Joseph II’s 1782 Edict of Toleration for the Jews of Lower Austria:

Its Economic and Secular Underpinnings and Effects

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**Introduction**

Throughout the history of the Habsburg dynasty, we see a Latin Christian identity being pushed onto the nation's subjects. It aided the Habsburg family in consolidating their familial ties to the throne, as well as in attempting to unite the entire Habsburg nation. For example, they promoted themselves as the protectors of the Roman Catholic Church and brought Christianity into the new lands that they had control over.[[1]](#footnote-1) This Catholic identity and connection within the Habsburg empire, so ingrained in its history and noble families, did not promote religious toleration. In particular, during the 17th and 18th centuries, “the policy of the Habsburgs had been, in principle, to rid at least their central provinces of Jews as well as of Protestants, either by converting them to Catholicism or by expelling them.”[[2]](#footnote-2) One particular Habsburg ruler, Maria Theresia (r. 1743-1780), was known for being openly anti-Jewish. The rulings she put in place decreased the numbers of Jewish peoples in certain areas, essentially punishing them for their ethno-religion. However, the 1782 Edict of Toleration for the Jews of Lower Austria, instituted by Joseph II (r. 1765-1790) shortly after her death, reverses this anti-Jewish sentiment by allowing for increased legal toleration of Jewish peoples. This Edict would, in some ways, allow for the educational, economic, and social lives of Jewish peoples to improve. The Edict itself stems from Joseph II’s broader secularization crusade, which affected many other aspects of government and law, all in an effort to create an economic powerhouse.[[3]](#footnote-3) Viewing this Edict in terms of the implications it would have for the state as well as for the Jewish people of Lower Austria reveals the motives behind implementing it, as well as Joseph II’s own prerogatives. In issuing this Edict, it is clear Joseph had two main goals: creating a more secularized state and creating more useful citizens. In examining reforms, edicts, and other proclamations from Joseph’s rule, this 1782 Edict for the Jews of Lower Austria fits into a much larger plan of secularization and increased economic activity.

**The Edict**

In order to make Jews “more useful and serviceable to the State,” Joseph II enacted this Edict of Toleration.[[4]](#footnote-4) Issued in 1782, this Edict, part of an enlightened and liberalizing series issued from 1781 and 1789, reveals how the emperor planned to deal with Jewish communities in Lower Austria following his mother’s death in 1780. The text itself, a product of Joseph II’s enlightened regime and ideology, known as Josephinism, declared and instituted a number of statements directly relating to how Jewish people in Lower Austria were to carry out their lives henceforth. Promulgated largely in an effort to secularize the state, the Edict both benefitted and disadvantaged Jewish people. While the fees and taxes Jewish peoples were required to pay before the Edict was issued were abolished, they were still not able to “constitute their own community…,” or to “[perform] public worship, [and attend] public synagogue.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The first proclamation within the Edict goes on to say that Jewish peoples will have “no press of their own for works in Hebrew, for which they must use the press in Bohemia.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Forced to travel simply to produce works in Hebrew, attend public synagogue, or perform public worship, the Edict is clear in its removal of visible Jewish communities. Additionally, they were able to “lease their own accommodation where they please in the city or its suburbs,” but were unable to use Hebrew or Yiddish in “any public judicial or extrajudicial procedures.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Jewish people affected by the Edict were placed into a position they where they were able to benefit from living in Lower Austria, but at the cost of their own culture, religion, community, and language. The Edict permitted them to contribute to a bustling economic society, but only if their Jewish identity was diminished. Overall, Joseph II and his Edict of Toleration aimed to acculturate or germanize Jewish people. Removing old limitations on the Jews in the area and integrating them into secular schools, working under the expertise of old Christian master craftsmen (at the craftsmen’s own accord), moving into largely Christian societies,both Catholic and Protestant, and removing restrictions which denoted them as obviously Jewish, created a system in which Jewish peoples could be integrated into mainstream Austrian society. The cost at which Jewish people became integrated into Austrian society was in accordance with Joseph’s plan. By tolerating these Jews and allowing them into society, he hoped to germanize them. They adopted German names, dress, language, education, and culture, with Joseph’s ultimate goal to “reduce their prejudices and lead them towards Christianity.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Following the belief that Christianity, specifically Catholicism, was the only correct religion, Joseph’s plan in integrating these Jews was to enable them to become both tolerated and acculturated, all in an effort to secularize the state and improve it economically.

The Edict furthers its aims at acculturation by saying,

“We look to their sense of duty and their gratitude that they do not misuse this Our grace and the freedom deriving from it to cause any public scandal by excesses and loose living, and nowhere to offend the Christian religion, nor to show contempt toward it and its servants; for misconduct of this kind will be most severely punished and will be visited on the offender, according to the circumstances, by expulsion from here and from all Our dominions.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

This last portion of the Edict is of remarkable interest. While Austrian Jews were allowed certain liberties, they had to live their lives on a tightrope. In order to retain their newly tolerated life, they could not cause any “public scandal,” exhibit any “loose living,” or offend Christianity and its servants, for instance, priests or nuns. The scarcity of detail in these guidelines implies an easy removal of a Jew for any misdemeanor. What defined “loose living” under Joseph II’s standards? What offended Christianity and what did not? Under these vague instructions, Jews in different parts of Lower Austria would have varied and inconsistent experiences according to regional and individual policing efforts. Additionally, the phrase “Our dominions,” is worthy of comment. At this point, Habsburg territory consisted of many legally, culturally, and geographically distinct regions, so what exactly constituted these “dominions” outlined in the Edict? Was it purely the Lower Austrian lands, or did it include all other Habsburg holdings as well? The vague nature of the Edict’s rules and regulations left much up to debate, and up to the agenda of those enforcing it. Overall, the content of the Edict varied considerably in terms of its main message. It preached integrating Jewish peoples in Lower Austrian societies for the purpose of economic gain, while working to marginalize their culture and religion. Additionally, while it allowed for their religion to exist, in a private setting, it clearly placed Christianity at a much higher level of importance, as it was the official religion of the monarchy and Joseph II himself. The overall vagueness of the Edict allowed for much discrepancy among the various Lower Austrian cities, making it an unevenly enforced piece of legislation.

**Life of Jewish Peoples Before the Edict of Toleration**

Despite Jewish settlement and life in the Lower Austria region from as early as the 3rd century, their relationship with the local gentiles was always ambiguous. The lives of Austrian Jews until the Toleration Edict of 1782 were uncertain. Depending on the ruler at the time, they could be relatively accepted by Christian communities and governments, live and work alongside Christians and other Jews, and attend their synagogue in peace. At other times, antisemitism ran deep. During the reign of Duke Albert V of Austria (r. 1397-1439), things quickly changed. The Vienna Gesera of 1420-21 was one of the worst instances of antisemitism in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Jews in Vienna were either exiled or burned at the stake under his rule. The view the Habsburgs had of Jewish communities in Austria leading up to the 14th century was that they were purely a source of ducal revenue.[[10]](#footnote-10) Under Albert, the Jews were stripped of their identity in the sense that they were only valued for their income, and this Jewish community was wiped out for their supposed connection to the Hussites, an enemy to the state at this time.[[11]](#footnote-11) While religious reasoning may be at play, the source for the Vienna Gesera is complex, with economic, social, religious, and political facets.

Another key ruler in the history of the lives of Jewish peoples in Lower Austria is that of Maria Theresia. Though also a Catholic Habsburg ruler, Maria’s policies were more tolerable than Albert’s, although she is remembered, as a cruel, antisemitic ruler. Life for Jews under Maria Theresia remained considerably different than life under the co-monarchy and eventual sole rule of Joseph II following her death. For instance, in 1777, she gave the following order regarding Vienna to her Austro-Bohemian Chancellery:

“’In future no Jews, of whatever reputation, are to be permitted to retain here without my written permission. I know of no more dangerous plague than this nation, who reduce people to beggary by fraud, usury and money-lending, who engage in all the evil business practices that an honourable man would shun. Hence, they should, so far as possible, be kept away from here and their numbers be reduced. Send me every quarter-day a table showing how many Jews there are here, where they live, and whether they have increased or diminished.’”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Maria Theresia’s anti-Jewish speech clearly indicated that Jewish people were not tolerated under the Habsburgs prior to Joseph II’s Edict. Additionally, she proclaimed “it should be that in the ‘future no more Jews will be tolerated in Our Kingdom Bohemia.’”[[13]](#footnote-13) This resulted in many being forced to move elsewhere. These anti-Jewish policies of Maria Theresia created an atmosphere of limited, if any, Jewish acceptance in this region of the Habsburg domain.

Born into the strict Roman Catholic Habsburg family, Maria Theresia considered all religions except Catholicism inherently immoral, including Judaism.[[14]](#footnote-14) As this belief was reflected throughout Habsburg territory through governmental policy and shared by gentile society, Jewish people would have felt marginalized under her rule. Despite the unwelcoming nature of the Habsburg domains, Jewish communities continued to settle in the region. However, this life was not without difficulties. These included restrictions on trade, general requirements to live in a certain area, in addition to prohibitions against settling in large urban areas, purchasing land, or even testifying against Christians in court. In this regard, they were essentially excluded from the societies they were ‘permitted’ to live in.[[15]](#footnote-15) Despite these exclusions, which continued under Maria Theresia’s rule, some Jews were permitted to stay in parts of Lower Austria, such as Vienna, before the Edict. However, these Jews were from wealthy, influential families. Their economic contribution to society allowed them to live there. Additionally, as pointed out by European social and economic historian, Annemarie Steidl, “Despite the ban on founding their own community, they mostly led a traditional Jewish life.”[[16]](#footnote-16) So while life was legislatively bad for Jewish peoples, their cultural and religious lives went on.

**Economic Status of Lower Austria Before**

The economic state of Austria before 1781 needs to be determined before examining one of the ultimate goals of the Edict, a more efficient economic “use” of Jewish citizens of Lower Austria. While resources and records from this time detailing economic input and output are scarce, some of those that remain allow for the examination of the overall economic state. In this region, particularly within Bohemia, there was a rise in population density in places that specialized in handicrafts, rather than agriculture with the first half of the 1700s.[[17]](#footnote-17) Within the context of Jewish peoples being excluded from cities, or handicraft populations, that is cities or towns which specialized in craft production, such as textiles and machinery, rather than mining or agricultural work, it can be inferred that these rising populations did not contain many or even any Jewish peoples.

Before the Edict was issued, Vienna was already a major centre for proto-industrial production.[[18]](#footnote-18) Producing both luxury and consumer goods, Viennese markets produced commodities for the broad range of social strata. Additionally, the Monarchy’s liberal economic policy in relation to industry and trade as well as the structural transformation of the commerical sector within Vienna added to this bustling market.[[19]](#footnote-19) For instance, Viennese scholar of economic and social history Aris Kafantogias’s analysis of the body linen market within Vienna from 1760-1823 shows how this specific market alone, purchased by all social sectors, was fundamental in building the material world of the Viennese. As a consistently produced and consumed product, analysis of its consumption patterns indicates how these body linens were essential to Viennese markets as well as the citizens that produced them. From an analysis of just one example of a consistently produced and consumed product made within Vienna, it is evident that Vienna contained a broad range of craftsmen and producers. As such, the city, even in 1760 was able to produce numerous products to export on a national scale.

Within this context it is evident that with this Edict, Joseph II planned on further broadening this market. Bringing in Jewish citizens to learn crafts and trades, open factories, and also live within Vienna would allow for a larger and therefore more profitable market. Essentially making Jewish citizens employees of the state, Joseph was hopeful in his implementation of this “toleration” Edict.

**Joseph II**

To give a clear analysis of the 1782 Edict of Toleration, an examination of Joseph II, the man behind the Edict, is necessary. While Joseph and Maria Theresia had a strong relationship, their disagreements on matters such as religious teachings and toleration set them apart.[[20]](#footnote-20) While Maria Theresia “loathed and suspected [Jews] of being peculiarly disloyal,” Joseph took on a more liberal approach, with a focus on economic gain through religious tolerance.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In the state his mother had left the empire, there was much room for Joseph II to make it more welcoming for Jewish peoples. Though Catholic as well, Joseph attempted to secularize many aspects the kingdom. Throughout his reign he would promote many other acts in which secularization was a key factor, for instance the termination of one third of Austrian monasteries in 1782.[[22]](#footnote-22) As an ‘enlightened despot,’ creating a state in which politics and law were for the most part his ideal.[[23]](#footnote-23) He believed that doing such would ensure higher economic output and efficiency for the nation, as more time, money and effort would be devoted to political and social factors rather than religious ones.[[24]](#footnote-24) Throughout Joseph II’s life, the theme of “existing for the state,” often recurs. For instance, In Joseph’s ‘Principles for every servant of the state,’ or ‘Pastoral Letter,’ he states, “National or religious differences must not make the slightest difference in all this and all must feel themselves to be brothers in a single monarchy, all striving to be useful to each other.”[[25]](#footnote-25) While this statement professes religious toleration and the equality of all nationalities and religions, including Jewish people, it retains the underlying element common in Joseph’s line of thinking. That is, the idea of all subjects of the dynasty being ‘useful.’ Religious toleration was similar to Joseph’s reforms of the education system to provide more children with access to education, by which he hoped to create more ‘useful’ citizens, rather than just creating literate ones with improved qualities of life.[[26]](#footnote-26) Essentially, this education provided not just a way to improve literacy and intelligence among citizens, but was rather to prepare them to better produce for the state, economically, socially, and perhaps even politically. This idea that “Everything exists for the state…” evidently included Jewish people.[[27]](#footnote-27) As in the 1782 Edict, Jews became integrated into the societies of Lower Austria not necessarily to provide them with religious toleration, but to make them “more useful and serviceable to the state.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This ‘untouched market’ of Jewish peoples existed to Joseph as an untapped source for profit. In allowing Jewish people more access to society, they thus would contribute more economically.

Wanting to keep the state secular while also professing religious toleration of Jews and Protestants, providing education not for the gain of individuals but rather the state, Joseph existed as a unique ruler among the Habsburgs, especially in terms of his goals for the state.

**Life for Jewish People After the Edict**

Although this Edict had an ultimate goal of secularization and economic efficiency, Catholicism was still to remain the dominant religion of the state. Joseph’s decrees continually stressed this. With “everyone to be told that it was his wish and intention that those unfortunate souls who were not at present Catholics as a result of their ignorance or delusion should be converted,”[[29]](#footnote-29) Jewish peoples were not tolerated religiously at an equal level of Catholics, nor was that the goal. By creating a position of “near-equality with the followers of other foreign religions…,” Judaism was to be tolerated to the degree of the usefulness of its peoples.[[30]](#footnote-30) As each individual territory had its own specific laws, however, this Edict was not enforced to the same degree throughout Lower Austria. Due to the differing legislations of the Länderstellen, the Monarchy’s various provinces, most legislation for Jews remained the same as before, with painful restrictions until 1848 or even 1867.[[31]](#footnote-31) Towns were told of the plan to implement this Edict, such as Czernowitz, Vienna, and Lemberg. However, this plan was two-fold in that while these cities were to make preparations for its implementation, they were “reminded also ‘to expel all foreign, useless, and harmful Jewish vagrants.’”[[32]](#footnote-32) Here again we see the idea of usefulness. The Edict was not about welcoming Jews as Jewish subjects to cities, as in that case all Jews would be welcome, including Jewish immigrants. Instead, by barring such immigration without a reviewed application, only the ‘useful’ Jews could take permanent residence, not any ‘foreign, useless, or harmful’ Jews.[[33]](#footnote-33) In addition, many, including those in charge of implementing this Edict disliked it. The secularizing nature of the Edict ‘was widely seen as undermining the privileged status enjoyed by Catholicism as the state’s established religion, and consequently called forth a storm of popular and political resentment.’[[34]](#footnote-34) No doubt, many in the towns that Jewish peoples were now allowed to reside and work in felt challenged by new business and religious competition. Though the toleration aimed to make Jews in a sense less Jewish by integrating them into society, the distinctions between Jews and non-Jews likely still felt clear. The dislike of Jewish peoples, created through centuries of Habsburg rulers and their legislation, created an atmosphere of virulent antisemitism that no doubt still remained. Even Joseph’s own goal of making them more ‘Austrian’ through tolerating them in the hopes they would integrate fully into society by converting to Catholicism, indicates how, although it is an Edict of Toleration, there was still a prejudicial agenda.

While the acceptance of Jews within Vienna and Lower Austria, as well as the overall relationship between Jews and Christians fluctuated over time, it is clear that class played a large role in the status of Jews both before and after the Edict was promulgated. It is clear beforehand in the records, which largely referenced the higher classes that both elite Jews and Christians, “[had] mutual influence regarding tastes and lifestyle… at the highest social level.”[[35]](#footnote-35) We see much of the inconsistency regarding the acceptance of Jews in Lower Austria centered around this issue of class. After the early fourteenth century, following their integration and welcoming into Viennese society, they became seen as purely a source of ducal revenue, leading up to the Vienna Gesera of 1420/21.[[36]](#footnote-36) Centuries later, Joseph II welcomed them back in with the goal of economic gain. This inconsistency indicates Jews in Lower Austria, particularly in Vienna, were often merely sources of economic revenue. They were valued as an individual community with their own distinct culture and religion only to the extent that it could provide a convenient scapegoat, as under Duke Albert V. Jewish life in Lower Austria leading up to the 1782 Edict was one of luck and chance. If a Jew lived before the time of Albert V, they likely had a life in which they could work, live, and practice their religion in a relatively accepting society. Afterwards, however, they could be exiled or killed simply for their religion. The implementation of this Edict allowed for an improved standard of living and acceptance into society, even if this was allowed only on the basis of broader economic gain.

**Results of the Edict**

As such, the Edict serves more as a starting point for the full legal emancipation for Jewish peoples rather than a complete integration. Allowing Jewish people access to a larger number of careers and trades, and “exhort[ing] them to establish manufactures and factories,” introduced them to a much larger economic and entrepreneurial world.[[37]](#footnote-37) Additionally, the Edict abolished the personal toll fee on foreign Jews, the wearing of yellow badges indicating their religious affiliations, and the ban on carrying swords. Removing this tax and other detrimental religious restrictions created more equality between the differing religious groups, allowing Jewish peoples in Lower Austria to gain much more independence and free will in regard to their identity. Though this Edict served as way to make “Jews more useful and serviceable to the State, principally through according their children better instruction and enlightenment”, it nonetheless provided a starting point for the complete religious toleration of Jewish peoples.[[38]](#footnote-38) Their newfound ability to open factories, engage in retail and wholesale business, attend Christian schools and universities only furthered this economic activity.

By the early 19th century, the archduchy of Lower Austria, including Vienna, “contained the largest, wealthiest, and most self-confident Jewish community in the Habsburg Monarchy.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The presence of this large, wealthy, and pious group of Jewish people in Lower Austria at this time could not have happened without the Toleration Edict. Its existence allowed for the integration of Jewish peoples into society and allowed for a larger Jewish presence within cities in Lower Austria. However, while this Edict may have allowed for Jewish toleration on paper, its effectiveness among the people remains up to question. While by the early 19th century these relatively new Jewish migrants were wealthy, antisemitism among Lower Austrians is evident. As a reaction to this Jewish acculturation into the upper class, the society known as the Lower Austrian Estate of knights adopted a statue in 1808 barring those of Jewish ancestry from admission, essentially disallowing Jews from becoming nobles.[[40]](#footnote-40) This 1808 statute was unique in that no other similar legislation existed in central and western Europe in the 1800s, and shows how antisemitic sentiments remained even 18 years after the emperor’s death.

Following the implementation of the Edict, there is a considerable rise in the Jewish population of Lower Austria, particularly in Vienna. During Maria Theresia’s rule, the Jewish population in Vienna was between 450 to 600 residents, or around 40 families. After the Edict was introduced and integrated from 1782 to 1802, this number rose to around 1400, or 132 families.[[41]](#footnote-41) It is clear from this rise in immigration that the Edict caused Jewish people to feel more acceptance and agency to move into larger and more urban areas.

**Economic Status of Lower Austria after the Edict**

While Lower Austria can be referred to as an industrial society from the Middle Ages due to its production of both consumer and luxury goods on a large scale, in addition to its commerical relations in far northern and eastern Europe, its growth as an economic powerhouse within Europe began in the early 19th century.[[42]](#footnote-42) The integration of Jewish peoples into Lower Austrian society as made possible by the 1782 Edict no doubt added onto this economic success. Their inclusion into the mainstream economic sphere of this society, in particular their abilities to open factories, engage in retail and wholesale business, attend Christian schools and universities, as well as hire Christian servants, as made possible by the Edict, minutely added to the economic success of Lower Austrian society, especially during and after the Napoleonic Wars. However, the degree of this impact is debatable.

While Jewish peoples being added into the aforementioned populations that specialized in handicraft production no doubt added to their overall numbers, it is hard to determine whether or not this addition made a huge economic impact. As well, other areas at this time, such as Bohemia, had already been undergoing major industrial centralization and extensive urbanization.[[43]](#footnote-43) Although Bohemia, though geographically close, is not Lower Austria, it can be concluded that the 1782 Edict had similar effects in terms of industrial centralization and urbanization within their citiesThe move of Jewish peoples from rural, agricultural areas, into more prosperous, textile or handicraft-based areas can be seen as having little economic impact on Lower Austria, as deduced by comparing it with economic records from Bohemia.

Nevertheless, while the arrival of Jewish families seems not to have affected Austrian economics on a macroscopic level in accordance with its seeming continuous economic growth, the economies should be examined on a microscopic level as well. As mentioned above, following the 1782 Edict, the archduchy of Lower Austria contained the largest, most wealthy, and most self-confident Jewish community in the Habsburg Monarchy in the early 19th century. As a direct result of this Edict, many Jewish people, now allowed into cities, quickly amassed wealth, and become prosperous. The state and some individuals responded to this newfound wealth by accepting them socially. For instance, the first ennoblement of a Jew came in 1789, the first granting of a baronial title in 1798, and marriages between high-ranking Roman Catholic noblemen to daughters of Jewish houses beginning in the 1780s.[[44]](#footnote-44) Additionally, they also became ‘useful’ in another regard to the state. Following the emperor’s death in 1790, the ongoing revolutionary and later Napoleonic wars allowed for the formation and growth of new bankers and wholesalers in Vienna, many of them Jewish. These new Viennese bankers and wholesalers “made large sums available to the cash-strapped state and thereby acquired reputations as ‘patriots’ in the eyes of authorities.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Despite this newfound patriotic title, the Lower Austrian Estate of Knights still decided to bar them from membership in 1808, excluding them from a chance at nobility. As such, it is clear that sentiments regarding the Edict were diverse in nature, during and after Joseph II’s death.

While the Edict allowed for an increase of around 1400 people in Vienna between 1782 and 1802, it must be noted that this number is not a direct indication of the new number of labourers or craftsmen. Taking into account children, the elderly, and non-working men and women, the number of newly introduced workers is much fewer. While this exact number is unknown, it is clear that there was not a huge surge of new workers in Vienna or the rest of Lower Austria during this time.

**Conclusion**

The creation of the Edict of Toleration was one of colliding religious beliefs and values, especially for the deeply Christian Joseph II. As Derek Beales, a British historian with a focus on Joseph II says, “The tension between the desire to be rid of the Jews and the need to retain them persisted into Joseph II’s reign and beyond.”[[46]](#footnote-46) It is clear that Joseph II went through with the Edict of Toleration not because he held positive attitudes towards other religions. While more liberal than his mother and consistent with his enlightened absolutist ideology, Josephinism, he permitted Jews to stay, but disagreed with their religion as a whole. As a devout Catholic himself, he believed his person to be appointed by God but also retained that God, “must have given him the necessary capacity to rule and the opportunity to achieve appropriate reforms.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Creating this piece of legislation, which served to secularize and enhance economic activity in the dynasty, allowed for the greater acceptance of the Jewish peoples in Lower Austria. However, with the construction of synagogues only permitted in some spaces, how tolerant was this Edict? Allowing Jews full religious autonomy would have let them pray in a local synagogue, perform their rituals and traditions, observe Sabbath, and more. The Edict allowed them enhanced economic and indeed social opportunities within major cities, such as Vienna, but still limiting their religious practice to the domestic sphere. As well, the Edict can be viewed as not meeting its economic goals in some respects. With Austria retaining domestic and small-scale enterprises after the implementation of this Edict and the subsequent arrival of Jews into larger towns, the assumption can be made that the economic output of Lower Austria did not increase significantly. Regardless, as economic growth within Austria was continuous throughout 1782, it can also be assumed that the Jewish populations had a small economic effect simply with their integration into majorly Catholic cities.[[48]](#footnote-48) However, the later economic affects they would have in opening banks during the Napoleonic Wars allowed them to retain a position of great economic assistance during the latter 18th century. These assumptions of Jewish peoples’ effects on the Austrian economy are dependant on whether it is examined with a macroscopic or microscopic view. When macroscopically examining Austria’s entire economy over a long period of time, the arrival of Jewish populations seemingly had little to no effect. On the other hand, for example, if one were to examine the economic impact of the arrival of Jewish residents within a small Lower Austrian town two years into their move, change would be much more noticeable.

Some, such as Beales, suggest that this Edict, and Joseph II’s other measures were ones of emancipation, rather than toleration, for instance, in allowing them to attend Christian schools and universities, as their conditions were improved, rather than newly allowed.[[49]](#footnote-49) As part of a series of toleration edicts starting in October 1781 stretching through to May 1789, this legislation is unique to the rule of Joseph II as emperor. Throughout the history of the Habsburg monarchy they used religion as a way to not only consolidate their power, but also spread it, but here there is almost a reversal. By ‘removing’ religion, such as converting or destroying religious structures, such as monasteries and nunneries, suppressing contemplative orders, and creating more equality between the religions, as through the Edict of Toleration, Joseph II used religion, to exert power onto the Habsburg empire. Additionally, this toleration Edict itself has a unique place in both Jewish history. Coming into creation during the rise of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment movement across Europe (1770s-1881), it marked an important beginning stage in promoting Jewish identity in European history. The Edict itself can be viewed as a product of the overall European Enlightenment, introducing new, more liberal ideas in terms of religious acceptance in the nation. In a sense reversing the anti-Jewish society Maria Theresia carried on from her Habsburg forebears, Joseph II brought forward a new beacon of light for the Jewish peoples of Lower Austria. Granting them this toleration, though not put into effect everywhere immediately and for the main purpose of economic gain, established a beginning point for the increased prescence of Jewish peoples in mainstream society. This 1782 Edict of Toleration is a unique historical document, in terms of its timing, as well as its secularizing and economic underpinnings.

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1. Joseph Patrouch, “Where do Noble Families Come From? The Habsburg Example, the Southwestern ‘Germany’ in Flux” (lecture, University of Alberta, Main Campus, Edmonton, AB, January 11, 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Derek Beales, *Joseph II: Against the World, 1780-1790* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 197-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. T.C.W. Blanning, *Joseph II* (London, UK: Longman, 1994), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Joseph II, “Joseph II’s Edict of Toleration for the Jews of Lower Austria (January 2, 1782).” *German History in Documents and Images,* accessed March 8, 2022, GHDI - Document (ghi-dc.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, Issue 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, Issue 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Joseph II, “Joseph II’s Edict,” Issue 18 and 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Blanning, *Joseph II*, 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Joseph II, “Joseph II’s Edict,” Issue 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
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