

Abstract for the conference on “Grey Areas: Two Centuries of
Wissenschaft des Judentums”

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**On the other side of the border: Wissenschaft des Judentums,
Franco-Judaïsme and the Rediscovery of Jewish Identity.**

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Parallel to the Wissenschaft des Judentums, there was an equivalent interest in “Jewish Studies” in France. Actually, on the other side of the border, scholars like Joseph Salvador, Gustave d’Eichthal or Léon Halévy recalled Judaism in a specular manner compared to the Wissenschaft. If for the Germans the reformist drive was towards Judaism, for the French assimilated Jews it had to proceed from Judaism to society and humankind. Either Jewish Communities choose, in fact, scientific discourse to face and combat prejudices against the perpetuation of their tradition, their values and their insertion in the Modern World. For example, it is no coincidence that both environments analyzed the figure of Jesus as a Jew (Salvador’s *Jésus-Christ et sa doctrine*, 1838 and Geiger’s *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, 1865-71), even coming to similar conclusions. Yet, French emancipated Jews argued in favor of a rejuvenation of the identity and the idea of Judaism. They stated that Judaism was no longer a separated component of the Nation but a regenerative element of the moral order of the World. Precisely French cultured Jews felt themselves inheritors of the demands of the 1789 Revolution. Each of them, reflecting different gradations and nuances, proposed the overcoming of Jewish particularism to lead to a Mosaic-based universalism. In this sense, Joseph Salvador was influential towards a supposed fusion of all religions starting from the ancient sinaitic Judaism of Moses.

The lecture I propose intends to analyze the simultaneous developments between Wissenschaft des Judentums and the so-called Franco-Judaïsme in the context of the mid-Nineteenth century: how did the two movements speak to the Jews? How did they deal with Jewish identity? What importance did religion have for them? What is the difference between French “Mosaism” and German reform?