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**Eliyana R. Adler.** *In Her Hands: The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011. 196 pp. $44.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8143-3492-8.

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**Commissioned by** Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

To say that this important book by Eliyana R. Adler fills a gap is an understatement. I know of no other modern monographic treatment of Jewish women's education in Eastern Europe and this alone should make Adler's book essential reading in a number of fields. The fact that it is well written, carefully researched, and solidly documented is an added fillip.

Adler presents her rich material clearly and systematically. Consisting of five chapters, the first part deals with the rise and expansion of private schooling for Jewish girls in the Russian language. Chapter 1 is a general introduction to Jewish education--traditional and "modern" in the western part of the Russian Empire. The second chapter examines the development of government schooling for Jews and the implications specifically for Jewish girls. Teachers are the focus of the third chapter, while the fourth deals with financial matters, largely taxes and tuition. The next chapter addresses the content of the education Jewish girls received in schools. The second part of the book deals with what Adler terms "the interactions between these new educational institutions and the society in which they functioned" (p. 9). It opens with a chapter that describes the students who studied in the new schools for girls and what they did with their education. The following chapter explores the ways different groups in Jewish society responded to changes in girls' education. The subsequent and last substantive chapter deals with the broader influence of girls' schools on Jewish education. As could be expected, the book concludes with reflections on the development of formal education for Jewish girls in Russia, the links between this development and other changes in Jewish society, and the impact of their education on the Jewish community.

This book is full of information that will almost certainly be new to most readers--a testimony to Adler's careful study of printed sources and archival materials. Her discussion of the pioneering Perel School in Vilnius in chapter 1, for example, introduces new perspectives that will help readers understand how the Vilna-centered haskalah related to girls' education and other gen-

der issues. Her analysis showing that the opening of government schools for boys pushed educational entrepreneurs to apply their talents in starting schools for girls, in the same chapter, is also quite original. Adler collected a great deal of material, enabling her to give a detailed picture of the teaching staff of girls' schools. As she shows, teachers had many motives for choosing to teach. Undoubtedly, financial concerns were at the core for most, but Adler also points to other reasons for choosing careers as educators, such as family connections, a sense that modern schools for girls were more acceptable than such schools for boys, and a desire for social improvement. Finances in the nineteenth century, as today, were a central issue; schools and educators could not and did not wait for solutions to come their way and instead were energetic in creating solutions to financial constraints, such as using communal tax income, subsidies for low-income students, appeals to the government, and Jewish organizations for support. Adler also brings together a great deal of data on the schools--names, dates, places, and curricula--but she manages to keep unnecessary details in the notes and maintains a very readable style. What is noteworthy in her discussion of curricula is that the time devoted to Jewish studies grew over time, as did interest in teaching crafts. This is not necessarily because of a parallel growth of interest in Judaica and crafts on the part of students (or parents), but might well have been due to the time it took to overcome the lack of precedent for teaching these topics.

Adler comes to many important conclusions. Girls' schools had a significant impact on the lives of individual students and their families; in certain cases, graduates took on leadership roles. The number of students grew over time and "thousands and most likely tens of thousands of Jewish girls passed through the network of private Jewish schools" (p. 101). While the schools' founders often were interested in transforming their students into modern young women who would concentrate their interests on enlightenment, parents often had pragmatic goals and were interested in usable skills more than transformations. Adler is careful to point out that the impact of the schools was less revolutionary than one could have expected and than some of the founders were hoping for. She follows the facts and not the wishful thinking that has characterized some writers of Jewish women's education. Her analysis of public discourse, mainly in the press, on the education of Jewish women shows how much can be learned about different movements and trends in Jewish society by considering attitudes toward women's education. As she points out, not only was women's education changed by new values but there also were initiatives to alter men's education because the next generation of Jewish men would live in a society in which women were educated! She also notes the significance of schools for girls as innovative frameworks and shows that trade schooling and modernized heders (religious schools for boys) were influenced by the educational system for girls. One of these innovations was the development of frameworks in which Jewish and non-Jewish girls studied together. In some cases, this was regarded as less radical than Jewish boys and girls studying together! The process of developing frameworks for the schooling of Jewish girls began haltingly in the 1830s and 1840s, and it was only near the end of the century that it became a large-scale movement that was transformed by the introduction of such ideologies as Zionism or socialism. It is difficult to measure the impact of a school system and Adler is acutely aware of the complexities. Yet she convincingly presents a claim that the educational frameworks for women were a significant element in the transformation of Jewish society from a traditional one with rigid and clear gender lines to one in which both men and women were expected to receive a formal education. Moreover, these schools had an extremely important influence on the lives and expectations of the women who had studied in them in their childhood.

Education is often a matter of definition. As we all know, schools are not known for their ability to teach wisdom and it is not at all clear that schools help make good people--male or female. Schools can teach skills, give diplomas, and provide a framework for networking and developing social skills. Therefore, I gave a great deal of thought to the subtitle of this book--"The Education of Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia." Most Jewish girls and women in tsarist Russia never attended school but they were largely literate in Yiddish; the knowledge they acquired informally about Jewish culture and religion would possibly compare rather favorably with that of some contemporaries receiving a university education. These women acquired knowledge through informal study and independent reading. These channels of education for women differed from but certainly were no less effective than the ways boys studied. Informal education is notoriously difficult to measure and to document but that does not mean that it did not or does not exist. Therefore, this book deals with a minority of Jewish girls who received formal education or school education. The move to formal education rested on the assumption that the way boys studied was better than girls' informal study. Students in girls' schools moved from a world of distinctive women's education to education that was similar to boys' or men's schooling. One could hope for a broad and detailed analysis of that lost educational world of women but because of a lack of documentation, a monograph on traditional informal education will probably never be written.

It is important then to remember that ***In Her Hands*** is the story of how a growing minority of girls came to be educated. Over time, as adult women they took active and significant roles in their societies. This well-written book is an important and even essential text in the history of Jewish society and education.

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