

Victoria Khiterer. *Jewish City or Inferno of Russian Israel? A History of the Jews in Kiev Before February 1917*. Academic Studies Press, 2016. *Jews of Russia and Eastern Europe and Their Legacy*, series editor, Maxim D. Shroyer. xx, 474 pp. Illustrations. Tables. Maps. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. \$89.00, cloth.

The life of the Jews of imperial Kyiv was as contradictory as the city itself. Kyiv stood inside the Pale of Settlement, yet it served as an important cultural symbol for Orthodox Christian believers. Jews lived in areas surrounding Kyiv, but they were often excluded from settling in the city. Victoria Khiterer's latest work uses vivid descriptions and detailed illustrations and mines a rich base of primary sources to explore the life of imperial Kyiv as a Jewish city. Khiterer offers that the city, to its Jewish inhabitants, was paradoxical. Kyiv's Jewish community was one of the largest and wealthiest in the Russian Empire, yet Kyivan Jews had a difficult and unstable relationship with the city and its administration. The first three chapters of the book provide an overview of the history of the Jews in Kyiv from the tenth century to the February Revolution. Khiterer's discussion is thorough and offers background information for those who are not well versed in Ukrainian or Jewish history, so that they may understand her argument. The rest of the book focuses on the social and cultural history of the Jews in Kyiv. Throughout their history in the Kyiv area, Jews were the victims of discrimination, forcible removal, and violence. Khiterer describes the sporadic pogroms that Jews faced in Kyiv, discrimination by government officials, the closure of Jewish schools, and the increasing radicalization of Jewish youth. The author also highlights the vast achievements of the Kyivan Jewish community, from its helping to industrialize the city through various enterprises to its building of Jewish hospitals and developing multiple avenues for ameliorating the poverty and hardships faced by the majority of its members. Khiterer's work is as much a celebration of Jewish accomplishments in Kyiv as it is a tale of state and popular anti-Semitism and violence against the Jewish community.

Khiterer's argument does not provide a definitive answer to the question that she poses in her title. Rather, she argues that the city was a "two-faced Janus" (19). She shows that depending on the year and the gender and socio-economic status of a Jewish person, Kyiv could be for that person a city of promise and economic opportunity or a city of Judeophobia and government oppression. Her extensive use of primary sources, particularly newspapers from that time, allows her to provide multiple perspectives on important events in the history of Kyiv's Jewish community. The most interesting parts of Khiterer's work are her chapters illustrating the Jewish community of Kyiv in the final decades of the Russian Empire. The author's analysis, particularly

in chapters 5, 7, and 8, focuses heavily on the most wealthy and influential members of the Jewish community—magnates like members of the Brodskii family, the Margolins, and Lev Ginzburg among others. These wealthy Jews experienced both sides of Kyiv’s paradoxical treatment of its Jewish citizens. While they were able to build empires and wield influence in their respective areas of business, they were still victims of violence during the pogroms that terrorized the Jewish community. Khiterer’s portrayal of the poor Jews in Kyiv is particularly interesting because of the nature of Kyiv’s Jewish community—while it was the wealthiest community, it was also afflicted by crippling poverty. This area, though, is where one finds one of the few shortcomings of Khiterer’s book. She relies heavily on contemporaneous newspaper accounts and government records in archives. While excellent for providing a localized perception of events, these documents do not explore the personal experiences of the poor. Taking a closer look at the lives and experiences of the poor Jews in the city complicates Khiterer’s argument about Kyiv’s paradoxical nature. Poor Kyivan Jews had neither the financial resources nor the political standing available to the wealthy community members for mitigating their circumstances. The poor would not have had as many positive experiences, relegating them to experience the Judeophobic and oppressive side of the two-faced Kyiv described by Khiterer. However, considering the lack of formal education for poor Jews in Kyiv, which thus limited their written testimony in documents and archival materials, this shortcoming in the book is understandable.

Khiterer also examines the impact of the 1905 pogroms on Kyiv’s Jewish community. The pogroms, she argues, marked the point at which there was no hope for the Kyivan Jews to assimilate into imperial Russian society. Furthermore, the pogroms coupled with decades of state-sponsored discrimination against the establishment of Jewish schools led to the radicalization of young Kyivan Jews, who then turned to revolutionary groups. Particularly telling is the exchange between Vasili Shul’gin (an officer) and an elderly Jewish man. Shul’gin states that the older generation of Jews must keep its children and grandchildren under control. The elderly Jew responds, “Your honor, how can we control them! I am an old Jew . . . But these boys! They grab a bomb, go out and kill! There is your revolution!” (417). This episode highlights the underlying argument of Khiterer’s work—that the vacillating nature of the tsar’s feelings toward the Jews created an inconsistent environment of tolerance and intolerance toward Jews in Kyiv. Official policy oscillated between the active assimilation of Jews and the pushing of Jews into the Pale of Settlement to prevent them from assimilating into mainstream imperial Russian society.

Khiterer’s monograph is an authoritative work on the history of Jews in Kyiv. It is similar to Steven J. Zipperstein’s *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural*

History, 1794-1881 in how it provides a deep understanding of the cultural life of Kyivan Jews, and it builds on previous works discussing various aspects of Jewish life in imperial Russia. Khiterer's writing style is easy to follow. At times, though, she uses terms specific to Jewish culture (such as *maskilim*) without providing a definition for the term until later in the chapter or providing it in a different section of the book. This was the biggest issue that I found hinders one's understanding of the material. However, the author's use of maps, illustrations, and photographs of imperial Kyiv assists the reader in visualizing the various events that she describes in detail. The maps of Kyiv also help one comprehend the impact of the increasing segregation of Jews in the city. Each of the book's chapters includes its own introduction and conclusion. Thus, each chapter can be assigned separately for undergraduate reading to cover different subjects. Overall, Khiterer's work is a straightforward and engaging read; it can appeal both to experts in the fields of Jewish and Ukrainian studies and to undergraduate students.

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Works Cited

Zipperstein, Steven J. *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881*. Stanford UP, 1986.