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Introduction

The eleven essays brought together in this book focus broadly, although not exclusively, on the history of the Russian Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But within those parameters, the primary emphasis is on the years 1855–1921, stretching from the accession of Alexander II (the "Tsar Liberator") to the end of the Russian Civil War – a period of fateful importance in the history of Russia, of the historic Polish-Lithuanian lands, and of the Jewish people.

Written as individual articles at different moments over the last twenty-five years, the essays vary considerably in type and in subject matter. Some are essentially microcosmic case studies, while others seek a broader overview; most deal directly with history, but two are studies in historiography; and while the geographic center of gravity here is to be found in the Pale of Settlement and Congress Poland, there are also chapters that examine episodes in the public life of the Russian Jews in their emigrant communities overseas, in the United States of America, and in Ottoman Palestine.

However, for all the diversity, a number of key themes dominate in this volume, lending the separate essays a measure of coherence. Framing the entire collection is the idea that modern Jewish politics, which first emerged in the West during the early decades of the nineteenth century, increasingly – beginning in the 1880s – took on radically different forms in the Russian empire. Of course, to employ the concept of "modernity," in opposition to "tradition," as an explanatory tool necessarily means to impose an artificial measure of neatness on complex historical realities, but I take it as a given here that abstractions of this kind can hardly be avoided if shape is to be given to the Jewish (and, indeed, the general) history of recent centuries.

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While the politics of the traditional Jewish world, so the argument goes, was corporatist, based on a juridically authorized measure of internal self-government, on fiscal (tax-collecting) autonomy, and on powers of coercion, modern Jewish politics developed on a voluntary basis. In the traditional setting, it was the selected communal representative, the *shtadlan*, who had the task of interceding with the authorities whenever necessary, thus embodying the higher politics of the community: at once a spokesman, a diplomat, and a conveyor of emergency payments (or bribes, to use an anachronism). In contrast, in its modern form, Jewish politics depended (and outside Israel still depends) on the ability to recruit members to associations, movements, and parties that pursued a wide variety of different, and often conflicting, goals.

Traditionally, Jewish politics was oriented toward the present, if not the past, and was defensive or, at most, cautiously incrementalist, as dictated by the dependent status of the Jews as a small religious and ethnic minority in the Christian and Islamic worlds. As against that, what drove the development of modern Jewish politics was the belief that the dynamics of change was creating a future different – perhaps totally different – from the present and that Jews had to organize themselves in order to exert an influence on, and find a place in, the shape of things to come. The one system was theocentric, and rabbinical authority ruled much of everyday life; the other was anthropocentric, resting on the assumption that society was being remade by man on the basis of new, universally applicable principles: liberty, equality, and national self-determination – principles that could be seen either as complementary or as mutually exclusive and antagonistic.

It was with the creation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris in 1860 that the Western version of modern Jewish politics first truly came into its own (the "reception" of the Alliance in the Russian empire and elsewhere is the subject of the second chapter of this book). In the manifestos setting forth their credo, the young founders of the organization stated with great confidence that the liberal principles of 1789 were everywhere gaining ground and that the march of Progress was unstoppable. The task of the Alliance was, therefore, to advance the course of Jewish emancipation wherever possible; to rally public opinion in defense of Jewish communities suffering persecution at the periphery of the civilized world; and to encourage the Jewish people to prepare itself (primarily through the enlightened and utilitarian schooling of its children) to participate as equal citizens in the life of their countries. Similar ideas subsequently inspired the establishment of, for example, the

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Anglo-Jewish Association, the Israelitische Allianz in Vienna, and (in 1906) the American Jewish Committee.

Sharing the same liberal or "emancipationist" belief system were the founders and leaders of the major Jewish philanthropic organizations, which, while devoted primarily to combating poverty and advancing "productivization," could not avoid entanglement in politics (both local and international), among them being the Hilfsverein in Germany, the Jewish Colonization Association (founded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch in Vienna), and, most important of all, the American Jewish Distribution Committee. A line of thought essentially no different inspired such Jewish financial magnates in St. Petersburg as Evzel Gintsburg and Samuil Poliakov to create, respectively, the Society for the Dissemination of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia (OPE) in 1863 and the Society for [the Advancement of] Artisan and Agricultural Work among the Jews in Russia (ORT) in 1880. That gradual change, guided jointly by the regime and by the Jewish liberal elites, would produce a process of incrementalist emancipation or "selective integration" (the term employed by Benjamin Nathans in his recent groundbreaking study of St. Petersburg Jewry, *Beyond the Pale*)[1] was the assumption, or at least the hope, of the Gintsburgs, the Poliakovs, and a significant number of their fellow Jews in the Russian capital.

However, for the most part, the spotlight in this book is directed elsewhere, toward those individuals and groups that believed in, and worked for, a revolutionary rather than an evolutionary breakthrough to the future. In the last decades preceding the First World War, modern Jewish politics in the Russian empire, and specifically in the Pale and the Polish provinces, was characterized ever more sharply by deviations from the Western pattern of emancipationism with its single-minded concentration on the attainment of civil rights. Thus, for example, from the early 1880s, emergent nationalist movements spoke in terms of an exodus from Russia and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine or, perhaps, in the American West. In consequence, when, almost twenty years later, the Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl made his sudden and charismatic appearance on the Jewish stage expounding the same radical ideas, he found by far his most enthusiastic following in the tsarist empire.

The mainstream Russian Zionists, like the Hibat Zion (or "Palestinophiles") before them, had revolutionary ideas, but they were not

[1] Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 2002).

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revolutionaries. In contrast, the Jewish parties such as the Bund, which espoused socialism in combination with various forms of nationalism, threw themselves heart and soul into the insurrectionary movement directed against the tsarist autocracy and ultimately, as they saw it, against the capitalist system. Their assumption was that eventually it would be possible to attain a complete synthesis of liberty, equality, and Jewish national self-determination (be it autonomist or territorial in form). Many factors combined to produce this heady utopian mix, but it is certainly arguable that one such ingredient was a secular transformation, usually presented in would-be scientific terms, of the traditional messianic faith then still so much part of everyday discourse on "the Jewish street."

Within this context of the radicalizing process at work in Russian-Jewish politics, the focus in most of the essays collected here is specifically on the role played by the intelligentsia. In Chapters 4, 5, and 10, respectively, the attempt is made to trace the ways in which Shloyme Zanvil Rappoport (S. An-sky), Yosef Haim Brenner, and Shimon Dubnov understood and reacted to their times (whether during a limited period or, in the case of Dubnov, over a life's span); while in Chapters 7 and 8, attention shifts overseas to ideological disputes conducted among emigrant members of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia in Ottoman Palestine and in interwar New York. Socialist anti-Zionism, the subject of Chapter 9, also developed initially as a polemical dispute pitting Jews in rival political camps against each other, only later to be taken up by the Soviet regime as an important matter of state policy.

It would certainly be misleading to suggest that the radical Jewish movements, whether nationalist, socialist, or based on some combination of both, were dominated solely by the intelligentsia. During their periods of rapid growth, broadly speaking in the decade from the mid-1890s until 1906, workers in large numbers flooded into the Bund and into its rival Jewish socialist parties (and that was the case again in 1917 and – particularly in the 1930s – in interwar Poland). For its part, the mainstream Russian Zionist movement (like Hibat Zion) was largely peopled by members of the middle class for whom the idea of an exodus from Russia had no practical bearing on their everyday lives; and in the upper echelons of those organizations was to be found no small number of Orthodox rabbis.

Nonetheless, in the absence of a political class ready to think beyond cautiously incremental measures (the preferred policy, as already noted, both of the St. Petersburg financial elite and of the traditional leadership,

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most of the rabbis included), radical initiatives became the almost exclusive domain of the *intelligenty* (with their command of Russian or Polish) and, to a lesser extent, of the yeshiva-educated "half"-intelligentsia. It was the intelligentsia that produced the breakthrough ideologies oriented toward an imagined future and that, almost unaided, launched the organizations confidently expected to lead the way to that future, to a juster world that would eliminate the "Jewish question." And when the radical parties went into catastrophic decline in the decade from 1907 until 1916, it was the intelligentsia again that ensured that the development of a modern Jewish culture, whether in the Hebrew or the Yiddish language, would gain momentum.

Still another, a third, theme that has pride of place in this book is the focus on periods of crisis. The years of the first pogrom wave (1881–82); of the first Russian revolution (1905–07); as well as of the First World War, the February and October revolutions, and the Civil War – 1914–21 – provide the basis for all four chapters in the second section of the book. (Moreover, two widely publicized causes célèbres involving major attacks on Jews and, in effect, on the Jewish people – the Mortara case of 1858, which led in response to the formation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and the so-called Damascus Affair, or Blood Libel, of 1840 – serve as issues of key significance in the opening chapters of the volume.)

In the radical turn taken by modern Jewish politics in Russia, the years of upheaval, of crisis, proved, so I claim here, to have been of exceptional importance. It was at such moments that so many could conclude that the misbegotten present was doomed and that a future totally transformed was within grasp. And it was then that the political activists, *teoretiki* and *praktiki*, had their chance, however fleeting, to mobilize a large, sometimes a mass, following.

If the impact of the crises in tsarist Russia made its mark primarily in the Pale of Settlement and Congress Poland, its effect was also felt abroad, stimulating various protest campaigns, diplomatic interventions by foreign governments, and the foundation of new organizations designed to respond rapidly to future disasters whether in Russia or elsewhere – among them most notably, as already mentioned, the American Jewish Committee, set up in 1906, and the Joint Distribution Committee, established in 1914. Even though such initiatives were rarely radical in intention, the fact remains that the international dimension of Jewish politics proved to be a significant factor not only in the development of the nationalist movements in the tsarist empire (Hibat Zion, Russian

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Zionism and Territorialism) but even in that of the Bund, which depended for much of its budget on fund raising in the United States.

The argument is made here – and this is a fourth theme to be found in the book – that, for all the vast differences involved, modern Jewish politics, whether in its "Western" and liberal or its "Eastern" and radical incarnation, can be envisaged as constituting a single "subsystem" with a two-way feedback linking Russia to the West in myriad ways. (To take one striking example, mentioned in Chapter 3, in late 1905 Judah L. Magnes, then a New York rabbi closely linked to such members of the American Jewish establishment as Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, became one of the leaders of the Jewish Defense Association, which took it upon itself to channel funds from the United States to the revolutionary socialist Zionist and territorialist organizations in Russia. The money was earmarked to reinforce the self-defense groups formed to combat the pogroms and was largely spent to purchase weapons to be smuggled into the country from abroad. At the Russian end, the figure who initiated this clandestine scheme was Manya Vilbushevich – later Shochat – one of the more colorful and, in some ways, notorious personalities on the Jewish Left in Russia, as later in Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine.)

In the essays brought together here, I have developed, and elaborated on, subjects that first occupied me in my book of 1981, *Prophecy and Politics*.[2] A number of the key ideas that I built on there, and that reappear here, have meanwhile come in for criticism, both explicit and implicit, from fellow historians. The publication of the present book thus provides me with the opportunity to discuss some of the major issues raised by them, as indeed by my own retrospective reflections.

Three of the four pivotal ideas just enumerated have been the object of such criticism. First, it has been argued both by Yoav Peled[3] and by

[2] *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews 1862–1917* (Cambridge, 1981).

[3] Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia* (New York, 1989). Peled summarizes his argument thus: "The most plausible explanation of the evolution of the Bundist ideology is the one which views it as an expression of the political consciousness of Jewish workers." (p. 119). In elaborating on this thesis, he writes: "The social reality within which the identity of Jewish workers was formed had both ethnic and class dimensions to it. . . . [The] workers were thus caught in the cross currents of common and conflicting interests with both their co-ethnic employers and their class-comrade competitors. As a result, they developed what may be termed 'ethno-class consciousness', a consciousness of the distinctiveness of their own interests in relation to both these groups" (p. 121). And

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Matityahu Mintz[4] that my focus on the role of the intelligentsia as being of dominant importance in shaping the course of radical Jewish politics in the Pale and Congress Poland is one-sided and provides a distorted picture of historical realities. Specifically, they insist that what led the Bund to take its historic decision to adopt a program in 1901 based on national (as well as civil) rights was the pressure of deep-rooted structural factors, both social and economic, and not, as I believe, a mix of fierce ideological debate, conducted largely in the émigré student colonies in Switzerland, and organizational pressures engendered by complex interparty – and intraparty – conflicts.

Second, my claim that sharp disjunctures in the ongoing historical process played a decisive role in Russian-Jewish history during the late tsarist period has been held to be excessive by Benjamin Nathans (and, indirectly, by others).[5] The contention is that the emphasis on the decisive importance of crises inevitably diverts attention from long-term trends in

he concludes: "From the onset of its 'agitational' phase, the Bund sought to represent, rather than to shape, the consciousness of the Jewish working class" (p. 131).

[4] Matityahu Mintz, "Lesugiyat hamegamah haleumit shel habund," *Gal-Ed: Measef letoledot yahadut polin*, vol. 17 (Tel-Aviv, 2000), pp. 12–20. One of the problems with *Prophecy and Politics*, argues Mintz (with much exaggeration, in my opinion), is that there the ideological development of the Bund is explained as resulting from "the manipulative maneuvers of functionaries and *intelligenty* seeking view points and modes of action calculated to entrench them in their established and privileged positions" (pp. 18–19). On the contrary, he insists, "the Bundist workers, or alternatively the group of *intelligenty* which linked itself to those workers, did not invent some distinctive form of Jewish nationalism in order to fence themselves in behind a wall of wounded pride. They were part of the process producing a steady rise in Jewish power" (p. 19).

[5] Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, pp. 7–13. For example: "According to what one might call the crisis paradigm, the pogroms of 1881–82 were the catalyst of modern Jewish politics in pre-revolutionary Russia, a decisive turning point in Russian-Jewish history, and indeed modern Jewish history as a whole. But there have been important qualifications and amendments to this view.... Taken together, these responses do more than just complicate the periodization of the Russian-Jewish encounter. I believe they unsettle the entire notion of a revolutionary 'leaping of phases' among Russian Jews... [and] point to a kind of Tocquevillian revisioning that seeks not to deny the profound upheaval that occurred in Russian Jewry (just as Tocqueville never denied that a revolution occurred in France in 1789) but rather to reveal the subtler forms of change as well as continuities that bridge the moments of crisis" (p. 9). For examples of the qualifications and amendments mentioned here, see, e.g., Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 146–199 and particularly pp. 146–8; Eli Lederhendler, "Messianic Rhetoric in the Russian Haskalah and Early Zionism," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 7 (*Jews and Messianism in the Modern Era: Metaphor and Meaning*), ed. J. Frankel (New York, 1991), pp. 14–33; and idem, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York, 1989). For an important contribution to this ongoing discussion, see David Engel, "Crisis and Lachrymosity: On Salo Baron,

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that history – trends that in many cases were rooted in everyday, even "normal," life. Emergencies certainly attract optimal attention, but, so the reservations run, their ultimate impact can all too easily be exaggerated.

Finally (and here again the critic is Matityahu Mintz), the question is asked whether there is not a serious historiographical risk in laying stress on the emigrant communities when analyzing the dynamics of change on "the Jewish street" in the Pale and Congress Poland. Given the rapid rate of socioeconomic and cultural change affecting the Jewish people in the Pale and in Congress Poland – the population explosion, accelerating urbanization, new patterns of employment, the emergence of Yiddish as a language of mass communication – is there justification for hunting out external factors to help explain major developments within the world of Russian-Jewish radicalism?[6]

At the inevitable risk of misinterpreting these different lines of criticism, I would suggest that they share a preference for modes of historical explanation based more on continuity than on contingency. But for my part, I do not perceive the issues as a case of either/or. History proceeds simultaneously on different levels. Everyday life and long-term trends have their own momentum and their own logic; but so too do the discontinuities produced variously by political leaderships, by crises, by revolutions, and by wars. Ideally, an author setting out to write a comprehensive study of a nation, of a state, of a civilization, or of the world would eschew a priori all-encompassing historiographical theories, choosing rather to give due weight – in accord with the material at hand – to both evolutionary and revolutionary factors.

However, in the great majority of cases, historians, myself included, usually choose to study specific aspects of the whole (the history of particular developments, of institutions, of events, of ideas, as the case may be), thus accentuating the subjective factor that accompanies all historical research and analysis. What the historian decides is significant, and therefore worthy of study, depends largely on his (or her) own personal

Neobaronianism and the Study of Modern European Jewish History," *Jewish History*, vol. 20, nos. 3–4 (2006), pp. 243–64.

[6] See, for example, Mintz's comment that it is fundamentally erroneous "to overlook the cardinal difference that distinguished the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, socially compact, demographically numerous and deeply rooted, from the relatively small-scale Jewish immigrant populations in the London and New York of the 1890's. . . . The ethnic presence and consciousness of the Jews in Russia, Poland, Galicia and Romania was so variegated, so tangible, so vital, that any attempt at comparison with the East End of London is fundamentally flawed, irrelevant – and the same holds true of the Lower East Side of New York" ("Lesugiyah hamagemah haleumit," pp. 15–16).

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viewpoint, as formed variously by his life experience and by his place in an ever-changing sociopolitical and historical context. In an effective metaphor, E. H. Carr once compared history to a

> moving procession . . . swerving now to the right and now to the left, and sometimes doubling back. . . . New vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the procession – and the historian with it – moves along. The historian is part of history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.[7]

Given my particular place in this moving column, it is hardly surprising that my perspective on modern Russian, Jewish, and Russian-Jewish history would not necessarily be shared by others. That I emphasize the importance of crises in that history seems to me natural enough given the times and the places that shaped my formative years. Even though I personally came through totally unscathed, it is nevertheless true that I grew to adulthood and maturity during a period when danger and drama were part of the woof and weave of history. As a child I lived through the Second World War in Britain; I reached my thirteenth birthday in July 1948, when the new state of Israel was fighting its war of independence; and since I moved to that country in 1964, it has experienced no less than six major armed conflicts, as well as two prolonged Palestinian uprisings.

All of this would no doubt in itself have been enough to make me acutely conscious of the inherent instability and lack of predictability in human affairs. However, it was the June (or Six-Day) War of 1967 that first brought home to me the idea that crises, however short-lived, could actually serve as turning points in the course of history. The transformation of the political climate in the country from the deepest anxiety prevailing in the weeks before the war to the almost boundless euphoria afterward was truly astonishing, and arguably produced a fateful break in Israel's development, dividing the "smaller" minimalist state of 1949–67 from the postwar "greater" Israel in which quasi-messianic groups proved able to redirect public discourse and the settlement policies of the state.

Of course, none of this would have been possible if the Zionist enterprise (on the left as well as on the right) had not throughout its development nursed maximalist potentialities, but they had become increasingly marginalized, even anachronistic, in the years prior to the outbreak of the June War. (The debate within the labor-oriented Russian-Jewish

[7] E. H. Carr, *What Is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge*, January–March 1961 (London, 1985), p. 30.

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More information

intelligentsia in Ottoman Palestine – the "Second Aliyah" – regarding the future of Arab-Jewish relations forms the subject of Chapter 7).

The idea that the crisis of 1881–82 exerted a decisive impact on the development of radical ("post-liberal") Jewish politics in Russia and in the emigrations was thus inspired directly by the shock of June 1967 (or so it seems to me in retrospect). Similarly, personal experience in all probability lies at the root of my intuitive assumption that politics and political culture function to a significant degree according to their own logic and dynamics, enjoying a measure of "autonomy," and should not be regarded as a mere epiphenomenon.

After all, could one grow up as a child in Britain in the 1940s without having the importance of leadership and leaders, as a potentially decisive factor in the affairs of men, stamped deeply on one's consciousness? Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Hitler all loomed far larger than life in my understanding. And in the Jewish subworld there was David Ben Gurion, no less a remarkable figure, albeit on a microcosmic rather than a macrocosmic scale – the man who, arriving in Palestine from the Russian empire in 1906, did so much to forge the strategy and tactics that led to the establishment of Israel in 1948.

At the same time, to put the case for the possibly decisive role of leadership in the historical process is in no way to deny that such leadership can function effectively only within the severe constraints imposed by social, economic, and cultural factors. No more is being claimed than that the sphere of politics cannot be reduced to a superstructure ultimately determined by the socioeconomic or sociocultural base.

In the Bundist historiography, it has always been maintained that the transition from an integrationist to a nationalist platform was dictated by "life" itself, meaning by the pressures exerted from below by the Yiddish-speaking masses. This explanatory model fitted the Marxist concept of the essentially one-way causal relationship between the factor of class and that of ideology: a world outlook that sought scientific certainty in a determinist ideology.

But if the Bundists, like the mainstream Mensheviks, thought along such lines, Lenin did not. And here too was a formative influence on my thinking about the autonomous role of politics (an influence going back half a century to my days as a Ph.D. student). While always finding Lenin's ruthlessness, fanaticism, and Machiavellian methods repellent, I nonetheless still stand in awe of his ability to combine a Marxist, socio-economic grasp of deep-rooted historical forces with an extreme voluntarism in the tradition of Russian revolutionary Jacobinism. His

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