

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

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Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution and internal life of Ireland's Jewish community during its foundation period of 1881 to 1914. In order to do so, it has been necessary critically to reassess the existing historiography of Irish Jewry, which has been found to be inherently flawed. This dissertation contends that the current historical narrative of the Irish community has been disproportionately influenced by a combination of popular memory and traditional Jewish meta-narrative, and has been moulded in reaction to external negative stereotyping. These issues have been addressed through the introduction of a hitherto absent Jewish dimension, which has been based upon a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Irish Jewry has thus been located within three main historical contexts: the Russian empire, the era of mass emigration and Anglo-Jewry.

This thesis argues that the gaps in the surviving primary sources do not preclude a detailed and nuanced reconstruction of communal life in the era of mass emigration. This reveals that the Irish community is neither entirely typical nor somehow unique with relation to the broader patterns of Jewish history in this period. Rather, Irish Jewry displays important points of comparability and distinctiveness, particularly with respect to its main setting as a British provincial community. This demonstrates the importance of context to the meaningful historical analysis of any Jewish community, even a small, insular and outlying community such as Ireland's. It also underlines the merit of studying smaller Jewries in their own right, as opposed to subordinating them to the history of their larger and more intellectually and politically influential counterparts, in order to gain a more complete, holistic and complex understanding of Jewish history in general.

April 2015