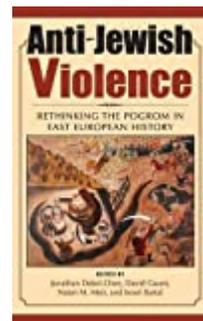




Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meir, Israel Bartal, eds. *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. xvi + 220 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35520-1.



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The Pogroms in Tsarist Russia: Still an Intriguing Question?

The book under review is dedicated to the memory of John Doyle Klier (1944-2007). Until his untimely death, he taught as Sidney and Elizabeth Corob Professor of Modern Jewish History in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London. The world's leading authority on tsarist Russian policies toward Jews, he authored two seminal books regarded as the gold standard in this field. A Renaissance Man, Klier was a superb teacher and stimulating scholar, asking important questions and initiating new research initiatives that have reshaped our opinions on the Jewish situation in the tsarist empire. Most of the contributors of the reviewed book belonged to Klier's scholarly network. Some were his students and friends. In May 2005, they participated in an international academic conference in Stockholm, "Anti-Jewish Violence: Reconceptualizing the Pogrom in European History, 17th-20th Century." *Anti-Jewish Violence* presents the conference's contributions.

The book opens with an introduction written by the coeditors which discusses the importance of the topic, its

historiography, definitions of a pogrom as a historical phenomenon, Jewish responses to pogroms, and regional perspectives of violence. Definitions and historical context are also analyzed in the first chapter, "What's in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence," authored by David Engel from New York University. He writes about the main elements of pogroms, the general historical mechanisms leading to them, a conflict between the *Rechtsstaat* and the preexisting old time-honored moral order, modernization, the general population's growing insecurity, and the expanding social roles of the Jews.

Part 1, "Twentieth-Century Pogroms," includes three chapters. In "1915 and the War Pogrom Paradigm in the Russian Empire," Eric Lohr from American University compares World War I anti-Jewish violence with pre-war pogroms, concentrating on the roles of the army, the Central government, religion, economic tensions, and nationalism. Then, in "The Role of Personality in the First (1914-1915) Russian Occupation of Galicia and Bukovina," Peter Holquist from the University of Penn-

sylvania demonstrates how personal attitudes of top Russian military and civilian leaders affected the situation of Jews. Finally, in the third chapter of the first part, "Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the 'Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom' in Russia, 1917-1918," Vladimir P. Buldakov from the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences shows the correlation between the growth of revolutionary violence and the violence directed specifically against Jews, who were blamed for food shortages, speculation, and failures of all the forces involved in the revolution.

Part 2, "Responses to Pogroms," consists of two chapters. In "Preventing Pogroms: Patterns in Jewish Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Russia," Vladimir Levin from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev analyzes three procedures, which were supposed to stop the pogroms: intercession, self-defense, and systematic struggle against anti-Semitism. In "The Sword Hanging over Their Heads: The Significance of Pogrom for Russian Jewish Everyday Life and Self-Understanding (The Case of Kiev)," Natan M. Meir explains why this prevention was so important.

The final, third part of the book, "Regional Perspectives," offers five chapters. Lilia Kalmina from the Buryat Scientific Center, Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Ulan-Ude, in "The Possibility of the Impossible: Pogroms in Eastern Siberia," explains how violent anti-Semitism could appear in places with almost no Jews. In the tsarist empire, they constituted no more than 1 percent of the total Siberian population, and were widely dispersed, highly assimilated, and generally considered a welcomed supplement to the Siberian economy. And still, pogroms did occur in Irkutsk and Tomsk in 1905, and in Krasnoyarsk, Bogotol, Biysk, Novonikolaevsk, Barnaul, and some villages in Tomsk and Yenisei provinces in 1916-17. Vladas Sirutavičius and Darius Staliūnas give an interesting answer to the question in the title of their chapter: "Was Lithuania a Pogrom-Free Zone? (1881-1940)." They claim that even though the tension between Jews and non-Jews had been less visible in Lithuania than in Ukraine and the Lithuanian national movement needed Jews as allies (mostly against Poles), still anti-Jewish hostility had simmered under the surface of everyday life for a long time, and, when new historical phenomena appeared in Lithuania, old xenophobia exploded as bare violence.

Two noteworthy chapters deal with Belarus. Claire Le Foll from the University of Southampton, in "The Missing Pogroms of Belorussia, 1881-1882: Conditions

and Motives of an Absence of Violence," argues that "Belarus territory was not modernized enough for pogroms. Significant parts of the feudal system survived in Belarus until the twentieth century and preserved the old social position of Jews. Pogroms were mostly an urban phenomenon while Belarussian towns were few, small, and demographically dominated by Jews. In "Ethnic Conflict and Modernization in the Interwar Period: The Case of Soviet Belorussia," Arkadi Zeltser from Yad Vashem shows how the old anti-Jewish stereotypes were supplemented with new elements created under entirely new conditions.

The volume is closed with an optimistic chapter: "Defusing the Ethnic Bomb: Resolving Local Conflict through Philanthropy in the Interwar USSR" by Jonathan Dekel-Chen. His study concentrates on the Jewish agricultural settlement in Soviet Crimea and southern Ukraine. This region of stormy history had been traditionally multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual. It appeared, therefore, that the "parachuting" of about two hundred thousand Jewish settlers there between 1922 and 1941 could ignite an explosion of hatred. And yet the reasonable policies of the Soviet authorities and three Western Jewish philanthropies (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in New York, the ORT-Ferband in Berlin, and the Jewish Colonization Society in Paris) did defuse the tension.

Anti-Jewish Violence is a bit uneven. On the one hand, it presents a variety of different perspectives: American, British, Swedish, Israeli, Lithuanian, and even Buryat. Some essays are devoted to topics rarely discussed and offer new facts. Most chapters, based on meticulous archival research, are intriguing and stimulating. On the other hand, not all contributions are easy to read. It appears that Buldakov's text has been badly translated. Its first paragraph suggests that Russia was governed by "liberals and socialists" before February 1917 (p. 74). The chapter is devoted to well-researched topics and is based on archival materials and a careful reading of Russian and Russian-Jewish press, but it does not offer a new conclusion. A part of it, surprisingly based on an article in the weekly *Rassvet*, claims: "It is noteworthy that in 1918 pogroms were more systematically organized in Galician cities and towns than elsewhere" (p. 86). The next sentence about "mobs made up of Polish women" suggests that the author writes about western Galicia, but the main wave of pogroms took place there in 1919, not in 1918, and they were as spontaneous as the Russian violence.

Polish issues return in several essays. Note, writes Engel in the first chapter, that none of these actions [Polish military pogroms] was undertaken in the heat of battle; they were rather *punitive* expeditions carried out *after* the immediate threat of hostile takeover had passed (p. 33, emphasis in the original). Many scholars would argue that even though the most devastating of these infamous pogroms (in Lvov, Vilna, Pinsk, and Minsk) did not take place in the heat of battle, they did happen in the middle of military operations, when the threat of Ukrainian and Soviet attacks was still very real

and only disappeared months later. Maybe, therefore, a chapter about a Polish contribution to the tragic history of anti-Jewish violence would have clarified some matters.

This, however, can be a topic of another symposium, which would have to be very well prepared to reach the scholarly level of the Stockholm conference. *Anti-Jewish Violence*, a major scholarly achievement, is indispensable reading for everybody interested in Russian Jewish history. Klier would have been proud of his colleagues and friends.

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