

Session 1 – October 18 (Beth El Library)

Background information on:

- Mendelssohn's World
 - 18th Century "Prussia"
 - 18th European Judaism
 - 18th Century European Literature and Philosophy
- Mendelssohn's Life and Work
 - Early Life (1729-1745)
 - Becoming Moses Mendelssohn (1745 – 1760)
 - The Jew from Berlin (1760 – 1775)
 - Struggles With Friends and Enemies (1775 – 1786)

Handouts:

Map of Europe 1721

Map of Seven Years War

Timeline of Moses Mendelssohn's Life

Significant Events in 18th c European History

Moses Mendelssohn's Family Tree

Significant Events in 18th c European Jewish History

Optional Reading:

H. Holborn, A History of Modern Germany, 1648 – 1840 (Princeton 1964), Chs. 3-9

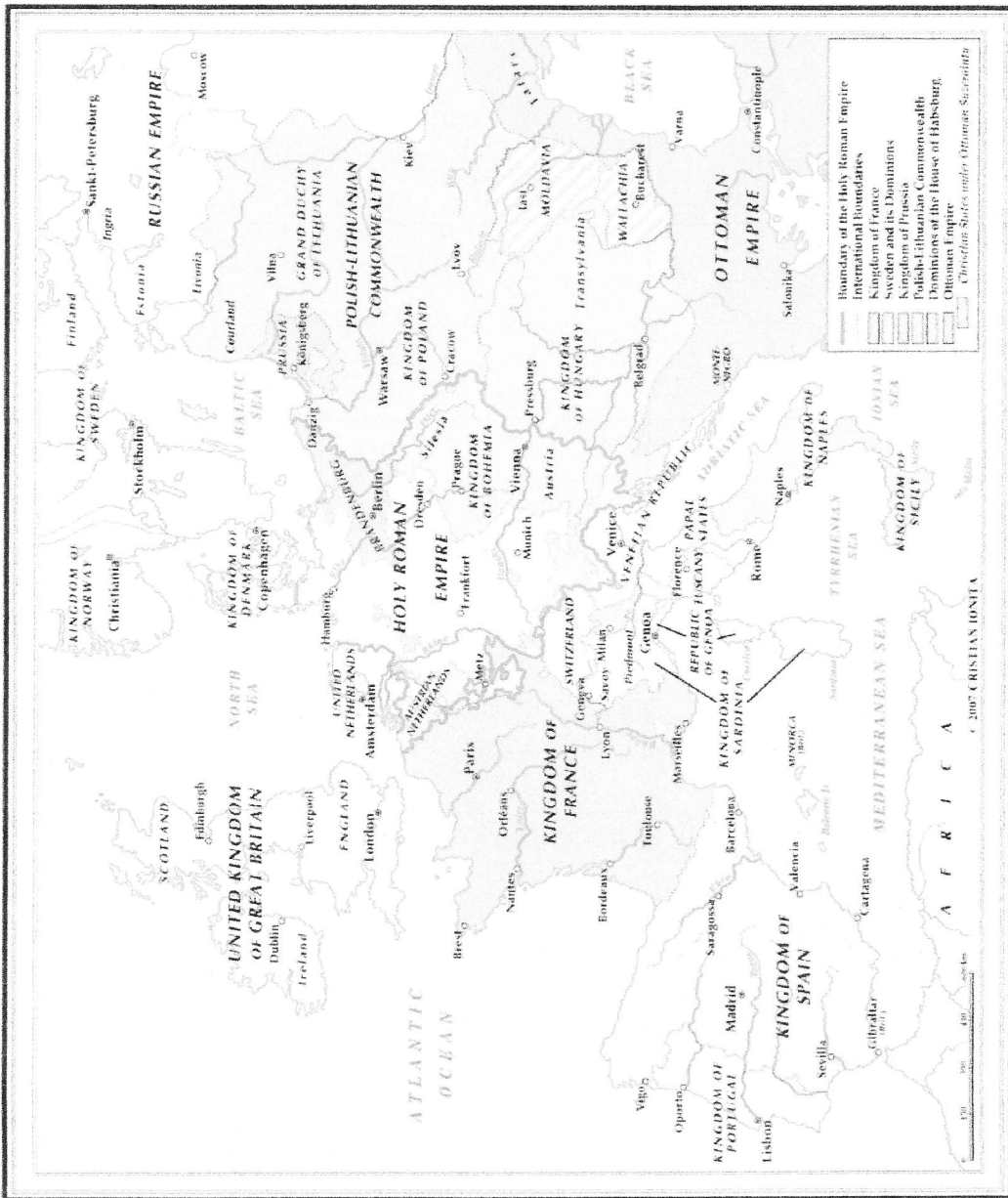
S. Feiner, Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity (tr. A. Berris, Yale 2010)

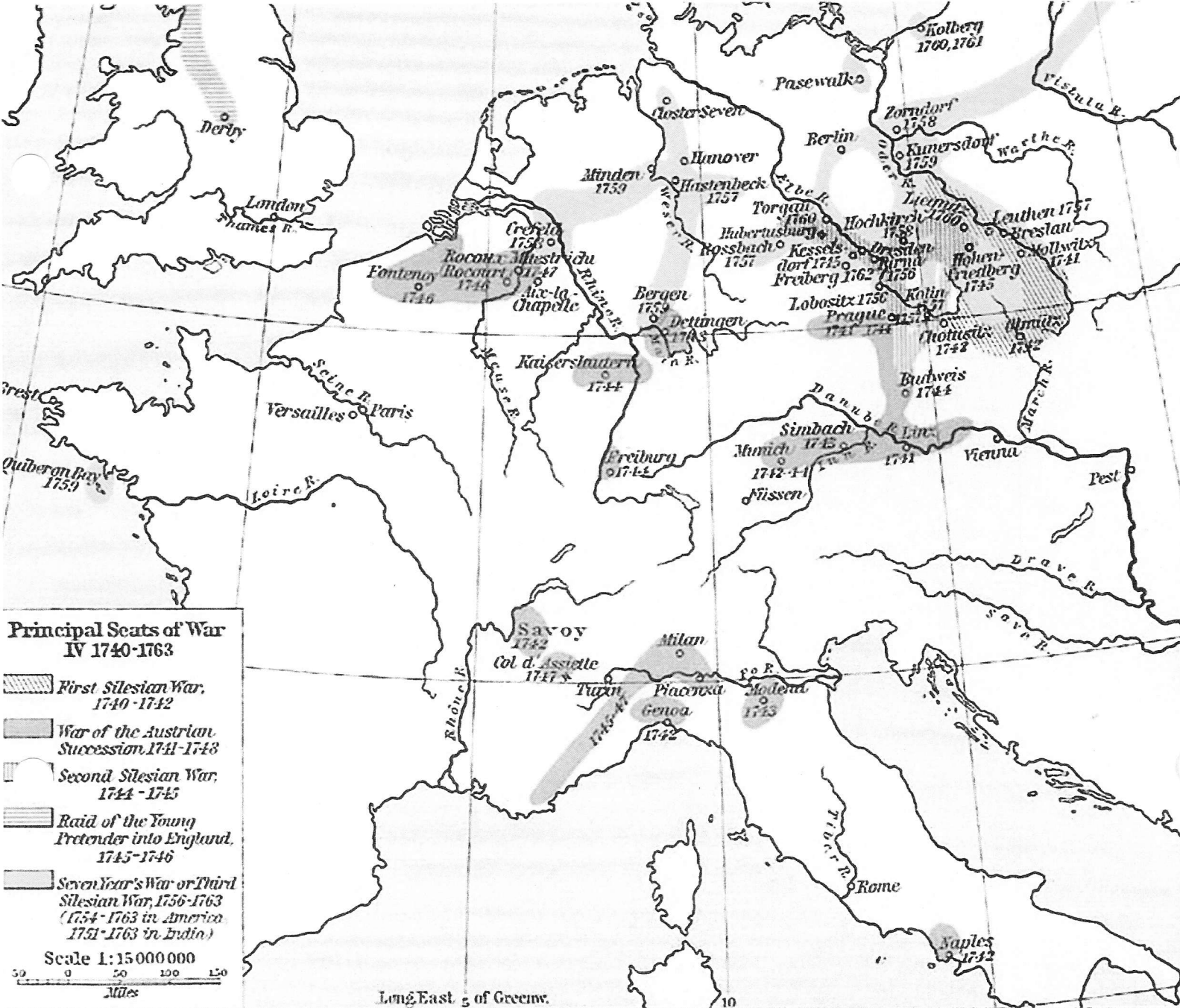
E. Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Updated Ed., Princeton 2009)

I. Berlin, Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder (Reprint Princeton 2003)

A. Elon, The Pity of it All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch 1743 – 1933 (NY 2002), Chs. 1 & 2

EUROPE IN 1721





**Principal Seats of War
IV 1740-1763**

[Diagonal lines] First Silesian War, 1740-1742

[Solid grey] War of the Austrian Succession, 1741-1748

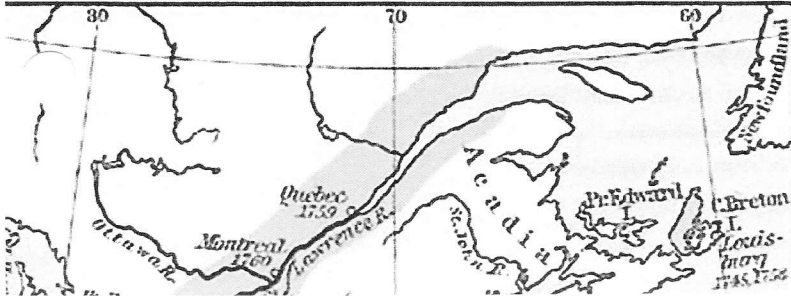
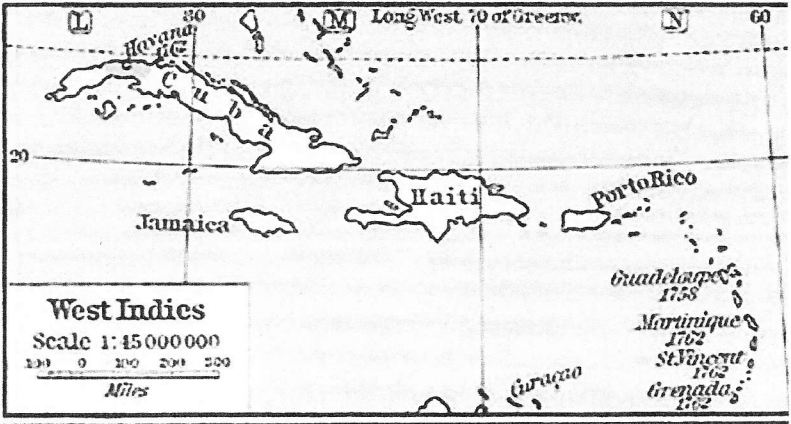
[Horizontal lines] Second Silesian War, 1744-1745

[Vertical lines] Raid of the Young Pretender into England, 1745-1746

[Grid pattern] Seven Year's War or Third Silesian War, 1756-1763 (1754-1763 in America, 1751-1763 in India)

Scale 1:15 000 000

50 0 50 100 150 Miles



Moses Mendelssohn
Selected Dates in 18th Century European Intellectual History

- 1711 – A.A. Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times
- 1715-1720 – A. Pope, translation of the Iliad
- 1716 – G.W. Leibniz dies
- 1726 – Third (final) edition of Newton, Mathematical Principles of Natural Science (“Principia”)
- 1727 – Isaac Newton dies
- 1724 – I. Kant born
- 1729 – G.E. Lessing born
- 1725 - 1740 – Conflict over the philosophy of Christian Wolff
- 1732 – Voltaire, Zaïre
- 1736 – Maupertuis’ expedition to Lapland, geodetic measurements (‘shape of the earth’)
- 1737 – Voltaire, Elements of Newton
- 1740 - Friedrich the Great becomes Prussian ruler
- 1735 – Rameau, “Les Indes Galantes”
- 1740 – S. Richardson, Pamela or Virtue Rewarded
- 1742-45 – E. Young, Night Thoughts
- 1745-1747 – Construction of Sanssouci Palace
- 1748 – Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws
- 1748 – D. Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding
- 1750 – J-J Rousseau, Discourse on the Sciences and Arts
- 1751 – J. L. d’Alembert, Preliminary Discourse for L’Encyclopédie
- 1752 – J-J Rousseau, “Le Devin du Village”
- 1757 – J-J Rousseau, Letter to M. d’Alembert on Spectacles
- 1757 – E. Burke, Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful
- 1762 – J-J Rousseau, Emile
- 1764 – J.J. Winckelmann, History of Art in Antiquity
- 1772 – G. Herder, Treatise on the Origin of Languages
- 1774 – J.W. Goethe, Sorrows of Young Werther
- 1767 – 1769 – G. E. Lessing, Hamburg Dramaturgy
- 1776 – A. Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations
- 1776 – E. Gibbon, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
- 1778 – G. E. Lessing, Education of the Human Race
- 1779 – G. E. Lessing, Nathan the Wise
- 1781 – I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason

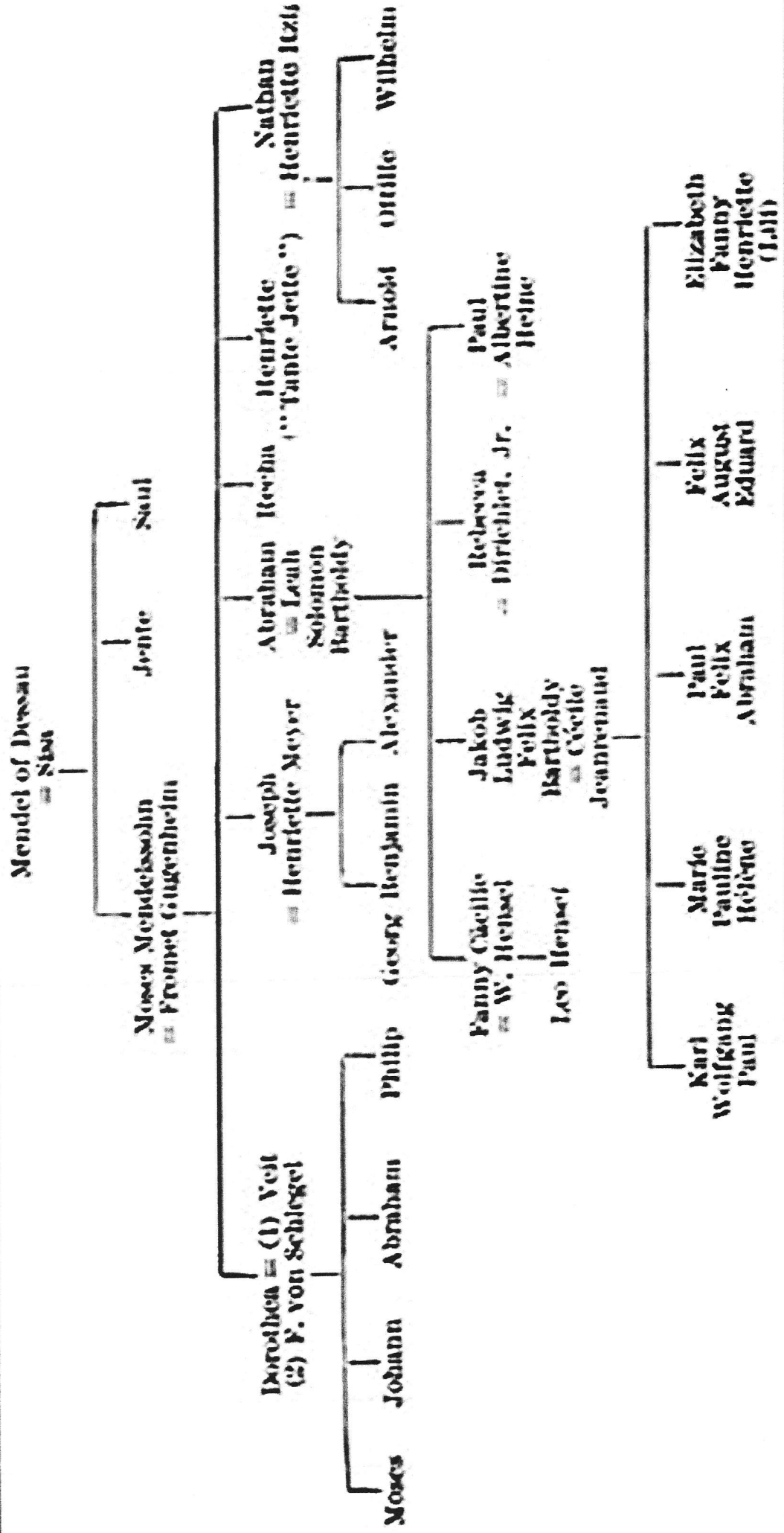
MOSES MENDELSSOHN
TIME LINE

- Pentateuch* and publishes some translations of *Psalms*
- 1784 publishes "On the Question: What does 'to enlighten' mean?"
- 1785 publishes *Morning Hours or Lectures on the Existence of God*
- 1786 dies January 4; final publication *To the Friends of Lessing: An Appendix to Mr. Jacobi's Correspondence on the Doctrine of Spinoza* appears January 26

MOSES MENDELSSOHN

TIME LINE

- 1729 born September 6 in Dessau, Anhalt-Dessau, Germany
- 1743 follows Rabbi Frankel to Berlin and studies with the Maimonides scholar, Israel Samoscz
- 1745- Meets A.S. Gumpertz, learns German, French, Greek, Latin, mathematics,
1754 philosophy, tutors in various households
- 1754 becomes accountant for firm of silk manufacturer, Isaak Bernhard; begins lifelong friendship with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
- 1755 publishes anonymously *Philosophical Dialogues, On Sentiments*” and (with Lessing) *Pope, a Metaphysician!*
- 1756 publishes anonymously *Thoughts on Probability* and a translation with critical evaluation of Rousseau's second *Discourse*
- 1757 publishes anonymously “Considerations on the Sources and the Connections of Fine Arts and Sciences” in *Library of Fine Sciences and Fine Arts* which he co-edits with Lessing and Friedrich Nicolai
- 1758 publishes anonymously “Considerations of the Sublime and the Naïve in the Fine Sciences” in *Library of Fine Sciences and Fine Arts*
publishes *Kohelet Mussar*, a Hebrew language periodical that appears for only two issues, the first of its kind in Europe
- 1760 composes Hebrew commentary on Moses Maimonides' *Logical Terms*
- 1761 publishes *Philosophical Writings*, containing his previously published essays together with a new essay, “Rhapsody or Additions to the Letters on the Sentiments.” Rabbi Eybeschütz declines to give Mendelssohn formal title of ‘morenu’ or ‘haver’
- 1762 marries Fromet Gugenheim
- 1763 awarded prize by the Royal Academy of Sciences for “On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences” (published a year later)
- 1767 publishes *Phaedo: or On the Immortality of the Soul, in Three Dialogues*
- 1768 completes Hebrew commentary on *Ecclesiastes*; assumes co-management of Bernhard firm with Bernhard's widow
- 1769 publishes *Letter to Lavater* in response to Lavater's challenge to refute or embrace Charles Bonnet's arguments for Christianity
- 1771 publishes second edition of *Philosophical Writings*; onset of illness; denial of membership in Royal Academy
- 1777 publishes third edition of *Philosophical Writings*; intervenes successfully in Dresden to prevent expulsion of needy members of Jewish community
- 1780 publishes Bi’ur, translation of *Genesis* plus commentary
- 1781 publishes Bi’ur of *Exodus*
- 1783 publishes *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* and completes Bi’ur of



Moses Mendelssohn
Selected Dates of Significance among European Jews, 18th Century

1690 - 1764 – R. Jonathan Eybeschütz: Prague and Altona (Hamburg)

1697 – 1776 – R. Jacob Emden: Altona (Hamburg)

1751 – 1764 - Emden/Eybeschütz controversy

1720 - 1797- R. Elijah of Vilna (Vilna Gaon)

1698? – 1760 – R. Israel ben Eliezer (Baal Shem Tov)

1710? – 1772 – R. Dov Ber of Mezeritch

1772 – First Partition of Poland

1753 – 1800 – Solomon Maimon

Introduction

IT is the nature of great events to obscure the great events that came before them. The Seven Years War in Europe is seen but dimly through revolutionary convulsions and Napoleonic tempests; and the same contest in America is half lost to sight behind the storm-cloud of the War of Independence. Few at this day see the momentous issues involved in it, or the greatness of the danger that it averted. The strife that armed all the civilized world began here. "Such was the complication of political interests," says Voltaire, "that a cannon-shot fired in America could give the signal that set Europe in a blaze." Not quite. It was not a cannon-shot, but a volley from the hunting-pieces of a few backwoodsmen, commanded by a Virginian youth, George Washington.

To us of this day, the result of the American part of the war seems a foregone conclusion. It was far from being so; and very far from being so regarded by our forefathers. The numerical superiority of the British colonies was offset by organic weaknesses fatal to vigorous and united action. Nor at the outset did they, or the mother-country, aim at conquering Canada, but only at pushing back her boundaries. Canada—using the name in its restricted sense—was a position of great strength; and even when her dependencies were overcome, she could hold her own against forces far superior. Armies could reach her only by three routes,—the Lower St. Lawrence on the east, the Upper St. Lawrence on the west, and Lake Champlain on the south. The first access was guarded by a fortress almost impregnable by nature, and the second by a long chain of dangerous rapids; while the third offered a series of points easy to defend. During this same war, Frederic of Prussia held his ground triumphantly against greater odds, though his kingdom was open on all sides to attack.

It was the fatuity of Louis XV. and his Pompadour that made the conquest of Canada possible. Had they not broken the traditional policy of France, allied themselves to Austria, her ancient enemy, and plunged needlessly into the European

war, the whole force of the kingdom would have been turned, from the first, to the humbling of England and the defence of the French colonies. The French soldiers left dead on inglorious Continental battle-fields could have saved Canada, and perhaps made good her claim to the vast territories of the West.

But there were other contingencies. The possession of Canada was a question of diplomacy as well as of war. If England conquered her, she might restore her, as she had lately restored Cape Breton. She had an interest in keeping France alive on the American continent. More than one clear eye saw, at the middle of the last century, that the subjection of Canada would lead to a revolt of the British colonies. So long as an active and enterprising enemy threatened their borders, they could not break with the mother-country, because they needed her help. And if the arms of France had prospered in the other hemisphere; if she had gained in Europe or Asia territories with which to buy back what she had lost in America, then, in all likelihood, Canada would have passed again into her hands.

The most momentous and far-reaching question ever brought to issue on this continent was: Shall France remain here, or shall she not? If, by diplomacy or war, she had preserved but the half, or less than the half, of her American possessions, then a barrier would have been set to the spread of the English-speaking races; there would have been no Revolutionary War; and for a long time, at least, no independence. It was not a question of scanty populations strung along the banks of the St. Lawrence; it was—or under a government of any worth it would have been—a question of the armies and generals of France. America owes much to the imbecility of Louis XV. and the ambitious vanity and personal dislikes of his mistress.

The Seven Years War made England what she is. It crippled the commerce of her rival, ruined France in two continents, and blighted her as a colonial power. It gave England the control of the seas and the mastery of North America and India, made her the first of commercial nations, and prepared that vast colonial system that has planted new Englands in every quarter of the globe. And while it made England what

she is, it supplied to the condition of their greatness.

Before entering on a look at the parties to

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dition of their greatness, if not of their national existence.

Before entering on the story of the great contest, we will
look at the parties to it on both sides of the Atlantic.