

eral (male) Jews and brief accounts on the liberal Jewish women Sara Nathan and Emma Lazarus as noteworthy exceptions. The editors openly tackle this lacuna and justify it with the fact that women were historically excluded from the liberal polity and Jewish communal politics. However, as Abigail Green herself remarks in passing, Jewish women did find various ways to circumvent these restrictions and engaged in political and social activism (pp. 356 f.). In addition, it is a rather established fact that gender played a seminal role in the construction of Jewishness, antisemitism, and liberalism. More emphasis on these aspects could have added a further layer of complexity to the volume's subject and thus would have contributed to its intended purpose.

This notwithstanding, the volume is a major contribution to the field of modern Jewish history. It is remarkable for a project with such an ambitious agenda that it largely succeeds to deliver on its promises. The collected essays effectively apply transnational and post-colonial methods and perspectives to their objects of investigation, showing as a whole that the relationship between Jews, liberalism, and antisemitism is more complex and involves more places and linkages than often assumed. However, the greatest achievement of the volume is perhaps its potential to stimulate further questions. It could serve, for instance, as a starting point for the examination of Jewish-gentile relations in other places, like modern Iraq. More broadly, the authors brilliantly demonstrate the benefits of studying the modern Jewish experience in its transnational dimension and in close connection to the ambiguities of liberalism and other mar-

ginalized groups. Transcending established pathways of interpretation may prove especially valuable at a time of increasing debates on the relationship between the Holocaust and colonial violence. This renders the volume relevant for scholars in various fields. It should be considered as a major historiographical intervention that will hopefully become a reference point not only for historians of Jews and antisemitism but also for future research on liberalism, colonialism, minorities, genocide, and human rights.

Note:

- 1 J. Pitts, *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*, Princeton, NJ, 2010; D. Losurdo, *Liberalism. A Counter-History*, London 2014; D. Bell, *Reordering the World. Essays on Liberalism and Empire*, Princeton, NJ, 2016; T. Stovall, *White Freedom. The Racial History of an Idea*, Princeton, NJ, 2021.

Stephan B. Riegg: *Russia's Entangled Embrace: The Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801–1914*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2020, 314 pp.

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In *Russia's Entangled Embrace*, Stephan B. Riegg presents a very clear and quite comprehensive analysis of the Russo-Armenian relationship in the South Caucasus (1801–1914) through the “new imperial history” paradigm. He examines the encounters and rules in imperial borderlands as com-

posites of various social, economic, and cultural interactions, negotiations, and collaborations that coexist with frictions and resistance. This approach underlines the precarious relationship between colonizers and colonized (or citizens and subjects), challenging the abiding prevailing position of the former and accommodating substantial room for the agency of the latter. Thus, Riegg can dispense with “the reductive question of whether Russia was a friend or foe to Armenians”, which tends to accentuate the indispensable role the Armenian agency played in Russia’s empire-building in the Caucasus and beyond. Relying on this methodological approach, Riegg starts his chronological narrative with Russia’s embrace of its Armenians in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, during which the Tsarist Empire repulsed its southern rivals, the Muslim, Persian, and Ottoman empires, from the South Caucasus (chapters 1 and 2). Up until that period, Russia had already had a centuries-long experience of incorporating Armenians into its rule and harnessing their transimperial commercial and religious networks, including, by extension, their various services, such as gathering intelligence and delivering messages (usually in return for economic privileges).

In the Caucasian borderland, it was neither Georgian peasants – shaken by endemic social and economic discord in the years following Alexander I’s dethronement of the Bagrationi dynasty in 1801 – nor Georgian elites – who were both submissive and rebellious towards the Russian rule and therefore not reliable – but rather Armenians who most efficiently perpetuated Russia’s already entrenched imperial deeds, becoming the extended arms of the

Tsarist Empire in the region. In Moscow, the Lazarev Institute, which evolved into an advanced oriental institute pioneering Armenology in the late 1820s, formed the main pillar of this Russo-Armenian cooperation, aiming at “civic Russification” and integration into the imperial conduct of Armenian students as well as others from diverse backgrounds.

The Russian administration did not refrain from settling Persian and Ottoman Armenians in the newly annexed territories since they were seen as “the frontiersmen of Russian expansion”, “diligent”, and “politically loyal”. Apparently, this approach was not connected to preventing other, more-established Armenian merchants in the southern territories from using tax exemptions granted to them in the previous century on the pretext of maintaining the social hierarchy and Russian ascendancy. However, despite codifying Russian law and maintaining juridical and fiscal uniformity during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825–1855), being a requirement of a police state, geopolitical concerns led Russia to compromise with Armenians anyway (chapter 3).

In the South Caucasus, the regional administrators prioritized bureaucratic effectiveness, along with economic, social, and political incorporation of the region into the imperial realm. Riegg contends that although these attempts were only partially realized as ministers and regional and central bureaucrats held different views (e.g. whether or not the South Caucasus should be considered a colony), this incorporation still achieved a consolidation of the Armenian middle classes. The statute of 1836 codified the rights and obligations of Armenians and conferred on the Ar-

menian clergy in Ejmiatsin an unprecedented ecumenical autonomy, thanks to its indisputable influence on Armenian diaspora (in contrast to the Georgian Orthodox subjects whose church lacked such a transimperial power and was subsumed under Russian Orthodox Church). Until the Crimean War, therefore, Armenians were Russia's "core allies" in the region, not only as middle-class tradesmen and well-educated and distinguished military men but also as trustworthy proselytizers so long as they did not confront the predominant faith.

A connection between Armenian religion and political agitation was to be detected, however. The unifying force of the dogmatic and liturgical bond between Armenian Apostolicism and Russian Orthodoxy was shaken, resulting in early Russian hesitation over the sociopolitical reliability of Armenians (chapter 4). Thus, the Russian authorities did not view Ottoman Armenian immigrants from the Russo-Ottoman War (1877/78) as ideal settlers, and they were only accepted because of the constraints of Russian foreign policy. Such urgencies overrode Russia's domestic concerns and entailed a political leverage over diasporic Armenians that could only be maintained by a peaceful relationship with Ejmiatsin. The central authorities and Ejmiatsin compromised on the issue of hampering the ambitious activities of non-clerical Armenians as well as Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the Caucasus.

The Tsarist state never left the Armenian Apostolic Church's domestic and interimperial activities unchecked, some of which appeared as unique moments in the unification of a dispersed Armenian nation.

Equally, though, there was "no master plan" to rule over the Russian Armenians by 1880, and central authorities were quite perplexed as they endeavoured to follow a delicate balance between presenting themselves as the defenders of Eastern Christians to Armenians abroad and keeping their own Armenians under control due to the apprehension that some might have been involved in nascent revolutionary movements in Russia.

Riegg argues that despite the fact that the rise of Armenian nationalism and political activism were perceived differently by central and regional statesmen in accordance with their individual viewpoints and ideological standings, this never posed a real threat to the Russian interests; nevertheless, the activism no longer allowed the Armenians in the South Caucasus to be the epitomes of political reliability and socioeconomic progress again after the 1880s until the First World War (chapters 5 and 6). By virtue of Russia's political stability and security in the South Caucasus, fostered by the common religious and cultural identity, Eastern Armenians aspired to take action against the ill-treatment of Western Armenians in Ottoman Anatolia. This amplified their cross-border activities, rendering them suspicious in the end. For its part, Russia paid attention not to impair its relationship with the Ottoman government during 1890s while avoiding any confrontation with Armenians. Yet, the political symbiosis between them dwindled, leading to a relentless questioning of Ejmiatsin's transimperial political sway over Armenians that reached its nadir with the confiscation of Armenian Apostolic Church properties in June 1903.

Riegg enthusiastically emphasizes that the confiscation decree never reflected the collective insights of ministers and other political authorities but rather was the outcome of intense rivalries among them. The resumption of the Caucasian viceroyalty with a powerful and pro-Armenian statesman, Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov (in early 1905), led to the annulment of the decree. Manifestly, it was possible to rule over Armenians in the South Caucasus without quarter-century-old Russification policies. Vorontsov-Dashkov earns the author's sympathy with his firm belief in Armenians' devotedness to the empire, which was lambasted by conservatives of the epoch, like Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin. Vorontsov-Dashkov's indulgent policies towards Caucasian natives aimed at regaining their trust, which, as he retrospectively attested, was requisite for imperial objectives in the region. This was concomitant with the advent of Russia into the international scene as the principal political actor behind the reform agenda of Western Armenians on the eve of the war, although their succour was not sufficient for them to stand on their own feet when the war ended.

Although Riegg's meticulous and coherent narrative of the Russo-Armenian relationship demonstrates the variable but mostly favoured position of Armenians within the imperial hierarchy, it only rarely touches on the effects and implications of this vis-à-vis their neighbours, the Georgians and Azeris. Crucial demographic changes oc-

curred as a result of the population shifts, with Armenians evidently favoured in terms of land allocations and settlement at least until the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This suggests an interesting ethnoterritorial perspective on the "entangled embrace" that also speaks to considerations of imperial management and local autonomies more broadly.

Albeit never a uniform group, the majority of Armenians were economically and socially advanced compared to their neighbours, which made them familiar Asiatics and reliable colonists in the eye of the Russian authorities while being simultaneously quieted. This historical context, remarkably depicted by Riegg, impels one to learn more about the reasons and outcomes of the discrete and small-scale but in any case accrued tensions among these neighbours throughout the nineteenth century. Such a narrative would qualify other minority groups as being subject to and part of this enterprise of imperial expansion, rule, and stability in the region, as promised in the book, while at the same time illuminating the backdrop of the vicious interethnic clashes at the turn of the twentieth century.

That said, Riegg's book will remain one of the foremost monographs on the synchronous development of Armenian nation-building and Russian empire-building in the South Caucasus, as well as a very good case study of the maintenance of rule in an empire's shattering multiethnic borderland on the eve of the First World War.