

Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion

During the first half of the twentieth century, nationalizing processes in Europe and Palestine reshaped observant Jewry into two distinct societies, ultra-Orthodoxy and national-religious Judaism. Tracing the dynamics between the two most influential Orthodox political movements of the period, from their early years through the founding of the State of Israel, Daniel Mahla examines the crucial role that religious-political entrepreneurs played in these developments. He frames the contest between non-Zionist Agudat Yisrael and religious-Zionist Mizrahi as the product of wide-ranging social and cultural struggles within Orthodox Judaism and demonstrates that at the core of their conflict lay deep tensions between rabbinic authority and political activism. While Orthodoxy's encounter with modern Jewish nationalism is often cast as a confrontation between religious and secular forces, this book highlights the significance of intra-religious competition for observant Jewry's transition to the age of the nation state and beyond.

Daniel Mahla is an assistant professor of modern Jewish history at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich.

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Daniel Mahla
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From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel

DANIEL MAHLA

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page viii
<i>A Note on Terminology</i>	xiii
Introduction: Contentious Dynamics and the Transformation of Religion	I
1 Of Priests and Prophets: Social and Political Activism among Orthodox Jews	24
2 The Genesis of Orthodox Political Camps	51
3 Interwar Poland: Formative Competition within the Kehillah	75
4 Divisive Land: The Jewish Settlements in Mandatory Palestine	105
5 A New Era in Orthodox Relations	131
6 Emerging Israeli Milieus	159
Epilogue: Orthodox Dynamics in the Twenty-First Century	186
<i>Appendix</i>	198
<i>Notes</i>	203
<i>Bibliography</i>	268
<i>Index</i>	296

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Acknowledgments

ix

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Acknowledgments

xi

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A Note on Terminology

Expressions such as *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) and *aliyah* (Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel) derive from Jewish tradition, and are thus laden with symbolic significance. For this reason, I use *aliyah* primarily in ideological contexts, while referring to actual processes of migration in more prosaic terms. (For more on the ideological aspects of Zionist *aliyah*, see Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014].) References to the land on which the Zionists intended to build their state posed an even greater challenge in composing this study, as there was no generally accepted name or even geographical demarcation in use during the period under consideration. Although it is not a neutral term either, I adopt the name (Ottoman/Mandatory) Palestine when referring to the physical location, in contrast to ideological/theological debates for which I deploy *Eretz Yisrael*.

Similar difficulties arose when I considered how to refer to the very subjects of this study. According to convention, English-language literature generally uses the term “Orthodox” to describe Torah-observant Jews, and I have adopted that descriptor as well, despite the fact that it is etymologically inaccurate (orthodox meaning the adherence to the accepted creeds). *Haredi*, the term most frequently used in contemporaneous sources, shifted in meaning over the course of the first half of the twentieth century: whereas it was originally used as a general description of Torah-observant Jewry, it later came to connote specifically non-Zionist or ultra-Orthodoxy. I have therefore chosen to refer to my subjects as non-Zionist Orthodoxy versus religious Zionists during the earlier period under consideration and as ultra-Orthodox and national-religious

Jews during the latter decades of this study. These terms allow me to highlight such developments and to underscore the novelty of these unique group formations.

Some of the challenges inherent in these questions of terminology stem from the fact that many of the labels used to describe Jewish collective formations are borrowed from the Christian context. This includes the term “religious,” an adjective that in its modern use is closely tied to societal and political developments in the Christian world. Nevertheless, I use this expression in order to distinguish Orthodox activists from their secular or secularist opponents, without intending to exclude other forms of religious Judaism. (In truth, while other Jewish denominations such as the Reform and Conservative movements were strong forces in Germany and the United States during the first half of the twentieth century, their role in the emerging state structures in Palestine remained limited.)