



Review of the publication: Jonathan Dekel-Chen, , David Gaunt, , Natan M. Meir, , Israel Bartal, *Anti-Jewish Violence. Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2011, ISBN 978-0-253-35520-1

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Anti-Jewish Violence. Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History, edited by Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Nathan M. Meir and Israel Bartal, is a collection of eleven essays devoted to pogroms and their role in the history of Jewish-non-Jewish relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Without looking at pogroms through the lens of the Holocaust, the authors succeeded in presenting different types of pogroms (or the lack of them at the times of the growing anti-Jewish violence) in a new and highly unique way.

The book is divided into three parts ("Twentieth-Century Pogroms", "Responses to Pogroms" and "Regional Perspectives") and begins with an essay by David Engel ("What's in a Pogrom? European Jews in the Age of Violence") that suggests a theoretical framework for interpreting the concept of pogrom. As Engel argues, pogrom "is not a pre-existing natural category but an abstraction created by human being in order to divide complex and infinitely varied social phenomena into manageable units of analysis" (p. 21).

Nevertheless, there are certain factors (they were usually spontaneous outbreaks of violence taking place at the time of social, economic or political changes in places where Jews constituted a high percentage of local population) that, when taken together, may help us in defining a pogrom.

The following three chapters discuss the lesser known examples of anti-Jewish violence taking place during the First World War across Eastern Europe. Presented as the most violent examples of pogroms, these events do not always fit into the framework established by Engel. As Eric Lohr points out, the role of the Russian army in 1915 war pogroms was much greater than in any previous wave of anti-Jewish violence (p. 41). The arrival of soldiers unaccustomed to the social landscape of the Pale of Settlement (on very rare occasions Jews had been allowed to settle beyond western areas of the Empire) and the growing fear of Jewish, as well as German, spies, strengthened the existing economic, religious and social anti-Jewish sentiments. According to Vladimir P. Buldakov ("Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the 'Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom' in Russia, 1917-1918"), the fall of the Russian Empire did not mean the end of anti-Jewish violence. Buldakov divides the pogroms of that period into two types: "those that were a part of bread riots, and those carried out by masses of demoralized soldiers or retreating revolutionary detachments" (p. 86).

Part two of the book presents Jewish responses to pogroms. Vladimir Levin's essay ("Preventing Pogroms: Patterns in Jewish Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Russia") offers an interesting approach to the ways in which Russian Jews tried to prevent pogroms by "intercession, self-defense, and systematic struggle against antisemitism" (p. 96). The first of these methods was the most traditional of all and it was linked with the tradition of "shtadlanut" (the process of representing a local Jewish community by a Jewish lobbyist, or a "shtadlan") in which prominent Jews represented and defended interests of their coreligionists among the governing classes. However, in the context of anti-Jewish violence "and intercession could be made only when there was a direct threat of pogrom" (p. 98), significantly limiting the success of any intervention. Even self-defence, despite its importance in preventing local Jewish population from the worst effects of pogroms, could not always prevent pogroms from happening. Instead their very existence "could potentially increase hostility toward Jews among Christians" (p. 100), particularly if we take into consideration links between self-defence units and Jewish radical parties. Organisations such as the Jewish People's Group or the Society for Disseminating Correct Information about Jews and Jewry served as an attempt of liberal Jews to fight against Russian antisemitism, but they also failed in their attempts to prevent pogroms.

The last part of the book presents five different regional perspectives that include Belorussia, Lithuania, Siberia and Crimea. Apart from the work of Lilia Kalmina ("The Possibility of the Impossible: Pogroms in Eastern Siberia"), being well beyond the geographical scope discussed in the majority of other essays, only one essay ("Was Lithuania a Pogrom-Free Zone? (1881-1940)" by Vidas Sirutavičius

and Darius Staliūnas) discusses the problem of pogroms that actually happened, while the other three chapters look at the absence of anti-Jewish violence. Significantly, these analyses of factors that determined peaceful co-existence of Jews and non-Jews seem as important as the elements that usually led to pogroms (described by Engel).

To a certain extent *Anti-Jewish Violence* promises more than it actually delivers. Almost all chapters discuss problems relating to pogroms and anti-Jewish violence taking place on the territories of the Russian Empire or Soviet Union. With the exception of the case of Siberia, the promise of the editors to go "beyond the geographic and even the chronological boundaries normally associated with pogroms in Eastern Europe" (p. 2) remains unfulfilled, though it is true that only a few of the presented works discuss the problem of pogroms in the usual period (1881-1918) associated with anti-Jewish violence in the region. Moreover, despite the good outline presented in the introduction and much more detailed analysis of the concept of pogrom in Engel's chapter, a few authors decided to devote several paragraphs of their essays to discuss theoretical problems associated with definitions and contexts of pogroms. Though at times it appears significant (particularly in Lohr's work, where he stresses the existence of an additional factor, the army, in the pogroms of 1915), on several occasions, all we get is just a repetition of already discussed theoretical framework.

By looking at less-known pogroms that took place during the First World War, several authors point out the uniqueness of these events, particularly in comparison to the outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in 1881-2 and 1905. Even more enlightening are approaches aiming at explaining not the actual pogroms, but the absence of anti-Jewish violence in some places and periods. Overall, "Anti-Jewish Violence. Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History" offers an interesting contribution to the subject of pogroms in Eastern Europe.

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