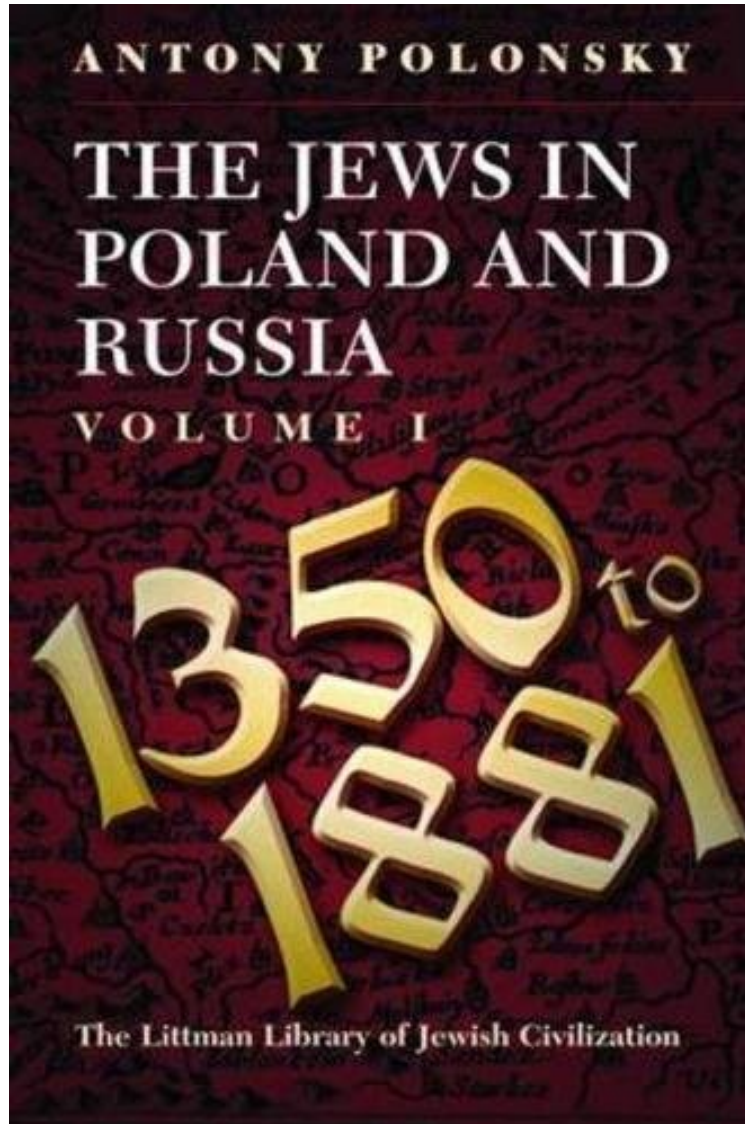


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The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 1, 1350 to 1881

Antony Polonsky

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Antony Polonsky : The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 1, 1350 to 1881 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol. 1, 1350 to 1881:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. separateness helps support not only there attempt to be different ...By Walntzseparateness helps support not only there attempt to be different but also the negativity reflected on them by the places they lived6 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Excellent historyBy Charles S. FisherPolonsky stands out among the many historians I have read. Searching for my roots in Eastern Europe and Western Russia, I want to understand the context from which my mother's family arose. But to do that I need to

understand the circumstances of the peoples among whom the Jews lived and how the latter's experience differed, if it indeed did. That is a big undertaking because of the elephant in the room, the holocaust and how contemporary zealots use it as a whipping boy to argue for special treatment or to discredit others who disagree with them. Neighbors whose suffering was real puts Jewish suffering in a wider context and undermines the obscene notion that there is any winner of what has been called the Ethnocidal Olympics. I really appreciate Polonsky's massive effort and have learned so much from him. This is the second of his volumes I have read. The one covering 1914 to 2008 filled me in on much I hadn't known and lead me to want to understand interwar Polish history: the tensions between the ethnic anti-Semitic, anti-Ukrainian, anti-Lithuanian nationalists and multi-nationalists, especially the fact that Pilsudski was no Hitler or Mussolini. Nonetheless by focusing so minutely on internal Jewish movements and the political, religious, social and economic details of Jewish life it is easy to lose sight of how Jewish neighbors were also faring, which in some cases was not as well, despite their lack of sympathy for Jews. One of the points which really sticks in my mind is how little the extent of infiltration of Enlightenment sentiments is appreciated by a world that sees shtetl life through the lens of "Fiddler on the Roof" or the German Jewish distain for their dirty, greedy, conniving, religiously reactionary, Eastern brethren. The 18th and 19th century swirl of ideas about rational, bureaucratic, efficient state institutions as seen, desired, or abhorred by rulers and entrenched interests had crucial influence on Jewish life even if, in the end, it changed it little. Enlightenment Jews hitched their wagons to the forces unleashed by proposed reforms even though they were often disappointed with the results which often allied them against traditional or Hasidic communities. I think Polonsky does a good job in teasing out the ins and outs of these progressions. I had thought my ancestors came out of the Pale to occupy land Catherine the Great liberated from the Ottoman's in the southern Ukraine but from Polonsky's descriptions of the movements I can't quite figure out how and when they did this. Not many people went south during Catherine's life time and the spigot was turned on and off. It seems to me that a lot of Jews were drifting out of the Pale with or without permission as Jewish population boomed and Jews were permitted or banned from various occupations. Jewish brewing and alcohol sale, and other middle man activities were seen as deleterious and non-productive. Farming was the only worthwhile non-parasitic occupation and Jews made lousy farmers, being unwilling to struggle with the land and submit to overlordship as did serfs and then free farmers. They also seemed to have made lousy soldiers. The Jews, themselves, shielding the children of the more well to do, scholars, and craftsmen used force to corral the poor, disenfranchised and young. Shanghaiers is not something that Jews like to hear applied to themselves, especially when carried out by prominent members of their own community. Polonsky says there is no good answer as to why Jewish population growth exceeded their neighbors, but the results of that, along with limited employment opportunities, led to the explosion of Jewish Luftmenschen, the un- and underemployed so often characterized as spaced out, incompetent beggars who wheedled for a zloty here and a ruble there. I would have loved to know more of the demographics of this and how the phenomena affected life in the various parts of Eastern Europe and Russia he covers. Certainly my father's Yekke ancestors must have regarded unwashed, kaftan, robed Luftmenschen with disdain. How much of the Jewish world did they inhabit? Despite Fiddler and Buber it is hard to make schnorrers or gonifs into romantic people. Certainly neither yuppie Jews nor Israelis would regard American street people romantically. (And religion has little to do with it. It is a class issue.) Who romanticizes the ambulatory psychotic or criminal elements on US streets today. We just want them disappeared. They are frightening, remind us of inequality and interfere with commerce. The book divides the world temporally into the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania where the Jews, a small proportions of the population, are agents of Polish landowners carrying out the orders of their patrons and greasing the interstices of rural life by collecting taxes and rents, dealing in grain, selling liquor, running inns and engaging in some artisanal production. With the conquest of that monarchy, controlled by the Polish gentry, four states emerged: Poznan under the control of Prussia, the Kingdom of Poland, a Russian puppet with independent laws, Galicia, a somewhat neglected part of Austro-Hungary, and Russia i.e. Byelorussia, Polish Lithuania and the Ukraine. They each had a different flavor. Jews in Poznan quickly became assimilated as did the rest of the Jews in Germany when restrictions on their lives were eased. It would be curious to know whether the Polish populations suffered from German restrictions the Jews avoided and/or were held back by their religion, conservatism and peasant outlook. They were resentful of Jews who leapt ahead because of access to enterprise and education, resentful of Jews who became Germans of Jewish faith. Many Jews left Poznan being caught between a growing Polish nationalism and Prussians whose nationalistic assertions were also anti-Semitic. Were Poznan Poles especially anti-Semitic when they rejoined Poland after World War I? Poor Galicia. It was Austria's burden. Austria hobbled behind Germany in both economy and transition to a modern state. It has been years since I read a novel but I can remember Ivo Andrić's "The Bridge on the Drina" because of the vivid picture it paints of modernizing Austria's encounter with traditional societies within its borders. So while enlightenment Jews may have gotten what they wanted legally from the state they were still embedded in a contentious Polish-Ukrainian country. They eventually were able to ally themselves with the Polish gentry they had served as intermediaries during the Commonwealth and who continued to dominate Ukrainian peasants under Austrian aegis. It was a no-win situation in the face of lack of economic development and growing Ukrainian nationalism. The kingdom of Poland, granted special status by its Russian master, gradually gave rights to Jews who constituted a large proportion of the urban population. Jews who

had supplied the government and army during the Napoleonic wars morphed into industrialists and bankers. They laid the groundwork for the emergence of a Polish bourgeoisie who were, needless to say, hostile to their Jewish competitors. Hasidim which dominated society in most small towns were opposed to any integration. I just had tea with an English Jewess whose ancestors had been rabbis in Russia, descended from rabbis, who hundreds of years before came from what is now Italy. She dropped into a kind of horrified whisper talking about the oppression of aunts by her non-Hasidic super Orthodox uncles. Both Polish peasantry and rural Jews never quite made it into a modern industrial world and suffered during the changes. But Jews in cities made leaps forward in the face of hostility. The aspiration of enlightenment Jews to become Poles of the Jewish persuasion remained unattainable. Tsarist Russia was indeed a turbulent place. This volume ends at 1881, the point where the s*** really hits the fan leading to the collapse of old Russia. Tsars and their minions were confused by their conflicting desires to assimilate Jews as contributing members of a Russian society that could meet the modern world and their deep seated anti-Semitism which found Jewish commitment to faith and life style incomprehensible. Not always so lurking in the background was the belief that the ultimate solution would be the conversion of Jews. But Russia, itself was ambivalent about changes needed to modernize. So there were fitful attempts to improve Jewish schools, reform the Rabbinate, and allow Jews into new areas and occupations. As Tsars swung from liberalization to reaction so too did policy toward the Jews. Enlightenment Jews and other Jewish reformers were caught in these swings. In 1851 Jews under 50 were forbidden traditional dress and tonsure, including espousal baldness. The laws and fines proved ineffective. In the economic enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, some Jews were improvised while other Jewish economic activities did grow. The Jews never significantly took to farming the only occupation the government could conceive of as non-parasitic. Jewish urban populations continued to grow but enlightenment Jews were still few and ineffective. Tsar Nicholas I was not good for the Jews. Alexander II was both better and worse. Jewish fate was only one aspect of the chaotic encounter of Russia with the industrial world. The Ukrainian bread basket, railroads, freeing of the serfs, and factories all crept uneasily into the great body of traditional Russia. Jewish population in greater Russia quintupled in the 19th century. Misguided attempts to protect freed serfs and peasants from Jewish exploitation added to Jewish poverty and was a reason behind massive emigration. Attempts to Russify Jews increased under Alexander and ran into the same economic and social problems as earlier: cultural recalcitrance and the impossibility of enfranchising Jews without creating competition with non-Jews. So reform swung from pillar to post. When Jews were granted admission to higher education in Lithuania a Russian Orthodox priest responded, "It is hard to live with Jews now, and it will be harder when they become the intelligencia of our region...." Sixty years later Stalin attacked that very outcome beginning his anti-Semitic drives. In the last years of Alexander's reign Orthodox Jews struck back at the increasingly loud voice of Enlightenment. "...the foolish wickedness of Jewish intelligencia---They should limit their role to---vital statistics---leaving religious questions to genuine rabbis..." For most Jews in the Pale life got worse, free serfs and commercial agriculture left them adrift. On the other hand the growing commercial production of grain, sugar beets, and tobacco turned Odessa into a great exporting city. Together with the admission of Jews to gymnasias and higher education, it created the groundwork for my family. The tipping point of Russian society was the assassination of Alexander II. My grandmother was 19 years old and as family stories tell, they had only pepper to throw in the eyes of the Cossacks rampaging during the great Pogrom which began in her home town. I can't wait to read volume 2, even if my reading of it is in an odd order. Charlie Fisher emeritus professor, Brandeis University and author of "Dismantling Discontent: Buddha's Way Through Darwin's World" and the forthcoming "Meditation in the Wild: Buddhism's Origin in the Heart of Nature." 23 of 30 people found the following review helpful. The History of Jews - In Poland and Russia. By marianerdrum I recently found out that I have Jewish ancestors and have since wanted to read everything I can come across to learn about my Jewish family roots. I have ordered almost a library, it feels, from from cookery books to history books and even a Hebrew language pack and yes, I have started to learn Hebrew. My immediate family did not like to hear that I had Jewish genes and I got really nasty comments about how horrible these people were and are and that I should not feel proud to be one of them. Little did they know that I already knew an awful lot about the Jews and their history and that I have always been in great support of the Jews and the State of Israel. Their ignorance is sadly shared with too many people around the globe. The Jews in Poland and Russia 1350-1881 is therefore a history book that should be read as widely as possible. It will change the view of the ignorant as they come to learn the real truth about this wonderful people and their history in Poland and Russia, which was the heartland of the Jewish world before second world war. The history also reflects on how the Jews saw it from their perspective of what was going on around them and how they responded to the constant attacks on them. History written previously about Jews are often mythologized and way too many stereotype the Jews. This book however removes the myths and looks behind the classical stereotypes and brings out the special features of the Jewish civilization as well as showing the the socio-political, economic and religious history of this people. This book should be read by everyone wanting to understand the Jewish history whether they are Jewish or not so as to bring an end to the persecution and hatred towards Gods chosen people!

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 covers the period 1881-1914; Volume 3 covers 1914-2005.

'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* 'Exemplary and formidable . . . Polonsky, as much as anyone else, has created the field of modern Jewish history as a subject to be considered and understood rather than simply a tragic past to be mourned. He is too good a historian to confuse the history of Jewish life with the German policies that brought Jewish death . . . The barely visible commitment in these three wonderful volumes is to rescue a world from polemic, for the sake of history.' Timothy Snyder, *Wall Street Journal* 'Definitive . . . The scope is immense and the author does an impressive job of synthesizing a vast literature . . . This trilogy will no doubt serve as a standard history of east European Jewry for a long time.' Shaul Stampfer, *Religious Studies* 'Magisterial . . . all three volumes, but particularly Volume 3, should be of special interest to Polish Americans and all Americans interested in the history of the Jews in Poland, Lithuania, and Russia.' Anna M. Cienciala, *Polish* 'We can only commend Antony Polonsky for his massive effort to explain seven centuries of Jewish history in a mere 2,000 pages . . . Polonsky's strength lies in his ability to illuminate intellectual and cultural developments . . . Because of the excellent bibliographies, extensive annotation, and wonderful maps included in each volume, any reader wishing to read in greater detail about Polish and Russian Jewry will have plenty of resources to enable the search.' Alexandra S. Korros, *Jewish Quarterly* 'Combines a masterful grasp of Jewish history with that of eastern Europe. While underlining the unique features and achievements of the Jewish communal experience he authoritatively integrates them into the history of the countries in which Jews lived . . . Incorporating current, ground-breaking scholarship from North America, Israel, and Europe these beautifully narrated volumes should not only be seen as a staple of university courses, but also as a must-read for anyone attempting to understand any aspect of modern Jewish history and religious tradition, wherever it may be playing out . . . With this extremely important book, Antony Polonsky not only writes history but, following the example of his illustrious predecessors, makes it.' Katarzyna Person, *European Judaism* 'Succeeds admirably. Simply put, these volumes are required reading for anyone with a serious interest in East European history or for anyone looking for a scholarly assessment of a particular feature of Polish or Russian Jewish history. Handsomely produced, with extensive maps and tables, and a glossary . . . will remain a standard work in the field for some time . . . a body of work that, in summarizing the current state of our knowledge, effectively sets the agenda for future scholars. Polonsky is perhaps the scholar most responsible for the growth of Polish Jewish studies in the late twentieth century . . . Very few historians could write a series of volumes like this . . . [he] has armed scholars with a formidable tool that will help them dispel stereotypes . . . Just as these volumes are destined to become the starting point for the work of many students, they will be the touchstone for scholars working in the field at all levels.' Sean Martin, *European History Quarterly* 'Polonsky's sweeping study offers an illuminating, accessible view of Jewish life in eastern Europe since the end of World War II. In elegant prose, the author engages major historiographical issues while analyzing important cultural, religious, social, and political trends among eastern European Jewry. He carefully frames each section with a chapter-long overview of the relevant historical context for the following chapters . . . Throughout, Polonsky masterfully navigates the different realms of a turbulent eastern European Jewish world, conveying both the richness of its history and the tragedy of its destruction. Highly recommended.' J. Haus, *Choice* About the Author Antony Polonsky is Albert Abramson Professor of Holocaust Studies, an appointment held jointly at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Brandeis University.

Before this he taught at the London School of Economics, and he has been a visiting professor at the University of Warsaw, the Institute for the Human Sciences, Vienna, and the University of Cape Town; a visiting fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies; and Visiting Senior Associate Member of St Antony's College, Oxford. He is the editor of *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, a yearbook also published (since 1993) by the Littman Library, and the author or co-author of several books, including *Politics in Independent Poland* (1972), *The Little Dictators: A History of Eastern Europe since 1918* (1975), *The Great Powers and the Polish Question, 1941-1945* (1976), *The History of Poland since 1863* (1981), and *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (1981). Professor Polonsky is vice-president of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies and of the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies. He is a member of the International Council of the State Museum in Auschwitz, of the International Advisory Board of the Mordecai Anieliewicz Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Warsaw, and of the Executive Committee of the National Polish American-Jewish American Task Force, and an Associate of the Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University. In 1999 he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.