

political conjunctions were responsible for the fact that the study of Byzantium more often subverted than asserted the idea of the common Balkan past, as one would imagine.

Outlining the development of the specific field of Byzantine studies from the late nineteenth century, Mishkova points out how, despite the newly introduced scientific methods, historiographies continued to reflect political and ideological constraints and ambitions, though there were outlier historians and thinkers all along, like Stojan Novaković in Serbia, Demostene Russo, Petre P. Panaitescu, and Alexandru Elian in Romania, and the late Ottoman historian Ahmet Refik or Anthony Kaldellis among contemporary scholars, whose views are clearly the closest to the author of this systematic overview. Amidst general trends, Mishkova provides superb analysis of individual authors such as “Iorga’s highly speculative bravura, visionary flair and opaque and ornate style . . .” (119). The interest of both professional historians and state establishments made the Balkans since the interwar period into an international hub of Byzantine scholarship. It was a complex achievement, as Mishkova shows, with scholarly methodology largely deceptive, as old notions acquired new coatings throughout the Cold War and its aftermath with political and security anxieties projecting onto the past.

Historians in the region will criticize Mishkova’s selections, interpretations and generalizations. But they always would. What puzzles the reader is the author’s ambition, as stated in the introduction, to be a “neutral observer,” and the intention to leave reception and dissemination of historians’ production outside her remit. Yet, she duly notices the inherent epistemological dichotomy of such an effort. Ultimately, she settles on a narrative that sees historiographies in interplay with socio- and geopolitical contexts filled with examples of how competing political visions or diametrically opposed values meshed with historians’ conclusions or sheer inventions (Mishkova politely calls them construals). She also looks at scholars and figures beyond historians to strengthen her arguments, showing how trends emerging from the study of Byzantium formed schools of thought on national history and extended their conclusions to national character and essence. Mishkova’s book is thus not just an overview of Balkan historiographies, but of the Balkan states’ political, intellectual, and cultural histories through the Byzantine prism. As her title aptly sums it up, Balkan states engaged in “rival Byzantiums,” or a multitude of ways in which Byzantium has been represented, appropriated, or disowned. Taking a *longue durée* perspective and placing them in global context, the Balkan historiographies on Byzantium, produced by a *mélange* of amateur and professional historians/politicians/national visionaries, whose output could hardly be isolated due to the porous boundaries of historical writing genres, are not an exception in their manipulability. What distinguishes the Balkans is, according to Mishkova’s persuasive study, only its protracted course and the continuous insecurities that underpin it.

## **Ed. Kateřina Čapková and Kamil Kijek. *Jewish Lives Under Communism: New Perspectives.***

**New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022. 270 pp. Notes. Index. Photographs. \$120.00 hard bound. \$44.95, paper.**

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This slender volume of twelve articles heroically updates the understanding of the lived experience of Jews under communism. Focusing on “people at the bottom” after 1945 and employing

a wide variety of sources (from period sociological surveys to copious oral histories compiled over the last decades), the authors cover space from East Berlin to Birobidzhan to explain how individuals' strategies for survival occurred amid omnipresent hostility from above.

The first section, "Center and Periphery," surprises with Jews flourishing on the margins of socialist Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine. Both Kamil Kijek and Kateřina Čapková (writing on the first and second of these countries, respectively) see Jewish migrants from spaces newly annexed by the Kremlin reinvigorating Jewish life on lands ravaged by the Holocaust. Valery Dymshits adds that Jews in Ukraine's Vynnytsia Oblast (having survived relatively benign wartime Romanian occupation), like those in the industries of northwestern Bohemia, also profited amid regional economies operating outside the center's attention. Not surprisingly, though, given our current experience of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many of articles in this collection show how interwar antisemitism and the subsequent Nazi occupation bonded Jews together and continued to do so even as the secularization of identities accelerated into the 1980s. Still, it is refreshing to hear that unreformed Jewish workers hailing from the shtetls of eastern Europe maintained strong religious identities while thriving within the nuances of a completely planned economy.

A longer second section, "Perceptions of Jewishness," returns the focus to elites and here the picture is not so encouraging. Diana Dumitru's helpful primer on the Soviet state and its Jews after the Holocaust reminds us that any mention of antisemitism by the state would have legitimized Jewish claims of discrimination during the postwar years. Anna Shternshis's collection of fifty-eight oral histories with elderly, post-Soviet Jewish physicians fleshes out life during and after the Doctors' Plot, but like Dumitru she does not comment on the difficulties of survival in an economy of shortage during the ensuing post-war decades. With official antisemitism through quotas in education and the workplace unassailable and the Kremlin's aversions to any Israeli policy decision unchangeable, the everyday aftermath of this Jewish predicament is ground for further research. Agata Maksimowska's deep dive into Jewish life in Birobidzhan does reflect the aftermath of official marginalization—at least for the seven-tenths of one percent (14,269 people as of 1959) of the Soviet Union's Jews who lived in the Jewish Autonomous Region of eastern Siberia. For the Jewish minority residing there especially, she concludes, "...the Soviet system not only failed to fight popular antisemitism, but even enabled its survival in everyday interpersonal relations" (142). Circumstances were much improved in the postwar German Democratic Republic (GDR) chronicled by Anna Koch; a few Jews there (all immigrants or returnees) could openly embrace their religion as the second world in East Berlin at least remained focused on the defense of socialist internationalism.

A shorter third section, "Transnationalism," opens with the late David Shneer's innovative look at communist Jews in the German Democratic Republic and their ties to a global Jewish communist community. Again, for a very small group of people, East Germany seems to have been a progressive bastion compared to other locales. Shneer writes of a state-sponsored April 1963 concert by a "relocated Dutch Communist Yiddish-singing Auschwitz survivor," Lin Jaldati, at the Babylon Theatre on Rosa Luxembourg Platz in the heart of East Berlin: "...The first major East German commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was thus presented simultaneously through socialist, Jewish, and Polish memories of Nazi atrocities" (159). Together with the twenty-fifth anniversary commemoration of Kristallnacht a few months later, brought to fruition by the GDR state secretary of church affairs, Jaldati's concert unleashed decades of Jewish communists' cooperation with the GDR in the name of anti-fascism. As these events continued through 1988 (with Erich Honecker's blessing), one is left wondering whether there were other reasons for the arrival of these Jewish artists from around the world? The transnationalism evident in the volume's other articles by Marcos Silber (on Poland) and Gennady Estraiikh (on the USSR) is less soothing, as with a Jewish man hoping to return to Poland after mistakenly emigrating to Israel in the 1960s, or an effort to convince the authorities in Moscow—a city with 240,000 Jews around the same time—that publishing in Yiddish for local readers might also further the cause of socialism following Nikita Khrushchev's opening to the world.

A final section entitled “Dissidents” discusses resistance, but given the context described above, such actions are few and far between. For Hungary, Kata Bohus chronicles the work of one Jewish intellectual, György Gadó, on the fortieth anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, who argued that Jewishness should be “defined according to historic, cultural and ethnic factors,” instead of strictly religiously, if Hungary were ever to successfully transition to democracy (239). When it comes to life in Soviet Russia, it is difficult to equate the bravery of Gadó with the refusenik experience chronicled by Galina Zelenina at this collection’s end. She interviews Jews who once lived in the heavily Jewish dacha settlement of Malakhovka on Moscow’s eastern side in the 1970s and 80s and finds the idea of emigration to Israel—with perestroika well underway—failing to attract followers even as country houses were inundated with refuseniks on summer weekends. Taken together, the granular details of Jewish life under communism presented here make this volume’s articles indispensable knowledge for those attempting to chronicle what life after 1945 was actually like under the Kremlin’s fist.

## **Hillel J. Kieval. *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder at Europe’s Fin de Siècle.***

**Jewish Culture and Contexts. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. ix, 298 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Tables. \$65.00, hard bound.**

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There has been a renaissance of scholarly works on the modern blood libel tied to critical analyses of modernity, antisemitism, and knowledge and authority in an age of science and print culture. Hillel Kieval’s new book, *Blood Inscriptions*, builds on his past articles on the topic and offers a European-wide narrative of the accreditation of the blood libel in the modern criminal justice system through six trials spanning the era between Jewish emancipation in central Europe by the 1870s and the dissolution of Europe’s continental empires in World War I. Rather than naturalizing the accusation of Jewish ritual murder as a ready-made anti-semitic plot since the Middle Ages available for scapegoating Jews in the event of unsolved local murder and broader socio-economic and political anxieties, Kieval argues for the newness of the phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ritual murder accusations were not pre-packaged narratives but rather socially constructed by individuals. Kieval pays close attention to the individual personalities and activities of investigators, state prosecutors, academic experts, medical examiners, and journalists who took part in this construction. Kieval upholds Max Weber’s classic theorization of modernity as characterized by secularization, or the “disenchantment” of the universe, thus dismissing analyses of the blood libel focused on “the lasting power of myth, or irrationality” (19) in the modern world. Kieval argues that the modern trial was argued in the language of science and reason (136–37); the key protagonists saw themselves as modern and held themselves to such scientific standards; and the narrative itself was not about Christian salvation but Jewish criminality.

The first main chapter provides a cultural history of small town and village life in central Europe focused on face-to-face Jewish-Christian encounters with an eye to occasional anti-Jewish violence despite the tenor of good Jewish-Christian neighborly relations. Kieval emphasizes