

Imperial Russian Rule in the Kingdom of Poland, 1864–1915. By Malte Rolf. trans. Cynthia Klohr. Russian and East European Studies. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. xvi, 441 pp. Glossary. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$60.00, hard bound.
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After the Polish uprising in 1863–64, the tsarist regime reformed the Kingdom of Poland and established a new system of administration that determined the development of the Polish provinces of the Russian empire for the next fifty years. This book investigates the top echelon of the imperial bureaucracy of the Vistula lands and its adaptable relationship with local society.

The book convincingly demonstrates a need to study the periphery instead of focusing on the metropolis. Russian Warsaw served as an example of field experimentation in modern governmental practices. As often was the case with other European empires, Russia gained knowledge after such experiments and generated ideas at the periphery that often returned to the metropolis and had influence there. Moreover, Russian Warsaw was a window to western practices. Russian Poland became a bridge to European practices and was used as a model in various decisions of the metropolis.

The book studies the governing process of Russian Poland from 1864 to 1915. Throughout that period, the administration was mostly unchanged. The governing forces were limited, and the Vistula lands remain under governed. The efforts to rule, therefore, had to be particularly challenging to implement power. The governing process was also plagued by ever-present friction between the center and periphery, between multiethnic and multi-confessional bureaucracy, between institutions of power, between the local population and the administration of the Governors-General, whose rule consisted of activities that were habitually adjusted to match the directives of the metropolis.

The authors' profiles of ten consecutive Warsaw Governors-General suggest that they shared analogous backgrounds and career patterns, but each had personal preferences. The Russian empire did not develop a uniform policy on nationality, and the policies did not intend to alter Vistula lands and its culture and people. Instead, the governing consisted of maneuvering and responding to daily changes. The decisions were often ambiguous and contradictory. Using case studies of conflict and cooperation, Malte Rolf invalidates the old "freedom-loving Poles vs. oppressive Russians" narrative. The high number of Catholics in service made it implausible. To achieve results, the local bureaucracy tried to avoid conflicts with locals while at the same time "put on a facade" for their superiors in St. Petersburg. Even at a time of crisis, the recourse came as a staged repression that mirrored the aggressive acts. The administration did not act proactively but rather replied to the occurrences. However, the practice was exactly what made the administrative practices flexible and built a durable system. It proved its robustness, particularly during the revolutionary events of 1905–6. The regime was resilient, concludes the author. The imperial authorities managed to find a way to sustain *modus vivendi*.

The author masterfully uses case studies of conflict and cooperation. He explores such examples as Warsaw's booming building sector and concludes that constant negotiation tactics and the necessity for collaboration with the local population were pragmatic and frictionless. Urban modernization and the vision of Warsaw as a future metropolis was shared by both sides, "the colonizers" and "the colonized." Both sides enjoyed their privileged position, which in turn separated Russian Warsaw's inhabitants not only from the rest of Vistula lands but also from St. Petersburg's administration. This rift created a particular identity for the Russian Warsaw inhabitants who saw themselves as modern-day elites juxtaposed to other Russian provinces.

The book *Imperial Russian Rule in the Kingdom of Poland, 1864–1915* is a superb contribution to the field of history of Russian Poland, the Russian empire, and elites. Yet, it is also proposing a revision of the much-needed historiography of empires and their organization. Rolf brings to the surface the most profound question: what do we mean by imperial rule? The author determines that the heterogeneity of the Russian empire, the complexity of issues and actors, and the efforts of collaboration, integration, and resistance reveal the complexity of any imperial rule. He ascertains that instead of such concepts as “forced colonization” or an “authoritative hierarchy” historians should use “mutual relationships” that were flexible and negotiated. Those relationships not only shaped the social, economic, and political structures of the periphery. They also left a mark on the identity of participants. The identities and the way they were formed by encounters and communications demonstrate a real, not an imaginary constellation of power.

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An Unchosen People: Jewish Political Reckoning in Interwar Poland. By Kenneth B. Moss. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021. xii, 388 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$45.00, hard cover.
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Kenneth Moss’s thought-provoking and well-crafted book, *An Unchosen People*, convincingly challenges a range of historiographical truisms regarding the study of modern Jewish history, in general, and Jewish history in interwar Poland, in particular, which all scholars and students of these and related fields will want to contemplate as they pore over this path-breaking study.

Based on a large amount of source material in Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish, Moss argues that much of the research conducted on modern Jewish politics in English, Hebrew and Polish over the past two generations has overlooked several key points that, together, demonstrate the need to reevaluate and revise prevailing assumptions regarding what many have long thought was a somewhat saturated field of study. Moss’s ability to reconfigure this major chapter in modern Jewish and Polish histories is a testament to the originality of his historical thinking, his mastery over a wide array of historical materials, and his ability to weave them together into a convincing monograph. This is no small feat.

Moss’s first major point is that the time has come to take seriously the increasingly pervasive sense of “futurelessness” among so many Jews in interwar Poland (41–87). Turning to Yiddish memoirs composed by Jewish youth as part of the YIVO Institute’s autobiographical contests from 1932, 1934 and 1939, Hebrew reports penned by emissaries of different Zionist organizations based in British Mandate Palestine, the analyses of Jewish sociologists like Max Weinreich and Jacob Lestschinsky, and other sources, Moss demonstrates that an increasing number of Jews in interwar Poland felt as though they had no future, and argues that scholars need to treat Jewish “futurelessness” just as they would any other historical phenomenon.

As part of his efforts to convince scholars that the time has come to recast their interpretation of Polish and Jewish histories in this period, Moss brings a staggering amount of source material to the table. Similar to other studies like those by Kamil Kijek, (*Dzieci modernizmu*), Rona Yona, (*Nihyeh kulanu halutsim*),