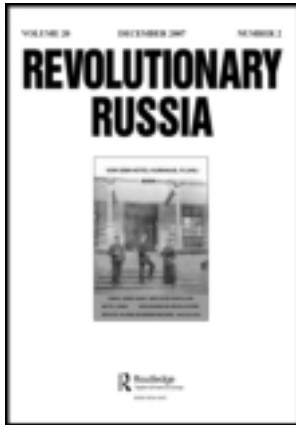


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Exemplary Bodies: Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture since the 1880s

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and capacity to conduct operational manoeuvre, and undermines any older prejudices that might remain regarding the intellectual calibre of the Russian officer corps. Yet the overarching outcome remains clear; these problems, though repeatedly recognised and acknowledged, were not overcome, largely because the steady emergence of a bottom-up intellectual meritocracy within the officer corps (a point underlined by the fact that non-Guards officers formed a narrow majority – 54.7 per cent – over aristocratic Guards officers within the General Staff on the eve of war in 1914 [p. 282]) continued to be constrained by the social nature of a top-down autocracy. Amongst the many points made in this masterful study, Steinberg helps underline how Tsarist military performance continued to be undermined by the empire's growing social and political contradictions.

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Henrietta Mondry, *Exemplary Bodies: Constructing the Jew in Russian Culture since the 1880s*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008. Pp. i + 301; illustrations; Notes; index. £55.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-934843-39-0

Until very recently, scholars have tended to ignore the study of the idea of 'race' in late Imperial and Soviet Russian history. Instead, attention has been much more focused on the concepts of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity'. This book is a welcome addition to the small but growing literature that aims to address the neglect of 'race' (see also Marina Mogil'ner, *Homo Imperii. Istoriia fizicheskoi antropologii v Rossii*. Moscow, Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2008). Mondry's book has a broad and ambitious scope: it aims to explore the racialisation of the 'Jewish body' in Russian literature and film since the late nineteenth century. The main argumentative thrust is that, from the 1880s onwards, a racialised discourse rooted in pseudo-scientific theories of biological determinism emerged and became increasingly influential in Russian culture (p. 15). This discourse, argues Mondry, has been underpinned by the notion that the Jews constitute a people with inherent, heritable and predicative characteristics, which are rooted in their biological constitution (p. 16). Emerging from the theories of physical anthropology and biological sciences of late-Tsarism, the notion of the 'Jewish body' has been constructed as the archetypal 'other' to all things Russian. Mondry further argues that these racialised conceptions of Jewishness gained special momentum during the 70 years of the Soviet Union (p. 16) and continue to grow today as Russian nationalism reasserts itself in the post-socialist era (p. 268).

The first five chapters cover the period from the 1880s to the 1930s and will be of most interest to readers of this journal. Chapter 1 offers an interesting overview of the extent to which Russian anthropological and biological scientists in the late Imperial period began to draw upon the ideas of 'race' which were gaining momentum in France and Germany. Mondry draws here predominantly on the works of S. V. Eshevskii (1829–65), I. A. Sikorskii (1842–1919) and A. P. Bogdanov (1834–96) to illustrate the extent to which Russian scientists were building upon the classifications of 'races' already undertaken by James Cowles Prichard and Arthur de Gobineau. Mondry

forcefully argues that it was Jews more than any other group that became the object of an emergent Russian scientific racism (p. 66). The analysis of the 1880s is accompanied by an exploration of the influence of these scientific theories in the writings of Chekov (chapter 2). Mondry contends here that the representations of Jews in Chekov's writings in the 1880s (she analyses *The Steppe* and *Tina*) often exhibited an indebtedness to theories of hereditariness and biological determinism (p. 44).

An analysis of the works of writer and philosopher V. V. Rozanov (1856–1919) produces an engaging discussion of the roles of sexuality and gender in representations of the Jewish body (chapter 3). Indeed, throughout the book, Mondry convincingly demonstrates the extent to which the idea of a Jewish 'race' has been articulated with themes of 'Jewish sexuality' and related forms of gendered discourse.

Mondry also argues that racialised ideas about Jews have often been 'internalized' (p. 92) by Jews themselves. For instance, chapter 4 demonstrates the extent to which racialised conceptions of the Jewish body found expression in Ehrenburg's 1920s writings. These writings are used to suggest that pre-revolutionary ideas about the 'Jewish race' were maintained with surprising ease after 1917.

Chapter 5 assesses the period between the 1930s and 1950s. Mondry argues here that Stalinist attempts at re-forging (*perekovka*) were paradoxically accompanied by an intensification of racialisation processes (p. 125). The empirical focus shifts here to the screen and V. V. Korsh-Sablin's 1936 film *The Seekers of Happiness* about life in the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan is explored. Mondry suggests that despite the film's support for re-forging, it nonetheless portrays the character, Pinia, with a love of money and physical appearance which are deemed to be 'Jewish' and biologically determined (p. 131).

Later chapters look at the period from the 1950s to the present. Chapter 6 addresses literary works during the anti-Zionist campaign, which escalated after the Arab–Israeli war of 1967. T. K. Kichko's 1963 *Judaism Unvarnished* takes the primary focus here. The impact of the *Glasnost*' reforms on discourses concerning the Jewish body are also explored (chapter 7). Subsequent chapters focus on the recent writings of Russian Jewish émigrés in Israel, whilst the final chapter addresses current manifestations of racist anti-Semitism in contemporary Russian literature and science.

The book has undoubted strengths. It represents a welcome theoretical shift away from the tendency to view religious-based anti-Semitism and racialised anti-Semitism as being somehow distinct (p. 273). Indeed, the book places the idea of 'race' and processes of racialisation at centre stage, and this is a most welcome theoretical contribution. Moreover, each chapter is generally focused on a close reading of the literary works of one or two individuals, yet, at the same time, Mondry makes frequent and useful references to other contemporary writers, and this contextualisation helps broaden the narrative.

However, some weaknesses need to be noted. First, the broad chronological scope of the book limits the depth of analysis in places; for instance, the discussion in chapter 1 of late Imperial anthropological and biological sciences is frustratingly short. Moreover, at times, the argument of the book takes on a rather one-dimensional character. For example, Mondry offers much evidence of racialisation of Jews in Russian literature, but very little discussion of counter-narratives or competing ideologies is given. Indeed, non-racist discourses regarding Jews in Russian literature are conspicuous by their absence. This raises questions about the representative nature of the empirical evidence used to support the book's argument. There are also some problems regarding theoretical rigour.

For instance, Mondry claims at the outset to make ‘a clear distinction’ between the concepts ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ (p. 17). However, this distinction is not often maintained in the analysis (pp. 126–27; 168; 269), and the terms are used interchangeably at times.

There are also unresolved problems with Mondry’s claim that ideas concerning the Jewish ‘race’ informed the decisions of policy-makers in the late Imperial period and the 1920s (pp. 18, 30, 35). For instance, there is little attempt to substantiate empirically the interchange of ideas between anthropologists and biological scientists and political elites in either the Tsarist or Soviet government. More generally, analysis of literary works may not be the most suitable way through which to make claims about the assumptions and ideas of political elites. Of course, the book’s focus on literature and film is a valid and important one. However, Mondry assumes at times a direct link between writers and political elites, without sufficient supporting evidence to substantiate that such links exist. For instance, in chapter 11, Mondry argues that the pseudo-scientific racist ideas of writer V. B. Avdeev (b. 1962) are widespread among Russia’s current political elite (p. 267). However, only one member of the Russian Duma (A. N. Savel’ev) is cited as being influenced by Avdeev and one is left wondering how widespread his views actually are.

Nevertheless, these issues should not detract from what is an otherwise important contribution to our understanding of representations of Jews in Russian cultural history. Above all, the book presents a forceful argument that the idea of ‘race’ has been central to the ‘Jewish question’ in Russian culture since the 1880s. The book will be of interest to scholars of Russian literature, and those with an interest in Russian-Jewish history more generally.

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Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. Pp. xviii + 382. £18.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-2532-2058-5

While doing research in the Kiev archives for my monograph on the history of the Jewish community of late Imperial Kiev, I was struck by the files containing charters and annual reports of hundreds and hundreds of Jewish charitable and cultural organisations from innumerable towns across Kiev and neighbouring provinces. The history of Jewish charity and philanthropy in the Russian Empire has yet to be written, but Jeffrey Veidlinger has now given us a captivating and readable portrait of organised Jewish cultural life in the last decades of Tsarist rule. Inflected by Veidlinger’s expertise in Jewish history, his insight into the nuances of Jewish communal existence, and his sensitivity to gender and class, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* presents a new angle on the development of a modern Russian-Jewish identity in a time of turmoil and repression, but also great dynamism and creativity. As a number of scholars of Russian-Jewish history have done over the past decade or so, the author urges us to shift our gaze from political movements and parties, on the one hand, and from the elite production