

**THE HISTORY AND INTERNAL POLITICS OF  
IRELAND'S JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THEIR  
INTERNATIONAL JEWISH CONTEXT (1881-1914)**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university; that it is entirely my own work; that I agree that the library may lend or copy the thesis upon request.

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Natalie Wynn

April 2015



This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my great-grandparents,  
and to all the immigrant generation:

Janie (Haina Malka) and Solomon (Zalman Sheftl) Clein  
Bessie Gertrude and Harris Daniel (Daniel Tsvi) Noyek

*z"l*

And to my family, with heartfelt appreciation for all their support



# **THE HISTORY AND INTERNAL POLITICS OF IRELAND'S JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THEIR INTERNATIONAL JEWISH CONTEXT (1881-1914)**

## **SUMMARY**

This thesis charts the course of communal life during the foundation period of Ireland's Jewish community in the years 1881 to 1914. In order to do this, it has been necessary to address the many flaws in the existing historiography of Irish Jewry. This study is based on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, ranging from the very familiar to the obscure and neglected. It is constructed around four main elements: context, historiography, community and philanthropy. These have been determined by the nature of the extant primary sources, which relate mostly to key communal institutions such as synagogues and charities. The importance of an appropriate Jewish context as a starting point for any comprehensive and meaningful evaluation of Irish Jewish communal history and narrative is demonstrated throughout. This dissertation contends that the lack of any sound mooring in contemporary scholarly approaches to Jewish history has rendered the study of Irish Jewry overly reliant on popular narrative and collective memory. This is the single greatest defect in Irish Jewish historiography as it currently stands.

Chapter One sets out the three primary contexts of Ireland's Jewish community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Russian empire, mass emigration and Anglo-Jewry. The first part of the chapter outlines the important advancements that have been made within the discipline of Russian Jewish historiography in recent decades. Although it is barely recognised outside the field, the findings of this research have serious implications for the popular narratives of the communities that were formed and reconstructed as a consequence of mass emigration. The rest of the chapter surveys the processes of mass emigration itself and the political, cultural and economic demands that this placed upon the established Jewries of the western world, and upon traditional notions of Jewish solidarity. Chapter One concludes by reviewing these general trends with relation to mainstream Anglo-Jewry, and its response to east European immigration.

Chapter Two applies these findings to current Irish Jewish historiography. In Section 2.1, the arrival, settlement and reception of east European Jewish immigrants

in Ireland is reviewed. Particular attention is paid to confronting popular and persistent arrival myths, and to investigating their possible origins. The widespread tendency to approach the study of Irish Jewry from condescending, dismissive and reductive perspectives is thereby confronted. Section 2.2 considers the influence of anti-Jewish sentiment on Irish Jewish communal narrative. It is argued that all assessments of the Jewish experience in Ireland are based upon subjective perceptions of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the Irish setting, a stance which must be challenged and supplanted by a critical, holistic and contextual approach to the topic. In Section 2.3, existing understandings of the Limerick Boycott of 1904 are interrogated with respect to these observations, and important questions are raised concerning popular perceptions and memories of the Boycott, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Chapters Three and Four close the circle of mass emigration, by investigating the reconstruction and reconfiguration of Ireland's principal Jewish communities as a result of largescale east European immigration. A specific concern is to rewrite the pre-existing 'native' contingent back into communal history, and to assess its response to accelerated immigration with relation to broader trends and patterns. Ireland's immigrant communities are also examined, as far as possible in their own right, and with particular relation to questions of their acculturation and integration into Irish Jewish communal life. The importance is stressed of paying due attention to the internal divisions for which all British immigrant communities were notorious in this period. It is contended that these have much to disclose regarding the character and intricacies of communal life, potentially in the long as well as in the short term. In these chapters, significant points of comparability and distinctiveness emerge with relation to the Anglo-Jewish context of Ireland's Jewish communities, in areas such as acculturation, philanthropy and notions of Jewish solidarity and obligation.

As a whole, this dissertation argues for the merit and importance of studying smaller Jewries in their own right. This complements and enhances the bigger picture of Jewish history that is gained from the examination of more intellectually, culturally and politically dominant communities, and elucidates broader trends and patterns by relating them to more specific, localised settings.



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