



Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov (Great Lakes Books)

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Long before there were Jewish communities in the land of the tsars, Jews inhabited a region which they called medinat rusiya, the land of Russia. Prior to its annexation by Russia, the land of Russia was not a center of rabbinic culture. But in 1772, with its annexation by Tsarist Russia, this remote region was severed from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; its 65,000 Jews were thus cut off from the heartland of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Forced into independence, these Jews set about forging a community with its own religious leadership and institutions.

The three great intellectual currents in East European Jewry--Hasidism, Rabbinic Mitnagdism, and Haskalah--all converged on Eastern Belorussia, where they clashed and competed. In the course of a generation, the community of Shklov—the most prominent of the towns in the area—witnessed an explosion of intellectual and cultural activity.

Focusing on the social and intellectual odysseys of merchants, maskilim, and rabbis, and their varied attempts to combine Judaism and European culture, David Fishman here chronicles the remarkable story of these first modern Jews of Russia.

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