



From Bagels to Brotherhood

Bringing bagels to the world...Emancipation and the modern Jew...contemporary men and Torah study...and a novel that asks “Is it good for the Jews?”.... **by Bonnie V. Fetterman**

The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread

by Maria Balinska

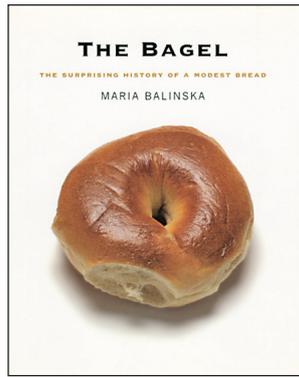
(Yale University Press, 220 pp., \$24)

Who would think that a history of the Jews could be written through the story of the bagel? This cogent little book delivers the taste and texture of the Jewish experience through the bread that has traveled with Ashkenazi Jews over time.

Maria Balinska, a BBC journalist of Polish Jewish and gentile ancestry, became interested in the bagel while studying at Jagellonian University in Kraków, mainly because she missed it; the *obwarzanek*, a Polish round bread, was not the same. The missing bagel almost feels emblematic of her search for the missing Jews who once constituted 10% of prewar Poland. “Produced principally by Jewish bakers and sold mainly by Jewish pedlars,” she writes, “the bagel was a snack available on almost every street corner in almost every town in Poland, consumed and enjoyed by people of every ethnicity and class.”

Bagels are mentioned in references to Jews settling in Poland as early as the 15th century. In fact, disputes with guilds over who could make round, white breads reveals much about the position of Jews—welcomed by monarchs and resented by local bakers—as Poland positioned itself to become the leading grain producer of Europe.

Through art, folklore, and song, Balinska follows the path of the bagel. With the worldwide depression of the 1930s—and Jewish poverty compounded in Poland by boycotts of Jewish businesses—bagel peddling became a symbol of Jewish impoverishment.



Eastern European Jews brought the bagel to America in the mass migration that began in the 1880s. On New York’s Lower East Side, the Jewish baker’s union, including bagel makers, made labor history in 1909 with its successful seven-week

strike for better working conditions. The achievement of the Jewish bakers, Balinska writes, “ushers in a period during which the Jewish labour movement as a whole came to play a leading role among American unions.” But as late as 1950, the bagel was still largely unknown outside New York. All that changed in the 1960s and 70s with the aggressive marketing of the Lender family, which introduced frozen bagels at a time when American homes were routinely equipped with freezers and toasters. The goal of its advertising was to shed the bagel’s image as a Jewish food. As Murray Lender remarked, “It’s a roll with per-

sonality. If you must be ethnic you can call it a Jewish English muffin with personality.”

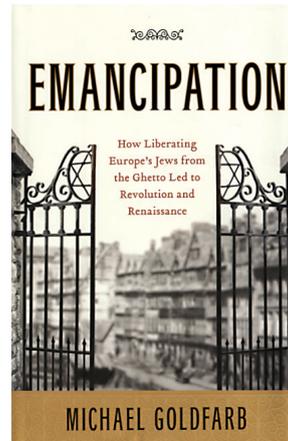
The story of the “bagelization” of America is a saga in itself. And in an ironic twist, Balinska finds a café in Kraków endeavoring to reintroduce the bagel—as “one of the most popular breads in America.”

Emancipation: How Liberating Europe’s Jews from the Ghetto Led to Revolution and Renaissance

by Michael Goldfarb

(Simon & Schuster, 408 pp., \$30)

Americans generally relate the term “emancipation” to the liberation of African-American slaves during the Civil War—but Michael Goldfarb, a London-based journalist and former bureau chief of NPR, uses it to refer to the single most important phenomenon in modern Jewish history: the Jewish struggle for citizenship in the emerging states of modern Europe.



Revolutionary France became the first nation to emancipate its Jewish residents on September 28, 1791—but this historic moment had been preceded by years of heated debate over whether Jews could be “ameliorated” sufficiently to be French citizens. Viewed as “a nation within a nation,” Jews had their own autonomous governing structures, different language, dress, customs, trades, and religion. Even advocates of emancipation required Jews to change, and the Jewish communities of France (first Sephardim, then Ashkenazim) basically

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