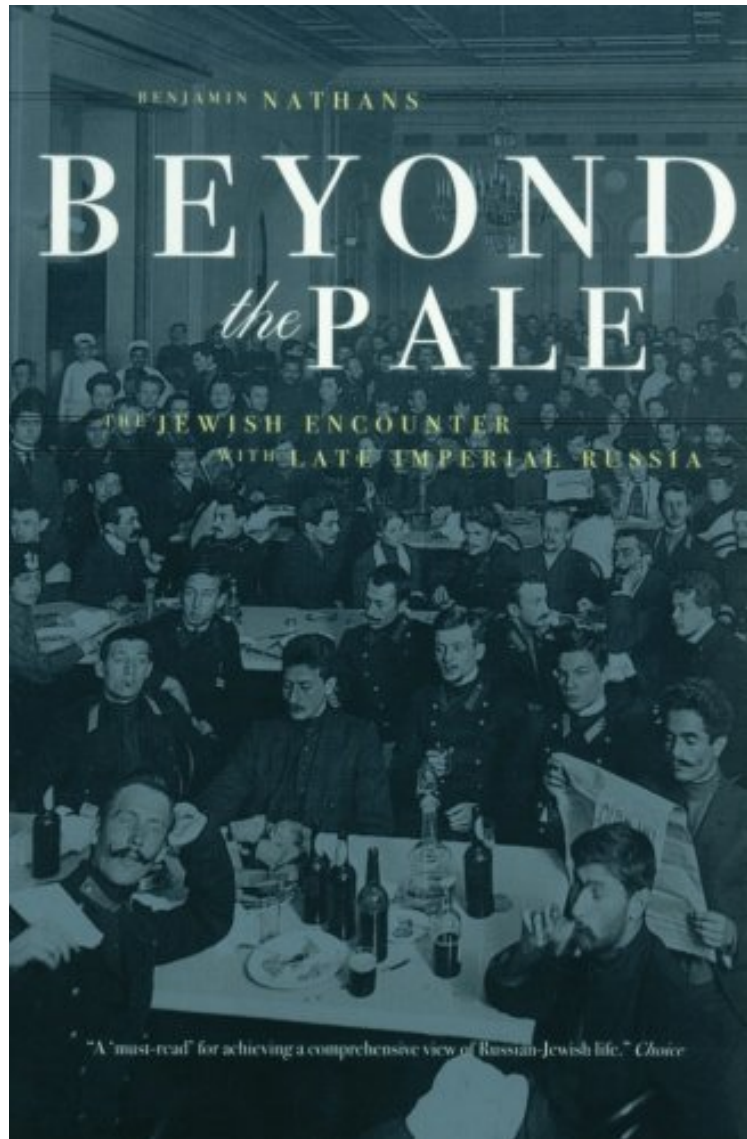


(Read free) Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Studies on the History of Society and Culture)

## **Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Studies on the History of Society and Culture)**

*Benjamin Nathans*

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**Benjamin Nathans : Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Studies on the History of Society and Culture)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Studies on the History of Society and Culture):

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. The Jewish Question By Richard A. Blumenthal Russia came to the Jews; the Jews did not come to Russia. As the tsarist regime expanded westward, it annexed large portions of Poland between 1772 and 1795, inheriting approximately half a million Jews in the process. Divided into four parts, Nathans' book traces what he terms the selective integration into Russian society of colonized Jewish people from the Pale of Settlement in late imperial Russia. Focusing on a range of demographic, cultural, and political issues, Nathans analyzes the geographic and social mobility of the Jews during this period, and the impact they had on the transformation of Russian society in the modern age. Part I frames the monograph by looking at the attempt to adapt European-style emancipation to a tsarist autocracy still emerging as a hierarchy of culturally and juridically distinct estates. As a result, a policy of what Nathans calls "selective integration" evolved where certain categories of "useful" Jews were granted rights and privileges similar to those enjoyed by their Gentile counterparts according to social estate, including the right to reside outside the Pale. Nathans situates the selective integration of the Jews in the context of Alexander II's Great Reforms. Part II examines the privileged Jews who, taking advantage of residential freedom offered by the policy of selective integration, moved to St. Petersburg, which became the largest and most prominent Jewish community in Russia, and the politics that arose within the Jewish community itself, as St. Petersburg's Jewish elite asserted a self-appointed leadership role over Russian Jewry as a whole. The second half of the book looks at Jewish integration into two specific social institutions. Part III traces the experience of Jewish men and women who enrolled in Russia's institutions of higher education. Taking advantage of a decree in 1861 guaranteeing Jews with university degrees the right to live outside the Pale, Jews, with the aid of new forms of Jewish philanthropy, flocked to the universities in such disproportionate numbers to their Gentile counterparts that official quotas were enacted in 1887 to stem the tide. Nathans also examines the role Jewish students played in the failed 1905 Revolution. Part IV examines the Russian-Jewish encounter in terms of the newly reformed Russian court system. The Judicial Reform of 1864 created a modern judiciary, and is especially significant in that it broke with the tradition of officially sanctioned discrimination against the Jews. Barred from employment in academia and civil service, Jews flocked to the bar and became private practitioners. By the twenty-fifth anniversary of judicial reform, in 1889, Jews constituted 14% of the empire's certified lawyers and an astounding 43% of apprentice lawyers, the primary pool from which future lawyers would be drawn. Unwilling to tolerate the dominance of Jews in the legal profession, Tsar Alexander III enacted a so-called temporary decree (which remained in effect until the October Revolution—nothing was more permanent in late imperial Russia than a temporary decree) requiring the personal approval of the Minister of Justice for the admission of any non-Christian to the bar. The impact on the Jews of this decree was felt immediately. Half a century after the creation of an open, semi-independent legal system in Russia, Jews were completely barred from it. Interestingly, the impetus for state protection came not only from the state but also from within the ranks of the bar itself. Fear of competition was the clear motivation. Nathans concludes this excellent piece of scholarship with a comparison of the policy of selective integration to the experience of Jews elsewhere in Europe and the experience of other Russian minorities within late imperial Russia. Although sharing many similarities with its Western European counterparts, the Russian-Jewish encounter was distinct in that it unfolded at a time when Russia's hereditary estates remained the predominant source of social identity and the means through which the tsarist regime sought to manage its residents. The tsarist autocracy attempted to use these estates as a conduit for Jewish integration, all but ensuring a stratifying effect on the Russian Jewish population as a whole, which in Nathans' view prepared the ground for the significant role played by Jews in the Russian Revolution and development of Soviet society.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This was a fascinating portrayal of life of the Jews ... By Eleanor Kett This was a fascinating portrayal of life of the Jews both in Russia and the Soviet Union. It almost seems as if anti-Semitism is part of the Russian DNA.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Russian-Jewish Encounter in Society, Politics, Military, etc. By Jan Peczkis This book includes details about Jews that lived within the Pale of Jewish Settlement. However, it notably features the Jews of St. Petersburg, which was located outside the Pale. It elaborates on Jewish social, political, educational, and other movements. In my review, I focus on Polish-Jewish relations, even though this is not a theme of this work.

### JEW'S EFFECTIVELY A SEPARATE NATION IN POLAND

The vast majority of Russia's Jews had been Poland's Jews in what became Russian-ruled eastern Poland after the Partitions. Up to that time, the privileges of Poland's Jews had gone far beyond tolerance, and were much more than that of the middleman situated between the nobility and the peasants. Nathans comments, (quote) Under Polish rule, the Jews had achieved a degree of political and social autonomy unsurpassed in the European diaspora. More than in any other country, the Jews of Poland were able to engage in the full range of practices that made Judaism a distinct social order. Not only their ritual observance but their rabbinic courts of law and system of taxation were recognized and protected by the state. In each community, a governing body known as the KAHAL gathered and apportioned Jewish taxes, policed the local Jewish population, and controlled residence and membership in the community. Moreover, a country-wide institution known as the Council of the Four Lands (referring to the four major regions of the Polish commonwealth) coordinated practices among the hundreds of Jewish communities and presented them vis--vis Polish rulers. Though not formally part of the hierarchy of estates that composed Polish society, in practice Jews functioned as one of the many corporate elements in their characteristically segmented "old regime"

society. (unquote). (p. 25).**THE JEWISH DEPARTURE FROM THE POLISH CAUSE**Any affinities of Poland's Jews to Poland largely disappeared in less than a generation after the Partitions. Russian Adjutant General A. A. Suvorov praised the Jews for their loyalty to the government of Russia during the Napoleonic invasion of 1812 [which Poles supported] and again during the November 1830 Polish Insurrection. (p. 46).The tsarist Russian government did its part in driving Jews away from the Polish cause. Nathans comments, (quote) Even in Congress Poland, where in the early 1860's the tsarist government came closest to a European-style Jewish emancipation, the abolition of serfdom and the scaling back of aristocratic privileges--much like the granting of certain rights to Jews--were essentially tactical maneuvers designed to neutralize support for Polish independence. (unquote). (p. 78).**IMPLICATIONS OF JEWISH PARTICULARISM**The tendency nowadays is to attribute hindrances to Jewish progress solely to the policies of non-Jewish authorities. In contrast, Nathans points out some self-imposed Jewish limitations. Thus, Jews had their own institutions of higher Jewish learning, the yeshivas, for the longest time, but were hostile to non-Jewish learning until relatively recent times. He quips, (quote) Much of the resistance, however, came from Jews themselves. In traditional Jewish society, secular knowledge was formally countenanced strictly as a tool for greater understanding of the Torah, or for the more complete fulfillment of divine commandments. The notion that non-Jewish learning was worthy of study carried with it the unsettling implication that not all truth was contained within the Torah. Compared to other Jewish communities, those of Eastern Europe were among the least interested in non-Jewish learning, and resistance only deepened with the spread of Hasidism in the late eighteenth century. During the preceding centuries, only a handful of Polish Jews are known to have found their way to universities... (unquote). (p. 206).Now consider the beginnings of Jewish assimilation in the 19th century. Widespread Jewish resistance to assimilation went beyond the desire to preserve religious and cultural distinctiveness, and went beyond concerns that Jews were not getting equal rights as part of the process. For instance, the Zionists summarily denounced Jewish assimilation as a form of spiritual slavery. (pp. 334-335). Among surveyed early 20th century Jewish university students, arguably the avant garde of Jews in tsarist Russia, only about one-fifth unambiguously favored the assimilation of Jews, whereas nearly half favored the concept of Jews as a nation. (pp. 302-303).Genrikh Borisovich Sliozberg was a notable Jewish historian (p. 319) and high-level member of Russia's Ministry of Internal affairs. (p. 326). Although a non-Zionist, Sliozberg asserted that he, and most Jews, were opposed to the "Poles of the Mosaic faith", and they instead recognized Jews as a nationality. This was on par with all the other nationalities that comprised the Russian Empire. (p. 335). Ironically, Endeks have been condemned for reckoning Jews a separate nationality. Many if not most Jews did likewise, and did so long before the Endeks.**JEWIS AND COMMUNISM**Even though the USSR is outside the purview of this book, the author discusses the massive overrepresentation of Jews in Soviet Communism [sometimes called the Zydokomuna] as follows, (quote) After the Revolution of 1917 perceptions dramatically reversed, as Jews suddenly appeared as consummate insiders in the young Soviet state. They were extraordinarily visible in the upper echelons of the Communist Party, the Red Army, and the Cheka (the security apparatus that eventually became the KGB), achieving a level of integration within institutions of state power unmatched in any country at any time before or since (apart, of course, from ancient in modern Israel). In fact, Jewish visibility in the young Soviet state was even broader. In the 1920s and 1930s, Jews were a much-noted presence across virtually the entire white-collar sector of Soviet society, as journalists, physicians, scientists, academics, writers, engineers, economists, NEPmen, entertainers, and more. (unquote). (p. 2).

A surprising number of Jews lived, literally and figuratively, "beyond the Pale" of Jewish Settlement in tsarist Russia during the half-century before the Revolution of 1917. Thanks to the availability of long-closed Russian archives, along with a wide range of other sources, Benjamin Nathans reinterprets the history of the Russian-Jewish encounter.In the wake of Russia's "Great Reforms," Nathans writes, a policy of selective integration stimulated social and geographic mobility among the empire's Jews. The reaction that culminated, toward the turn of the century, in ethnic restrictions on admission to universities, the professions, and other institutions of civil society reflected broad anxieties that Russians were being placed at a disadvantage in their own empire. Nathans's conclusions about the effects of selective integration and the Russian-Jewish encounter during this formative period will be of great interest to all students of modern Jewish and modern Russian history.

"A groundbreaking, brilliant and compelling book."--"HaaretzFrom the Inside Flap"Nathans's deeply researched and meticulously argued book takes us into the drawing rooms and offices of successful Jews of St. Petersburg and greatly enhances our understanding not only of Jewish intellectual, political, and professional leadership but of Russian politics and society as well."Richard Stites, author of *Russian Popular Culture*"The work of an extremely talented and intelligent historian. It breaks new ground both conceptually and substantively."Michael Stanislawski, author of *Zionism and the Fin de Sicile*"Ben Nathans moves in this remarkable book well beyond the standard spatial as well as conceptual boundaries typically associated with prerevolutionary Russian Jewry. It is the work of a splendid historian who negotiates brilliantly the borders of Russian and Jewish history, and manages to link the two persuasively in an

original, lucid narrative."Steven J. Zipperstein, author of *Imagining Russian Jewry*