such elegance."--*Newsday* About the Author David Vital is former Nahum Goldmann Professor of Diplomacy at Tel Aviv University. He served in the Israeli government for eleven years, holding posts in the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office. He has taught at UCLA, Dartmouth, and Northwestern. He lives in Israel.