

Nunn on Kalman (2017)

Kalman, Julie. *Orientalizing the Jew: Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France*. Indiana UP, 2017, pp. x + 172, ISBN 978-0253024275

Tessa Nunn, Duke University

As much a history of nineteenth-century France's search for a national identity as an attempt to reconceptualize Orientalism, *Orientalizing the Jew* sets out to examine the ambiguous position of Jews in nineteenth-century French culture and diplomacy. Kalman analyzes how literary works, travelogues, and diplomatic communications created both philosemitic and antisemitic representations of Jews in France and abroad. This ambiguity, Kalman argues, transformed Jews into totemic figures used to explain contested notions of French national identity and French Catholicism. As a figure, the Orientalized Jew allows Kalman to question how constructions of otherness can be understood as overlapping and intertwining. For her, Orientalism is not simply knowledge or discourse but rather a negotiation in which real and imagined Jews were often negotiators.

The first chapter explores encounters between Jewish populations and French Catholic pilgrims to the Holy Land, showing how these confrontations reinforced notions of French Catholicism. Kalman dedicates significant attention to François-René de Chateaubriand's 1811 *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, in which he transforms Palestine into a Romantic image of both a biblical past and a French past marked by the Crusades. According to Kalman, Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire* served as an impetus for other Catholics who wrote similar chronicles about their journeys to the Holy Land. Linking the Crusades, biblical narratives, and Romantic notions of nationalism, pilgrims sought to strengthen Catholicism's place in French national identity and France's position within Christian history. Contrasting with Edward Said's secular concept of Orientalism, Kalman underscores the importance of religion in establishing an idea of the Orient that allowed French Catholics to write themselves into an imagined Holy Land. According to her, pilgrims traveled through the Holy Land as if they were walking through Biblical scenes or were seeing Torquato Tasso's 1581 *Jerusalem Delivered*. At the same time, she reads the descriptions of the degradation and squalor of Jerusalem's Jewish quarter as revealing pilgrims' hostile condemnation of Judaism's rejection of Jesus. In some pilgrimage accounts, Jews hardly appear, which Kalman suggests may be an attempt to suppress their presence in the Holy Land.

Chapter two takes Théophile Gautier as a case study of the entanglement between the imagined and the real. Kalman considers first the fantasized descriptions of Jewish people in Gautier's unsuccessful play *La Juive de Constantine* and his novel *Le Roman de la momie* and then his accounts of his Parisian Jewish acquaintances. Within Gautier's work, Kalman identifies gendered clichés of overwhelmingly beautiful Jewish women and avaricious, ugly Jewish men, maintaining that Gautier established his Romantic ideas by spurning capitalism and exalting beauty through representations of Jews. Throughout her book, Kalman shines light on examples of Jewish and Muslim figures explaining one another through stark contrasts. She argues that Gautier's representations of Jews, unlike his representations of Muslims, oscillate between being saved and being damned, being assimilated and being exoticized. For Kalman, Gautier's Jews represent ideas or qualities anchored in a perceived reality. This fluid position allows Jews to serve as malleable figures used to express Romantic authors' desires and dissatisfaction. Looking at various representations of Jews in Romanticism, Kalman seeks to show how distinct categories of the real and the imagined break down. In this chapter, she likewise argues that Jews in France participated in the production of culture featuring the Orientalized Jew. While her discussion of the actress Rachel Félix and composer Giacomo Meyerbeer are informative, this argument merits more attention, particularly with regard to how Jews in France crafted Orientalized representations of Jews.

In each chapter, Kalman shows how Jewish people acted as intermediaries between France and a predominately Islamic Orient, in effect shaping French bureaucrats, travelers, and Catholic pilgrims' experiences of the Orient. This go-between position influenced how Catholics, Jews, and Muslims interacted diplomatically in the long nineteenth century. After focusing on travelogues and Romantic literature in the first two chapters, Kalman concludes the book by turning to diplomatic correspondences. The final chapter studies the role of the Jewish House of Bacri and Busnach as a diplomatic intermediary between France and the Regency of Algiers. This historical case allows for a discussion of Jews' activity in political discourses surrounding Imperialism. In this chapter, Kalman uses a very specific example to demonstrate how Jews participated in nineteenth-century French imperialist projects but does not adequately connect these Franco-Algerian correspondences to a broader scheme of French imperialism.

In sum, *Orientalizing the Jew* proposes nuanced ways of thinking about Orientalism, otherness, and national identity that allow for fluid and intertwining relationships instead of clear binaries. The book, however, engages very little with existing

scholarship on Jews in Orientalism. This text could serve as a resource for scholars of Romanticism, Orientalism, travel literature, and colonial history.

Volume: 47.1–2

Year:

- 2018