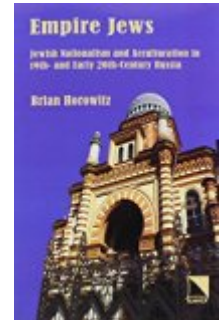


Brian Horowitz. *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in 19th- and Early 20th-Century Russia.* The New Approaches to Russian and East European Culture Series. Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2009. 305 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-89357-349-2.



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It is terrible to become irrelevant, to be a person who lacks the foresight of historical knowledge to know which way history will turn. Looking at the case of Russian Jewry of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who would have known that a small group of ideologues called Zionists would so fundamentally reshape the Jewish map? It is true that people like Ahad Ha'am and Leon Pinsker were important in their own time, but their importance only grew as Zionism's ideas became political and cultural realities. In fact, there were many central Jewish figures, like the Russian Jewish writer Shimon Frug, whose ideas and strategies for navigating Jewish life in Russia were more popular and mainstream at the time, but who faded into irrelevance as times changed. *Empire Jews*, a collection of essays by literary scholar and intellectual historian Brian Horowitz, demonstrates the author's attraction to these figures, to "secondary characters who better embody typical intellectual tendencies more vividly than more famous figures" (p. 7).

Horowitz has been one of the key scholars rescuing the Russified liberal Jewish intelligentsia from the trash bin of a history that led in Russia to the triumph of Bolshevism and Zionism, and forced liberals and conservatives to flee the country. In this book, which is as much a retrospective of his work from the past fifteen years as it is new scholarship, Horowitz shows that in their day, these less radical figures were important, even if history does not remember them that way. He makes a convincing case for studying this particular period when there was something distinct called "Russian Jewish culture," produced in the language of power, not Yiddish or Hebrew, but nonetheless targeted at a Russian-speaking and reading Jewish audience. Horowitz argues that the same was not the case for "the great Jewish writers Isaak Babel, Osip Mandelshtam, and Boris Pasternak," who "turned their backs on the sectarian world of Jewish culture and devoted themselves fully to Russian literature" (p. 11). In nearly every essay, Horowitz reminds the reader that there is very little written about the people he

covers. If today, we know about Sh. Ansky and Isaac Leib Peretz, Horowitz turns his gaze to figures like the Dostoevsky scholar Lev Shteinberg or Michael Morgulis, the Jewish communal leader, who used traditional Jewish political strategies by acting as a *shtadtlan* (intercessor) to benefit Russia's Jews.

These essays show how the Russian Jewish intelligentsia changed (or perhaps radicalized and nationalized) from the maskilic, integrationist approach of the 1860s (typified by Lev Levanda, Morgulis, and Avramm Harkavy) to the more national approach of the 1890s and 1900s, like the historian Simon Dubnov and the Zionist newspaper publisher Leyb Yoffe. The debate between the grandfather of Russian Jewish history, Harkavy, whom nonspecialists will never have heard of, and Dubnov, the young upstart and one who would come down in history as the most famous Russian Jewish historian, reveals this divide. When they had their battles, the young Dubnov angrily and impolitely chastised his older and very famous mentor (who, unlike Dubnov, had residency rights in Petersburg) for his interpretation of Jewish history. By the 1880s and 1890s, through the eyes of their intellectual successors, the maskilim, like Harkavy and Levanda, had to respond to the regime's failures at modernization and realized that their approach to history, politics, and society was still stuck in the 1860s. Too little, too late, as Dubnov--the diaspora nationalist--would become the most well-known historian of Russian Jewry, while Harkavy faded into irrelevance.

Ironically, or perhaps tellingly, the trajectory of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia uncannily resembles that of Horowitz himself. In the 1990s, Horowitz focused on deeply integrated and Russified Jewish intellectuals, like Mikhail Gershenzon, who wrote canonical biographies of important nineteenth-century cultural figures, and carried on polemical debates with the likes of the famous Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev. His (and

here I mean both Gershenzon and Horowitz) first love was in those who had little love for Jewish culture. Horowitz went to great lengths to find something "Jewish" about these highly integrated Russian intellectuals and philosophers. After all, in tsarist Russia, they could have (or more likely should have) converted to Russian Orthodoxy in order to get the best jobs in their chosen profession, given the restrictions on Jews' access to those positions. Horowitz suggests that their unwillingness to convert must say something about their ideas. He argues that Gershenzon and Lev Shestov preserved a universalist instinct in Russian thought that was slowly disappearing as the Russian intelligentsia became more obsessed with Orthodox Christianity, especially after the 1905 Revolution. These Russian philosophers of Jewish background were committed to a more universal approach to philosophy, even to the point of misreading thinkers, like the conservative Slavophiles, whom Gershenzon read as universalists. The suggestion here is that a writer's Jewishness may have unwittingly encouraged an attraction to the universal over a Christian system of philosophy. This, he argues, was Jews' contribution to Russian intellectual history, a fascinating way of thinking about Jews' role in a culture that was increasingly Christian and nationalistic.

As Horowitz's own work moved into the twenty-first century, he became increasingly interested in Russian *Jewish* culture, in such figures as Ansky and Yoffe, who produced Russian-language culture with the explicit goal of advancing Jewish life in the tsarist empire. Like the characters he studies, Horowitz, too, moves from studying the Russian Jewish integrationists to a deeper interest in the national approach to Russian-language Jewish literature.

Horowitz's closest interlocutors are the late John Klier, who focused on the Russified Jewish intelligentsia and asked about the tsarist state's relationship to its Jews, and Steven Zipperstein's earliest work on Odessa and the Jews. But these

intellectual inspirations also highlight how some of the essays in the book feel a bit dated. For example, one finds phrases in the footnotes like “since this article was written,” and then cites two books that came out in the late 1990s. Why not incorporate that work from ten years ago into the essay? More important, there is no engagement with some of the best work in Russian Jewish studies of the 2000s that has fundamentally transformed how we think about ideas, daily life, political strategy, literature, and Jewish culture, such as that of ChaeRan Freeze, Olga Litvak, Gabriella Safran, and Michael Krutikov, just to name a few.

This is not just an idle criticism about needing to update a collected volume to speak to the scholarship that has developed in the interim, unless the point is to show how one’s ideas change over time. Rather, this is a more fundamental statement about how quickly the field of Russian Jewish history has changed since the fall of the Soviet Union. Horowitz’s other recent book on the Society for the Enlightenment of the Jews (OPE) demonstrates in a deeper way how the new scholarship has changed our thinking about late imperial Russian Jewry (*Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* [2009]). In that book, the germ of which is an essay included in this volume, Horowitz shows how the historical actors based in St. Petersburg changed from maskilic integration and modernization to a more aggressive, and disappointed, national cultural development. The book also clearly shows how Horowitz himself has changed his historical interests from those central figures of the Russian intelligentsia, who happened to be Jewish, to the people and institutions, who built the modern Jewish world.

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