

## RECLAIMING A HISTORY, JEWISH ARCHITECTS IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA AND THE USSR, VOL.1 LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA: 1891-1917

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Berkovich, G. (2020)  
*Reclaiming a History. Jewish Architects in Imperial Russia and the USSR, Volume 1. Late Imperial Russia: 1891–1917* (Grünberg Verlag: Weimar and Rostock).

The first edition of the book by Gary Berkovich entitled *Reclaiming a History, Jewish Architects in Imperial Russia and the USSR, Vol.1 Late Imperial Russia: 1891-1917* aims to fill in the gap in the knowledge on the Russian Jewish heritage of the turn of the 19th century. It is undoubtedly a work of an enthusiast, deeply passionate about the subject. At the same time, the work lacks sufficient scientific elaboration and therefore it appears to belong to the category of popular literature. The qualities of research publications, such as, for instance, a well-defined scope or a systematic approach, are missing. Russian empire was a vast country; its borders changed in a diachronic way along with the political situation. Therefore, it would be helpful if the Author makes it explicit which specific part of the empire he covers. The explanation of the political background would be also useful. It might be difficult for a reader who is not familiar with Russian history to understand the local context. The period covered in the book is extensive and includes fundamental political transformations. Putting all the events and persons listed in the text on the timeline would improve the structure and make it easier to grasp the full image. Nevertheless, the cognitive values of the book deserve appreciation, since, unfortunately, the work of Jewish

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architects is hardly known outside of Russia. While answering this need, the book contains an extensive collection of edifices by Jewish architects constructed in Kharkov, Moscow and St. Petersburg at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Since the Reviewer is not familiar with Russian heritage enough to verify the factual data or opinions regarding the main body of the work, she can only raise doubts that refer to what concerns the architectural heritage of the Kingdom of Poland (since 1867 Vistula Country). The Congress Kingdom was not a part of the Pale of Settlement, nor Russia proper. The conditions to settle here were different, and they changed in time. Numerous works address these topics (eg., Sienkiewicz, 2010; Teller, 2014), including volumes published in English. The story is also depicted in detail in Yivo materials online<sup>1</sup>. The research thread is expanding quickly in recent times, and publications on architectural

<sup>1</sup> <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Russia> access 2.09.2021



## Reclaiming a History

Jewish Architects in Imperial Russia  
and the USSR

Volume 1. Late Imperial Russia:  
1891-1917

By  
Gary Berkovich

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<sup>2</sup> Krzysztof Stefański writes about the relations between Lodz and centres of Russian architecture in his article: Stefański, K., 2013, Sankt Petersburg-Łódź-Moskwa: o wzajemnych relacjach architektonicznych na przełomie XIX i XX wieku, *Sztuka Europy Wschodniej Искусство Восточной Европы Art of Eastern Europe* 1, 279-291, available at [https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Sztuka\\_Europy\\_Wschodniej\\_B\\_Art\\_of\\_Eastern\\_Europe/Sztuka\\_Europy\\_Wschodniej\\_B\\_Art\\_of\\_Eastern\\_Europe-r2013-t1/Sztuka\\_Europy\\_Wschodniej\\_B\\_Art\\_of\\_Eastern\\_Europe-r2013-t1-s279-291/Sztuka\\_Europy\\_Wschodniej\\_B\\_Art\\_of\\_Eastern\\_Europe-r2013-t1-s279-291.pdf](https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Sztuka_Europy_Wschodniej_B_Art_of_Eastern_Europe/Sztuka_Europy_Wschodniej_B_Art_of_Eastern_Europe-r2013-t1/Sztuka_Europy_Wschodniej_B_Art_of_Eastern_Europe-r2013-t1-s279-291/Sztuka_Europy_Wschodniej_B_Art_of_Eastern_Europe-r2013-t1-s279-291.pdf) access 2.09.2021

<sup>3</sup> For example, a popular online resource that discusses this topic: <http://baedekerlodz.blogspot.com/2018/09/architekci-i-budowniczowie-odzi.html> access 2.09.2021

<sup>4</sup> An interested reader might find detailed information on the economic activities of Polish Jewry in publications by W. Puś (Puś, 2003; Puś, 2005; Puś, 2006).

heritage are also abundant (eg., Łoza, 1954; Popławska, 1973; Stefański, 1995; Strzałkowski, 1997; Laurentowicz-Granas & Manžett-Kubiak, 2009; Majer, 1977). Recently this collection was further enriched by the publication by Stefański (2021) on the work of Henryk Hirszenberg and other Jewish architects active in pre-war Łódź, with a chapter presenting works of Jewish architects in Łódź between 1885 and 1914<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, I find some omissions of topics that refer to this subject. For instance, the book mentions only one Jewish architect who worked in Łódź and whose work deserved attention, Adolf Zeligson. While the principal focus of the book might explain this since Zeligson moved later to Russia and worked there, the exclusion of others is misleading; there were at least three leading Jewish architects working in Łódź at the time who should be covered<sup>3</sup>.

Further, we learn that the Jewish industrial base covered 70 % of the industry without giving dates or source information. This, however, cannot be considered accurate - Jews were active in trade and commerce, and in these fields, their firms indeed covered a large share of the market. Still, when it comes to industrial production, they shared the field with German and later Polish producers<sup>4</sup>.

All the above considered, while I am glad to welcome a book that shows lots of enthusiasm and presents a collection of valuable architectural works, I also hope this first book in the series will not be the last in this series. This is undoubtedly the task for professional architecture historians of various backgrounds, including Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Belarusian and Jewish working together, to further systematise the presentation of the rich and well-illustrated material collected in the current volume.

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