

Jérôme [Hieronymus] Napoleon, King of Westphalia, “Decree Abolishing Fees Imposed on the Jews” (January 27, 1808)

Abstract

In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte’s regime in France took a step backward from the French Revolution’s unconditional conferral, in 1791, of civil and religious equality upon the Jews. Nevertheless, his brother Jérôme [Hieronymus], who ruled the German satellite Kingdom of Westphalia, stuck with revolutionary precedent. As King of Westphalia, he issued the following decree, which abolished seigneurial taxes on Jewish subjects and travelers and extended freedom of occupation and marriage to the Jews. It won more than a few German Jews over to the cult of Napoleon.

Source

We, Hieronymus [Jérôme] Napoléon, etc.

in accordance with the tenth and fifteenth articles of the Constitution of November 15, 1807, and on the basis of the report by Our provisional Minister of Justice and the Interior, and after hearing the views of Our State Council,

have decreed and so order the following:

Art. 1. Our subjects of the Mosaic faith shall, in our lands, enjoy the same rights and liberties as all Our other subjects.

Art. 2. Those Jews who travel through our kingdom or sojourn here, without being Our subjects, shall be accorded the same rights and liberties given to any other foreigner.

Art. 3. In consequence of the above, all imposts and taxes which apply only to Jews, by whatever provenance or title, are herewith wholly abolished. Accordingly, it is forbidden for all noblemen, feudal lords, and other landholders under Our sovereignty to further levy these taxes, or to have them levied by others. Otherwise they shall be held legally liable to make full restitution, similarly to those found guilty of blackmail.

Art. 4. They [the Jews] may, without having to obtain the special permits that were previously required, marry, care for the education and domestic arrangements of their children, or transfer property to them. However, they are obliged to carry out all such actions according to the rules and regulations of the Code of Napoleon.

Art. 5. They are equally free to settle in any city, or any other locale they favor, and to set up trade there, be it understood that they give appropriate notice to the municipal authorities and that they obey the statutes of the guilds and trades they wish to join. [...]

Source: *Bulletin der Gesetze und Decrete des Königreichs Westphalen*. Volume 1. Kassel: Luckhardt, 2nd edition, 1810, pp. 359–61; reprinted in Walter Demel and Uwe Puschner, eds., *Von der*

Französische Revolution bis zum Wiener Kongreß 1789–1815, Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung, ed. Rainer A. Müller, Volume 6. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1995, pp. 208–09.

Translation: Richard Levy

Recommended Citation: Jérôme [Hieronymus] Napoleon, King of Westphalia, “Decree Abolishing Fees Imposed on the Jews” (January 27, 1808), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/the-holy-roman-empire-1648-1815/ghdi:document-3651>> [July 16, 2024].