



Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov (Reappraisals in Jewish Social & Intellectual History S)

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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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