

## INTRODUCTION

The early Zionist Movement sought to define and create a Jewish national culture in order to activate a sense of belonging to a Jewish nation among the Jews of Europe.<sup>1</sup> The elements of a Zionist culture to be considered here are the parts of a movement, in Central and Western Europe from 1897 to 1914, that were employed to foster Jews' identification with the Zionist program through changing their national self-consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

The processes and products of Zionism's attempt to create a Jewish national culture help explain why the movement persisted and developed within a milieu that overwhelmingly rejected Jewish-national political assumptions, a milieu in which official membership in Zionist organizations never numbered more than a fraction of assimilated Jews before the First World War.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite an originally hostile or at best indifferent audience, Zionism accomplished more than simply "keeping and nourishing ideas – and an organization to embody them."<sup>4</sup> It exemplified a view of the world which afforded even peripheral participants in Zionism a glimpse of the movement's whole effort. The Zionist *Weltanschauung* held that Jews under Zionism were creating a culture which affirmed Jewish distinctiveness, while incorporating the most admirable aspects of the civilizations with which the Jews had had contact.<sup>5</sup> It worked its way into the ideology of the Jewish middle-class by drawing heavily on that group's ideal of nationalism, which emanated from the Jews' greatest hopes for a fruitful emancipation in the early nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Zionist culture, consciously and unconsciously, also amplified the criticism of Judaism and Jewry articulated in the Haskala beginning in the eighteenth

century; it comprised an impulse to regenerate patterns of Jewish life and thought that were seen as corrupt or decayed.<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, Zionism owed a great deal to the Judaic liturgy and motifs claiming that national redemption would come from a collective return to Zion. Equally important in the movement's genesis was the notion of defending the interests and rights of severely persecuted Jews.<sup>8</sup> Yet the Western Jews' secular liberal faith was also significant, allied with the notion of the decadence and regenerative potential of Jewry. A main tenet of this creed was the primacy of *Bildung*, which "combines the meaning carried by the English word 'education' with notions of character formation and moral education."<sup>9</sup> This was rooted in the classical humanist tradition from the time of the War of Liberation, emanating from the thought of Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, and Fichte – complemented by the Haskala – and was framed by the *fin-de-siècle* nationalist forms familiar to Jews.<sup>10</sup> Accompanying the establishment of a modern Jewish nation, Zionist culture envisioned a continuous process of educational and moral regeneration, progressing toward greater freedom of the nation and humankind. A large part of Zionism's attraction for Western Jews can be traced to this merger between culture and politics that the movement embraced and expressed in the images of a viable cultural order: Zionism was to be the consummation of Jewish Emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

Zionist politics began with cultural presuppositions, and Zionism sought to endow Jews with a complete way of life, or at least to influence the tenor of their lives. "Culture" in early Zionism was not a precise formulation based on the Hebrew language or certain texts, but rather a mood, and a kind of comportment. It comprised respectability (as defined by middle-class European society), Jewish cohesion, and an enthusiastic (but not chauvinistic) Jewish patriotism. West European Zionist culture also incorporated an abiding respect for education, literature, and the arts, with a special reverence for what formerly had been regarded as "Jewish culture," laying stress on its "national" (as opposed to theological) content through the revival of Hebrew. Zionists disagreed, however, over the extent to which the Hebrew revival should occupy the movement. Culture in Zionism exalted a belief in the interconnectedness of the fate of all Jews.<sup>12</sup> It annexed itself to the prophetic tradition "concerned less with the salvation of the individual soul than with the holiness of the nation" and maintained that the revitalized nation of the Jews would spark the advancement of humankind.<sup>13</sup> A radical anti-assimilationism,

which was a confession of the serious failure of emancipation in Europe, was inherent in Zionist culture; however, the work toward the establishment of a Jewish people and state, and the idealization of the incipient Jewish society in Palestine was consistently wrapped in the mantle of Enlightenment ideals and aspects of nationalism that Jews had known in Central and Western Europe.<sup>14</sup> Zionist culture also included a potential to criticize its own national myths, in the tradition of Heinrich Heine; consequently, it not only tolerated dissent, but at times deemed it vital to its culture.

Most Zionists would have largely agreed with Moses Mendelssohn's understanding of culture as esteem of secular education, and "an improvement in manners, morals, and taste," along with the retention of "tradition." This would allow for "the achievement of the dignity requisite to operate within the educated gentile society;"<sup>15</sup> Zionism's additional condition was that Jews should be regarded as equals, as a nation. Theodor Herzl summarized a similar view of Jewish culture in a speech by the President of the Jewish Academy in his utopian novel, *Altneuland* (1902): "We are in duty bound to increase beauty and wisdom upon the earth, unto our last breath."<sup>16</sup> In short, Zionism encompassed a form of *Bildung* with a Jewish national consciousness, striving toward the end-goal of building a Jewish national home in Palestine. In his address to the First Zionist Congress (1897), Herzl attempted to clarify the misperception that Zionism was a fundamentalist Jewish movement which sought to combine religious orthodoxy with nationalism: "We have no intention of yielding one bit of the [secular] culture we have acquired. On the contrary, we are aiming for a broadening of culture, such as any increase in knowledge brings." Herzl maintained that the material and spiritual products of the Jews – regardless of their Jewish self-consciousness – comprised Jewish culture, and that the Jews' creations as the members of a Jewish nation would be their national culture.<sup>17</sup>

Herzl's formulation was consistent with the perceptions of Zionist culture held until 1914 by most Western and Central European Zionists.<sup>18</sup> Hugo Bergman, a leader of the "Prague Circle" of Zionists, "one of the germinal groups in the intellectual history of modern Jewry," offered a cogent synopsis of this view in 1913: "Jewish culture cannot be identified simply as Hebrew culture. As Hegel said, the culture of a people is their total possessions in an 'objective spirit.' Everything that is an expression of its spirit comprises the culture of a people. Language and literature are a part of this objective spirit, but

are not its totality. National laws, as well as national dance, proverbs, dress, folk songs, jokes, fairy tales, children's games, and in their broadest parameters, the ways of conceiving schooling and sports – however disparate – belong to a people's culture."<sup>19</sup> David Yellin, a noted Hebrew educator in Palestine, concurred that national culture consists of "everything which strengthens the national sentiment in a people – a feeling which produces in its component parts the consciousness that together they form one whole, with a natural striving to cherish and develop the possessions that belong to it."<sup>20</sup>

This book reconstructs and analyzes segments of the Zionists' initial instruments of nationalization as they were received by Western Jews.<sup>21</sup> Chapter 1 details Western perceptions of the Zionist Congresses, which were held annually from 1897 to 1901, and biennially from 1903 to 1913. These were the chief mediators of Zionism that exhibited the movement's political style; to a large extent the Congresses embodied the prewar Zionist Organization, and showed how Zionism was related to European nationalist models.

The following two chapters of this book detail the debate on "the problem of culture" (*Kulturfrage*) in the context of the Congresses, and how it was influenced by, and in turn affected the political liturgy and festivities of the Congresses. Delegates at the Zionist Congresses did not speak in a vacuum, or simply echo ongoing polemics from the Jewish press; their words were part of a Zionist event in Europe, accompanied by great fanfare and publicity. They talked about and demonstrated the advancement of a national culture which not only grew and developed, but incited counter-trends, and acted as a lightning rod for dissenting views about the essence and direction of the movement. It will furthermore be argued, against the grain of most historiography of the movement, that the cohesion of Western Zionism was partly based on common attitudes toward *Kultur*. Chapter 4 discusses the lionization of Zionist heroes through the Congresses, and the conceptualization of the Zionists' "New Man." Beginning in Chapter 5, the more material expressions of Zionist culture, which were not exclusively tied to the Congress days, will be explored. These are analyzed as the artistic and photographic dimensions of the movement, which enabled Jews literally to see a Zionist national culture. While Zionist art was more suggestive and subject to interpretation, the movement's photography was often augmented by travelogue-type or scientific reports and purported to carry great authority and veracity. Specifically, the visualization of Zionist culture in Pal-

estine will be investigated in Chapter 6. Finally, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), the main fundraising unit of Zionism, which was the principal instrument connecting Western Jewry to the Zionist project, will be analyzed as the most effective transmitter of the myths and symbols inciting Western Jewish participation in Zionism. It was the means by which most Jews experienced the movement by 1914 and integrated it into their lives. The JNF, together with the Congress as an institution, the so-called *Kulturdebatte*, and the visual depictions of the movement continually referred to each other and helped concretize a discourse on Zionism that represented the entirety of the movement to prewar Western Jewry.

Interestingly, major trends in Zionist historiography have impeded the investigation of how Zionism was conveyed and understood in the form of myths and symbols through these aspects of Zionist national culture. In particular, the history of Zionism has tended to examine “the problem of culture,” or *Kulturfrage* in early Zionism within the contexts of the Hebrew revival, political feuds, or biography. Furthermore, historians of Zionism have been mainly concerned with what Zionists said and wrote about culture in the movement. They tend to neglect what Zionists at that time saw as culture and grasped as culture.<sup>22</sup> In large part, this is due to their categorical avoidance of sources which were used as “propaganda” and “agitation.”<sup>23</sup> As an end result, historians have ignored or obscured the implications of the popular means by which the movement was received in Europe for the first generation of Zionism’s existence. Yet these very means of popular dissemination represented vital aspects of *Kultur* to the early Zionists.

The novelty of the attempt to bring forth a Zionist national culture in Western Jewish history also has been deemphasized due to the assumption of many writers that the longing for a Jewish home in Palestine was always deeply ingrained in the Jewish consciousness, and that the advent of modern Zionism was a more or less predetermined event.<sup>24</sup> The history of Zionism has often been depicted from the perspective of Jewish statehood, and the processes that contributed to this are seen as part of a messianic or secular-national teleology.<sup>25</sup> From this point of view, the notion that there might not have been a Jewish State, a substantial Jewish presence in Palestine, or a viable Zionist Movement is virtually unthinkable. Moreover, a teleological standpoint takes for granted the existence of a Jewish people with a common culture. This assumption is questionable. When the Zionist

leader Nahum Sokolow observed in 1903 that “we don’t even have a people yet,” he underscored a diametrically opposed idea.<sup>26</sup> The early Zionists’ first major task was the creation of the Jewish people as a national-cultural entity.<sup>27</sup>

Early Zionism confronted the reality of a Jewry deeply splintered along religious, geographical, linguistic, social, economic, and political lines, coupled with a Jewish community in Palestine that was a small, precarious, and heterogeneous minority.<sup>28</sup> This compelled the movement to invent ways to overcome these awesome obstacles. One of the most important developments in the service of this goal was the fabrication of a national culture with which European Jews could identify without setting foot in Palestine. The national culture fashioned by the early Zionists, therefore, played a vital role in establishing the movement as a possible though supplemental nationality for the Jews of Central and Western Europe. It was a prodigious force in the Jews’ conception of a Jewish State, comprising an established Jewish settlement in Palestine and a Jewish people defined on the basis of an autonomous nationality. And one could be part of this nationality without living in the territory that served as its focus.

The analysis which follows probes the reception of Zionist culture primarily by Western and Central European Jews who identified with the movement. Such Jews were “characterized by a high degree of assimilation in the majority cultures of which they were a part, a detachment from both Yiddish and orthodoxy, a completed secondary school degree, and a strong likelihood of university or professional education. Socioeconomically, they were usually middle class, highly urbanized, and had fewer children than the surrounding population.”<sup>29</sup> There were numerous university students in the Zionists’ ranks, many of whom had recently emigrated from Eastern Europe, whose incomes were chronically lower than their middle-class tastes and outlook.<sup>30</sup> Ideas and images of Zionist culture were available to this group in cafes, university and Jewish community reading rooms, Zionist society reading rooms and social groups, and through literary or journalistic subscriptions.<sup>31</sup> They were conveyed in many forms: through participation in the Zionist Congresses and local meetings; through verbatim reports of such events in the Zionist press and in bound volumes; and through periodicals, newspapers, books, pictures, postcards, and materials produced or expressly endorsed by the Zionist Organization.

The apprehension of Zionism by bourgeois European Jewry around

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the turn of the century was significant because it established enduring paradigms for Western Jewish perceptions of the Zionist project. Such perceptions were in fact adopted by some Jews who went on to forge new lives for themselves in Palestine, usually after 1918, but most Western Zionists remained in Europe and were not called on by the movement to accept this ultimate challenge. Zionist culture did not immediately foresee the European Jewish bourgeoisie as the settlers of Zion, nor did it consistently appeal to them to immigrate in order to solve their own “Jewish Problem.” Nevertheless, Zionism regarded all of its followers as full members of the Jewish nation. The “vicarious nationalism” that it engendered is quite possibly a unique feature of Zionism. Although the reception of Zionism occurred as part of the dialectic between Zionist culture as imagined by the movement’s founders, and the realities of the Jewish and non-Jewish world, its paradigms have become an important part of the self-identity of Western Jews. This was in force long before the actual birth of the Jewish State.

The officially sanctioned, extra-territorial dimension of Zionism in one sense assisted in reducing the movement to an interest or cause in which one could be involved when time and energy permitted. It also abetted Zionism’s perception by Western Jews as something ultimately meant for Jews other than themselves, or a charity, whereby participation meant giving money. At the outset, Zionism purported to replace the Jews’ diverse national sentiments with loyalty to a Jewish nation. For Western Jews it emerged as a contingent national identity; one could be a Zionist, and remain a good German or Englishman, as the vast majority did. Yet from a different perspective, Zionism even in its prewar phase was able to relate a matrix of myths and symbols intimating the possibility that “Israel might live again as a nation” in the modern world for the assimilated Jews of Europe – that could be transformed into real intellectual, social, and political alternatives. At the conclusion of the last Zionist Congress before the First World War, an editorial in London’s *Jewish Chronicle* summed up the Zionist world which appeared to be unfolding through Zionist culture: “When we think about the gymnastic displays on the one hand, and the determination to found a university on the other, and remember all else that is going forward – the serious development of colonisation work in Palestine, for instance – it seems that the ‘three Ms’ demanded at one time – Mind, Muscle, and Men – are now forthcoming by the Jews in their effort to become a nation.”<sup>32</sup>

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Excerpt

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## CHAPTER ONE

## CONGRESS-ZIONISM IN MOTION

**T**he preeminent institution of the prewar Zionist Movement was its Congress, which convened on eleven occasions: seven times in Basel and once each in London, the Hague, Hamburg, and Vienna. The Zionist Congress was a novel innovation in Jewish political life, since it represented the first attempt to create a forum for Jewish national self-definition and policy that would include the whole of Jewry. The First Congress, which met during August 29–31, 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, fostered a political liturgy, national ceremonies, and a variety of myths which to a large extent determined the content of Zionist culture for the Jews of Central and Western Europe. Thereafter, succeeding Congresses provided the single most powerful force in transmitting Zionist goals and ideals to the party faithful and the broader Jewish audience. Their inspirational impact was visible not only to direct participants; it also enabled delegates and spectators to represent the movement enthusiastically in their communities as living extensions of Zionist culture.<sup>1</sup>

Shmarya Levin, an East European Jew who became a leading Zionist emissary to the West, conveyed a vivid sense of the Congresses that was widely shared when he recalled that

the impression of the Congress was ineffaceable. The praesidium on the tribune, with the majestic figure of Herzl at its head, called up in my mind the descriptions of the ancient Sanhedrin. I forgot for the moment our condition, helpless and unprotected. I only saw before me the representatives of an ancient, cultural people, and I believed that with the power behind them they would move mountains and build up worlds.<sup>2</sup>



Indeed, the Congress became the framework and symbol that helped assure the coherence, viability, and respectability accorded Jewish nationalism through Zionism. With the parliament of the incipient Jewish State in its center, the Congress developed a pattern of visual imagery, interactive deliberations, and ancillary activities which became a microcosm of the new Jewish civilization that Zionism hoped to engender. It concretized the idea that a Zionist national culture had been called into existence while simultaneously providing a means for the dissemination of much of the movement's culture. The Congresses cultivated, as well, a carefully groomed image of statesmanlike respectability in European gentile culture at large, establishing the central myth that the Zionists represented the whole of Jewry, on a nearly equal footing with the existing governments of the world.

In many respects, the Zionist Congresses enjoyed rapid success in developing effective secularized liturgy and ceremonial forms. Already at the First Congress, for example, one of the most significant parts of this liturgy found its expression in its opening session, featuring the entrance of the praesidium to tremendous ovations. Herzl's presidential address to the assembly followed, and was complemented by an assessment of the Jewish condition delivered by Max Nordau, the second great embodiment of early Zionism. Characteristically, the opening and close of the principals' speeches were greeted by choruses of cheers, applause, and hat, handkerchief, and flag waving. The rhythms of nationalism thus initiated at the First Congress sustained the perception of the institution as the nucleus of a nascent Jewish State and were powerfully reinforced by subsequent national homage. Indeed, it might be said that this is the way that all European political movements proceeded; the very normalcy of Jewish nationalism, in this regard, was crucial for its acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, though the evolving spectacle of the Zionist Congresses came to satisfy Herzl's penchant for imagery and detail, the institution of the Congress itself was far from his original design. In fact, Zionism's primary institution materialized in large part through improvisation. Herzl himself had initially favored a popular newspaper as the chief instrument for drawing attention to Zionism, but was forced to drop this project because of insufficient finances.<sup>4</sup> Later, in *Der Judenstaat* (1896) he called for "the center of the incipient Jewish movement" to be an elitist body he termed "the Society of Jews." At this stage in his thinking, Herzl hoped to gather a number of

well-known Jews from business, politics, the arts, and the rabbinate and had made a point of visiting well-placed Jews in London and the continent by November 1895. From Herzl's perspective it was most important to win the backing of Jewish industrialists, dignitaries, and financiers; they would comprise the movement's central policy-making body, and it would be their duty to perform the "political and scientific" tasks necessary for the foundation of the Jewish State.<sup>5</sup> His "Society" was to be, in effect, a committee of notables which Herzl also envisioned would provide the movement with much of its necessary capital.

The influence of Nordau, Herzl's trusted colleague, helped transform the idea of a "Society of Jews" into that of a "Zionist Congress." There is no suggestion in Herzl's voluminous writings that portended a deliberate imitation of an existing legislative body, such as the French Chamber of Deputies or Austrian Parliament for the First Congress – although his familiarity with these assemblies undoubtedly played some part. Herzl drew his famous sketch of the "Jewish Parliament" between the First and Second Congresses.<sup>6</sup> Nordau was chiefly concerned that Zionism should be perceived by Jews and non-Jews as a democratic movement, and should therefore assume the form of a representative assembly. He believed that in order for Zionism to succeed, the Jewish masses, the Eastern Jews themselves would have to participate in the governance of the movement. It is doubtful that Nordau sincerely believed that Zionism ought to be rigorously democratic; but, because he felt that the most prominent European Jews would remain aloof from the plan, Nordau pressed Herzl to alter his proposal.<sup>7</sup> Nordau's advice was corroborated by Herzl's father, Jakob, in whom the leader also placed a good deal of confidence.<sup>8</sup>

Herzl reiterated this idea at a crucial planning session in Vienna, attended mostly by members of small Jewish nationalist societies from Berlin and Vienna, which decided to call "a general Zionist Congress" to be held in Munich. By demanding an all-encompassing forum on the *Judenfrage* rather than a convention which included Jewish charitable societies, Herzl managed to cast the nascent movement as a grand exercise in state-building – while also incorporating the movement's directive of saving the most wretched Jews.<sup>9</sup> Predictably, the notion of the Zionist Congress as a representative body was ridiculed. Nonetheless, had it not assumed a parliamentary appearance in 1897, the movement probably would have incurred many more accusations