Semen Goldin, *Priniat' iskliuchitel'nye mery ...' Russkaia armii i evrei. 1914–1917*, Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 2018. ISBN 978-5-93273-499-5

According to the Russian Imperial Census of 1897, Jews constituted 12.73 per cent of the total population in the Vilnius province, 13.73 per cent in Kaunas, and 10.14 per cent in Suwalki; while in the Republic of Lithuania in 1923, Jews made up barely 7.6 per cent of the total population. It is obvious that the war affected Jews much more than other ethno-confessional groups in Lithuania. Semen Goldin's book about the Russian army and Jews presents numerous explanations as to why this was so. Goldin is interested not only in the attitudes of military leaders and ordinary soldiers towards Jews, or their specific actions aimed at the exploitation and persecution of this ethno-confessional group, or echoes of the problem in Imperial domestic policy and on the international arena. He is interested in a question that is much broader in scope: how did this 'Jewish question' aspect affect the empire? In other words, was the collapse of the empire not also related to the fact that between 1914 and 1917, the tsarist government was not only engaging in military operations against foreign armies but also 'waging a war against the Jews' (pp. 371–372)?

The book has both a chronological and a thematic design. The first chapter is about the Russian army at the beginning of the 20th century and its relationship with the Jews. This theme has already attracted the close attention of Yohanon Petrovsky-Shtern.¹ However, Goldin, much like Oleg Budnitskii,² argues that Petrovsky-Shtern's idea that there was more pragmatism than anti-Semitism amongst the leaders of the tsarist army regarding the Jewish question actually contradicts the facts presented in his book (pp. 45, 373). Goldin shows how there was more anti-Semitism in the Russian army, primarily among its leaders, than in society, and that on numerous occasions in the early 20th century

¹ Y. Petrovskii-Shtern, *Evrei v russkoi armii 1827–1914* (Moscow, 2003); idem, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge, 2008).

² O. Budnitskii, 'Shots in the Back: On the Origin of Anti-Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921', *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John D. Klier*, eds. E.M. Avrutin, H. Murav (Boston, 2012), p. 189.

the Imperial political elite considered the proposal that Jews should no longer be conscripted, because they were 'a harmful and dangerous element' (pp. 56–57). This idea was never implemented, due to the war, and due to opposing politicians, who claimed the measure would be unjust towards other national groups living in the empire. Nonetheless, instances of anti-Semitism even before the Great War were very frequent. Probably the most obvious example of discrimination against Jews is that they could not become officers in the tsarist army (p. 34). In this context, an important shift took place at the beginning of the 20th century, when the criteria by which the Imperial government (military leaders) determined whether an individual was a Jew or not changed. If before this criterion was confession (a Jew was deemed someone who professed Judaism), then in 1910 Nicholas I issued a decree that Jews were no longer allowed to sit the exams to become officers 'regardless of what confession they professed'. Goldin treats this formula as proof that in identifying Jews, the Imperial government moved from confession to race (pp. 35–36). This idea about the growing intensity of the racial criterion is repeated numerous times in the book (pp. 54, 57, 138), although in one place the author does not appear to be so sure: 'In the eyes of the Imperial government, throughout the whole 19th century, the Jews were a religious group, in the 20th century they started being viewed as an ethnic or even a racial group' (p. 373).³ From this quote, it is clear that the author does not use the terms race and ethnic group as synonyms, but rather places them in a kind of hierarchy: a race, more than an ethnic group, is characterised by innate, unchanging qualities. This review cannot reveal all the complexity of the issue, especially as I have not analysed how the term 'race' functioned in the early 20th-century Russian discourse; however, the examples given in the book allow us to doubt the statement that the ruling Imperial elite did indeed think in terms of racial categories. For example, in the book, we read that in 1914 the Warsaw military district commander indicated that neither Jews who had converted to Christianity, nor the sons and grandsons of those who had been 'born into Judaism' (p. 36), could become *praporshchiks*. This formula tells us that, according to the understanding of the military elite, the conversion of a Jew to a Russian (assimilation) could only occur in the fourth generation. This assimilation threshold, to use

³Semen Goldin has discussed this question in more detail in a separate article: S. Goldin, 'Evrei kak poniati v istorii imperskoi Rossii, «Poniatija o Rossii», *K istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda*, Vol. II, eds. A. Miller, D. Sdvizhkov, I. Schierle (Moscow, 2012), p. 340–391.

a term coined by Aleksei Miller, was extremely radical, for in the case of a Pole, for example, to paraphrase Witold Rodkiewicz, it was enough 'to be born Orthodox';⁴ however, he did still state that assimilation was possible, which would seem to suggest that he was talking about the ethnic, not the racial, criterion.

In the second chapter, Goldin analyses how the role of the army in public life changed once the war had begun. Most of the Jewish Pale of Settlement ended up under the military government. During the whole duration of the war, as the author states, there were constant conflicts between the military and the civil authorities. This chapter explains why the military leadership had so much power, impacting not only Jews in the army but also those civilian Jews who found themselves in the rear of the front-line zones.

The third chapter is about the military government's attitude towards Jews during the war. According to the author, the negative image of the Jew formed not only under the influence of clear, prewar anti-Semitic stereotypes, but also as a result of the military defeats the Russians were experiencing, when scapegoats were needed, and as a result of the idea that military success was impossible until disloyal elements in society were neutralised. As Goldin shows, in terms of the empire, and primarily its military elite, Jews were not the only suspect element. The government had an even more negative view of Germans, both German subjects and ethnic Germans who were subjects of the tsar.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the mass deportations of Jews from the rear of front-line zones and their internment. At first, this process affected relatively small numbers of Jews; however, the actions were carried out on a mass scale at the beginning of 1915. Yet even then, Goldin did not see any kind of consistency or planning in these activities, but more a sporadic policy dependent on the decisions of individual military commanders. These deportations caused the Imperial government a great deal of difficulty, blocking lines of communication and military supplies, and led to an overall worsening of the economic situation, which made the military authorities abandon the deportations in favour of interning Jews. Both measures had the same aim: to neutralise the alleged hostility of the Jews and their assistance to the Germans. According to Goldin's calculations, around 200,000 to 250,000 Jews were deported, of whom

⁴ A. Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism. Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest/New York, 2008), p. 52; W. Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905)* (Lublin, 1998), p. 60.

around 160,000 were from the Kaunas province.⁵ Jews were not the only group to be deported. The tsarist government also deported citizens of states that Russia was at war with, including ethnic Germans; however, as Eric Lohr has noted, in the case of the Jews, these deportations were accompanied by a great deal of violence and extortion.⁶

In the fifth chapter, Goldin shows how the accusations made against Jews changed in 1915. At first, the Russian military leadership accused Jews mostly of spying for the enemy, but by the end of the year accusations of engaging in revolutionary activities and sabotage had begun to prevail. As the deportations appeared not to be particularly effective in ensuring Jewish loyalty, and seemed to worsen the general situation, especially economically, the Imperial government halted these drastic measures and started to consider various other forms of repressions aimed at Jews.

In the sixth chapter, Goldin turns away from the senior military authorities, and looks at the violent behaviour towards Jews by ordinary soldiers. Along with extra-judicial executions, the rape of women and other acts of violence, the author devotes a lot of attention to pogroms. These large-scale anti-Jewish acts of violence were usually performed by Cossacks or other cavalymen. Pogroms took place on the western periphery of the Russian Empire between July and October 1915 (15 times in the Kaunas province, and 19 times in the Vilnius province). Goldin bases his descriptions of these outbursts of violence mostly on Jewish testimonials, as it is difficult to find other sources. The press was strictly censored, while the civilian government had no powers to investigate such incidents. Goldin notes how the local population participated, if not in the same way, then in a very similar way, in their active denunciations, and by stealing from Jews. My research, meanwhile, has

⁵ See also: S. Goldin, 'Deportation of Jews by the Russian Military Command', in: *Jews in Eastern Europe*, No 1(41), 2000, pp. 40–73; E. Lohr, 'Novye dokumenty o rossiiskoi armii i evreikh vo vremia Pervoi mirovoi voyny', in: *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta* 8(26) 2003, pp. 245–268; S. Goldin, 'Deportatsiia russkoi armiei evreev iz Kovenskoi i Kurliandskoi gubernii (aprel'–mai 1915 g.)', *Evrei v meniaiushchemsia mire. Materialy 5-i mezh du narodnoi konferentsii, Riga, 16–17 sentiabria 2003 g.*, eds. G. Branover, R. Ferber (Riga, 2005), pp. 260–265; S. Goldin, 'Russkoe komandovanie i evrei vo vremia Pervoi Mirovoi voyny: prichiny formirovaniia negativnogo stereotipa', in: *Mirovoi krizis 1914–1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropskogo evreistva*, ed. O. Budnitskii (Moscow, 2005), pp. 29–46.

⁶ E. Lohr, *Russkii natsionalizm i Rossiiskaia imperija: kampaniia protiv „vrazheskikh poddannykh“ v gody pervoi mirovoi voyny* (Moscow, 2012), p. 162; for deportations and hostages, see pp. 161–171.

revealed that in Lithuania, unlike Belarus for example, there were no cases where pogroms were initiated by the local population. According to the victimised Jews, their Christian neighbours often exploited these acts as an opportunity to exact revenge on Jews, to ridicule and exploit them, although other local Christians would express their sympathy and try to help Jews.⁷

The seventh chapter is about the attempts of Russian Jewish leaders to find allies and to stop the persecutions. Some of these attempts failed because at first neither the liberal Russian parties nor the government wanted to listen to the requests by the Jewish representatives; however, in Goldin's view, the actions of international Jewish lobbyists were more effective, and in August 1915 the Pale of Settlement was partly dismantled. In his writing about the years 1914 to 1921, a somewhat longer period than that discussed in the book, Goldin's teacher, the late Jonathan Frankel, described the image of both this and other international Jewish lobbying successes, and the strengthening of Jewish power, in rather dramatic terms: 'Belief in Jewish power, exaggerated to the level of myth, had permitted Jewish organizations and advocates to intervene at crucial moments and at the highest government levels to prevent still-worse disasters during the war – and to win grandiose promises with regard to the future. Few realized just how much this myth, albeit a source of political strength, was still more – given the essential weakness it disguised – a source of danger without limit.'⁸

To complete this review, I would agree with the author that 'the war against the Jews' certainly did not strengthen the Russian Empire during the Great War. Discrimination and persecution certainly did not boost the Jews' loyalty towards the Russian Empire, while at the same time the policy, especially the deportations, only aggravated the already complicated economic, social and inter-ethnic situation. At the same time, it should be said that this book does not really specify the impact of Jewish policy on the empire's stability. In order to make a more thorough analysis of this problem, other phenomena should be investigated (the change in political attitudes of the Jews, the social and economic situation, etc). I think Goldin's book is more important in other respects. It provides comprehensive and convincing evidence of how and why the views of the senior military leadership towards the Jews changed,

⁷ D. Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest/New York, 2015), pp. 204–208.

⁸ J. Frankel, 'The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality: Thoughts on the Jewish Situation during the Years 1914–1921', in: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 4 (1988), p. 18.

how repressive measures directed against this ethno-confessional group evolved, and how this was reflected in relations between the army and Jewish civilians. This is all very important, because readers can get a much better understanding of the events that unfolded after the February revolution. The scale of anti-Jewish pogroms of 1917 to 1921, the most serious outbreak of mass anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe between the Khmelnytsky Uprising in Ukraine in the 17th century and the Holocaust can only be explained in the context of what was happening during the Great War (p. 383).

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