

The Jews

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Let us begin with the end. It has not escaped attention that the execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his family on 17 July 1918 was directed by Yakov Moiseevich Sverdlov (1885–1919), the first chairman of the Soviet government. The image of a Jew administering the *coup de grâce* to the Romanov dynasty and to tsarist Russia was at one time emblematic of the striking role of Jews in the Russian Revolution, a source of one of the twentieth century's most potent controversies. Well before the Bolshevik seizure of power, however, Russian Jews had already imprinted themselves on world consciousness, not as regicides but as pogrom victims and impoverished refugees. During its final decades, over 2 million Jews fled the Romanov empire for points west (Europe and especially America) and, in far smaller but historically no less significant numbers, south (Ottoman Palestine). Among the enormous waves of human migration from Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in fact, only the Irish matched Russian Jews in the magnitude and permanence of their departure.

Many explanations have been offered for these remarkable phenomena, but one has tended to overshadow them all: that a deeply anti-Semitic Russia, alone among the European great powers at the end of the 'long nineteenth century' (1789–1914), had failed to emancipate its Jews.¹ In a display of what the historian Tomas Masaryk called Russia's 'Christian medievalism', the tsarist autocracy confined its Jewish subjects to the 'Pale of Settlement' in the empire's western borderlands, at a safe distance from most ethnic Russians. In addition to territorial containment, a vast labyrinth of discriminatory laws – 'exceeding in volume the [entire] Code Napoleon', as a liberal Russian journal lamented in 1885 – restricted Jews' choice of career, their ability to own real estate, and countless other arenas of daily life.²

¹ One other state, Rumania, also maintained official discrimination against Jews until after the First World War.

² *Vestnik Evropy* (January 1885): 461.

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The history of Russian Jewry has thus appeared as a self-reinforcing triad of discrimination, emigration and revolution, a turbulent reflection of the tsarist doctrine of 'Orthodoxy Autocracy and Nationality' inaugurated by Nicholas II's great-grandfather and namesake, Tsar Nicholas I. And yet, like that doctrine, the image of Russian Jewry as driven by state-sponsored repression to mass exodus or revolutionary struggle barely begins to capture the deeper structures of official policy, the forces at work within Jewish society and the dynamics of the Russian-Jewish encounter.

The present chapter explores these issues over the course of two and a half centuries, divided into three unequal periods. The first, a prologue, concerns the era prior to the partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, during which Jews were legally barred from Russia. The second, extending from the partitions to the Great Reforms of the middle of the nineteenth century, surveys the earliest efforts by the tsarist government to reform its newly acquired Jewish population as well as the currents of pietism and enlightenment that began to recast Jewish society from within. The third, extending from the Great Reforms to the First World War, traces the increasing presence of Jews in Russian society, the rise of independent Jewish political movements and the emergence of the so-called 'Jewish Question' at the heart of debates about modernity and empire in Russia.

The pre-partition period

By the year 1600 the majority of the world's Jews lived in the eastern half of Europe. Rising persecution in the West, including massacres by Crusaders, accusations of ritual murder and host desecration, and numerous expulsions from cities or entire countries, had driven hundreds of thousands of Jews eastwards, where leaders of relatively less urbanised (and more tolerant) lands promoted Jewish settlement in order to stimulate commercial activity and fiscal vigour. Russia's neighbours, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire, dividing between them the East European corridor from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south, were the principal recipients of this migration. They quickly became the demographic heartland of Jewish civilisation for much of the early modern period.

This historic migration from Western to Eastern Europe halted abruptly at the border of Muscovite Russia, whose rulers repeatedly banned Jewish settlement. Muscovy's long-standing fear of proselytizing by foreign faiths had crystallised, in the Jewish case, during the so-called 'Judaisers' (*zhidovstvuiushchie*) controversy in the late fifteenth century. While it is by no means clear that the

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'Judaisers' or their teachings bore any substantive relation to Judaism, their legacy was a strident Judeophobia among Muscovy's clerical and political elites. But not, apparently, among Russians at large: prior to the nineteenth century, Russian popular culture was largely free of references to Jews, if only because of the absence of sustained contact with them.³ The occasional exceptions to the ban on Jews in Russia were typically granted at the behest of Christian merchants eager to buy and sell goods with Polish Jews at annual trade fairs in Riga, Kiev, Nezhin and elsewhere.

Under Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725), pragmatic considerations gained strength. While bans on Jewish settlement were not rescinded, neither were they renewed. Peter imported a number of Jewish converts from the Netherlands and employed them at various levels of government, from court jester to chief of police in the newly founded city of St Petersburg. His successors, however, quickly reverted to a hard line. In 1727, for example, Catherine I (r. 1725–7) extended the ban on Jews to the recently acquired Ukrainian territories. Empress Anna (r. 1730–40) renewed the ban, suggesting possible difficulties with its enforcement. Anna also presided over the public burning in St Petersburg of Baruch Leibov, a Jewish merchant accused of instigating the conversion to Judaism of a Russian naval captain as well as of torturing a Christian girl in order to obtain her blood for ritual purposes. Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth I (r. 1741–61) inaugurated a campaign of forced conversion of Russia's non-Orthodox subjects, including Muslims and Jews, and reissued older decrees barring Jews from Russian soil. In response to a petition from Christian merchants in Riga requesting special permission for their Jewish counterparts to do business in the city, Elizabeth famously declared, 'I desire no mercenary profit from the enemies of Christ.'

Even as Jews were repeatedly barred from coming to Russia, however, Russia itself was coming to the Jews, an unintended consequence of its successful wars against the Polish and Ottoman states. The annexation of eastern Ukraine from Poland in 1667 brought thousands of Jews *de facto* under Russian rule. Conquests in the Baltics (1721), the Crimean peninsula (1783) and the northern littoral of the Black Sea (1791) – the last two seized from the Ottoman Empire – similarly placed significant numbers of Jews under the dominion of the tsars. The most fateful recasting of borders came, however, with the three-stage partition of Poland (1772, 1792, 1795), as a result of which some half a million Jews – the largest Jewish population of any country in the world – were transformed into subjects of the Romanovs.

3 J. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the 'Jewish Question' in Russia, 1772–1825* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 30.

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Early encounters

Russia was by no means the only country to acquire its Jews unintentionally. Prussia and Austria, the other participants in the partitioning of Poland, found themselves in a similar situation, as had France two centuries earlier with the conquest of Alsace and Lorraine. But these countries had had prior (if not very happy) experience with Jews, and the Jewish communities they acquired as a result of annexation were relatively small. Half a million Polish Jews could not be dealt with by the traditional method of expulsion – at least not in the imagination of eighteenth-century rulers.

Under Polish rule, Jews had achieved a degree of collective autonomy unsurpassed in their European diaspora. They possessed their own languages – Hebrew for liturgical and scholarly purposes, Yiddish as the vernacular. Their forms of dress, especially for males, were distinctive. They were highly concentrated in certain occupations (as tavern-keepers, estate managers, merchants and artisans) and maintained a dense network of communal institutions whose task was to sustain religious traditions and to secure the basic needs of the poor. While intimately enmeshed in urban economies and networks of exchange between land-owning aristocrats and enserfed peasants, Polish Jews typically lived in segregated quarters. They benefited from numerous exemptions from general laws even as they suffered from multiple forms of legal discrimination. Most importantly, Polish Jews sustained a system of collective self-government (including internal taxation and administration of justice according to Jewish law) that made Judaism not just a religion but a social order. Though not formally part of the hierarchy of estates that composed Polish society, in practice the Jews functioned as one of the many corporate elements in a highly segmented population.

Catherine the Great (r. 1762–96), who presided over Russia's annexation of eastern Poland, was determined to order things differently. As part of her campaign to fashion a European-style society of hereditary estates, Catherine embarked on a programme of absorbing her newly acquired Jewish subjects into the Russian social hierarchy while gradually dismantling separate Jewish communal institutions. Henceforth, Jews were to enjoy the privileges and obligations of members of the urban estates – the *meshchanstvo* (artisans and petty traders) and *kupechestvo* (merchants). On paper, at least, Catherine granted terms of integration to her Jewish subjects that went beyond what any of Europe's old regimes had offered.

In reality, however, the old structures of Polish-Jewish life remained largely undisturbed. It was not simply a matter of Catherine's sudden loss of

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enthusiasm for Enlightenment ideas of order and utility in the wake of the French Revolution. Hostility in the imperial court, as well as among the clergy and segments of the Christian merchantry, deterred the tsarina from relaxing the inherited prohibition on Jews in the empire's Russian heartland. By confining her Jewish subjects to the former Polish and Ottoman territories annexed by St Petersburg, Catherine in effect perpetuated the *cordon sanitaire* established by her predecessors, laying the groundwork for what in 1835 formally became the 'Pale of Permanent Jewish Settlement' (*cherta postoiannoï evreiskoi osedlosti*), a territory extending from Kovno to Odessa, roughly the size of France.

Quite apart from pervasive anti-Jewish sentiment, Catherine's integrative agenda ran up against the fact that, from a strictly utilitarian viewpoint, the costs of dismantling Jewish corporative autonomy threatened to exceed the benefits. Who, if not the local Jewish communal governing board, the *kahal*, would collect Jewish taxes for the imperial treasury? Who would record Jewish births and deaths, censor books in Yiddish and Hebrew and render justice at the local level? Stretched to the limit by its recent imperial conquests, the tsarist regime lacked alternatives to the *kahal* as an instrument of fiscal and social control. A similar logic helped preserve, at least in the short term, a relatively high degree of communal autonomy among other recently conquered peoples such as Poles and Finns.

During the initial decades of tsarist rule, in fact, the most significant threat to the *kahal's* authority came from within Jewish society itself. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the mystical-pietist movement known as Hasidism had fanned outwards from its birthplace in the Ukrainian province of Podolia as far north as Bialystok and as far south as Odessa. Investing new, person-centred meaning into traditional Jewish texts and practices, Hasidism offered its followers (the *Hasidim*) a kind of spiritual enfranchisement, making accessible the esoteric teachings of Jewish mysticism, or *kabbalah*. At the heart of the new movement was the figure of the *tsaddik* (holy man and wonder worker), whose charismatic authority contrasted with that of the traditional rabbi, the interpreter of Jewish law.⁴ While the *Hasidim* – in contrast to Jewish religious reformers in Central Europe – remained strictly within the bounds of Jewish law and liturgy, the movement's radically new leadership structure posed an unprecedented challenge to traditional communal and rabbinic

⁴ For an excellent recent summary of scholarship on Hasidism and Polish-Jewish society on the eve of the partitions of Poland, see G. Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

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authority. Hasidism assumed the character of a large but diffuse sect (its precise dimensions remain unknown), with separate houses of worship, charitable institutions, and quasi-royal 'courts' centred around the tsaddikim. The resulting threat to established Jewish elites – whose coercive powers were limited to begin with – gave rise to numerous intramural conflicts, including instances in which rabbis appealed to tsarist officials for assistance in their struggle against Hasidic rivals – and vice versa.⁵

Relations with gentile powers-that-be were traditionally the exclusive prerogative of the kahal. To put it more theoretically: if, as Max Weber argued, the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence is the defining characteristic of the modern state, then the kahal's monopoly on legitimate *recourse* to the gentile state was the guiding principle of Jewish political behaviour and the sine qua non of Jewish autonomy.⁶ It should be noted, however, that the challenge posed by Hasidism to the kahal's monopoly over access to tsarist authorities was an unintended consequence of the movement's growth, rather than part of some larger Hasidic plan to employ non-Jewish power in order to transform Jewish society. Most of the tsar's Jewish subjects at the time, Hasidic or not, wished above all to be left alone.

The same cannot be said for the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*), which during the early nineteenth century spread from its point of origin in Berlin to outposts in the Russian Empire such as Odessa, Riga, Shklov and Vilna. Like the larger European Enlightenment from which it derived, the Haskalah was less a coherent movement than a distinctive form of social criticism. It aimed to transform the Jews by recasting the way they were educated: stripping away accumulated superstitions, introducing secular subjects, replacing the corrupt Yiddish 'jargon' with German or Russian (along with revitalising the study of Hebrew) and steering Jews to productive labour, especially agriculture.⁷ In contrast to inward-looking Hasidism, and because its followers were so few and so isolated, the Haskalah in Russia looked to the state as an ally for Jewish reform. Isaac Baer Levinson (1788–1860), for example, who served as a translator for Russian forces during the Napoleonic Wars, submitted numerous memoranda to the tsarist government urging reform of

5 G. M. Deych, (ed.), *Tsarskoe pravitel'stvo i khasidskoe dvizhenie v Rossii. Arkhivnye dokumenty* (self-published, 1994).

6 E. Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 3–13.

7 On the Haskalah in the Russian Empire see I. Etkes (ed.), *Ha-dat ve-hahaim: Tenu 'at ha-haskalah be-mizrakh eiropa* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1993) and M. Zalkin, *Ba- 'alot ha-shahar: Ha-haskalah ha-yehudit ba-imparyah ha-rusit ba-me 'ah ha-tesha- 'esreh* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000).

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Jewish parochial schools and stricter supervision of Hebrew publishing. His major programmatic work, *Te'udah be-yisrael* (A Witness in Israel), publication of which was delayed for five years by Jewish opponents, bore the imprimatur of the Russian government.

Of course tsarist bureaucrats in the Petrine and Catherinian mould hardly needed Jewish dissidents to introduce them to Enlightenment ideas. In fits and starts, notions of economic utility and social engineering were beginning to compete with Muscovite Judeophobia to reshape government policies. The rhetoric of 'civic improvement' of the Jews, borrowed from earlier debates in Europe, was already present in the deliberations of various official 'Jewish Committees' under Alexander I (r. 1801–25), though with little or no effect on the ground. Real change began under Nicholas I (r. 1825–55), who gave Jews definitive evidence that the old (Polish) dispensation was gone. Like his predecessors, Nicholas sought to break down Jewish autonomy through state-sponsored 'merging' (*sliianie*) with the surrounding population. Unlike them, however, he took as his medium for accomplishing this aim not the embryonic hierarchy of urban estates but the imperial army. As part of his extension of compulsory military service to many of the groups inhabiting the formerly Polish territories, Nicholas decreed in 1827 that henceforth Jewish communities would no longer enjoy the privilege of paying extra taxes in lieu of sending recruits. Over the course of the next three decades, some 50,000 Jews served as soldiers in Russia's army, where the normal term of service was twenty-five years. Among them were thousands of 'cantonists', boys as young as eight or nine.

The introduction of compulsory military service produced what can arguably be called the first 'Russian' Jews. Many served outside the Pale, in Russia proper. Several thousand converted to Christianity. Most – including Yakov Sverdlov's grandfather – learned Russian and were exposed to Russian ways of life. But their integration was painfully incomplete: unless they converted, Jews were barred from advancing to the rank of officer, and veterans who survived the gruelling twenty-five years of service were forced to return to the Pale of Settlement, where once again they faced all the standard legal disabilities against Jews even as their former communities shunned them as outsiders. Those communities, too, were deeply shaken by the draft. The fact that the macabre job of selecting recruits was placed in the hands of communal authorities only deepened sectarian and class fault lines, producing numerous instances of rioting, kidnapping and denunciation. Although by mid-century some 50,000 Jews had been drafted, they were judged to have contributed little to the army's strength – certainly less than the value of the

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taxes Jews had previously paid for the privilege of exemption from military service.⁸

Other, less coercive strategies of ‘merging’ the Jews with the surrounding population were even less successful. Abolition of the kahal by imperial decree in 1844 stripped Jewish self-government of formal recognition by the tsarist state but hardly put an end to the institutions and practices of Jewish communal life.⁹ In an effort to weaken the grip of Jewish religious education, the government’s ‘Jewish Committee’ (1840–63; officially known as the ‘Committee for the Determination of Measures for the Fundamental Transformation of the Jews in Russia’) established a network of state-sponsored primary schools specifically for Jews. In the face of severe communal suspicion, however, only a few hundred boys enrolled annually. Similarly, when special agricultural colonies were set up in an effort to fashion a Jewish peasantry, only several hundred families took part, and many subsequently returned to their home communities. Like military service, neither secular schools nor agricultural labour gave ‘merged’ Jews rights equal to those of their Christian counterparts. Graduates of state-sponsored Jewish schools still required a gymnasium diploma in order to apply to an institution of higher education. Jewish agricultural colonists were kept carefully segregated from Christian peasants for fear that the former would revert to old habits and ‘exploit’ the labour of the latter.

For the time being, then, the tangible influence of Enlightenment notions of integration and social utility – whether championed by followers of the Haskalah or by tsarist bureaucrats – was slight at best. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, in fact, Russian Jewry as a whole was marginal – literally and figuratively – to imperial Russia’s political and cultural life, the object of a minor species of Orientalism along with gypsies and other exotic ‘Eastern’ peoples.

This state of affairs was destined to change, however, for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the Jewish population was expanding at an exceptionally high rate over the course of the nineteenth century. By the time of the 1897 census, there were some 5.2 million Jews in the Russian Empire,

8 M. Stanislawski, *M. Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), pp. 13–34; Y. Petrovsky-Shtern, *Evrei v russkoi armii 1827–1914* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), pp. 113–72.

9 A. Shochat, ‘Ha-hanhaga be-kehilot rusiya im bitul ha-kahal,’ *Tsiyon* 42, 3/4 (1977): 143–233; I. Bartal, ‘Responses to Modernity: Haskalah, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism in Eastern Europe’, in S. Almog, J. Reinharz and A. Shapira (eds.), *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, USA: University Press of New England, 1998), pp. 13–24.

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an approximately tenfold increase over the course of a single century, nearly five times the growth rate of the ethnic Russian population. Jews became the empire's fifth largest – and the largest non-Slavic and non-Christian – ethnic group.¹⁰ It is not that Jewish women bore markedly more children than others; nor was Jewish life-expectancy longer than that of most other ethnic groups. Rather, the key factors appear to have been a lower rate of infant mortality (possibly due to religiously prescribed hygienic practices and lower levels of alcohol consumption) along with dramatically higher rates of remarriage (as well as divorce), thus allowing individuals to create second families.¹¹

Robust demographic growth produced a population both young and mobile. By the end of the nineteenth century over half the empire's Jews were under the age of twenty. Internal migration brought hundreds of thousands of Jews out of *shtetlakh* (small rural towns, sing. *shtetl*) into rapidly expanding cities. Never before had so many Jews lived in one country and never, since their expulsion from ancient Israel, had Jews formed such a high proportion of the local population: by 1897 over a tenth of the population of the Pale as a whole, a third or more in cities such as Warsaw, Odessa, Lodz and Vilna, and an absolute majority in dozens of large towns across the Pale. By century's end, half the Jewish population lived in urban settings, as compared with 16 per cent of ethnic Russians and Latvians and 23 per cent of ethnic Germans and Armenians.

Demographic expansion, an increasingly youthful population and significant geographic mobility only intensified the centrifugal forces that had begun to weaken Jewish communal authority from within. As the *kahal* gradually lost its monopoly on recourse to outside powers, and as the tsarist state began to accept input from other, internally unsanctioned sources, a contest for authority was unleashed within the Jewish world that would define much of Russian-Jewish history for the next century.

¹⁰ Jews outnumbered Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians combined (4.1 million) Tatars (3.7 million) Kazaks (3.1 million), Georgians (1.4 million) and Armenians (1.2 million). While the empire's Muslims totaled some 14 million, they were divided into numerous ethnic and linguistic groups (e.g. Tatars, Kazaks, Bashkirs, Uzbeks). See H. Bauer et al. (eds.), *Die Nationalitäten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszählung von 1897* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1991), vol. II: *Ausgewählte Daten*, pp. 77–8.

¹¹ C. Y. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover, USA: University Press of New England, 2000), pp. 68–71; D. Ransel, 'The Ethno-Cultural Impact on Childbirth and Disease Among Women in Western Russia', *Jews in Eastern Europe* (Fall, 2001): 27–47.

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Into the whirlwind

One of the first groups to rise to prominence in that contest was a cohort of Jewish merchants whose livelihoods brought them into frequent contact with tsarist officials and at the same time made them economically independent of Jewish communal authorities. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Jews had come to dominate commercial life in the empire's western borderlands; some 27,000 registered Jewish merchants constituted nearly three-quarters of the merchant estate in the territories of the Pale. Dozens of them built mini-empires of their own as tax-farmers in the liquor trade, collecting millions of roubles for the state treasury (which depended heavily on revenue from the sale of vodka) and amassing considerable fortunes for themselves. Foremost among them was Evzel Gintzburg (1812–78). Like a good number of his colleagues, Gintzburg shared the Haskalah's aspirations to reform Jewish society and to break down the barriers separating it from the surrounding population. Unlike men such as Levinsohn, however, Gintzburg had proved his utility to the tsarist state and had direct access to high officials in the imperial capital.

Sensing a change in the political winds following the death of Nicholas I, Jewish merchants began to submit what would become an extended series of petitions to the government's Jewish Committee. In essence, these proposals called for St Petersburg to return to the estate-based approach adopted by Catherine the Great, that is, to 'merge' Jews with the surrounding population by incorporating them into the appropriate estates. This time, however, rather than automatically assigning the entire Jewish population to the various urban estates, only certain groups who had demonstrated their usefulness to society at large would qualify, and having been formally recognised as merchants, artisans, soldiers, etc., they would receive the same rights and privileges as other members of the given estate. Chief among the rights sought by Gintzburg and other merchants was the freedom to live and work outside the Pale, in the empire's vast Russian interior. The potential economic gains, for the merchants themselves as well as for the imperial treasury, were considerable. But so, according to Gintzburg, were the civilising influences that would flow from exposure to 'native Russians', the empire's 'ruling' nationality, in contrast to the Poles, Lithuanians and 'little Russians' (Ukrainians and Belorussians) among whom Jews resided in the Pale.¹²

¹² See the petition by Gintzburg and other Jewish merchants quoted in Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 50–1.

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In effect, Gintsburg and his fellow merchants proposed a dramatic widening of social and legal distinctions within the Jewish population. Yet they had something far broader in mind than their own well-being. The granting of freedom of residence and other privileges only to 'useful' Jews was meant to serve as a powerful instrument in the Jewish elite's struggle to transform the Jewish masses, and thereby to chip away at the wall separating Jews from their neighbours. As Gintsburg's secretary, the Haskalah enthusiast Emanuel Levin, put it in an 1859 memorandum to his employer, 'We must gradually prepare our co-religionists for the great epoch, make them worthy and capable of apprehending the grand blessing whose arrival, especially under the new spirit of the current government, we have good reason to hope for.'¹³

In 1859, the tsarist government under Alexander II (r. 1855–81) granted to Jewish merchants of the first guild the rights and privileges of their Christian counterparts, including the freedom to reside with their families and employees outside the Pale. Over the course of the next decade, petitions streamed into the Jewish Committee from students, artisans, retired soldiers and other groups eager to translate their usefulness into expanded rights – often with the implicit endorsement of Evzel Gintsburg or his son Horace, who in the meantime had moved to St Petersburg and established the House of Gintsburg as the empire's largest private bank. The result was a series of laws that extended the rights and obligations associated with specific Russian estates – including residential rights – to Jewish graduates of Russian universities (1861), to certain categories of Jewish artisans who were in short supply outside the Pale (1865), to Jewish veterans of Nicholas I's army (1867) and finally to Jewish graduates of all Russian post-secondary educational institutions (1879).

The policy of selective Jewish integration was consistent with St. Petersburg's general approach to ruling its non-Russian and non-Christian populations in the nineteenth century. In addition to serving as an instrument of social control within Russian society, the hierarchy of estates (*sosloviia*) also provided a technique of imperial management, allowing the government to assign privileges and obligations to corporate units within non-Russian ethnic groups, dividing the favoured from the unfavoured and binding the former to the imperial state. Prior to the Reform era, this practice was most visible at the top of the social ladder, as the tsarist state attempted to integrate non-Russian hereditary ruling elites (for example, among Poles, Baltic Germans, Georgians and Tatars) into the Russian nobility. Jews, however (along with Armenians, Old Believers and other minority groups), lacked such an elite, leading the

¹³ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 52.

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Reform-era government to focus instead on absorbing what it considered to be economically 'useful' elements of the Jewish population into the Russian estate hierarchy.

Russia's strategies of imperial rule were not the only model for the policy of selective Jewish integration. Indeed, in their public and private discussions of the subject, both tsarist officials and Jewish reformers were more likely to invoke the example of Jewish communities in Europe than that of other minority groups in the Russian Empire. Unlike Baltic Germans and Armenians, Jews were a truly pan-European minority. From the eve of the French Revolution to the aftermath of German unification, the so-called 'Jewish Question' had gained extraordinary prominence in European societies as the wave of Jewish emancipation swept across the continent from west to east – stopping abruptly, as had the Jews themselves in previous centuries, at the border of the Russian Empire. St Petersburg's Reform-era policy of selective Jewish integration can thus be understood as a cautious attempt to adapt European-style emancipation to the corporative structure of Russian society, which itself was not yet emancipated from the hierarchies of the old regime.

The results of selective integration were dramatic. By 1880, some 60,000 Jews were legally residing in the provinces of European Russia outside the Pale. By the time of the 1897 census, that number had risen to 128,343, while an additional 186,422 Jews were recorded as living in Siberia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic provinces.¹⁴ By century's end more than 314,000 Jews were thus living outside the Pale, with the largest single community in St Petersburg. 'It's apparent to everyone,' noted Dostoevsky in 1877 in his serialised *Writer's Diary* (*Dnevnik Pisatel'ia*), 'that their rights in choosing a place of residence have broadened immensely over the last twenty years. At least they have appeared in Russia in places where they weren't seen before.'¹⁵ And, as contemporaries were quick to note, in institutions where they weren't seen before: above all those of higher education, the leading incubator of Russia's nascent civil society as well as of the revolutionary movement. By the 1880s Jews accounted for 10 per cent of gymnasium students and 15 per cent of university students across the Russian Empire. Inside and outside the Pale, Jewish beneficiaries of selective integration were becoming an unmistakable presence in the worlds of banking and finance, journalism, and a host of

¹⁴ It is impossible, however, to determine how many of the latter group left the Pale thanks to selective integration and how many were descended from Jewish communities that had lived in these regions throughout the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ Dostoevsky, F., *A Writer's Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), vol. II, p. 908.

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white-collar professions whose ranks ballooned in the wake of the Great Reforms. Perhaps the most dramatic example was in the legal profession: by the 1880s, 13 per cent of the empire's lawyers and 20 per cent of apprentice lawyers were Jews. In cities such as Odessa, Warsaw and St Petersburg, the percentages were considerably higher.¹⁶

Jews also entered the ranks of virtually the entire spectrum of Russian revolutionary parties, from populists and terrorists to the multiple varieties of social democrats. In a handful of cases they were co-founders. Mark Natanson, a student at the Military-Medical Academy in St Petersburg, helped launch Land and Freedom, Russia's first revolutionary party, in 1878; six of the nine delegates to the founding congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) in Minsk in 1898 were Jews; after 1903, the leader of the Menshevik fraction of the RSDWP was Iulii Martov (1873–1923), grandson of the Hebrew and Yiddish publisher Alexander Tsederbaum (1816–93). Contemporaries and historians have argued passionately about whether the presence of Jews in the revolutionary movement was a symptom of their assimilation to the Russian environment (the 'non-Jewish Jew' theory) or, on the contrary, of a modern Jewish propensity to rebellion (intellectual and political) against the gentile order.¹⁷

Selective integration began to transform Jewish society as well, imposing stark new forms of inequality. Graduates of Russian gymnasia and universities formed a new 'diploma intelligentsia' whose status, like that of Gintsburg and his cohort of merchants, rested on institutions outside the purview of Jewish communities. Some, like the lawyer and later Duma (parliament) deputy Joseph Gessen (1866–1943), used their independence to detach themselves from Jewish society, while others, like the ophthalmologist Max Mandelshtam (1839–1912), took an active role in communal and national affairs, often competing with rabbinic or plutocratic elites. There were, to be sure, instances of co-operation between Jewish intellectuals and wealthy notables: one of the most prominent was the Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, established in St Petersburg in 1863. Initially conceived as a kind of headquarters for the Haskalah in Russia, the society's main achievement in its early decades was its massive subsidisation of scholarships for Jewish university students. Even more influential as a mouthpiece of the newly minted Jewish

¹⁶ See data in Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, pp. 218, 343, 348 and 354.

¹⁷ Among noteworthy recent contributions to the debate are E. Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); A. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti let vmeste (1795–1995)*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Russkii put', 2001–2); and Y. Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

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intelligentsia was the burgeoning Jewish press. The 1860s and 1870s witnessed the founding of nearly a dozen Jewish newspapers and journals in Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish, vehicles for (among other things) an explosion of Jewish literary creativity. The centres of the new Jewish print-culture included venerable cities such as Vilna and Warsaw but also newer communities based in Odessa and St Petersburg.¹⁸ To an even greater extent than networks of rabbis or merchants, the periodical press brought far-flung Jewish communities into contact with one another, fostering for the first time in Russia a sustained public conversation on Jewish issues of the day.

In the Russian press, too, that conversation was increasingly audible, not to say shrill. By the late 1870s, in fact, selective integration had begun to produce a notable backlash. Even the modest easing of legal discrimination against Jews, coupled with a general increase in social mobility made possible by the Great Reforms, was presented as putting ethnic Russians at a disadvantage in their own empire. Jews, not alone but most prominently among various minority groups, were already disproportionately present in the professions that constituted the building blocks of an emerging imperial civil society. In this sense, selective integration and urbanisation produced effects strikingly similar to those that had followed legal emancipation elsewhere in Europe. Anti-Jewish riots, accusations of ritual murder, calls for scaling back Jewish rights – all these periodically surfaced in *fin-de-siècle* Russia as they did in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Wilhelmine Germany, republican France and elsewhere.

Most striking in the Russian case were the outbursts of public violence against Jews. It is true that anti-Jewish riots had occurred sporadically well before the reform era, especially in southern cities like Odessa, where rapid Jewish in-migration stimulated ethnic hostility. But in the absence of a developed railroad network and means of mass communication, such incidents typically had been confined to a single town or city and were easily contained by police and military forces. By the 1880s this was no longer the case. The wave of anti-Jewish violence triggered by the assassination of Alexander II on

¹⁸ On the reform-era Jewish press, see J. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855–1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 66–122; A. Orbach, *New Voices of Russian Jewry: A Study of the Russian-Jewish Press of Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms, 1860–1871* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); and Y. Slutsky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit ba-me'ah ha-tesha'esre* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970), pp. 9–55. On the rise of a modern literature in Jewish languages in the Russian Empire, see D. Miron, *A Traveler Disguised: A Study in the Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), and Robert Alter, *The Invention of Hebrew Literature: Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

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1 March 1881, for example, quickly spread to dozens of cities, and while individual pogroms rarely lasted more than a few days, attacks continued across southern provinces of the Pale for over three years, reaching hundreds of cities and towns and claiming dozens of lives along with millions of roubles worth of property.

Both the causes and the effects of the 1881–4 pogroms have been the subject of considerable controversy. Contemporary conspiracy theories, according to which tsarist officials instigated the violence to deflect popular discontent from an incompetent regime, or revolutionaries organised the riots as a prelude to a broader uprising, have now been laid to rest. Even the most common contemporary explanation – that the pogroms were the bitter harvest of Jewish exploitation of the peasantry – has failed to withstand scrutiny, given that little seems to have changed in relations between Jews and peasants that could account for the sudden outbursts of violence, and in any event the pogroms were almost exclusively urban. In fact, historians have yet to provide a satisfying explanation of the events beyond the undeniable but vague fact of widespread social and economic dislocation in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs and other Great Reforms.¹⁹

Much has been made of the pogroms' effects on Russia's Jews, and indeed on modern Jewish history as a whole. Episodes of violence – pogroms in the 1880s, the expulsion of some 15,000 Jews from Moscow in 1891 and far more violent pogroms in the period 1903–6 – were certainly an important stimulus for rising waves of Jewish emigration. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that violence was the sole or even primary cause of the exodus. Significant numbers of Jews had already begun to leave the Russian Empire in the 1870s as a consequence of widespread poverty, the decline of social control by communal authorities (most rabbis opposed emigration) and raised hopes regarding life in countries that had fully emancipated their Jews. Like these long-term factors, emigration swelled gradually over time, spiking in the aftermath of pogroms but never losing its own momentum. To the underlying long-range factors was added, following the pogroms of the 1880s, a marked shift in official policy. Convinced that the Jews themselves were to blame for the outburst of popular hostility against them, the tsarist government responded in 1882 by banning new Jewish settlements in rural areas *within* the Pale. Soon thereafter, quotas

¹⁹ H. Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); I. M. Aronson, *Troubled Waters: The Origins of the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990); J. Klier, and S. Lambroza (eds.), *Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

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were established on admission of Jews to gymnasia and institutions of higher education, the medical and legal professions, and many other arenas of Russia's rapidly modernising economy and society. Jews' right to vote and stand for office in municipal elections was also curtailed. In effect, Alexander III (r. 1881–94) froze the mechanisms of selective integration (as he did the Great Reforms) without reversing their effects.

The potent combination of rising pressure from without – whether in the form of popular violence or the official narrowing of the paths of integration – combined with growing ferment from within, sharply politicised Russian-Jewish life. One of the first manifestations was the emergence of the Zionist movement. A characteristic early leader of the movement, the physician Yehuda Leib (Lev) Pinsker (1821–91), had been an ardent integrationist, a prominent member of the Odessa branch of the Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, until the pogroms forced a dramatic change of heart. In 1882, in the midst of plunder and assault, Pinsker published a searing pamphlet entitled *Autoemancipation!* in which he diagnosed anti-Semitism as an incurable psychosis and called on the Jews to put an end to their dispersion by settling en masse in a single territory – whether in Palestine or elsewhere.²⁰ Hundreds of Jewish students, declaring that 'we do not believe in the possibility of a bearable existence in Russia', enacted their own version of the Populists' 'going to the people' movement, visiting synagogues in cities across the Pale in an attempt to promote mass emigration to the ancient land of Israel.²¹ Though largely unsuccessful in the short term, with time Zionism would become one of the leading political orientations among Russia's Jews, and Russia would supply the majority of the tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants to Ottoman Palestine prior to the First World War.

Zionism was the earliest and most radical but hardly the only expression of secular Jewish nationalism in late Imperial Russia. True, the Jewish labour movement, whose origins go back to a series of strikes in the 1870s and 1880s by Jewish workers in Vilna and other cities in the Pale, began in a manner that can fairly be characterised as 'Jewish in form, socialist in content.' Georgii Plekhanov (1856–1918), the leading Russian Marxist of the time, lauded Jewish

²⁰ *Autoemancipation! Mahnruf an seine Stammesgenossen von einem russischen Juden* (Berlin: Commissions-verlag von W. Issleib, 1882). Pinsker's pamphlet was published anonymously and directed to Jewish leaders in Western Europe, whom he regarded as the sole possible organisers of mass Jewish emigration.

²¹ Quoted in Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 97.

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strikers as ‘the avant-garde of the workers’ army of Russia’.²² At its founding in 1897, the ‘Bund’ (the General Jewish Workers’ Union (Bund) in Lithuania, Poland and Russia) was militantly internationalist in orientation, pressing for class struggle against the Jewish plutocracy in the name of a broader revolutionary assault on tsarism. Over time, however, the Bund’s leaders came to doubt the willingness of ‘all-Russian’ social-democrats (including the Jews among them) to address specifically Jewish grievances. As the Bund zigzagged towards the demand for Jewish national autonomy within a post-revolutionary federal Russian state, its relations with Lenin’s All-Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party oscillated between coalition (the Bund was declared an ‘autonomous organisation’ within the RSDWP at the latter’s founding in 1898) and separatism (the Bund quit the RSDWP in 1903, only to grudgingly rejoin in 1906).

Even after the introduction of parliamentary politics in Russia in 1906, the Bund and the various Zionist parties (some socialist, others not) were less interested in gathering votes than in building alternative institutions on the Jewish street, from mutual aid funds and primary schools to para-military self-defence units. In this sense they resembled micro-societies in the making, secular alternatives to the dense network of traditional Jewish communal institutions that had governed life in the Pale for centuries. It was a sign of the far-reaching politicisation of Russian Jewry, moreover, that by 1911 even the representatives of tradition itself, namely the rabbinate, saw fit to band together in a self-styled ‘Brotherhood of Israel’ (Agudat Yisrael), bringing together leaders of Hasidism with their erstwhile orthodox opponents.

On the eve of the Great War, Russian Jewry thus presented a picture of tremendous ferment and fragmentation. It was not simply a matter of struggle between separatism and integration: the separatist camp itself was divided between traditional (religious) and modern (secular) variants, as well as between proponents and opponents of emigration, while integrationists were similarly split between those who aspired to join Russia’s emerging civil society and those determined to reconstruct that society via revolution.

For Russian history, of course, it was the integrationists among the Jews – not just regicides like Sverdlovsk, but the larger ranks of literate, urbanised entrepreneurs, professionals, writers, artists and others – who ultimately mattered most. What began in the medieval and early imperial periods as an outright ban against Jews on Romanov soil had given way, by force of imperial expansion at the end of the eighteenth century, to territorial confinement

²² Quoted in Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia: From its Origins to 1905* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 61.

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in the empire's western borderlands. A century later, under the influence of Enlightenment notions of utility and imperial consolidation, territorial confinement had been tempered by a partial and highly uneven integration of Jews into Russia proper. In the process, Russia's Jews were transformed from a marginal people – literally and figuratively – to a hotbed of self-reinvention, a lightning rod for debates about winners and losers in the modernisation of Russia's multinational empire.