



The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 1, 1350 to 1881

Antony Polonsky

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In his three-volume history, Antony Polonsky provides a comprehensive survey - socio-political, economic, and religious - of the Jewish communities of eastern Europe from 1350 to the present. Until the Second World War, this was the heartland of the Jewish world: nearly three and a half million Jews lived in Poland alone, while nearly three million more lived in the Soviet Union. Although the majority of the Jews of Europe and the United States, and many of the Jews of Israel, originate from these lands, their history there is not well known. Rather, it is the subject of mythologizing and stereotypes that fail both to bring out the specific features of the Jewish civilization which emerged there and to illustrate what was lost. Jewish life, though often poor materially, was marked by a high degree of spiritual and ideological intensity and creativity. Antony Polonsky recreates this lost world - brutally cut down by the Holocaust and less brutally but still seriously damaged by the Soviet attempt to destroy Jewish culture. Wherever possible, the unfolding of history is illustrated by contemporary Jewish writings to show how Jews felt and reacted to the complex and difficult situations in which they found themselves. This first volume begins with an overview of Jewish life in Poland and Lithuania down to the mid-eighteenth century. It describes the towns and shtetls where the Jews lived, the institutions they developed, and their participation in the economy. Developments in religious life, including the emergence of hasidism and the growth of opposition to it, are described in detail. The volume goes on to cover the period from 1764 to 1881, highlighting government attempts to increase the integration of Jews into the wider society and the Jewish responses to these efforts, including the beginnings of the Haskalah movement. Attention is focused on developments in each country in turn: the problems of emancipation, acculturation, and assimilation in Prussian and Austrian Poland; the politics of integration in the Kingdom of Poland; and the failure of forced integration in the tsarist empire. Volume 2 will cover the period 1881-1914; Volume 3 covers 1914-2005. *** Winner of the 2011 Kulczycki Book Prize for Polish Studies, awarded by the American Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. *** ". . . exemplary and formidable three-volume work of historical synthesis . . ." - Wall Street Journal, May 19, 2012 *** "No one interested in Jewish, Polish, or Russian history can afford to be without these volumes . . . will long remain the standard work on this crucial Jewish community . . . The most important thing one can say about Antony Polonsky's *The Jews in Poland and Russia* is: get it and read it!" - Theodore R. Weeks, *The Polish Review* *** "Antony Polonsky's particular scholarly achievement lies in the fact that he combines a masterful grasp of Jewish history with that of Eastern Europe. . . . these beautifully narrated volumes should not only be seen as a staple for university courses, but also as a must-read for anyone attempting to understand any aspect of modern Jewish history and religious tradition.... It all originates in Eastern Europe, Antony Polonsky reminds us, and without understanding our collective past, how can we understand our present." - *European Judaism*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Autumn 2013 *** "The first serious, and most successful, effort thus far to summarize the history of the Jews of 'Eastern Europe' . . . the first book to synthesize the vast research that has emerged since the seventies . . . comprehensive and multidisciplinary . . . there is no book today that can compare to its scope and to the vast and new materials that he brings forth and analyzes with a broad imagination, an intensive approach, and a moderate style." - Moshe Rosman, *Zion* [Subject: History, Jewish Studies, Polish Studies, Russian Studies, European Studies]

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