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BEYOND THE PALE: THE JEWISH ENCOUNTER WITH LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA, By Ayse Dietrich*, Published by: University of California Press, California. Written by Benjamin Nathans, Year of Publishing: 2004. Subject Area: History of the Jews in Late Imperial Russia. Book Type: History, Jewish Studies. Total Number of Pages: 424. ISBN: 9780520242326, \$34.95, Paperback.

The book *Beyond the Pale*^[1]: *the Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, consists of List of Maps, Illustrations, and Tables, Acknowledgements, List of Abbreviations, Introduction, four Chapters, a Conclusion, Bibliography and Index.

The discrimination and anti-Semitic beliefs and attitudes that were directed against Russia's Jews began very early in the history of Russia and continued till 1917. The negative connotations about the Jews in Russian literature can be traced back to the 12th century chronicle called *the Tale of Bygone Years*, to the story of Vladimir's choosing Orthodox Christianity. "According to the chronicle, Vladimir sent representatives to investigate all the options available to the Rus. The tale explains that Vladimir and his advisers considered Judaism unacceptable because they found it inexplicable that the God of the Jews, if He were truly powerful and favored His people, would have allowed them to be deprived of a country of their own".^[2]

The Jews have long been treated as outsiders undeserving of a place within Russian society. In 1791, Catherine II (the Great) authorized the creation of the "Pale of Settlement"^[3], an area in the western part of the Empire where her Jewish subjects would be reside, by law. Jews were forbidden to live within 50 kilometers of the Pale's western border.

In the 19th century the government was a major actor in fomenting a wave of pogroms which were then followed by a series of decrees limiting Jewish access to secondary and higher education, barring them from government service, denying them the right to vote in *zemstvo*^[4] or city дума elections, and discriminating against them in a numerous other ways. Stricter restrictions on where Jews were allowed to reside forced thousands from their homes.

In the Introduction, “The Russian-Jewish Encounter”, the author starts with the sentence “When I was a little girl, the world was divided into two parts; namely, Polotzk, the place where I lived, and a strange land called Russia”, an excerpt taken from Mary Antin’s autobiography, *The Promised Land*, Chapter I “Within the Pale” which show how Russian society was divided and how the Jewish community was marginalized.

The author states that his book documents the encounter between Jews and Russians, the factors in Jewish integration into Russian society, and the role of individuals, social groups, and the imperial state in this process. He argues that Jewish integration into Russian society began well before the Revolution of 1917, and that its origins were evident before the Bolsheviks altered the course of Russian history.

He dates the formal beginning of contact between the Russians and the Jews formally with the Russian annexation of eastern Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. This act resulted in the Romanovs unwittingly gaining some half a million Jewish subjects. However, this event marked the beginning only of tsarist administration of the Jews. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the growing pressures from the center and during the Russification policy, that Jews began to speak and read Russian, to migrate to the empire’s Russian regions, and to become a part of Russia’s social order. Not until the 1860s did the term “Russian Jew” (*russkii evrei*) become commonplace, and by the end of the nineteenth century the Jews became the most important subject of nationalities policy.

Part I, “The Problem of Emancipation under the Old Regime”, includes two chapters: “1-Jews and the Imperial Social Hierarchy”, and “2-The Genesis of Selective Integration”.

In Chapter I, the author first explains how the Jews involuntarily migrated from West and Central Europe to Russia and became subjects of the Empire; why the Jews came to Poland and the Ottoman Empire, but not Russia. He then describes how Russia came to the Jews at the end of the eighteenth century by expanding its territory westward and annexing large portions of Poland between 1772 and 1795 where the Jews had achieved a degree of political and social autonomy. Chapter I also highlights the status of the Jews in the Empire after the annexation of the territory; the European style top-down status of social estates (*soslovie*) which only began to emerge at the end of the eighteenth century with the partitions of Poland under an autocratic system; the registration of the newly acquired Jewish subjects as urban residents and the privileges granted to “useful” Jews and their restriction to living in the western and southern borderlands, away from the Russian interior. The author also examines Nicholas’s intention to break down Jewish autonomy through state-sponsored “merging”(*sliianie*); the trauma related to the imposition of the draft, riots and attacks on *kahal* authorities; the result of the military draft that weakened internal Jewish authority; and the establishment of the Pale of Permanent Jewish Settlement^[5] in 1835 by Nicholas that formalized the restrictions on Jewish residence. The chapter then goes on to discuss Kiselev’s Committee for the Determination of Measures for the Fundamental Transformation of the Jews in Russia (1840-1863); the abolishment of *Kahal* in 1844 and the effects of the state-sponsored schools; Gintsburg’s achievement of obtaining rights for the Jewish community and adapting them to the surrounding society; and the emergence of wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs and their effects on economic policies.

Chapter II describes the abolishment of Nicholas’s conscription policy; the issue of gradual

integration during the Great Reforms of Alexander II; the rights Jewish merchants and other select groups within the Jewish population such as students, retired soldiers, writers and artisans gained through the Jewish merchants' petitions; the reforms in the Jewish community introduced during the Great Reforms, and the social vocabulary used to denote the integration of estates.

Part II, "The Jews of St. Petersburg", includes three chapters: "3-Language, Ethnicity, and Urban Space", "4-Conflict and Community", "5-The Geography of Jewish Politics".

Chapter III examines the situation of Jews who settled in the Russian interior, learned Russian and adapted to Russian ways of life. The author discusses how the largest Jewish community moved outside the Pale to St. Petersburg, to the "Window on Russia", by taking advantage of the residential privileges offered by the policy of selective integration; and how they became the most influential Jewish community in Russia proper. He then discusses the meaning of "native language" and its relation to ethnicity. The author describes how the Jews who came to St. Petersburg as genuinely certified artisans or merchants, or in other approved categories, who were engaged in pursuits considered "useful", often found themselves unable to make a living in their stated professions and therefore turned to different occupations, particularly petty trade. By doing so they lost their legal right to reside outside the Pale and were subject to expulsion. This chapter also describes family and gender roles, especially women within the Jewish community, and the assimilation seen in linguistic practices and the adoption of Russian as a native language. There is also a discussion of the emerging Jewish elite who gained prominence as self-appointed mediators for Russian Jews, and who sought to assert their authority throughout the Pale by domination Jewish communal institutions in the capital.

In Chapter IV, the author describes the new image of the Jew (plutocracy) as modern, cosmopolitan, and very successful urban professions during the Great Reforms; their apparent self-distancing from less prosperous Jews that was a mystery to Jews in the Pale and to non-Jews; and their relations with the state authorities. The Jews who fit this new image resided in St. Petersburg and seem to have mixed very little with the city's predominantly Russian population on a social level. In the city that was regarded as the "window on Russia" the Jews remained spectators. The author goes on to discuss the struggle to build communal institutions and a synagogue in St. Petersburg, an effort garnered intense official scrutiny by the tsarist government. He also examines the social and religious tensions present at all social levels of the city's Jewish population, and how St. Petersburg's Jewish elites became the self-appointed leaders of Russian Jewry as a whole.

In Chapter V, the author examines how Odessa became the first center of an emerging Russian-Jewish culture, displacing St. Petersburg, and the geography of Jewish life. He continues by discussing the results of the selective integration that produced wealth and (secular) learning among St. Petersburg's Jews, but was ultimately intended to achieve their active participation in, and integration into Russian society. This is followed by the controversies related to the Vilna Commission and military service, the period of inertia in official Jewish policy during the selective integration; and the origins of the pogroms of 1881-82 triggered by the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. The author claims that the pogroms' effects have not been reexamined; and he criticizes contemporary descriptions of the pogrom as "spontaneous" rather than consciously manipulated antipathies in certain sectors of the population.

Part III, "Jews, Russians, and the Imperial University", includes two chapters: "6-The University as

Melting Pot?”, and “7- A Silent Pogrom”.

In Chapter VI, the author is interested in the issues related to the influx of Jews into secular higher education; the reasons for the success of Jewish students in the imperial university, and the important consequences of the role of the Enlightenment in the Russian–Jewish encounter. He then compares the open, egalitarian and secular student atmosphere in Russia with their counterparts in Central Europe where there was a requirement to take a Christian oath. He also introduces the reasons for the Jewish educational system that produced high literacy levels among both men and women that were higher than those of the Russian Orthodox and Catholics; the sources of finance to obtain higher education and the distribution of funds; the type of Russification policy that was pursued by the state; and the special values and cultural norms that the government wanted Jewish students to adopt; and the self-organized Jewish student associations which first appeared in 1881. He also talks about the student demonstrations in cities across Russia between 1899 and 1905; the students’ self-perception that developed under the influence of the Russian intelligentsia and the collective identity of Russian-Jewish students in the aftermath of the failed 1905 revolution.

In Chapter VII, the author examines the assimilation of the Jews into Russian society through secular education, as well as the controversies and Judeophobia against the influx of Jews into Russia’s institutions of higher education. He discusses the arguments made against the Jews – that they have a negative moral influence on their Christian counterparts; that they support the revolutionary movement, and that a large Jewish presence in higher education threatened balance of power. This is followed by sections on the decisions taken in 1877 not to extend the privileges of university graduates, and the pogroms in 1881; the effect of ethnically based quotas introduced by the government targeting Jews and Poles; the activities of a broad network of Jewish student organizations across European Russia; and the impact an anti-Semitic play performed at St. Petersburg University had on relations between Russian and Jewish students.

Part IV, “In the Court of Gentiles”, includes two chapters: “8-The Judicial Reform and Jewish Citizenship”, and “9- Ethnicity and Civil Society: The Russian Legal Profession”.

In the Chapter VIII, the author talks about impact of judicial reforms on relations between Jews and Russians which broke with the tradition of official discrimination against Jews, pointing out that Jewish lawyers were leading advocates during integration in the 80s. The author emphasizes three areas that were reshaped by the introduction of juridical categories and norms: “the attempt to create a usable narrative of the Russian-Jewish past, the struggle for emancipation, and the search for new Jewish identity in a reformed multinational state”. This chapter also deals with the problems of the historiography of the narrative legal history of Russian Jewry, and examines the status of Jewish lawyers and their freedom within their profession. He concludes with a discussion of the controversies surrounding the issue of restrictions on the admission of Jews to the bar that emerged from within the profession itself.

The Conclusion, “The Russian-Jewish Encounter in Comparative Perspective”, examines the problem of Jewish emancipation and integration in late imperial Russia by comparing it to two contemporary phenomena: the experience of other European Jews, and the experience of other minorities in the Russian Empire. It highlights the stratification of Russian Jewry that resulted from half a century of selective integration, and suggests how the Russian–Jewish encounter in the

decades before the Revolution of 1917 set the stage for the significant role Jews would play in early Soviet society.

This book is about the struggle of the Jewish community and their selective integration into Russian society in late imperial Russia, their accomplishments in obtaining their rights, and their adaptation to the surrounding society, culture and place. The theme of the Jewish presence in the capital and their appearance in literary works and memoirs supports his arguments very well. This is an comprehensive, readable and highly recommended book for researchers and academicians examining the issue of the Jews who lived in the last decades of the Russian Empire.

^[1]Pale of Settlement (*Cherta postoyannoy yevreyskoy osedlosti*) - a restricted area where Jews were permitted to live.

^[2]Martin, J., (2007) *Medieval Russia, 980-1584*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks, Cambridge, pp.7.

^[3]Abolished formally only in 1917.

^[4]Rural self-government.

^[5]First enacted by Catherine II.

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