



Becoming Habsburg: The Jews of Austrian Bukovina, 1774-1918 (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

David Rechter

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The region of Habsburg Bukovina no longer exists in central Europe, save in the realms of historiography, nostalgia, and collective memory. Remembered for its remarkable multinational, multi-faith character, Bukovina and its capital city Czernowitz have long been presented as exemplars of inter-ethnic cooperation, political moderation, and cultural dynamism, with Jews regarded as indispensable to the region's character and vitality. While this is not mere rhetoric, the myth of Bukovina as an El Dorado for Jews demands closer inspection. This important new book conveys the special nature of Bukovina Jewry while embedding it in the broader historical frameworks of Galician, imperial Austrian, and east central European Jewish societies. Carefully tracing the evolution of the tangled relationship of state and society with the Jews, from the Josephinian Enlightenment through absolutism to emancipation, the book brings to light the untold story of the Jewish minority in the monarchy's easternmost province, often a byword for economic backwardness and cultural provincialism. Here, at the edge of the Habsburg monarchy, Jews forged a new society from familiar elements, a unique hybrid of eastern and western European Jewries. Bukovina Jewry was both and neither: its history can help us understand the crucial east/west fault line within European Jewry in the modern era. *** "Argues that Bukovina served as a unique site for Jewish integration. Its diverse character, frontier setting, and balance among its different ethnic groups created the conditions necessary for the development of the 'supranational society' idealized in the politics of the Habsburg Empire. These conditions in turn enabled the formation of a unique form of Jewish society . . . written in fluid, readable prose that will appeal to both beginners and more advanced readers." - J. Haus, Choice, Vol. 51, No. 6, February 2014

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