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Review Of "Soviet Zion: The Quest For A Russian Jewish Homeland" By A. L. Kagedan

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Review

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ality, experience, scientific achievements and philosophical views. Sophia Dobzhansky Coe, his daughter, contributed a warm and anecdotal biographical note, while Nikolai Krementsov, Daniel Aleksandrov and Mikhail Konashev provide new information of archival origin on Dobzhansky's "Russian roots." The American historians of science—Garland Allen, Robert Kohler and William Provine, among others—analyze individual aspects of Dobzhansky's long list of scientific achievements. Another group of contributors concentrates on problems to which Dobzhansky responded as both a scientist and a philosopher. These problems include "the evolutionary world view" (Costas Krimbas), "the biology of democracy" (John Beatty), "the 'nature-nature' debate" (Diane Paul) and "the problem of progress" (Michael Ruse).

Dobzhansky began his scientific work as an entomologist and that led him to an abiding interest in genetics, which, in turn, prepared him for an intense engagement in two pivotal questions of modern biology: a theoretical integration of the experimental data of genetics and the general aspects of evolutionary theory, particularly as they focused on the origin and evolution of *homo sapiens*. His publications helped carry the messages of modern developments in genetics and neighboring disciplines to a rapidly growing general public interested in scientific themes. A poignant element of humanist philosophy was clearly evident in all his scientific works. He emphasized the role of cultural factors in changes of the genetic composition of mankind and was skeptical about the role of the racial factor in the genesis, advancement and deterioration of civilizations. Dobzhansky was one of the first members of the international community of scientists to condemn lisenkoism.

A short article giving a summary review of the major steps in the evolution of Dobzhansky's scientific interests would have added to this excellent book. A more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the humanistic side of the Dobzhansky equation would have been most welcome. And so would an index—even a short one.

Mark Adams deserves much credit for all stages in the preparation of this work.

ALEXANDER VUCINICH
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Soviet Zion: The Quest for a Russian Jewish Homeland. By Allan Laine Kagedan. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. xii, 157 pp. Index. \$45.00, hard bound.

The phenomenon of Jewish agricultural settlement, particularly in tsarist Russia and during the early years of Soviet power, has been largely neglected by scholars. Allan Kagedan's monograph on early Soviet efforts to establish Jewish agricultural colonies is therefore a welcome addition to the literature about the history of Russian Jewry. Kagedan situates his topic in the context of the broader modern European Jewish experience. Beginning with the advent of Jewish emancipation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many European gentiles concerned with the perennial "Jewish question" called for the settlement of Jews on the land. They hoped to "normalize" the Jews' socio-economic profile through agrarianization, believing that such a policy would render the Jews less "parasitic" and "exploitative of the peasantry." Jews themselves often internalized this critique, with many pursuing dreams of working the land by joining *kibbutzim* in Palestine or becoming chicken farmers in the US.

The resettlement of Soviet Jews began in earnest in 1924, when a plan was unveiled to promote the colonization of land in Ukraine and Crimea. Advocates of the plan included high-ranking party and government officials (such as Mikhail Kalinin) interested not only in productivizing Soviet Jewry but also in laying the groundwork for a Jewish national territory. As Kagedan ably demonstrates, the story of the Jewish colonies in Ukraine and Crimea is as much about the formulation and operation of nationality policy during the first two decades of Soviet power as it is about the largess of American Jewry to help finance this experiment. For example, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee pumped millions of dollars into the resettlement plan and, in line with general Soviet nationality policy between 1927 and 1935, five Jewish

autonomous districts were created in Crimea and southern Ukraine. Even though cultural life, in particular education and theater, and official government business were supposedly conducted in Yiddish, these efforts to promote Jewish national autonomy foundered, according to Kagedan, for a variety of reasons. First, due to harsh living and working conditions, the colonies had difficulty in attracting and then retaining Jewish colonists, the vast majority of whom were unfamiliar with life on the land. Second, forced collectivization also deterred many potential settlers seeking to become successful individual farmers, and led to the collapse of many existing colonies which buckled under the pressure of government policies in the countryside. Third, collectivization also discouraged the colonies' American benefactors, who withdrew their financial support.

Finally, the decision to allocate land to Jewish settlers did not sit well with Ukrainian peasants and Crimean Tatars, and fanned the flames of national resistance in these regions. It was therefore not surprising that the Kremlin began searching for a more suitable territory for Jewish agricultural colonization and national consolidation, deciding in 1928 upon Birobidzhan, an area located along the Amur River in the Soviet far east. Given the region's low population density, advocates of Birobidzhan stressed that Jewish colonists would not face the opposition of local inhabitants. In addition, geo-strategic considerations, especially fears of possible Chinese or Japanese incursions, also played a role in the selection of Birobidzhan. Consequently, money and effort were diverted from Crimea and Ukraine to Birobidzhan, which was officially designated as the national territory of Soviet Jews and elevated to autonomous status when it was renamed the Jewish Autonomous Region in 1934. Notwithstanding the public relations campaign surrounding settlement in Birobidzhan, Kagedan argues that the project as a prelude to genuine Jewish national consolidation and cultural autonomy was stillborn. Only about 136,000 Jews, representing some 4.5% of the Soviet Jewish population, had chosen to live in agricultural colonies by the start of World War II. And, as Kagedan and other scholars point out, Stalin and his coterie never intended for this "quest for a Russian Jewish homeland" to succeed. Yet I—hardly one to downplay Stalin's visceral dislike for Jews and all manifestations of genuine national-cultural autonomy—believe that Kagedan oversteps his evidence when he suggests that lurking behind the scenes was the evil genius Stalin, the virulent anti-Semite who relied on the machinations of his minions to sabotage the Crimean project in particular.

Kagedan offers an interesting, albeit conventional portrait of the twists and turns of Kremlin decision making regarding Jewish colonization and the heated debate over the relative merits of Crimea or Birobidzhan. Apart from a very brief section devoted to educational, cultural and religious activities, he has very little to say about the actual operation of the agricultural colonies. What was day-to-day life like for those adventurous Jews who settled the land? What were the trials and tribulations, as well as the joys and sense of accomplishment, among the tens of thousands of Jews who chose new lives as agriculturalists? The voices of the colonists themselves beg to be heard so as to complement Kagedan's exploration of Soviet policy making toward the Jews.

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Za kulisami "Ministerstva pravdy": Tainaia istoriia sovetskoi tsenzury, 1917–1929. By A.V. Blium. St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 1994. 320 pp.

This gem of a book about bolshevik censorship from 1917 through 1929 should interest everyone concerned with twentieth-century Russia. The author writes primarily about the censorship of the printed word. Yet the book is not only about the persecution of creative elites. It also encompasses such things as the Party's orders to prevent the dissemination of information about price policy during the NEP, control over advertising, surveillance of children's literature, religious and military censorship, the