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The metamorphosis of Jewish identities in nineteenth century Russia, 1801-1894.

James Russell Weiss

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THE METAMORPHOSIS OF JEWISH IDENTITIES IN NINETEENTH CENTURY
RUSSIA, 1801-1894

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A Dissertation submitted to the College of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

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ABSTRACT

The Metamorphosis of Jewish identities in Nineteenth-Century Russia, 1801-1894

James R. Weiss

During the period between the ascension of Tsar Alexander I and Tsar Nicholas II, the Jews of Russia and Russian officials were engaged in a curious partnership. Both parties were concerned with determining the precise definition of Jewishness and how this would change during the course of the nineteenth century. Russian officials, in the main, wanted to refashion the Jews of Russia into Russophiles imbued with Russian mores and education but, on no account, were these "new Jews" to be considered true Russians since God had made them a distinct group from their Slavic neighbors. Being compelled to be a part of the Russian milieu and yet kept apart from Russian society, the best that a Jew of Russia could accomplish was to become a Russian with a Jewish accent. From the Jewish perspective, specifically the intelligentsia and certain native and foreign philanthropists, the Russian Jewish identity needed to be reformed in order to maintain its viability but not at the price of complete assimilation. Towards that end, a number of educational initiatives were presented to the Russian government and even approved, giving the appearance of a partnership, though their respective ends were hardly identical.

Understanding the underlying motivations of each side is imperative. Aside from Russian xenophobia in all of its manifestations, Russian officials simply did not know what to do with approximately 800,000 Ashkenazic Jews after the Polish partition of 1795. Being unknowns, Tsar Alexander (1801-1825) attempted to make them familiar to the official Russian mind via the imposition of Russian education. With this exposure, the Jews would then become Russians of a sort which meant that they were no longer to be feared and could be utilized for Imperial benefit. In brief, this was the rationale of Russian officialdom.

For their part, the Jews of Russia did not accept these policies passively. Beginning in the mid-1830's and continuing until the end of the century, the Jews of Russia, along with foreign allies, promoted their own reforms, some of which met with favor from St. Petersburg. In the end, between wranglings and *détente*, the Jews of Russia prevailed by creating a number of identities which bore various degrees of Jewishness and yet allowed them to engage in the intellectual, social, and political milieus beyond the bounds of their community.

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I hope that my homage to the living has been sufficient to allow me to express my gratitude towards my parents who supported me in this endeavor but did not live to see it completed. Given what has come to pass, there is no satisfactory compensation for their encouragement, and I hope that my dedication of this work to them will serve as my lasting acknowledgment of their sacrifices in my behalf.

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GLOSSARY OF PRINCIPAL TERMS

Bet Din: House of Judgment. In a Jewish community, this court of religious law, with Russian government sanction, was presided over by the local rabbi to ensure the spiritual welfare of its residents.

Behola: Fright. This was a reference to Jewish communal reactions following amendments to the 1827 Recruitment Ukase which threatened to diminish the Jewish ethos in Russia. It was particularly virulent during the 1830's.

Gaon: Titular spiritual leader of Eastern European Jewry who resided in Vilna.

Get: A divorce document procured from a Bet Din.

Kettuba: Literally, a writing, a wedding contract.

Halakhah: Jewish religious law, some of which is in Torah but largely in Talmud.

Haskalah: Enlightenment. This intellectual movement was imported to Russia from the German lands and was a consequential influence upon Russian Jewish intellectual development from the late 1830's until the middle of the 1870's.

Heder: Jewish primary school which all Jewish boys had to attend beginning at age three. The teacher, the malamid, was responsible for instructing his charges in the rudiments of Torah in order to enable them to lead moral lives and, for his brighter pupils, the requisite knowledge to pursue more advanced learning in the bet ha-midrash (house of study) and yeshiva.

Herem: Ban of excommunication from the Jewish faith. Usually the prerogative of the Gaon or high-ranking rabbinical authorities attached to the Bet Dinim of the larger Jewish intellectual centers.

Kadosh Hashem: Holiness of God. It is also the last pious act of a Jew facing death.

Melamed: Teacher in the heder.

Odessa School: Originating from a circle of Jewish intellectuals circa 1819-20, this was one of the models for a modern Jewish curriculum which promised to liberate Russia's Jews from their officially-perceived parochialism and transform them into "modern" and useful citizens of the Empire.

Moses Mendelssohn and the Mendelssohnians: Gifted eighteenth-century German scholar who attempted to make Orthodox Judaism dynamic by acquainting its precepts with German rational philosophy. Though he did not intend to bring about the complete assimilation of German Jewry to German customs, a circumstance against which he inveighed with particular vehemence, some of those who ostensibly carried on his work

after his death succumbed. Having some knowledge of this, Sergei Uvarov, Nicholas I's Minister for National Enlightenment, opined that if the Jews of Russia were exposed to the German language and philosophy, their alienation from their traditions would only be a matter of time.

Phylacteries: The two boxes containing the commandments to "bind the words of G-d upon your hand, let them be a symbol before your eyes."

Rosh Hodesh: Head of the Month in the Hebrew calendar. In the Orthodox tradition, this event is marked by special observances.

Tallis: Prayer shawl worn by mature Jewish males during prayer observances. A shorter tallis katan (short tallis) is worn under the shirts of more observant Jews when outside of the synagogue.

Torah: The five Mosaic scrolls.

Yeshiva: Academy. Jewish educational institution devoted to educating the more scholarly members of the community in Talmud and advanced Halakhik concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Hasidism's triumph over the Vilna Rabbinate by securing a majority in the city's kahal and the office of Gaon in 1798 initiated a new chapter in Jewish history. At issue was the Jewish community's sense of being divided into numerous and antipodal factions and the desire to regain its imagined communal cohesion, a task which held no promise of facility. Where were they to begin? To many, communal restoration lay in the establishment of a single, all-encompassing identity which would define for all time who was a Jew and what was Jewishness.¹ Superficially, the matter seemed plain enough yet the ensuing quest occupied most of the nineteenth century and led to the formation of a multiplicity of identities. This fragmentation ironically served to preserve Russian Jewry, and the analysis of these identity transformations in nineteenth-century Russia (1801-1894) from an intellectual perspective is the principal concern of this work. As the Jews of Russia struggled to define and maintain their cultural and intellectual distinctiveness within a fairly hostile environment, the Russians themselves were occupied with defining Russianness. The ensuing clashes between the government and its Jewish population resulted in legislative action for most of the period and violence towards the end. Even so, these actions served as the engine of identity formation for the Jews of Russia. Official "reform measures" aimed at the Jews inspired Jewish intellectual and social initiative, and it was this balance of initiative and accommodation which allowed the Jews of Russia to remain intact by refashioning themselves into several Jewish entities, distinct from one another and yet still Jewish.²

¹ Martin Buber, On Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 24.

² This description is akin to what Simon Dubnow termed "Diaspora nationalism" in his work Letters on Old and New Jewry (1897). Since losing their state in 70 C.E., the Jews, in Dubnow's estimation, still retained

At the core of this history was the unusual development of a blind partnership which was quite significant in governing the course of this metamorphosis. Russian authorities had little understanding of the Jews and, for their part, the Jews tended to view Russians, and the government in particular, as unpredictable.³ While seemingly unpromising, Russian officials and Jewish communal leaders and intellectuals were, nevertheless, able to meet one another in the field of Jewish education. Seldom pacific, it was often the scene of pitched battles not only between themselves but also, from time to time, among themselves. Amidst numerous assertions, threats, retractions, modifications, and accommodations, however, there emerged a rough symbiosis grounded in a mutual spirit of give and take. In brief, the struggle for Jewish identity in Russia essentially comes down to two general endeavors which were not necessarily in opposition. First of all, Jewish communal leaders and intellectuals were concerned with preserving the Jewish ethos among themselves and their coreligionists through the acquisition of Jewishness, an umbrella term covering all subjects germane to Judaism. Secondly, Russian authorities sought to create an educated Jewish workforce capable, official restrictions notwithstanding, of employment in useful endeavors.⁴ Throughout this

their Jewish national distinctiveness while adapting themselves to life within other nations. Sophie Dubnow-Erich, The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 1.

³ Linda J. Ivanits, Russian Folk Beliefs (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 90, 137. The usual images of Jews in the Russian imagination according to Ivanits were of sorcerers who cast spells upon their Christian neighbors or as adversaries of Christianity from its origins. A popular story which circulated for some time before the nineteenth century was of Mary telling Jesus of a dream she had where the Jews had bound him hand and foot and brought him before Pilate for judgement. On the Jewish side, the pogroms were testament to the tenuous nature of their coexistence. The first major riot on Russian soil took place in Odessa in 1821 with others occurring episodically throughout the century. Usually, the slighted rumor was enough to spark these disturbances. This will be discussed in more detail later on in this work.

⁴ John Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772-1825 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 183. Not all reforms were ill-intentioned. Klier maintains that, for the most part, Russian officials were attempting to fashion Jews into what they perceived to be worthy citizens.

ninety-three year symbiotic contest, neither side was completely satisfied with the results, especially the Jews. Emigration to Palestine and United States testified to this disenchantment but just as significant was Russian Jewish communal viability whose identity was, by 1894, secured through heterogeneity.

The ends of this metamorphosis may be clear but not the means by which they were realized. Perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of this subject is to appreciate the relevant issues and emotional currents which were often obscured by rhetoric and chancery language. Simple enough to state, it can be a daunting pursuit. By way of a starting point, it is necessary to begin with the obvious. Russians and Jews lived in mutual ignorance of one another, and this ignorance was not one arising exclusively from cultural and theological considerations. The fact that a Jew was not a Russian and vice versa was reason enough to excite mutual fear and distrust, and as facile as this statement may appear, it was a truism which was often obscured in the flurry of activity surrounding Jewish education and reform. Where this blindness was most evident was in the endeavors of foreign Jewish philanthropists. Baron Maurice de Hirsch, for example, was a wealthy French Jew who submitted to Alexander III a detailed proposal for Jewish education for which he had set aside a considerable sum and directions for how the funds were to be used. The Tsar approved his design only to find fault with it several months later. In his letter to Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod, he expressed his dismay at having crafted his project within the framework of Russian law only to have it disallowed shortly after it had received the Tsar's approbation.⁵ On the other side, Russian authorities had to contend with a prominent non-Russian group in

⁵ YIVO Archives 318/22/6. A letter from Baron de Hirsch to Konstantin Pobedonostsev. 16 May 1889.

their midst whose beliefs and ways were alien to them.⁶ Foreseeing no other alternative, the authorities, beginning with Tsar Alexander I and his ministers, embarked upon various programs which sought to make the Jews a part of Russian society and yet apart from it. This contradiction of purpose was considered feasible if Jewish youths were given a broad-based and cosmopolitan education with a diminution of Jewish religious instruction.⁷

By their very title, the Jews could not escape being identified with Judaism, but though it served as their principal identity, it disguised certain aspects of the community's character which would emerge in the course of the century. Specifically, the struggle between Rabbinical and Hasidic Judaism did not end in 1798. Acknowledging their defeat but never conceding the field, the Vilna Rabbinate and its adherents engaged in a partisan campaign to discredit the Hasidim. From time to time, articles would appear in Jewish journals, such as *Russkii evrei*, condemning Jewish "religious fanaticism" as being injurious to intellectual and social progress.⁸ More often than not, the Hasidim stood accused of harboring and propagating this sentiment in addition to publishing

⁶ Of course, this was not always so. During the time of the Khazars and immediately thereafter, Russians thought of Jews as being clever merchants and bearers of culture. Even the Judaizing heresy which involved some of the higher Kievan Christian clergy was not checked by religious authorities until 1487. Until the early sixteenth century, Judaizers were influential at court and then, through a series of ecclesiastical decrees, adherents were either executed, imprisoned for life, or compelled to return fully to the Orthodox Church. A more distant memory in the Russian mind would have been Khazaria's hostility towards Byzantium which would have been interpreted as Jewish animosity towards Christianity. See Louis Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation* vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 3-6, and L. N. Gumilev, *Ot rusi do rossii* (St. Petersburg: Yuna, 1992), p. 42.

⁷ Dmitry Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v Rossii, 1797-1917: ocherki istorii tsenzury* (St. Petersburg: Mosty Kul'tury, 1999), pp. 63, 82. Anxiety over inadequate surveillance of the western frontier, coupled with the inevitable smuggling in those regions, prompted Russian officials to impose a ban on the importation of all foreign Jewish books in 1763. Some books, such as the *Rosh Hodesh Siddur*, banned in Amsterdam on 22 January 1798 and in Russia shortly thereafter, were clearly religious in nature whereas *Bobe Maises* (Grandmother's Stories), was proscribed because some of the stories were about landlords being murdered by their impoverished tenants.

⁸ "V vedenie evreiskago zakonucheniiia v kievskikh gimnaziakh." *Russkii evrei*, 18 February 1881. no. 8. p. 283.

leaflets in Russian and Yiddish to swell their ranks. Jewish publishing overall was a contentious issue particularly in the 1830's when Tsar Nicholas, vowing to improve the quality of Jewish literature, ordered the closing of all Jewish presses in Russia in 1836.⁹ Engendered in this action and those of his immediate predecessor was the suspicion of Jewish sedition, a stigma which was never shed entirely.¹⁰ Regardless of any threats to the state potential or imagined, when Jewish intellectuals and social progressives would bring these charges to the attention to the government, the latter was disconcerted. Obviously not wanting to admit that it did not know who or what to believe, it was simply easier to impose some sort of temporary censure upon a group of Jews and be done with it.¹¹

Confusion was not the exclusive province of Russian officials. Caught up in the maelstrom as well were intellectuals such as Lev Nevakhovich who perceived all official efforts to improve the Jewish condition as attempts to diminish Jewish consciousness which would lead, invariably, to its eradication.¹² To ardent traditionalists, any change from what they perceived to be Jewish meant immediate assimilation. As the nineteenth century progressed, however, Jewish partisans of intellectual modernity initiated their own improvement schemes from within the Jewish community as a means of maintaining Jewish consciousness and the identities to which it gave birth. In the promotion of some projects, such as the establishment of Jewish schools on the Odessa model, collaboration

⁹ Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat, p. 125.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

¹¹ John Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772-1825 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 183. Klier mentions that when confronted with the complexities of Jewish issues, Russian officials merely blamed every consequence on the Jews just to rid themselves of unpleasant situations with which they met.

with Russian officials was necessary. What was also imperative was to play upon official prejudices for Jewish advantage. A clear example of this was the introduction of German into the curriculum of the modern Jewish schools. German was the language of science and philosophy which Jewish educators saw as a means of broadening the intellectual horizons of their students whereas Nicholas I and Sergei Uvarov, his Minister for National Enlightenment, saw it as a guarantee of Jewish estrangement from Jewishness. This and other issues will be discussed more fully in the body of this work, but it should be noted here that the latter consequence did not come to pass and, in truth, aided in the formation of Jewish identities in Russia.

Despite the trials, tribulations, and overall turbulence in Russia at this time, the question in need of an answer is how could all of these distinct Jewish identities still lay claims to Jewishness. In examining this particular historical process, it is a formidable obstacle. Defining the Jews as a distinct “nation” is difficult given the varied shades it took on during the century. David Weinberg is correct in his assertion that Jews in the Russian milieu, owing to their splintered national identity, religious divisions, and lack of territorial concentration, made it impossible for the Russian government to establish a consistent definition of Jew.¹³ Contemporary Jewish efforts to create a definable identity are equally frustrating. One of the fundamental problems associated with this issue of identity and identity formation is the complicated interaction between “Russian” as a national category and the Russian Empire as a multinational state. Such terms as “state,” “nation”, even “tribe,” according to Ted Weeks, are adequate for describing specific

¹² John Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 73. Nevakhovich was an early representative of the Berlin Haskalah and not opposed to Jewish reform in general, only Alexander I's proposals.

relationships in certain circumstances, but there is no single definition which will hold true in all instances. Furthermore, “state” and “nation,” especially in nineteenth-century Russia, have to be considered separately.¹⁴ These difficulties, compounded by the intellectual, social and political changes sweeping through the Empire in the mid to late nineteenth century, however, do not put problems of Jewish identity formation out of scholarly reach. If anything, there is plenty of work to be had.

In his now classic work, Benedict Anderson affirmed that “nationality,” owing to the values individual scholars have assigned to it, is difficult to define and analyze.¹⁵ He did, however, pose a solution which, he admitted freely, has its limitations but at least sufficed in the broader spectrum. Anderson’s definition of “nation” is that of an “imagined political community” which is inherently limited and sovereign. Such a definition holds true for the Jews of Russia who imagined themselves as a community, bound together by a common culture, language,¹⁶ and background, not to mention a “shared memory” of experiences. Sovereignty, meaning a degree of political and cultural autonomy, certainly existed among Russian Jews, though it varied throughout the nineteenth century.

More recently, Ernest Gellner has amended and extended Anderson’s argument. Common experiences and communal memory forge a shared culture, according to Gellner. The very impetus for nationalism in a community, he contends, is brought about by the educational and bureaucratic institutions of another, ostensibly, more powerful one

¹³ David Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowksi, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity (London: Holmes & Meier, 1996), p. 37.

¹⁴ Theodore Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier 1863-1914 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 4.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso Press, 1983), p. 3.

which surrounds it.¹⁷ Communal memory is vital but, as Gellner concedes in citing Ernest Renan, if a nation is to emerge, a shared amnesia must be also present for its continued viability.¹⁸ By this statement, Gellner is referring to a community's ability to rejuvenate itself over time by discarding seemingly outmoded practices for more modern and improved ones. The parallel with the nineteenth-century Russian Jewish community is evident. Some segments of the Russian Jewish community exchanged time-worn notions of the world and cultural practices for more cosmopolitan ones. Still, there is one other dimension to this evolutionary process which warrants examination. This same amnesia inspired offended traditionalists to reconstitute the lost Jewish world that existed before the Khmelnytsky Risings (1648-56) and, therefore, reclaim identity. Well before the nineteenth century, but particularly acute during that period, the interplay of memory and amnesia was crucial in Jewish identity formation.

Literature on the Jews of Russia and Russian Jewry is extensive, and while this facilitates research in the field, it also presents challenges. Since Russian society was the larger of the two, historians tend to concentrate more upon its trials and tribulations than those experienced by Jews. Even when the Jews are the subject under study, their "side" of the Jewish Question and related issues is often given minimal to moderate attention and, more often than not, viewed through Russian eyes. Limited access to Jewish archival material in Russia, lost or destroyed documentation, and a host of other difficulties were acknowledged limitations on historical investigation. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of these frustrations have been removed while some

¹⁶ Yiddish

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. viii.

¹⁸ Gellner, *Culture, Identity, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 6.

stubbornly persist. Even this work was not spared, though every attempt has been made to present a balanced account of those Russian, Jewish, and other (especially Polish) forces which influenced the formation of Jewish identities in nineteenth-century Russia.

Resurrection of the historical Jewish voice, where Jews are permitted to express themselves intellectually, socially, and politically, is crucial. This endeavor is now possible given the greater freedom accorded scholars in Russian archives. All the more encouraging, native Russian scholars, some of whom are Jews, have discovered materials in archives which were either barred to Western scholars or simply unknown to them. Whatever the reasons, these scholars are publishing articles and books in the field which can only augment the extant literature.

Optimism is indeed warranted, though it should be recognized that scholarship on Russian Jewry tends to fall into two categories: Russocentric Jewish history and Judeocentric Russian history. Neither can claim superiority over the other and, in certain respects, their contributions have been substantial. Moreover, some authors belong to both categories, depending on the particular work. Even so, to analyze them properly, it is best to separate them into their respective groupings beginning with the larger Russocentric group. It should come as no surprise that nineteenth-century Russian sources on Jewish affairs are more plentiful and easily accessible than contemporaneous Jewish ones. Despite being an outspoken advocate of a Jewish historical resurrection,¹⁹ even Simon Dubnow had to labor under just such a limitation in composing his three-

¹⁹ Dubnow-Erich, The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow, pp. 4-5. Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity, pp. 145-7.

volume work, The History of the Jews of Russia and Poland (1915).²⁰ Though dated in certain areas, it is still a valuable source for any work in the field. Certainly well researched for its time, Dubnow's reliance upon Russian materials, however, tends to portray the Jews as being recipients of their fate rather than being proactive in shaping it. A far more recent and extreme representative of the Russocentric historiography, however, is Heinz Dietrich-Lowe's The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction, and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia 1772-1917 (1993), which is concerned primarily with the Jewish "image" that the political right manufactured and manipulated to achieve its ends.²¹ In light of his purpose, the author states openly that he has no interest in who the Jews "were," merely what they were perceived to be.

The same could be said of much of the more specialized literature. Michael Stanislawski's Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia 1825-1855 (1983) is concerned with presenting an objective account of the legislative causes which transformed Jewish society during Nicholas I's reign.²² Though he is meticulous in his examination of causes and effects, the Jews in Stanislawski's study are objects of official ministrations rather than actors in their own right. Coming a little closer to the Jewish side but still rooted in Russian sources is John Klier's Imperial Russia's Jewish Question 1855-1881 (1995). Unlike Deitrich-Lowe, Klier does touch upon Jewish identity formation but again, it is mainly from the Russian perspective. Having consulted no less than 200 journals, newspapers, and periodicals relating to

²⁰ Simon Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1915).

²¹ Heinz Deitrich-Lowe, The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia 1772-1917 (Geneva: Harwood Press, 1993).

²² Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia 1825-1855 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), p. xii.

Russian public opinion about the Jews during the reign of Tsar Alexander II, Klier is still dealing with the Jewish “image” rather than the Jews for what they were. In light of his purpose, this was the most viable role Klier could accord them since his primary concern focused on what particular Russian parties meant when they spoke of the Jewish Question and how each proposed to resolve it.

In his earlier work, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia 1772-1825 (1986), Klier declared at the outset that this work would concentrate on Russia’s acquisition and administration of its Jewish population. Here, the Jews are used to illustrate Russian bureaucratic attitudes towards a sizable non-Russian population which had to be incorporated into the Empire as a political necessity. Again, the consequences arising from Russian-Jewish contact are seen as Russian problems rather than Jewish ones, even though the Jews are at the core of the matter.

The same can be said of Hans Rogger’s Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia (1986) which addresses the question of why Jews were treated as second-class citizens in the period 1881-1917.²³ In his estimation, the Jews were convenient pawns in the delicate and often treacherous game of Imperial politics. Though concerned primarily with the Jews, Rogger, nevertheless, attempts to avoid scholarly near-sightedness by placing the Jewish plight within the context of those suffered by the Baltic Germans, Poles, Finns, and other non-Russian nationalities. Despite the cursory treatment given these other groups, Rogger points out that the Jews of Russia have to be examined within a broader spectrum in order to present as complete an historical account of Russian official attitudes as possible.

Michael Aronson's Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia (1990), has a narrower focus than some of the previously mentioned works but it serves a vital purpose with regard to the Jewish condition in relation to official policy.²⁴ Given his minute investigation and assessment of the Odessa and Kishinev pogroms, the author provides a compelling case against any involvement on the part of the Imperial government. Aronson's conclusions stand in stark contrast to those stated in Edward Judge's work. Judge's Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom (1992)²⁵ considers the 1882 pogrom within the context of world opinion and is reluctant to give up the notion of official involvement entirely. Eventually conceding that local anxieties may have been the impetus, he then claims that pogroms, not necessarily the Jews, were a prominent and influential force in Russian politics during the 1880's. According to Judge, the Jews served both as a means to achieve various political ends as well as the recipients of the socio-political fallout.

For some time now, the Judeocentric side of Russian Jewish history has been given considerable attention, especially in the publication of biographies and biographical sketches. Michael Stanislawski's For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry (1988) offered a fresh perspective on Jewish educational initiatives from the mid-nineteenth century onward.²⁶ Though centered on Gordon's

²³ Hans Rogger, Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia (London: Macmillan Press, 1986).

²⁴ Michael Aronson, Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

²⁵ Edward Judge, Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

²⁶ Michael Stanislawski, For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

activities, the author also placed him within the larger scope of Jewish and Russian social and intellectual transformations which would come to fruition by the end of the century.

Though possessing an even narrower focus but undoubtedly a substantial work is Sophie Dubnow-Erlich's The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History (1991).²⁷ Taken from a voluminous and heretofore unpublished work, Dubnow's daughter emphasized her father's self-appointed role of "the missionary of history" to the Jewish people. She also recounted his influence and criticisms of the various Jewish cultural, intellectual, and political movements, many of which he believed would bring about the death of Russian Jewry. Of particular import was his opposition to Ahad Ha-Am and the Palestinophile movement of the 1880's which, in Dubnow's estimation, was a misrepresentation of the highest order to Russia's desperate Jewish population.²⁸

By devoting his research to Dubnow and two other Jewish intellectuals who bridged the gap between religious Orthodoxy and secular nationalism, David Weinberg has made a profound contribution to Judeocentric Russian history. His work, Between Tradition and Modernity (1996), recounted the major contributions of Haim Zhitlowski, Dubnow, and Ahad Ha-Am (Asher Guinsberg) who, in Weinberg's opinion, shaped the modern Jewish identity.²⁹ Though their respective biographies are presented as three distinct chapters, the author established a "roundtable" within the work which allowed for dispute and dialogue among the three participants.

²⁷ Sophie Dubnow-Erlich, The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁹ David H. Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowski, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity (London: Holmes & Meier, 1996).

Clearly, the Jewish voice and initiative are present in these works. This is no less true of Steven Zipperstein's The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History 1794-1881 (1985). This particular Jewish community's unusual rise to prominence, the author contended, was a consequence of internal transformation.³⁰ Jewish actions and initiative were clearly the dominant theme of this work. With the passing of rabbinism in Odessa, many Jewish intellectuals who had been waiting in the wings put into practice their various skills and knowledge which they had acquired beyond the heder curriculum.³¹ This same emphasis on Jewish initiative in identity formation was present in some collaborative works as well. In Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History (1992), Alexander Orbach's "The Development of the Russian Jewish Community 1881-1903" provided some interesting revelations. Though 94% of the Empire's Jews still resided in the Pale as late as 1897, certain categories had been allowed to leave it. Few took advantage of this liberality and those who did, left behind the world of the shtetl and prayer house to transform the synagogue into a political crucible from which, they hoped, an original and singular Jewish national identity would spring.³² Orbach's analysis ties in neatly with Klier's "Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Pogroms" in which the author argued that the 1881 pogroms inspired Russian Zionism's determination to establish a "new" Jewish identity divorced from the Russian experience. The pogroms could very well have forged a Zionist identity, but care should be taken in extending it to Russian

³⁰ Steven Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History 1794-1881 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

³¹ In Weinberg's work, both Haim Zhitlowksi and Simon Dubnow both went beyond the staid heder curriculum and taught themselves foreign languages from bilingual books.

³² Alexander Orbach, "The Development of the Russian Jewish Community 1881-1903," Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History, edited by John Klier & Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 145

Jewry as a whole since Jewish identity had assumed several forms by the early to mid-1880's.

By the 1880's, "modernity" had come to mean, for some, citizenship in a civil society which allowed for political participation. In Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe (1992), Eli Lederhendler contended that Russian Jewry did not obtain this prize fully until February 1917.³³ In his article, "Modernity Without Emancipation or Assimilation? The Case of Russian Jewry," the author maintained that as the Jewish polis came into its own, political modernity was its sole concern. This is in keeping with David Vital's Origins of Zionism (1975)³⁴, but in many respects, both Vital and Lederhendler parochialized the issues by limiting Russian Jewry identity formation to political goals exclusively. Both authors accorded Jewish culture and religion an inferior status in the modern era almost to the point of ignoring them. Viewed from the narrow basis of Jewish socialist literature from the mid-1860's to the 1880's, their respective portrayals of the Jewish identity appear skewed and monolithic.

Not to be discounted is the fairly recent work of Russian and Russian Jewish scholars which have made some notable contributions in the past seven years. For example, Novaia evreiskaia biblioteka (1992), is an anthology with an academic orientation.³⁵ Its contributors are specialists in Jewish history, anthropology, sociology, as well as in other fields of Jewish studies, who have published their work for a broad audience in an effort to restore Jewish knowledge which had been suppressed during the Soviet period. Appealing to the Russian Jewish public and popular interest, works such

³³ Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein, eds., Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁴ David Vital, Origins of Zionism (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975).

as Yevreiskii mir (1992),³⁶ the Russian translation and compendium of Rabbi Joseph Telushkin's Jewish Literacy, and Ruth Samuel's Po tropam evreiskoi istorii (1993),³⁷ have been published for the benefit of those who have had either no knowledge of Jews and Judaism or a superficial one.

A balanced account of the Jewish metamorphosis is a key concern of this work. Even so, it was imperative to begin with official Russian records, principally, the law statutes and state papers comprising the Polnoe sobraniia zakonov rossiiskoi imperii (series I & II). Both Series I (1649 to December 1825) and Series II (1825/6 to March 1917) have been cited throughout this work and, consequently, all dates are given Old Style. Admittedly, this source has its limitations, nevertheless it does provide a coherent chronology of the Russian official disposition towards the Jews and the proscriptions under which Jewish reformers had to labor in order to realize their projects either in whole or part.³⁸

In terms of organization, the first chapter will address those conditions and circumstances which brought about the physical and intellectual scattering of the Jewish community and attempts to reconstitute an imagined original whole. Subsequently, Jewish and Russian encounters and relationships will be examined, concluding with the ascension of Tsar Alexander I. Chapter II will overlap somewhat with the preceding

³⁵ Novaja evreiskaia biblioteka: istoricheskie sud'bi evreev v Rossii i SSSR nachalo dialoga (Moscow: Free University Press, 1992).

³⁶ Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Yevreiskii Mir: vazhneishie znaniia o evreiskom narodie, ego istorii i religii (Moscow: Jewish University Press, 1992).

³⁷ Ruth Samuels, Po tropam evreiskoi istorii (Moscow: Biblioteka Aliya, 1993).

³⁸ In theory, Series II is to terminate with the final legislation immediately antedating Nicholas II's abdication, yet this is not so. Accounting for papers inserted in later volumes which were not available at the time that their proper chronological volumes were published, the last volume of Series II terminates in 1910 with some scattered dispatches and laws from the mid-1880's. Overall organization falls into disarray in 1878-79 and worsens with each succeeding volume.

chapter in its examination of the consequences of the Polish partitions, the challenges to Jewish identity, and the Jewish Question. Both Paul I (1796-1801) and Alexander I (1801-1825) attempted to address Jewish issues by various means, not all of them accepted in silence. Beginning with Lev Nevachovich's essay, "Lament of the Daughters of Judah," and continuing throughout this work, voiced Jewish apprehensions, accommodations, and innovations will be introduced to balance the all but eclipsing Russian dicta.³⁹ Chapter III will take up the Jewish metamorphosis during Nicholas I's (1825-1855) reign. Though official attempts to accelerate changes in Jewish demeanor through the imposition of Russian mores via compulsory military service and educational institutions were certainly prominent, they had to share company with equally notable Jewish initiatives. This thirty-year period saw the emergence of the blind partnership between the government the Jews but also frustrations within the Jewish community itself over identity and education, some of which were settled immediately while others lingered on for decades.

Chapter IV's principal theme is reconstruction. Most immediate was the challenge before Alexander II to rebuild both government and state in the aftermath of the Crimean War. For the Jews, the Garden of Eden had not be realized but, at the very least, the temper of Alexander II's reign allowed them to breathe freer than they had ever been permitted in Russian history. During these twenty-six years, Jewish self-awareness and intellectual development allowed the community to examine who and what they were. One boon in particular was the relative relaxation of the censorship laws in April 1862 and the rise of the boulevard press three years later. From these developments, the

³⁹ Though Russian officialdom was prominent, the YIVO Archives possess documents and manuscripts

Jews were not excluded. Journals such as *Evreiskaia biblioteka* (Jewish Library), for example, one of a number of Jewish journals, reflected this growing intellectual awareness and expression among the Jews. For a brief period prior to January 1863 and the Polish Insurrection, the Jews of Russia were permitted more than they had ever been in determining their own cultural and intellectual evolution. Knowledge, specifically secular learning in a variety of fields, was prized since it led to opportunities to express Jewish talents in gainful and meaningful employment.

Russian authorities and society were taken aback by Jewish initiatives. After suppression of the Polish Rising (1863-64), the problem for Russians became the Jewish strength of purpose, a clear commitment for defining who they were and what they proposed to become. Contending with the difficulties associated with serf emancipation (1861), Poland, and the Odessa pogrom (1871), such assertiveness was ominous. Ukrainian nationalism inspired the government to take a harder line which, invariably, affected the Jews. From the mid to late 1870's, Jewish admission and advancement in several fields became much more restrictive, and Jewish education itself was coming under fire in terms of its supposed efficacy and the chimera of respectability in the eyes of Russian officials.

Chapter V concerns the culminating phase of the nineteenth-century Jewish metamorphosis during the reign of Tsar Alexander III (1881-1894). Certainly no friend of the Jews, he nevertheless had to play the role of "philosemite" on occasion in order to curry favor, especially monetary investments, from Jews such as Baron de Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch. With Russia struggling to transform itself into a modern state,

which will amplify the Jewish voice.

the Jews of Russia resumed an active role determining their individual and collective fates with the assistance of domestic and foreign philanthropy. *Voskhod* (Rising), a journal which ran from 1881 to 1899 and episodically thereafter, provided an open forum for Russian Jewish opinions as did *Russkii evrei*. Intellectual investigation, debate, and ongoing infighting over various issues promoted the Jewish community's diversification, though this proved a strength rather than a weakness. Disparities of education, wealth, and social orientation made an all-encompassing definition of Jew impossible. Simon Dubnow, the first comprehensive historian of Russian Jewry, saw in this divisiveness the community's complete dissolution, as did Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod. This did not come to pass. Lacking a monolithic national identity actually allowed the Jews of Russia to become socialists, communists, Zionists, secularists, and Bundists, or remain Orthodox or Hasidic, and still lay claim to Jewish identities as they suited their particular dispositions. By the time of Nicholas II's ascension in 1894, concerns over Jewish identities shifted to the political arena where, it was believed, Jews could safeguard their gains by obtaining a viable political voice.

CHAPTER 1: THE ORIGINS OF THE RUSSIAN JEWISH QUESTION

Introduction:

The year 1798 was the ignition point for the Jewish metamorphosis on Russian soil, yet it was only one of two. Preceding it by 150 years was the first of the Khmelnytsky risings which inspired the popular Jewish quest to reconstitute what had been imagined as a whole Jewish community and identity.¹ For 384 years (1264-1648 Poland and Lithuania had served the Jews as refuges from both Crusaders and the Inquisition, a condition which had allowed them to flourish as a community in a variety of ways. Aside from their engagement in a number of activities, what made Polish and Lithuanian Jews unique was their devotion to learning. The Vilna Gaon² and rabbinates were renowned throughout the European Jewish community, and many flocked to the lively intellectual centers of Vilna, Lublin, and other cities known for their rabbinical academies. Despite episodic proscriptions and expulsions, the Jews enjoyed a considerable degree of collective prosperity and autonomy though, by no means, had Eden been transplanted.

Growing animosity towards the Jews on the part of Polish noblemen after 1539 did not alarm most Jews, especially merchants and estate managers whose economic

¹ G. Deich, Liubavich: tsentr khasidov khabad, dokumental'nye ocherki (Morristown, NJ., 1994), p. 9. To further illustrate the imagination of what was lost and the desperate attempt to regain it, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Dream of the Ridiculous Man* is, perhaps, the closest parallel to that of the Jews in the aftermath of the Khmelnytsky risings. See Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 717-738.

²Gaon, meaning "one endowed with perfect understanding" in terms of mastering Torah and Talmud, was an office established during the Babylonian Captivity (587-514 B.C.E.). The principal function of this official was to maintain the intellectual and spiritual integrity of the Jewish communities in Babylonia through periodic missals and judgement on ritual and civil matters as they arose in the various communities. At the conclusion of this period and in succeeding centuries, this office waned in Western Europe in favor of regional rabbinical councils but still survived in Eastern Europe until the early nineteenth century.

interests had brought them into close contact with the Polish szlachta.³ If there had been some value attached to their association with the Crown and nobility, it was lost during Khmelnytsky's seven-year rebellion against the Polish monarchy. In the diaries and official correspondence between Khmelnytsky, Polish King Jan Casimir, and Tsar Alexis, Khmelnytsky's erstwhile Russian "protector," the Jews were virtually invisible.⁴ Regardless, the Jews found themselves dispersed and divested of the institutions which had given them their sense of communal stability, wholeness, and identity. In order to restore what had been lost, they relied on their own resources and efforts to rebuild Judaism from the rubble and amidst the uncertainties of daily life. It was a daunting task.

Physical dislocation coupled with a dire spiritual need for rejuvenation left the Eastern European Jewish community desperate for any hope of communal or religious reconstitution, messianic or otherwise. Such vulnerability invited the ministrations of individuals such as Sabbatai Zevi and Jacob Frank who appealed to those for whom the Vilna Rabbinate was geographically and spiritually remote.⁵ Being among the people rather than placing themselves at a distance from them gave them a decided advantage over their spiritual leaders who had no inclination to venture forth and instruct those whom they considered their spiritual subjects. Emphasizing their estrangement, the Rabbinate failed to offer feasible alternatives to what Zevi and Frank were preaching. Impotence was disguised by a hail of missals threatening to place under *herem* (ban of

³ Lucy Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), p. 7. One other factor to consider is the Vaad Arba Arazot (Council of the Four Lands) which was both an authoritative body within the Jewish community and represented the Jews in their relations with the state and with the formal institutions of the other estates.

⁴ For further investigation, see Jaroslaw Pelenski "Cossack Insurrections in Jewish-Ukrainian Relations" and Frank E. Sysyn, "The Jewish Factor in the Khmelnytsky Uprising," in Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective, eds. Peter J. Potichnyi and Howard Aster (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), pp. 38, 49-50.

excommunication) communities and individuals who followed these men and their respective movements, though how the Gaon proposed to enforce this decree was left unsaid. Frustration mounted on both sides. The community wanted guidance and an education from a dispassionate leadership which assumed that its directives would be implemented without question owing to its position in the Jewish world. By the eighteenth century, it was apparent that Judaism had to be brought to the people, and the vehicle responsible for bringing this about was the Hasidic movement.

At least in the mind of its founder, Israel ben Eliazer, the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Holy Name), or Besht as he came to be known, Hasidism was a sincere attempt to bring the complexities of Torah, Talmud and Kaballah down to the level of ordinary Jews.⁶ Once imbued with a general knowledge of Jewish beliefs and rituals, the Besht opined, the Jewish majority could participate actively in Jewish life. Though Eliazer was not a rabbi, his two successors, Dov Baer and Schneur Zalman were, and they were responsible for the spread of Hasidism throughout the spiritual realm Vilna claimed for itself. Acting out of self recrimination for failing to educate the Jews themselves, the Rabbinate, under the leadership of Elijah ben Solomon, Vilna's most noteworthy Gaon, embarked upon a campaign against the Hasidim which ended with Vilna falling under Hasidic control. The diminution of the Rabbinate, however, was not the only dramatic change with which the Jews had to contend.

At the time of the first Polish partition in 1772, Empress Catherine II either had no knowledge of the Hasidic-Rabbinate debate or it was of no importance to her. The new territory she had acquired needed to be assessed, put in order, and utilized for the

⁵ Dawidowicz., The Golden Tradition, p. 11.

benefit of the Russian Empire. Unlike Elizabeth I (1740-63), Catherine the Great did not fear the Jews nor did she have any marked philo- or anti-Semitic leanings. Concerned more with how to utilize Jewish talents, Catherine, in the course of her reign admitted Jews to the Empire so that they could be of service. The Pale of Jewish Settlement established in 1795 was a deferral of what would become Russia's Jewish Question. Dying the next year, it became Paul I's concern and, five years later, Alexander I's.

The Polish Legacy

In 889, German persecutions prompted the first mass influx of Jewish refugees into Poland which were followed by several more by 894. Removed from their perils and anxious for respite, the Jews thought Poland to be a true haven.⁷ Social conditions there were so amenable that Hebrew linguists rendered Poland into two Hebrew phonemes, "Pol" and "lin," meaning "stay overnight" or "here God rested."⁸ Whatever the interpretation, the crystallization of the Polish monarchy coupled with the growth of towns and villages attracted many Jewish tradesmen, merchants and artisans who served themselves as well as the Polish elite through holding a virtual monopoly on the luxury goods trade.⁹ Polish noblemen made ready use of Jews as tax collectors, estate managers, and in a variety of administrative capacities which, over time, made them the mainspring of commercial life in the small private towns of the southeast. Although all of this

⁶ Deich., Liubavich, p. 7.

⁷ Alexander Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 122-3.

⁸ Bernard Weinryb, The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland 1100-1800 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), p. 13.

⁹ Murray Rosman, The Lord's Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 77.

compared favorably to the conditions they had known in the German lands, even the “new Canaan” was not entirely free of nasty turns. Working on behalf of the Polish nobility was often hazardous. Prior to 1264 and especially after 1539 Jews in the employ of one lord could and often did suffer injury, hindrance, and even death at the hands of another lord’s retainers in order to satisfy a parochial grievance between the two magnates. With the transfer of Jewish patronage from the Crown to the nobility, the dangers increase and pretenses to Jewish protection were gradually dropped.

Jewish welfare had been a Crown concern for nearly three hundred years. Identified in some sources as King Boleslaw the Wise, in others, “the Pious,” what was not in dispute was his enactment of the 1264 Statute of Kalisz and its definition of Polish-Jewish affairs.¹⁰ In addressing the imperfect nature of this relationship, this piece of legislation set forth precise instructions as to how both parties were to interact socially, theologically, and commercially. Christians accusing Jews of wrongdoing would now be heard only if the accuser could bring forth two Christians and two Jews whose characters were beyond repute to testify to the charge. In addition, the Christian plaintiff had to swear on the cross while the Jewish defendant had to attest to his innocence on the Ten Commandments.¹¹ Should anyone be found to swear falsely, the penalty was excommunication for the Christian and lifetime exile from the Jewish community for the other. These penalties would serve as guarantees, thought the King, against superfluous and manufactured suits.

¹⁰ Norman Davies, God's Playground: A History of Poland, The Origins to 1795 vol. 1. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 79-80.

¹¹ See the 1264 Statute on Jewish Liberties in Poland in Iwo Pogonowski, Jews in Poland: A Documentary History (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993), p. 45.

Primary to the Statute's aims was a commercial relationship which had become strained owing to Jewish and Polish competition in a number of areas. Jews were often charged higher tolls, a form of discrimination redressed by the statute. Associated with this was one other practice which Boleslaw found most abhorrent, that being the demand for special duties from Jews on the part of some customs officials when transporting corpses of their coreligionists from one town to another in order to inter them. Both actions were now treated as criminal offenses and their perpetrators deemed thieves. In addition, Jews were now permitted to hold hereditary estates into which they had come via foreclosure. The King also decreed that Jews were considered "treasures" (i.e. valuable assets), and with that status, were not obliged to participate in military campaigns or contribute to such endeavors.¹² In general, the Statute can be interpreted as a perceptive countermove to noble exploitation; however, even Boleslaw, whose position was more secure than his successors, realized that every lacuna would be manipulated to Jewish disadvantage and all that he could hope for was that his successors would honor this mandate.

The most important aspect of the Kalisz Statute was its draconian treatment of the Blood Libel. In the clearest language, article 39 stated that Pope Innocent had declared such acts fantastic since they violated Jewish law. Papal authority on this matter was beyond question but should anyone insist upon pressing this charge, it had to be prosecuted on the testimony of three Jews and four Christians, all of whom had to be property holders and of irreproachable character. If the matter progressed to trial, it would be held in a synagogue and judged by the palatine of that region and by a Jewish

¹² Ibid., p. 54.

judge. Death and complete property divestment would be the outcome of these proceedings either for the defendant if found guilty or for the plaintiff if caught in a deception.¹³ No law could eradicate or cowl popular superstition completely since rumors of such activities persisted within the Polish Kingdom and later Commonwealth. Even so, this provision prevented actual trials from occurring and the Statute's overall integrity in safeguarding Jewish liberties lasted 275 years.

Jewish liberties in Western Europe had also existed de jure, but the Statue of Kalisz was unique because it encouraged Jewish communal vitality.¹⁴ Altruism may have been an impulse in the King's reasoning, though practicality was the governing force, particularly in commercial affairs. Boleslaw knew the value of his assets and realized that if the Kingdom were to benefit fully from these astute and industrious people, they had to possess a sense of stability and have opportunities to express their talents. Towards those ends, Boleslaw authorized their engagements in moneylending and estate management.¹⁵ Many Jews prospered from this relatively free market and from the successive confirmation of commercial privileges and political autonomy under Casimir the Great (1364), Casimir IV (1453) and Stanislaw August (1765).¹⁶

Secure in their status, Jews were also accorded liberties and freedom from molestation which allowed Jewish life and culture to flourish, eventually making the Kingdom of Poland and then Poland-Lithuania (1385) the center of Eastern European

¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁴ Mark Wischnitzer, A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds (New York: Jonathan David, 1965), p. 208. For a partial translation of the Kalisz Statute, see A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People From the Patriarchs to the Present, ed. Eli Barnavi (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), p. 119.

¹⁵ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 229.

¹⁶ Weinryb, The Jews of Poland, pp. 34-7. See also Davies, God's Playground, pp. 130-1.

Jewry.¹⁷ Encumbered with fewer proscriptions than in the West, Polish Jews suffered fewer privations since they were under the King's personal protection. All of this would change, however, in 1539 when the monarchy was compelled to relinquish considerable authority to the nobility, including its patronage of the Jews.¹⁸ When this transition occurred, the Jews expressed little concern since their contracts and patents were binding and defensible under Crown law; moreover, they had had to plead their cases often over the years. It mattered little initially if justice came from the King or the local nobleman since the Jewish relationship with the "jurisdiction of the castle," as local administration had come to be termed, was already centuries old and the nobles, in theory, were bound by the same legal strictures. By 1648, this would be tested to the limit.

Jews were both prized and cursed in noble eyes. Many noblemen, especially middling ones, envied Jewish commercial success and domination in some parts of the Commonwealth, a sentiment made more acute by the belief that Boleslaw and his successors had favored Jews through the establishment of special conditions which allowed them to compete unfairly with their Polish rivals.¹⁹ The time had come for restitution. In 1539-40 there circulated throughout the Commonwealth a "conversion libel" which accused the Jews of deceiving innocent Christians into converting to Judaism by arguing that Christ was a Jew.²⁰ This would not be the last instance of suspected "Judaizing." Although the whole affair was discovered to be a farce by mid-

¹⁷ Wischnitzer, *A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds*, pp. 208-9.

¹⁸ Rosman, *The Lord's Jews*, p. 39; Shmuel Ettinger, "The Legal and Social Status of the Jews of Ukraine from the Fifteenth Century to the Cossack Uprising of 1648," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 17 (Summer-Winter 1992), p. 109.

¹⁹ Wischnitzer, *A History of Jewish Crafts and Guilds*, p. 213. See also Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1927), pp. 542-3.

²⁰ Shmuel Ettinger, "The Legal and Social Status of the Jews of Ukraine from the Fifteenth Century to the Cossack Uprising of 1648," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 17 (Summer-Winter, 1992), p. 110.

1540, the damage had been done. Strict proscriptions were imposed upon Jewish-Christian contacts which polarized both groups psychologically as well as spiritually. Some noblemen forced Jews to accept baptism and conversion to Catholicism out of a spirit of “divine revenge,” a practice which met with tangible resistance and would continue well into the next century. In retrospect, these episodes of coercion, harassment and intimidation were merely antecedents to Bogdan Khmelnytsky’s pogroms which laid bare Jewish vulnerability in Poland.²¹

Prior to 1648, most Jews regarded their life in the Commonwealth as one of give and take. For all of their liberties, they were expelled from Lithuania in 1495 on an unspecified pretext only to be repatriated in 1503, though they remained barred from certain cities. More legislation aimed at the Jews would follow. The Second Lithuanian Statute (also known as the Volhynian Statute) condemned Jews to death by burning for circumcising and converting their slaves to Judaism as well as for compelling Christian women to act as wet nurses to Jewish infants. The Third Lithuanian Statute (1588) merely recapitulated its immediate predecessor with some minor additions.²² As extracommunal hostility increased, however, Jewish cultural and spiritual activities in and around Vilna became more vigorous. Several Hebrew and Yiddish presses and libraries were established as well as a famous yeshiva (rabbinical academy) whose Gaon would eventually determine Jewish orthodoxy in Belarus and Russia as well as in Poland and Lithuania. From painful historical experience, however, the Jews had learned that fortune was temporary and that the Evil Eye would not miss an opportunity to bring low

²¹ Rabbi Nathan ben Moses, Yeven Metzulah (Abyss of Despair): The Seventeenth Century Chronicles depicting Jewish Life in Russia during the Chmielnicki Massacres 1648-9, translated by Abraham J. Mesch (1649; reprint, New York: Bloch Publishing, 1950), pp. 37-41.

the haughty. Even in the best of times the boundary between paradise and perdition was a fine one.

Boleslaw could not exert his will from the grave. Trailing after the Jews like an unwanted camp follower, the Blood Libel still made its rounds among Christians who remained convinced that Jews required the blood of unbaptized Christian children as a leavening agent for matzos and blood offerings to “their God.”²³ Any time of the year was ripe for Libel rumors, though Easter was most susceptible owing to its proximity to Passover. In 1534, a riot ensued after the commission of a ritual murder in Plock which was later discovered to be a hoax. Five years later, another one surfaced; on this occasion the hapless Jews were executed, since not even the King’s authority could prevent vigilante “justice” and the nobles were reluctant to intercede.

Viewed as theological pariahs, Jews were also singled out for having the unique and unenviable position of being the only stewards, functionaries and petty entrepreneurs (i.e. innkeepers, craftsmen, etc.) to enjoy greater proximity to the peasant population than either King or nobleman. Valued when needed, Jews were also easy targets of popular recrimination for real and alleged malfeasance.²⁴ Polish magnates, the real perpetrators of such burdens as higher rents, price increases on basic staples, and demands for longer working weeks, were usually absent, but the Jewish agents of their estates were almost always local. That a number of Jews were also tax farmers did little to endear them to larger rural population. As noble demands for more revenue grew, so too did the tax

²² Ettinger, "The Legal and Social Status of the Jews," p. 112.

²³ Though beyond the period in question, two sources which illustrate the forces at work are Sholom Aleichem, The Bloody Hoax, trans. Aliza Shevrin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) and Ezekiel Leikin, The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial that Shook the World (London: Jason Aronson, 1993). One of the better short stories about such incidents is Heinrich Heine’s “The Rabbi of Bacherach” in Great Jewish Short Stories (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966).

farmers' portion, leading many villagers to believe that these Jewish "lackeys," and not the "unseen" King and nobles, were extorting money, a misconception which made rural Jewish livelihoods precarious. Jewish incomes were as meager and, at times, episodic as that of any Polish peasant. Gratuities earned from tax farming, a temporary commission, augmented Jewish incomes, but this was little appreciated by their affected Christian neighbors who often lived proximate to them. Now firmly under castle (noble) jurisdiction, Jews had to apply to their noble employers for protection, the very stratum of Polish society least sympathetic to them. Their collective fate in pre-partition Poland was fast approaching its nadir. Even the mere suspicion of illicit trading or petty extortion could ignite a riot or, at the very least, an official expulsion edict, a measure which would find favor with Russian officials in the not too distant future.²⁵

Matters came to a head in early 1648 when King Wladyslaw IV summoned Cossack leaders, including Bogdan Khmelnytsky, Hetman of the Zaporozhian Sich, to Warsaw in order to plan a joint Polish-Cossack expedition against the Turks. All were in accord with this project save the Sejm which refused to finance the campaign. Not wishing to press the nobles, Wladyslaw abandoned his plans not knowing what he was about to unleash.²⁶ Khmelnytsky believed himself aggrieved. In his address to the Cossack hetmen, the King had promised to maintain ancient Cossack traditions, but this pledge seemed contingent upon the now-moribund expedition and could be disavowed by the Sejm at will. Whatever his thoughts may have been, the Zaporozhian Hetman wanted

²⁴ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, pp. 56-7.

²⁵ Two examples pertaining to the same accusation illustrate this condition beautifully. PSZ (I), Law 5032 14 March 1727, Concerning the Exile Abroad of Borchta and Leybova and the Associates in Tax Farming and Customs Collection and Law 5063 26 April 1727, Concerning the Deportation of the Jews from Russia and the Disposition of the Gold and Silver Money which must not be taken out.

to “express” his displeasure with the monarch’s change of mind in person, an opportunity which escaped him with Wladyslaw’s death in May 1648. Since he had not had the opportunity to establish a rapport with Jan Casimir, though he had actually favored him initially, Khmelnytsky found himself in open rebellion against the King with the odds in Cossack disfavor.²⁷

In Jewish history, this rebellion would bring to an end the wholeness of the imagined Jewish community. Whether Khmelnytsky was an active anti-Semite or not cannot be answered with absolute certainty despite the substantial number of Jewish deaths attributed to his men.²⁸ Given the series of rebellions which followed Khmelnytsky’s revolt in 1648, the number of Cossacks involved, and the breakdown of law and order, Jews falling victim to those seeking sanguinary restitution for grievances, real and imagined, would have been a natural consequence. On 28 July 1655, for instance, the Jews of Vilna were attacked by both marauding Cossacks and Muscovite soldiers, resulting in considerable loss of life among the defenseless inhabitants.²⁹ As for the Zaporozhian Hetman’s personal sentiments, judging from his correspondence, the Jews never figured in his plans.

According to Nathan ben Moses, a Jewish witness and survivor, the revolt began on 25 May 1648, when the Jewish governor of Czehiryń, Zachariah Sobilenski, claimed that Choronzhy, a nobleman, had not paid his land taxes in full. Immediately, charges of “Jewish churl,” “extortionist,” and a host of other expletives flew about, confirming a resolution on the part of Choronzhy and his henchmen to pay back the Jews with interest

²⁶ Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 1.: *The Origins to 1795* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.463-65.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

for all of the years of alleged fiscal abuse.³⁰ Supposedly, this episode intensified the rebellion against King Jan Casimir with considerable Ukrainian noble and peasant support though, in all probability, it was one of many such events. What followed regardless was a massacre beyond compare to any previous violent outbreak in Eastern Europe. Jews in the villages and private towns had no effective defenses. Some were put to the sword while others were captured, sold into slavery, or simply slaughtered in their sleep.³¹ This pogrom raged until June, with Khmelnytsky's forces defeating the Poles on many fields and the Jews suffering the brunt of these victories. Taking advantage of the turmoil in Nemerov, for instance, Hetman Ganya called upon the Jews to convert to Catholicism. Responding to this demand with all speed, Rabbi Jechiel ben Eliezer led the entire community of 6,000 in Kadosh Hashem (the prayer sanctifying God's name) who were then martyred on 10 June.³² Not long afterwards, Hetman Krivonoss of Tulczyn made the same demand of the 15,000 Jews there and met with the same result.³³ Those who survived the 1648-9 massacres remembered them as "gzerot takh ve tat" (times of evil). In the traditional grace after meals on 20 Sivan (June 15), the phrase "lo nikem" (let us not be disgraced) was replaced with "velo nikoshel" (let us not stumble), "stumble" being a euphemism for conversion to Christianity.³⁴

²⁸ Moshe Pelli, *The Age of Haskalah: Studies in Hebrew Literature* (Leiden: Brill Press, 1979), p. 35.

²⁹ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 467.

³⁰ Rabbi Nathan ben Moses of Hanover, *Yeven Metzulah* (Abyss of Despair), trans. Abraham J. Mesch (1649; reprint, New York: Bloch Publishing, 1950), pp. 37-9.

³¹ Joseph Kastein, *The Messiah of Ismir: Sabbatai Zevi* (London: John Lane, 1931), pp. 36-7.

³² Kastein, *The Messiah of Ismir*, pp. 43-4. See also Nathan Hanover's *The Massacre of the Holy Community of Nemerov* in *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* ed. David Roskies (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 111.

³³ So too did the Jews of Pavlysh. See *The Martyrs of Pavlysh* in *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 113-15.

³⁴ Chone Shmeruk, "Yiddish Literature and Collective Memory: the Case of the Khmelnytsky Massacres," *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, vol 5 (1990), pp. 173-4.

The calculations involved in these compulsory and humiliating “conversion-or-death” mandates reveal a deeper angst which had been coalescing for some time previously, though the extant sources give no specific reasons for the hetmen’s actions.³⁵ As for Khmelnytsky, fortune was already turning against him. Smarting over his rout at the Battle of Beresteczko (29-30 June 1651), and frustrated completely with Poland’s monarchical weakness, Khmelnytsky, on 22 March 1652, petitioned Tsar Alexis for personal and corporate citizenship.³⁶ Four times within the corpus of his petition, he protested his faith as well as that of his company in the Russian Orthodox Church as well as their willingness to serve Muscovy. With the aid of prolific rhetorical flourishes, Khmelnytsky transformed himself from a Cossack hetman into a Christian knight leading a body of men, ready to defend the Church. He admitted openly to destroying several Polish towns and laying waste to countless versts, being as expansive in his narrative as Jan Casimir would be in his a year later and equally silent about the Jews. This lacuna mattered little since Alexis had his own affairs to settle with the Commonwealth, and yet it is telling in terms how visible the Jews were to the Cossack insurgents not to mention their sentiments towards them.

Khmelnytsky’s letter possessed a sense of urgency, much like the petition of a desperate supplicant to an indifferent authority figure, though he had nothing to fear regarding Alexis’ acceptance of his service. Polish-Muscovite relations had been strained since the early seventeenth century owing to long-standing territorial disputes,

³⁵ A possible explanation may lay in Slavic folklore, specifically Ukrainian duma (ballads), in which the acceptance of a foreign faith, such as Cossacks taken captive by Turks being forcibly converted to Islam, meant a living death for the individual. See "Duma about Marusia of Bohuslav" in *Ukrainian Dumy*, trans. George Tarnawski and Patricia Kilina (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Institute, 1979), pp. 37-41.

particularly over Smolensk. Nearing the brink of inevitable conflict with the Commonwealth, the Tsar needed to strengthen his forces and granting protection to these skilled horsemen whose ranks would enhance Muscovite cavalry was a rare boon.³⁷ For Khmelnytsky's part, Muscovy provided both sanctuary and the promise of safeguarding Cossack liberties which, after all, were his foremost concerns.

King Jan Casimir did not seem to be troubled with the Jews either. Desiring a measure of restitution for Cossack excesses, Casimir appealed to Tsar Alexis in 1653 for the extradition of Khmelnytsky and his host for their crimes. Citing a germane provision in the 1637 constitution, the King affirmed his right to make this request and the Tsar's obligation to consider it.³⁸ Khmelnytsky was branded a brigand and murderer, and the petition proceeded to enumerate a protracted and detailed account of his depredations which surprisingly, owing to its deliberate meticulousness, made no mention of the Jews.

Cast Adrift and in Search of a Compass: Sabbateanism and Frankism

When the storms subsided in 1656, communal cohesion and social stability had vanished. To whom could the Jews turn for protection and guidance? Previous guarantees of Jewish protection by the Polish crown had now been whittled away to meaningless affirmations. Amidst the ruins of their villages, lives, and institutions, the Jews of Poland, Ukraine and southern Russia eventually found their supposed salvation

³⁶ PSZ (I): 22 March 1652, Regarding Permission Granted to the Messenger of Bogdan Khmelnytsky, Ivan Iskri, to Present Himself to the Prince with a Petition regarding the Acceptance of the Hetman and the Zaporozhian Cossack Host as Subjects.

³⁷ The Bashkir who were accomplished horsemen themselves were adopted similarly in the 1730's.

³⁸ PSZ (I): 1 October 1653, Letter from the Polish King Jan Casimir to Tsar Alexis Mikhailovich.

in the arrival of Shabbetai Zevi in 1665.³⁹ Claiming to be the long-awaited Messiah, Zevi promised an immediate respite from Christian hostility and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth in return for Jewish communal allegiance to him. Skeptics declared him a charlatan and shunned his company, contending that if the Messianic Age had dawned, a profusion of auguries would now be evident and not just the proclamation of one man.⁴⁰ The Rabbinate assailed him with deprecating missals but did nothing else to dissuade the Jewish masses from following him. Emboldened by this lack of effective resistance, Zevi then increased his opponents' opprobrium for him when he asserted that Bogdan Khmelnytsky was to be praised and remembered since his actions made 1648 the year of Jewish redemption, which had initiated the Messianic Age.⁴¹ Such messianic fantasies were seductive to those starved for hope amidst despair. The ignorant, semi-literate, and destitute who, seeing themselves assailed from all sides with few allies and fewer prospects for a peaceful existence, joined the Sabbatean movement.

Zevi's following grew throughout Eastern Europe and into the Ottoman Empire where, in 1666, the Ottoman Sultan summoned him into his presence. Sabbatean influence had reached the Sultan's realm and there was a danger that some of his Muslim subjects would join its ranks which would compromise the Sultan's spiritual and secular authority. Unwittingly, where the Rabbinate had failed, the Sultan prevailed. Exploiting Zevi's conceit, the Sultan allowed him to place himself into an untenable position which ended when the would-be Messiah elected conversion to Islam rather than death for

³⁹ Joseph Kastein, The Messiah of Ismir, p.35.

⁴⁰ John Evelyn, The History of Sabatai Sevi: The Suppos'd Messiah of the Jewes (1669; reprint, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 61.

⁴¹ Gershon Scholem, Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676 (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 591.

misrepresentation.⁴² Active propagation of Sabbateanism would be terminated for a time, though the desperation which had driven so many to join him would linger. Its influence was so powerful that a number of his more ardent neophytes followed his example and converted to Islam, believing that their apostasy would affect the restoration of Palestine to Jewish patrimony.⁴³ As for the majority, disillusioned and embarrassed by this false prophet and his equally incredulous Torah,⁴⁴ some converted to Christianity or shunned religious observances altogether, much to the consternation of both Western and Eastern European rabbinical authorities.

Contemporary with Zevi's movement was Vilna's election as Eastern Europe's premier center for Jewish learning and arbiter in Jewish affairs. Zevi's messianic claims soon put the Rabbinate's arbitration skills to the test. In addition to offending Jewish conservatives, his actions incensed Christians who, in 1665, rioted in Pinsk, Lublin and Vilna, compelling Jewish authorities to seek government protection and denounce the Sabbateans as heretics.⁴⁵ This inglorious episode deepened the Rabbinate's enmity towards Zevi and, more importantly, called into question their authority and power regarding the Jews over which they claimed spiritual hegemony. Fuming was the extent of its exertions. Despite its concerns and with the integrity of Eastern Europe's Jewish community in the balance, Vilna never dispatched regular educational missions or delegations to the villages and settlements to offer spiritual solace or instruction. On

⁴² Evelyn, *The History of Sabatai Sevi*, pp. 88-91. This was the punishment reserved for false prophets.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-78, 89-91. Ostensibly, those who elected this course of action saw it as an act of religious martyrdom since to leave the Jewish caste was tantamount to a complete separation from Jewish life and, in effect, death. See Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, pp. 90-2.

⁴⁴ In this context, "Torah" is not a reference to the Mosaic books but to a particular "interpretation and application" of them.

those occasions when the Rabbinate did decide to take an active hand, however, it succeeded in worsening its already-waning prestige. Embarrassed and incensed over Zevi's activities even in defeat, the Rabbinate punished the Sabbateans by denying them readmission to Judaism, a decision which eventually produced another disconcerting episode in the evolution of Jewish identities in Eastern Europe.

Sabbateanism created a gulf between Vilna and the larger Jewish community which would widen with each passing year. More than the welfare of its theological subjects, Vilna's priority was the maintenance of its own credibility and authority. Its attitude of protective paternalism actually masked an unattractive truth. Despite his individual reputation as well as the respect attributed to his office, the Vilna Gaon, the principle spiritual leader of the Eastern European Jewish community, was denied the liberty of independent action. His acumen and ethical fortitude meant little when he had to rely upon the Vilna Kahal (Jewish governing body) for his maintenance and tenure in office, a position which could be terminated at will should he act contrary to the wishes of that body.⁴⁵ If that had come to pass, there was no recourse open to him since the Kahal also held the reins of the Vilna Rabbinate. What authority the Gaon had was vested in missals to local rabbis and in their willingness and ability to carry out his will. Painfully aware of their true "power," both the Gaon and the Vilna Rabbinate attempted to use rabbis and Jewish community leaders to impose doctrinal rigidity upon their

⁴⁵ Aside from religious affairs, Vilna Jews were powerless since they were excluded from even the most minor offices. In such situations, appeals to higher authorities were necessary. See Margolis and Marx, A History of the Jews, pp. 578-9.

⁴⁶ This situation was similar to that of a Jewish scholar who married the daughter of a wealthy businessman and, literally, was obliged to him for his welfare.

respective congregations inasmuch as that was possible.⁴⁷ Shtetlach were spread over a vast area which meant that effective communication was a rarity, but there was a larger issue at hand. Rigidity over a generations-old narrow body of knowledge associated with Jewishness certainly played a role in later identity formation.⁴⁸ Depending upon the fortunes of individual villages and towns, how Jews came to know who and what they were and what God expected them to do would shape their individual and collective intellectual development.

Knowledge was a jealously-guarded preserve which Vilna shared with an elected few. If the Rabbinate had been more accessible, instructive, and supportive, Zevi would not have had much of an opportunity, but despite the aversion of what could have been a significant disaster, the leadership held fast to its old courses. This attitude of neglect favored Jacob Liebovitz, a.k.a. Frank, ninety-one years later. Initially, he and his followers resurrected an altered form of Sabbateanism and renewed the battle with the Rabbinate.⁴⁹ Like Zevi, Frank claimed initially that he was the second person of the Trinity, the Messiah, only to abandon this claim in favor of declaring himself and his company “Zoharists at war with the Talmud.”⁵⁰ Among disaffected Jews in search of a way to discover true Judaism, he soon acquired a following. To the Rabbinate’s initial

⁴⁷ Israel Cohen, Vilna (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), p. 151. Vilna's effectiveness lay in its proximity to the various communities under its titular jurisdiction.

⁴⁸ Cohen, Vilna, pp. 128-9.

⁴⁹ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 38. See also Shmuel Ettinger, "The Modern Period," A History of the Jewish People, ed. H.H. Ben-Sasson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 767-8. The Frankist movement was a mystical reaction against Rabbinical rationalism which was, given the general state of Jewish education, beyond the grasp of most Jews. Mysticism was closer to hand.

⁵⁰ Margolis and Marx, A History of the Jews, pp. 583-4. What Margolis and Marx do not relate is that this declaration must not be perceived superficially. Frank knew that Gaon Elijah was an accomplished Talmudic scholar who mandated that no one under age 40 be allowed to read the Zohar and even then only after an individual had proven himself conversant in Talmud. The Gaon disparaged the “Zoharists” because Zevi employed his “version” of the Zohar to promote his messianic claims as did Frank and, hence, the latter’s declaration.

relief, Frank, unlike Zevi, was not advocating a competing theology which would challenge Orthodox Jewish doctrines or alterations in ritual practices and, furthermore, the movement lacked overall cohesion. It was not, however, harmless. Frankism was quite effective in heightening tensions in several Jewish communities by stirring up questions and speculation surrounding the legitimacy of Rabbinical authority. Desiring negotiation over confrontation in order to assuage Gaon Elijah's concerns, Frank and his followers answered a summons to appear before Poland's principal rabbinical court. They had no idea that their mission was doomed before it began. Taking its instructions from the Gaon who had already judged the Frankist before hearing them out, the Brody Bet Din excommunicated them in 1756.⁵¹ This act of bad faith would cause Vilna considerable concern.

The Frankists refused to accept the verdict. Since the Rabbinate had not granted them a fair hearing, they sought another theological forum more inclined to do so. Soon thereafter, they appealed to Bishop Dembrowski of Kameniec-Podolski to consider their claims that the Talmud was an anti-Christian work, a charge which the Bishop weighed carefully and prosecuted cautiously. After some deliberation, the Bishop called together Poland's renowned rabbinical sages to debate this charge in the summer of 1757. Taken unawares and lacking the requisite forensic skills and refinement which their experienced Western coreligionists had elevated to an art form, the Rabbinate made a poor showing and many copies of the Talmud were subsequently burned. Not everyone saw finality in this act. Dissatisfied with the results and believing that the matter required further discussion, Canon Mikolski called for another disputation in Lvov in 1760 at which many

⁵¹ Elijah Judah Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna (London: Jason Aronson Press,

of the leading rabbinical luminaries of the century were in attendance, including Israel ben Eliazer, the Baal Shem Tov. On this occasion, the Rabbinate was prepared and argued its case deftly as did opposing Polish Catholic theologians. The result was a stalemate. Both sides had demonstrated considerable knowledge and sophistication in presenting their respective positions and the Canon lawyers in attendance were unable to determine whether Jews were indeed heretics or enemies of Christianity.⁵² This conundrum was the core of the Frankist case and the insurmountable obstacle which prevented both ecclesiastical and civil authorities from taking punitive action. Persuasive theological arguments aside, the Polish Catholic Church lacked the authority to rule on such issues which contributed to the deadlock and subsequent dismissal of the Frankist suit. Episodic in Western European history, such inquisitions relating to the Jews were rare in the East and, in either event, Frank did not benefit.⁵³ The impasse could not be bridged and given the perishable nature of his cause, all he and his followers could expect was alienation from both Jewish and Christian communities. No Imam was present to welcome Frank to the delights of the Koran, but Poland was not at a loss for Catholic clergy willing to accept converts.⁵⁴ In July 1759, Frank and a number of his remaining retinue converted to Catholicism with the King of Poland acting as their sponsor.⁵⁵

1994), p. 49.

⁵² Within this context, Polish ecclesiastics were attempting to discern whether Orthodox Judaism was merely a different theology or one contradictory to Christian precepts. If there was credence to the latter, the next issue to be resolved was whether Jewish “deviations” from Christian theology were benign or, as the Frankists contended, malevolent.

⁵³ Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 78-9.

⁵⁴ Schochet, *The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna*, p. 53. The Baal Shem Tov was sympathetic to the Frankist but regretted their conversion to Christianity believing, as he did with regard to Zevi, that a good man had been handed over to Satan.

⁵⁵ Margolis and Marx., *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 584. To complete the story, not long after his conversion, Church authorities discovered that Frank’s devotion to Catholicism was peripheral at best and he was imprisoned for apostasy. Freed by the Russians in 1772, he managed to acquire an estate and called himself the Baron of Frank.

Thanks to Frank's compromising apostasy, Eastern European Rabbinical Judaism won back a portion of its reputation if only by default. Only a few dissidents had been lost through Frank's defection, yet there was little cause for complacency. Frank and his followers would pass into obscurity but not so his aspersions regarding the Talmudic basis of Gaonic and Rabbinical authority. On that score, he had a case which was one of the reasons why the Brody Bet Din excommunicated the Frankists in all haste. By declaring the Frankists *apikursim* (heretics) and then imposing a *herem* (ban of excommunication), Elijah ben Solomon sought to silence them by discrediting their movement in the eyes of Polish and, more broadly, Eastern European Jewry. According to prevailing wisdom, no self-conscious Jew would accord credibility, much less listen to, the accusations of a "non-Jew." This would have been a reasonable calculation if the Gaon had had the backing of the Jewish majority. Being an astute scholar whose learning spanned both Judaica and secular subjects, it could not have escaped Elijah that the Frankists threatened the precarious foundation upon which his position rested. For all of the vigorous defenses of the Gaonate's Talmudic veracity, few could verify it. Physical access to the relevant volumes was the privilege of a select circle as well as Hebrew comprehension, but this gave Vilna little security.⁵⁶ Time would bring change with predictable certainty but would Vilna be able to adapt?

Breaching the Eyruv: The Shtetl on the Eve of Change

⁵⁶ Though the Gaonate was not a concern in the 1850's, a fundamental complaint among Jewish educational reformers was the overall lack of books. This will be discussed further in chapters three and four.

Too preoccupied with his position and continued good relations with the Vilna kahal, the Gaon left the task of Jewish education and, consequently, identity to the innumerable shtetlach which were scattered throughout Poland and Lithuania, not to mention those in Ukraine and Russia. Just as there were disparities among shtetl Jews in wealth and circumstance, each Jewish village and settlement differed in its perception of the defining elements of Judaism. Not everyone knew Hebrew but most could converse in Yiddish and, depending upon location, Polish. At the synagogue, everyone worshipped, though only the most scholarly and wealthy were given the choicest seating by the eastern wall, the most holy part of the building since it was in the direction of Jerusalem. On Friday night, everyone celebrated the Sabbath, some with meat while others with only challah. Regardless of social status, all males were circumcised eight days after birth, all were entitled to a *huppah* (wedding canopy), and, at death, a talis divested of its fringes would be worn by all deceased males and buried with them. Even these commonalities had their disparities, but still there was a sense of Jewishness among the populace, understood in the most simple and immediate terms.

Those who wished to advance in these communities required either substantial financial means or a demonstration of scholastic aptitude. Affluence was concentrated and mobility restricted save by marriage which was governed strictly by an individual's *yikhes* (family background).⁵⁷ For young men who had any ambition, early scholastic success carried with it the promise of study at a renowned *yeshiva* (rabbinical academy) under the desired patronage of a wealthy Jew who might be persuaded to wed his

⁵⁷ Diane K. and David G. Roskies, The Shtetl Book: An Introduction to Eastern European Jewish Life and Lore (New York: KTAV Press, 1979), p. 86.

beneficiary to his daughter.⁵⁸ As for daughters, there was little available to them. The nineteenth century would see women joining men in search of greater opportunities but, in the eighteenth, Jewish custom and circumstance regarded women as financial liabilities to be transferred to the first eligible male via *kettuba* (wedding contract).⁵⁹

A man of exceptional financial means could be respected given his social and commercial conduct, but scholars were revered. For a “genius” of Torah and Talmud, the yeshivas of Warsaw, Lublin, Vilna, and Berlin were open to talented young men who, under the tutelage of a learned master, could aspire to fame and riches, not to mention the privilege of lending his sagacity to the integrity and promotion of Rabbinical Judaism. Less than two percent of the male Jewish population could take advantage of such opportunities.⁶⁰ Most had to content themselves with *heder* (religious primary school) where, as young boys, they were taught elementary Hebrew and then immersed in the Book of Leviticus with all of its codes and complex judicial arguments.⁶¹ A young Jew was expected to know the laws at an early age in order to lead a moral and ethical life. Instruction began at the age of three under the shtetl *melamed* (heder teacher) whose sole purpose was to impart Jewish literacy (learning Hebrew was considered important but merely a means to an end) to his charges, some of whom might surpass him some day.⁶² Despite his vital services in educating the young, most melamedim were considered

⁵⁸ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, pp. 77-8.

⁵⁹ As testament to this circumstance, there is an old Yiddish proverb which, in English, is translated: “If you have daughters, you have no need for laughter.”

⁶⁰ Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, Life is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl (New York, Schocken Books, 1962), pp. 84-5.

⁶¹ Steven Zipperstein, Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), pp. 42-6. Quoting Chaim Weizmann, Zipperstein claims that most of these squalid, one-room schools were “classrooms filled with death.” Education under these circumstances was difficult and promised few rewards. Little would change under Russian rule.

⁶² Zbrowski, Life is With People, p. 88.

either failed or lazy scholars and were paid meagerly. This image was a product of folk wisdom which, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, was accepted as fact.⁶³ Religious notions among shtetl dwellers also had a similar genesis.

In such circumstances, secular knowledge received minimal attention. Vilna was aware of the problem, and sent scholars on occasion to shtetlach and settlements in an effort to correct a variety of errors.⁶⁴ It came as no surprise that these missions failed more often than not since the would-be teacher and his students spoke different languages. Though more evident in the nineteenth century, already by the mid-eighteenth there was a scholarly stigma attached to Yiddish.⁶⁵ In all four dialects, it was the lingua franca of Ashkenazic Jewry and yet it was one of the more divisive elements between the Vilna intelligentsia and the rest of the Jewish population, though both were conversant in it.⁶⁶ For generations, yeshivah luminaries had impressed upon their students that Yiddish was a profane jargon fit for tradesmen and artisans while Hebrew was a learned language sanctioned by God himself, though never to be used in vulgar communication. For secular conversation, Polish, Lithuanian, German and Russian were considered sufficient media by Jewish authorities, though many shtetl Jews enjoyed only limited facility in these languages.

Inaccessibility was a source of power over those furthest away from Vilna's aura.

The Jewish majority, it was imagined, viewed Vilna as the "ivory tower" of authority and

⁶³ For a description of the heder experience of popular memory, see Irving Howe, World of our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life they Found and Made (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), pp. 200-2.

⁶⁴ Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, pp. 10-15.

⁶⁵ Some learned Jews thought of Yiddish as jargon, yet it is interesting to note that Yiddish and Hebrew had a share in Jewish education. For instance, if a Rabbi told a parable to illustrate a point of ethics, he would do so in Yiddish while his attendant scribe would later write it down in Hebrew. See Benjamin Harshav, The Meaning of Yiddish (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 22.

would continue to obey its mandates until the end of time. Few of them realized that any Jewish identity had to be grounded in the very knowledge which was denied those most in need of it. Given their own meager resources, “non-scholastic” Jews resorted to a variety of beliefs and half-forgotten concepts learned long ago. Interspersed with Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish folklore, and perhaps a kernel of Jewish theology, custom, and ritual, it was all the knowledge most possessed. Under such circumstances, it was a natural reaction for some Jews to be suspicious and, in some instances, hostile towards anyone, Jew or Russian, who tried to either discredit their beliefs or ply them with new information which might challenge cherished notions.

The Unintentional Challenge: The Hasidic Movement:

Never retiring from their quest for communal reconstitution and the education which would give it vitality, it was only natural that the Hasidic movement would emerge among the Jews. Although Hasidism’s challenge to Vilna antedated the Polish partitions, its true denouement occurred under Russian rule in an unexpected manner. The movement's subsequent victory over the Vilna Rabbinate in 1798 and subsequent domination of the kahal and Gaonate ended their persecution at the hands of the latter. Initially, Hasidic leaders merely wanted a dialogue with the Rabbinate to explain their goals and mission. This was denied them repeatedly. Through a combination of frustration, obduracy, and persistence on both sides, disputes graduated to conflicts which resulted in the Rabbinate losing the Vilna Gaonate and kahal majority.

⁶⁶ Abraham P. Gannes, Childhood in a Shtetl (Cuperton, CA: Ganton Books, 1993), p. 51.

At its core, Hasidism was committed to promoting Jewish literacy among those who could not obtain this education by other means. It was with an eye towards forging Jewish communal integrity and identity, not to mention unlocking the mysteries of Torah and the universe, that Israel ben Eliazer, the Baal Shem Tov created the cosmology and Torah of Hasidism.⁶⁷ Of the many problems East European Jews confronted in the eighteenth century, the one which barred them from “higher wisdom” was Hebrew. For Torah and Talmud scholars, this was certainly not a problem, but the vast majority of Jews did not have the luxury of time to devote to learn Hebrew fluently. Without a lingua franca comprehensible to a quasi-literate population, Judaism was in danger of losing its vitality. In order to resolve this challenge, ben Eliazer reflected upon his own approach to God, that is, through sensing God’s *shekhina* (terrestrial spirit) while engaged in fervent prayer rather than through meditating upon sterile pages.⁶⁸ Only in this state, the *Besht* (acronym of Baal Shem Tov) opined, could one possess true *kavannah* (intention) during prayer and be admitted to the Gates of Wisdom and to God’s throne.⁶⁹ Embracing his audience in the truest sense of the word, the Baal Shem Tov and his learned followers adopted storytelling, a familiar village pastime, as a medium for conveying Hasidism’s peculiar interpretations, tenets, and addenda to Orthodox Judaism.⁷⁰ Often created off the cuff, and combining the mundane with the esoteric,

⁶⁷ Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography* (1792-93; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p. 49. See also G. Deich, *Liubavich: tsentr khasidov khabad, documental'nye ocherki* (Morristown, 1994), p. 7.

⁶⁸ David Sears, *The Path of the Baal Shem Tov: Early Chasidic Teachings and Customs* (Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1997), pp. 50-1.

⁶⁹ Gershom Scholem ed., *Zohar: The Book of Splendor: Basic Reading from the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 27-30. See also Schochet, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁰ *Nahman ben Simhah of Bratislav*, trans. Arnold J. Band (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. xiii. Nahman ben Simhah was the great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and one of the principal propagators of the Hasidic movement in early nineteenth century Russia and Ukraine. He was one of the few Hasidic masters to commit their thoughts to paper since many, like the Besht, did not bother to do so.

Hasidic tales served as successful didactic tools in bringing all aspects of Judaica to those who could not obtain this knowledge otherwise.⁷¹

Not intending to contest Vilna's authority, the Baal Shem Tov merely perceived the traditional educational institutions and practices as being far too narrow in scope. Those who possessed an acumen and disposition towards Torah and Talmud study should be encouraged, according to the Besht, but everyone had different aptitudes and intellectual needs.⁷² Sensitivity towards the less well-endowed members of the community was the key to Hasidic success. By combining selections from Kabbalistic literature and Jewish folklore presented in an instructive theological setting, the Hasidim gave shop clerks, cattle dealers, liquor agents, estate managers, and innkeepers, the opportunity to understand their faith and enjoy a closer communion with it.⁷³ Though born in Ukraine and an extensive traveler, the Besht is not known to have made his way to Belorussia and Lithuania. Even so, he was known in those regions and Hasidic cells existed there during his lifetime.⁷⁴ Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezhirech, his immediate successor, expanded this organization in order to cull the eager, restless and frustrated Jewish masses into a version of Judaism which was all-embracing and accessible to them.⁷⁵

Often referred to as the Great Maggid (preacher), Rabbi Dov Baer succeeded the Besht upon his death in 1760. During his twelve-year tenure, he promoted his predecessor's teachings further afield to more of the shtetlach and settlements of Ukraine

⁷¹ "Torah" means "guide." Often Hasidic tales, many of which were expositions upon the Mosaic books, are referred to as "torah" since their purpose was to guide their listeners along the paths of righteousness.

⁷² Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, pp. 54-55.

⁷³ Aaron Wertheim, Law and Custom in Hasidism (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing, 1992), p. 16

⁷⁴ Wolf Zeev Rabinowitsch, Lithuanian Hasidism (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 5.

⁷⁵ Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition, p. 15.

and Belorussia and made significant innovations to Hasidic theology which brought him into conflict with Gaon Elijah.⁷⁶ Friction began in 1765 when the Gaon, claiming to have read a Hasidic tract and finding its deficiencies heretical, issued a ban on all such publications. Respecting the office as well as the erudition of its holder and desiring to avoid a pitched battle, Dov Baer, in 1771, sought an audience with Elijah to explain that Hasidism was an augmentation of and not in competition with Orthodox Judaism. Dov Baer had hoped to prove to the Gaon that his anxieties over doctrinal and ritual innovations were unfounded. To these expressed intentions, Elijah responded by burning all Hasidic works obtainable in Vilna's town square and expelling the resident Hasidim.⁷⁷

Despite Rabbinical disapproval, the movement grew. Eastern European (soon to be Russian) Jews first encountered the Hasidim in force during the tenures of Dov Baer (1760-1772) and his successor, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1772-1813). In the immediate confusion following the Besht's death, Dov Baer moved the center of the movement to Mezhiroch in Volhynia which allowed him to exert considerable influence upon Lithuanian and Belorussian Jewry.⁷⁸ Concerned with maintaining the movement's vigor, the Maggid adopted the Lurianic Kabbalah and took the honorific title of tsaddik (righteous man), which the Besht had bestowed rarely and only upon a select few of his followers, and made it an active institution within Hasidism.⁷⁹ This last innovation did

⁷⁶ Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, pp. 7-8, 31-2. See also Ruth Samuels, Po tropam evreiskoi istorii (Moscow: Biblioteka Aliya, 1991), pp. 256-7.

⁷⁷ Of primary concern to the Gaon was the affinity of Hasidic tenets to those of the Frankists and Sabbateans. The devotion towards the tsaddik, for instance, was a concern of both the Gaon and many of the mitnagdim as were Hasidic methods of achieving mystical understanding which conservatives found invalid. See Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, pp. 130-1, 141.

⁷⁸ Rabinowitsch, Lithuanian Hasidism, p. 8.

⁷⁹ Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer, Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), pp. 120-5.

much in propagating Hasidism and winning converts though, eventually, tsaddikim would almost bring down the movement.

While not eschewing scholarly activity, Hasidism did not possess an intellectual orientation. Both in fashioning Hasidism's general philosophy and in creating tsaddikim, Dov Baer was concerned more with winning over converts through psychological manipulation than in promoting learned discourse. Most of those seeking an audience with the Maggid took a seat at his dining table in the company of his followers. Unbeknownst to the visiting pilgrim, he was to be duped. The friendly and inquisitive townsfolk he met as he made his way to the Rav's house were actually Hasidim in disguise. Long before the stranger sat down, Dov Baer had been informed about his history, desires, and concerns. During the course of the meal, Dov Baer would seek him out and astound all in attendance with his keen insight into the stranger's life.⁸⁰ In a time and place where magic and supernatural powers were accorded unqualified credence, few suspected duplicity. Usually surprised and often at a loss to account for such perspicacity, the visitor saw Dov Baer as a "righteous man," a great seer whom only God could have favored. Joining his company was seen as the next logical step. Solomon Maimon, writing in his memoirs about his own victimization at the Seer's table, commented that a more astute intellect could see plainly that this well of knowledge had a false bottom. Hindsight being what it is, this was certainly true, but given the general demeanor of those who sought out Dov Baer, such critical keenness was exceptional and the Maggid knew it.

⁸⁰ Solomon Maimon, An Autobiography, pp. 49-50.

Dov Baer had an innate understanding of those who came to him. Coming primarily from proximate provinces and regions with similar customs and mores with which he himself was familiar, the Maggid could sympathize with those who sought his council and religious guidance. Being a rabbi, he could not claim ignorance of *musar* (ethics) which his recruiting techniques challenged. On this score, Dov Baer took advantage of the “gray areas” of Jewish spiritual ethics which assessed the ethical qualities of the means in light of their ends. Reasoning that his particular goal was to rebuild and maintain a tangible Jewish community in Poland, Lithuanian, and Belorussia, he would then have accomplished the mitzvah of *kadosh ha-Shem* (honoring God’s holiness), the most holy act a Jew could perform. The Maggid had no cause for hesitation or regret.⁸¹

Dov Baer was well-versed in casuistry, a talent he could not impart to those of his followers whom he appointed tsaddikim. During the Besht’s leadership, those who were accorded this title were merely objects of emulation with no vested authority aside from their influence-by-example. Believing them to be an under-utilized resource in promoting Jewish education, Dov Baer appointed them as teachers and spiritual guides. One clear advantage that they had was mobility, especially given the Maggid’s own physical limitations. Even if he had been free of infirmities, it would have been impossible for the Maggid to visit every settlement, and a group of individuals familiar with a variety of local circumstances promised more effective organization of the Hasidic movement.⁸²

⁸¹ Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likkutei Amarim Tanya* (1793; reprint, Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1993), pp. 391-3.

⁸² Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, p. 239.

Initially, this quasi-missionary design swelled Hasidic ranks, but continued expansion corrupted Dov Baer's intentions. Assuming that all tsaddikim receiving identical instruction under his auspices would maintain doctrinal uniformity, the Maggid had failed to account for his students' particular dispositions and their abilities to adapt to circumstance. As time and physical distance separated him from them, innovations were inevitable. Coupled with that consequence, each shtetl, town and urban enclave had its particular customs, dispositions, rituals and peculiarities which would require his original followers to accommodate their respective *torahs* (religious guidance) to the needs of their local congregations.⁸³ Such divergence and differentiation increased exponentially as the next generation of tsaddikim were ordained into the movement.

The Besht knew that educating the Jewish masses had to be done methodically. Innovations had to be presented and assimilated gradually or else conflicts would erupt. As the tsaddik's role in Hasidic practice was redefined, differences in rituals and beliefs among some Hasidic groups led to rivalries and even violence when competing tsaddikim and their respective retinues were too proximate for comfort.⁸⁴ Egos notwithstanding, this unfortunate development illustrated one of the chief obstacles to progressive Jewish education. Unconsciously mimicking Vilna's behavior, these righteous teachers became jealous of their narrow preserves of knowledge and power, thinking that they alone held the key to understanding true Jewishness. Not that this behavior would have been welcome in the best of times but, as fate would have it, these divisions were

⁸³ Ibid., p. 275.

⁸⁴ One such rivalry which exists to the present is that between the Lubavicher Hasidim (Lublin) and the Satmar Hasidim, (Satmar, Hungary).

contemporaneous with the first Polish partition of 1772.⁸⁵ Russian domination would not halt this fragmentation either then or during the two succeeding partitions. Not surprisingly, Elijah and the Rabbinate became increasingly desperate to maintain Jewish cohesion in the crumbling remnants of the Polish state.

Despite the disparities, Hasidic propagation continued which meant that Vilna knew no peace. Had the Rabbinate met its match? For all of his erudition and wisdom, Gaon Elijah could not and would not comprehend Hasidism. Not unmindful of their desire to become a part of the Jewish community and their theology and philosophy accorded canonical authority, the Gaon could not imagine an accommodation for the Hasidim within Orthodox Judaism. In addition, his own ego bristled when he perceived that these heretics were slowly winning the allegiance of Jews that he had always regarded as his own.⁸⁶ Like his predecessors, he resorted to the oft-tried and seldom successful recourse of Gaonic missals. Sagacious at one moment and emotional at the next, Elijah's sentiments towards his adversaries were as mysterious as his refusal to meet and confront the Hasidim in a public forum. One possible explanation may have been the Gaon's reliance upon secondhand information about the Hasidim which ranged from the mundane to the bizarre. Bound to the vicinity of his office as Dov Baer had been to his dining table, Elijah could only perceive the Hasidim at a distance and at their imagined worst. Dov Baer died in 1760 in Anapoli in Ukraine having failed to present his case, but neither the Hasidic movement nor Rabbinical hostility towards it followed him to the grave. Much like what would come to pass later on under Russian suzerainty,

⁸⁵ The first partition also opened up the struggle between Catholics and Uniates. See Deich, *Liubavich*, p. 13.

neither side really understood the other. In this instance, the Rabbinates had no firm idea who and what the Hasidim were. All that the Gaon really knew was that this group had appropriated the title *Hasidim*, meaning "the pious ones," implying that those who did not belong to the movement were not. Furthermore, they worshipped in *shtetlim* (little prayer houses) and some among them were called "tsaddik" whose claims to this title rested upon the credulity of their followers rather than spiritual edification and scholarly erudition.⁸⁷ Eyewitness accounts had attested that they turned somersaults during prayer and engaged in unrestrained *davvening* (bowing) reminiscent of sexual intercourse. Bizarre and fantastic were reports that Belorussian and Ukrainian Hasids danced naked with the Torah scrolls and were seen swinging from the *ner tamid* (eternal light) above the Torah ark. Upon this foundation of spurious intelligence Elijah created and launched his campaign to discredit them. Theological politics fostered in him an acute acrimony which the all-powerful Vilna Kahal reinforced and Elijah applied to purpose. The time was fast approaching when either Hasidism would have been brought to its knees and discredited or Elijah would have to relinquish the office of Gaon.

Enter the Russians

The Polish partitions brought Jews and Russians closer together, and though they may not have understood one another, they were hardly strangers. The earliest known Jewish community in present-day Ukraine was established in 1388-89 and had enjoyed

⁸⁶ Israel Cohen, *Vilna*, p. 211, 214. See also Schochet, *The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna*, pp. 33-36.

⁸⁷ Schochet, *The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna*, pp. 79-83. Cohen, *Vilna*, p. 229.

commercial relations with Russian merchants and markets.⁸⁸ By the mid-fifteenth century, with the further development of commerce in Moscow and its environs, Jews were more prominent and tolerated episodically, though never really trusted. Russian chroniclers and officials made note of Jewish commercial activities and, on rare occasion, their settlements near the Polish frontier. Though not ignored in official papers, they were seldom accorded more than marginal importance.

Peter the Great, the founder of the Russian Empire, did not trouble himself with the Jews. Engaged completely in building his capital city and the Imperial state, the Tsar's energies were taken up entirely by other matters. At no time during his reign did Jews confront him nor did they pose an obstacle to his aspirations. They were simply not "seen" and, owing to their far-flung demographic distribution, the often-quoted anti-Jewish statement attributed to Peter is all the more improbable.⁸⁹ Nowhere in his 1702 Manifesto did the Tsar ban Jews from the Empire because "they are known cheats,"⁹⁰ although there is documented evidence of the Emperor's promotion of a Jewish commercial enterprise in 1717 which will be discussed later in detail.

Commerce and xenophobia underscored the Russian-Jewish relationship from the outset. Jews and Greeks in Odessa conducted a thriving trade which spanned from the coast of Asia Minor north to Moscow and, competition aside, there was no evident animosity between the two until the early nineteenth century. The Russian perception of Jews was different. Ivan IV's seizure of Polotsk in 1563 and subsequent order that all

⁸⁸ Shmuel Ettinger, "The Legal and Social Status of the Jews of Ukraine," pp. 107-9.

⁸⁹ Several secondary sources claim that Peter's 1702 Manifesto, PSZ (I): 1910, 16 April 1702, Manifesto: Regarding the Call to Foreigners to Russia with the Promise of Freedom of Religion, prohibited Jews from coming to Russia and did so explicitly. Upon a close reading, however, foreigners are promised freedom of religion but absent are any references to Jews.

Jews residing within the vicinity be baptized in the nearest river or drowned in the same was an unprecedented mandate which the Jews found incomprehensible.⁹¹ To their minds, they had done nothing to merit such treatment. Even accounting for the Tsar's determination to make Russia the true seat of Christianity did not explain why such a harsh imposition was levied upon these non-combatants. The answer was, perhaps, more mundane. Swearing that no disbeliever would find quarter in his domains, Ivan IV, nevertheless, would have appreciated the immediate practicality and necessity of removing displaced Jews from Polotsk's environs to prevent them from becoming camp followers who could potentially impede his forces' movements.⁹²

This same draconian practicality certainly motivated Tsar Alexis Mikhalovich in 1658 when he conquered Vilna and repatriated the resident Jews to the city's outer walls.⁹³ Claiming that he was "excoriating infidels from the body of Christianity," it was clear that Jewish removal was a military consideration and not a religious one. Vilna was situated ideally for launching an offensive against Poland and required a large Russian garrison. Since the Jews were non-combatants, they were a potential encumbrance to Russian troop movements and, in Alexis's mind, had to be removed.

Muscovy's war with Poland (1654-1667) brought the Jews into view, though still peripherally. The first official reference to them in the PSZ was in a state paper dated 7 March 1655 which reported that Jewish and Lithuanian prisoners were being moved from

⁹⁰Mina Curtis, A Forgotten Empress: Anna Ivanova and Her Era 1730-1740 (New York: Friedrich Ungar, 1974), p. 86. This is merely one citation of this "fact" which can be found in other works on this subject.

⁹¹ Joshua Kunitz, Russian Literature and the Jews: A Sociological Inquiry into the Nature and Origins of Literary Patterns (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 6.

⁹² James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture, (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 68.

⁹³ Evgenii Semenov, The Russian Government and the Massacres: A Page of the Russian Counterrevolution (1907; reprint, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972), pp. 22-3.

Kaluga to Nizhni Novgorod.⁹⁴ Bogdan Kamnin and his associates were ordered to escort a group of 92 war captives, no distinction made between civilian hostages and combatants, to the latter destination to be sold to Greek slave merchants with the anticipation of realizing substantial revenues. Without delay, the company was to set out for Nizhni Novgorod with the first spring thaw, although four were to be freed prior to embarkation once ransom money had been secured in their behalf. Selling war captives was a centuries-old practice, but the inclusion of Jews in the company was unusual. Polish and Russian laws and customs had exempted them from both military service and enslavement. Under the circumstances, Jews were considered foreign nationals as were their Lithuanian co-captives, accorded a political identity rather than an ethnic or religious one, and no further discrimination was made between the two groups.

Jewish and Lithuanian slaves were a commodity, valued only for their labor. Jewish merchants, by contrast, posed a potential threat. On 12 September 1676, an official protest on behalf of the Moscow merchants was submitted to the government in response to a report from customs officials that Jews were disguising themselves and their goods in order to sell their wares in Moscow.⁹⁵ Central to their grievance and a perennial dilemma was Muscovy's lengthy western border which lent itself to smuggling and bootlegging, especially in proximity to Smolensk, an important commercial center recently reconquered from Poland. Quartered in the Big Customs House, Russian officials registered both traders and goods and exacted the appropriate duties before allowing them to proceed to the interior. Though it is plausible that illicit goods were

⁹⁴ PSZ (I): Edict 148, 7 March 1655, Regarding the Expulsion from Kaluga to Nizhni Novgorod of Lithuanians and Jews

making their way to the Moscow markets, the Jews did not hold an exclusive monopoly on smuggling. Poles, Lithuanians and Germans crossed these same frontiers for commercial purposes and in greater numbers. Jews, however, by their distinct dress and demeanor, were more easily recognizable foreigners. This report and its successors attributed Jewish smuggling to a lack of vigilance along the border owing to too few border guards and officials to cover all crossing points. Bribe-taking was suspected and was mentioned specifically in future legislation along with severe punishments for corruption. As to who informed the authorities about these matters, Muscovite merchants may have been prompted to do so owing to imagined or actual commercial competition from itinerant traders, many of whom were Jews.

Muscovite Russia came to an end with the ascension of Peter the Great (1701-1725) whose single purpose was to fashion a modern Empire worthy of European prestige.⁹⁶ Before executing this endeavor, however, the Tsar had to quell accusations that he was the Antichrist by establishing the Preobrazhenskii Prikaz which was empowered to discover and try cases of word and deed against the Emperor.⁹⁷ Marring this inauspicious inauguration further were the Swedes who would occupy most of Peter's attention until their defeat at Poltava which rendered them far less of a threat to Imperial security than they had been previously. Afterwards, afforded a rare opportunity to breathe easy, Peter devoted his energies to fashioning his Empire from his new capital

⁹⁵ PSZ (I): Edict 662, 12 September 1676, Regarding a Command Given to the Jews Arriving in Moscow in Disguise and with Concealed Goods.

⁹⁶ V.I. Buganov, Petr Velikii i ego vremia (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), pp. 33-48.

⁹⁷ W. Bruce Lincoln, The Romanovs: Autocrats of All the Russias (New York: Anchor Books, 1981), p. 147.

at St. Petersburg, an ongoing occupation in which the Jews were accorded marginal official notice.⁹⁸

Despite the discrepancy over the exclusion of foreign Jews from entering the Empire, there is no argument that Peter I's Manifesto of 16 April 1702 welcomed all foreigners to Russia with the promise of religious liberty.⁹⁹ Making plain his situation, the Tsar proclaimed that his Empire needed specialists of all backgrounds, especially those conversant with commercial affairs which had developed little over the centuries and remained weak owing to the Great Northern War (1700-21). In an effort to allay all reservations, those who responded to Peter's invitation were guaranteed security under the laws of their respective lands and freedom of Christian worship. The importation of foreign clergy to serve those needs, however, was not permitted because, as Peter explained in the corpus of the statute, the dissemination of foreign doctrines among his subjects would undermine ancient customs and traditions.¹⁰⁰ No reference to Jews, either directly or indirectly, appeared in this address. Moreover, this omission was certainly not an indication of Peter's disposition towards the Jews or that he considered them inconsequential to Russia.

Ilya Matve'ev, son of a Jew, was granted a license to establish factories in and around Moscow for the manufacture and sale of silk, damask, and brocade in 1717. The

⁹⁸ Lindsey Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 425-9. Marginal to a point. In his administration, Peter had his coterie of favored Jews such as Peter Shafirov, a privy councillor, and Pavel Iaguzhinsky who, during The Great Northern War, was promoted to general adjutant and, later, procurator general. Though both had converted to Christianity, they were still aware of their Jewish origins.

⁹⁹ PSZ (I): Paper 1910, 16 April 1702, Manifesto: Regarding the Call of Foreigners to Russia with the Promise of Freedom of Religion.

¹⁰⁰ Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great, pp. 375-7. Like most Russians of his age, Peter was brought up on Orthodox liturgy and catechism, not to mention the better-known passages of the New Testament since the Bible was considered the wisest of all books. He did, however, dislike superstition and

particulars of how this man and his brothers secured this lucrative patent are not known, though there is no mistaking the Imperial favor afforded this operation.¹⁰¹ Empress Anne renewed it with much enthusiasm in 1737, expressing her astonishment at the growth of their business and sustained success over a twenty-year period. Beginning with one factory in Moscow the Matve'evs had expanded their operations manifold in and around Moscow and their wares remained without rival.¹⁰² Court Jews such as Lipman, the jewel merchant and Golitsyn favorite in Anne's reign, could be found interspersed among official and bureaucratic circles and accorded various privileges in return for gratifying personal or governmental needs. This was precisely the niche the Matve'evs occupied during the latter years of the Great Northern War and in the decade following its conclusion.¹⁰³ They would have their successors in the next century.

Assisting Peter's plans greatly was the Treaty of Nystadt (1721) which afforded the Empire sufficient land and security as well as a basis for future expansion, a bittersweet moment since Russia had won the war only to face impending fiscal disaster. Russia's trade relations had been disrupted by the war and its silver reserves diminished, the latter condition aggravated further by a silver depression in Western Europe that would last well into the 1740's.¹⁰⁴ Considering that silver was still a stable and valuable specie, Peter and his successors placed strict controls on its traffic and all but banned its

actually defrocked an Orthodox priest on one occasion for perpetrating a miracle hoax associated with an icon.

¹⁰¹ Silk and satin manufacturing was quite lucrative. In both Austria and Prussia, Jews were encouraged to establish factories in order to build up these industries. See Louis Greenberg, The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 14-15. It is also worth noting an observation of Pavel Iaguzhinsky's that once the sovereign conferred his favor upon a person that their former baseness (i.e. Yiddish origins) was concealed. See Hughes, p. 426.

¹⁰² PSZ (I): Edict 7294, 23 June 1737, A Tribute to the Matve'ev Brothers and the Diffusion of their Silk Manufacturing in Moscow.

¹⁰³ Curtis, A Forgotten Empress, pp.87-8.

exportation. Gold was even more dear, and unauthorized traffic in it incurred severe penalties.¹⁰⁵ Plainly, Russia needed enterprises which could aggrandize its specie reserves, and the Matve'evs were one of a number of manufacturers who had the full support of the government to affect this.¹⁰⁶

Jewish acumen in commercial affairs was known in Russia and needed despite the formidable obstacle of Orthodox Christian prejudice. Rarely was there little to fear from Jewish-Christian contact. In Odessa, for instance, Jews and Greeks lived within proximity to one another and carried on a thriving fishing and mercantile contest with little acrimony.¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Jews were employed as tax farmers, liquor agents, customs officers, and in various other occupations with one crucial stipulation. The Polish monarchy had accorded Jews various autonomous rights, and though these were altered and diminished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Jewish community still remained a recognizable legal entity in terms of its culture and religious practices. In Russia, however, such cultural and intellectual distinctiveness inspired uneasiness in the government which would manifest itself in official edicts. Throughout the nineteenth century, some decrees pledging the preservation of certain cultural and religious practices were then annulled and then restored in return for supposed Jewish concessions to official

¹⁰⁴ Jan Blanchard, Russia's Age of Silver: Precious Metal Production and Economic Growth in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge Press, 1989), p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ Hughes, Russia in the Age of Peter the Great, p. 146. The crisis, by 1723, had become acute. Fearing that foreign merchants would flood the Russian economy, Peter placed tight controls on all currencies imported into Russia.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147. Even this was of small comfort. Russia's commercial fleet was not as large as its European competitors but Peter refused to rely upon foreign transports for Russian goods. Furthermore, the Emperor communicated his fears to his ambassador to Spain that the French, Dutch, and Italians would deliberately sell their goods below what Russian merchants could afford and, therefore, shut Russian goods out of the markets in which they needed to enter.

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed history of Greek-Jewish commercial relationships in Odessa, see Steven Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History 1794-1881 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985). See also John

policies. All Jews had to contend with the shifting soil of Russian life, but a portion of the Jewish population had the added burden of dealing with consequences arising from the economic demands of the monarchy and nobility in Russia which bore heaviest upon the peasantry.

One case is worth noting. On 14 March 1727, two Jewish tax farmers and customs collectors in Smolensk, Borchá (Baruch) and Leybov (Lev), along with their associates, were ordered expelled from the city and the Empire and all collected revenues returned to the appropriate parties save the Jews.¹⁰⁸ Despite the order's severity, no specific charges were rendered nor was an official investigation mandated to either substantiate or discount the grounds for their removal. Compounding the problem was two hundred miles of bad road which separated Smolensk from Moscow where the Currency Board would have had to decide this seemingly trivial matter, but this case stood out owing to its relevance to broader issues. At the time of this expulsion edict, the Imperial Senate was demanding, on pain of substantial fines, that all subjects surrender their old currency for new at the ratio 1:11. Noting this devaluation and desiring to collect their legitimate portion as stipulated in their farming and customs licenses, these Jews and their assistants sought exactions which the local inhabitants perceived as personal extortion. As to whether Baruch and Lev acted out of greed is beyond determination, but it should be understood that they and others who held such licenses did not derive their income solely from this activity. Most likely, these Jews had business concerns either in Smolensk or within its immediate environs which had tapered off owing to economic uncertainties and

Klier, "The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History," in Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History, eds. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 15-17.

thus made their tax and customs collections more important than they would have been under normal conditions.¹⁰⁹

Circumstance is a key factor in determining identity formation. While it is true that the image a particular group has of itself is certainly consequential, its external appearance is equally important. The incident involving the two tax collectors was one of many which left an impression upon the minds of some Russians that Jews were rapacious. In those difficult years of the late 1720's, those who had to bear most of the tax burden only saw the Jews as their adversaries. That Jews themselves had to pay those taxes if not more in some instances did not enter into their reasoning and particularly not within government circles in light of what transpired a month later. Empress Catherine I and the High Secret Council, on 26 April 1727, ordered all Jews expelled from the Empire and demanded that they leave behind all of their gold and silver money.¹¹⁰ Targeted specifically were Jewish settlements in Ukraine and Jewish inhabitants of cities in western Russia. All of them were ordered to settle beyond the border and forbidden to return to the Empire, save under special leave and conduct. Fast upon this order (April 29) was a renewed demand for exchanging old money for new in order to facilitate re-minting. Reluctance and desperate pleas by the affected Jews led to dire threats which were wielded imperfectly and promoted noncompliance as well as official frustration.

Empress Anne's disposition towards the Jews during the 1730's was unusual. On the one hand, she was pleased in the summer of 1737 with the Matve'ev brothers and

¹⁰⁸ PSZ (I): Edict 5032, 14 March 1727, Regarding the Exile Abroad of the Jews Borchta and Leybova and their Associates in Tax Farming and Customs Collection.

¹⁰⁹ Peter was known for taxing everything in sight. By this time in his reign, the list of taxes was considerable as were the penalties for non-payment. With the added burden of a degraded currency, hardships were inevitable. See Hughes, pp. 139-40.

decreed that their children could inherit the industry and continue to produce silk and damask with the skilled craftsmanship of their fathers. It was also on this occasion that she took the liberty to elaborate upon her praises by claiming that Jewish industry had benefited greatly from Peter's laws as evidenced by the success of this enterprise.¹¹¹ This self-congratulatory favor was one of the very few she bestowed upon the Jews. Shortly thereafter, a report reached the Holy Synod that a Jew, Baruch Leibov, was Judaizing among Her Majesty's subjects. Usually such a charge came from malcontents, but this particular case evidently had merit since the accused admitted to converting to Judaism with Leibov's encouragement and assistance. Unfortunately, the particulars of the case were not noted. It is uncertain whether the convert admitted to this crime freely or whether his testimony was coerced. Whatever transpired, a Jew who converted a Russian Orthodox Christian to Judaism committed a capital offense. Leibov was executed in St. Petersburg on 15 July 1738.¹¹² Many questions were left unanswered, and the motivations of both the convert and the converter remained unknown. Judaizing, real and imagined, was a rare occurrence in the Empire which had recently been revitalized via Poland and Western Europe along with the Blood Libel. Cases of Judaizing would crop up again though, of the two, the Blood Libel would enjoy far greater frequency and have a more profound impact upon fashioning the Jewish image in popular Russian imaginations.

Jews residing in Russia were vulnerable in almost every aspect of living, and this condition was most acute in commercial affairs. Outside the cities and larger towns, inns

¹¹⁰ PSZ (I): Edict 5063, 26 April 1727, Regarding the Deportation of Jews from Russia and the Disposition of their Gold and Silver Money.

¹¹¹ PSZ (I): Edict 5064, 23 June 1737.

and taverns were staples of village and small town life usually under Jewish management. A general meeting place to discuss local affairs, these establishments could also become dens of iniquity for highwaymen and bootleggers, especially if they were within proximity to the western frontier. In an effort to curb criminal activity, Empress Anne decreed, on 18 August 1739, that Jews were prohibited from operating such establishments and that their rent money was to be returned to them prior to their departure from Ukraine.¹¹³ Permanent Jewish exclusion from the western provinces, however, would have exacerbated the Empire's already-strained economic condition which prompted the government to include a provision for legitimate commercial intercourse, provided that Jewish merchants register with customs officials and pay the requisite duties. Not wishing to compromise its public stance, the government labeled Jews as potential spies ripe for adversarial employment. Border guards were to investigate them thoroughly before allowing them to cross the frontier and prevent their resettlement. At this time, the Russo-Turkish War (1736-39) was nearing its end and given the ongoing communication between the Jewish communities of both states, the Imperial War College may have assumed that such contacts would prove inimical to the Empire.¹¹⁴ Whatever the reason, implementation was delayed until the conclusion of hostilities.

With the passing of Anne and the ascension of Empress Elizabeth I in 1740, official vigilance and suspicion of the Jews did not abate. Acting on reports from so-

¹¹² Curtis, *A Forgotten Empress*, p. 88. Archbishop Gennadi of Novgorod was the first to order Judaizers to be burned at the stake. See Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 6.

¹¹³ *PSZ* (I): Edict 7869, 18 August 1739, Regarding the Prohibition of Jews to Maintain Taverns in Little Russia and the Immediate Return of their Rent Money.

called credible informants, the Military General Chancery, in the interests of the Little Russian Chancery, submitted a report to the Senate calling for the expulsion of the Jews from Ukraine.¹¹⁵ Anticipating a substantial delay, the Chancery further declared that it would prohibit outright any new Jewish settlement within its environs and would scrutinize every lease agreement pertaining to taverns, inns, and coach houses lest Jews enter into such arrangements to circumvent the ban on direct proprietorship. It was also stipulated that all Jewish property had to be registered; those refusing to do so would be declared “troublesome Jews” and have their real estate confiscated and turned over to monasteries. Both chanceries sought to dispose of “houses of ill repute,” by which was meant those taverns and inns which catered to smugglers.¹¹⁶ Breaking the surface of a sea of contradictions and obfuscations, the report concluded by classifying Jews as being “good” or “bothersome.” The former were accorded business and estate security, while the latter were to be expelled immediately, including three men of that category who taught their children Jewish letters.

Pared down to the essentials, this report presented an interesting addendum to the Russian image of Jews. Commencing in a xenophobic vein, it then made distinctions between “good” and “bad” Jews and went so far as to give the former some property rights. This may not have been a *simcha* (joyous occasion) for the Jews but in the

¹¹⁴ Biron’s political terror and its attendant paranoia may very well have played a part in crafting this legislation but it is still an odd codicil. See Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, 4th. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 245.

¹¹⁵ PSZ (I): Report 8169, 11 July 1740, Concerning the Expulsion of the Jews from Little Russia to Resettlement Beyond the Borders.

¹¹⁶ As opposed to “brothels.” Given the report’s general ambiguity, however, nearly all such Jewish-run establishments fell under this presumption as well.

Russian milieu it represented a small precedent for securing legal status. As for ridding the Empire of “bad Jews,” it and its successors were complete failures.¹¹⁷

Two years later, Empress Elizabeth I decided to make a partial concession to her resilient Jewish subjects. Reiterating the pro forma expulsion order, the Empress then gave leave to those Jews who would accept the Greek rite of the Christian faith.¹¹⁸ Considering that Jews had been living in these areas illegally since 1727, the Empress opined, this was a benevolent offering. Having made this statement, blunt expression then took precedent over diplomacy. Insisting that her actions past and present were expressions of maternal ministrations, she proceeded to accuse resident Jews of being “despisers of Christ and Christians” from whom her Orthodox subjects must be protected. Any contact between the two had to be forbidden since it could only come to a bad end and, therefore, Elizabeth ordered the immediate resettlement of “those who do not share our ways” beyond the borders. Border guards were once again ordered to divest these Jews of their gold and silver. As had been true of its predecessors, this latest edict would prove unsatisfactory.

On 16 December 1743, the Imperial Senate published an order which reiterated the expulsion mandate and attached to it a report and assessment from the Little Russian Chancery which contained ambiguous concerns relating to Jewish settlement in the Empire.¹¹⁹ Riga, a vital commercial port, had a sizable Jewish population which the Empress ordered removed within six weeks, a provision which supposedly extended to

¹¹⁷ That it was a report rather than an edict would account, in part, for its failure. Another factor is that local administrators were often slow to implement “suggestions,” not to mention edicts, owing to their physical distance from St. Petersburg.

¹¹⁸ PSZ (I): Edict 8673, 2 December 1742, Touching Upon the Expulsion of Jews from White Russia and from Little Russian Cities, Settlements, and Villages and barring their Future Admission to the Empire except those Accepting the Christian Faith of the Greek Rite.

further Jewish residence in Russia. However, the report from Ukraine claimed that, although 142 Jews had been sent across the Polish border, most Jews coming into the Empire had no intention of settling but merely to attend markets and fairs to buy and sell goods. Smuggling was still considered a problem in the region yet the Jews reportedly paid duties and registered their wares at the customs houses. In response to this favorable depiction, Elizabeth relented somewhat by permitting Jews to enter the Empire only for commercial affairs if they had no outstanding debts to Russian merchants beyond their means to pay.¹²⁰ The author of the Chancery paper, in other words, understood the Empress' position in protecting Russian commerce and the integrity of its borders, but reasoned that limiting the number and species of contracts and promissory notes between Jewish and Russian merchants would place undue hardships upon Imperial finances. Foreign merchants, many of whom were Polish and Latvian Jews, made substantial annual investments in Russia which, unless some liberality were demonstrated, could be diverted elsewhere to the Empire's detriment. Unlike Alexander III nearly a century and a half later, this prospect did not move Elizabeth. Having received this information and assessing it, the Empress declared simply: "From the enemies of Christ, I desire neither interest nor gain."¹²¹

The following year, Elizabeth issued yet another expulsion edict which banned Jews from entering Russia even on business, this owing to a new concern which had been brought to her attention.¹²² In her estimation, the Empress now declared Jews to be in open competition with the Orthodox Church for winning converts. Once more the charge

¹¹⁹ PSZ (I): Paper 8840, 16 December 1743, Jews Prohibited from Settling in Russia.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

of Judaizing was levied but, since no specific case was mentioned, it was an odd indictment. Apparently, both the Empress and the College of Spiritual Affairs and Foreign Creeds were ignorant of the internecine struggle between the Orthodox Rabbinate and the Hasidim over the very essence of Judaism. Neither the occasion nor the desire for extracommunal proselytizing ever presented itself, not to mention that it would have been an unappealing notion.¹²³ Judaizing was merely one of Elizabeth's fantastic fears. Whether real or imagined, Elizabeth could not be dissuaded from her conviction that Jews were adversaries in all realms touching Christian concerns and that their removal from Russia was imperative.¹²⁴

The Jews under Catherine the Great

Elizabeth's statutory crusading against the Jews ended with her death in 1763, though the judicial exclusions and restrictions affecting them remained. Having accrued some formidable political debts following Peter III's deposition and determined to complete Peter the Great's plan for the Empire, Catherine II had to balance her actions, desires, and decisions with prudence and pragmatism.¹²⁵ In a climate replete with usurpation plots and pretenders, the former Princess Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst knew that

¹²² PSZ (I): Edict 8867, 25 January 1744, Regarding the Settlement Abroad of Jews from Little and White Russia and Other Conquered Cities and the Unlawful Presence of Jews in Russia even for Trade.

¹²³ Historically, the quest for converts had always been lukewarm at best. See Norman Cantor, The Sacred Chain: A History of the Jews (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 52.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth's fear of Jews is remarkable owing to its prominence in her legislation. Though its exact origins in her case will never be discovered, it does seem to parallel other Judeophobic cases where an individual's only exposure to Jews and Judaism was in the synoptic gospels. See Cantor, The Sacred Chain, pp. 89-91.

¹²⁵ Isabel de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 41.

she had to choose her allies carefully and arrived at a simple calculus applicable to both private and public affairs.¹²⁶ Individuals as well as groups were either assets or liabilities. Entrance to the favored category, such as that accorded the Orlov brothers, required a demonstration of personal loyalty and benefit to the state. In 1762, the Empress needed a legion of friends to defend her against further political intrigues and to help her modernize the Russian state. Towards those ends, on 4 December, she issued an open invitation to all foreigners, excluding Jews, to come to Russia as well as a guarantee that Russian nationals who had fled abroad could return without fear.¹²⁷ Ten days later, she issued a second decree welcoming the return to Russia of Orthodox schismatics (Old Believers), pledging that the torture and oppression that had driven them from their homes would not be revived.¹²⁸ Such prudence accrued substantial dividends, affording Catherine various beneficiaries who, in time, would outweigh her political opposition. However, Jews remained superficially barred from the Empire and did not figure in Catherine's pre-Partition plans.

Stability on all fronts was Catherine's chief concern and necessity in the early to mid-1760's which might have prompted official Jewish exclusion at that time. As had been true during Elizabeth's tenure, most Jews resided in the Baltic provinces, Poland, Ukraine and Belorussia where they posed no problem per se. Opening the Empire to them might have resulted in a mass exodus which would have brought them into direct

¹²⁶ John T. Alexander, Catherine the Great: Life and Legend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 64-6., Henri Troyat, Catherine the Great (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), pp. 177-8.

¹²⁷ PSZ (I): Proclamation 11720, 4 December 1762, Regarding Permission of Foreigners Except Jews the Freedom to Enter, Depart, and Settle and Freedom of Return to Russian Subjects who have Fled Abroad.

¹²⁸ PSZ (I): Edict 11725, 14 December 1762, Regarding the Settlement of Schismatics in Russia and their Freedom to Leave.

contact with the Russian peasantry with unpredictable results.¹²⁹ Such an encounter might require military intervention, and Catherine depended upon the army's support in the critical opening years of her reign. Should soldiers be compelled to fire upon the very people from which they themselves were drawn, Catherine's political survival might have been imperiled. The Pugachev Rebellion was her test by fire and it was more than sufficient to test the Empress' mettle.¹³⁰

The other consideration was that Catherine II valued people based upon what they had to offer her and the Empire. In her employ, she had Bartolomeo Rastrelli, a gifted sculptor and architect, Etienne Falconet, the sculptor of the Bronze Horsemen, and a host of Scottish engineers, French men of letters and German scientists.¹³¹ Imbued with the perceptions of Jews prevailing in Western Europe, Catherine initially thought that they had little to offer. She was not alone. Voltaire, whose opinions the Empress solicited and valued, referred to the Jews as a petty nation whose laws were those of gain which made them the very tissue of human criminality.¹³² The Empress' impressions of Jews thus came to her secondhand and their absence in her diary and letters before 1772 indicates that she had very little direct exposure to Jewish affairs. It is curious, however, that the Baal Shem Tov, the Hasidic movement and even the contest over Vilna never

¹²⁹ Madariaga contends that Catherine was probably an agnostic in terms of her religious demeanor, though not ignorant of the Russian theological disposition which had to be handled carefully if she desired to reform Russia in accordance with her designs. See de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great, p. 503.

¹³⁰ In 1767, peasants and soldiers did clash with significant loss of life. See de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great, pp.127-8.

¹³¹ W. Bruce Lincoln, The Romanovs: Autocrats of all the Russias, pp. 267-9.

¹³² The origins of Voltaire's anti-Semitism came from a debt he owed to Prussian Jewish moneylenders on which he planned to default until Frederick the Great compelled him to either make just restitution or suffer the consequences. Il faut prendre une partie, 1772, in The French Enlightenment, pp. 303-4 and cited here in What did They Think of the Jews? Collected and edited by Allan Gould (London: Jason Aronson Press, 1991), p. 91. See also Peter Gay, The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), pp. 101-08.

entered her official or private correspondence, which indicates that either these developments were too marginal for her or that, until 1795, they were too distant to concern St. Petersburg.¹³³

Whatever the Empress' disposition was towards Jews, their immediate consideration was deferred. The modernization of the Empire was a more pressing affair. Peter the Great had accomplished much in laying the Empire's foundation by means of his building projects, the importation of scholars and experts, and conquest. The Empress wished to cap these achievements by ratifying her Imperial Law Code. The Bolshoi Nakaz, The Grand Instruction, which the Empress formulated in 1764 and presented to the Legislative Commission the next year was an attempt to rationalize the relationship between the state and those it governed. This comprehensive codification of laws never came to pass and the Empress, who had so hoped to make it her lasting legacy, had to consider it a failure. Nevertheless, its intentions must be considered beyond the immediate political moment. The Grand Instruction concerned the general nature of just laws in which Catherine stated that nothing should be forbidden save that which is prejudicial to individuals or the community in general.¹³⁴ Following from such a premise, it was mandated that punishments were not to proceed from the arbitrary will of the official local. Good laws are those that maintain a just condition, and, above all, that good conduct is secured through educating one's children in the fear of God, the Ten Commandments, and the traditions of the Orthodox Church.¹³⁵ Jews were not a

¹³³ In 1793, Catherine's troops besieged Vilna, prompting the Gaon to lead the Jewish community in prayers for deliverance, and the battle with Hasidism would continue for another five years. See Cohen, p. 225.

¹³⁴ The Grand Instructions to the Commissioners Appointed to Frame a New Code of Laws for the Russian Empire, trans. Michael Tatischeff (London: St. Martin's Lane, 1768), p. 76.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3, 159, 252.

consideration.¹³⁶ Even Chapter 13, which dealt exclusively with commercial affairs, was silent. Save for taxation purposes, Jews were relatively invisible to official eyes prior to 1772.¹³⁷

With the first Polish partition, however, the Russians had to take a hard and sustained look. The first proclamation which Count Chernyshchev, Governor General of White Russia, had posted in all important locations, concerned the Jews but only in its last few articles.¹³⁸ Granting them the same guarantees as Christians, Jews residing in the annexed provinces were promised freedom of religious exercise and security of their property which Russian troops would enforce with the strictest military discipline. In explicit terms, Jews were not to suffer abridgment of or exclusion from previous and future social benefits. In commercial affairs, for example, Jewish and Christian merchants were required to apply for and obtain official permission to trade on or near the border in addition to registering their wares at the customs houses. In a similar vein, prior to leaving their homes and conducting their affairs, everyone had to remain where they were and register by person for census and taxation purposes. Here is where most of these formerly Polish Jews discovered their worth and status under Russian appraisal. First, everyone had to register as individuals, beginning with the Christian population, then followed by resident foreigners, with Jews being entered lastly. If some Jews anticipated a change in demeanor when Russian authorities began to classify the urban

¹³⁶ Perhaps not under the law but, in 1764-5, the government wanted to consolidate its hold on the Black Sea littoral by means of foreign settlers. So anxious was he to bring this about that Prince Potemkin declared that he would "even colonize the area with Jews." See John Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772-1825 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 37.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹³⁸ PSZ (I): Declaration 13850, 16 August 1772, Regarding the Taking under Russian Jurisdiction Polish Provinces and for Appointing a set time for the Inhabitants to Order their Affairs.

population, they were disappointed when the ranking was arranged as follows: (1) Merchants (2) Manufacturers (3) Workers (i.e. day laborers) (4) Jews.¹³⁹ Russian officials had recognized a Jewish corporate identity, though their overall status was far from ideal or even on a par with lower-class Christians, whether Orthodox or Roman Catholic. Even so, this categorization was done expeditiously so that this new acquisition could be assessed and then used to Imperial benefit.¹⁴⁰

It was this same interest in public order which impelled Catherine, through Chernyshchev, to insist that Jews accept Christian laws and be included in the universal taxation scheme.¹⁴¹ Of particular concern was Jewish residence.¹⁴² Catherine realized that a Jewish presence in the western border regions could potentially be problematic, but then too the Empire stood to benefit from their commercial acumen. To surmount this impasse, the Empress introduced a moderate degree of flexibility into her edicts on Jewish residency restrictions.

Imperial relaxation regarding Jewish settlement did not carry over into the realm of taxation. For example, the average merchant, peasant, and artisan in Belorussia was required to pay seven grivnas (70 kopecks) in annual taxes whereas resident Jews had to establish residence, register with the appropriate kahal, and pay one ruble.¹⁴³ If the Jewish registrant was a merchant, the obligation increased to one ruble and twenty kopecks on goods and excises dating from 1 January 1773. Failure to pay for any reason

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ PSZ (I): Edict 14522, 17 October 1776, Concerning the Displacement of Jews Living in White Russia and Acceptance of Christian Laws and Universal Taxation.

¹⁴² Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews, p. 37. During the war with the Ottoman Empire, Jews were allowed to settle in the Empire though confined to New Russia.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 56-7. Klier maintains that Catherine wanted to use Belarus as a testing ground for the overall legal integration of the Jews into the Russian milieu.

would result in expulsion. Mindful that Chernyshchev and his staff had several obligations to meet, Catherine commissioned the Pskov and Mogilev provincial governors to establish a network of inspectors in certain key cities and surrounding areas who would register and verify the number and occupation of Jews for taxation purposes. Both governors and their subordinate inspectors were to oversee the kahals and observe that they collected the appropriate assessments. Imperial social control of the Jews relied upon the kahals since it was from these bodies alone that Jewish inhabitants could obtain property leases and passports, the latter having to meet with Provincial Chancery approval as well. Bureaucratic integration, which aimed at ensuring Jewish communal compliance with the Empire's Christian laws, took a further step when Imperial authorities ordered kahal and local authorities to surrender records pertinent to cases involving bootlegging and related offenses.¹⁴⁴

Though heavy-handed outwardly, the Empress knew that the potential value of Jewish traders in Russia could not be discounted. Granted, Jewish commerce was almost always viewed in disparaging terms, yet Catherine followed a practical course of action in dealing with it.¹⁴⁵ Only too mindful of parochial superstitions and xenophobia, Catherine established the Pale of Jewish Settlement in 1795, not only in order to contain Jewish residence but also with an eye towards "organizing" Jews into their own estate, a move which could only benefit the Empire.¹⁴⁶ Before Catherine could put her plans into

¹⁴⁴ PSZ (I): Edict 14522. 9 October 1772, Regarding the Regulation of the Jews.

¹⁴⁵ PSZ (I): Law 8867, 25 January 1744, Regarding the Settlement Abroad of Jews from Little and White Russia and Other Conquered Cities and the Unlawful Presence of Jews in Russia even for Trade.

¹⁴⁶ de Madariaga, Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great, p. 507. According to de Madariaga, Catherine was probably an agnostic in terms of her true theological sentiments and realized the importance of Jewish commerce as early as the mid-1770's. What hampered many of her attempts to entice Jews to settle in specific areas of Russia (specifically South Russia) were local anti-Semitic sentiments. No matter how

action, however, she died and her good intentions were subverted. Russian xenophobia and theological chauvinism were two forces which Catherine the Great could neither conquer nor ignore in her reform designs, especially in regard to Jewish affairs.¹⁴⁷ Prominent in the state papers were regulations designed to limit “pernicious Jewish influences” upon the simple peasant populations and “unfair” competition with the Orthodox Church.¹⁴⁸

Fear was not an Orthodox Christian monopoly. The Jews themselves feared the worst with the first Polish partition, though Catherine’s declaration of 16 August 1772 assured the Jews of “the retention and maintenance of all of their freedoms.” Even so, this provision was neither a precedent for subsequent legislation nor the fruition of earlier decisions.¹⁴⁹ Empresses Anne (1730-40) and Elizabeth (1741-62), her two immediate predecessors, merely ordered the Jews to settle beyond the border and limited their entry into the Empire, but Catherine’s circumstances required a more diplomatic hand. Ordering the immediate expulsion of 200,000 Ashkenazim from the Empire would have been folly and not in keeping with Catherine’s character.¹⁵⁰ Though the Russian party was in control of Polish affairs by October 1767, the formation of the Confederation of Bar on 29 February 1768 initiated a four-year civil war which required Russian

well intentioned or seemingly “complete” her Jewish edicts appeared, local officials could always find ways to circumvent them.

¹⁴⁷ As Klier remarks, Russian reforms were a tangle of optimistic Enlightenment rhetoric and the prejudice-reinforced complaints of vested economic interests. See Klier, *Russia Gathers her Jews*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁸ Klier, *Russia Gathers her Jews*, p. 23. Klier maintains that anti-Jewish sentiments among Orthodox Christian peasants had very deep historical roots. Most notably, the sermons of Hilarion of Kiev (mid-11th cent.) and Cyril of Turnov (mid-12th cent.) were still making the rounds of the village churches at this date.

¹⁴⁹ *PSZ* (I): 13,850, 16 August 1772, On the taking under Russian Jurisdiction Provinces Ceded from Poland.

¹⁵⁰ Examining the full range of legislation during Anne and Elizabeth’s reigns, Jewish expulsion decrees were promulgated in 3-5-year intervals.

intervention.¹⁵¹ This, coupled with war with Turkey (1768-74), occupied her attention and demanded Imperial resources on such a scale that it was imperative to conclude the first Polish partition with all due expedition. Jewish fears over displacement, property divestment and legal proscriptions could very well have touched off disturbances unless the Empress adopted a policy which would allay their anxieties. Of the Jews in general, if succeeding legislation and reports reflected her true disposition, Catherine considered them resident foreigners, regardless of their tenure on Russian soil, who could be either constructive or inimical to the Empire.¹⁵² Judging from what she understood to be true at this particular juncture (1772), Catherine did not believe that the stereotypically Jewish occupation of small trading could be utilized by the state. Therefore, the Jews were considered to be of little use initially.¹⁵³ Time and circumstance indeed made some external alterations to the Empress's disposition.

In 1772, the newly-acquired Russian Jews had to be kept in some sort of order and take a loyalty oath to their new ruler.¹⁵⁴ Readjustment neither promised nor proved to be easy. Imperial authorities had to assume various duties and reach a modicum of accommodation with all parties, including those former Polish Jews whom they particularly acknowledged as masters in fiscal affairs. It was widely believed in court

¹⁵¹ Norman Davies, God's Playground: A History of Poland, vol. 1. The Origins to 1795 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 518-19. See also Jaroslaw Pelenski, "Cossack Insurrections in Jewish-Ukrainian Relations," Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective, pp. 36-9.

¹⁵² On 7 May 1786, Catherine issued a decree which declared Jews to be subjects of the Crown with the right to enjoy privileges appropriate to their social status and occupation. See de Madariaga, p. 507.

¹⁵³ John T. Alexander, Catherine the Great: Life and Legend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 15-16. See also Voltaire's Essai sur les Moeurs and Dictionnaire Philosophique for a more elaborate treatment of this "enlightened" notion of the Jews. Catherine was well acquainted with these works and considered their "lessons" faultless.

¹⁵⁴ PSZ (I): Declaration 13850, 16 August 1772, Regarding the Taking under Russian Authority of the Lands Ceded from the Polish Provinces; Concerning the Appointment of a Time for the Inhabitants to Take the Principle Oath of New Subjects; Concerning Taxes on Public Revenue to be Paid to the Treasury and

circles that Jewish merchants were more clever than Christians, exposed to more markets, and capable of accumulating more substantial gains. Deficits were omnipresent in the state treasury and comprised a continual impediment to Catherine's domestic and foreign projects, which made finding a lasting solution to the financial crisis all the more pressing. Acting out of a combination of judicial utilitarianism and cultural prejudice, the government assessed Jews at a higher rate and to a greater extent than their Christian counterparts in order to increase revenues.¹⁵⁵ It was hoped that such measures would be the only ones required to make the Jews an asset to Russian society. Absent from this calculation, however, was the Empress' acknowledgment of Jews as Russian subjects in return for their compliance.

Conditional upon their submission to Christian laws, Jews were offered a vague assurance that stricter legislation would be held in abeyance. What was left unstated was the extent to which the Jews were expected to accept what were deemed Christian principles. "Acceptance" had a wide range of meaning and it was unclear whether the Empress indeed meant acknowledgment or outright assumption. By way of an answer, Catherine emphasized that Russia was a Christian state in which Christian morals and ethics held sway, but unlike Empress Elizabeth, this was not meant to encourage Jewish apostasy.¹⁵⁶ At the core of Catherine's Jewish policies was her attempt to bring the Jews under control of the throne. The Empress did not imagine that the Jews would abandon their religion, culture, and traditions to become Russians, which would be as absurd as it

Touching upon the execution of Trials and Punishments in Legal Cases in Accordance with the Laws and Customs of those Places.

¹⁵⁵ PSZ (I): Edict 14522. The remittance required of the Jews dating from 1 Jan. 1773 did not apply to Christians.

was impossible. Mandating that Jews accept Christian laws as engendered in state policies and invested in autocratic authority was a way of securing their legal obedience.¹⁵⁷ In effect what she sought to create was an administrative category which could be entered into the tax, census, and other official rolls without special stipulations. Such legal status did not accord its holders the rights of Russian Christians and resident foreigners, relax their residency restrictions in any appreciable way, or abrogate employment proscriptions. Instead, such status reinforced distinctions between her subjects.

In general, Catherine's Jewish policies were not unlike her other initiatives in that they were promulgated in a spirit of pragmatism. The so-called Jewish problem on the western border might very well have been a problem initially, but Catherine was not so rigid in her thinking as to discount "improvement." By the late 1770's and early 1780's, the Empress had become convinced that Jews were adept businessmen and that their talents could prove profitable for the Empire. It was ordered that Jews, along with Christians, establish institutions which would facilitate the assessment of human and natural resources in the annexed provinces. Though this was a reasonable endeavor, it was delayed because of Russia's participation in the Second Turkish War (1787-92).¹⁵⁸

After the second Polish partition (1793), Jewish life in Russia became strained. Imperial authorities imposed additional restrictions and obligations upon Jewish

¹⁵⁶ James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage Press, 1970), p. 168. Aside from being the highest spiritual authority, the Orthodox Church was also the chief conservator of the Russian identity.

¹⁵⁷ Until Alexander I's reign, possessing the Jews only in body was sufficient.

¹⁵⁸ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, pp. 260-61, 264-65.

merchants which were to last three years and followed by their expulsion from Russia.¹⁵⁹ Christian commercial interests, believing themselves undercut by Jewish competition, petitioned the Governor of Belorussia who then informed the State Treasury of this issue which was then laid before the Empress and Senate.¹⁶⁰ Old and in declining health, Catherine the Great merely wanted peace throughout the Empire and especially in the vulnerable and potentially volatile western border lands. By forbidding permanent settlement and barring Jews from conducting their affairs only to reverse herself, Catherine did more to confuse matters than to arrive at a definitive policy. Fears arising from the French Revolution probably led to the Empress's diminution of Jewish market exposure. Providing clearly defined parameters in this new edict, Jewish merchants were restricted to the provinces of Minsk, Isyaslov, Bratslav, Polots, Moghilev, Kiev, Chernigov, North Novgorod, Yekaterinoslav, and a few outlying regions. Confinement to these smaller and middling markets would result in inevitable loss of revenue which was balanced by the imposition of a double tax effective on 1 July 1795. In appearance, this was the most formidable challenge Catherine had tendered to the Jews to date but not even this would confine or diminish the Jewish presence in Russia. Like the Pale of Settlement, enforcement of the Jewish decrees never met with much success owing to the state's inadequate means of implementing its own laws.

Two months prior to the imposition of the new tax, the Minsk Governor reported that the Jews had utilized the resources at hand and were plying their affairs with great

¹⁵⁹ PSZ (I): Edict 17224, 23 June 1794, Touching upon the Obligations of Jews to Register in the Cities, especially Proprietors, Small Businessmen, and Merchants, to determine Location and the Payment of a Double Tax by those in Competition with Christian Businessmen.

¹⁶⁰ Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews, p. 32.

success.¹⁶¹ With greater delight, he added that the Jews had become more sedentary and communal, content to execute their business among their own kind, producing, manufacturing, and propagating themselves within their communities rather than wandering about to the detriment of the larger population. As if these assurances were not enough to pacify the Empress, the Governor announced that the kahals in the district cities had been given authority, with strict guidelines, to judge religious matters falling within the purview of religious law and liturgy. Jewish communities were finally coming together in an organized fashion and order was assured. It was at this time, however, that the Hasidism-Rabbinism debate was in its final stage and if the Minsk Governor General did not know of it at this juncture he would be apprised of it soon enough.¹⁶² For the time being, granting the kahals partial autonomy in deciding theological matters seemed a quiet but important “concession” on the part of the Imperial administration in an important aspect of Jewish life. Although stipulations reinforcing their role as revenue factors kept kahal elders under the Imperial aegis, their possession of authority in religious and cultural matters encouraged the Jewish leaders to assume that they could weather any internal storm with Imperial backing.

Conclusion

Dostoevsky's ridiculous man and the Jews who found themselves under Russian rule at the end of the eighteenth century shared a similar plight. First, there was an

¹⁶¹ PSZ (I): Report 17327, 3 May 1795, Concerning Various Orders Pertaining to the Governance of the Minsk Province

imagined and perfect community which was subsequently shattered. Among the Jews, there were some who sought to reconstitute what had been lost and like Dostoevsky's protagonists, found that the realization of their design would meet with numerous obstacles. Frustrating and seemingly futile at times, hope and historical amnesia provided the animation behind that endeavor. While the struggle to restore Jewishness was largely internal and esoteric, the Jewish community was certainly not immune to external social and political developments. In the aftermath (1656-1798), the Jewish community first had to regain its collective self assurance and then proceed to the task at hand.

While the Jews were adjusting to their new circumstances, so too was the world around them. Political relations between Poles and Russian were never easy, and beginning with the first Polish partition, new challenges awaited the Jews. Though never a paradise for the Jews, at least Polish officials had had centuries of experience with Jews residing their kingdom and, later, commonwealth. In contrast, the Russians, and specifically government officials, had only dim historical recollections of the Khazars and, more immediate though still fairly distant, the association of Jews with the founding of Kiev. Historical amnesia and episodic contacts with Jews prior to 1772 did not promise a welcome reception and even less so the emergence of positive Jewish images in the immediate future. Even recent history was of little help. Peter the Great paid little attention to them save for those few whose trades could bring scarce specie into the Empire. Empress Anne's reactionay policies had merely elucidated a fundamental

¹⁶² I.G. Frizel, Governor of Lithuania province mentioned the imbroglio, claiming that the credulity of the simple Jewish shtetl and town dwellers fueled it. See Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews, p. 90.

human trait of fearing most what she understood least. For Catherine II, however, emotionalism had to be discarded in favor of discrete, sagacious, and pragmatic action.

Well acquainted with the stock Jewish stereotypes of her age, which Voltaire augmented with great relish, the Empress nevertheless realized the economic benefits Jews could bring to the Empire. Carrying on a tortuous balancing act between Russian xenophobic sentiments and worldly fiscal pragmatism, Catherine admitted some Jews surreptitiously while publicly calling for their restricted admission. Like those employed to affect the Empire's European transformation, the Jews had their place in Catherine's schemes to establish a mercantile estate. As fate would have it, neither Russia's refashioning nor a Jewish estate came to pass in the Empress's lifetime, yet the transformation of both Russia and its Jews was gathering momentum and their respective courses would cross one another frequently.

CHAPTER II: A NEW ELEMENT TO CONSIDER IN JEWISH REFORMATION 1796-1825

Introduction:

Insofar as their historical contacts with one another were concerned, Russians and Jews were not new to one another. What had changed by the end of the eighteenth century, however, was their mutual proximity. Catherine's Polish partitions and Paul's annexation of Courland meant that Jews could no longer be sent beyond the borders or be kept at arm's length. Tsar Paul I wanted order which was the fundamental reason behind his official settling of the Rabbinical-Hasidic contest. Alexander I, his immediate successor who ruled for twenty-four years, saw the Jews as a potential asset to the Empire in need only of a modern education. Beginning with his initiatives, Russian authorities took an unprecedented direct hand in formulating and directing Jewish education, and this was the new element in the Jewish quest for identity.

How Matters Stood: 1796-1801

With Catherine's passing, Tsar Paul I ascended the throne. Though well-educated in the art of statecraft under Nikita Panin's tutelage, Paul, nevertheless, could neither improve upon nor rid himself of the one defect which kept him at a distance from his mother; he was Peter III's son. It had a retarding influence upon his political education. More than a bad marriage, Peter had been for Catherine a political hurdle

which she had to surmount for her very political and physical life.¹ When she assumed the Imperial scepter, she reversed many of Peter III's decrees in a determined effort to eradicate all vestiges of his reign save for Paul. His removal would have imperiled Catherine's political legitimacy yet his proximity was distasteful to her. In light of that consequence, Paul was placed in Panin's care, kept out of sight, and given virtually no opportunity to practice the art of government. For his part, Panin attempted to give the Grand Duke the best education possible under the circumstances yet, owing to the uneven quality of his instruction and his mother's rejection of him, he grew up to be an obstinate and suspicious man.² When Paul made his initial forays into Imperial policymaking in 1774, Catherine rebuffed him contemptuously. Not surprisingly, Paul's thoughts may have been ill-formed, his logic incomplete, and his written expressions clumsy, yet no one had bothered to instruct him in the proper language of Imperial administration.³

Suffering for a crime he did not commit, it was little wonder that Paul gave his vengeance full vent upon Catherine's death. Assuming the throne at age forty-seven, Paul followed his mother's example by altering and reversing many of his predecessor's policies and removing some of her more favored ministers. As much as he would have liked, Paul could not indulge in this sport at length owing to various pressing matters of state. It was early in his reign when both the Vilna Hasidim and Rabbinate appealed to

¹ John T. Alexander, Catherine the Great: Life and Legend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 3-5.

² Charles Masson, Secret Memoirs of the Court of Petersburg (1802; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), pp. 102-3. According to David Ransel, the education Paul was given was the best Nikita Panin could provide under the circumstances. Platon Levshin, a monk and later metropolitan, was a Russian churchman well read in the works of the Western Enlightenment, and instilled in Paul a sense of piety and religious toleration. For his part, Panin's instruction in statecraft was contradictory. He wanted Paul to rule as a constitutional emperor in the spirit of Peter the Great. See David L. Ransel, "An Ambivalent Legacy: The Education of Grand Duke Paul" in Paul I: A Reassessment of his Life and Reign, ed. Hugh Ragsdale (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), pp. 3-5.

³ Hugh Ragsdale, "The Mental Condition of Paul," Paul I: A Reassessment of his Life and Reign, p. 19.

him in 1798 to settle the question of legitimate Jewish orthodoxy.⁴ This matter, coupled with the annexation of Courland the following year, made the Jews prominent in Russian considerations, though Paul probably would not have given the Jews any consideration had it not been for I.G. Friezel's claim that the root of Jewish "evil" lay in their language, clothing and customs.⁵ It was Friezel's assessment and the attitudes of the Poles and Polanized Lithuanians towards the Jews had a profound influence upon the development of Russia's Jewish policies.⁶ Though quite significant later on, the creation of a lasting Jewish policy was deferred until Alexander's reign. Paul's concerns were largely directed elsewhere.

The Climax and Resolution of the Hasidism-Rabbinism Struggle

One issue which refused official neglect was the Hasidism-Rabbinate imbroglio which was coming to a head. Russian authorities, and Paul I in particular, had been invited to decide the ultimate outcome of the contest between the Rabbinate and Hasidism being played out in Vilna. Central to this affair were Gaon Elijah ben Solomon, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and Elijah's able lieutenants, Rabbis Avigdor ben Hayyim and Hirsch ben David.⁷ By the mid-1790's, Hasidism showed no signs of waning and the Rabbinate's prestige was in a precarious state. Worse was yet to come.

⁴ Israel Cohen, Vilna (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1943), p. 256. Not only was he instrumental in settling this long-standing dispute but he also permitted Jewish presses with restrictions.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 256-7.

⁶ John Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews: The Origins of the Jewish Question in Russia, 1772-1825 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 57.

⁷ Elijah Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna (London: Jason Aronson, 1994), pp. 21-27, 33-37. Cohen, Vilna, pp. 243-252. Gershon Kranzler, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1959), pp. 14-17.

Despite two formal excommunication bans, repeated public burnings of Hasidic works, and orchestrated ostracism within the community, the Hasidim had reached the doorstep of the Vilna Kahal and the Gaonate itself. Even by the late 1790's, the Rabbinate misunderstood and misinterpreted the goals of its opponent, errors in judgement which would prove fatal. Adding to the confusion and frustration was uncertainty over St. Petersburg's Jewish policies and Russian receptiveness to official Jewish suggestions. Until 1799, nothing was certain, and the situation was sufficient to try even the hardest Jewish souls. Tsaddakhic rivalries were marring Hasidism's principal claim that it was affecting the restoration of the world.⁸ Catherine II's territorial aggrandizement, Vilna's intransigence, and Dov Baer's ill-conceived institution had all proven too much for Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi who, as Dov Baer's successor, sought to bring about reform and reconciliation as best he could.⁹ Facing obstacles from all sides, perhaps the most dire was that the tsaddikim had become unmanageable.¹⁰ Long ago they had overstepped their authority as teachers, the only capacity intended for them. Styling themselves as great prophets, many tsaddikim demanded absolute allegiance from their disciples and of others residing within proximity to them.¹¹ This behavior was completely alien to the traditional structure of Jewish life. Most abhorrent, some had taken up wonderworking for various purposes which bordered upon occult practices forbidden explicitly in Torah.

⁸ One of the more acerbic contests was between Rabbi Nahman ben Simhah of Bratislav and Rabbi Zeide. When the latter settled in Zlatopol with his followers, Rabbi Nahman, great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, accused him of promoting heresy and sought to have him excommunicated. In the end, even Rabbi Zalman eschewed Rabbi Nahman's company. See Nahman ben Simhah of Bratislav, trans. Arnold J. Band (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 15-20.

⁹ G. Deich, Liubavich: Tsentz khasidov khabad, documental'nye ocherki (Morristown, NJ, 1994), p. 13.

¹⁰ Roman Foxbrunner, Habad: The Hasidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady (London: Jason Aronson Press, 1993), p. 26. Zalman remarked that there were too many well-intentioned Jewish teachers whose efforts were counterproductive in spreading Jewish enlightenment.

This particular breach Schneur Zalman could not abide.¹² There were some acts for which there was no redemption. Perhaps the Gaon had been correct in insisting that no one under age 40 be permitted to read Kabbalistic literature or study its mechanics and then only after mastering Torah, Talmud and Gemarah.¹³ Clearly Hasidism's educational mission had been compromised and sadly by the very tenets which had supported it for many years. The Hasidim had been encouraged to explore and approach God through various forms of prayer and rituals, but this had been done without established guidelines.¹⁴ Equally detrimental had been the integration of mysticism into Hasidic theology and philosophy. Religious enthusiasm without scholarship had given way to chaos.¹⁵ In a desperate gamble to rescue both the movement and the Jewish community, Zalman established Habad Hasidism, a sect of mainstream Hasidism which embraced the Baal Shem Tov's teachings while discounting sensory and emotional experiences in favor of rational intellectual self-examination, scholarship and toleration.¹⁶

¹¹ Moshe Idel, Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 214-15. Idel maintains that this cohesiveness which existed between a tsadik and his devotees allowed for greater spiritual and material ministrations. This, of course, assumes that a tsadik acted out of a spirit of altruism.

¹² In the Torah, specifically Exodus 22: 17, is translated as: "You shall not permit a sorceress to live." Elaborating upon this dictum to include all occult practices are Deuteronomy 18: 10-11 and Leviticus 19: 26, 31.

¹³ Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (New York: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Foxbrunner, Habad, p. 145. Unlike many of the tsadikim, Rabbi Zalman made Torah study the principal duty of all Habad Hasids. By its very title, it was the guide to higher ethics and wisdom.

¹⁵ Louis Greenberg, The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 69. As Greenberg points out, mainstream Hasidism gave its devotees a dignity which they needed in earnest and had eluded them for so long but it also inspired the notion that the unlettered were the equals of the erudite in the eyes of God. While this belief, by itself, was not ominous, it had carried over into the terrestrial milieu, and this attitude fueled the animosity between the two groups throughout the nineteenth century in Russia.

¹⁶ "Habad" is an acronym of three Hebrew terms, "hochma" (wisdom), "binah" (understanding) and "da'at" (knowledge). One of its fundamental tenets was that the tsaddik, though worthy of honor, was not to be adored or possess the mystical powers attributed to that office by both the Baal Shem Tov and Dov Baer. Cohen, Vilna, p. 241n. See also Foxbrunner, Habad, p. 59.

Zalman's reforms would lead to the defection of a significant number of yeshiva students, Judaism's elite and Rabbinism's only hope.¹⁷ If common Jews believed themselves estranged from Vilna, scholars engaged in traditional study with its staid formalism and parochial veracity viewed their education as esoteric and antiquated when compared with the simple vitality and contemporary logic of Habad Hasidism.¹⁸ Intentionally, Zalman ensured that there was little innovation in Hasidic theology and philosophy which was not in agreement with Orthodox Judaism. Even so, one crucial departure from tradition with which he imbued his movement was its consideration of contemporary conditions and the application of Jewish enlightenment which would serve secular interests while preserving Judaism's spiritual integrity. For too long, the cloistered atmosphere of the yeshivah had emasculated the Jewish intellect by preventing its full expression within the context of modern circumstance. Indeed, the Rabbi practiced what he preached and would have liked to have expanded his new sect, but first he had to obtain official sanction as a legitimate part of Judaism which could come only from the man who had no sympathy for his cause.

Zalman was not alone in feeling the strain of this protracted struggle. Tired and at the end of all conceivable options, Elijah ben Solomon, by 1793, was ready to give up the fight. Even the so-called Sages of Shklov, his most ardent supporters, could offer him

¹⁷ Scholem, *Kabbalah* pp. 74-5.

¹⁸ Despite Rabbinical claims to the contrary, Rabbi Zalman, as did his predecessor, emphasized the importance of Torah and Talmud study in addition to the mystical and ethical works. Where they differed from Orthodoxy was that each maintained that prayer took slight precedence over study since the former activity allowed the petitioner an intimacy with God that could not be achieved in the bet ha-midrash (House of Study).

little comfort.¹⁹ Noting his master's weakening ardor and physical constitution, Rabbi Hayyim ben Avigdor, Chief Rabbi of Pinsk, approached the Gaon with a proposition. In due course, he persuaded Elijah to issue an official order to burn the latest Hasidic publication, Zavaat ha-Ribash (Testament of the Besht) on the steps of Vilna's Great Synagogue as a demonstration of the Gaon's unflinching commitment to afford Hasidism neither quarter nor respite while he still lived.²⁰ The order was executed the following year. Believing that this latest assault would disable his adversaries for some time, the Gaon imagined a perpetual sabbatical from the fray, but that was not to be. The Hasidim wasted little time in exploiting an opportunity to strike back. Two years later in May 1796, rumors reached Vilna that a young man claiming to be the son of Gaon Elijah and an attendant were touring throughout the German lands to inform the resident Jewish communities that Elijah had reconsidered his opposition to the Hasids and actually sympathized with them.²¹ To this libel, the Gaon responded by dispatching a long letter to those communities which had hosted the impostor and his aid, particularly those in Lithuania and Belorussia, denouncing this latest Hasidic calumny and pledging a renewed campaign against them. Investing teeth to his commitment in October 1796, shortly after Yom Kippur, the Gaon sent a circular letter to all Jewish communities in the Russian Empire ordering the expulsion of Hasidim from their midst. Russian officials had given

¹⁹ David Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 11, 20. In 1793, the community was still in the Rabbinical camp but, by 1796, it became a major center of Habad Hasidism.

²⁰ Cohen, Vilna, p. 242.

²¹ Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, pp. 22-23.

similar orders earlier in the century regarding Jews in general, which had proven to be as ineffective as the Gaon's.²²

The conflict now reached its apex. After the publication of Elijah's October mandate, Rabbi Zalman was urged to debate him and prove beyond all doubt that Hasidism still adhered to the fundamental doctrines of Orthodox Judaism. Owing to the failure of his earlier petition, the Rabbi declined this suggestion, electing instead to commit his attestations to a letter which he hoped the Gaon would see. Fate decreed otherwise. On 9 October 1797, during the holiday of Sukkot, Elijah died without ever seeing the manuscript. Vilna's Hasids, learning of the Gaon's demise, rejoiced openly while others mourned, prompting immediate Rabbinical revenge.

Convinced that the Russian Tsar would uphold its authority, the Rabbinate appealed to Paul I to arbitrate and settle this long-standing affair. Shortly before his death, Elijah ben Solomon, in his parting protestation, accused Rabbi Schneur Zalman and his adherents of heresy and demanded justice, certain that the Tsar would carry out Vilna's sentence. Seeing more clearly than the dying Gaon that the debate's composite esoteria could be easily misconstrued by one unschooled in Jewish theological polemics, Elijah's closest associates, using the collective pseudonym of Hirsch ben David, notified the St. Petersburg that Rabbi Zalman was sending money to Turkey for clandestine, anti-State activities. To ensure that official action would be taken, another letter was sent to Tsar Paul I himself, charging that Hasidism challenged Christian social morality and posed a threat to public peace.²³ Rabbi Zalman was arrested forthwith and incarcerated

²² Depending upon the urgency of the issue at hand, it is quite common to see a number of successive decrees mandating, with little variance, the conditions and designs of the original edict.

²³ Schochet, The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna, p. 61.

for several months until he came to trial and was released for lack of evidence.²⁴ Embarrassed by this compromising episode, the governor of White Russia signed an order on 15 December 1798 protecting Zalman and his company from any further legal action. Fortune now favored the Hasidim and they took full advantage of it by accusing the Vilna Kahal of misrepresenting its annual income and only giving half of what was due to St. Petersburg. Once more, acting upon an unsubstantiated charge, the Imperial police arrested the entire Kahal. What followed was a Hasidic coup d'état. Elijah's death and the Kahal's incarceration left Vilna and the Jewish community without a governing body. Owing to the speed of Russian jurisprudence, several months would elapse until the former kahal members could return. The community needed a governing body to meet its present needs and to comply with Russian regulations. Elections were held at once and the Hasids gained an eight-seat majority and the office of Gaon.²⁵ Seeking legitimacy, the Hasidim greatly diminished the centuries-old power of the Rabbinate, and though that body would linger, never again would it enjoy the potency it once possessed. In its blind zeal to build a fence around Judaism and restore its faith in God free of "myths," the Rabbinate had failed.²⁶

The Hasidic conquest of Vilna ended an overt conflict which had lasted three generations, though much remained to be settled. Eastern European Jewry was in need of order and Schneur Zalman's creation and promotion of the Habad movement was merely one response to it. Russian authorities apprehended that need as well, though their thoughts of order and reform went in an entirely different direction. The consequences

²⁴ Kranzler, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, p. 16.

²⁵ Cohen, Vilna, p. 270.

²⁶ Martin Buber, On Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p. 99.

arising from these differing visions were not immediate, but it should be pointed out that the capture of the intellectual capital of Russian Jewry by the Hasids was a tainted if not pyrrhic victory. Russian authorities did not relinquish the ingress to Jewish affairs afforded them.²⁷ In Paul's last two years, the Jews were compelled to do little more than keep house by maintaining the kahals and compiling census and tax rolls. No further attempt was made to influence Jewish life and culture at the time. A wide breach, however, had been made which Paul's successors would exploit throughout the next century.

Vilna opened the door but it was really in 1799, with the assumption of the Duchy of Courland and its sizable Jewish population, that Russian officials took a hard look at Jewish affairs. Far from high drama, the first order of business the Russian had with the Jews was to organize and assess them for the purposes of census and taxation.²⁸ The fundamental problem was to keep them in their original places of residence. Despite repeated orders and entreaties to remain where they were at the time of Russian annexation, many Courland Jews continued to wander from town to town as was their accustomed habit. Complicating matters further, Jews coming into Courland from other places as well made an accurate assessment impossible. Demonstrating partial cooperation, Jewish merchants and tradesmen registered in their categories and specified their vocations when required, but often they failed to indicate a permanent residence or

²⁷ Rabbi Avigdor, one of the more prominent embittered Rabbinical supporters, complained that Russian laws imposed upon the Jews from 1795 up to the present (1800) no longer permitted Jewish scholars to settle Jewish issues. The Hasidim could not have been happier since, among numerous proscriptions, Russian authorities forbade excommunication (herem) explicitly. See Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews, p. 19.

²⁸ PSZ (I): Instruction Paper to the Senate 18889, 14 March 1799, According Permission to the Courland Jews to Produce and Promote Small Businesses and Trade, Obligation to Pay the Double Tax, Enrollment in the Town Registers, and Compulsory Possession of Yearly Passports.

commercial locale.²⁹ As an alternative means to collect revenue, the Senate requested that at least Jewish recruitment money, payable in lieu of active military service, be collected and returned to the Treasury. Expedition was wanting and months would elapse before even a partial remedy could be found. One advantage granted Russian administrators, however, was that the kahals were still extant and functioning which was really all that was needed for Imperial authority to establish a foothold.

Each city in Courland was to have a kahal subservient to an “Oberkahal” which would coordinate activities between them. As had been true in the territories annexed from Poland, each city kahal was to register the Jews within its environs and ensure that master craftsmen were registered in their respective guilds. Residence was open to everyone, though proof of gainful employment was required of those residing in the cities. Upon completion of the census, Jews were allowed to move to other locations within Courland provided that they applied to the Imperial Senate to do so. For a time, these regulations pacified the inhabitants but Russian officials were still perplexed as to why, in comparison to Polish Jews, Courland Jews were so disorganized.

Language, more than any other factor, was a problem in dealing with the Courland Jews since many did not understand what the Russians wanted of them.³⁰ The standard procedure which had been used during the three Polish partitions required officials to post public declarations of rights and responsibilities in Russian. Conversant in Yiddish, Lithuanian, Lettish, and German, many of these Jews did not comprehend Russian to any appreciable degree and Russian officials did not translate their instructions

²⁹ Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*, p. 54. One reason for this could have been the consequences arising from the 1791 measure which forbade Jews living outside of Belarus from registering as merchants.

into the local vernaculars. Prior to 1799, Polish Jews were the only ones with whom Russian authorities had dealt with any frequency. From that experience there developed a notion that Jewish communities were all the same, the fallacy of which they were slow to recognize. Courland Jews were more mobile because their social cohesion and communal institutions were not as strong as those of their coreligionists in the western borderlands. They were an island unto themselves, incomprehensible to their conquerors who mistook their behavior for stubbornness.

Jewish Publishing on the Eve of Alexander I's Ascendance:

To understand the undercurrent of official Russian attitudes towards the Courland Jews, one must consider the Russian term "nemets." In general parlance, it means "German" and, depending upon context, can serve a synonym for "foreigner" and, by semantic extension, "mute."³¹ Anyone not conversant in Russian was considered to be so, however, this linguistic chauvinism, though narrow, did not blind Imperial officials to one crucial aspect of the Jewish community which came under its suzerainty. Though somewhat scattered, the Jews had a viable publishing industry and a collection of intellectual salons whose influences emanated primarily from Germany.³² If ever there was a single aspect of the Jewish ethos which frustrated and buoyed the Russian government, it was the arrival on Russian soil of the ostensibly Germanically-influenced

³⁰ Benjamin Harshav, The Meaning of Yiddish (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 9. In addition to a language barrier, there existed a sense of intrusion on the part of the Jewish community.

³¹ According to the Oxford English-Russian Dictionary, the modern Russian term for a dumb person is "nemoi," which is fairly close to its linguistic predecessor.

Jewish education. There was little doubt that members of these salons forged strong bonds with German society but, to the consternation of some Jewish intellectuals, this communion affected conversions to Christianity in some cases.³³ A careful examination of the respective policies of Alexander I and Nicholas I reveal that this latter consequence did not escape their notice. More immediate, however, was the question of how the government could effectively control the traffic in Jewish books and ideas across the Empire's long and ill-defended border. Paul's overwhelming fear of being assassinated precluded the formulation of any concrete design, and even his successors would find most of their efforts wanting for a lasting solution.

From 1772 to 1797, Russian officials did not see the necessity for censorship regulations regarding Jewish books.³⁴ With the establishment of the Riga Censorship Committee in 1798, the government intervened in what had been a fairly prosperous commercial endeavor. Immediately, problems surfaced. Jewish booksellers complained that, given the time needed to approve a certain book, their profits were severely curtailed.³⁵ To expedite matters, the government then employed Jews conversant in Yiddish and Hebrew to read over suspected texts and pass judgment on them, only to replace them with Jewish converts to Christianity in belief that they would be more reliable.³⁶ Throughout the nineteenth century, official illiteracy in Yiddish and Hebrew regarding all aspects of Jewish publication and education would be an omnipresent

³² Deborah Hertz, Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 8. In the period 1780-1806, these salons were at their heights, especially in Berlin. Their intellectual goals closely paralleled those of the Haskalah movement which would make inroads into Russia later on.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁴ Dmitry Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v rossii, 1797-1917: Ocherki istorii tsenzury (St. Petersburg: Most-kul'tury, 1999), p. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

concern and the fundamental reason behind the mandate that Jewish publications appear in Russian. This imposition in no way diminished the Jewish identity since, as had been true of German literacy, it actually expanded communal and intellectual horizons. Even so, some Jews opined that they could only express themselves fully as Jews at night out of the light of the assimilationist sun.³⁷ After all, assimilation had few guarantees. Moses Mendelssohn, the founder of Haskalah and a Germanicized Jew, was not spared the assaults of a drunken antisemite on a Berlin street or the taunts of Immanuel Kant's students when he visited the philosopher's lecture hall.³⁸ Many of the lessons of Jewish adaptation which would enjoy full realization decades later originated in this four-year period prior to Alexander's assumption of the throne.

The Jews and Other Non-Russian Nationalities

After Courland's annexation, did Russian authorities suffer from a heightened sense of xenophobia brought about by Jewish proximity to Russian population centers? Both Chechens and Georgians, for instance, were made part of the Empire and lived in the remote Transcaucasus region.³⁹ Cultural differences notwithstanding, the only other factor was that the Chechens lived near northeastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains whereas the Georgians lived to the southwest and yet this difference in location did not

³⁷ Israel Zinberg, *Istoriia evreiskoi pečati v rossii v sviazi s obščestvennymi techeniami* (Petrograd, 1915), p. 17.

³⁸ Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin*, pp. 125-6.

³⁹ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th. ed. (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 308. The annexation of Georgia, among other consequences, touched off the Russo-Persian and Russo-Turkish wars in the period 1804-13.

preclude Russian interference.⁴⁰ In comparison with other “inorodtsy” (a foreign body or national minority) however, the Russian perception and treatment of the Jews was unique.⁴¹ Imperial authorities judged such groups as the Bashkir, Kalmuks, Samoyeds, Tatars, Kirghiz, and Uzbeks as inorodtsy, backward when measured by Russian standards.⁴² Being non-Russian was a consideration, but since these people were far removed from Russian population centers and were quite self-sufficient, Imperial authorities interfered little with their internal affairs.⁴³ One outstanding example of this laissez-faire demeanor was the government’s attitude towards the Bukhara emirate under the Manghit dynasty.⁴⁴ Owing to their commercial access to China and the Far East which brought into the Empire considerable revenue, Catherine the Great ensured that Muslim domains were seldom disturbed. The Empress even went so far as to sanction the creation of a Muslim consistory at Orenburg which was later moved to Ufa. While the Orthodox Church sent missions into these areas to convert some communities to Christianity, there was no urgent necessity, theologically, intellectually, or politically for

⁴⁰ V.V. Trepavlov ed., Rossiia i severnyi kavkaz:400 let voiny? (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ Count A. de Gurowski, Russia as it Is (New York: D. Appleton, 1854), p. 219.

⁴² Backwards in some respects but not in others. Concerning the Muslims of Central Asia, Catherine the Great had, by the early 1790’s, placed the senior religious and commercial officials in the Table of Ranks. In Bukhara, they initiated several reforms along religious and secular lines which were being implemented in the late 1790’s and would continue throughout the nineteenth century. See Helene Carrere d’Encausse, Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 56-68. To follow up on this imagined inferiority of non-Russians, Max Lilienthal was puzzled in the 1840’s when Uvarov insisted that Jews be brought up to Russian educational standards when, to Lilienthal’s mind, the Jews already stood in higher cultural stead than the average Russian. See Louis Greenberg, The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 34.

⁴³ In general, this had been true but not always. Russian activities in the Transcaucasus region have ranged from interference to full-scale military action for four hundred years. See Trepavlov, Rossiia i severnyi kavkaz, p.p. 5-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

their modernization via Russification.⁴⁵ Already drawn into the Imperial sphere they were serving the Empire satisfactorily as they were. True, Peter the Great had used the educational function of the Russian Orthodox Church in his attempts to win over Muslims to Orthodoxy by dispatching a number of priests to act as both teachers and missionaries.⁴⁶ Meeting with considerable resistance early on was to be expected, but the chief obstacle between Russian teacher and Muslim or pagan student was that they did not speak the same language. Learning from this shortcoming, the Church ensured that its missionaries became fluent in inorodtsy languages. From this change in tactics, usually the first generation became literate in Russian and arithmetic while eschewing Orthodox baptism and religious instruction. In this matter the Holy Synod insisted that conversion was not be forced upon the unwilling. There would be time enough for the next generation to commit themselves.⁴⁷ Orchestrated as a long-term process, succeeding generations whose education consisted of reading, writing, and instruction in the laws of the Christian God brought them ever closer to Russian bearings. Those accepting Orthodox baptism were told that they had been freed from pagan and Islamic ignorance and given five kopecks as a christening gift. Should they intermarry with Russians, their progeny would become Russian, otherwise they remained inorodtsy invested with a Russian state orientation while retaining some of the old customs.⁴⁸

Russification via Orthodoxy had been most successful as well as self-perpetuating with the Kalmuks. Once they had become Christianized, the Kalmuks sent missionaries

⁴⁵ d'Encausse, Islam and the Russian Empire, p. 20. Jews residing in Bukhara, along with Hindus, Gypsies, and Christians, had to pay a poll tax. Furthermore, Jews had to wear a black cord around their waists to distinguish them from Muslims and could not ride horses. Despite these proscriptions, most Jews were employed in the principal trade of silk-dying and conducted their affairs in Tajik.

⁴⁶ Archbishop Filaret of Chernigov, Istoria Russkoi Tsverki, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1848), pp. 20-1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to the Bashkir. Owing to their skilled horsemanship, the Russians enlisted both groups in the Imperial cavalry where they served with distinction. It should be pointed out, however, that none of these inorodtsy groups capitulated easily, yet the Church persevered and continued to educate and supply monetary gifts to the impoverished nomads who settled subsequently, farmed the land, took instruction and accepted baptism, all of which eventually undermined their resistance.⁴⁹ Despite claims of saving heathen souls for Christ, by converting these people to Russian Orthodoxy, the tsars not only possessed these people in body but in soul as well.

The Jews, however, presented different challenges. Situated on the Empire's western border where their commercial acumen potentially threatened their less-adept Russian competitors, Jewish life there was destined to be difficult.⁵⁰ In addition, deeply-entrenched superstitious and religious beliefs among their Russian neighbors made the Jews known to them, and these were augmented by anti-Semitic remarks, stories, and Western European publications.⁵¹ Images arising from these sources imparted an external identity to the Jews which was virtually impossible to cast off. Mutual parochialism afforded little opportunity or desire for either Russians or Jews to get to know one another intimately. Perceiving Jews as adversaries, the Russian Orthodox Church and government realized in the aftermath of the Polish partitions and the annexation of Courland that their dealing with the Jews would be much more complex

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 23-4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁰ It had been already and did not promise improvement. See H.H. Ben Sasson, "The Collapse of Old Settlements and the Establishment of New Ones, 1348-1517," and "Jewish Settlement and Economic Activity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *A History of the Jewish People* ed. H.H. Ben Sasson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 571, 641-4.

⁵¹ Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), pp. 97-8.

than that with the Muslim and Siberian groups.⁵² Possessing an intellectual tradition well inured to internal edification while contending with external adversity, Jewish capitulation would require an exceptional degree of sophistication.

Having met with Rabbi Zalman during his incarceration, Tsar Paul had been impressed by his erudition and plans for educating the Jewish masses since it promised to bring about their pacification. Pleased with this potential for restoring order, the Tsar was soon disillusioned when he and his officials discovered that the Hasidic victory did not bring with it firm guarantees against future disturbances. What could be expected in the future could only be imagined in the darkest terms.⁵³ By 1800, the government was convinced that the Jews under their authority were generally backward and in need of reform.⁵⁴

A Jewish Community in Turmoil

From all appearances, Jewish communal integrity was in a precarious state in the period 1799-1803. Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the victor of Vilna, now had to stave off divisions within his own ranks. Habad Hasidism, the rational branch of the mainstream movement dedicated to restoring genuine philosophical and intellectual enlightenment to the Jews of Russia, was being torn apart by the same emotionalism which almost

⁵² Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), p. 93. What at first appeared to be myth turned out to be a rational and complex theology and philosophy.

⁵³ Hugh Ragsdale, "The Mental Condition of Paul," Paul I: A Reassessment of his Life and Reign (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 26.

⁵⁴ Cohen, Vilna, pp. 250-2.

destroyed its parent.⁵⁵ Rabbinical factions, refusing to concede defeat and spoiling for confrontation, were an omnipresent problem. More serious, however, were the internecine contests between tsaddikim which had infiltrated the movement and were exerting an inimical influence despite Zalman's abhorrence of them. Proximity to the parent Hasidic movement, which Zalman opined had deviated from its original creeds, coupled with insufficient distinctions between it and his group, threatened to destroy Zalman's attempts at a "pure" Hasidic revival before it had reached maturity. The Rabbi had to marshal all of his intellectual skills to save it. With his understanding of human nature, Zalman appealed to his followers' vanity and shame by espousing the superiority of critical discernment over emotionalism which had preserved Habad and its mission to fortify the entire Jewish community to meet all challenges.⁵⁶ A quick resolution was imperative, especially because, as events would bear out, Jews seldom were left in peace for any extended period of Alexander's reign.

Habad and mainstream Hasids were too preoccupied with each other and the Orthodox Rabbinate to notice another rival which would in time challenge their competing claims to authority over Russia's Jews. Joshua Tseitlin (1742-1821), a wealthy estate owner in Uste, Mogilev province, provided Haskalah its ingress to Russia. Rabbis and students alike flocked to his estate to study and discuss the potential for Jewish reform along the lines of Moses Mendelssohn and, ironically, Elijah ben Solomon, the deceased Gaon of Vilna.⁵⁷ Combining modern scholarship with deep rabbinic learning and piety, Tseitlin urged Jews to accept Russian acculturation as a

⁵⁵ Roman A. Foxbrunner, *Habad: The Hasidism of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Lyady* (New York: Jason Aronson Press, 1993), p. 50.

⁵⁶ Kranzler, *Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi*, p. 11.

means of fortifying their Jewishness and making it more viable in the contemporary milieu. His efforts did not go unnoticed. Befriended by Grigori Potemkin, Catherine II accorded Tseitlin the title of “court advisor” and his name was entered into the ranks of the Russian aristocracy. For Tseitlin, this recognition was beyond that which any Jew could imagine. Nonetheless, like most official honors given to Jews in Russia, it brought only temporary benefits to the individual recipient without any lasting improvement in the status of the larger Jewish community.

Alexander I's Inheritance: An Overview

Tsar Paul 's assassination in March 1801 left open the settlement of Russia's Jewish affairs. Catherine and Paul's irredentist acquisitions made sending Jews beyond Russia's borders impossible and little in the way of alternatives to deal with them. Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) decided to embrace them with a bipartisan reform design. Education was the cornerstone and in the first phase, 1801-12, official efforts were made to introduce Jews to vocational training, specifically in the fields of agriculture, small business, and artisanal trades. Later on, Jews who showed a scientific aptitude were encouraged to seek training as medical personnel. On occasion, though vaguely, the government offered some benefits to Jews who converted to Christianity. A mere administrative device to bring the Jews further under state control, it would assume institutional importance after 1815.

⁵⁷ Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews, pp. 56-8. See also Haberer, Jews and Revolution, p. 5.

During the Napoleonic Wars, Alexander experienced a personal religious transformation which influenced his post-Napoleonic Jewish policies profoundly. The second phase of official Jewish reformation (1812-25) took on the character of a millennial crusade. In 1817, Alexander and the Holy Synod entered into a joint venture which became known as The Society for Israelite Christians. Outwardly, it had the trappings of a missionary quest to bring the Jews to Christianity and utilize rural Jewish talents for the Empire in a beneficial yet benign fashion.⁵⁸ Agriculture was the sole vocation of the Society's communes, and by placing its members in remote settlements, it was thought that Jewish Christian farmers would gratify the Tsar's desire for conversion and the government's with regard to economic development. For those Jews who elected to become members, the only benefit they derived was to have their names entered into the Christian tax rolls. Haphazard implementation and general ineptitude caused many Jews to become wary of the Society and instead of softening the "stiff-necked" Jewish demeanor, Alexander's zeal prepared the ground for future Jewish wariness towards the reforms of his successor, Nicholas I.

Attempts at Jewish Reformation in the Face of Napoleon

Alexander's early Jewish reforms were influenced by I.G. Frizel and Count Gavril Derzhavin, his Minister of Justice.⁵⁹ Though out of office by the time Alexander

⁵⁸ What is frustrating about the Society from the standpoint of historical research is that, despite its episodic appearance in the PSZ, there is no official documentation as to its actual size or growth during its eight-year existence.

⁵⁹ Derzhavin's view of the Jews was quite blunt. Since Providence had not destroyed such a dangerous people, he surmised, it was the duty of the government under which they lived to make the Jews useful to

came to the throne, Frizel's report to the government, submitted during the last year of Paul's reign, set the tone for reform. From his account, the Jews were not only lazy but in a state of perpetual chaos.⁶⁰ As proof of the latter, he spent considerable time elaborating upon what he perceived to be the nonhierarchical Jewish clergy whose espousal of contradictory teachings was absurd.⁶¹ Just as inimical as their theology, the former Vilna governor contended, were the kahals and their unwholesome activities. Well in advance of Jacob Brafmann, Frizel decried the bondage of fear and ignorance with which the average Jew was attached to this institution. As if this was not enough, the Jewish language and their customs kept them apart from their Christian neighbors, and Frizel chafed at what he saw as the "charmed circle" which kept the Jews in a world of their own.⁶²

Sharing these concerns was Count Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin, Frizel's contemporary and colleague, who was also a court poet, jurist, and had been a favorite of Catherine II's. Though a key figure of Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life and, at times, the scourge of Nota Notkin and Judah Lev Nevakhovich, Derzhavin was more of a literary figure who shared Karamzin's concerns about the purity and efficacy of the Russian language.⁶³ Even so, Alexander took his opinions on Jewish affairs with considerable gravity. Like Frizel, he considered the kahals to be corrupt and suggested

themselves and the larger society. Cited in What did they Think of the Jews? ed. Allan Gould (London: Jason Aronson Press, 1997), p. 173.

⁶⁰ John Klier, Russia Gathers her Jews (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 89-90.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

⁶³ Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, 1801-1917 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 107. It is quite possible that, from Frizel's comment on the Jewish language, that Derzhavin took his cue. Within the context of his statement, Frizel did not make it clear what he meant by the "Jewish language," either Yiddish, Hebrew or both but, given the presence of Jewish publishing, Derzhavin and the government would have been concerned.

that all of them be abolished in favor of a government-appointed "Protector of the Jews."⁶⁴ Furthermore, he insisted that Jewish children above age twelve should be educated in Russian state schools, traditional dress should be abolished, and that strict censorship should be imposed on all Hebrew books and that foreign Jewish books be banned altogether.⁶⁵

Despite the spirit in which they were composed, almost all of the Alexander's reforms were presented as gestures of goodwill. Apparently oblivious to the Committee's domination by Russian officials and the compulsory nature of the 1804 edict, the government took for granted Jewish volunteerism.⁶⁶ Whether the issue was increased taxation or occupational proscriptions, the Tsar's edicts were usually composed in language expressing the autocrat's care and concern for his Jewish subjects. It was not Alexander's intention to eradicate the Jewish presence or destroy their identity. Regulation of the Jewish population, particularly the rural communities, was at the heart of his program. Somehow the scattered shtetlach of the western border regions has to be brought under effective administration. Both Alexander and his successor, Nicholas I, would address this issue with varying degrees of success. Urban Jews did not escape attention but, being more settled, were more manageable from an administrative perspective.

The Jewish Statute of 1804

⁶⁴ Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews, p. 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ In February, 1803, Alexander decreed that peasants could buy their freedom and purchase land if they could reach agreements with their respective lords. Jews were not excluded from this scheme and, like the "free" peasant, would still be under direct autocratic control. See David Saunders, Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform: 1801-1881 (London: Longman Press, 1992), p. 24.

With Alexander I, the Russian government took an increasingly active hand in Jewish affairs. Until 1804, Russian efforts had amounted to little more than demographic reorganization and almost always for fiscal considerations. For example, in Minsk province the Governor ordered Jewish removal to the towns in 1795 only to unsettle them from the province's larger villages in 1801. This was eventually halted by the Imperial Senate the following year for fear that these forced migrations would impair revenue collection.⁶⁷ In that same vein, the Finance Ministry issued a directive that all merchants, guildmasters and Jews residing in the Minsk province pay 500 rubles in assignants or 360 in silver for each recruit.⁶⁸ Now with the threat of Napoleonic France, more decisive measures had to be implemented. De La Harpe's assurances that Napoleon had no intention of infringing upon Russian interests bore no credibility with Alexander who realized that it would only be a matter of time before the two of them would meet on the battlefield.⁶⁹ Napoleon's perspicacity and shrewdness had propelled him to the heights he now enjoyed. By turning his opponents' weaknesses to his advantage, the Emperor was able to triumph, and Alexander endeavored not to become one of his hapless victims. It was imperative, therefore, to bolster the ranks of the Imperial army and maintain a guarded westward vigilance, which included a vigorous attempt to husband the Jews and their resources.

⁶⁷ Joshua Kunitz, Russian Literature and the Jews: A Sociological Inquiry into the Nature and Origins of Literary Patterns (New York: Harper & Row, 1929), p. 6.

⁶⁸ PSZ (I): Report 20,496, 6 November 1802, Together in the Minsk Province the Merchants, Guildmasters, and Jews to Pay 500 Ruble Assignants or 360 Silver Rubles for each Recruit.

⁶⁹ Michael Klimenko, Notes of Alexander I: Emperor of Russia (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989), pp. 103-5.

Alexander's knowledge of the Jews prior to the promulgation of the 1802 statute (the antecedent to the 1804 edict)⁷⁰ was minimal which accounted for his assessment of them as rank provincials living lives of endemic poverty, dishonesty, and ignorance as a consequence of their communal educational institutions.⁷¹ Of the three, Alexander considered this last privation particularly inimical since it had denied Jews numerous social benefits, chief of which were legal residence and broader employment within the Empire. Their plight, in Alexander's mind, was the result of a profound disability but one which was surmountable and could be remedied immediately through exposure to a broader and cosmopolitan curriculum. Often referred to as the Jewish Statute, the 1804 declaration/edict was the first studied attempt to define the Jews politically and draw them into the Russian milieu by expressing official intentions of meeting the educational and employment needs of urban and rural Jewish communities. The autocracy made it clear within the statute's fifty-six paragraphs that the Jews and their children were guaranteed an education on a level commensurate with that of Russian nationals, but not contrary to or inconsistent with their religious beliefs.⁷² It was also made plain that Imperial authorities needed doctors, surgeons and scientists; Jews who had sufficient aptitudes for mathematics, medicine, physics as other allied fields were encouraged to train for these professions. On the one hand, the 1804 statute heightened Jewish expectations of improved status both individually and collectively.⁷³ For its part, the

⁷⁰ The fundamental difference between the 1802 and 1804 statutes is that that the former required Jews to study Russian, Polish and German in preparation for Russian schooling whereas the 1804 legislation extended the compulsion to modernize to Jewish commercial concerns, even down to bookkeeping.

⁷¹ PSZ (I): Edict 21547, 9 December 1804, Concerning the Social Organization of the Jews.

⁷² Deich, Liubavich, p. 17. See also Cohen, Vilna, pp. 251-2.

⁷³ Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews, pp. 90-92. Both Nota Notkin and Judah Nevakhovich believed that Russian fluency among their coreligionists would make them eligible for the Russian civil service with all rights and privileges.

Empire expected to gain a viable resource, an educated “class” indebted to the Emperor and his ministers. The price for this largess was fluency in either Russian, Polish or German and the adoption of modern dress patterned after one of the three.⁷⁴ Superficially, the edict appeared to mandate minimal concessions with no noticeable departure from Jewish traditions, but some were skeptical. Those who had more liberty to examine this posted legislation in totum, however, discovered that its graduated stringency and full consequences portended ill for the Jewish existence in Russia.

What was unique about this particular piece of legislation was that it was fashioned by the Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life which had three Jewish members. Established in 1802, Judah Lev Nevakhovich, along with Grigorii Perrets and Nota Notkin, were solicited to become members of this body in an advisory capacity.⁷⁵ Though certain aspects of the Statute of 1804 reflected their influence, especially in the opening paragraphs, the Russian members clearly determined its character. Led by Derzhavin, the restrictions placed upon Jewish commercial activity in the later sections of the Statute all but eclipsed the promised benefits. This consequence of competing interests between Russian officialdom and the Jews would be the hallmark of Alexander’s Jewish policies and, eventually, lead to their ultimate failure. From the government’s point of view, however, potential Jewish manufacturers, farmers, craftsmen, and traders in later sections of the Statute were being offered the best arrangement for promoting Jewish advancement and autocratic control over the

⁷⁴ Really, this was not a profound adjustment for the Jews, particularly for those who had resided in Poland. Knowledge of languages other than Yiddish and Hebrew had been imperative in conducting daily commercial transactions. See Daniel Stone, “Knowledge of Foreign Languages among Eighteenth-Century Polish Jews,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 10., ed. Gershon Hundert (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1997), pp. 200-18.

⁷⁵ Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*, p. 87.

community. Alexander may have sympathized with some of the concerns voiced by the Committee's Jewish members, but Derzhavin and Victor Kochubei (Minister of Internal Affairs) carried more weight. After all, they were Russian and high-ranking government officials. What arose from this Committee and the statute it produced was a precarious balancing act between proposed Jewish modernization and Russian political conservatism. More precisely, what had been laid bare was the contradiction of making the Jews part of the Russian milieu and yet apart from it, an attitude which Alexander's successors would perpetuate.

In terms of its language and organization, the Statute of 1804 was straightforward and more lenient than Derzhavin and Frizel's proposals.⁷⁶ After outlining professional obligations and benefits, its authors next addressed non-professionals who were divided into four groups: merchants, farmers, manufacturers and mechanics (craftsmen), and small merchants. Without exception, all were compelled henceforth to conduct their affairs in the prescribed languages (i.e. German, Russian, Polish) and don the appropriate modern dress. Time for adjustment was noted and granted but, as of 1 January 1807, all bills of exchange had to be in the approved vernaculars, along with ledgers, logs, and account books no later than 1 January 1808.⁷⁷ The wording became more strident and the tone demanding, but these alterations, at least from the Russian perspective, amounted to pedestrian procedures which had been part of Jewish-Christian commercial relations for centuries. Following these mandates was an expression of the statute's fundamental purpose. Predicting that there would be some who desired their own farmsteads and

⁷⁶ Heinz-Dietrich Lowe, The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia 1772-1917 (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Press, 1993), p. 31.

⁷⁷ PSZ (I): Edict 21547.

factories, the State Treasury was authorized to offer loans for such endeavors interest-free for ten years after which repayment would be required at a rate to be determined upon the expiration of that term. The hand of official assistance towards alleviating the Pale's myriad economic ills had been extended.

Not discounting his grandmother's wisdom for instituting the Pale while simultaneously promising expanded settlements, Alexander was quick to stipulate a number of proscribed districts and regions before enumerating those amenable to the anticipated exodus. Although the viability of the land for agricultural or industrial use was questionable, this lacuna was glossed over with assurances to those persons wishing to travel as far as Astrakhan and the Kazak lands that their re-settlement would not be coerced.⁷⁸ Upon establishing themselves, all State obligations for the new settlers would be waived for ten years, save land taxes and customs duties. At the conclusion of the ten-year period, these Jewish colonists would assume the obligations of Russian nationals and be accorded the same educational opportunities as their Russian Orthodox neighbors in addition to a perpetual exemption from the double tax.

Education on a par with Russian Orthodox subjects was desirable if it could be accomplished but, that aside, no other shared privileges were mentioned. This same omission was evident in the offers tendered to manufacturers and industrial workers willing to resettle. Pertinent articles were replete with unspecified promises that Jews would manage these operations themselves and that Jewish workers would enjoy wages commensurate with those of Russian employees. Potential factory owners were encouraged to purchase land for their proposed operations but, should current prices

⁷⁸ Ibid.

prove prohibitive, factories and equipment could be established on manorial lands provided that there was a legally-binding contract between the factory heads and concerned nobles.⁷⁹ To prevent this arrangement from leading to abuses, it was mandated that nobles were clearly forbidden from meddling in the operations and commercial affairs of these enterprises which, under the provisions of the statute, enjoyed both unlimited market exposure and exemption from standard Jewish excises. By according enterprising Jews this protection, it was surmised, their acceptance of further reformation would be secured and their resistance minimized. Already under this project, the Jews who took advantage of it were tied securely to the Imperial treasury since few possessed the requisite start-up capital.⁸⁰

Some Jews had reservations and, upon closer scrutiny, realized the true “price” being demanded for their future “prosperity.” Despite assurances in the Statute’s first articles that Jewish education and culture were protected, subsequent demands for fluency in Polish, German or Russian, adopting contemporary dress, and the mandatory assumption of recognizable Russian surnames seemed to undercut these guarantees of ethnic integrity.⁸¹ In 1804, Alexander was concerned only with reforming the Jews and making them an asset to the Empire, ignorant of the notion among some Jews that the acceptance of anything outside of their traditions was antecedent to spiritual death. Forever blind, Alexander never understood the Jewish position despite the presence and advice of the Jewish members of the Committee. Preoccupied with his own conceptions

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ As of 24 December 1801, Alexander had opened up unpopulated land (without serfs) ownership to non-noble ownership. See Janet M. Hartley, *Alexander I* (London: Longman Press, 1993), pp. 44-5, 47.

⁸¹ At least in the short term. Urban Jews, more so than shtetl dwellers, were affected by these regulations, yet they were more “worldly” than their rural coreligionists and most likely to adapt to Russian ways. Very

of Jewish reform, he was incapable of viewing the Jewish Question from another vantage.

The Committee's conservative influence was pronounced in the Statute's middle paragraphs which dealt with restriction on Jewish enterprises. Care had to be taken that such a diminution of employment and market share ensured that most Jews would be reliant upon Treasury loans but not to the extent of promoting the possibility of default which would destroy the very prospect of economic development. Through a delicate balance of fiscal constraints and concessions, the Finance Ministry had to institute these measures with minimal fanfare which was not an easy task. Proceeding by degrees, Jewish-run taverns, coaching houses and inns had to obtain new leases demonstrating that they had adopted Russian partners no later than 1 January 1808 and that such businesses had to operate away from main roads. As had been true in Poland, not all Jews had stationary concessions. Wine, brandy and spirit merchants were itinerant traders and usually the most prosperous which would explain why the finance minister ruled that all contracts to sell wine in villages and towns would become null and void within ten years and ineligible for renewal.⁸² No official reason was given regarding this proscription though one was inferred from examining antecedent and successive articles. Commerce in alcohol was a lucrative endeavor since it exposed merchants to numerous markets and brought them into contact with other merchants, tradesmen and clients who could aggrandize their customer base. Such sojourns, however, made it difficult for the government to oversee Jewish entrepreneurial endeavors. This inability to determine

few Jews suspected that these initial changes were to be the antecedents to a gradual erosion of the Jewish identity in Russia.

whether Jewish wine merchants' actual revenue from these transactions agreed with the figures entered in their respective ledgers when presented annually to the district excise officers seemed to justify their exclusion from the trade. Ending illicit traffic and false fiscal disclosures meant the imposition of a general exclusion of the Jews from the wine and spirits trade which included the sale and distribution of kosher wines. Since there was no hope of securing an exemption, celebrating the sabbath and festivals became all the more difficult since this decree all but compelled Jews to consume non-kosher wines or those of questionable purity.⁸³

Beer and vodka peddling was to remain unchanged since it tended to keep the Jews in place and provided more commercial competition.⁸⁴ Pliers of malted and potato spirits were omnipresent, manufacture and sales were local, profits modest but taxable, and official scrutiny more keen. Depending upon the size of the town or city and market demand, competition among these license holders was ardent and acrimonious, arising from an overburdened market which was made all the more onerous through the introduction of stringent passport regulations which limited the movements of itinerant Jewish liquor peddlers. In short, the 1804 statute was, primarily, an attempt to reorganize Jewish society along viable and exploitable economic lines.⁸⁵

Noteworthy about this particular law in light of its legislative antecedents and successors was the qualification of "demonstrations of good behavior." In effect, the

⁸² The word "vino" as it appears in the statute meant wine but could also be applied to brandy or any spirituous liquors including vodka though, in this particular statute, "vodka" is mentioned in its own right.

⁸³ As a demonstration of official earnestness in this matter, paragraph 36 of this statute mandated that Jews apprehended for selling wine or selling other alcoholic consumables were to be fined 100 rubles for the first offence, 200 rubles for the second, and Siberian exile for the third.

⁸⁴ While it is true that vodka was a spirit, its manufacture and consumption was commonplace. Wine and brandy required ingredients which were more scarce and, therefore, these products were much rarer and more expensive.

government held individual and communal Jewish *l'goti* (privileges) hostage, a condition made even more onerous since this “carrot and stick” stipulation was cloaked in vagaries rather than defined guidelines. Kept off balance, the community was laid bare to official manipulations of its attitudes, sentiments, and perceptions, all of which amounted to a delaying tactic until a permanent accommodation could be established. Alexander, for his part, could not fix a definite “Jewish image” in his mind which would serve as a template for their future alteration. Then again, he was becoming increasingly occupied with the threat posed by Napoleonic France.⁸⁶ The question of how the Empire could derive maximum benefit from Jewish industry, secure Jewish loyalty and goodwill, and still relegate them to marginal citizenship remained unanswered.⁸⁷

From the Jewish perspective, the 1804 Statute was both unique and conformed to previous legislation. Having contended with Russian edicts since 1772, two issues must have stood out in the minds of astute Jewish merchants. The significance and long-term consequences of tightening economic proscriptions which came with the government’s eager offer of treasury loans would not have been lost on them. In addition, they and other members of the community could not challenge the statute through legal recourse, let alone seek a hearing on the matter, as their ancestors once could in Poland. Still, Jewish reaction to it was ambiguous. Jewish religious institutions and practices had been safeguarded in the first two paragraphs of the statute’s body which afforded some hope of

⁸⁵ Dietrich Lowe, *The Tsars and the Jews*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ One explanation could be that the Jews simply were not that pressing an issue at that juncture and, therefore, could be deferred.

⁸⁷ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 26. One aspect which Russian officials appeared to overlook or at least undervalue is that commercial intercourse between Russian Jews and their Western European coreligionists established the foundations for their intellectual contacts.

an accommodation.⁸⁸ Rabbis and kahal candidates were still chosen from among and by their respective communities, although they were now subject to pro forma Imperial approval and limited to three-year official tenures. For his part, Alexander I's initial foray into Jewish affairs was conducted with guarded restraint, though whether this action was a consequence of uncertainty in dealing with Jewish affairs or a conscious effort to introduce reforms gradually is not known for certain.

Instead of paving the way for Jewish emancipation, the 1804 Statute was viewed by some as a challenge to Jewish existence.⁸⁹ Judah Lev Nevakhovich, Jewish poet and an proponent of modern Jewish education, dared to publish "Lament of the Daughters of Judah" in 1804 as a response to Alexander I's proposed reformation of the Jewish community.⁹⁰ To him, the matter was plain. Astonished at the thought of sweeping away Jewish culture and life itself, Nevakhovich, a man who considered Russia his beloved country and whose "tribe" shared that sentiment, wondered what the Jews had done to merit such "trampling underfoot."⁹¹ He had taken Russia to his breast as a cherished daughter and now he and his coreligionists were compelled to abandon all that they held dear as recompense. In the eighteenth century, Russia had been a haven for Jews (in his opinion), now certain Christians condemned Jews as enemies (i.e. Christ killers, defamers of Christianity) without proof and were believed by others. Worse still, Nevakhovich claimed that the abolition of Yiddish and imposed limitations on Hebrew would censor the Jewish intellect in exchange for a stipulated "modern" Russian education which

⁸⁸ PSZ (I): Edict 21547.

⁸⁹ Haberer, Jews and Revolution, p. 7.

⁹⁰ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 24. Nevakhovich dedicated this work to Victor Kochubei, a member of the Jewish Committee and later Minister of the Interior.

⁹¹ Lev Nevakhovich, "Volp docheri iudeiskoi," reprinted in Budushnosti, vol. 3. (St. Petersburg, 1902), pp. 118-119.

promised literacy but no improvement in fundamental rights. Jews were people of the book and Hebrew literacy a mainstay of Jewish erudition. To suggest otherwise, as had the autocracy, was contemptible in Nevakhovich's eyes. Concluding his appeal, the author asked simply that the Jews be spared government attention, any of which he found undesirable. Satisfied that he had voiced his sentiments and those of his coreligionists, his parting request to the Tsar was that the Jews be allowed to live in peace in the manner to which they were accustomed.⁹²

Nevakhovich believed himself betrayed by the Tsar and members of the Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life, especially by Derzhavin, though this was hardly surprising.⁹³ Joining him in that sentiment were his associates Nota Notkin and Grigorii Perrets.⁹⁴ Seldom complementary towards the Jews, Derzhavin, nevertheless, had invited these three noteworthy, "modern" Jews to assist the Committee. Initially, this Jewish *troika* (three) had devised a comprehensive program of Jewish reforms which, save for a few minor ones, were completely disregarded. Notkin returned to his business affairs.⁹⁵ As for Nevakhovich and Perrets, surmising that they had reached the end of their political lives and were too "European" in outlook to return to the Jews of Russia,

⁹² Ibid., p. 122.

⁹³ Along with Derzhavin and Kochubei were Mikhail Speranskii (Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs), Count V.A. Zubov, and Polish Counts Adam Czartoriski and S.O. Potocki. See David Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 86.

⁹⁴ At this time, Perrets was engaged in a number of commercial activities, one being shipbuilding for the Russian government. See Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 24.

⁹⁵ Nota Notkin was particularly dispirited since he, like Joshua Tseitlin, had enjoyed official favor only to realize its true worth. Intent on affecting an accommodation between Jews and the Russian government, Notkin, as early as 1797, addressed a detailed memorandum to General Procurator Aleksei Kurakin in which Notkin suggested that Jewish poverty, especially in Shklov where it was acute, could be alleviated through the establishment of agricultural colonies along the Black Sea and training Jews in "good and useful" trades. Tsar Paul I ignored these suggestions, and though they were submitted to the Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life for consideration, the 1804 Statute made little use of this Jewish contribution. See Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews, pp. 84-5.

both converted to Lutheranism.⁹⁶ From that point, nothing more was heard of Nevakhovich, but Grisha Perrets, the tutor of Mendel Lefin who laid the foundation for the Odessa School, would reappear on the political stage.

Placing the Jews under Closer Scrutiny

Bringing the Jews into line was becoming a perennial problem. Rural Jewish migrations made administrative oversight difficult and directives to local officials to keep Jews in their place failed to achieve the desired results. Passport regulations were also of little use, owing to the paucity of soldiers and officials to enforce them. Most Jews in Russia lived in towns which made their governance relatively manageable. By 1810, however, rural Jews were migrating en masse into New Russia and the Litovsk province carved from Prussia's Polish territories as a result of the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), creating significant problems for both the Finance Minister and the Minister of Internal Affairs.⁹⁷

New lands on the western frontier were ripe for cultivation but there were few farmers in those regions.⁹⁸ Agricultural colonists, regardless of religion or nationality, were initially solicited to move into and settle these areas with the Imperial treasury promising generous financial backing. However, owing to the influx of impoverished rural Jews, this project soon was in peril of bankruptcy since fiscal demands exceeded

⁹⁶ Haberer, *Jews and Revolution*, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Dietrich Lowe, *The Tsars and the Jews*, pp. 32-3.

⁹⁸ Russia did receive sizable lands in the West, from Prussia mainly, under the provisions of the Treaty of Tilsit between France and Russia (the other being between France and Prussia). Prussia itself, however, was saved from complete annexation at Alexander I's insistence. See Riasanovsky, p. 308.

allotted resources.⁹⁹ In a joint report to the Senate, the ministers of Finance and Internal Affairs warned that Jewish families, which at present numbered in excess of 600 (3,640+ souls), were already resident in these areas with the promise of 300 more (1800+ souls) in transit. Only ill could be expected from such consequences since they were of the poorest lot, dirty, and suffered from high mortality. Should anyone suspect that these figures were fantastic, the Finance Minister pointed out that as of April, 1810, the government had paid out 145,680 rubles in establishment and maintenance costs to Jewish farmers. At the current rate of five kopecks per soul (individual) per day, the annual outlay for 1810 alone would come to 219,000 rubles. Colonization under the current circumstances was deemed vital, but the Treasury viewed Jews more as a debt pool than as an asset-aggrandizing factor. No one could or wished to dispute these findings and the project was terminated for a time.

By 1811-12, the government had a clearer idea of what to do with the Jews. A Senate decree of 20 April 1811, little more than a paragraph in length, freed Jews from paying the recruitment bounty in return for converting to Orthodox Christianity.¹⁰⁰ For a nation on the brink of war and requiring substantial revenue to equip its forces, this fiscal reprieve ostensibly reflected a new official attitude. Visions of delivering Christian Europe to the Messiah were still a few years distant, although on the eve of Napoleon's invasion a change was coming over the Tsar. Alexander was beginning to see

⁹⁹ PSZ (I): Report 24,185a, 6 April 1810, On the Stopping of Jews from Resettlement in the New Russian Border Regions.

¹⁰⁰ PSZ (I): Decree 24,599, 20 April 1811, Release of Jews Accepting Christian Enlightenment From Recruitment Draft Payments.

Christianity as more than just a religious creed.¹⁰¹ To him, it was the repository of true knowledge which would free those who embraced it from ignorance and usher in beneficial modernity and guarantee Jewish loyalty to the throne.¹⁰² This last point was crucial. As for the relationship between Alexander's early messianic impulses and the promised liberation of Jewish converts from the recruitment bounty, the wisdom was quite simple. Rural Jews, it was thought, would gladly accept Christianity in return for relief from one of the state's fiscal exactions. Even if it failed in the long term to accrue a substantial number of converts, this latest offer would inevitably find some "takers." With consistent official pressure and the inevitable attrition, ostensibly Judaism could be rendered a cultural and ethnic accent.¹⁰³ At this time, before Napoleon's occupation of Moscow which would transform Alexander into the "Tsar-Liberator of Europe," Russian Jewish Christians were seen as those who could be trusted implicitly by Russian officialdom. As had been true of the Jewish Christian censors, these potential Jewish Christian farmers would be placed more firmly within the compass of the Tsar's power.

In Anticipation of Jewish Spiritual Reformation

Prior to leaving for the front in December, 1812, Alexander I issued a decree establishing the St. Petersburg Bible Society under the direction of Pastor John Patterson,

¹⁰¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, 1801-1917 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 164. In 1810, Golitsyn took over the newly created Directorate of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions whose purpose was to deal with the non-Orthodox religious communities of the Empire.

¹⁰² Klimenko, Notes of Alexander I, pp. 196, 208.

¹⁰³ Dietrich Lowe, The Tsars and the Jews, p. 33. This design would be pursued in earnest after the Napoleonic Wars.

a member of the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹⁰⁴ Assisting Patterson in this endeavor was fellow Society member, Reverend Robert Pinkerton.¹⁰⁵ Nowhere within the corpus of this document were the Jews mentioned directly, though they would be the unknowing objects of an ambitious millennial project which this organization inspired five years later. For some time, the Tsar claimed, illiteracy and poverty had kept the Gospel from those most in need of it for which there was no immediate remedy. When Patterson petitioned him for permission to establish a branch of his Society in St. Petersburg and hearing him plead his case, Alexander was impressed and perceived that this design would resolve his problem. Patterson's organization possessed substantial monetary resources and a record of success in distributing the Holy Bible as far as India. This helped secure official Russian approval, but what made this proposal all the more attractive was Patterson's assurances that certain members of the Society were conversant in and could translate these works into Kalmuk, Tatar and other Central Asian languages.¹⁰⁶ Curiously, it was Alexander's original desire to save these eastern communities from the Mohammadeans, who were mentioned directly and took precedence over all other competing considerations, including the Jews. Patterson assured Alexander that his Society would assist the St. Petersburg Bible Society financially and establish a publishing operation with the intent of forming a distinct

¹⁰⁴ PSZ (I): Decree 25,287, 6 December 1812, On the Founding of the Bible Society in St. Petersburg.

¹⁰⁵ Hartley, Alexander I, pp. 186-7.

¹⁰⁶ H.L. Empaytaz, Sketch of the Religious Character of Alexander, Emperor of Russia (New York: American Tract Society, nd), p. 44. Over time, a number of foreigners were disseminating the Scriptures in Empire which prompted the Bible Society to petition Alexander for redress. The Tsar responded by banning all bible societies in his domains and made the propagation of the Scriptures and religious education the province of the Holy Synod. One note about this sources. Reverend H.L. Empaytaz was pastor of the Church of the Pelisserie in Geneva and a close associate with Madame de Krudener who is often credited with bring about Alexander's religious transformation. This work was published originally in French and, from the character of its prose and references, shortly after 1825.

Russian Bible Society which would cater to Imperial needs. Thus began an evolutionary process which yielded such an institution in 1813.

From a Russian historical perspective, the Russian Bible Society was a unique undertaking. It was an assembly of many Christian rites and creeds which included Lithuanian Catholics, Franciscans, and several Protestant denominations, all committed to proselytizing among the Empire's non-Christian and semi-Christian population. This was also the first officially-sanctioned theological group which, though under Prince Golitsyn's advisement was, at this time, not under the complete domination of the Holy Synod nor its membership entirely Russian Orthodox.¹⁰⁷ The Russian Bible Society, above all, was a reflection of Alexander's conception of an all-encompassing, indivisible Christian community promoting spiritual and intellectual enlightenment to usher in the Millennium. Germinating during the liberation of Russia in 1812, it became incorporated into the Tsar's growing belief that he was an instrument of Divine Providence, a sentiment confirmed through his reading of the Book of Daniel and his identification with Daniel's trials.¹⁰⁸ By 1815, Alexander had become convinced that he was the "benevolent deliverer" of Europe and God was urging him to prepare the ground for the Messiah's return, a mission which would eventually include the Jews and shape Imperial foreign and domestic policies until the Tsar's death in 1825.¹⁰⁹

Napoleon and the Jews

¹⁰⁷ Prince A.N. Golitsyn was Alexander's Minister for Education and Spiritual Affairs from 1817 to 1824. See Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 165.

¹⁰⁸ Empaytaz, Sketch of the Religious Character of Alexander, p. 8. It was during the capture of Moscow that Alexander experienced his crisis of conscience which led him to Madame de Krudener and also Reverend Empaytaz.

¹⁰⁹ Klimentko, Notes of Alexander I, p. 229

During his invasion of Russia, Napoleon had thought that he had an opportunity to exploit a Russian “weakness” to French advantage. By promising the Jews of Vilna and their coreligionists throughout Russia a homeland in Palestine, he revealed something of himself. Napoleon thought of the Jews as a nation rather than a religion, and knowing their desire to settle their own state, he pledged Palestine.¹¹⁰ Securing Vilna as a supply depot for the Russian campaign, of course, was his principle objective and, towards that end, he made another grandiose promise. The reconstitution of the Great Sanhedrin invested with unrestricted legal authority in determining religious laws and ritual orthodoxy among European Jews was offered in return for Jewish cooperation. Napoleon, however, overestimated the strength of his appeal. True, some Jews took him at his word, but centuries of cynicism had tempered Jewish receptivity toward the promised gifts from kings, emperors and princes, most of which had never materialized.¹¹¹

Caution in this instance served them well. Napoleon had no intention of liberating the Jews from oppression.¹¹² As a soldier, he knew how to assess and exploit resources; as a politician, he could enlist the hopes and desires of potential supporters. War, in his opinion, was the apex of political contest. In France, he had embarked upon a scheme of gradual Jewish integration into French society in the belief that they would

¹¹⁰ Scott Ettinger, “Legal Status in Absolutist States and During the French Revolution,” A History of the Jewish People, edited by H.H. Ben Sasson, 9th. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 761.

¹¹¹ G. Deich, Liubavich, p. 17.

¹¹² Ettinger, “Legal Status,” p. 761-2. Napoleon was inconsistent in his approach to the Jews, which varied according to those territories which came under his domination. The 1808 “Infamous Decree” caused Napoleon to suspend total emancipation for Jews residing in the Duchy of Warsaw until 1818, yet the Jews of Westphalia were emancipated forthwith.

come to identify with it rather than their so-called alien creed.¹¹³ Exposing his true sentiments in 1808 with the promulgation of the Infamous Decree, he placed onerous restrictions upon Jewish loans and occupations, and forbade settlement in northeastern France, a measure which found favor with France's foremost mathematician and physicist, Francois Fourier. Also in that same year, he had declared that Jewish commerce was the source of all evil. Whether Vilna's Jews knew of these particulars or not cannot be ascertained, but their natural skepticism kept most of them from making commitments to Napoleon.

Alexander could not gauge Jewish loyalty initially, and even accounting for their general refusal of Napoleon's pledges, the soundings from St. Petersburg were disturbing. On the eve of the invasion, the anti-French proclamations of the Catholic Church in Russia contained anti-Semitic references which were more than matched by the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod. Caught up in the spirit of the moment, each claimed that should Napoleon triumph, Muslims and Jews would be unopposed in rising up and destroying the Christian Church and civilization. Alexander himself, however, remained more level-headed. The nation was on a war footing, in the Tsar's opinion, and everyone's talents, including the Jews, had to be pooled.¹¹⁴

Within the Jewish community the lines had already been drawn. Rabbi Schneur Zalman and his Habad Hasidim had pledged their support for the Tsar, reasoning that should Napoleon prove victorious, Jews might become emancipated and less impoverished but that French hegemony would result in assimilation into Russian society and the loss of Jewish identity altogether. Horrified by that prospect, Zalman opined that

¹¹³ Ettinger, "The Modern Period" in A History of the Jewish People, p. 762.

it was far better to pray for the realization of the other eventuality. Though the Jews could expect continued poverty and little relief from the Russian autocracy, at least they could cleave to the traditions and beliefs for which they had labored so long and hard to retain.¹¹⁵ Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rymanov and the Maggid of Kosnice, however, had come to a different conclusion. Napoleon's guarantees of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and full citizenship in Europe were too much for them to dismiss. Both held fast to their conviction that the French Emperor's word would be honored. To justify their stance, they pointed out that after creating the Duchy of Frankfort in 1811, Napoleon had granted full citizenship to the five hundred resident Jewish families there.¹¹⁶ For them, this was proof enough of Napoleon's sincerity.

Such enticements offered to desperate people were difficult to discount, yet the majority of the Jews of Russia supported the autocracy, as evidenced by the distribution of Yiddish pamphlets urging all Jews to pray for the Tsar's immediate victory.¹¹⁷ Russian forces re-entered Vilna in mid-April, 1812, with the Jewish kahal and other members of the community greeting them with bread and salt.¹¹⁸ Alexander took the opportunity to commend Jewish loyalty and industry with regard to his troops, particularly the saddlers and dry goods merchants who kept them well supplied.¹¹⁹ Though favorable, this appraisal was tempered by the Tsar's conviction that the rural shtetl environment was not conducive to healthful lives and was in dire need of modernization. Observing these same scenes but coming away with a markedly different

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 123-4.

¹¹⁵ Lucy Dawidowicz ed. The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 95-6.

¹¹⁶ Abraham Sachar, A History of the Jews (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 238.

¹¹⁷ Cohen, Vilna, p. 263.

¹¹⁸ Klimenko, Notes of Alexander I, Emperor of Russia, p. 182.

view, his younger brother Nicholas opined that the “zhids” were dirty, cowardly leeches who bled dry the peasantry. Military service was the only remedy, especially naval from which desertion would be much more difficult than in a land-based army.¹²⁰

Endemic Jewish backwardness, real or imagined, was not the difficulty Russian authorities encountered when dealing with Jews. Shortly before Napoleon’s advance, the Jews of Shklave in Lithuania complained bitterly to Russian officials in Vilna about their Rabbi and community leaders who had been extorting money from them for their own enrichment while impoverishing the rest of the settlement’s population.¹²¹ The complaint was legitimate but Russian law provided no redress. Transgressions against the state and associated punishments were detailed in the Empire’s laws in general, yet very few edicts were devoted to civil violations. Compounding the problem was the state of Jewish legal status in Russian society which was nebulous. The kahals were supposed to address matters pertinent to Jewish communal concerns which Russian authorities deemed either too esoteric or inconsequential to warrant their attention. Had Shklave’s rabbi and communal elders cheated the government, justice would have been swift, but their malfeasance affected only their fellow Jews. Nothing could be done. The pro forma instructions which the government issued to local rabbis and community leaders were ambiguous and Russian officials seldom oversaw their subsequent execution. Corruption was an inevitable consequence of episodic government on the communal level. Despite the number and extent of Alexander I’s reforms, law, order and justice on the local level improved little.

¹¹⁹ Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 182.

¹²⁰ W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of all the Russias* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 289-90.

The Society of Israelite Christians

From 1812 until the Congress of Vienna, preoccupation with the affairs of war and peace gave Alexander I little time to think about the Jews.¹²² It was only when Lewis Way, the founder of the British and Foreign Bible Society, brought up the question of Jewish social and political equality with Christians at one of the closing sessions of the Congress of Vienna that the Tsar took a renewed interest in their welfare. Listening to Way's rational assertions and adapting them to his own mien, Alexander contemplated the social and spiritual benefits which could be derived from such a consequence. What came out of this discourse were the guiding tenets of the Society for Israelite Christians. For Alexander, this became the answer to his Jewish Question. Such an organization, to Alexander's mind, could indeed channel Jewish talents and resources, specifically in agriculture, which would benefit the Empire.¹²³ Alexander's conceptions were not so fanciful as they appeared at first glance. Some rural Jewish affairs did assume a desired official order shortly after the Society's establishment, though only for a limited time. Disillusionment among Society members resulting from unrealized promises, social and economic realities, and general misfeasance all conspired to render the project all but moribund by the early 1820's.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² He was too busy thinking about God's protection of his person and his (Alexander's) unworthiness to receive it. See Empaytaz, Sketch of Alexander, p. 27.

¹²³ Deitrich Lowe, The Tsars and the Jews, p. 34. See also Nicholas Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, pp. 318-19. This latter reference addresses a parallel design of Alexander's and Alexis Arakcheev to settle decommissioned soldiers in agricultural communes. This was done ostensibly to reform the old and inefficient estate system, and though Jewish designs were formulated in a different spirit, the Society's communes were, undoubtedly, part of this pedestrian pursuit.

Though it appeared to be a novel invention, the Society for Israelite Christians was really composed of much of the same time-worn thinking and devices which had determined state policies towards the Jews since 1772. Monetary exemptions, loans, and promises of expanded educational opportunities had not brought in sufficient Christian converts and now hopes were invested in this project.¹²⁴ The Tsar saw no reason why success could not be achieved. Russia's own reform was progressing slowly, but this in no way indicated a failure, and the same, to Alexander's reasoning, was applicable to Jewish affairs.

He knew that he had to tread cautiously. The Society's eventual formation, organization, and direction evolved in two steps. Noting that forced conversions never secured loyal adherence, Alexander, along with the Procurator of the Holy Synod, officers of the Russian Bible Society (formerly the St. Petersburg Bible Society), and several learned ecclesiastics established the Committee for the Conversion of the Jews to Christianity.¹²⁵ Prince A. N. Golitsyn, the Minister of Education and Spiritual Concerns, was appointed head of this body, and its adherents targeted rural Jews and apprised them of Christianity's spiritual benefits.¹²⁶ Their present circumstances, the Jews were told, were a consequence of their "old" faith. Furthermore, Jewish social isolation and tax burdens arose from their rejection of Russian society, not the other way around. As a Christian people, Russians were benevolent and welcoming; Jewish relief was at hand if

¹²⁴ Empaytaz, Sketch of Alexander, pp. 43-4. Alexander believed that it was the mark of the Savior's supreme favor to spread the word of God among all nations.

¹²⁵ PSZ (I): Decree 26,752, 25 March 1817, Concerning the Establishment of a Committee for the Conversion of the Jews to Christianity, Resettling Them on Lands in the Northern and Southern Provinces under the Auspices of the Society of Israelite Christians.

¹²⁶ Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, p. 319. More than mere convincing, Golitsyn's mystical and pietistic sentiments were as pronounced as Alexander's. Eventually, he came to believe that the Bible alone was the source of all knowledge and all other intellectual pursuits were superfluous if not dangerous.

only they would join the Russian mainstream. Arguing along these lines, Committee agents were able to bring in a sufficient number of converts to establish some short-lived Society communes. Once these settlements were in place, the second stage unfolded.

Newly-baptized Jewish-Christians, as the statute deemed them, were to be organized into agricultural colonies for which lands had been reserved in the northern and southern provinces on the Empire's western border.¹²⁷ The decree accorded community members the privileges of brewing beer and distilling vodka and other grain products, as well as building and administering their own communal institutions with little interference from the government.¹²⁸ Stating the matter bluntly, traditional Jewish life was described as a burdensome condition. By joining the Pastor's (i.e. Jesus') flock, relief would be forthcoming. Those availing themselves of the opportunity would constitute a special class of citizens, yet this status and other key issues were simply declared without further elaboration.¹²⁹ Many who had joined the Society were soon confused and frustrated with the government's incomplete conception of how its members fit into the Russian milieu if at all.

The Statute was posted publicly throughout the concerned communities, and those who had liberty to read it completely must have wondered about the implications and consequences of this envisioned special class. Neither Russian nor wholly Jewish, it could only have meant that members had merely exchanged one restricted and nebulous

¹²⁷ PSZ (I): Decree 26,752.

¹²⁸ Simon Dubnow, A History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present vol. 2. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1918), p. 72. Despite what was expressed in this statute, the Russian government could never find a lasting accommodation with this aspect of Jewish commerce and the stigma it cast upon their image in Russian eyes.

¹²⁹ Alexander never settled the issue of whether the Jews constituted a separate estate or one which would eventually be made part of the Russian estate structure. From the actions of his successors, it was still an unresolved matter at the end of the century.

status for another. Equally troublesome was the profusion of terms such as “guardianship,” “protection,” “patronage,” and “security.” It was not clear what specifically was being promised to these Jewish Christians save that those who became members of the Society’s communes would enjoy the same benefits of Russian Orthodox Christian farmers. Still to be resolved in a meaningful manner were the specific liberties accorded Jewish Christians and how they compared with those of their Orthodox Christian brethren. It was understood that Jews converting to Christianity were released from discriminatory Jewish taxes and given the tax status of Christian peasants but little else beyond that. Society members were left to wonder if they had any real protection of person and property under the laws.¹³⁰ As a pacifying measure, the statute’s authors emphasized the promotion and protection of Jewish agriculture and industry, though no stipulations were given as to the portion of the Imperial market which would be open to them nor what they could buy, sell or trade.

If the statute’s lacunae left its intended audience guessing, the logical conclusion of what it portended did not. Members were urged at length to bring their immediate and extended families into the Society’s cells so that future generations would benefit from the automatic assumption of membership without alteration of privileges.¹³¹ In the strongest terms, however, relations with non-aligned Jews were forbidden. The Interior and Finance ministers considered these former friends and associates potential wreckers and cautioned members to report any potential wreckers from within or outside the Society to the head of their respective communities.

¹³⁰ Catherine II’s legislation had granted such protection while Alexander I’s ignored it completely.

¹³¹ PSZ (I): Decree 26752.

In the end, conversion to Christianity and Society membership had resulted in a double exile from both Russian and Jewish societies. Ensnared in remote communes with few resources, Society communities constituted an inaccessible socio-economic archipelago with no appreciable improvement in any facet of their members' lives. After 1820-21, the Society no longer appeared in official reports nor were any further statutes promulgated for its maintenance. From all indications, it had become a moribund institution.

When stripped of its theological facade, what the Society created, in effect, was a quasi-fluid Pale. Neither Alexander nor his ministers were ignorant of the fact that Catherine's Jewish fringe suffered from a paucity of resources and shtetlach scattered throughout. By allowing a limited number of Jews to settle in small remote communities under tight control, Jewish acculturation, at the very least, would have an opportunity to take root. As for banning contact between Society members and practicing Jews, the true reason behind the proscription was more mundane than any fears of the latter's supposed corrupting influence. Often in their dealings with Jewish Christians and Jews, revenue officials became easily confused as a consequence of continued economic relationships. Inefficient and incomplete registration of Jewish Christians made it impossible to distinguish between these Jews and others even on the communal and district levels, and the state bureaucracy itself was still going through the growing pains of Alexander's earlier administrative reforms. Separation of Jewish Christians from Jews made social control of both easier, at least in theory. Bureaucratic practice, however, was another matter.

Unforeseen Consequences Arising from Jewish Spiritual Reformation

During the Society for Israelite Christians' existence, other problems relating to Jewish identity would emerge. By its very name, Christian theology was the Society's fundamental pillar, but it was treated in such a manner as to cause further obfuscation for the Imperial administration. All Christian creeds were admitted to the Society's cells and judged equally valid, and their adherents were free to build schools, churches and engage in all God-ordained affairs.¹³² This ecumenical sentiment did not curb contradictory action, however, as evidenced by Alexander's expulsion of the Jesuits from St. Petersburg in 1812 because they were converting Orthodox Christians to Catholicism. In an 1823 decree, on the other hand, the Tsar was disposed to consider the Roman Catholic Church Orthodoxy's sister church.¹³³ Even in the early months of its existence, the St. Petersburg Bible Society and its immediate affiliates had Lithuanian Catholics as members who, along with their Orthodox associates, proselytized among the Jews without prejudice.

Relations between the Bible Society and the Holy Synod had been a precarious one, guaranteeing that the former's tenure in Russia would be limited. On the eve of the 1820's, ill-will between Prince Golitsyn and Patriarch Photius was wearing down Christian solidarity and imperiling Alexander's grand plan.¹³⁴ Trying to head off a full-

¹³² Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire 1801-1917, pp. 164-5. This should not come as a surprise considering that Prince A.N. Golitsyn was made Minister of Education in 1816 while still holding the post of Ober Procurator of the Holy Synod. Regarding Christianity, he was tolerant of all its creeds.

¹³³ PSZ (I) Decree 29,662, 30 November 1823, Jews Accepting Roman Catholicism and their Exclusion from the Capitation Assessment.

¹³⁴ Klimenko, Notes of Alexander I, p. 324. Photius accused Golitsyn of "sins against the Orthodox Church," for which he had to confess and do penance. When Golitsyn refused, the former declared that his sins would "prevent him from ever seeing Christ in his glory."

blown confrontation with the Holy Synod which would dash all “Jewish-alluring” projects present and future, Alexander brokered a “truce” which afforded him time to perfect his vision of a Christian brotherhood.¹³⁵ Any sect which professed Christian teachings, in the Tsar’s estimation, had merit as far as the Society of Israelite Christians was concerned. More than mere Christian theology, this open-creed invitation was directed primarily at foreign Jews, specifically Western Europeans who had accepted Christianity and wanted to join the Society. This was not a complete fantasy. A few Eastern European rabbis and Jewish intellectuals had studied in German yeshivas and Western universities. The West, for some Russian Jews, was the repository of knowledge, particularly Jewish knowledge, scarce commodities in their own communities.¹³⁶ Knowing this, the Tsar sought to exploit this inferiority complex among Russian Jews for Imperial gain. Granting these Western Jewish scholars freedom of movement to and from the Empire as well as property rights, in addition to those accorded to native Society members, Alexander also played upon an established sentiment among Western Jews that their Eastern coreligionists were backward and in need of instruction.¹³⁷

Prone to flights of fancy, Alexander could also exercise considerable shrewdness. His timing for this particular reform project could not have been better. In the late 1810’s and early 1820’s, some German Jewish intellectuals were subjecting Jewish traditions

¹³⁵ Ibid. When Photius' accusations were verified, Alexander stripped Golitsyn of his offices though he still kept him within proximity since he valued his advice and opinions.

¹³⁶ Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v Rossii*, p. 111. In the period 1816-26 in the Kingdom of Poland, D. Friedlander and S. Potoskii were establishing special Jewish schools which emphasized modern subjects along with traditional Jewish ones. So successful were they that, in 1826, Potoskii was responsible for the opening of the first Rabbinical school in Warsaw. Progress to Russia would soon follow.

and theology to scientific scrutiny in an effort to determine whether Judaism could be made compatible with modern circumstance or should be discarded altogether. Such luminaries as Heinrich Heine and Felix Mendelssohn, ostensibly enlightened Western Jewish-Christians, certainly had their followers, and it was precisely these individuals whom the Tsar hoped would invite the Jews of Russia to join them.¹³⁸ As for the Society of Israelite Christians and its mission, it did enjoy some success in the smaller southern and southwestern communities but it was a failure overall in realizing the Christianization of the Jews of Russia. It was dissolved formally in 1825.

Aside from the Society, there were other religious affairs involving Jews which occupied the Autocrat. Beginning in the late fall of 1822, the Jews unwittingly turned the tables on Alexander by using his own statutory vagueness against him. It originated with the case of Stanislav Fromgold, a saddler from St. Petersburg province, who had recently renounced Judaism and converted to Roman Catholicism but was still being taxed as a Jew.¹³⁹ Accomplishing little with the district authorities, he appealed to the Holy Synod for redress, and it was before this body that the particulars were brought to the fore. First, Synod officials accused Fromgold of violating the law of 13 August 1820 which forbade converted Jews from associating with their former Jewish friends.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, a simple conversion to Christianity in and of itself, he was informed, did not signify a change in status. Demonstrable proof of his religious sincerity had to be forthcoming

¹³⁷ This very belief guided the efforts of Sir Moses Montefiore, Isaac ber Levinsohn, and Max Lilienthal later on in the century.

¹³⁸ Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v Rossii*, pp. 110, 127-8. Among other uses, the government thought that Jewish converts to Christianity made ideal censors. This attitude would wax and wane throughout the nineteenth century.

¹³⁹ PSZ (I): Report 29,228, 30 November 1822, *Jews Accepting Christianity and the Condition of their Tax Duties*

before any action could be taken. Subsequently, Synod officials admitted that Fromgold's plight was shared by others owing to bureaucratic delays which had kept legitimate names from being entered into the official Christian registers. Under the circumstances, Christian Jews could easily be mistaken for Jews. Shifting responsibility further, Prince Golitsyn declared that such incidents could be avoided in the future if converts would submit proof of their conversion in writing which would then be subject to review and, upon official confirmation, their taxes adjusted accordingly.

Jews, Jewish taxes, and legislative misfeasance would follow Alexander to the grave. In late 1823, an unprecedented event occurred in the Bialystok region which no one in the Imperial administration could have predicted. That Jews there were converting to Roman Catholicism was known and tolerated, but that they were applying to become novices in the Franciscan Order with some actually becoming Friars was most unusual.¹⁴¹ Initially, many of these Jewish converts belonged to a voluntary prayer group associated with a Franciscan monastery from which some later applied to become novices. Irked and puzzled, the government questioned the legitimacy of these novitiates under Canon Law, a query which was duly answered and not to their liking. Jurist Ferrara, representing the position of the Catholic Bishop responsible for the Bialystok region, claimed that the rule of Benedict XIV assumed the sincerity of all novices to the order without examination, though candidates were cautioned that it was an arduous three-year novitiate which many would not complete. If the government was hoping for a canonical loophole, it could not be found.

¹⁴⁰ PSZ (I): Edict 28337, 13 August 1820, On the Exclusion of Jews Converting to Christianity from Community Taxes.

From the Jewish perspective, taking monastic vows was an alien notion if considered solely on theological grounds. In light of the overall Jewish situation in the period 1817-23, especially in rural environs, joining the Franciscan order was tantamount to affecting social emancipation. To remain a practicing Jew with its attendant legal and fiscal burdens guaranteed most a life of perpetual poverty. Out of desperation, should some join the Society for Israelite Christians, there were still no assurances that a Jewish Christian's quality of life would improve. Like those who converted to Christianity but did not join the Society, they would assume the obligations of Russian Christians but be denied almost all of the benefits. By becoming a Friar, the severance with Judaism was complete but so too was direct Imperial influence. Exempt from all taxes and obligations and having all material needs met on a regular basis, some Jewish friars must have felt that monastic life was a far better fate than the prospect of permanent poverty, the prospect of starvation, and bureaucratic intervention. The other side of this phenomenon was that it was the most potent self-sacrificing form of resistance to Imperial authority.

Depending upon how well informed they may have been, a few of these friars may have known that if the government pursued them into the monastery, they would do so on contestable ground. With reactionary sentiments running high, the Tsar found himself trying to settle ecclesiastical accounts throughout his Empire, and a confrontation with the Catholic Episcopate and the Vatican would have been too much to bear. By means of conciliation and negotiation, it was resolved that should Jewish Christian novices leave the monasteries, the heads of these communities would notify the district authorities at once so that their names could be re-entered into the Christian tax rolls. If

¹⁴¹ PSZ (I): Report 29,662, 30 November 1823, Regarding Jews Converting to Roman Catholicism and

this departure proved to be a case of apostasy, the apostate was duly re-entered into the Jewish rolls.¹⁴² Another concession the government was able to gain from the Roman Church was a ceiling on the number of novices accepted into the order which, for a time, satisfied both sides, though Imperial administrators had to admit privately that they had been outmaneuvered.¹⁴³

The Spectre of Constitutionalism and its Consequences

Discord and discontent were not confined to theological issues. Jewish political activism, though minute, was in evidence. In 1819, Grigorii Perrets re-entered the political fray. Like many Russian intellectuals of the post-Napoleonic period, he saw constitutionalism as the only means to bring about Russian liberation and, by extension, Jewish liberation as well. Though now a practicing Lutheran, Perrets still identified with the Jews of Russia. It was in the period 1819-21 that Perrets established the Society of Perrets, a group of “pure constitutionalists,” committed to affecting reforms which would bring Russian government into line with Western liberalism. Though envisioning the work of his group in broad secular terms, Perrets, nevertheless used “heruth,” Hebrew for “liberty,” as his group’s watchword and buttressed his arguments for constitutionalism with citations from the Old Testament.¹⁴⁴ For all of his efforts, however, he could only draw ten people, and though the group disbanded in 1821, Perrets’s influence on the

their Exclusion from the Poll Tax Assessment.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, p. 319. This was not the only instance where the government found itself literally the victim of its own policies. It was in 1824 when Mikhail Magnitsky of the University of Kazan, so intent on purging Russian society of all anti-Christian influences, overstepped his commission when he accused then Grand Duke Nicholas of free thinking. His fall came shortly thereafter.

Decembrists, though slight, was sufficient to have him arrested in 1826 and sent into exile. From this experience, Grigorii (Grisha) Perrets earned two distinctions; he was the only “Jewish” Decembrist the Russian government recognized and, unwittingly, the “founding father” of the secular-oriented Jewish intelligentsia in Russia. Unknowingly, Perrets introduced yet another element to the composite mosaic of the Jewish identity in Russia.

Conclusion

Jewish affairs did not suffer from want of attention or activity in the period 1796-1825. Paul I and Governor Freizel took an active hand in settlement of the Hasidic-Rabbinical contest in Vilna if only by accident of circumstance. Ill at ease for most of his life and even more so as Tsar, Paul merely wanted peace, taxes, and an accurate census of Courland’s Jewish population. None of the three were realized completely, particularly peace, though the continuing struggle between the Hasidim and their rabbinical opponents would remain behind the scenes throughout this period. This internalization, however, did not preclude government intervention.

Alexander believed that he had no choice but to shape Jewish affairs. For the first time in Russian history, a concerted attempt was made to rein in the Jews for the purpose of serving the Empire. To his mind, education was the indisputable agent to affect the transformation of the Jews into modern and beneficial citizens. Alexander's reign fell into two distinct parts, 1801-1812 and 1812-1825. In the first part, there was the

¹⁴⁴ Harberer, Jews and Revolution, pp. 2-3.

establishment of the Committee for the Organization of Jewish Life in 1802 to initiate and guide the Jewish intellectual metamorphosis. Distinguishing between urban and rural Jewish communities and recognizing their distinct needs, desires, and aspirations, Alexander and his ministers adopted a policy of superficial invitation. By this, the government made it appear that those Jews who followed the mandates of the 1804 statute would derive much in return for modest compliance. The potential for social advancement was emphasized at length, a small price for the Empire to pay considering Russia's urgent need for skilled professionals and scientists. While not an urgent mandate at this time (1804), Napoleon's eastern advance could only have meant that a French presence on the Imperial frontier was inevitable and the marshaling of resources imperative. For Jews residing in the countryside, the prospect of being one's own master by owning a homestead or factory held some ephemeral allure while serving the covert purpose of bringing the Jews further into the Russian fold without altering their status.

On the eve of Napoleon's invasion, the government tried two experiments in hopes of bringing the Jews more securely into the Imperial fold. The 1811 offer of recruitment bounty relief in exchange for Christian conversion was clearly exploitative of their economic situation which disguised official concerns regarding their loyalty. Similarly, the Russian Bible Society was conceived in order to bring all of Russia's non-Christian populations to Christianity. Once this had been realized, the Empire would be theologically homogenous and concerns over loyalty would dissipate since everyone would be bound body and soul to the Tsar. Granted, there was no mention of the Jews initially but, using the eastern tribes to test the Society's effectiveness in proselytizing, a

potentially invaluable tool had been acquired for attempting the conversion of the Jews later on.

From 1817 to 1825, with the help of Madame de Krudener and Reverend H.L. Empaytaz, Alexander's own spiritual visions served as the impetus for bringing all of Europe as well as the Jews to Christ.¹⁴⁵ The Society for Israelite Christians was a true expression of how sincere and to what extent the Tsar and Holy Synod were willing to emancipate the Jews from the evils of their perceived provincialism. Newly-created Jewish Christians were thought to be suitable in Imperial needs. Little was to be feared from them since the government dictated all aspects of their education and residence under the thinly-veiled guise of Christian liberation. Superficially, the matter seemed clear to the government, and yet practice would prove otherwise.

Perhaps it is too facile to claim that both Jews and Russian officials were too comfortable with their illusions of one another to reach a mutual understanding. Certainly, the educational institutions for such investigations did not exist nor did the overall atmosphere in Russia encourage this communion.¹⁴⁶ Instead, their mutual blindness which had developed during Alexander's reign would not diminish with his successor had an unexpected benefit. In defiance of all reason, that one commonality served as the engine behind the Jewish metamorphosis in succeeding decades.

¹⁴⁵ Empaytaz, *Sketch of Alexander*, pp. 35-6. Though he considered himself the most Christian member of the Holy Alliance, he had some assistance from Friedrich Wilhelm, King of Prussia, and Emperor Francis of Austria.

¹⁴⁶ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, p. 304. Though much has been made of Jewish education, the state of Russian instruction also concerned Alexander.

CHAPTER III: BATTLES WITHOUT DISTINCT VICTORS: THE JEWISH METAMORPHOSIS, 1825-1855

Introduction

In their dealings with the Jews, Russian officials seemed to have every conceivable advantage. They established the reform committees, promulgated and imposed the laws, controlled the ministries, and had undisputed authority over the military and police. What did the Jews have as a counter to the overwhelming tide of compulsory Russification with a Jewish accent within the next thirty years (1825-55)? Nicholas I was an austere man who could never forget a wrong nor forgive a transgression no matter how slight.¹ Furthermore, he considered the very reason for human existence was for the purpose of service because, in his estimation, everyone served.² This rigidity permeated all his policies foreign and domestic, especially those regarding the Jews, and yet there was some elasticity.³ Certainly he had no sympathy with the Decembrists and exhibited an ardent distrust and acrimony towards both Slavophiles and Westernizers even though he did recognize, if only in a narrow vein, that Russia had to change with the times. Jews aside, the Russians themselves were in need of reform and yet, given the established official notions of law and order within an autocratic frame, Nicholas and his ministers were forever wary. How far was too far?

Ironically, that same question plagued Jewish conservatives in terms of how modern the community should become and still retain its Jewish identity. Identity itself was becoming a plurality during this period which proved to be a source of constant

¹ Konni Zilliacus, The Russian Revolutionary Movement (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1905), p. 18.

² Nicholas Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 1.

frustration. From the 1830's onward, these tensions would spill over into the larger arena of Jewish-Russian affairs and, at times, assume the demeanor of pitched battles. Strength seemed to favor the Russians and yet the results of these confrontations were generally matters of give and take. Such an attitude, however, did not preclude the government from attempting to implement its designs clandestinely. Prior to the Crimean War, Nicholas I instituted his final Jewish reform. The Rabbinical Pedagogical Institutes of Vilna and Zhitomir were established in 1848 to train Crown Rabbis for congregations and Jewish teachers for the government Jewish schools. There was no mistaking official intentions when it was expressed clearly that Crown (i.e. Official) Rabbis would be the only acceptable Jewish clergy within ten years' time. In an effort to accelerate the official Jewish metamorphosis, it was decreed in 1855 that the duties of Rabbi and teacher would be merged "so that there would be no distinction between the two."⁴ Despite their respective efforts, at the time of Nicholas' death neither side was completely satisfied with what had come to pass nor could one really claim victory over the other. The Crimean War was a loss but Jewish affairs had come to a stalemate.

Tsar Nicholas I: A Warrior Ready for Combat

Before the stalemate came the battle, and being a career military man, Nicholas embraced it with the confidence of a seasoned commander. He was a man of simple political tastes who demanded the fulfillment of only one requirement; his subjects had to

³ Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, 1801-1917 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 200. Though he distrusted innovation, he did not reject it in principle.

⁴ This quote was taken from PSZ (II): Edict 29276, 3 May 1855, Limitations and Restrictions on Rabbis and Teachers of Jewish Subjects.

submit to his notions of law and order.⁵ Though largely self-assured, the last years of his brother's rule had made him fearful and hardened against anyone who might oppose his wishes. Reactionary by nature, Nicholas could not abide the liberal upswell in Europe following the Napoleonic wars. The circumstances which brought about the draconian Carlsbad Decrees in Germany (July 1819) and the Six Acts in England (December 1819) inspired fears among the Tsar and his conservative ministers that liberal and revolutionary ideas might very well infect Russia in the near future. Already, his late brother had taken preventative measures which Nicholas confirmed and augmented. Determined to eradicate the contagion or, at the very least, localize it, the government viewed the universities of Kazan and St. Petersburg with suspicion. Convinced that certain professors at Kazan were disseminating liberal ideas, Mikhail Magnitsky of the Russian Bible Society petitioned the government for a full investigation in March 1819. Believing that Magnitsky's concerns were genuine, the Tsar sent him to the University of Kazan on 8 June 1819 as its new rector, and he proceeded to purge the faculty of "radicals."⁶ In 1822, under the ministrations of Dmitri Runich, the University of St. Petersburg saw the dismissal of certain professors who expressed "mild sympathies" for constitutionalism and atheism, though no clear definitions or criteria for these charges were ever established. Suspicion alone was sufficient for dismissal and the repressive climate continued to spread. At the University of Dorpat, Russian students who had studied abroad were denied admission in July 1822 for fear that they would "propagate the customs of disobedience" among the "untainted" student body. Following up on this

⁵ Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, p. 199. Throughout his life, Nicholas thought in terms of the military notions of loyalty, obedience, and efficiency.

proscription, in February 1823 the government declared certain German universities off limits to Russian students owing to their cultivation of “antireligious and immoral ideas.”⁷

Russian public discourse was being closed rapidly and tightly, much to the consternation of many of the intelligentsia.⁸ Nicholas I would prove even more repressive than his brother since, like him, he claimed neither to understand writers (i.e. those who produced intellectual works) nor did he have much sympathy for them.⁹ This disposition would plague the intelligentsia throughout his thirty-year reign, beginning with the bloodletting on Senate Square in December 1825. Having been deprived of the possibility to participate in the discussion of Russian life, the Russian intelligentsia bided its time until political and social conditions permitted it to rejoin the debate, if only temporarily.¹⁰

The Jewish Recruitment Ukase of 1827 and its Consequences

While the intelligentsia nursed its wounds in the aftermath of the Decembrist Rising, Nicholas I, in 1826, created the Third Section of His Majesty's Own Chancery to investigate all subversive activities where they could be found.¹¹ With only the arrest of Grisha Perrets, the thought of Jewish revolutionary activity did not seem to be a pressing

⁶ Anatole G. Mazour, The First Russian Revolution 1825: The Decembrist Movement, Its Origins, Development and Significance (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1937), pp. 32-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸ Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 200.

⁹ Abbott Gleason, Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860's (New York: Viking Press, 1976), pp. 78-9.

¹⁰ Nicholas Riasanovsky, A Parting of the Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia 1801-1855 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 249.

concern. Nevertheless, the Tsar had not forgotten his 1816 assessment when he authorized the Second Section to codify the 1827 Recruitment Ukase. More than simply means of ordering the Jewish community to government standards, it was believed that the military would be the ideal school for exposing Jewish youths and young adults to modern (i.e. Russian) education which could only help them in their future affairs.¹² Curiously, the notion of education through military training had been confined exclusively to the nobility, and clearly Nicholas was breaking new ground when he imposed it upon an ostensibly plebeian group who had heretofore never been required to shoulder arms.¹³

Personal disposition aside, Nicholas may have realized that a bad example can be a great teacher. In this instance, the pedagogue was the Society for Israelite Christians and its ultimate failure to bring all the Empire's Jews under control. Alexander I and the Russian Bible Society had overestimated the effects of their propaganda. Deception was of limited use. The Russian Empire was a well-ordered Christian state and, in Nicholas' estimation, the Jews, along with all of his subjects, would have to know the distinction between themselves and their governor and be bound together the strictest obedience.¹⁴

Hardened and embittered two years after the failed Decembrist Rising,¹⁵ the Tsar was determined to teach his subjects what it meant to live under absolute authority, and

¹¹ Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855, p. 91.

¹² Simon Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present vol. 2. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1918), p. 18. See also Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), p. 15.

¹³ Mark Raeff, Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), p. 130, 137.

¹⁴ W. Bruce Lincoln, Nicholas I: Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias (De Kalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1989), p. 36.

¹⁵ The consequences of this event would fall upon the Russian intelligentsia more so than the Jews though, by irony of circumstance, both shared similar hardships during Nicholas' reign.

the Jews would experience this lesson in full vigor.¹⁶ This took the form of two statutes comprising the Jewish Recruitment Ukase of 26 August 1827 but not before Nicholas encountered delays in its promulgation and implementation.¹⁷ Apparently, Jewish lobbyists played upon the conservative nature of key military officials to stall approval of this design. One such figure, Admiral N.N. Mordvinov, was reportedly paid 200,000 rubles for his silence on the issue, but Nicholas would not be dissuaded.¹⁸ Eventually, the Tsar bypassed official channels and imposed the Ukase by virtue of his prerogatives.

Beyond all doubt, Jews were now subject to direct state service, according to the first of these two statutes. The military (i.e. army) was seen as an apt school for the instruction of subjects and for fostering obedience to the state.¹⁹ By no means was this to be considered an onerous burden, but an honor. Those conscripted were to understand that their experience would ensure greater success in their respective endeavors once military service had terminated and that their actions, with regard to the Jewish community as a whole, would facilitate the equalization of their condition with that of Russian society.²⁰ Such hopes were tempered by some disquieting omissions. A period of service was mentioned but no stipulation made as to its duration.²¹ Furthermore, the promises of “greater success” and the “equalization of all conditions” were neither elaborated upon nor given specific definition. These promises did not come with written

¹⁶ Nicholas I opined that the army epitomized social order. Like human existence itself, it represented a life of continual service because everyone serves. See Nicholas Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia 1825-1855 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), p. 1.

¹⁷ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ PSZ (II): Edict 1329, 26 August 1827, An Address to the Jews to Perform Recruitment Duty in lieu of Paying Duties.

²⁰ What really came to pass was that Jews were to be reduced to the lowest common denominator of rightlessness. See Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 17.

guarantees and few Jews would put stock in the verbal assurances of the Tsar and his officials. Left to individual and collective interpretation, the Recruitment Ukase led to an emotional outpouring of frustration and fear in a number of communities throughout the Pale.

Questions as to whether Jewish military service was truly voluntary or obligatory were answered in the preamble of the second ukase. The recruitment bounty which Jews had had to pay previously was abolished in lieu of compulsory active service in which they would be treated the same as other citizens commensurate with their demonstrated loyalty.²² Should there arise a need to alter Jewish obligations, action would not be taken without prior permission from the Chief Command of Jewish Affairs, but since the concern of the moment was to increase Jewish ranks, this was not the occasion to entertain such notions.²³ Under advisement from the Minister of Finance, the Autocrat made a provision for some shtetlach, towns, and communities who could not meet their allotted quota in manpower to pay a duty commensurate with their obligation, but only under strictly defined conditions.²⁴ Reason had to prevail in this and all other legal circumstances and Nicholas' jurists and ministers were committed to denying the Jews an avenue through which they could bypass conscription.

²¹ Twenty-five years was the standard recruitment tenure though no mention of it was made in the Ukase. This would be lessened over time and, by the mid-1840's, Jewish servicemen could have their wives and children join them.

²² PSZ (II): Edict 1330, 26 August 1827, Recruitment Regulations for the Official Employment of the Jews. The term "citizen" (grazhdane) might appear odd, yet it is contained within the document.

²³ This office was certainly a new institution created by Nicholas since there is no mention of it in prior legislation.

²⁴ Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 18. Ninety-five clauses with sixty-two supplementary clauses. What was in print and what was reality stood at considerable variance. See Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 21-2.

Quantity was a prominent factor, but Imperial legislation also foresaw abuses on the part of community leaders in procuring their quota and, therefore, stipulated that those males under age 12 and over 25 were not to be taken in the draft.²⁵ To express a dictum was one matter, to enforce it another, and despite this qualification and its reiteration in subsequent legislation, *klappers* (from the Yiddish “clap,” meaning “to take”) would violate this mandate with impunity as would unscrupulous recruitment officers.²⁶ That would be an omnipresent consequence of the system. In the immediate offering, those Jews who were subject to the Ukase would experience its full weight when paragraph 4 was implemented. It was in this section of the Ukase where officials choreographed every aspect of the ceremony for dispatching the recruits in a contrived setting resembling a typical weekday morning service.

Local rabbis were made responsible for administering the loyalty oath to the recruits in the synagogue while adhering to a carefully scripted ritual. The Ukase included footnotes in the bottom margin from both Torah and Babylonian Talmud which had God “commanding” the Jews to serve the Tsar. This, together with the “Jewish cast” of these proceedings, were designed to convince those participating that all was theologically legitimate.²⁷ Fragments of scriptural passages were taken out of context and presented piecemeal in the statute in such a manner as to have Nicholas’ address to the Jews read: “As David was once your King, so now am I. As Israel was once your Kingdom, so now is the Empire, and as God commanded you to serve both, that obligation stands still.” Once this had been impressed upon the draftees, each recruit had

²⁵ For Christians, the age span was 17-35. See Steven L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, A Village in the Tambov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 152.

to take the oath to the Tsar without omission or variation lest he be taken without a validation receipt.

The oath had to be taken before the Torah scrolls, save on Shabbat and the High Holidays, in the presence of the officiating rabbi and government judicial officers. One oddity encountered in the latter articles was that the rabbis had to lead the recruits in the preliminary oath while the secondary had to be done by the recruits themselves. To disarm any discomfort over this secular affair which might impede processing, rabbis were ordered to have two candles burning on either side of the scroll platform and, at the end of the first oath, were to declare that these proceedings were not pursued for the benefit of the kahal but for God alone.²⁸ As if preparing for morning prayers, the draftees were then obliged to wash their hands as prescribed under *Halakhah* (Jewish law) and to don tefillin and talasim.²⁹ Afterwards, they were taken to their places in the synagogue or shul and read the oath first in Hebrew and then in Russian where, if unclear, rabbis could write out the troubling word or phrase on a board or separate sheet of paper if available. Vocalization had to come from the individual inductee alone and closure was signified by four blasts from the synagogue shofar. As a final seal, the rabbis were compelled to assert with all vigor that every facet of the induction ceremony was God-ordained. Any violation or diminution on the part of miscreants would result in Divine punishment visited upon their families and the possibility of their being cut off entirely from Jewish

²⁶ Clause 8 of the Ukase mandated that the kahals were responsible for providing conscripts in the age range 12-25.

²⁷ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 21.

²⁸ *PSZ* (II): Edict 1330.

²⁹ The term "tallism" (also rendered as "tallithim") is the plural for "tallis," the ritual prayer shawl Jewish men don for weekday, sabbath and holiday prayers. Tefillin, or phylacteries, are leather cords usually worn on the left arm and shoulder (the weaker side of the body) and head. Each cord has a box in which is

tradition. Retribution would not stop there. Grave were the commandments of the Lord (the Ukase used the Hebrew term *Adonoi*), and the violation of even the least of them would subject all of Israel to torment.³⁰

Imperial authorities had anticipated the potential for desertion which was why the Ukase promised reduced obligations for bravery under fire, although even this came with an attached warning. Should any Jewish recruit desert and become a fugitive despite this “grace,” his entire community would have to pay 1000 rubles for him and anyone else from that village who followed his lead.³¹ At the time, assignants were worth a fraction of their printed value which was why this fine was demanded in coin, an impossible financial burden for many shtetlach and larger towns owing to inflation and the Empire’s chronic specie shortage.

Apart from synagogues, only houses of study could host the induction proceedings. The Ukase stipulated that communities had the option of presenting first anyone delinquent in paying taxes, vagrancy, and other crimes falling under government purview.³² Officers from the Justice Ministry were charged with ensuring that the trials and sentencing of these so-called convicts accorded with standard jurisprudence and that these individuals were not simply being sacrificed in haste to satisfy the community’s quota.³³ Nicholas made this point quite clear. Also, to ensure that dead souls were not enlisted, the community was given a receipt for each consignment which was then

written the Viahavta prayer taken from the book of Leviticus obliging Jews to “bind the words of God upon their hands and to allow them to be a symbol before their eyes.”

³⁰ This warning became a standard feature of Jewish legislation in the Nicholas period.

³¹ Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, p. 20. This was the standard outlay per recruit demanded of those communities which could not meet their quota.

³² Ibid.

³³ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 29-30. Kahals overstepped their authority frequently and local Russian authorities were not always ignorant of this.

entered into the recruitment registers which were subject to official review every three years. Copies of these books were to be surrendered to the Imperial Chancery where they were kept to ensure accuracy.³⁴

Clearer in some sections than in others, the 1827 Ukase was not to be applied to all Jews.³⁵ Rural Jews were more likely to be called up than their urban counterparts, to be sure, but Nicholas and the Ministry of Finance also realized that drafting all able-bodied rural Jews into the army would impair Imperial commerce. As elsewhere in Russia, recruitment obligations were imposed selectively. Binding Jews to his person and the Russian state through military service was imperative, but exceptions could be made with respect to first guild merchants, Jews having Russian university diplomas, rabbis, and teachers who had completed training and had registered with the district authorities.³⁶ Each of these exempted persons owed their status to the State and became indebted to serve the same. Anticipating that some petty traders who had accrued sufficient wealth to qualify for first-guild membership (i.e. district merchants) might take this occasion to press their suits, the government allowed them to do so with the understanding that if successful in obtaining this elevation, they were still subject to possible recruitment. If only for psychological considerations, the “rod of authority” had to remain visible.

First-guild merchants may have been made exempt but not so their sons, an effective means for ensuring their fathers’ good conduct. Beneficial to the state in one respect, this provision was potentially inimical in another. Should a sizable number of

³⁴ Ibid., p. 20. In addition to a Russian copy, one also had to be rendered in Yiddish.

³⁵ Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 29.

³⁶ PSZ (II): Edict 1330.

merchants' sons be drafted, the resulting loss of revenue from that quarter would eradicate any benefit derived Jewish recruitment. In rural Jewish society, sons, save only the most gifted Talmud-Torah scholars, succeeded their fathers in their trades.³⁷ This meant that Nicholas had to spare some of them in the short term for the Empire's sake while simultaneously engineering their gradual weaning from Judaism for the same purpose.³⁸ Alexander had been able to allay and manipulate Jewish anxieties with vague assurances made conditional upon joining the Society of Israelite Christians. Nicholas, however, did not share his brother's millenarian inspiration and had to rely upon more pragmatic means to affect a similar and better end. In other words, a first-guild merchant could be led to assume that if his deportment was respectable in both his commercial and social endeavors, the kahal or district excise agents would inform the appropriate officials and all would go well. Obedience would be assured without having to make concessions.

Rabbis, teachers and Jews who held Russian university degrees were accorded the same privileges and obligations as first-guild merchants. Believing that scholars would make poor soldiers, the Tsar was moved to exempt them from the draft but not from his grander design.³⁹ As in the case of first-guild merchants, sons of the Jewish educated elite were also eligible and virtually held hostage to fate and circumstance in order to guarantee their fathers' loyalty in submitting to the government's directives. Of the three, rabbis were the most valuable in realizing Nicholas' aims and their role will be elaborated upon in due course. As for teachers of Jewish subjects, only those who had completed the requisite pedagogical courses and could produce official certificates

³⁷ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 32. Kahal officials were reluctant to draft good Talmud students.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101. Throughout his reign, Nicholas never departed from this intention.

attesting to this accomplishment were made exempt so long as they kept their employment. Ancillary officials such as synagogue *shammesim* (sextons), members of the *chevrin kadisha* (burial societies), and other functionaries and wardens who held religious offices were all liable for conscription if they fell within the prescribed age brackets.⁴⁰ The only exit option afforded them was that they, along with other non-exempt Jews, were free to find Jewish substitutes.

Jewish university degree holders were also exempted, but considering that the first recipient, Lev Ossipovich Mandelstamm, did not obtain his diploma until 1844, it is a mystery as to why it was a consideration at all. Most likely the government sought to address all conditions real and potential in an effort to affirm that it had examined Jewish affairs completely. Urban Jews educated in other Russian institutions were not permitted to think themselves exempt, although in truth the government had little to fear from them. Most had already been assimilated or were well on their way towards doing so, the veracity of which the Rabbinate had confirmed.⁴¹ Russian-educated Jews were in State employment in one fashion or another and their overall relationship with the Empire was comfortable in terms of satisfying their fundamental needs. Their fiscal well-being (in comparison to their shtetl counterparts) and general apathy towards theological Judaism

³⁹ Lincoln, *Nicholas I*, pp. 81-2. Lincoln states that Nicholas had no respect for those who had not been soldiers and was wary of educated public opinion.

⁴⁰ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 25-6. Prescriptions notwithstanding, determining the age of the average Jewish recruit, many of whom did not possess birth certificates, was up to the attending physicians at the induction centers or a so-called reliable Jewish testator acquainted with the inductee.

⁴¹ As stated previously, assimilation in the Russian context meant that a "Jew" had acquired more of a secular or ethnic identity, though not necessarily abandoning the faith entirely while in State service. There was a marked tendency among the Rabbinate to consider such persons as "outcasts" who had relinquished all claims to Jewish spiritual benefits. For a discussion of this mien which originated among the Polish rabbinate and was exported to Russia, see Alexander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 87-9.

made their recruitment eligibility pro forma rather than actual, a circumstance which separated them from their rural coreligionists.

While not prominent at the very outset of Nicholas' reign, Jewish theological and intellectual initiative, along with government policies, would exploit and exacerbate this division between urban and rural Jews from the 1830's onward. Urban Jewish priorities in the late 1820's, however, rarely included spiritual or theological issues or did so as fleeting tangents. The fear of being rendered soulless would have been alien to them as would ardent adherence to Rabbinical authority which made aggressive military conscription among them unnecessary.

For most rural Jews, the Recruitment Ukase afforded them only one tangible exemption which, like all of the others, few could claim.⁴² Those engaged in agriculture could hope to avoid conscription if they could prove ownership of a farmstead and success in that endeavor for twenty-five years. Unlike university degree holders, these people actually existed, though to qualify a Jewish farmer would have had to have taken his parcel and government loan in 1802 when Alexander I made the initial offer as part of his Jewish improvement scheme. Such individuals were rare indeed but, in creating this exception, the government believed that it had honored an earlier pledge.

Legalities notwithstanding, "klapping" and soul-trafficking both served and frustrated Nicholas I's plans. Despite the expressed prohibition of presenting underaged males for the draft, implementation was left to local authorities and recruitment officers.⁴³ Jewish folklore and various reminiscences from this period decried the fate of the

⁴² Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26,29. Kahals and klappers collaborated frequently and Russian officials rarely turned away bribes.

kantonisti, Jewish boys between ages 8-17, many of whom had been kidnapped or taken by various administrative means and died on the march to distant recruitment centers or were subjected to forced baptisms.⁴⁴ The severity of the barracks regimen and the absolute severance from Jewish life, ostensibly for the whole of their 25-year enlistment period, were bleak enough prospects for these boys.⁴⁵ All the more onerous was that service in the cantonist regiments was not deducted from their actual military commitment as adults.⁴⁶ The repetition of such irregularities in recruitment was a direct incursion into the very fiber of Jewish communal life, and was exacerbated by maladministration and corruption which portended disaster in the long term.⁴⁷ Validation receipts given to communities for producing underaged recruits (younger than 12 years) became an accepted vice of the system, even though the treasury outlay for maintaining immature draftees undergoing training would strain Imperial coffers. In the event of war and with such recruits in the field, the Empire would have been at risk, and indeed it was by October 1855. Added to this was the inevitable galvanizing of Jewish communal opinion against the government which was limited in its ability to base its actions upon the pseudo-legitimacy of Torah and Talmudic grounds. To be sure, the Jews would never have the power to overrule much less overthrow the government, but if Judaism had to be

⁴⁴ Louis Greenberg, The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation vol 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), pp. 50-1. Floggings, starvation, and the pouring of cold water upon recalcitrants led some to commit suicide.

⁴⁵ As a small measure of the grief brought about by the cantonist system, songs such as "The Streets Flow with our Tears," "For Twenty Miles I Ran and Ran," and "O, Merciful Father" were sung throughout the villages. See The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe ed. David Roskies (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 119-121.

⁴⁶ Dubnow, History of the Jews of Russia and Poland, pp. 19, 55-70.

⁴⁷ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 23-4. Despite the Ukase's pledge of religious freedom, Jews were divested of their prayer books, fringed garments, and forbidden to speak Yiddish to one another. Like some cantonists, adults were tortured into converting to Russian Orthodoxy.

reconstructed along Imperial contours, an ingress, not a barrier, was needed between the two parties.

To the government, however, prosecution of the Ukase and its successors amounted to a surface operation where it was hoped that the Jews of Russia would be worn down by attrition. It mattered little to the government that its injunctions against bribery, falsifying recruitment ledgers, and indiscriminate kidnapping were not heeded as long as recruitment secured sufficient numbers. Moreover, Jewish religious fanaticism and separatism were seen as obstacles to assimilation. According to Governor-General Bibikov of Kiev, the interior of Jewish life had to be transformed, and it was in this endeavor that military service was seen as invaluable.⁴⁸

Jewish resistance to the Ukase was to be expected. Shortly after its implementation, there were reports of a Jewish mutiny in St. Petersburg. After emotions died down, this demonstration turned out to be merely a mass meeting of Hasidim praying to the Almighty for the law's revocation.⁴⁹ Efforts to evade or diminish draft obligations collectively on legal grounds had their precedents in Russian practice which the Ukase's authors sought to nullify.⁵⁰ Despite his life-long acquaintance with military affairs prior to 1827, the Tsar did not have the requisite experience to guide him in mastering the most crucial aspect of this particular fray, that of discerning the reaction of

⁴⁸ Dubnow., History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 47.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 22. See also Stanislawski, p. 31.

⁵⁰ The case of Michael Bercinsky, for example, was not an isolated one. By becoming well versed in Russian and Russian law, there was a hope that he would be spared "education" in the army. This tactic, however, had decided drawbacks from the perspective of Jewish traditions. While studying Talmudic law in his father's house, the maid had discovered the "horror" that he had also been acquiring fluency in Russian and Russian law, a sin which prompted his father to sit shiva (seven days of mourning) for his "dead" son. As bad as it may have seemed, Michael had mastered both "proscribed" subjects to the extent that, later on, he was able to save the shtetl synagogue from appropriation by the Russian Orthodox Church. Miriam Zunzer, Yesterday: A Memoir of a Russian Jewish Family (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 7-12.

the Jews from afar, anticipating their maneuvers, and devising effective countermeasures.⁵¹ Neither the Autocrat nor his ministers had any concrete or inside knowledge of the Jews, an ignorance which would mar their efforts.⁵² Nevertheless, they tried to imagine all conceivable scenarios. Article 48 of the Ukase, for instance, stipulated that a Jewish recruit could have another Jew go in his place upon producing a written testament with that individual's signature declaring that he volunteered for this service in good faith. Simple and straightforward to be sure, it also invited local corruption, since the kahals were made sole arbiters of good faith, competence, and requisite compensation for the families of such substitutes.⁵³ Absent from the statute were admonitions against coercion or forging a substitute's agreement to this 25-year commitment.⁵⁴ As long as the resultant acrimony fell to the kahal elders and not the government, the resulting divisions in the rural Jewish community only strengthened the latter's hand.⁵⁵ As proof of this, one need only consider subsequent articles in the Ukase. Christians were liable for making up legitimate shortfalls in Jewish communal quotas, a mandate which could only have intensified tensions between the two groups. Furthermore, if it had been discovered that a recruit injured himself intentionally and was rendered unfit for service, his family had to pay a fine sufficient to outfit a healthy replacement and the offending community was not issued a validation receipt for the

⁵¹ Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p.199. Nicholas was more at home with and had greater affinity for soldiers than civilians. This disposition did not change during the whole of his reign.

⁵² Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 38. Essentially, difficulties lay with an incompetent bureaucracy which was neither overly familiar nor particularly concerned with Jewish life.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 26. It was not simply the kahals. Unmarried boys of seventeen years of age could be offered as replacements for married members of their families. There was also no shortage of individuals who, for a price, would perjure themselves in presenting one of their so-called children as a conscript.

⁵⁴ In Petrovskoe, peasant communal elders, in collusion with estate owners, behaved similarly in ridding themselves of unwanted and troublesome individuals. Hoch, p. 152.

⁵⁵ By the early 1830's, the Council of State considered abolishing the kahals owing to their autonomous condition. See Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 49.

substitute.⁵⁶ Without a receipt, the government did not count that soul towards the community's quota which meant that two had to take the place of one. Hiding a recruitment-eligible dodger who was found out subsequently carried with it a fine for the abettors and again the soul was taken in the draft without receipt. Desperate to stave off penalties for default, anyone could be "klapped."⁵⁷ Woe betide the unfortunate traveler or peddler who did not possess the requisite papers or was divested of the same upon arrival in a straited village and whom the kahal elders judged to be a wandering vagrant.⁵⁸ Such individuals were deemed appropriate replacements under local legal provisions, a practice which would be legitimized tacitly from the mid-1830's onward when recruitment authorities granted communities receipts for them.

The Recruitment Ukase was unique in the sense that active Jewish military service had been imposed in Russia although it portended much more. Impressment, whether legal or illicit, was tantamount to a death sentence for many individuals and a number of smaller Jewish communities.⁵⁹ Local concerns and public protests in these communities, including attacks upon klappers, only provoked some of the more vocal Jewish intellectuals to ridicule their provincial coreligionists, and it would be years before even they perceived the larger consequences of the Ukase. Castigating Jews for hysterical behavior and backward thinking was not the government's exclusive province.

⁵⁶ Hoch., *Serfdom and Social Control*, p. 151. When this happened in Petrovskoe and in the surrounding communities in the Tambov, army doctors were bribed to accept maimed conscripts. After a time, those selected were placed in leg irons to prevent flight or self-mutilation.

⁵⁷ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 33. It astonished some Jews to realize that these klappers were not Russian Philistines but Jews who wore sidelocks and beards.

⁵⁸ A fictional illustration of this appears in Maxim Gorky's "Comrades" in *Russian Short Stories* (London: Senate Press, 1995), pp. 92-104.

⁵⁹ Mortality arising from non-combatant duties was quite significant but so too were natural disasters such as the cholera epidemic which swept through Minsk and the surrounding shtetlach in August, 1848 which claimed 893 Jewish lives. Given such precarious conditions, it would have been possible for a returning

Town and country Jews, Hasidim and Orthodox, were more divided than ever in the late 1820's.⁶⁰ Acrimony stemming from 1798 and before had only been submerged, and the Recruitment Ukase merely brought to the surface sentiments which had been boiling underneath. The shtetl Jews, "die shayne yidn," were isolated socially and intellectually from their disdainful cosmopolitan urban counterparts. Cut off at every turn, there was little promise of their continued separate existence, and the dissolution of the shtetl would be the first step in disposing of Jewish consciousness in Russia.

Military service was thought to bring the Jews under tighter control while giving them a sense that their imagined suffering would turn to benefit in the future. In perpetrating that design, the Tsar had the support of certain Jewish intellectuals. Abraham ber Gottlober (1811-1899), for instance, took up the Tsar's cause eagerly and decried the "ignorant emotionalism" of those Jews who wailed and assumed a funerary demeanor in the face of one of the greater *mitzvahs* (good deeds) which could have befallen a Jew in Russia.⁶¹ Military service was the prime means of expressing Jewish loyalty to the government, not to mention expanding educational and vocational opportunities to the benefit of Empire, community and self, Gottlober asserted. In light of all of these benefits, recruitment was hardly a threat to Jewish tradition and the death of all things Jewish. If anything was dying away, he contended vociferously, it was Jewish parochialism and isolation which had squelched all sparks of vitality and were the

Jewish soldier to find that his home and/or entire village was no more. *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, vol. 39, August, 1848, p. 565.

⁶⁰ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 54-5.

⁶¹ Lucy Dawidowitz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 117. Gottlober was born in Starokonstinov in Volhynia in 1811. In his youth, he studied under Joseph Perl, the leading maskil (scholar) of Galicia and an ardent proponent of modern Jewish education. From 1865 to 1873, Gottlober taught at the Zhitomer Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute which he

true evils of the Jewish condition in Russia. Expressing these views prior to the 1830-1831 Polish Revolt, Gottlober took comfort in the pages of his diary by pronouncing that when cooler heads prevailed, the Tsar's rationale would be vindicated and that the Jews would see for themselves the benefits of his policies. Such arguments fell on deaf ears, especially when the Polish Rising broke out.⁶² During that time, a number of Jews perceived the event as a harbinger of the coming of the Messiah.⁶³ Melancholia again spread to all echelons of the community with Nicholas' suppression of the Rising, which was followed by a series of ardent addenda to the 1827 Ukase.

The Jews were left with little room to maneuver in terms of the law, giving rise to more desperate devices. It was not unheard of for mothers accompanying their male offspring to induction centers to plead with the examining physicians to spare their sons by granting an exemption. Some recruits resorted to self-mutilation and starvation to acquire genuine and feigned medical conditions which would invalidate them for service, and though a fair number of these cases abounded, rarely did they meet with success. In Jewish accounts, the term *behola* (fright) was often used to describe the emotional state of the recruits and their friends and families which seemed to border on hysteria and led to bizarre behavior. For example, David Tobach, a young Ukrainian Jew, not only saw military service as his duty but as his right as an Imperial subject and was eager to do so. Standing in queue at the induction center, he rehearsed exactly how he would conduct himself in front of the doctors to ensure his acceptance which he feared he might forfeit.

saw as "the happiest period of my life." When the Rabbinical School closed in 1873, he continued his academic pursuits by publishing a Hebrew journal and wrote several books in German and Yiddish.

⁶² Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 19. A number of Polish and Ukrainian gentry participants were conscripted.

⁶³ *A Jewish Life Under the Tsars: The Autobiography of Chaim Aronson 1825-1888*, trans. Norman Marsden (Towtowa, NJ: Allenheld, Osmun & Co., 1983), p. 18.

When his turn came, he strode up to them and declared that he was fit and anxious to serve. The doctors were speechless. After a brief moment, one of them queried Tobach about his state of mind and asked whether he fallen on his head recently. In response, he reaffirmed his ability and desire to don a uniform which the authorities took as sufficient grounds to have him declared incompetent and issued to him a blue exemption card which, Tobach remarked later, dashed many of his hopes for happiness.⁶⁴

Happiness had not eluded David Tobach entirely, and though he did not intend to escape the draft, many did through a variety of official loopholes and a few unforeseen ones in the 1830's. Starting from a seemingly implacable position with few exemptions, the government was then moved to consider other occupations and circumstances. For instance, regular Jewish agricultural workers, in addition to farmstead holders, did not have to register. By 1834-35, bona fide heads of households were no longer liable, a situation which touched off another *behola* in the shtetlach of Belorussia and Ukraine which did not abate for several years. Matchmakers and rabbis alike, especially in the western borderlands, were besieged with requests for "good Jewish girls" who could be married off quickly. Writing at the peak of these events (1834), Yenta Bercinsky recounted that in her village, the rabbi and matchmaker were literally stumbling over one another. It was all that they could do to keep pace with demands for their services in the race to spare as many young men as possible from both klappers and recruiting agents. Yenta herself married a young Talmudist in haste who, though supposedly exempt since

⁶⁴ The Journeys of David Tobach as Retold by his Granddaughter Carole Malkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 136.

he was studying for the rabbinate, was released only after his father ransomed him from recruitment officers for 1000 silver rubles.⁶⁵

One group of Jews, however, the Crimean Karaites, were granted total immunity from recruitment and guaranteed their properties in 1827. Given Nicholas I's ardor and those of his ministers in reordering the Jews, as Pavel .D. Kiselev put it,⁶⁶ the Karaites appeared to be an anomaly. Using tactics similar to those of the Karaite delegation to Catherine II in 1795, Simcha Babovich and his compatriots convinced Tsar Nicholas and Victor Kochubei, President of the Council of State, Vasili Lanskoi, Minister of Internal Affairs, Dmitri Naryshkin, Governor of Crimea, and Count Mikhail Vorontsov, Governor of New Russia that, though Jews, they merited treatment apart from their Rabbinical coreligionists. First of all, they were of Sadduceean descent and therefore guiltless in promulgating the Pharisaic calumnies which resulted in Christ's crucifixion. Just as significant, Karaites were pre-Talmudic Jews who believed in a strict interpretation of Torah and discounted all works outside of it, a very important theological and political point, especially from the government's point of view.⁶⁷ Fate and a skillful treatment of their suit favored the delegation. Babovich was soon granted his request and he returned to the Crimea, but his departure meant only the beginning of official notice of Karaite issues which was often efficacious to this unique community of 500-700 families.

⁶⁵ Miriam Zunzer, Yesterday: A Memoir of a Russian Jewish Family (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 1-2.

⁶⁶ Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁷ Philip E. Miller, Karaite Separatism in Nineteenth Century Russia: Joseph Solomon Lutski's Epistle of Israel's Deliverance (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1993), pp. 5-6, 29-30. By presenting themselves as pre-Talmudic Jews rather than anti-Talmudists, they would not appear as "rebels" against Rabbinical authority. Being a distinct "sect" of Judaism was safer than being "heretics" which Russian authorities could interpret as "treasonous" behavior as had been the case during the early phases of the Hasidic challenge to Rabbinism in Vilna.

Rabbinical Jews' fortunes, however, continued to decline. Shortfalls in recruitment quotas by the mid-1830's meant abridgments in if not the complete abrogation of military exemption status and other legal securities. Heightened demands for more Jewish conscripts precipitated a commensurate rise in kahal avarice and pettiness which resulted in landing certain "protected" individuals in the custody of recruitment officers. Some so consigned wept, pleaded or attempted to purchase their way out while others, who may or may not have been subject to this trade, took revenge against those responsible in order to put an end to present and future extortion.⁶⁸ A year after their legalized release from the draft, married men, heads of households and agricultural workers found that their exemption status was becoming more and more tenuous.⁶⁹ Stated clearly within the statute On the Passage of Jews into Settlements and Villages, promulgated on the same day as the edict proscribing marriages to avoid recruitment, Jews were considered Russian citizens. However, those engaged in agricultural pursuits were free from paying taxes for ten years and, based on their tenure in this vocation, were accorded partial to full exemption from military service.⁷⁰ That being so, M. Kirlisher, a Jewish agricultural colonist writing under an assumed name to avoid censure, recounted a night in 1837 when his settlement was raided on the pretext of recovering an escaped draftee.⁷¹ From his account, an impressment detachment arrived late at night searching for the fugitive and when informed that no one had seen a stranger milling about or seeking shelter, violence broke out. The colonists, though unarmed, put

⁶⁸ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 33.

⁶⁹ Miller, Karaite Separatism in Nineteenth Century Russia, p. 28. Nicholas had declared on 13 April 1835 that unless a Jewish male had been married prior to this date, he was forbidden to marry prior to induction and that such an event would not prevent him from being taken into the draft.

⁷⁰ PSZ (II): Edict 8054, 13 April 1835, On the Passing Away of Jews into Settlements and Villages.

⁷¹ M. Kirlisher, "Kto vinovat?" *Evreiskaia Biblioteka*, vol. 4. (St. Petersburg, 1873), p. 111.

up such a resistance that the detachment had to move on and settle the matter in the morning. Conspicuous by its absence during the melee but represented fully at dawn, the local constabulary was now ready to dispense justice, a scenario which astounded Kirlisher. Under the transparent guise of officious zeal in examining the evidence, such as it was, the police prefect concluded that the Jews had instigated the row and arrested a number of them on the spot. Protest would have been useless but garnish money paid to the prefect procured the release of the suspects and the affair ended. Taking stock of the episode, Kirlisher claimed that this was a “simple” matter and certainly not an isolated one but, in another incident with which he was acquainted, paying off the appropriate officials would have been futile.

About this same time, a young Jewish farm worker was arrested and charged with possessing insufficient documentation relating to his status as a result of a clerical error. Distraught and desperate, his mother and various Jewish officials appealed to the local administration to free the young man and convinced them that they could vouch for his employment. He was to be released within two days but when the time came, he was transported to another colony five hundred versts away. No reason was given for this action. When his mother sought justice, she was told to take up the matter in the district courts but, in the same breath, the clerk advising her wondered what she hoped to gain. It was true that she had the right to seek redress, but the fortunes of a Jewess in a Russian court were not promising. Acknowledging this truism and resigned to circumstance, there was little else she could do but to pack up her household and remaining children and travel to the new settlement.⁷²

⁷² Ibid., p. 95, 99.

Opportunism and corruption among Russian and Jewish officials inspired some with a sense of hopelessness while others, frustrated to the limits of endurance, sought reprisal. In the village (shtetl) of Novoushitsa on 14 November 1836, two fishermen from Vohkovtsi in Podolsk province pulled two corpses from a pond. Both were in stages of advanced decomposition yet they were identified later as those of Isaac Oxman and Shlemko Schwartzman, itinerant Jewish tradesmen who had acted as recruitment informants for the local kahal elders and provincial authorities.⁷³ In the course of the ensuing investigation which resulted in the arrest of 82 Jewish suspects in the period 1836-40, it was discovered that these men were part of a sophisticated apparatus of professional informants. In existence for some time, these men accommodated both the parochial needs of the Jewish elders and the government's claim to Jewish recruits, ostensibly without the latter's knowledge. What was most important to the investigation, which included interrogation under torture, was how Oxman and Schwartzman were exposed since their abettors included the Novoushitsa kahal. Eventually it was learned that the drama unfolded when Volya Gutterman, one of the killers, discovered names withdrawn from a "corrected" census lists so that these favored individuals could evade recruitment. Within a short time, Oxman, Schwartzman and their entire operation, not to mention the local politics behind it, became known to him. Since his targets moved about as they did without a definite schedule, assassinating them posed some difficulties. There was also the danger that such a plan would leak out and reach the intended victims. Oxman had admitted already to regional and kahal officials that he was known among the Jews. That they were his enemies was beyond doubt, and he implored the Novoushitsa

⁷³ Vadim Altskan, "Novye archivnye materialy o novoushitskom dele 1836-1840," [Novaya evreiskaia](#)

kahal incessantly to grant him protection on the roads.⁷⁴ His request was denied on the grounds that an armed bodyguard accompanying an ostensibly benign itinerant tradesman would have caused alarm and raised suspicions which could lay bare their actual business. Furthermore, they opined, Oxman's fears were exaggerated. On the morning of 30 January 1836, however, the assassins were given their opportunity. At Novoushitsa's post house, Gutterman posed as a trader in desperate need of a horse to go to Kamenets. Much to Oxman's surprise (but not to Gutterman's), he was heading in the same direction and thought that this companion would serve as adequate protection for Schwartzman and himself from assault. What transpired along the way will never be known for certain. At some point, Schwartzman changed route and headed in the direction of Sokulets while Oxman maintained his sojourn to Kamenets. Nonplused by this, Gutterman stayed with his man and was rewarded when the latter decided to rest before continuing. As he lay by a roadside tree, Gutterman smothered Oxman.

The resolution of one problem begat another. Gutterman knew that Schwartzman could identify him if the homicide came to light and that he, too, had to be disposed of discretely. Ensuring that Schwartzman stayed in Sokulets (with the help of fellow conspirators), Gutterman, posing as Oxman, then sent a letter to him three days later requesting that he come to Novoushitsa to discuss commercial affairs with the merchants of Vilshten. For two days, Schwartzman stayed in Novoushitsa not knowing or even suspecting what had become of his partner. On the third, he was invited to a prayer minyan in the bet hamidrash which he, by Jewish custom, was obliged to attend. During prayers all was normal but upon conclusion, an argument on some obscure matter arose

biblioteka istoricheskie sudbii evreiev v rossii I USSR: Nachalo Dialoga (Moscow, 1992), p. 71.

and Schwartzman was knocked to the ground. As he attempted to rise, one of Gutterman's accomplices came from behind and strangled him.⁷⁵ After waiting 24 hours, the conspirators dismembered the body and placed it in a tar barrel in the local bath house until it could be dumped into a nearby pond.

A Jew who killed a Russian did not have to wonder about his punishment under Imperial law, but what was the fate of a Jew who killed a coreligionist?⁷⁶ After four years of official investigation, some of the perpetrators were sent to Siberia for hard labor including Novoushitsa's rabbi, Michael Averbuch. Those who had knowledge of or advocated the killings were fined in accordance with their complicity but, in the main, the matter was resolved without draconian punishments.⁷⁷ What was unique was that Oxman's daughters were granted an indemnity of 1200 rubles and his sons, as well as those of his partner, were freed from all financial duties and obligations. More ominous was the questionable evidence submitted that the Hasidim were behind these murders. This point will be elaborated upon later but it should be noted that in the late 1830's, Jews who wished to maintain tradition and those who desired substantial reform both found Hasidism to be a convenient scapegoat for deflecting government attention from and meddling in their respective affairs.

From these events, a number of issues within the Russian Jewish community and its relations with the government become clear. Both married men and agricultural workers had been granted vague assurances and exemptions from recruitment. By the

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 73-5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁶ In Zamot, a village the size of Novoushitsa, if a Jew assaulted a Russian and drew blood, he was either whipped or placed in the stocks and his family sent to jail until the stipulated fine was paid. If the man was poor, the community paid the fine. Aronson, A Jewish Life under the Tsars, pp. 30-31.

end of the 1830's, however, not only had the vagaries proven chimeral but so too the absolutes in light of the Tsar's will. This uncertainty lent credence to the Marquis de Custine's observation that Russia's "army of officialdom," with each member trying to outdo the other in executing unnecessary examinations and delays, evidenced the image of an impotent man struggling for action.⁷⁸ The same could be said for the Empire's dealings with its Jews, where Jewish policies were sometimes implemented by buying off officials (i.e. paying klappers a capitation fee for each recruit they could produce). Regardless of particulars, Jewish policies dependent upon local enforcement were largely ineffective. In large part, this was a consequence of how the government viewed the Jews. To the Tsar, a Jew was valued as a citizen insofar as it was convenient, and that he was taxable, recruitable, exploitable, and employable, and invested with limited "rights" which afforded negligible benefits.⁷⁹ Despite the onerous impositions placed upon them, the destruction of the Jews outright was an impossibility and could have marred Imperial fortunes if it had been brought off even partially. Nicholas never entertained such a notion.⁸⁰ On the other hand, refashioning the Jews of Russia into benign subjects, useful yet pliant and devoid of political aspirations, was proving to be more of a challenge than the government had initially surmised. Be that as it may, the officials in charge of the matter were still confident that progress was being made, though their measure of that

⁷⁷ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 129. Kahal officials could usually evade punishment by paying off Russian officials.

⁷⁸ Marquis de Custine, *Letters From Russia* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 28-32.

⁷⁹ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 39. In July 1839, Jews were permitted to hold certain offices in city councils though Vilna's was still denied them.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35. Stanislawski maintains that Nicholas was committed to conscripting the Jews and then converting them. Even though the Tsar's hopes were heightened by increased conversion rates in the military during his last ten years, to affect the complete waning away of a profitable component of Russian society does not accord with Nicholas's rigid pragmatism.

progress appeared to be at cross purposes.⁸¹ Jewishness, in all of its manifestations, possessed a vitality which the government understood little. Perhaps sensing this blindness, though never admitting to it, the Tsar and his ministers resorted to making Jewishness and Judaism sensitive and painful issues through incessant amplification and attention. This psychological war of attrition, it was hoped, would encourage Jews to distance themselves from those institutions which engendered and promoted their distinctiveness and, in time, render them secular Jews, an ethnic group with little or no reference to active Judaism.

If the government desired to see a significant Jewish transformation in the immediate offing, it had only itself to blame for delays. On 2 April 1833, Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of National Enlightenment and a principal agent of Jewish reform, proclaimed the birth of Official Nationality and its subsequent implementation in all facets of Russian life.⁸² Resting upon the three pillars of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality, the only recognizable “citizens” and institutions in the Tsar’s domain would be those who embodied these qualities. No mention was made of the Jews on this occasion, but there was no question as to their status for the duration of Nicholas’ reign.

The Changing World of the Shtetl

The events of Novoushitsa revealed an undercurrent in Russian Jewish development which was gaining momentum in the mid to late 1830’s. Shtetl Jews were

⁸¹ The boundaries of the Pale of Settlement, for instance, were reconfirmed in 1835 despite Nicholas’s intention to expand Jewish settlement in Russia by means of establishing agricultural colonies. Elaboration upon this scheme will be forthcoming.

not educated in the sense that they received formal, broad-based education, though they, like their urban and ostensibly cosmopolitan counterparts, were developing a new awareness of their Jewishness. Conceded, the ignition point came from outside the community as a direct result of official policy and extracommunal political initiatives, but the actual thrust came from Jewish folk and theological traditions. Within two decades, this parallel development would surmount shtetlach confines and become a part of the larger transformation of Russian Jewry.

Neither passive nor helpless, shtetl Jews had a variety of methods for discovering informants, their allies, and the consequences of their existence within the Russian Jewish community. Originally, if a Jew wanted to inform the community about the calumnies of its leaders, he/she, by custom, could affect a *ivku ha-kri'ah*, disruption of the Shabbat service.⁸³ The usual effect of this action was the convention of an ad hoc examination of the supposed malefactors and determination of their guilt but, from 1827 onward, this practice had been invoked with such frequency as to render it impotent. Circumstance now compelled Jews to take an active role in their own defense and preservation. Perceived social and political weakness had merely emboldened government officials to dishonor their guarantees of Jewish integrity and encouraged Jewish opportunists to exploit their coreligionists for monetary gain. Extending as far back as the early years of the Inquisition, Rabbinical sources deemed such individuals *perushim*, cut off from the Community of Israel, and deserving of physical death commensurate with their spiritual one. More than mere vigilantism, there were distinct Biblical injunctions which would have been known to shtetl Jews but not to Russian officials investigating the murder of

⁸² Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia 1825-1855, pp.73-4.

informants.⁸⁴ For instance, Psalm 101:5: “Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret I shall destroy.” was interpreted as a *tsavot* (i.e. command) to punish these individuals capitally, as well as Proverbs 30:10: “Slander is not a servant to his master.” Given these citations, native logic concluded that these *minim* (heretics who had renounced Judaism in secret while professing it openly), and *meserim* (those who abjured their coreligionists), were legitimate targets since they were no longer genuine Jews.⁸⁵

Novoushitsa and other Jewish communities which had had similar experiences were too isolated to garner widespread attention or interest among the Jews of Russia. Even so, the very records attesting to their Jewish resistance to adverse political and quasi-legal oppression testified to their fortitude and discredited the alleged Paschal Lamb image. Haskalah, which was just coming into its prime in the 1830’s, took no notice of these Jews and literally forgot them, imbued with the long-standing Rabbinical prejudice that they were beyond hope in terms of enlightenment and intellectual intercourse.⁸⁶ Despite this shunning, “die sheyne yidn,” were gradually being drawn into the larger spheres of Russian Jewish society. and some had actually graduated to the ranks of Haskalah by the last decade of Nicholas’ reign. Beginning in the mid to late 1830’s, the eventual confluence of “town and country,” though tortuous, was coming to pass and would eventually chart a definite course in Russian Jewish evolution.

⁸³ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 127-8.

⁸⁴ According to Altskan, this act of “self-judgement” was the principle concern of the investigating officials. Altskan, “Novye arkhivnye materialny o novoushitskom dele, 1836-1840,” pp. 76-77.

⁸⁵ Philip Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 344-5, 353-54. One other consideration to bear in mind is that “meserim” bears a phonemic closeness with the German and Yiddish “messer” (knife), taken as a reference to those who cut themselves off from the community and how some of them eventually met their deaths as a consequence of their actions.

⁸⁶ Zunzer, *Yesterday*, p. 97.

Meanwhile, through natural increase, the Pale of Jewish Settlement was just starting to bulge in terms of its ratio of population to resources.⁸⁷ Underemployment by mid-decade was on the rise, and though Nicholas I and his ministers were aware of the problem, they were at a loss for a solution. The Pale's boundaries were reconfirmed in 1835 and yet the Tsar wanted Jewish farmers to populate Siberia and make the region and themselves productive. For two years, Jewish farmers were encouraged with financial enticements to make the trek and establish themselves in the eastern wilderness, but Count Bludov, Minister of Internal Affairs, and other high government officials were ill at ease about the project. Peasant reaction to Jewish settlement was unpredictable, and Bludov assumed the worst case scenario.⁸⁸ To his mind and those of his allies, it made no sense to "mend the fence" only to make an aperture in it. After two years of sustained pressure, Nicholas finally recalled these colonists and halted the migration of their would-be followers.⁸⁹ From this episode, it was plain that the Pale, regardless of its legal reconfirmation, was very fluid, and the boundaries which defined it could not prevent Jewish immigration into the Russian interior. This fluidity was made all the more evident as Nicholas continued to define and develop his Jewish policies. For instance, with the establishment of modern Jewish schools in some of the Empire's more important commercial cities, Jewish residency restrictions were relaxed, and subsequent policies and circumstances would render the Pale little more than a Jewish region rather than a confined area of settlement.⁹⁰ In any event, what has to be understood is that these odd

⁸⁷ Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, pp. 70-1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸⁹ PSZ (II): Edict 10242, 15 May 1837, Measures Against Settling Jews in Siberia and for the Reduction of their Numbers Already There.

⁹⁰ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 66.

affairs in 1837 would come to full fruition in the 1840's and '50's and prove consequential well beyond Nicholas' reign.

Frustration but not Futility: Obstacles to the Expression of the Jewish Intellectual Voice

He may very well have been uneasy about assuming the throne in 1825 but, once the Imperial crown settled on his brow, Nicholas I imagined himself an expert in every field. Regarding education, he believed that people should only be taught those subjects and to the degree which would allow them to fulfill the obligations of their stations.⁹¹ As to whether this was a hard and fast position depended upon whether the object of consideration happened to be Russians or Jews. Accounting for the course of Jewish instruction during his tenure, it was peculiar that the Jews, regarded as potentially inimical to society, were placed in a position of intellectual privilege which was denied tens of millions of seemingly benign Russians.⁹² A principal reason for this paradox could be found in Pavel Kiselev's unoriginal and increasingly time-worn assertion that the Jews lived in a state of vagrancy and that Talmud was a retarding influence.⁹³ Modern and diverse subjects, it was believed, was the panacea for Jewish ills, and yet the pursuit of this design only served to make the government more uneasy. The 1830's and '40's saw a number of proposals for Jewish education and the establishment of government-sponsored Jewish educational institutions, but there were instances when the initiative came from the Jews themselves rather than those of government ministers. Even

⁹¹ Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855, p. 95.

⁹² Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 35.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

though these progressive Jewish intellectuals pledged their talents in accord with official sympathies, autochthonic intellectual conceptualization carried with it a sense of autonomy which neither Nicholas nor his ministers could condone comfortably.

Where this discomfort was most keenly felt was in the field of Jewish publication. In 1834, a group of Vilna literary figures, among whom were Ben Iakov, M.A. Ginsburg, A. Levinsohn, and Kh. Katzenelenburg, petitioned the government for permission to establish a journal, *Minkhat Bikurim* (Afternoon Portions).⁹⁴ Demonstrating the purity of their intentions, the proposed submitted to the Vilna Censor's Office included a detailed layout of their publication which was to include a section for poetry, open letters, literary criticism, reviews, etc. Perhaps their timing was not the best since this was the year when the government was revising its recruitment regulations. Jewish resistance was to be expected and did materialize but, more so than any other factor, the request that this journal be printed in part in Hebrew condemned it.⁹⁵

It was obvious that most Russian officials could not read Hebrew, did not desire to learn, and feared the potential for subversive expression which would inevitably come about at the expense of their linguistic ignorance. That aside, during Nicholas' reign, there was a move to employ Jewish converts to Christianity as censors for Jewish publications which opened up a peculiar aspect in Jewish identity formation. For the would-be editors of *Minkhat Bikurim*, the man responsible for denying them permission was Wolf Isaiahvich Tugengold whose tenure in office began in 1827 and ended in

⁹⁴ Israel Zinberg, *Istoriia evreiskoi pečati v Rossii v sviazi s obshchestvennymi techeniiami* (Petrograd, 1915), pp. 16-17.

⁹⁵ Dmitry Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pečat v Rossii, 1797-1919*, pp. 113, 135.

1864.⁹⁶ Like Jacob Brafmann, Tugengold was a Jewish convert to Lutheranism with a knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew whose activities impeded Jewish intellectual advancement periodically but not permanently. As far back as the early years of Alexander I's reign, both Jewish-Christians and Jews were employed as censors and then fell under official suspicion. By the end of the 1820's, it was decided that of the two groups, those who still clung to Judaism were not as trustworthy as those who had converted and, as of 1828, non-Christian Jews were admitted to government service in drastically-reduced numbers.⁹⁷ Furthermore, what had made Tugengold so attractive to the government was that he had been one of the pioneers of the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement in Galicia, was fluent in several languages, and his Lutheran creed. All of these qualities combined with a degree from the University of Breslau made his association with German culture complete and in accord with the educational notions of the Tsar and his Minister for National Enlightenment, Sergei Uvarov. Like Admiral Alexander Shishkov, Uvarov's predecessor (1825-28), Tugengold allowed very little to be disseminated in the Empire and, in November 1836, the Jews of Russia were dealt a profound blow when it was declared that all Jewish presses were banned. They were not alone because, in that year and shortly thereafter, press suppression affected the Russian intelligentsia and, like their Jewish counterparts, served to alienate them from the government.⁹⁸ Oddly enough, this crackdown only pertained to native Jewish presses and publications but not to those published abroad such as *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*. Despite some instances of official relaxation, the 1830's and '40's saw some

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

of the most stringent censorship ever encountered in the Empire prompting some, such as intellectual Boris Chicherin to wonder what he and his fellow luminaries were to do if they were denied access to open air.⁹⁹

Haskalah and the Russian Jewish Schools

Nicholas' government may have been oppressive but not completely suffocating. Despite shouldering more disadvantages than their fellow Russians, Jews were still able to rise to the occasion and determine the course of events in some instances. The Odessa Jewish School, which was coming into full fruition in the 1830's, had actually been a product of Russian Jewish initiative under Count Vorontsev's sponsorship in 1822. Mendel Lefin, an early *maskil* (scholar) of the Mendelssohnian School (Haskalah), brought the movement to Ukraine and Russia, and it was through his auspices and those of his colleagues and successors that the authorities were supplied with the requisite intellectual resources for establishing such an institution.¹⁰⁰ From its humble origins the Odessa School had, by 1837, one of the more modern curricula in the Empire for which it had received the Tsar's praise. So impressed had he been with the philosophy behind this new form of education that Nicholas had entertained hopes that more Jewish institutions of its kind would be established in the future.¹⁰¹ Haskalah had been behind the Odessa School and had, with episodic success, tried to found additional "odessa schools" in

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 125., Zilliacus, The Russian Revolutionary Movement, pp. 30-1. See also Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform, p. 53.

⁹⁹ W. Bruce Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform, p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ L.M. Bramson, "K istorii nachal'nago obrazovaniia evreev v rossii" in Sbornik v Polzu Nachalnikh Evreiskh Shkol (1895; microfiche, New York: Norman Ross Publishing), p. 290.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 295.

Uman and other communities throughout Russia and Ukraine in the late 1820's and early 1830's. Resistance among some Jewish groups was unavoidable but the Tsar reasoned, as did Isaac Ber Levinsohn (1788-1860), that Haskalah's "spark" in Odessa would, in time, remove all barriers to educational reforms.¹⁰² Chief among their attractions, these schools drew foreign Jewish teachers who, given their assimilated ways, were thought capable of hastening Jewish modernity. Riga and Vilna were given patents for such schools in 1839 which helped attract, along with Sergei Uvarov's invitation, Dr. Maxwell Lilienthal.

Consequently, during the period 1837-1843, the success of the Nicholas Plan appeared to be assured. Once more, the Karaites surfaced and so too did the Tsar's partially-formed ideas for their use in undermining the Rabbinate. Having received a Karaite petition to establish a consistory in Tver, the Tsar granted it and permitted them to settle within the Empire's Russian heartland.¹⁰³ Again, Karaite denial of Talmud's validity provided benefits denied Rabbinical Jews. When Russian ecclesiastical and secular authorities attacked Judaism from a religious perspective, Talmud was the favored target since it was safer to do so than Torah with its proximity to the Old Testament. Karaite disregard for it was perceived as an example of modern Jewish thinking to be held up to the Rabbinate and its traditionalist supporters. Augmenting this disposition was the example of Bezel Stern, a Rabbinical Jew from Galicia who was appointed director of the Odessa School and who, in 1831, devised the curriculum which removed Talmud instruction from the plan of study. Claiming that instruction in Talmud

¹⁰² Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 57. Odessa became the second most important center for Russian Haskalah after Vilna.

¹⁰³ PSZ (II): Edict 9991, 3 March 1837, Approval for the Formation of the Tver Karaite Consistory.

was anachronistic and futile in preparing Jewish youths for the challenges of the modern world, he assigned works by E.B. Levinsohn, S. Redgio and others whose expository works placed Jewish life and culture within a broader context which allowed for critical analysis and commentary.¹⁰⁴ These arguments would resurface in the 1840's among the adherents of Russian Haskalah who called themselves "maskilim," the same title Karaites gave themselves going back as far as their Babylonian origins.¹⁰⁵

Such a confusion of names by itself could serve the government's cause though careful exploitation was imperative. In the secular sphere, granting Karaite Jews privileges and exemptions for which Rabbinical Jews dared not hope might serve as an enticement for some to turn coat and join them. It was a reasonable assumption given the distance imposed by tradition between "teachers" (Rabbinical intelligentsia) and "students." The latter existed only to support the former, giving it spiritual and some political clout, though the debt was never acknowledged. Damaging the Rabbinical case further was that much of its authority originated during the Babylonian Captivity (587-514 B.C. E.) and was ensconced in the Babylonian Talmud. Few Jews, rural or urban, had ever seen so much as one volume of this work which supposedly justified the Rabbinate's overall authority over them, peppered with occasional high-handed treatment. Over the next three decades, pointed questions over Rabbinical legitimacy would arise and press the Orthodox *mitnagdim* (opponents of Haskalah) for verification. The stage was set for the Jews of Russia to engage in a battle between the so-called Jewish ancients and cosmopolitans. While not possessing a detailed knowledge of Jewish theological affairs, the Tsar and those ministers concerned with the Jews could

¹⁰⁴ L.M. Bramson, "K istorii nachal'nago obrazovaniia evreev v rossii," p. 299.

imagine it well enough to convince alienated modernists of the Tsar's veracity in condemning the Talmud as a false doctrine.¹⁰⁶

The Karaite consistory was, in theory, a vehicle for manipulation far superior to the one afforded in the aftermath of the Hasidism-Rabbinism debate. By favoring this Jewish sect which had its own rabbinate, synagogues, almshouses, and traditions, the government hoped to offer the Rabbinate competition with an eye towards dividing the Jewish community. Government expectations in this regard, however, were not realized. Russian authorities had no idea that concord between Rabbinical and Karaite Jews had been achieved. Past disputes between the two had been adamant but now both had reached a workable peace despite their doctrinal differences, and Karaites always referred to Rabbinical Orthodox Jews as "our brothers." Whether he realized that late in his reign or not, Nicholas' fascination with the Karaites went beyond theological issues. Episodically, the Tsar would visit Yevpatoria, the city designated by his hand as the Karaite capital, and would discover Rabbinical Jews living alongside Karaites, speaking similar Tatar dialects and sharing common commercial interests.¹⁰⁷ So adept were they in the latter endeavor that in the early 1850's, Nicholas allowed the Karaites to expand their settlement and trading concerns north of the Black Sea.

Russia's non-Karaite Jewish majority were in unenviable circumstances, though not altogether dire. Censorship notwithstanding, the Jews of Russia did enjoy a degree of free expression in the pages of Ludwig von Phillipson's *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*. Published in Leipzig, this general newsletter of the Jews had

¹⁰⁵ Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, p. 547.

¹⁰⁶ Pavel Kiselev claimed that this had already been accomplished. See Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 33.

correspondents in Kiev, Minsk, Vilna, St. Petersburg, Odessa, and elsewhere throughout the Empire which kept the Jewish world and world at large apprised of events there. It is curious that the first mention of Tsar Nicholas I was of his approval for a German translation of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmudim and, more amazingly, his writing the dedications to these works.¹⁰⁸ For many Jews within and outside the Empire this was welcome albeit strange news, but not for Isaac Levinsohn who saw this as an historic moment.

In 1828, Levinsohn had written *Te'uda be Yisrael* (Desire for Israel), in which he emphasized the study of foreign languages and German in particular since it was the language of philosophy and critical analysis. Previously, Maimonides and Elijah ben Solomon had each advocated such instruction, eschewing the old Rabbinic superstition that for every word of a foreign language a Jew learned, he or she lost one Hebrew word.¹⁰⁹ In the proposed Riga School, the edict mandating its construction also determined that instruction would include an amalgam of home economy, an issue Levinsohn had advocated since the early 1830's, in addition to Russian, German, Hebrew, arithmetic, and geography which would have been in line with Bezel Stern's Odessa curriculum.¹¹⁰ New taxes on kosher meat were mandated in Riga to cover construction and teachers' salaries. In this school and subsequent Jewish institutes, foreign teachers with appropriate credentials were hired and could teach without censure, a liberality which contradicted the Tsar's 1828 stance on Russian education which was to

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Fuki, *Karaimi: Sinovia i Docherii Rossii, Raskazi i Ocherki* (Moscow: Interprint, 1995), pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, no. 1 (29 March 1837), p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Dawidowitz, *The Golden Tradition*, pp. 116-17.

¹¹⁰ PSZ (II): Edict 12321, 10 May 1839, Concerning Permission to Bring to Riga a Jewish Community School with the Intention of Establishing Special Tax for its Maintenance.

be practical and serviceable to the State.¹¹¹ The Jews constituted a special case since their modern education was just beginning. Limitations would be imposed later.

Submitted to the Imperial Senate on 10 May 1839, a request concerning the establishment of a Jewish preparatory school in Riga of such a caliber that its students could take university entrance examinations and hopefully continue their education was duly granted.¹¹² Municipal residence posed an obstacle. Under the 1835 Jewish Settlement Ukase, Jews were forbidden from residing or even being present in port cities, especially Riga, until their ships were set to sail for overseas markets.¹¹³ Count Bludov, and A. K. Benkendorf, Chief of the Third Department, fearing that the Tsar was being too liberal in allowing Jews more mobility than had heretofore been accorded them, had urged Nicholas to withdraw or place limits upon his concessions.¹¹⁴ Nicholas maintained his position. At the behest of Sergei Uvarov, the Riga School was to be divided into two classes, one primary and the other advanced, with the latter class being taught German for the expressed purpose of reading Moses Mendelssohn's works. German itself had been a required language of Jewish instruction since 1804 for the purposes of studying science and its allied fields, but to qualify it in this manner was unusual.¹¹⁵

One other issue regarding Jewish education was brought to the government's attention in 1839. Isaac Ber Levinsohn, who enjoyed a modicum of respect from the government and from Jewish intellectuals, advocated schools which would train both

¹¹¹ David Saunders, Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, (London: Longman Press, 1992), p. 117.

¹¹² PSZ (II): Report 12321, 10 May 1839, Concerning Permission Given to Establish a Jewish Community School in Riga with the Intention of instituting a Special Tax for its Maintenance.

¹¹³ PSZ (II): Edict 8052, 13 April 1835, Concerning the End of the Suspension of Jews Settling in Villages and Settlements

¹¹⁴ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 39.

Jewish girls and boys.¹¹⁶ A little over two decades later, Judah Leib Gordon would also advocate the education of girls, but it should be understood that social equity was not the goal of this otherwise unprecedented expression of intellectual democracy. Nevertheless, in Levinsohn's scheme, both needed instruction in religious and general subjects and, above all else, vocational training. The Jewish community was quite diverse; everyone's talents were different, and it was foolish to foster the belief that every child was a potential rabbi, doctor, philosopher, and teacher.¹¹⁷ As for Hebrew, it was enough to know its rudiments in order to understand the law.¹¹⁸

This certainly accorded with Sergei Uvarov's conception of creating an educated Europeanized Jewry. Meeting with the leaders of the Vilna maskilim, Nisan Rosenthal, Hirsh Zvi Katzenellenbogen, and Israel Gordon, the Minister of National Enlightenment wanted to establish a new educational program for Russia's Jews.¹¹⁹ Interested in their views and providing his own, he saw the possibilities for accommodation between the Russian Jewish intelligentsia and the government, actually going so far as to declare that a raised finger on their part would result in the extension of the Russian hand towards them. Cheered by this goodwill offer, the maskilim were still not sure of this man and his motives. At times, he could be magnanimous and demanding in other circumstances. While he was no scholar or original thinker, it was still unresolved in some Jewish minds

¹¹⁵ German had long been a required language in Russian higher education. See Marc Raeff, Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), p. 140.

¹¹⁶ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ Zinberg, Istoriia evreiskoi pechati v Rossii, pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁸ After the revolutions of 1848, obtaining permission for almost all publications in Hebrew was impossible. See Zinberg, Istoriia evreiskoi pechati v Rossii, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 63.

whether Uvarov was devious or merely playing the role of a typical Russian functionary.¹²⁰

Regarding the censorship of Jewish books, there was little confusion as to its influence upon Jewish society. At first light, however, it appeared to be a very peculiar policy. That Nicholas was committed to ridding the Jews of their religious fanaticism was well attested.¹²¹ Fast upon this claim was that of Count A.G. Stroganov's (Minister of Internal Affairs) that every Jewish book, almost without exclusion, was imbued with Talmud and, therefore hostile to both Christianity and society.¹²² Where the peculiarities arose was in what Sergei Uvarov and the Tsar believed to be safe foreign Jewish literature. Almost without exception, these two men were enamored of the German Jewish intellectual tradition as presented by Haskalah. Mandatory German-language instruction in the Riga School stemmed from their selective appreciation of Moses Mendelssohn's German writings and those of his immediate followers who abandoned Judaism, became German and/or converted to Christianity.¹²³ What both Uvarov and Nicholas failed to recognize or eschewed as an inconvenience was that Mendelssohn's work and those of the Mendelssohnians differed dramatically in disposition and motives. The father of Haskalah wrote in Hebrew and later used that language as a didactic tool for Jews to learn German, the principle goal of his translation of the *Pentateuch* (the five Mosaic books) with commentaries in that language. Rationalism rooted in classical logic, to his mind, would free both Jews and Judaism from superstition and parochialism which had denied them free exchange with educated Europeans and allow them to succeed in

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 59, 61, 63.

¹²¹ Zinberg, *Istoriia evreiskoi pečati v Rossii*, p. 19.

¹²² Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pečat v Rossii*, p. 182.

the larger European societies. Nonetheless, Mendelssohn stated emphatically that Jewish cultural distinctiveness must and could be maintained within a modern context and under no circumstance was Judaism to be sacrificed upon the altar of assimilation.¹²⁴

Experience had taught Mendelssohn that moderation would allow Judaism, with all of its richness, to remain intact in a Christian-dominated society, but that lesson was lost on a number of his followers. As had befallen Hasidism after the Baal Shem Tov's passing, Haskalah (a.k.a. the Mendelssohnian movement) was cast adrift from its original moorings. Many maskilim who had been faithful to their teacher's tenets then assumed an unusual dual demeanor in their writings. Hebrew, in late eighteenth-century Germany, was still considered the language of intellectual discourse and Haskalah works tended to express moderate to conservative principles, sentiments which were lost when they wrote in German. Whether that language served as a release valve for pent-up frustrations or signaled an evolutionary stage in Judaism's development is debatable. What is beyond dispute, however, was that German granted its employers boundless liberty in expressing anti-traditional views as diverse as discounting the practice of swinging a dead chicken above one's head for the expiation of sins to a complete negation of the Talmud. Even God fell under their scrutiny and was often presented in deistic or animistic terms.¹²⁵ Stripping Judaism to the bones and finding no substance, some maskilim became atheists while others converted to either Catholicism or Lutheranism, claiming that though these faiths suffered from irrationality as well, the joy of the Church was preferable to the gloom of the synagogue. Less than fifty years after his passing, philosophical amnesia

¹²³ Zinberg, *Istoriia evreiskoi pechati v Rossii*, pp. 20-22.

¹²⁴ Dawidowitz, *The Golden Tradition*, p. 16.

¹²⁵ *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 784.

had all but eradicated the original precepts of Mendelssohn's school. Even Mendelssohn's 1769 rejection of Johann Caspar Lavater's proposal that he convert was forgotten.¹²⁶

Mendelssohn's correspondence with Lavater was entirely in German, though no Jewish student in Russia was ever made privy to it. Students in Riga, Zhitomir, Vilna, Odessa and elsewhere in the Empire where the German model had been adopted were exposed to carefully-crafted compendia which supported the government's designs. What could not be avoided was that German proficiency also permitted students and instructors alike in the government Jewish schools to study the latest scholarship in history, geography, philosophy and the sciences, all quite useful for modern life. Care, however, was taken not carry Germanophilia to illogical extremes.¹²⁷

Though one of the more contentious topics of Jewish journals three decades later, Jewish languages, and Hebrew in particular, was a problem which refused to leave. Banning publications in the language was one matter, but how was the government to deal with certain Jewish groups for which there was no other medium of communication? The Crimean Karaites appeared to be just such a community. Five years after granting them their consistory, the government wanted assurances of their loyalty to the state and comprehension of their responsibilities. Both of these matters were usually met with the swearing of a loyalty oath in Russian. Given their relative isolation from Russian society and even their Russian-speaking coreligionists, it was necessary to present them with an

¹²⁶ Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), p. 91.

¹²⁷ For some of the Russian intelligentsia, Germanophilia had already taken firm root and Nicholas knew it. The Arzamas Circle, for example, was enamored of German romanticism and claimed Sergi Uvarov among its "alumni," Sergei Uvarov. See Mark Aronson and Sergei Reiser, *Literaturnie Kruzhki i Saloni* (Leningrad, 1929), pp. 96-7.

oath rendered in Russian, Hebrew, and Tatar expressed in Hebrew characters.¹²⁸ Even the most rigid of tsars had to bend in this instance.

The Russian Intelligentsia and its Consequences for the Jews

From 1835 onward, events proceeded apace, affording the Tsar little leisure to assess and move decisively on certain crucial issues. Along with the Jews, Russian educated society was undergoing its own intellectual metamorphosis which would give rise to profound social, spiritual, intellectual, and political consequences by the middle of the 1840's.¹²⁹ Nicholas was not adverse to such developments altogether but, as with the Jews, he was concerned as to the course and extent of these changes and how Russia could benefit. Talmudic instruction in the Jewish curriculum in the period 1835-1843, for example, was one issue among many during this transitional period, and his apparent wavering was actually indicative of his attempt to order the maelstrom of change which was taking place around him.¹³⁰ Another was the establishment, on 27 December 1840, of the Committee for Defining Measures to Affect the Transformation of the Jews of Russia with Count Kiselev as its head.¹³¹

Russian Jewish spiritual and intellectual developments, though significant, were only part of the larger transformation which placed the Russian intelligentsia on a

¹²⁸ PSZ (II): Paper 15199, 7 January 1842, The New Form of Oath for the Karaites.

¹²⁹ Raeff, Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia, pp.142-47. During Nicholas I's reign, Russian intellectuals made every attempt to realize the tenets of Idealism which was frustrated on numerous occasions by social and political reality. See Richard Pipes, Russian Under the Old Regime (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), p. 261.

¹³⁰ A key factor with which he and the Empire had to contend was the establishment of Official Nationality and its exclusion of all non-Russian groups. See Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855, p. 73, 77.

collision course with the government. From 1826 until 1840, the Russian intelligentsia was, save for the Slavophile-Westernizer debate, relatively calm, but that would change in 1840. In that year, the chief of the Moscow Gendarmerie remarked in his official report to St. Petersburg that “something was wrong.” Though unable to state specifically what it was or from which quarter it came, he sensed that there was a feeling of dissatisfaction in the city which would soon reach its boiling point.¹³² As the chief would discover subsequently, the Russian intelligentsia would enjoy its first burst of expression during that decade. Nicholas would be hard pressed to rein in the educated public but by no means was the Tsar a hard-line reactionary. Throughout the 1830’s and 1840’s, the government spent substantial sums establishing technical institutes and, in 1842, a School of Law in St. Petersburg.¹³³ There was no mistaking that Russia’s continued viability in all spheres would be determined by its educated public and bureaucracy but Nicholas, sharing the same concerns as conservative Jews, wondered about the extent he should accord free thinking before imposing limits. The Decembrists and their attempts to impose European liberalism had failed yet, in 1835, the Sungorovsky Circle, which included Alexander Herzen, tried to revive the Decembrist program.¹³⁴ They were hunted down subsequently, arrested and exiled, but this was of little comfort to the Tsar. Nicholas’ distrust of men of ideas, the very people who had the abilities to reform his bureaucracy, was growing daily and would continue to do so throughout his reign.¹³⁵ By the mid-1830’s and not quite a decade old, the Third Department already had several

¹³¹ Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 49.

¹³² Riasanovsky, A Parting of the Ways, p. 249.

¹³³ Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality, pp. 214-17. Considerable funds were made available under the 1835 University Statute.

¹³⁴ Aronson, A Jewish Life Under the Tsars, pp. 199-200.

¹³⁵ Riasanovsky, A Parting of the Ways, p. 252.

prominent intellectuals and intellectual literary circles under surveillance, such as the Society of the Green Lamp which counted Alexander Pushkin as one of its members.

At the heart of this uneasiness and growing frustration between the intelligentsia and the government, which would eventually involve the Jews, was the former's desire to improve Russia along Western European lines. Most students and scholars who made up these literary-political groups such as the Society of the Green Lamp, Arzamas Circle, Stankevich Circle and, later, the Petrashevskii Circle, had received part of their educations abroad, mainly in Germany. Some were able to temper their passions for Western institutions and modes which they thought superior to what existed in Russia, but even the most contrite were frustrated.¹³⁶ Owing to the Empire's rigid social mores and ardent legality, a number of these intellectuals believed themselves isolated from both Tsar and society. Under the transparent guise of canvassing public opinion, a number of these groups used their respective journals and newsletters to criticize the Russian condition. Strange as it may seem, Nicholas permitted criticism of the bureaucracy with no limit imposed upon authors as to the degree of acerbity. Such liberality came with a stringent admonition against direct or tangential criticism of the autocracy which had always been taboo.¹³⁷ At least this was so until 1836.

Nicholas, always suspicious of their activities, found that some of his fears regarding the intelligentsia were verified when Peter Chaadaev's "Philosophical Letter"

¹³⁶ Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality*, pp. 131-2. Beginning in the late 1830's and continuing on throughout the next decade, foreigners, particularly the French, were ridiculed in the press. Part of the reason lay in a feeling of inadequacy among some elements of Russian society. Fears that the Russian language would be judged uncultured and ineffective abounded as well as the insistence of some intellectuals that Russia should make every effort to distinguish itself from Europe.

¹³⁷ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, p. 252. Not only was the Autocrat held out of bounds but so too the Orthodox Church. Official Nationality notwithstanding, Nicholas insisted that any comment or

appeared in the journal, *Teleskop*. Written entirely in French, Chaadaev's argument was quite simple: Russia had no civilization of its own.¹³⁸ Not even Vissarion Belinsky's 1834 "Literary Musings" with its thesis that Russia had no original literature drew down a firestorm of the magnitude which greeted Chaadaev's work.¹³⁹ Immediately, *Teleskop* was closed down, its editor exiled, and Nicholas himself declared Chaadaev insane and compelled him to submit to medical examinations lasting for several months. Miraculously, the author was not exiled, but now the Russian intelligentsia faced its greatest crisis.¹⁴⁰ Divisions which had been forming since the Decembrist Rising now separated Russia's intellectual luminaries into Slavophiles and Westernizers, both of whom Nicholas distrusted.¹⁴¹ Now it was only a matter of time before the Tsar's attitude towards the Russian intelligentsia would eventually carry over to the Jews and their intellectual initiatives.

On the Jewish side, circumstances were not so dramatic but, nevertheless, about as dire. Since Sergei Uvarov's declaration of Official Nationality on 2 April 1833 and its supports of Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality, no Jew had to question his or her place in the new order.¹⁴² Though antedating the overall ban on Jewish publishing for three years, official reaction to any unsupervised publishing unleashed a deluge of denunciations of Jewish works which would continue well into the next decade.¹⁴³ Most of these charges were Jews accusing other Jews, specifically Orthodox against

criticism regarding that institution be submitted to the bishops without delay. See Zilliacus, [The Russian Revolutionary Movement](#), p. 19.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 257-8.

¹³⁹ Edward J. Brown, [Stankevich and his Moscow Circle 1830-1840](#) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 88.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Pipes, [Russia Under the Old Regime](#) (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1974), pp. 265-66.

¹⁴¹ Riasanovsky, [A Parting of the Ways](#), pp. 252-3.

¹⁴² Riasanovsky, [Nicholas I and Official Nationality](#), pp. 73-4.

Hasidim.¹⁴⁴ It would not stop here. For the rest of Nicholas' reign and the entirety of his successor, the charges of religious fanaticism, propaganda, and even the occasional accusation of "danger to public morals" would find its way into the public forum, especially after 1865. Prior to Maxwell Lilienthal's arrival, the Russian government had no idea who or what to believe and had little time to investigate the matter in great detail. By suppressing all Jewish publications in the Empire, officials could afford themselves some distance until the next issue in Jewish affairs confronted them.

Maxwell Lilienthal and Russian Jewry

Revolution was not quite in the air by 1840, though all was not well. Russian intellectual discontent and divisions, Jewish educational reforms and aspirations, and the Tsar's bad health all boded ill for Dr. Maxwell Lilienthal (1814-1882).¹⁴⁵ Invited along with Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) by Sergei Uvarov to assist him and his lieutenants in finding a solution to a heretofore insurmountable problem, Lilienthal had little idea of what to expect.¹⁴⁶ Firm in his convictions, however, he was a reform-minded German Jew who had promised his host that he would elevate Russian Jewry intellectually by means of Haskalah.¹⁴⁷ This was welcome news to the Tsar and his Minister for National Enlightenment who had come to believe that the flame which Isaac

¹⁴³ Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia, p. 135.

¹⁴⁴ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 41. Maskilim frequently reported Hasidic publishers to the authorities in the hope that the government would side with Orthodox Jewry against these so-called heretics. Though only one man, Count Bludov's observation was that both groups were fanatical and ignorant Jews and that no distinction could be made between them.

¹⁴⁵ Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality, p.7.

¹⁴⁶ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 37. Sir Moses declined this initial invitation but did come in 1846.

¹⁴⁷ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 71. He was intoxicated by his almost messianic mission.

Levinsohn and his fellow travelers in Odessa had kindled was in danger of being extinguished. Haskalah in Russia was in dire need of rekindling. Accepting the directorship of the Riga School in 1840, Lilienthal arrived with a number of preconceived ideas about Russia and its Jews, an ignorance which made him an ideal and pliant vehicle in the eyes of Russian officials. Count Uvarov tailored his briefing to augment Lilienthal's prejudices about the community's backwardness, and this marred his efforts in trying to convince his skeptical and often cynical Russian coreligionists of the benefits offered by this new enlightenment. It was also apparent from his subsequent actions that he did not know of Uvarov's double game of seeming to advocate Jewish enlightenment and promotion of Official Nationality. Had he been privy to this intelligence, the contradictions would not have escaped him and, undoubtedly, he would have left Russia much sooner and with more frustration than he did.¹⁴⁸

Principally, he was the director of the Riga School, but Lilienthal was also given the added obligation of convincing Russian Jews, from Vilna to Odessa, that the government's educational program was for their benefit. This part of his mission began in earnest in 1842. Working with the meager information Uvarov and his subordinates permitted him, Lilienthal tried to placate his employers by doing what he thought was their bidding, namely to ameliorate fears among various Jewish communities and prepare them to accept a new intellectual regimen which would propel them into the modern world. Before Jewish audiences, he spoke from his experiences with German Haskalah. It was apparent that Lilienthal's sincerity regarding broad intellectual, spiritual and social

¹⁴⁸ G. Voltke, "Russkii ludi po voprosi ob obrazovanii evreev," *Sbornik v Polzu Nachalnikh Evreiskh Shkol* (microfilm, 1895; New York: Norman Ross Publishing), pp. 496-7. *A History of Russian Philosophy from*

reforms was unquestioned, but so too his inability to vouch for the government. He had been charged with building a bridge between the Tsar and the Jews without being given the keystone of official intentions, the lack of which would haunt him for the duration of his tenure in Russia.¹⁴⁹

If this problem had escaped Lilienthal, the Vilna community elders and its other leading members apprised him of it. It should be noted that though he had been in Russia two years prior to this visit, Lilienthal had had no real contact with Russian Jewry.¹⁵⁰ The surprises awaiting him and his optimism would not be pleasant. In Vilna, he began by merely reiterating Uvarov's views when he told those assembled that they had misunderstood Alexander I's motives for Jewish education and were perpetuating this error through their reluctance to embrace Nicholas' improvements.¹⁵¹ Fears arising from government policies, he contended, were unwarranted. Grateful for Jewish support during the Napoleonic invasion, Lilienthal explained, Alexander had been appalled at the squalor, disease and illiteracy which greeted him at every settlement and had resolved to improve their station. Official disdain was directed at the Jewish condition, not the Jews as a group. Nicholas was merely striving to realize Alexander's vision of edifying Jewish institutions commensurate with those for Russians with an eye towards diminishing the disparity between the two.

Out of respect, the Vilna elders allowed their German Jewish guest to finish his exposition and then queried him about the present Tsar's actual intentions. Lilienthal

the Tenth to the Twentieth Centuries, vol. I. ed. Valery A. Kuvakin (Buffalo: Prometheus Press, 1994), p. 140.

¹⁴⁹ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 77. Actually, the Russian government was declaring its intentions for Jewish educational reform through Lilienthal's visits. It was not interested in Jewish opinion or reaction.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

could only guess at their reserve and distrust which three years later he would understand fully. Vilna may have lost its Gaon long ago but not its perspicacity, and having weathered Alexander's conniving and that of his brother, it was little wonder why the elders accepted half-heartedly. On that score, all Lilienthal could offer was an anemic concession that they knew the Tsar better than he, a humble stranger.¹⁵² A day later, the scholar met with Vilna's Stadt Maggid (City Preacher), a man convinced that Haskalah, no matter how veritable its proponents, would lead to assimilation and apostasy. Finding his courage once more, Lilienthal proceeded to analyze the Maggid's concerns in detail and was adept at exposing many of his irrational views. Gaining the field on some points, he could not claim complete victory since it was beyond his competence to guarantee that Haskalah would safeguard Jewish culture and religion in Russia. Regardless, the German cosmopolitan assured the Maggid that this was not another pseudo-Mendelssohnian design for Christian conversion but a legitimate attempt to broaden Jewish intellectual horizons. To the latter's mind, Lilienthal's assertions had some merit even though the program he was advocating still left much to chance and question.¹⁵³

Vilna had not been easy and his mission would become decidedly more difficult. Minsk had been overtly hostile and Kiev proved to be obdurate, each time making their German guest aware of his program's weaknesses and the resistance it generated. Disheartened and nursing a growing resentment towards those who questioned his program, these receptions also made him more determined to free these Jews from what

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 71. Uvarov had told Lilienthal that the Tsar's intentions were honorable.

¹⁵² Dawidowitz, *The Golden Tradition*, pp. 149-50.

¹⁵³ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 73.

he perceived to be their superstitions which were responsible for their fears and stubbornness. If indeed learning to them meant only the study of Torah and Talmud in preparation to settle a land which had yet to be reclaimed and most would never see, studying practices which had been in abeyance for centuries, and all of this for the indefinite coming of the Messiah, the absurdity was self-evident.¹⁵⁴ What Lilienthal did not appreciate was that ignorance was not the sole cause for the stiff Orthodox reaction to his mission. Vilna's capitulation to Schneur Zalman was approaching its fiftieth anniversary and the Rabbinical intelligentsia was still combating mainstream Hasidism over doctrine, ritual, culture, and education. As if this were not enough, the Karaite issue was a potential ill whose effects were anticipated with trepidation. Still to be deflected were St. Petersburg's ardent and perennial promises of fiscal enticements, expanded employment opportunities, freedom of settlement outside the Pale, and commercial benefits in return for Christian conversion. Given these conditions, it was understandable that Haskalah was seen as another thinly-veiled threat to Jewish integrity. Russian officialdom had kept all of this from their naive German guest or at least marginalized them. Upon reaching Odessa, the last stop, Lilienthal was given some respite. Here there were no disapproving clamors or embarrassing questions, and his proposed reforms were approved enthusiastically, but this should not have come as a surprise. Odessa was southern Russia's major center of Jewish intellectual activity which had a reputation for being cosmopolitan in composition and demeanor. It was, after all, Russian Haskalah's other city, and it was only natural that its Jewish inhabitants would give a German representative of the movement a warm reception. Appreciative of its hospitality,

¹⁵⁴ Zunzer, Yesterday, pp. 49-50.

Lilienthal had come to some hard realizations. He operated from pure motives in terms of enhancing and improving upon Jewish education in Russia and had been led to believe that the government was of the same disposition. Could he really trust his employers? Few options were open to him in such a circumstance and the only hope that he could entertain was that the faith he invested in Uvarov was wise.

Upon his return to Uvarov, Lilienthal possessed the demeanor of a Pharisee who had suffered a Sadducean rebuke.¹⁵⁵ Barely concealing his anger, he suggested to the Minister that all Jewish schools be placed directly under his ministry and that a rabbinical synod be convoked to approve the government's educational reform program. Though impossible to gauge Uvarov's mood, he did approve of this measure and set in motion preparations of a meeting of the Rabbinical Commission in St. Petersburg which was to be held from 6 May to 27 August 1843.¹⁵⁶

One matter which was becoming increasingly difficult to disguise was the inducement of Jews to convert to Christianity. Count Uvarov informed Lilienthal that conversion was not in the Autocrat's interests and certainly was not tied to education, a statement which was a half-truth.¹⁵⁷ Further blurring the appearance of government

¹⁵⁵ Before the events of C.E. 70-73, Pharisees, the theological liberals, were forever the target of the Sadducees, the Temple guardians who also saw themselves as the preservers of traditional Jewish learning who feared any hint of liberal innovation.

¹⁵⁶ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 75, 78.

¹⁵⁷ Three statutes from the period 1837-1842 supported Uvarov's claim. Two years after granting the Karaites their consistory, an edict of 1839, permitted them to convert to Christianity and enjoy full participatory rights of Russian citizens. Another edict in 1842 declared that Jewish children were considered Christian only if both parents converted. Should the father convert and not the mother, only male issue would be deemed Christian while daughters would remain Jewish and the reverse should the mother take the initiative. In either event, the "beneficiaries" would receive 15-30 silver rubles as financial aid and, if they had reached the age of majority, entered into the Christian tax rolls. A third edict sanctioned marriages between Jews and Protestants provided that the ceremony be conducted by a Protestant minister and some guarantee on the part of the Jewish spouse to convert at some point in time. PSZ (II): Edict 12963, 10 December 1839, Permission of the Karaites to Establish Their Consistory, PSZ (II): Edict 15198, 7 January 1842, Jewish Children Considered Christian if Both Parents Convert, and PSZ

designs were unprompted Jewish initiatives for self-improvement through educational reform.¹⁵⁸ Weary of traditional Rabbinical pedantry, scholastic arrogance and deliberate physical and psychological distancing, progressive Jews in Riga, Odessa and Kishinev petitioned the Ministry for National Enlightenment in 1836 for Jewish secular schools devoid of all religious instruction and committed to teaching modern subjects.¹⁵⁹ They were not alone. In their wake, several primary and secondary schools were constructed throughout the major Jewish population centers and nearby villages, all modeled after the Odessa School to varying degrees. Itsak Volozhinski, an educational reformer and close friend of Lilienthal's, established a number of small institutions in and around Vilna and Minsk which broadened the Jewish educational network and acted as feeder system to the nascent Jewish gymnasia in the two cities. So pronounced was this regeneration from within the Jewish community that, in an unprecedented move, the erstwhile xenophobic Dorpat University, while still closed to foreign Jews, opened its doors to native Russian Jews who were free to study any field of their choosing. These students were informed, however, that they were still subject to the poll tax imposed on all Jews.¹⁶⁰ This limitation was far from onerous and a number of Jews applied for admission.

Changes in the Jewish identity were evident but not ones which found lasting favor with Nicholas. Jewish entrance into the Russian mainstream was not occurring at the rate and in the numbers he desired, a shortcoming for which he castigated Uvarov who, in turn, passed responsibility on to Lilienthal, claiming that Jewish lethargy was to

(II): Edict 15685, 11 June 1842, Permission of Jews and Protestants to Marry if the Ceremony is Conducted by a Protestant Minister.

¹⁵⁸ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 119. Some maskilim maintained throughout Nicholas's reign that both Tsar and government were acting in the best interests of the Jewish community.

¹⁵⁹ Cynthia Whittaker, The Origins of Modern Russian Education: An Intellectual Biography of Count Sergei Uvarov 1786-1855 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 203.

blame. Aghast but by no means silenced by this brusqueness, Lilienthal informed the Count that if he desired the level of Jewish education and social accommodation enjoyed in Austria and Prussia, a point which Uvarov had made ardently at the first meeting of the Jewish Committee in 1840, then the Jews of Russia must be emancipated.¹⁶¹ For once, Uvarov was left speechless.

The Fruits and Failure of Official Labor

Seldom does a straightforward design yield straightforward results. The government had imagined that a Russian education stressing Russian language, history and culture would wean Jews from their traditional identity, yet this had not occurred. Through a combination of accommodation and initiative, the Jews appeared to be shaping up along lines that officials had not anticipated and unsure of how to govern. Even so, official efforts to change the Jewish community had been realized to a limited degree.

Loyalty to the state, perhaps more so than any other issue, was an overarching concern of the government in their dealings with non-Russian groups. That Vilna's Jews had demonstrated such adherence in 1812 had not been forgotten, but there seemed to be a question as to its duration. Was such a commodity perishable over time? By way of an answer, at Kronstadt in 1840, 2000 Imperial Jewish sailors were interviewed about their daily regimen and treatment. Without exception, all claimed that they were happy with their lot, particularly since they were free to practice their faith under the direction of a resident rabbi without hindrance or ridicule. As for government supervision or

¹⁶⁰ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, no. 15 (21 March 1840), p. 3.

intervention, the only mandatory condition required of them was that they could not use Sabbath and High Holiday observances for seditious purposes, a restriction which the sailors considered reasonable.¹⁶² What did the government have to fear? The rabbi, most likely, seconded as a paid informant, and this topic which will be discussed later on in detail.

Though only one example, it was apparent that Jewish loyalty was still in evidence and, ostensibly, plied with a smile. What was also noteworthy was the apparent acceptance of Jewish religious practices, an obvious instance where Jews and Russian officials "gave and took" from one another. By no means was the government weakening in its disposition towards the Jews or Russian society as a whole. The 1840's were the most reactionary years of Nicholas' tenure but not to the extent that neither he nor his ministers were blind to the benefits of guarded flexibility. Obviously, where and when Jews and Russian officials met, there was no question as to who possessed most of the advantages or what would come to pass if both sides remained immovable. Nevertheless, circumstances compelled them to reach various accords, concessions which really did not cost or impair their respective positions or programs.

Another curious aspect of Jewish-Russian relations was played out not long after the interview with the Kronstadt sailors. A mysterious fire had broken out in the new Jewish school near Minsk, destroying it completely and leaving the Jewish community at a loss for what to do. Stepping into the breach voluntarily, local noblemen contributed 2000 silver rubles toward the construction of a new facility.¹⁶³ The government could not

¹⁶¹ Whittaker, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education*, p. 204.

¹⁶² *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, no. 7 (15 February 1840), p. 89.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

have imagined a better exercise in public relations. A foreign newspaper (*Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*) had carried a glowing story about Russians helping Jews. Perhaps, some thought, Lilienthal's claims that the Tsar was acting for Jewish well-being merited reconsideration. Hopeful and, to a limited degree, mitigating, such reports were little more than a convenient shield for the regime's true intentions which, at best, allayed Jewish fears temporarily but seldom brought lasting improvements in their wake.

Even accommodation had its limits, and if indeed the Empire was committed to Official Nationality and particularly the promotion of Christian Orthodoxy, why were Jewish institutions and worship still tolerated? Certainly sufficient time had passed where, even under the guise of flexibility, Jewish theology would have been undermined and yet it endured.¹⁶⁴ During his visit in the late 1840's, Sir Moses Montefiore was informed that Jewish worship in the military was fairly routine. He himself would participate in a soldiers' Shabbat though, he observed, the celebrants were all adult recruits.¹⁶⁵ Kept out the public eye, the cantonist system still existed and kahals were still violating recruitment laws by permitting the kidnapping of children for the army and navy. Christian conversion of cantonists had been suspended temporarily but had not been abolished, and until Alexander II put an end to it, Jewish youths would still be at risk.

Cantonist regiments were not presented as a means of slavery but as a step towards Jewish self-liberation. Whether this freedom came through military service which carried the recruit far away from those influences which were thought to blind him

¹⁶⁴ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 22-3. Beginning in January 1843, Nicholas received monthly reports on the rate of Jewish conversions to Christianity in the military.

or by means of Talmud-free education, government officials were seconded by a number of Jewish voices.¹⁶⁶ Regarding the latter, Russian Jewish intellectuals such as Abraham Mapu, Lev Ossipovich Mandelstam, Mendele Mokher Sforim, Judah Leib Gordon and Moses Leib Lilienblum advocated outright anti-Talmudism when they introduced their own projects to refashion Jewish society in Russia. By virtue of their promotion of anti-Talmudist and anti-traditionalist sentiments, Jewish intellectuals afforded the Tsar time and distance from these affairs to reassess and redirect his policies as necessary. It was fortuitous that at Uvarov's behest, the 1843 Rabbinical Conference convened in St. Petersburg. Anticipating a session where Jewish communal leaders would merely approve government reforms, the Minister would soon learn that rigidity bore little fruit.

Prior to the Conference, in 1841, the government launched another frontal assault on Jewish publishing which acquired some Jewish allies. When it was learned that the authorities had banned further publication of Rabbinical works and that those extant were to be destroyed, the Rabbi of Shilel, Chief of the town's Bet Din, assumed the office of "seeker-Rabbi" and enlisted the aid of "enlightened Jews" to discover and destroy all the offending works in the community.¹⁶⁷ Virtually a law unto himself, anyone who either possessed the proscribed books and refused to surrender them voluntarily or impeded confiscation would be arrested and, if of age, included in the village's recruitment quota. Fear and opportunism most likely provided the motivation, not to mention the ongoing struggle between Orthodox and Hasidic Jews which could not be discounted. Above all

¹⁶⁵ Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, ed. Dr. L. Loewe, 2 vols. (Chicago: Belford-Clarke, 1890), Vol. 1, p. 335. Cantonist were forbidden to worship as Jews and denied contact with adult Jewish servicemen. See Stanislawski, p. 24.

¹⁶⁶ Zinberg, Istoriia evreiskoi pechati, p. 19.

¹⁶⁷ A Jewish Life under the Tsars, p. 56.

else, overall tensions within the Jewish community were becoming more pronounced and the events in Shilel merely publicized an otherwise internal affair.

Every influential Jewish leader in the Empire attended the 1843 Rabbinical Conference, the purpose of which was to reach a consensus with the government on Jewish education.¹⁶⁸ Among those present were Rabbi Isaac of Volozhin who represented the Mitnagdim, R. Menachem Mendel Shneerson of Lubavich for the White Russian Hasidim, Israel Halperin of Berdichev for the Polish Hasidim, Bezel Stern of the Odessa School and Dr. Maxwell Lilienthal, director of the Riga School and assistant to Count Uvarov in Jewish affairs.¹⁶⁹ Crucial to the success of this meeting was the classification of Jewish subjects and traditions into categories of sacred, those subject to contemporary mutability, and those deemed antiquated.¹⁷⁰ A Herculean labor in ideal circumstances, reaching a consensus on such issues promised to be Sisyphean in this inauspicious atmosphere. Despite the diversity of opinion and degrees of acrimony among the representatives and their respective communities, some matters were resolved. For instance, Torah study was to remain a part of the Jewish curriculum as would Hebrew (for religious purposes only), Chaldean, Jewish geography, and other subjects essential to Jewish viability. Having established this, there was an added provision that those students who did not have the aptitude for rabbinical or spiritual vocations would receive vocational training. Regarding Talmud, despite what had been attributed to the Tsar,

¹⁶⁸ Dawidowitz, The Golden Tradition, p. 108. See also "The Mystic and the Minister," A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah, compiled by Rabbi S.Y. Zervin (New York: Mensorah Publications, 1992), pp. 257-59, and Cecil Roth, A History of the Jews From Earliest Times through the Six Day War (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), p. 322.

¹⁶⁹ A similar meeting would take place in 1868 which proved to be just as explosive. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter IV.

Uvarov made it clear that Nicholas did not want to impugn Talmudic credibility as a means to convert the Jews. The Babylonian Talmud, as well as the works of the sages, would remain sacred and, Uvarov reassured his audience, Halakhah (ritual law) would not be altered or suspended.¹⁷¹

Laborious and tedious as it had been in wending his way through hostile territory, Uvarov thought that the most difficult obstacles had been surmounted until he broached the subject of Kabbalah. Unwittingly, he had set a match to a powder keg. No sooner had he mentioned it than Bezel Stern condemned it as nonsense and a dangerous foray into speculative philosophy. Immediately, the Hasidic delegates launched a vehement attack upon Stern, claiming that Kabbalah was the key to higher levels of being, the realization of self-perfection, and the means to affect the restoration of the world to original purity (*tikkun olam*). A heated debate ensued and there was a danger that the meeting would spin out of control. During this drama, Lilienthal made no attempt to support the Odessa School principal in any way, perhaps because he now perceived the goal of these proceedings with complete clarity. For his part, Uvarov saw that a physical brawl was in the offing, and how he would explain it to the Tsar should it come to pass was a scenario not to his liking. Asserting his authority as Minister, he declared that Stern's assessment was correct and that the study and practice of Kabbalah and any other form of mysticism was to be abandoned. The issue refused to die. Raising his voice above the tumult, Rabbi Shneerson proceeded to explain the error of such a position. Uvarov, out of patience and surmising that he had fanned the fires in his efforts to

¹⁷⁰ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 79. Supposedly, this meeting was conducted in secret and there are no official records of the deliberations. The only information about this event came from some of the participants and their relations later on.

extinguish them, ordered Shneerson to be quiet and take his seat. Shneerson would not be cowed and resumed his protest which elicited from the Minister a more emphatic order to desist or face arrest and removal. Schneerson's mind and ears were elsewhere and he simply, as he would claim later, did not hear that injunction nor did he realize what had come to pass until he found himself incarcerated in a neighboring room.¹⁷² Alone and perceiving that it was time for afternoon prayer, the Rabbi immediately began to hum a *nigun*, a lyricless tune performed prior to engaging in prayer. Uvarov, having recovered his composure and pondering Shneerson's statements, heard the *nigun* as well as the Rabbi's eloquent chanting of the mid-afternoon psalms and he paused in his deliberations. Apocryphal accounts claimed that Mendel's prayers touched the Minister's soul which made him reverse his previous decision. A more plausible and less dramatic explanation may have been Israel Halperin's, (the Polish Hasidic representative), less- impassioned presentation of Kabbalistic study which made it appear more as a benign anachronistic addendum to Jewish ritual rather than a retardant to the State's intended reforms.¹⁷³ Not only was Rabbi Shneerson released from confinement but, as an added oddity, Tsar Nicholas granted to him and his children hereditary citizenship in perpetuity. On a more dismal note, Rabbi Yitzak told a group of intimates eager to hear of the proceedings that he perceived a wind of destruction bearing down upon the Jews and that only prayer and mercy could come to Jewish aid.¹⁷⁴

Confusion and little order had resulted from this congress, save now that the battle lines between the Hasidim and Orthodox maskilim had become entrenched. In its the

¹⁷¹ Dawidowitz, The Golden Tradition, pp. 108-9.

¹⁷² Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 81. The story of Shneerson's arrest came from his great-grandson.

aftermath, Lilienthal, thoroughly frustrated, abandoned hope and left Russia, to be succeeded as Uvarov's lieutenant by Lev Ossipovich Mandelstamm (1809-1889). The latter, upon receiving a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from St. Petersburg University in 1844, had the distinction of being the first Jew to earn a degree from a Russian university. Though committed to continuing Jewish educational reform, Mandelstamm and his fellow travelers soon discovered that official sentiment, which had been riding high in their favor, had taken a decided reverse. Count Pavel Kiselev, Nicholas' Minister of State Domains and advisor on peasant affairs, attributed continued Jewish backwardness to their religious instruction. The cant may have been stale but not the new catechism Kiselev proposed which would embodied re-education in religion, patriotism and useful employment.¹⁷⁵ Being one of Nicholas' closest confidants, Kiselev's statements bore considerable gravity and certainly influenced the prevailing conservative reaction.¹⁷⁶

On 13 November 1844, Nicholas made the education of Jewish youths a special concern which demanded immediate redress. How unfortunate, he opined, that in the past all efforts to improve instruction among them had met with failure owing to ignorance and resistance. Henceforth, the Jews were to be guided to productive labor and placed upon the path of honest citizenship.¹⁷⁷ Uvarov was now commissioned to appoint a board of Rabbinical supervisors and Christian overseers and coordinate their activities

¹⁷³ Zervin, A Treasury of Chassidic Tales on the Torah, p. 259. Dawidowitz, The Golden Tradition, p. 109.

¹⁷⁴ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 82.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁶ The same could be said of Prince A.S. Menshikov, General Kleinmikhel, and General A.K. Benckendorff. All of these highly-placed favorites were known for their conservative policies, unoriginal thinking, personal devotion to Nicholas, and general incompetence. Benckendorff, for example, was chief of security police who had frequent trouble remembering his own name. See Seton-Watson, p. 201.

in an effort to bring Jewish instruction up to Christian standards at the gymnasium level. Admittedly, Jewish recruitment obligations had to be overcome before this project could be realized and, as an obvious afterthought, a solution was found. In the case of an able Jewish instructor or promising Jewish student being called up for military service, demonstrated proficiency in Russian would garner a shorter service commitment and allow them to pursue their education or professional pursuits.¹⁷⁸

These revamped educational schemes were tied closely to the fate of existing Jewish autonomous institutions. After insisting that kahal members take an intricate and ponderous loyalty oath to him in 1838, Nicholas dissolved all kahals in 1844, transferring their functions to local Russian administrations.¹⁷⁹ On the surface, this edict seemed to mandate an administrative reorganization of local Jewish institutions. Absent were any references to malfeasance, an ideal pretext for dissolution. The kahals' original *raison d'être* was to collect taxes and assume limited jurisdiction over Jewish communal affairs. In some instances, kahal officials found that their authority overlapped with that of district and provincial administrations. Eliminating the kahals meant the elimination of bureaucratic duplication which accorded with the Tsar's relentless efforts to streamline the bureaucracy.¹⁸⁰ There was, however, one other possible explanation for this action.

Aside from physical distance, bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption and outright prevarication, the Tsar knew that some kahals were kidnapping under-aged Jewish boys, apprehending vagrants, and waylaying itinerant travelers to meet recruitment quotas.

¹⁷⁷ PSZ (II): Law 18420, 13 November 1844, *The Establishment of Special Instruction for the Education of Jewish Youths.*

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ PSZ (II): Edict 18546, 19 December 1844, *Affirming the Subordination of the Jews in Cities and Provinces Towards the Abolition of the Jewish Kahals.*

Regional and district authorities had routinely turned a knowledgeable blind eye to the traffic since it was useful to do so. In 1841 however, part of his bout of temper with Uvarov over the perceived failure of Jewish education was that even military recruitment was not producing the requisite quantity of Russified Jews to realize his plan. He may not have mentioned it to the Count at that meeting but it would only be a matter of time before he would lay the blame for this failure on the feeder institutions, the kahals being chief among them. Moreover, questions arose about tax fraud. Soldiers and excise officers had been sent to Jewish settlements from time to time to ensure that the proper sums were collected and yet both could be intimidated and bribed with the end result being, in most instances, that both the offending official and kahal leaders escaped punishment. Geography afforded many kahals accidental autonomy in this and other matters, and since faultless oversight and total control were impossible, the kahals had to go.

Storm Clouds Gathering: The Russian Intelligentsia 1845-1849

From 1843 onward, Nicholas took a hard line towards the Jews, especially in cultural and educational affairs. In part, this posture was an expression of his uneasiness in dealing with issues with which he was not familiar but, perhaps more so, the Jewish intelligentsia suffered as a result of the Russian intelligentsia's activities. Friction between the Slavophiles and Westernizers was on the rise and both, in their own ways, were criticizing Russian conditions very close to the throne. At the University of

¹⁸⁰ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, pp. 43-4. Kiselev was convinced that the kahals were

Moscow, throughout the 1840's and '50's, Timofei Granovsky, Alexander Herzen, and Vissarion Belinsky were an intellectual force there, the dynamic representatives of the Westernizers as opposed to the Slavophile movement personified by Stepan Shevryev and Mikhail Pogodin.¹⁸¹ Though the latter may not have enjoyed influence commensurate with that of the former, both groups nevertheless made the University of Moscow a center of Russian cultural life.¹⁸² Even so, Nicholas, in assessing the situation, might very well have found credence in A.F. Ulybyshev's remark that Russia was beset with "two darkesses fighting one another for the genius of enlightenment."¹⁸³ As if that did not pose problems enough, what really upset the Tsar was when Vissarion Belinsky, a prominent member of the Stankevich Circle, declared in 1847 that Christianity in Russia was mere superstition and not one of genuine belief.¹⁸⁴ Attacking one of the pillars of Official Nationality was strictly forbidden, but all the Tsar did in response was to intensify surveillance of the Stankevich Circle.¹⁸⁵ In that same year, authorities in Kiev uncovered the Brotherhood of Cyril and Methodius, a group committed to the Ukrainian "messianic" realization of a democratic Slavic confederation centered in Kiev. Among those arrested and subsequently exiled were the historian Nicholas Kostomarov and poet Taras Shevchenko, both ardent champions of romantic Ukrainian nationalism.¹⁸⁶

merely shielding Jewish subversion and should be abolished.

¹⁸¹ Pogodin saw Russia as a single family with a Tsar-father and his subject children. In a similar vein, Nikolai Gogol claimed that the law was wooden and that only Grace at the Tsar's hands could mitigate it. In that capacity, Nicholas was certainly the Russian David and Solomon. Believing that Nicholas had delivered Russia from ruin, Alexander Pushkin went so far as to declare him the Russian Moses. See Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855*, pp. 98, 118.

¹⁸² Abbott Gleason, *Young Russia*, p. 78.

¹⁸³ Aronson & Reiser, *Literaturnie kruzhki i saloni*, p. 113.

¹⁸⁴ Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, p. 262.

¹⁸⁵ Brown, *Stankevich and his Moscow Circle, 1830-1840*, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶ Riasanovsky, *A Parting of the Ways*, p. 253.

Surveillance of these intellectual circles translated into action following the Revolutions of 1848. First, Nicholas embarked upon a censorship terror which targeted so-called literary journals and newspapers highly critical of government policies under the guise of reporting public opinion.¹⁸⁷ This crackdown led to the closing of a number of small presses and caused the dissolution of many cells associated with such groups as the Miliutin Circle.¹⁸⁸ While this campaign was in motion, the Tsar next put an end to the Petrashevskii Circle, a discussion group interested in utopian socialism which had taken up protests against Nicholas' regime and demanded social and political reform. Dostoevsky was among those taken into custody in the spring of 1849 when agents of the Third Department moved in on the group.¹⁸⁹

Nicholas, in the late 1840's, knew only too well that this intellectual ferment needed an outlet which the autocracy was incapable of providing owing to its very nature. A number of these disgruntled individuals were progressive bureaucrats whose abilities and education were never utilized fully owing to the ponderous and convoluted customs of the Russian bureaucracy Nicholas was committed to reform. With such independent intellectual talents straining at the bit, the Tsar and his ministers feared the long-term consequences of such liberty to their authority and the autocratic Russian state. Efforts to placate the Russian intelligentsia had failed, which meant that new strategies and a firmer hand would proceed into the next decade. This change of course would also be felt within the Jewish community.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁸⁸ W. Bruce Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825-1861 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. 83.

Official Judaism and its Critics

In the year following the dissolution of the kahals, official Jewish presses were established in Vilna and Zhitomer under the supervision of the Director of Rabbinical Instruction.¹⁹⁰ Similar to the edict abolishing the kahals, this latest action was presented as an administrative reform implemented to accommodate the growing number of Jewish schools in the two cities. In other words, state sponsorship of Jewish publishing was presented as a practical move. By 1845, two gymnasium-level Jewish schools had been established as well as several primary institutions and all were in need of textbooks. This did not provoke alarm at the time, though it should have because it provided a convenient cover for a more ambitious project.

Earlier in 1844, the Tsar, Sergei Uvarov and the Minister for Foreign Creeds had banned Talmud instruction in the Jewish schools and placed strict limits upon all Jewish publications, especially those in Hebrew. Either in response to Rabbinical petitions or a carefully-orchestrated demonstration of chimeral benevolence, the state's Jewish publishing scheme was enacted less than a year after the proscription of Talmud. Superficially, the establishment of official Jewish presses could have been taken as a step towards reinvigorating progressive Judaism. On a deeper level, however, it was a veiled reaffirmation of autocratic manipulation. Employing a Rabbinical director as a low-level censor was an astute maneuver.¹⁹¹ Should some Hebrew authors discover that this officer

¹⁸⁹ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, p. 366.

¹⁹⁰ PSZ (II): Edict 19474, 27 November 1845, Regarding Supervision of Jewish Typography. The Director of Rabbinical Instruction and his agents are not to be confused with the Rabbinical Commission which was established in 1848 shortly after the the institution of Crown Rabbinical seminaries.

¹⁹¹ Obviously, this person was not a Christian convert and, therefore, the depth of official trust in him was shallow. See Elyashevich, p. 135.

deemed their works inappropriate, he would be the recipient of abuse, derision, and perhaps a firestorm or two of indignation. Perhaps the district and regional administrators above him would also receive the brunt of hostilities and, possibly, the Minister for National Enlightenment himself on rare occasion. The order and placement of these firebreaks surrounding the Tsar were stated clearly in the statute.

Associated closely with these official presses was the manipulation of Crown or Official rabbis. Not until three years hence would there be physical institutions committed to producing such state officers, yet in official correspondence, statutes, and contemporary memoirs prior to 1847-48, they were already extant.¹⁹² Fallout from the internecine struggles within the Jewish community would invariably spread to the larger Russian society, and those disgruntled souls who wished to avenge themselves made apt employees in government service. Crown rabbis and Jewish censors often worked in tandem though not always conscious of one another, and it is very possible that the director in charge of these two presses was one of these disaffected souls. It was his duty to make monthly reports to district and regional officials and present an annual digest to St. Petersburg, noting which publications he approved and the reasons for those he rejected.¹⁹³

Crown rabbis were a unique facet of the Russian-Jewish experience. Codified in 1847, their origins appeared to stem from the 1827 Recruitment Ukase or, more precisely, a failure to realize its intended design. Recall that the demand for Jewish males,

¹⁹² Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 135. Information about rabbis, official and otherwise, is rare. Part of the reason for this was the effectiveness of official censorship but also there was a belief among many Eastern European Jewish intellectuals that chronicle writing or biography was inappropriate for a scholar.

¹⁹³ Elyashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia*, p. 181. In addition, a copy of each rejected or destroyed book was to be retained by the authorities for future reference.

specifically among the 12-18 age group, was an obvious attempt to starve Jewish Orthodoxy of its future. That some recruits died while others became estranged from their former homes and, for some, Judaism as well was to be expected, but there still Jews committed to their faith, a rival for loyalty Nicholas could not abide. Crown rabbis, above all else, were charged with securing Jewish loyalty by manipulating Jewish beliefs to accord with the Russian ethos. Why some Jews became Christians while others remained Jews was an episodic concern which the government wanted to resolve with finality. The creation and installation of ostensibly loyal rabbis in various communities afforded authorities an ingress not only into the religious lives of the Jews local but also greater supervision. It was soon known throughout much of the Russian Jewish community that these individuals were government agents. What did matter? Many Jews continued to suspect the so-called old Rabbinate of oppressive and often self-serving practices within the community. Cynicism combined with frustration to convince many that more than a few of their leaders and prominent citizens were actually parasites.¹⁹⁴

Russian Jewry did experience changes during this period but, in the main, they were limited to certain urban communities. During his tenure in Russia Lilienthal delivered his droshes (explanation of the weekly Torah portion) in German. In a similar vein in March 1847, the New Synagogue in Odessa had a choir singing in lieu of a cantor and many in the congregation wore European clothing.¹⁹⁵ Did these innovations afford Russian Jewry the free air it needed to breathe in order to survive? As later decades would attest, the Jewish intellect was certainly vigorous, but as to whether these German

¹⁹⁴ Kunitz, Russian Literature and the Jews, p. 63.

and European innovations to its religious rituals among various congregations was the source could not be ascertained for certain. One matter that was clear, however, was that a form of German Reform Judaism did emerge late in the century but it did not become widespread nor did it separate Russian Jews from Judaism.

Western Scrutiny of Russia's Jewish Question

Intimate knowledge of Jewish affairs in the Empire may have eluded those residing outside of its borders, but sufficient intelligence from travelers, émigrés, and other sources had made it into the Western press and prompted external concern. In 1846, six years after his initial invitation, Sir Moses Montefiore, his wife, and a friend, Dr. Loewe, came to Russia to appraise conditions for themselves. Arriving in St. Petersburg on 5 April 1846, Sir Moses wasted little time in his interview with Count Nesselrode to seek the repeal of two edicts removing Jews to fifty versts from the Empire's western borders and to urge the establishment of Jewish schools. The first item, the Foreign Minister assured his guest, was in the immediate offing but the second could not be brought off so quickly. By no means wishing to speak for Count Uvarov with whom Sir Moses was to meet the following day, Nesselrode claimed that Western European Jews were the cream of the lot whereas those in Russia and Poland were the of the basest sort.¹⁹⁶ Sadly, he continued, the Bible had been right to describe the Jews as a stiff-necked and hard-headed people, traits which had allowed them to survive adversity

¹⁹⁵ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 138.

¹⁹⁶ Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, vol. I, pp. 330-31.

but at the cost of imposing upon themselves an impregnable provinciality. This would become evident to Sir Moses in his travels.

Evidence to suggest that Nesselrode and Uvarov compared notes or read from the same script prior to the Englishman's arrival has yet to surface but, at the very least, the similarity between their respective postures towards the Jews of Russia was uncanny. Composed for the occasion, Sir Moses implored the Minister for National Enlightenment to affect the ready amelioration of Jewish ills in terms of their education and employment within the Russian state. The response was a near copy of the Foreign Minister's with the addition of Uvarov's word of honor that Christian conversion was not in the government's interests. Happiness will come to the Empire's Jews, he maintained, only when education had prepared them for it. The Count then proceeded to inform Sir Moses that all ills, with few exceptions, besetting the Jews of Russia could be linked to Talmud. It was a collection of false doctrines and had been exposed as such among the learned, but its reckless dissemination among the ignorant Jewish masses had corrupted them, and therein lay the root of the entire problem. Base and cunning, employed in the lowest traffic, Russian Jews had thus abandoned their faith and culture. In response, Sir Moses contended that many learned Christians held Talmud in high esteem, but Uvarov would not be swayed.¹⁹⁷ Adding to Sir Moses' incredulity, Count Uvarov then claimed that he had to compel the Jews to study Hebrew in order to safeguard their own religion.¹⁹⁸

Montefiore, though not possessing Lilienthal's academic credentials, had a keener understanding of the peculiar condition of Russian Jewry. Both men naturally held preconceived notions about Russia and its Jews prior to their respective visits, but

¹⁹⁷ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 37.

whereas Lilienthal came as the omniscient teacher, his English successor came as a student desiring to learn. Convinced that many Jewish fears arose from simple ignorance, the German had been quick to dismiss uncritically Russian Jewish complaints of government malfeasance. In contrast, the philanthropic Knight of the British Empire listened, considered, and would draw up a report of his findings and present it to the Tsar and the appropriate ministers. From Nesselrode's and Uvarov's initial remarks, it was apparent that they regarded Montefiore as another Lilienthal, a well-intentioned foreigner who could be led to believe most of what was told to him but could do little owing to his non-Russian origins and ignorance of Russian Jewish ways. It was assumed that his impact would be minimal, that the "good" he accomplished would leave with him, and that the resulting frustration would accord flawlessly with official designs. Little did they imagine that the Englishman's visit would initiate others.

Naiveté was not one of Montefiore's character traits or at least not a prominent one. Delayed initially, Sir Moses was granted an audience with Nicholas I on 9 April in a setting and conducted in such a manner which would not have been out of place in the Marquis de Custine's *Letters from Russia*. Conversing in French for the duration of the interview, Sir Moses asked Nicholas to "bend an eye of merciful consideration upon my coreligionists." A rare smile crossed the Tsar's face as he informed his guest, while not really addressing his request, that there were Jews among his personal guards.¹⁹⁹ Improve the Jewish condition? Why would anyone desire the opposite? Nicholas claimed that he and his ministers had labored for the betterment of Russia's Jews, an essential condition which had to be achieved forthwith since they were invaluable to the

¹⁹⁸ Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore, vol. 1., p. 333.

Empire. Yes, it was true that hardships seemed to plague them, but their adherence to separate ways and customs hindered their progress and inspired fear and superstition among the surrounding peasantry. Official protection, given the size of the Empire, was all but impossible. So many projects had been executed in their behalf and almost all had failed or yielded unsatisfactory results which had cast both the Jewish community and the government into a condition of frustration and despair. After conversing at length on related issues, Nicholas suggested that Montefiore call on Count Pavel Kiselev, his advisor on Jewish affairs, who could give him more information before he began his visits to the settlements and cities.

One week later, Count Kiselev welcomed Sir Moses and proceeded to the point without ceremony. The Jews, he claimed, were hopeless. Obdurate and unthinking, their addiction to Talmud escaped all rationale and, even worse, that single work had spawned a renewed wave of Orthodox Jewish fanaticism which was reversing all of the previous reforms of the decade. Reforming the Jews of Russia was a fantasy, Kiselev told Montefiore. Such a mission would be in vain but, if the Englishman still wanted to do some good despite this circumstance, there remained one option. Informing Montefiore that Nesselrode had mentioned his complaint over removing Jewish villagers from the western border, Kiselev suggested that Sir Moses take 10,000 of them to Palestine. Sir Moses' facial expression must have betrayed his thoughts, which induced Kiselev to produce an edict with Nicholas' signature permitting any Jew desiring to leave the Empire to do so without encumbrance.²⁰⁰ Still enjoying Nicholas' confidence, Kiselev,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 333-4.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 335-6.

nevertheless, was fast losing his diplomatic reserve when he could barely maintain civility towards the English Jew.

Free at last to pursue his fact-finding mission in the field with the promise that he submit a copy of his findings to each of the ministers and the Tsar, Sir Moses and his entourage sallied forth. He and his party made every effort to visit villagers, townsfolk, soldiers, itinerant artisans and craftsmen to produce as complete a report as possible. Chief among his concerns was the treatment of Jewish soldiers whom he wanted to question about the conditions and tenure of their recruitment obligation. To appreciate their circumstances, Sir Moses was invited to assist in a soldiers' Shabbat service. Later, he remarked that it had been both an honor and a relief to see that these servicemen knew the correct order of rituals and prayers, even those for the welfare of the Tsar, which stimulated his curiosity all the more. Sir Moses also inquired about the trials and tribulations of Jewish soldiers in Imperial service which had been reported via various media in the West. In response, the servicemen apprised him of some notable changes in their treatment which Montefiore found surprising. He had not been misinformed about the brutality associated with the draft in the late 1820's and early 1830's. Some married men were kidnapped or seized outright, leaving their wives in the status of *aguna*, an abandoned woman who could not remarry until she had irrefutable proof of her husband's death or had obtained a *get* (official divorce decree) bearing his signature and that of a recognizable *bet din* (rabbinical court). Now all of that had changed. Husbands and single men who served in the guards' regiments had twenty-year obligations whereas non-combatants served for twenty-five, yet everyone was free to practice their faith and

their wives and children could now live with them in the barracks.²⁰¹ Impressed by this information which he received and to which he bore witness, Sir Moses was careful not to allow himself to be swayed into making facile assumptions. He continued his sojourn in an attempt to discern between exception and rule and gauge accurately, or at least as far as he was able, the extent of Nicholas' reforms.

At the end of his journeys, Sir Moses honored his commitment by making a report of his findings to the Tsar and appropriate officials. To some of them he wrote letters decrying their indifference to several segments of Jewish society. Still smarting from Kiselev's off-handed offer to repatriate 10,000 Jews to Palestine, Sir Moses suggested to the Minister of State Domains that he remove the blinders from the Tsar's eyes where the Pale was concerned. Nowhere within its 17,000 square miles did its residents enjoy so much as a hint of Nicholas' reforms which had been lauded extensively. If the Count desired specifics then he should know that Jewish artisans were forced to look outside of the Pale for employment which, legally, was permitted only through conversion to Christianity. Now was the occasion for Sir Moses to express his displeasure, an exercise which was given full vent when the Englishman recalled that even after committing apostasy, the Christian Jew could never advance to journeyman or master in his vocation.²⁰²

Sir Moses Montefiore was not one to allow idealism and superficial courtesies to blind him from realities, a lesson which would now be given to Count Sergei Uvarov. As with Kiselev, Uvarov was reminded of his prior statements about Jewish provincialism and how happiness would rain down upon the Jews of Russia once modern education had

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 338.

a firm footing. Maintaining an even temper, Sir Moses gave Uvarov a logical exposition of what he had observed in the government Jewish schools and could conclude only that in Russian, arithmetic, history and Hebrew, the students acquitted themselves admirably. Christian teachers and their Jewish colleagues worked together amicably enough, and considering past acrimony between the two groups, such a cooperation could heal wounds and hopefully put an end to Jewish discrimination. This ideal setting, however, had one imperfection. Given the growth of a modern Jewish intelligentsia which he had witnessed and which he knew had been an ongoing process even before Nicholas' reign, the Jews had certainly proven themselves able to supervise their own schools rather than defer to Christians.²⁰³

How influential were Sir Moses' visits, reports and correspondence regarding the Jews of Russia? When Nicholas received a copy of Montefiore's report advocating equal rights for Jews and Christians, the Tsar responded that that would never come about as long as he reigned.²⁰⁴ Autocratic obduracy had not rendered Sir Moses' mission a complete failure, however. Because of his travels and his political connections, England's premier philanthropist was able to persuade Queen Victoria's government to establish a Jewish aid society and ancillary institutions. His crowing achievement came a generation later with Parliament's approval of L1,000,000 in 1881 to assist Russian Jewish emigrants on their way to America or Palestine, an operation which also coordinated its efforts with the Alliance Israelite Universelle under Baron de Rothschild's

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 361-2.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 375.

²⁰⁴ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 39.

sponsorship.²⁰⁵ More immediate and not to the Tsar's liking was that the Empire's so-called Jewish problem was accorded closer scrutiny by the Western presses and governments, a consequence which Nicholas II would have to deal deftly after the 1903 Kishinev pogrom. For the present, Nicholas I would have to deal with another foreign Jew who promised to resolve the Empire's now prominent Jewish Question.

Jacob Altaris, a French Jew and close associate of Baron de Rothschild, arrived in Russia the same year as Sir Moses but with a different intention. If Nicholas I would authorize the repatriation of 40,000 Jewish families from Russia and Poland to Algeria for 1,000 francs per family, Altaris claimed that he would handle all of the arrangements. Far from building castles in the air, he had Rothschild's backing as well as that of many of Europe's wealthier Jewish families in realizing this project.²⁰⁶ The Tsar answered him two days later with a counter demand for 60 rubles per capita, perhaps anticipating that this would put an end to the plan which it did. Altaris did not understand. How strange it was to the Frenchman that the Autocrat wanted to retain a group that he considered to be a problem, but then he was unacquainted with Nicholas' persona. The Frenchman's offer was a business proposition but the Tsar saw it as a Jew dictating terms to the Autocrat of all the Russias. He therefore had made an absurd counteroffer to save his affronted prestige. Having no alternative, Altaris left Russia never to return and Nicholas was glad to see him depart. Meanwhile, preparations for the Tsar's last major blow to Russian Rabbinitism were already under way.

²⁰⁵ *Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore*, vol. 2, pp. 304-6.

²⁰⁶ Bernard Weinryb, "Quel fut le But du Voyage d'Altaris en Russie?," *Revue des Etudes Juives*, vol. 95 (Paris, 1933), pp. 172-3.

Point and Counterpoint: Nicholas Facing the Jews, 1847-1855

In 1847, the Tsar announced the establishment of two Crown Rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir with the dual purpose of training rabbis for religious functions and Jewish teachers for the government schools. Despite their professional designations as Rabbinical pedagogical institutes, both schools were accorded the status of Russian gymnasia yet their curriculum, particularly for Rabbinical candidates, could have rivaled the best institutions of either St. Petersburg or Moscow.²⁰⁷ Identical to other Jewish schools, the proportion of Christian teachers and administrators to Jewish was in the former's favor though compensated with the exclusive employment of Jewish faculty in those subjects dealing specifically with Jewish rituals, Halakhah, and the liturgical languages.²⁰⁸ Balance, or at least its appearance in administering these institutes, was crucial lest their true nature be exposed and the project killed in its nascent stage.²⁰⁹ For Nicholas, it had to have time to mature. Not until 1855 would he expose his hand openly, though he deceived himself if he believed that his motives were concealed from the outset.

Nicholas Farmaskirten, one of the Jewish administrators assigned to the Vilna institute, was suspected of attempting to turn the school into a de facto recruitment depot shortly after it opened, a charge which could not be dismissed as mere slander.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ YIVO 24/2/138. Contained within this file were actual diplomas of Rabbinical graduates which listed twelve subjects ranging from Torah to physics with their corresponding grades (1-5), with 5 being the highest, which had to be completed satisfactorily before a person was deemed a rabbi.

²⁰⁸ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 103. The first inspector of the Vilna Institute was the maskil Hirsh Katzenellenbogen and Vilna Censor Wolf Tugengold taught Jewish history there.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104. Most of the students in these institutes were enrolled to evade the draft.

²¹⁰ Yosef-Dovid Derevianskii, "Di Batziung fun der Gesellschaft in di Regirungs-Krizis der Rabbiner Shul," in YIVO Bletter, vol. 10 (August-September 1936), p. 15.

Though never sanctioning this practice de jure, government officials, in the late 1840's up until 1855, made discreet inquiries to the principals and other administrators about "volunteers" from among the rabbinical students who were suited for military service. When such were found and presented, the institution was given a monetary remuneration. Cosmopolitan Jews associated with the Institute, along with Vilna's resident adherents, were quick to deny such malfeasance and accuse Jewish conservatives of trying to discredit reform altogether. Matters had degenerated to the point of both sides nearly coming to blows in the streets of Vilna. By way of a partial truce, Yitzak ber Levinsohn, one of Haskalah's remaining visible torchbearers, managed to arbitrate a tenuous settlement and took the liberty to chastise both sides for losing sight of what the Institute really represented, Haskalah realized. Echoing the words of Isaac ber Levinsohn, those who did not recognize that Haskalah was identical to authentic Jewish traditions was ignorant and influenced by the Hasidim.²¹¹ Credited for restoring peace, his pronouncement soon became a source of embarrassment when a recruitment shill was discovered in the fourth rabbinical class, though the unmasking did not end there.²¹² It was learned shortly thereafter that the actual bestowal of rabbinical and teaching degrees came from the government and not from any of the Institute's administrative personnel. In government employ, the Institute's principal also answered monthly to St. Petersburg. Such an arrangement served to undermine the Institute's credibility and all but doomed the city's so-called Uvarov School, a damning appellation which would remain with it and its Zhitomer sister long after the Minister's death in 1855.

²¹¹ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 110.

²¹² Apparently Nicholas was determined to make Jewish recruitment yield the Russification results he demanded and would accept no obstacle. By including the sons of convicted exiles in the cantonist system

Responsibility for the troubles besetting the rabbinical schools did not reside with the government exclusively. From the time the first Jewish students came to Vilna to attend the Institute, it was apparent that Vilna itself had become a den of corruption. Chaim Aronson, anxious to become a rabbi, had traveled to the city and received an education that he had not expected. Seeking orientation and legal assistance to facilitate his entrance into the Institute, he found out that the only difference between the Upper Bet Din and the Lower was the amount of corruption and graft which was carried on in plain view.²¹³ His initial attempt to gain admission having failed, Aronson became an apprentice watchmaker to earn a marginal living. He eventually came into contact with some other would-be rabbinical students who had come to the conclusion that most government-sponsored Jewish studies were folly.²¹⁴ Even so, Aronson did not want to give up his dream until the illegality around him became more than he could bear. In particular, he learned that Chaim Haikil, grandson of the esteemed Rabbi Gershon of Vilna, was a government informant whose actions had placed a number of people in the hands of recruitment officers. When Haikil was discovered, he was bound in chains and sent off to face the same fate to which he had condemned others, but those who saw him off wondered why he was so complacent. Before the examining officers at the recruitment center, Haikil produced the register of the Vilna Chevra Kadisha (Vilna Burial Society) which had a number of “living” souls entered in its pages. He was

in April 1847, one such bar was removed. PSZ (II): Edict 21110, 14 April 1847, The Inclusion of Sons of Jewish Convict-Exiles in Military Cantons.

²¹³ A Jewish Life under the Tsars, p. 77.

²¹⁴ Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, p. 107. Moses Leib Lilienblum arrived at the same conclusion.

released at once.²¹⁵ Aronson wondered how an honest Jew could maintain his integrity in such an environment. When he had amassed adequate resources, he left Vilna.

Similar disillusionment affected Rabbi Israel Salanter, a respected scholar to whom the government offered the directorship of the Vilna Institute in 1848. Throughout his career, he had served the Empire in a variety of capacities, but the prospect of becoming one of the Tsar's minions in Vilna was unappealing and, with all due respect, he declined and moved to Kovno. This departure did not mean his abandonment of his students. Indeed, it was Salanter who introduced to the Empire the *Musar* (ethics) movement which would reinvigorate the Russian Jewish community.²¹⁶

A complex man with a simple program, Salanter promised neither a contemporary messiah nor to be one himself. He offered no miracles nor a "new" Torah. Furthermore, he was not at war with the Talmud nor did he claim to be a righteous soul in whom God had invested extraordinary wisdom and mystical power. Too much damage had been done to Judaism's theological and intellectual edifice at the hands of opportunists and apostates whose guilt was commensurate with that of the Tsar's on several levels. Before Judaism in Russia became a body without a soul or even worse, a crypt without a corpse, repairs had to commence at once. Chief among those labors was the restoration of Judaism's spiritual vitality. Salanter was convinced that Haskalah had gone too far in stripping away seemingly useless tradition to the point of reducing Judaism to mechanical forms without substance.²¹⁷ Even Nicholas I's strictest edict had envisioned alterations to traditional Judaism on far less a scale than what the Maskilim had affected. All the more

²¹⁵ *A Jewish Life under the Tsars.*, pp. 121-22.

²¹⁶ Lester K. Born, *The History of the Musar Movement, 1840-1945* (New York: Shengold Press, 1975), p. 22.

distressing was that Jewish intellectual noteworthies such as Abraham Mapu and, to a lesser degree, the poet Judah Leib Gordon, were touting the remaining barren desolation as a triumph over traditionalism.²¹⁸ Casting aside all critical considerations, Mapu had gone so far as to declare that all good accorded the Jews of Russia came from Haskalah and all ill from fanatical Rabbinism. In Kherson province, M. Epstein declared that he was overjoyed to discover that Jewish youths enrolled in the government school there were taught contrary to Mosaic law. Freedom from archaic Rabbinism, ignorance, and the opening of Jewish eyes to reality could only have come, Epstein wrote, through the auspices of the blessed Tsar Nicholas I who had allowed Jews to progress.²¹⁹ Salanter, for his part, was at a loss to determine the direction of that progress. Eschewing emotionalism which had and would continue to plague every attempt at Jewish self-reformation, Rabbi Salanter presented his movement in the most rational and straightforward context as being one which sought to act as a bridge between Orthodox Jewish tradition and the demands of the modern world.²²⁰

Novel and to the point, the Musar movement was successful, but only in the long term. Despising mainstream Hasidism and popular movements for their emotionalism, denigration and alteration of Jewish ritual and culture, Salanter was inspired to create a logical and humanistic reform akin to the studious nature of the Habad movement. Not unlike Hasidism's leaders in its early years, Salanter established himself as a teacher who, in turn, made teachers of his students. Unlike Hasidism, however, Musar did not fashion itself into a mass movement. Because of Musar's insistence upon Halakhah,

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

²¹⁸ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 104. At this time, Mapu was teaching in the primary government Jewish school in Kovno and Gordon held a post in Poniewezh.

Torah, and Talmud study as a means of interpreting and rationalizing age-old tenets and covenants within Russian and world circumstance, the mental acuity and spiritual discipline required to build the bridge between tradition and modernity would remain reposed in a minority. Far from being exclusive, what did reach Russian Jewry was a new conscience derived from Halakhic and Mosaic ethics which, in their plainest form, were understandable and applicable to mundane circumstance. The reinvigoration Nicholas claimed to have sparked among the Jews of Russia really did come to pass in part owing to Musar which, like Habad Hasidism, eventually left an indelible stamp upon the course of Jewish evolution.

Rabbi Salanter would never reside in Vilna after 1848, but this consequence did not impair his ability to influence Jewish life there and earn a place in popular memory. Shortly after he moved to Kovno, Vilna experienced a virulent cholera epidemic during Yom Kippur which prompted Salanter to urge his former community to ignore the fast and eat. The Rabbinate had refused to allow this for fear of eliciting God's wrath by violating the injunction to act contritely. To this fear, Salanter countered with a greater one rooted in Halakhah, that the preservation of life in the face of death was the supreme expression of *Kadosh Hashem* (Holiness of God). According to Salanter, if the Rabbinical authorities maintained their obduracy in the midst of this epidemic, they were sanctioning communal suicide, an unforgivable sin for which they, the learned elders,

²¹⁹ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, no. 20 (21 March 1848), pp. 290-292.

²²⁰ Lester Ecmán, *The History of the Musar Movement* (New York: Shengold Press, 1975), p. 42.

would have to answer before God at Final Judgment.²²¹ The Rabbinate was forced to concede.

Cholera was not the end of the city's woes. New troubles were astir in the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute which threatened to close it down. On 25 August 1850, the Ministry of National Enlightenment informed the director of the Institute that a plot to overthrow the government had just been uncovered and that Institute teachers were among the suspected conspirators. There followed reproaches regarding the Director's vigilance over the dissemination of ideas among his faculty and students.²²² For all of their accusations and intimidation, neither the Third Department nor the Ministry ever found solid evidence of the plot, although a means had been discovered for exerting greater control. Nicholas was now confronted with a problem of his own making. Uncharacteristically, he had removed all barriers to Jewish education in the interests of cosmopolitanism, hoping to foster the abandonment of ingrained provincialism. In light of this "revolutionary scare," however, he concluded that perhaps he had gone too far. Clearly, he had given his Jewish adversaries a potent weapon which could be turned, if not against the autocracy as such, towards reversing his accomplishments to date.

The transparent concealment of Jewish recruitment for the army and navy from various recruitment pools, including the government's rabbinical seminaries, helped to bring both armed forces up to full strength by the early 1850's.²²³ Enjoying success in one sphere meant potential failure in another as attested by the frantic letter of Alexander N. Orlov, Director of the Vilna Institute, to the Tsar dated 10 March 1852. Enrollment in

²²¹ Zalman F. Ury, The Musar Movement: A Quest For Excellence in Character Education (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1970), p. 21.

the Vilna Pedagogical School was steady but the Rabbinical School was in dire need of a viable pool since the present one was almost dry. Eleven Rabbinical classes were about to graduate which, on paper, was impressive but with very few coming behind them, there was the possibility that that part of the Institute would face dissolution.²²⁴ The throne was silent, perhaps knowing too well the cause of the diminution. In light of successive events, the very outcome Orlov feared most appears to have been calculated. On no account could the beleaguered Director know the Tsar's mind, an unavoidable occupational hazard. Hoping to execute the Tsar's presumed will with what was available, Orlov was reluctant to petition him or the Minister of National Enlightenment unless it was imperative. In April 1852, he asked Nicholas for both funds and materials sufficient to meet the Institute's needs. Six days later (24 April), he followed with a renewed plea to establish satellite schools which would feed into the Vilna Institute since it was virtually starving under the present system.²²⁵ Once more, the Autocrat failed to respond.

Orlov's experience with the Tsar revealed more than official apathy or indecision on the latter's part. Never losing sight of the end he intended for the Jewish condition, Nicholas was experimenting with the means to bring it about by testing the consequences of withdrawing the Imperial hand in one instance and applying it in another. Dissatisfied with the results of Jewish printing limitations, bans on teaching Talmud and instituting

²²² YIVO 38/24/44, A Letter from the Ministry of National Enlightenment to the Director of the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute, 24 August 1850.

²²³ PSZ (II): Report 27412, 3 July 1853, Fleet Recruitment up to Full Strength.

²²⁴ YIVO 38/24/46, Letter from Alexander Orlov to Nicholas I, 10 March 1852

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1852 and 24 April 1852. Eleven classes appears to be inflated, yet two possibilities exist for this claim. Since closure of the Rabbinical School was all but immanent at this point, to give an inflated figure of rabbinical graduates might have been a vain attempt to "prove" viability and stave off dissolution.

so-called beneficial educational substitutions for time-worn *yidischekeit*, the Imperial Senate decreed on 12 April 1851 and again on 10 October 1852 that it was unlawful for Jewish women to shave their heads prior to marriage.²²⁶ On its own merits, it was an odd issue over which to take the Jewish community to task. A tradition for centuries among the Orthodox and a revered practice in mainstream Hasidism, brides were compelled to shave their heads and wear wigs prior to going under the *chuppah* (bridal canopy). Checking the lust of the other male attendants was one consideration but, traditionally, this was done to distract the Evil Eye from casting aspersions upon the bride's true beauty and future happiness. Official proscription of this practice had no legal precedent, but the motive behind this latest legislation went beyond nullifying impediments to government plans. To date, alterations actual and proposed in Jewish education and socialization influenced the externals of Jewish life while leaving its core of rituals and esoteria untouched. If reformation was to take place at all, it had to come from within and begin with the abolition of rituals regardless of importance or triviality.

Nicholas may have been desperate, but his seemingly fantastic scheme could have been brought off in the proper climate. The voices of M. Epstein and other radical maskilim were prominent enough to be heard and heeded, and it would have been an easy adaptation for these modernizers to include theological furniture in their zealous prosecution of Jewish cosmopolitanism. Pre-nuptial hair divestment was a middling ritual issue at best which, unlike earlocks, had no sanction in either Leviticus or Deuteronomy

Another possibility could be that there actually were eleven classes graduating though, admittedly, they would have had to have been very small.

²²⁶ The two pieces of legislation involved were : PSZ (II): Edict 25113, 12 April 1851, Forbidding Jewish Women from Shaving their Heads, and PSZ (II): Edict 26603, 10 October 1852, Punishments for Shaving the Heads of Jews.

and certainly did not weigh heavily in routine shtetl and urban affairs.²²⁷ However, if the autocracy could enforce its will on this point with the assistance of Jewish allies, then other aspects of Jewish ritual would follow and the Jewish edifice would decay from within. In the end, this too would come to naught since there was no urgent purpose for cosmopolitan Jews to band together and act upon such peripheral issues. Besides, a far more serious matter was brewing. By January-February 1853, misunderstandings between Russia and Britain over the decline of the Ottoman Empire meant that a more aggressive Jewish reformation would have to wait.

This latest ploy to affect state-sponsored Jewish reformation had failed, but Nicholas was not ready to concede defeat quite yet. Neither mortality nor conflict with the Western powers prevented the Tsar from trying one last time. Occupying little more than a quarter page in the statute book, the decree of 3 May 1855 limiting the authority of rabbis and Jewish teachers and redefining their roles in Jewish education had the potential of being as profound as the 1827 Recruitment Ukase. In addition to a planned reorientation of existing instruction, accompanied by a reiteration of proscriptions and penalties regarding suspected books, the Tsar declared that within twelve years there would be no discernible distinction between a Crown rabbi and a Crown Jewish teacher.²²⁸ From this date, these future state officers would be required to attend either of the two Rabbinical Pedagogical Institutes, and only upon receiving government

²²⁷ Philip Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, p. 498. The passage relating to earlocks, Leviticus 19:27-28 forbids Jews from marring their temples or the corners of the beards. This proscription was instituted to separate the emergent “Jews” from their pagan neighbors and relatives. One other interesting note is that Deuteronomy 14:1 forbade Jews from “making themselves bald above the forehead.” Again, the original reason for this was to separate Jews from pagan practices, especially funeral rites. With the exceptional sanction of Hasidic mysticism, shaving heads was forbidden, although this practice became differentiated over time in terms of gender.

certification (i.e., obtaining their diplomas) would they be permitted to teach in the government schools. This mandate was to be applied without exception and would be executed in all provinces and regions.

Imagining even the short-term consequences of this innovation could not have cheered Jewish traditionalists or even moderate Jewish reformers. What it presaged was worse than the dissolution of one branch of the Vilna Institute. Combining the numbers of teaching and rabbinical candidates through a redefinition of the curriculum would certainly maintain institutional viability. However, the forced amalgamation of secular and sacred pedagogy would create further confusion within the Jewish intellectual community and Jewish society as a whole. Yes, *rabbi* meant teacher, but one who instructed his fellow villagers and townsmen in their spiritual obligations, wrote learned tracts and commentaries if he had the disposition and acumen, and performed the “rites of life” (i.e. weddings, funerals, bar mitzvas, etc.) as stipulated in the 613 commandments.²²⁹ Jewish life overall, especially in the shtetlach, hinged upon everyone knowing who they were and what God expected them to do. By denigrating rabbis to the level of ordinary teachers, the traditional Jewish hierarchy would have been thrown into chaos.²³⁰ More importantly, if “official rabbis” were taught from the same book as “official teachers,” spiritual and intellectual life would be stifled. How would it appear if one of these new rabbis was called to perform a *bris milah* (ritual circumcision) and had

²²⁸ PSZ (II): Edict 29276 3 May 1855, *Limitations and Restrictions on Rabbis and Teachers of Jewish Subjects.*

²²⁹ Though the ten commandments are itemized in Exodus, there are 613 *tsavot* (commands) which a pious Jew is supposed to honor throughout his life. Some of these had fallen out of use or were no longer valid, but most of those imposed upon rabbis were still in effect and, theoretically, had to be honored and answered for every Yom Kippur.

to rely upon the assistance of an old, “illegal” colleague because the Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute had not taught him the proper prayers and procedures? By that same token, it was conceivable that the day would come when an Institute rabbi would be compelled to defer his ritual responsibilities to the leader of a local *chevra kadisha*, a pious Jewish layman, at a burial for the same reason. If the Tsarevich’s mien accorded with that of his father, in the future, Jews would be educated only to a level sufficient to serve the Empire rather than the community.

Upon Nicholas’ death in 1855, the Jews of Russia greeted the news with cautious relief and hope for amelioration. Little was known of his son, the fate of the Empire, or their own. One fact which could not be ignored or diminished, however, was that the Jewish community, despite its fragmented appearance, was still extant. Forced conversions, recruitment into the armed forces, Haskalah, Hasidism, and government schools had each taken their toll, and though the Rabbinical leadership was in a weakened and vulnerable state, Orthodox Judaism was not showing any signs of immanent dilapidation. Yet given the legacy of Nicholas’ policies inherited by his successor, Jewish leaders and the community were steeling themselves for what was to come.

Notes from Above Ground: Baron Horace (Naftali Herz) Guenzburg

²³⁰ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 103. In both Institutes, intellectual and theological speculation were discouraged since the government's purpose was to draw in these rabbis to the Russian milieu and to think and reason along prescribed Russian lines.

Not all Jewish critiques and attempts to aid Russian Jewry came from abroad. In the 1850's, Baron Horace Guenzburg, engaged the Tsar and various ministers on what he believed to be the most serious issues regarding his coreligionists. Education, of course, was of considerable importance, and the nobleman, in a letter to Nicholas in 1850, could not understand why the Jews of Russia were still waiting to receive the fruits of their intellectual labors. Why, for instance, did not education result in equal rights with the Tsar's other subjects?²³¹ In addition, the Baron hoped that the government would take measures to end Jewish residency restrictions, discard internal passports, and reform Jewish recruitment regulations. To all of these concerns Nicholas remained silent, but this was one Russian Jew who refused to be put off.

Of all of the aforementioned issues, Jewish recruitment was a matter Guenzburg was determined to make Nicholas address. Writing on 15 June 1852, he recognized that the government would not abandon the 1827 Ukase altogether but, he argued, officials would be wise to equalize communal quotas. Some of the smaller communities were being pressed for more conscripts than their larger neighbors, a situation which seriously impaired their labor needs and general viability.²³² Evidently this revelation fell on deaf ears since, three years later, Guenzburg was compelled to resurrect this issue in his correspondence with the Minister for State Domains and Minister of Internal Affairs.²³³ True to his remarks in the aftermath of Montefiore's visit, Nicholas would not make any major amendments in the Jewish policies or concessions to the community while he ruled.

²³¹ YIVO 89/755/2.

²³² YIVO 89/755/3

²³³ YIVO 89/755/5

Official rigidity gave rise to an apparent paradox. To convert all of Russia's Jews to Christianity may have been Nicholas's dream but, had it been realized, he would have lost a valuable fiscal asset. In early 1855, the Baron wrote the Tsar in behalf of the first-guild Jewish in the Empire's western provinces. At stake was the onerous burden of paying 500 silver rubles per conscript, with emphasis upon "silver" specie rather than Imperial assignants.²³⁴ Again, the throne was silent but, embroiled in the Crimean War, Nicholas could be excused for minding more pressing affairs.

Conclusion

It would be a vain endeavor to determine winners and losers in this three-decade contest over Jewish metamorphosis. Even so, Professor Stanislawski maintained that it was Nicholas's object to use the military to affect their transformation into a Russified Judeo-Christian entity. Assuming that Nicholas did not deviate from this design and if indeed this had been his dream, it was not realized even though the last ten years of his reign did see an appreciable rise in Jewish conversions in the military. On that criterion alone, it would be too easy to assert that Nicholas and his government failed because, even though Russian Jewry remained intact by 1855, it did not come through the storm completely unchanged.

Mandatory military service did result in some conversions from Judaism though, by the Tsar's own calculus, not to the degree that he would have desired. Education along modern lines was another attempt to bring the Jews closer to the Russian milieu

²³⁴ YIVO 89/755/4

and, hence, modernity. Considerably more Jews were encouraged to embrace intellectual modernity via this endeavor and its myriad satellite projects than in the military though, at times, just who was maintaining oversight was questionable. Jewish educational initiatives from the 1830's onward appeared to keep pace with those of the government which, in an autocratic state, caused some officials considerable uneasiness. In part to regain the reins definitively, Sergei Uvarov invited Maxwell Lilienthal to St. Petersburg to reinvigorate Russian Haskalah and re-establish Jewish reformation along official courses.

From 1840 onward, Russian officialdom made aggressive attempts to verify, if only for its own vanity and security, its predominance in determining the future form of Russian Jewry. The 1843 Rabbinical Convention had been a disappointment for both the government and Jewish leaders since the investment yielded inconclusive results. Not surprisingly, the Tsar and his ministers made the education of Jewish youths a special concern the following year and, in 1847, institutionalized Crown rabbis. Of all communal figures, rabbis were seen as the corporate representations of the Jewish intellect and conscience, therefore reformation which centered on the manipulation of these individuals was seen as the most effective means of bring the Jews to rein. He did not live to see the results of his handiwork which, in any event, proved a dismal failure.

The government may have had all of the key advantages but the Jews had a voice which they used to express their ideas and criticisms. Maxwell Lilienthal expressed his rather late in his tenure but not Sir Moses Montefiore nor, to a lesser degree, Jacob Alteris. Foreign Jews with considerable political influence and financial backing certainly took an interest in the affairs of Russian Jewry but so too did some Jewish

natives. Lazar Poliakov and his fellow industrialists would make considerable inroads in Jewish affairs during the reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III, but Nicholas did have the attention of Baron Guenzburg. As to the effectiveness of the Baron's correspondence, little can be assessed since neither the Tsar nor his ministers bothered to respond. Granted, the Crimean War would have occupied them, not to mention Nicholas's ardent rigidity which could only have been heightened in light of Russia's floundering during the conflict. Jewish affairs would have to be resolved, if possible, under his successor.

CHAPTER IV: A FLOWER WITH MULTI-COLORED PETALS: GROWING JEWISH DIVERSIFICATION, 1856-1881

Introduction

Abraham Gotlober once remarked that Russia had difficulties incomparable to those of other European nations, and few would have contested this assertion.¹ Despite the adversities of the preceding thirty years, however, the impossible had occurred. In soil sown with salt, a stem grew and the bud of Russian Jewry's intellect and identity took form. Though the bud had been swelling, the time had not been propitious for it to come into bloom. Within the next twenty-five years, 1856-1881, the petals unfurled from their tightly-knit compact and the fantastic spectacle it presented was a simultaneity of opposites. Beautiful and grotesque, chaotic and yet possessing a semblance of order, Jewish diversity came into full fruition at this time and guaranteed for itself a viable, though not easy, future.

One of the more daunting challenges in analyzing the changes taking place within Russian Jewry during the reign of Alexander II (1856-1881) is to recognize the distinction between Jewish and Russian historical development. Until 1863 and the January Rising in Poland, both Tsar and government were seen as sympathetic to reforming Russia, and serf emancipation in 1861 could only have been taken as a positive indicator of future beneficial measures. After the suppression of the Polish revolt, however, the once touted "Tsar-Liberator" assumed a more conservative line in his policies and most significant reforms had come to a halt. A facile sketch to be sure, but what needs to be realized is that the Jewish aspect of this period did not quite fit into this

general mold. Prior to 1863, there was hope in the Jewish community that the new Tsar would alleviate some social and legal disabilities and considerable frustration when neither he nor the government realized these desires. During and in the years succeeding 1863, Jewish frustration was omnipresent but so too were expanded opportunities for social and intellectual development, not to mention a deeper understanding of themselves. As to whether Russian Jews "won" or "lost" at this time is a question of perspective. In terms of their intellectual growth leading to civic parity with their Russian countrymen, this was a disappointing defeat. The ongoing struggle between the Orthodox maskilim and Hasidim, however, kept the issue of Jewish identity alive, in the forefront of Jewish minds, and by odd turns lent integrity to the Russian Jewish community. It was a strange victory against dissolution but a victory nevertheless.

Can the Double-Headed Eagle Rise from the Rubble?

Defeat in the Crimean War forever altered the relationship between the Autocrat and the governed. Gone was the myth of Gatchina where both Russian society and military could be ordered in similar fashion. It was also apparent that the Empire, despite its loss of prestige, was becoming more open to the West. Whether Tsar Alexander II favored these conditions or not, he had to reach an accommodation with Russian society which meant relaxing some of the more stringent regulations of his predecessors.² The Jews would invariably be influenced by official policy, but in ways which differed from

¹ Israel Zinberg, Istoriia evreiskoi pechati v Rossii v sviazi s obshchestvennymi techeniiami (Petrograd, 1915), p. 139.

² W. Bruce Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825-1861, pp. 168-70.

that of the Russian population. It was indeed odd that their patriotism at the siege of Sevastopol was renowned for the moment and then so easily allowed to slip into oblivion.³ During this time, Jews were accorded greater liberty of movement and settlement throughout Russia's cities and, in 1865, the Pale was abolished for artisans and their families.⁴ Freer subjects meant a more viable workforce for the remaking of the Russian Empire but concessions had to be made in order to inspire them to affect this labor. Of their concerns, the Russian and Jewish intelligentsias had many both respective and common, and even in the absence of the Polish Revolt, the government would have been hard pressed to satisfy even the more vital issues. By way of self protection, Russian officialdom fell back upon conservative reaction which only served to worsen certain situations.⁵

Hope, Frustration, and Unfinished Business

Foremost in the minds of most Russian Jewish intellectuals in the years preceding the January Rising was the state of Jewish education and the hope of receiving civic rights equal to those of Russians. Under Nicholas I, the latter was too fantastic for consideration, but his son was of a different mien. Even so, Jewish patience were frayed, and, as Baron Horace de Guenzburg wondered in his letter to the Minister of National Enlightenment of October 1858, when would the benefits of officially-sponsored Jewish

³ John Klier, Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 39. See also Zinberg, Istoriia, p. 27.

⁴ Edward Judge, Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 9-10. Louis Greenberg, The Jews of Russia: The Struggle for Emancipation vol. 1. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 76.

education arrive?⁶ Furthermore, the Jewish nobleman continued, it was hoped that no limitation of any kind be placed on religious instruction which was still considered essential in the education of modern Jews. One other point which was raised and might have in order to allay Russian fears over Jewish ambitions was the likelihood of establishing more vocational schools so that those Jews not destined for the professions could still obtain useful skills.⁷ No answer was forthcoming and, judging from later correspondence, Alexander's government was slow to act.

Part of the answer for official intransigence could be found in a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs dated 22 February 1861. According to the correspondent, some Jews were still under the influence of fanatical rabbis, particularly in Vilna, and that measures were being taken to contain them.⁸ In his assessment of the situation, Vilna's Governor General surmised that Jewish education and employment were in need of sincere reforms, and only when these were in place would there be stability in the Jewish community. Evidently, the promised reforms did not go far enough because, on 25 October, de Guenzberg wrote that despite Jewish efforts to follow the prescribed course of instruction and obtain their degrees, legal barriers still worked to their collective disadvantage.⁹ Why should a Jew try to prepare for entrance into a university? For all of his efforts, he is met with official hostility and further obstacles which he must surmount

⁵ Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform*, pp. 171-2. See also Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1974), p. 303.

⁶ YIVO 89/755/9.

⁷ Throughout this twenty-five-year period and the succeeding thirteen-year one, both Russian Jewish intellectuals and Western European Jewish philanthropists advocated vocational training ostensibly for practical purposes but also to tread lightly in the advancement of Jewish intelligence in hostile territory.

⁸ YIVO 89/756/25.

⁹ YIVO 89/756/23.

and, if he happens to be in the fortunate 25%, will obtain his degree.¹⁰ Written in a spirit of frustration and cynicism, it was also an expression of disappointment for a Tsar and an administration for which it was hoped that the alleviation of a number of Jewish disabilities would come to pass immediately.¹¹

Initially, it would appear puzzling as to why the government was apparently disinterested or, at least, marginally inclined to affect changes in Jewish education, particularly in Vilna which was still an important Jewish intellectual center. Occupied with more pressing affairs of state would certainly have been a plausible reason but, more specifically, this supposed indifference could very well have been a period where officials observed and then acted. For instance, reports that Jewish graduates could not find employment was an echo of Lipman Gurvich's plight in 1851. A gifted graduate of the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute, Gurvich soon learned just how progressive his fortunes became when his services were not in demand in the Russian milieu. He was by no means alone.¹² One could argue that the government, in this particular instance, merely abandoned its own product, but matters did not improve when it decided to take an active hand either. In that same year, the Director of the Vilna RPI complained to the Vilna Education Inspector that it was impossible to teach even the rudiments of Jewish orthodoxy to state rabbinical candidates without Hebrew instruction.¹³ This was at a time when the government had banned all Jewish works save those composed in Russian. During Alexander II's tenure, disputes over language, education, and Jewish identity would arise more from forces within the community than without, but though not as

¹⁰ YIVO 89/756/26.

¹¹ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 74.

¹² YIVO 52/20/69.

intrusive as his predecessor, the Tsar and his government never relinquished their hold on Jewish educational affairs entirely. A reminder of that fact came on 29 July 1859 when it was decided that the melamedim, Jewish heder teachers, would come under direct government authority.¹⁴

Closely related to Jewish education was Jewish military service, an issue the government did ameliorate by abolishing the cantonist system in the late 1850's though not releasing those youths already in the system. Calls for reform in this area would appear in the Jewish press throughout the period.¹⁵ In its issue of October 1862, *Kol Mevasser* expressed a cautious and hopeful sentiment when it reported that, according to the Tsar's 26 August 1856 Manifesto, the recruitment ratio of Jews to Russians would be five per thousand and that now Jewish veterans would be eligible for various benefits.¹⁶ Furthermore, tighter regulations now mandated that those who were called up had to be twenty-one years old and, if the head of a household, in their early thirties. In addition, valor among Jewish soldiers would now be recognized and rewarded appropriately with one limitation, namely, that their highest promotion would be to that of sergeant. Conspicuous by its absence was any mention of the cantonists.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, in spite of improved service conditions, evasions, falsification of recruitment ledgers, and even emigration to America. Whether a Jew served or escaped, profound estrangement

¹³ YIVO 52/25/105.

¹⁴ YIVO 52/41/9

¹⁵ *Russkii evrei*, n. 4. (24 September 1879), pp. 99-100.

¹⁶ *Kol Mevasser*, n. 2. (6 October 1862), p. 1.

¹⁷ Be that as it may, according to Hugh Seton-Watson, recruitment for cantonist units was halted on 26 August 1856. See Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801-1917* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 416.

from the Jewish milieu was an omnipresent danger.¹⁸ For some Jewish conservatives, the disgrace in these actions was not for any considerations of Russian patriotism, after all, Jews had been part of the landscape but never the milieu.¹⁹ More profound in their minds was that whether a Jew went off to service or fled, the Russian Jewish community suffered for the loss.²⁰ Communal viability was at the core of identity maintenance, but unless the deformed legal system responsible for keeping Jews in a stigmatized status was amended, no progress would be possible.²¹ Even with these ameliorating adjustments, the prevailing notion that military service was still a panacea for ridding communities of undesirables was still current and vigorous among Jews and Russians alike.²² Like their intellectual coreligionists, it was only too easy for a Jew to find himself estranged from the company of Jewish traditionalists and, after making the required sacrifices, denied entrance into the Russian intelligentsia and general milieu.²³

Educational reform was episodic and little had been gained in ameliorating Jewish military obligations.²⁴ In spite of all of this attention, it was as though the Jews were invisible, made to appear only when needed or when the Jews themselves could no longer bear the hardships of their station in silence. Regardless, it was clear to many in the Jewish intelligentsia that if they were to remain visible, perhaps their journalistic voice

¹⁸ One very poignant case occurred in Bransk during the Nicholaev period where two brothers were seized for the draft. One managed to escape but the other, returning to Bransk after forty years as a Russian major, was literally “written out of the Book of Life” as far as the Jewish community was concerned. See Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), p. 116.

¹⁹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 44. (29 October 1880), p. 1725. It was opined that the reason for Jewish evasion of military service was a direct consequence of their citizenship status on Russian soil.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 34. (20 August 1880), p. 1323.

²¹ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881*, pp. 354-5.

²² *Kol Mevasser*, no. 2., p. 2.

²³ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881*, p. 38. See also Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 85.

needed to be amplified. In the late 1850's, permission to publish a Jewish organ on Russian soil was impossible to obtain though not in Prussia. Taking advantage of this situation, the Hebrew publication *HaMaggid* (The Preacher) was published in the city of Lyke and transported over the Russian border. This particular journal merits mention not because it was particularly famous or that it lasted for a time. Established in 1855, by 1856, only five issues left the press and it was shut down subsequently.²⁵ Like most Jewish journals, *HaMaggid* suffered from fiscal poverty which made its production difficult and eventually impossible. In April 1862, Jews were permitted to establish their own presses anywhere in the Empire provided that they operated within the 1817 censorship laws.²⁶ This was part of Alexander II's larger scheme of relaxing censorship over print publications which gave rise to the commercial mass-circulation press in the mid to late nineteenth century.²⁷ Despite conservative government reaction, journals such as *Evreiskaia biblioteka* provided an open forum which heightened Jewish cultural and intellectual awareness which, in turn, manifested itself in various modes of political expression such as Zionism. Known initially to a small segment of the Jewish population resident in Belorussia and around Minsk, Zionism, by 1894, had grown appreciably as a result of the Jewish press.²⁸ It was also within the Jewish press that one of the more frenetic battles among the Jews of Russia was played out, the language issue. Official pressure on Jews to become literate and publish in Russian notwithstanding, debates over

²⁴ *Russkii evrei*, n. 4. (24 September 1879), p. 107. Jewish education was an abnormal amalgam of general subjects and russification.

²⁵ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, p. 30.

²⁶ David Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowksi, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1996), p. 61.

²⁷ Louise McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Aron Skir, *Evreiskaia dukhovnaia kultura v bielarusi* (Minsk, 1995), p. 10.

the intellectual efficacy of Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish and what they portended for the formation of Jewish identities and their future viability kept the Jews from ossifying. By no means a glib assessment, this battle was fought on a number of fronts and levels, challenging the Jewish intelligentsia time after time to define who was a Jew and what constituted Judaism. On the outside looking inward, the scene would have appeared to be one of hopeless chaos yet, when privy to an intimate understanding of the attitudes and apprehensions which motivated the participants, one discovers a perceptible unity via diversity which preserved Russian Jewry.

Building Russian Pyramids: Alexander's Visions of Productive and Progressive Russian Jews

Through professional education, the Tsar and his ministers had sought to make the Jews valuable instruments in the Empire's renaissance. Between 5 November 1856 and 11 January 1863, the Senate promulgated legislation which called for improved standards in Jewish education, expanded professional opportunities and stipends for Jews to attend Imperial universities.²⁹ Previous directives had focused exclusively on rabbinical training and authority while neglecting Jewish instruction at its fundamental communal level, the *heder* (primary communal Hebrew school). Closer oversight had to be implemented to ensure that Jewish youths were being prepared to serve society while still preserving their theological and ethnic identity.³⁰ Towards that end, on 5 November 1856, it was mandated that all *melamedim* (heder teachers) and rabbis register with the

²⁹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 4. (24 September 1879), p. 108. Most Jewish parents favored the government Jewish schools since their sons would have needed them to become engineers, doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

Jewish Teaching Committee, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, and be examined annually on their knowledge, qualifications, and performance.³¹ Rabbis had been subject to such scrutiny already and its extension to the *melamedim* revealed some telling difficulties officials had in implementing Jewish policies. *Hederim* had heretofore fallen outside of official purview and relied upon communal support. Jewish government schools, by contrast, had been favored with state financial assistance in some communities but attendance often had to be secured by police force.³² Resistance among some Jewish parents was to be expected as was their recourse to traditional instructors, such as melamedim, to prevent the children from assimilating to Russian ways.³³ Progressive education notwithstanding, the government needed to reaffirm its authority in Jewish affairs, though neither the Ministry for National Enlightenment nor the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and Foreign Creeds challenged or insisted upon radical alterations to traditional Jewish instruction at this point. Successful compliance was incumbent upon measured steps.

In 1861 it was decreed that Jews who held degrees in medicine, surgery, or teaching could stand as candidates for university faculty positions.³⁴ Nicholas had permitted Jewish doctors to sit on regional and provincial medical boards with their Russian colleagues and little else. Now Alexander had expanded this freedom to include

³⁰ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, pp. 79-80. In 1859 E. P. Kovalevsky, Minister of Education, declared that religious instruction would be left to the parents without pressure from the government.

³¹ *PSZ* (II): Law 31104, 5 November 1856, Regarding State Oversight of Jewish Youth Education.

³² Yacov Prelooker, Under the Czar and Queen Victoria: The Experiences of a Russian Reformer (London, 1891), p. 4.

³³ Simon Dubnow, Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958), p. 85. Dubnow contended that assimilation in varying degrees had been a constant factor throughout Jewish history. Another factor in favor of the Jews was that the Russians had no great talent for absorbing other cultures. See Klier, Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, p. 353.

³⁴ *PSZ* (II): Law 37684, 27 November 1861, Regarding Educated and Professional Jews.

a wider range of professionals and a new field of opportunity within the state bureaucracy.³⁵ Foreseeing that residency restrictions would be a problem since Jews were still confined to the Pale, newer legislation included a clause which suspended them in this instance. Clearly the government was marshaling its intellectual and professional resources through the inclusion of an undervalued group, but closer observation and expanded employment would fall short of meeting the grander design without addressing the general social and economic state of the Jews.

Poverty, from both the Jewish and government perspective, was the single barrier most important to Jewish advancement in general. In order to circumvent this difficulty, a decree was enacted in January 1863 granting stipends to Jewish students to attend institutes and universities.³⁶ Support for this endeavor came from an annual 24,000 silver ruble tax exacted from the Jews which was then redistributed in the form of stipends ranging from 25 to 60 rubles per student according to need. Furthermore, impoverished students would be given financial consideration if they demonstrated promise in their studies.³⁷ Teachers as well could benefit from this educational initiative, however, it was stipulated that Russian language teachers were given priority followed by those who taught German, Polish, and Latin. Funding priorities aside, change was immanent. Confirming this new directive, the St. Petersburg Technological Institute, in May 1863, opened its doors to Jews with unrestricted access to courses and lectures for 70 rubles per annum tuition. The timing could not have been better. Overcrowded and possessing limited resources, the Pale was suffering from a conjunction of demographic expansion

³⁵ A Jew with a medical or other advanced degree would enter the Imperial bureaucracy with a rank between 8 and 10. See Seymour Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985), p. 106.

and declining employment in late 1861 which led to a number of ills and widespread discontent, not all of them related to government policies.³⁸ Jewish discontent over education and employment was no secret, and if some amelioration could be effected without injury or hindrance to official reforms, so much the better.

The Other Side of Jewish Educational Reform

Undoubtedly, many Jews benefited from the government's concern over and redistribution of funds for improvements in Jewish education. Even so, it was surprising that this reform did not reach Vilna's Jews or, at best, offered them marginal relief. That poverty was as much a source of frustration as some official policies cannot be denied, but in 1863, some tempers could be contained no longer. Kurnatovik, the Vilna Educational Director, received a number of complaints from teachers in the various Jewish schools complaining about insufficient funds to meet daily operating costs.³⁹ More than mere expressions of disgruntlement tinged with sarcasm, the majority of these missals were pathetic. A rather popular opening was: "Unhappy and poor is my position ..," followed by reports of insufficient supplies, food, unforeseen expenditures, and a host of other concerns.⁴⁰ Surpassing all others, however, was the letter of Leon Keningson, a distraught teacher in Vilna's Second Jewish Gymnasia who did not mince words when he claimed: "Extremely helpless is my position ... ," and concluded his litany of woes by

³⁶ YIVO 52/47/112.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ John Klier, "Russian Jewry on the Eve of the Pogroms," Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History, eds. John Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 5.

³⁹ YIVO 52/30/5-8

wondering if the school itself could exist for any length of time.⁴¹ Inundated with this correspondence, Kurnatovik probably wished that someone else would receive these tales of frustration, fear, and despair which were beyond his power and resources to repair. Kurnatovik was a Jew, and though it was not known if he was a praying man, in the case of Chaim Taits, another official, one of his superiors, was made privy to the misery.

Fearless and strident in his letter to Prince Alexander Prokhorovich Shirinskii-Shikhmatov, Trustee of the Vilna Educational District, Chaim Taits, a teacher in the Second Jewish Gymnasia, made plain his case.⁴² In detail, he informed the Prince that he had been an exceptional student at the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute and had graduated with distinction. Though the curriculum had been challenging, he bemoaned that it had been insufficient to prepare him for what he was to expect upon graduation. By means of his own intellectual resources, he was able to overcome these deficiencies, but now he was confronted with another problem. Trained specifically as a Jewish teacher for employment in a state Jewish school, Taits was grateful to find employment immediately after graduation but now was compelled to relinquish his post because he could not make a livelihood.⁴³ From the Prince, there was no recorded response. Be that as it may, Taits's situation was certainly not an isolated one and, more than likely, why both Rabbinical Pedagogical Institutes came under increasing fire from the Jewish community.

The Fate of the Jewish Rabbinical Pedagogical Institutes

⁴⁰ YIVO 52/30/12.

⁴¹ YIVO 52/30/14.

⁴² YIVO 52/30/55-6.

Reform was fickle and in Russia almost impossible to predict. Nicholas I had envisioned, through the creation of the two institutes in Vilna and Zhitomer, a profound remolding of Russian Jewry from the inside out. Heady ambitions for the late 1840's, their realization would have been imperfect at best by the 1860's considering that both institutes were literally out of synchronization with one another. In Zhitomer, German was the language of instruction and a Germanic influence permeated the curriculum because, its directors reasoned, without German, there was no Reform Judaism.⁴⁴ The Vilna RPI had a Russian curriculum with Russian as the language of instruction because both state Jewish teachers and rabbis were to advocate Russian patriotism.⁴⁵ Like other Jewish institutions of the day, rare indeed was the occasion when these schools understood financial security or security in general, but that was the least of their worries.⁴⁶ Even the Russian government had its suspicions about the students. As unlikely as it may seem, the cradle of Jewish socialist propaganda was in the Vilna RPI, inspired by Arkadi Finkelstein and his compatriots when they organized an "illegal" library there. When the government found out, the group was expelled, but it was the institute, more so than the students, who suffered the consequences.⁴⁷ Was it any wonder that neither the government nor the Jewish community trusted Crown rabbis?⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, employment for Institute graduates became scarce. Faced with the closure of the Rabbinical School attached to the Vilna Institute, its head, Rabbi

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Zinberg, Istoriia, p. 139.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁶ YIVO 24/7/113

⁴⁷ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 153.

⁴⁸ *Russkii evrei*, n. 11. (12 March 1880), p. 405. See also Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p.122.

Lipman Kaplan, wrote an urgent letter to the governor of Nicholaev Province on 3 January 1866 requesting a post there as a Crown Rabbi. The governor replied that no such position was available at this time, news which made the applicant quite anxious about his future.⁴⁹ Beginning in fall 1865, correspondence between the head of the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute and the Ministries of National Enlightenment and Spiritual Affairs and Foreign Creeds stated plainly that the Rabbinical school could not attract sufficient candidates.⁵⁰ Seen from its inception as a transparent attempt on the part of the government to manipulate the essence of Russian Jewry, the school, and the Institute as a whole, could not shed the stigma of corruption. Memories of the recruitment scandal which had occurred within a few years of its opening were still fresh among Vilna's Jews. It was almost inconceivable, not to mention a shock, that official letters had been sent to the head Rabbi requesting "volunteers" from among the rabbinical candidates to make up recruitment shortfalls. This news had made the rounds of most Jewish settlements in the form of fact and rumor. Credibility had been wanting for some time and even their so-called cosmopolitan curriculum was being challenged. Russian Jews were becoming more aware of their Jewishness and when cast into the fray with maskilim, mainstream and Habad Hasidism, not to mention the mitnagdim, Institute graduates could not compete with their minimalist Jewish education. Russian officials could not be blind to these developments, and whether, in 1872, Governor General Potopov sincerely believed that Jewish education was responsible for the rise of Nihilism or not is a matter for conjecture. What is not questioned, however, was the convenience

⁴⁹ YIVO 24/1/161.

⁵⁰ YIVO 24/2/138

of this charge in providing him with the pretext for shutting down the rabbinical branch of Vilna's RPI.⁵¹

Another justification of equal merit was the desire to streamline the Jewish educational system by reducing the size and scope of the Institutes. State rabbinical education at both facilities ended by 1873. Despite this, their respective ancillary pedagogical schools would remain until 1879 (Zhitomer) and 1914 (Vilna). Subsequently, these rumps were then reorganized in order to upgrade their status to full secondary schools which would allow their graduates to enroll in universities.⁵² Progress, however, was bittersweet.⁵³ First-rank Crown Jewish schools which had bolstered the prestige of Jewish teachers were now dissolved, compelling their former faculties and newly-minted pedagogues to seek employment in the broader Russian educational system. Again, government officials apparently did not take into account the extant legal barriers Jews would encounter by making this move.

The Hand Reaches Deeper: Official Attention to Jewish Primary Education

On 4 February 1865, de Guenzburg wrote to Judah Leib Gordon that enlightenment had to extend to the lowest level of Jewish education. As matters stood, Jewish primary education was not equal to its Russian counterpart.⁵⁴ Within a short time, official ministrations extended beyond the secondary schools to the primary facilities. Until the 1860's, Jewish primary education had been considered a local matter, but now

⁵¹ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 159.

⁵² YIVO 24/2/24

concerns over curriculum and conduct required closer supervision. Henceforth, all melamedim were obliged to demonstrate acceptable personal conduct within and outside their hederim in order to obtain the annual renewal of their licenses and all vestiges of autonomy had been surrendered to the Ministry of National Enlightenment.⁵⁵ From a pragmatic position, the government wanted to ensure that Jewish education was uniform and complied with official standards but, it should be recalled, that the Orthodox mitnagdim called for closer scrutiny of the melamedim as early as July 1859.⁵⁶ Intellectual integrity was a foremost concern, though it had stiff competition from the fear among traditionalists that the Hasidim might exert their influence on their children at this stratum and eventually undermine the Orthodox vision of Judaism.

Language and Identity: The Hope and Despair of Russian Jewry

Alexander II's government was neither laissez-faire nor overly domineering regarding the Jews, and yet Jewish initiatives were in some respects automatic. This was possible in part because Russian officialdom afforded the community some much-needed breathing space which allowed it liberty to assess itself and to determine its place in Russian society. Amidst a plenitude of impulses, the most significant one driving Jewish reform was, perhaps, the sense of belonging.⁵⁷ Were the Jews a nation among nations or should they merely assimilate to Russian mores and customs so that religion alone would

⁵³ PSZ (II): Edict 52020, 16 March 1873, Reorganization of the Jewish Teachers Institutes and the Authority of Jewish Teachers.

⁵⁴ YIVO 89/756/49

⁵⁵ PSZ (II): Law 55183, 24 October 1875, Conduct of Melamedim and Annual Review.

⁵⁶ See earlier reference to 52/41/9 of 29 July 1859.

⁵⁷ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 129.

be the only distinguishing factor?⁵⁸ If only the Jewish Question rested upon such a simple choice. Shades of meaning abounded as well as internal reforms which kept the issue of Jewish intelligence and identity fluid and volatile. After all, Osip Rabinovich (1817-1869) stated quite clearly that the Jews first know themselves since it was only through self-knowledge that they would win the respect of others.⁵⁹ While not a Sisyphean quest it inspired considerable frustration which served as the engine behind the events and circumstances of the 1860's and '70's. Though usually a negative quality, it actually lent to the community a sense of unity through some of the tougher challenges of these decades.

One of those challenges refused to disappear. Few other items dominated the Jewish press, correspondence, and various meetings of Jewish religions and educational leaders than the prolonged campaign against the Hasidism. Long considered the maverick theology and philosophy which the rabbinate condemned as being innovative and inimical to theological orthodoxy, now styled itself as the embodiment of true Jewish theology.⁶⁰ In their favor, at Baron Vrangels's behest, in 1862, Jewish censorship regulations were relaxed and provisions were made for the establishment of Jewish presses in Vilna, Kiev, and Odessa.⁶¹ Ostensibly for the benefit of rabbinical Judaism, the Hasidim soon took advantage of this liberality to publish their tracts which excited fears among Jewish conservatives who thought of them as unwarranted competition, and it was only a matter of time before the matter was put before the government. At issue was the relative freedom from oversight that Hasidic presses enjoyed, a circumstance

⁵⁸ Dubnow, Nationalism and History, p. 97. Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 107.

⁶⁰ Hoffman, Shtetl, pp. 153-4.

which elicited charges of religious fanaticism and sedition from the rabbinical camp. Not knowing who or what to believe, local officials either suspended all Jewish publishing in their districts or, as in the case of Geisel Shapiro and his brother in 1867, shut down a specific press.⁶² The Shapiro brothers of Zhitomer stood out because, led by Kh. Z. Slonimskii, Censor and Inspector of the Zhitomer Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute, the local *maskilim* accused them of being the tools of the Hasidim, particularly the *tsaddikim*. Under Russian law, they had a license to publish Jewish works without any further stipulation but, charged with disseminating religious fanaticism the government became concerned. Episodic closures of Jewish presses and the overall problems associated with Jewish publishing stemmed from the government's inability to understand the social and intellectual currents in Jewish society, though it made every attempt to compensate for this deficiency by regulating language use and the substance of Jewish works.⁶³

Though a government initiative, there were many Jewish intellectuals who advocated universal Russian literacy.⁶⁴ No aspect of Jewish life, not even religious works, was to remain untouched.⁶⁵ In January 1867, M. Epstein, the Vilna Education Inspector, mandated that all books on Jewish subjects, particularly those concerning the Bible and

⁶¹ Dmitry Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat v Rossii, 1797-1917: Ocherki istorii tsenzury (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 1999), pp. 267, 270.

⁶² Zinberg, Istoriia, p. 28. Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia, p. 271.

⁶³ YIVO 52/22/16. The fundamental obstacle in the government's efforts to exert meaningful regulation was hampered by its indecision over the proper language. In a letter to the Director of the Vilna RPI dated 18 August 1851, the Governor General reported that a number of Jewish works had been approved for publication in German. By the middle to late 1860's, Russian became the primary language for Jewish works. See also Elyashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia, p. 274.

⁶⁴ Klier, Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, p. 81.

⁶⁵ YIVO 52/47/42. In a letter to the Vilna Director of Education of 13 July 1862, Education Inspector Lemeshevskii complained that the Jews would not avail themselves of the holidays on the Christian calendar owing to religious considerations. Assimilation was a contentious issue which showed no sign of easing.

the books of the prophets, would now be published in Russian translation.⁶⁶ Abraham Gotlober welcomed this news. For years, he had argued that a Russian translation of the Bible would bring about Russian Jewish enlightenment, a suggestion which was resisted in various official circles. With some trepidation, the Holy Synod eventually commissioned Danel Khvolson (1819-1911), a Jewish convert to Lutheranism, to translate two-thirds of the Old Testament into Russian.⁶⁷ Aside from the Bible, the government also supported the efforts of such individuals as Yuri Tavrish, Vilna Jewish Censor who, on 28 August 1868, ordered that all Jewish religious works be presented in Russian to ensure that Russian literacy reached as many Jews as possible.⁶⁸

Secular fields were also affected by this linguistic chauvinism. The natural sciences were believed to be ideal for budding Jewish scholars and, towards that end, G. Finn published *Ha Karmel* in August 1865 which was devoted exclusively to those interests and funded by the St. Petersburg Jewish Committee.⁶⁹ A knowledge of Russian and other European languages was seen as an effective counter against parochialism and fanaticism which, it was commonly believed among many Jewish intellectuals, had infected the masses. The supposed altruism behind these statements, however, was obviously self-serving.⁷⁰ For some progressive scholars such as Hilel Nussbaum, the imposition of Russian literacy on all levels of Jewish society brought with it an invaluable benefit. Yiddish was the lingua franca of the Hasidim, and if the promotion of

⁶⁶ YIVO 52/47/127.

⁶⁷ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, pp. 139-40. Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, pp. 178-80. This came about in 1871 and it was also in the 1870's that Russian translations of the Jewish siddur (weekday prayer book) were made available. Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, pp. 110-11.

⁶⁸ YIVO 89/756/63.

⁶⁹ YIVO 89/756/52.

⁷⁰ *Russkii evrei*, n. 50. (10 December 1880), pp. 1964-5. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 77.

Russian was manipulated carefully, those most susceptible to their influences would, in time, be insensible to their messages.⁷¹

This brings up a curious addendum to the language issue. Obviously, Nussbaum did not appreciate that Yiddish had a wide audience and, unlike Hebrew which was confined to a limited intellectual elite, could gain ingress to various quarters of the Jewish community through the development of a unique literature, humor, and satire which would make it impossible to eradicate.⁷² That a similar Jewish literature developed in Russian cannot be discounted, but the curiosity of Yiddish arose from the Russian perception of it.⁷³ Yiddish as a fusion language was a notion beyond their compass, and those officials who considered it a jargon took their cues from ardent Hebraist. Overall, the Russian government tended to view Yiddish as "Jewish German," merely a transition language which was to lead the Jews of Russia out of darkness and into the light of the modern world. Its supposed affinity to German made it appealing though, as the decades widened the gulf between Nicholas's reign and that of Alexander's, the myth of instantaneous Jewish rebirth into a modern and respectable form was now touted with diminished fanfare.⁷⁴

Official and communal pressures to conform to the Russian ethos inevitably influenced the Jewish press. Initially, the only printing house of any consequence was that of the Romm Brothers in Vilna which had been established in 1799. Conservative to a fault, their activities were limited to producing Hebrew liturgical texts, commentaries and *midrashim* (exegetical works), and not once did they depart from this exclusive

⁷¹ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, pp. 41, 92.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 93-4, 97.

agenda.⁷⁵ That being so, the challenges of the 1860's and 1870's necessitated the establishment of newer publishing houses which produced such journals as *Evreiskaia biblioteka* (Jewish Library). Like *Voskhod* (Rising), its successor which began publication in the early 1880's, *Evreiskaia biblioteka* was published for Jews by Jews in Russian and, aside from offering serial novels, poetry and historical sketches, it became a forum for contemporary concerns and complaints regarding Imperial Jewish policies.⁷⁶ Surprisingly, given some of the pointed criticisms leveled at the government, this was accomplished with the censors' approval.⁷⁷ More narrow in scope, *Kol Mevaser* (The Announcing Voice), the Yiddish weekly of the Odessa Jewish community (1861-1871), offered its readers topics of secular and contemporary relevance along with high holiday calendars and reports on the Jewish conditions in other nations. Though similar in format to *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, its principle aim was to inform Odessa Jews of affairs which affected them immediately.

Along with *Kol Mevaser* (1861-1871), *Di Yiddishe Folks-Blat* (1881-1890) was, perhaps, one of the more notable Yiddish newspapers but, like most, suffered from inadequate financial support.⁷⁸ Alexander Zederbaum, *Kol Mevaser's* editor, struggled for three months with the government to gain approval for its establishment and the production of its first issue in 1861. For all of his energies and efforts, however, he could

⁷³ *Russkii evrei*, n. 17. (26 December 1879), p. 620. Jewish literature in Russia and in Russian was still in its formative stages.

⁷⁴ Diminished in comparison with the russification efforts of Nicholas's government and its allies.

⁷⁵ For a good overview of the Romm press, see Yuri Vartanov, "Iz istorii krupneishikh evreiskikh izdatel'stv vilni XIX veka: tipografia-izdatel'stvo Romm," in *Novaia evreiskaia biblioteka: istoricheskiye sud'by evreev v rossii i SSSR, nachalo dialoga* (Moscow, 1992), pp. 203-231.

⁷⁶ Both of these journals will be explored further later on in this chapter.

⁷⁷ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, p. 32. This was no mean feat considering that Jewish censors, at times, were even more fearful of free expression than their Russian counterparts.

⁷⁸ A. Kirshnitz, *Di Yiddish Presse in der Gevezner Ruslandisher Imperia* (Moscow, 1930), pp. 8, 10.

not sustain its circulation. Ten years later, Zederbaum had to abandon it because it was cost-ineffective in light of the newer Russian-language Jewish journal *Den* (Day).⁷⁹

Rarely was silence accorded Jewish expression and exchanges of opinion in either Yiddish, Russian, or Hebrew if only in brief runs.⁸⁰ During the 1870's, *Evreiskaia biblioteka* was practically the only functioning Jewish organ in the Empire.⁸¹ Meager financial resources were an omnipresent hardship, but it was also much easier for an editor of a Russian-language Jewish newspaper or journal on a number of counts. One had to be nimble in negotiating the convoluted course of Russian officialdom and legislation to win out in the end, and this was much more likely for a Russian publication than one in either Hebrew or Yiddish. Who would sit *shiva* (seven days of mourning following interment) for either one of them, particularly the latter? To this, Abraham Uri Kovner (1842-1909), a prominent Russian Jewish intellectual, wondered why some Jews still quibbled over a matter which, to his mind, had a clear solution. Believing as many German Jewish reformers that Hebrew was not the language of their parents, Kovner went so far as to declare it merely a language consisting of dead letters.⁸² Arguing in a similar vein, Lev Levanda described the staff of Hebrew journals as being "vaguely international" with no roots in either the German or Jewish intellectual traditions.⁸³ As for Hebrew being the identifying factor for Jews, this reasoning was also flawed according to Michael Margolis. It was clear to anyone conversant in Jewish

⁷⁹ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, pp. 108-9.

⁸⁰ According to Stephen Corrsin, the rise of Yiddish among Warsaw's Jews in the 1880's led to the establishment of a truly popular Jewish press. See Stephen Corrsin, Warsaw Before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire 1880-1914 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 75.

⁸¹ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, pp. 113-15. *Evreiskaia biblioteka* will be examined in greater detail later on in this chapter.

⁸² Zinberg, *Istoriia*, pp. 146, 195. See also Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, pp. 124-5.

affairs, he claimed, that Jewish communities in Western Europe had already abandoned Hebrew in favor of the languages of their respective lands. Evident as well was the fact that linguistic assimilation did not mean the eclipse of the Jewish identity, and it would behoove the Russian Jewish community to take notice.⁸⁴ This advice did not go unheeded. Abraham Mapu (1808-1868), a well-known Russian Jewish short-story writer and poet, contended unhesitatingly that Russian assimilation did not mean the end of the Jewish identity.⁸⁵ Playing up its part, the journal *Rassvet* (Dawn), made its case for government-sponsored Jewish education and was committed to spreading the doctrines of true religion and morality to all Jews. Also at the government's direction, this organ championed state rabbis and teachers in an effort to accord them some credibility and trust in the Jewish community, an endeavor which produced paltry results.⁸⁶

Just as contentious as language was the issue of religion. Official Judaism as purveyed by the graduates of the two rabbinical pedagogical institutes may have garnered some followers but, in conjunction with Jewish intellectual challenges, the overall effect upon religious orthodoxy was profound, particularly in the fashioning of "True Russians of the Mosaic faith."⁸⁷ Rigidity on the part of traditionalists and progressives divided the community into various factions which promoted intellectual growth but, simultaneously, led to apathy and apostasy. Attempting to act as a moderating voice, Moses Leib Lilienblum (1843-1910) insisted that both sides recognize that Judaism was dynamic and not static. Reform was not a parochial whim but a necessity and it could only come about

⁸³ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 106.

⁸⁴ *Russkii evrei*, n.2. (9 September 1879), p.40. At this time, a number of Jewish philosophical and historical works were available in German translation.

⁸⁵ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, pp. 127, 136.

⁸⁶ Zinberg, *Istoriia*, p. 40.

⁸⁷ Jacob Brafman, *Kniga kagala* (St. Petersburg, 1869, 1881), p. 247. See also Hoffman, *Shtetl*, p. 128.

if both sides would become more flexible in their reasoning. In fact, Judah Gordon saw the union of reason and faith as imperative to meet the needs of the time, but flexibility had its limits and one could only bend so far before reaching the breaking point.⁸⁸ Some avoided this controversy by assuming an apathetic attitude. Where this was most pervasive was among Jewish youths who, dissatisfied with their education and interminable religious debates, placed little value in religious education and Jewish history.⁸⁹ Those still interested in maintaining their traditional ties called for a more balanced curriculum while others saw the answer to their woes, equal rights, as a goal which could only be achieved through modern secular instruction.⁹⁰ Entrenched traditionalist considered this last proposal to be tantamount to atheism and a warning sign that Russian Jewry was becoming lost in a maelstrom of contradictions. Buffeted from all sides, the Jews of Russia may have thought that there was no room for a calm and rational voice, indeed there were times when the shouting could be deafening. Despite this, there were some, such as Simon Dubnow, saw nothing wrong with the rise of Jewish secularism. To him, there was no abandonment of faith, merely that religion should no longer occupy the supreme position in the Jewish national conscience.⁹¹ On the contrary, L.I. Mandelstamm argued that religion was the key to national unity, no other arrangement could be entertained, and A. Passover carried this position a degree further when he stated emphatically that religion simply could not be separated from the national character of the Jews.⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 8. (18 February 1881), p. 283.

⁹⁰ Ibid., n. 2. (9 September 1879), p. 38, and n. 3. (17 September 1879), p. 67.

⁹¹ Dubnow, *Nationalism and History*, p. 91.

⁹² Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 45, 47.

Was there a relatively safe position for young, ambitious, and frustrated Russian Jews trying to keep their heads above water and trying to advance their fortunes against all odds? A. Dumashevskii's statement that an educated Jew suffered estrangement from the Jewish community and barred admission to the Russian intelligentsia had some merit though there would be exceptions. By 1871, a number of educated Russians viewed their Jewish counterparts indifferently or, at worst, part of some inchoate anti-Christian conspiracy.⁹³ Desperate for any relief, some believed that the only course that would lead them away from the restrictions which ensconced them in a state of ossification was conversion to Christianity. On this score, Dubnow had reached his breaking point. He declared that such individuals, even if they still thought of themselves as Jews and practiced the faith in secret, were no longer Jews.⁹⁴ Agnosticism, ostensibly the last hermitage, also came under fire from both Jewish and Russian sources. The journalist Ivan Aksakov did not mince words when he labeled those Jews who left Judaism but refused to convert to Christianity as "moral amphibians."⁹⁵

Education: All the Same, The Petals Begin to Open

Deprecating labels and slanders spurred on Jewish quest for who and what they were by inspiring introspection. Though it would have been very easy to blame this crisis on the government, Jewish leaders also realized that there was some merit to the contention that Jewish intellectual parochialism was inhibiting progress. In an effort to

⁹³ Ibid., p. 369.

⁹⁴ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, pp. 172, 174.

⁹⁵ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 365.

resolve the problem or at least lay it open for scrutiny, the Jewish Committee of St. Petersburg held a conference on 5 October 1869. In attendance were delegates from Kovno, Vilna, Minsk, Grodno, and Odessa, who came to share their problems and complaints with the assembly and anxious to arrive at some lasting remedies and reform. From the minutes of that meeting, the delegates certainly did not lack for material.⁹⁶ In the field of spiritual reform and lending direction to Jewish education in general, Jacob Brafman (1825-1879) and his compatriot Gur'ev, submitted items for debate which, in the end, were deemed adversarial to Jewish interests. Being a Jewish convert to Lutheranism did not enhance his standing with his compatriots nor did his Christian-oriented proposals which were dismissed throughout the sessions.⁹⁷ In their eyes, Brafman was not really a Jew and, therefore, a moribund entity, but he was also seen as treacherous and cunning. Mindful of their hostility, Brafman tried to garner sympathy by declaring at one point that neither he nor his supporters bore any hostility towards the efforts of the Committee and the present assembly. They stood with them and desired to assist in creating meaningful reforms if only those assembled would trust them. In the end, no one did because, like the Russian writer N.I. Neboisiev who also claimed to be a friend of the Jews, he had a reputation of negotiating in bad faith.⁹⁸ Other issues included a petition to Alexander II regarding reform in the draft regulations which still favored Christians, and there was some discussion over the possibility of developing a pure Jewish literature in Russian. All of this was promising but, as it was recorded, many of these issues would require

⁹⁶ YIVO 89/756/68.

⁹⁷ Ibid. It is unfortunate that the recorder did not provide details of Brafman's proposals but, from the contents of *Kniga kagala*, one could make intelligent assumptions as to the thrust of his reform measures.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

resolution at a later date and some with the grace of God and Tsar since Jews still did not have the rights of Russian citizens.

It would be erroneous to conclude that this meeting was an exercise in futility. Obstacles abounded but did not dampen Jewish efforts to arrive at identities which would afford them a place in Russian society. Brafman and his "fellow Christians," as they were identified in the minutes, did not pose much of a disruption, but this was not reason enough to discount them. Above all else, concerns from the five larger Jewish communities of the Empire needed a proper forum for expression, discussion, contemplation, and, for some, resolution, and indeed this need had been met. Even the Tsar was compelled to hear if not act in their behalf, but what must be appreciated is that those who took an active hand in developing the collective Russian Jewish intellect were not all men nor geriatric by the standards of the day. Indeed, in the period 1864-1877, the demands of Jewish youths for reforms in education and religion gave purpose for the Society for the Spreading of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia.⁹⁹ During its tenure, the Society forged communal solidarity and many rural Jews who would not otherwise have received any formal education did so through the Society's schools and the talents of individuals such as Judah Leib Gordon, but neither the Society nor its program had any security for further sustenance. Financial woes were never distant and aggravated by the leadership's grandiose schemes which required commensurate revenues which were not extant. The only potential source of profit which it possessed was its publishing operation, but that too was mismanaged. Early on, the Society generated ill will among some Jewish authors whose manuscripts they had rejected. It was not the

⁹⁹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 4. (23 January 1880), p. 123.

rejections themselves which angered these authors but the Society's criteria for publication. Not only were these not made available, but given the uneven quality of those works which were published, the Society garnered few allies.¹⁰⁰ Given its apparent egoism and arrogance, as charged by its detractors, it was ironic that Society schools were always short of textbooks.

The Education of Women: A Challenge to Tradition and the Promise of Viability for the Community

Intellectual secularism and various shades of cosmopolitanism under the umbrella of modernity certainly stirred Jewish passions, but the education of Jewish women beyond the mandates of tradition excited an emotional explosion. Coming to the fore in the mid-1860's, immediately traditionalists condemned such proposals as dangerous.¹⁰¹ Once begun, there was no telling what the result might be. To those clamors, Lev Levanda, M. Hirschfeld, and others informed the naysayers and entrenched traditionalists that times were changing along with the needs of the Jewish community. Were they so blind as not perceive that by educating women to degrees beyond those of governesses and petty shopkeepers that a more economically viable and intellectual Russia Jewry would emerge?¹⁰² Of course, even among its advocates, attitudes towards what women should be taught and their employment was far from settled. In Tel'shi in 1872, Rabbi Khazanovich began teaching Jewish women a wide range of subjects in order to prepare them for the entrance examinations to gymnasia and institutes.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 123-4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., n. 7. (17 October 1879), pp. 217-19.

¹⁰² Ibid. Also, n. 4. (23 January 1880), p. 129 and n. 31. (30 July 1880), pp. 1201, 1203.

Impoverished students attended his lectures for free.¹⁰³ Some remarked that Jewish women made better students than men since they had escaped the ineffable intellectual rigidity of the heder imposed upon their male counterparts. Possessing more mental flexibility allowed them to grasp newer concepts rapidly and show greater confidence in making inquiries and speculations. This was by no means a parochial observation. Desiring progress within and without the community but still wedded to tradition, Rabbi Zalkind Minor and like-minded luminaries proposed vocational education as the most beneficial to Jewish women.¹⁰⁴ More than gender chauvinism, this conservative tendency was inspired by the recognition on the part of the Russian government that the Jewish intelligentsia, and particularly the presence of Jewish students in Russian universities, was on the rise.¹⁰⁵ Incurably xenophobic, officials initiated means to limit Jewish admissions and employment, and it was the Curator of the Odessa Educational District who first proposed the infamous Numerus Clausus.¹⁰⁶ Fearing that they might lose the little that had been gained, progress was not abandoned but pursued along different courses.

Just as prominent as Lev Levanda (1835-1888) who at one time held the post of Learned Jew in the Vilna Governor General's office, was Judah Leib Gordon (1831-1892).¹⁰⁷ Both men believed that Jewish reform was a necessity and not an evil, but Gordon, a graduate of the Vilna Rabbinical Pedagogical Institute, was more outspoken and engaged on the ground floor of Jewish education, so to speak, in the late nineteenth

¹⁰³ *Russkii evrei*, n. 4. (23 January 1880), p. 130.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 11. (12 March 1880), p. 414. and n.31. (30 July 1880), p. 1205.

¹⁰⁵ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁶ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

century.¹⁰⁸ In 1872, he became the secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Culture Among the Jews of Russia and St. Petersburg, an organization which advocated secular education along with traditional Jewish instruction with an eye towards creating the “modern” Russian Jew. Pursuing this endeavor zealously, Gordon tempered it with humanistic understanding so as not to lend his voice to the madding din which reverberated throughout the community. As he saw it, nothing could come of one group accusing another of malfeasance while obfuscating or feigning amnesia regarding its own dubious dealings. If the *mitnagdim* feared Hasidic exploitation of the ignorant, equal attention should have been given to manipulation of the intelligentsia by the *maskilim* which Gordon perceived to be the greater threat.¹⁰⁹ Donning the garb of civilization while removing the very kernel of Judaism, Gordon believed, would bring about the end of Judaism in Russia. Tradition could not be discarded indiscriminately. Each facet had to be weighed against contemporary conditions, its value assessed in terms of sustaining Jewish life, culture, spirituality, and intellectual stature, and then either retained, adapted or discarded. Gordon was concerned, moreover, that his simple and sound program was threatened with the introduction of German Reform Judaism to the Empire in the late 1860’s. Russian Jews were just beginning to discover themselves and realize the possibilities of chthonic Judaism. Given the influences of Haskalah and the German-oriented state-sponsored Jewish education, a number of Jewish intellectuals had been conditioned to believe that German Judaism was superior.¹¹⁰ The Jews of Russia needed to have confidence in their own abilities, an observation which was easier to identify than

¹⁰⁸ Michael Stanislawski, For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 132.

remedy. If there was to be any Russian Jewish identity, it would have to be achieved after considerable effort.

It was not uncommon for such an effort to depart from Jewish tradition, which is what Gordon did when he decided to extend Hebrew language instruction to women. He shared Levanda's belief that Jewish women needed broader intellectual exposure, though his reasoning was decidedly different. To Gordon, Jewish women were wives and mothers and, in the latter capacity, were charged with instilling their sons with Jewish traditions and morals.¹¹¹ Particularly among the more affluent families, Jewish women knew French and German, and Russian Jewish intellectuals were accustomed to reading and speaking in a number of European languages.¹¹² No one considered this an odd development, in fact those who possessed this knowledge occupied a special stratum within Jewish society, but when it came to Hebrew and the intention of teaching it to women, hackles arose in various quarters. From Original Sin to myths regarding their weaker constitutions, Jewish conservatives had a wealth of reasons why the extension of this knowledge to women and girls was a mistake. Judah Gordon, however, would not change his mind. Only too cognizant that Hebrew would never become a universal language or, as Eliezer Perlman ben Yehuda (1858-1922) opined, one that could only be revived in a land where Jews constituted the majority, Gordon, nevertheless, saw it as one of Judaism's precious treasures which he did not want to disappear.¹¹³ Assisting him in this cause were Miriam Markel-Mosessohn, one of Gordon's confidants, and Raschel

¹⁰⁹ Lester Ecman, The History of the Musar Movement:1840-1945 (New York: Ktav Press, 1975), pp. 35-7.

¹¹⁰ Stanislawski, For Whom do I Toil? , p. 154.

¹¹¹ Carole B. Balin, "Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia, 1869-1917" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1998), p. 6.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 15. *Russkii evrei*, n. 31. (30 July 1880), p. 1204.

Mironovna Khin. Both of these women were, in Gordon's estimation, exceptional Hebraists with much potential, though he would often catch himself if he believed that his enthusiasm for their work overextended the bounds of propriety. A frequent criticism of their respective works was that it was defective in parts, a fault which was not of their own making.¹¹⁴ Denied the benefits of heder and yeshiva, flawed Hebrew would be inescapable. Though he did not belabor this point, it was apparent that Gordon found himself in a difficult position. First of all, Hebrew instruction itself was an exercise in rote memorization without any analysis of syntax or grammar.¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, prose and poetic creations in the language tended to be stilted and halting rather than natural and flowing. In addition, Markel-Mosessohn's skill excelled many of Gordon's male students, and this was not well received. Still, Gordon did not eschew his female prodigies, especially when Rashel Klin was one of the few Jews accepted into the ranks of the Russian intelligentsia and even played host to the philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev.¹¹⁶ Proud in one respect, Judah never discounted his belief that the true purpose in providing Jewish women with a Hebrew education was to make them enlightened mothers. Their education was a means for preserving Jewish patrimony, and at no time was there any serious consideration of allowing Jewish women significant freedom within the society.¹¹⁷

Like a Potter's Vessel¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 143.

¹¹⁴ Balin, "Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia," pp. 36-8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 133.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ Isaiah 30:14. See also Psalm 2:9.

Intellectual freedom, real, imagined, and in its formative stages, brought with it changes in the Jewish milieu which left some at a loss for reception. A flower of multi-colored petals was coming into bloom, and though it was doing so within the currents of a raging tempest, progressives viewed this phenomenon as a welcome consequence of their labors. From the opposition camp, diversification was merely the antecedent to dissolution. To ultra-traditionalists, regardless of the terms used to describe the relationship between some Jews and the broader Russian society, it was a heretical courtship. The age-old superstition that for every word of a foreign language a Jew learned he forgot a Hebrew one was still in force and now with renewed vigor since it could be used in direct assaults upon modern Jewish journals published in Russian.¹¹⁹ More than adopting a foreign language as their own, the parallels between the so-called sins of the prideful modern Russian Jews and those in the Book of Isaiah were self-evident. Already, to their minds, the state of Russian Jewry resembled the punishment God levied upon Israel when, with a rod of iron, he had dashed them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

“Judaism is disintegrating into two hostile camps, Hasidim and Mitnagdim, and there appears to be no hope for resolution,” wrote E. Orshansky in 1871.¹²⁰ Neither side could claim motivational purity or altruism in their actions towards the Jewish masses in pursuing their respective courses, though some conservative circles considered the Hasidim to be the greater of two potential evils. By their very title, “Hasidim,” (the pious

¹¹⁹ Yacov Prelooker, Under the Czar and Queen Victoria, p. 6. Prelooker's grandfather, Rabbi Abraham, was just such a man who thought that even the smallest innovation to “orthodox” Judaism meant immediate assimilation.

ones), they made themselves contentious to Jewish orthodoxy. Insult over a mere name was not so grave as their claims to being the upholders of Jewish traditions when their *tsadikim* were not rabbis and largely ignorant of Talmud and wisdom literature. In their stead, superstition and mythology were presented as erudition and not for the enlightenment of their followers but to support the *tsadik's* otherwise untenable position. Neither Halakahic nor Mosaic law had made provisions for this office and, considering the potential and actual injuries which these individuals have perpetrated, their very existence is offensive. That these charges almost always originated with the *mitnagdim* should not diminish their overall veracity even though the accusers had their own designs to fulfill.¹²¹

Orshansky went on to claim that some of these self-styled holy men suffered from delusions but others, out of blatant opportunism, engaged in unholy and illegal activities. Ironically, even though some *tsadikim* had been exposed as frauds, legions of desperate and unlearned individuals still flocked to them. Fine distinctions between movements within Judaism had now become blurred. Hasidic calumnies had diminished the status of legitimate rabbis and compromised their spiritual authority. Should this process be allowed to continue ad infinitum, Orshansky contended that the Jews of Russia would experience spiritual statelessness. Though his biases were inescapable, Orshansky, nevertheless, attempted to act as an honest broker by pointing out that Hasidism would not have grown or become as potent as it had if the Rabbinate had been more forthright with and attentive to the Jewish masses. Blame had to be shared equally.

¹²⁰ E. Orshansky, "Misl'ii o hasidizme," *Evreiskaia biblioteka*, vol. 1. no. 1. (St. Petersburg, 1871), p. 73.

¹²¹ Orshansky, "Misl'ii o hasidizme," pp. 74-75.

Arguing in a more restrained and logical vein, Joachim Isaakovich Tarnopol (1810-1900) an Odessa Jewish merchant, presented a more moderate view of the current situation.¹²² Whether dressed in Russian garb with shiny leather boots and speaking eloquent Russian or in dirty rags bellowing in marketplace Yiddish, the Russian Jew, Tarnopol asserted, was a collaborative creation of Russian officialdom and the Jews themselves. For better or ill, change were mandated and both parties had to work together to bring it about. Referring to Alexander II as “our humane Emperor,” Tarnopol credited him with opening Russian universities to Jews and allowing Jewish professionals to enter various societies, associations and teaching positions. Pleased with these advances, Tarnopol was not yet prepared to discard caution in favor of jubilation. He had heard of the two rabbinical pedagogical institutes of Vilna and Zhitomer and knew only of their purpose in graduating Crown rabbis and Jewish educators. On this subject, the author assumed a curious position. Hoping that their education would gratify the delicate balance of tradition and modernity, he then expressed doubts about the efficacy of their instruction in cultivating their collective theological and intellectual dexterity.¹²³ Uncertainties aside, Tarnopol's main plea was that the Jewish community be given the opportunity to show Russia and the world that its continued productivity and success was proof enough of its self-sufficiency. Once that had been recognized in official circles, the Jews would have their political emancipation.

Realization was at hand. The Rabbinate was a wraith incapable of posing an obstacle to progress. Gone were the days of intensive Hebrew study for all boys and men.

¹²² Joachim Tarnopol, Reflexions sur L'Etat Religieux, Politique et Social des Israelites Russes (Odessa, 1871), p. 15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

Vanished, too, were Talmudic disquisitions on irrelevant esoteria pertinent to residence in empires no longer extant. Russian authorities could not help but see that Judaism was pliant and that Jews, particularly the more astute, had adapted already. Even ritual, Tarnopol maintained, could be modified to reflect current experience and not diminish the Jewish essence. The Saturday morning service, for example, would be more meaningful to intellectual theists if some antiquated prayers were discarded and Judaism permitted a natural rejuvenation.¹²⁴ After all, since Judaism was a religion with agrarian roots, it should have been understood that the removal of dead undergrowth was essential if the field was to be made ready for a new crop. Mainstream Hasids and ultra-conservative orthodox worshippers, however, resisted even the slightest alterations. Emotionalism, not historical necessity and reason, governed their continued obduracy. To buttress his point, Tarnopol employed Moses Mendelssohn's pronouncement that Judaism was as ever-changeable as life itself.¹²⁵ Change was inevitable, and Tarnopol exhorted the Jews of Russia, particularly the intelligentsia, to recognize it as an opportunity for self-liberation in all aspects of Jewish life and not to hide from it in fear.

Haskalah: One Current among Many

Since its introduction to Russia, it had been subdued and subordinated episodically, but Haskalah remained a viable undercurrent in Russian Jewish intellectual development. Adamant about the supremacy of secular over sacred learning and seeking to rebuild Judaism along those lines, they followed a course akin to that of the Rabbinate.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

Discounting recent Jewish history and reacting against mainstream Hasidism's democratic appeal, Haskalah's elitism continued to exclude women and workmen from its ranks. Claiming that the movement's sole interest was to groom a new Jewish intellectual vanguard to lead the ignorant, Yiddish-speaking masses through the perils of the modern world, the *maskilim* succeeded in alienating many of those they sought to save.¹²⁶ Even so, Haskalah's growth showed no signs of waning. Throughout the 1860's and '70's, Haskalah's influence reached into the Empire's more renowned yeshivas of Volozhin and Mir which the Rabbinate could neither prevent nor counter. Baiting the Hasidim had become de rigueur, and flushed with success and a sense of righteousness, the maskilim adopted Hebrew as their lingua franca. Traditionalists were shocked. To them, Hebrew used in this manner constituted a desecration of Jewish theological tradition and Jewishness overall, especially when this language was manipulated by some budding Jewish socialists.¹²⁷ Owing to the flurry of activities engaging the Jewish community in the middle and later decades of this century this development would be one of many worries to ensconced traditionalists.

Contemporary Relevance Rooted in the Past: The Shades of Pfefferkorn and Donin and the Dangers of Apostasy

Tradition competed with modernity, secularism with theocracy, and varying shades of one cause or another occupied a nebulous middling position in the Jewish

¹²⁵ Moses Mendelssohn, Jerusalem and Other Writings (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 70.

¹²⁶ Miriam Zunzer, Yesterday: A Memoir of a Russian Jewish Family (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p. 97.

¹²⁷ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 155. Aaron Lieberman (1845-1880) saw Hebrew as a means of bringing into the Jewish socialist movement Talmud students whom, he envisioned, would one day assume its leadership.

spectrum. One of those currents was Jewish apostasy. Though their numbers were small, the Jewish press of the 1870's and 80's allowed apostates and disaffected Russian Jews to disseminate their views to a larger reading audience than had been possible in previous decades. Particularly pernicious was the stridency of the apostates' position. Believing that salvation rested with the complete eradication of Judaism as a corporeal entity, all facets of Jewish spirituality were deemed repugnant, though their language was not always direct. Educational pragmatism often presented an alluring facade by which the artless or gullible could be drawn in before they knew the full consequences of their new association. For instance, the Jewish youths of New Russia were being educated progressively, completely eschewing the mysticism and abstractions of traditional education.¹²⁸ If all proceeded well, the time would come when these new Jews would be on an intellectual par with their Austrian coreligionists. Promises of this sort aggravated the extant disaffection among the larger Jewish population which provided apostates with fertile ground. Rebuking their flawed logic, the mainstream Jewish intelligentsia admonished those who might be tempted that an ostensibly free Jewish status bought with the death of Judaism in order to placate Orthodox Christian provinciality and Jewish opportunism was not freedom and that such a price must never be paid.¹²⁹

More than a declatory warning would be needed if the intelligentsia hoped to combat the apostates. With a fair knowledge of their audience, the authors and editors of *Evreiskaia biblioteka* employed the age-old art of didactic storytelling in an effort to reach those most in need of their message. Delving into Jewish history, they finally resurrected

¹²⁸ *Russkii evrei*, n. 2. (9 September 1879), p. 38.

¹²⁹ "Ot Izdatelia," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 1. no. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1872), p. vii.

two of the more notorious Jewish apostates, Jacob Pfefferkorn and Nicholas Donin, as object lessons of what could befall Jews of Russia if they were not on their guard.

Jacob Pfefferkorn, like a number of contemporary Russian Jewish apostates, was not taken seriously at first. Desiderius Erasmus thought him to be little more than “an ignorant butcher with a forehead of brass,”¹³⁰ whose arguments were mere conjecture without metaphysical support. True as this may have been, this initial disregard and contempt sponsored a false sense of security which eclipsed the potential inimicability of a malevolent, ill-educated, and determined man. Russian Jews were particularly vulnerable to such individuals since the Jewish intelligentsia, in the main, considered contemporary apostates as ignorant babblers and the rest of the Jewish population was occupied with more immediate concerns. This mixture of apathy, ignorance and arrogance could only bode ill.

Considered spiritually dead by his contemporary coreligionists, Pfefferkorn was accorded complete liberty of action.¹³¹ Taking advantage of the prevailing political climate to serve his ends, he allied himself with the Dominicans and almost persuaded Emperor Maximilian I to authorize the burning of all Jewish books save the Bible on the grounds that they were anti-Christian.¹³² There was no conceivable reason why his petition would be rejected. Nicholas Donin, two centuries before, had been a Jewish apostate in Dominican service and had levied the same charge against Talmud resulting

¹³⁰ A variation of Isaiah 48:4: Because I know that you are stubborn and that your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead bronze.

¹³¹ When a Jew became either an apostate, atheist, or converted outside of the faith, some close to the individual sat shiva (seven days of mourning) and consider the person “dead.”

¹³² P. Grentz, “Reuchlin i Pfefferkorn,” *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 1. no. 1. (1871), p. 254. According to Reuchlin, the only Jewish works which merited burning were *Toledoth Yeshu* (Life of Jesus) and *Ha Nissachon* (The Victory) because they insulted Christ. See Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, trans. Martin and Sarah Goodman (1516, reprint; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 14.

in the destruction of all known copies in Paris. At his instigation, the learned doctors of the Sorbonne conducted a trial in which the Talmudic tomes were placed at the bar and condemned for heresy and punished forthwith. Kabbalah was also presented as dangerous and anti-Christian since, even more than Talmud, it was far removed from Christian experience and the likelihood of this slander being revealed was slight. Be that as it may, as the self-appointed inquisitor of Judaism, Pfefferkorn made it known that all volumes of these works would be the first to perish but he could not act alone. He needed allies and not just anyone would do. It was imperative that credible scholars lend their support to this plan. Johann Reuchlin was one of those he sought out, and by bringing his intentions to the attention of this Christian humanist, Pfefferkorn sealed his fate.¹³³ It was apparent to Reuchlin that Pfefferkorn had never seen a page of any of the works he proposed to destroy whereas he, Reuchlin, was a Judaic scholar familiar with many of the condemned works. Through cogent argument, he exposed his adversary's lack of theological erudition, and the humanist further convinced the Emperor and the Dominicans that what they were about to consign to the flames were the pillars of higher Christian thought. Pfefferkorn's commission was revoked post haste.

Reuchlin had his own motivations though it could not be denied that the Jews had benefited from his actions. His intervention had been a lucky stroke, but luck and miracles could not be counted upon in all instances. Though Tsar Alexander II did not share Empress Elizabeth I's disposition towards Jews, Russia's social, intellectual and theological climate in the early 1870's was, nevertheless, susceptible to opportunism.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 18. It was not lost on Pfefferkorn that Reuchlin's Kabbalistic scholarship was dedicated to verifying Christian principles. What he did not count on, however, was the scholar's devotion to its preservation even if, as some charged, there were some anti-Christian references.

Bearing this in mind, the examples of Pfefferkorn and Donin in the pages of *Evreiskaia biblioteka* served as a call to action. The Jews needed only look around them for inspiration. Official barriers still denied them full privileges while guaranteeing them added burdens in the form of special taxes. Coupled with this was the tacit dictum that no Jew would ever be permitted to reach the upper social echelons. Believing themselves trapped on all sides, a number of *maskilim* embraced socialism's secular reductionist philosophy, but the both the movement and its influence were still in its nascent stages. Meanwhile, impatience with second-class status among Russian Jews was running high. For those whom Haskalah had cast away and Judaism's appeal was as welcoming as an empty tomb, Christian conversion promised immediate relief which, for some, took priority over the long-term consequences of such a decision.

Prelooker and Liutostanskii: Russian Jewry's Musicians of Hamelin

Neither of them demanded outright the complete destruction of Jewish works, yet Yacov Prelooker and Ippolit Liutostanskii were apostates not to be taken lightly. What both men may have lacked in terms of their respective Jewish theological educations, they were well compensated in cunning and acumen when they challenged the Odessa and Moscow Jewish communities respectively in the late 1870's and early 1880's. Aside from the usual hardships and disabilities, urban Jews were particularly susceptible to conflicts between secular knowledge and parochial mores.¹³⁴ Jewish tradition placed a premium upon knowledge and intelligence, esteeming both above the acquisition of

¹³⁴ Lucy Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition, pp. 27-8.

material wealth, but in a narrow vein. It was de rigueur that an exceptional *bar mitzvah* (a thirteen-year-old boy called to the Torah) who possessed superior talents in discussing Torah and Talmudic issues was held up as an example to others. Be that as it may, that individual's favor could be withdrawn with the same ease in which it was conferred if his habits did not conform with his particular community's notion of normalcy. Shtetl Jews tended to have little tolerance for difference. Woe betide the *nebesh* (unfortunate one) who lacked the acumen or interest to pursue intellectual and theological affairs even to a moderate degree. Aside from having to endure parental disappointment, those who did not fit in could expect varying degrees of ridicule which subsequently alienated them from their communities and, for some, divorced them from Judaism altogether. Ironically, the same held true for some child prodigies in the face of inflexible communal beliefs and standards. Growing bored with the traditional Jewish education, some read "forbidden books" and taught themselves foreign languages.¹³⁵ Such acts, when discovered, usually resulted in ostracization from the community. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, this social and intellectual rigidity would be taxed to the limit of its strength and, in some quarters, brought asunder altogether.

Yakov Prelooker was an apostate whose sole interest was to create an organization where Jews would be encouraged to embrace Christianity and eradicate all prejudice which had existed between the two religions.¹³⁶ His ultimate exile in England

¹³⁵ Simon Dubnow and Haim Zhitlowski were two Jewish intellectuals who acquired their fluency in foreign languages by these very means. See David Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlowski, Simon Dubnow, Ahad ha-Am and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1996), pp. 89,148-9.

¹³⁶ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 356. A similar attempt had been made in Vilna in 1867 with marginal success.

testified to the ill fortune of his movement.¹³⁷ What had brought him to that fate did not seem out of the ordinary until January 1882 when he published the credo of his Brotherhood of the New Israel which earned for him the ire of Christian and Jewish theologians alike. Prior to this, Prelooker had led a fairly quiet and unremarkable life as a government functionary. By his own admission, his childhood was like that of most Jewish children save that even at an early age he could not bear the ignorance and superstitions of his parents and his grandfather, Rabbi Abraham. Feeling stifled in such an oppressive environment, he left it in August 1877 to enter the College of Preceptors in hopes of expanding his knowledge and finding useful employment.¹³⁸ Compared to the Crown Jewish schools of the day, the curriculum was identical save that Jewish candidates were retained an additional year to study Hebrew, Jewish history, literature and religion, all taught by Jewish faculty while other subjects fell to Orthodox Christians. During the course of his studies, there were no attempts to proselytize among the Jewish students or compulsion to perform demeaning tasks; if anything the College's atmosphere was tepid. Upon graduation, he was made assistant director of the Second Odessa Jewish Government School and, shortly thereafter, his life took a decided turn.

In December 1881, Prelooker formed his Brotherhood of the New Israel and established contacts with an allied group in Elizabethgrad, the Biblical Spiritual Fraternity under the direction of Yakov Gordon.¹³⁹ Both organizations sought to bridge the adversities which separated Jews from Christians in Russia. Gordon's group imagined that a Judeo-Russian fraternity would come about when Rabbinical Judaism

¹³⁷ Prelooker, Under the Tsar and Queen Victoria, p. 1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

was discarded in favor of a reformed synagogue rooted in rationalism and married to a purified Protestant church.¹⁴⁰ Prelooker had a more ambitious and naïve design in mind. From his vantage, all Christian denominations could be united by means of what he termed a “theologically benign” Judaism, shorn of all trappings which Christians found objectionable. Crafting and honing his theology and philosophy and anxious to increase the Brotherhood’s membership, he then printed his manifesto in the *Odesski listok* of 29 January 1882 with the hope that his imagined theological *kettuba* (wedding contract) would be executed. What he received ultimately was a *get* (divorce contract) from both communities.

Prelooker was at a loss in discerning what had gone wrong. For years, *maskilim* and cosmopolitan *mitnagdim* had been exhorting Jews to come to the Russian bosom and become as Russian as was humanly possible. Various members of the Russian intelligentsia had also called for viable solutions to the Jewish Question.¹⁴¹ Bearing all of this in mind, Prelooker assumed that the day of his manifesto’s publication would be one of triumph. It turned out to be a nightmare which lingered for several weeks. Both his parents and grandfather expressed their conviction that he (Prelooker) would be better off as a dead Jew than a living apostate.¹⁴² Being disowned was not the worst of it. Following fast upon this tragedy were the vehement denunciations of the Odessa Rabbinate which excommunicated him and threatened his supporters with the same if they continued their associations with either him or the Brotherhood. After three weeks,

¹³⁹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 16. (15 April 1881), pp. 604-5. Gordon's group had existed for some time before Prelooker's though, it was thought, that few Jews would be attracted to the Spiritual Jewish Fraternity because it was not a legitimate part of the Jewish faith.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴¹ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 185. Katkov claimed that Jews were raw material for Russification.

divested of his most steadfast followers, Prelooker was left alone to confront the Jewish community's continued fury as well as the mounting anger of the Christian one.

Odessa's Orthodox Christian prelates could not decide if Prelooker was offering them a Trojan Horse or was simply a fool. The mere notion of a merger of Russian Orthodoxy with Judaism, no matter how benign the latter may be, was repugnant. To them, it contravened the Divine Order which, from the Orthodox Christian perspective, was plain. The Jews had had their chance and had watched it expire on the cross; let that be their punishment since a delayed awakening to their doctrinal errors could not mitigate their original crime. It was a matter that went deeper than theology and ethnicity. The historical circumstances which had forged Russian-Jewish relations and their perceptions of one another could not be swept away on a whim, and Prelooker should have recognized that prior to publicizing his group's existence. Insensitive to Russian-Jewish realities, he was also too late in acquiring an appreciative Christian audience for Jewish apostasy. Alexander III and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod, were now actively discouraging Jews from converting to Christianity or approaching a station akin to it. Prelooker's efforts were unappreciated by all save one. In the midst of his trials, he was summoned before Colonel Katanski, head of the Odessa secret police. At that meeting, Katanski informed him that Interior Minister Ignatiev extended his congratulations and best wishes to the reformer and predicted a mass conversion to Russian Orthodoxy in the near future. By this time, however, the absurdity could not have escaped Prelooker. Accepting these impotent expressions graciously, he departed for England soon afterwards.

¹⁴² Prelooker, Under the Tsar and Queen Victoria, p. 31.

Central to this commotion was the publication of eleven precepts which defined and governed the Brotherhood of the New Israel. Prelooker's strident program was more parochial, reactionary, and polemical than a rational response to the Jewish-Christian divide. Nevertheless, he touched upon some telling points with which Russian Jewry struggled to define itself and its role in the larger society. Prelooker denied Talmud's divine influence since both the Babylonian and Jerusalem talmudim were exegeses on Torah and Halakhah which were not handed down to Moses from God. Primarily, the two works existed merely to fill in Torah's textual lacunae and elaborate upon esoteric points of law, tradition, culture, and ritual. As for the Babylonian edition being evil, Prelooker left the matter as a statement without elucidation, using it only to strike a familiar chord among ill-educated Christians and wavering Jews as an inducement to join his organization. In that same vein, the Brotherhood espoused that only a contemporary rational interpretation of the Bible could serve as a source of faith and divine authority, an obvious concession to the *maskilim* since this very theme permeated Moses Mendelssohn's Haskalah works over a century before. In his attempt to denude Judaism of what he perceived to be its "hubris," Prelooker overestimated the strength of his argument, especially when it touched upon one of Judaism's most sacred ritual "pillars."

Circumcision, to his mind, was to be understood spiritually and not corporally.¹⁴³ For a man who had claimed to have been "initiated into the realm of Rabbinical mystery" at age six, this was an incredible assertion. The usual course of study began with *Vaikra*(Leviticus) and *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) and then *Bereshit* (Genesis) where

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 26-7.

Prelooker could not have overlooked God's covenant with Abraham.¹⁴⁴ Employing and altering Torah, Tanya, and St. Paul's manipulation of the circumcision mandate (Genesis 17: 9-12), he was able to arrive at his position and buttress it so as to make it appear legitimate. In Torah, specifically Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 4:4, there were references to the "circumcision of the heart," described as removing the spiritual prepuce (thick foreskin) from this organ in order to liberate the soul and affect its union with the Divine. Within the original Old Testament contexts, God was concerned that the Jews had turned from Him. This injunction was made ostensibly to remind the Community of Israel of its divine obligations. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Habad Hasidism, carried this metaphor one step further when he opined that the prepuce covering the hearts of men would be removed when the Messiah returned. The Divine sparks which had been scattered when the world began would then be reunited and affect *tikkun olam* (restoration of the world to perfection).¹⁴⁵ The last piece of the puzzle which had to be placed carefully was St. Paul's circumvention of physical circumcision to cull pagans into the early Christian Church. In that period, a pagan desiring to become a Christian had to convert to Judaism as a prerequisite and undergo circumcision, a painful and often fatal rite of passage given the attendant lack of hygiene. Mindful of this, Paul contended that if a person underwent a "spiritual circumcision of the soul," this alone would be sufficient for admission to the Christian faith. Prelooker used this device merely to play upon popular Russian misconceptions, uneasiness, and disgust for the

¹⁴⁴ Genesis 17: 9-14.

¹⁴⁵ Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Amarim-Tanya* (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1984), pp. 402-3.

practice in order to discredit it and thus remove what he perceived to be the fundamental barrier between Christians and Jews.¹⁴⁶

The conclusion to Prelooker's attempted bridge and the fate of Yacov Gordon's Biblical Spiritual Fraternity was unusual. In his memoirs, he accounted himself blameless. Slanders and intimidation which had rained down upon him and his Brotherhood had been brought about by the manifesto's publication in Russian which, he insisted, made it unintelligible to many in the Odessa Jewish community. One wonders to whom he addressed this claim since anyone knowledgeable about the Jewish situation would have found this apology preposterous. Odessa was a major international port with a Jewish population of 100,000 in the early 1880's.¹⁴⁷ Russian literacy was both essential and widespread among the Jewish inhabitants. When he submitted his eleven points to the local Russian paper, one wonders, given his argument, what language he expected the printer to use. Joachim Tarnopol's expose of a decade before asserted that Russian literacy among the Jews was unquestioned. Also absent from Prelooker's calculations was that a Jewess numbered among the conspirators responsible for Alexander II's assassination.¹⁴⁸ That alone was sufficient to indict the Empire's entire community from the Russian reactionary point of view. Neither theological union nor Jewish conversion to Orthodoxy was palatable, and to ensure that there would be no mistaking the government's position on this and related matters, Alexander III declared that Jews who had converted to Orthodoxy were still Jews and were denied full rights as citizens of the

¹⁴⁶ Prelooker, Under the Tsar and Queen Victoria, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ See Zinberg, Istoriia, p. 39.

¹⁴⁸ Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 151. Hessie Helfman was one of the conspirators who later died in the Peter & Paul Fortress.

Empire.¹⁴⁹ Prelooker had been cast adrift but was by no means alone. Other Jews who had pursued similar courses found that they were unable to return to the very society they had condemned while they remained barred from joining and participating fully in the new Russian society. They were truly stateless.¹⁵⁰ As for the fate of Yacov Gordon's group, the authorities found favor with the Biblical Spiritual Fraternity as it was presented to them, stipulating only that all prayers and rituals be conducted in Hebrew so that Russian *raskolniki* (schismatics) would be dissuaded from joining them. Like the Brotherhood, the Fraternity was a radical group but of a contained variety. Its members kept to themselves and did not imagine turning the Empire on its head.

For all of his faults and potential for harm, Yakov Prelooker was an amateur when compared to Crown Rabbi Ippolit Liutostanskii. A former Pole turned Russian "patriot," he published a series of pamphlets which purported, through the use of footnotes and in-text citations of supposedly irrefutable Jewish sources, to verify Jewish bloodlust for Christians.¹⁵¹ Eager to transform his calumny into profit, the Rabbi concocted a story in 1879 that the Jews had offered him 100,000 rubles to suppress his publications, especially those addressing the Blood Libel. He refused to do so. His public had to be apprised of these sinister dealings. Regardless of the consequences, he had to warn as many people as possible, particularly those willing to pay 2-3 kopecks per volume.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Konni Zilliacus, The Russian Revolutionary Movement (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1905), p. 176.

¹⁵⁰ Hans Rogger, Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 64.

¹⁵¹ This pretense to Russian patriotism was most likely a consequence of the Russification of Poland after the 1863 Rising. See Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 377 and Theodore Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 48, regarding the limitations imposed upon this process.

¹⁵² Heinz-Dietrich Lowe, The Tsars and the Jews: Reform, Reaction, and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia 1772-1917 (London: Harwood Academic Press, 1993), p. 59.

Rabbi Zalkind Minor, an eminent Russian Jewish intellectual, was alarmed at how quickly this Rabbi's works were disseminated among the gullible and feared that even marginal Jews would fall under his influence. Malevolent and cunning, Liutostanskii knew well his audience and how to craft his prose in order to incite the requisite level of horror and indignation which whetted its appetites. No longer employing baseless polemics which shrieked from the pages of other pamphlets and tracts, this apostate attempted to present his evidence in pseudo-erudite terms and buttressed his arguments by citing so-called scholarly references designed to impress his uneducated readers. Though of the essence, Minor bided his time and his patience was well rewarded. Confident that he could proceed unchallenged, Liutostanskii immediately overplayed his hand by denouncing Talmud as evil and erroneous in his 1879 work, *Talmud i evrei* (Talmud and the Jews). In content, this publication was little more than a Russified resurrection and merger of Pfefferkorn's and Donin's polemics with some minor additions which its author assumed would either be accepted or pass without contest. Zalkind Minor soon apprised him of his miscalculation and commenced his response in earnest.

Liutostanskii's first error appeared on the first page of his manuscript when he altered a codicil in Polish King Boleslaw the Wise's 1264 Jewish Toleration Edict (The Kalisz Statute). At issue was the proscription against kidnapping Jewish children for conversion purposes which was a capital offense. This section, as well as the entire Edict, was written in Polish, Latin and Russian, a point which Minor emphasized in appraising Liutostanskii's scholarship. The whole of the Rabbi's entire thesis rested upon a single sentence fragment, "krast detei evreev" (to steal children of the Jews), which had

been altered in Liutostanskii's work to read, "krast detei evreami" (to steal children by [means of] the Jews). In the original statement, the Jews were victims; Liutostanski's alteration of noun case transformed them into victimizers. Acknowledging tacitly Liutostanskii's skill at linguistic manipulation, Minor then emphasized his opponent's apparent illiteracy in Polish with relish. Mockingly, Minor castigated him for not checking his interpretation against the Latin and Russian editions. If Liutostanskii had been acquainted marginally with those languages, this error might have been excusable, but the Rabbi was not in a pardonable position. The Kalisz Statute was also written in Polish, and a man who had been educated in Poland should not have mistaken the Polish genitive for the instrumental.¹⁵³

Minor's devotion to this error covered several pages which, taken on their own merits, resembled an exercise in puerile hairsplitting but, in relation to Liutostanskii's work as a whole, this was a calculated tactic. Contemptuous of him and his motives, Rabbi Minor also realized that Liutostanskii was one of the more sophisticated Russian Jewish apostates in print. His alteration of legitimate information taken from legitimate sources and presented in a manner resembling a learned treatise could not be exposed and disproven easily. On the cusp of the 1880's, Russian Jewry was in a tenuous position. Beleaguered, confused and uncritical Jews, in addition to their Christian counterparts, were ideal consumers of such literature. It was imperative, therefore, that Minor and his colleagues acquaint themselves with apostate literature, analyze their content and reasoning and then tailor their responses in a manner intelligible to the average reader.

¹⁵³ Zalkind Minor, Rabbi Ippolit Liutostanskii i ego sochineniie "Talmud i evrei" (Moscow, 1879), p. 4.

Above all else, they had to ensure that their responses would not be viewed as mere additions to the very upswell they hoped to quell.

Linguistic grounds had not posed insurmountable obstacles and in terms of theology, Minor had even difficulty in dealing with Liutostanskii who condemned himself with every step. Well-versed in Torah and Talmud, Rabbi Minor was certain that his opponent had never read a single page of the latter.¹⁵⁴ Interspersed among Liutostanskii's discourses, Minor recognized several undocumented borrowings from other polemical pieces and that some sources were outright fabrications. An example of the latter was the Rabbi's claim that Rabbi Uchazim (a corruption of *Etz Hayyim*--Tree of Life) had uncovered a secret code in Jewish daily and Sabbath prayers which indicated that Jews prayed for the Messiah's coming along near-identical Christian lines. Minor questioned this claim on a number of points. A cursory examination of the contemporary Jewish *siddur* (daily and Sabbath prayerbook) and *maksor* (High Holiday prayerbook) with their plain Hebrew texts could not be translated or interpreted to credit such an assertion.¹⁵⁵ Following from this statement, Liutostanskii then claimed that Jews had been hostile to Christians and Christian practices from time immemorial. Citing Deuteronomy 20:16, he uncovered what he deemed to be the basis for Judaism's anti-Christian bias which was still viable and constituted a threat to Russia's commonweal. Admonishing his readers to consider the context from which the verse was taken, that is, Deuteronomy 20:10-17, Minor proceeded to lay bare Liutostanskii's fallacy. First of all, God's injunction to the Israelites to kill aliens in their midst had been in force only in wartime against their pagan neighbors. All adult males were to be killed to prevent the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

Israelites from abandoning their nascent monotheism to embrace again “their gods which had caused you to sin in times past.”¹⁵⁶ Christians did not exist when this mandate was made, but since Liutostanskii interpreted this to mean all foreigners (i.e. non-Jews), his *Torah* (notions of Jewish doctrinal orthodoxy) and historical literacy now came under attack. Before the Israelites became Israelites (those who wrestle with God), they were Chaldeans, Akkadians, Moabites, Amorites, and Canaanites, all of whom had been polytheists. Struggling to survive as a distinct people, they had to separate themselves from the larger societies from which they came, hence this sanguinary injunction which, as Minor noted, was never carried out.

Towards the end of *Talmud i evrei*, even its author had become aware of gaps and ill-constructed premises in the work and attempted to remedy them through references to imaginary Jewish theological texts. Even so, he somehow deluded himself into thinking that he had reached the zenith of his thesis when he declared that Jesus was a viable factor in Judaism. Should skeptics question this assertion, Liutostanskii insisted that one need only look to the Talmudic tractate “Etz Hayyim” and discover for oneself the works of the “Christian Rabbi.” This tractate was part of a supposedly cloistered third Talmud which the Rabbinate kept under lock and key for fear that its contents would bring an end to its authority.¹⁵⁷ On his merit as a Crown rabbi, Liutostanskii claimed that he had been permitted access to this work and became guilt-ridden. While he and his colleagues had benefited from this secret, the Rabbi’s conscience compelled him to reveal the truth to the Jews of Russia.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 25-6. See also Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *Hemsheh Hum’shi Torah* (New York: Maznaim Publishing, 1981), p. 965.

Discarding this declaration, Minor now gave full rein to his acerbic acumen and consternation. Admittedly, Liutostanskii's work left him confused. It was simply incomprehensible as to why the author, who had decried Talmudic tractates all along for their textual contradictions, so often turned to them for support. That the Babylonian and Jerusalem *talmudim* presented contrasting viewpoints was an obvious revelation to any learned Jew. If Liutostanskii had been the scholar that he had claimed to be, he would have known that Talmudic discourse rested upon countervailing interpretations which had kept Jewish intellectual life viable for centuries. Often the obvious was invisible, a defect which carried with it profound consequences which Minor hoped that he had mitigated through his analysis and exposure of this pseudo-intellectual fraud. Had the obvious now shed its obscurity and been made plain? The Jews of Russia were compelled to exercise caution if there was to be any future for Judaism in Russia.

Wariness and skepticism were most effective when its practitioners knew the dimensions and character of the challenges before them. At a time and in a land where little was what it appeared to be, Russian Jewish apostasy was also an enigma because it was often more than a simple divorce from Judaism. Ardent apostates occupied one end of the spectrum while their traditional opponents secured the other and their respective sentiments were beyond question. In between them lay this quasi-nebulous array of "Jews of a sort" who either eschewed or limited their active religious participation while still retaining a cultural or intellectual tie. Moses Lieb Lilienblum (1843-1910), for example, was such a man. As a child, he showed promise as a scholar but his perspicacity and curiosity led him to grief. Growing up in the village of Marshalov

¹⁵⁷ Minor, Rabbi Ippolit Liutostanskii, p. 41.

(Ukraine), he followed the usual course of childhood instruction but, finding the standard Hebrew fare staid, he collected secular literature in various languages. By undisclosed means, he was found out and the local rabbi raised such a furor and roused the community to such an extent that he had to leave. Lilienblum never forgot that incident, especially since the final assault upon him came from the local Hasidim who tried to poison him.¹⁵⁸ Not discarding Jewish theology outright, he enjoyed little more than a tangential relationship with it afterwards, preferring to invest his Jewishness in secular education with the goal of forming a secular Knesset Israel. As a consequence of personal experience and general observation, religion for Lilienblum and other moderate *maskilim* had been a divisive element among the Jews rather than a cohesive force. It needed to be given its rightful place within the framework of contemporary circumstance. Socialism, with its emphasis upon actual collective work for collective commonwealth, seemed to be a viable solution to a number of Jewish ills.¹⁵⁹ Certainly there would be a division of labor as such a system developed, but everyone would have to be skilled in some endeavor. No one who was able-bodied would be permitted to benefit from the labor of others unless he himself labored with them. Regarding education, Lilienblum advised Jewish parents to shield their children from speculative philosophy by teaching them a trade.¹⁶⁰ By no means an appeal to parochialism, this was a heartfelt exhortation to the Jews of Russia to deal with immediate issues before addressing abstractions. Accomplishing higher goals was imperative but so too was it for the Jews to establish a corporal and spiritual identity, a state of being which would put an end to their stateless

¹⁵⁸ Dawidowitz, The Golden Tradition, p. 125.

¹⁵⁹ Haim Zhitlowski, a contemporary modern Jewish thinker, was an ardent proponent of Jewish socialism. See Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity, pp. 88-90.

existence. As Dubnow pointed out, spiritually and culturally strong nations persevered their identities even under profound political subordination, and Lilienblum concurred.¹⁶¹ Though his identity with Judaism as a religious faith had been diminished, embracing it as an ethnic community gave him greater latitude of action and would come into full fruition with the Zionist movement.

Rank Opportunist: The Case of Jacob Brafman

Neither progress nor regression within the Jewish community could ever be given definite definitions owing to myriad conceptions and consequences associated with these notions. Though blatantly self-serving, Ippolit Liutostanskii saw himself as a Jewish reformer attempting to rid Russian Jewry of its ills. Likewise, Jacob Brafman labored under this delusion, and though he lacked Liutostanskii's virulence, his potential for delaying Jewish initiative and compromising reform could not be overlooked or dismissed. Given his performance at the 1869 assembly of the St. Petersburg Jewish Committee, he was a known quantity among Russian Jewry's spiritual and intellectual leaders. Their intelligence was increased when Brafman publishing *Kniga kagala* in Vilna in 1869, and though he did not live to see its reissue in St. Petersburg twelve years later, the fact that various government officials, including the Tsar, saw merit in this work. Among Jewish intellectuals, it was ridiculed and a frequent complaint was that

¹⁶⁰Dawidowitz, The Golden Tradition, p. 127.

¹⁶¹Dubnow, Nationalism and History, p. 78.

Brafman could never seem to find *Ibid* and *Ibidem* which was rather unfortunate since the whole of his work rested upon these two primary sources.¹⁶²

For a man deserving such ridicule, it is remarkable that so little was known of him. As a young man, he converted to Lutheranism to avoid conscription and became a Hebrew teacher in the Minsk Spiritual Seminary with the added responsibility of overseeing the institution's acquisitions of Hebrew and Polish Jewish texts. It was a secure and uninspiring post which, ostensibly, gave him a reasonable livelihood which brings up the question of why he wrote the Book of the Kahal. Presumably, he had had no profound contest with any Jewish faction which would have touched upon his life directly. Brafman's name does not appear among those in the midst of the traditionalist-modernist struggles, so an obvious motive hardly presents itself. Government preferment for promotion, given his post, would have been in keeping with his self-promoting nature but considering that Brafman had ensconced himself in a relatively safe position from the Jewish maelstrom, why would he have written a contentious book? Truth be known, he was determined to settle accounts, and the only outstanding debt to his pride which required the peculiar satisfaction he desired originated from the frigid alienation he suffered during the St. Petersburg assembly. If *Kniga kagala* had been merely a protracted invective against the Jewish community, it would have been little better than *Talmud i evrei*. With its complex network of ideas, history, and contemporary commentary, Brafman also criticized Russian officials while still attempting to forge a bridge of understanding between Russians and Jews.

¹⁶² Greenberg, The Jews of Russia, p. 93.

Meticulous in establishing his thesis, Brafman began his work with a lengthy account of Jewish history up to the present, detailing legalistic intricacies and their bearing upon Jewish historical and cultural development. Owing to the degree of detail, this was primarily for the benefit of a non-Jewish audience. After having satisfied himself with this background, Brafman then argued that the true divide between Jew and Russian lay not so much in theology but in the calumnies of the kahals.¹⁶³ He pointed out that Polish monarchs had created them as revenue factors and accorded them limited autonomy in communal affairs as long as there were no conflicts with or compromise of royal authority. On paper this arrangement appeared ideal but, on the advent of the partitions, kahal abuses had become blatant and Russian authorities merely absorbed this corruption along with Polish territory. Expediency once more led to autocratic blindness, according to Brafman, since the tsars valued the kahals solely as tax collectors and trade regulators. Their officers were given a free hand in communal affairs, a mistake which was realized when revenue returns from some communities varied radically from year to year and eventually led to the dissolution of the kahals in 1844.¹⁶⁴ When this occurred, Brafman had hoped that the Jewish community had learned its lesson about integrity over guile. He was disappointed. Filling the void was a new Jewish administrative body, the *asifr* (asifah) which the author claimed was even more corrupt and skilled at deception than its predecessor.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Jacob Brafman, *Kniga kagala* (St. Petersburg, 1881), p. 88.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103, 109.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90. This is the most esoteric reference in the entire work. According to Israel Cohen, the Asifah was, as Brafman described, an exclusive and influential group which was made up of kahal elders and held near-absolute authority. Where Brafman errs is in thinking that this body took the place of the kahals after the 1844 dissolution, ignoring the fact that the Asifah could not stand alone. See Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944), pp. 118-120.

At the core of Brafman's concerns was what he perceived to be the ill-defined place of the kahals within the socio-political structure of the Empire. Limited autonomy via the kahals as a temporary step towards emancipation was a cynical device, he opined. For example, the government established three-year limits on communal rabbis in order to avoid official corruption yet neglected to either define or limit their authority as chief judges of their respective *Bet Dinim* (communal rabbinical courts) which fell under kahal purview. Akin to the office of Gaon, these rabbis soon found that impartiality and justice to be romantic fictions while placating those who administered their salaries became a full-time occupation.¹⁶⁶ Some Jewish communities were literally divided against themselves owing to this circumstance. Russian literacy, another imposition, was billed as the liberating grace from superstition and mysticism and yet for those who acquired it, the government offered little in the way of employment outside of the shtetlach or integration into the larger society. If embracing Jews in a free forum caused uneasiness, there would be little risk in following Napoleon I's example in France by establishing a commensurate category of True Russians of the Mosaic faith.¹⁶⁷ Brafman was at a loss to understand why the government was reluctant to affect this transition. Traditionalists would not have to fear assimilation and Russian reactionaries could find little fault in such a designation, but official action was slow in coming. Devoting considerable attention to Jewish education was admirable, Brafman conceded, but to train Jews for occupations and positions which would not be there for them after completing their instruction was the height of futility. The Society for the Spreading of Enlightenment

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 247. No doubt this was one of the so-called Christian proposals in the 1869 meeting which had been met with derision from a number of delegates.

among the Jews, Brafman contended, had a noble mission before it. By 1880, it numbered 340 men and had cells in Odessa, Kiev, Moscow, Yekaterinoslav, Vilna, Minsk, and Kazan which all enjoyed minimal success overall in the face of staunch suspicion from the Jews themselves. Past government designs and bad-faith negotiations had made many Jews suspicious of any attempt to improve Jewish education. Accused of being apostates determined to absorb Judaism into the Russian milieu, Society agents had to reassure potential members that russification neither eradicated nor diminished Talmudic morals while believing it themselves.¹⁶⁸ To lend credence to their promises, their schools, most notably the one in Mariampol (in Russian Poland), taught Russian, German and geography along with Jewish history, Hebrew, and religion with the result being that these cosmopolitan schools inculcated their students with a greater awareness of their Jewishness than any heder or yeshiva. Satisfied with this condition, Brafman concluded his lengthy survey of the Jewish condition by expressing wonder as to why *mitnagdim* and *maskilim* were fretting about the demise of their respective designs as a result of the other's slanders and manipulation. Judaism had to change. Even Baron Lionel de Rothschild's L'Alliance Israelite Universelle, whose foray into this dispute made it all the more ludicrous, could not prevent the obvious transformation of the Russian Jewish condition. Whatever Russian Jewry became would have to be accepted as a *fait accompli*. Despite being an apostate himself, Brafman's pronouncements on this subject were neither malicious nor contemptuous. Relating to the significance of the *bris* (rite of circumcision) and marriage rites, he actually referred to them as "our most holy

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 299-300.

events,” which testified to the convenience rather than the conviction of his conversion.¹⁶⁹

The Polish Revolt and its Aftermath: The Mosaic of Official Jewish Identity

Brafman was not the first to exploit conditions for personal benefit but, that aside, *Kniga kagala* did emphasize the frustrated hope among the Jews of Russia for civic parity. Around the time of its second printing in 1881, Russian Jews were still hoping for what Jews in other lands possessed and should have been accorded to their Russian coreligionists had not adversity interceded.¹⁷⁰ No other event proved so decisive in deciding the destiny of Russian Jewry than the Polish Revolt of 1863-64. Russian liberals rallied behind the Tsar in a spirit of chauvinism.¹⁷¹ In such an atmosphere, paranoia permeated all strata of society. Any mention of “separatism”, “nationalism” or “particularism” coming from a non-Russian community, no matter how slight, fell under the scrutiny of the Interior Minister.¹⁷² Besides the Poles, the Ukrainians were becoming a source of uneasiness in the immediate aftermath of the Revolt but, when overt hostilities ceased, all non-Russian nationalities would become suspect. Reform had to come to the Empire, but the intent had been to spare the autocracy.¹⁷³ In this endeavor, Alexander II was alone without any means to guide his course. His two predecessors had recognized the potential for a reform crisis, but each had managed to put it off. Domestic

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁷⁰ *Russkii evrei*, n. 3. (17 September 1879), p. 67.

¹⁷¹ Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 368.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 410.

¹⁷³ W. Bruce Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform, pp. 171-2. See also Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, p. 45.

and foreign affairs had not accorded the present Tsar that luxury. The Poles had been offered the restoration of those liberties which Nicholas I had abrogated in 1831, but the Reds had insisted upon an independent Poland and nothing less.¹⁷⁴ Polish unrest and the subsequent Rising of 22 January 1863 could not have come at a worse time. Education, heretofore seen as the key to Russia's modernity, was now considered suspect. Owing to the lack of clearly defined rights and safeguards on academic freedom and the authority of professors and administrators, student riots broke out at the universities of Kazan, Moscow and St. Petersburg. These events, coupled with mysterious fires in the capital, all but compelled the Tsar to reconsider his actions.¹⁷⁵ Already, the limitations on university admissions had been repealed on 23 November 1855 and the curriculum made more comprehensive. The education students were receiving made them able competitors with their European counterparts while alienating them from the autocratic state. Exacerbating the problem was that in the period 1858-63, Russia had had three successive education ministers, none of whom had attended university.¹⁷⁶ This matter was laid bare when the Russian intelligentsia accepted and became entrenched in the philosophy of German Idealism and its emphasis upon critical investigation and intuition.¹⁷⁷

Giving birth to an intellectual elite capable of transforming Russia into a respected European power required significant institutional restructuring. Like the

¹⁷⁴ Poles and Jews were considered the enemy and, in the period 1861-64, "brothers in arms." All that mattered now was the unity of the Empire. See Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, pp. 35-7., and Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), pp. 46-7.

¹⁷⁵ Pipes, Russia Under the Old Regime, p. 270. See also Samuel D. Kassow, "The University Statute of 1863: A Reconsideration" in Russia's Great Reforms 1855-1881, ed. Ben Eklof (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 256.

¹⁷⁶ Kassow, "The University Statute of 1863," p. 250.

expectations of the nobility in the aftermath of serf emancipation, the intelligentsia's demands for direct political participation was only a matter of time. Nicholas I had outlawed discussions of political issues in 1845 and sought to keep the governed at bay. Alexander II, however, realized that if Russia was to progress, the intellectual elite would have to be given a voice, perhaps a hand in political affairs, but only to a limited degree.¹⁷⁸ The Basic Principles, proposed in 1862 and implemented fully throughout the Empire by the middle of 1865, was Alexander's attempt to achieve social and political concord with an increasingly changing Russia. Universities were granted greater freedoms than they had had heretofore, and there was moderate easing of the censorship statutes but, lest there be any mistake, this liberality was sharply curtailed in political affairs. When a group of landowners sought an audience with the Tsar in 1864 to negotiate the extent of their participation in politics, Alexander agreed to meet with them unofficially. When they had his audience, the Tsar then made it clear that political reform was his prerogative alone and that no social class had the right to interfere.¹⁷⁹ To prevent future misunderstandings, the Basic Principles directed the Minister of Internal Affairs to banish persons deemed politically dangerous or suspicious, and thus was born the Russian legal institution of administrative exile which would outlive the Empire. Despite this development, the Basic Principles provided a foundation for Alexander's reform initiatives, including the introduction of public trials as a guarantee of openness in legal procedures. Unified rule of law in the Russian Empire, a feat beyond Catherine II's

¹⁷⁷ Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, pp. 260-61.

¹⁷⁸ Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, p. 342. See also Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform*, p. 197. In November 1857, Alexander II ordered the Minister of Education to present to him all articles expressing a desire for change so that he, the Tsar, could decide which ones would be published and which were too harmful for dissemination. See Daniel Balmuth, *Censorship in Russia 1865-1905* (New York: University Press of America, 1979), pp. 1-2.

abilities, was a viable hope for Alexander II.¹⁸⁰ Regardless of his disposition towards reform, Alexander could not prevent the upswell of revolutionary fervor among Russian intellectuals and their Jewish counterparts.¹⁸¹ European influences were flowing into Russia daily, and Europe's perceived advantages only made Russia's deficiencies all the more stark. Attempts on the part of A.V. Golovnin (Acting Minister of Education) and P. Valuev (Minister of the Interior) to arrive at a censorship arrangement suitable to both the government and journalists proved daunting. Ivan Turgenev termed those intellectuals "nihilists" who sought to cast aside everything in the belief that destruction was a creative force, and condemned them for the ills which would invariably follow. Conservative intellectuals, ministers, and newspaper editors were duly concerned by the revolutionary ferment of the post-emancipation era, but none more so than the Tsar himself. That Alexander was preoccupied with his prerogatives and what would become of them was self-evident, but this was not his concern alone. The massive and unwieldy Russian bureaucracy, through obduracy, fear, and stupidity on some levels, was fighting for its very life.¹⁸² Beset with a society "straining at the bit" and a government incapable of accommodating its aspirations, the Tsar had one of the more unenviable positions in Europe. In an effort to improve Russia's image abroad and encourage interest, preferably commercial, in the Empire, the newspaper *Le Nord* was established in Belgium in 1855 to

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁸⁰ Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform*, p. 201. See also Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, pp. 295-6.

¹⁸¹ Balmuth, *Censorship in Russia*, pp. 2-5, 8. Of particular note was P. Valuev's (Minister of the Interior) attempts to ban all Yiddish works save those with a discernible religious or moral content in 1861.

Censorship of Jewish works, whether in Hebrew or Yiddish, along with a general censorship of Russian intellectual works, failed to curb what Alexander II termed the "excesses" of writers.

¹⁸² Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, p. 303.

acquaint Europeans with the “reality” of Russia and dispel falsehood.¹⁸³ The Europeans remained unconvinced and their general thoughts and perceptions towards Russia were hostile, especially towards those autocratic precepts which Alexander II swore to uphold at his coronation. Russia’s integrity could not be sacrificed on any account, but the Tsar had only a small coterie of advisors to guide him and Russia towards modernity, a problematic situation in its own right.¹⁸⁴

The Jews of Russia were neither lost nor forgotten amidst the ferment of the Great Reforms. Polish rebels, suspected and actual, were punished in droves, an ominous move which the Jews interpreted as a harbinger of matters to come since their Polish coreligionists were represented in the rebel camp.¹⁸⁵ It would have mattered little if only one Jew had taken part since his punishment alone would not have spared Jewish communities on both sides of the border from official and unofficial recrimination. Being the Empire’s most visible non-Russian community, any involvement would have excited fears in government circles because, like that of the Poles, the Jewish condition was a product of decades of oppression. From being an unwanted nationality, they had graduated to the status of potential fifth column. Prior to 1863, discussion over Jewish emancipation had been broached along with various implementation schemes, but now all

¹⁸³ Larissa Zakharova, “Autocracy and the Reforms of 1861-1874 in Russia: Choosing Paths of Development,” Russia’s Great Reforms 1855-1881, pp. 20-21.

¹⁸⁴ Count D.A. Miliutin was charged with reforming the Russian army in the years preceeding the Russo-Turkish War, but met with numerous obstacles from Count Paul A. Shuvalov. In the period 1866-73, Shuvalov had the Tsar’s ear which was filled daily with concerns over State security. Since Miliutin wanted to reduce and streamline the army, this meant that a number of his initiatives were either deferred or rejected out of hand. Finally, Shuvalov was removed to another post and, in the end, Miliutin’s plans were implemented, but Alexander’s dependence upon a select cell of advisors remained.

¹⁸⁵ W. Bruce Lincoln, The Romanovs: Autocrats of all the Russias (New York: Anchor Books, 1981), p. 438. Corrsin contends that the Empire was both Polonophobic and Judeophobic. See Corrsin, Warsaw Before the First World War, p. 3, and Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, p. 117. According to Opalski and Bartal, the Jews who participated in or contributed materially to both the Warsaw

was for naught.¹⁸⁶ The Polish Revolt had taken its toll on the Tsar's prestige, and retribution was point of personal and dynastic honor.¹⁸⁷

Alexander II's response was to impose a new set of special taxes on the Jews. So proficient and regular was he in implementing these excises that the Yiddish novelist Mendele Mokher Sforim declared that death may indeed be the end of most men but taxes would certainly be the end of the Jew.¹⁸⁸ Official admonishments to engage in productive pursuits and educational opportunities followed in the wake of fiscal obligations. However, no sooner would the Jews be directed or encouraged to take advantage of openings in various professions or university and technical schools then, just as swiftly, they were held back by such legal obstacles as the *numerus clausus* in university admissions and an ever-narrowing employment sphere.¹⁸⁹ Earlier generations had greeted these contradictions with relative silence, but a newly-emerging Jewish intelligentsia began to make its voice heard. Honoring St. Petersburg's injunction to apply their imposed Russian literacy and fluency in other foreign languages to good purpose, many vented their frustrations and ideas in Jewish journals and newsletters which gave them a public venue to express their views on a wide range of issues. Few hesitated to decry their plight and criticize official Jewish policies, an exercise which was

Insurrection (1861) and the January Rising went from being compared to Christian knights to being deemed profiteers. *Poles and Jews*, pp. 46, 58, 101.

¹⁸⁶ The Jews of Russian Poland had been granted emancipation in April 1862.

¹⁸⁷ Valuev, who took over censorship implementation in 1863 when Golovnin retired, feared that Ukrainians might use the period of adjustment after the Polish Revolt in their bid for the recognition of a distinct Ukrainian nation. Whether Valuev's fears of this were justified or not cannot be determined but, sensing that Ukrainian authors might impregnate their works with nationalistic sentiments, he banned the use of Ukrainian in all forms, including the printing of the New Testament in the language. See Balmuth, p. 15.

¹⁸⁸ Mendele Mocher Seforim, *The Travels and Adventures of Benjamin the Third* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ The University Statute of 1863, which relaxed admission requirements, did not include Jews.

given almost free vent considering the abandonment of pre-publication censorship.¹⁹⁰ Even so, many of these works, even some of the less virulent articles, were subject to subsequent bans or alterations.¹⁹¹

Could a mutually-beneficial consensus between the government and the Jews be reached? This was the overarching concern of Joachim Tarnopol who praised Alexander II for his progressive programs and apologized for his bureaucratic shortcomings, yet expressed his dismay over wasted Jewish potential when denied the opportunity of full expression in gainful employment.¹⁹² No one contested the changes in Russia which had come about in this era, but some attitudes and actions differed little from what had been given in the previous reign. Various officials maintained that provisions had been made to provide ample educational and employment opportunities, but many of these palliatives were transparent, and no other group understood this more keenly than Jewish farmers. At the behest of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1863-64, official investigations of Jewish agricultural colonies were undertaken in Bessarabia, Minsk and Yekaterinoslav to assess their productivity. Without exception, the reports claimed that the land contours and soil were extremely poor which made any worthwhile agronomic endeavor impossible to pursue in these areas. Similar investigations were carried out in other Jewish colonies throughout the decade and were published in *Materiali dla geographii i statistiki rossii* (Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia) in 1871. By its own admission, the government had allotted to these settlements substandard land

¹⁹⁰ Even when censorship regulations tightened in the mid to late 1860's both Jewish and Russian publishers knew how to circumvent them. See McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, p. 24.

¹⁹¹ True, the 1863 University Statute did relax censorship regulations. The 6 April 1865 Temporary Censorship Act, however, gave the Russian government more control over glasnost and, consequently, oversight over "questionable" literature. See W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform*, pp. 205-6.

and yet the colonists, expecting financial relief or land improvements, were faulted. In spite of the evidence before them, officials stated that Jewish farmers brought about their own failures owing to their addiction to Judaism.¹⁹³ State officials contended that fertilizer and seed from government stocks had been made available to the colonists as well as low-interest loans for land purchases, more than sufficient resources for cultivation. By arguing in this vein throughout this discourse, the Ministry revealed its intentions. It was of little consequence if Jewish agricultural settlements were situated in peripheral locales known to have nitrate-deficient soil. Instead, documented Jewish failures in this endeavor provided prima facie evidence to support the contention that Judaism was an anti-agrarian religion.¹⁹⁴ At best, Alexander II may have heard of these developments in passing but it is unlikely that he perceived the broader implications. Propaganda value notwithstanding, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its provincial and regional officials engaged the Jews in a cynical game rigged to favor the designers at the expense of its unwilling players. Before the Ministry investigators set out for their designated regions, higher officials had guessed beforehand what their agents would find. The reason for this was that as far back as 1817 with the first Society of Israelite Christians' agricultural settlements, this same ruse had drawn in the Jews. In the mid-1830's, Nicholas I had advocated Jewish agronomy to another generation as a means of social advancement, and a new set of players were rooked in the same fashion. Since there was no perceivable way to turn these failures into monetary windfalls, their value

¹⁹² Joachim Tarnopol, Reflexions sur l'Etat Religieux, Politique, et Social des Israelites Russes (Odessa, 1871), pp. 69-71.

¹⁹³ V. Levanda, "K voprosi o zemledeliiu evreev v rossii," Evreiskaia biblioteka no. 2 (1872), pp. 348-9.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 365-66. Ironically, Dubnow's principal concern over Russian Jewish emigration to Palestine was that an Orthodox presence there would compel existing Jewish farmers to give up the plough for the

rested in inculcating among rural Jews with a sense of inferiority and perpetuating that image in the popular Russian imagination. Direct bureaucratic assistance was well disguised. If viable land had been apportioned to Jewish colonists and they had succeeded, the stereotypes would have lost potency and the Jews accorded psychological emancipation from their ill-favored status.

After examining the survey reports, the Ministry of the Internal Affairs surmised that it would be futile to teach Jews how to farm. Jewish writers wasted no time in exposing the presumed anti-agrarian nature of Judaism as a feeble libel. Abraham, the first Jew, was a farmer and so too were generations thereafter.¹⁹⁵ In addition, the Jewish calendar was a lunar one centered around the seasons and Sukkhot, the Festival of the Ingathering, could be nothing else than an agrarian celebration. However, it was assumed that despite these indisputable facts, government agents would not retract what they had advanced. The Russian public, Jews and non-Jews alike, were the target audience. Informing them of these affairs in an effort to influence public opinion and forestall adverse government actions sustained the Jewish stigma which could be used to official advantage. Jewish survival was at the heart of nineteenth-century Jewish journalism, particularly when the Ministry of Internal Affairs finally admitted that it had suppressed the truth behind the Blood Libel.

Acts of mob violence touched off on the slim pretext of a Christian kidnapping and ritual murder were often matters of life and death which the Ministry downplayed as localized disturbances. As early as 1871-72, a fact-finding mission similar to that

prayerbook. See Sophie Dubnow-Erich, The Life and Work of S.M. Dubnow: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.

¹⁹⁵ Levanda, "K voprosi o zemledeliiu evreev v rossii," pp. 366-7.

constituted to examine Jewish agricultural productivity conducted investigations into the Blood Libel. Those involved concluded that the notion was impossible given Jewish theological mores, ethics, and practical science.¹⁹⁶ Seven years elapsed before the Ministry published its assessments of Jewish agronomy while those on the Blood Libel were withheld and popular superstition allowed to gather strength. Since 1821, Russia had experienced episodic pogroms sparked by the Blood Libel, but those from the 1870's onward were extremely virulent, culminating finally in the famous 1913 Beilis Trial.¹⁹⁷ Bureaucratic slowness and disinterest played no small role in delaying official discounting of this myth, though calculated inefficiency and low cunning had their worth. Like the mythical anti-agrarian Jewish religious fanatic, the specter of the bloodlusting anti-Christian Jew could be manipulated to control public perceptions and keep the Jews as the eternal outsiders. The Blood Libel was permitted to stand because it checked Jewish social, intellectual, economic and professional advancement and added to their stigmatized status. The image of Jewish inundation of Russian life and the anticipated vengeful persecution of their former oppressors weighed heavily upon more than a few anti-Semitic consciences.¹⁹⁸

For all of its advantages, the Blood Libel was becoming one of Russia's graver curses in the century's last three decades. The liberal reform impulses which had

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁹⁷ Mendel Beilis fell under suspicion in 1911 and then was brought to trial after a two-year investigation. For a more detailed account, see Ezekiel Leikin, The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial that Shook the World (London: Jason Aronson Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁸ As for the fear of a Jewish takeover and the tables being turned on the Christians, see Julian Niemcewicz, "The Year 3333 or An Incredible Dream" (1858) in Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature, ed. Harold Segel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 61-70. Though rare, Alexander II had accorded some Jews noble status during his reign and had even permitted some to rise in the bureaucratic ranks. When it appeared that Jewish officers in the Russian army might be a possibility, an unidentified publicist urged the authorities to consider the Dreyfus Case before presuming Jewish

engulfed Western Europe and had made inroads in Poland and Russia had the reciprocal effect of laying bare their respective social iniquities. Russia would certainly not be exempt from exposure if only because the Rothschilds, Baron de Hirsch and other philo-Semites were determined not to allow it to hide behind a wall of secrecy. Eliciting acute international criticism were the two Kishinev pogroms of 1881 and 1903, the latter the result of a rumor of ritual murder. Claiming that the size of the official bureaucracy and its countless ex-officio civilian assistants made prevention and the administration of justice virtually impossible may have been a credible excuse, though the international community disregarded it.¹⁹⁹ Following this with protestations of innocence in either orchestrating or condoning these riots may very well have been plausible, but for an Empire striving for the respect and dignity of a world power these apologies injured its chances of obtaining this status. Other nations would look askance at an Empire so large and mighty whose government could not enforce domestic order. Foreign observations and judgments were blunt and Nicholas II, along with his two predecessors, knew this and noted it accordingly. Pogroms were no longer internal matters and half measures towards discovering and punishing their participants were now unacceptable. As a consequence, the Odessa regional police inspector ordered the arrest of some 200 suspected pogromists in the aftermath of the 1903 Kishinev pogrom, but only at the

“patriotism” and trustworthiness. See Seymour Becker, Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia p. 121.

¹⁹⁹ Alexander II did make an effort to clear up corruption and inefficiency in the bureaucracy but, by the last decade of his reign, it appeared to be a futile endeavor. See Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform, pp. 184-5.

urging of the resident American military attaché. The fate of the incarcerated was not reported but, they were set at liberty after a brief imprisonment.²⁰⁰

It is difficult to state precisely whether Russia, especially in the late nineteenth century, suffered from what Theodore Mommsen termed *Judenfurcht* (Jewish terror) or its beleaguered officials were merely at a loss for what to make of the Jews.²⁰¹ No doubt some did nurse apprehensions though few sought the Devil under their respective bedsheets. Alexander II and Alexander III thought of the Jews from time to time but neither's policies towards them demonstrated extraordinary or even moderate Judeophobia.²⁰² Matters seemed to be taking on a life of their own. Accounting for this, several facets of the Russian Jewish condition may not have been dictated from above though responsibility for them still lay within proximity to the throne.

Jewish Journalistic Self-Defense and Concern Over the Russian Identity

With official reaction running high in the aftermath of the Polish Revolt, social and literary Judeophobia was not only widespread but actually respectable.²⁰³ Should anyone be so ill-advised as to assume that Jewish silence meant agreement, Osip Rabinovich ensured that no such misconstruance could be made. To those who referred

²⁰⁰ The legal reforms of 14 August 1864 were not forgotten but applied selectively. Owing to the acquittal of Vera Zasulich for shooting and wounding General Trepov, Chief of Police for St. Petersburg, assaults on State officials were transferred to and decided in courts martial. Pogromists were tried in courts martial for "assaults upon the State" but, for lack of credible evidence of such, were let go. Assaults traded between Jews and Christians would have gone to public trial under the 1864 judicial reforms, but the juries and judges would have been overwhelmingly Russian Orthodox.

²⁰¹ Theodore Mommsen, *Auch Ein Wort uber unser Judenthum* (Berlin, 1880), p. 9.

²⁰² Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 350. Liberal Russian journalists suffered more from Judeophobia than any other segment of the population.

²⁰³ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 350.

to Jews as Moshkas, Ioshkas, and espoused a host of slanders and libels, Rabinovich responded that for the Jews to respond to each and every one of these insults was unworthy of them.²⁰⁴ Attempts on the part of Russian Jews to present themselves honestly were usually distorted in the Russian press, a consequence which led to the establishment of a number of Jewish journals in the 1860's and '70's. Devoted to Jewish concerns within the broader spectrum of Russian life, newspapers such as *Den: organ russkikh evreev* (Day: Organ of the Russian Jews) and *Vestnik russkikh evreev* (Russian Herald of the Jews) advocated a rapprochement between Jews and Russians. Legal reform was the first step and had actually begun prior to the Polish Revolt after which it became a moribund issue. Even so, what both *Den* and *Vestnik* wanted their Russian compatriots to understand was that Jews wanted to participate in all facts of Russian life while still retaining the religion of the forefathers.²⁰⁵ Official attempts to diminish Jewish religious attachment by means of the Jewish government schools had been misguided, according to the Jewish contributors of these journals. If Russian educators had been commissioned to teach Russian as an augmentary component of, not a substitution for, Jewish studies, the Russian-Jewish rapprochement would now be a reality. As matters stood by 1871, there was still a glimmer of hope that Russians and Jews could come together as distinct peoples, it was a distant one. Both sides had much to accomplish before such a project bore fruit.

Associated with the Jewish Question was Russian officialdom's attempts to preserve the Imperial state against the influence of resident non-Russians.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 35-6.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 354-5.

²⁰⁶ Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, p.45.

Russification was not desirable by the 1870's, not that it had ever been a crucial consideration in Alexander II's plans. In the eyes of Russian officialdom, the peasant, because of his ignorance of foreign ideas, was considered to be the ideal standard-bearer of Russian national culture who was well suited to implant it wherever he settled. He was thought to be incorruptible. Reality, however, dictated otherwise. In the late 1870's, it came to the attention of the government that a number of these so-called incorruptible emissaries of Russian civilization had "gone native" in Siberia.²⁰⁷ Perplexity was the first official response. It was unthinkable to the government that a born and bred Russians, members of a great civilization, could be degraded by voluntarily assuming the culture and religious practices of their erstwhile lesser neighbors. Indeed, this was an embarrassment to Russian prestige but, finally, an official explanation was offered. This ethnic degeneration was the fault of the Russian colonists who tended to be of the "lowest type," barely aware of their Russianness and, therefore, the most susceptible to compromise.²⁰⁸ Given the physical distances, the state of transportation, and the hopelessness of reconverting these individuals to Russian mores, the Russian government eventually ignored them and attended to more pressing matters of state.

Evreiskaia biblioteka: A Jewish Perspective

²⁰⁷ Willard Sunderland, "Russians into Yakuts? "Going Native" and the Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North 1870's-1914," *Slavic Review* vol. 55. no. 4. (Winter 1996), pp. 811-13.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 822-3.

By the latter part of the century it was realized that the Jewish popular press had the potential to act as a mediator between the Jewish community and the government.²⁰⁹ Dialogue was essential if reform within in the Jewish sphere was to enjoy any success, and with the liberalization of press restrictions in the mid-1860's, the Jews were among the beneficiaries. As early as 1858, Alexander II opined that the heavily-censored Russian press impeded social reform. Society had to be more open, a calculated risk which would launch Russia into the modern age, and during the period 1862-65, Russia's first boulevard press emerged.²¹⁰ Jewish presses were included and permitted to exist anywhere within Russia provided that they, like their Russian counterparts, observed the standing censorship regulations. Well inured to such proscriptions, it did not take long for both Russian and Jewish editors and writers to develop strategies which allowed them self-expression while circumventing the more onerous prohibitions.²¹¹ Of equal consequence were the demands of subscribers who, by the 1870's, were determining the content and orientations of their periodicals. Direct criticism of the Tsar was still forbidden, but an investigative report on local corruption would certainly be appreciated in St. Petersburg and spark official action.²¹²

Making its debut in 1871, *Evreiskaia biblioteka* was both a journal and a newspaper. Claiming to be a literary-historical journal, this particular publication embraced a wide spectrum of ideas, commentaries, editorials, and even extensive book reviews. Serial novels, such as Lev Levanda's *Goriachee vremia* (Hot or Turbulent Times) and stories like M. Brandshteter's *Mordkhe kizovich*, were examples of an

²⁰⁹ Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 60-61.

²¹⁰ McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, pp. 23-4, 52.

²¹¹ Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, p. 61.

emergent new Jewish literature which this publication showcased in the hope of ensuring Jewish viability. Its more mundane function was to provide an outlet for local or special interest articles, opinions, and complaints against government policies, Jewish parochialism, or any issue touching upon Jewish life in Russia or abroad. By assuming this dual demeanor, *Evreiskaia biblioteka* served a variety of interests among Russia's various Jewish groups though, for most of its life, the Jewish intelligentsia made up the bulk of its contributors. Nevertheless, during its ten-year run (1871-1881), it informed the Jews of Russia, promoted intellectual development, provided an officially-sanctioned forum for grievances, and most importantly, an audible "voice" which was heard with greater attention in official circles as the nineteenth century entered its final decades.

A general description of *Evreiskaia biblioteka*'s submissions could be summed up in the title of Lev Levanda's novel. The 1870's were indeed turbulent times for Russians and Jews alike though, with regard to the latter, the contest over identity had changed. Gone were the external assaults upon Judaism; now a new problem from within had come about which concerned Lev Gordon (Judah Leib).²¹³ A moderate Jewish reformer, Gordon and his associates had labored to preserve Judaism while bringing it in line with modern circumstance. This project had always been a frustrating one, particularly in Russia during Nicholas' reign where obstacles abounded without end. Now under Alexander II, the atmosphere was not so severe but the question of Jewish identities had taken on another dimension. In the German rabbinical academies and Jewish schools,

²¹² McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, p. 57.

²¹³ Lev Gordon, "Sovremennoi evreiskoi literatury," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 1. no. 7. (1871), pp. 342-43.

Hebrew instruction was being abandoned.²¹⁴ Given the Russian Jewish association with German scholarship, Gordon feared the worst. Though perceptible gains had been made in some quarters regarding the formation of distinctive Russian Jewish identities, the Russian Jewish intelligentsia tended to follow the German example. A new Jewish literature written in contemporary languages and reflective of modern Jewish experiences was indeed needed, according to Gordon, but not at the expense of literacy in Hebrew.²¹⁵ Hebrew was the key to understanding and preserving Jewish history and culture. If it were abandoned, then those two pillars of Jewish identity would be lost as well. Russian Jews, however, by maintaining Hebrew literacy while developing a new literature made accessible in Russian and other modern languages via translation, could revitalize Jewish intellectual life. Quite possibly, such works would appeal to a non-Jewish audience and mitigate the misconceptions surrounding the Jewish community. Quite possibly if such a rapport could be established with the larger Russian community some good could be derived. By no means a solitary and ephemeral crusade, Alexander Harkavy, another Russian Jewish intellectual, would advocate a similar program a decade later.

Hope amidst adversity was a predominant theme in the articles published in *Evreiskaia biblioteka*. In 1873, V.V. Stasova remarked that there was hope of Jewish acceptance, or at least toleration, in European circles owing to a renewed artistic interest in Jewish life and culture.²¹⁶ For the first time since the medieval period, Jews once more

²¹⁴ Greenberg, *The Jews of Russia*, p. 140. In some temples, Hebrew was actually banned.

²¹⁵ Gordon., "Sovremennoi evreiskoi literatury," pp. 345-6. See also *Russkii evrei*, n. 17. (26 December 1879), p. 619. It had to be recognized that Jewish literature was not meant for Jewish consumption exclusively.

²¹⁶ V.V. Stasova, "Evreiskoe plemia v sozdaniikh evropeiskago iskusstva," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 3. no. 22. (1873), p. 287.

were being depicted without hostility, at least on canvas in Paris.²¹⁷ Throughout Europe, but particularly in France, Stasova claimed that Jewish images were being rethought and cast in a new light. This change in demeanor, however, should not come as a surprise. To Stasova's mind, France had always been the first among the European nations to embark upon socially progressive ventures which would soon be taken up by her neighbors.

What Stasova hoped to gain from his article was twofold. First of all, he broadened the horizons of his readers by informing them of significant developments affecting Jewish interests outside of Russia and Germany. More to the point, he offered hope. The political rights of non-Russians were meager with no immediate promise of expansion, let alone equality, with Russian citizens who themselves had few rights comparable with those of a growing number of their Western and Central European counterparts. Even so, Alexander was anxious to modernize Russia and make it an equal partner among the European Great Powers and, in pursuit of that goal, Russian society had become more open. Jewish journals and periodicals were certainly progressive within the Russian milieu and, with the passage of time, it was quite possible that the Jews of Russia might still stand to gain some important concessions. Since the flow of modernity tended to migrate from west to east, its arrival in Russia was not out of the question, just simply a matter of time. Such was Stasova's perception in any case.

Current intellectual and political issues were quite important but so too were some lingering unresolved issues from within the Jewish community. Writing in response to an earlier letter to the editor and offering an explanation for the failure of Haskalah in Minsk province, Lev Levanda attempted to present the Jewish side of one of the more

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 289.

controversial aspects of Russia's Jewish Question. Specifically, M. Margolis, another contributor, had criticized the Jews of Minsk province for their rejection of Max Lilienthal when he attempted to win them over to Haskalah. Levanda thought that this condemnation was too severe and unjustified.²¹⁸ In his rebuttal, Levanda maintained that too often Russian officials and some Jewish progressives assessed blame without considering circumstance. It should be remembered, Levanda admonished, that Lilienthal's arrival was unexpected. At first, he puzzled the Jews with whom he came into contact. When he announced his Haskalah program, he excited fears among his listeners, fears which could have been mitigated if only he had been willing to listen to Jewish community leaders and had considered their views.²¹⁹ Taken by surprise and confronted with a program which was beyond both their experience and comprehension, Lilienthal's mission was doomed to fail. Haskalah for the Jews of Minsk province, Levanda contended, was too progressive a scheme to be implemented, much less maintained, given the community's intellectual resources. Once these deficiencies had been taken into account, it was plain that these Jews should not be judged so harshly.

Education and intellectual advancement were key concerns among the Jewish intelligentsia and especially to *Evreiskaia biblioteka's* contributors. Frequently, their pieces expressed requests for equal civil rights. Ia. Rosenfeld stated the matter plainly when he claimed that if sensible Russian society would unite with the Jews, expanded and equal rights for the latter would be forthcoming.²²⁰ All too often, legislative decisions were influenced by public opinion which had always opposed this demand.

²¹⁸ Lev Levanda, "Po povodu stat'i M.G. Margolisa," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 3. no. 23. (1873), pp. 365-66.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 366-67.

What was the point of all Jewish labors and hopes, he inquired, if these rights could not be achieved? Why are Jewish detractors unable to see that such a reform would not benefit the Jews exclusively? By expanding Jewish legal and political rights, Rosenfeld claimed that state economic and social interests would also be served.²²¹

An active voice was Russian Jewry's only hope to affect substantial social and political gains and Jewish journalism held the key.²²² The golden age of Jewish literature had arrived, declared Ben Iosef, and amidst the variety and diversity of publications, the Jewish voice had never enjoyed such freedom. Attitudes within the Jewish community were changing. Fifteen, even ten years ago, conservatives believed that Jewish literature written in languages other than Hebrew would lead to impiety, but this had not occurred. Jews were still God-fearing (bogoboriaznenny).²²³ Even Hebrew had been enlisted in secular service. As early as 1854, the Jewish newspaper, *Ha Maggid*, was published for Russian Jews who were so eager for news that they read it in their synagogues during prayer hours.²²⁴ At that time, the Crimean War was of particular interest. The founder of this publication, Zilbermann, wanted to educate the Jews of Russia, especially the young, but was concerned about imparting too much of the truth about the larger world to his readers. Since then, times have changed, observed Ben Iosef, and now the Jews of Russia could take full advantage of the literary openness which was before them.

Indeed, Jewish journalism and the voice it expressed had made great strides during Alexander II's reign though, even with relaxed censorship regulations, it had not

²²⁰ Ia. Rosenfeld, "Obzor zakonodatel'stva: otноситel'no evreev za istekshii desiatileti," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 7. n. 43. (1879), p. 112.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²²² Ben Iosef, "Obozrenie evreiskoi zhurnalistiki," *Evreiskaia biblioteka* vol. 7. no. 46-7. (1879), p. 282.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

been an easy sojourn. Ben Iosef's article struck a positive tone, but even he could not have forgotten the bitter journalistic contest which had arisen from the 1861-62 *Sion-Osnova* Controversy.²²⁵ Perhaps Ukrainians had only one word for "Jew," (zhid), but Jewish progressives feared that that same word, orthographically identical to the Russian slur, and other epithets would find their way into the Russian press. In the face of a fairly active Jewish parallel, however, their influence would be challenged and certainly not accepted in silence.

Comparisons with the Polish Jewish Experience

Russian Jews shared with their Polish coreligionists the same government but not entirely the same circumstance. The situation of Polish Jewry was so changeable, particularly after the suppression of the Revolt, that it would have defeated a gambler's odds. Russian efforts to foment divisions between Jews and Poles and overt hostility towards any attempts between Poles and Jews to achieve rapprochement, made Jewish life there all but untenable.²²⁶ Even so, the Jewish Question was the most-discussed issue in Polish journalism.²²⁷ Venerated as the acceptable "little Jews" in one instance and then vilified as an "alien group with no attachment to Polish culture" in another, Polish Jews often did not know where to turn or how to react to the sea of philo- and anti-

²²⁵ For a more detailed treatment of this matter, see Roman Serbyn, "The *Sion-Osnova* Controversy of 1861-62," *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, eds. Peter J. Potichnyi and Howard Aster (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1990), pp. 85-110.

²²⁶ Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, p. 117.

²²⁷ Alexander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 203.

Semitic polemics which all but consumed them.²²⁸ In their efforts to stabilize the turbulence, they found an odd ally in adverse political events. One favorite accusation of Polish anti-Semites was that Jews were anti-patriotic and disrespectful towards Polish Catholic institutions and traditions. This claim lost credibility temporarily in April 1861, when Rabbi Ber Meisels of Bransk was arrested and then expelled from the country for closing local synagogues in protest over Russian desecration of Warsaw's Catholic churches.²²⁹ The Polish press also noted that during the 8 April demonstration Michael Landy, a young Warsaw yeshiva student, grabbed a cross-capped staff from a fallen priest whom the Cossacks had gunned down and continued to march on in his place. A few steps later he too would fall dead.²³⁰ Such heroism could not be discounted, and when these stories circulated throughout the country, they instigated a temporary philo-Semitic outpouring.²³¹

The year 1861 saw a flurry of activity on the part of Polish reformers trying to forge a national political entity while, at least as far as the moderates were concerned, placating their Russian overlords. Working ardently towards realizing Polish autonomy within the bounds of the 1832 Organic Statute, defusing radical revolutionary furor, and even advocating full emancipation and legal equality for Jews was Count Alexander Wielopolski.²³² One of his early champions and a notable figure among the Whites

²²⁸ Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 370. Particularly puzzling was the presence of positive Jewish images in a number of Polish works in the period 1865-1880 amidst recurrent accusations of Jewish "betrayal" as the cause for the failure of the January Rising. Opalski and Bartal, Poles and Jews, pp. 42-3.

²²⁹ Hoffman, Shtetl, p. 121.

²³⁰ Cyprian Norwid, "Polish Jews" (1861) Stranger in Our Midst, p. 89. See also Opalski and Bartal, Poles and Jews, p. 46.

²³¹ Since the goal of the Polish press was to inspire patriotism, it was only natural to include "good Jews," acting in behalf of Polish interests. Once adversity set in, however, the Jew would revert to alien status. See Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 209.

²³² Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p.372.

(moderates) was Leopold Kronenburg, a Jew who had converted to Catholicism to avoid personal adversity in the preceding decade.²³³ Despite apparently substantial support, Wielopolski soon discovered that his was a thankless task. Through insisting that nationalist demands be cast aside and that full cooperation with the Russian government was the only way Poland could ameliorate Russian rule, he ended up alienating large sections of the moderate camp. Count Andrzej Zamoyski, for example, whose group was linked to the Agricultural Society and had initially supported Wielopolski's scheme, eventually succumbed to the Warsaw Reds (revolutionary radicals). Soon others joined the radical ranks out of political pressure. Time was of the essence. For the young army officers, landowners, and university students who comprised the radical camp, Wielopolski was moving too slowly and was too subservient to the Russians, especially since the Count would not even consider the notion of a fully independent Poland. Alexander II's expressed approval of Wielopolski's proposals did little to ingratiate him with those who styled themselves as selfless Polish patriots, and when the Polish Catholic Church cast its lot with the radicals at the end of 1861, Wielopolski had to concede the field.²³⁴ The Uprising of 1863-64 was the consequence of the failure to steer a moderate reformist course.

In 1866, novelist Josef Kraszewski (1812-1887), reflecting upon the Warsaw demonstration and the January Rising (1863), wrote a fictionalized account of two friends, Iwas, a Christian, and Jacob, a Jew, discussing the status and perception of the latter's coreligionists in Poland. Iwas queried as to whether his friend thought himself

²³³ Hertz claims that forced conversions in Poland were a rarity and that some Jews simply converted for material and political gain. Even so, there was still a good deal of tension between the Jewish convert and

more of an Israelite than a Pole, considering that he did not adopt Polish customs, dress, or participate in political activities. Jacob responded that the Jews owed Poland a substantial debt for taking them in and shielding them from medieval Crusaders and the Inquisition; since he had lived all of his life in the country, he thought himself as much a Pole as an Israelite.²³⁵ Rabbi Meisels had reasoned similarly, claiming to be part of Polish landscape. Iwas's observations of Jewish non-assimilation and a reluctance to enter politics were accurate but as Jacob pointed out, these shortcomings were as much a consequence of Christian proscriptions as they were Jewish parochialism.²³⁶ Given the current influx of influences from Western Europe, however, Jewish political participation would soon take off.

Polish elites, by virtue of an autonomous educational system before 1863, had attempted to bring about Jewish assimilation through the imposition of a cosmopolitan curriculum and had achieved results similar to those of the Russians. Jewish society in Poland now consisted of several groups and dispositions scattered throughout the country, and it was apparent that the Jew of late nineteenth-century Poland was not what he once was. Owing to his Jewish, European and humanistic education (Jewish women were excluded from this milieu), the modern Polish Jew had more choices and opportunities before him but, as Kraszewski's Jacob opined, such freedom was perilous. Jewish traditions had, for the heedless, been replaced by Polish ones or sacrificed on the altar of reason which rendered them soulless entities in possession of a dead

the "established" Polish Christian. As one Polish Jewish patriot remarked, "I love Poland but not Catholicism." Opalski and Bartal, *Poles and Jews*, p. 88.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 374.

²³⁵ Josef Kraszewski, "The Jew: Contemporary Images" (1866), in Segel, *Strangers in Our Midst*, p. 94.

modernity.²³⁷ For Jacob, this was a dreary prospect but one which had not become universal. Presenting himself as one of a select minority, Jacob asserted that he was neither a spiritual ghost nor a fanatic, superstitious traditionalist. He was a cosmopolitan Jew who respected Jewish traditions within the context of contemporary life. As such, he posed no threat to Polish mores or anyone else's.²³⁸

Could not most Poles understand that Jews were their patriotic brethren? Having been active in the January Rising and sharing defeat's hardships with their Christian countrymen, the latter repaid Polish Jewish patriots by joining the Russians in denouncing them as spies and opportunists, casting them adrift without any support.²³⁹ A Jew and the devil were children of the same mother, according to a Polish proverb which was gaining currency at this time.²⁴⁰ Such fickleness made continued coexistence doubtful when the maintenance of that centuries-old symbiosis was essential if Poland wished to remain a cultural nation of any stature.²⁴¹ Old habits had deep roots and those of the Poles were well entrenched. Jewish status before and after the Polish Rising served as an object lesson for Russia and Russian Jewry if they were astute enough to grasp it.²⁴² The parallels were there. Poland was undergoing a similar dual metamorphosis and sought identical means in resolving its Jewish Question, differing only in that these processes were more prominent than in the Empire. With Poland being

²³⁶ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 204. Polish anti-Semites blamed Judaism, especially the Talmud, for Jewish separateness. As was true in Russia, Talmud received the most acerbic criticism from Christian ecclesiastical officials which, invariably, trickled down to the average Christian in the street.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-6.

²³⁸ With the rise of mass political movements in Poland in the late nineteenth century, ethnicity became a key political issue. See Corrsin, Warsaw Before the First World War, p. 3.

²³⁹ Hoffman, Shtetl, pp. 123-27.

²⁴⁰ Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 200.

²⁴¹ Klemens Junosza, "Froim: A Sketch from Nature," (1889), Segel, Stranger in Our Midst, p. 188.

brought under even closer scrutiny after 1863, St. Petersburg could ill afford to ignore the Polish mirror of its own Jewish affairs.

In a climate of uncertainty, the liberal novelist and journalist, Boleslaw Prus decided to write in 1875 what he hoped would be recognized as a well-reasoned response to the Jewish presence in Poland. True, the focus of his “Chronicles” was on the Jews of Poland, but if “Russia” were substituted for “Poland,” his article would have been relevant still. “Reason must prevail over the anti-Semite,” he wrote. To advocate the immediate expatriation of the Jews from Poland was akin to divesting the human body of its arteries and expecting it to continue living.²⁴³ Since the tenth century, Prus contended, Jews had been living in Poland and though they were still a distinct people, their long relationship with Polish society had made them an essential part of the country’s organic whole. Prus made it clear that he was neither a philo- nor anti-Semite but merely one who sought to distribute equally credit and blame among Poles and Jews. Some believed that Jews held the monopoly on filth and laziness but should one venture into Warsaw’s slums, Prus maintained, it would be clear that poor Christians suffered from the same afflictions. Every popular misconception about the Jews could be applied to Christians. As far as ignorance, intolerance, arrogance, and prejudice were concerned, both communities possessed them in equal measure.

The Jews were in need of reform, Prus agreed, but their present defects were as much of Europe’s making as their own.²⁴⁴ Spain, France, England, Italy and Germany each gave testament to Jewish fortitude under extreme duress, but it was in Poland where

²⁴² Theodore Weeks maintains that many Poles thought of themselves as an incomplete nation because they lacked a middle class. What there was of one was dominated by the Jews. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, p. 117.

they found rest, established institutions, and prospered for several centuries. Since the beginning of the Diaspora, Poland was as close as the Jews had come to having a fatherland. They had labored for many of its causes and these deeds had not gone unnoticed. The Castellan of Lukow had once declared that Jews were Polish citizens and useful ones at that. Though hardly a recommendation for sainthood, it was a genuine rebuke to those individuals who found Jewish criminality, real and imagined, more distasteful than the Christian variety. Such reasoning, Prus admonished, should be examined carefully. Since the fifteenth century, Polish Jews had been compelled to act contrary to human nature. After all, it was the height of perversion to insist that they labor on Poland's behalf when its fruits were not assured them. Furthermore, to expect them to act with civility towards those who spat in their faces and to conduct themselves honestly when most honest employment was denied them was a cruel joke. Perhaps the most preposterous aspect was the belief that Jews should assume a dignified bearing while fettered about the neck and kiss the hands of those responsible for placing them in this condition.²⁴⁵ Good and evil were not the exclusive provinces of one group and it was true that the Jews had their respective representatives of both as did all other nations.

Before concluding his "Chronicles," Prus expressed his opinion on the Talmud and the belief that this work was at the root of the Jewish condition. He found it puzzling how otherwise intelligent Christians could assume that books defined a people's character. Those who subscribed to such oddly fascinating theories possessed a fatal blind spot in their reasoning. If Talmud was pernicious, a fact established beyond

²⁴³ Boleslaw Prus, "Chronicles," (1875), in Segel, p. 211.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 216.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 215.

apology and refutation, Prus asked, then why had the Christian Bible and Patristic works, judged as good books ostensibly under the same criteria, failed to move Christians towards more honorable endeavors and extend charity to those outside of their faith?²⁴⁶ Enough stones had been cast in both directions and further discourse on good and evil and the merits and shortcomings of Jews and Poles were futile in light of the most pressing issue to date, Poland's future. If the nation wanted a true solution to Christian-Jewish relations, it could be summed up in "brotherhood."²⁴⁷ Throughout the country there were ills enough to be addressed without infighting and their resolution could only come about through a united effort which was certainly not beyond Polish capabilities.

Russians in Search of Russianness

In their quest for identity, the Jews were not alone. From 1856 until the end of the century, the Jews of Russia would have to contend with the Russian quest for Russianness which carried with it its own frustration and despair. Defining Russianness in terms of the Russian Orthodox Church, long regarded as the institutional keystone of Russian national identity, now needed augmentation. Karamzin's dictum that in becoming citizens of the world, Russians ceased to be Russian was gaining currency among many Russian intellectuals.²⁴⁸ Much of traditional Russia had passed away with

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 216-17.

²⁴⁷ In the parlance of Polish liberalism, this reference could, depending upon the author's disposition, mean that the Jews suffered in common with the Poles and, therefore, were "brothers." "Brotherhood" could also be interpreted as a by-word for paternalistic anti-Semitism in which the "silly little Jew" of Polish folklore required the "brotherly guidance" of their "superior" Polish neighbors. Hertz, The Jews in Polish Culture, p. 81, 198.

²⁴⁸ Stephen K. Carter, Russian Nationalism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (London: Pinter Publishers, 1990), pp. 13-15. See also, Theodore Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, p. 8.

the Crimean War but not the Slavophile-Westernizer debate which now took on a particular urgency in terms of establishing the Russian identity.²⁴⁹ The humiliating defeat at the hands of England and France, nations which had heretofore sent men of letters, engineers, artists and architects to Russia, seemed to verify the Slavophile sentiment that Russia had grown weak owing to its dependence upon the West. Debate over the West's perceptions of Slavs, Russians and civilization itself animated Russian and Jewish discussions alike, raising questions about the former's supposed superiority and the latter's ostensible backwardness.²⁵⁰

Unmistakably, Russia had incorporated some European cultural and artistic elements into its own edifice. By the time Alexander II ascended the throne, an astute Russian would have noted significant European influences in the nation's architecture, social structure, educational system, and even in Russian vocabulary. Discomfort among the Slavophiles was to be expected. To their minds, Russian reformation had to come from within and along strict Russo-Slavic lines.²⁵¹ Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Gogol and Turgenev each played upon this theme, a tenuous balancing act between Russian tradition and European progressivism, in order to illustrate the various benefits and evils Russians encountered in their search for a tangible Russian identity. As part of this milieu and contending with these same issues within their own ranks, the Jews could sympathize

²⁴⁹ The Russian Idea, that is the creation of a purely Russian culture and history, was seen an antibody to modernity as represented by Western Europe. See Tim McDaniel, The Agony of the Russian Idea (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 25.

²⁵⁰ Nikolai Danilevsky, an ardent Slavophile intellectual, was convinced that all non-Slavic nations were hostile to Slavs in general and Russians particularly. Russian "meekness," he opined, was incomprehensible to the corrupt and violent West. See Dmitry Shlapentokh, The French Revolution in Russian Intellectual Life, 1865-1905 (Westport: Praeger Press, 1996), p. 23. See also McDaniel, The Agony of the Russian Idea, p. 28.

²⁵¹ The fundamental mistake of the Slavophiles was that they imagined that Russia once had an individual culture which it could never have had and never could have. See McDaniel, The Agony of the Russian Idea, p. 27.

with the Russians but, being resident “foreigners” and perceived as a potential threat to all things Russian, they were kept at a distance.²⁵²

What the Tsar Did Not Know

Whether they lived in Poland or Russia, Jewish visibility was forever blurred in the eyes of officialdom. Following from the January Rising, Alexander did not see the Jews in his own right but relied upon his ministers to inform him of their activities. The Jews became the responsibility of the government’s bureaucrats. Bureaucrats and bureaucracies are composed of personalities, from the lowliest clerk to ministry heads, a fact which should not be underrated. Nikolai Gogol’s Dead Souls examined the gulf between appearance and reality which was extant in the Russian bureaucracy with fair acuity.²⁵³ Despite its strict on-paper pyramid of power, almost everyone had some province of authority and those who had not yet attained that coveted position made up for the deficiency with guile. Few functionaries would have been neutral on the Jewish Question or, depending upon their rank, reluctant to implement their designs in policymaking if the opportunity was afforded them.²⁵⁴ August von Kotzebue, Governor of Odessa, for example, was angry with the city’s Jews for their pro-French posture during the Franco-Prussian War and instigated a three-day pogrom at Easter in 1871.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov was one such expositor of this sentiment. See Kritikus, “Lituraturnaia letopis: I.S. Aksakov i evrei,” *Voskhod*, vol. 2, no. 308. (1887), pp. 2-3.

²⁵³ This was one of many gulfs. Much wider was that separating the central bureaucracy from officialdom in the provinces, a consequence which made the transaction of state business in the main a cumbersome and often inefficient affair. See Pipes, Russia Under the Old Regime, p. 287.

²⁵⁴ Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire, p. 416.

²⁵⁵ Evgenii Semenoff, The Russian Government and the Massacres (1907) (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1972), p. 32.

Without hard evidence, the Governor claimed that he knew the Jews to be *kramolniki* (plotters), anti-patriotic and forever scheming against Imperial rule. The time for retribution had come.²⁵⁶ No one was in a position to stop him. A local project pursued without Alexander's authority, Kotzebue was assured immunity from prosecution since such an action would draw into question the authoritative integrity of Imperial administration. This was the fundamental irony of the autocracy when even the Tsar was as much a captive of this system of government as he was lord over it.

The visibility problem was a mutual one. Some officials were known to the Jews but, in general, their collective fate was subject to a legion of invisible faces. For a few, that was cause enough to convert to Orthodox Christianity or eschew theology altogether and become as "Russian" as was permitted by law and custom even though little was gained from the transformation. Often conditions worsened when certain state officials resigned, retired, or were dismissed and their replacements were of a differing disposition. Jewish status was tenuous even in the best of circumstances and dire in the extreme during transition periods. The longer the reign the greater the turnover of officials, and with the ascension of a new Tsar, communal anxiety, frustration and tumult reached their apex. Alexander II reigned twenty-five years, his successor only thirteen, but their combined thirty-eight years were sufficient to alter the course of Russian Jewish development in such a manner that there could never be a return to the "old ways."

Conclusion

²⁵⁶ Semenoff, The Russian Government and the Massacres, p. 7.

The flower of Russian Jewry's intellect and identity came into bloom in the midst of a gale of hardships. Some problems, poverty and parochialism, refused to abate and yet very few were willing to surrender to fate. At no time was the Jewish condition in Russia ideal nor was it enshrouded in impenetrable gloom, particularly during Alexander II's twenty-five-year tenure. If only as a consequence of circumstance, the Russian government accorded the Jews two general benefits at this time; the 1863 educational stipends and press liberties two years later. Of these two boons, the latter was the greater because it allowed grievances pertaining to Jewish education, culture, identity, and religion to be expressed beyond the small circles of intellectual elites. From a purely pragmatic vantage, this relative liberty of expression released a considerable amount of tension that had been welling up for decades but even more so, thoughts could now be put into print and then translated into action.

The October 1869 meeting of the St. Petersburg Jewish Committee was one such translation. Its accomplishments may have been subject to debate, yet it cannot be denied that those delegates from five of the larger Jewish communities in Russia brought to the fore concerns which were shared by all. Details of this assembly were limited, but what came from this meeting was a determination to create a Jewish educational environment sensible to the demands of both modernity and tradition. Jacob Brafman's proposal of a Christian marriage to Jewish reforms was rejected, but even his performance yielded benefits in the struggle against apostasy.

Liberties seldom come without consequences, and the same censorship relaxations which allowed Lev Levanda and Abraham Mapu to espouse their views on and contributions to the Jewish identity also permitted apostates the same exercise. That

Russian was the mandated lingua franca posed no obstacle to Rabbi Ippolit Liutostanskii and Jacob Brafman who made ready use of it in their respective publications. Combining cunning with market sense, Liutostanskii was able to disseminate his invectives against Jewish theology through a series of three-kopeck pamphlets. He had the potential to reach a wide audience which was why Rabbi Zalkind Minor had to act quickly and resourcefully in his counter to his opponent's pseudo-erudition.

Jacob Brafman, in contrast, published a book. Presumably, he garnered far fewer readers than Liutostanskii but, unlike the latter, his work caught the Tsar's attention and won his approval. Certainly possessing the potential for inimicability, Brafman's *Kniga kagala* lacked the virulence of Liutostanskii's *Talmud i evrei* because the author was arguing from a secured position. Employed in the Minsk Seminary, life may have been boring but seldom disquieting and he was able to maintain a livelihood. No doubt his ego had been bruised at the St. Petersburg assembly, and surmising that members of the Rabbinical Committee might have allegiances to the clandestine and corrupt Asifra, he would have had adequate inspiration to publish his work.

Apostates aside, the Russian-language Jewish press initiated a *glasnost* (openness) in Jewish society which would allow the intelligentsia to explore all facets of just who and what they were as Jews. Judah Leib Gordon called for a new Jewish literature; a call which Ben Iosef claimed had been answered by the end of the decade. Perhaps the most important development to emerge from the Jewish press was the encouragement it gave Jewish writers to produce books, poems, and short stories. As Ben Iosef remarked, this (the late 1870's and early 1880's) was the golden age of Jewish literature; the Jewish voice was not only being expressed, it was on display for all to see. This was a major and

permanent accomplishment. It also contained another benefit which would prove consequential in the years ahead.

Intellectual expression, coupled with Alexander's rejection of Russification for non-Russians, afforded the Jews the opportunity to engage in introspection. In a sea of criticism regarding government policies, demands for civil rights, and intercommunal squabbles, the Jews of Russia began to appreciate the fact that though they were "a Jewish community," often defined by the term *evrei* or the more derisive *zhidy*, they were also a pluralistic society. Wrangling over definitions of Jewish identity had become a time-worn and futile exercise. Now it was time to explore the possibilities and dimensions of identity in order to establish a varied Jewish sense of self which could withstand the tests of time and circumstance.

CHAPTER V: WILTED AND FADED BUT NOT DIVESTED OF ITS STEM: JEWISH SELF-EXAMINATION AND ACTIONS IN A DARK AND COLD CLIMATE, 1881-1894

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of Tsar Alexander II's assassination on 1 March 1881, Russians and Jews were filled with sadness and synagogues and churches to capacity, all praying for a time of peace.¹ God had turned deaf. Despite Jewish entreaties to the Tsar of Heaven and the Tsar of Earth (Alexander III) for justice and social tranquility, 1881-82 saw myriad pogroms which all but divested the Jews of any hope of communion with Russian society. As for the Jewish identity in its many forms, this would continue, and the Jewish cultural mien would be strengthened if only because many Russian Jews could not leave the country which had hosted them and their ancestors for ten centuries.² In spite of this, these years and their successors did see substantial emigration to both Palestine and the United States where the seeds of Russian Jewry germinated anew on ostensibly fertile soil but not for the benefit of those left behind.

Among those unable to leave, there was the sense that they were caged pariahs, unwanted, unloved, and with no place to go. Some capitulated to these pressures in a variety of way while others embarked upon the endeavor of “bridge building” between Jewish tradition and modernity and, by extension, between themselves and Russian society. Haim Zhitlowski, Ahad ha-Am, and Simon Dubnow, to name a few, believed that contemporary Judaism was capable of changing with the times while preserving its fundamental structure. Even the Christian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev saw the salvation of Russian Jewry in bridge building, though, as he conceived of it, Judaism

¹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 10. (4 March 1882), pp. 361-2.

would eventually adopt Christian theology and ethics. This, Solov'ev opined, would end their suffering. The facility of this position would be borne out by subsequent events and the fact that Russian Jewry would not have survived to this point without its resilient spirit. Being able to adapt to circumstance was a common thread in Jewish history, but now Russian Jewish leaders had to preserve their gains which were in danger of eclipse in light of the Zionists' call for *aliya* (emigration to Palestine) and the idealism surrounding life in the United States.

While it is true that the first Jewish settlement in Palestine, Rehovot, was a colony of Russian Jews, Zionism in Russia was a multi-dimensional movement.³ Fragmented into various factions with each espousing its own particular version of Jewish identity, a number of Zionists also associated themselves with the rising socialist movement. Of course, non-Zionist Jewish socialist groups emerged as well, and both movements afforded those Jews who could not emigrate the prospect of political and social participation. Without losing their distinctiveness and becoming more at ease with their Jewishness, many Jewish workers and intellectuals tried to become part of the Russian landscape, but that was one bridge which would never be open to them completely. There were, however, a few isolated exceptions. In the Don-Dnepr Basin, for instance, a clear, albeit tenuous, comraderie developed between some groups of Jewish and Russian workers which was somewhat beneficial in reducing the barriers which had separated them, though tensions always remained below the surface. Nevertheless, the imagined community of Russian Jewry was gaining substance in the political milieu. Political

² Ibid., n. 1. (1 January 1882), p. 6.

awareness and nationalist impulses led to the realization and the possibility of placement or belonging within the Russian context, but after having won the battle for shaping their own identity, the second battle for political status would be fraught with disappointments and meagre gains during Nicholas II's reign.

These pains were not suffered in silence. Western philanthopists such as the Rothschilds and Baron Maurice de Hirsch each presented their projects for Jewish reform to the Russian government in the belief that officials would see the benefit of assisting rather than hindering the Jewish community. Specifically, Baron de Hirsch wanted to acquaint his Russian coreligionists with the arts and works of refined culture and invest them with a taste and zeal for making themselves, in time, purveyors of civilization. Towards that end, he pledged 60,000 rubles.⁴ Abundant wealth coupled with a commensurate degree of generosity, his efforts were not appreciated in official circles and even thwarted. If his education designs were to come to naught, he contemplated including Russian Jews in his Argentinian colonization operation which had already transplanted a number of Jews from unfavorable circumstances to reasonable prosperity in South America. Like Jacob Alteris before him, unfortunately, this too met with official obfuscation and, by the 1890's, de Hirsch concluded that he could do no more.

Repression and emigration notwithstanding, the Jews still had their voices in the mass circulation press though the titles were changing. For instance, taking *Evreiskaia Biblioteka's* place was *Voskhod* (Rising) with a run which extended well into Nicholas II's reign. Like its predecessor, it too would serve as an outlet for intellectual and social

³ YIVO 318/21/5. As of 1897, Rehovot had 22 families who worked the land. Housing was still a problem as were basic resources. More so than any other need was the one for doctors which was why requests for establishing medical schools there were made in earnest.

expression as did several Jewish journals in Russian Poland. For its part, Polish Jewish journalism in the previous decade espoused, however briefly, some of the benefits to be derived from assimilation.⁵ Controversy naturally ensued, but what was brought into sharper focus on both sides of the border was that even within the assimilationist milieu, Jews were taking more active roles in determining who they were and in defining their particular places in society.

Was Russian Jewry coming to an end or was it at the threshold of a new beginning? Conservatives could not see beyond the former and progressives lived in hope of the latter. Some could not tell if the Jews of Russia were experiencing chaos or progress. Fragmentation of Russian Jewish opinion reflecting communal diversity was now more noticeable owing to the presence of Jewish journals which broadened participation in this ongoing discourse.⁶ Difference, moreover, did not necessarily imply communal disintegration even though Simon Dubnow could not be dissuaded from this position completely.⁷ Perhaps the best metaphor for the times was Scholem Aleichem's fiddler on the roof because almost every thought and institution which had defined Russian Jewry was in a precarious balance. It was enough to negotiate the weight between tradition and modernity and then assume the added burden of contending with the mercurial mien of Russian society. Was it any wonder that most Russian Jews and

⁴ YIVO 318/21/2.

⁵ The assimilation issue in Russian Poland was an on-again, off-again affair. By 1881, the desire among educated Polish Jews to become Poles was on the wane, though it would again gain some ground at the turn of the century. Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 71.

⁶ As could be expected, this diversity also accentuated the incompatibility of the "old faith" (i.e. traditional Judaism) with this mostly secular revolution. For Christians, abjuring the faith did not mean abjuring the community yet, for Jews, such a divorce meant just that. See Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 77.

⁷ David H. Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1996), p. 62.

Russian Jewry as a whole did all that they could to “scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking their necks?” Nonetheless, at the end of Alexander III’s reign in 1894, the fiddler was still playing.

Climatic Changes: The Immediate and Long-Term Consequences for the Jews

Alexander II’s reign began on a note of optimism for the Jews and ended in tragedy. On the day of his assassination, the much-celebrated “Tsar-Liberator” had intended to give his subjects a limited form of representative government, a plan which Alexander III scrapped as one of his first acts.⁸ Prior to 1881, the general disposition among Jewish intellectuals was one of guarded hope. Despite omnipresent restrictions, it appeared to the Jews of Russia that they were establishing themselves as a viable component of Russia’s modernization, a sentiment bolstered by Alexander II’s fairly progressive Jewish policies. Fortune, like every facet of Jewish life in Russia, was fragile. When the Tsar was assassinated, it was reported that Heisse Helfman, a Jewess, was among the conspirators, and that intelligence unleashed the tensions, fears, and prejudices which had been largely pent up during the previous decades of Alexander II’s reign. In an instant, the tenuous peace between Russians and Jews exploded into violence.

Alexander III condemned the pogroms and, on 11 May 1881, received a delegation of prominent Russian Jews to inform them of his displeasure and that he

⁸ W. Bruce Lincoln, The Romanovs: Autocrats of All the Russias (New York: Doubleday Press, 1981), p. 447.

regarded all of his subjects equally.⁹ That the Jews were singled out for this violence was most unfortunate because they were little more than a weak pretext for these disturbances. Governor Bil'basov of Poltava assumed the same attitude of incensed inaction and Count Ignatiev, Minister of the Interior, was actually castigated at session of the Council of Ministers for his ineptitude in dealing with, if not passive support for, the *pogromchiky*.¹⁰ Others questioned the cavalier treatment of this grave and widespread problem. No mere temporary affair, the events of 1881-2 were an expression of a deeply-seated hatred and fear of Jews whose roots emanated from the very core of Russian society and the world had to be apprised of it.¹¹ This latter position did not want for credibility. Jewish property losses in the south were staggering but just as alarming was the apathy of local police and troops in quelling the riots and in their subsequent prosecution of the rioters and Jews.¹² This in itself was an education. Jewish identity formation in Russia had been ongoing with little indication of how it influenced their image in Russian eyes until the aftermath of the pogroms. Part of the blame rested with the inadequacies of Russian law. Proscriptions and penalties which defined the relationship between the government and the governed abounded but not one described disturbances between groups within society itself.¹³ Lacking any tangible guidance, police and military authorities local were left to devise boards of inquiry and trials along their own lines which, obviously, led to inadequate compensation for the victims and outright miscarriages. Jews who sought restitution for damages were compelled to

⁹ I. Michael Aronson, Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Pogroms in Russia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), p. 182.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 167.

¹¹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 11. (18 March 1883), p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, n. 19. (7 May 1882), p. 670. See also Aronson, Troubled Waters, p. 47.

¹³ Aronson, Troubled Waters, p. 147.

submit detailed catalogues of what had been destroyed or stolen and account for every kopeck of remuneration. Furthermore, it was incumbent upon the injured parties to not only produce the malefactors responsible to ad hoc tribunals in corpore but to present irrefutable evidence that the suspects were the actual perpetrators.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, little was accomplished in terms of restitution, and the Jews had had little time to recover their composure before they were subject to further indignities.

On 3 May 1882, the May Laws came into effect. Among its proscriptions, Jews could not move freely from one town to another and, even more onerous, could not conduct business on Sundays or Christian holidays.¹⁵ It did not stop there. From 1882 until 1901, educated Jews found that employment in those fields which had heretofore given them some status and hope for better treatment had been severely curtailed. During this period, Jewish admission to the bar was suspended for fifteen years and the Imperial army set a quota of 5% on Jewish doctors. In some of the more remote townlets, Jews were denied the vote in local elections and, taken together with other omnipresent restrictions, Jewish frustration was at its peak.¹⁶ "We have lived too long in hope of our rights which have now been cruelly dashed.," wrote one journal subscriber while another, demanding the release of the Jews from the government's "imposed indignities," blamed the Jewish intelligentsia for its failure to fulfill its role as guardian of the community.¹⁷ Indeed, this last pronouncement, despite its impassioned nature, was truer to the mark than its author intended.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁵ Ibid.

A Challenge to Theological Integrity

In the midst of their evolution, the Jews of Russia often found themselves facing revived aspects of their past. As had been true of some Jewish communities in the immediate aftermath of the Khmelnytsky risings, a number of southern Russian communities found themselves without any theological bearings and desperate for any promise order and security. Their coreligionists, 226 years before (1656), had embraced the Sabbatean movement with devastating consequences and, in 1882, *New Times* offered similar wares and portended the same end. Already, the Spiritual Biblical Brotherhood, which had preceded *New Times*, had caused some concern among Jewish intellectuals because of its proposed reform of Jewish religious practices and theological outlook. Subsequently, according to some Jews who had either left the Brotherhood or had some association with it, it was a systematic perversion of Judaism which extended down to its fundamental principles.¹⁶ Given the Jewish experience in Russia, especially with apostates and opportunists, this was a serious problem which had been seen before and for which there were remedies. Now, however, a new wrinkle had been added. Targeting the Jews living around Elizavetgrad who were largely ignorant of Jewish history and culture, the Brotherhood was able to spread among them easily, but *New Times* was much more sinister because it made ready capital of the demoralization arising from the 1881-82 pogroms. Unencumbered among individuals who could not offer them any tangible resistance, the movement's leadership proceeded to interpret the

¹⁶ Hans Rogger, Russia in the Age of Modernization and Revolution, 1881-1917 (London: Longman Press, 1997), p. 203.

¹⁷ *Russkii evrei*, n. 19. (7 May 1882), p. 699. and *Russkii evrei*, n. 2. (14 January 1883), p. 2.

Old Testament in a narrow and literal vein. Talmud was considered superfluous and dangerous and therefore banned, as was sacred music from its services, and anthropomorphic art owing to the Biblical proscription regarding graven images.¹⁹ At the core of New Times's perniciousness was its exploitation of the ignorance surrounding Torah and the Old Testament. The latter was a product of Christian translations and editing of the Mosaic pentateuch (five books) over the centuries but, in Russia, this work was expanded in the Russian Orthodox octateuch (eight books) with an additional purpose. In this work, its translators, editors, and compilers made every attempt to prove that Christ was present and a significant force in Jewish theology well in advance of the immaculate conception. By telescoping the Old Testament into the New Testament, those Jews who were ill-acquainted with their own traditions, not to mention being frightened and desperate, were ripe for Christian conversion.²⁰ Such shameless cunning was not without historical precedent, a fact which was recognized by some Jewish observers who considered New Times's tactics worthy of the Hellenization efforts of Antiochus Epiphanes.²¹ Regardless, what had to be appreciated and addressed was that reform from within the community was everyone's business and there was no paucity as to the areas in need of competent ministrations.

Once more, education became a central issue among the Jews of Russia. Shortcomings in terms of instruction were found on every level and for reasons other than mere poverty. The melamedim, for instance, had been a mainstay of the Jewish

¹⁸ Ibid., n. 35. (7 October 1884), p.3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Sermons and Rhetoric of Kievan Rus*, trans. Simon Franklin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. xxxii, 10. Metropolitan Illarion saw the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New. In 1050, he delivered "A Sermon Concerning the Laws of Moses and the Grace of Jesus Christ" in which he promised full clerical sanction to those Jewish apostates who could convert Jews to Christianity.

experience because they were the first academic authorities with whom Jewish boys met on their rigorous course of study. Few would have contested their historical role in molding Jewish minds and, by extension, the custodians of intellectual communal integrity, but times had changed. To remove them would have been a loss to Jewish culture, but their services had become obsolete and Jewish youths needed scholars who would prepare them for the challenges of a world in transition.²²

By no means was intellectual modernity to be construed as an excuse for cultural amnesia and abandonment. Talmud and Torah were still the pillars of strength that they had always been and their study could not be ignored. Even among ardent progressives, Talmud was seen as a liberating work and not one of enslavement. Though a closed canon since the sixth century C.E., it compelled its students in every age to reason flexibly and to consider all possible sides of an issue before rendering a pronouncement. One in possession of such skills could never really be a slave to another. A keen understanding of its subtleties and intricate forensics revealed the means by which it forged Jewish life and permeated all of its facets, and this was maintenance of the highest order.²³ In the eyes of those who saw it as a collection of time-worn and irrelevant precepts, ignorance and obduracy were in full vigor since Talmud was as much a part of the Jewish present as it was of the past.

Talmud had withstood adversities well in advance of those experienced in Russia, but how would the rabbinate fare? Since the 1798 Hasidic coup in Vilna, calls for rabbinical reform had echoed throughout every major Jewish shtetl, town, and city

²¹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 35. (7 October 1884), pp. 3,5.

²² *Ibid.*, n. 41. (28 October 1883), pp. 4-5.

²³ *Ibid.*, n. 32. (11 August 1882), p. 1218.

quarter in Russia. By the early and mid-1880's, thoughts of Palestinian emigration all but eclipsed this issue, much to the consternation of those committed to fortifying the local Jewish community. Palestine, it was argued, was a distant dream which would require of those determine to make *aliya* a spirit of complete sacrifice. More immediate was the reformation of the Rabbinate.²⁴ In some respects it was a circular issue in the Jewish press which often returned to the general concern over Jewish education, the rabbinate being one of the more critical areas in need of improvement. Credibility, more so than any other factor, was in dire want. Not widely reported in the Jewish press were stories of rabbis and congregations engaged in dubious activities which eventually led to official prosecution.²⁵ Though not as potent as they once were, Crown rabbis lingered on, and more than a few found themselves engaged in other occupations in order to gain a living. One of them, Solomon Rabinovich, who wrote under the name Scholem Aleichem, dedicated himself to the development of Yiddish literature. Exceptions aside, the rabbinical question was one of those concerns which did not become any more virulent with time but also never saw complete resolution.

Vladimir Solov'ev: A Would-be Purveyor of Jewish Reform

Theological and philosophical reform were not a Jewish monopoly. Unsolicited, Vladimir Solov'ev, a devout Orthodox Christian and philosopher, lent his talents to this endeavor as a means of bridging the gulf which separated Jews and Russians. So many errors had marred Christian-Jewish relations and, consequently, those between Russians

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 1219,1222.

and their resident Jews, but redemption was possible. Jews were not be viewed as an isolated entity but rather seen as a component of the Christian ethos; the Jewish Question was really a Christian one.²⁶ Casting scorn and ridicule on Jewish law, long the favorite activity of theological polemicists, was futile since Jewish and Christian law and ethics were essentially the same, the latter being a revision and more relevant edition of the former. Mindful that his critics might lay a charge of heresy against him, Solov'ev was quick to point out that the Jews suffered from arrested development which led to their subsequent failure in establishing a completely ethical society. No Christian, however, was permitted comfort in this revelation because, he admonished, they too were morally culpable.²⁷ On the issue of Christ and the Jews' repudiation of him, Solov'ev offered what he believed to be a rational explanation. Before the Messiah's coming, he conjectured, God invested the Jews with a materialistic bent in order for them to develop a sense of nationalism which would allow them to recognize and appreciate the Redeemer when he appeared in their midst. Either the investment had proven too profound to uproot or God had miscalculated the end of his means since it led to a complete denial of Jesus' divinity and ultimate execution. Such "boneheadedness," as the author termed it, was simultaneously the Jews' greatest asset and curse in that it kept Knesset Israel intact while leading to its spiritual degradation.²⁸ As dire as their situation appeared, however, Solov'ev maintained that the Jews were not lost. The blood of Christ was the blood of redemption shed for all, including those who had rejected him, but this sacrifice was only the next to last step in a process towards spiritual perfection.

²⁵ *Russkii evrei*, n. 5. (1 February 1884), p. 3.

²⁶ Vladimir Solov'ev, "Evreistvo i kristianskii vopros" (1884), *Sobranie Sochinenii Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, 2nd. ed., 10 vols (Brussels, 1966-70), 4: 159.

Recognizing Christ as the son of God was the true end of this theological odyssey, and the Jews had yet to reach this point. What had to be revealed and ardently impressed upon the Jews was that their theology was not so much erroneous as it was archaic and incomplete, ills which could be rectified at once if Judaism could be bridged and married to Christianity.²⁹ Solov'ev was convinced that Jews had an obsessive concern for Christians and could not account for their reluctance to convert but, truth be known, no such interest was borne out to any significant degree in the nineteenth century.

The marriage of Judaism to Christianity was Solov'ev's all-consuming passion which few others shared. Beginning his research in 1875 and publishing the results in 1889, he was convinced that Jewish mysticism, specifically the first three *sephirot* (emanations) of the ten in *Kabbalah* (mystical revelation), were exact representations of the Christian Holy Trinity.³⁰ Taking linguistic license and picking those aspects of Jewish mysticism which suited him, Solov'ev, in effect, created an ecumenical church which he supported with German rational philosophy. He took the first three Kabbalistic emanations, the *ein sof* (infinity, the infinite one), *hokhma* (wisdom) and *binah* (understanding), and equated them with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To buttress his assertion, Solov'ev claimed that the Hebrew *rosh* (head) was a reference to *Adonoi* (Lord, God), and since the *ein sof* was always placed at the top of the representational Kabbalistic *keter* (crown), this was undeniable proof that Jews possessed the same conception of God as Christians.³¹ Several problems arose from this interpretation, the

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 159-160.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 142, pp. 150-151.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

³⁰ Judith Kornblatt, "Solov'ev's Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah," *Slavic Review*, vol. 50, no. 1 (Spring 1991), p. 492.

³¹ Ibid., p. 494.

most profound being that God was never referred to as “rosh” in either Torah, Talmud or in the major Kabbalistic works. As for his rendering of *ein sof* into the Greek *sophia* and, by inference, “holy wisdom” in the Christian context, he took a considerable linguistic leap. A considerable effort, Solov’ev, nevertheless, failed to make the connection between Jewish mysticism and the Trinity but this did not daunt him. Confronted with evidence to the contrary, he would not accept the existence of two distinct religions where his reasoning mandated that there should be only one.

Vladimir Solov’ev, among all of the bridge builders, was the most unusual though hardly an innovator. In analyzing his 1884 essay and other works, his theological and intellectual demeanor appear identical to those of Western European Christian intellectuals of the late Renaissance. Like them, Solov’ev valued Judaism as a pedestal for Christianity and had a guarded respect for Jewish beliefs and rituals while opining that many had lost their original meanings over the centuries and were retained only through Jewish stubbornness. Though he would have liked to have welcomed Jews into the Christian fold, Solov’ev did not intend an ambush similar to that of John Caspar Lavater whose proffered polemical hand to Moses Mendelssohn in 1769-70 became an arresting grip intent upon pulling the so-called infidel into the bosom of Christianity. Solov’ev’s welcome was a firm offer and not a belligerent command to the Jews, formulated through the astute crafting and strategic deployment of theosophical forensics. He succeeded in making some discernible inroads. It is quite plausible that if German and Polish Jewry influenced Russian Jewry, Western Christianity had acted similarly in certain spheres of Russian Orthodoxy, though the reception would have been a slow and

reserved one.³² Despite xenophobic reservations among Russian Orthodox Christians, Solov'ev illustrated the Empire's growing receptivity to Western influences in many fields. Theology may have been a restricted one but, as Solov'ev and his fellow travelers illustrated and as Pobedonostsev feared, rationalism and speculative reasoning had entered the Russian mind and what would become of Church and State relations was an ominous unknown.³³

Jewish Bridge Builders and Their Prospects

In their midst, the Jews had their own Vladimir Solov'ev in the person of Osip Mandelstam. Writing in the early twentieth century, he interpreted Judaism as more of a way of thinking rather than a formal religion.³⁴ Freed from formalism's rigid confines, Mandelstam carried his thesis one step further when he claimed that his unique human consciousness embraced all human nature which made Torah and Christ, Judaism and Christianity, and the Patriarchs and Disciples all complementary components in the ongoing dialogue between God and humankind.³⁵ Undoubtedly, Solov'ev would have seen the bridge Mandelstam offered and praised it guardedly because he had not created it himself and it did not accord precisely with his own vision of bringing the Jews to

³² This was true in Poland where Jewish and Christian influences both came from Germany and, from there, migrated to the Russian Empire. See Klemens Junosza, "Our Jews in Towns and Villages" (1889) in Stranger in Our Midst: Images of the Jew in Polish Literature, ed. Harold Segel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 189.

³³ Konstantin Pobedonostsev impressed upon his former pupil, Alexander III, that rationalism and speculative thought were dangers to Russian order and tradition. See Lincoln, The Romanovs, pp. 452-3, and also Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Reflections of a Russian Statesman (1898, reprint; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 159.

³⁴ Patrick Kegel, "Ethnicity and Culture in the Poetry and Prose of Osip Mandelstam" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1994), p. 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Christianity. Unity would have been welcome but only in a communion which assured Christian primacy and not, as Mandelstam conceived, universal equity.

It would not be an inconsiderable logical leap to claim that Osip Mandelstam's theology and philosophy was inspired by the battles over Jewish religious integrity in the late nineteenth century. With no discernible gains or losses, victors or vanquished, these clashes were becoming tiresome for both participants and observers. Conservatives believed that Russian Jews were being pulled in too many directions, and the time for religious argument had passed. Now more than ever, the social and material needs of the community must be addressed before all others.³⁶ To this plea, Moses Lilienblum would not have been insensible but he had his own design and would not be distracted from it. Socialism, as he saw it, was the universal secular engine for constructing a tangible Jewish identity and making Jews and Judaism a productive and beneficial partner in Russian, European, and eventually global affairs. The only obstacle before him was Judaism's theological identity which had cloistered the Jewish community for many centuries and had, in his assessment, retarded its development. Securing Jewish political dignity and autonomy was the next step in Russian Jewry evolution but one which would require the community to search beyond its boundaries for substantial allies. Russian society had been approached prior to 1881 with the results ranging from a mere slap on the wrists to homicide. Pogroms and mutual fears cast long shadows impervious to dispersion, and the lesson learned under these conditions which most impressed Lilienblum was the necessity to create a secular division of Judaism. Theology would not be discarded but, as Dubnow suggested, no longer made a principle impulse of Jewish

³⁶ *Russkii evrei*, n. 19. (7 May 1882), p. 697.

nation building. Kept to a minimum, the primary labor would be to construct a pragmatic foundation for the Jewish national identity which, in itself, would prove an all-consuming mission. Mundane issues, not abstractions, had to be addressed immediately if Russian Jewry was to remain viable. As for the Russians, Lilienblum's hope of assistance from that quarter was shattered in the 1881-82 pogroms.³⁷ Allies had to come from beyond Russia's frontiers while efforts from within had to continue without abatement.

Yiddish and Zionist Movements: Plaintive Hopes of Modernity

Hope was becoming a diet of starvation, and it was only too apparent that Jewish liberation from St. Petersburg was beyond contemplation. Tarnopol had written that Jews were strong enough to determine their own course, a sentiment which Sir Moses Montefiore had emphasized in his reports to Nicholas I and his ministers. Now it was up to the Jews themselves to forge their own identities and to fashion their own liberation. Officially, reform was slow in coming. Jewish patience was diminishing and, by the late 1880's, was all but exhausted. Incapable of waiting any longer for official action, Leo Pinsker, a Russian Jewish doctor from Odessa, exhorted his coreligionists to seek emancipation from within rather than expect it from without.³⁸ This task, like many

³⁷ Lucy Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 128-9. Lilienblum expressed his feelings of hopelessness and bitterness in his diary when he noted that "no matter how educated or cosmopolitan a Jew becomes, he is still an alien in either Russia or Europe. They are the sons of Shem among those of Japheth."

³⁸ Pinsker was not alone. Alexander Herzen made the same claim when two of his early associates, Boris Chicherin and Konstantin Kavelin, both moderate Westernizers, kept hoping that the government would "magically" usher in liberalism along western lines. Herzen's more radical approach to reform and his belief that it had to come from the people rather than brought to them eventually alienated him from the moderates. See Abbott Gleason, Young Russia: The Genesis of Russian Radicalism in the 1860's (New York: Viking Press, 1979), pp. 88-9.

others, would not be an easy one. For too long the Jews had been without a fatherland, a physical geopolitical center from which they could form a cohesive society and establish distinct intellectual and cultural institutions which would permit them to stand as an independent entity.³⁹ Poland had been an apt host centuries ago but even when Jews were tolerated, Pinsker pointed out, they were mere interlopers in a land which they could never call their own. A Jewish national identity was neither a dream nor an idle wish but a necessity whose development had been impeded owing to extracommunal hostility. Looking at Russia, Pinsker contended that that Jews had resided there for centuries but as resident foreigners who were despised because they were not autochthonous. No one was really to blame for this and certainly not the Russians since this was a natural, human reaction towards those different from themselves. This obvious revelation did not solve the problem. Judaism's generally nebulous condition in the Empire was an insurmountable barrier to continued Jewish viability. Being neither native nor true aliens owing to the duration of their habitation, Jews had been reduced to rootless wanderers, beggars devoid of all dignity, forced to plead for charity. Making the matter all the more bleak, Pinsker opined that emigration would be impossible if this grave circumstance were reported around the world since no nation would welcome such an impoverished people.⁴⁰ Working his angst up to maximum pitch, he concluded his didactic essay by claiming that the Russian Jew would never find true peace until a Jewish nation became a reality.

³⁹ Leo Pinsker, Autoemanzipation: Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden (1882, reprint; Berlin: Judischer Verlag, 1932), p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Leo Pinsker was a sober, intelligent, but an uncharismatic figure in the evolution of Russian Jewish identities. The Jews of Russia needed a dynamic leader whose vision spanned beyond the shtetl and Russia's borders; a leader who could realize a rational program for Jewish reform and carry it out. Stepping into that role reluctantly was another Odessa Jew, Asher Ginzberg, later known as *Ahad ha'Am* (One of the People), and his secret Zionist society, *B'nai Moshe* (Children of Moses).⁴¹ One of the consequences of the events of 1881-82 and their residual effects was the inauguration of Russian Zionism, and though Theodore Herzl would eventually eclipse Ginzberg and his organization, there is no disputing that he was one of the key figures in Russian Jewry's rejuvenation.⁴² Everyone involved in the Zionist movement had an idea of what Zionism was and what it should become, but Russian Jews, like Russian Slavophiles and Westernizers, could not arrive at a concrete agenda or workable process to realize their respective visions. Some even wondered if it would solve Russia's Jewish crisis because Palestinian emigration was still in its formative stages and deficient in most means of support.⁴³ Granted, there was some backing from Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild and other prominent Western European Jews, but the translation of funds to the Palestinian colonies and the skills required of the colonists once there still posed problems.⁴⁴ Skills and education were in short supply, a deficit which afflicted all strata of the Zionist ranks and *B'nai Moshe* as well. Among those members who comprised the inner circles reposed the attributes for success. To a man, they were sophisticated, European-educated, quasi-

⁴¹ Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad ha-Am and the Origins of Zionism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 23-5.

⁴² John P. Marietti, "Signs of Life: Ahad ha-Am and the Emergence of the Jewish National Ethos" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1997), p. 3.

⁴³ *Russkii evrei*, n. 32. (11 August 1882), p. 1218.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 1. (1 January 1882), p. 30.

secularized Odessa Jews who, by circumstance, were confronted with a situation in part of their own making. Anyone of them might have made a successful go at Palestinian settlement but they were few in number and not inclined to do so. Outside of their cabal, there were the more numerous rank-in-file members who were traditionally-educated, deeply pious, and somewhat suspicious of their leadership's motivations. Ginzberg himself had to tread lightly in his dealings with them since he was no longer a practicing Jew but deeply attached to Judaism all the same and could not conceive of being anything else.⁴⁵

Divisions abounded and were particularly acute in the upper echelons. From the formal initiation of B'nai Moshe in 1889 until its dissolution in 1898, Ginzberg was engaged in a protracted dispute with Moses Leib Lilienblum over the direction and priorities of Jewish nationalism. Ginzberg believed that cultural nationalism, that is, the restoration of Jewish mores, customs, education, and religion to a moderate degree, should take precedence over all other considerations in preparation for Russian Jewry's *aliya*.⁴⁶ Lilienblum insisted that nationalist efforts be concentrated in socioeconomic reform in Palestine exclusively. Eventually, their dispute reached its apex when Lilienblum accused Ginzberg of not addressing the impoverished condition of Eastern European Jewry, a charge to which Ginzberg responded bluntly by claiming that Jewish nationalism was neither suited to nor interested in solving such problems.⁴⁷ Disputes and divisions never healed and were actually exacerbated by Ahad ha-Am's practice of telling the leadership, and his favorites in particular, more of the "truth" than what he permitted

⁴⁵ Marietti, "Signs of Life," pp. 45, 72.

to be disseminated among the rank and file. He justified this practice by claiming that this method of dissemination protected the long-term goals of B'nai Moshe and its renovation of the Jewish identity from the majority's emotionalism and rash behavior in coming to terms with the dilemmas of Jewish identity.⁴⁸ Not once did he suspect that the threat of dissolution would come from above rather than below. Equating emotionalism with ignorance, he had failed to recognize that defect within his inner circle which would eventually cost him his organization.

Despite the many difficulties he had to confront, Asher Ginzberg could seek solace in B'nai Moshe's single success, the establishment of the very first self-supporting agricultural colony in Palestine, Rehovot.⁴⁹ In this one instance, Russian Jews were the pioneers, not the followers, and their example would lead other Jews to settle there.⁵⁰ Volunteers in Russia to go to Palestine were plenty; the financial resources to send them were meager. As a Zionist, he and his fellow travellers had encouraged others to settle there without first-hand knowledge themselves. Curious but also concerned about the accuracy of his information regarding the success of Jewish settlements there, Ginzberg traveled to Palestine in 1891-92 and, unwittingly, condemned himself and B'nai Moshe in the process.

His agent in Palestine had been Joshua Eisenstadt (also known as "Barzilai") with whom he had been associated since 1887. From that time, Eisenstadt had given Ahad ha-

⁴⁶ Simon Dubnow took issue with this design. Owing to the difficulties involved and the limited benefits from settling there, Dubnow claimed that the United States offered greater opportunities. Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, p. 47.

⁴⁸ Marietti, "Signs of Life," p. 39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108. To Ginzberg, Rehovot and the other colonies in Palestine were the signs of life of the Jewish nation.

⁵⁰ Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, p. 54.

Am an idealistic impression of Palestine which the latter had trusted sight unseen. Upon reaching Palestine, the illusion was dashed against reality.⁵¹ First of all, the arable land that potential settlers had been told was plentiful was actually at a premium. Coupled with this, Arab land agents and merchants were not above exploiting the ignorance of newly-arrived colonists and, perhaps most disturbing to Ginzberg, Jewish settlers were treating Arabs with contempt. Further exacerbating tensions was Baron Edmund de Rothschild whose philanthropy Ginzberg found to be manipulative and demanding, not to mention that he actually rivaled the Arabs in controlling Palestinian settlement.⁵² Had there been any positive indications, no matter how slim, he could have reached a happier conclusion, but that was not to be. Nothing that he saw boded well and under these circumstances, a large-scale *aliya* now seemed impossible. Returning to Odessa, Ginzberg decided to present the stark realities of Palestinian settlement to his followers and urge them to establish the means for Jewish nationhood for a time when Palestinian settlement would be more favorable.⁵³

Disenchantment with Palestine was only the beginning of Ginzberg's woes. Contrite and sincere, he presented his findings to the entire membership but it fell upon deaf ears. Suspecting that he was not telling all that he knew, some of the more desperate to leave Russia surmised that their leader's findings were a ruse to keep Palestinian settlement limited to a favored few. To this charge, he responded that the Palestinian colonies were all but completely dependent upon outside philanthropy.⁵⁴ The more desperate refused to hear him, and when he realized that he could not stem the onrushing

⁵¹ Dubnow had already accused the Palestinophiles of misrepresentation; Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity, p. 155.

⁵² Marietti, "Signs of Life," pp. 110, 154.

tide, Ginzberg then informed those who were determined to make the trek that they had to act in a spirit of complete self-sacrifice.⁵⁵ Any other attitude would be unrealistic. Not that he had acted dishonestly, but his decision to be completely forthright with all members of B'nai Moshe came too late. By 1898 B'nai Moshe had disbanded though its philosophy of self-determination in forging Jewish identities remained.⁵⁶

Land was a key component to national identity in the minds of some which spurred Russian Jewish *aliya* but, tied closely with this notion, was language. In general, the two were equally important but, in light of the Jewish condition, language was believed to hold the greater value since it was in immediate communal possession whereas Palestine was governed by others. The creation of a Judeo-Palestinian society was far beyond the means of most Russian Jews but not so the creation of a high Yiddish culture.⁵⁷ For Haim Zhitlowski, Yiddish was a bridge capable of binding together the Jewish community, specifically the worker and the intellectual.⁵⁸ It would be very simple. A Yiddish program, properly implemented, would allow for the creation of a collective Jewish consciousness with little effort. and the raw materials were at hand. Despite the stigma attached to Yiddish as a so-called shtetl jargon, a number of left-wing Jewish intellectuals claimed that indeed a Yiddish culture held more promise in

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 116-17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 120.

⁵⁵ Zipperstein, Elusive Prophet, pp. 59-60.

⁵⁶ Asher Ginzberg's advocacy of Jewish cultural nationalism as a means of establishing a Jewish identity among the Jews of Russia was still viable during the Soviet period. Since the Jews of Russia came by their "theological education" piecemeal, works such as Leon Uris's Exodus and Howard Fast's My Glorious Brothers (about the Macabees), which emphasized nationalism and history over religion, were more comprehensible to them and, therefore, were ideal initiators for those who wished to "build" a Jewish identity. See Stefani Hoffman, "Jewish Samisdat and the Rise of Jewish National Consciousness," Jewish Culture and Identity in the Soviet Union ed. Yaacov Ro'i and Avi Beker (New York: New York University Press, 1991), pp. 91-2.

⁵⁷ Ezra Mendelsohn, Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 38, 118.

promoting Jewish progressivism than an irrelevant and dying religion.⁵⁹ Hebrew was still considered the intellectual language of the Jews but Yiddish, owing to its linguistic informality, had the potential for reaching a much larger audience.⁶⁰ In the spirit of the times, Zhitlowski sought to put into practice what he espoused.

In the period 1883-87, he attempted to develop a scientific scheme for Jewish national survival. As an initial step, he had discarded what he termed the “narrow nationalism” which had infected much of the Jewish community and contributed to its mental parochialism. Hoping to lead by example, he joined the Russian *Narodnik* movement as a “nationalist Jew,” finding a common cause with Russian progressives who advocated greater social and political rights. For a time, he believed that he had discovered the common ground where the two could meet and act for mutual benefit but, in the end, this was not to be. They may have spoken the same language, espoused similar beliefs in terms of social reform, and even shared their hopes and frustrations, but no confidence, no matter how intimate, could change the fact that a Jew was a Jew and a Russian a Russian. It mattered not how well Zhitlowski presented himself, he was incapable of reversing the tide of Russian Judeophobia which had gripped the nation for much of the 1880's and '90's.⁶¹ He and his coreligionists were the others, forever condemned to be on the outside looking in and, owing to official peculiarities, occasionally the recipients of illogical and cruel policies. For example, in the early 1880's, the government offered stipends to Jews who wished to attend the Medical

⁵⁸ Weinberg, *Between Tradition and Modernity*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁶⁰ In the period 1890-3, Jewish education in Riga was conducted entirely in Yiddish and, in Vilna, a Yiddish library was established to meet the intellectual needs of organized workers. The works of authors such as Scholem Aleichem, Mendel Mocher Sforim, Y.L. Peretz and David Pinsky were prominent. See Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, pp. 117-18.

Surgical Academy and the Military Medical Academy but no relief from the virulent and pervasive anti-Jewish propaganda in circulation at that time.⁶² Many Jews simply wanted to belong in Russian society as Jews without hindrances, but the quest for that belonging, that acceptance, was a fast-fading bloom. Nevertheless, perseverance had to be maintained and perhaps the forces of attrition might yield some small ingresses.

Another Attempt at Jewish Educational Reform: The Efforts of Baron Maurice de Hirsch

If the Jews of Russia were to become useful citizens of a grand empire, it was imperative that they be educated in such a manner as to affect their ready and easy assimilation of Russian mores.⁶³ Such was the design of French Jewish philanthropist Maurice de Hirsch who, from 1881 to 1890, made every attempt to establish a network of well-funded progressive Jewish schools which would allow his Russian coreligionists to embark upon useful occupations. Assisting him in this design before his untimely death in 1886 was one of the Poliakov brothers who had made their fortune in Russia's railroad industry. That aside, it was Poliakov who had solicited de Hirsch for this design in 1881 because of his concern for Jewish affairs in Russia and his financial resources. Once the two men had agreed upon general principles, they were then directed by Count F. Danilov, the St. Petersburg Minister of Public Instruction, to submit their proposals in accordance with Russian governmental procedure. There was some cause for optimism when Danilov notified de Hirsch that Tsar Alexander III was pleased with the general

⁶¹ *Ruski evrei*, n. 1. (1 January 1882), p. 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, n. 2. (8 January 1882), p. 44.

⁶³ YIVO 318/22/34.

principles and was inclined to approve a more detailed rendering of them.⁶⁴ On 1 June 1881, the Baron received welcome news that the organizing committee for his project had been approved with Lazar Poliakov as president.⁶⁵ The next step was to establish the governing regulations for what would become the Baron Maurice de Hirsch Foundation and its schools.

At some time during these negotiations, Horace de Guenzburg wrote de Hirsch with a friendly admonishment that projects in Russia must start small and their backers reserved in what they asked of the government.⁶⁶ From the nature of de Hirsch's correspondence, he took this advice to heart when he informed Danilov that he wanted to act within the full compass of Russian law. By July 1881, de Hirsch had presented the Minister with a lengthy document detailing, among other issues, the establishment of the Foundation, limitations on annual fiscal outlays from his account in the Bank of France, a request for shorter military obligations, and the assurance that all instruction would be conducted in Russian.⁶⁷ For his part, Tsar Alexander did shorten the recruitment obligations of the students and promised that the government, along with de Hirsch's appointed agents local, would ensure that expenses did not exceed 100,000 francs per annum. As for overall approval of this project, that would have to wait until 13 November 1887 but, in the meantime, the Baron could put into place his network to ensure smooth operations once the Foundation was running at full potential.

For a time, the Foundation met with no substantial obstacles. Baron de Hirsch was able to ensconce Le Marquis d'Alsace and Mr. Leonce Lebmman as his agents in St.

⁶⁴ YIVO 318/22/1.

⁶⁵ YIVO 318/22/3.

⁶⁶ YIVO 318/22/45

Petersburg who gave him monthly reports as to the progress the Foundation was making in Russian Jewish education. In addition to his desire to make the Jews useful to Russian society, de Hirsch also impressed upon his agents and Russian officials that he was determined to free them from the moral and material degradation in which they now found themselves but not without compensation. By affecting this liberation, de Hirsch made it clear that he desired Russian officialdom to reciprocate by according the Jews a measure of benevolence under the law.⁶⁸ It was a simple request expressed more as a wish than a command, yet it may very well have been the instigator of the trouble to come.

In January 1889, Leonce Lebmann informed Baron de Hirsch that negotiations with the government regarding the principles and operations of his Foundation were floundering. Amazed and perturbed, de Hirsch wrote to Danilov for an explanation of what had come to pass. Had he forgotten that just as the Marquis and Lebmann were obliged to keep him informed so too was Danilov?⁶⁹ Why was the Russian government withdrawing its approval from key articles of the Foundation's constitution? In his possession, the Baron argued, he had a copy of that document bearing the Tsar's signature and seal. Did this mean nothing? More distressing were the official counter proposals. For instance, in Article 5 paragraph 7, Russian officials now demanded the right to exclude Foundation members from deliberations regardless of pretext. This was insufferable. Making no effort to hide his anger, de Hirsch wrote that the only guarantee that was sure to be honored was that of official delays if not outright stonewalling. What

⁶⁷ YIVO 318/22/17.

⁶⁸ YIVO 318/22/34

⁶⁹ YIVO 318/22/40.

was even more galling was the complete rejection of Article 6 which pertained to the successors of de Hirsch and the Foundation's principle officers because, once again, the government had found no fault in this arrangement previously. Should Danilov require proof of this, the Baron informed him that he had retained the Minister's letters to him which had confirmed official approbation.⁷⁰

That his pride and honor had been bruised by this reversal of fortune was evident but it did not cloud the Baron's judgment or his capacity for innovation. He had to delegate authority. In the conclusion of his missal, de Hirsch proposed to establish a committee composed of the Grand Rabbi of France and Paris, along with the presidents and vice presidents of the Jewish Consistory of Paris, Paris Committee of Jewish Benevolence, and the Paris Jewish School of Trades to determine the succession of officers. Previously, this had been de Hirsch's sole prerogative. Believing that he had satisfied official amendments to Article 6, he then turned his attention to Article 9 paragraph 2 where he reaffirmed his educational commitment with the addendum that his pedagogues would elevate Jewish morals along with their intellectual life.⁷¹ Engaged as he was, de Hirsch could not leave Paris at that moment and had to rely upon the Marquis and Lebmann to execute his wishes to the best of their abilities. Did he dare hope that the crisis had been met?

Less than a month later, de Hirsch received his answer. From St. Petersburg on 1 February 1889, Leonce Lebmann wrote his employer to ask about de Hirsch's actual control over his Foundation.⁷² Affairs were still sluggish, officials remained obdurate

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² YIVO 318/22/42.

and vague and, from his perspective, Lebmann could only conclude that the Baron's partners in this endeavor shared neither his frankness nor his ardency of commitment. Obfuscations may have been part and parcel of the Russian government's mode of operation, but for a man who had pledged 50,000,000 francs towards a design of unprecedented importance, the darkness of ignorance was not an acceptable working environment. On 16 May 1889, Baron de Hirsch wrote to Konstantin Pobedonotsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod, to express his dissatisfaction over the use of his funds.⁷³ As stated clearly in the first article, those funds were dedicated to Jewish education exclusively. Where was the money going? The financial disbursements from the Foundation's fund in the Bank of France were legally binding and could not be altered without considerable effort and the Baron could see no benefit from such an action. It was clear to him that he could not realize his goals, initial or final, if the Russian government persisted in its present course. Apparently, the Procurator thought little of the Baron's concerns since he did not bother to reply.

On that same date, Maurice de Hirsch informed Count Danilov that he was willing to make some additional amendments to the Foundation's constitution though he considered these alterations grave.⁷⁴ Had he not insisted that Danilov inform him of the legalities involved? If indeed he, de Hirsch, had been misdirected, why would Poliakov have allowed this since, after all, he had relied upon that man's guidance? Giving full vent to his frustration, de Hirsch still wondered why the government, which had had no reservations about his Foundation and its program in 1887, now all but condemned it. The curriculum for the Foundation schools had not deviated from its initial proposal nor

⁷³ YIVO 318/22/47.

had it advocated any other goal than the assimilation of Russian Jewry. When Poliakov had approached him 1881, he had made plain this desire of the government and since no Russian official had informed him to the contrary, de Hirsch thought that his designs were in accord with official sentiments.⁷⁵ Being a man of affairs and expecting negotiations to be conducted in good faith, by 1890, de Hirsch had lost his ardor and taste for Russia. Though he would continue to fund some Jewish institutions in Greater Russia, such as the St. Petersburg Jewish Orphanage, he had all but given up on the Jews of Russia. Even his successful Jewish colonization scheme in Argentina only saw the arrival of a few Russian Jews since, as Jacob Alteris discovered before him, getting Jews out of Russia in large groups was virtually impossible.⁷⁶ Once more, Russian Jews had to rely upon their own intellectual resources and expect little in the way of amelioration.

Caged by Design: Alexander III, Tsar of all of the Russias

It could not have escaped the Jewish imagination that Russia was ostensibly a prison without visible bars and walls, but what may have been overlooked was that its warden was also an inmate. Alexander III was as much a prisoner of the Russian state as he was head of it. His inability to prevent the pogroms of 1881-82 from breaking out and his dalliance in sequestering them was evident, but then again the means which would have allowed him to do so were not readily available.⁷⁷ Be that as it may, these events

⁷⁴ YIVO 318/22/48.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Most Russian Jews had never known of this other project of de Hirsch's yet, in Isaac Babel's "First Love," there is a passing reference to Jews absconding from Russia to start businesses there. See "First Love" in *The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 46.

⁷⁷ Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*, pp. 55-6.

left Alexander III in a dark mood.⁷⁸ The Jewish Question had been a matter that he would have liked to have kept indoors but efforts to do so had proven futile. One reason for this was the government's ongoing appeals to Western European creditors for financial assistance to bring the Empire up to modern standards which, as matters stood, were still quite distant. Added to this, serf emancipation, a decidedly progressive step, earned for the government the opprobrium of both estate owners and former serfs who were unable to adapt readily to the new economic conditions and faced an uncertain future.⁷⁹ Further aggravating Alexander's initiatives was the State Council, a body for which the Tsar had a particular dislike since, from his perspective, it was forever challenging his prerogatives.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Jewish journalists continued to press their demands for Jewish civil rights and no amount of anti-Jewish rhetoric from the Russian press could squelch it.⁸¹ A de facto moratorium on the issue had been in place since 1863 and would have remained so indefinitely had not the Empire fallen on hard times. Alexander III needed money. Russia was in dire need of Western European investment, especially from England, Germany and France whose prominent Jewish bankers and

⁷⁸ The pogroms were not confined to the Orthodox population of the western provinces. Believing that the Jews had betrayed them in the January Rising, many Poles took revenge upon the Jews in the Warsaw streets in 1881; Opalski and Bartal, Poles and Jews, p. 100. Many Russian Jews who had been attracted to the "professed internationalism" of the People's Will and the Black Repartition believed themselves betrayed when the pogroms exposed this and other declarations as empty rhetoric. Eric Haberer "Cosmopolitanism, Anti-Semitism and Populism: A Reappraisal of the Russian and Jewish Response to the Pogroms of 1881-1882," Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History, John Klier and Shlomo Lombroza eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 98.

⁷⁹ Lincoln., The Romanovs, p. 437-38.

⁸⁰ Heide W. Whelan, Alexander III and the State Council: Bureaucracy and Counter-Reform in Late Imperial Russia (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1942), pp. 127-8.

⁸¹ *Russkii evrei*, n. 1. (1 January 1882), p. 5. Haim Zhitlowski and his followers also added national rights to these demands. See Henry J. Tobias, The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 106.

financiers were well informed of the treatment accorded their coreligionists in Russia.⁸² On one occasion in particular, the Tsar had to avert a potential divestment scenario from coming about when his Finance Minister, Nikolai Bunge claimed in an official memorandum that he was determined to expose the evils of Judaism through exposure of their commercial interests. Count Nikolai Ignati'ev, the Minister of Internal Affairs, sent a similar notice to the Tsar asserting that he had proof of Jewish control over the banks, bar, stock market, the press, and other areas of public life and that his countermeasures awaited His Majesty's approval. Much to their mutual consternation, the Tsar sequestered their presumed revelations for fear that Baron Edmund de Rothschild, who was purchasing a substantial number of Russian state bonds at the time, would cancel his transaction.⁸³ In an attempt to resolve Russia's Jewish Question, Alexander III ordered the Pahlen Commission to study the Jews of Russia from all conceivable vantages and to submit recommendations. Dissatisfied with its findings and suggestions, especially that of granting Jewish emancipation over a course of years, he dissolved the Commission and made the Jewish Question part of Nicholas II's complex inheritance.

Voskhod: The Hope of a New Day

Efforts to refashion, revitalize, reconstitute, and reform Judaism in Russia never diminished nor, for that matter, did its new voice. Taking up the mission of *Evreiskaia biblioteka* was *Voskhod* (1881-1899) which was similar to its predecessor in content

⁸² Jewish banks in France and Germany were the principal sources for loans to both Russians and Russian Jews alike. See Arkadius Kahan, "Notes on Jewish Entrepreneurship in Tsarist Russia," *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union*, eds. Gregory Guroff and Fred Carstensen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 110., and Alexander Fenin, *Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia: Memoirs of a Russian Mining Engineer* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 38.

though it was decidedly more strident. Jewish self-examination was still practiced but so too was the drive on the part of some contributors to place the Jewish community and all of its distinctive characteristics within the broader Russian milieu. Even in the darkest hours, the need for belonging never diminished. Neither *Voskhod*'s editor, A.E. Landau, nor its commentators, poets, short story writers, and the occasional philosopher imagined that centuries of distrust between Russians and Jews would be eradicated overnight. The primary concern of all of those associated with the journal was to heighten awareness of the Russian Jewish condition among both Jews and Russian alike which was why, like its predecessor, *Voskhod* was published in Russian.

In his poem, *Ruskomu evreiiu*, Ia. Steinberg offered a unique allegory of the Jewish condition. The Jew was “an aggrieved stepchild,” put to bed hungry and plagued by nightmares. Darkness offered no protection since the threatening voices still assailed the Russian Jew as he groaned in vain, but now both the night and these ghosts were receding. Already, day was nearing. Hope was not forlorn.⁸⁴ On a rare note of optimism, Steinberg envisioned a Russia which was indeed transforming in terms of its social, political and intellectual complexion and believed that many Jews sought to be a part of these changes. His hopes were shared by others but, as could be expected, such optimism was invariably countered by pessimism or, at least, a studied sobriety.

The Jewish Question in Russia, according to M. Margolis, would become most pointed when Jews achieved a degree of political self-consciousness.⁸⁵ The Jewish

⁸³ Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia*, pp. 58-9, 71-7.

⁸⁴ Ia Steinberg, “*Ruskomu evreiiu*,” *Voskhod*, vol. 1. no. 1 (1881), pp. 60-1.

⁸⁵ M. Margolis, “*Evreiskii vopros v ego osnovaniakh i chastnostiakh*,” *ibid.*, p. 1. See also Gellner’s discussion of it in *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 105.

Question tended to originate within the Jewish community itself and then extended to the country in which Jews lived. Comparing Russian Jews with their Western European counterparts, the author pointed out that often the Jewish Question was lost amid a host of pressing issues. It was therefore incumbent upon the Jews themselves to keep it viable. Various obstacles had to be negotiated with great care, specifically social prejudice and legal proscriptions, which was an arduous but not impossible task. Even so, the more people have tried to resolve the Jewish Question, the more entangled it has become. In Russia, Margolis continued, a causuist approach had been taken in attempts to resolve this dilemma without any true understanding of its nature.⁸⁶ It was imperative to first discover how the Jewish Question was established and under what conditions. Once that has been accomplished, it was important that in the political milieu Jews not demand the same rights as Christians.⁸⁷ If the Jews of Russia really desired true emancipation, Margolis surmised, the German and American Jewish communities were apt models. Quoting Bruno Baer, Margolis claimed that the Jews of Germany redefined themselves in terms of human science, freeing themselves completely from religious constraints which had retarded their political development. In short, they subordinated their religious identity for political ends.⁸⁸ America, which had no state religion, was an even better model since Jews could ostensibly enter into politics without difficulty. Summing up his essay, Margolis concluded that the formation of a completely political society free of religion would solve the Jewish Question.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 2

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

Moving from the political to the literary field, another contributor, known only as Mevakker, claimed that Jewish literature had to expand its horizons in a modern language or else face extinction.⁹⁰ What was needed was a new Jewish literature written in modern Hebrew.⁹¹ Russians and Jews alike were at present not aware of the vast store of Jewish literature since it was ensconced in ancient Hebrew.⁹² It concerned Mevakker that Jews had to read their own work in translation rather than in the original, a consequence he hoped would be removed with the advent of a new form of literacy. More than simply creating a new Hebrew language out of the older one, Jewish authors had to modernize the Jews themselves by placing them in contemporary circumstances. This would be no mean feat; in fact it would require several stages to make the endeavor a reality.⁹³ Barely in its infancy, this project already had its detractors who called for the death of Hebrew in all forms since, they claimed, it was an anachronism. To this challenge, Mevakker would not deign to respond because, for him, the continuance of Jewish life and spirit was rooted in the development of a truly Jewish language.

Associated closely with linguistic identity was historical literacy, a call which was taken up by Alexander Harkavy and his associates under government auspices. A member of the Society for the Spreading of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, Harkavy published a paper in 1894 detailing his efforts and those of his associates to

⁹⁰ Mevakker, "Literaturnaia letopis: derevne-evreiskaia zhurnalistika i literatura," *Voskhod*, vol. 1. no. 4 (1881), pp. 17-18.

⁹¹ Aside from literary creations which would give the Jews of Russia a distinctive aesthetic, many Jewish labor organizers, such as Aaron Lieberman of Vilna, saw in Hebrew the promotion and preservation of Jewish national consciousness. See Nora Levin, While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917 (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 40-1.

⁹² The author's specific reference is "ancient Jewish language."

⁹³ Mevakker, "Literaturnaia letopis," p. 18.

amass sufficient documentation for the publication of a Jewish historical journal.⁹⁴ That much of the documentation was inaccessible made the project all but impossible, but the Society's members, Harkavy declared, had not given up. Lithuanian archives were more accessible, and already it was hoped that the publication of these documents in a collection, *Russko-evreiskaia arkhiva*, would be possible. It was to be a monumental work. Using three typesets, Cyrillic, Roman script (not block), and Hebrew, every aspect of Jewish history in Russia was to be considered, from tenth-century Karaite manuscripts up to the present. So that no detail would be missed, Baltic German Jews were to be included along with their Lithuanian, Polish and Russian coreligionists.⁹⁵ Furthermore, a Slavic-Jewish names directory of towns and individuals was to be included to give balance to the work's overall scholarship. In that vein, perhaps one of the more progressive proposals was to gather letters, pamphlets, diaries and personal reflections of non-Jews living in proximity to the Jewish communities in hopes of discerning the origins and nature of their relationships. It was believed that by according non-Jews a comparable voice in this Jewish work, a truly balanced and comprehensive history could be published in Russia.

Jewish identities and self-determination were growing appreciably at this time, and with the community's increasing participation in various fields, particularly in the political sphere, it would attract Russian allies.⁹⁶ While true Russian advocates of Jewish causes were not to be turned away, the author publishing under the pseudonym of

⁹⁴ Alexander Harkavy, "O zaniatiakh komissii po istorii evreev," *Voskhod*, vol. 1. no. 599 (1894), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Russkii evrei*, n.3. (15 January 1882), p. 83. More skeptical Jews doubted that any such alliance could come about since Russian rarely read Jewish publications in Russian and almost never discussed the Jews in general conversation.

Kriticus, in his critique of the late Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov, admonished Jews to be wary. At issue was the third volume of Aksakov's collected articles which pertained to the Slavophile's writings on Polish and Jewish questions.⁹⁷ Prior to 1862, the author pointed out, Aksakov was an actual supporter of the Jews. Citing his journalistic work in the late 1850's, specifically when he wrote a series on Jewish commerce in the southern provinces, the Jews were described as being industrious and prosperous. Early in the next decade, however, Aksakov had a change of heart.

The issue responsible for this change from advocate to adversary had been the question of Jewish legal and civil rights. Serf emancipation in 1861 and the granting of civil rights to the Jews of Russian Poland in 1862 weighed heavily in Aksakov's considerations, especially when the Jews of Russia demanded for themselves what their coreligionists across the border had been granted. When it was decreed that Jews could be employed in all government branches, Aksakov reached his breaking point. Sounding the tocsin, Aksakov wondered if the office of Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod fell under this new order.⁹⁸ Limitations had to be imposed. Jews were hostile towards Christianity and Russia was a Christian state, he claimed. Once he reached the apex of his argument, Aksakov claimed that Russians had never been hostile towards the Jews and were prepared to grant them autonomy and even the freedom to settle anywhere in Russia. That alone should be sufficient, Aksakov added. Jews had to understand that Russians were not willing to grant them equal rights and full emancipation. Further debate over this issue would prove fruitless.

⁹⁷ Kriticus, "Literaturnaia letopis: I. S. Aksakov i evrei," *Voskhod*, vol. 2. no. 308 (1887), p.1.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

In presenting this piece, Kriticus was not writing out of frustration but rather offering a cautionary missal to Jewish progressives to maintain their self-restraint.⁹⁹ Change in the Jewish condition was both noticeable and expanding into various fields by the late 1880's, but with it came uncertainty, chief of which was the possibility of losing what had been gained thus far. Amidst this omnipresent trepidation, however, there were promising signs. As the century neared its end, Russian-Jewish cooperation, primarily in labor politics, was more prominent than it had been previously but also more tenuous.

Pragmatic Bridges and Mutual Cooperation

In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, many bridges had been built to modernity with episodic results. Zhitlowski envisioned a Yiddish culture capable of maintaining tradition while adapting to contemporary conditions. In that same vein, Harkavy and Dubnow labored to invest the community with Jewish historical literacy so that Jews would not forget their origins and become lost in the maelstrom of assimilation. Even Ahad ha-Am's version of rebuilding Judaism was a dualistic attempt to resurrect a form of Biblical Judaism capable of creating a modern Jewish state in Palestine. On a more mundane level, however, the Jews of Russia needed to address issues closer to home.

⁹⁹ The term "svoestesenie" appears frequently in articles relating to politics. Quite possibly, however, the author meant "sderzhannost."

The Pale was becoming more overcrowded and resources, which had never been plentiful, became all the more dear. With the 1881-82 pogroms fresh in their memories and sporadic anti-Jewish disturbances throughout the southern and western regions of the Empire, Jews of all walks of life had little choice but to bow to circumstance and seek their fates in the larger Russian society. Some turned to such trades as prostitution which, given the rise of industry and the formation of new towns, supplied services which were in great demand.¹⁰⁰ Still others found employment in the Baku oil fields, private banking, and since the 1880's and '90's was Russia's age of railroads and mining, a select few made substantial financial gains in those industries. Lazar Solomonovich Poliakov, for instance, leader of the Moscow *kupechestvo* and a Jew, financed both the Moscow-Odessa line and, in 1892, initial construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad.¹⁰¹ By the end of the century, there was hardly an area of entrepreneurial activity where Jews were successfully excluded. Jews could be found in the Siberian gold mines, the Volga and Amur fisheries and in the shipping lanes on the Dnepr, not to mention the southern Russian coal mines and factories.¹⁰² From Russia's economic transformation, the Jewish identity in Russia experienced another change in its complexion. A distinct Jewish working class with its particular interests was taking shape as was a Jewish bourgeoisie which the Russian government found useful in pursuing its industrialization schemes. In different ways, both developments accorded Jews a place within Russian society while

¹⁰⁰ Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 162.

¹⁰¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire: 1801-1917* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 519.

¹⁰² Kahan, "Notes on Jewish Entrepreneurship in Tsarist Russia," *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 111.

leaving its permanence uncertain.¹⁰³ More than just a logical outcome of events, a number of Jewish workers came to realize that they and their Russian counterparts had shared interests. Granted, a similar phenomenon had taken place in the 1870's, but its revival in the late 1880's and 1890's offered some Jews a faint hope that communion between Jewish and Russian workers was still possible. Each side had its own peculiar needs but, in terms of establishing a politically free-standing entity, their overall objectives were nearly identical. This was particularly true in Ukraine owing to the industrial concentration there which made it a virtual hodgepodge of nationalities.¹⁰⁴ The most profound changes in the Jewish condition during these decades of transition resulted from the rapidly increasing number of Jewish workers who would acquire their own voice both within and beyond the Jewish community.

Jewish Socialism: An Addendum to the Identity Issue

For the Jewish majority, employment proscriptions still hindered progress and, in certain regions, these impositions were so rigorous that some Jewish women had to become prostitutes in order to survive.¹⁰⁵ As for the overall Russian revolutionary movement, Jewish adherents who had not deserted the cause in the aftermath of the pogroms hoped that Populist claims of waning anti-Jewish violence and rising anti-

¹⁰³ Yoav Peled, Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 38.

¹⁰⁴ Theodore H. von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), p. 47.

Tsarist agitation bore some truth.¹⁰⁶ In terms of employment, little had changed since the 1870's. The textile mills concentrated in Belorussia and Lithuania still employed the greatest number of Jewish workers along with cigarette and match factories.¹⁰⁷ Of the two groups, the latter comprised the only true Jewish proletariat prior to the late 1880's. By itself, this situation was not unusual until one realizes the target audience for pre-Bundist Jewish socialism which originated in these regions.

The Bund of 1897 grew out of various Jewish socialist circles. While it is true that these groups were Jewish in terms of their leadership and rank-in-file, their goals were geared to producing educated Jewish socialists who would then present socialism to Russian factory workers. In this regard, the results were negligible. Why Jewish socialist intellectuals embarked on these missions prior to 1890 can be explained by the simple fact that Russia's factory workers were Russian almost to a man. Furthermore, the concepts of class struggle and bourgeois exploitation had greater currency among Russian laborers than Jewish ones. Jewish workers were certainly capable of striking and work slow-downs but, considering that in most instances Jewish employers were little better off than their employees, gains were minimal. Often the victory of Jewish workers was mainly the satisfaction that they could act collectively regardless of the meagre concessions they gained from their actions.¹⁰⁸ Jewish socialist intellectuals did not doubt

¹⁰⁵ Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Haberer, "Cosmopolitanism, Anti-Semitism and Populism: A Reappraisal of the Russian and Jewish Response to the Pogroms of 1881-1882," *Economy and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1860-1930*, eds. Linda Edmondson and Peter Waldron (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 99-101, 117. What made matters all the more difficult was the growing irreconcilability between Jewish national loyalty and Russian revolutionary dedication which was why most Jews hesitated before pledging themselves to one side or the other.

¹⁰⁷ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, pp. 23-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

that Jewish workers possessed the requisite socialist impulses, but until more were employed in the larger labor market, their impact on the socialist revolution would be minimal.

Factories and mechanization may have freed some Jews from traditional occupations, though the majority still found themselves on the outside of Russia's industrial revolution.¹⁰⁹ Often Jewish applicants for factory positions were passed over in favor of Christians, even by Jewish factory owners, because the latter tended to possess the essential technical skills to ensure efficient production. That few technical schools were open to Jews was an obvious handicap, but more profound was the state of Russian industry itself which worked against both Jews and Christians alike.

Mining, metallurgy, and railroads were major pursuits of the government which funded their respective developments with substantial foreign aid. Even so, large-scale industrial projects were initially unattractive to members of Russia's wealthy elite. Inflation following the Crimean War and the decline of the ruble's value made them conservative in terms of their investments. Government securities with a guaranteed annual return of six percent were far more lucrative than a long-term investment with an uncertain promise of returns.¹¹⁰ This made credit to potential industrialists all but unobtainable. Compounding the problem was the legal obligation on the part of the industrialist to support his workforce regardless of the profitability of the venture, not to mention the monetary exactions from the workers themselves for such necessities as questionably-potable water, bad food and poor lodgings. If a factory owner wanted to

¹⁰⁹ Peter Gattrell, The Tsarist Economy: 1850-1917 (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), p. 90.

give his operation the promise of longevity, he would turn to foreign banks for loans, but even then his troubles were not over. Competing with him for foreign credits was the government itself. About the only industry which brought in substantial returns, at least by Russian standards, was textiles, and even that success did little to improve Jewish factory employment.¹¹¹

Aside from the reluctance of Russian factory owners to employ Jews, potential Jewish workers had to contend with a more immediate problem when confronting their coreligionists. Jewish factories were smaller than Russian ones and, therefore, required smaller workforces. The dearth of industrial skills notwithstanding, the potential problems which could arise from Jewish employees made them unattractive to Jewish employers. First of all, Jewish workers would expect to be excused for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur which, alone, resulting in a ten-day work hiatus. In addition, fast days, the Ninth of Av, Purim, not to mention events such as brises, funerals, and weddings, would all conspire to mar productivity. Even more profound was the employer's obligation to perform some function at a life-cycle event when asked to do so. It would have been perfectly natural for an employee to ask his boss to accept the Elijah chair at his son's bris or, if older, to stand in attendance at the child's bar mitzvah. Since, ostensibly, both employers and employees attended the same synagogues and were part of the same community, the authoritative distance between boss and worker was

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 207.

¹¹¹ Kahan, "Notes on Jewish Entrepreneurship in Tsarist Russia," pp. 108-9.

blurred.¹¹² By the early 1890's, however, this "communal intimacy" was changing dramatically.

The *khevrat*, artisan associations to which both Jewish artisans and masters belonged, began to disintegrate.¹¹³ In large part, this was due to Jewish workers who wanted to form distinct associations among themselves to discuss issues of concern beyond the watchful eyes of their employers. Owing to ongoing Jewish identity diversification, this development was merely another instance where a traditional social institution was being replaced by another which, ostensibly, was more flexible in terms of working with newer concepts and daring to experiment with new and "foreign" ideas. More to the point, it was a demonstration of the spirit of self-determination which was spreading to the wider Jewish population. From mere rhetoric, the demand for charting one's own course was translating into action. To Jewish traditionalists, modern Russian Jews of the 1890's were going off in all directions without a coherent program. Then again, these were the same people who feared that the abandonment of any traditional notions meant complete assimilation. Because of the ties that bound Jews to their community, some simply could not free themselves from this confinement, much of which was of their own making.

Outside of the Jewish community, Jews had to contend with the inexhaustible supply of Russian prejudices. One in particular which tended to frustrate Jewish employment was the belief that Jews would not work on Saturday. Those Jews who hoped to compete in a Christian-dominated society discarded this traditional proscription.

¹¹² Henry Tobias, The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905 (Stanford: Stanford University

Even so, some potential employers began to perceive the Sabbath as evidence of Jewish revolutionary potential out of some misguided notion that Jews met among themselves in secret on that day. The potential, however, proved to be real enough. According to Okhrana records from the period 1884-90, there were 579 known active Jewish revolutionaries among the 4307 revolutionaries in their files who were considered among the most radical.¹¹⁴ Consequently, though Jewish employment might be possible, it was never easy.¹¹⁵

Some Jewish intellectuals saw the betrayal of the Jewish community coming from all sides and from within. If the Jewish community was to emerge from this maelstrom intact, a new guiding philosophy had to be found and implemented at once. One blessing which Alexander III had bestowed upon Russia's Jews, if only unconsciously, was that he did not keep them forever in his sight. He neither attempted to russify the Jews nor to envelope them within the garment of the Russian Orthodox Church, a circumstance which permitted Jewish intellectuals an opportunity to step back and assess the Jewish condition and propose solutions. Socialism, an ideology which was gaining wide currency among Belorussian and Lithuanian Jews in the 1880's and '90's, held more promise than any other option at the time. Before it could be presented to the Jewish community, however, the community, specifically the Jewish worker, had to be educated in order to appreciate it and realize that the achievement of its ends would be a long-term process. In other words, a segment of the Jewish intelligentsia intended to present the socialist program in line with a Jewish nationalist identity. Haim Zhitlowski had

Press), p. 18
¹¹³ Ibid., p. 19.

advocated such a program for years with Yiddish being the vehicle of liberation for the Jewish proletariat from their bourgeois coreligionists. Along with him, John Mill saw great potential in fitting Jewish nationalism into a socialist framework, and Karl Kautsky, whom the Russian Social Democrats held in high esteem, claimed that a correct answer to the national question was essential if the class struggle of the proletariat was to yield substantial dividends.¹¹⁶ Global liberation from exploitation to which Russian Jewish hopes were pinned was the ultimate goal, but it had to be acted upon immediately; otherwise this ideal would be little more than a mere abstraction.

Other voices took up the call for Jewish liberation. Vilna, the center of Jewish intellectual life for centuries, became the home of Jewish socialism. On 1 May 1892, a group of Jewish socialist intellectuals who were active in organizing Jewish workers, gave a series of didactic addresses to their audience in an effort to convince them that revolutionary change was inevitable.¹¹⁷ Avram Maizel, a jeweller, was the first to speak. Progress, he stated, was in the immediate offing. Jewish Russian subjects had taken destiny into their own hands in a variety of ways with the most important being the rejection of traditional Jewish holidays.¹¹⁸ Tradition had been a retarding influence upon the Jewish mind; now that holidays and religious practices had been discarded, Jews could now embrace an international movement whose “holidays” would last for an eternity. More than mere acknowledgement of historical inevitability, the socialist movement demanded action. As an immediate goal, Maizel urged his audience to press

¹¹⁴ Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale*, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Levin, *While Messiah Tarried*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹⁶ Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, pp. 106, 108-9.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Fenin, *Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia: Memoirs of a Russian Mining Engineer* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 35.

the government for a constitution which would allow specifically workers' concerns to be presented to the government. Ultimately, however, Jewish workers had to demand that political liberty lead to civil equality. Such developments had already taken place in Western Europe, and there was no reason why it could not be realized in Russia.¹¹⁹

Arguing in a similar vein, Reuben Gershovsky desired a complete break with Jewish tradition, contending that the quest to maintain distinctiveness alienated the community from all other societies and was at the root of Jewish adversity. Now was the time to combine with others into a socialist international whole. Though some of the other speakers agreed with him, Gershovsky's mandate met with considerable opposition from another speaker, Shmuel Gozhansky. The Jews, he opined, had fought too hard for their distinctive identity to cast it away for any cause. Why should socialism demand that they do so? Other groups within the movement retained their distinctive characteristics without marring the overall international mission; Jews were no different. Within the context of liberation, the specific needs of the Jewish community needed to be addressed and in no way would they impede the progress of revolution.¹²⁰

Of the two positions, Gozhansky's prevailed in the end with the formation of the Jewish Bund in 1897. A socialist union of Jews working for the benefit of Jewish workers, it was certainly not an institution designed to meet short-term goals; a belief which was impressed upon its membership.¹²¹ Furthermore, even though Arkady Kremer, the "father of the Bund," and his fellow proto-Bundists were influenced by

¹¹⁸ Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale*, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 38.

¹²¹ Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, pp. 106-7.

Haskalah and saw it as the means by which the Jewish community could adapt to modern life, the Bund never perceived itself as a brain trust but as a mass movement. Like the Russian Populists, Bundists believed that socialism would regenerate Russian society and, towards that end, education was the key which would guarantee its success.

Concerning Jewish identity, the Bund demonstrated that socialism did not run counter to traditional Judaism. Granted, most Bundists minimalized their adherence to the Jewish faith, but even they saw that the liberation socialism would bring, at least in theory, would allow Jewish identities to flourish. Just as important was that the Jews of Russia were now open to the international network of socialist organizations which existed in France, Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere. The international window for which the Jewish intelligentsia had been striving now had the promise of being realized.

Coal and Railroads: The Pillars of Imperial Russia

If we retreat from the projected future to economic reality, there was some hope for those Jews who were young, able and desperate for employment. Making the trip south, those who arrived at the coal mines of the Donbass-Dnepr bend found that their wages would be sufficient to sustain their families.¹²² Employment for a Jew either in the mines or the steel mills was fairly easy. At least in the beginning, the development of southern Russia appeared to promise the Jews greater opportunities and prosperity than

had heretofore been accorded them. With the coming of railroads and the opening of new mines and factories came the establishment of schools, hospitals and utilities which eventually created a number of small municipalities. Often, Jews worked in proximity to Russians and Ukrainians, a condition which always held the prospect for violence, and indeed there were incidents. Nevertheless, the condition of Jewish workers tended to improve and progress made in terms of relative acceptance by their co-workers. As could be expected, disputes between workers and factory owners abounded, not to mention those which erupted between skilled and unskilled workers. In the latter instances, the skilled workers tended to side with the Jews who, eventually, were regarded for their educated and urbanized demeanors.¹²³ Furthermore, as a tenuous trust developed between Jews and Russians in this region, the Jews formed the intellectual leadership in such groups as the Social Democrats. Within its ranks, Russians and Jews, along with a number of Ukrainians, realized their common cause which diminished the barriers separating these groups to a limited degree, and yet they could be raised again at the slightest provocation. Not blind to history, the Jewish socialist intelligentsia rationalized that some movement in labor relations was better than ossification, and the Jews needed these Christian workers as allies. Like their Polish coreligionists, the Jews of Russia were seeking ingress into Russian politics in the hope that their status could be improved and their identity gains safeguarded. In order to affect this, they needed the support of non-Jews in creating mass political movements capable of bringing this about.¹²⁴

¹²² Charters Wynn, Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia 1870-1905 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-9.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Particularly after 1895, Jewish organizers intensified their efforts in promoting this design.

Though not a Jew himself, Alexander I. Fenin (1866-1945) spent much of his adult life as a mining engineer in southern Russia and had a number of Jewish colleagues. From his perspective, the young Russians who toiled side by side with the Jews and Ukrainians thought it their mission to take an active part in restructuring Russian economic and industrial life.¹²⁵ Honor associated with labor, coupled with a psychological need to forge an original Russian nationalism, made up the atmosphere of the mines during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Given the relatively low educational level among the miners, unique notions about labor and industry developed. For instance, with the rapid expansion of railroads in Russia, some miners came to believe that an engineer was somehow a “money grubber” whose labor, in comparison to theirs, did not justify his wages.¹²⁶ Fenin excused such conceptions on the grounds that these peasants had little understanding of the changes occurring around them which were indeed momentous. Both railroads and coal, vital to Russia’s growing industrial base, were indebted to foreign banks as well as native ones, some of which were Jewish-owned.¹²⁷ With the quantities of coal, iron ore and flux being mined and the vast distances between the mines and factories, a well-developed rail network was essential. Even so, the success of the Russian infrastructure at this time rested upon the mining communities which nurtured it.

¹²⁵ Fenin, Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia, p. 35.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38. To illustrate how dependent Russia was on foreign capital, when the Jews were expelled from Moscow in 1891, Finance Minister Iurii A. Vishnegradski failed to raise a loan from a Paris bank as a

A close friend of Fenin's and fellow mining engineer was Leo G. Rabinovich. Rabinovich was a Jew and, like Fenin, spent as much time in the mine shaft as he did topside. Though engineers ranked above the men they directed, there developed a bond between them, a comraderie which recognized few differences, including religion and ethnicity on occasion. Fenin recounted the day that Rabinovich earned his men's lasting respect. Often disputes over the practice of giving miners part of their pay and sending the remainder to their families led to short-term strikes. In and of themselves, these temporary work stoppages amounted to little but, as Fenin pointed out, the resolution of the dispute lay in the ritual of settlement. On this particular occasion in the early 1890's, Rabinovich was in the process of negotiating a settlement with the strike leader when the latter blew the smoke from his cigarette into his face. Without hesitation, Rabinovich snatched the cigarette from the miner's mouth and threw it to the ground. That action soon settled the strike and Rabinovich earned the respect of all present.¹²⁸ As an odd corollary to this incident, the peasants of Chutino, who had always been on good terms with the miners and Leo Rabinovich, appointed him chairman of the building committee for their new Orthodox church. In their minds, no one else was more suited for the position and, after all, he was a friend to everyone. Granted, this was a rare exception to the rule and yet, amidst the anti-Jewish violence and passions simmering just below the surface, communion between Jews and Christians was at least possible, even if it were unlikely to become a widespread phenomenon.

result. This failure led to his dismissal and the appointment of Sergi Witte in his stead. See Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, p. 518.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

In isolated instances, goodwill between Russians and Jews prevailed, but as the Russian government became more adamant in building an efficient rail system and incurred greater debt to Jewish financiers in the process, amity would become a scarce commodity. Perhaps Finance Minister Sergei Witte (1892-1903), more so than any other figure in Alexander III's administration, understood the precarious nature of the economy and attempted, through his own ingenuity and negotiating with Baron de Rothschild, to build a viable rail infrastructure. To his credit, he made the Southwestern Railway, which had been operating at a loss, one of the more profitable lines in the Empire through the imposition of freight tariffs and offering loans on grain in transit to potential shippers.¹²⁹ Within a short time, he was able to increase revenue to nearly double the value of assets. Because of this miraculous feat, Ivan Vyshnegradskii, Witte's predecessor as Finance Minister (1886-1891), called upon him to establish an official Railroad Department in 1889. Working through the Baranov Commission, Witte imposed a unified freight schedule over the Empire's entire rail network and, by 1890, had all but placed every rail line under government control. To be sure, all appeared to be secure on the surface, but even Witte's talents could not overcome some of the more fundamental problems. First of all, cost overruns in construction and maintenance were endemic.¹³⁰ Reluctant to part with any of its gold reserves, the government imposed bare budgets upon contractors and engineers which resulted in an inefficient and, in parts, dangerous railroad system. Since native financial capital on a par with that possessed by Lazar Poliakov and Jan Bloch was

¹²⁹ Theodore von Laue, Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), p. 47.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

scarce, Witte had little choice but to seek funds from the most prominent of Russia's foreign creditors, the Baron de Rothschild.

Purchasing Russian state bonds was only part of the Baron's interest in the Empire. Railroads in Russia, given its vast mineral resources, was an investment opportunity which could not be bypassed. Specifically, de Rothschild saw considerable potential in the Baku oilfields. Kerosene had a ready market in Europe and Russia could offer a steady supply. Initially, there was the logistical problem of transporting the kerosene from the fields to market; one which de Rothschild resolved by advancing loans to Russian refiners for the purchase of tanker cars.¹³¹ Despite his wealth, he did not act alone. Foreign investment in Russia's railroads accounted for fifty percent of the outlay, a condition which came about through Witte's creation of joint-stock banks in which accounts to industrial clients were secured by stock shares. Even so, for all of his careful economic planning, he could not forestall the eventual disaster of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. Everything from cost overruns to shoddy and delayed construction was laid at his feet and, eventually, brought about his downfall as Finance Minister. Poliakov, Bloch and de Rothschild were three very wealthy Jewish financiers which Witte, by all rights, enlisted to save the very "veins" of Russia's nascent industrial modernization, and yet even in this positive light, circumstances conspired to rob them of a positive image in Russian eyes.

What were Russian Jews to think? In one instance, they were ripe for Russification and in another, held at arm's length.¹³² The Poliakov brothers had supplied Russia with its "veins of iron" and yet their educational partnership with de Hirsch and the Foundation garnered little official support. Even the much-celebrated and Rothschild-backed Alliance Israelite Universelle was seen as a weak weapon in the battle against Russian anti-Semitism.¹³³ Perhaps the most perplexing was the government's own investigation of the Blood Libel in which officials confirmed its impossibility and yet Pavolacki Krushevan, the formulator of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, could claim that he had discovered how Jews made wine without grapes and be believed.¹³⁴ Old superstitions died hard if they died out at all, and regarding Jewish images in Russian eyes, few notions would have wanted for immortality.

Popular attitudes ranged from admiration to disparagement with room enough even for disinterest. It was indisputable that Jews were considered different in every conceivable respect. For instance, their supposedly remarkable resistance to various diseases was rationalized as a genetic and environmental adaptation to their squalid living conditions. During the 1880-82 scarlet fever epidemic, it was pointed out that the Jewish mortality rate was much lower than that among the Christians.¹³⁵ To the simple observer, there was no other plausible explanation. Continued contact with the Russian population

¹³¹ John P. McKay, "Restructuring the Russian Petroleum Industry in the 1890's: Government Policy and Market Forces," *Economy and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1860-1930: Essays for Olga Crisp*, ed. Linda Edmondson and Peter Waldron (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 91-3.

¹³² Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, p. 185.

¹³³ *Russkii evrei*, n. 11. (18 March 1883), p. 3.

¹³⁴ Edward Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 39-40.

and proximate residence, some opined, would impair this immunity and, as proof, it was mentioned that in the 1884-5 Podolsk smallpox epidemic both Jewish and Christian populations living in close proximity to one another suffered at a ratio nearing 1:1.

Superior constitutions or not, one area where Jews were inferior to other groups, according to L.S. Minor, was in their neurological makeup. In his essay on the subject he observed that Jews suffered from chronic hysteria and that this trait was most acute in adult males.¹³⁶ Proof was in observation. In the marketplace, they stood apart from others waving their hands and posturing in uncontrolled emotional outbursts in incomprehensible gibberish, clearly these were outward manifestations of a nervous disorder, but Jews were a queer lot prone to pathological inconsistency. Alcoholism among the Jews should have been more prominent since it was a consequence of weak-willedness and yet it was not at all pervasive among the Jewish population. Minor had to admit that after he had conducted a long-term study of Russians and Jews, a higher proportion of the former suffered from alcoholism than the latter, all but invalidating his thesis of Jews being endemic neurotics. Reluctant to abandon his initial supposition, he could not deny his research findings, a quandary with which he struggled for several pages. Finally, unable to resolve the issue one way or the other, he concluded his disquisition on a neutral note.

Greener Pastures Over There: The Myth and Reality of Jewish Life in America

¹³⁵ S. O. Gruzenberia, "Getto i zarazniia boleznyi," Sbornik v polzu nachalnikh evreiskikh shkol (microfiche, 1895; New York: Norman Ross Publishers), p. 485.

¹³⁶ L.S. Minor, "Nekatoria danniiia iz sravitel'noi nervnoi patologii russkikh evreev i kristian," Sbornik v polzu nachalnikh evreiskikh shkol, p. 167.

There had to be a place in the world where Jews were not subject to stringent scrutiny for the sole purpose of exposing their imagined inadequacies. Palestine may have been alluring to some but America seemed more appealing. Resources there were thought to be plentiful as well as land, and opportunities for social and intellectual advancement were believed to be limitless. Alas, many could not make the trip but, for others, emigration to *der goldener land* was possible though, like with Rehovot, some pioneers had to lead the way. Though not every Russian Jewish emigrant who landed at Castle Rock, New Jersey or Ellis Island was a Talmud scholar, the Hebrew-language press, more so than its Russian and Yiddish counterparts, reported on conditions in the United States and what Jews could expect. First of all, Hebrew literacy in Russia and Eastern Europe was not widespread, and considering that yearly subscription to such publications as *Ha Meliz* and *Ha Zefirah* were between five and six kopecks, few could afford them.¹³⁷ An explanation for this limited appeal was that the Jews who would eventually travel and settle in America would need an intellectual elite to lead them and, prior to their arrival, address and hopefully remedy any major difficulties. A number of the Hebrew-literate intelligentsia had the financial means to make the trip and, ostensibly, the linguistic skills beyond Hebrew to make inroads in the extant Jewish community there. Even among them, optimism was forever in bloom and, consequently, ripe for defoliation.

Established American Jews greeted the new immigrants tepidly at best and, as reported in *Ha Zefirah*, insisted that they give up all of their cultural characteristics as

¹³⁷ Susan Miller, "The Image of the United States of America as Presented in *Ha Meliz* and *Ha Zefirah*, 1879-1882" (Rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1988), pp. 1, 136.

soon as possible.¹³⁸ This same publication also reported that in Chicago, German-American member of B'nai B'rith refused to grant a charter to Polish and Russian Jews desirous of establishing their own lodge because, from their perspective, these Jews were unfit for membership in the Brotherhood.¹³⁹ Even in America, old attitudes were still in evidence though, in time, they would either disappear or become benign. What shocked newly-arrived Russian Jews more so than harsh treatment at the hands of other Jews were the curious innovations in Jewish rituals and customs which exceeded their imaginations.

On 1 August 1882, *Ha Meliz* reported that it was not uncommon for ritual slaughterers in America to wear earrings, be clean shaven, cut their earlocks and, most surprising, men and women were seen sitting together during Shabbat services. Some Jewish men had even had the audacity, as in Cincinnati, to pray without skull caps.¹⁴⁰ Confusing matters further was the notion of American Reform Judaism which most Russians found perplexing. Had the matter remained so, experience might have unravelled the mystery but, in 1879, two events occurred which caused long-standing ripples in the Jewish psyche. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, according to *Ha Zefirah*, not only permitted his daughter to marry a Christian but also blessed the union.¹⁴¹ Conservative sensibilities barely had time to receive this when it was learned that a bowl of boiled shrimp had been served at the reception of HUC's inaugural commencement.¹⁴² Had the observation of *Ahad ha-Am*

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 96, 98.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 123, and Harry Rosenfeld, "A Comparative Study: The Image of American Jewry as Reflected in the Periodicals *The London Chronicle*, *Ha Meliz*, and *Ha Zefirah*" (Rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1981), p. 82.

¹⁴¹ Miller, "The Image of the United States of America," p. 125.

¹⁴² Ibid., Rosenfeld, "A Comparative Study," p. 84.

come to pass? Ginzburg had once wondered if it was possible within Reform Judaism to be Jewish and not Jewish simultaneously.¹⁴³ *Ha Zefirah* went even further by claiming that Rabbi Wise was worse than Pharaoh, and that from all appearances, the Jewish identity in America was in greater peril than it was in Russia. Even so, the country could not be discounted completely because Jewish hopes were far from extinction. In the United States, there was still promise of a Jewish future; the soil was ripe for germination and renewal and, in 1887, these sentiments were verified with the establishment in New York of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

There was no disputing the conservative natures of these publications and yet, in their peculiar compositions, each made allowances for change. Conceded, worship without skull caps and the serving of *treyf* at a Jewish function would never be condoned, yet both publications advocated Judaic and secular studies for American Jewry. America's promise of a Jewish future was more secure and immediate than Palestine's in the 1880's and '90's. Of course, modernity has some disquieting aspects but without them Judaism could not flourish. If the Jews had learned any lessons from history it was that the times were ever-changing, and if Jews and Judaism were viable and organic, they too had to redefine themselves in every age and this one was no different than any other, past or future.

Jewish Identity in Russian Poland

¹⁴³ Marietti, "Signs of Life," p. 78.

If the fortunes of Russian Jewry at home and in America had appeared odd and uncertain at times, the condition of Polish Jewry in the last two decades of the nineteenth century took some unusual turns of its own. Though they had been given their civil rights in 1862, the Jews of Poland had gained little from that advantage by the 1880's and '90's. Every gain had been a struggle. In 1861-62 and again in 1863, there had been a sense of fraternity between Poles and Jews; a relationship which, after 1864, had cooled considerably.¹⁴⁴ Largely responsible for this frigid estrangement was the incessant interference of Russian officialdom. Though a Polish-Jewish reconcilliation appeared unlikely, it was, nevertheless, a possibility which prompted the Russians to go to considerable lengths in promoting friction between the two communities.¹⁴⁵ Antipathy was omnipresent, but Polish-Jewish relations never reached a state of complete ossification, particularly with the coming of mass politics in the 1880's. Ethnicity, more so than any other, became a key issue in Russian Poland which prompted some Jews to become Poles of a sort by converting to Catholicism and adopting Polish ways and surnames. Those who elected to do so, however, constituted a negligible minority. More significantly, Warsaw, the heart of Polish politics, had a sizable population of what Jewish and Polish proponents of assimilation termed "Poles of the Mosaic faith."¹⁴⁶ In the pages of *Israelita*, a Jewish assimilationist weekly, Dr. Ludwik Nathanson espoused the importance of Polish identity, but he had joined a battle he could not win. First of all,

¹⁴⁴ Opalski and Bartal, *Poles and Jews*, pp. 90-1.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen D. Corrsin, *Warsaw Before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire 1880-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 3. See also Theodore Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 33.

with the influx of Jews into Warsaw from Lithuania, the definition of “Jew” became quite diverse as the decade progressed. Also, Jews desiring to assimilate Polish ways encountered stiff opposition by the leaders of the *Endecja* who, like Roman Dmowski, claimed that assimilated Jews could not share the Polish consciousness and, therefore, could never be considered Poles.¹⁴⁷ Compounding the problem, religion alone was not a sufficient determinant and language, a crucial component in identity formation, also proved unreliable.¹⁴⁸ At this time, Warsaw’s inhabitants spoke and were literate in Russian, Polish, Yiddish, German and Hebrew.¹⁴⁹ Jewish particularism became even more obscured with the coming of Russian-speaking Litvaks and their particular Jewish culture. The Warsaw assimilationists were at a loss as to where to turn. Not only was the importance of being Jewish consequently amplified; so too was the confusion over what constituted Jewish life and culture. Warsaw was a magnet for Jews coming from various parts of the Empire who brought with them other modes of Jewish life apart from traditionalist and assimilationist ones. More identifying options were made available, and this diversity had the potential of preserving Polish Jewry just as it had done so for the Jews of Russia, but the politically-minded assimilationists anticipated the worst. In their minds, a coherent and unified identity was imperative if the Jews were to enter politics and, ostensibly, improve their collective and individual lots in life. Be that as it may, it was becoming evident even to the most ardent supporters of a single Jewish identity that such a notion was a fantasy. Diversified Jewry in the political sphere soon gave rise to a diverse Jewish press.

¹⁴⁶ Corrsin, *Warsaw Before the First World War*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁷ Brian A. Porter, “Who is a Pole and Where is Poland? Territory and Nation in the Rhetoric of Polish National Democracy before 1905,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 51. no. 4 (Winter 1992), p. 647.

As with politics, the language of publication did not always distinguish the Jewish press from its Polish counterpart in the 1880's.¹⁵⁰ Some Polish-language journals were clearly published for Jewish consumption. In time, however, with the adoption and promotion of Yiddish, a distinct Jewish popular press was established as well.¹⁵¹ By the 1890's Yiddish had actually been accorded a measure of respectability in most Jewish circles.¹⁵² Its strongest association was with the socialist movement because it bound together Jews of all intellectual, social and political backgrounds. Warsaw was indeed a polyglot city and its Jewish community equally so, yet Yiddish was the Jewish lingua franca which, not surprising, contributed to the preservation and maintenance of an imagined community amid diversification. Mass politics used Yiddish to promote its aims, a recognition of the increasingly important cultural role of Yiddish as the language of diaspora nationalism.

Conclusion

By 1894, had Russian Jews won or lost? The answer depends upon how one values their gains against unrequited desires. For their labors, they had made considerable progress initially in education and employment and had proven themselves intellectually capable in a number of fields prior to having almost all of that taken from them in the wake of the 1881-82 pogroms. While cleaning up the physical debris left behind, the Jewish intelligentsia had to perform the same service regarding the remnant

¹⁴⁸ Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ Corrsin, *Warsaw Before the First World War*, p. 33.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

psychological rubble by facing the challenges posed by apostates and opportunists who, under the guise of reform, were sowing dissension. That situation was met and conquered, but it became apparent that if the Russian Jewish community was to enjoy guaranteed viability it would have to build bridges to the outside world, an endeavor which would take substantial energy, sagacity, and trust.

One of the first notable endeavors of this sort came from Vladimir Solov'ev. A devout Orthodox Christian, he appeared to sympathize with the plight of Russian Jewry, though this sentiment carried with it an ulterior motive. Quite simply, he surmised, Russian Jews suffered as they did because their faith was not in keeping with the times nor had it been since the birth of Christianity. If only they would cast off their boneheadedness and recognize the similarities between their tenets and the deuteronomical Christian ones and make the logical step by joining the Christian faith. Careful not to assume an imperative tone, Solov'ev was offering his hand to any Jew who would take it.

Wishing to realize Jewish assimilation to Russian society, Baron Maurice de Hirsch actually thought that he was honoring the wishes of both his coreligionists and the Russian government. More than a business proposition, the Maurice de Hirsch Foundation and its schools were to provide Russian Jews with vocational skills which would make them employable in Russian society. Considering that Tsar Alexander III had given him his approval in November 1887, the Baron did not imagine that serious difficulties would arise as long as he acted within Russian law. For a variety of reasons, his Foundation suddenly lost official favor and no clear reasons were forthcoming as to

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 79.

why this had come to pass. At a loss for what to do, de Hirsch eventually dissolved the Foundation and admitted defeat.

As inauspicious as conditions were for Russian Jewry, relatively few sought Christian conversion as a remedy. Most bridge builders, such as Haim Zhitlowski and Simon Dubnow, sought an accommodation with the larger Russian society as a distinct community. It was hoped that this could be realized on a number of levels. Zhitlowski's advocacy of Yiddish, for instance, had the potential for being an intellectual tie with binding power, drawing together Jews from all strata, especially Jewish workers who were starting to take interest in the rising socialist movement. Along with Moses Leib Lilienblum, Zhitlowski saw in socialism Judaism's secular salvation. By placing religion in the background, the Jews of Russia would have been freer in their associations with Russian socialists, sharing similar frustrations and aspirations, and hopefully achieving tangible civic rights. Despite episodic instances of communion in southern Russia and other industrial regions, however, centuries-old superstitions, antagonisms, and distrust made the lasting realization of this dream an impossibility.

Self-help was a notion so embedded in the Jewish experience that it could very well have served as its synonym. Zionism, especially in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, was just such a movement and appeared to be one of the more intelligent courses for Russian Jewry. Perhaps Palestine was an arid wilderness but it was also a land without pogroms, prejudice, and a place where a Jew could be a Jew without restriction. A facile representation to be sure, Russian Zionists nevertheless, and Ahad ha-Am in particular prior to 1892, envisioned the Jewish homeland as being little

¹⁵² Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, p. 120.

different from this idealized sketch. Such visions originated from the frustration and desperation surrounding them, and it mattered not if one lacked actual verification of conditions there; it had to be better than what they now experienced. Added to this was the wish and the promise of the Passover feast known to every Jew: "Next year in Jerusalem, next year in the Holy Land." Emotions alone inspired a desire to make *aliya*, and if this was to be so, Asher Ginzburg wanted to ensure that he was not sending his coreligionists to a land in which life would be untenable. When he discovered just that and shared this knowledge with all members of B'nai Moshe, he may have saved some lives but lost his organization.

If Palestine was not yet ready for a mass *aliya*, the United States appeared to be more receptive. As *Ha Zephirah* and *Ha Meliz* reported, however, the reception was not always an amicable one and the social conditions in America were unlike any that Russian Jews would have experienced in their lives. Synagogues without balconies and sanctuaries without partitions allowed husbands and wives to sit together, a strange innovation which was not always to the tastes of Russian Jewish visitors or newly-arrived immigrants. Furthermore, Jewish men without beards or earlocks, the serving of *treyf* at Jewish functions and, perhaps more horrific, the possibility of marriages with Christians, made it appear as if the Jewish world was being turned upside down. Even so, both publications still maintained, with some reservation, that for the time being America provided the most stable environment for Russian Jews until Palestine was capable of receiving Jewish immigrants.

For Russian Jews who could not make the trip to America or Palestine immediately owing to financial resources or other affairs, Poland served as a temporary

residence. Though Jews in Russian Poland had actually received rights in 1862, they had derived few benefits. As an added burden, Russian authorities made every effort to prevent any meaningful collaboration from developing between the two groups but, as had been true in Russia, there were isolated instances of cooperation which, at the very least, maintained a social balance with few major violent outbreaks.

At the end of this thirteen-year period, Russian Jews had little to cheer them save that their fundamental goal of communal integrity had been secured if only in a fragmentary form. Had they acquired rights commensurate with those of Russians, they would have had the added protection of Russian law, but that was not to be. Later on, those Jews who stayed behind would find their niches not only in the Jewish Bund but also within the Bolshevik ranks and the Jewish Section of the Communist Party until Stalin decided that they constituted a threat. Even emigration was an identity-preserving measure though, on first glance, it might not appear so. Though the Russian Jewish community lost their intellects and talents when they left the Empire, these emigrants, whether they settled in Rehovot or elsewhere in Palestine or the United States, transplanted Russian Jewry in places where it could bloom anew and propagate. Now some would argue that upon leaving Russia, these Jews ceased to have any identity which would incorporate Russia or Russian in any way since, after all, it was a convenient locative designation more than a cultural one. In response to this position, it should be pointed out that there had been a Jewish presence in Russia for ten centuries and the "battle" for Jewish distinctiveness in Russia did not preclude the absorption of elements from the numerically dominant and often hostile culture. These elements made up part of the baggage that the immigrants would carry with them. Certainly, citizenship

documents would identify these individuals as Palestinians and Americans to which they might add the designation "Jew," but what of it? Though historical amnesia might have erased much of the cultural lucidity invested in their ancestors, there was no denying that succeeding generations provided Russian Jewry with a viable continuum both in Russia and abroad.

CONCLUSION

Among some Russian Jews and Slavophiles, there was a shared illusion of an original and homogenous version of their respective communities to which they believed that they were destined to return and all would be right with the world. If indeed some Jews still adhered to that notion in 1894, it paled when confronted with the reality of multiple identities. Still, there was some comfort to be derived from the realization that though there was no one impeccable definition of the Russian Jewish community, it was a community all the same. Even the “imagined community” was more than an historical myth; it was and had always been a state of mind and the inspiration for the Jewish community to adapt to ever-changing circumstances in its attempt to return to a more pristine state.

As a natural addendum to community, a number of Russian Jews preceded to broaden their respective outlooks in embracing the grander notion of nation and nationality. According to Theodore Weeks, Russian authorities never arrived at a precise definition of “nation” in late Imperial Russia; an obstacle which Benedict Anderson’s conception of nation as an imagined political community which is inherently limited and sovereign seems to circumvent. Applied to Imperial Russia, “limited” meant that the community was distinct from the larger Russian society, and this was certainly true of the Jews. In that same vein, “sovereign” implied a degree of self-determination which the Jews possessed in creating their multiple identities. Despite the concerns of Simon Dubnow and some traditionalists that this fragmentation was the death knell of Russian Jewry, the community showed no signs of imminent collapse and actually weathered several storms throughout the nineteenth century.

In analyzing the metamorphosis of the Russian Jewish identity in the nineteenth century, it was necessary to begin with a mental fiction. The myth of Jewish wholeness and its subsequent shattering during the 1648 Khmelnytsky Rising illustrated not only the physical dispersal of the Eastern European Jewish community but also the beginning of its intellectual quest for restoration. Amidst their ruined homes, Jewish survivors also suffered the loss of their intellectual confidence, and this vulnerability made them receptive to the messages of Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank. Each of them promised to produce a pure form of Judaism which would stand all contest and their followers, desperate for guidance and stability, followed them and, eventually, became disillusioned. Hasidism, as formulated by Israel ben Eliazer, the Baal Shem Tov, was actually a sincere attempt to present Judaism to and the investment of a Jewish identity in those Jews who did not have the benefit of formal Jewish education or the means to acquire it. Of these three movements, it held the greatest promise of preserving communal integrity, and its success made it the target of Rabbinical Judaism which recognized no other version of the faith aside from its own.

Profound concerns within the Jewish community, Tsar Alexander I (1801-1825) was only interested in transforming them into a Russified (i.e. loyal) Jewry given their numbers and their settlement along the Empire's vulnerable western frontier. Determined to make the Jews "modern people," the Tsar and his officials enacted legislation and established programs which allowed them to integrate into Russian society and become assets to the state while keeping them at a distance. Aside from the practical and military benefits to the Empire in the face of Napoleon's invasion, there was little else he could do with 800,000 Ashkenazim which his grandmother, Catherine the Great, had laid at the

Imperial doorstep. Motivated by millenarian zeal inspired by Madame de Krudener and Reverend Empaytaz, Alexander believed that it was his mission to expose the Jews to the glories of Christianity. In 1817, the Society for Israelite Christians was created specifically for the realization of that purpose promising the Jews of Russia that their quality of life would improve substantially from what it had been previously should they join. In response to these legislative entreaties, the Jews of Russia were largely skeptical, and given the chronic maladministration of Jewish affairs in the early 1820's, few entrusted their futures to the Tsar.

Mysticism and delusions of Divine Providence were replaced subsequently by the brutal practicality of Nicholas I (1825-1855). It was during his tenure that the Jews of Russia developed their sense of self-reliance and resilience which would carry them through subsequent decades. The challenges to Jewish identity and integrity were not long in coming. Beginning in 1827 with the Jewish Recruitment Ukase and continuing through to 1831 and the suppression of the Polish Revolt, Nicholas and his ministers took an active hand in attempting to refashion the Jews of Russia into Russians with a Jewish accent. Though not an immediate presence in all official actions concerning the Jews, Nicholas's character, nevertheless, determined the temper and tone of their treatment. He was a man who, in one respect, expected to be obeyed without question or resistance. In the military, this was standard and the Tsar saw little difference between the barracks and Russian society. Even so, his rigidity was not immune to restrained laxity, and as the 1830's progressed, changes within the Jewish community encouraged Nicholas to relent gradually. For their part, Jewish intellectuals learned to adapt to the contours of Russian government and were able to enter into a "blind partnership" which not only resulted in

safeguarding the Jewish community against complete assimilation but also inaugurated one of the more unusual developments in Russian history.

Jewish initiatives in educational reform first caught Nicholas I's attention in the mid-1830's. The curriculum of the Odessa School, which had actually been established in the early 1820's, emphasized modern subjects over traditional Torah and Talmud studies with an eye towards preparing Jews for the modern world. Not only did Nicholas approve of this curriculum but made ready provision for the establishment of several Jewish schools designed on the Odessa model. With equal ardor, he endorsed a German translation of the Talmud and advocated the teaching of German as a modern and scientific language. All of this progress, however, did not eradicate Nicholas's suspicious propensities, and his reservations and anxieties began to show in the late 1830's and continued throughout the next decade.

Perhaps the most pressing issue was one which concerned not only the Jews but the nature of Russian society as a whole. Order and discipline were essential to autocratic viability, but if Russian society was to remain viable, it had to be allowed to breathe. It was clear that certain liberties had to be accorded the governed, Jews included, but the question remained as to how these liberties could be reconciled with autocratic power. Furthermore, with the coming of Dr. Maxwell Lienthal in 1840, Russia's Jewish affairs were placed on the international stage for all to see. That the Jews themselves appeared to be directing their own reform was both heartening and disconcerting because there was the potential danger that the autocracy would find itself chasing after Jewish initiatives in an effort to regulate them. To head off such a scenario, Sergei Uvarov was authorized in 1843 to convene a rabbinical conference in St.

Petersburg in order to discover just what was on the minds of the Empire's Jewish leaders and how their designs could be brought in line with the government's Jewish policies. The results of this meeting made Nicholas more determined to bring the Jews under control.

If he thought that the influence of Jewish modernists would diminish the Jewish identity in Russia, Nicholas was soon disappointed and resorted to desperate measures. Particularly in the last three years of his reign, proscriptions against various rituals, such as brides shaving their heads prior to going under the wedding canopy and the blending together of Crown rabbis and Crown Jewish teachers, were both fantastic and futile. Of the two, the last would have had a profound impact on the Jews of Russia if the Tsar's death had not prevented its implementation. Nevertheless, Russian Jewry endured.

During the tenure of Alexander II (1856-1881), Jewish expression and frustration were both running at fever pitch. Given his demeanor, the new Tsar was believed to be more liberal than his predecessors and Jews even dared to think that their emancipation was in the immediate offing. Prior to the Polish Revolt (1863-4), Alexander remarked that the Russian press had to be more open, Jewish recruitment obligations were ameliorated, and the serfs were finally emancipated. All of these were taken as positive indicators of reforms to come, but after the suppression of the January Rising, Russian officialdom became more conservative and reserved in terms of granting liberties.

Despite this, Jews were given educational stipends and press liberties equal to those of Russian editors and journalists. Through this medium, the Jews of Russia were able to engage in self-examination, criticism, and intellectual discourse in front of a wide audience. Such issues as education, rabbinical reform, and employment were freely aired

and, in some instances, garnered official attention and improvement. Primarily, the press was perhaps the best anti-revolutionary policy devised by the government. By allowing a fair degree of expression within clearly delineated legal boundaries, concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and even humor, satire, and creative impulses had an outlet which reduced tensions and gave officials insights as to what the governed were thinking. Granted, this last "benefit" was an area which tested Jewish and Russian editors' creativity in manipulating government censors, and the authorities probably suspected as much.

Liberty of the press also meant that apostates could present their programs to the Jewish reading public. Both Jacob Brafman and Rabbi Ippolit Lieutostanskii made ready use of this medium for their parochial benefit but so too did their opponents. What resulted was that the battle for Jewish identity and integrity which had been confined mostly to intellectual circles was now aired for all to see and, if inclined, to join. It cannot be denied that the Jewish public was well informed about the dangers of apostates and their pseudo-Jewish reform movements but, inundated to the point of saturation, apathy was inevitable. Some wondered what all of this energy had to show for its expenditure. Had the Jewish condition improved? Was there indeed a future? Unbeknownst to most Russian Jews, Tsar Alexander II had implemented a design for limited representative government on the morning of 1 March 1881; a measure which would die with him a few hours later on a snow-covered boulevard in St. Petersburg.

Several years after the assassination, few would have remembered the name of Heisse Helfman, the only Jew among the conspirators, who perished in a basement cell in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Even so, the presence of one Jew was pretext enough to incite the pogroms which Alexander III (1881-1894) condemned but did little to quell.

Perhaps there was some truth to the statement he gave a Jewish delegation shortly after the violence began that Jews were merely an excuse for the disorders. Certainly no philo-Semite himself, he often found himself acting as a de facto defender of Russian Jews because he literally could not afford to do otherwise. Russia's industrialization was bankrolled by politically-influential European lenders, many of whom were Jews, a fact which escaped some of his subordinates. Nikolai Bunge's supposed revelation of a Jewish financial plot to take over the Russian government, sporadic pogroms, and the ill-timed 1891 expulsion of Jews from Moscow which denied Russia much-needed funds for famine relief were some of the many pressures with which the Tsar had to contend. In addition to the Jews local, philanthropists such as Baron Lionel de Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch were attempting to ameliorate the plight of their Russian coreligionists. Given his disposition, Alexander probably wondered about the extent of his authority, and it would not have been unusual for him to discount his arrangement with de Hirsch over that fundamental concern. By the early 1890's, Jews were present in every major industrial endeavor despite omnipresent discrimination and not only as workers but also managers, owners, and lenders.

Neither proximity nor segregation succeeded in eradicating centuries-old prejudices and instances of violence between Jews and Russians. Even so, Jewish persistence eventually contributed to the evolution of Jewish identities on Russian soil. By 1894, Jewishness had not been reduced to an accent or, as Simon Dubnow had once feared, been absorbed into the larger Russian society and culture. It had developed several forms, all equally valid, viable, and distinctly Jewish. Though emigration

reduced their physical numbers in Russia, the proliferation of Russian Jewry in Palestine and the United States guaranteed its viability.

The struggle to maintain Jewish identities had been won but a political foothold was still wanting. With Jewish emigration swelling during Nicholas II's reign, a meaningful political concession which might have stemmed the tide appeared unlikely. For those remaining in Russia, even the establishment of Jewish sections in the larger Russian socialist parties did little to advance specific Jewish political aspirations. Some politically active Jews saw that their eventual placement in the Russian milieu would probably come about under a predominantly Russian socialist banner and not a Jewish one. Regardless, what had to be recognized was that the Jewish identities which had been brought about by various means were themselves a means to achieving the end of a politically recognized "nation" within a multinational state.

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Papers and Publications:

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