# Beyond the Bima:

# Reconfigurations of Rabbinical Authority in Eastern Ashkenas, 1865–1902

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I, Nathan Samuel Kahn, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

#### Abstract

This thesis focuses upon the reconfiguration of rabbinical authority in Eastern Ashkenas during the last third of the nineteenth century through the action of several key figures. The period of study, 1865–1902, was characterized by great permutations in the world at large, Jewish society and culture, and in the realm of Jewish religious observance. Traditional rabbinical authority, long based on scholarship, was under threat from several areas, including governmental intervention, reform movements and urbanization. The growing prominence of the press transformed the Jewish public sphere, offering new opportunities and mobility to a Jewish society whose observance had previously been dominant. The resultant pressures upon the rabbinate challenged the office to retain communal integrity and required new platforms to preserve relevance. This thesis assesses the attempts of leading rabbinical figures to maintain a leadership position within Jewish society via other means.

The principal subjects of this study, Rabbis Isaac Rülf (1831–1902), Shmuel Mohilever (1824–1898) and Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (1817–1896), each adopted singular missions which defined alternative platforms in achieving increased authority and jurisdiction for the rabbinate. Rülf's activities in a pioneering use of the rabbinate, leading a cross-border, wide-ranging philanthropic relief project during the famine of 1868/9 and his early advocacy of a cross-border Jewish consciousness marked a new and innovative use of the office. Mohilever's call for measured, open dialogue between opposing factions, and for a broader, inclusive definition of Jewish society served as a potential roadmap for retaining communal harmony. Spektor's ground-breaking, lenient rulings expanded his rabbinical jurisdiction considerably and his efforts to provide maximum flexibility in traditional jurisprudence brought relief to many Jewish communities. In a concluding comparative assessment, this thesis finds similarities as well as important differences in the strategies employed.

## **Impact Statement**

This thesis addresses a topic which remains highly relevant to today's religious environment, one which increasingly tends towards conservative extremism and one in which the place of religion remains a critical issue in Jewish and modern society. The rise of religious fundamentalism, i.e. in the United States, Israel and Iran is often hallmarked by intolerance of opposing views, strident and toxic press and a narrowing of discourse in the political sphere. In many instances this trend is led by clerics, often defining their role as not only communal and religious leaders but as heads of political movements. As such the question of, 'what is a religious leader' and what should their role be, remains highly relevant. In the case of rabbis, the office remains one which generally attracts respect, or at least visibility and attention, and is still a potent platform for influence and activism, whether it be for philanthropy, providing religious direction or political leadership. What remains problematic for Jewish society as a whole is the ability to engage in meaningful, civil, crossdenominational dialogue leading to a definition and preservation of an overall Jewish solidarity and identity. An important element in addressing this critical issue is whether rabbis possess a sufficient degree of agency or will to impact the conversation in a positive and constructive manner. This thesis provides several potential responses to these questions, through the actions of important late nineteenth-century transitional figures, each of whom viewed their obligations as communal leaders as an essential mission as they sought to transform and expand the role of a rabbi in challenging times. Each subject assumed a responsibility to and for the greater Jewish community through different yet highly effective paths, exercising maximum manoeuvrability through the choices each made in their endeavour to lead and leave a mark. Although not always successful in their efforts, their voices in support of a cohesive Jewish community deserve expression in today's fractious environment and this work seeks to bring the wide and important scope of their activities to new light.

This thesis also contributes to scholarship via the substantial body of original research underpinning the cataloguing of collections published for the cross-border relief efforts in response to the 1868/9 famine. Over four thousand entries, including the names of individual donors, charitable societies, amounts and locations from which donations were received (see Appendix item 1 for an excerpt of the raw data collected) served to support the analysis of the Jewish community's contributions in the famine and allowed for the mapping of this relief effort (see Appendices 2–18). This digitized information will serve future research into the social and economic histories of the various donor and recipient communities and organisations as well as a genealogical resource for the substantial number of individual donors cited in the data.

## Acknowledgements

As I complete nearly six years of this project it is incumbent upon me to thank all of those who provided me with support, without which it would have been impossible to have reached its conclusion. First and foremost, I thank Sandy, my dear wife of forty-six years, who is the pillar of my life and my closest friend, advisor, and critic, and to whom I owe everything – thank you is grossly insufficient for the debt I owe and will always owe to her. Much of the years, months, days and hours spent closeted at my desk, in libraries, archives and travelling was time sacrificed from our lives together – her willingness to support my work has been boundless.

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This thesis has benefited substantially from many kindnesses done for me by many individuals. Giora Katz, Referent for Personal Papers at the Central Zionist Archives and Dr Yochai Ben-Ghedalia, Director of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem were instrumental in making available original correspondence and archival materials which were critical to my research. The Central Zionist Archives in particular agreed to provide access to their extensive materials during Covid, which was most helpful and kept my work on track. Professor

Rebecca Kobrin of Columbia University provided support as a local advisor which was extremely helpful, including securing an appointment for me as a visiting scholar at Columbia's Harriman Institute. My two years in residence at the Institute provided regular access to Michelle Margolis, the University's librarian for Jewish Studies whose guidance through Columbia's extensive resources was most productive. Rabbi Dovid Kamenetsky served as a resource for my work at the National Library of Israel, helping me to effortlessly locate relevant documents through the library's collections. Rabbi Yechiel Goldhaber graciously shared his original research on the chicory controversy of 1877 and Rabbi Eliezer Lipschitz was helpful in providing family oral history regarding his ancestor, Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz. I am indebted as well to Professor Adam Ferziger for several meetings during which he provided valuable suggestions and guidance. Discussions with Professor Motti Zalkin provided substantial input regarding the educational process during the period of study and Professor Vladimir Levin was helpful in several areas particularly in connection with the medal commemorating Rabbi Spektor. My good friend Rabbi Irwin Kula provided constant encouragement as well as an overview regarding the modern possibilities of the rabbinate, helpful as a contrast to the transition period of this study. Finally, with respect to languages, I extend my thanks to Dr Timothy Spence for his assistance with Russian newspaper resources and to Ms Weronika Szarafin for her help in connection with Polish publications. As well, and importantly, to Ms Andrea Widegreen, my German language tutor who has also become a good friend and who patiently taught me the intricacies of the language enabling me to read competently, both in modern print and Fraktur, an indispensable necessity for this thesis.

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#### **Note on Sources**

The Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) style for footnotes is utilised throughout. The use of this system allows footnotes to be readily accessible on the same page as the citation, and each chapter's footnotes are renumbered rather than continuous. The translations, both from Hebrew and from German are my own unless specifically otherwise stated. With respect to transliterations from Hebrew the traditional Ashkenasic pronunciations are mostly employed, reflecting the likely use during the period of study. No attempt was made to distinguish or standardise the transliteration between the Hebrew letters chet and hay, with the choice made as would be best understood by the reader, in the opinion of the author. Throughout this study the terms Traditional and Orthodox have been used interchangeably unless otherwise stated, referring to those who maintained traditional religious practice/observance. The term Ashkenas as utilised in this thesis refers to those within Jewish traditional practice who shared a common Nusach, the Ashkenasic prayers and liturgy. While Jews in the Pale of Settlement and in the West worshipped from similarly worded prayer books, the realities of their existence varied substantially. The daily life of Jews in the East was characterised by wide-spread poverty, a very dynamic demographic development in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. limited social interaction with non-Jewish beyond the economic sphere, and, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, more frequent cases of violence directed at them. In contrast, the western Ashkenasic Jews underwent a process of social advance and growing integration, despite lingering prejudice among large segments of the non-Jewish population. The actions of the rabbis represented in this study were dictated by these realities in which each operated.

Sources utilised for this thesis feature extensive use of archival materials, including from the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, The Central Zionist Archives (CZA), Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), The National Library of Israel, The Jewish Theological Seminary Library's rare document collection, and the Center for Jewish History in New York. These sources proved critical in identifying original correspondence, of particular relevance in connection with Rülf's extensive philanthropic and political activities in the famine of 1868/9, his involvement in the Kovno Circle, the expulsion orders of 1885, his reaction to the growing antisemitism in Germany and his later participation in the early Zionist movement. The six-volume publication, Ketavim L'toldot Hibat Zion V' yishuv Eretz Yisrael edited by Alter Druyanov, re-edited by Shulamit Laskov, served as a primary source for early correspondence regarding Hibbat Zion in general, and for Mohilever and Spektor in particular. Use of period German and Jewish press was extensive and included the German language newspapers Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, Der Israelit, Pfälzische Volkszeitung, Über Land und Meer Allgemeine Illustrirte Zeitung, which provided contemporary reportage regarding the famine of 1868/9, both in terms of the prevailing conditions and the various appeals for relief and importantly recording the value, geographic sources and identification of donors for contributions secured by the various relief committees. This raw data, consisting of over four thousand entries, served as input for the cataloguing of the donations contained in the relevant appendices. The German language press also reported regarding ongoing concerns of both the German and greater Jewish communities and also served as the target for ongoing correspondence from Rülf. Hebrew language newspapers included HaLevanon, HaMagid, HaMelitz and HaZefirah, which provided a forum for events affecting the Jewish community and *HaLevanon* in particular served as the arena for the ongoing

debate between Lipschitz and Mohilever. Newspapers in the English language included The Jewish Chronicle, which publication was instrumental in publicising details of the pogroms of 1881 and *The New York Times*, which provided coverage of events affecting the Russian Jewish community from an American perspective. The Russian and Polish press were consulted, including respectively, *Golos, Novoe vremia* and *Izraelita*. As the subjects of this thesis wrote principally in German (Rülf) or in Hebrew (Mohilever, Spektor and Lipschitz), the press in Eastern European languages was less central to this investigation. Other primary sources included letters, articles and books authored by the subjects of the study as well as sources from secondary materials, including presentations reflecting existing scholarship. Halakhic responsa were also consulted in connection with Spektor and Mohilever, providing an overview of their legal methodologies and in the case of Spektor underlining his penchant towards leniency in general and particularly in determining cases of agunot. Lipschitz's comprehensive Sefer Zichron Yaakov was utilised where deemed appropriate, always with a caveat that his historiography was neither neutral nor objective.1 The author of this thesis remained fully aware of his bias towards a rabbinate-centric version of events, which required particular care in its assessment, and verification via independent sources.2

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Regarding Lipschitz's bias, see Eli 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), p. 80, describing Lipschitz's recording of events as, 'self-serving in its zeal to promote the primacy of the rabbinic leadership, whose militant partisan Lipschitz was.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> With respect to the trend which began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in which the Orthodox viewed historiography to be 'a value in itself' and a way to 'define the nature of Jewish existence', see Israel Bartal, '*True Knowledge and Wisdom: On Orthodox Historiography*', in Studies in Contemporary Jewry X (1994), p.179.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The main body of this thesis is divided into three chapters covering the personal histories, development, and accomplishments of three rabbis as transitional figures and communal leaders within traditional, observant Jewish practice during the last third of the nineteenth century and a fourth chapter which analyses the parallel trajectories and the choices made by each. This study assesses the use of these figures' rabbinical platforms in transforming the role of the office during the period of study. In the final chapter the unique contributions of officiating rabbis Rülf, Mohilever and Spektor are reviewed and compared through the lens of three distinct and important categories: jurisdiction and authority, the public sphere and political activity. In each of these arenas the subjects' accomplishments were atypical for the period, marking them as pioneering figures in the use of their rabbinical platforms to expand their jurisdiction, and to substantially increase their authority through the use of the public sphere, particularly via the growing importance of the Jewish press and their political activism in a rapidly changing and challenging environment.<sup>3</sup> The subjects were chosen as case studies by virtue of their being original and outstanding individuals, with aspects of their accomplishments and legacies insufficiently reflected in scholarship, and serving in distinct geographies and backgrounds which guided their ability to make choices in addressing the substantial pressures faced by the rabbinate and the broader Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> Their diverse

<sup>3</sup> On the rise in importance and impact of the Jewish press see Roni Beer-Marx, 'Al ḥomot ha-neyar: 'iton ha-Levanon veha-ortodoksyah = Fortresses of Paper: The Newspaper HaLevanon and Jewish Orthodoxy (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-ḥeker toldot ha-'am ha-Yehudi, 2017). Also see Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p.124, with the press seen as 'as wise man preaching a new Torah'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For examples of challenges facing the officiating rabbinate see Simon Schwarzfuchs, *A Concise History of the Rabbinate*, Jewish Society and Culture (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1993), p. 98, 'there seemed to be no worse situation today than that of a rabbi', and Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism: First Encounters* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2002), p. 230, with rabbis as the target of maskilim, who viewed the rabbinate as the principal impediment to reform and integration, claiming that Judaism had been 'fossilised', focused on only what was permitted or prohibited.

and wide experiences to reconfigure their rabbinical roles were unique for the period and their actions in response to the challenges facing the rabbinical office and the Jewish community in both the West and East during the era of this study render them important exemplars of what a rabbi could be in the modern era. This thesis is specifically not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary hardships and challenges facing each community or rabbi nor is it intended as a review of the actions of all rabbis in Ashkenas during the period.

The subjects of this thesis were not the sole instances of efforts to transition rabbinical roles during the period of study. Other traditional rabbis who confronted the rapidly changing religious environment and who attempted to preserve and renew religious authority included Rabbis Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1820-1892) and Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1810–1883). While these figures were prominent within the Russian and greater Jewish communities, their activities were generally circumscribed and focused communally inwards, with an objective to preserve and further traditional observance and practice. Rabbi Soloveitchik was highly regarded by his contemporaries for his methodology of Talmud study, deemed essential for the preservation of traditional practice. Soloveitchik had also been politically active during rule of Tsar Nicholas I (reigned 1825–1855) in protesting, mostly futilely, the kidnapping by Jewish *khappers* of children under 12 years of age to fulfil the quota of obligatory military service imposed on the Russian Jewish community in 1827.6 Rabbi Salanter's efforts were equally focused on the preservation and promotion of traditional Jewish practice, primarily through his introduction and advocacy of the philosophy of Mussar, 'the effort and the means employed to attain religio-ethical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> I. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth*, 1st English ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), p. 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Judith Bleich, *Defenders of the Faith: Studies in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Orthodoxy and Reform*, Touro University Press Books (New York: Touro University Press, 2020), pp. 189–91.

self-perfection and self-restraint'. While this philosophy enjoyed significant impact within traditional circles, its influence beyond was not as great. Salanter's other activities, including his support for the Kolel Perushim, discussed in a later chapter and in his editorship of the short-lived journal of religious thought, Tevunah, were also aimed at preserving traditional and rabbinic practice, 'the strengthening of traditional Torah elite'.8 Salanter was also known to oppose any compromise with or incursion of outside secular influence, as noted in his refusal to write a letter of support for Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer's (1820–1899) rabbinical seminary, which incorporated secular studies in its program.9 This attitude contrasted with Rabbi Spektor, a subject of this thesis, who agreed to do so, notwithstanding that he was personally opposed to secular studies. Salanter's approach was in concert with the mainstream Russian traditional contemporary attitude during the period of study of closing ranks in attempting to prevent the incursion of innovation, which has been termed 'a major failing of the Russian rabbinate'. 10 In contrast to the activities of Rabbis Soloveitchik and Salanter, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816 – 1893), known as the 'Netziv', and who headed the prestigious Volozhin Yeshiva from 1854 until its closure by the Russian authorities in 1892 was reported to be prepared to accommodate, albeit on a limited basis, the government's demands regarding the introduction of secular studies at the school. 11 His influence beyond the walls of the yeshiva was however more limited, notwithstanding his later support for the Hibbat The subjects of this thesis notably sought to expand their Zion movement. jurisdiction beyond their communities, engaging substantially via the public and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Michael Stanislawski, 'Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate', in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *Jewish Religious Leadership: Image and Reality*, vol 2 (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), p. 440.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 439.

political spheres. It is this wider horizon of societal and political involvement which this study seeks to explore and bring to the fore.

The individuals featured in this study were either based in the Russian Empire or active within it. Their activities were deeply marked by prior developments. During the rules of Tsar Alexander I (reigned 1801 – 1825), and Nicholas I prominent rabbis, including Hasidic leaders, engaged in shtadlanut and in political cooperation with the Russian government. During the former period, 'the most important role was played by rabbis of national reputation, who were the effective leaders of transcommunal constituencies', specifically including Rabbis Chaim Volozhin (1749 - 1821) and Shneur-Zalman of Liady (1745 – 1812), the founder and first *Rebbe* of the Hasidic Chabad movement.<sup>12</sup> Jewish leaders strove to demonstrate their loyalty to the government, as stressed by Chaim Volozhin, 'it is all the more incumbent on us, who live in peace, thank God, under our glorious government's protective wing, to seek its peace and welfare with all ability and conscious thought'. 13 In the latter era, prominent rabbis, including Rabbis Yitzchak Volozhin (1780 – 1849) and the Hasidic leader Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (1789 – 1866) participated in the Russian government's rabbinical conference of 1843. In that conference however, the aforementioned participants were at odds; Volozhin had been inclined to consider the introduction of secular studies in his yeshiva as advocated by the government, whereas Schneerson was opposed. Yitzchak Volozhin has been regarded as, 'the most influential representative of his time of the moderate wing of rabbinic Judaism' although his position, in his attempt to cooperate with the government essentially set him apart from others in the mainstream traditional rabbinate.<sup>14</sup> The latter group was

<sup>12</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855*, 1st ed (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), p. 78.

largely opposed to accommodation with the government's objective at the conference, to the extent that Salanter, upon meeting Volozhin, was reported to have remarked, 'Rabbi Yitzchak, leave this path!' Other Hasidic leaders were active as well during the reign of Nicholas I i.e. Rabbis Yitzchak Meir Alter (1799 – 1866) the first Gerer Rebbe and Rabbi Yisrael Friedman of Ruzhin (1796 - 1850), who had together attempted to counter the decree promulgated in 1845 to ban traditional Jewish clothing by writing to Moses Montefiore asking him, albeit without success, to intercede with the tsar during the latter's visit to St Petersburg. 16 Subsequent engagement via shtadlanut and political cooperation with/or influence of Russian government authority, particularly following the dissolution of the Kahal in 1844 was mounted by competing groups of religious and communal leaders vying for the mantle to speak for the Russian Jewish community, 'a contest for authority was unleashed within the Jewish world that would define much of the Russian-Jewish history for the next century'. Among these groups vying for authority, rabbis featured prominently, including Rabbis Yisroel Salanter and Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, acting as, 'a shadow government' behind the scenes, allowing and preferring the wealthy shtadlanim in St. Petersburg to take the credit. 18 Indeed, 'the involvement of rabbinic figures in Jewish politics is one of the characteristics of 19th century Russian Jewish public life'. 19 This phenomena found its roots during the reign of Nicholas I and particularly following the dissolution of the Kahal which witnessed a religious realignment in Russian Jewry in which process rabbis played a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement, p. 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Glenn Dynner, The Garment of Torah: Clothing Decrees and the Warsaw Career of the First Gerer Rebbe in, *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, eds., IJS Studies in Judaica, vol 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 103.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, *Studies on the History of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 20), p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

key role.<sup>20</sup> Hasidic factions as well, led by Menachem Mendel Schneerson acting in the 1850s established their own, 'elaborate, effective political machine' utilizing 'modern political techniques' which enabled the *Rebbe* to be closely informed about government developments affecting not only the broader Jewish community but in particular Hasidim.<sup>21</sup> An important objective of Schneerson's activities had been to demonstrate to the Russian government that Hasidim, and not just the maskilim were loyal to and allies of the government and that the group did not represent a threat to social reform.<sup>22</sup> Schneerson represented, not just a 'Hasidic shtadlan' but 'the prototype of a modern political leader, able to represent the Jews to the government based on his leadership of a broad-based community'.<sup>23</sup>

Existing scholarship regarding the rabbinate in the period of study has predominantly been focused on the considerable stresses including the decline in respect and authority facing the office. Exploring the role of the rabbi in the early modern period, David Ruderman cited the statement by the Maharal, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1520–1609) that rabbis had already lost considerable prestige and had become wholly dependent upon the 'Roshim', the lay leaders. The 'great erosion of its [rabbinic] powers and the loss of prestige as a result of 'rabbinic divisiveness' during the eighteenth century's clerical campaigns against Sabbatian sectarianism and heresy and the failed attempts to create a rabbinic 'authoritative centre' have been described by Elisheva Carlebach. Pressure upon the office as a result of the impact of Hasidism as well as the challenge to rabbinic authority from religious reformers

<sup>20</sup> Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 521.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 300, 520.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 299, 520.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> David Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 1, 2, 123.

has also been studied by Francois Guesnet.<sup>26</sup> Michael Miller described the defensive efforts of the traditional rabbinate in Moravia, which strove to 'blaze a path between *nihilistic* Reform and *ossified* Orthodoxy'.<sup>27</sup> Shaul Stampfer, in his review of the roles occupied by communal rabbis, stated, 'if previously the rabbi had responsibilities which were seen as serving the community, in the nineteenth century functions that were far more narrowly defined became current'.<sup>28</sup> Mordechai Zalkin's work describing the economic and societal challenges facing the community rabbi in eastern Europe as well dealt extensively with the pressures facing these figures, including the issue of a greater number of rabbis vying for fewer open positions.<sup>29</sup> Considerably less, however, has been written about how rabbis in general, and traditional rabbis in particular, attempted to deal with these pressures upon their office or with the rabbinate itself, as posited by Michael Stanislawski: 'even in terms of intellectual or halakhic history, most of the crucial figures in the intricate history of East European Jewish Orthodoxy remain unstudied by critical historians'.<sup>30</sup>

There have been several limited attempts to deal with this lacuna including by Andreas Brämer, who described the rabbinate in the period of study as being 'in distress' and pointed out that, 'Rabbis enjoy the respect they earn; their stature only

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> François Guesnet, *Polnische Juden im 19. Jahrhundert: Lebensbedingungen, Rechtsnormen und Organisation im Wandel*, Lebenswelten Osteuropäischer Juden, Band 3 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), p. 387.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Michael Laurence Miller, *Rabbis and Revolution: The Jews of Moravia in the Age of Emancipation*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Shaul Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis, and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Mordechai Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory: Community Rabbis in Eastern Europe* (Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021). Also coverage in the press, i.e. in *HaMelitz* of 21 May 1897, issue 105, p. 1, which described the unparalleled joy experienced by yeshiva students upon hearing that a community's rabbi had died, as they all prepared and competed for the position. In archival sources as well, covering the open rabbinical post in Ostrowo for which 26 aspirants vied, see 'Die Anstellung des Rabbiners', YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Fach 3, No. 4, Box 5, Folder 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Stanislawski, 'Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate', p. 432.

offers them the opportunity to acquire respect and influence'. This allowed a rabbi to reach beyond his traditional portfolio of scholarship and expand the jurisdiction and authority of the office in other, new ways without specifically defining what these could be. Shaul Stampfer stated that while rabbinic leadership did not disappear, he posited that 'it came to be found more and more among heads of yeshivas and among *admorim* and Hasidic leaders'. All of the position of scholarship and expand the jurisdiction and arrange and the jurisdiction and authority of the office in other, new ways without specifically defining what these could be. Shaul Stampfer stated that while rabbinic leadership did not disappear, he among admorim and Hasidic leaders'.

Steven Lowenstein highlighted paths in which rabbis, including those who opposed innovation and reform, could engage in new tactics including appealing to public opinion via the press.<sup>33</sup> He also outlined other paths utilised by contemporary Orthodox rabbis, specifically the establishment of new educational institutions to incorporate a modern curriculum, citing in particular the work of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) in Frankfurt.<sup>34</sup> Mordechai Breuer's study of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany highlighted the advances wrought by seminaries in this geography, citing in particular the Hildesheimer school, which 'contributed to the training of a new type of Orthodox rabbi'.<sup>35</sup> David Ellenson's comprehensive study of the life and work of Rabbi Hildesheimer dealt with the latter's efforts and substantial accomplishments in addressing the challenge for the traditional rabbinate within German Orthodoxy, 'to compose a response which would take account of the transformations in the community while simultaneously affirming the eternality and unchanging divine nature of the *Halakhah*'.<sup>36</sup> Simone Lässig described rabbis' ability

<sup>31</sup> Andreas Brämer, *Rabbiner und Vorstand: Zur Geschichte der Jüdischen Gemeinde in Deutschland und Österreich 1808–1871*, Aschkenas, 5 (Vienna: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 88, 203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Stampfer, Families, Rabbis, and Education, p. 300.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Steven Lowenstein, 'Old Orthodox and Neo-Orthodox Rabbinic Responses to the Challenges of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Germany', in Wertheimer, *Jewish Religious Leadership*, pp. 481–503 (p. 495).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 497, 498.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Mordechai Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 137.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> David Ellenson, *Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1990), pp. 287, 290.

to utilise sermons and writing as a means to improve their stature as a reflection of Bildung, which had become a major theme for German Jewry.<sup>37</sup> Movements for religious renewal in the Russian Empire have been studied by Israel Bartal who identified the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a period when, 'it became ever more obvious to pious Jews that historical study in the spirit of Wissenschaft des Judentums involved criticism of sacred texts and was often permeated with a vehement anti-rabbinism'. This engendered a strong Orthodox response, often involving steps to circumscribe and thus attempt to strengthen observance and the position of the rabbinate.<sup>38</sup> This trend found a continuation via the previously described efforts of Yisroel Salanter and in the later work of Yaakov Lipschitz to similarly advocate separation and renewed dedication to traditional observance including the veneration of the rabbinate as a means to preserve community. More recent scholarship by Yochai Ben-Ghedalia dealt with philanthropy as a platform for rabbinic activism, a role pioneered by Rabbi Isaac Rülf, covered extensively in this thesis.<sup>39</sup> Steven Kessler's biography of Viennese Reform Rabbi Adolf Jellinek covers the rabbi's efforts to effect a 'non-destructive transformation' in keeping a 'fractious and diverse' community together, a position which was also the focus of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, a subject of this study.<sup>40</sup> In describing the distinction between pre-modern and modern rabbinical authority, David Ellenson used the term as between imperative and influential authority, inasmuch as relying on a rabbi's previous platform of scholarship alone would no longer suffice.41

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Simone Lässig, Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum: Kulturelles Kapital und Sozialer Aufstieg im 19.
 Jahrhundert, Bürgertum Neue Folge, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), p. 323.
 Bartal, True Knowledge and Wisdom, p. 179.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Yochai Ben-Ghedalia, 'Empowerment: Tzedakah, Philanthropy and Inner-Jewish Shtadlanut', *Jewish Culture and History*, 19, no. 1 (2018), pp. 71–78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Samuel Joseph Kessler, *The Formation of a Modern Rabbi: The Life and Times of the Viennese Scholar and Preacher Adolf Jellinek* (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2022), pp. 6, 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ellenson, 'Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Quest for Religious Authority', pp. 287, 290.

While this study incorporates and builds upon previous work, its overall objective and scope is to fill the gap in scholarship concerning ways in which several important rabbinical figures within the Ashkenasic Orthodox tradition could utilise their rabbinic platforms to adopt new missions in preserving and expanding their jurisdiction and authority. The main theme which runs throughout this study is the use by each of these prototypical figures of their individual rabbinical platforms as an influential springboard to establish authority beyond the age-old juridical and religious roles previously occupied by the traditional rabbinate, which functions had become increasingly under threat of irrelevance.<sup>42</sup> An exception to this approach is the presence in chapter three of Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz. While he was not a rabbi, his work, in conjunction with, and with the benefit of association with Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, served to elevate in prestige and perpetuate the identity and importance of the traditional rabbinical office within the Russian Empire.

Chapter two deals principally with the activities of Rabbi Isaac Rülf, and also sets the stage for the following chapters, highlighting the growing importance of the Jewish press in the period, the 1881 pogroms in the Pale of Settlement, and the rise of Zionism as a pre-political entity. The chapter details the causes and impact of the famine of 1868/9, which affected eastern Prussia and even more acutely western Russia, particularly the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Rülf's early rise to fame via his *Aufrufe* in which he described the suffering of the victims in the famine served as a platform for his widespread recognition, utilising his clerical title as the rabbi of Memel as a means to validate trust. All Rülf's written appeals had become so effective,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Causes for the erosion of traditional position of the rabbinate included the growth of religious publishing resulting in a 'knowledge explosion' so that rabbis no longer enjoyed a monopoly on scholarship; see Ruderman, p. 99, and government limiting of rabbinical powers of enforcement and that rabbis had been reduced to 'mere functionaries for certain tasks'; see Shnayer Z. Leiman, 'Rabbinic Responses to Modernity', *Jewish Studies*, 5 (Fall, 2007), pp. 20–21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Aufruf!', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 29 Januar 1868), Heft 5 ed., p. 82.

and via the medium of the press so widely circulated, that over the course of the famine he became the authority for distribution of relief to the East and the amounts he collected dwarfed those collected by other entities of which there were several, described in detail in the chapter. 44 The total funds collected and distributed by Rülf's Memel committee are documented in the appendices. They depict the sources and wide reach of his relief initiative and compare and contrast its results with the collections of other committees which also solicited donations.<sup>45</sup> The chapter's title, 'From Famine to Fame' aptly applies to Rülf's unlikely journey from a virtual unknown rabbi serving in a relatively remote town in the Prussian Empire to a position of renown within the greater Jewish community. Rülf's continued use of the print medium combined with his mobility, including travel across the eastern border, regarded at the time as adventurous and somewhat dangerous, helped to burnish his reputation.<sup>46</sup> In addition, and perhaps as a result of Rülf's experience and travels in the East where devout religious tradition and practice impressed him deeply, he became an advocate for cross-border Jewish solidarity and a national Jewish consciousness, an objective he pursued throughout his career.<sup>47</sup> In reconfiguring the role of a rabbi within the German rabbinical milieu, Rülf's options were limited; as a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> See Appendix item 7, by 1869 Rülf's Memel committee received donations which were >3x greater than the next largest collection.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Appendices 4 and 5 provide data regarding the composition of donors to the famine relief committee based in Lyck during 1868 and 1869 respectively. Appendices 6 and 7 provides a comparison of the principal committee's receipts of donations during 1868 and 1869 respectively. Appendices 8 and 9 outline the geographic sources of the committee's collections in those years. Appendices 10 and 11 outline the geographic sources of donations and the composition of donors to the committee based in Schippenbeil. Appendices 12–16 detail the geographic sources and composition of donors to the various committees of the *Der Israelit* newspaper. Appendices 17 and 18 provide data covering Rülf's Memel committee during 1869, including geographic sources of donations and the composition of donors.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> For contemporary views contrasting the border crossing see Börries Kuzmany, *Brody: A Galician Border City in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2017), p. 1 and Chaim Aronson and Norman Marsden, *A Jewish Life under the Tsars: The Autobiography of Chaim Aronson, 1825–1888* (Totowa, NJ: Allanheld, Osmun, 1983), p. 176.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Isaak Rülf, *Meine Reise nach Kowno: um die Uebersiedelung nothleidender Glaubensgenossen aus den Grenzbezirken nach dem Innern Russlands zu ordnen, sowie die in der dortigen Synagoge gehaltene Predigt* (Memel: Druck von S. Goldschmidt, 1869), p. 13.

traditional expounder of religious law and adjudicator of disputes his training would not have proved sufficient for him to rise to a level of a recognised authority, which would have enabled him to use scholarship as a basis of expanded jurisdiction, in a way utilised by both Spektor and Mohilever. His choice to expand his jurisdiction and indeed to provide an alternative path to rabbinical jurisdiction via writing and his adoption of famine relief as a special philanthropical project proved to be the vehicle for the transformation of his rabbinical role. The chapter also covers the years between the famine and the pogroms of 1881 during which time Rülf continued to be active in philanthropy and importantly following the pogroms he formed an integral component of the Kovno Circle in relaying information regarding the atrocities to the West.<sup>48</sup> He also acted as a principal benefactor assisting refugees passing through Memel, providing shelter and funds for onward transportation, acquiring a reputation as 'Dr Hülf' for his service to both communities and individuals. 49 His efforts as shtadlan in attempting to ameliorate the expulsion orders of 1885 affecting foreigners in Prussia are documented, including correspondence with local and national officials as well as his efforts to combat the rise in German antisemitism. 50 Notwithstanding all that he accomplished, having mostly acted independently of the mainstream German rabbinate, and indeed often as a vocal critic of well-known rabbis occupying pulpits in principal cities, Rülf was never able to gain recognition from this group as a figure of the first order. The chapter concludes with a description of Rülf's early involvement with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) and Zionism and his support of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Seit sechzehn Jahren', 1882, Central Zionist Archives, A1\2 pp. 3-30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Leon Scheinhaus, 'Ein Edler in Israel', *Jahrbuch für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 15 (1912), p. 211.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Appendix item 19, letter from Rülf dated 6 October 1885 to Reichkanzler Bismarck, Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 500 Nr. 38, bl. 15–16 and Appendix item 20 letter dated 11 November 1885 from Rülf to Landgraf Cranz, Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 500 Nr. 38, bl. 13.

movement through writing for the organisation's organ *Die Welt* and his becoming an esteemed and in-demand speaker for the cause.

The third chapter retraces the trajectory of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever and his attempts to bestride the growing and acrimonious public dispute between the maskilim and the traditionally observant in the Russian Empire, terming the conflict 'a house on fire', which serves as the title of the chapter.<sup>51</sup> Mohilever's advocacy for communal unity expressed via his articles in the press during the 1870s and his strong support for settlement of the holy land, particularly following the pogroms of 1881 were directed towards the preservation of the Jewish community suffering both physical and religious stresses. As a traditionally trained scholar, indeed as a widely recognised gaon and posek, Mohilever utilised this platform as entrée to the public sphere to promote compromise, open and civil dialogue. At the core of his vision was the concept of an expanded membership in the Jewish community, one in which classical observance would no longer be the sole qualification.<sup>52</sup> Unusual for a traditional rabbi, Mohilever was prepared to publicly accept that changes were needed, particularly in the realm of education, including the acquisition of local languages.53 In this respect, Mohilever may be regarded as a trailblazer. His advocacy for reforms set him in direct opposition to contemporary traditional avoidance of same, however in later years, as outlined by Simon Schwarzfuchs, 'in due time much of this opposition would disappear with the emergence of the new rabbinate, which was predicated on the harmony of general and rabbinic culture'.54

<sup>51</sup> M. Ben-Zvi, *Rabbi Samuel Mohilever* (London: A Bachad Fellowship & Bnei Akivah Publication, 1945), p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> In his 1876 essay, 'Matzaveinu b'midot v'derekh eretz' Mohilever emphasised that working on behalf of the community as a whole represented a higher spiritual level than privately observing mitzvot; see Yehuda Leib Maimon, *Sefer Shmuel: Zikaron leha-Rav Shemuel Mohlivir* (Jerusalem: Histadrut Hamizrachi, 1923), p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Mohilever 1890 essay, 'Matarat niseati l'artzenu haKedosha', in Maimon, p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Schwarzfuchs, p. 124.

As part of Mohilever's efforts to seek compromise he importantly posited that religious belief and observance was a personal matter and that active participation in communal activities represented an equal entry to community. Also, he became a strong advocate of the value of work in general and within agriculture in particular, both as a result of his tenure as a communal rabbi in Radom and likely as well as a signatory on a scroll tendered to Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885) commemorating the latter's eightieth birthday in 1864.55 Following the 1881 pogroms in the Pale of Settlement, Mohilever began to focus intently upon settlement in the holy land as a unifying communal medium, and his subsequent activism, along with his considerable mobility in the cause of Hibbat Zion served as his platform for increased jurisdiction beyond solely that of scholarship. Indeed, Mohilever's activities in connection with early Zionism represented the highest level of contemporary political engagement of the rabbinate.<sup>56</sup> Mohilever's promotion of emigration to Palestine triggered negative reactions from other traditional scholars, particularly from prominent rabbis in the Russian Empire, who had pointed to biblical references that a return to the holy land should only be accomplished by the coming of the Messiah.<sup>57</sup> This view was rejected by Mohilever, who stated that redemption would occur in a natural manner and that one should not wait for a miracle, particularly not when the community was suffering under such stress.<sup>58</sup> The chapter also discusses Mohilever's initiative to include women as active members in Hibbat Zion activities

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> François Guesnet, 'The Great Sir, Unique Among His People': Envisioning Jewish Unity and Leadership in East European Tributes to Sir Moses Montefiore' in Pawel Macienjkol and Scott Ury, eds., *Making Jewish History: The Dialectics of Jewish History in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Studies in Honor of Professor Israel Bartal* (Leiden and Boston, MA: 2020) Series: Studia judaeoslavica, vol 12, pp. 111–28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Guesnet, *Polnische Juden im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 394.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'HaGeulah', in Maimon, p. 153.

and later, in the Religious Zionist, Mizrachi movement which he founded.<sup>59</sup> As a posek as well, Mohilever utilised his vast scholarship to find a path to permit flexibility in even biblical laws which might serve to ease the burden of the Jewish community. His permissive ruling in the *Shemita* year 1888/9 to allow agricultural work in the holy land when such activity would have been biblically prohibited recognised the necessity of preservation of the early settlements. 60 This ruling served as the basis for its wider dissemination with the support of Rabbi Spektor who based his agreement upon Mohilever's scholarship and demonstrates the dynamic reconfiguration of the rabbinic role in the period under consideration.<sup>61</sup>

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, the protagonist of the fourth chapter, was a revered figure and the generation's leading Talmudic commentator and posek. Spektor used his halakhic platform with an objective to ease the religious burden of his followers. This included his lenient halakhic rulings in many spheres including social and economic and the use of his office via political involvement, substantially expanding his jurisdiction. Spektor's background was modest. He completed his rabbinical training independently and as a young communal rabbi endured poverty, serving to underline the legendary empathy which permeated his halakhic rulings. Spektor was renowned for both focusing on practical rulings as well as finding any means possible to provide leniency, for individuals as well as for the greater Jewish community. Recognising the peril to traditional observance posed by the maskilic threat Spektor endeavoured to stretch Halakhah to every extent possible to permit lenient rulings. maskilim had focused upon tradition's perceived ill treatment of

<sup>59</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington,

IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> For the biblical prohibition see, Tanach (Koren Publishers Jerusalem Ltd, 2000), Leviticus 25:4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> The Origins of Israel. 1882–1948: A Documentary History, ed. Eran Kaplan, Derek Jonathan Penslar, and David Jan Sorkin, Sources in Modern Jewish History (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), p. 21.

women and particularly in the cases of divorce in which rabbis would refuse to permit a divorce based upon even a minor technicality in the divorce document, the Get.<sup>62</sup> Spektor's determinations, specifically targeting the cases of agunot, ruled in 98 per cent of the cases brought before him in favour of permitting the women to remarry, freeing them from that state. 63 Similarly, his rulings in the matter of the importation of esrogim from Corfu in 1875 as well as in other controversies described in the chapter, were less about the halakhic issues and more about the economic hardships and social concerns facing the greater Jewish community. 64 Spektor's use of the traditional rabbinic office to address the challenges of modern society represented a reconfiguration of the rabbinate from increased stringency in circumscribing religious observance to an empathetic use of Halakhah, able to adjust and accommodate modern realties. In this, Spektor's view coincided with that of Mohilever and Rülf in their primary focus on preservation of a unified Jewish community. Spektor's political activism as well served as a tool to achieve the same objective. His leadership of the Kovno Circle involved Spektor's marshalling of diverse elements of the Jewish public, all of whom respected him for his scholarship and known love for the community to mount an effort to prevent further persecution of Jews in the Pale. Following the pogroms of 1881 Spektor's authorship of written appeals under the heading of Heye Im Pipiot, a classic form used in times of distress, directed at Western audiences, in which he outlined the dire pressures and persecution affecting the Pale's Jewish community proved impactful due to the wide esteem in which Spektor was held. As a keen observer of the political scene,

<sup>62</sup> Michael Stanislawski, For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry, Studies in Jewish History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 126-28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ephraim Shimoff, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor: Life and Letters (New York: Yeshiva University, 1959), p. 141 (English section). See also recently published scholarship by Haim Sperber dealing with the plight of agunot, highlighting several of Spektor's rulings, Haim Sperber, The Plight of Jewish Deserted Wives, 1851–1900: A Social History of East European Agunah (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2023), pp. 93n, 94n, 97n-100n, 104n, 106n and 115n.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Tikkun gadol', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 19 May 1875), 39th ed., p. 305.

Spektor was able to alter his focus in subsequent, similar appeals as a result of the persecutions of 1891, changing as the times demanded. 65 Spektor placed communal unity above strict halakhic consideration, also evident in his ruling in favour of the London Bet Din in the Shechita controversy of 1891. Notwithstanding that it was likely that the Bet Din was in the wrong in a serious matter of kashrus, Spektor supported the rabbinate, in order to ensure that England would remain a hospitable country for potential refuge.66 Spektor's attempt to preserve a legacy of an empathetic, traditional rabbinate, an objective which he viewed as closest to his heart, is also detailed in his participation in, and serving as titular head of the Kolel Perushim, founded and based in Kovno. The kolel provided an opportunity for young religious scholars to study while receiving support from the organisation itself, without the need to depend on the largesse of either family or community, which had traditionally been the case. As well, Spektor was reported to be 'generous' in his granting certificates of ordination, ensuring an ample supply of a trained rabbinate for the future.<sup>67</sup> Spektor's relationship with Hibbat Zion is also covered in this chapter, with the author's position, based on archival research that Spektor was supportive of the group and specifically of its objective of providing a relief valve for potential emigration following the pogroms.<sup>68</sup> This chapter also includes a discussion of Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz who served as secretary to Spektor and whose aggressive use of the press to promote strict traditional observance and a perpetuation of the traditional rabbinate is detailed. Lipschitz's vitriolic articles, often authored to counter the proposed compromises of Shmuel Mohilever and his later strident opposition to the Hibbat Zion movement promoted an agenda of a closed circle of Jewish

<sup>65</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov (Bnei Brak, 2009), Part 3, pp. 175–76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Letter from Spektor to Adler, 25 November 1891 in, *Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan*, vol 1, p. 337.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory*, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Letter from Spektor to Hildesheimer, 'B'H, Yom Vav, Erev Shabbos Kodesh, 20 Tammuz, 5742' in *Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan*, vol 2, p. 435.

communal participation, defined solely by strict observance and submission to rabbinical authority. This position was bolstered and publicised as well by Lipschitz's use of the media via the publication of broadsides and pamphlets though the organisation he founded, the 'Black Office', based in Kovno. So prominent had Lipschitz become, considerably through his close relationship with Spektor that many contemporary observers viewed Spektor as being completely manipulated by Lipschitz, causing Spektor to exceptionally take to the press to deny the rumour. <sup>69</sup> The examples of Lipschitz, Spektor and Mohilever serve as to emphasise that reconfigurations of the rabbinate during this important period of study could go in very different directions; inclusiveness as demonstrated by Spektor and Mohilever or the exclusivism of Lipschitz.

The fifth, analytical chapter, proposes a comparative assessment of Rülf, Mohilever, Spektor and Lipschitz. Rabbis' previous stock in trade, scholarship, adjudication of disputes and enforcement of religious observance had become less valued by a traditional community which was, following the Enlightenment and emancipation in the West, being decimated by the incursion and appeal of the Reform movement. In the East governmental appointment of Crown rabbis, maskilic ideology publicised widely via the press, and the physical threats of poverty and persecution were all issues which challenged the office. Due to these factors and in response to the perceived threat of, or actual loss of followers, upon whom rabbis depended for validation of their positions, rabbis were faced with a dilemma as to how to react to remain relevant. As previously outlined and as characterised by Schwarzfuchs the rabbinical charge became not only to ensure the keeping of laws, but importantly to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Elbono Shel Torah', *HaZefirah* (Warsaw, February 1890), 18th issue, pp. 77–78.

one of keeping Jews.<sup>70</sup> Options available to individual rabbis to adapt were dependent upon their backgrounds, the areas in which they served and the subsequent choices each made. These included seeking compromise with modernity by accommodating reforms in practice, adopting a new mission which could benefit the wider community or simply accepting the loss of constituents and building legal barriers to keep reformers out and the observant in, which had the attendant value of increasing the importance of rabbinical authority.

This chapter identifies jurisdiction and religious authority, the significance of the public sphere and political involvement, core areas of contrast and comparison between the protagonists of this study. These were arenas in which rabbis could attempt to transform their traditional roles, and in which the principal figures of this study were active, setting precedents for what rabbis could achieve through adapting their missions in the modern era. In the realm of jurisdiction and authority, a key area of rabbinical transition, the authority of rabbis had traditionally been local; however, via the growing influence and reach of the press, which Yaakov Lipschitz termed 'a new Torah', a rabbi was able to increase his jurisdiction and authority by utilising his rabbinical role via innovative activities to become more widely recognised. 71 Rülf's adoption of the famine relief project of 1868/9 served to increase his authority in the West regarding Eastern needs and culture. Through the wide collection geography his fame and jurisdiction spread considerably beyond his relatively remote pulpit in Memel, providing him with a platform for further accomplishment. Similarly, Mohilever's use of the press, with a ready entree provided by his renown and authority as a scholar, allowed him to promulgate his positions, increasing his jurisdiction in reaching a wide audience. His reputation as a scholar of note allowed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Schwarzfuchs, p. 87.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 124.

him relatively easy access to audiences beyond his native Poland, and he took advantage of this stature in approaching potential supporters, also utilising mobility to promote his agenda.<sup>72</sup> Spektor had already enjoyed great authority as a generational posek and his jurisdiction was expanded through his many responsa, marking him as a preferred address for many halakhic questions from near and far. In the realm of the public sphere as previously outlined the rise of the press during this period served to greatly expand the Jewish public 'main street'. Rülf's rise to prominence was wholly dependent upon his use of the press as a vehicle to publicise his Aufrufe and to orchestrate his successful multinational collections for famine relief. The use of his unique and descriptive style of writing allowed him to become a prominent, 'first mover' in philanthropy, a tool he continued to utilise to publicise and promote his further activities. The debate between Mohilever and Lipschitz with respect to the choice between cultural modernisation or strict adherence to tradition and later regarding Hibbat Zion was played out in full view of the public via the pages of *HaLevanon*.<sup>73</sup> Notwithstanding Spektor's sparse personal use of the press, his rulings represented the epitome of halakhah l'maaseh, of practical application. Same were spread rapidly through the public sphere of the press, such as his prohibition of the use of Corfu esrogim in Kovno, which was rapidly and widely disseminated, as if via a quasi-public Bet Midrash. 74 In the arena of politics all three protagonists utilised their rabbinical platforms in a wider effort to improve conditions for the Jewish community. On the basis of his success in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> To some extent Mohilever used his position to gain access to excess, i.e., his visits were often not only unproductive but raised the ire of Baron Edmond de Rothschild, expressed in a letter of 3 February 1887, from his manager of charities, Michel Erlanger (1828–1892): 'it pains me to say that this man [Mohilever] has gravely undermined the unity of your organisation [Hibbat Zion]'; see Shulamit Laskov, *Ketavim l'toldot Hibat Zion v'yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, 6 vols (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House Ltd., 1988), V, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> For further details regarding the use of *HaLevanon* by the Orthodox, see Lipschitz, *Sefer Zichron Yaakov*, part 2, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Beer-Marx, p. 125.

providing relief during the 1868/9 famine, Rülf was able to secure a position of unusual prominence for a rabbi of his station, enabling him to meet with Russian governmental officials, making recommendations for better treatment of Jews in the Empire. As previously described, in his communication with local officials and with Chancellor Bismarck, he worked to ameliorate the orders of expulsion in 1885 which affected a significant percentage of his community in Memel. Spektor's relationship with the Jewish elite in St Petersburg and his later leadership of the Kovno Circle along with Lipschitz essentially circumvented the former group, revealing him to be a keen political observer, prepared to act flexibly and with practicality in defending and advocating for the Russian Jewish community. Mohilever's involvement to free Jewish prisoners in the Polish uprising of 1863 and his later founding of Mizrachi, which later became an important political entity within the Zionist movement, were based on his stature as a leading rabbinical figure.

In the following chapters it will be demonstrated that during the period of study the office of the rabbi was subjected to great pressures from both advocates of reform and from those who insisted that the only means of preservation of Jewish society was strict adherence to a closed and even an extreme new version of traditional observance. This study, by focusing on an era of rapid change, transition, and expansion of the public sphere, seeks to improve our understanding of the potential for a middle ground; a rabbinate that strives to adapt, to find alternative missions for the office in redefining its purpose from scholarship, legal expertise, and religious practice alone to a responsibility for community leadership via other, productive means. The experiences of Rabbis Rülf, Mohilever and Spektor will prove to be instructive in setting a high bar for the rabbinate, not only for their accomplishments

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Wie ist den nothleidenden Juden in Westrußland zu helfen?', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 15 June 1869), Nr. 24 ed., p. 469.

in support of contemporary societies but as important role models for all time, in what a rabbi could and should be.

## **Chapter 2: From Famine to Fame: Isaac Rülf**

## <u>Introduction</u>

Rabbi Dr Isaac Rülf was an important figure in the reconfiguration of the role of the rabbinate during the period of study, Rülf's contributions to the expansion of rabbinical authority and jurisdiction were in several main arenas. His skillful and manifold successful use of the press to publicise and attend to the urgent needs of the Russian Jewish community during the famine of 1868/9 and his attendant efforts to promote cross-border solidarity between western Jews and those in the East, utilising his rabbinical platform as a means to validate trust, served as a means to achieve prominence. His activities in support Palestine as a potential homeland for Jews and his early support of Zionism displayed an important use of the office for political involvement.

Born in the small rural village of Rauisch-Holzhausen near the town of Marburg the second son of a cattle merchant, Rülf rose to become internationally known through his many activities including philanthropy, cross-border activism, and promotion of trans-national Jewish solidarity. As a youth, Rülf described himself as a 'weak and fragile boy', and his family realised early that he had neither the interest in nor skill for business. Instead, he was provided the opportunity to pursue a religious education at a local, small yeshiva founded by Rabbi Mordechai Wetzlar (1801–1878) in the nearby town of Gudensberg.¹ Following the completion of his schooling there, Rülf continued his religious studies in Marburg where in 1857 he completed his rabbinical studies and received ordination. Concurrently he had pursued intensive secular studies through the offices of a local Catholic priest, which enabled him to secure entrance to university. He had originally contemplated a career as a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> J. Rülf, Wissenschaft des Weltgedankens (Memel: F.W: Siebert, 1883), Vorwort, p. iii.

physician, but in short order changed focus to the study of philosophy, and finally received a PhD in Philosophy at the University of Rostock in 1865.2 In the same year he assumed the pulpit of the German-speaking Jewish community in the town of Memel (now Klaipėda in Lithuania, about 135 miles northwest of Kaunas), then located in the northeastern-most corner of the Prussian Empire. The Jewish population in Memel in 1867 was reported to be 887, and the community was divided between Jews of German origin and those whose origins lay east of the border, mainly from the Kovno Governorate in the Russian Empire, each having their own synagogues.<sup>3</sup> This relatively minor position in a remote geography placed Rülf at the periphery of the western rabbinate which was dealing with its own issues, mainly from challenges to traditional observance by the Reform movement and the resultant loss of constituents. Seeking a role beyond traditional local rabbinical functions Rülf worked to expand his jurisdiction by establishing himself as an authority to the West on and spokesman for Russian Jewry and as an advocate for a trans-national Jewish identity. Rülf's principal tool in these efforts was his writing style, which was both colourful and transmitted a graphic and realistic view of the situations being described. His work, which took the form of newspaper articles, travelogues, pamphlets and books were often referred to as speeches in written form. Speeches had become, for the rabbinate in Germany, an important component of *Bildung*, the expression of culture, and Rülf's writing took the form of written oratory.4

The rise in importance and expanded readership of the period's Jewish press provided a ready vehicle for the transmission of Rülf's work, allowing his message to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Yitzchak Rülf, 'Toldot Yemei Chayai', in Avraham Levinson, *Sifriat Sharashim: Yitzchak Rülf* (Tel Aviv, 1946), pp. 45–50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Synagogues in Lithuania: A Catalogue, ed. Aliza Cohen-Mushlin (Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Arts Press, 2010), p. 260.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Lässig, p. 323.

reach far beyond his immediate area. Memel's location along Prussia's eastern border with the Russian Empire placed Rülf in a position to be an early witness to the effects of the famine of 1868/9 which affected both eastern Prussia and even more acutely the Jewish communities in the western Russian Empire. When news of the famine reached Memel, Rülf joined the local committee in raising both awareness and funds for relief of victims on both sides of the border. Rülf utilised his platform as a communal rabbi, identifying himself as such by his signature as 'Preacher of the Synagogue Community' to issue written pleas for donations, primarily to provide assistance for the towns and victims of the famine across the eastern border.5 Through the use of his rabbinical position, implying that he was a man who could be trusted, combined with the power of his writing transmitted broadly through the vehicle of the press, Rülf assumed a leadership position for himself in the philanthropic and relief efforts and as a spokesman for the affected Russian Jewish communities seeking relief. As a result of this success, by 1869 Rülf and his Memel committee had become the recognised leaders in collection and distribution of funds for famine relief east of the border, and Rülf as the persona of the committee had achieved a degree of international fame for his influential writing, philanthropy and for his precise and orderly administration of the relief efforts. His appeals attracted an overwhelming and positive response, not only geographically, but across social classes and religious commitment; Memel, acting as a clearing house for donations, was the major recipient of funds channelled through both the Orthodox publication Der Israelit as well as the more liberal-leaning Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums. Rülf's meticulous tracking and publication of both the donations he received, listing each donor and the amount of the gift, as well as providing detailed records as to the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf', p. 82.

use of the funds he distributed to each beneficiary town inspired confidence in his abilities and leadership role.

The result of this success was the considerable extension of Rülf's reputation and jurisdiction beyond Memel and a rabbi's traditional and local rabbinic authority and function. Additionally, and significantly, he transitioned from philanthropy to action, initially via his visit in 1869 across the eastern border to Kovno, marking an expansion of his rabbinical jurisdiction via mobility. Following this visit he authored an extensive travelogue: Meine Reise nach Kowno. In this work he not only described his first-hand impressions of the poverty and suffering but as well sought to elevate the image of Russian Jewry in the eyes of his western readers, whose view of eastern Jews had been mostly negative. His advocacy for cross-border Jewish solidarity was to serve as a basis for his establishing a reputation as 'Dr Hülf' in recognition of his decades-long aid to Russian Jewry. 6 His work touched not only the many individual refugees seeking relief and onward direction, but entire communities as well, many of which suffered devastating fires which frequently affected towns east of the border. As a result of the fame and reputation Rülf acquired, at the time of the 1881 pogroms in the Russian Empire he served as an early and important link in the collection of and transmission abroad of information as part of the Kovno Circle, initiated by Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor and Spektor's secretary, Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz.

Active locally as well, Rülf wrote extensively regarding the rise of antisemitism in Germany and he reacted to the expulsion from German territories of both Jewish and non-Jewish alien residents in 1885 by writing several times to Chancellor Bismarck, in an effort to ameliorate the decree. His activities went beyond philanthropy and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Scheinhaus, 'Ein Edler in Israel', p. 211.

advocacy, importantly leading him to becoming a pioneer in recognising and highlighting a national consciousness for Jewry, spanning both East and West. His 1883 work, *Aruchas Bas Ami* advocated Palestine as the national homeland for Jews and Rülf later played an active role in early Zionism as a supporter and early contributor to the movement's newspaper, *Die Welt*. In a lifetime marked by activity across a wide spectrum of philanthropy, action, and accomplishment on many levels, Rülf represented an important transitional figure in defining a greater role, function and expanded jurisdiction for the rabbinate in the Jewish public sphere. Considering his humble origins and his occupying a minor pulpit in a remote region, it is truly a unique narrative for Rülf to have risen to such fame and international recognition; surely driven in part by personal ambition, but even more so by dedication, hard work, and strategic use of his rabbinic position.

## The Famine

A traveller on the road from Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) to Gumbinnen (now Gusev in the Russian Oblast of Kaliningrad, about 70 miles east of Kaliningrad) in eastern Prussia during the early 1860s would have been struck by the widespread agricultural bounty of the land, described as 'highly fertile'. This view however hid the underlying weakness of the local farms and farmers, as crop yields depended upon outdated farming methods and a lack of local and central government communication regarding technological advances which left the farms even more susceptible to the vagaries of nature. The weather during the summer of 1866 began a series of natural events which was to reveal, with grave consequences, just how weak and vulnerable the underlying farm production was. That summer in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Anon., *Der Notstand in Ostpreußen, Ursachen Desselben und Mittel zu Dauernder Abhilfe. Von einem Gutsbesitzer in Ostpreußen* (Berlin: C.G. Lüderitz'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1868), p. 1. <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

eastern Prussia was unusually dry, and by its end it became apparent that the area had suffered a drought. With the resultant shortfall in the harvest, other sources of grain supply needed to be rapidly located and accessed. The obvious and first option was to seek sources immediately across the eastern border, particularly the crops in Russian Lithuania and Poland.9 The result of this increased demand and the higher prices paid by the Prussian market served to draw substantial supplies from the local markets in Russian territories east of the border. 10 In the following summer of 1867 there occurred an opposite condition; almost 2.5 months of continuous rain preventing both harvesting of old crops and the planting of new crops for the following year. 11 With local stocks of grain already depleted due to the preceding year's drought and the increased demand of the previous season, the lack of harvesting and new plantings in 1867 proved to be disastrous for the local economy and its residents on both sides of the border. This confluence of events created an acute shortage of food which became evident as early as the late autumn of 1867. The resultant famine spread quickly and as the area was essentially agrarian and self-sufficient, there was little reserve standing between residents and starvation.

# Prussian Responses to the Famine

The crisis was covered extensively in the Prussian press, which initiated and supported requests for donations from both Prussian and foreign sources.<sup>12</sup> As early as December of 1867, collection efforts by community-based committees in Prussia were active, publishing donations from private individuals and towns.<sup>13</sup> The situation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Yaakov Lipschitz, *Toldot Yitzchak* (Warsaw, 1896), p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Elizabeth B. Jones, 'Fixing Prussia's Peripheries: Rural Disasters and Prusso-German State-Building, 1866–1914', *Central European History*, 51, no. 2 (2018), pp. 204–27 (p. 204).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Albrecht Hoppe, 'Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel und Ostdeutschlands', Band 61, Heft 1 (2015), pp. 169–200 (p. 171).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

also engendered support, albeit on a limited basis, from within Prussia's central government in Berlin.<sup>14</sup> One of the factors in this 'limited' governmental support was the division in the government between traditional Prussian attitudes and liberal parties. Governmental aid was channelled through the Hilfsverein für Ostpreußen, and consisted principally of grants for road-building and other public projects, due to ingrained Prussian opposition to the concept of handouts (Almosenvergabe) as demoralising. 15 This aid proved to be grossly insufficient, benefiting merely 4 per cent of East Prussian cultivators and accomplished almost nothing to relieve the famine. 16 There was also a government sanctioned relief committee, 'Der Vaterländische Frauenverein', founded by Queen Augusta of Saxe-Weimar Eisenach (1811–1890) which was active in providing donations of clothing as well as soup kitchens for the local needy. 17 This aid, while welcomed, was viewed by the local affected population as, 'too little, too late'. 18 As it concerned the Jewish population of the region, often the aid was in the form of skills with which the local population was unfamiliar or the provision of non-kosher food, rendering it unusable. 19 The limited aid that arrived from Berlin stopped at Prussia's eastern border.

On the Russian side of the border aid was scarce and in many locales no government help was forthcoming which resulted in starvation for masses.<sup>20</sup> During late 1867 and well into 1868 as the famine raged the additional scourge of typhus was exacerbated by the cold weather and lack of food, which added to the general misery.<sup>21</sup> Realising the necessity of addressing the situation, several additional relief

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Jones, p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Hoppe, p. 182.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Jones, p. 214.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Hoppe, p. 181.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Hermann Pölking, Ostpreußen: Biographie einer Provinz, 2017, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> 'Die Noth in Preußen und Rußland', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 19 February 1868), Heft 8 edition, p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> 'Famine in Russia', *The London Jewish Chronicle* (London, 8 May 1868), p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Jones, p. 210.

committees were formed by eastern Prussian notables. Additionally, efforts were undertaken by other entities as well as by the press in main Prussian cities to solicit private contributions for famine relief in the affected Prussian region. Such efforts were visually memorialised in the 1868 painting Borussia by Adolf Menzel (1831-1902), portraying a stylised Prussia caring for its eastern poor. It is noteworthy that the painting itself was created for sale at a bazaar to benefit those in the east affected by the famine.<sup>22</sup> The famine became not only a Prussian media-wide event within the country, but also served as a rallying point for overseas involvement as a national cause.<sup>23</sup> An example of such an appeal was a concert organised in Egypt by local German citizens, which raised 720 Thaler for the relief effort.<sup>24</sup> Regarding an event held in London, 'A concert was given at St. James's Hall last Saturday, for the benefit of the sufferers from the famine in Eastern Prussia. All the performers who contributed their service were German. A considerable sum was realised (sic)'.25 Additionally, appeals were published in Prussian newspapers, which called for donations to be sent to the editors for forwarding to the central committees. An example of such effort was the front-page appeal which appeared in the Stuttgartbased publication Über Land und Meer, Allgemeine Illustrirte Zeitung under the heading 'Für die Ostpreußen!'26 The editors appealed for donations to be made for famine relief and undertook to forward donations received to the committee in Berlin for channelling to the needy. The lack of sufficient central government assistance was well documented and lamented, especially by the liberal press: 'From East

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Adolf Menzel, *Borussia*,

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="https://www.dhm.de/lemo/Bestand/objekt/20012321">https://www.dhm.de/lemo/Bestand/objekt/20012321</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Hoppe, p. 198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Pölking, p. 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> 'Music', *The Illustrated London News* (London 7 March 1868), Nr. 1472 edition, p. 238.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> 'Für die Ostpreußen' (Stuttgart, January 1868), No. 17 edition, section *Über Land und Meer Allgemeine Illustrirte Zeitung,* p. 1.

Prussia heartbreaking reports. The State Treasury remains closed. Help, help! help!!'<sup>27</sup> Word of the famine reached even as far as the United States, as recorded in *The New York Times*, 'The Prussian province of East Prussia is now suffering from a terrible famine ... is the topic of all conversation in Berlin and creates the greatest interest and sympathy'.<sup>28</sup> The newspaper closed its report with an appeal as well, '... a man may sustain life for seven months with \$2. Who will do a good act put a few greenbacks in an envelope addressing it Redaction des Staatsburger (sic) Zeitung, Berlin, Prussia?'<sup>29</sup>

## Jewish Relief Activities

Efforts were similarly undertaken by prominent Jews who formed committees for the purpose of alleviating the needs of the affected Jewish families. Many of these Jewish committees were located in eastern Prussian border towns such as Memel, Lyck (now Elk in Poland, about 70 miles northwest of Białystok), Schippenbeil (now Sępopol in Poland, about 150 miles northwest of Białystok) and Tilsit (now Sovetsk in Russia, about 60 miles southeast of Klaipėda) whose residents included many of Eastern origin and who therefore had both good sources of communication and reliable contacts through which relief funds could safely and reliably be distributed both in eastern Prussia and across the border. Indeed, the Jewish community of Königsberg, a leading border town, had recently sounded the alarm in response to a Russian law, promulgated in 1843 requiring Jews in the Pale of Settlement to leave their residences within a 50 verst (about 33 miles) distance of the western border of the Russian empire. On that occasion that community wrote a plea directly to the tsar to withdraw the decree and they also mounted an extensive effort to enlist other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> 'Zur Tagesgeschichte', *Pfälzische Volkszeitung* (Kaiserslautern, 23 January 1868), 23rd ed., p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> 'Affairs in Germany', *The New York Times* (23 February 1868), vol 57, nr. 5121 ed., p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid.

western Jewish communities to write in a similar vein. This ultimately successful project was also expanded to include the contacts within the Rothschild family, articles in the secular and Jewish press as well as recruiting the help of the recent 'heroes of the Damascus Affair' Sir Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Cremieux (1796–1880).<sup>30</sup>

The aforementioned border committees and others, along with dissemination of news of the famine and its effects through the press, were able to raise funds to ameliorate some of the suffering caused by the famine. Unfortunately, the summer of 1868 proved to be one in which no rain fell which rendered the planting of new crops for the following year impossible.<sup>31</sup> This situation resulted in renewed misery and famine and engendered redoubled efforts by the already established and newly formed aid committees, which activities continued with renewed vigour for the needy in West Russia through mid-1869. During this latter period, the relief effort was expanded, and several important additional committees were formed along with increased collections by and through community rabbis. These efforts by the Jewish committees to support the West Russian affected areas extended to include the general Prussian public, such as a concert which was held at the Neue Synagoge in Berlin during April of 1869 to benefit the situation.<sup>32</sup> It was also recorded that the king and queen attended this event to show their support.<sup>33</sup>

The first Jewish entities to raise the alarm concerning the dire situation which existed both in eastern Prussia and over its eastern border were the committees in Lyck

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Jacob Jacobson, 'Eine Aktion für die russischen Grenzjuden in den Jahren 1843–44', in Meisl Elbogen, Ismar Wischnitzer, and Mark Josef, *Festschrift zu Simon Dubnows siebzigstem Geburtstag* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1930), pp. 237–50 (p. 241).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> 'Zeitungsnachrichten Deutschland', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 11 May 1869), 19th ed., p. 370.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> 'Nichtamtliches', Königlich Preußischer Staats-Anzeiger (Berlin, 26 April 1869), Nr. 96 ed., p. 1722.

followed by Memel, due to their locations as border cities.34 As early as August 1867 HaMagid, the Hebrew-language newspaper based in Lyck, and the only one of the leading Jewish press actually published in a border city, stated that, 'these are bad days, food is expensive'.35 By December however, the same organ was describing the population over the border in Russia as 'starving' and that there was no house without want and poverty.36 In Memel in northeastern Prussia, the situation by early 1868 had grown particularly dire. In addition to the famine, the local economy had been adversely affected by the introduction of rail transport which detracted from the port of Memel's long-standing centrality to the East-West lumber trade. Indeed, many Jews had made their living as brokers or agents for processors of logs which were floated down the Neman/Memel River.<sup>37</sup> Historically, lumber from the Russian interior was transported to the port of Memel for further export. With the advent of rail transport the industry's reliance on Memel's water-based transportation system was lessened, and indeed given the cold winters in which water transport was not feasible, rail provided exporters with an all-season option, bypassing Memel altogether. Additional strains facing the community were created by the influx of refugee families from the East, in which area the effects of the famine were even more acute and the supply of government aid non-existent. In response to this situation the leading Jews of Memel formed a committee, 'The Society for Defense of the Crisis' under the leadership of prominent citizens for the purpose of collecting funds to help address their town's misery as well eventually to provide aid to the neighbouring communities in Russia, 'of which 3/4 of the residents are Jews'. 38 Memel

<sup>34</sup> Notwithstanding the claim by Isaac Rülf of Memel that 'no one came to their aid . . . before I did', see J. Rülf, *Die russischen Juden* (Memel: Siebert, 1892), p. 4.

<sup>35 &#</sup>x27;Russland', HaMagid (Lyck, 28 August 1867), no. 34 edition, p. 273.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> 'Russland', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 18 December 1867), no. 49 ed., p. 392.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Emil Bernhard Cohn, *David Wolffsohn, Herzl's Successor* (Philadelphia, PA: Zionist Organization of America, 1944), p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf!', p. 82.

itself already had an established history of cross-border involvement; since the middle of the nineteenth century it had become an important communications point on the mail route between Berlin-Königsberg-Riga-St Petersburg.<sup>39</sup> Further, the tales of woe from Eastern refugee families who arrived in Memel provided first-hand exposure to the disaster unfolding across the border. Memel, as well as other border cities, had 'experienced continuous streams of Lithuanian, Polish, and Jewish migrations moving to and through Prussia from the areas near the border throughout the second half of the 19th century'.<sup>40</sup>

The committee's first call for help was publicised in *Der Israelit* in January 1868, in which an impassioned plea was written by the committee's secretary, Rabbi Dr Isaac Rülf, who described himself as 'Preacher of the Synagogue Community' as well as acting as secretary of the committee. It is possible that in mounting this effort Rülf was also aware of the successful effort of the previously mentioned work of the Königsberg community in connection with the 1843 Ukase which included use of the press. Despite Memel's location as a relatively small town at the very furthest northeastern point of the Prussian Empire, Rülf's appeal proved to be uniquely persuasive. This was likely due to the force of his writing style, which described the local situation in impassioned and familiar terms, enabling his readers to relate almost personally to the tragedies being described. His writing, oratorical in style in which a preacher uses the platform of the ministry to promote a cause via preaching, or in the case of Rülf, via his writing, displayed a keen use of the media. His appeals and reports were typically filled with examples of individual and heart-rending

<sup>39</sup> Ruth Leiserowitz, *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein: Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812–1942* (Osnabrück: fibre-Verl, 2010), p. 221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ruth Leiserowitz, 'Litvak Migratory Decisions in the 19th Century and Their Consequences: Prussian Transit Migration' (presented at the 28th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy, Chicago, IL: 2008), p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf!', p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> 'Bonn, 26. September', *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums* (Berlin, October 1902), 40th ed., p. 4.

experiences which brought home to his readers the immense personal impact of the famine. While this written form was not unique for the period as it had been employed as well by the secular press in awakening public sympathy, 'an emotional and agitating effect ... encouraging the populace to donate', it was unusual for the contemporary Jewish press in its coverage of the famine. <sup>43</sup> The strength of Rülf's reports and appeals allowed him and the Memel committee not only to participate in the relief effort, but also to assume a leadership role, both in reportage and in collection of donations. Rülf and his committee became one of the principal 'go-to' parties as authorities for the German-speaking and reading public on all things famine-related occurring across the border in western Russia. The funds collected by *Der Israelit* were primarily channelled by its editor to the Memel committee for onward distribution to the affected Russian areas. Although Rülf began as simply the committee's secretary, he viewed himself as its heart and soul and it was reported that eventually the other committee members resigned, not wishing to be part of an organisation dominated by one person. <sup>44</sup>

## Role of the Press

The concept of 'crowdsourcing' can be defined as 'the broadcasting of problems to the public and an open call for contributions to solve the problem'. 45 With the rise in importance of print media and its wider circulation, the ability to disseminate a particular issue and to solicit a wider response increased. The press became and was widely viewed as a reliable means of communicating with the general public the actual situation in the world, providing readers exposure to a much greater universe than had previously been the case. The Jewish press in particular 'conveyed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Hoppe, p. 185.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> 'Crowdsourcing', *Merriam-Webster* <a href="https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crowdsourcing">https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crowdsourcing</a>.

information regarding the Jewish situation and directed the attention of the Jewish public to general Jewish problems'. 46 As well, 'to an increasing extent, the Jewish press came to transcend national, linguistic and sectarian divisions, creating, as it were, a world-wide forum in which those Jews willing to enter the modern world (and they included neo-Orthodox and even some ultra-Orthodox circles) circulated news, debated and polemicised, often angrily.'47 Indeed, the rise and influence of the Jewish press in the second half of the nineteenth century cannot be underestimated and the press 'became the chief platform of the Jewish public sphere'. 48 Within the Jewish world of the 1860s, three publications in particular enjoyed relatively wide readership; Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, Der Israelit and HaMagid. The Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, 'AZJ' was the eldest of the three publications; founded in 1837 by Dr Ludwig Philippson (1811–1889) in Leipzig. Its ambitious goal, as stated in its very first edition, was to serve as 'an impartial organ for all Jewish interests and especially for politics, religion, literature, history, linguistics and the Belles-Lettres'. 49 Notwithstanding this objective, the publication very early found itself raising the alarm in response to a serious and shocking threat to the broader Jewish community. In addressing the Damascus Affair of 1840, a blood libel which served as a watershed event for the contemporary Jewish press, Philippson felt compelled to 'steel himself' and criticise the secular newspapers carrying the sensational, but unproven details of the Affair and to bring the matter to the attention of his readers. 50

Prominent members of the local Jewish community in Damascus had been arrested

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> A History of the Jewish People, ed. by Ḥayim Hilel Ben-Sasson and Avraham Malamat (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. Press, 2002), p. 849.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 34–35.

Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism*,
 Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), p. 47.
 'Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 2 May 1837, 1 edition, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'Ritual Murder,' Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 242.

and charged with murdering a Christian monk for ritual purposes. This development of a libel thought to be of a long-past age was covered by the secular western European press with the presumption that the accused Jews were guilty as charged.<sup>51</sup> The reaction by Jewish communities outside of the Middle East was initially of scepticism, however, as details began to emerge, 'Jews both in the Middle East and in the West were caught completely off guard, defenseless'.<sup>52</sup> That details of the Affair had become widely circulated, and that the *AZJ* stepped up in defense of the Jewish community asserted the growing importance, maturity and influence of the contemporary Jewish press. From the founding of the paper, published in the German language, the organ was well received, not only in Germany but 'in all directions in lands where Jews live'.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the *AZJ*, 'considered itself the mouthpiece of all of German Jewry'.<sup>54</sup>

Der Israelit, founded in Mainz in 1860 by Rabbi Dr Marcus Lehmann (1831–1890) may have been, in some respects, an undertaking in reaction to the more liberal-leaning AZJ. Der Israelit was among contemporary Orthodox organs described as 'intended to replace for Orthodox Jews Philippson's allegedly nonpartisan but in fact liberal AZJ'. <sup>55</sup> Lehmann himself was described as 'entirely devoted to Orthodox Jewry'. <sup>56</sup> Through the publication of Der Israelit Lehmann became known as 'Orthodoxy's propagandist' Its audience was the Orthodox Jewish readership and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Israel Mark Jost, *Culturgeschichte der Israeliten* (Breslau: Jacobsohn, 1847), p. 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 166.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Steven Lowenstein, 'Jewish Participation in German Culture', in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, ed. Michael A. Meyer et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), vol 3, p. 326.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Jacob Katz and Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, *A House Divided: Orthodoxy and Schism in Nineteenth-Century Central European Jewry* (Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press, published by University Press of New England, 1998), chapter 22, 'Eduard Lasker, the Prophet of Freedom of Conscience', p. 248.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 47.

its stated purpose as set forth in the initial 'Prospectus' was 'to serve as a platform for Orthodox Jewish questions that affect community and family, synagogue and school'. So extreme was the reaction to the Reform-minded *AZJ*, that in the initial edition of *Der Israelit*, the lead article glorified the previous era in which, 'Jews lived in their Ghetto away from the outside world in a wonderful and high spiritual life'. The publication also found a receptive readership and became, for the period, the principal organ of the German-speaking/reading Jewish Orthodox community as well as enjoying wide readership abroad.

HaMagid, founded in 1856 by Eliezer Lipman Silberman (1819–1882) in Lyck, a Prussian border town, was a popular newspaper, published almost exclusively in Hebrew. Silberman's decision to publish in Prussia, notwithstanding that his principal target audience was in the Russian Empire was possibly a result of his desire to avoid the Russian government censorship. His choice of the Hebrew language, which Silberman describes as, 'the beautiful language', was both a cultural and political statement. The period had witnessed a revival of the language, principally by the Haskalah movement and could have been viewed as a means to bind Jewish communities together. Additionally, inasmuch as the publication was aimed principally at the Russian Jewish audience, Silberman chose Hebrew as a medium which would be more widely understood – although the publication was read as well in the West. HaMagid's aim, as stated in its initial edition, was 'to say to Jacob the doings throughout the world that are fit to be known to each Jew'. The editor made it a point to invite correspondence and news reports from readers and specifically informed the Russian readership how they might go about subscribing, so that this

<sup>58</sup> 'Prospectus', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 15 May 1860), pp. 11, 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> 'Leitender Artikel', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 15 May 1860), 1st ed., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> 'HaMagid', *HaMagid*, 4 June 1856, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Ibid.

audience could be more readily reached. Silberman also undertook to gather news from Jewish communities far and wide, including not just Europe, but also Asia, Africa, America and even Australia.

A regular appearance in each of these publications were various appeals for help or for contributions, ranging from personal appeals by wives seeking word of their missing husbands or from relatives asking for any word of missing family members. to more global appeals for contributions in support of communal or universal causes. Examples can be seen in various editions of *HaMagid*, in which the language of appeal, 'kol koreh' appeared often; a call to the readers to support a particular cause. A typical representative of this was a regular appeal on behalf of the poor of Palestine in which the writer described the situation of poverty and asked the reading public to respond charitably, with donations to be directed to the editors of *HaMagid* for onward distribution. 62 Solicitations for distribution in Palestine had a long tradition in Ashkenasic Jewry; known as the Halukah, initially established during the Middle Ages described funds collected in the Diaspora for support of Torah scholars in Palestine, later expanded to include funds for the Palestinian poor as well. 63 Such appeals were particularly popular before the Jewish principal holidays of Passover and Rosh Hashanah, in which donations were collected for relief of the poor in the Holy Land and on the basis of the response, hundreds of names of the donors and the value of their donations would then be published.<sup>64</sup> It is interesting to note that Silberman came under some criticism from his early publication in the Hebrew language of the donations he received. This practice was viewed by the Orthodox as immodest, as both the donors and the recipient towns were identified in a widely

<sup>62 &#</sup>x27;Kol Koreh L'acheinu b'nei Yisrael', HaMagid (28 August 1867), no. 34 ed., p. 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Jody Elizabeth Myers, *Seeking Zion: Modernity and Messianic Activism in the Writings of Tsevi Hirsch Kalischer* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), p. 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> 'Spenden für die Armen des hl. Landes', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 19 February 1868), Heft 8 edition, pp. 137–140.

understood language, causing public embarrassment to the receivers of charity and for the donors, as the highest form of charity would have been to donate anonymously. This was contrasted with the other organs publishing donations in the German language only, which was viewed as foreign to the receiving entities in Russia who were mostly unfamiliar with German but were able to read Hebrew. <sup>65</sup> The issue concerning the publication of charity contributions had already been a point of concern in the Orthodox community, as evidenced by an 1867 responsa of Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer (1820–1889). In his decision, while he acknowledged that the practice of listing donations may have been halakhically questionable and would not represent 'the highest elements of Jewish piety', he 'forthrightly acknowledged that this practice led to success in the task of fundraising for worthy causes'. <sup>66</sup> It was perhaps for that reason that subsequent publications of donations received by *HaMagid* for relief of the famine in Russia were published as separate addenda to the publication in the German language.

## Isaac Rülf, Public Figure

Isaac Rülf would have been well aware of the power of the press, having availed himself of this medium on several occasions preceding the relief campaigns of 1868/9. As such, when faced with a need to galvanise support for famine relief he immediately turned to the familiar medium of print as his tool of choice. A prolific writer, he had on at least two prior occasions availed himself of the media to publicise his accomplishments. In 1858 as a newly minted rabbi, he self-published an article on the defense of Jewish rights in general and in particular regarding the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> David Ellenson, 'Tzedakah and Fundraising: A Nineteenth-Century Response', *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, 45, no. 4 (1996), pp. 490–96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Rülf, *Die russischen Juden*, p. 4.

Jews in Hessen.<sup>68</sup> This publication was in response to the government of Hessen's attempt to limit the rights of the local Jewish population. 69 While in 1833 Jews in Hessen had been granted the 'same rights as subjects of other faiths', the law contained exceptions and restrictions, notably the exclusion of those engaged in Nothandel, a broad term which could be described as itinerant peddlers, from equal rights.<sup>70</sup> Rülf was writing in reaction to a memorandum issued to all judicial and administrative authorities in Hessen to require close surveillance of all Jewish businesses to potentially determine if the rights of their Jewish owners could be revoked under the broad exclusionary clause of the 1833 law.71 Following his acceptance in 1865 of the pulpit of the rabbinate of the Ashkenasic community in Memel, he became involved in the attempted conversion in 1867 Memel of Jankel Widutzsky, in which an English minister tried to convert a Jewish youth. Rülf successfully intervened and was able to prevent the attempted conversion. Seeking an outlet to publish his success, he submitted a request to the Alliance Israélite Universelle for a grant, describing the need to publish the account as 'a reply to attacks made upon the Alliance in Memel by an English missionary for having prevented by his intervention the conversion of a child'.72 The request was strategically well-directed, citing the need by the organisation to defend itself, and the grant was approved. The article was published and widely read throughout Prussia, providing Rülf with heightened recognition as well.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Isaak Rülf, *Zur Vertheidigung der Juden und überall mit besonderer Rücksich tauf ihre Stellung und Beaufsichtigung in Kurhessen* (Marburg, 1858).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Mordechai Breuer, 'The Jewish Middle Ages', in Meyer et al., vol 2, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Rülf, *Zur Vertheidigung der Juden*, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> 'First Half-Yearly Report of the Universal Israelitish Alliance for the Year 1867', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 11 October 1867), p. 2.

Having grown up in modest circumstances, Rülf was no stranger to poverty and hardship. Such origin predisposed Rülf to a sympathetic, if not an empathetic view of those suffering and in need. Additionally, becoming a rabbi in this period presented Rülf with a new set of challenges. In the preceding decades, the role and function of a rabbi had been steadily under pressure. Stresses included the advent of the Enlightenment and emancipation and the rise of the Reform movement which provided optionality in and validation of non-traditional religious practice. As well, increased ease of movement and urbanisation undermined the authority and jurisdiction of the rabbinate, as the option to simply remove oneself from a community rendered the role of the local rabbi less relevant. One result of this trend was a reduction in the number of smaller communities and therefore fewer available traditional pulpits. This, combined with the continued production of ordainees from rabbinical schools created an overabundance of rabbis seeking a limited number of positions.<sup>73</sup> As an example, in 1871 there were 26 applicants for the vacant pulpit in Ostrowo, hailing from a wide range of towns – and the election had already been held once, with the results contentiously overturned, resulting in a new slate of aspirants.74 Indeed, for rabbis brought up in the immediately preceding era, with many lacking the secular education which had become an important rabbinical qualification, 'there seemed to be no worse situation today than that of a rabbi'. 75 For Rülf, as for other rabbis of the period, the search for meaning in their positions became a key challenge. For those university-educated German rabbis the use of sermons and preaching in the 'High German' style was an important component of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> 'Die Anstellung des Rabbiners', YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Fach 3, No. 4, Box 5, Folder 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Schwarzfuchs, p. 98.

Bildung, described as 'the acquisition of cultural capital.'<sup>76</sup> That the sermon had become an important vehicle for rabbis establishing stature already began early in the century, 'In Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century, sermons were the most important, and above all, the most widely effective form of public speech'.<sup>77</sup> The concept of *Bildung* implied not only education but also the 'cultivation of reason and aesthetic taste' and the 'notion of character and moral education'.<sup>78</sup> This view had replaced the previously accepted social concept of pedigree as the ideal.<sup>79</sup> In that vein, university educated rabbis invented the idea of 'mission' – with preaching a key element.<sup>80</sup> Rülf's penchant for and use of the media to publicise the famine emergency via the use of what was essentially a written sermon, likely reflected his attempt to meet the high standard of *Bildung*, in lending meaning to his position. His signature, which identified him as a *Prediger*, preacher, utilised the platform of the rabbinate in a new and novel manner to broaden the influence and purpose of his position and mission, which Rülf expanded and transitioned to include results-oriented writing and practical action.

One aspect in particular of the language utilised by Rülf in his description of the misery wrought by the famine set the Memel appeals apart from the many others for famine relief. He was a talented writer, narrator, and a colourful painter with language, and indeed he would later be described as 'possessed with an unusual talent with words'.<sup>81</sup> His writing was highly descriptive, able to outline complex

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Tobias Brinkmann, *Sundays at Sinai: A Jewish Congregation in Chicago* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Lässig, p. 323.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism*, The Modern Jewish Experience (Bloomington, IN and Cincinnati, OH: Indiana University Press and Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> David Jan Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> 'Israels Heilung', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 9 October 1883), 47th ed., pp. 662–66 (p. 662).

circumstances in short paragraphs - providing the reader with a vivid and clear image of the scene being described. More pointed was his use of heart-rending descriptions of misery, such as the tale of a father who committed suicide following the death of his son from starvation.82 On his journey to Kovno to witness the actual situation in the affected areas, he reported in vivid detail what he had personally witnessed: 'I saw 520 children, naked, miserable, squalid, almost no longer human, with wild greed chasing after a plate of soup or a small piece of bread'.83 Rülf set himself apart from others and successfully secured for himself a platform for mission and reputation in the use of his unique oratorical writing style, so much so that his reports and appeals were published equally in all the leading press. Additionally, his willingness to make the journey across the border, viewed by many Prussian writers of the period as a transition from civilisation to an uncivilised cultural sphere underscored his increasing stature.84 Those travelling in the opposite direction remarked similarly that 'it seemed to me that I had emerged from the darkness of prison into the light of freedom, into a land which seemed like the Garden of Eden'. 85 This journey also served as personally transformative for Rülf himself, awakening a feeling of solidarity and empathy with Russian Jewry, 'I admit it openly.... I felt quite at home.'86 Additionally, his visit to Kovno served to strengthen his ties to this community, which may have played an important part in later relief efforts as part of the Kovno Circle, a critical channel of communication which operated during later crises. This 'Circle' headed by Rabbi Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor of Kovno served as a

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<sup>82</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Nothstands-Angelegenheiten', *Der Israelit*, 17 June 1868, Nr. 25th ed., p. 485.

<sup>83</sup> Rülf, Meine Reise nach Kowno, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Kuzmany, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Aronson and Marsden, p. 176.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Rülf, Meine Reise nach Kowno, p. 13.

conduit of information regarding the situation of Jews in Russia, and among his early contacts was Dr Rülf.<sup>87</sup>

In his dedication to the ideal of mission and fame, Rülf was early on and consistently willing to reach across denominational and even religious divides, emphasising solidarity as well as philanthropy. In an early letter in January 1868, he included in his appeal, '... My fellow brethren from near and far, of any class, faith or nationality...we make no difference.'88 In formulating his reports and appeals he clearly had in mind not only a readership within the Orthodox community, such as those readers of *Der Israelit*, but also a broader audience. In his letter to the AZJ, relating the experience of a carter in Telschen (now Telšiai in Lithuania, about 60 miles northeast of Klaipėda) who lost his two sons to the famine he used several Hebrew phrases which were then translated into German for the readers, a device which would not have been necessary for readers of Der Israelit.89 Due to this ecumenical outreach and in his later efforts on behalf of the Russian Jewish community to all potential donors regardless of religious or denominational affiliation, he earned the disdain of leading figures within the German rabbinate although not within the Russian community, who were focused more on Rülf's commitment to the relief efforts and his value as a channel to the West. Going even one step further, Rülf was also not hesitant to approach non-Jews in his appeal, 'Christian brethren and fellow citizens' in which he referred to Christians as brothers, a highly unusual step for an Orthodox rabbi, and perhaps reflective of the extensive secular education

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Oppenheim, Israel, 'The Kovno Circle of Rabbi Yitzhak Elhanan Spektor: Organizing Western Public Opinion over Pogroms in the 1880s', in *Organizing Rescue: National Jewish Solidarity in the Modern Period*, ed. S. Ilan Troen, Benjamin Pinkus, and Merkaz le-moreshet Ben-Guryon (London and Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1992), pp. 95, 118.

<sup>88</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf!', p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel, 18 Januar', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 2 February 1869), 5th ed., p. 91.

he acquired in his youth from his studies with a Catholic priest. <sup>90</sup> In such an appeal, he employed his trademark, evocative and picturesque writing style to bridge the gap from difference in religion to simple common human compassion. His reporting of children orphaned by the famine and his repeated use of '*Brüder*' sought the same goal, to be as inclusive as possible in the reach of his relief efforts.

# Rülf as an Advocate for Jewish Solidarity

One aspect of Rülf's success was his ability to engender support for Russian and Polish Jews in a Western environment and with a Jewish audience which was predominantly negative in its view of the needy communities. There was also a fear that Eastern Jews could one day swarm over the border, perhaps bringing disease with them, and swamping the ability to care for them in Prussia. Rülf himself stated that he had initially, 'tried to avoid the West being floated (sic) by Russian brethren', rather advocating relocation of Jews from the Pale to the Russian interior. <sup>91</sup> Even more deeply felt was the trepidation that 'backwards' Jews would somehow imperil the acculturation and acceptance of German Jews into the greater society. 'The eastern European Jew became exclusively identified as the ghetto Jew toward the middle of the nineteenth century, when most German Jews began to regard their own project of cultural assimilation as relatively complete.' Some of the characteristics of these Jews particularly rankled and struck a deep-seated chord within German Jews: 'Yiddish, the Jargon, elsewhere sounded strange but in Germany it was its precise familiarity that bred contempt – the very antithesis of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Christliche Mitbrüder und Mitbürger!', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 24 March 1869), 12th & 13th ed., pp. 220, 221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Concerning the Emigration of the Russian Jews', 19 April 1882, CZA, A1\3, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison. WI and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), p. 7.

Bildung, synonymous with Unbildung'.93 The sight of these Jews in the West, wearing the traditional long, black Polish kapote which served to preserve their separate culture would have been an anathema to German Jews who were striving to do exactly the opposite, to blend in to modern secular society. The period 1868-1871 also witnessed the peak of the controversy over Jewish religious reform, a struggle which had become quite raucous and divisive.94 The reaction, for example, to Rülf's impassioned appeal on behalf of the starving communities east of the border reflected some of these tensions. In correspondence to the AZJ a writer to the newspaper launched a bitter attack upon Rülf's view of Eastern European Jews as 'authentic Judaism'. The author made several points including that Eastern Jews often abandon their Orthodoxy once they moved West, and that Jews in Germany had no desire to return to the backwardness of the early 1800s prior to the German reform in Jewish practice. In closing, the writer lamented that it was regrettable to hear such an approach from a German clergyman.95 In view of such opinions, Rülf's success in the relief effort was indeed surprising and represented a significant achievement in the use of his rabbinical platform.

Notwithstanding the potential resistance of his audience, Rülf remained committed to his relief activities and through the power of his writings and efforts he was able to awaken surprising empathy and response to his appeals. His writing evinced his own personal concern for the plight of the Eastern Jews, whom he viewed as committed co-religionists, faithfully practising tradition. Indeed, in his response to the invective levelled at him from an anonymous writer to the *AZJ*, he wrote, 'I will not dignify to respond to personal attacks on myself however I will vigorously defend the blanket

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Yosef Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence: Orthodoxy in the Grip of Nationalism*, Judaism and Jewish Life (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), p. 86.

<sup>95 &#</sup>x27;Aus Ostpreußen', Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (Leipzig, 26 May 1868), No. 22 ed., p. 439.

insinuation that over a million people are simply thieves and smugglers.<sup>96</sup> Rülf's continued use of the descriptive terms Mitbrüder and Glaubensbrüder emphasised his view that all Jews had more in common than differences. In this respect Rülf has been regarded as one of the first to erase the divider between 'civilised' western Jews and those of the East". 97 As well, he may have also seen himself in the longestablished mould of intercessors, shtadlanim; those Jews who historically interceded with authorities to advance and protect Jewish causes. 98 Classically, however, 'the ideal form of political activity was shtadlanut – intercession by a wellconnected and wealthy Jew (not a rabbi)', which Rülf, utilising the platform of an activist rabbinate sought to change. 99 In the second half of the nineteenth century as well, 'a new form of politics evolved', characterised by organised appeals to public opinion, in this case interceding through the use of the media to protect an otherwise neglected community of fellow Jews. 100 Additionally, during the period of Rülf's activity the role of philanthropy had become an important element of shtadlanut, 'the main manifestation of Jewish power and politics', with Rülf's efforts and accomplishments a hallmark of this growing phenomenon. 101

## Activities of the Relief Committees

During the famine year of 1868 the principal Jewish committees which collected funds for famine relief, and for which lists of donations were publicly listed, were collected through the publication *Der Israelit*, and committees in Lyck (via *HaMagid*),

<sup>96</sup> Rülf, 'Nothstands-Angelegenheiten', p. 485.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> François Guesnet, 'The Politics of Precariousness - Josel of Rosheim and Jewish Intercession in the Holy Roman Empire in the 16th Century' <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2017.1409994">https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2017.1409994</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Vladimir Levin, 'Orthodox Jewry and the Russian Government: An Attempt at Rapprochement, 1907–1914', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 39.2 (2009), pp. 187–204 (p. 188)..

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Volovici, pp. 46–47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ben-Ghedalia, p. 75.

Schippenbeil and Memel (Appendix item 2). There were other local committees in 1868, such as the one in the border town of Tilsit, an area later in the century referred to in local guidebooks as the 'capital of Prussian Lithuania' and which collected for West Russian relief and published a smaller list of donations. 102 This effort intensified in 1869 with groups being formed in other towns, with most funnelling their collections through the major committees whose lists were extensively published. Additionally, several rabbis, particularly Adolf Salvendi of Dürkheim (1837–1914) and Seligman Bär Bamberger of Würzburg (1807–1878) appeared prominently in lists of donations present throughout the period as 'bundlers' of funds which were then directed to the major committees. Bamberger, as well as being a constant presence as a collector in 1868, formulated appeals and published extensive lists of his own during 1869, accounting for the substantial donations he received. Other rabbis as well, potentially influenced by the Rülf model of rabbinical involvement and leadership and its evident success also became active, including Azriel Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt and Berlin, Samuel Wormser of Gersfeld (1807–1892), Menachem Menko Berlinger of Braunsbach (1831–1903) and Marcus Gerson (Mordechai) Wetzlar of Gudensberg. The committee in Lyck collected exclusively for the affected areas in Russia and the organisation in Memel, after a short period of collecting for its own poor also focused their efforts on the affected areas in Russian territory over the border. The committee in Schippenbeil restricted its activities to assist the needy in the east Prussian affected areas and frequently came under attack for doing so.

The publication *Der Israelit* hosted two separate collections, one for each area, for eastern Prussia as well as for the support of the suffering co-religionists in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Spatial Concepts of Lithuania in the Long Nineteenth Century, ed. by Darius Staliūnas, Lithuanian Studies (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2016), p. 401.

Russia Empire. The editor requested donors to earmark their contributions specifically to the area which they wished their donations to be applied. At times the dichotomy became competitive, with a committee collecting for Russia casting aspersions on the use of funds collected by a committee soliciting for East Prussia. The editor of *HaMagid* wrote, 'Only this I am required to reveal to the light of day that which is widely known regarding the large sum of money sitting unused by the Schippenbeil committee. They committed to distribute the funds to the needy of East Prussia; however, due to internal conflicts within the committee nothing was done.<sup>103</sup> This tension between competing committees and geographic needs reached even as far as the United States. As related by the editor of HaMagid, a Rabbi Isaac Goldstein of New York had committed to found a committee to collect charity for the relief efforts, presumably to benefit the Lyck committee's distribution in western Russia. When funds were not received, Silberman investigated further. It emerged that a conflict had arisen within Rabbi Goldstein's congregation between members of Prussian origin and those from Russia with each wanting to support only those areas of their respective heritages. This reported conflict engendered a response from the editor stating, 'I attest here that I am of Prussian origin, yet the committee should support the Russian communities whose needs are being ignored and whose needs are much greater.'104

Similarly there was early competition between committees for the substantial funds collected by *Der Israelit*, as Rülf lamented Dr Lehmann's allocation of funds to the Lyck committee, when the need supported by the Memel committee remained acute: 'I note with a heavy heart that 1000 Thaler have been sent to others for the same

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> 'Al daat ḥevrateinu l'Temichat Aniyay Bnei Yisroel b'Russland u'Polen', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 26 August 1868), no. 34 ed., p. 267.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

purpose.<sup>1105</sup> As the famine in western Russia stretched into mid-1869, the committees soliciting for East Prussia wound down their activities as the situation there had improved. The committees appealing for West Russia, however, redoubled their efforts and several committees organised their work to ensure an orderly and professional distribution of funds. In response to 'hundreds of letters' from needy towns received by the editor of *HaMagid* it was reported that an agreement had been reached in April of that year between the major committees in Lyck, Memel and Königsberg to limit their relief efforts to those towns in their immediate catchment areas east of the border, to avoid duplication of effort and uneven distribution of donations.<sup>106</sup> During early 1869 other committees increased their collection activities for this area, including a major initiative and resultant collections by Rabbi Seligman Bär Bamberger in Würzburg. As related by Rülf in December of 1868, the hope had been that the impact of the famine over the border had lessened and the need satisfied; however, not only was this not the case, but the situation had deteriorated even further, necessitating a renewed and impassioned appeal.<sup>107</sup>

## The Collections:

## The Lyck Committee/HaMagid

The Jewish philanthropic response to the famine and its impact on the wider community can be traced to the autumn of 1867. The editor of *HaMagid* was the first to raise the alarm as to the growing crisis on the Russian side of the border. The newspaper requested donations for famine relief on an ongoing basis, publishing the donations of food, donated and subsidised, as well as monetary gifts at regular

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> 'Extra Beilage zu Nr. 20 des Israelit', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 13 May 1868), no. 20 ed., p. 378.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> 'Al daat ḥevrateinu l'Temichat Aniyay Acheinu Bnei Yisroel b'Russland u'Polen', *Hamagid* (Lyck, 21 April 1869), no. 15 ed., p. 122.

<sup>107 &#</sup>x27;Rettungs Ruf!!', Der Israelit (Mainz, 16 December 1868), Heft 51 ed., p. 957.

intervals. These appeals were predominantly found in its own newspaper (Appendix item 3) although on occasion requests were carried elsewhere, such as in Der Israelit Heft 16 of April 15, 1868, and with increasing frequency in 1869. This fundraising resulted in extensive published lists of donations, which ranged in value from a few Groschen to larger donations from both communities and individuals, as recorded in the accounts published by Lyck in April of 1868 (Appendix item 4). The total donations collected between 1868 and the first half of 1869 represented the largest amounts received by any other committee for West Russia other than by the Memel committee (Appendix items 5, 6 and 7). Donations originated predominantly from Prussia as well as some from outside the empire, including a substantial supporter in San Francisco with donations also arriving from Scandinavia, France, Bavaria, England, and the Austrian Empire (Appendices 8 and 9). Additionally, lists were published outlining those cities being aided by the campaign as well as amounts sent to each, which remittances typically ranged from 20–100 silver Rubles, and which allocations for various towns were repeated several times. The editors possessed and revealed an intimate knowledge of activities east of the border, relating the detailed relief efforts of local communities. Examples included the reported actions of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1810–1883) who visited the city of Krynki to personally appeal for help for the poor and collected money to purchase wheat for distribution at subsidised prices as well as the activities of Rabbis Shmuel Mohilever and Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor who, in their respective cities convinced merchants to contribute a percentage of sales to provide for the needy. 108 Additionally, the editor later described in detail other specific efforts being undertaken by individual communities such as in the city of Kovno where local women were raffling their handiwork with the profits helping to provide subsidised matzos for Passover

<sup>108 &#</sup>x27;Maaseh HaZedakah', HaMagid (Lyck, 8 January 1868), no. 2 ed., p. 12.

consumption. 109 In that same city the rabbinate took an extreme step and permitted the eating of 'Kitniot', a food category usually prohibited on Passover, due to extreme need.<sup>110</sup> It was also recorded that Rabbi Spektor travelled to various cities to collect contributions for the poor affected by the famine. 111 One hallmark of the Lyck campaigns was their insistence on receiving verified receipts for distributions. On several occasions the editor of *HaMagid* exhorted the receiving towns to ensure that a receipt for monies were forwarded to the newspaper and that absent these, there would be no additional remittances. Further, those receipts needed to be signed and sealed with the community's official seal and the endorsement of the regional rabbi. 112 One additional aspect of *HaMagid's* efforts was their continued and largely unsuccessful appeal at soliciting funds from overseas, targeting not only other European countries but also the United States and Australia. An exceptional success was the response from the community in San Francisco, which also gathered donations from other regional U.S. communities such as Portland, Oregon. The editor also did not hesitate to name names, calling out for example the lack of response from Rabbi Moshe Reintal of Melbourne (1823-1880), in whose community lived many parishioners whose origins were in the affected regions. 113

## The Schippenbeil Committee

The committee in Schippenbeil, known as 'The Jewish central support committee of Schippenbeil in East Prussia', was focused exclusively upon addressing the needs of local communities in East Prussia which were suffering because of the famine. In its

<sup>109 &</sup>quot;Maaseh HaZedakah b'Russland', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 1 April 1868), no. 14 ed., p. 107.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

Haim Avni, *Ezratam v'yachasam shel Yehudei Haratzot ha-anglo saxon, tzarfati, germania, l'mifaal ha-ezra l'yehudei russia nifge'ei Ha-Raav B'Shnot 1868–1869 v'tozaeihem.*, p. 4, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Halperin Archive P127/206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> 'Tomchei Dalim b'Russland u'Polan', *HaMagid*, 27 January 1869, no. 4 ed., p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> 'Al daat ḥevrateinu l'Temichat Aniyay Bnei Yisroel b'Russland u'Polen', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 3 February 1869), No. 5 ed., p. 1.

founding letter dated 5 February 1868, which appeared in *Der Israelit*, the committee stated as its purpose to collect money, clothing, and food for the suffering in East Prussia, whose lot had grown direr due to widespread sickness, especially typhus. The committee fashioned itself as a central collection and distribution point and its membership was comprised of local towns in the area, including Landsberg, Heilsberg and Gerbauen. The committee recognised that the central government was providing aid, however this aid in the form of non-kosher food and in work requiring skills which Jewish women did not possess, such as spinning which was therefore unhelpful to the Jewish population. 114 In subsequent weeks, as the need in West Russia became more acute and known, and as Schippenbeil's collections were accumulating at a rapid rate, the committee came under criticism from other border towns, Gumbinnen in particular, for not being willing to help the needy over the eastern border. 115 Immediately under the letter from Gumbinnen, a note from HaMagid's editor was also published, exhorting the Schippenbeil committee to allow its funds to be distributed east of the border where the needs were greater. Schippenbeil's committee responded several weeks later restating its position and pointing out that the need in East Prussia was still acute and that its purpose remained to support the local East Prussian community. It nonetheless must have felt itself under severe pressure, as in subsequent editions of *Der Israelit* it published letters from several local communities in East Prussia which had written to thank the committee publicly for their support in times of need, including an 'open letter of thanks' which appeared in Heft 23 of *Der Israelit* on 3 June 1868. In the meantime, donations continued to flow to the committee, mostly from communities throughout Prussia as well as from France, Switzerland, Bavaria, and the Netherlands

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> 'Schippenbeil, den. 5 Februar 1868', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 19 February 1868), section No. 8, pp. 121–23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> 'Gumbinnen, im März', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 25 March 1868), No. 13 ed., p. 218.

(Appendix item 10). The value of these donations ranged from a single Thaler to a donation of 1694 Thaler from Berlin, and in total the contributions easily eclipsed in value any other recorded Jewish committee collections for East Prussian relief (Appendix item 11). Although outgoing grants were published by Schippenbeil, there was still lingering doubt as to the use of the substantial funds, which likely triggered *HaMagid*'s later criticism that large amounts of money collected by Schippenbeil were not used, with the thinly veiled insinuation that these funds were possibly unaccounted for, or worse.

## **Der Israelit Collections**

The collections launched by *Der Israelit* in early 1868 were divided between appeals for relief efforts both in East Prussia and in West Russia. The editor held a view that Jews in all locations were deserving of community support, as the balanced heading of his initial intention to accept collections was titled 'The emergency in Prussia and in the Russian border districts'.<sup>116</sup> In this article the editor pointed out that there was verified misery on both sides of the border, with the emergency in eastern Prussia already well documented and that he had recently been receiving ongoing communications from many border towns, including Memel, testifying to the terrible conditions which existed in West Russia. As such, the editor agreed to act as an addressee for donations from the greater public, and that when sending donations, the donors should clearly specify for which of the affected areas the contributions should be applied. As details of the actual situation in West Russia began to emerge with greater clarity on the basis of more frequent communications received particularly from Rülf as well as from others, Lehmann's opinion began to change in favour of concentrating relief to that region, as he observed, '...that the state of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> 'Leitender Artikel', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 5 February 1868), no. 6 ed., p. 89.

emergency of our co-religionists in East Prussia is quite insignificant as compared with the situation in Russia and Poland'. 117 Throughout the famine and subsequent emergency, Der Israelit served as a faithful address for reports and letters from the various committees, including an overwhelming number from Dr Rülf. It acted as a forum for the listing of donations and grants during 1868 for both East Prussia and West Russia and in 1869 for West Russia. Contributions were received predominantly from within Prussia and surrounding German states, as well as from donors in the Austrian Empire, Romania, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Bavaria, and France (refer Appendices 12 and 13). During the 1868 campaign Der Israelit's collections for both sides of the border together represented the largest amount of donations whereas in 1869 the total collected by the newspaper was well behind those of both Memel and Lyck, possibly as donors became more comfortable with sending donations directly to the border committees. In both 1868 and the first half of 1869, the majority of the donors who contributed through *Der Israelit* were individuals (90.5 per cent in 1868 and 74 per cent in the first half of 1869; see Appendices 14, 15 and 16). Lehmann's onward forwarding of the contributions received by Der Israelit was overwhelmingly directed to various border city committees, and Memel by far received the largest portion of the funds followed by Lyck and then smaller grants to other towns including Tilsit, Gumbinnen and Königsberg.

## **The Memel Committee**

The committee in Memel began its involvement in famine relief primarily as a local effort. The appeal which appeared in Heft 5 of *Der Israelit* on 29 January 1868 marked the committee's entrance onto the relief scene, describing the difficult

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Marcus Lehmann, 'Leitende Artikel', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 25 March 1868), no. 13 ed., p. 217.

conditions in Memel, both as a result of the famine and the economic hardships being faced by the town. There was a passing reference to the conditions east of the border, mainly as it related to the fifty or so refugee families who had escaped from even worse conditions there. In its appeal the committee branded itself as simply 'The Association for the Defense Against the Emergency', 118 with many signatories including committee members and community notables and Dr Rülf as preacher of the synagogue community. In the same edition, however, a lengthy letter from Dr Rülf as sole author appeared in which he both supported the appeal of the committee but also recorded independently the horrific conditions that prevailed east of the border where 90 per cent of the inhabitants were 'without bread' and that 'the misery and distress of these people is indescribable'. 119 In the following edition of *Der* Israelit, Dr Lehmann in a lead article related that he had received numerous communications from border towns, including Memel, Gumbinnen and Königsberg describing the terrible conditions which prevailed east of the border and advocated the formation of committees to address the situation there. 120 In response, and as quickly as Heft 10 of Der Israelit, published shortly thereafter on 4 March 1868 a letter appeared from the committee in Memel pledging themselves to the relief effort as suggested by Dr Lehmann, with the signatures now being identified as, 'The Board of Directors of the Association for the Alleviation of the Emergency Situation of Jews in the Russian Borderlands', denoting a change in focus. 121 This letter was followed by an impassioned plea for relief efforts for western Russia, signed by the committee members, including Dr Rülf.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf', p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Memel, den 16. Jan.', *Mainz*, 29 January 1868, no. 5 ed., pp. 77–78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> 'Leitender Artikel'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> 'Zur Abwehr des Nothstandes der Israeliten in den westrussischen Provinzen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 4 March 1868), No. 10 ed., pp. 158–59.

The committee and Rülf's appeals, collections and reports of donations continued to be published throughout 1868, with such appeals directed both at the general public as well as to Dr Lehmann, in an effort to attract a larger share of the donations the publication was receiving directly. There also appeared in both the *AZJ* and *Der Israelit* regular, extensive and highly detailed 'Statement of Accounts' outlining the receipt and use of the funds, listing each donor, receiving town, and the value of the donations in an effort to remain transparent. During 1868 the situation in West Russia appeared to reach its climax in late springtime, as recorded by Rülf, 'The famine among our Jewish brethren in western Russia has reached its peak'. Thereafter the crisis seemed to improve over the summer and into the autumn, with a noted absence of further appeals from the committee, although donations still were being received and published mostly from within Prussia as well as from England, the Austrian Empire, France, Italy, Romania, the Netherlands and New York.

# <u>1869 – the Turn Eastwards/Rülf Takes Centre Stage</u>

Due to the drought which occurred in the summer of 1868 and with the onset of winter and the lack of local aid, the West Russian communities again faced a hunger crisis in 1869. Described by Rülf in his appeal published in both the *AZJ* and *Der Israelit* in December 1868 as an issue of 'Lebensrettung', saving of lives, the appeal for donations for West Russian Jewish communities resumed and intensified. The complexion of the appeals, however, during the first half of 1869 differed considerably from those of the prior year. The existence of the famine and its effects were already widely known and there was increased publicity of the need, resulting in widespread participation from various synagogue committees and rabbinical leaders which yielded higher donations for the cause, especially and critically for

lsaak Rülf, 'Rettungsruf', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 1 July 2019), no. 27 ed., p. 526.

funds sent to Memel for onward distribution over the border. Indeed, the total amount of donations received by the Memel committee during the first half of 1869 was greater than the combined total of the donations received by all of the published committees' receipts for the entire year 1868 (refer Appendices 6 and 7); such was the jurisdiction, authority, and reputation that Rülf had acquired.

While Rülf's writing style remained his most valuable tool in attracting contributions. the success of his campaign engendered even greater support as donors were emotionally touched and moved by his descriptions of the misery east of the border and likely wanted to be a part of the Memel committee's success. The reach of the committee in this period was equally impressive, which easily set their activities apart from those of any others, not only in value but in geographic reach (Appendix item 17), including Rülf's appeal translated into English which appeared in *The Jewish* Chronicle, attracting local donations, including from Baron Lionel de Rothschild. 123 While 'large' donations throughout 1868 were measured in hundreds of Thaler, during 1869 these amounts would be considered routine. Aside from the donations from Dr Lehmann totalling approximately 3000 Thaler, the committees in Würzburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Hamburg each contributed close to or over 5000 Thaler to the Memel effort. Other notable contributions arrived from communities in Copenhagen and Paris (~1000 Thaler each), from Budapest (2800 Thaler), from London (1500 Thaler) and even from five cities in the United States (total 1500 Thaler). These large-value donations did not detract from the sheer volume of individual donations. which still comprised the majority of the funds collected, indicating the vast popular appeal of the cause and of the Memel committee's standing among donors (Appendix item 19).

<sup>123</sup> A. L. Green, 'The Appalling Distress Among the Jews of Western Russia', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 26 March 1869), No. 39, New Series-Full, no. 745 ed., p. 6.

An even greater change during the period was in Rülf's increased presence in the media and the wider coverage he enjoyed. His name became increasingly wellknown and recognised, and he often no longer needed to identify himself with his congregation as 'Preacher', simply signing his letters and reports 'Dr Rülf'. Rülf utilised this increased visibility to both continue with his appeals and relief efforts, but now mounted an ambitious platform to attempt to address on a more global basis the problems facing Russian Jewry. In January he proposed an approach to unify Jewish support worldwide for educational institutions in West Russia, either in conjunction with the Alliance Israélite Universelle or if necessary as an alternative, free-standing effort, due to Rülf's perception regarding the Alliance's lack of focus on this issue. 124 Later, in a long letter to the AZJ he addressed concerns from donors as to why the affected communities did not do more to help themselves and why the local government was not doing more, instead of having German Jewry solve what should have been a local issue. In this essay Rülf pointed out that the catastrophe facing the West Russian communities was not of their own making, rather it was due to poor harvests and changes in local economic policies. He specifically mentioned that the Bildung of eastern Jewry was as high as any European standard, with this Bildung expressed through expertise in Talmud study. He then commented that insofar as local government assistance was concerned, this would require further study, however it had been reported that at least the government was no longer ignoring the problem. 125

Utilising the platform of greater renown, Rülf began to expand the role of his rabbinate, viewing his ministry as global in nature and jurisdiction. Not hesitating to

<sup>124</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Memel, den 12 Januar', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 27 January 1869), no. 4 ed., pp. 60–61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> 'Erster Rechenschafts Bericht', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 6 April 1869), no. 14 ed., p. 281.

become involved in politics beyond Memel or even locally in eastern Prussia, he penned an open letter to the governor of Kovno, advocating a solution to the problems affecting Jews in Kovno and its surroundings and more generally Russian Jewry. Rülf ambitiously sought to achieve the granting of full freedom and equality for Russian Jews, through comparing the higher and more integrated status of Prussian Jewry to that of their coreligionists in Russia; the sole difference being the granting of freedom and equality for Jews in Prussia. 126 As well, in an effort to become even more acquainted with, and/or possibly to assume even greater prominence in the relief effort and with his involvement in the status of Russian Jewry in general, Rülf accepted an invitation from the governor and decided to make a journey across the border to visit Kovno, one of the affected cities. 127 The tendering of this invitation also represented the increased stature that Rülf had achieved through his prominence in the relief efforts through the flow of donations he marshalled and controlled. Rülf filed reports from Kovno, including his own detailed and often heart-rending description of the misery he found there, and outlined his proposed solution to the problem of poverty and the overall situation of the local Jews. These proposals were contained in a series of reports published in the AZJ and focused on relocation of the community to the Russian interior, for which he also stated having received support from the local governor. A substantial caveat was added in that this proposal required central government approval. 128 An additional influence on Rülf as a result of this journey and which would play a significant role in his later advocacy for a Jewish homeland was his own reaction to the feeling of community he experienced while in Kovno, 'My heart was deeply moved, I believed that I had been transported to Erez Israel, to the dear and ancient home of the

<sup>126</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Memel, den 6. April', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 5 May 1869), No. 18 ed., pp. 362–63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Scheinhaus, 'Ein Edler in Israel', p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Rülf, 'Wie ist den nothleidenden Juden', p. 469.

Fathers'.<sup>129</sup> A further significant result from Rülf's visit was his strengthened ties with the Russian Jewish community which helped to secure his reputation as a man of action, and as a person on whom wider Jewry could depend.

## From Dr Rülf to 'Dr Hülf'

By the autumn of 1869, the issue of the famine had receded, as reported in HaMagid, 'also in Poland and west Russia the earth has provided its bounty and accordingly the situation of our brethren who were suffering from famine has improved'. 130 As such, Rülf's activities in the period 1870–1879 were re-focused primarily on his work in the local Memel community, aiding emigrants from the Russian Empire as well as responding to ongoing requests for assistance from various towns east of the border. 131 During the famine relief he had acted primarily as the principal member of the Memel committee, raising funds, and providing financial aid, while in the 1870s Rülf received and responded to requests made to him individually, likely on the basis of his work during the famine, cementing his personal standing in the Russian Jewish community and as a cross-border link. Throughout the decade he exerted ongoing efforts in philanthropy, albeit on a significantly circumscribed scale than had been the case during the widespread famine relief. His initial post-famine work began with applying funds remaining from the 1868/9 appeals; 1733 Thaler, 6 Silbergroschen for the establishment of a Jewish hospital in Memel to treat needy refugees. 132 He continued to provide support to refugees in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Rülf, *Meine Reise nach Kowno*, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> 'Al hamidinos bo ya-amer', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 29 September 1869), 37th ed., p. 289.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Regarding the mass immigration movement from the East partially having its roots in the famine of 1868/9, see Eli Lederhendler, 'Modernity without Emancipation or Assimilation', in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein, Institute of Jewish Studies (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 334.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> 'Das Jüdische Krankenhaus in Memel', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Berlin, 25 July 1919), 30th ed., pp. 331–32.

Memel not only financially but as well in assisting them to locate work and to educate children, many of whom were orphans. In this latter role, Rülf's efforts were specifically and positively commented upon during an 1872 visit by Alliance representatives to Memel. Also in 1872 as a means of supplementing his income from the rabbinate and to secure his independence from community lay leaders he assumed the editorship of the local newspaper, *Memeler Dampfboot*, a position he held for the following twenty-six years. In that role he was regarded as a fair and independent spirit, reporting the news without prejudice and provided the publication with its direction for the future, enabling it to be recognised as a leading regional organ.

In dispensing relief to western Russia during the 1868/9 famine Rülf and the Memel committee had provided aid to 230 individual towns thus publicising in a broad and concrete manner the availability of help in Memel and in the person of Isaac Rülf. <sup>137</sup> He had been the first to have seen the imperative of utilising Memel and its position as a border town to act as an important bridge between the Western and Eastern Jewish communities. <sup>138</sup> This likely increased the appeal of Memel as a first stop for emigrants and as an address for aid for individuals and communities. Regarding aid to individuals, as was reported in an obituary for Rülf, 'who among the youth in the 70s and 80s who wandered from their homes with empty pockets and without any support and knocked on Rülf's door in Memel and did not find a warm greeting,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Cohn, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Report of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. 2nd Half-Year, 1871, & 1st Half-Year 1872 (London: Turner & Co., Printers, 1872), p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> 'Achar Mitato shel HaDoktor Rabbiner Rülf z"l', *HaMelitz* (St. Peterburg, 25 September 1902), 206th ed., p. 1., citing the *Memeler Dampfboot*, no. 221 of 20 September 1902.

<sup>137</sup> Scheinhaus, 'Ein Edler in Israel', p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Leiserowitz, Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein, p. 236.

financial support, sound advice and letters of reference for their onward journey'?<sup>139</sup> Among these refugees was David Wolffsohn (1856–1914), later to succeed Theodor Herzl as the president of the Zionist Organiation. About his interaction with Dr Rülf he stated, 'In the early seventies I went to Memel, where my oldest brother was then residing. Here I made the acquaintance of Rabbi Dr I. J. Rulf, who had great influence on my future career and way of thinking.'<sup>140</sup> This comment was likely an understatement, as Rülf had arranged for Wolffsohn's training as a timber merchant leading to a successful financial future and also took an important part in his religious training which later served an influence on Herzl, 'contributing an intimate knowledge of, and feel for, the heartland of European Jewry'.<sup>141</sup>

As a magnet for appeals from the East, Rülf received many requests for relief in the wake of multiple fires which occurred throughout the decade including from Schadow (now Šeduva in Lithuania, about 80 miles northwest of Vilnius) in 1871. 142 The following year he responded by providing aid as a result of a fire in Schaulen (now Siauliai in Lithuania, about 80 miles east of Klaipėda). 143 In 1876 he responded to a fire in Kupischok (now Kupiškis in Lithuania, about 80 miles north of Vilnius). 144 In 1877 the committee provided aid to the town of Wilkomir (now Ukmerge in Lithuania, about 35 miles north of Vilnius) which had largely devastated the city. 145 In 1879 the town of Utian (now Utena in Lithuania, about 40 miles north of Vilnius) was provided with aid, following receipt of an urgent, heartfelt plea received by Rülf, as a result of

<sup>139</sup> 'Achar Mitato shel HaDoktor Rabbiner Rülf z"l'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism 1600–1918*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1919), II, Appendix LXXXIII, pp. 388–89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 271n.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Notruf!', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 29 August 1871), 35th ed., p. 706.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Zum Hülferufe für die Abgebrannten in Schaulen', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 10 September 1872), p. 731.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Theure Glaubensgenossen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 16 August 1876), 33rd ed., p. 776.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Hilferuf!', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 8 August 1877), 32nd ed., p. 768.

his reputation and prominence and citing his previous philanthropy, 'providing aid as you have done for many other towns'. 146 In response to these disasters Rülf mounted public campaigns through the AZJ and Der Israelit, utilising the methodology he had previously and successfully employed in the famine of 1868/9. The calls for help were similarly worded, including vivid descriptions of the losses to property and the homelessness of the victims, with appeals to Glaubensbrüder to express compassion and provide financial support. While the appeals were similarly constructed, and were addressed to, 'all affluent coreligionists of the world [who] must provide support', the responses for each of the appeals were less robust, both in terms of number of commitments and funds collected. 147 While the amounts collected in the 1868/9 campaign were reported to have exceeded 121,000 Thaler, responses to the appeals for relief from fires were typically being received in considerably smaller amounts. 148 As an example, donations received in response to the appeal for Schadow totalled 901 Thaler including remittances from individuals, communities and rabbis many of whom and which had been part of the network that had previously donated to the Memel committee in 1868/9, i.e. Rabbi Seligman Bär Bamberger of Würzburg. 149

Rülf's reputation had been established through his success in the widespread famine appeals, however in the wake of his now frequent calls for help to benefit various cities and causes in the Russian Empire including smaller 'Städtchen', he found

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Jssay Back, 'Wilna 8/20 Juni 1879' (Wilna, 1879), CZA, A1\219, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Rülf, 'Zum Hülferufe für die Abgebrannten in Schaulen', p. 731 (Müssen alle Wohlhabenden Glaubensgenossen der Welt...unterstützungsbereit sich zeigen).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Ein Bild Aus Westrußland', *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums* (Leipzig, May 1880), 21st ed., pp. 327-28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Verzeichniss der für abgebrannten Israeliten in russischen Städtchen Schadow bei den Unterzeichneten eingegangen Spenden', Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (Leipzig, 13 February 1872), 7th ed., p. 134.

himself on the defensive for 'die Schnorrerei'. 150 The issue of repeated solicitation by Jewish immigrants and transmigrants from the East had become a personal issue for many citizens in Germany as homes were, 'being closed to itinerant beggars', with signs being posted on gates, 'begging and peddling verboten'. 151 Rülf remained unapologetic, stating on another occasion, 'Even if I had to beg and plead for my poor Russian brothers in faith, even if I had to put up with many a shameful rejection, I would not refrain from knocking on your hearts.'152 In an especially passionate and strident defense of his continued activities on behalf of Russian Jewish communities he represented himself as their principal benefactor, which in this and the previous decade he may very well have been. In the relief effort for the fires which devastated the town of Wilkomir, the Memel committee had apparently been acting on behalf of the Alliance. 153 The effort was a relatively major one, supported by a personal plea from Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor and resulted in significant donations, published in at least six separate donation lists. In a response to criticism from the Alliance for his continued requests for aid, Rülf stated, 'Were a German or French city to experience a similar disaster and 6,000 people became homeless and completely lost all their possessions, the entire nation of 40 million persons would rush to their aid. In 'holy Russia' not a hand or foot is raised' underlining the singular and central importance that he and the Memel committee played in the Russian relief efforts. 154 In addition to responding to requests and appealing for funds for fire

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Einige Worte in Bezug auf die Aufrufe zur Wohlthätigkeit', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 4 December 1878), 49th ed., pp. 1199–1200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 230.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Theure Glaubensbrüder!', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 1 August 1876), 31st ed., pp. 500–501 (Wenn ich auch bis zum Überdrusse für die armen russischen Glaubensbrüder bitten und betteln, ja wenn ich mir selbst manche beschämende Abweisung gefallen lassen müsste).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Gegenerklärung', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 16 October 1877), 42st ed., p. 676 (the signature of the article is, 'Für das Local und Grenzcomité der Alliance Israel Universelle in Memel: Dr. Rülf').

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

damage, Rülf also received requests for other projects such as the building of a synagogue in the town of Kurzian (now Kuršėnai in Lithuania, about 50 miles east of Klaipėda). The head of that community had visited Memel to request further support and responding to his invitation to visit the town personally Rülf agreed, continuing his willingness to travel as necessary, notwithstanding his description of the journey's hardship: 'in a difficult journey via a small handcart'. 155

While organising relief funding for and responding to the various appeals from the East, Rülf continued his local rabbinical functions in Memel. His daily routine was described as extending from early morning, often as early as 5am, at which time he repaired to the synagogue to pray and to teach Talmud to his congregants, returning there in the evening for the same purpose. 156 In addition his activities included managing and teaching in the local school, which duties required significant time and attention as was described by his successor Rabbi Emanuel Carlebach (1874-1927).157 Rülf's administrative work in the school was wide ranging, including establishing what may have been a pioneering school savings plan, about which he received an inquiry from a school in Königsberg, seeking to implement a similar program in their institution.<sup>158</sup> Rülf dedicated considerable energy to both local and regional education both as a member of the regional school supervisory board and even composed a play for students to perform on the holiday of Purim, which was apparently widely circulated, occasioning a request for copies of same from a teacher in Riga.<sup>159</sup> Closing out the decade, in 1879 Rülf founded a local school for poor children, the Armenschule, a school for the poor, in which the Hebrew

<sup>155</sup> Rülf, 'Theure Glaubensbrüder!', p. 500

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Leon Scheinhaus, 'Erinnerungen an Rabbiner Dr. Rülf', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 38 (1912), pp. 449–51 (p. 450).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Emanuel Carlebach, 'Memel, Dienstag 21/VI. 98', 21 June 1898, CZA, A1\72 p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Kruger (Mrs), 'Königsberg 31 Decbr 91', 31 December 1891, CZA, A1\77 p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> M. Aronsberg, 'Riga, den 16t Januar, 1889', 16 January 1889, CZA, A1\78 p.8.

language, German and Talmud were taught, and in which Rülf played an active part. Although the period had not provided a platform for Rülf to extend his reputation substantially beyond his extensive work in philanthropy to benefit his locale and the Russian Jewish communities, he remained poised to take advantage of any opportunities to do so, which the following years amply provided.

## <u>1880–1885 – Rülf Redux</u>

In February 1880 Rülf authored a letter, published in the AZJ, responding to a recent article by a noted historian and politician, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) regarding, 'a German-Jewish question'. 161 For many citizens of Germany, this question had been settled by the passage of a law by the Reichstag of the North German Confederation in 1869 abolishing all restrictions due to differences of religion, a law which was extended to the whole of the Kaiserreich in 1871.162 The stock market crash of 1873 and the subsequent economic impact caused attention to be focused on Jewish participation in the economy and antisemitism, 'became an outlet for the expression of dissatisfaction with the crisis: anti-capitalist, anti-socialist, anti-modernist and anti-emancipationist'. 163 By the time of Treitschke's article, 'Unsere Aussichten' appeared in November 1879 in the prestigious publication *Preussische Jahrbücher*, there had already been increasing anti-Jewish sentiments. These included the founding by court preacher Adolf Stöcker (1835-1909) in January 1878 of the first antisemitic political party (Christian Social Workers' Party) appealing to 'artisans and craftsmen', with Stöcker referred to as 'patron saint of the rowdies' as well as publications such as 'The Way to the Victory of Germanism over

<sup>160</sup> Leiserowitz, Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein, p. 237.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Peter Pulzer, 'The Return of Old Hatreds', in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Peter Pulzer 'Introduction', in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Sonja Weinberg, *Pogroms and Riots: German Press Responses to Anti-Jewish Violence in Germany and Russia (1881–1882)* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 39.

Judaism' in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904). What made Treitschke's comments different was the standing that he enjoyed in educated and mainstream circles as a professor at the University of Berlin, and that 'his reputation gave his statements the aura of scientific reputation'. In his article he stated, 'Year after year there pours over our eastern frontier from the inexhaustible Polish cradle a host of ambitious trouser-selling youths, whose children and children's children one day will dominate Germany's stock exchange and newspapers'. In identifying the 'trouser-selling youths' with Polish immigration Treitschke had attempted to capitalise on existing and growing anti-Polish sentiment which had already been a factor in Chancellor Bismarck's introduction of legislation in 1878 referring to Poles as, 'enemies of the Reich'. In Institute of the Reich'.

In January 1880 Treitschke published further on the same subject via a pamphlet, 'Ein Wort über unser Judentum', in which he advocated annulling the granting of emancipation to Jews. There were several swift negative reactions to these publications, including a 'Declaration of the Notables', signed by 75 gentile personalities as well as by several articles and pamphlets including by the noted historian Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) and the lead article in the *AZJ* of December 9, 1879. The *AZJ's* response addressed the facts stated by Treitschke as *Behauptungen*, assertions, which the newspaper systematically addressed and rebutted. Rülf's contribution to this significant issue was relegated to a letter written to the *AZJ*, and which appeared as 'correspondence'. In a vein similar to that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> Pulzer, 'The Return of Old Hatreds', p. 205.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Albert A. Bruer, *Aufstieg und Untergang: Eine Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (1750–1918)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), p. 309.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Weinberg, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> 'Leitende Artikel - Antwort an Professor Dr. v. Treitschke', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 9 December 1879), 50th ed., pp. 785–87.

followed by the *AZJ* of denying the claims brought by Treitschke, he referred to the latter's visit to Memel and stated that there were in fact no young pants sellers present and that in any case most immigrants were cultured and desired to emigrate beyond Germany. The tone of Rülf's letter was almost sarcastic, addressing Treitschke's comments as uninformed and baseless accusations, clearly not sufficiently recognising the standing of the author or gravity of the issue, which represented an important antisemitic cultural change.<sup>170</sup> While his letter might have represented an attempt by Rülf to weigh in on an important issue, he was unable to achieve this objective as a commentator of the first order, underscoring perhaps his irrelevance to a domestic German agenda and a lack of access to or recognition within the public sphere where non-Eastern matters or philanthropy were involved.

In 1880 Rülf published a philosophical work, outlining an important personal tenet through its title, *The Idea of Unity as the Fundamental Concept of all Religion and Science, as the Basis of Understanding among the educated of all Confessions and Nations*.<sup>171</sup> In this work and in his later five-volume work on Metaphysics, in which subject he had presented his doctoral dissertation at the University of Rostock in 1865, published in stages from 1888 to 1903, Rülf wrote to advocate for the unity of science and philosophy.<sup>172</sup> As he wrote to his son, Benno (1871 – 1942), 'Philosophy and exact science, thing and imagination, inner and outer must completely agree'.<sup>173</sup> While it seems clear that Rülf viewed himself as a philosopher and he dedicated

Werner Bergmann and Ulrich Wyrwa, *Antisemitismus in Zentraleuropa: Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Geschichte kompakt, 1. Aufl (Darmstadt: WBG (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), 2011), p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> J. J. Rülf, *Der Einheitsgedanke - Als Fundamentalbegriff aller Religionen und Wissenschaft, als Verständigungsbasis unter den Gebildeten aller Confessionen und Nationen* (Memel: Verlag von Robert Schmidt, 1880).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Julius H. Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism: Hess, Pinsker, Rülf: Messianism, Settlement Policy, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, European-Jewish Studies Controversies, Vol 2 (Berlin and Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2013), p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Lieber Benno', 4 February 1896, p. 4, Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History, AR3179.

considerable time and effort to its writing, 'every moment of my life and all of my time I have devoted to this', there was not a wide recognition of, or acclaim for his work in the field. 174 Within German Jewish Orthodox circles there was a distancing from his advocacy for the unity of religions, indicated by a printed retraction in *Der Israelit* of a previously favourable review of his 1880 work. The newspaper stated that the retraction was necessary due to a sentiment that his views 'tend towards heresy' and could therefore not be endorsed or recommended. 175 This retraction elicited a prompt and sharp criticism from Rülf, published as an advertisement in the AZJ in which he stated, 'Neither your words, nor the words of anyone else, will distract me from my work. My writing was done in the consciousness of full faithfulness, purity of heart and love of truth.'176 Within the work Rülf cited several endorsements of the Enlightenment including, 'Enlightenment is still necessary today, or rather, as necessary again today, as it was a hundred years ago, when heroic spirits of enlightenment stormed the castles of fratricidal feud and spiritual darkness.'177 This view was affirmed in a beautiful hand-drawn scroll tendered to Sir Moses Montefiore in 1884 in honour of his hundredth birthday in which Rülf, in the name of the Memel community cited Sir Moses as the fourth 'Moses' among Judaism's 'spiritual elite' numbered among the biblical Moses and Maimonides. In this testimonial, mentioned immediately preceding Sir Moses was Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) as the third 'Moses', who captured 'the spirit of the first Moses and to adapt it to the spirit of modern times'. 178 This position would also have contributed to his being viewed by some members of the Orthodox Jewish rabbinate in Germany as, 'the personally

174 I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel den 8ten Nov. 1887', 8 November 1897, CZA, A1\4, pp. 6–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> 'Mainz, 18. Oct.', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 20 October 1880), 42nd ed., p. 1014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'An Herren Dr. Lehmann und Genossen', *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums*, 2 November 1880, 44th ed., p. 702.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> J. J. Rülf, Vorrede, *Der Einheitsgedanke* p. III.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Die vier Moses', 1884, UCL Digital Collection: The Tributes to Sir Moses Montefiore.

observant Rabbi Isaak Rülf in Memel could hardly be reckoned among Orthodox Jewry'. The Rülf's continued view of the importance of unity could also have been a driver in his life-long motivation in reaching across geographic and religious sectarianism to seek respect for and full acceptance of Eastern Jews within Western society and seeking national unity. In reviewing Rülf's achievements, the obituary in the *AZJ* touched upon his philosophical work, contrasting it with his long efforts for Russian Jews: 'If his philosophical theories are easily long forgotten, Rülf's memory will still live on in the grateful hearts of Eastern Jews.' 180

Despite his failure to contribute meaningfully thus far to the German-Jewish political scene his connections to, relationships with, and respected authority as it related to Jewry across the eastern border remained strong. News of the pogroms which began in the Russian Empire during April 1881 (and which will be covered in greater detail in a subsequent chapter) reached the West and Rülf's reaction was swift; on May 22nd, less than a month after the pogrom in Kiev, he published an appeal for aid in the *AZJ*.<sup>181</sup> In the appeal Rülf made specific reference to his work in the famine period, stating, 'You entrusted us with more than half a million Marks in that terrible emergency of 1867/68. We supported 230 Russian cities with it, sought the best use for every penny and gave the most accurate account, which shall also be done now.'182 Not alone in this respect, a concurrent appeal was published by the Alliance, which appeared in *Der Israelit*, inviting donations to be sent through the editors for further distribution.<sup>183</sup> Rülf's appeal was, as in the past, far reaching, eliciting responses from within Europe as well as from abroad, notably from the United

<sup>179</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 246.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> 'Bonn, 26. September', p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> 'Deutsche Volksgenossen und jüdische Glaubensgenossen', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 7 June 1881), Heft 23rd ed., p. 382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> 'Aufruf für die russichen Israeliten', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 8 June 1881), Heft 23rd ed., p. 562.

States. Due to a lack of published receipts, it is difficult to estimate the total contributions; however, from the letters contained in the Rülf folio at the Central Zionist Archives it seems clear that the amounts donated were less in comparison to those collected in the famine of 1868/9. Donations tendered from June through the summer of 1881 included, from Europe, a relatively large donation from the Berlin firm of Platho and Wolff of 3,087 Marks.<sup>184</sup> Other European contributions were recorded from the Jewish community of Crefeld (now Krefeld in North Rhine Westphalia) of 833.50 Marks and smaller donations of 73.80 Marks from Greifenberg in Bavaria and 53.50 marks from Griesheim in Hesse.<sup>185</sup> From the United States a contribution of 100 Marks was received from the community in Camden, New Jersey, 120 Dollars from New Haven, Connecticut, and a promise of a 'not insignificant sum' to be sent from the Ohab Shalom Gemeinde in Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>186</sup> As indication of the transmissibility and reach of Rülf's influence, the cantor of the Baltimore synagogue reported having made several copies of Rülf's request, sending it onwards to neighbouring smaller communities.<sup>187</sup>

In addition to his fundraising efforts, Rülf continued to issue reports regarding the atrocities being committed, including a sensationalised report of a pogrom in the town of Borispol (now Boryspil in Ukraine, located about 25 miles east of Kiev), citing in a vivid manner rapes and murder, reports of which were carried in Russia, both in the Jewish and non-Jewish press.<sup>188</sup> These efforts towards shtadlanut in the public sphere via the press were termed by Klier to be 'very influential ... emphasised

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> 'Berlin, 15 August 1881', 15 August 1881, CZA, A1\220, p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> CZA, A1\220 pp., 23, 32, 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Ibid., pp. 19, 20, 25, 29–30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> A. Kaiser, 'Baltimore July 7, 1881', 7 July 1881, CZA, A1\220 pps. 29, 30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> John Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 402.

Russian atrocities in order to mobilise an international relief and protest movement'. 189 In June, a further notice was published by Rülf seeking aid for fires in towns just east of the border, citing requests he had received from various rabbis of the affected towns, and in particular a request by Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor. 190 There had not been major pogroms in Lithuanian Russia, in large measure due to the Church hierarchy receiving instructions from secular authorities to order priests to calm the population. 191 Local authorities as well had issued instructions to the population to prevent unrest, i.e. by E. I. Totleben (1818–1884), the Governor-General of Vilna who stated, 'to eliminate the occurrence of any disorder.... I consider it my duty to warn the populace that any congregation, gathering or congestion of people in squares and streets is prohibited'. 192 As well, the absence of pogroms in the region has been attributed to, 'a traditional xenophobia based on a religious feudal Judeophobia, as yet untouched by the innovations of antisemitism in the modern age'. 193 Additionally, the authorities in Lithuania and the western borderlands had retained fresh memories of the 1863-1864 uprising, and officials had reason to be concerned that any anti-Jewish movement in Lithuania could spill over as a 'side-effect'. 194 Notwithstanding the relative calm, there had been an outbreak of severe fires in Lithuania that had been attributed to arson. 195

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> 'MiKovno', *HaMelitz* (St Petersburg, 19 July 1881), 26th ed., p. 559.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars*, Historical Studies in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, vol III (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2015), p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> *Pogroms: A Documentary History*, ed. by Eugene M. Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 39, 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Claire Le Foll, 'The Missing Pogroms of Belorussia, 1881–1882: Conditions and Motives of an Absence of Violence', in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen, ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 170–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Staliūnas, p. 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882*, p. 54.

In July of that year Rülf again cited the need to raise money for the victims of the fires, referring to sums that the Memel committee had already sent to several of the affected towns. 196 Although there were other appeals and funds had been collected, including by the Alliance and the committee in Berlin, Rülf believed that insufficient action was being taken. 197 In particular he cited the ignoring of his requests to both the Alliance and to the mayor of Berlin to send a delegation to Russia to investigate and refute the allegations that the Jews themselves were to blame for the riots. 198 Acting upon this frustration Rülf decided to make this trip himself and on July 27th, he set off eastwards, with his initial destination the town of Vilna, located about 185 miles southeast of Memel. 199 The resulting travelogue, Drei Tage in Jüdisch-Russland - Ein Cultur und Sittenbild written by Rülf in December 1881 and published the following year described in great detail the lives and culture of the Jews in Vilna and Minsk as well as the damage to Minsk due to the recent fires. Overall, the work was predominantly an exercise in promoting understanding of and solidarity with the Russian Jewish community, describing in great and praiseworthy detail the traditional practice of Judaism he observed, citing the inhabitants as representing 'the ideal figures of beautiful human form, who walk the streets by the dozens'.200 Rülf himself was deeply and emotionally affected by his experience in Vilna, describing his celebration of a Sabbath there: 'only rarely have I ever experienced the poetic ideal of the Sabbath'. <sup>201</sup> As well, expressing in the work perhaps a nascent Jewish national sentiment, he described being surrounded by fellow Jews, 'who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel, 30. Juni.', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 19 July 1881), 29th ed., p. 482.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> 'Bonn, 5. Juli', Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, 19 July 1881, 29th ed., p. 481, citing collections of Fr. 212,327 by the Alliance and M. 47,771 by the Berliner Comité.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> J. Rülf, *Drei Tage in Jüdisch-Russland - Ein Cultur und Sittenbild* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag von F. Kauffman, 1882), Vorwort, pp. iii, iv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

recognised me without reserve as one of their own, and among whom I could give myself unrestrictedly as what I am, and could be without the slightest restraint, what I always wanted to be - a Jew'.  $^{202}$  Rülf sought to educate the West in providing a more accurate picture of the cultured Eastern Jewry, stating, 'Respect is based on knowledge, however until now the image of the Russian Jew is that of the itinerant "Schnorrer", a view he aimed to correct. 203 The work also reflected Rülf's greatly dimmed view of the possibility of accommodating a long-term Jewish presence in the Russian Empire, terming the Russian people as a whole 'deep in barbarianism and immorality and even the educated Russians have only to a very limited extent adopted the advances of civilisation'. 204 This represented a specific shift in his previous position as expressed in an 1869 report in the AZJ, in which he advocated resettlement of Jews within the Russian interior. 205 Reviews of the publication appeared in both the AZJ and Der Israelit, with the AZJ summarising its contents in detail and recommending the 'small volume' by the 'indefatigable' author as a 'benevolent' view of Russian Jewry. 206 Der Israelit as well published a favourable review of the work, highlighting Rülf's description as to the diligence of the Torah scholarship in Vilna and stating that 'the author has portrayed in rich colour the cultural picture of our Russian co-religionists'. 207

As a bridge to the West and as an effective provider of support and relief Rülf remained an important address to which those in the Russian Empire seeking to transmit the suffering of the community and to solicit assistance could communicate.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Ibid., Vorwort, p. iv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Ibid., Vorwort, p. v.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Rülf, 'Wie ist den nothleidenden Juden' in Westrußland'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> 'Reiseerinnerungen II', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 31 Januar 1882), 5th ed., pp.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> 'Literarischer Bericht', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 22 Februar 1882), 8th ed., pp. 178–79.

The pogroms of 1881 and subsequent persecution provided ample opportunity for Rülf to continue in a central role both a provider of aid to refugees and as a spokesman for the Russian Jewish community and as a conduit to the West. As will be covered in detail in a subsequent chapter, a group known as the Kovno Circle was organised by Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor and his secretary, Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz as a vehicle for transmitting details of the pogroms and requests for foreign intervention beyond the Russian Empire. The initial communication of the group in the form of Heye Im Pipiot; a traditional form of appeal in times of stress was sent from Kovno to Dr Asher (1837-1889) in London on 31 October 1881.<sup>208</sup> In this appeal Dr Asher was informed in detail of the persecutions under which the Russian Jews were living and was requested to recruit Lord Nathaniel Rothschild (1840-1915) to the cause and to publicise the letter's content. By doing so, sympathy for Russian Jewry could be engendered and a movement to shame the Russian government into improving its treatment of the Jewish community could be mounted. Dr Asher responded promptly on 6 November and agreed to proceed as requested.<sup>209</sup> Pleased with the success of achieving a positive response from overseas, steps were taken to expand the Circle and the next point of contact was Dr Rülf in Memel. He was chosen due to his well-known relief work in the famine of 1868/9 as well as his subsequent philanthropic efforts, notably in connection with the fire in Wilkomir, during which time he responded to a personal request from Lipschitz via Spektor.

In mid-November, Spektor dispatched his son, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Rabinowitz (1848 – 1910) to Memel to request assistance in publicising the situation facing Russian Jewry in other European communities. Rülf began to act immediately, printing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

'thousands of copies' of a circular for distribution throughout Europe.<sup>210</sup> He also critically provided invaluable advice and contacts with several influential community leaders in Germany, including Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt, although the contacts with Hirsch were unproductive, as noted by Hirsch: 'what little I can do, I have already done'.<sup>211</sup> A further step taken by Rülf was an appeal to the Chief Rabbi of Denmark, Rabbi Abraham Wolff (1801–1891) in an unsuccessful attempt to secure an audience directly with the tsar during his visit to Copenhagen, along with his wife Maria Feodorovna (1847–1928) who was of Danish origin (formerly Princess Dagmar of Denmark).<sup>212</sup> While the achievements of the Circle were minimal in terms of easing the lives of Russian Jewry, its work and Rülf's involvement in enlarging contacts beyond Great Britain served to increase cross-border Jewish solidarity. While Rülf was not the prime mover in the Circle's activity, he was regarded as 'an important intermediary for the transmission of atrocity reports abroad and for building a campaign of support in various European states'.<sup>213</sup>

Rülf's established and considerable reputation in the East as a man of action served as a magnet for desperate Jewish communities, anxious to provide news of the atrocities being perpetrated upon them, in the hope of securing recognition and relief. As a result, many first-hand testimonials of violence were directed to Rülf, who in turn translated them into German and forwarded the translations to England for further distribution.<sup>214</sup> Although an active participant in the Kovno Circle's work, Rülf took pains to ensure that his principal role in support of west Russian Jewry

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, 'B"H, Yom Hay, Yud Tet Kislev 5742', 11 December 1881, CZA, A1\36, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Oppenheim, p. 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 341.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel, 5 Feb 1882', 5 February 1882, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, JP-5056.

remained centrally recognised. In a letter received, translated and published by Haim Guedalla (1815–1904), a great-nephew of Moses Montefiore, Rülf reminded English readers that, 'for the past sixteen years . . . I have been unceasingly occupied with the position of my Russian co-religionists,' and, 'To our deep regret, we have been obliged to notice how all activity and care are devoted solely to our South Russian brethren ... to lose for this reason altogether sight of West Russian Jews would be a great and serious misconception of the situation'.<sup>215</sup>

In concert with Rülf's focus on the areas contiguous to Memel across the eastern border and as the town continued to serve as a transit point for refugees, the Memel committee reported that it carefully screened and processed applicants, excluding any whose origin was not from 'Gouvernements Kowno und Kurland und deren angrenzenden Bezirken'. 216 Additional criteria for providing aid included that the men would be capable of sustaining themselves via work, that they were not deserting their families, and that they possessed sufficient funds to allow them to reach their destinations – which needed to be outside of Germany, as most of the refugees would not fit into the German social fabric, 'to avoid their becoming nuisances there'. 217 While continuing to screen, and provide relief and onward passage to refugees, others had a more jaundiced, or perhaps realistic view as to Rülf's broad definition of 'refugee'. The English city of Hull's Hebrew Board of Guardians, in a letter addressed to Rülf dated May 22, 1882, complained that the Memel committee was indiscriminately sending too many refugees onwards without taking note of their motives, and that unless matters improved, future arrivals would be returned. 'The people you do send are not victims of the recent persecutions, rather they are simply

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Rülf, 'Concerning the Emigration of the Russian Jews', pp. 1, 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> 'Rechenschaftsbericht des Unterzeichneten Comites, besonders in Betreff der Auswanderungs - Angelegenheit', 1 July 1882, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, JP-5056.
<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

poor people who wish to leave Russia either to avoid conscription or to desert their families'. This comment supports recent scholarship which attributes the rise in emigration from the Russian Empire principally due to economic motivation rather than to persecution. Nonetheless, as an example of Rülf's centrality in the relief efforts, he was also cited in a report submitted by the government's district administrator to the regional authority, Dr Albrecht von Schlieckmann (1835–1891) in Königsberg. A letter dated 5 June 1882 stated that 'a large number of Russian Jews entered the city of Memel ... these immigrants are taken care of by the Ständiges Hülfs Commite für die Nothstände Russischer Israeliten zu Memel', citing first among the committee's members, 'Rülf, rabbiner'.

Rülf's philanthropic efforts during 1881–1882 extended as well to his serving as a primary address not only for refugees but as well as for others simply seeking a stable point of contact in the maelstrom of the mass exodus from the Russian Empire. In this capacity he acted as a tracer of lost persons for families within the empire, i.e. for a father whose son had emigrated, reportedly through Memel and who had not communicated his whereabouts to the family.<sup>221</sup> As well, his reputation as a reliable intermediary attracted the transfer of funds from abroad, i.e. in one case from as far afield as Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to be held in Memel for collection by families from the East.<sup>222</sup> In that instance the writer chose to communicate with Rülf due to his prior experience passing through Rülf's home as a refugee and, 'having

<sup>218</sup> I. L. Jacobs, 'Hull Hebrew Board of Guardians' (Hull, England, 1882), CZA, A1\118, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Yannay Spitzer, 'Pogroms, Networks, and Migration: The Jewish Migration from the Russian Empire to the United States 1881–1914', Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel, Discussion paper series 21.03.3 (2021), 84 (p. 5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Königlicher Landrath, Memel, 'Betrifft Russische Juden', 5 June 1882, Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, XX.HA rep. 2 l Tit. 30 no. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Abrahm Rubenstein, 'Libau, 18/30 October 1881', 18 October 1881, CZA, A1\220, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> J. Simon, 'Baton Rouge, September 20, 1881', 20 September 1881, CZA, A1\220 pp. 13–15.

read in newspapers all over America of your worthy name, that you take care of the suffering'.<sup>223</sup>

While Rülf remained a key transit point for information and relief he was perhaps cognizant of his lack of influence in his home, German arena. Lipschitz reported that when Rülf was asked by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Rabinowitz to travel to Berlin to enlist support for the application of pressure on the Russian government, Rülf demurred, stating that he doubted the success of such a visit. 224 Beyond Germany, however, Rülf continued to be engaged in his own overseas agenda to publicise the hardships being experienced by Russian Jews. In ongoing direct correspondence with British Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler (1803–1890) Rülf was kept updated by Adler on the progress of the Circle's efforts in England. In return Rülf was asked by Adler to accumulate and keep accurate records of witnessed acts of violence and brutality which Rülf had been receiving from eastern correspondents, in preparation for a rebuttal to likely Russian attempts to propagate disinformation regarding the reports of atrocities which had recently been published.<sup>225</sup> Indeed, Rülf had been receiving ongoing reports from within the Russian Empire containing alleged first-hand reports of violence, i.e. in the town of Yadlovka (now Peremoha in Ukraine, about 30 miles southwest of Kharkov) a woman identified as Disha Landesman had been repeatedly raped following her husband having been beaten to death. 226 This event was only one of many recorded in a lengthy memo, which reads as a detailed and explicit testimony of murders, violence and rapes, with the goal likely to establish a factual and permanent recording of events.<sup>227</sup> In this work Rülf also ensured that wherever

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Nathan Marcus Adler, 'London, 26th January 5642', 26 January 1882, CZA, A1\128 pp. 4, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> 'Heye Im Pipiyot', 7 February 1882, CZA, A1\87, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Rülf, 'Seit sechzehn Jahren', pp. 3–30.

possible, perpetrators were cited by name, as were those Christians who at personal risk rendered assistance to their Jewish neighbours. In his communication with Adler, Rülf also provided early news regarding the impending passage of further limitation of Jewish rights in Russia, later that year promulgated and known as the 'May Laws'. He further suggested a politically insightful attempt to publicly blame and shame Count Ignatiev for the pogroms, with the aim to have him retreat from further persecution of Jews, lest the publicity negatively affect his aspirations for higher office.<sup>228</sup>

## 1881-1882: The Bright Line

The pogroms of 1881–1882 have been referred to as an historic bright line, 'a dramatic turning point in modern Jewish history'. 229 Many who had advocated and hoped for Jewish integration within Russian society became disillusioned and this disappointment engendered a search for new forms of political activity. With the failure of integration as a solution to the 'Jewish Question' in the Russian Empire a vacuum was created in which a search for other directions and platforms came to the fore. Among these were Socialism, Zionism, and a heightened sense of nationalist aspirations. The crisis of the pogroms had created an opportunity for 'ideas normally too utopian to voice to enter the discourse of the everyday'. 230 One of the first to react publicly to the failure of the integrationist philosophy was Dr Leon Pinsker (1821–1891). Pinsker, a Russian Jew living in Odessa, had been a prominent advocate of Jewish Russification; however, he had already begun to doubt the success of this direction following the 1871 Easter pogrom in Odessa, during which the authorities had refrained from stepping in to protect Jewish interests, and the city had been

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel d 16 Februar 1882', 16 February 1882, CZA, A1\4 pps. 3-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> John Klier, 'New Politics for Old: A Reassessment of the Traditional Jewish Political Leadership in 1881–1882', *Jewish Studies at the Central European University*, 2 (2002), p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Frankel, *Crisis*, *Revolution*, and Russian Jews, pp. 1, 2.

'taken over by a hellish anarchy'. 231 Following the pogroms of 1881 and during a meeting of the OPE (Russian acronym for the Society for the Promotion of Culture among the Jews of Russia) he expressed in a 'ferocity of language' that the Jewish elite-led society was simply 'amusing themselves' while Jews were in dire straits.<sup>232</sup> In an independent effort to propose a solution to the crisis facing Russian Jewry, in September 1882 Pinsker authored Autoemancipation!, Mahnruf an seine Stammgenossen. The work represented a further departure from the time-tested mediation of shtadlanut and instead represented a call via the public sphere of the press directly to the Western Jewish elite. Key points proposed by Pinsker were that Jews needed to help themselves, rather than await salvation via emancipation or the granting of equal rights, and critically that the sole solution was a territorial-political one; that Jews must establish their own homeland. 233 While the issue Pinsker was addressing was one which affected Russian Jews and although Pinsker himself was fluent in Russian and had been an established contributor to the Russian press, his work was authored in the German language. The status of the German language 'rose during the nineteenth century to that of a universal language, serving as a central medium of communication in the fields of science, culture, and politics'. 234 While one reason Pinsker might have chosen to write in German could have been to avoid the Russian censors, a more likely rationale was that the work was squarely intended as an appeal to the German and Austrian political and economic Jewish leadership.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, Pinsker believed that there was a lack of capable leadership

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Ronald Sanders, Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration (New York: Holt, 1988), p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> David Vital, A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789–1939, Oxford History of Modern Europe (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Ibid., pp. 382–383.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Volovici, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

among Russian Jewry and therefore any action or solutions would need to be led by the West.<sup>236</sup>

Once published, the reception in the East was immediate and favourable; Pinsker 'became something of a hero, almost overnight'.<sup>237</sup> The liberal Russian newspaper *Razsvet* issued a prompt Russian translation of the work which began to appear in October 1882.<sup>238</sup> A Hebrew version followed, published in Vilna the following year.<sup>239</sup> Despite its popularity and favourable reception in the East, there was limited reception in the West, and these mostly echoed the comments of Viennese Rabbi Adolf Jellinek (1821–1893) to Pinsker. He stated that 'supporting your proposals would require me to repudiate my entire past, all of the speeches which I have held and published for over three decades'!<sup>240</sup> He and others likely believed that a spread of Jewish national ideology would threaten the goal of integration that Western Jewry had been striving to achieve.

In some respects, the publication of *Autoemancipation!* could be regarded as 'the closing act of the crisis of 1881–1882', as it marked the shifting of the public dialog from relief efforts to potential solutions.<sup>241</sup> While Pinsker has been termed a 'Pioneer of Zionism' his work significantly was not Zionist in that it had not sought settlement of the Holy Land but rather the establishment of a Jewish homeland, and also it lacked practical steps for realisation of his proposal.<sup>242</sup> The actual translation of Pinsker's ideas to Zionism along with a plan of action would need to wait until the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, p. 126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> Leon Pinsker, 'Lev Pinsker el Dr. Rülf', *HaOlam* (Jerusalem, 18 December 1941), 12 ed., p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> Vital, A People Apart, p. 388.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 315.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

following year in 1883, with the publication by Rülf of his seminal work, Aruchas Bas Ami, Israels Heilung. Ein ernstes Wort an Glaubens- und Nichtglaubensgenossen.

Although there was muted reaction to *Autoemancipation!* in the West, Rabbi Isaac Rülf in Memel was inspired by the work. In the space of just seven months following the publication of Pinsker's work Rülf issued his own 94-page remedy for the 'sickness' of Russian Jewry via his Aruchas Bas Ami, a title derived from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, translated as the restoration of the health of my poor people.<sup>243</sup> The work was also published in German, as was usual for Rülf, and which language continued to play a central part in the early history of Zionism. In addition to the target Western audience, the language later 'promoted the perception that Zionism occupied high cultural ground'. 244 Aruchas has been described as a 'largescale sermon in style and in structure', and was rich with many biblical quotations and references to Jewish tradition and biblical quotations.<sup>245</sup> The volume was targeted as an appeal to both traditionally observant Jews and to those who had become assimilated or estranged from Judaism.<sup>246</sup> As its introduction, Rülf penned a letter to Pinsker in which he stated that Aruchas was directly influenced by Autoemancipation!, and that Rülf's presentation was intended by him to serve, 'as a completion' to Pinsker's work.<sup>247</sup> Rülf stated that his views regarding the solution to Russian Jewry's problems had been completely altered and focused by Pinsker's work. Whereas previously Rülf had opposed emigration and instead had advocated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha; an Ecumenical Study Bible, ed. by Michael D. Coogan and Marc Z. Brettler, Fully rev. 4. ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 1075, Jeremiah 8:22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Michael Berkowitz, 'Publication of Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* begins a diverse tradition in Central Europe of Zionist writing in German', in Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture, 1096-1996, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Jack Zipes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> Reuwen Michael, 'Israels Heilung. Isaak Rülf und die Anfänge des Zionismus in Deutschland', Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts, 6, no. 22 (1963), pp. 126-47 (p. 130).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 15.

relocation of Russian Jewry from the Pale to the Russian interior, the pogroms and the subsequent government mandate that those Jews who had relocated within Russia were now required to return to the Pale had forced him to consider other options including emigration.<sup>248</sup> While agreeing with Pinsker that Jews required their own homeland he significantly differed from Pinsker in Rülf's focus on the Holy Land as the location for such settlement. Pinsker's work had likely triggered Rülf's deep feelings regarding Palestine, already expressed in his Meine Reise nach Kowno in which he wrote effusively regarding the 'land of our forefathers'. 249

Rülf's insightful Aruchas consisted of four parts, entitled respectively Golus/Exile, Rischus/Evil, Avdus/Slavery, and Cherus/Freedom. In Golus, the author defined the root cause of all evil as Jews living in the Diaspora and that all efforts to assimilate were doomed to failure. Rischus/Evil was described as ingrained hatred of Jews, with Avdus/Slavery defined as a loss of Jewish consciousness as a nation and the need for national pride. In Cherus/Freedom Rülf reiterated Pinsker's urging that Jews needed to help themselves by acquiring a country of their own; however, in Rülf's view Erez Israel was the only suitable location. He stated that the Holy Land had been not only been promised to the Jewish nation by God but that the Old Testament recorded that Jewish ancestors had conquered the land only to have it been 'stolen' from them. 250 Rülf believed that once Jews mounted an effort to reclaim their ancestral land, other nations would support the effort to establish a refuge for our persecuted brethren, and that one could also count on the Alliance to be helpful in the process. As well, anticipating an objection from Orthodox Jews regarding settlement in Palestine in advance of the Messiah's coming, he stated 'The Messiah

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> Rülf, *Meine Reise nach Kowno*, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 21.

shouldn't wake the people, the people should wake him'.<sup>251</sup> In this statement, Rülf took direct aim at the view that the redemption of the Jewish people could only take place with 'the appearance of the Redeemer of Israel in all his power'.<sup>252</sup> Rülf posited as well that the timing was opportune to purchase ownership of the land in that the Ottoman Empire which controlled the territory was weak and in dire need of funds.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, the empire, which had issued substantial debt in the wake of the Crimean War (1853–1856), had declared bankruptcy in 1875 and in 1881 the Ottoman Public Debt Administration had been established to collect payments for its European creditors.<sup>254</sup>

Aruchas was published in Frankfurt and an advertisement appeared in the *AZJ* in July 1883 referring to Rülf's previous fame in supporting Russian Jewry and stating that the author was proposing a 'new way' to improve the position of Jews.<sup>255</sup> One of the first to react to the piece was Pinsker, who stated in a letter to Rülf, 'What I have been able to draw in broad and crude strokes, you have been able to depict as a full painting.'<sup>256</sup> He added in the same letter that Rülf's confidence that the Alliance would assist in his objective was misplaced, and that the time of the Alliance, with their 'antiquated doctrine' had passed.<sup>257</sup> In subsequent correspondence and in the hope that Rülf as 'man of action', and presumably also of stature and authority in Western Jewry, could help to further their agenda Pinsker wrote to Rülf, 'you are a man of

<sup>251</sup> Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Ravitzky, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Tunçsiper, Bedriye, and Hasan Abdioğlu, 'The Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) in the Debt Process of the Ottoman Empire', unpublished manuscript, Balikesir University of Turkey.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> 'Verlag von J. Kauffmann in Frankfurt a. M.', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 24 July 1883), 30th ed., p. 493.

Letter from Pinsker to Rülf, 2 August 1883 in *Palästinaliebe: Leon Pinsker, der Antisemitismus und die Anfänge der Nationaljüdischen Bewegung in Deutschland*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps, Studien zur Geistesgeschichte, Bd. 29 (Berlin: Philo, 2005), p. 113.
 Ibid., p. 114.

action; go forth into the field and I will be your servant'. Although Rülf had identified himself in his introduction to *Aruchas* as 'a German Rabbi' and had acquired a reputation in the West through his philanthropic activities, he acknowledged that his wider influence in that geography was minimal. A sharper point was later put on this view in a letter from Lev Levanda (1835–1888) to Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz (1845–1910), stating in regard to Rülf, 'His authority in Germany is zero'.

The public reception of *Aruchas* in the West was at the time of publication generally unfavourable, such as the review in *Jüdisches Litteratur-Blatt*, which while also holding Rülf himself in friendship, stated critically, 'The rioters of Neustettin and Kiev and their patron saint [Stöcker] have as their watchword out with the Jews to Palestine, and Rülf comes up with the same idea as the sole remedy.'261 This criticism of Rülf was particularly pointed as during the violent riots which had taken place in Pomerania and West Prussia during 1881, initially in Neustettin, and subsequently spreading from there to Pomeranian provincial towns, demonstrators had indeed marched through the streets chanting 'Jews to Palestine!'262 The reception to *Aruchas* in the East was more positive, with David Gordon (1856–1922), the editor of *HaMagid*, offering to assist in promotion of the work in Russia and later Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz's letter to Rülf suggesting that he translate *Aruchas* to Hebrew and that Rabinowitz would try to have it translated into Russian.<sup>263</sup> None of these efforts were undertaken and *Aruchas*, authored after and as a continuation of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 102. Letter from Pinsker to Rülf, 25 September 1883.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 180. Letter from Rülf to Pinsker, 16 February 1885, 'My local knowledge in Germany is the least possible'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> Laskov, vol III, pp. 47–48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> Caro-Pilsen, 'Litteraturbericht', *Jüdisches Litteratur-Blatt* (Magdeburg, 1 September 1883), 35th ed., pp. 138–39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History, ed. Christhard Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 28.

Pinsker's work, was relegated to remain in its 'shadow'. As a companion to *Aruchas*, Rülf also composed a *Manifesto of the Jewish Nation* outlining his plan for possession of the Holy Land which reportedly included detailed recommendations for immigration, settlement and redemption of the land. While the work was submitted by Rülf to Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz for publication it was never printed; it was, however, read aloud at a session during the 1884 Kattowitz conference, which Rülf chose not to attend, although having been invited by Pinsker, and it was subsequently lost. Had that not been the case, its contents might have served as a basis of the Zionist movement as its recommendations later formed the bedrock philosophy of political Zionism. Had the properties of the Zionism.

## Rülf to the Rescue?

As a result of the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) the Grand Duchy of Poznań had been ceded to Prussia, with its predominantly Polish majority, and in which area the bulk of the Polish Jewish population lived. <sup>267</sup> Prussia had pursued a 'zig-zag' policy toward its Polish population during the subsequent periods, at times favouring the preservation of Polish culture but the overall approach had tended towards 'Germanisation'. <sup>268</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, the conflict between Poles and Germans in Prussian Poland became increasingly acute. <sup>269</sup> Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898) in particular, initially as Minister President

<sup>264</sup> Chaim Orlon, 'Aruchat Bat Ami - Bat Tish'im', *Davar* (Tel Aviv, 23 November 1973), No. 14, 840th ed., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> Orlon, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), vol 1, p. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Richard Blanke, *Prussian Poland in the German Empire (1871–1900)*, East European Monographs, 86 (Boulder, CO and New York: East European Monographs; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: A Short History*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), p. 127.

of Prussia (1862–1890) and later as Chancellor of the German unified German Reich (1871–1890), had focused on the potential threat to the country's security from the substantial Polish ethnic minority in Prussia. As early as 1863, Bismarck sought to take punitive action against any alleged supporters of the Polish uprising taking place across the eastern border. During the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 he had questioned the loyalty of Prussian Poles, labelling the community as 'potential security risks'.<sup>270</sup> He also faulted the role played by the Catholic clergy who he claimed were directing the strengthening of pro-Polish sympathies within Prussia, both during the war and thereafter.<sup>271</sup> The Kulturkampf, the conflict that took place between Prussia and the Roman Catholic Church which lasted from 1872 to 1878, was regarded by Bismarck as, 'determined for me mainly by its Polish aspect'. 272 Bismarck remained concerned regarding the potential threat from the Polish minority and in 1878 he introduced legislation branding various non-national German residents and especially Poles as 'enemies of the Reich'. 273 During this period as well, Bismarck's political affiliation had moved from an alliance with the National Liberals to, by 1879, a return to the Conservatives. 274 This move further bolstered Bismarck's desire to increase the Germanisation of the eastern provinces and as well re-opened the Jewish Question for political debate, as conservative elements sought to curb civil rights of emancipated Jews.<sup>275</sup> As well during this period, 'the distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Polish feelings was not always a sharp one; a general sense of German nationalism' was prevalent. 276

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Blanke, p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> Weinberg, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> Ibid., pp. 38–39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>276</sup> Blanke, p. 40.

By 1881 the issue of foreign presence in Prussia had grown acute, as the ethnic Polish population had grown to comprise 10 per cent of its residents, a situation which was being further exacerbated by Jewish emigration from the East. 277 From Bismarck's position as Chancellor, an overview of the issues of Socialism, Conspiracy, Polish Nationalism and Eastern European Jews was 'in the process of merging into one problem'. 278 Bismarck's view of the antisemitic movement and of Jews, as expressed through the pages of the Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, regarded as a 'house' newspaper for the Chancellor, was reported to be ambivalent, with his main focus on the Polish presence and the need for the increase in German nationals.<sup>279</sup> On May 11, 1881 Prussia's Minister of the Interior Robert von Puttkamer (1828–1900) received a memo regarding a request by Bismarck that he gather data concerning the number of Russian subjects who had crossed into Prussia from the Polish sector of the Russian Empire.<sup>280</sup> This request was shortly thereafter amended to include the religion of the emigres and to provide information about Polish Jews in particular, who Bismarck termed an 'unwanted element'.281 Following the above memo and over the subsequent years through 1884 there were limited expulsions of Russian refugees, overwhelmingly Jews, who were expelled from eastern Prussia, especially from Königsberg and also from Berlin.<sup>282</sup> In the spring of 1884 the provincial president Dr von Schlieckmann expelled numerous Jews from the Heydekrug district, on which occasion Rülf penned an initial letter to Bismarck in an attempt to ameliorate or cancel the decree.<sup>283</sup> While there appears to be no record of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. vii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> Weinberg, p. 182.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>283</sup> Helmut Neubach, *Die Ausweisungen von Polen und Juden aus Preussen 1885–1886* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967), p. 146.

a response to this request, it is likely that the expulsions were carried out, as in the following year Rülf met again with von Schlieckmann and although the meeting began pleasantly the official explained that the steps to remove foreigners were necessary; the sole concession won by Rülf was that the expulsions would be carried out 'with mercy and consideration'. 284 Perhaps due to a lack of significant objections to the previous years' limited expulsions, on 11 March 1885 Bismarck set a larger-scale program in motion in an order to Puttkamer.<sup>285</sup> Reacting promptly, on 26 March Puttkamer issued a decree expelling all 'Russian Poles'; while not specifying religion of the affected individuals, it was likely not objectionable that among those covered by the order were Jews and Polish Catholics. 286 Puttkamer as a Prussian landholder was reportedly against the measure, suggesting that Polish labour was necessary for the large agricultural estates, and that most of the aliens were in any case 'well behaved' and not a burden to society. 287 Nonetheless the central government's view was that the Polish problem was the greater issue and as well that many eastern officials saw an opportunity to rid the region of, 'troublesome Jewish traders' and the economic competition they presented.<sup>288</sup>

By 1885 the residents of Memel had already heard of the expulsions that had affected the region in the previous year and there was widespread fear that the order would be executed in Memel as well.<sup>289</sup> In anticipation of such an event Rülf later reported that 'we believed that we could prevent the misfortune by our own action to expel all those families and persons that we considered to be 'useless and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> 'Wbg. Memel', *Die Israelitische Wochenschrift für die religiösen un socialen Interessen des Judenthums* (Magdeburg, 25 February 1886), 9th ed., p. 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers*, p. 215.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Blanke, p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>289</sup> Leiserowitz, Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein, p. 229.

troublesome'.290 Due to a lack of funds Rülf and the committee were not successful in removing such persons nor were they able to persuade others to voluntarily emigrate.<sup>291</sup> On September 2, 1885 the edict reached Memel as Rülf characteristically and vividly reported, 'at 8:30am as I was about to enter my Armenschule for Russian-Jewish children in order to celebrate Sedantag I was met by the chief of police informing me of the deportation order, which affected more than 2/3 of our 1214 residents and 75 of the school's students'. 292 Following receipt of this notice, Rülf took two immediate steps; he published an appeal for relief funds to assist those who would be subject to deportation and wrote to Bismarck in an attempt to ameliorate the decree. He specifically requested that those who could be deemed 'useful' to the city's economy be permitted to remain. In attempting to utilise this rationale he was perhaps guided by the case of one Elias Lekus (b. ~1851), a Jew of Russian origin and citizenship who had applied for German nationalisation in the previous year. At first Lekus' application was denied in keeping with the government's mandate to reject any such applications from Russian nationals. The local magistrate in Memel however had appealed the decision on the basis of Lekus' value to the city, as he operated an essential timber processing plant, employing 80 workers. The appeal on this basis was granted, and Lekus was the last Russian Jew in Memel to be naturalised.<sup>293</sup> A telegraphic response to Rülf's letter from Bismarck was received within four days, outlining instructions to the provincial authorities to reconsider the expulsion decree in cases where the affected persons could be deemed essential to the city's economy, and that the expulsion orders were to be carried out with compassion. The result of this intervention was that about 80

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>290</sup> 'Jahresbericht über die Thätigkeit des Hülfs-Comites für die Nothstände russischer Israeliten zu Memel', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 2 February 1886), 6th ed., pp. 85–88.
<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> Leiserowitz, Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein, p. 229.

families, previously slated for deportation were allowed to remain.<sup>294</sup> Notwithstanding this success there were subsequent, additional lists of those individuals and families to be expelled and in total between Memel and the previous expulsions in Heydekrug about 700 individuals were deported.<sup>295</sup> These additional expulsion orders saw Rülf write a third time to Bismarck, claiming that even those who had been deemed useful to the state and city were under orders of deportation and he further pleaded for additional time for those expelled to put their affairs in order and for Rülf and his committee to accumulate funds to underwrite their relocation.<sup>296</sup> It appears that these further appeals were at least partially successful in that about 100 individuals were granted an extension of the deportation order until October 1886.<sup>297</sup>

As well, Rülf continued to advocate for individuals on a case-by-case basis, including an instance of an American national who as a foreigner was caught up in the deportation order.<sup>298</sup> While working to act in the best interests of his constituency, both of those resident in Memel and Russian refugees in general, it is noteworthy to contrast his comments and opinions in the case of expulsions with those in respect of the Russian persecutions. In his correspondence with Bismarck as well as in subsequent conversations with the local authorities in Memel he stated that he 'never doubted the political and economic necessity' of the expulsion orders and even adding that 'for those expelled from Memel the deportation was a blessing'. 299

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>294</sup> 'Jahresbericht über die Thätigkeit des Hülfs-Comites für die Nothstände russischer Israeliten zu Memel'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> Leiserowitz, Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein, p. 229.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Letter from Rülf to Bismarck, 6 October 1885 (Appendix item 19) from the Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 500 Nr. 38, bl.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>297</sup> 'Jahresbericht über die Thätigkeit des Hülfs-Comites für die Nothstände russischer Israeliten zu

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>298</sup> 'Eine Ausweisungs-Geschichte', Allgemeine Israelitische Wochenschrift (Berlin, 27 December 1895), 52nd ed., p. 861.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Letter from Rülf to the District Administrator in Memel, 11 November 1885 (Appendix item 20) from the Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, PK, I. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern, Tit. 500 Nr. 38, bl. 13.

He supported this opinion with the assertion that, 'for reasons unexplained hundreds of people had settled in Memel and despite hard work they were unable to support themselves here', and that in retrospect he remained convinced as to the appropriateness of the deportations, 'especially as they were carried out with mercy and consideration'.300 This seemingly strong support for a harsh measure affecting Rülf's principal constituencies stands in stark contrast to his many attacks on the Russian government's treatment of the local Jewish communities, 'the unleashed beast has raged horribly'.301 Rülf's well-documented appeals for relief of Russian persecution of Jews. i.e. his participation in the Kovno Circle and his terming of Russians in general as 'even the educated Russians have only to a very limited extent adopted the advances of civilisation' stand in opposition to his response to his own government's actions. 302 Despite Rülf's description of the deportations being carried out mercifully, or perhaps having convinced himself as to the necessity of such belief through loyalty to the state, others took a more critical view. Several paintings depicting the expulsions convey a sense of brutal injustice, such as the 1909 work by Wojciech Kossak (1856–1942), Rugi Pruskie which depicts the sorrow of a poor simple farmer peasant being read an edict of expulsion by a Prussian soldier on horseback.303

In November 1885 a strongly worded resolution was introduced in the German Reichstag, supported by Polish representatives, the Progressives and the Centre censuring Bismarck for the expulsion order. 304 The parties behind this resolution were in part motivated by an attempt to interpret the rationale for the deportations as anti-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> Neubach, p. 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> 'Deutsche Volksgenossen und jüdische Glaubensgenossen', p. 382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>302</sup> Rülf, *Drei Tage in Jüdisch-Russland*, Vorwart p. v.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>303</sup> https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/rocznica-zarzadzenia-o-rugach-pruskich

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>304</sup> Blanke, p. 50.

religious; both anti-Catholic and antisemitic to draw attention away from an action directed specifically against Polish nationals.305 Coverage in the Jewish press, however, took an opposite approach, tending to stress Poles as a target of the order, and that Jews were simply caught up in the edict. Der Israelit in July 1885, attempting to minimise the impact on Jews, estimated that about 30,000 foreign nationals would be forced to leave, of which only 4,000 were Jews, who in any case would not be required to return to their homeland, and instead could emigrate to a destination of their choice, including America, Switzerland or other lands.306 In the following month the paper wrote that 'The Poles were expelled allegedly to put an end to their anti-German propaganda'.307 The AZJ was even more specific as to the purpose of the expulsions, citing Minister Puttkamer, 'in recent times in the eastern provinces Polonisation had made significant progress. As such, the state government must direct all its attention to this and put as strong a stop as possible to prevent the growth of this situation.'308 Stating further, 'as a result, Russian citizens had to be expelled without distinction and it is evident that the innocent had to be affected as well'. 309 The paper also sought to lay the blame for any suggestion that the principal reason for the expulsion was directed against Jews.<sup>310</sup> In an article appearing on 24 November 1885 the AZJ again quoted Puttkamer in asserting that 'rarely has the reason and purpose of a political measure been so openly and credibly explained by the government as in this case', as 'national-political' to prevent *Polonisation* of the eastern provinces.<sup>311</sup> The newspaper explained that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> 'Berlin, 9. Juli', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 13 July 1885), 55th ed., p. 932.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>307</sup> 'Zweite Beilage zu Nr. 69 des Israelit', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 31 August 1885), 69th ed., pp. 1197–98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>308</sup> 'Die Ausweisungen I', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 22 September 1885), 39th ed., pp. 619-20.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>311</sup> 'Die Ausweisungen', Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums (Leipzig, 24 November 1885), 48th ed., pp. 761–63.

order had been directly targeted at all unregistered aliens and in the category of those Jews who were affected there were most likely individuals deserving of expulsion. Broad reference was made to the poor character of the 'surplus of Russian and Austrian Jews' that were mostly 'being harassed by the law over there for some offence or crime' and 'came to work here with all the impure means to which they are accustomed over there'. The article further cautioned German Jews from identifying themselves with the 'immigrating tribes from beyond' as 'the Jews in our country are spiritually and morally on a completely different level'. The article further cautioned German Jews in our country are spiritually and morally on a completely different level'.

In the final analysis it has been reported that of the more than 30,000 persons of Russian citizenship cited in Puttkamer's study of the problem, and thus targeted for expulsion, only about 30 per cent were Jewish, about 60 per cent Catholic and 10 per cent Protestants.<sup>314</sup> As this event resulted in significant pain and relocation for a great number of people including Jews, even Rülf himself questioned the effectiveness of his intercession with the Chancellor, stating, 'What has been achieved by these requests?' In providing his own response, 'everything that could have been achieved under the circumstances and presupposing the necessity of the measure, that the authorities are proceeding with the utmost care and consideration'.<sup>315</sup> Clearly limited by his loyalty to the Prussian state, Rülf's response to this significant event was relatively muted, and he seemed satisfied that he had accomplished all that was possible within the limits of his national allegiance.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> Blanke, p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> 'Jahresbericht über die Thätigkeit des Hülfs-Comites für die Nothstände russischer Israeliten zu Memel', *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 2 Februar 1886), 6th ed., p. 86.

## Rülf in the Middle – Mounting Pressures from East and West

During the period following the expulsions Rülf remained active, both in his rabbinical role in Memel as well as retaining a leading position in providing relief for Russian Jews. In taking concrete steps towards rebuilding his community, 'torn by the expulsions', a cornerstone was placed in May 1886 for a new synagogue, at a ceremony where Rülf presided.316 He continued to lead his local Armenschule and played an integral part in Jewish education both locally and regionally. For example, he participated in the area's conference of Jewish Religious Teachers of the East Prussian Communities, where his speech on the 'spirit and character of the Hebrew language' was met with 'lively applause'.317 He also attended and spoke at regional events such as the Organisation of East Prussian Synagogues and regularly wrote articles commemorating the various Jewish holidays. He remained active as well in launching appeals to solicit funds for his welfare activities both in Memel and across the eastern border. Examples include his broader appeal for funds which were becoming in short supply, resulting in Rülf's apparently expanding his solicitations to include clothing as well.<sup>318</sup> In an effort to augment the Memel committee's 'completely empty treasury' he published a dramatic appeal stating that 'in view of the Jewish population consisting of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Russian border towns who are languishing in the greatest misery; hounded, persecuted, raped etc.' funds are urgently required.<sup>319</sup> As well there were solicitations for the many fires which continued to occur east of the border, such as for the town of Crottingen (now Slikiai

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> 'Memel, 16.Mai', Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums (Leipzig, 1 June 1886), 23rd ed., p. 362.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>317</sup> 'Königsberg i. Pr. Um 15. März', *Allgemeine Israelitische Wochenschrift* (Magdeburg, 29 April 1892), p. 142.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>318</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Verzeichnisse der bei dem ständigen Hilfscommite für die Nothstände russischer II. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Verzeichnisse der bei dem ständigen Hilfscommite für die Nothstände russischer Israeliten in Memel seit Juli 1885 zu verschiedenen Unterstützungszwecken eingelaufenen Sendungen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 10 March 1887), p. 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>319</sup> 'Theure Glaubensgenossen!', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 2 June 1887), 22nd ed., p. 342.

in Lithuania, about 30 miles north of Kaunas) where Rülf felt the need to be particularly important as in that city, 'all nationalities and confessions live together in beautiful harmony'. Rülf's collection for the victims of this town elicited a response from former residents, then residing in England, who referred to his assistance as 'from heaven', with the writer himself sending a donation accompanied by thanks to Rülf and his spouse for the warm hospitality previously extended to him during his own passage from the East. In addition to providing funds for relief, Rülf's reputation with Eastern Jewry remained near-legendary and many emigrants continued to find their way to Memel hoping to obtain immediate relief and funds to continue their onward journeys. A teacher standing outside the school in Memel observed 200–300 individuals lying on the stone floor, poor, ragged and hungry, men, women and children all waiting for an appearance of 'the man', Rülf. Rülf.

The increased rate of Jewish emigration from the Russian Empire during the period 1886–1890 presaged what was to become a flood in the coming years. For those whose destination was the United States for example, the average rate of emigration 1886–1890 was 44,829 individuals, representing an increase of almost 250 per cent over the period 1881–1886. Several events factored into this increase including the Russian government ruling in 1887 in addressing the perennial problem of draft evasion by Jewish conscripts. This new law, applicable solely to Jews, imposed a fine of 300 Rubles on the family of any recruit who failed to report as ordered. Inasmuch as Jewish evasion of army service had been a principal cause of

320 'Edle Menschenfreunde!', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 27 June 1889), 26th ed., p. 412

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>321</sup> Sundel Priskov, 'Lieber Herr Doctor', 1889, CZA, A1\118, pp. 7–9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>322</sup> Sally Bernstein, 'Memel, 30.Mai', *Israelit und Jeschurun* (Mainz, 8 June 1891), 45th ed., pp. 829–830.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>323</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol 2, p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>324</sup> Sanders, p. 142.

emigration, this additional measure, in an environment in which the average daily wage for a skilled worker such as a carpenter was about 1.2 Rubles represented a significant incentive for families to emigrate. 325 Two additional and significant political events were harbingers of further pressure upon the Russian Jewish community; the dissolution in 1888 of the Pahlen commission in Russia without any of its liberal recommendations being implemented and the renewed enforcement of the May Laws, which had become lax. 326 The High Commission to study the Jewish Question in Russia had been approved by Tsar Alexander III (reigned 1881 - 1894) in February 1883, and K. I. Pahlen (1833–1912) was subsequently appointed to chair it. Pahlen was reported to have been a moderate on the Jewish Question and indeed supported the majority of the Commission's opinion favouring gradual Jewish emancipation.327

In March 1891 the expulsion of the Jews from Moscow contributed further to the feeling of instability of the Russian Jewish community, particularly as it affected not only the illegal residents of the city but the wealthy as well. The brutality of the action was reported to have been shocking, involving homes being forced open and ransacked, with over 700 men, women and children being marched through the streets to police stations, with some being chained together with criminals and forced from the city by Cossacks.328 Jews in Moscow had been settling in the city, both legally, i.e. as army veterans and illegally to such an extent that in 1880 Minister of the Interior Lev Makov (1830–1883) had published a circular essentially legitimising

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>325</sup> Robert C. Allen and Ekaterina Khaustova, 'Russian Real Wages Before and After 1917: In Global Perspective' (NYU Abu Dhabi, 2017).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>326</sup> I. M. Aronson, 'The Prospects for the Emancipation of Russian Jewry During the 1880s', *The* Slavonic and East European Review, 55, no. 3 (1977), pp. 348-69 (p. 362).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>328</sup> Sanders, p. 146.

such illegal settlement on the basis of economic usefulness.329 Following the assassination of the tsar in 1881 and the replacement of Makov by Count Ignatiev, restrictions regarding Jewish residence were more closely scrutinised. In Moscow, however, the governor general Vladimir Dolgorukov (1810-1891) continued to approve residence for Jews deemed to be useful, although local Russian merchants disputed the definition of 'useful' as they suffered from competition from an increased presence of Jewish traders who were willing to accept lower prices. 330 In February 1891 Dolgorukov was dismissed and with the support of the Minister of Interior Ivan Durnovo (1834-1903) a law was passed on 29 March 1891 banning Jewish craftsmen from settling in Moscow and evicting those already settled there. This law was particularly effective as according to an official survey in 1890 the Jewish population in Moscow had been comprised of 48 per cent craftsmen and 13 per cent merchants, and as a result it has been estimated that at least 20,000 Jews were expelled from a total Jewish population of about 30,000–35,000.<sup>331</sup> Dolgorukov was subsequently replaced as governor general of Moscow by Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich (1857–1905), brother of the tsar at the instigation of Konstantin Pobedonoscev (1827–1907) advisor to the tsar and advocate of Russian Nationalism and the Orthodox state church in Moscow, who saw to it that the expulsion law was fully, if not brutally enforced.

Concurrent events on the Prussian side of the border as well contributed to an increased stream of refugees leaving the Russian Empire. Leo von Caprivi (1831–1899) had been appointed chancellor in March 1890 and among his policies was

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>329</sup> Yvonne Kleinmann, *Neue Orte - neue Menschen: jüdische Lebensformen in St. Petersburg und Moskau im 19. Jahrhundert; mit 15 Tabellen*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts, Band 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), p. 350.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>331</sup> Ibid., pp. 353, 355.

negotiating a 'most favoured' customs agreement with Austria and Russia. 332 While the primary objective of this policy was to encourage domestic industry an attendant effect was to allow for almost free immigration into Germany from these countries.<sup>333</sup> Adding to the incentive to emigrate was a widespread rumour among Russian Jews that Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831–1896) was prepared to underwrite the resettlement of Jews in Argentina. This led to a fear in Germany that were this false rumour left unchecked, 'hundreds of thousands' were prepared to emigrate from the Russian Empire.<sup>334</sup> Baron de Hirsch had initially attempted to persuade the Russian government to accept his proposal to invest 50 million francs to found educational institutions within Russia, similar to schools he had established in Turkey and Galicia.335 His motivation, as stated in an 1889 interview, was to 'destroy a corner stone' of the Chinese wall that separated the Jews of Russia from 'the rest of humanity'. 336 When the Russian government rejected this offer, which would have provided for technical and agricultural schools in the Pale, de Hirsch focused instead on emigration, founding The Jewish Colonisation Association in September 1891 and directing the capital he had intended to invest in Russia instead towards that enterprise.<sup>337</sup> The focus of de Hirsch on Argentina as a potential area for settlement had been due to a contact established through the Alliance. The Alliance had dispatched Dr Wilhelm Löwenthal (1850–1894) to care for a group of 820 Russian immigrants who had arrived in Argentina in 1889 and were suffering from poverty

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>332</sup> Moshe Zimmerman, 'German Jews and the Jewish Emigration from Russia', chapter 7 in Troen, Pinkus, *Organizing Rescue*, p. 127.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>334</sup> Rülf, *Die russischen Juden*, p. 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>335</sup> Max J. Kohler, 'Educational Reform in Europe in Their Relation to Jewish Emancipation, 1778–1919', *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, 28 (1922), pp. 83–132 (p. 129).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>336</sup> 'Baron de Hirsch on the Future of the Russian Jews', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 25 January 1889), 1,035 ed., p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>337</sup> Edgardo Zablotsky, 'The Project of the Baron de Hirsch. Success or Failure?', *CEMA Working Papers: Serie Documentos de Trabajo No. 289*, 2005. <a href="https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?">https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?</a> abstract\_id=998626>.

and illness. Upon his return to Europe, Löwenthal submitted a proposal to the Alliance as to the suitability of founding agricultural settlements in Argentina, which proposal was then adopted by de Hirsch. The project envisioned the initial transfer of about 25,000 Russian Jews to Argentina, with over three million to potentially follow over the course of the next 25 years.<sup>338</sup> Nonetheless, by 1891 the stream of migrants from the Russian Empire had become 'a flood' and as such, that year marked a turning point in organised German Jewish attitudes and actions with respect to such emigration.<sup>339</sup>

A meeting of the German Central-Committee for Russian Jews which had been established in May 1891 was convened in Berlin in October of that year to address the issue, with wide attendance, not only from within Germany but from overseas countries as well, including representatives from the United States. Among the delegates was Rülf of Memel who reported that in the past year, since November 1890 the Memel committee had aided in the transport of 6,473 individuals overseas.<sup>340</sup> One of the principal conclusions of the assembly was that only emigrants who had legitimate reasons to leave Russia and who were believed to have a chance of success in relocation should be aided. Referring to Memel and to the Austrian border in particular, the committee reported that 'with a heavy heart but with a strong hand all the unsuitable elements were repatriated'.<sup>341</sup> Other than attempting to limit the flow of emigration, i.e. by publishing the falsity of the Baron Hirsch rumour in Russian newspapers, and by taking steps to select only 'suitable'

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>339</sup> Zimmerman, p. 127.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>340</sup> 'Die Delegirten-Verammlung', *Allgemeine Zeitung Des Judenthums* (Berlin, 6 November 1891), 45th ed., pp. 529–36 (p. 536).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 531.

individuals for onward relocation the committee was unable to get beyond the 'extraordinarily difficult' question of an overall permanent solution.<sup>342</sup>

The following year, in 1892, Rülf published Die russischen Juden, Ihre Leidensgeschichte und unsere Rettungsversuche, a four-part work in which in its final chapter he attempted to address the problem of Russian refugees with concrete recommendations. In this section he initially reviewed several of the proposals being considered by the committee, which Rülf found to be simplistic, implausible, or inadequate. He dismissed as nonsense the suggestion to advocate for Russian Jewish emancipation within Russia and to then depend upon the Russian government to improve the lot of its Russian citizens.<sup>343</sup> In addressing the potential of establishing Jewish colonies outside Russia as a place of refuge for Jews he reviewed the proposals in general, focusing on several potential sites: Argentina, America and Palestine. While Argentina might have been suitable to settle about 30,000 persons over several decades and America might also be a possible destination it would be irrational and unrealistic to suggest establishing colonies to relocate 5 million Russian Jews.344 Regarding Palestine, Rülf referred to both Pinsker's and his own Aruchas work on the subject of a new national home and pointed out that the goal of these publications was to raise the popular consciousness of Jews, but not at this stage to seriously consider wholesale immigration.<sup>345</sup> As at least an interim solution Rülf practically and realistically posited concentrating on providing aid to individual and carefully vetted emigrants rather than to support a policy of mass emigration, which he regarded as infeasible.<sup>346</sup> Rülf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>342</sup> 'Die Delegirten-Verammlung', p. 530.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>343</sup> Rülf, *Die russischen Juden*, p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

also suggested enlisting the cooperation of communities in which previous emigrants had settled to accept new immigrants, and he referred to the town of Sunderland in England as an example.<sup>347</sup> The reviews of Rülf's work were generally favourable such as that published in *Der Israelit* referring to the author as 'one who has dedicated his entire life to the rescue work of our fellow believers in Russia' and that the proposals presented by Rülf, 'show the way for rational and successful help'.<sup>348</sup>

While continually occupied with the question of and aid for Russian Jewry Rülf was acutely aware of the heightened presence of antisemitism within Prussia. In 1887 an antisemitic pamphlet was published by Otto Böckel (1859–1923), Die Juden – die Könige unserer Zeit, in which the author attacked Jews for their dominance of German life and in particular held Jews responsible for the hardship of small farmers in Hessen. He positioned himself politically as the saviour of the common peasant with a slogan, 'Gegen Junker und Juden', and he sympathised with the peasants' dependence on credit provided by Jewish merchants.349 In the Reichstag election of 1887 Böckel became the first open antisemite to secure a seat. While this could have been discounted as an aberration, in the Reichstag election of February 1890 Böckel's new party, the Antisemitische Volkspartei in conjunction with the Deutschsoziale Antisemitische Partei increased their representation to five seats. This series of events likely resonated deeply with Rülf, as both a Hesse by birth and having written an essay in 1858 on the defense of Jews in that area.<sup>350</sup> In June 1890 he published a five-part series, Entstehung und Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in Hessen. In the first instalment the author described the history of Jewish settlement in Hessen, pointing out that Jews there, even after emancipation had been secured

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>348</sup> 'Leitender Artikel', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 8 August 1892), 63rd ed., pp. 1187–89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>349</sup> Pulzer in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>350</sup> Rülf, *Zur Vertheidigung der Juden*.

following the payment of huge sums of money, were subject to discrimination and unable to enter the public service.351 Rülf, speaking from his own personal experience and origin as part of the Landjuden, stated that the farmers in Hessen were never antisemitic and it was only that Böckel had attempted to feed on economic crises to use antisemitism as a tool to political ends.352 Insightfully, Rülf also used his article to paint a political objective to antisemitism, an analysis which has been termed 'amazingly far-sighted'.353 Rülf's view was that antisemitism as expressed by Böckel was nothing less than 'a revolution against life, communal and State order', and needed to be forcefully opposed.<sup>354</sup> In the final instalment Rülf went even further, equating antisemitism with anarchy, which attempted to undermine the existing social order, a long-standing, highly sensitive issue within Prussia. 355 As well, he defended the traditional Jewish occupation of trading, asserting that it was a 'noble' profession which helped the economy by creating capital and facilitating the exchange of goods.<sup>356</sup> In closing the series of articles, the author suggested that if by addressing the poison of antisemitism the potential danger to society could be averted then the issue of antisemitism would have been considered a blessing.357 Regrettably however, the following years revealed that antisemitism was not going to disappear, with the return of the blood libel in 1891 in Xanten and the subsequent Buschhoff trial. In that instance in the Roman Catholic Rhineland town of Xanten the local Jewish butcher, Adolf Buschoff, was accused of ritual murder. Initially arrested

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>351</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Entstehung und Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in Hessen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 5 June 1890), 44th ed., pp. 793-95 (p. 793).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>352</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Entstehung und Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in Hessen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 12 June 1890), 46th ed., pp. 829-31 (p. 830).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>353</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 340.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>354</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Entstehung und Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in Hessen', *Israelit und Jeschurun* (Mainz, 16 June 1890), 47th ed., pp. 849-50 (p. 849).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>355</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Entstehung und Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in Hessen', *Israelit und Jeschurun* (Mainz, 19 June 1890), 48th ed., pp. 865-67 (p. 867).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 865.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 867.

and charged, Buschoff was released fairly quickly due to a lack of evidence. The noted antisemite Adolf Stöcker was outraged by what he considered a lack of thoroughness in the matter, and he brought the case to the attention of the Prussian Diet, resulting in Buschoff's re-arrest. Tried again, this time by a jury, the charge was found to be without merit and Buschoff was acquitted.<sup>358</sup>

In the Reichstag election of 1893, the antisemites were able to secure 3.4 per cent of the total votes with 16 seats.<sup>359</sup> That same year also witnessed the departure from the Reichstag of Ludwig Bamberger (1823–1899) a long-serving Jewish member of that body, who had worked to defend Jewish interests in the face of rising antisemitism. In his resignation he pointed to increased and virulent antisemitism, 'which seemed not to disturb three-fourths of my colleagues'.<sup>360</sup> These events were likely highly disturbing to Rülf, as he would have been challenged not only with contemplating a potential solution to the plight of Russian Jewry in the East but now as well with a resurgent antisemitism at home, portending a more widespread Jewish national concern.

### Rülf and Political Zionism

In February 1896 Rülf published an article in the Jewish monthly periodical *Zion* in which he began to address the issue of Jewish identity in light of the recent rise in German antisemitism. *Zion* was a German-language publication, edited in Berlin during 1895–1896 by Heinrich Loewe (1869–1951), an early supporter of Jewish Nationalism, having founded a group called Young Israel-Jewish National

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> Vital, A People Apart, p. 536.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Pulzer in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 223.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>360</sup> Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 18*93–1914 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 44.

Association in 1892.361 In this piece, Rülf specifically launched an attack on an organisation, The Central Society of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith, which had asserted their position as being firmly German citizens and who were emphatically opposed to Zionism.362 Rülf challenged the society's stance as being, 'in common with antisemitism in that it denationalises Jews, and that is the greatest danger to Judaism'. 363 The author asserted that Jews should identify first as part of a Jewish nation, an identity which would not be in conflict with loyalty to their German home country. The article emphasised that 'one is born a Jew and as a Jew one must remain' on the one hand and at the same time that such nationality had no influence on the necessity to be patriotic to one's country.<sup>364</sup> While Rülf wrote, 'God knows that I love the German fatherland as much as the best patriot', he lamented the government's inability to protect Jews from persecution, stating that the hate directed at Jews, 'is more than a Jewish back can bear.'365 Building upon this article, Rülf subsequently targeted those who termed themselves as German citizens of the Jewish faith as being self-delusional. While they might convince themselves 'a hundred times' that they are German, the fact remained that no one else would believe that to be the case. 366 Further, those who that expected assimilation or even conversion would serve as admission to a Christian German society were in error; ultimately antisemitism would ensnare them as well.367 In Rülf's view there was only one solution to the problem of antisemitism and that was for Jews to understand that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>361</sup> Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany, 1897–1933: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>362</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Der Jude als Staatsbürger', *Zion* (Berlin, 29 February 1896), 2nd ed., pp. 37–46 (p. 37).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>364</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>366</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Der deutsche Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens', *Zion*, 17 May 1896, 4th and 5th ed., pp. 109–14 (p. 113).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>367</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

they were Jewish citizens of Germany and not German citizens of the Jewish faith; members of a national Judaism first and foremost. He reminded his readers that his position on this point had been promulgated as early as 1883 with the publishing of his Aruchas work, referring to both this piece as well as to Pinsker's Autoemancipation!368 Rülf's involvement in this issue and his position that Jews could be both members of a Jewish nation as well as German citizens represented a progression from the debate held earlier in the century between Gabriel Riesser (1806-1863) and Heinrich Paulus (1761-1851). Riesser, an early advocate of emancipation of German Jewry posited that religion should not bar Jews from citizenship in any way different than German Catholics or Protestants, and he defined Jewish identity 'in strictly religious terms'. 369 Reisser further emphasised that the German Jews 'no longer regarded themselves as a nation', and that 'their only home was Germany'. 370 This view was also advocated by a leading Reform rabbi, Samuel Holdheim (1806–1860), the Landesrabbiner of Mecklenburg-Schwerin who stated, 'Jews have no particular Jewish nationality'.371 Paulus' position, opposing citizenship for Jews on the basis that they formed a separate nation, was improbably echoed by Rülf; Jews' adherence to their religion rendered them a nation unto themselves, here, however, he was critically departing from Paulus who, on the basis of his views precluded Jews from citizenship; Rülf envisioned a dual loyalty.<sup>372</sup>

In February 1896 Herzl published his work *Der Judenstaat* which capitalised on the challenges being experienced by the Jewish community and the publication was regarded by many Jews as transformative. While proto-Zionist societies, such as

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>369</sup> Pulzer, in Meyer et al., vol 2, p. 233.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>371</sup> Samuel Holdheim, *Über die Autonomie der Rabbinen un das Princip der jüdischen Ehe* (Schwerin: Verlag der C. Kürschner'schen Buchhandlung, 1843), p. iii.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

Hibbat Zion had already existed, a central focus for the movement had not been created and they remained a loose federation of committees dedicated to providing philanthropic aid; all this changed with Herzl and the political movement he presaged.373 While Herzl's ideas were not new, as the idea of Jewish selfemancipation and Jewish nationhood had been espoused by both Pinsker and Rülf in particular, his work came at a time during which European Jews were searching for an identity and were in conflict between their desires to be good citizens of their own countries while still enduring persecution. Herzl stated that the surest way to avoid antisemitism in Europe, which he asserted would never end, was to create an independent Jewish state, encouraging Jews to buy land in Palestine but also considered Argentina as a possible site. By so proposing he 'transformed Pinsker's ideas into a clear call, now, here and at once'. 374 The early political movement in the wake of *Der Judenstaat* 'created a form of nationalistic thought and participation that drew on aspects of the European nationalisms acceptable to Jews'. 375 As well, 'the movement achieved the partial nationalisation of Western Jewry by inventing a supplementary nationality; a way for Jews to be good Zionists while remaining in the nations where they lived, apparently without conflict with their being good Germans.376 The concept that Jewish nationality could co-exist with German patriotism had concurrently been expressed by Rülf in his *Zion* articles, and the idea of establishing a home for Jews had been promulgated in both Aruchas and Autoemancipation! Not surprisingly, Rülf, upon learning about Der Judenstaat from initial reports in the press, apparently took deep offence that Herzl had not bothered

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>373</sup> Lowenstein, 'Ideology and Identity', in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 291.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>374</sup> Cohn, p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>375</sup> Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. xiv. <sup>376</sup> Ibid., p. xv.

to credit either Rülf or Pinsker and wrote as such in a letter to Wolffsohn. <sup>377</sup> In his response, Wolffsohn pointed out that Herzl had not been aware of either piece before writing *Der Judenstaat*. <sup>378</sup> This comment was at least somewhat inaccurate as Herzl would likely have already heard of Rülf and had also noted in his diary in 1895, 'Pinsger (sic) is unfortunately already dead. His writings are supposed to be remarkable. I'll read them as soon as I have time. <sup>379</sup> Once Rülf read *Der Judenstaat* in early June, he was impressed with its content and regretted his earlier denigration of Herzl. <sup>380</sup> He promptly penned a letter to the author expressing solidarity, citing his own and Pinsker's works and identified their critical differences as compared with Herzl's piece. He stated that while *Aruchas* and *Autoemancipation!* had been written with deep emotion in reaction to persecution of their Jewish brethren, the authors lacked training in economics and politics to bring their ideas to action, at which they could only hint, and which Herzl had now accomplished. <sup>381</sup>

The following year, 1897, saw an opportunity for Rülf to gain a new pulpit for expressing his views, with the founding by Herzl in that year of the Zionist organ *Die Welt*. As well, the first Zionist Congress which was convened in August proved to be a milestone event for the movement and might have also served as a further platform for Rülf had he chosen to accept the invitation to attend. In May, Rülf wrote to Wolffsohn regarding an invitation to attend the Congress by stating that 'who can foresee what might occur before the Congress convenes' and in any case Rülf stated that his daughter and grandchildren were scheduled to visit from Brussels in early August and that he was also required that summer to attend two rabbinical

<sup>377</sup> Letter from Wolffsohn to Rülf dated 21 May 1896, in Levinson (Avraham), p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>378</sup> David Wolffsohn, 'Köln, den 21 Mai 1896', 21 May 1896, CZA, A1\89 p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>379</sup> Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>380</sup> Letter from Rülf to Wolffsohn dated 28 May 1896 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 196–197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>381</sup> Letter from Rülf to Herzl dated 3 June 1896 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 197–198.

meetings.<sup>382</sup> Perhaps by his comments Rülf was expressing uncertainty regarding the ultimate success of the conference and was therefore hesitant about committing his attendance, whereas in the wake of its success he did agree to attend the following year.

With the founding of *Die Welt* in June Rülf became an early and frequent contributor, utilising the press as among his favourite mediums to extend his reach and attempt to influence public opinion. His initial opportunity to do so arose in the first month of Die Welt's publication, with Rülf responding to a piece which had appeared earlier that month in the AZJ. The AZJ article was written jointly by traditional and liberal rabbis, Rabbi Dr Sigmund Maybaum (1844–1919) of Berlin and Rabbi Dr Heinemann Vogelstein (1841–1911) of Stettin, entitled 'Against Zionism'. 383 The principal reason for the piece was their objection both to Zionism in general and to the appearance of the German-language newspaper in Vienna of *Die Welt* in particular. On the subject of Die Welt, they stated that the newspaper was 'a disaster' and one which needed to be strongly opposed.<sup>384</sup> As long as the Zionist writings had been promulgated in Hebrew, they did not feel the need to object but now that the German language was being used, voices in opposition would need to be raised. The use of the German language was viewed as an attempt to direct Zionist propaganda to loyal Germanspeaking citizens whose allegiance to their 'Fatherland' was unquestioned, essentially espousing the view that Jews were Austrian or German citizens of the Jewish religion. With respect to Zionism itself, they viewed its objective of purchasing Palestine from the Turks to be wholly unrealistic, as well as its undermining the centuries of Jewish attempts to gain equal rights and integrate into their local

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>382</sup> Letter from Rülf to Wolffsohn dated 4 May 1897 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 198–199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>383</sup> S. Maybaum and H. Vogelstein, 'Gegen den Zionismus', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Berlin, 11 June 1897), 24 ed., p. 1.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

societies.385 Rülf's response to this article was prompt and in his characteristically forceful and emotional style he issued a scathing response to these *Protestrabbiner*, a term later coined by Herzl.<sup>386</sup> Not satisfied to merely refute their objections concerning Die Welt, Zionism and the concept of a national Judaism citizenry Rülf took aim at the personal integrity of the authors, suggesting that in their opposition they were worse than the most rabid antisemites.387 Beginning with the rhetorical question of who appointed these rabbis to speak for Jews, he responded, 'only themselves' and went on to impugn their motives, suggesting that they were out of touch with mainstream Jews and only responsive to their wealthy congregants; they occupied important pulpits and collected high salaries while ignoring the suffering of their brethren, in which efforts Rülf had long been engaged.388 He continued by justifying the need for the upcoming Congress, pointing out that it was not only Russian Jews who were subject to persecution but that the situation in Prussia was also perilous, referring specifically to the expulsion decrees which had affected his congregation in Memel.<sup>389</sup> The intensity of Rülf's response might have been due to his personal feeling of being left out of a German mainstream leadership position of the first order, to which he likely believed he was entitled and which these rabbis represented. Ironically, Rülf's criticism of the *Protestrabbiner* by questioning who appointed them as spokesmen for the Jewish people represented an inherent tension; just as the *Rabbiner* may not have been formally appointed as spokesmen, neither was Rülf ordained as a spokesman for Russian Jewry. Indeed, Rülf had appointed himself to that position, representing an important transition of the historic,

<sup>385</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>386</sup> Theodor Herzl, 'Protestrabbiner', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 16 July 1897), 7th ed., pp. 1–2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>387</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Erklärung gegen Erklärung', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 25 June 1897), 4th ed., pp. 1–3.

<sup>388</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>389</sup> Ibid.

local rabbinical function based on scholarship to wide, international fame based upon philanthropy and action.

Having worked tirelessly for so long in establishing his reputation, it is also possible that Rülf now found himself 'used' by Herzl in several capacities including responding to protests by rabbis with a rabbi of his own. As a basis for this position Herzl believed that the success of the movement would depend upon Orthodox Jewish support, having written in his diary in 1895, 'The rabbis will be pillars of my organisation.'390 The movement had also appropriated symbols of traditional religion such as the Magen David, which was reported to have infuriated a member of the traditional rabbinate to urge that such symbols be ejected from the Bet Midrash.<sup>391</sup> Rülf continued to operate independently, and held the opinion that his response to the *Protestrabbiner* as written in *Die Welt* was sufficient, and refused a request from Wolffsohn to sign a petition advocating such opposition.<sup>392</sup> As well, he remained hesitant to join the Congress as part of a group of widespread delegates, stating as late as mid-August that he was 'too old and weak' to attend, a statement belied by his subsequent vigorous activity.<sup>393</sup> Rülf often would use this excuse when he wished to avoid a commitment, perhaps and particularly in those venues in which he was not the principal speaker; he was later described as displaying youthful energy, and having 'an unbelievable elasticity of body, as an avid sportsman, sailor, ice-skater and bicycle rider', up until the time of his death, ironically as a result of a fatal bicycle accident.394 Even while in Memel Rülf had been actively engaged in sports as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>390</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 252.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>391</sup> Joshua Shanes, 'Nationalism and Modernization' (the author's note from presentation at the International Conference - On the Edge of the Empire: The Cultural and Historical Legacy of Galicia and Bukovina, Jerusalem, 2022).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>392</sup> Letter from Rülf to Wolffsohn dated 15 July 1897 in Levinson (Avraham), p. 200.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>393</sup> Letter from Rülf to Wolffsohn dated 17 August 1897 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 201–202.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>394</sup> 'Der Zionismus in Trauer', *Israelitische Rundschau* (Berlin, 26 September 1902), 39th ed., p. 2.

evidenced by his 1874 membership card Nr. 1 in the Memeler Turn-Genossenschaft.<sup>395</sup>

Although Rülf elected not to attend the Zionist Congress, he participated in the planning committee and did send a telegram of greeting, which when it was read during one of the sessions the mention of his name was greeted by the delegates with 'loud cheers', which likely encouraged his attendance at the following year's Congress. 396 He may have also regretted his decision not to attend, having missed a sight: 'one third of the delegates had come from the East and nearly all of them appeared to be men of high intellectual power and not a few of them of commanding presence'. 397 Inasmuch as Rülf had invested much of his rabbinical and philanthropic career advocating respect for Eastern Jews this view might have represented, finally, a personal vindication. Following the conference, and perhaps further appreciating the value of having the widely respected Rülf as an image if not in person as part of the Zionist organisation, Herzl requested a photograph of Rülf, which Rülf was pleased to provide. 398 It is likely that this photograph could have found application in Zionist publicity, as in graphic Zionist representations 'religious Jews usually recalled sages or grandfatherly figures'. 399 In a similar vein, the transition from 'old' to 'new' was depicted in a sketch of Rülf's address in the closing session of the 1898 Zionist Congress in Basel, in which a white-haired and bearded Rülf is shown on the speakers' platform with a raised hand, pointing towards a youthful Herzl, which gesture was 'greeted with thunderous applause' (Appendix item 21).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>395</sup> 'Mitglieds-Karte', 1874, CZA, A1\10\29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>396</sup> 'The Zionist Congress', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 3 September 1897), 1,488th ed., pp. 11–15 (p. 12).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>397</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>398</sup> Letter from Rülf to Herzl dated 22 September 1897 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 202–03.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>399</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture*, p. 126.

In March 1898 Rülf chose to retire from the Memel pulpit, which he had occupied for 33 years, relocating to Bonn, reportedly to devote himself fully to the study of philosophy. 400 In Rülf's attendance at the second Zionist Congress in August of that year, the sole Congress in which he personally participated he expressed the sentiment he had voiced to Wolffsohn in prior correspondence; concern regarding the ability to unify the significant differences of opinions among the delegates. 401 As part of his address he advocated the critical importance of unity and, as he later wrote, 'Subordination is a word that has not yet found its way into the lexicon of Zionism, subordination of the private will to the collective will, subordination of personal opinions and inclinations to the established goals and aspirations of the party.'402 As the Zionist movement grew, Rülf's Aruchas began to be rediscovered and the interest in Rülf himself as a speaker increased; he reportedly received invitations from 'tens' of Zionist chapters including those in Austria, Germany, England, Romania and Russia. 403 In December 1898 Rülf, as a featured speaker, accepted an invitation from the Zionist Union for Germany in Frankfurt am Main at which about 500 people attended, particularly students from the nearby university towns of Giessen, Marburg, Bonn and Heidelberg. 404 Word of this meeting reached Martin Buber (1878–1965) then a student in Leipzig who, in early 1899, invited Rülf to address a Zionist group in that city. He wrote to Rülf, 'The first person we decided to turn to you, most esteemed Herr Doktor. Your name is here among the German Zionists by far the most popular and, from the pamphlets that we sell your *Aruchas* Bas-Ami has generated the most enthusiastic impact.'405 Again as the featured

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<sup>400 &#</sup>x27;Bonn, 26 September'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>401</sup> Letter from Rülf to Wolffsohn dated 17 August 1897 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 201–02.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>402</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Unterordnung', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 15 June 1900), 24th ed., pp. 3–4.

<sup>403</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>404</sup> 'Frankfurt a. M.', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 30 December 1898), 52nd ed., p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>405</sup> Letter from Buber to Rülf dated 1 January1899 in Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 71.

speaker, Rülf accepted this invitation and on 5 April delivered a lecture in Leipzig on 'The development and importance of the national idea in Judaism', which was met with 'long and enthusiastic applause'. 406 Later that year, in a letter addressed to the third Zionist Congress Rülf sent his regrets at not attending the upcoming event, citing that 'my age stands in the way of dealing with all the issues involved with the Congress'. 407 As part of the Congress' agenda Rülf was appointed to its Action Committee, an appointment he accepted and committed to work to the fullest of his abilities. 408 In the same communication of acceptance he cited a 'personal matter' regarding an article he submitted to the party's *Die Welt* organ containing a 'pleasant story' about Russian Jews. Rülf had not yet received confirmation of the article's acceptance and was requesting an update or, 'I will try to publicise my work elsewhere. 409

During subsequent years, Rülf continued to write supporting Zionism as well as addressing issues of concern to him and to the overall Jewish community. In an article published in May 1900 he commented regarding the blood libel and trial of Leopold Hülsner (1876–1928) stating that the dawn of a new century, in which people expected improved education, morality and humanity, had failed to quash the brutality and barbarism of blood libels. 410 Referring to centuries past in which he estimated that 9 million Jews were murdered by Christians, at no time did Jews allege ritual murder; just as there could be criminal Christians so too could a Jew be guilty of a crime without incriminating an entire people. 411 In this comment, Rülf may

<sup>406</sup> 'Leipzig. Mittwoch, den 5 April', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 21 April 1899), 16th ed., p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>407</sup> Letter from Rülf to the second Zionist Congress dated 14 August 1899 in Levinson (Avraham), pp. 205–06.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>408</sup> Letter from Rülf to the Central Zionist Office in Vienna, dated 4 September 1899 in Levinson (Avraham), p. 206.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>410</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Eine zeitgemässe Betrachtung', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 18 May 1900), 20th ed., pp. 2–4. <sup>411</sup> Ibid.

have been sensitive to a practice which found roots in the mid-nineteenth century regarding 'Jewish Crime', as part of the *Kriminalstatistik* debate in Germany, which in one aspect was a practice which 'mainly equated Jews with criminals'. 412

In February 1901 Rülf celebrated his 70th birthday, commemorated particularly in Memel by his former congregation on which occasion many speeches were delivered in his honour and letters written to him. Many diverse groups participated in this event including a trade association comprised mainly of Christian craftsmen of which Rülf had been in its leadership for many years. 413 That Rülf enjoyed a good relationship with his Christian neighbours was evident as well in their ongoing support of the local Jewish institutions, the Armenschule and hospital.414 Many Zionist chapters as well likely sent greetings to mark the occasion, as this elicited a public response from Rülf later in the month thanking all the well-wishers for their greetings.415 Later that year a Romanian Zionist group was founded and in Rülf's honour named itself 'Sectiunea Zionista Dr Rüelf'. 416 Rülf continued his speaking engagements into the following year, and on 8 July 1902 at a meeting of the local Zionist group he was a principal presenter for the Zionist position.<sup>417</sup> He was also featured to speak later that month at a 'mass meeting' in Manchester, where he was described as 'the Patriarch of Zionism'. 418 As well, learning that Rülf was to appear in Manchester he received a letter from the nearby Sunderland Zionist Association with

<sup>412</sup> Michael Berkowitz, The Crime of My Very Existence: Nazism and the Myth of Jewish Criminality,

The S. Mark Taper Foundation Imprint in Jewish Studies (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>413</sup> 'Memel, 12. Febr. (Die Feier des siebzigjährigen Geburtstages für Dr. J: Rülf.)', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 18 February 1901), 14th ed., pp. 317-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>414</sup> J. Rülf, 'Memel, August 1880', 1880, Jewish Theological Seminary (NS) CH16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>415</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Edle Kinder Zions', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 22 February 1901), 8th ed., p. 1.

<sup>416 &#</sup>x27;Rumänian', *Die Welt*, 11 July 1902, 28th ed., p. 12 and Levinson (Avraham), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>417</sup> 'Frankfurt a. M., 8. Juli. (Der Zionismus und die Rabbiner)', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 10 July 1902), 55th ed., pp. 1173-74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>418</sup> 'Manchester', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 4 July 1902), 27th ed., p. 12.

an appeal to also visit their city in which 'a significant number of the local community were formerly residents of Memel and the surrounding area'.<sup>419</sup>

On 18 September 1902, Rülf died, having been fatally injured in a bicycle accident. There were many obituaries published and commemorative events held, in which Rülf's multi-faceted long career, including his rabbinical, philanthropic and most recently his activities to promote Zionism were highlighted, with *Die Welt* referring to him as 'unseres geliebten Altmeisters'. The obituary published in *HaMelitz* cited the *Memeler Dampfboot* of 20 September, which predicted that 'his memory will live eternally in our hearts'. 421

# Isaac Rülf: An Assessment

Rabbi Dr Isaac Rülf was a unique individual at a critical time of transition within the Ashkenasic Jewish community in general and for the rabbinate in particular. His substantial activities and accomplishments were multi-faceted, spanning an active career of almost 50 years, featuring a keen use of the media as an exceptionally talented writer, a philanthropist of renown and as a man of wide vision and action. In many ways he was prototypical in the transformation of a rabbinical platform to substantially expand his jurisdiction, using his otherwise narrow role as a preacher in a small, remote town within the Prussian Empire to achieve fame and widespread impact in many arenas. Insulated by remote geography and serving in a minor pulpit with an established and stable community he was, early in his career, relatively unaffected by the challenges of the Reform with which his colleagues in Germany and in the West were dealing, and he was thus able to focus his attention eastwards

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>419</sup> Israel Jacobs, 'Sunderland Zionist Association', 8 July 1902, CZA, A1\174, pp. 6, 8.

<sup>420 &#</sup>x27;Rabbiner Dr. Isaac Rülf', Die Welt, 26 September 1902, 39th ed., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>421</sup> 'Achar Mitato shel HaDoktor Rabbiner Rülf z"l', *HaMelitz* (St Petersburg, 28 September 1902), 208th ed., p. 1.

and rose to fame through his writing and philanthropy in the famine of 1869/9. Utilising his rabbinical platform, he transitioned to inter-communal leadership in his relief work and to action through his writing and mobility via travels to the East and in providing aid to individuals and communities in Memel and beyond, emerging as a critical resource and point of contact for refugees. A global thinker, there was no problem facing the Jewish community upon which Rülf could not and would not comment, and he later readily adapted to Zionism as a national political movement, viewing it as a potential solution to the 'Jewish problem'. Throughout his career he tended to act alone, outside of the established rabbinical and organisational channels, and as a result he usually failed to achieve the wide success and recognition that his activities might otherwise have earned had he been accepted into the mainstream. Even at a time when his fame had been relatively established, Rülf's absence from a list of those prominent German and notable rabbis sponsoring a testimonial for Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer's 70th birthday in May 1890 was indicative of his status as an outsider. 422 From his small-town origins of poverty, he exerted great personal efforts to advance his status beyond that of a community rabbi, and this struggle likely engendered his strident and self-reliant personality, which was to characterise and guide his substantial and impactful life's work.

Rülf recognised that 'rabbis alone no longer possessed the influence to control the people' and sought other ways than through the traditional route of erudition and scholarship to make his mark and to establish his reputation beyond that of a traditional rabbi.<sup>423</sup> In the field of traditional rabbinical functions Rülf applied himself

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>422</sup> 'Berlin, Datum der Poststempels', 1890, Center for Jewish History, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Records of the Ostrowo Jewish Community Council, RG13, Series IV: Charitable Aid and Voluntary Associations, 1834–1919, Part 3, p. 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/7/archival">https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/7/archival</a> objects/167838>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>423</sup> Isaak Rülf, 'Was Wir Wollen und Sollen' (Address presented at the Society for Jewish History and Literature in Memel, Memel, 1897), p. 13.

as well; while teaching in his daily classes and authoring articles on the occasion of the various holidays, he founded a local hospital as well as his Armenschule, which featured lessons in the Hebrew language. 424 While rabbinic influence and authority had historically tended to be local, Rülf converted his jurisdiction into international fame and expanded his reputation considerably beyond Memel through extensive written materials, charity work, mobility and importantly as a bridge between Eastern and Western Jewry. His work included not only philanthropy but importantly he promoted Jewish solidarity; he strove to erase the divider between 'civilised' West and 'primitive' East. He espoused unity between all Jews, and he was a pioneer in equating the Bildung of Eastern Jews with that of Western Jewry. In this manner he expanded the Jewish public sphere both geographically and culturally, advocating a concept that would later play an important role in political Zionism as its' 'first major task was the creation of the Jewish people as a national-cultural identity'. 425 In his opposition to 'Germans of the Mosaic persuasion' Rülf promulgated the concept of 'dual citizenship', with primary membership in a trans-border Jewish nationality as well as having loyalty to Jews' countries of residence. Rülf's masterful use of the press was central to his expanded jurisdiction; it was often not what he wrote but how the subject was presented. His description of the misery during the famine of 1868/9 as well as during the pogroms of 1881 in which he transmitted information that was already known proved influential and effective through the use of hyperbole and sensationalism, i.e. his graphic description to the British press of 'gruesome accounts of rapes', on the basis of first-hand accounts he had received. 426 Rülf's use of the press marked him as well as a transitional figure in the role of shtadlan, utilising the platform of the rabbinate and the vehicle of philanthropy and via the

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<sup>424</sup> Leiserowitz, 'Litvak Migratory Decisions'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>425</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture*, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>426</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 237.

media to appeal to wider public opinion in addition to his having acted in a role of self-appointed intercessor in his 1885 appeals to Bismarck.

Rülf's work and influence in the East during the period of the famine and thereafter set him apart from the actions of other traditional rabbis not only in the West but also in the Russian Empire. Rülf's focus on philanthropy as a direct means to alleviate suffering represented an effort to address the poverty which characterised life in the Pale, and which had been exacerbated by the famine. The Orthodox rabbinate within the Pale were mostly unequipped to deal with economic deprivation and found it easier to focus their efforts on a known threat, the Haskalah.<sup>427</sup> The activities of Yisroel Salanter, specifically his promotion of the Mussar philosophy, appealed to elements of the Orthodox however, it did nothing to address the daily needs of a population suffering in poverty; it was Rülf's activities which won him broader renown in the eastern Jewish public.

It was in the use of his rabbinical platform for politics that Rülf re-established his national reputation beyond that of his fame during the 1868/9 famine. When Herzl appeared on the Jewish national stage Rülf was prompt in expressing support for the new movement, which he viewed through the lens of national unity, a solution to the 'Jewish problem' and a potential vehicle for the promotion of Palestine as a Jewish homeland; all positions he had previously advocated. The platform of Zionism allowed Rülf an opportunity to fulfil his desire to help the Jewish nation on a global level, an objective he had long sought as early as his 1869 visit to Kovno. The relationship with Herzl and the nascent Zionist movement proved symbiotic: Rülf regained national stature as a popular speaker and figure, regarded as an *Altmeister* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>427</sup> Vladimir Levin, 'Denying Tradition: Academic Historiography on Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe', in *Studies in Polish Jewry: Writing Jewish History in Eastern Europe*, ed. Natalia Aleksiun, Brian Horowitz and Antony Polonsky, Polin, vol 29 (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2017), p. 271.

of the movement and in turn having been used by the organisation as 'their' rabbi in promoting an agenda and defending from attacks by other rabbis when necessary. Rülf returned to prominence through his preferred platform of the press, becoming a frequent contributor to the organisation's organ *Die Welt*, marking an important transition in the politicisation of the rabbinate.

Notwithstanding Rülf's hubris, 'it is sixteen years since I took it upon myself to be an advisor and saviour of my Jewish brethren in Russia', he was a man who made a difference. Consistently striving for good causes to provide relief for individuals, communities, or the Jewish community in general, he was often overshadowed by others but never deterred, discouraged or flagged in his efforts. As a man from humble beginnings and as a rabbi in a minor community, Rülf was 'one of those men who was more than he appeared'. He earned the name 'Dr Hülf', bestowed upon him by his successor in the Memel pulpit, Dr Emanuel Carlebach through his manifold efforts and contributions to Jewish society, in small and large measures through a lifetime of dedication, as a transitional figure and an exemplar of modern rabbinical possibilities.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>428</sup> Levinson (Avraham), p. 146, handwritten note by Rülf.

<sup>429 &#</sup>x27;Bonn, 26. September'.

<sup>430</sup> Scheinhaus, 'Ein Edler in Israel', p. 211.

### Chapter 3: A House on Fire: Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever

Shmuel Mohilever was a dynamic and multi-dimensional figure whose life was marked by exceptional dedication and efforts extended on behalf of the Eastern European Jewish community at a time of great permutations. By birth and training a member of the 'old school' of the traditional rabbinate, he was first and foremost a great scholar and a master of halakhic texts whose rulings were widely sought and respected. At the same time, he recognised that he was present during a watershed moment in the life of the Jewish people threatening the very continuity and safety of Jewish existence.

The Jewish population within the Russian Empire, including the Kingdom of Poland, had grown 150 per cent from 1.6 million in 1820 to 4 million in 1880. As an example of this growth, in the course of only one generation between 1850 and 1880 the number of Jews registered as inhabitants in Warsaw grew threefold, from below 40,000 to more than 120,00. While poverty had always existed, the significant growth in Jewish population and the dislocation caused by the ending of the Feudal system in 1861 caused massive impoverishment, creating the new phenomenon of the *luftmenshn*, desperately seeking employment wherever they could. The immense growth in population as well as the loss of power by the Polish nobility following Polish revolts and the subsequent confiscation of their lands caused Jews to seek other sources of livelihood in the newly developing cities.

<sup>1</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol 2, p. 198, table 6A2, 'Jewish population of the tsarist empire, including the Kingdom of Poland 1795–1910'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> François Guesnet, 'The Emergence of the First European Jewish Metropolis in Warsaw, 1850–1880', in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, ed. Alina Gromova, Felix Heinert, and Sebastian Voigt, Jüdische Kulturgeschichte in Der Moderne = Jewish Cultural History in the Modern Era, vol 4 (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), p. 184.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (2010), p.400.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Israel Bartal, The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 42.

The ending of serfdom also contributed to the growth of antisemitism. Lacking what had been a well-defined role, peasants felt 'powerless in the face of the Jews', a sentiment that was later to contribute to anti-Jewish violence.<sup>5</sup> The failed Polish rebellion of 1863 in which many Jews had supported the Poles against Russia also caused a weakening of the Jewish community's standing within the Russian Empire. Indeed, the Orthodox rabbi of Warsaw, Dov Ber Meisels, (1798–1870) had 'openly championed the Polish struggle and appeared at mass demonstrations against Russian rule'.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the 1871 pogrom in Odessa and the government's inability or unwillingness to defend its Jewish citizens began to disillusion even those who had hoped for better times and potentially equal rights following the ascension of relatively liberal Tsar Alexander II (reigned 1855–1881) to the throne.

The concurrent rise in the importance of the press and the spread of the Enlightenment also presented new options in mobility and religious practice to the community which rendered the threat to Jewish solidarity substantially different from the many that had preceded it over the centuries. Whereas Jewish observance and identification as a people had previously been essentially unitary, the contemporary challenges had, as if through a prism, caused Judaism to emerge refracted into new factions and practices. The collapse of the traditional world also meant that the community, and by extension the rabbinate no longer possessed coercive political authority or power that its decrees be observed. The responses to these challenges were varied including by members of the Haskalah movement who sought to create a 'reformed Jew', incorporating values, moral criteria, fashions and manners recently originating in western and central Europe, although within the context of historic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, vol* 2, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 87.

Jewish identity.<sup>7</sup> They claimed that Judaism had become 'fossilised' with a focus solely on 'whether the Torah permitted or prohibited'.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, among their primary objectives was educational and religious reform, including the removal of many newer restrictions placed upon the community by 'more recent rabbis'.<sup>9</sup> A parallel response was advocated by traditionalists who rejected the call for reform and who believed that modernity was merely at the fringes and that it could be kept out by closing the tent. Mohilever bestrode the conflict in an attempt to preserve the unity of the Jewish people, viewing the impending split in the community as 'a house on fire', and in such a case, 'one does not investigate whether those who come to extinguish the flames are God fearing or not'.<sup>10</sup> He sought to bridge the growing divide, and during the period prior to 1881 his efforts were directed to advocating peace and cooperation between factions and also in promoting measured, and his opinion, needed reform, particularly addressing insufficiencies in the education of Jewish youth, a position also supported by the Haskalah.

An additional central issue for Mohilever was the need for fluency in local languages, a position advocated by Mendelson and his circle in Germany a century earlier, as well as by Moses Montefiore during his 1846 visit to the Russian Empire. As Mohilever later remarked, 'In our times it is imperative to learn the language of our country, the lack of which skill is a major reason for our economic deprivation'. He found fault not only with traditional Jews in Russia who refused to teach Russian language in schools, but later on in Palestine as well, in which religious communities

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 230.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> David Assaf and Israel Bartal, 'Shtadlanut v'ortodoxia: tsadikei Polin b'mifgash em ha-zemanim haḥadashim', in *Tsadikim ve-anshe ma'aseh: mehkarim ba-hasidut Polin*, ed. Rachel Elior, Israel Bartal, and Chone Shmeruk (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), p. 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Maimon, p. 48, Shmuel Mohilever essay, 'Matarat Niseati L'artzenu Ha-Kedosha', 1890.

failed to teach their children neither Arabic nor French. Adopting a somewhat revolutionary religious position for a traditional scholar, Mohilever stressed the importance of communal loyalty above personal religious beliefs and observance, stating that 'one does not inquire about religious observance of those who work for communal benefit'. <sup>13</sup> As a man of action, he travelled widely throughout Europe and in Palestine and wrote prolifically in promoting his agenda although his efforts were largely unsuccessful and subjected him to frequent and sharp criticism from the very groups he was hoping to reconcile. He was, however, 'graced with a staunch heart and a readiness to fight for his beliefs, even if he had to fight alone'. <sup>14</sup>

The assassination in 1881 of the tsar and the widespread pogroms in its wake galvanised all factions of the community to renewed action. The majority of the traditionalist rabbinate continued their efforts via established and expanded channels of shtadlanut to stabilise the situation and was opposed to emigration, which other factions including Mohilever as well had begun to advocate. For Mohilever the crisis meant renewed and strident advocacy for resettlement of Jews in the Holy Land as a way of dealing both with the bodily and spiritual threats to the Russian Jewish community. Following the pogroms many societies had been established to provide aid to the victims and these groups later formed the nucleus of the Hibbat Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement, which promoted settlement in and agricultural development of Palestine. In the period following 1881 Mohilever became convinced that the future for the Jewish community lay in emigration, and addressing the physical threat, he stated, 'our enemies are many and are multiplying and were it not

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 71, Shmuel Mohilever, 'Final Instructions'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement (1882–1904)* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 89.

for their fear of the government we would have been lost'. <sup>16</sup> He focused as well on the spiritual threat to the integrity of the nation, 'all who strive together for Hibbat Zion must work in harmony and unity together'. <sup>17</sup> In his view the objective of settling in the Holy Land would serve to keep the Jewish nation whole, 'under the unifying banner of Zion'. <sup>18</sup> Mohilever elevated the cause of settlement in Palestine to new heights, and that the traditional status quo which had served the Jewish community for so many years might no longer have been adequate. <sup>19</sup> In pursuit of his objectives and in the battleground of ideas he rose to fame through his great courage, determination, and energy as he utilised his renowned reputation and standing in the traditional rabbinate, transforming its function into a platform for activism. Mohilever's constant struggle for compromise and unity and his involvement in founding and taking an active and principal role in the nascent Hibbat Zion movement positioned him as a transitional figure and redefined the role of a rabbi as community leader in a rapidly changing world.

Previous scholarship has largely valued his role primarily on the basis of his association with and activism for the Hibbat Zion movement, i.e. Yosef Salmon's description of him as 'Samuel Mohilewer, the Rabbi of Hibbat Zion'. A review of his career however reveals a deeper and broader valuation, leading to a reassessment of his position and actions within Eastern European Jewish society as an advocate of compromise and unity at a time of unprecedented challenges. His overall objective was always the preservation of the Jewish nation through dialogue with and reconciliation of the diverging streams within the Jewish community, utilising his

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Maimon, p. 68, Shmuel Mohilever, letter to first Zionist Congress, 1897.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 68

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Jacob Samuel Fuchs, 'Evel Am', *HaMagid* (Kraków, 16 June 1898), 23rd ed., p. 183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 38, Shmuel Mohilever essay, 'Matarat Niseati L'artzenu Ha-Kedosha', 1890.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 140.

advocacy of Hibbat Zion and Zionism as a tool. His willingness to co-opt modern techniques of fund raising, use of the press, the inclusiveness of women in his organisation and his extensive cross-border travels mark Mohilever as an important and unique cultural type of rabbinical figure at a critical moment in Jewish history. His position, that one's religious beliefs were private matters and that involvement of all Jews in communal affairs were to be valued on an equal basis and perhaps even more highly than personal religious beliefs or practice, created a potential bridge for understanding. Nonetheless, much of his work in promoting compromise and dialogue was unsuccessful; indeed, the debate continues to this day as to whether there exists any room for compromise or reform within the confines of traditional Judaism. A more appropriate view of Mohilever's legacy therefore should focus on his wide-ranging efforts in promoting openness, dialogue, and compromise as a means for the preservation of Jewish unity at a watershed juncture in Jewish history.

Mohilever's character was shaped through various periods and rabbinic positions in his career, as he increasingly found his public voice both as a *posek* as well as a spokesperson for both communal unity and later for Hibbat Zion and Zionism.

His early years were marked by training in both traditional and secular scholarship, during which time he distinguished himself, acquiring a reputation as a master of Talmud and Halakhah, Jewish law. Following the completion of his education and rabbinical ordination he practised for several years as a merchant, accumulating commercial experience which broadened his horizons. Following this, he accepted the first of several rabbinical posts he was to hold in his career, beginning in his hometown of Glebokie (now Hlybokaye in Belarus, about 100 miles east of Vilnius) in 1848, and finally in 1883 in Białystok, his final position. By the time he assumed the rabbinate in Suwałki in 1860 he began to contemplate involvement beyond the local

rabbinate, and in 1864 he participated in the celebration of Sir Moses Montefiore's 80th birthday. This event likely had a substantial impact on Mohilever's views of the potential for more global impact, both in Jewish communal matters and an appreciation for the potential of settlement of Palestine as an imperative. His assumption of the pulpit in Radom in 1868 provided a springboard for Mohilever's public voice as he began to utilise the press to advocate for compromise between the maskilim and the traditional factions and to promote reform of education and the acquisition of local language skills. Like Rülf, Mohilever's recognition of the power of the press as a medium to articulate and advocate views and positions was reflective of a new type of rabbi, one aware of the reach and possibilities of the media. The pogroms of 1881 within the Russian Empire served as a trigger for Mohilever, although his pulpit was in an area not been directly affected by the violence, and he launched into full scale support for the nascent Hibbat Zion movement as a means for societal unity and by advocating emigration to Palestine as a defense against further physical threats to the nation as a whole. These goals served for Mohilever as lifelong guideposts. He dedicated the balance of his career to these objectives.

### 1824–1859: The Formative years

Mohilever was born in 1824 in Glebokie, then part of the Russian Empire. His family had a long tradition of outstanding rabbis, going back 22 generations.<sup>21</sup> While known for scholarship and piety, Mohilever's father was also renowned for his expertise in mathematics and was primarily engaged in the world of commerce.<sup>22</sup> Mohilever was trained by his father at an early age not only in traditional Jewish religious studies but also in secular subjects.<sup>23</sup> At the age of 10, he was already recognised as an *illui* 

<sup>21</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Chovev, p. 7.

(prodigy) in recognition of his mastery of religious texts.<sup>24</sup> He was subsequently accepted for study at the prestigious Yeshiva of Volozhin, an institution regarded as em ha-yeshivot, the mother of Lithuanian yeshivas from which he received rabbinical ordination.<sup>25</sup> This program of study and the imprimatur of the institution marked Mohilever as an agent of the first order within the framework of traditional Judaism.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that even those who later were to oppose his views invariably deferred to and respected his outstanding scholarship, and he was always addressed and referred to as gaon, an eminent religious and judicial authority.<sup>27</sup> While the Volozhin yeshiva focused its education on the traditional study of Talmud and commentaries it was 'more than an institution for the dissemination of Torah in the narrow sense'.28 The school was at the same time reported to have been relatively open and tolerant towards outside contemporary events, and 'not dominated by the reactionary spirit that prevailed at other Yeshivas'.<sup>29</sup> As examples, other than the study of Talmud, which was the standard curriculum at most rabbinical schools, Bible classes were included in the curriculum.30 Periodicals in various languages as well circulated freely on its campus.31 Students at the school were exposed to Haskalah literature and 'young men attracted to the literature of the Haskalah found in the yeshiva ample opportunities to explore it'.32 It was also reported that Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, founder of the yeshiva, demonstrated his support for reform in Jewish society in the spirit of the Haskalah.<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Yitzchak

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning* (Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015), p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement, p.47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Luz, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Luz, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

Volozhin, son of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, who served as the yeshiva's head during Mohilever's attendance, was known to be fluent in German, Russian and Polish, and after his death, 'many books of Polish literature were found in his house'. <sup>34</sup> Also unusually during his tenure at the yeshiva Mohilever exhibited an independent streak and refused to rely on the traditional support for students, normally provided by the charity of the host town. <sup>35</sup>

Determined from an early age to not enter the rabbinate as a career, and not needing to do so due to independent means, he chose instead to engage as a flax merchant, a trade which had grown in importance as the volume of linen production in the Russian Empire had increased following the adoption of the spinning wheel at the turn of the century. Mohilever managed this business for the five years following his ordination, and due to his exposure to the wider world of trade during this period, he may have developed a relatively high tolerance for nuance and openness which would have been required in commerce, a trait which would become evident in his future career. As part of this experience in business he acquired the knowledge 'as an excellent organiser who understood the value of both spirit and machinery of discipline and management'. Due to the deaths of his in-laws from whom he may have been receiving support, he was unable to continue in business and subsequently in 1848 reluctantly entered the rabbinate. This path towards the rabbinate was not uncommon for the period, with young men initially pursuing a career in business and later filling rabbinical roles in town and communities due to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Savva Dmitrievich Purlevskii and Boris B. Gorshkov, *A Life under Russian Serfdom: Memoirs of Savva Dmitrievich Purlevskii, 1800–1868* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005), p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Leo Jung, ed., *Men of the Spirit* (New York: Kymson Publishing Company, 1964), p. 427.

either failure on their own or an adverse event affecting their in-laws.<sup>39</sup> Mohilever's first position was in his hometown of Glebokie and then in 1854 he assumed the rabbinate in Shaki (now Šakiai in Lithuania, about 150 miles southeast of Klaipeda), a small town located about 15 miles east of the Prussian border and about 20 miles west of Kovno, a position he held until 1860.<sup>40</sup>

This period of Mohilever's life coincided with groundswell changes throughout European Jewry. In the West, the Jewish Enlightenment, which found its roots in the late 18th century writings and philosophy of Moses Mendelssohn, spread through maskilim which had been attracted to his circle, and who, 'supported him in the task of creating a secular sphere of life within Jewish society'. 41 The first Jewish reform service was held in the early 19th century in Seesen followed by a larger and more regular service in 1818 in Berlin, attended by about one thousand worshipers.<sup>42</sup> This trend continued through the 19th century, attracting a growing following and accelerating through the training and professionalisation of the rabbinate, which served to rationalise the reform movement, which in any case was proving attractive to western followers seeking to acculturate, a phenomenon not seen in the East. 43 The sentiment towards openness to secular culture had been furthered in the West through the slow but steady progress of according equal rights to Jews - in the city of Frankfurt am Main in 1864, in the North German Confederation in 1869 and in the united Empire in 1871.44 These developments had both improved the lives of western Jews and challenged the worldviews of traditional Jewish communities and their rabbinic leadership, as the Reform movement continued to attract followers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory*, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Michael Brenner, 'Between Revolution and Legal Equality, in Meyer et al., vol 2, p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Stanislawski, '*Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate*', pp. 436–7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 291.

The situation in the Russian Empire was quite different. The rabbinate was still widely honoured, however lacking equal rights, and discriminatory tsarist policies within the Pale of Settlement kept the pressure on Jewish communities, with many Jews seeking relief. Prior to the ascension to the throne of Tsar Nicholas I Jews within the Russian Empire had enjoyed a degree of autonomy and insularity however this began to change with the monarch's policies of Russification.<sup>45</sup> In 1804 the government mandated that within eight years rabbis would be required to learn a local language and also be responsible for keeping the official population registry. 46 In 1835 the Russian government established the roles of 'Crown Rabbis' within the Pale, requiring rabbis to have a secondary or higher secular education.<sup>47</sup> These rabbis were sanctioned by the government and were often committed to Haskalah and to integration of Jews into Russian society. 48 Indeed the government-sanctioned two rabbinical seminaries founded in 1847 in Vilna and Zhitomir featured on its staff, 'a who's who of the Russian Haskalah'. 49 While there were still traditional rabbis in many communities, known as dukhovnyi ravvin (spiritual rabbis) the crown rabbinate often drew support from rich and powerful members of the Jewish communities, which served to undermine the authority of the traditional religious authority and the rabbinate.<sup>50</sup> Additional policies promulgated under the tsar included a movement to impose a broader requirement for secular education, one of the main objectives of the government in the rabbinical conference of 1843 held in St Petersburg. The dissolution of the Kahal in 1844 caused major disruptions to the traditional communal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. xii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Valdimir Levin, 'Civil Law and Jewish Halakhah: Problems of Coexistence in the Late Russian Empire', in *Religion in the Mirror of Law: Eastern European Perspectives from the Early Modern Period to 1939*, ed. Yvonne Kleinmann, Stephan Stach, and Tracie L. Wilson, Studien zur Europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, Band 280 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2016), p. 215.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis, and Education*, p. 284.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 103.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Stampfer, Families, Rabbis, and Education, p. 285.

structure, including in the selection of a rabbi in traditional communities which had been an organised process, regulated by communities through the centralised Kahal framework. Thereafter the selection of a traditional rabbi became an ad hoc process, resulting in fewer such rabbis being appointed.<sup>51</sup> Following the dissolution of the Kahal various factions strove for communal leadership, with followers of the Jewish enlightenment and defenders of traditional observance at opposite ends of the spectrum. Mohilever proved and exceptional figure in his endeavour to hold a middle ground.

Mohilever's coming of age in the aforementioned period presented him with special challenges, as a traditionally trained rabbi in favour of many of the reforms advocated by the Haskalah he was subjected to attacks from both the traditional and maskilic factions. He was however firmly convinced that many of the reforms were valid and even important, especially those relating to education, and he believed that adapting to the changing environment through the implementation of reforms stood the best chance of preserving the greater continuity of the nation. Believing that other options existed rather than an 'in or out' membership in the Jewish community, Mohilever sought to expand the definition of communal identification. On the other end of the spectrum from the Haskalah and pursuing a similar goal of communal preservation, other traditional rabbis sought a retreat to strict observance and a 'closing of the tent flaps' to modernity, which not coincidentally continued to provide for, and even strengthened the role of the rabbi in traditional circles. <sup>52</sup> As posited by Charles Liebman, religious extremism had always existed, and following the breakdown of the Kahal, which had served to keep such tendencies in balance, 'the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Jacob Katz, 'Towards a Biography of the Hatam Sofer', in *Profiles in Diversity: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870*, ed. Frances Malino and David Jan Sorkin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 260.

path is now open to the creation of independent rejectionists institutions'. <sup>53</sup> By adopting a position that strict adherence to traditional observance remained the best option for national survival, the continued supremacy of *Daas Torah*, the infallible wisdom of the rabbinate in all arenas, including religious, political, social and economic remained paramount. <sup>54</sup> This strategy had also been gradually implemented by Hasidic circles, 'to limit the damage' so that in reference to the homes of Hasidim, 'windows are to let light in, but not to look at the dangerous influences on the outside'. <sup>55</sup>

In pursuit of this objective and to escape the need to contend with the frightening challenge of change, the religious leadership adopted a stance of seclusion and isolation. An example of the latter was the well-known position of Rabbi Moses Schreiber (1762-1839), known by his principal work, the Hatam Sofer, who posited that anything new was prohibited by the Torah, in keeping out any incursion into or change in traditional religious practice. In support of this position, Schreiber insisted upon strict observance of all rituals and customs; even those which had a weak basis in Halakhah. In doing so, he was actually pioneering the erection of a new boundary between those who adhered to traditional beliefs and observance and those who had left the fold by consciously flouting traditional practice. Schreiber had already realised in his era that traditional authorities had lost their ability to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Charles Liebman, 'Extremism as a Religious Norm', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22, no. 1 (1983), pp. 75–86 (p. 82).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Gershon C. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939*, Studies of the Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jews, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1996), p. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Mendel Fikaz, 'Spiritualism dati neged ha-zionut v'elitism deterministi; Likchei dirashot shel ha-admor mi-Perzava (1866–1930)', in Elior, Bartal, and Shmeruk, *Tsadikim ve-anshe ma'aseh*, p. 280. <sup>56</sup> Luz, p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Adam S. Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), p. 73.

enforce observance of the religious commandments, 'individuals could violate the Sabbath in public and committing of the sins proscribed in the Bible, and the leadership of the community, rabbinical and lay alike had no means to force them to cease their activities or to expel them from the community'. Similar isolationist tendencies were exhibited by Hasidic communities as well, as espoused by a contemporary of the Hatam Sofer, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772–1811). He had seen, 'the political changes of Napoleonic times' and was outspoken in his warning against 'German Haskalah influences' and adjured his followers to abstain from engaging in any form of science or philosophy. His principle disciple, Nathan Sternhartz (1780 – 1844) held a similar view directed towards reformers, 'these evil sects [maskilim] want to teach languages and science to the young and to lead them to utter heresy'. Indeed, 'from an element of radical ferment in the 18th century, Hasidism had evolved into a bulwark against modernity, a force of conservatism'.

Others, and particularly during the reign of Alexander II, expressed more moderate voices and attempted to find a middle ground between the extremes, with a view towards stemming the loss of community members. Shmuel Yosef Fuenn of Vilna (1818–1890) an individual with a classic traditional education and background, and who later served as one of the leaders of Hibbat Zion, sought to make peace between the secularists and the traditional factions within the organisation. Other contemporary contextual philosophies would have included the position of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), who was also concerned about the growing fragility of observance in exile and advocated a return for the Jewish community to its historical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ellenson, *After Emancipation*, p. 67.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Biale et al., p. 491.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 603.

homeland in Palestine.<sup>64</sup> This view was initially replete with messianic connotations, perhaps influenced by the sentiment in some Jewish community circles of the impending coming of the messiah in the Jewish calendar year 5600 (1840).<sup>65</sup> Such believers were termed 'Tarniks' from the numerical value in Hebrew of 1840 (Taf-Resh, or TAR) and the movement was 'sufficiently widespread to create a problem in some Jewish communities in Eastern Europe'.<sup>66</sup> A key element in Kalischer's philosophy was his idea of redemption by natural steps, vs. the age-old traditional view of redemption all at once via the coming of the messiah and that Jews should classically not 'ascend the wall' by taking steps to hasten their redemption, which would include emigrating to the Holy Land in advance of the coming of the messiah.<sup>67</sup> The existence of the Yishuv community in Palestine was not deemed to be in this category, as its presence was viewed by the traditionally observant community as necessary to ensure the ancient practice of announcing the new moon, attending graves of scholars and to maintain the learning of Torah in the Holy Land.<sup>68</sup>

The view of gradual redemption through the efforts of men was shared by Mohilever, stating in an 1876 essay, 'The redemption will take place in a natural manner', thus underpinning Mohilever's advocacy for emigration to and settlement of the Holy Land even absent a messianic event. <sup>69</sup> The year 1840 was also marked by the Damascus affair, discussed in a previous chapter. In 1858 the Mortara case of a Jewish youth kidnapped from his home by the Church which claimed that he had been baptised as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Malino and Sorkin, *Profiles in Diversity*, Introduction, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Abraham G. Duker, 'The Tarniks: Believers in the Coming of the Messiah in 1840', in *Joshua Starr Memorial Volume, Studies in History and Philology*, 5 (New York: Jewish Social Studies, No. 5, 1953), pp. 191–201 (p. 191).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Ravitzky, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup>Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Maimon, p. 153, Shmuel Mohilever, 'Ha-Geulah'.

an infant became public and was a cause célèbre within Jewish circles, memorialised in the painting by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (1800–1882), The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara. 70 Notwithstanding the publicity generated, the pleas of the distraught parents as well as the failed visit to Rome by Sir Moses Montefiore, all appeals proved useless.<sup>71</sup> In the words of Pope Pius IX, 'But let the newspapers, for their part, go on talking all they want . . . I don't care a rap', which underscored yet again the helplessness of the Jewish community. 72 The case spurred the greater Jewish community to solidarity; in its wake the Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in France in 1860, which was viewed even by those whose religious positions differed with it an organisation which could serve as a common, unifying factor for the various Jewish communities - the Alliance stressed an instinctive psychology that all Jews shared, regardless of location.<sup>73</sup> While the activities of the Alliance were often subject to criticism, its wide reach, and its acting as a central address for Jewish concerns was an attempt in redefining Jewish unity and community. The period also witnessed a growth in the press serving a range of Jewish constituencies and viewpoints, i.e. HaMagid founded in Lyck in 1856, Der Israelit in Mainz in 1860, and HaLevanon in Palestine in 1863. The ascension in 1855 of the relatively liberal Alexander II to the Russian throne as well as the widespread sentiments of freedom following the ending of the Crimean war (1853-1856) also witnessed the launching of *HaKarmel*, the first Russian Hebrew language periodical, published in Vilna in 1860 by S. Y. Fuenn. The rise of the press in this period also underscored the novel and significant reach of the media and through it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/judaica-n09060/lot.60.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Diaries of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore (The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1983), vol 2, p. 99.

 $<sup>^{72}</sup>$  August Hasler, How the Pope Became Infallible: Pius IX and the Politics of Persuasion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Lipschitz, *Sefer Zichron Yaakov*, part 2, p. 14.

to publicise viewpoints and influence public opinion on a wide scale. This development impressed even the traditional Orthodox who soon realised its value as a platform to express its views, noting that due to the reach of the press, 'the far became near.'74 An early attempt to give voice to the traditional viewpoint was the publication in Memel and Königsberg by Rabbi Yisroel Lipkin Salanter in 1861 of Tevunah, a periodical of responsa and Talmudic novellae. Due to a lack of support and subscriptions the publication failed after only twelve issues over a period of three months.<sup>75</sup> The rapid growth of the media during this era was striking; in 1838 the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums was the only Jewish newspaper, and by 1880 there were over 100.76 All of these forces and trends formed the backdrop of Mohilever's early years as a student, merchant and communal rabbi. The times were rapidly changing; previously Talmud learning alone brought a man honour, and if fortunate a rabbinical position, but as new values began to take hold in Jewish society the link between Torah study and social rank began to shift.77 It was in this fast-changing environment Mohilever strove to find a path for himself in the role of a traditionally trained rabbi.

## Transition to Activism

The town of Suwałki, a seat of the district government in the Polish-Lithuanian borderlands, was located approximately 26 miles east of the Prussian border.<sup>78</sup> In 1860 the rabbinate in Suwałki, previously occupied by the renowned scholar and halakhist author Rabbi Yechiel Heller (1814–1861) became vacant. Due to his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement*, p. 261.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Abigail Green, 'The "West" and the Rest: Jewish Philanthropy and Globalization to c. 1880' in, *Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller, *Jewish Culture and Contexts* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 161.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Leslie Sherer and Arthur Leonard, *Yiskor Book Suwalki*, p. 13

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Suwalki/suwe009.html">https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Suwalki/suwe009.html</a>.

increasingly widespread reputation as a scholar Mohilever was recommended to fill this position, which he held through 1868.79 Suwałki at that time, as a border city with Prussia to the west, had been influenced by the Enlightenment, as following the blockades of Crimean War the border had become porous, having been opened for commercial and rail traffic.80 By the time of Mohilever's arrival in the city, 'wealthy Suwałki Jews were employing in their homes teachers from Germany who taught Bible in the German translation'. 81 While Suwałki Jews were on the whole traditional, they did not oppose secular learning and also did not condemn the behaviour of enlightened Jews, with religiosity regarded as a personal matter. 82 This attitude was later to play a prominent part in Mohilever's own philosophy, drawing a distinction between Hibbat Zion's public activities and the private beliefs and lives of its members, in which the organisation did not involve itself.83 It was reported that in their selection of a rabbi, the elders of the Suwałki community were careful in retaining not only traditionally competent scholars but also individuals who would understand 'the spirit of the times'.84 It seems clear that having been selected for the position, Mohilever would have already been perceived not only as a pre-eminent Torah scholar, but also as a broader thinker and actor, as well as being accepting of wider practices, although he himself 'punctiliously observed the slightest Mitzvah and religious custom' again reflecting his distinction between public and private practice.85 While at Suwałki his fame as a halakhic scholar continued to spread and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Maimon, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Ruth Leiserowitz, 'A Border from a Jewish Perspective Developments on the Prussian Periphery', in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, ed. Alina Gromova, Felix Heinert, and Sebastian Voigt, Jüdische Kulturgeschichte in Der Moderne = Jewish Cultural History in the Modern Era, vol 4 (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Sherer and Leonard, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Salmon, Do Not Provoke Providence, p. 363.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Sherer and Leonard, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 5.

he was consulted for halakhic questions from other localities as well.86 In June of 1862 he responded to a question from the rabbi of Weizen (now Vac in Hungary, about 30 miles north of Budapest) regarding the importance of honouring the office of the communal rabbi. 87 Aware of his growing influence as a halakhic authority, after stating his opinion he provided explicit permission for the ruling to be publicised. The founding of the 'Suwałki School for the Children of Jeshurun' in that same year would have also impacted his view regarding education. This institution's subjects of instruction included grammar, Polish and German as well as the classic Hebrew and religious subjects, and its curriculum was reported to have won great praise from the Rav of Suwałki.88 This was not surprising in view of Mohilever's own early education at home which had similarly included religious and secular subjects. One important distinction enjoyed by Suwałki during this era was the large percentage of the population who earned their livings from farming. The effort to attract Jews in Poland to farming had commenced earlier in the century, including a committee formed in 1843 by Viceroy Ivan Fyodorovich Paskevich (1782–1856) to promote agricultural work among Jews, and subsequently a decree issued in 1862 removed many of the restrictions on Jewish land ownership.89 Throughout Mohilever's tenure in Suwałki the numbers of Jewish landholders continued to increase, and their success would have impressed Mohilever and given him confidence in Jewish agricultural ability. 90 In addition to his own years in the business world, his time in Suwałki and its community of farmers likely provided Mohilever with familiarity with farming and its management. This was later to play an important role in his activities 'as a man who

<sup>86</sup> Maimon, p. 1. section 'Divrei Shmuel'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, *Sh'alot u-teshuvot may-ayss Harav Shmuel Mohilever* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1980), p. 112.

<sup>88</sup> Sherer and Leonard, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Glenn Dynner, *Yankel's Tavern: Jews, Liquor, and Life in the Kingdom of Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 155, 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

knew how to run a farm', which was reflected in his detailed and knowledgeable advice and recommendations to prospective settlers in the Holy Land.91

Mohilever's tenure in Suwałki witnessed the start of his involvement in affairs beyond those of the traditional rabbinate, as he began to look upon his rabbinic post as a means through which he could work for the good of a greater community. 92 January of 1863 marked the Polish uprising against the Russian government and the revolutionaries in Suwałki demanded money from the local Jewish population.93 Seeing no choice but to submit to this demand the community complied; however, following the failure of the uprising the Russian government imprisoned several community leaders, sentencing some to death. When efforts by the community to free those accused failed, Rabbi Mohilever visited the garrison commander and personally interceded for the condemned men. He guaranteed with his own life that if the men were freed for the High Holiday services, which were to take place the next day, the men would return for their sentences to be carried out. In response, the men were released and were subsequently never again remanded. 94 Thereafter he received a formal recognition and medal from the Russian government for his outspoken public statements and efforts in calming the situation following the uprising.95 This action on Mohilever's part showed extreme bravery under great stress and personal risk, as in the wake of the uprising many Jews were arrested, about a thousand were tried, several hanged and others exiled to Siberia. 96

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Salmon, Religion and Zionism, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Jung, Men of the Spirit, p. 421.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Sherer and Leonard, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 33.

<sup>95</sup> I. Schalit, 'Rabbi Samuel Mohilewer 1824–1898', *Die Welt* (Vienna, 17 June 1898), No. 24 ed., pp.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe,* p. 87.

The year 1863 also witnessed the founding in St Petersburg of The Society for the Promotion of Culture among the Jews of Russia (known by its Russian acronym, 'OPE'), a society which advocated moderation and cooperation among all Jewish factions, and importantly supported reforms in education. 97 The society was founded with government approval under auspices of wealthy Russian Jewish merchants, including Baron Joseph/Evzel Günzburg (1812-1878).98 The Günzburg family was part of the 'elite secular leadership' of Russian Jewry, having secured privileged social status by providing economic benefit to the government via their substantial wealth, accumulated through tax-farming the state liquor monopoly, which evolved into an international banking house.99 They, along with other prominent Jewish financiers such as the Brodskii family of Kiev, who had made their fortune in sugar, viewed themselves as having inherited the mantle of shtadlanut in their efforts to gradually win better treatment for the Russian Jewish community. 100 Notably, the organising of this society also marked the rise of the Russian maskilim as a political entity. 101 Notwithstanding that the organisation was openly maskilic in its philosophy, Mohilever maintained links with the OPE where it suited his views and goals. particularly in its support for educational reform and local language studies. 102 The society was a strong advocate for educating Jewish youth in the local language, causes which were aligned with Mohilever's. 103 This willingness to cooperate with organisations and individuals of different and even of opposing views marked

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Luz, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Nathans, p. 173.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (2014), pp. 325–26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup>Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia. Vol 1: 1350 to 1881*, p. 412.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 112.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Brian Horowitz, *Russian Idea - Jewish Presence: Essays on Russian-Jewish Intellectual Life* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013), p. 74.

Mohilever's lifelong philosophy and set him apart from others in the traditional rabbinate.

Along with many communities around the world, the Jews of Suwałki joined in sending an intricately scribed testimonial as a tribute to Sir Moses Montefiore in 1864, in praise for his recent mission to Morocco and in celebration of his 80th birthday. 104 Sir Moses was already established as a leading figure throughout worldwide Jewish communities due to his devotion to Jewish causes wherever the need arose. The news of his various efforts, including in the Damascus blood libel of 1840 had reached deep into Russia and his visit there, along with his wife Judith in 1846 had been regarded with special reverence and honour. Eye witness accounts reported how the visit was highly valued equally by maskilim and haredim, so that even religious schools were closed enabling all to catch a glimpse of the great man and his procession as it passed. 105 Sir Moses' devotion to Eretz Yisrael was noted even then, as both on his carriage in gold letters, as well as upon the large white buttons of his footmen was inscribed the wording, 'I recall you Jerusalem, holy city.'106 In the 1864 tribute sent by Suwałki first of the signatories was that of Shmuel Mohilever, as the rabbi of the community. Through his signature on this document Mohilever and others tied their local concerns to Montefiore's global perspective, with Montefiore praised for his wide-ranging activities on behalf of Jewish welfare, including his commitment to Jewish learning, religious observance and the Land of Israel.<sup>107</sup> As importantly, the widespread submission of testimonials provided a sense of solidarity among the different Jewish diaspora communities. As signatory to this tribute, Mohilever would likely have envisioned and aspired to his own broader

<sup>104</sup> Guesnet, 'The Great Sir'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, pp. 150–52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Guesnet *The Great Sir*.

canvas for action to aid the larger Jewish community than simply could have been achieved as a pulpit rabbi. The model of Montefiore and his activities remained a significant factor in the following years to all those who strove to make an impact on Jewry at large, and the use of his name and as a role model permeated the following period. Significantly as well in taking inspiration from Montefiore's successes and hand-in-hand with the rise and reach of the press a movement towards the 'politics of the public sphere' in which Mohilever and many others could also have an impact in a broader sense than had been previously possible.<sup>108</sup>

## Rise to Prominence

In 1868 Mohilever departed Suwałki and accepted a position as rabbi in Radom, located approximately 75 miles south of Warsaw, remaining within the Kingdom of Poland, then part of the Russian Empire. In Radom he began to use the platform of the rabbinate in earnest for wider community service, in attempting to improve the positions of both his local community and the 'general Polish Jewish community' as well.<sup>109</sup> As the community rabbi he maintained good relations with all factions, including the many Hasidic adherents of the town.<sup>110</sup> Indeed the Hasidic community in Radom had repeatedly approached him to receive blessings and had even attempted to persuade Mohilever to function as their *Rebbe*, which appointment Mohilever declined.<sup>111</sup>

During this period, Mohilever became alarmed by the growing divide between the secular and the traditional, but even more so by the increasingly blatant hostility between these two factions. He was convinced that were this issue not addressed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Green, 'The "West" and the Rest', p. 167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Maimon, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

openly and decisively it could result in a permanent split due to the Haskalah's advocacy for reform, a position to which Mohilever often subscribed in part, and the traditional rejection of any reform whatsoever. In an attempt to mediate between the factions and using his platform as a renowned scholar he began to utilise the press to gain a wider audience for his positions, acknowledging the significant reach and influence of the media. His writing, usually firmly grounded in and replete with traditional sources, was clear, direct, even-tempered, and used classic Hebrew language, aimed at broad segments of Jewish society. His letters and articles would typically appear in *HaLevanon*, an organ founded in Jerusalem 1863 by Yechiel Brill (1836–1886) and published intermittently in various locations including Jerusalem, Paris and Mainz until Brill's death in 1886. This publication had originally served as a platform for news about the Yishuv in Palestine and despite its various geographic publishing locations it could be considered as a 'Eretz Yisrael newspaper, published mostly in Europe'. 112 Diverse viewpoints appeared in its pages, such as a spirited series of articles during the period 1870-1874 in which Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz espoused traditional opposition to any maskilic reforms and Rabbi Mohilever and others advocated tolerance and compromise. The maskilim had already achieved a dominant position in the press, principally through the vehicle of *HaMelitz*, published in Russia, with some interruptions, 1860–1904, with such articles as 'Ha-Rabbanut' which appeared in February 1870, in which the traditional rabbinate was portrayed as completely out of touch with the modern needs of the people. 113 The traditional factions, led by Lipschitz, had, due to a lack of capital to found their own organ,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Yechiel Brill, *Yesud Hama'ala, The Immigration of Eleven Farmers from Russia in 1883*, 1978 ed. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1883), Introduction, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Moshe Eisman, 'Ha-Rabbanut', *HaMelitz*, 28 February 1870, No. 7 ed., p. 49.

decided to utilise *HaLevanon* as their press platform. This use testified to the emergence of a more vocal, self-conscious and assertive Orthodox Jewish public. 115

One of the first articles issued by this faction appeared in HaLevanon in April 1870, authored by Lipschitz, entitled 'Fear of Sin and Wisdom'. 116 Lipschitz's aggressive and confrontational writing style was established early, introducing his piece by referring to maskilim as 'idiots, tricksters and those who rebel against the light'. 117 In contrast to Mohilever, Lipschitz's writing tended to the rambling, dense and circumlocutory, taking up many columns to make a single point. In response to continued maskilic articles and publications, Lipschitz again took up his pen in January 1872, crafting a response and appealing for national unity and to the traditional faction to utilise the press as a platform for expression, 'lest our silence be perceived as agreement' with the maskilic views. 118 He referred to an historic nadir in Jewish history, the Middle Ages, in which Jews were subjected to immense persecution; it was only faith and traditional observance which saw them through and kept Jews together. In his view, therefore, the only logical and time-tested response to oppression remained strict adherence to faith. Echoing the position of the Hatam Sofer he stated that allowing even the slightest reform could lead to complete assimilation; as proof he cited over 1200 families in Berlin, influenced by the reform who had abandoned their Judaism. 119 Lipschitz also decried the recent divisions within the Jewish community as 'sin'as chinam', groundless hate, which sought to

<sup>114</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Kobrin and Teller, *The 'West' and the Rest*, p. 165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'Yiras chet v'ha-chochma', *HaLevanon* (Paris, 11 April 1870), pp. 115–20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'Ha-leum v'ha-achdut', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 17 January 1872), 19th ed., pp. 145–46 (p. 146).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'Ha-leum v'ha-achdut', *Ha-Levanon* (Mainz, 10 January 1872), 18th ed., pp. 137–38.

'burn the previously unified house of the Jewish people down'. 120 This phenomenon had become widespread, not only creating a divide between the traditional and the maskilim but as well between Western and Eastern Jews, i.e. French and German and those in Russia and Poland. Lipschitz pointed out that in former times Western Jewish communities had regularly and wisely sought their rabbinical leadership in Russia and Poland, which served to keep the community both unified and loyal to traditional Judaism. In recent years, however, and due to the influence of the reform and maskilim, 'the devil has been dancing among us to divide brothers. Jews of Russia and Poland are denigrated and the epithet "Polack" is used to denote the lowest character traits – Western Jews have begun to see themselves as angels and the eastern Jews as less than donkeys'. 121 Lipschitz did, however, acknowledge the generous assistance provided by Western Jews in the wake of the recent famine of 1869, for which the Russian community would be eternally grateful and which left him with some hope for a restoration of unity. In closing, he appealed to all Jews to unify under the banner of traditional Torah observance, which would restore the former glory of the Jewish community, as well raising its profile vis-à-vis the outside world, i.e. with the tsar.

Mohilever, in sharp contrast to Lipschitz, published an early article in *HaLevanon* during July 1872 in which the rabbi advocated compromise. He began by addressing the leaders of the Haskalah in a respectful manner as 'those who seek to raise the banner of Israel with all their hearts'. 122 In a bold statement he asserted that even the traditional rabbinate were themselves secretly in favour of educational reforms, 'many of the great rabbis desire the reform in the education of our youth' and further

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Lipschitz, 'Ha-leum v'ha-achdut', p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'El ḥevrat marbei haskalah b'Yisrael v'el ha-rabbanim b'Russia v'Polin', HaLevanon (Mainz, 31 July 1872), 47th ed., pp. 992-93.

cited that in previous generations many of the most prominent scholars themselves had excelled in secular knowledge and in science. 123 This position, expressed relatively early in his public career would serve as a constant refrain in Mohilever's advocating compromise. As did Lipschitz, and presenting different visions of utopia, Mohilever also harked back to an earlier period in Jewish history; a 'Golden Age' of Judaism at the time of the Mishna and Talmud. By doing so he reminded readers that prominent scholars often combined scholarship with professions and of the high regard in which agricultural work in particular was held. Confident that dialogue rather than estrangement could bring compromise, he advocated for a meeting between the traditional rabbinate and the maskilim, positing that such a gathering would find a peaceful way forward; incorporating the benefits of the maskilic reforms while preserving tradition and observance. 124 In closing he urged the traditional rabbinate to 'awaken from your slumber', signing the piece with his title as Rav of Radom. 125 Interestingly, he seemed to acknowledge that his time in the city had served as a basis for his rise to wider prominence, as he referred to this title even later as the rabbi of Białystok, with his personal stationary inscribed in a letter written in 1886, 'S. Mohilewer, q. Ober-Rabbiner zu Radom, jetzt in Białystok' (referred to as the former chief rabbi of Radom, presently in Bialystok). 126

Lipschitz was guick to respond, seconding Mohilever's call for the rabbis to 'awaken'. In Lipschitz's view however, they needed to awaken for the purpose of strengthening observance.<sup>127</sup> Following the High Holy days in 1872 Mohilever again wrote to promote peace between the factions, granting that there was validity on both sides of

<sup>123</sup> lbid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Mohilever, *Sh'alot u-teshuvot may-ayss Harav Shmuel Mohilever*, pp. 12 (introduction, photo).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'Ha-seder v'hama'aseh', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 4 September 1872), 2nd ed., pp. 9-11.

the divide. He especially favoured educational reforms for youth, an improvement in relations with the government and that Jews should take part in civil responsibilities including army service, which was compulsory in Russia, although not in the Kingdom of Poland until 1874. 128 He further deplored the animosity which existed between the traditional 'God-fearing' and the maskilim and advocated for civilised dialogue between the factions, specifically citing the rabbinic dictum that 'Kol Yisrael arayvim zeh b'ad zeh', that all Jews are responsible for one another. 129 As usual, his article drew heavily on traditional sources, including comparing the different factions to the four species that were just recently joined together for the holiday of Succot, which classic rabbinical interpretation defined as a model for cooperation between all types of Jews. Mohilever also reminded his readers that the solemn holiday of Yom Kippur granted forgiveness only for sins between man and God but not between people; urging peaceful compromise. 130 It is interesting to note that throughout the exchange of articles in *HaLevanon* and despite Lipschitz's aggressive approach he never directly attacked Mohilever, likely out of respect for, and possibly even deference to Mohilever as a widely respected scholar, whose learning he respected. Mohilever, in correspondence with Lipschitz invariably addressed Lipschitz as 'my friend, the distinguished scholar, despite their differences. In one instance Lipschitz, perhaps sarcastically, later questioned whether Mohilever had an interest to support the Russian Jewish community in any way other than advocacy for settlement of Eretz Yisrael, in view of Mohilever's seemingly total focus on that issue. Mohilever responded that of course, everyone had an obligation to assist the community in any

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> François Guesnet, 'From Community to Metropolis: The Jews of Warsaw, 1850–1880' in *Warsaw*: The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky, Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet, eds., IJS Studies in Judaica, vol 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 140. <sup>129</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Ha-yirah v'ha-haskalah', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 11 December 1872), 16th ed., p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Ha-yirah v'ha-haskalah', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 4 December 1872), 15th ed., p. 113.

way possible and he stood ready and willing to do so; and that he did not even understand the nature of Lipschitz's question, since the response was so obvious.<sup>131</sup>

An edict from the Russian government had been promulgated in 1855 which required the dismissal of all traditional *melamdim*, who were the mainstay teachers of the traditional *heder* system of education, scheduled to take effect in 1875. 132 During the intervening years the *melamdim* were required to be trained in secular studies and in particular in the Russian language and only such trained *melamdim* would receive teaching permits. In 1868 the government began to refuse the issuance of new permits to untrained teachers who were not previously licensed and limited any renewals to expire in 1875. The traditional rabbinate was very much perturbed by this potential intervention and disruption in their schools, taught by the melamdim, in which the curriculum was typically restricted to limudei kodesh (holy studies), with an absence of secular subjects. These rabbis placed the blame squarely upon the maskilim, sarcastically referring to them as 'those who wish to help us'. 133 For the maskilim, criticism of the *heder* and the struggle against it 'served as a central role in defining the maskilic educational ideal as well as in shaping the methods and frameworks of its activity'. 134 Rabbi Mohilever, who was already involved in efforts regarding educational reform within the Russian Jewish community, travelled to Kovno in 1873 to meet with Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, a prominent leader of the traditional faction to formulate a strategy with regard to this issue. During Mohilever's visit to Frankfurt am Main the previous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, *Sefer Machzikei Hadas* (Pieterkov: M. Zederbaum, 1903), p. 29 (Letter from Mohilever to Lipschitz, June 1883).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 118n.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Mordekhai Zalkin, *Modern Jewish Education in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe: The School as the Shrine of the Jewish Enlightenment*, Studies in Jewish History and Culture, vol 50 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016), p. 4.

summer he had made connections through an intermediary to Baron Joseph/Evzel Günzburg, who enjoyed a close relationship with the authorities in Saint Petersburg. During the meeting in Kovno, Mohilever volunteered to travel to St Petersburg to meet with the Baron to see what could be accomplished. While Rabbi Spektor's objective was that Mohilever would advocate to have the edit annulled, Mohilever himself had other ideas, 'intent on a renewed effort to merge the efforts of the moderate rabbis and the moderate maskilim.' This confusion in objectives resulted in both Spektor's and Mohilever's intentions failing, and the Baron stepped back from the entire issue.

While in St Petersburg, Mohilever met with the OPE and during these meetings Mohilever must have made an impression on Günzburg as a man who might be receptive to non-traditional ideology. In an open letter to Mohilever shortly after their meeting, the Baron urged the rabbi to oppose Jewish draft evasion which had become rampant in Russia, embarrassing the community in the eyes of the government. At the same time, Günzburg's intercession and efforts on behalf of the Jewish community, at least up until the pogroms of 1881 won full support from Mohilever, who praised both the man and his activities as worthy of support, describing Günzburg as 'an exalted prince of Israel'. 137

The year 1874 was eventful for Mohilever. In a four-part series of articles published in subsequent editions of *HaLevanon* on 11, 18, 25 February and March 4 of that year, Mohilever outlined what might have been termed his manifesto, *Osher Ha-Adam* (the Wealth of Man), possibly due to his inability to thus far successfully bridge

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Joseph Günzburg, 'Michtav', *Ha-Levanon* (Mainz, 17 September 1873), nr. 5 edition, pp. 34–35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Osher Ha-Adam', *Ha-Levanon* (Mainz, 11 February 1874), 26 edition, pp. 1, 2.

the gap between the maskilim and the traditional rabbinate. 138 In the first section of the series he outlined in a preamble, using biblical and traditional analogies replete with sourcing, that he was attempting to set forth critical objectives which needed to be adopted by the Jewish community. In following chapters, he highlighted the importance of communal unity and deplored the hatred which had developed between maskilim and those who feared any connection between Torah and secular knowledge, forecasting disaster should the factions not be reconciled. Referring to the past in which many of the Torah elite were prominent physicians, philosophers, and craftsmen he strongly advocated educational reform; that youth should be educated in both Torah and secular knowledge. He particularly highlighted work with one's hands in general and in agricultural arenas in particular as honourable pursuits. While spiritual development was important, spiritual goals would prove elusive without achieving economic stability through work. He also highlighted the importance of observing the local government's laws, which in his view was even more critical than observing the laws of the Torah. By doing so Jews would demonstrate allegiance to the government and thereby not provide a means for agitators to malign the community for disloyalty. In a similar vein Mohilever advocated the importance of learning local languages which were necessary to secure advancement in society and to respond to oppressors. Mohilever himself typically wrote in Hebrew; however, he spoke and understood and on at least one occasion corresponded in Russian. 139 He also stressed that one could not simply wait for help to magically appear from heaven; activity was necessary to achieve results. He specifically condemned traditional rabbinical leaders who took no action while the situation of the Jewish community worsened daily, 'Can a person's hunger or thirst

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Mohilever, 'Osher Ha-Adam'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Alter Dryuanov, *Ketavim le-Toldot Hibbat Ziyyon v'Yishuv Eretz Yisrael* (Odessa: Omanut, 1916), p. 347, no. 163, Letter from Mohilever to Pinsker, 3 December 1884.

be assuaged only by hope?!' he queried. 140 In a possible further condemnation of the traditional rabbinate and potentially also of the Hasidic tsaddikim, he stated that 'no intermediary is needed between man and his God'. 141 In his outlining of the means for the Jewish community to reach a high level of holiness he cited three key points: belief in the unity of God, a high moral standard and fluency in local languages. 142 Of specific interest is his attribution to fluency of local languages the same importance as to one of the tenets of Judaism; belief in the unity of God, which position would, by most traditional sources, have likely been deemed heresy. 143 Indeed, for the traditional, keeping local languages at a distance and preventing their being taught in religious schools was a bedrock tenet, as lack of fluency in the local language would render acculturation into the local culture impossible. This issue had been prominently cited as of critical importance to the ultra-Orthodox through the contemporary writings of Rabbi Akiva Yosef Schlesinger (1837–1922) who advocated strict preservation of the traditional language of Jews, Yiddish. 144 Lipschitz, while not replying directly to Mohilever, nonetheless in the very next issue of *HaLevanon* highlighted his own three key points: strengthening traditional education, raising the banner of the Torah and increasing personal faith. 145

In late 1874 and early 1875 Jews in Eastern Europe and throughout the world participated in a campaign, 'Mazkeret Moshe', founded by Sir Moses Montefiore on the occasion of his 90th birthday, to promote settlement in Palestine. The objective of this collection was to found a settlement in the Palestinian Yishuv which was to

<sup>140</sup> Mohilever, 'Osher Ha-Adam', 4 March 1874, no. 29, p. 225.

233-35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Mohilever, 'Osher Ha-Adam', 25 February 1874, no. 28, p. 218.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Michael K. Silber, 'Alliance of the Hebrews, 1863–1875: The Diaspora Roots of an Ultra-Orthodox Proto-Zionist Utopia in Palestine', *Journal of Israeli History*, 27, no. 2 (2008), pp. 119–47 (p. 120).
 <sup>145</sup> Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'Mish'alot Yeshurun', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 11 March 1874), 30th ed., pp.

bear the name of this philanthropist, whose dedication to the settlement of the Holy Land was renowned. Sir Moses' interest in and plans for Jewish agriculture in Palestine had been elaborated as early as 1839, in an attempt to render the Jews of Palestine self-sufficient. 146 In this work Rabbi Mohilever participated actively, and his participation marked a turning point in Mohilever's thought and subsequent actions. 147 This involvement identified for Mohilever the possibility to utilise the platform of settlement of Eretz Yisrael, as advocated by Montefiore, as a unifying medium in the spirit of compromise and more importantly as a potential bulwark against a split in the community. He feared that the traditional 'closed tent' approach would drive supporters of the Haskalah and its reforms away from the fold, 'if we try to expel the Haskalah entirely it will uproot all in its wake'. 148 He posited that the use of Eretz Yisrael as a unifying medium would have been attractive to both the traditional, as the motif of 'return to Zion' was a central part of the thrice-daily prayers, and to the Haskalah who esteemed a return to the basic values embodied in the classic culture of the Holy Land and whose spiritual world was closely bound to the Bible as well as to Jewish culture and to the Hebrew language. 149 Thereafter, 'he strove tirelessly on behalf of the ideal of Yishuv Haaretz, to which he dedicated his life'. 150 The year 1874 also marked the passing of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer who had long been an advocate of settlement in Palestine, as part of the early stirring of messianic redemption by natural means. This was a position that Mohilever shared, although he was careful to publicly disassociate his activism from any messianic idea. 151 Following Kalischer's passing it is possible that Mohilever saw an opportunity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Abigail Green, 'Sir Moses Montefiore and the Making of the "Jewish International", *Journal of* Modern Jewish Studies, 7:3, 2008, pp. 287-307 (p. 291).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Chovev, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Ben-Zvi, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Myers, p. 221.

to assume his mantle, as the former had acquired a broad platform for public expression, and indeed thereafter Mohilever became involved in all aspects of Jewish public activities of his time. 152

Mohilever's writings in the years 1876–1879 were replete with expressions of compromise and focused on efforts for reconciliation. In his memorandum published in 1876, Yirah V'Derekh Eretz, he lamented that 'there is a sickness in the land; maskilim are denigrated and abused, forgetting that all of Israel are responsible for one another; even if a Jew has sinned he is still a Jew'. 153 In the vein of conciliation and unity in a halakhic response of 1879 he wrote, citing the Talmud (Berachot 34b), that 'in a place where penitents stand, even the righteous cannot stand'. 154 In this, Mohilever pointed out that notwithstanding that an individual may have strayed from observance, treated with kindness and openness they may repent and in such case could rise in stature of piety even greater than those who were continuously observant. Mohilever was writing and advocating for settlement in Palestine as a way to bring all Jews together and more importantly to prevent the trend towards secularisation and assimilation, a growing concern in Russia and Europe. He believed that a return to the Holy Land would gradually bring Jews back to observance, stating in his 1876 essay, Ha-Geulah (the redemption) that once Jews return to their ancestral land observance will be renewed. 155 In this position Mohilever was careful to avoid reference to messianic activity, which had been a strain in previous decades, particularly as espoused by Kalischer and which had alienated traditional factions from supporting such settlement. He recognised early that the movement to settle the Holy Land before the coming of the Messiah would invite a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 144.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Maimon, p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

backlash from many in the traditional camp and was therefore careful to avoid any messianic overtones in his advocacy of settlement. To the contrary, he took pains to reiterate his staunch belief in the traditional coming of the Messiah, stating in his later address to the Basel Zionist congress, 'we have waited 2,000 years for the coming of the Messiah, and our belief in his coming remains as strong as ever'. 156 His writing continued to emphasise that Jews should not wait for any help from heaven, i.e. classic messianism, but rather active efforts were to be undertaken with the Ottoman government to assist in allowing expanded settlements and only with such activity could the way towards eventual redemption be cleared. 157 It is interesting to note that both Mohilever and Lipschitz were essentially addressing the same issue: unity and fear of secularisation, assimilation and preservation of faith and the faithful. Their differing approaches continued a debate which outlasted both of its participants.

## A House on Fire

The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March of 1881 and the subsequent rise of violence against the Jewish communities in Russia in its wake, often triggered by a call, 'Beat the Yids who killed our tsar', was a major challenge for Russian Jewry and a watershed moment for Jewish communities elsewhere. While there had always been antisemitism in Russia, such trends had intensified in the years leading up to these events, i.e. the resurfacing of a ritual murder charge and the reaction of Judeophobes within Russian society who feared the increased entry of Jews into trades and into the public educational institutions of the empire. The violence of the

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Maimon, p. 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Avrutin and Bemporad, eds., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 7.

pogroms represented 'not simply a permanent inconvenience but an immediate threat to their established way of life, as an explosive force, as a dynamic rather than static phenomenon.'160 The suffering and sense of danger caused many Jews from affected regions to flee, with large numbers of refugees massing in western border cities, such as the Galician cities of Podvolochisk, Brody and Lvov. Brody, only five miles west of the Russian Empire's border, was a magnet for refugees from the Russian Empire; conditions of Brody were described: 'the city was overcrowded in every nook and cranny, even in the corners intended for the animals'. 161 The city was rife with apocryphal rumours that the Alliance, which was present there, would provide free passage to America along with free land and financial support upon arrival. 162 This rumour became widespread, aided by false promotions in the Russian press, reportedly accompanied and supported by a forged signature of Sir Moses Montefiore which caused refugees to 'storm' over the border. 163 This occasioned a circular to be published in Brody during October 1881 by Carl Netter (1826–1882) a founder of the Alliance and on its behalf, that 'the lie of this rumour has no legs and contains not a kernel of truth'. 164 There had been emigration before this event, mostly due to a quest for better economic opportunities abroad; however, the events of 1881 triggered a significant acceleration of this trend, and in reactions throughout Jewish communities worldwide. It was reported that 'many are fleeing without purpose or goal, without support or shelter; old, young, women and children'. 165 Most

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*, Cambridge Paperback Library (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 51.

David Hirschfeld, secretary of the Deutsches Central-Comite für die russisch-jüdischen Fllüchtlinge, 'Brody, 27 Juli 1882', 27 July 1882, Geheimnes Staatsarchiv, Preussicher Kulturbesitz, I HA rep. 77 Ministerium Des Innern Tit. 1145 nr. 114 bd. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 371.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Moriz Friedländer, *Fünf Wochen in Brody Unter Jüdische-Russischen Emigranten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Russischer Judenverfolgung* (Wien: Druck und Verlag von M. Waizner, 1882), p. 5. <sup>164</sup> Laskov, pp. 118–19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Ibid., pp. 232–33 (letter from S. P. Rabinowitz (1845–1910) to Isaac Rülf, 27 April 1882).

of the refugees had already focused their emigration goals on America, a view supported and encouraged by the Alliance. The Alliance had already funded emigration on a limited basis to America in 1870–1871 following the famine in Lithuania and it viewed emigration to the United States as the most suitable option. An additional attraction of America as a destination was that by that time many Russian Jews had either a brother, cousin or acquaintance that had already arrived, settled and even prospered there. This objective was also encouraged by various emissaries of Western Jewry, i.e. by Sir Samuel Montagu of England (1832–1911) who personally visited the refugees in the border towns. He was reportedly concerned that the refugees would not settle in England, as their presence could potentially cause a rise in antisemitism there.

Already with a focus on settlement in Palestine, Mohilever became even more convinced in the wake of the pogroms that settlement of Jews in Palestine was a potential solution to both the persecution of Jews in Russia and to the growing divide between the Jewish community's factions. He was also concerned that mass emigration to America might lead to a rise in antisemitism there but more importantly he feared for the loss of observance and assimilation. The issue of Jews distancing themselves from the community either via secularisation or integration remained prominent in his view, and he remarked specifically that his primary concern was the preservation of the nation rather than the holiness of Eretz Yisrael. He travelled to Lvov to witness the refugee crisis first-hand with a view

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 147.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Frankel, Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917, p. 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 127 (Letter from Eliezer Mordechei Altschuler [1844–1921] of Suwalki to Zalman Dovid Levantin [1856–1940]), 3 December 1881.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Chovev, p. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> M. L. Lilienblum, *Derekh la'avor ge'ulim* (Warsaw: Achisaf, 1899), p. 119.

towards assisting with the disorganised stampede of refugees, as the relief organisations were completely overwhelmed. 172 He was also focused on encouraging those already present towards resettlement in Palestine, however without success. 173 Indeed, most emigres were focused on America as their destination, as outlined in HaMagid, 'But before us lies the prospect of deliverance from evil and national rebirth in the land of America. The Intelligent man will, therefore, choose this path.'174 Mohilever's reaction to the crisis can be contrasted to that of the traditional faction, led by Rabbis Spektor and Lipschitz. Whereas Mohilever placed his entire being and influence behind emigration to and settlement of Palestine, the traditional faction remained rooted in the classic practice of shtadlanut. This practice had been prominently marked by the efforts of Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Crémieux in connection with the Damascus affair, 'to employ Jewish influence to persuade major Western powers to pressure despotic regimes to change their policies'. 175 Spektor and Lipschitz's initial reaction to the crises was in squarely in that vein, in employing what became known as the 'Kovno Circle' to alert Western Jewry of the pogroms and to solicit their influence and intervention to improve the situation of Jews in Russia.

In the wake of the pogroms several aid societies were formed to help provide relief to the victims, such as the Minsk group 'Gatherers of the Wanderers of Israel' founded in early 1882. Its stated goals included providing immediate financial support to refugees as well as collecting data and dispensing advice regarding the suitability of

<sup>172</sup> Laskov, vol I, pp. 235–36 (letter from Rabbi Mohilever to Dr Asher in London, 28 April 1881).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> Sam Finkel, *Rebels in the Holy Land: Mazkeret Batya, an Early Battleground for the Soul of Israel* (Jerusalem; Nanuet, NY: Feldheim, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. by Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 393.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Selwyn Ilan Troen, 'Organizing the Rescue of Jews in the Modern Period', in *Organizing Rescue: National Jewish Solidarity in the Modern Period*, ed. S. Ilan Troen, Benjamin Pinkus (London, England and Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1992), p. 9.

destinations for resettlement.<sup>176</sup> These various societies, whose initial objective was relief, were not disbanded after the violence subsided. Their members had become disillusioned regarding the prospect of continued life for Jews in Russia as well as having been horrified by the lack of response from and assistance by the Jewish St Petersburg elite.<sup>177</sup> These groups subsequently transformed in function and focus, forming the basis of the initial Hibbat Zion chapters.<sup>178</sup> Even had the original intention of a society been to promote emigration, this goal could not then have been publicised due to government prohibition against such societies and against emigration; indeed, leaving Russia for the purpose of settling abroad was a punishable offence.<sup>179</sup> The violence of the pogroms and the disappointment with the government also caused a shift in position by the editors of *HaMagid*, who in a lead article cited emigration to Palestine as a 'city of refuge'.<sup>180</sup>

Many Jews began to seek alternatives via emigration, as expressed in a letter of 7 June 1881 to Rabbi Rülf in Memel from a Jewish resident of Kiev: 'we Jews of Russia have only two hopes; equal rights or emigration – as of now not only do we lack equal rights but whatever we have is being diminished'. <sup>181</sup> Despite the letter of the Russian government's law prohibiting emigration, many Jews focused on escape and a few considered Palestine as a destination. An early example of a plan to consider emigration to Palestine was that of Eliezer Altschuler (1844–1921) of Suwałki who dispatched a detailed (25 specific questions) request for information to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 180.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Nathans, p. 189.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol 2, p. 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> David Gordon, 'Im Lo Achshav Ay-Matai', *HaMagid* (Lyck, 8 June 1881), Nr. 22 edition, pp. 178–79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 72.

a correspondent in Jerusalem regarding potential emigration for his family. 182 Altschuler was also the founder of one of the first organisations dedicated to emigration to and settlement of Palestine by the name of Yesud Hama'aleh established in Suwałki in the summer of 1881. 183 Other societies followed, including one founded by Abraham Shalom Friedberg (1838-1902) in the autumn of 1881, in which Rabbi Y. E. Spektor was also involved. 184 The trend continued through the balance of 1881 and into the following year with individual societies being formed, with names such as Achot Zion (sisters of Zion) in St Petersburg<sup>185</sup> and 'The Society for the Settlement of Eretz Yisrael' in Kharkov. 186 Mohilever compared the situation following the violence as people trapped 'in a house on fire' and urged cooperation among all factions, even with those who may not have been observant. 187 Emigration to the Holy Land, he posited, could therefore serve a dual purpose: rescue from the literal conflagration affecting the Jews in Russia and to bring all factions of Jews closer together. If the community would only be willing to allow cooperation between all factions, 'the bond of brotherhood would not be broken'. 188 As such, the new wave of persecutions served as a catalyst for Mohilever to encourage emigration to Palestine, where he was confident Jews could remain in or return to the observant fold. With this objective in mind, Mohilever was able to persuade other prominent traditional sages, Rabbis Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk (1820-1892) and Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel of Lodz (1821–1912) to join him at a gathering held in Warsaw to promote emigration to Palestine. 189 The result of this gathering was to issue a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 571.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Maimon, p. 68.

<sup>188 .. . .</sup> 

<sup>189 &#</sup>x27;R' Eliyahu Chaim Maisel z"l Aynenu', Hazefirah (Warsaw, 2 May 1912), 87 edition, p. 1.

declaration in the summer of 1882 to be distributed to 'all rabbis in Israel'.<sup>190</sup> The memo discouraged emigration to America and supported the organising of societies in each town to promote gradual emigration to the Holy Land.<sup>191</sup> Inasmuch as Mohilever's vision for emigration to Palestine was focused on a return to observance he later took strong exception to settlers in Gedera who were reported to be publicly flouting religious observance in the Holy Land, initially threatening to have them expelled.<sup>192</sup> Not discouraged from his failure in Lvov to persuade refugees to consider Palestine as a destination, Mohilever committed himself fully to practical work on behalf of his objective. He was fortunate in being able to dictate his terms of engagement with the congregations he served and to devote his full energies and time to the organisation that later became Hibbat Zion inasmuch as he was reportedly financially independent, which allowed him to travel extensively, and his reputation for renowned scholarship ensured that he would be received with honour.<sup>193</sup>

While in Warsaw in 1882 he participated as a founder in a relief society to aid victims; the 'Christmas pogrom' of late 1881 had served to disillusion local residents who had hoped that they might be immune from violence similar to that had affected other cities earlier in the year. <sup>194</sup> Mohilever worked with the society to also seriously explore emigration to Palestine, and this group was later to become an important chapter in the Hibbat Zion movement. <sup>195</sup> Following this visit, he undertook extensive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Salmon, Religion and Zionism, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Maimon, pp. 20–21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Luz, p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Theodore R. Weeks, 'Jews and Poles, 1860-1914: Assimilation, Emancipation, Antisemitism', in *Poland and Hungary: Jewish Realities Compared*, François Guesnet, Howard Lupovich, and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Polin*, Vol 31 (London, Liverpool, and New York: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in Association with Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 593.

travel in Western Europe in a cross-border and cross-cultural effort to garner financial support for Hibbat Zion's objectives of settlement in Palestine. These efforts, including a meeting at the Alliance whose leadership lacked confidence that Russian Jews could be successful farmers were met with failure.<sup>196</sup>

On his return to Russia, he stopped at the spa in Bad Soden/Hessen (the Hebrew term is Zaiden) where he coincidentally met Yechiel Brill, editor of HaLevanon. Spas during this period often served as a meeting place of the entire range of Jewish middle and upper middle classes.<sup>197</sup> Brill had not previously been a supporter of Hibbat Zion and in fact his newspaper had acted as the organ of choice for the traditional, who vigorously opposed Hibbat Zion. The pogroms of 1881 however had completely altered his viewpoint and he had become a strong and vocal supporter of settlement in Eretz Yisrael. In an editorial published in *HaLevanon* in July of 1881, Brill pointed out that as the recent anti-Jewish violence had clearly shown, the maskilim would never be successful in their aim of integrating Jews into Russian society. He now urged emigration to and settlement of the Holy Land, and specifically advocated agricultural development there, echoing Mohilever's earlier support for manual labour including agriculture, a theme to which Mohilever would return and continually emphasise. 198 Brill proposed a plan to locate and dispatch a group of experienced farmers from southern Russia to Palestine, who would serve as pioneers, proving that Jewish farmers could be successful in the land. Once this group proved successful others could follow on a gradual basis. 199 Following their introduction in Bad Soden, Brill and Mohilever agreed regarding the possibility of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Ben-Zvi. p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Mirjam Triendl-Zadoff, *Next Year in Marienbad: The Lost Worlds of Jewish Spa Culture*, Jewish Culture and Contexts, 1st ed (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Mohilever, 'Osher Ha-Adam', p. 210.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> Yechiel Brill, 'Ma'amar Rahshi - Shivat Ziyon', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 6 July 1881), No. 48 ed., pp. 377–78.

meeting again in Paris in the autumn of 1882.200 In Paris, Mohilever had failed to enlist support for emigration to Palestine, having met with both Baron Horace/Goratsii Günzburg (1833–1909), the son of Joseph/Evzel Günzburg and with the Alliance. Brill, likely realising the positive impression that Rabbi Mohilever would make, both in his old-world classic rabbinic appearance and renowned scholarship, utilised the opportunity to arrange for a meeting with Rabbi Zadok Kahn (1839-1905), then chief rabbi of Paris. His objective was undoubtedly to take advantage of Mohilever's presence and rabbinical prestige and through Kahn's offices to approach Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934) for support. 201 Rabbi Kahn was initially sceptical of Russian Jews' abilities as pioneers or as capable settlers; in response to which Mohilever replied, that one should not judge five million Russian Jews by the few lower-class individuals who travel throughout the West to collect money. 202 Kahn was able to secure an audience with the Baron, who had coincidentally a month earlier had expressed concern regarding the issue of assimilation among French Jews and was already predisposed to consider supporting settlements in Palestine.<sup>203</sup> On the basis of the introduction and the subsequent meeting, the Baron agreed to underwrite an experiment; Mohilever was to locate 10-12 experienced Russian farmers who would volunteer to travel to Palestine and found an agricultural settlement.<sup>204</sup> Elated with this result, Mohilever deputised Brill to find the farmers and provided a letter of support including a personal guarantee of financial compensation to the farmers should the experiment fail, which on the basis of his widely recognised rabbinic reputation would aid Brill in his search. 205 Not wasting any time, and utilising

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Brill, Yesud Hama'ala, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Finkel, p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Maimon, p. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Finkel, p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Brill, Yesud Hama'ala, p. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

contacts suggested by Mohilever, Brill succeeded in locating the farmers in the small town of Pavlovka, a suburb of Ruzhany, located about 100 miles southeast of Białystok.<sup>206</sup> In November of that same year the men, accompanied by Brill himself set off for Palestine.<sup>207</sup> This group served as the founding core of the settlement of Ekron, later known as Mazkeret Batya, renamed for Rothschild's mother.<sup>208</sup>

In 1883 Mohilever resumed his travels, continuing his efforts to elicit support for the objectives of Hibbat Zion, with one of his stops in the town of Białystok. The town had experienced substantial growth following the modernisation of the Russian railway during the 1860s, locating Białystok as a central transit point on the St Petersburg-Warsaw line.<sup>209</sup> It is estimated that by 1883 the Jewish population of the town numbered 45,000-50,000 Jews of which traditionally observant Jews who would have comprised Mohilever's followers numbered around 30.000.<sup>210</sup> The town already hosted a sizeable and influential chapter of Hibbat Zion, established in 1882, as its platform appealed to local Jews by offering a national ideology similar to those of Polish and Lithuanian minorities surrounding the town. 211 Białystok's multi-ethnic population was in constant tension, particularly following the failed Polish revolt of 1863 and with the subsequent establishment of a Russian military base in the town. As a result of the influence of the local Hibbat Zion movement, the pulpit of the city was offered to Mohilever.212 Ever strategic, Mohilever realised that acceptance of such a prestigious appointment of a large and growing city would provide him with a greater power base within Hibbat Zion and he accepted the post, which he held until

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Finkel, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, p. 29

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Kobrin, 'Mohilever and Bialystok' (interview with Rebecca Kobrin, 30 April 2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Chovev, p. 22.

his death in 1898. In that role, and notwithstanding his duties as local rabbi, the community granted him substantial flexibility to continue his travelling and national work on behalf of Hibbat Zion. It was reported that in assuming the position, Mohilever specifically conditioned his acceptance on that he be free to pursue his activity on behalf of Hibbat Zion. He was further quoted as remarking that a rabbi who depended on the opinion and permission of others was a community lacking in leadership.<sup>213</sup> Mohilever's congregants were aware of his priorities and in order to support his communal responsibilities, and as had already been the case in Radom, a deputy rabbi had to be appointed for that purpose.<sup>214</sup> Indeed this became a point of pride for the community, as it was reported to have been said that 'our rabbi is the rabbi of all Israel, and occasionally the rabbi of Bialystok'.<sup>215</sup> This contrasted with the role of other communal rabbis, such as Rülf, whose opportunity for wider spread activities and travel was limited by their local responsibilities.<sup>216</sup>

The year 1884 marked the 100th birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore, and the principal actors of the Hibbat Zion organisation, including Mohilever and Dr Leon Pinsker used that occasion to convene a conference of all the societies. This meeting ultimately took place in November in the Prussian city of Kattowitz, a site chosen to evade surveillance by the tsarist police.<sup>217</sup> Pinsker, a veteran of the Crimean War and a former leader of the Odessa chapter of the OPE, had been an advocate of full-scale Russification for Jews.<sup>218</sup> In the wake of the 1881 pogroms, however, he had become

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Maimon, p. 173 (recollection of Y. L. Appel, meeting with Mohilever, summer of 1883).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Chovev, p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Palästinaliebe: Leon Pinsker, Der Antisemitismus und die Anfänge Der Nationaljüdischen Bewegung in Deutschland, ed. by Julius H. Schoeps and Leon Pinsker, Studien Zur Geistesgeschichte, Bd. 29 (Berlin: Philo, 2005), p. 117. (Pinsker to Rülf, noting that Rülf's community duties are occupying his time, keeping him from efforts on behalf of Chovevei Zion).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol 2, p. 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Horowitz, p. 74.

convinced that this objective was illusory.<sup>219</sup> In his inaugural address to mark the opening of the conference, Pinsker stated, 'Anläßlich der Jubiläumsfeier unseres altehrwürdigen Sir Moses Montefiore versammelten wir uns hier (on the occasion of the anniversary of our venerable Sir Moses Montefiore we are gathered here)'.<sup>220</sup> Indeed, the society was still then referred to as the 'Montefiore Association'.<sup>221</sup> In the first session of the gathering Dr Pinsker was elected president, with Mohilever as the Alterspräsident (president by seniority, an honorary title), although Mohilever had aspired to the presidency himself, and had received 24 votes to Pinsker's 25.<sup>222</sup>

Following the conference and in part as a result of the debate leading up to the vote, polarisation between the various factions within Hibbat Zion began to crystallise, further dividing the traditionally observant and the maskilim and sowing the seeds of discontent which were to plague and hobble the efforts of the organisation in the coming years. In the wake of the pogroms of 1881 Mohilever had succeeded in recruiting other rabbis such as Meisel of Łódź to support Jewish emigration to Palestine; however post-Kattowitz those with more traditionalist views began to retreat. They levelled criticism first and foremost at the secularity of the national idea, at Hibbat Zion's maskilic leadership and at the reputed violation of religious practice by settlers already in the Holy Land. They began to withdraw their support of the organisation, refusing to work with secular Jews. The divide between the traditionalists and the secular leadership of Hibbat Zion widened; nevertheless, Mohilever continued to work with the leadership and even immersed himself in the management and advancement of the society. Mohilever was regularly and

<sup>219</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol 2, p. 22.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Schoeps, *Pioneers of Zionism*, p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Druyanov, *Ketavim*, nr. 743

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Ravitzky, Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> Maimon, pp. 20, 21.

completely engaged in the organisation and in constant communication with the various Hibbat Zion branches and with Leon Pinsker in Odessa. He was intimately involved with the organisation's inner workings and 'there was not a single issue that arose to which Mohilewer did not relate, and not a decision was made by the leadership in which his contribution was not evident'. 225 As an example he was closely engaged in the ongoing efforts with the Ottoman government to allow immigration of Jews to Palestine, which was, until November of 1888, not officially permitted.<sup>226</sup> This point was also an important factor for those opposed to Palestine as a destination for emigration, and was often used to ridicule the Hibbat Zion movement as a quixotic enterprise. While Pinsker was planning to send emissaries to Constantinople to lobby the government, Mohilever opposed such action counselling restraint until hearing from Rothschild who was engaged in secret talks for the same objective. 227 In voicing his opinion he often used an expression, 'Ani Chazak Be'daati', I am strong in my opinion, which indeed he was, as a strong will and decisiveness was evident in his writing. Ever a man of action, Mohilever, often frustrated by the lack of same in the movement, wrote to Pinsker in response to the latter's questioning Mohilever's lack of correspondence: 'if Hibbat Zion is only to exchange letters without a plan of action. I have no patience for this'. 228 Not totally blameless, the secularists also complained that Mohilever, in his stubborn efforts to gain full control over the society, was also contributing to the inaction. They claimed that Mohilever's continued insistence on his being appointed as a treasurer of the organisation was causing unnecessary delays in collecting and distributing funds. Fearful of alienating such an important personality, Pinsker was advised by Aryeh

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Salmon, p. 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Laskov, vol VI, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Laskov, vol III, pp. 61–62 (Letter from Mohilever to Pinsker, 15 January 1885).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 197 (Letter from Mohilever to Pinsker, 12 March 1885).

Leib Levanda (1835–1888) the head of Vilna's Hibbat Zion chapter, that there was probably no choice but to agree to the rabbi's kindischen Vergnügen (childish amusements). 229 That the Orthodox faction was not to be alienated was also held to be important by Theodore Herzl, who believed that rabbis held the key to the hearts of the people.<sup>230</sup> The organisation was essentially paralyzed by internecine struggles between the traditionally observant membership, led almost single-handedly by Mohilever, and the secular maskilim led by Pinsker and several of the Hibbat Zion chapters, especially those in Odessa and Warsaw. Notwithstanding that by 1885 Hibbat Zion was able to attract almost 14,000 members, the organisation made little progress.<sup>231</sup> In describing the lack of progress during this period, the group has been described as 'a philanthropic organisation, and not a very effective one at that'. 232 Bogged down by such disagreements, the primary objective of the organisation, the practical settlement and development of agricultural settlements in Eretz Yisrael, stalled.<sup>233</sup> Despite ongoing conflict between Mohilever and the maskilic leadership he remained fully engaged, and his involvement was also deemed important by the leadership. In the organisation's effort for Russian government recognition Pinsker sought Mohilever's signature on the application, recognising that the government found statements by rabbis more trustworthy and reliable.234 Mohilever also recognised that his rabbinical stature was being 'used' by the maskilim to appeal for support from the traditional segment of the community and was willing to go along for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Laskov, vol IV, p. 71. (Letter from Levanda to Pinsker, 7 February 1886).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, p. 358.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 2, p. 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> Walter Laqueur, A History of Zionism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Luz, p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Laskov, vol IV, p. 37 (Letter from Aleksander Zederbaum [1816–1893], editor of *HaMelitz* to Pinsker, 27 January 1886).

the good of the organisation; however, even such tolerance had limits, and Mohilever lost his temper on occasions when he felt wronged.<sup>235</sup>

Throughout Mohilever's association and brief leadership of the Hibbat Zion movement he struggled to win full control of its direction. Without any tangible support from other traditionalists, he was strongly opposed by the secularists in the movement who viewed the rabbis in general as both impractical and honour-seeking, and Mohilever in particular as 'crafty as a snake', under whose leadership the organisation 'would not last six months'. 236 Even without consistent support from the leadership, and often at odds with it, Mohilever continued his energetic cross-border travels in an effort to garner support, both moral and tangible, for Hibbat Zion. In a letter to Hermann Schapira (1840–1898) an individual similarly active in Hibbat Zion and an advocate of establishing settlements in Palestine, Mohilever described the motivation for his extensive travels: 'journeying through cold and snow, the whole reason for my travels is only because of this holy purpose'. 237 Baron Edmond de Rothschild had cautioned Mohilever that further visits in the West should be dispensed with, as Rothschild viewed his own efforts in a proprietary manner as sufficient for the cause and was also confident that others were not interested in providing any meaningful additional backing. 238 Despite this admonition, the strongwilled Mohilever persisted in doing so and in early 1887 the rabbi visited Paris, Frankfurt and London. The visits were not only unproductive but also raised the ire of the Baron, expressed in a letter of 3 February 1887, from his manager of charities,

<sup>235</sup> Maimon, pp. 34–35.

<sup>238</sup> Laskov, vol V, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Laskov, vol VI, p. 121 (letter from Moshe Lilienblum to Menachem Ussishkin, 23 April 1888).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Yom Erev Shabbos Kodesh Daled Teves 5647 Frankfurt d'Main', 31 December 1886, The National Library of Israel, V1062/18 Hermann Hirsch Schapira Collection, p. 5.

Michel Erlanger (1828–1892) to Pinsker: 'it pains me to say that this man [Mohilever] has gravely undermined the unity of your organisation'. <sup>239</sup>

At the same time, traditionalist forces in opposition to Hibbat Zion continued to intensify, to the point that by 1889, Rabbi Soloveichik was terming the Hovevei Zion movement another 'Shabbetai Zevi', false messianism.<sup>240</sup> Finally in 1889, as Pinsker submitted his resignation from the leadership of Hibbat Zion due to ill health, Mohilever, backed by the support of Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, the 'Netziv', dean of the Volozhin yeshiva, was able to swing control to the traditionalist faction of the organisation.<sup>241</sup> This accomplishment was short-lived, however, as the Odessa committee finally secured official approval of the Russian government in 1890 for its organisation, allowing the secularly-led faction to gain the upper hand.

In 1890 Mohilever visited Palestine, at the head of a delegation of ten men dispatched by the Odessa Hibat Zion committee. While in Palestine he was received with honour by both the traditional Yishuv in Jerusalem as well as by the newer settlements, a testament to the respect in which Mohilever was held by all parties, regardless of their religious positions. His visit was covered extensively in the locally published *Habazeleth* newspaper, reporting that 'the well-known *gaon*, Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever delivered a lecture in the Hurva synagogue (an extremely prestigious venue) before a very large audience. In his presentation he spoke about the need for peace, unity and tolerance for different opinions, urging the Jerusalem rabbinate to follow this example'. During his time in the Holy Land he visited not only institutions of the old Yishuv in Jerusalem but also travelled extensively to visit

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. xxi.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Luz, p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> Maimon, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> Israel Dov Frumkin, 'Yerushalayim', *Habazeleth* (Jerusalem, 30 May 1890), No. 31 edition, p. 241.

several of the new settlements, including Petach Tikva, Rishon L'Zion, Ekron, Gederah, and Zichron Yaakov.<sup>244</sup> It was also reported that Mohilever purchased land for his own account during the visit in the early settlement of Rehovot, and was listed as a member of that Moshav.<sup>245</sup> During his return voyage he wrote a widely circulated letter, 'The Purpose of My Visit to the Holy Land'. 246 In this missive he stated several of his beliefs which provided a basis and a justification for religious Zionism in the face of traditional opposition.<sup>247</sup> Included in this extensive communication were radical pronouncements, supported by Talmudic sources, such as 'better for man to live Eretz Yisrael in a town where the majority of residents are non-Jews than in exile in a town where the majority of residents are Jews'. 248 Similarly alienating to the traditionalist faction was his assertion that 'all who live outside of the Holy Land are as though they are godless'. 249 He also stated that one could violate the Sabbath for the purpose of writing a deed for property in Palestine.<sup>250</sup> Mohilever held the belief that the preservation and unity of the Jewish people as a whole was paramount, which he believed could be accomplished by the settlement of Palestine, and as such he was prepared to go to great lengths to promote that objective. The letter also contained extremely detailed guidance for potential settlers regarding land quality and funds needed to establish communities, in concert with Mohilever's constant attention to practical detail in his proposals and organisation.<sup>251</sup> The essay closed with a call to action: 'everyone who truly loves Zion should not care solely

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Maimon, p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> Chovev, p. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Maimon, pp. 38–49 (the entire text of the letter is recorded).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 160.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Maimon, p. 38.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> She'elot u'teshuvot Moreinu Harav S. Mohilever (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook), Siman 19, Orach Haim, pp. 43–45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>251</sup> Ibid., pp. 38–49.

with thought, but with action, in body and with wealth'. 252 The above statements isolated Mohilever even further as one of the few prominent rabbis willing to work with the secular faction within the envelope of Hibbat Zion. This continued position, as well as the increased perception that return to the Holy Land did not necessarily equate with return to observance lost him and the organisation support from those few remaining traditional rabbis who had been loyal to the cause, i.e. Rabbi Alexander Moses Lapidot (1819–1906) of Rossiyeny who wrote regarding his and his colleagues' involvement with Hibbat Zion, 'we must admit, truly, that we have made a great mistake!'253

The clash between the two factions continued throughout the balance of Mohilever's life, and often became vitriolic, marked by personal attacks and slander against the organisation and against Mohilever himself. These attacks, publicised in the press and in often graphic handouts were typically engineered by the 'Black Office', based in Kovno and managed by Spektor's secretary, Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz.<sup>254</sup> The 'Black Office', or as it was called by the traditional faction the 'Holy Office', grew in parallel to the Haskalah and Hibbat Zion chapters, with smaller societies often named Hevrat Matzdikei Harabim (Society to Improve the Righteousness of the Masses), founded in various cities, originating in Vilna. 255 This faction had been utilising the publication *HaLevanon* as their organ of public expression; however, when it ceased publication in 1882 (publication resumed briefly for three months in 1886) they were left without a public voice. The various societies, particularly those in Brest, Warsaw, Vilna, Minsk and Riga banded together to support a unified committee in Kovno whose task it was to publish pamphlets specifically to discredit

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Yitzchak Nissenboim, *Alei Heldi* (Warsaw: Grafia, 1929), p. 105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 99.

the maskilim and their followers in any way possible. 256 Due to Lipschitz's leadership and organisational efforts the committee had a substantial negative impact on the Hibbat Zion movement, resulting in the loss of at least four of its chapters.<sup>257</sup> This, despite the local Hibbat Zion chapter in Kovno attempting to limit the reach of the 'Black Office' and particularly to counteract 'the poison' being spread by Lipschitz and the influence that he might have on Spektor, whose support of Hibbat Zion was deemed crucial.<sup>258</sup> While Spektor himself was reportedly not directly involved in the activities of the 'Black Office', the maskilim were of the view that Spektor meekly followed Lipschitz, 'as an ox through a valley'.259 This view was borne out in an episode in which Mohilever travelled to Kovno, the base of Spektor and Lipschitz and where a meeting had been scheduled for Saturday evening for Mohilever to speak on the topic of Hibbat Zion. Late on Friday afternoon, Spektor's assistant, rumoured to have been Lipschitz, advised Mohilever that the meeting had to be cancelled due to lack of government sanction. The organisers appealed directly to Spektor who reportedly 'started to cry and begged for mercy' and seemed incapable of intervening.<sup>260</sup> In a flash of humour, Mohilever, who had instead received an invitation to lunch with Spektor on Sunday, replied that he would be better off eating in his hotel room, lest the meal also be cancelled at the last minute, leaving him hungry. 261

Returning to Białystok from his visit to Palestine, Mohilever remained dissatisfied with both the lack of activity of the Odessa committee and the increasing distance of its membership from observance. In 1893 Mohilever organised a conference in Druskinikai at which he founded the Merkaz ha-Ruḥani, known in abbreviated form

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., pp. 219–220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> A. L. Horwitz, 'To our Dear Brothers' (Kovno, 1890), CZA, A9\71\3T, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> Ihid n 5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> Laskov, vol III, p. 465 (Letter from Lilienblum to Rabinowitz, 31 August 1885).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> Maimon, p. 177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> **Ibid**.

as Mizrachi, ostensibly to act as a spiritual centre for and as part of the Hibbat Zion movement.<sup>262</sup> In forming the group Mohilever cited the support of 'fifty-three of the best and prominent members of Hovevei Zion' as well as from Zadok Kahn and 'the Nadiv', referring to Baron Edmond de Rothschild of Paris.<sup>263</sup> The chapter, headquartered in Białystok, and managed by him and from 1894 in concert with his secretary Rabbi Isaac Nissenboim (1868–1942) occupied itself principally with propaganda for Hibbat Zion aimed primarily at a traditional audience and outreach for fundraising including via contacts in America. These efforts at disseminating propaganda via distribution of postcards for the holidays, pictures and fund-raising materials were taken very seriously at the time in advancing an organisation's ideology.<sup>264</sup> The practice of selling portraits had already existed in the early days of Hibbat Zion, as in the 1884 celebration of Moses Montefiore's 100th birthday, upon which occasion the organisation printed and sold his picture and 'thousands of copies of this picture must have been sold, for the proceeds for the movement amounted to 30,000 silver rubles'.265 Mizrachi utilised modern techniques including holding social functions that included all classes of Jews as well as women.<sup>266</sup> In this, the society likely drew upon the charter of Linas Hatzedek, a volunteer medical aid society established in Bialystok in 1885.267 This organisation pioneered in having all their members regardless of social class participate in providing free medical care including serving overnight shifts. Additionally, women were treated equally, afforded membership in its governing board and granted voting rights.<sup>268</sup> In adopting these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 163.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> 'Acheinu Ha-yekarim Hovevei Zion ha-ne'emanim', 16 August 1893, CZA, A35\84 p. 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture*, p. xv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>265</sup> François Guesnet, 'Chanukah and Its Function in the Invention of a Jewish-Heroic Tradition in Early Zionism 1880–1900', in Michael Berkowitz, Nationalism, Zionism and Ethnic Mobilization of the Jews in 1900 and Beyond (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), p. 241.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, p. 50.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

inclusive policies Mohilever displayed openness to modernity and a pioneering spirit to expand the membership of Hibbat Zion supporters. The inclusion of women in a traditional organisation proved prescient, as equality of women was later envisioned by Herzl as an ideal element in his 'New Society'. 269 Perhaps Mohilever was attuned to the increased exposure of women to the outside world, due in part to their engagement in commerce as they supported their husbands who were often studying the Torah on a full-time basis, and with some women having been educated in state or non-Jewish schools.<sup>270</sup> While in traditional circles this was seen early on as a problem and a threat, Mohilever likely viewed this as opportunity to involve women in Hibbat Zion activities, marshalling the power of this new and potentially influential group. From the time of its founding until the first Zionist conference held in Basel in 1897 the organisation's impact was minimal; however, following Mohilever's death in 1898, this group became the political entity of religious Zionism, known thenceforth by its acronym *Mizrachi*, led by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines (1839–1915), and which was termed 'a perfect synthesis of Orthodox Judaism and Zionist gusto'.<sup>271</sup>

In 1896, the translation of Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* into the Russian language marked the beginning of political Zionism in Russia.<sup>272</sup> The aged Mohilever wholeheartedly supported Herzl's call to action, as it coincided with his own oft-expressed philosophy. Reciprocating this support, Herzl called upon Mohilever to deliver a keynote address at the 1897 Basel gathering, referring in his invitation to Mohilever's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land*, translated from German by Lotta Levensohn (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> François Guesnet, 'Jüdisches Leben zwischen Tradition, Integration, und Nationbildung', in, *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte. Band 3: Die polnisch-litauischen Länder unter der Herrschaft der Teilungsmächte (1772/1795–1914)* ed. Michael G. Müller et al. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 2020), pp. 639, 640.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Daniel Mahla, *Orthodox Judaism and the Politics of Religion: From Prewar Europe to the State of Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>272</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 169.

representation of 'the spirit of our people and our holy law'. 273 Being too ill to attend personally, Mohilever sent his message along with his grandson Rabbi Dr Joseph Mohilever (1872–1943) and was given pride of place, with the message read at the full plenary session.<sup>274</sup> In the address, Rabbi Mohilever outlined several of his key philosophies, previously voiced, including the strong belief in the coming of the Messiah, the necessity of all to work together regardless of religious observance and that pamphlets published in support of the Zionist movement should also be printed in local languages.<sup>275</sup>

In continued tribute to the high esteem in which Mohilever was still held, the first working group following the Basel conference was hosted by him in Białystok.<sup>276</sup> In Mohilever's final instructions prior to his death in 1898, he reiterated much of the philosophy espoused in his address to the Basel gathering. In this document he emphasised again the importance of a balanced view; that there should be no maligning of the Torah and its observance, but importantly and significantly that personal, private observance and faith should not be an issue for those who work for the cause – all must pull together in complete love and unity. 277 This position became an important element in the later Zionist movement, echoed by Chaim Weitzman (1874–1952) at the fourth Zionist Conference in 1900: 'We have concluded that for us, the religious question is a private matter.'278 Following Mohilever's passing, there were many who eulogised him, including the obituary appearing in *HaMelitz* which emphasised one of Mohilever's remarkable qualities: his penchant for activity. In a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> Nissenboim, pp. 113–14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, p. 358.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>275</sup> The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader, ed. by Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), p. 405.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>276</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Maimon, pp. 70–71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>278</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture*, p. 85.

short lead article, there appeared no less than 13 verbs describing his work in the field of Hibbat Zion and the great hole that would be left in the Jewish community due to his passing.<sup>279</sup>

## The Legacy of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever

Legacy, strictly defined, refers to 'anything handed down from the past, or inheritance'. Despite the failures he faced throughout his life, did he make an appreciable difference, or can the model of his behaviour instruct for the future? A review of his career most assuredly dictates that the answer to the above must be in the affirmative. Utilising the platform of the traditional rabbinate his achievements broke significant ground in three general arenas: rabbinical, social and political.

As an *illui* and a traditionally trained Orthodox rabbi and renowned for his scholarship and mastery of Talmud and Halakhah he was already in a position to be revered as a sage of the first order in observant circles. Although many of his halakhic works were reported to have been lost in the Białystok pogroms of 1906, the substantial number which have survived attest that he was broadly and universally recognised as a *gaon* in the classic sense.<sup>281</sup> His rulings were sought by other rabbis and cities and his signature appeared alongside other leading halakhic *poskim* of the generation where his opinion bore equal weight, such as the landmark permission for work in the Holy Land during the *Shemita* year of 1888/9. In that instance Baron Rothschild and many settlers of the colonies in Palestine had initially turned to Rabbi Spektor to secure a waiver for work during the period in which according to the strict

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>279</sup> 'Rabbenu Shmuel B'harav Yehuda Leib Mohilever Einenu', *HaMelitz* (Peterburg, Russia, 10 June 1898), 116th ed., p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> The Random House Dictionary of the English Language - The Unabridged Edition (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 818.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>281</sup> Chovev, p. 8.

letter of biblical law, the land was to have been left fallow. Spektor's initial review of the problem yielded a possibility of granting permission to work under certain circumstances, but he was reluctant to issue a ruling without obtaining support from the local Jerusalem rabbinate.<sup>282</sup> The local rabbis of Jerusalem, however, in responding to Spektor's request for their agreement to grant a waiver, refused to do so, taking the position of the 'old Yishuv', which eschewed compromise and they, relying on and asserting their authority as local decisor, believed that a biblical prohibition needed to be strictly upheld. This set up a crisis between the Yishuv which had been classically supported by Halukah donations collected overseas to support those who dwelt in the Holy Land and were engaged in study and the recent colonists who were engaged in productive agriculture and who needed the dispensation to work and to survive. This difference of opinion was considerably more critical for those supported by the Halukah, as they struggled to preserve this long-standing economic support in an age of change.<sup>283</sup> Spektor, unwilling to directly offend the Jerusalem rabbinate, instead turned to Mohilever, whose rulings would also be widely respected, and who was known to be supportive of the agricultural colonies to find a path to allow work to proceed.<sup>284</sup> In character, Mohilever was courageously prepared to use his extensive rabbinic scholarship to find a solution despite Spektor's initial reluctance and the opposition of the Jerusalem rabbis. Mohilever presented a cogent and halakhic-based rational and a dispensation was indeed authored by him, co-signed by two other prominent halakhic authorities, Rabbis Shmuel Zanvil Klepfish of Kutno (1820–1902) and Yisrael Yehoshua Trunk of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Achiezer Arkin, *Shmitat 5649 - He'arot L'Pulmus Ha-Shemita* (Mazkeret Batya: Tziyonei Derech, 2022), p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>283</sup> Ben-Ghedalia, p. 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>284</sup> Kaplan, Penslar, and Sorkin, p. 21.

Warsaw (1821–1893). These rabbis issued the document permitting work during the year, conditional on the agreement of Rabbi Spektor who was already predisposed to accede to the request for a waiver, and relying on the logic and reputation of the three, substantially concurred. In later correspondence Mohilever termed the issuance of his ruling as having been based on a simple and clear rationale, likely believing that in his view, no other conclusion could have been reached. The following *Shemita* of 1895/6 witnessed a renewal of the dispensation in substantially similar form, with Mohilever stating that while he would of course have preferred that the biblical requirement be observed, the well-being of the settlers took precedence. He acknowledged letters from the colonists in Palestine that the waiver was essential to prevent starvation, and, on this basis, he felt it necessary to renew his previous ruling. With several of the settlements under local rabbinical pressure to observe the *Shemita*, Mohilever further commented that anyone who did so in the face of the risk of starvation was a 'pious fool'.288

Ever a champion of compromise, Mohilever could have easily justified a retreat into traditional and closed Orthodoxy, a path chosen by a great many of his contemporaries. Throughout his life Mohilever 'walked a thin rope between defense of traditional faith and openness to the newly developing world'. Faced with the challenge of increased secularisation as a result of the Haskalah and with physical danger to Russian Jewry, however, Mohilever worked tirelessly to transform the

<sup>285</sup> Yisrael Yehoshua Klepfish, Mohilever, Trunk Shmuel, Shmuel Zanvil, 'Heter Shemita' (Warsaw, 1888), CZA, A9\10-2-3T, pp. 1, 2, 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Heter Shemita' (Kovno, 1888), CZA, A9\10-2-3T, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Letter from Mohilever to Menachem Ussishkin, 14 Shevat 1896 Yisrael Shapira, *Igrot HaRav Nissenboim* (Jerusalem: Achia Cooperative, 1957), pp. 48–49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Yom Vov, Erev Shabbos Kodesh Nachamu', 2 August 1895, CZA, A35\84 p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>289</sup> Yosef Salmon, 'Ish Milchama: R' Moshe Yehoshua Leib (Maharil) Diskin', in Benjamin Brown and Nissim Leon, *The Gdoilim: Leaders Who Shaped the Israeli Haredi Jewry* (Jerusalem: Y.L. Magnus, 2017), p. 304.

rabbinate into a platform for advocacy, compromise, and outreach on a broad scale. While many of his Orthodox contemporaries were turning inwards, as covered in previous chapters regarding the positions of Rabbis Yisroel Salanter, Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Hasidic leadership, Mohilever did exactly the opposite; he displayed a willingness to work with and to show respect for anyone who might assist him in achieving his objectives, both within the Russian Empire and in the West. In pursuit of Jewish unity, he was prepared to work even with those who were committed to anti-rabbinical positions, with the hope of eventually returning them to observance and to preserve national unity. His penchant for travel within the Russian Empire and abroad as well as his openness to dialogue with all factions of Jews was unusual for the period and marked him as an important transitional figure. The increased scope of influence achieved through his mobility served as a model for subsequent practitioners, i.e. his secretary, Rabbi Nissenboim, 'visited hundreds of cities in Russia and Poland for Yishuv Eretz Israel'. 290 In an undated treatise Mohilever wrote, 'I have seen a sickness in the camp of the believers that they attack the new factions, to belittle, abuse and to alienate them'. 291 Writing further he clarified that if one man had strayed from observance perhaps such tactics might have been effective but not when there were entire groups involved. In such a case, by slandering them one merely adds fire which increases the blaze, and it must be remembered that 'even when a Jew sins he is still a Jew' and that 'all of Israel is responsible one for another' (Talmud Shavuot 39a). Additionally, by seeking peace between the various factions, a united front could be presented, avoiding the image of disunity which exposes the community to adversity from its enemies.<sup>292</sup> Increasingly throughout his career the rabbinate became for Mohilever a platform for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>290</sup> Shapira, foreword.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> Maimon, p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>292</sup> Ibid.

public and later for national activity, expanding his influence beyond the borders of his town and country. He recognised that his era was a watershed moment in the life of the Jewish people; the unity of the nation as well as its physical safety was at stake. The question was whether the rabbinate would attempt to keep all but the traditionally observant out or whether the tent could be expanded to include Jews of non-traditional observance. Additionally, while the traditional faction sought to retreat to intercession with the government for the safety of the Jews in Russia, Mohilever believed that facing an unprecedented challenge, the Jewish house, and perhaps even the institution of the rabbinate itself, was 'a house on fire' and that national unity and emigration as a solution to the multiple dangers facing the Jewish community was critical. In order to preserve an intact Judaism both in observance and in body, the target of emigration should be the Holy Land. Mohilever courageously chose a path of inclusiveness, fearing that anything else would have seen the estrangement of many of his co-religionists and the continued physical destruction of Russian Jewry regardless of religious observance. He also realised. and was prepared to accept, that despite others' non-observance, secular Jews in their strong support of Zionism could be considered 'within the tent' and held out hope for their return to more complete observance. In a marked departure from the past, Mohilever showed flexibility and defined what a rabbi could and should be in seeking to hold the community together in the wake of groundswell challenges to Jewish unity and to the role of the rabbinate itself. As succinctly recorded in the obituary appearing in *Die Welt*, 'Er lehrte in dem Volke und lebte mit dem Volke' (he taught among the people and lived with the people). 293 With a willingness to become involved in the minutiae of Hibbat Zion's management, utilising new and inventive methods of funding and exhibiting exceptional energy and dedication, he

<sup>293</sup> Schalit, p. 2.

represented a new type of rabbi, raising the bar for following generations of rabbinical leaders.

In the sphere of social practice Mohilever was unique in his willingness, as a traditional rabbi, to partner fully with Jews of all factions, firm in the belief that all Jews remain in the faith no matter whether they have sinned or strayed. In this approach, Mohilever was working to reverse the recent exclusionary trends in Orthodoxy, which he would have viewed as 'a departure from the time-honoured principle of the unified Jewish community encompassing both the observant and the back-sliders'. 294 Stressing an important position for Mohilever, he emphasised that working on behalf of the community as a whole represented a higher spiritual level than privately observing mitzvot and learning Torah. In an 1876 essay, 'Matzaveinu b'midot v'derekh eretz' (Our Situation in Deeds and Conduct), Mohilever emphasised that the entire purpose of the Torah was to train humankind in ethical behaviour, and lacking such conduct the Torah had no value.<sup>295</sup> Mohilever specifically criticised those of the traditionally observant community who 'are full of Torah and mitzvot' but look askance at others who may not be observant but who act for the betterment of the community. This former group had wilfully disregarded an important precept of the Torah that acting for the benefit of the overall community represented a much higher level of holiness, whatever shortcomings in personal observance they may have. Indeed, those who worked to advance the status of Israel by their wisdom and conduct serve to guard the nation and Haym m'kadshim shem Yisrael (they sanctify the name of Israel). 296 With the use of the verb m'kadshim classically used to describe those who have given their lives for their religious beliefs Mohilever raised

<sup>294</sup> Moshe Samet, 'The Beginnings of Orthodoxy', *Modern Judaism*, 8, no. 3 (1988), pp. 249–69 (p. 249).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> Maimon, p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

the actions of those who work for the benefit of the community to the highest levels of sanctity. This position made a lasting impact upon his congregants in Białystok, to the extent that when these former Białystokers emigrated to America and established their organisation in 1886, Bialystoker Unterstitzungs Verein Somaych Noflim (Białystoker Mutual Aid Society) in New York they noted that they had been inspired by Mohilever's attitude that 'everyone may live in their private lives as they please' – unity, rather than religious belief or practice was crucial.<sup>297</sup> At the same time, he demanded mutual respect; while the observant were to be tolerant of the maskilim, the latter must at the same time cease their abuse of the Torah and the Orthodox. Punctiliously personally observant, he also saw no conflict between tradition and modernity, viewing a synthesis as both possible and even necessary. As an example, he presented his grandson Joseph Mohilever to the Basel conference as an example of a 'new Jew', one ordained as both a rabbi and a physician.<sup>298</sup> His inclusion of women in Hibbat Zion's activities was ground-breaking for the era, underscoring his inclusive view that all who wish to participate in community work would be welcome. This legacy was later incorporated as a founding principle upon the organisation in 1916 of the Polish *Mizrachi* organisation. Rabbi Nissenboim, who became the organisation's president stated that 'ethical considerations' needed to be respected by including women in the voting process and in Mizrachi's activities.299

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>297</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>298</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 171.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Asaf Kaniel, 'Gender, Zionism, and Orthodoxy. The Women of the Mizrahi Movement in Poland 1916–1939', in Adam Teller, Magda Teter, and Antony Barry Polonsky, *Social and Cultural Boundaries in Pre-Modern Poland*, Polin, vol 22 (Oxford and Portland, OR: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), pp. 346–67 (p. 349).

His life-long efforts at peacekeeping were an outgrowth of his personal deeply held belief that 'more powerful is the power of peace than any other power'. Mohilever's work to achieve co-existence between the different factions was mostly met with failure, although 'he always remained confident in finding middle ground between such disparate factions; haredim and freethinkers'. By the time of the Basel conference in 1897 the rift between the traditional and the maskilim had already widened to a chasm; nonetheless, his legacy must be that despite the failures, the effort alone was worthy of admiration and emulation, a lesson often lost on future generations.

Utilising the platform of the rabbinate, Mohilever moved from its traditional functions and practice to broader political action even if not by founding a political party, as that would have required governmental sanction, which was at the time restricted. Instead, the Hibbat Zion chapters as well as the *Mizrachi* and Mohilever's advocacy for the settlement of Palestine as a key tenet of Judaism set the stage as a vital link and basis for later generations of religious Zionists. While he did not envision that the renaissance of the Jewish people in Palestine would require the establishment of a secular regime, this eventuality would not have been possible without openness to a secular culture — a position within the context of Zionism which was central to Mohilever's philosophy. Under the banner of Zionism, Mohilever was an advocate of cooperation with all Jews, regardless of personal religious conviction, practice or gender and solely based upon a return to communal unity and to basic Jewish values.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'Be'ezras Hashem, Yud Sivan 5654', 14 June 1894, CZA, A35\84 p. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> Maimon, p. 108 (recollection of Menachem Ussishkin [1863–1941] of his meeting with Mohilever).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>302</sup> Dov Schwartz, *Religious-Zionism: History and Ideology* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. vii.

## Chapter 4: Rabbinic Reconfigurations: Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor and Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor has been regarded as a master of Talmudic literature, predominantly as a *posek*, in the world of traditional Judaism. He is best known within the halakhic sphere for his many sympathetic responsa on the subject of agunot, literally, 'anchored', women who were 'chained to a marriage' having been abandoned by their husbands without the benefit of a divorce, preventing them from remarrying.<sup>1</sup> Of his 158 responsa on this subject over 98 per cent arrived at conclusions which successfully freed the women from that state.2 Women in Talmudic literature had often been 'objectified' as halakhic subjects; Spektor gave the women a personal identity as he exerted every effort to assist them individually and as a class via ground-breaking flexibility and lenient rulings within Halakhah, Jewish law and jurisprudence.<sup>3</sup> In the period of Spektor's activity women had been abandoned in unprecedented numbers, as their husbands had either been lost in wars or had deserted their families via emigration in pursuit of better economic opportunities abroad. This trend had accelerated during and following the famine of 1868/9, leading Eliezer Lipman Silberman (1819–1881), editor of *HaMagid* to lament. 'our newspaper is issued weekly, but even if it were daily it could not contain all the messages from deserted women, for they are too numerous'. Throughout his life Spektor was focused primarily on Torah study and halakhic matters and he viewed the study of Torah and its perpetuation as the mainstay of the Jewish people. In this manner he represented a continuum from the Gaon of Vilna (1720–1797) and Rabbi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Haim Sperber, '*Agunot*, Immigration and Modernization from 1857 to 1896', *Mishpachah: The Jewish Family in Tradition and in Transition*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon, Studies in Jewish Civilization, 27 (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016), p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Shimoff, p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Mark Baker, 'The Voice of the Deserted Jewish Woman', *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, vol 2, no. 1 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 96–123 (p. 98).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Chaim of Volozhin, both of whom promoted the ideal of Torah study as the very centre of Judaism. Volozhin further taught that the ways of 'true pilpul' meant intense research into the Talmud with the aim of coming to practical halakhic conclusions. 5 In this respect Volozhin had attempted to redefine the meaning of *pilpul* which had, as early at the sixteenth century been defined as 'an analytical tool that focused on the literary structure of the Talmud sugya (passage) while showing virtually no interest in its practical halakhic dimensions'. Spektor, as a link following Volozhin developed the concept to perfection, focusing on what I would term 'translational scholarship'; applying Halakhah in the form of empathetic responsa, sensitive to the pressures of the era, as a way to directly ease the lives of the Jewish community with an ultimate goal to keep the community together in times of great challenges. By the early nineteenth century, 'what had begun as an anti-Hasidic movement had turned into a cultural movement in its own right - at the core of misnagdic life was the reinvigoration of Torah studies'. Spektor became internationally recognised for his Talmudic erudition and through its mastery and his courageously and consistently aspiring to arrive at lenient rulings became regarded as the principal halakhic authority of the period. While he served as a central address for legal questions he was also widely known for his advocacy and promotion of the traditional communal rabbinate. During the period of his activity, traditional Orthodox observance was being pressured by the maskilim who sought to advance religious reforms and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries*, Sources and Studies in Kabbalah, Hasidism, and Jewish Thought, vol 1 (New York and Hoboken, NJ: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press; Ktav Publishing House, 1989), p. 29.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jay R. Berkovitz, 'Rabbinic Antecedents and Parallels to *Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, in *Jewish Historiography between Past and Future: 200 Years of Wissenschaft des Judenthums*, ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, Rachel Livné-Freudenthal, and Gai Miron, Studia Judaica, Band 102 (Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2019), p. 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia: Select Documents, 1772–1914, ed. ChaeRan Y. Freeze and Jay Michael Harris, Tauber Institute Series for the Study of European Jewry (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013), p. 9.

integration into Russian society. At the same time, the traditional rabbinate itself had lost influence and position due to the government's declaration as early as 1835 that only official state-appointed rabbis (kazennyi ravvin) had the right to perform and record Jewish marriages, divorces and burials.8 The abolition in Russia of the Kahal in 1844 and the loss of rabbinical coercive authority, especially the inability to apply the penalty of herem (excommunication) further undercut the position of the traditional rabbinate. This also had the effect of leaving women within the traditional Orthodox sphere increasingly powerless in matters of divorce, as they depended upon a husband's willingness to grant a divorce which often required rabbinical coercion via the issuance of herem.9 This issue became a rallying cry for the maskilim, who focused on the 'women's question' as a major social issue. 10 This position featured prominently in their attack on the traditional rabbinate, as exemplified by Judah Leib Gordon's (1830–1892) 1878 poem Kotzo shel yod, regarding a woman having been rendered an agunah by virtue of a minor error in a get; a writ of divorce. 11 In response to these threats. Spektor remained focused on providing flexibility within Halakhah as means to alleviate personal suffering and the potential alienation of individuals from the greater Jewish community. Indeed, in one of his responsa he specifically dealt with a case in which there were multiple spelling errors in a get, and in his ruling, he submitted a judgement validating the document, avoiding placing the wife in the status of agunah. 12 Spektor was acutely aware that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Paula Hyman, 'East European Women in an Age of Transition 1830–1930', *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Reesa Baskin, 2nd ed (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 274.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil?*, pp. 126–28. In addition to referencing the plight of the *agunah*, Gordon's poem focused intently upon perceived extreme injustices suffered by women within Orthodoxy, i.e. 'But the Jewish woman's vocation is endless servitude on earth', 'For you Torah is tasteless, beauty a detriment, every gift a flaw, every thought a bind', 'Place a kerchief on your head, your face you must hide', 'Like an object transferred from domain to domain'; see *The Jew in the Modern World*, ed. Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, pp. 362–64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, Sefer Ayn Yitzchak vol 2 (Vilna, 1895), p. 89, Even HaEzer Siman 31.

'the worst situation for a shtetl woman was to become an abandoned wife, an agunah'. 13 He therefore maintained a particular focus on the situation of women within tradition, and advocated flexibility within the Orthodox rabbinate as the route of transmission of these values, thereby hoping to ensure the preservation of the Jewish nation during an era of significant challenges and suffering. At the same time his efforts in partnership with his long-time secretary Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz via the Kovno Circle to unify various factions in attempting to influence Western public opinion against the Russian government's ill-treatment of Jews represented an effort to fill the gap initially left by the dissolution of the Kahal. 14 In the previous era it had often been the Kahal which served as a bridge between communities and with the government.<sup>15</sup> While these efforts were not unique, in that intercession was also practised by Hasidic courts capitalising on the personal charisma of the tsaddik as well as by *yeshivot*, notably Volozhin by dint of its reputation for scholarship, and by Menachem Mendel Schneerson by virtue of the network he had established to monitor and influence Russian government's actions affecting Jews, the scope of Spektor's activities lent new meaning to the authority, jurisdiction and political influence of the traditional rabbinate. 16 Spektor's range of activity was widespread, establishing ties via correspondence with various community leaders within the Russian Empire as well as those in Western Europe, particularly with Lord Nathaniel Rothschild and Dr Asher in London, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe*, first paperback printing (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 224.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> While the official political function of the Kahal had been terminated, 'voluntary organizations, *havurot* performed various philanthropic, educational and religious functions critical to the operation of traditional society'. Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity*, 1st paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Shtadlanut V'Ortodoksia: Tsadikai Polin b'mifgash Im haZemanim haChadashim, David Assaf and Israel Bartal in *Tsadikim ve-anshe ma'aseh: mehkarim ba-hasidut Polin*, ed. Rachel Elior, Israel Bartal, and Chone Shmeruk (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialiķ: ha-Merkaz le-ḥeker toldot Yehude Polin vetarbutam, ha-Universitah ha-'Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 1994), p. 90.

Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer in Berlin and Rabbi Dr Isaac Rülf in Memel, among others. These contacts had often been established via his capacity of responding to halakhic questions due to his reputation as a leading halakhic authority, with his rulings carrying significant weight internationally. He was also active in philanthropy in connection with the many tragedies which befell the Jewish communities in the Russian Empire, such as the 1877 fire in Wilkomir following which he sent appeals for relief to those individuals, especially to the relief committee in Memel. 17 The contact with Isaac Rülf in particular was wide-ranging and deeply rooted, from the latter's visit to Kovno in 1869 during which he established a relationship with the community, although apparently not with Spektor, whose name does not appear in Rülf's Meine Reise nach Kovno, and via Rülf's historic response during that period having collected and distributed significant funds for famine relief. Additionally, the Kovno-Memel route was particularly well travelled during the Crimean War period (1853–1856) when Russian ports had been blockaded. This resulted in increased commercial traffic on the Neman/Memel River, on which both Memel and Kovno lay as a principal trade route, which heightened communication between the cities. As well, many of the residents of Memel were of Lithuanian origin and descent, providing the communities with a common heritage. As would also be of great significance, residents of Memel possessed the ability to communicate fluently both in Hebrew and in German. For Rabbi Spektor there was also a personal connection, as in 1872 his son Benjamin Rabinovitch (1852–1906) married a daughter of Eliyahu Baer (d. 1895) of Memel, a prominent citizen of that city as well as a leader in the 1868/9 famine relief and subsequent efforts. Prior to 1881 Spektor supported and participated in traditional intercession via contact with the Günzburg family in St. Petersburg in an effort to preserve traditional institutions and to minimise

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Spektor, 'Hilferuf!', p. 768.

persecutions faced by Jewish communities in the Russian Empire. Central to his philosophy was loyalty to the government, both as a halakhic imperative but also to ensure that Jews were treated fairly and that there would be no grounds for rulers to find fault. Included in this position was Spektor's support for Jewish participation in military service, avoidance of which was viewed by those in power as 'our greatest sin'.18 Following the pogroms in 1881 he remained committed to the principle of shtadlanut but critically and importantly expanded his efforts via the platform of his existing network to include contacts outside of the Russian Empire as well, as part of what would later be referred to as the Kovno Circle. The latter term referred to the inclusion of disparate Jewish groups and individuals united in a common cause through the leadership of Spektor and Lipschitz in Kovno to publicise the suffering of Russian Jewry. The term itself was first noted in and was possibly therefore coined by Lipschitz himself in his Zichron Yaakov treatise. 19 Spektor's activities in this connection signalled his ability to utilise the platform and authority of the rabbinate to marshal the different factions of Russian Jewish society in supporting the transmission of information regarding the pogroms and suffering of the Russian Jewish community abroad. As expressed in Spektor's letter of 18 October 1881, to Shmuel Yosef Fuenn, when the community is facing danger, all must cooperate together, regardless of any differences in views.<sup>20</sup>

While endeavouring to avoid conflict and focused on the study of Torah and jurisprudence, Spektor was viewed as often 'not aware of new trends in traditional society'. <sup>21</sup> However, in frequent contact with local and distant correspondents it is more likely that as was later described, he was 'quite au fait' with all matters affecting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan vol 2 (Bnei Brak, 2004), p. 439.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, '25 Tishrei 5642', 18 October 1881, Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, P127/209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 181.

the interests of Jews and Judaism'. 22 Because he was a prominent and leading religious figure Spektor's reputation and personal authority were often utilised and/or his support sought by many in pursuit of their objectives. Where these efforts were deemed by Spektor to complement his overall worldview as being beneficial to the status and wellbeing of the Jewish people, he was prepared to lend his name and reputation. The wisdom to see his position as transitional both in the ability to find means to render lenient and often ground-breaking halakhic decisions as well as in communal leadership and political activism marked Spektor as a key figure in adapting to the challenges, both political and in traditional observance facing the nation. Although he was either nominally at the head of, or closely associated with an endeavour, several of the prominent projects and accomplishments for which he is credited may have been at the initiative and work of others. Critically, however, their successes were ensured by virtue of their association with and support of Spektor, whose endorsement lent credibility to the endeavours via his unparalleled authority. Three important examples were the founding of the Kovno Kolel Perushim. a school (kolel) in Kovno which provided full scholarships to young men willing to devote their time to rabbinical studies apart (perushim) from their families, the appeals to Western notables for relief in the persecutions of 1881 and 1891 and the Heter Shemita of 1888/9.

In the first instance, the principal actor in the establishment of the *Kolel* concept was likely Rabbi Alexander Moshe Lapidot (1819–1906), with support and management input from Rabbi Yisroel Lipkin Salanter. In the case of the Kovno Circle, the *Heyeh Im Pipiot* appeals to the West were reported by Lipschitz to have been initiated and authored by himself personally, although each was signed by, and ownership

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Aaron Asher Green, 'Rabbi Yitschak Elchanan "At Home", *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 9 September 1892), 1223th issue, p. 12.

attributed to, Spektor. In the matter of the *Heter Shemita*, while Spektor was first approached to permit work during the period he demurred, hesitant to take a leading position alone and also risking causing friction by alienating the Jerusalem rabbinate who were opposed to any dispensation. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was only after Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever and two other prominent rabbinical authorities agreed to issue a waiver that Spektor endorsed the ruling.

Lipschitz arrived in Kovno in 1870 and although lacking semicha but possessing organisational talent, he was able to secure an appointment as secretary to Spektor, which began an association lasting for the balance of the latter's lifetime.<sup>23</sup> While Spektor represented the model for ideal traditional observance, Torah learning, rabbinical and communal leadership and peaceful co-existence between factions, Lipschitz was mostly intolerant of opinions other than his own and was an active and aggressive user of the press in defending and promoting the traditional rabbinate and religious practice, marking him as a modern and transitional figure. Lipschitz had recognised early the value and impact of the press; he reported that as a young man living in Wilkomir groups of four would form a pool to subscribe to the newly printed HaMagid. He foresaw from the enthusiasm of the subscribers that the press was regarded as 'a wise man, preaching a new Torah'.24 This concept remained with Lipschitz, and he became a prolific contributor to the press as the leading Orthodox journalist and spokesman. In response to his perception that the maskilim represented a critical threat to traditional Judaism, his writing tended to be aggressive and later in serving as the soul of the Kovno-based 'Black Office', his missives often took the form of vitriolic and personal attacks on his opponents.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov part 2, p. 39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Nissenboim, p. 105.

Described by a contemporary as wily, energetic and determined, he was a man in search of a platform for advancement, which as secretary to Spektor he was able to secure.<sup>26</sup> Following his arrival in Kovno and in his association with Spektor during the decades beyond. Lipschitz remained focused on doing battle in defense of tradition and with the maskilim, whom he accused of undermining the very soul and substance of Judaism. Lipschitz recalled and idealised the insular Jewish village settlements of his youth in which unitary and traditional observance ensured Jewish religious continuity.<sup>27</sup> Realising that the maskilim had so far dominated the press Lipschitz began to utilise the platform of *HaLevanon* to prosecute his agenda in raising the voice of Haredim. HaLevanon had been founded in 1863 and Yechiel Brill, one of the founders and the organ's editor, was similarly inclined to defend tradition in the face of maskilic attacks and, importantly, he also realised the potential market opportunity in doing so.<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding that Lipschitz took credit in his Zichron Yaakov for persuading Brill to dedicate the pages of HaLevanon to the Orthodox position, its use for that purpose pre-dated Lipschitz's claim.<sup>29</sup> Once Lipschitz had decided to utilise this 'unholy medium', he became one of the newspaper's primary contributors, and indeed the organ became, with its wide distribution network throughout the Russian Empire, the voice of the traditional rabbinate.<sup>30</sup> One of the first articles bearing his name as author and setting the tone for his future pieces was his essay "Yiras Chet V'Ha-chochma" (Fear of Sin and Wisdom), which appeared in April of 1870.31 In this and subsequent articles he attacked the maskilim for attempting to create a new Shulchan Aruch, proposing to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Chaim Tchernowitz, *Pirkei Chaim* (New York: Bitzaron, 1954), p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 1, pp. 65–73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Beer-Marx, p. 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 54, 59, 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Lipschitz, 'Yiras Chet V'ha-chochma', pp. 115–20.

rewrite the laws which had governed religious Judaism for centuries.<sup>32</sup> Lipschitz countered every maskilic article with a prompt response and counter-argument, i.e. the maskilim wrote that the traditional rabbis were unfamiliar with the real needs of the people, which prompted Lipschitz's response that in fact no one was more attuned to their needs. The synagogue served as a communal gathering place for all classes of Jews thrice daily, and 'who do the anguished and distressed turn to if not the local rabbi?'33 Regarding the accusation that rabbis were xenophobic and extremists, Lipschitz pointed to the traditional prayers of Yom Kippur which specifically welcomed all Jews, including sinners.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the period that Lipschitz remained active in his attacks against the encroachment of the maskilim and in his defense of traditional Jewish practice he referred to the influence and participation of Spektor, which reference assisted greatly in the success of the effort. Lipschitz was also recognised as the 'gatekeeper' for Spektor, and those who desired to obtain Spektor's support were usually aware of the necessity to first convince Lipschitz as to the merit of their projects.35 Inasmuch as Spektor was 'head and whole' in the study of Torah and in issuing responsa, this gave Lipschitz substantial power and authority in Spektor's name. 36 At the same time, the relationship was symbiotic, with Spektor's reputation and prominence also benefiting from his association with Lipschitz. In particular, Lipschitz's self-reported leading role in the Kovno Circle, and his widespread activities in defense of tradition while in Kovno, with Spektor's ostensible support and association, raised the latter's public image. This cooperation rendered Spektor's stature as a transitional figure in utilising the position of halakhic authority for political purposes beyond that which might have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 1, p. xxxiv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 68, 203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

otherwise been the case. 'It is safe to assert that but for him [Lipschitz] the whole enterprise [Kovno Circle] would not have come into being, and it was even said that but for him Rabbi Spektor would not have become a leader'. 37 This opinion was aggressively promoted by Lipschitz himself, although it is more likely that Lipschitz's influence in partnership with Spektor was most pronounced in connection with the Kovno Circle efforts.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, in describing his relationship with Lipschitz, Spektor referred to him as 'of all my house he is the most trusted'.<sup>39</sup> This accolade would have been consider very high praise inasmuch as the term was taken from a biblical attribute used to describe God's trust in Moses. 40 It was perhaps unusual and extraordinary that a person of Spektor's background and position as a traditional and prominent scholar, as a well-known advocate of peace, would have been receptive to a partnership with an individual of Lipschitz's personality. At the same time, Spektor would have been aware of Lipschitz's aggressive personality and his public attacks against both maskilim and regarding any attempts at accommodation in traditional practices. While not supportive of the methods, Spektor's view would likely have been in concert with Lipschitz's such as in the case of introducing secular or language studies into traditional educational programs, as advocated by the maskilim. As described in a previous chapter, Spektor was opposed to any change in the *heder* educational system, a position fully in concert with Lipschitz's. Spektor's focus remained on the use of jurisprudence within the broad boundaries of halakha to uphold traditional values and practice, however he would not have disagreed with and would have been generally supportive of Lipschitz's positions and public advocacy. Their partnership was most pronounced and fruitful however in mounting

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Oppenheim, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, p. VI.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> *Tanach*, Numbers 12:7.

political efforts on behalf the Russian Jewish community. While Lipschitz and Spektor were aligned in their objective of preservation traditional values and in their effort to improve the position of Jews in the Russian Empire, their views were often not in alignment. Prominent exceptions included Spektor's support, albeit careful and initially lukewarm, for Hibbat Zion in the face of strong and even militant opposition from Lipschitz and in Spektor's high regard and respect for the government which stood in contrast to Lipschitz, who regarded the state as 'a zoo filled with wild beasts'.41 As well, there were centres of Mussar philosophy at the kolel, whose adherents were openly harassed by Lipschitz but tolerated by Spektor as Godfearing and dedicated Jews. 42 Whereas Lipschitz used abrasive and offensive terms to address those who differed with him, Spektor's communications, even with those who disagreed with him, were almost always respectful. Spektor's open letter to those who were to contribute to *HaLevanon* reflected this position, stating, 'do not make attacks personal and take care what you write and avoid injurious language', a position he voiced to the editor directly as well, that 'all articles should be in a peaceful manner'.43

In analysing the cooperation between Spektor and Lipschitz the historian finds him/herself relying considerably upon source material authored by Lipschitz: his *Toldot Yitzchak*, a biography of Spektor, published in 1896, following Spektor's passing, and his three-volume *Zichron Yaakov*, published posthumously in 1924 by Lipschitz's son Notel.<sup>44</sup> These works contain Lipschitz's first-hand contemporary recollections and scholars have typically relied on and cited Lipschitz's version of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'El Sofrim Nichbadim', *HaLevanon* (Paris, 30 June 1970), 23rd ed., pp. 177–78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> There had been a fourth volume, until now not found. Eliezer Lipschitz, Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, 'My Grandfather', 2022.

events. At the same time, however, his accounts tend to be overly self-aggrandising, and as commented by Bartal, one should view Lipschitz's works in some respect as 'seeking to create an alternate history'. 45 This history places traditional rabbinical leadership at the centre of contemporary activity, and it is likely for this reason that the exhaustive Zichron Yaakov volumes were republished as recently as 2009 in Bnei Brak, an Orthodox stronghold in Israel. The latter printing included as well Lipschitz's Machzikei Hadas, essentially an instruction manual in the defense of Orthodox practice. For example, it specifically cites the Machzikei Hadas society in London, which was involved in attacking the local kashrut supervision, to be discussed later in this chapter. 46 While Lipschitz took credit for initiating the efforts and accomplishments of the Kovno Circle, these accomplishments, even if the attribution were accurate, relied completely on the authority and reputation of Spektor. Contemporary rumours that Lipschitz 'controlled' Spektor and used the latter's reputation and authority for his own objectives were rife, as expressed in an article appearing in HaMelitz.47 Such views, however, were forcibly and publicly addressed and rejected by Spektor. 48 As a team, Spektor and Lipschitz successfully shepherded traditional (non-Hasidic) Jewish observance, Torah scholarship and the authority and model of the rabbinate as community leaders in both religious and political spheres through a period of unprecedented challenge and turbulence into the new century, both within the Russian Empire and beyond.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Bartal, *True Knowledge and Wisdom*, p. 183.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Lipschitz, *Sefer Machzikei Hadas*, p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Alexander Zederbaum, 'Divrei Shalom V'emet', *HaMelitz* (Peterburg, 21 January 1890), 7th ed., p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Spektor, 'Elbono Shel Torah', pp. 77–78.

## 1817–1863: Spektor - The Formative Years

Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor was born in 1817 in the town of Ros, in the Grodno district, about 65 miles east of Białystok, within the Russian Empire's Pale of Settlement. His father was the town's rabbi, renowned for his Talmud learning and piety and Spektor received his early traditional training from him at home.<sup>49</sup> Recognised at a young age as an *Illui*. Spektor was married at age 13 and moved to Vilkovishk (now Vilkaviškis in Lithuania, about 50 miles southwest of Kaunas), where he remained with his wife's family engrossed in Talmudic study for the next six years, and during this period received rabbinic ordination.<sup>50</sup> This rabbinical training, outside of the mainstream yeshivot, may have also contributed to an independent and unconventional way of thinking that characterised Spektor's subsequent career.<sup>51</sup> Due to financial hardship when his dowry was lost by an unscrupulous depository, Spektor was forced to secure a rabbinical position and in 1837 he assumed the pulpit of the nearby town of Zabelin (now Izabelin in Belarus, about 120 miles northeast of Brest). His brief two-year experience in Zabelin left a permanent imprint on his personality. Retained at a weekly salary of only 75 kopeks, this remuneration was apparently insufficient to procure even a meagre quantity of food for his family. The memory of the poverty, starvation, suffering of his family and the tears and deprivation of his wife in particular was recalled often by Spektor and likely served as an important element in his later empathetic halakhic positions. Realising that he could not continue in such a situation, Spektor borrowed a clean suit of clothes and travelled to the town of Karlin to present himself to Rabbi Jacob Minkowski (d. 1844), a renowned scholar and community leader within the Russian

<sup>49</sup> Lipschitz, *Toldot Yitzchak*, p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory*, p. 22.

Empire in an effort to impress him and to thereby hope to secure a better rabbinical position through Minkowski's referral. Spektor's scholarship proved his suitability for a more important pulpit and when the rabbinate of Biaroza (now in Belarus, about 75 miles northeast of Brest), became available he was recommended for the position, which he occupied from 1839 to 1846. As his fame as a scholar began to spread, particularly by way of his responsa regarding divorce and related halakhic issues, he was solicited for the pulpit by the community of Nyasvizh (now Niasviz in Belarus, about 80 miles southwest of Minsk). 52 He remained in Nyasvizh until 1851, at which time he accepted a post as the rabbi of Novohrodok (now Navahrudak in Belarus, about 110 miles west of Minsk). In later years, Spektor would look fondly upon his time in Novohrodok, where he served until 1864, as having had the ability, due to the relative small size of the community, to focus intently on study and responsa, answering of halakhic questions from both his own and from remote communities.<sup>53</sup> Recognising his increased stature as a *posek* he stated in the introduction to his published responsa in 1858, Sefer Be'er Yitzchak, 'I have been seen as a decisor by today's sages'.54 In that role he evidenced flexibility in providing lenient rulings, both in matters relating to marriage and divorce as well as in kashrut. Spektor's time in Novohrodok was particularly productive on matrimonial matters and laid the foundation for his reputation as an advocate for women's rights; importantly, 'he felt the pain of each woman' who came before him. 55 In his published responsa, Sefer Be'er Yitzchak and Sefer Avn Yitzchak he advanced principles which reflected leniencies, especially in the cases of agunot, and acceptance of expanded submissions of evidence in such cases. In particular his reliance on the principle of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Lipschitz, *Toldot Yitzchak*, p. 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Baruch Epstein, *Sefer Mekor Baruch*, 4 vols (Wilno: Drukarnia Rom, 1928), III, p. 1652.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, *Sefer Be'er Yitzchak* (Königsberg: H. Gruber and Langrien, 1858), p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> 'Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan Einenu', *HaMelitz* (St. Peterburg, 8 March 1896), 47th issue, p. 1.

'double majority' became a precedent for following generations in the freeing of *agunot*, whose husbands had been lost without providing a divorce. In illustrating this principle, he responded to a case in which a man had fallen into fast-flowing water and had then been struck by a log moving downstream. Following an extensive search, the body was never recovered, and the wife had been held as an *agunah* for several years. An appeal to Spektor resulted in her being freed from that state via the aforementioned principle; in the first instance men who fall into water and do not surface are presumed drowned and secondly those that are struck by lumber also perish. In freeing *agunot* Spektor also permitted the certification of government entities as decisive, such as in the case of the death of a Jewish soldier whose demise was confirmed by the army. In later rulings Spektor also allowed evidence of death submitted via police photographs as conclusive. In further recognition of his increased visibility as a widely recognised halakhic authority he was one of the pre-eminent scholars invited to contribute to the short-lived *Tevunah* journal, published in Königsberg in 1861 by Rabbi Yisroel Salanter.

## 1864–1880: The Kovno Years: Before the Storm

In 1864 Spektor accepted a call from the growing community of Kovno and assumed the pulpit there, a position he held for the balance of his life. The city had grown considerably over the preceding decade due to the paving of the road from Warsaw to St Petersburg which passed through Kovno, and the Berlin-St. Petersburg railway was also routed through the city. Additionally during the Crimean war its river port was widely used and developed due to the blockade against other, major Russian

<sup>56</sup> Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, 'Rabbi Yitshak Elhanan Spektor of Kovno: Spokesman for "Agunot", *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, 29, no. 3 (1995), pp. 5–20 (p. 13).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Spektor, *Sefer Ayn Yitzchak* vol 2 (Vilna, 1889), p. 217, Even HaEzer, Siman 19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 286, Siman 31.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> I. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement*, p. 262.

ports. 60 The Jewish population of Kovno was reported to be 16,514 at the time of Spektor's arrival.<sup>61</sup> By 1869 Rabbi Isaac Rülf stated that the Jewish population was between 25,000 and 30,000 souls, representing at least 60 per cent of the town's residents. 62 As rabbi of Kovno, Spektor distinguished himself both as halakhic decisor and as a communal leader, not only locally but for the Jewish community within the Russian Empire and abroad. An important milestone in defining the role of a communal rabbi was the dispute at the Mir yeshiva in 1867, for which Spektor was enlisted as an arbitrator along with Rabbi Dov Baer Meisels (1798–1870) of Warsaw. The question was whether the town's rabbi had priority in assuming control of the local yeshiva following the demise of its head. In their decision, both sages agreed that the roles of the head of the yeshiva and the communal rabbi were dissimilar and that each had separate responsibilities. While the two positions were important, the role of the communal rabbi was clearly defined as to teach, judge and deal with community matters, implying that those duties should be his priority. 63 It was reported that while Spektor clearly valued the veshiva and its importance, he recognised that the role of communal rabbi, which he himself occupied, was to be separate from the yeshiva in fulfilling a critical leadership position.<sup>64</sup> In subsequent years as well, Spektor advocated and defended the primacy of local rabbinical authority, often in strong terms, such as in outlawing the kashrus of a local slaughterer who had failed to have his tools inspected and approved by the local rabbi. 65

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Miriam Niv, "Kaunus" - Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania', 1996, pp. 4, 20 <a href="https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas">https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas</a> lita/lit 00512.html>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Rülf, *Meine Reise nach Kowno*, p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Lipschitz, *Toldot Yitzchak*, p. 67.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Ruling of Y. E. Spektor, 22 April 1887, in Dovid Kamenetsky, *Rabbeinu Chaim Ozer - Rabban shel kol b'nei haGolah* (Jerusalem, 2020), pp. 103–04.

In the cholera epidemic of 1871 which struck practically all parts of European Russia, including Kovno, Spektor was reported to have headed the relief committee and more significantly provided a blanket dispensation for Jews to both cook on the Sabbath and to drive coaches in the service of victims. 66 He would have certainly recalled previous outbreaks which occurred in 1831, 1848, 1853 and 1855 and Spektor would have been moved to take whatever steps he could to provide relief. This attitude of placing the preservation of health and the sanctity of life above any other consideration halakhic or practical would not have been unusual for a traditional rabbi; however, this view of the precedence of the human condition was clearly evident in his attitude and rulings. Similarly, his position in the ongoing debate regarding settlement of Palestine, later a principal goal of the Hibbat Zion movement, was that any effort 'directed to the rescue of oppressed and afflicted Jews' was always of great value. 67 While attending to the needs of his community, he remained focused on Torah scholarship and in 1872 published the first part of his commentary on the Shulchan Aruch, Nachal Yitzchak. In the forward to this work, Spektor stated several aspects of his philosophy relating to Jews' obligations towards the government, tenets which were critical to the safety and security of the Jewish community within the Russian Empire. These beliefs included that local laws were to be observed and also that by treating all humankind with respect and affection, Jews would earn the same in return. Spektor pointed out that as a decisor he never differentiated between Jews and non-Jews in cases which came before him. Indeed. his reputation for judicial probity drew non-Jewish merchants to seek out rabbinical courts in civil disputes involving money, as government courts had the reputation of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Niv, p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 170.

being swayed by bribery.<sup>68</sup> Spektor also stated that it was incumbent upon the Jewish community, as well as a mitzvah to pray for the health and well-being of the tsar and his ministers; even if they act without grace towards Jews, and to remain loyal subjects.<sup>69</sup>

In 1875, the controversy regarding esrogim from Corfu, which had begun in the late eighteenth century re-ignited. 70 The issue had historically centred around whether the growers in Corfu were grafting their trees and if so the kashrus of the fruit could be called into question. In April of that year an article by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Pines (1843-1913) appeared in HaLevanon which decried the use of Corfu esrogim, primarily due to the exorbitant prices that were being charged by the Corfu merchants, causing undue hardship on observers of the Succot holiday.71 In a subsequent issue Pines went on to suggest that on this basis esrogim from Corfu should be prohibited, re-awakening the prior questions of kashrus, and instead he proposed alternative sources, including promoting fruit grown in the Holy Land which had been the headline of his article on the topic. 72 The following month Spektor, primarily citing the economic blackmail being perpetrated on residents of Kovno and suggesting as well that until the issue of kashrus had been clarified, the use of esrogim from Corfu would be prohibited in Kovno.<sup>73</sup> Through this ruling. Spektor expanded his authority to include defense of his community from economic threats. As well, once the ruling had been publicised through the pages of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Azriel Shochat, 'Leadership of the Jewish Communities in Russia after the Abolition of the "Kahal", *Zion*, 42, nos. 3/4 (1977), pp. 143–233 (p. 221).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, *Sefer Nachal Yitzchak*, vol 1 (Vilna, 1872), p. Hoda'ah (acknowledgement).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Yechiel Michel Pines, 'Al Dvar Yeshiva Shel Eretz Yisrael (part 1 of 2)', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 14 April 1875), 35th ed., pp. 273–74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Yechiel Michel Pines, 'Al dvar yeshiva shel Eretz Yisrael (part 2 of 2)', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 28 April 1875), 36th ed., pp. 281–82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Spektor, 'Tikkun Gadol', p. 305.

*HaLevanon*, and although Spektor had only intended it to bind his own community, many other rabbis subscribed to the ruling, and this further served to expand Spektor's jurisdiction beyond Kovno. This use of the press to publicise a halakhic ruling also highlighted the press's use as a 'virtual Bet-Midrash', acting as a clearing house for such pronouncements.<sup>74</sup>

In 1875 Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, concerned about the lack of support available for students of Torah, posited the concept of a kolel where young married men could be supported while they learned and prepared for the rabbinate.<sup>75</sup> Intensified urbanisation had reduced the number of available rabbinical positions, and even in larger cities 'an absent Rabbi is the norm', with many towns utilising a moreh tzedek to adjudicate halakhic disputes and the controversies often surrounding the appointment of a rabbi leading to the post being left vacant. 76 As such, Reines felt the need to establish an entity which would substitute for the kest system, which had previously provided support from fathers-in-law for young scholars in the early years of marriage while they studied. The weakened prestige of the rabbinical profession had caused wealthy men not to consider Torah scholars as sons-in-law, which also created a vacuum in support for young rabbinical candidates. As described in the memoirs of Pauline Wengeroff, 'The expert, the doctor, the lawyer, and so on, took the place of the traditional meyukhes (aristocracy), replacing the ideal of Talmudic knowledge.<sup>77</sup> David Assaf, in his introduction to the memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik (1847–1921), similarly observed that previously accepted norms had been undermined, revamping the hierarchy of professional prestige and that 'the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Beer-Marx, pp. 125-30.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 338.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory*, pp. 33–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Pauline Wengeroff and Shulamit S. Magnus, *Memoirs of a Grandmother: Scenes from the Cultural History of the Jews of Russia in the Nineteenth Century*, Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 188, and footnote nr. 246, p. 321.

learned prodigy or the pious Hasid no longer comprised the sole models for emulation'.78

While the timing of Reines's concept was premature and failed to gain traction, it was subsequently taken up in 1877 by Rabbi Alexander Moshe Lapidot. Lapidot felt that the best place to establish a kolel would be in Kovno under the aegis of Spektor, in view of the latter's reputation as the central halakhic authority in Lithuanian Jewry. Lapidot dispatched a messenger, one Eliezer Habas, to Kovno to propose the concept to Spektor; however, Habas first met with Lipschitz who dismissed the idea out of hand and sent the messenger away. 79 Following several leads, Lapidot sent Habas to Berlin where he was successful in securing sizeable contributions from donors and in particular from a Mr Ovadia Lachman who made a substantial donation of 10,000 rubles. 80 More significantly, Lachman also promised to provide an annual gift of 1,000 rubles towards the study of Torah.<sup>81</sup> On the return trip from Berlin Habas passed through Memel, consulting with Rabbi Salanter who was then resident there. Although the Lachman donation was not earmarked for any specific purpose other than for the study of Torah, Salanter agreed with Lapidot that the establishment of a *kolel* would be its best use and suggested that its optimal location would be in Kovno, as was originally envisioned by Lapidot. Travelling to Kovno himself, and armed this time with funding, Lapidot persuaded Lipschitz as to the value of the enterprise and having secured Lipschitz's agreement the concept was presented to Spektor who consented to locate it in Kovno. This was predicated, however, on the specific condition that Spektor's son, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Yekhezkel Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik*, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press in cooperation with The Diaspora Research Institute, Tel Aviv University, 2002), p. 72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Yisrael Lipkin Salanter, *Etz Peri*, vol 2 (Vilna: Yehuda Leib Matza, 1881), p. iv.

<sup>81</sup> Stampfer, Lithuanian Yeshivas, p. 340.

would handle all aspects of the administrative functions, so as not to detract from Spektor's primary focus of learning Torah and issuing responsa. The main features of the *kolel* were that the students would live apart from their families, hence the name of the institution as Kolel Perushim, literally those who are separate, and that they would receive a stipend to free them from the responsibilities of earning a living, allowing them to concentrate on study exclusively. The underwriting of a student's term at the *kolel* also served an important purpose in raising the self-esteem of the young men, making them no longer dependent on the charity of either the host town's families or their wife's parents. This aspect of the *kolel* was likely most attractive to its members – for Spektor in particular, his experience in Zabelin would likely have still been on his mind.

The *kolel* had several unique features including that the students not only studied Talmud but also Halakhah to prepare them as community rabbis and that there was not just one study hall but several. For example, students could attend a previously established location, the Naviasky Klaus, where the Mussar philosophy was predominant, focusing not only on texts but also on ethics, or the 'old' *bet midrash* where Spektor was generally present. In publishing an appeal for further funding, Spektor referred to the difficult times then being experienced by those who learned Torah and the need for an institution to both encourage Torah scholarship at a high level and to 'leave a light on for our holy Torah for future generations' through the training of competent rabbis. In his appeal he seemed to take credit for the concept, or perhaps he felt that his association would garner greater support and

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<sup>82</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 223.

<sup>83</sup> Stampfer, Lithuanian Yeshivas, p. 368.

<sup>84</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Shimoff, p. 75 (English section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, Etz Peri, vol 1 (Vilna: Yehuda Leib Matza, 1881), p. 40.

stated, 'I and my assistants agreed to support these exceptional young men who dedicate themselves to God's Torah'.<sup>87</sup> Despite Spektor's proprietorial assertion, Rabbi Salanter continued to exert considerably more influence on the direction of the *kolel*, which ensured that the institution remained a centre of the Mussar philosophy he championed.

In an unusual two-part format, an appeal for funds for the kolel entitled Etz Peri was issued in 1880, with one section containing Spektor's message and the other principally Salanter's, with both including an essay from Lapidot, underscoring the latter's direct involvement in the concept. The difference in style between the two sections is telling in reflecting each author's philosophies and objectives for the kolel. In Spektor's section of the publication he was directly focused on two main goals: the critical importance of Torah learning and the training of rabbis who would be grounded in Halakha as a means of jurisprudence and in continuing the traditional function of a communal rabbi. He pointed out that for those who had no time to engage in Torah study, it was incumbent upon them to provide support for those who did and by doing so the donors would be credited with the mitzvah as if they themselves were engaged in study.88 Spektor highlighted the value of the novel concept of the kolel's providing support for the students, many of whom without such a benefit would be relegated to the role of simple *melamdim* and endure poor status and treatment.89 Spektor's preoccupation with the training of traditional rabbis as a means for protecting future Torah observance was also reflected in his reputation as being 'generous' in conferring ordination. 90 His flexibility and desire to perpetuate the office of the rabbinate was also in evidence in his 1879 support for Rabbi Azriel

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Lipschitz, *Toldot Yitzchak*, p. 77.

<sup>88</sup> Spektor, Etz Peri, vol I, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Zalkin, *Beyond the Glory*, p. 25.

Hildesheimer's rabbinical seminary in Berlin. While students there would also be attending university, a concept to which Spektor was opposed, he was aware of the challenges of the German Reform and felt that the seminary could serve as the best chance to preserve tradition in that environment, in which 'the setting of the sun in Germany as of 50 years ago [was] due to the evil of reform'. 91 In expressing support for the seminary, Spektor showed great courage and respect for Hildesheimer, referring to him as 'my dear friend, the Gaon, the great Tsaddik, the famous one, learned in Torah and renowned for his piety, our teacher'. 92 This position was in stark contrast to other contemporaries such as Rabbi Hillel Lichtenstein (1814-1891) a student of Moses Sofer who stated in reference to Hildesheimer, 'His every tendency uproots Torah and fear of God and plants in their stead apostasy and heresy in Israel'.93

The section of Etz Peri authored by Rabbi Salanter focused inwardly on the study of Torah as a means to promote personal improvement and to overcome the evil inclination.94 In this approach Salanter was targeting the Haskalah movement, which had 'turned light into darkness to demean our faith' and therefore the study of Torah represented the best defense. 95 The focus on Torah study as a way of life and purity of heart was prominent in Salanter's view and the inclusion of an essay in this section by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the 'Chofetz Chaim' (1838-1933) underscored that view, with the latter's well-known emphasis on ethical conduct and speech. Kagan had been the 'author of a score of works, including the eponymous Chofetz

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Letter dated 12 August 1879 from Spektor to Hildesheimer, in Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan (vol 1 of 2), 2 vols (Bnei Brak, 2004), I, pp. 37-38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Ellenson, Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy, p. 164.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Lipkin Salanter, *Ets Peri*, II, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

*Chaim*, published in 1873 and *Shemiras HaLashon*, Care of Speech, published in 1876, expounding the religious and ethical principles of the Jewish Religion'. <sup>96</sup>

In the summer of 1877 a great fire swept through the town of Wilkomir, located about 50 miles southwest of Kovno. 97 Lipschitz, who was originally from the town, reported that he mobilised and took charge of the relief effort for the victims, and received authorisation to draft and transmit appeals for relief in Spektor's name, particularly to the standing Memel relief committee headed by Dr Rülf.98 The committee had remained connected with the Jewish community in the Russian Empire, acting as an address for relief efforts such as in their appeal for funds following the 1872 fire in Schaulen, and the 1876 fire in Kupischock, about 100 miles northeast of Kovno. 99 Upon receipt of the message, the committee adopted the name Das Memeler Hilfecomité für die Abgebrannten der Stadt Wilkomir, and the appeal was translated into the German language and published both in Der Israelit and the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums, signed by Spektor as the rabbi of Kovno. 100 The appeal described the extent of the disaster, with 1,000 homes and 12 synagogues destroyed, many valuable books burned and 8,000 persons rendered homeless, without clothing or food. 101 The total collected and dispensed to Kovno for further distribution was reported to be 22,000 rubles. 102 In forwarding the donations, the Memel committee attached a letter from Rülf to Spektor providing detailed specific guidelines for its distribution. 103 The terms included that a sub-committee needed to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> 'Chofetz Chaim, 105, Is Dead in Poland', *New York Times* (16 September 1933), vol 82, 27,629th ed., p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, 176.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 176–77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Theure Glaubensgenossen', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 16 August 1876), 33rd ed., p. 776.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Spektor, 'Hilferuf!' and Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Hülferuf', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig, 7 August 1877), 32nd ed., p. 516.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 177.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Memel, ende December', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 2 January 1878), 1st ed., pp. 5, 6.

be formed to monitor the outlay of the funds and also provided bylaws for the committee. Additionally, while Spektor was to be the nominal head of the effort, he himself need not be closely involved, should communal responsibilities prevent him from doing so. Instead, the committee, whose members were specifically named by Rülf, would take full charge to ensure that the funds were utilised as intended; to aid all victims regardless of religion, and without the necessity to prove an actual loss. It remains unclear as to why Rülf and the Memel committee believed such extensive safeguards necessary, perhaps as a result of issues encountered in previous distributions. To emphasise these points, Rülf ended the letter with the admonition that if the specified conditions could not be strictly met Spektor would be obligated (zur Pflicht) to return the funds. 104 It seems clear, however, that in so insisting Rülf was significantly over-reaching his jurisdiction from his relatively minor pulpit in Memel, particularly challenging the leadership of Spektor in his own hometown. In this respect Rülf perhaps was operating under the assumption that the power of the purse supported his ability to do so, as 'philanthropy became the main manifestation of Jewish power and politics in the mid-19th century'. 105

During late 1877 a controversy arose in England regarding the kashrus of chicory, which was used as a less expensive substitute for coffee. As part of the fabrication process, factories operated principally by non-Jews had become accustomed to utilising animal fat, especially lard, to improve the taste and as a preservative. The debate surrounding the use by the Jewish community of such a product had predated the era, with most communities relying on the permission of the eminent posek Rabbi Joseph Teomim of Lemberg (1727–1792) due to the small amount used and that same in any case would be nullified in the manufacturing process.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Ben-Ghedalia, p. 75.

This ruling likely had its basis in the Talmudic dictum of batel b'shisim (Talmudic tractate Chulin 98b), stating that a small amount of a non-kosher substance, not exceeding 1/60th of the total amount allowed the overall mixture to remain kosher. Its use in England had continued without question, objection, or further investigation until the rabbis of Leeds and Manchester took it upon themselves to visit a production facility and saw first-hand the addition of lard as an ingredient. Instead of contacting chief rabbi Nathan Adler, the rabbis decided to raise the alarm on their own, to which Adler, having subsequently visited the facility, upheld the permission for use of chicory to continue. Not satisfied with this response, the rabbi of Leeds, Rabbi Yisrael Zvi Levinson (1826? –1900), took the matter up directly with Rabbi Spektor, hoping to circumvent Adler and secure validation of his position, with the knowledge that Spektor's widely recognised authority would serve as conclusive support and prove sufficient to over-rule Adler. Spektor responded to Levinson that indeed he had for some time prohibited the importation of chicory for the very same reason outlined by Levinson. Pleased with this response, Levinson published a piece in *HaLevanon* in which he outlined his views and appended the response from Spektor. 106 Realising the potential implications of his authority being undermined, Adler wrote to Spektor citing the importance of maintaining communal peace and unity, known to be a critical issue for Spektor. Upon receipt of the letter, Spektor responded promptly to Adler with an apology for his involvement and for not contacting Adler directly regarding the issue, although without retracting his comments.

The year 1879 marked the fourth convocation of the Rabbinical Commission, organised by the Russian government, with previous gatherings having been held in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Yisrael Zvi Levinson, 'Michtevei Sofrim. Leeds Medinas England 16 Kislev 5638', *HaLevanon*, 30 November 1877, 17th ed., pp. 131–32.

1852, 1857 and 1861. Its stated purpose was 'to supervise and render opinion on questions related to the laws and customs of the Jewish faith and affairs of the rabbis'. 107 This event served as both a flashpoint in the conflict between the maskilim and the traditional, and its eventual composition reflected the balance of power between the two factions vis-à-vis the government. The delegates and chairman were to be selected by the Ministry of Internal Affairs from candidates proposed by the Jewish communities. The campaign within the Jewish community to nominate representatives was extremely contentious, with both the maskilim and the traditionalists advocating for their respective slate of candidates. Lipschitz was the principal spokesman for the traditional faction, pointing out both the close bond that rabbis enjoyed with their communities and stating his view of the obvious, that a conference dealing with rabbinical issues should have 'real' rabbis as participants. 108 For the maskilim, a major written offensive was mounted, led by Moshe Leib Lilienblum (1843–1910), who stated, 'Anyone acquainted with the spirit of our rabbis knows how ill-equipped they are to comprehend what is in the Jews' best interest.'109 This period marked the height of the maskilic powers, both in their self-confidence as in their relationship vis-à-vis the government. Following the Congress of Berlin in 1878 in which guarantees of equality had been obtained for the Jews of Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, the maskilim had great hopes and expectations that the Jews in Russia could be next. 110 The Russian government was still focused on the objective of integrating Jews into Russian society and the maskilim were then viewed as the most likely partner to achieve this goal. As such, the Ministry chose to ignore the Jewish community's plebiscite, which had favoured dispatching traditional rabbis to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 206.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

the conference, and instead appointed mostly laymen with a state-appointed rabbi as chairman. As a result, Lipschitz conceded defeat, and even in liberal circles the conference became known as an 'assembly of rabbis without rabbis'. 111 As a result of the lack of traditional representation, Spektor was relegated, as representative of the traditional rabbinate, to write to one of the participants, Abraham Harkavy (1835– 1919) in an effort to have him use his influence 'for the good of the community'. 112 Spektor lamented that the government had failed to include in the conference 'any of the great gaonim' and he further questioned the ability and integrity of the commission to address any issues relating to Jewish law, which had been the entire purpose of the gathering. 113

The Bright Line: 1881

The pogroms which began in the spring of 1881 caused the Jewish community to experience not only the effects of the violence, but as well a sense of abandonment by its leadership. Neither the wealthy St Petersburg intercessors nor the maskilim, who had advocated integration with Russian society, had been able to anticipate, prevent or stop the pogroms. The void created by this failure had not been filled sufficiently by any entity, and into this breach at a critical moment stepped the partnership of Lipschitz and Spektor. Each contributed a unique expertise and standing which together enabled a new communal leadership to be formed. The shock of the pogroms served as an actuator to enable the talents of these two individuals to collaborate, utilising Spektor's widely respected rabbinical authority and Lipschitz's political savvy in the use of modern means of communication and his

<sup>111</sup> ChaeRan Y. Freeze, Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England [for] Brandeis University Press, 2002), p. 247.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Shimoff, p. 11 (Hebrew section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Freeze, Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, p. 247.

relationships within the Pale and with elements of the maskilic community via his brother, a prominent member of that group. <sup>114</sup> Further, the pair was able to harness the support of all groups within the community; 'the initial sense of elemental panic and common purpose, unleashed in 1881, tended to submerge ideological differences'. <sup>115</sup> It was the shock not only of the pogroms, but as well the information received by Spektor that elements of the government placed the blame for the violence on the Jews themselves. <sup>116</sup> This realisation opened his view towards other options to safeguard the Russian Jewish community. Spektor enjoyed wide trust and even reverence among all classes of Jews, and he was therefore able to capitalise on this standing to attract and marshal wide sources of first-hand information regarding the pogroms for transmission overseas via the Kovno Circle.

The town of Elisavetgrad, about 150 miles northeast of Odessa, in Kherson province, was the scene, on 15 April of the first of the at least 100 pogroms that were to sweep the Russian Empire during April and May of 1881. There had been long-simmering antisemitism in the Pale, particularly felt by the peasants who resented the Jewish presence in commerce and in tavern ownership. They used the pretext of curtailed Easter celebrations, mandated by the government as a sign of respect following the assassination in March of Tsar Alexander II, to begin a riot directed against the Jewish community. The pogroms which began there spread through other villages in the province, eventually moving beyond the area and reaching Kiev on 26 April

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 142.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 257.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 74. This phenomenon was not new, i.e. following the 1871 violence in Odessa an article in the Judeophobic Kiev newspaper *Kievlianin* stated, 'The chief cause of the disorders lies in the fact that the Jewish population exercises great advantages in Odessa. . . . soon all the land of Bessarabia and Kherson provinces will pass under their control; everywhere there is ruin [as a result of the Jews]. John Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, *1855–1881*, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 96 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 197.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882*, pp. xxii–xxiv.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

where the home of wealthy Jews including those of the Brodskii brothers were sacked. 119 This violence represented for the Jews of the Russian Empire a modernday departure from the static phenomenon of antisemitism into an 'immediate threat to their established way of life'. 120 Matters were compounded by attempts to place the blame for provoking the pogroms upon Jews themselves, as was contained in a memorandum issued on 22 August by Count Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatiev, Minister of the Interior. 121 Word of the pogroms travelled quickly; the censorship of the press in the empire had largely broken down with the proliferation of periodicals, and the restrictions that had been imposed were being circumvented. 122 As a result, the Russian press itself covered the pogroms in addition to telegrams and letters which were dispatched abroad describing in detail the actual events, which were then published outside of the empire. As news of the violence reached the West, on 24 April a deputation from the council of Anglo-Jewish Association and the Board of Deputies of British Jews met with Earl Granville, the United Kingdom's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to discuss the 'outrages upon Jews committed in various parts of the Russian Empire'. 123 The delegation was aware that 'it was extremely difficult for any government to take any direct action in the matter' and asked only for 'a mere expression of opinion emanating from the government of Her Majesty'. 124

Other reports included the *Berliner Tageblatt*'s article on 3 May that 'in order to rob, the rabble broke into the houses, demolished them, stole, murdered and destroyed the Synagogue . . . there were alone 17 deaths reported'. <sup>125</sup> Continuing to describe

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 51.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> 'Jews in Russia', *The Times* (London, 25 May 1881), 30,203th issue, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> 'Ueber die furchtbaren Metzeleien in Jelisawetgrad', *Berliner Tageblatt* (Berlin, 3 May 1881), 205th issue. p. 2.

scenes of violence, 'similarly, the most awful injuries occurred due to fiends torturing their victims in order to extort money from them'. 126 The report further stated that the victims, supported by respected Odessa Jews, appealed to the 'Societé Israélite' in London for assistance. Coverage was also provided in the press regarding riots in other locations, including Podol, a section of Kiev, which was completely destroyed and burned to the ground, with all Jewish homes demolished and many Jewish residents fleeing over the Austrian border. 127 The Jewish Chronicle in London on 6 May published first-hand reports, both from Odessa as well as from personal observations of travellers who witnessed the violence and transmitted their reports upon arriving in the West. 128 The Times of London reported on 11 May regarding 'the horrors' committed against the Jews, describing Elisavetgrad 'as if it had been devastated by the elements. Whole streets have been literally razed. Almost all the Jews' houses are sacked, and all shops plundered. Many are seriously and others slightly wounded, several were killed.'129 Further coverage of the pogroms was provided by the Jewish Chronicle and the Jewish World, with the latter publication providing 18 first-hand reports of the atrocities. 130 In June of 1881 additional news from Jewish sources began to filter out of the Pale, including a letter written on 7 June to Dr Rülf in Memel from Dr Max Mandelstam (1839-1912) in Kiev. Mandelstam wrote that the Jews in Russia had been 'sold and betrayed' and consistently treated as 'public property', i.e. defenseless and mistreated at will. 131 The writer promised to communicate further details under separate cover so that Rülf could publicise them in the German press; obviously Mandelstam was not then

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> 'Petersburg', *Der Wendelstein - Katholisches Volksblatt für das bayerische Oberland* (Rosenheim, 14 May 1881), 58th issue, p. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> 'Outrages upon Jews in Russia', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 6 May 1881), 632nd issue, p. 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> 'Russia', *The Times* (London, 11 May 1881), 30,191th issue, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 400.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Laskov, vol I, pp. 72–74.

aware that reports had already been communicated to the West. As the news had already reached Rülf, an initial appeal had been written on 22 May 1881, and published in the Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums on 7 June. Referring to the wide dissemination thus far of the atrocities perpetrated upon the Russian Jewish community, 'you have heard and read about the bloody persecution', he appealed for relief funds, signing his name as part of the Memel-based, Das ständige Hülfscomité für die Nothstände russicher Israeliten. 132 A similar appeal was published by the Alliance Israélite Universelle on 8 June, appearing in *Der Israelit*, which also solicited donations to be distributed to the victims of the pogroms. 133 An additional appeal was published by Rülf in Der Israelit of 22 June, in which he bolstered his request for donations by citing the many requests he was receiving from prominent persons in Russia including 'Rabbiner Yizchak Elchanan Spector in Kovno'. 134 While this was the first public mention of Spektor in connection with the pogroms, his involvement was later to take on a wider dimension as part of the Kovno Circle, which represented a successful effort by the traditional rabbinate headed by Spektor to assume a political role in shtadlanut, filling the void left by the failure of traditional intercession.

The Russian Jewish community's initial response to the pogroms has been described as 'hesitant, even routine', facing a unique and unprecedented wide scope of the anti-Jewish violence. A delegation led by Baron Goratsii Günzburg was presented to the tsar on 22 May, the result of which was described by the *Times*, as follows: His Majesty assured its members that the Jewish question should receive his best attention, and ordered them to address a memorial on the subject to the

<sup>132</sup> 'Deutsche Volksgenossen und jüdische Glaubensgenossen', p. 382.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> 'Aufruf für die russichen Israeliten', p. 562.

<sup>134</sup> I. (Isaak) Rülf, 'Bas-Ami Lo Echesche', Der Israelit (Mainz, 22 June 1881), Heft 25 issue, p. 631.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 52.

Minister of the Interior.'<sup>136</sup> That such an address was doomed to failure would likely have been well known, as the minister, N. P. Ignatiev, was a noted antisemite and would later be referred to by Rülf as a modern-day Haman. <sup>137</sup> Views expressed by Ignatiev included virulent antisemitic opinions: 'There is in St. Petersburg a very powerful Polish-Yid group, under whose direct control are banks, the stock exchange, the Bar, a large part of the press and other public activities.' <sup>138</sup> Ensuring the lack of effect from this approach, the Jewish delegation was naively 'highly impressed with the kindliness of the reception'. <sup>139</sup>

In the absence of any real progress, Baron Günzburg called for an assembly to take place in late August of 1881 in St Petersburg to consider the situation of the Jewish community and to establish a framework for addressing the continuing violence. The Baron invited predominantly representatives of the maskilim but also included Rabbi Spektor and Spektor's son Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz. During the conference the government-appointed rabbi of St. Petersburg, Abraham Drabkin (1844–1917), reported to the committee a conversation with Minister Ignatiev who had stated, 'The Jews themselves are responsible for the pogroms.' This was in addition to notice which reached Spektor regarding the content of a memo from Minister Ignatiev which implied that the government was involved in planning or at least in sanctioning the disturbances. The failure of the gathering to produce results and the subsequent inaction presaged that 'the initiative was passing out of the hand of the St. Petersburg magnates', creating a void within the Pale, which had become

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> 'Russia', *The Times* (London, 24 May 1881), 30,202th issue, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Rülf, *Die Russischen Juden*, p. 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> 'Russia', *The Times* (London, England, 24 May 1881), 30,202 issue, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> S. M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1918), vol 2 (1825–1894), p. 305.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> 'Russia', *The Times* (London, 24 May 1881), 30,202nd issue, p. 7.

accustomed to the elite's leadership and shtadlanut. This lack of success, and indeed its abject failure, created widespread disillusionment and fostered the leadership aspirations of several groups, termed by John Klier as 'The New Politics'. These included those promoting emigration, both to Palestine i.e. proto-Zionism via the emergence of the Hibbat Zion movement, and to the United States. The possibility of the latter destination was erroneously based on the expectation that the Alliance would underwrite the cost, which was in fact a gross exaggeration of the Alliance's position and which engendered a strong denial from the organisation.

Lipschitz reported that he had been receiving ongoing updates from the conference via letters sent from Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, and he quickly realised that absent a dramatic departure from the status quo, nothing would be done to stem the pogroms and that the dangerously deteriorating status of the Jewish community in the empire would continue. In view of the urgency of the situation, Lipschitz travelled from Kovno and met with Spektor and Rabinowitz who had stopped in Vilna on their return from St. Petersburg. Lipschitz recounted that he met with the pair and suggested that they expand their circle of shtadlanut to include the recruitment of individuals outside of the Russian Empire, and specifically to communicate on an urgent basis with Dr Asher in London. Lipschitz reported that both Spektor and Rabinowitz were reluctant to do so, as this effort would effectively circumvent the relationship that Spektor had long enjoyed with Baron Günzburg; however, in view of the dire circumstances facing the Russian Jewish community and without any real

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Klier, 'New Politics for Old', p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*, p. 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Laskov, vol I, pp. 118–19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>146</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 38.

alternatives, Spektor agreed. This Lipschitz-centric version of events does not focus on the great disappointment and consternation likely felt by Spektor after his recent experience in St. Petersburg. It is therefore doubtful that Spektor either required much persuasion to agree in the attempt to seek assistance abroad through his wellknown contacts or that Spektor himself was the prime mover in the effort. Additionally, Lipschitz's account fails to credit the significant involvement of the Russian literary intelligentsia and its contribution to the Circle's initiative, which 'played a crucial role in the formation of this coalition'. 147 A request was drafted to Dr Asher to be forwarded onwards to Lord Nathaniel Rothschild in London for action. It is unclear whether either Lipschitz or Spektor knew that word of the pogroms and its extent had reached the West, but it seems unlikely that they were completely unaware, at least inasmuch as Rülf's visit to Vilna during July, as recounted by Rülf in his Drei Tage in Jüdisch-Russland - Ein Cultur und Sittenbild would have been known locally. Even if they knew that news had reached beyond the Pale, nothing had changed in the position of the Jewish community, notwithstanding that monetary aid had been forthcoming and the potential for further and imminent danger was likely guite real. As such, a direct appeal to England via Spektor's relationship with Rothschild, using the former's authoritative and well-respected platform, might yield results. Clearly Spektor's detailed communications regarding the situation through this appeal would not have been, by any means, the first notice of the dire straits in which the Russian Jewish community found itself in 1881. This belies the 'romantic notion' that the Kovno circle of Rabbi Spektor paved a new, secret and daring path in smuggling out the first news of the pogroms and persecution of Russian Jewry. 148 It was, however, novel that the traditional faction, led in name by the otherwise reticent

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 129.

and scholarly Spektor, motivated by and partnering with Lipschitz was prepared to take the risk to deviate from a well-worn path of local intercession. Of equal significance was that the effort was targeted to reach beyond Russia to request foreign intervention in the Russian government's affairs regarding the Jews. The cooperation of maskilim, particularly Yehuda Leib Levin (1844-1925) and Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz with whom Lipschitz had previously made contact and who normally were opposed to the traditional rabbinate, but respected Spektor, was of equal, if not greater significance. The high regard for the traditional rabbinate in general and its authority in particular had not been diminished even as the wealthy elite in St Petersburg had assumed a communal leadership position. Even in the case of jaded maskilim 'Jewish intelligentsia cast their gaze back at the Pale as the living, human reservoir of Jewish civilization', which more readily facilitated support for Spektor's efforts at uniting the factions. 149 Spektor as well, in cases of pikuach nefesh, a matter of saving lives, held the long-established position that 'one does not argue about the differences of opinion or details of activity'. 150 The forming of that alliance, as well as the effort mounted by the traditional rabbinate to assume a leadership position and appeal to the Jewish communities beyond the empire, represented the real value of the Kovno Circle: solidarity between factions within the Russian Empire and on a supranational basis connecting with Jewish communities abroad. 151 In order to avoid the censors Spektor wrote an initial letter to Asher on 28 October indicating that he would shortly be forwarding a halakhic treatise regarding an abandoned wife, in line with his well-known responsa on that topic. The title of the essay to follow the initial letter was to be Heye Im Pipiot, a traditional supplication taken from the High Holidays' prayers, and historically used by rabbinical authors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Nathans, p. 378.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Laskov, vol IV, p. 152.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Oppenheim, p. 119.

communicating news in times of persecution. 152 The task of writing the actual essay was reportedly assigned to Lipschitz, who, after completion had it copied by a calligrapher and following approval by Spektor it was posted to Asher on November 3rd. Included in this missive was a reference to the memorandum from Minister Ignatiev, citing its content from HaLevanon. 153 It also expressed frustration with the lack of results from the recent gathering in St. Petersburg, and lamented that in general the situation of Jews in Russia was worse than any other in Jewish history. The memorandum suggested that even in the Middle Ages, during which time Jews were attacked by mobs, the government often offered protection. In Russia the opposite was true, with the government cited as complicit, so that Jews lacked defense and were left completely vulnerable. The note closed with the plea that the community had no one in Russia able to help or protect them against the atrocities being perpetrated regularly and with impunity, so that Jews had no choice but to ask for help from their brethren abroad. 154 Spektor requested two specific approaches: either trying to find a way to bribe Russian ministers, which had been a time-tested strategy for oppressed Jewish communities; or to approach major newspapers, specifically naming the Times of London in an attempt to persuade European governments to exert pressure on the tsar and his administration to improve their treatment of the Jews. Targeting the *Times* was insightful, as the paper was 'no friend of Russia' and 'had taken a specific interest in the Jewish Question a year before the pogroms'. 155 This strategy, focusing on the use of 'methods belonging to the modern world' can also likely be traced directly to Lipschitz, who was already a veteran user of the media and was intimately familiar with the potential of its wide

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, p. 154.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> 'Pekudat Ha-General Graf Ignatiev', *HaLevanon*, 7 October 1881, 11th issue, p. 83.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, pp. 24–28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> John Klier, 'The Times of London, The Russian Press, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882', *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, Paper no. 308, 1984, p. 2.

impact. 156 It is also possible that Lipschitz was aware that within Russia there was 'a special fascination with the attitudes of foreigners towards all things Russian'; hence, there existed a great sensitivity to criticism of Russian policy from foreign press outlets. 157 Asher was also requested not to reveal the authorship of the letter so as not to undermine Spektor's position with the government, and to have it translated into various languages as necessary to facilitate approaches to key sympathetic and influential individuals in England and in other European capitals. The writers emphasised that the new shtadlanim should highlight Russian Jews' complete innocence in connection with the pogroms, and to reveal the actual culprit elements of the Russian government itself. Upon receipt of the letter Dr Asher confirmed his understanding of the request and indicated that he had already forwarded the essay to Lord Rothschild, disguising the latter's name via a biblical reference to avoid the Russian censors. As this confirmation reached Spektor and Lipschitz, a further lengthy essay was prepared, reflecting Lipschitz's aggressive style and sent to Asher on November 15th, which expanded on the points outlined in the original letter. 158

Realising that their approach had reached a receptive audience, it was decided to expand 'the circle' of their activities and contacts beyond London. <sup>159</sup> As a first step Tzvi Hirsch was dispatched to Memel to enlist the well-known Dr Rülf in expanding the network of potential shtadlanim via the many contacts Rülf was known to have had. Upon receipt of the request accompanied by copies of the two *Heye Im Pipiot* letters, Rülf had the essays translated into German and disseminated the information in the name of the Memel committee along with his own request for support.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Oppenheim, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Klier, 'The Times of London', p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, pp. 29–36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

Evidence of Rülf's own political insight was his comment to Asher in late February that a benefit of public agitation against the Russian government could be to spotlight Ignatiev's policies as the cause of the protests, possibly giving him pause to ameliorate his treatment of Jews in support of his aspiration to the position of Secretary of State. 160 Lipschitz, as a keen political observer, presciently suggested that the foreign press emphasise that the government's encouragement of any type of riot could easily backfire on itself, a wholly undesirable outcome. 161 Further correspondence was initiated with Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt via couriers who carried the letters over the western border. Hirsch undertook to try to contact the Danish royal family, as the Danish princess Dagmar was married to the tsar, with the object of having her and/or her family intercede with the tsar on behalf of the Jews in Russia, an effort which ultimately failed. Other targets of Rülf's appeals included Rabbis Azriel Hildesheimer in Berlin, Seligman Bär Bamberger in Würzburg, and in Paris, Rabbi Zadok Kahn as well as Isidore Loeb of the Alliance. 162 The impact of these letters, contacts and efforts resulted in several public outcries. newspaper articles and meetings. In an article in the *Times of London*, published on 11 January and continuing on 13 January 1882, descriptions of the pogroms were listed as 'a scene of horrors that have hitherto only been perpetrated in medieval days during time of war'. 163 Included in this article were first-hand reports of murder, rape and arson on a widespread scale targeting Jews. The articles contained elements of the Heye Im Pipiot essay, but went into greater and specific detail, reflecting the receipt by the newspaper of first-hand reports from other sources as well, often gleaned from pages of the Russian press, and from correspondents in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Oppenheim, p. 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> 'The Persecution of the Jews in Russia', *The Times* (London, 11 January 1882), 30,401th issue, p. 4

East.<sup>164</sup> Additionally included were elements of Minister Ignatiev's memorandum of 3 September expressly and perversely blaming the Jews for the disturbances.<sup>165</sup> The piece concluded with a question, 'Are three and a half millions of human beings to perish because they are Jews'?<sup>166</sup> The articles elicited an immediate reaction from the Russian government denying the allegations, evidencing the impact and success of the effort in publicising the atrocities.<sup>167</sup> The Russian government launched a full-scale counter-publicity effort, focusing particularly on the allegation of mass rapes, which had particularly inflamed the English public.<sup>168</sup> The government was even able to produce a letter from the Günzburg brothers, likely under pressure from the authorities, denying cases of rape.<sup>169</sup> This position was in turn countered by a letter to the editor of *The Times* by Dr Asher in which he cited personal interviews in which at least 20 eyewitness accounts of rapes were recorded.<sup>170</sup>

Following the publication of the 11 and 13 January pieces in the *Times* a petition was received by the Lord Mayor of London signed by 'many distinguished names', the object of which was 'to give expression to the feeling excited in this country by the atrocities recently perpetrated on the Jews in Russia'. <sup>171</sup> In response to this request a meeting was called for 1 February to take place in London's Mansion House. While it is not known exactly what triggered the calling of the meeting, it is entirely feasible that the communication by Spektor and Lipschitz may be credited. The highlights of the meeting were that the 'hall was filled to the utmost' and that present were not

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>164</sup> Oppenheim, p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> 'The Persecution of the Jews in Russia (Continued)', *The Times* (London, 13 January 1882), 30,403rd issue, p. 4.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Oppenheim, p. 111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Asher Asher, 'To the Editor of The Times', *The Times* (London, 4 February 1882), 30,422nd issue, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> 'Persecution of the Jews in Russia', *The Times* (London, 2 February 1882), 30,420 issue, p. 4.

only members of the English Jewish elite but leaders of the Church as well. 172 The results of the meeting were the adoption of a lukewarm resolution to 'express opinion that the laws of Russia relating to the Jews tend to degrade them', tempered even further by the preface 'disclaiming any right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country', and a commitment to raise funds for relief. 173 Similar meetings were called in Glasgow by the Lord Provost on 2 February and in Manchester and Liverpool by their respective mayors on 3 February, all of which were well and ecumenically attended, and in general substantial funds were raised throughout the country for relief efforts. 174 Concurrently, and possibly as a result of letters sent directly by maskilim to contacts in the Unites States, a 'crowded' meeting chaired by the mayor was held on 2 February in Philadelphia which 'passed strong resolutions of sympathy with the persecuted Russian Jews, protesting against the spirit of medieval persecution thus revived'. 175

Despite the outcry from the articles and meetings, and other than funds collected for relief efforts, the impact on lives of the Jews in Russia was minimal, with sporadic pogroms continuing and the introduction of the 1882 'May Laws' which sought to further limit Jewish rights and livelihood. A communication from the Russian government on 11 February aptly stated, 'The report of British intercession being contemplated in favour of the Jews in Russia is so incompatible with the friendly relations existing between the British and Russian Cabinets'. <sup>176</sup> Indeed, there was likely a predisposition on the part of the British government to remain uninvolved and to risk negatively affecting relations with Russia, particularly over what could easily

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> 'The Persecution of the Jews in Russia', *The Times* (London, 3 February 1882), 30,421st issue, p.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> 'The United States', *The Times* (London, 3 February 1882), 30,421st issue, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> 'The Jews in Russia (5)', *The Times* (London, 13 February 1882), 30,429th issue, p. 5.

be considered a strictly internal matter between a legitimate government and its people. This would have certainly been the predictable outcome once William Gladstone (1809–1898) succeeded Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) as prime minister of the United Kingdom. While Disraeli was known to advocate anti-Russian views. Gladstone, who assumed office in April 1880, expressed opposite views, and indeed focused on this issue during the heated election campaign of 1879/80.177 Further supporting the government's position to avoid entanglement in the matter were the submissions of British consuls in Russia, i.e. that of Consul General Stanley: 'throughout these riots there has been little loss of life, and violations of women have, I believe, been most rare', and, 'no possible good can result to the Jews from such gross exaggerations as are contained in the accounts published by The *Times*'. 178 In a rebuttal to these findings, the London-based Russo-Jewish committee issued a statement signed by Sir Nathaniel Rothschild, 'The committee are unhappily in a position to prove too conclusively the occurrence of the outrages published in The Times . . . personal evidence affording corroborative evidence of the most undeniable kind.'179 The committee then proceeded to provide many testimonials from letters it had received, including excerpts from interviews held with victims, eyewitnesses, and refugees.

## **Emigration and Hibbat Zion**

Following the pogroms, many of the maskilim realised that their objective of securing equal rights within the Russian Empire would be unattainable and they began to advocate for emigration, a process which had already begun in the wake of the first

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> 'The Treatment of the Jews in Russia', *The Times* (London, 20 February 1882), 30,436th issue, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Sir Nathaniel de Rothschild, 'Statement by the Russo-Jewish Committee', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 3 March 1882), 675th issue, pp. 7, 8.

bouts of violence. The issue of emigration as a potential solution raged within the Jewish community and its leadership during 1881 and 1882, typified by an article appearing in HaMelitz in March of 1882, 'Yakiru v'yed'u' (To Appreciate and to Know) in which the position of the Jewish community in Russia was stated as simply untenable and that there was no choice but to emigrate. 180 Within the overall discussion the nascent organisations promoting Palestine as a destination, later to become chapters of Hibbat Zion, was also the subject of impassioned debate. The elite in St Petersburg remained opposed to wholesale emigration, lest this position be interpreted as disloyalty by the Russian government and that a plan to have six million Jews emigrate en masse was in any case simply unrealistic. Baron Günzburg convened a further meeting in St Petersburg in April 1882, ostensibly to deal with the issue of emigration, but as well to develop a strategy to address the overall position of Russian Jewry. Rather than Günzburg selecting those to be invited as had previously been the case, the choice to select delegates was given to individual communities, with the result that many of the attendees were traditional rabbis. including Spektor, marking the rise in political stature of the traditional rabbinate following the pogroms.<sup>181</sup> The meeting concluded with general support for renewed shtadlanut, in appealing to individual ministers and officials, attempting to convince them of the loyalty of Jews to the government and signalling a return to pre-maskilic times. The maskilic camp, however, pursued their goal of emigration as a solution, with the additional new focus on Palestine as a potential destination. As outlined in a previous chapter, several of the societies founded to provide relief to the victims of the pogroms later became founding members of the growing Hibbat Zion movement, promoting settlement and development of Palestine. Spektor's position regarding

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> Yehuda Leib Levin, 'Yakiru v'yed'u', *HaMelitz* (St Peterburg, 21 March 1882), 10th issue, pp. 170–74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 90.

settlement of Palestine in general was at root positive, citing the view that settlement of the Holy Land was a mitzvah which could be considered to be equivalent to all the mitzvot of the Torah. 182 Additionally, Spektor viewed such settlement in the current crisis as an effort 'directed to the rescue of oppressed and afflicted Jews'. 183 With respect to the Hibbat Zion societies in particular, Spektor's position was possibly best defined as early as September 1881 during a visit to Kovno by Avraham Shalom Friedberg (1838–1902), a founding member of Hibbat Zion. At that juncture Spektor seemed not to oppose the movement; however, he was reluctant to provide a public endorsement, citing the government's prohibition on such societies and also the then current illegality of mounting an appeal for financial support. Friedberg expressed the belief that once the government permitted the organisation to formally exist, which did not occur until 1890, Spektor could be persuaded to openly support it. 184 Despite Spektor's reticence regarding the issue of emigration, he did not shrink from providing support for those who sought to do so, especially wives and families who wished to follow a husband/father who had already departed. Responding to a letter from Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer urging Spektor to refrain from issuing letters of support to potential refugees, Spektor responded that while he would try to comply, 'they cry tears and refuse to leave my home until I write a letter for them . . . and I lack the strength to refuse. As well, many are wives joining their husbands who have already emigrated abroad. The right thing to do is to help these individuals.<sup>185</sup> Spektor's relationship with the Hibbat Zion movement was typically positive, although he was always careful to ensure that open support would only be forthcoming when government permission for the society could be secured. Always exceedingly

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan vol 2, pp. 378–79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 170.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Laskov, vol I, p. 114.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Letter from Spektor to Hildesheimer, 'B'H, Yom Vav, Erev Shabbos Kodesh, 20 Tammuz, 5742' in *Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan* vol 2, p. 435.

cautious, and aware of his prominent position within the Jewish community and the stature with which he was also regarded by the government, he would have taken great care with any public position that could negatively affect the community. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence that he supported the Hibbat Zion goals, i.e. in a letter dated 9 October 1883, Spektor cited 'dark days' and supported the establishment of similar societies in England, France and America to encourage settlements in the Holy Land. 186 As well, in advance of the initial gathering of the society in 1884 he hosted a meeting in his home in support of Hibbat Zion, attended by leading members of the Kovno community. In communicating about this meeting and regarding the upcoming gathering in Kattowitz, Spektor wrote that he would be 'satisfied and delighted for such a meeting to take place'. 187 In reciprocating this sentiment, one of the resolutions passed at Kattowitz was that thanks should be sent to Spektor for his support of the society. 188 Hibbat Zion's leaders continued to pursue Spektor's public support, with the full knowledge that 'his [Spektor's] words are like the fire of god and once his public endorsement was secured all rabbis would follow suit and promote the cause in their own congregations'. 189 As further evidence of Spektor's positive view of the activities of Hibbat Zion, in a collection raised in 1886 in memory of Sir Moses Montefiore to found a 'Mazkeret Moshe' in the Holy Land, listed as first in contributors from Kovno was Spektor, who donated 5 Rubles. 190 In 1887 Spektor was offered an official position within Hibbat Zion as an honorary gabbai, which, consistent with his reluctance to be publicly associated with the society he declined. 191 Finally, in 1890 when Hibbat Zion's Odessa committee was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan vol 2, Siman 193.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Laskov, vol II, p. 522.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 583.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Laskov, vol V, p. 175.

<sup>190 &#</sup>x27;Shemot HaMitnadvim B'Kovno', CZA, A9\145 p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Laskov, vol V, p. 250.

recognised officially by the government, Spektor publicly signed his name to an appeal for pre-High-Holiday collection plates for the colonies of settlers in Palestine. 192 Similarly in a letter written in 1891 to Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Slutzki (1861–1918) in which Spektor issued an endorsement for Slutzki's publication Shivat Zion, Spektor stated, 'my position is already known as is my agreement that the mitzvah of settlement of Eretz Yisrael is great indeed . . . and how fortunate are we in our generation to witness this with our own eyes'. 193 The view that Lipschitz successfully prevented Spektor from identifying himself publicly with Hibbat Zion seems misplaced. 194 It is more likely that Spektor exercised caution in taking a public position and in using his personal authority which could have been viewed in opposition to the St. Petersburg shtadlanim with whom he enjoyed a good working relationship and in supporting a group which had yet to secure government approval. At the same time, while other traditional rabbis began to publicly retreat from their previous support for Hibbat Zion as news was received that settlers in Palestine were not properly observing Torah laws, Spektor took a more sensitive approach regarding the observance of emigres. In writing to Rabbi Zadok Kahn in Paris he urged that Kahn communicate with Baron Maurice de Hirsch to ensure that proper religious functionaries would be provided in the Argentinian settlements funded by the Baron, which could ensure continued observance and as well that settlers' physical needs, including quality and suitable medical care, be provided. 195

In contrast to Spektor's position vis-à-vis Hibbat Zion, Lipschitz became one of the organisation's greatest and most vocal opponents. The evolution of his views is particularly of interest in that it appears that he was initially and generally in favour of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> Shimoff, p. 53 (Hebrew section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Oppenheim, p. 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 158.

emigration as well as supportive of Palestine as a destination. In a letter written to Baron Goratsii Günzburg in March of 1882, Lipschitz was one of five signatories advocating emigration, joining four others who were known as prominent maskilim and strong advocates of emigration: Shaul Pinchas Rabinowitz, Yehuda Leib Levin, Avraham Shalom Friedberg and Moshe Leib Lilienblum. 196 The letter made reference to the cooperation between the traditional rabbinate and maskilim in the recent effort led by Spektor to transmit information to London and concluded that no concrete result had thus far been achieved in improving the situation of the Russian Jewish community. The writers suggested that those who opposed emigration were sentencing Jews in the Pale to 'choke to death' as the government continued to restrict their ability to earn a livelihood. 197 The proposal was made to begin a collection, utilising the offices of Dr Rülf in Memel to underwrite the orderly emigration of Jews from Russia, either to America or, specifically citing the position of Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, to Palestine. Less than five months later, however, Lipschitz had completely changed direction and became opposed to emigration, with a passion equal to his recent advocacy. In a letter to Yehuda Levin in August of 1882 Lipschitz wrote that after careful consideration he was now against the idea of emigration and in particular he opposed the concept of settlement of Palestine and the society that advocated it. 198 He cited several reasons for his about-face; first that it logically made no sense to support an organisation that was itself illegal and which advocated illegal emigration to a land where settlement was also illegal. Further, in his opinion, 'God did not desire' this path and that the salvation of the Jews would not be in a 'natural' manner, which settlement of Palestine prior to the coming of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Laskov, vol I, pp. 196–203.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Ibid., pp. 436–43.

messiah would imply. <sup>199</sup> The latter opinion was the stated rationale behind Lipschitz's suggestion that the movement of Hibbat Zion represented 'false Messianism'. <sup>200</sup> A charitable view of Lipschitz's abrupt change would be that he came to believe the reasons he stated in opposition to emigration and Hibbat Zion. Another view was expressed in an article published in *HaMelitz* in 1899 which reported that in an early meeting of Hibbat Zion supporters in Kovno Lipschitz desired to be appointed in some capacity connected with the treasury. When such appointment was not forthcoming, he felt personally insulted and changed his opinion regarding the organisation. <sup>201</sup> Notwithstanding the overall negative and perhaps biased slant of the article, contemporaries of Lipschitz had heard and reported the same, and suggested that such a reaction would have been in character for Lipschitz. <sup>202</sup>

## Spektor: Traditional Rabbinate Leadership: 1882–1896

In some respects, the efforts of the traditional rabbinate's leadership in the period of 1881 and 1882 can be viewed as the beginning of a transition in the balance of power within the Russian Jewish community from the leadership of the Jewish intelligentsia to the Orthodox rabbinate.<sup>203</sup> Inasmuch as the traditional rabbinate had usually been viewed as passive, Lipschitz's aggressive style and the scale and success of the Kovno Circle cooperation caused the rabbinate to be viewed in a new, positive light. The traditional faction, which had never had illusions of equal rights, were therefore not overly surprised by the resurgence of antisemitism which had always existed and were thus prepared to deal with the government on traditional terms, rather than advocating radical changes. Already viewed as a

<sup>199</sup> Ihic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Salmon, *Do Not Provoke Providence*, p. 246.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Y Enikest, 'Im lo yagid', HaMelitz (Peterburg, 24 October 1899), 222nd issue, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 144.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*, p. 245.

compassionate and empathetic scholar and as one of the most publicly visible of the traditional rabbinate, Spektor assumed a leadership position in the hope for better relations with the government. In the initiative led by Lipschitz and Spektor the maskilim accepted Spektor's leadership and largely followed his and Lipschitz's direction regarding the gathering of information and its transmission.<sup>204</sup> This was not surprising inasmuch as maskilim in Russia had retained a strong connection with traditional culture, if not practice, through their use of the Hebrew language and biblical references in much of their written materials and had advocated that 'we should hold firmly to the faith of our fathers'. 205 The maskilim in general had 'retained strong allegiance to their Jewish background and often saw themselves as defenders of their brethren'. 206 The publicity garnered by the Heye Im Pipiot letters and the resultant publications in foreign newspapers and the many communal meetings made the traditional rabbinate a force to be reckoned with, thus increasing its visibility and stature as well with the government. The rabbinate had become a potential watchdog for the community with options to enlist help from abroad but was also more centrally viewed by the government as a more stable partner in its dealings with the Jewish community. Spektor had long written and advocated loyalty to the tsar and as a generally respected and even revered figure within the Jewish community he and his fellow clergy could be counted on as a steady, predictable, and reliable address for government dealings. As a mark of this transition, on 18 January 1882 a day of fasts and prayers was called by and for the nation as a whole. with a view towards time-tested, traditional means of supplication.<sup>207</sup> The valuing of tradition was so pervasive that even the most liberal university students, who usually

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Klier, Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882, p. 105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Brian Horowitz, *The Russian-Jewish Tradition: Intellectuals, Historians, Revolutionaries*, Jews of *Russia & Eastern Europe and Their Legacy* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017), p. 112. <sup>207</sup> Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, vol 2 (1825–1894), p. 286.

viewed observance with scorn, were reported to have donned tallit and tefillin and

joined in prayer and in rituals.<sup>208</sup> This phenomenon was perhaps not surprising as it

was only in recent past that rabbis were regarded as all-knowing, functioning as

spiritual guides, comforters in times of sorrow and even providing rudimentary

medical care when required.<sup>209</sup> At the same time, the success of Spektor and

Lipschitz's efforts placed them in a leadership position within the traditional camp

itself; other traditional rabbis strove to be involved, i.e. Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meisel

(1812–1912), who offered to travel to the West to secure further support for the

cause.210

During the period following the pogroms Spektor continued to focus on his primary

objectives – Torah scholarship and the critical importance of rabbinical leadership.

Additionally, several prominent issues arose during this era: the challenge of dealing

with Shemita year of 1888/9 in Palestine, the 1890 maskilic attack on the integrity of

the Kolel Perushim and in 1891 the government decree exiling Jews from Moscow.

Spektor also continued to be involved in scholarship, publishing part 2 of his *Nachal* 

Yitzchak commentary on the Shulchan Aruch and his two-part work covering

responsa, Ein Yitzchak and in becoming involved with halakhic issues both locally

and abroad, i.e. in the London shechita controversy of 1891.

The Shemita Question: 1888–1889

Early in 1888 Spektor was approached by Rabbi Zadok Kahn and Michel Erlanger

on behalf of Baron Edmond de Rothschild regarding the issue of the upcoming

Shemita year of 1888/9.<sup>211</sup> According to the strict letter of biblical law, every seven

<sup>208</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 76.

<sup>209</sup> Aronson and Marsden, p. 13.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>211</sup> Shimoff, p. 132 (English section).

years the land in Palestine was to be left fallow, with no work permitted. 212 In previous Shemita years, this issue had not arisen, as the strictly observant settlement in Palestine was primarily engaged in study, with no occupations that a communal leader in Europe would consider 'productive', and as a result were 'wretchedly poor' and classically depending on the Halukah, or charity from overseas.<sup>213</sup> With the establishment of settlements via immigration to Palestine in the years following the pogroms several working agricultural villages had been established, whose livelihoods depended upon farming of their crops. As a principal supporter of the settlements, the Baron was concerned that leaving the land without work during a year-long period might lead to the loss of the settlements altogether, as well as the likely starvation of the colonists. As covered in a previous chapter, Spektor believed that from a halakhic perspective, permission could be granted to work during the *Shemita* year.<sup>214</sup> At the same time, however, he was not prepared to issue such a ruling without consulting the local rabbinate in Palestine.<sup>215</sup> The hesitancy on Spektor's part may have been due to his understanding that this ruling would have significant implications for the future in the context of settlement of the Holy Land and the effect on religious observance: the apparent conflict between observing a biblical precept, Shemita, while engaging in the similarly biblical imperative of developing the Holy Land. 216 Supporting the dispensation authored by Rabbis Mohilever, Trunk and Klepfish, Spektor agreed to join the rabbis and added his signature to the document permitting work during the year. In doing so, he cited the importance of 'saving lives' by ensuring that crops could be maintained, avoiding

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Tanach, Leviticus 25:4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Kaplan, Penslar, and Sorkin, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Laskov, vol VI, p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Shimoff, p. 133 (English section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Arye Edrei, 'From Orthodoxy to Religious Zionism: Rabbi Kook and the Sabbatical Year Polemic', *Dine Israel*, 26–27 (2009), pp. 45–145 (p. 49).

starvation in the colonies as well as following the aforementioned three rabbis in expanding the meaning of 'saving lives' to include economic loss. <sup>217</sup> He also commented specifically on his hesitation in being the first rabbi to issue the ruling: 'I did not come out [with the ruling] until today, because I did not wish to be alone in a new matter, as is my practice in such instances'. <sup>218</sup> Spektor's initial finding that the waiver was warranted and in his eventually concurring with the official issuance of the allowance marked a clear transition in rabbinical thought in addressing 'the chasm separating past and present' conditions. <sup>219</sup> In response to a changing and challenging environment Rabbi Moses Sofer had attempted to elevate even rabbinic ordained prohibitions to the level of biblical proscriptions whereas Spektor had done exactly the opposite, finding a way to permit a biblically explicit injunction, marking an historic and ground-breaking halakhic accommodation to modernity.

## The Kovno Kolel Controversy: Spektor's Response

Another aspect of Spektor's assumption of a communal leadership position was in the establishment of the Kovno Kolel. Spektor's agreement to locate the institution in Kovno had been predicated by him upon general agreement that his son, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, would act as administrator of the *kolel*. Shortly after the *kolel* began functioning, however, Rabinowitz departed the position due to financial considerations.<sup>220</sup> In a meeting held in Kovno to decide on a replacement for Rabinowitz it was agreed that Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer (1837–1907), formerly the rabbi of St. Petersburg and 'a disciple of Salanter and one of the outstanding figures in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Heter Shemita' (Kovno, 1888), CZA, A9\10-2-3T, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Laskov, vol VI, p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Jay R. Berkovitz, 'Rabbinic Culture and the Historical Development of Halakhah', in Jonathan Karp, William D. Davies, and Adam Sutcliffe, eds., *The Cambridge History of Judaism Volume 7, The Early Modern World*, *1500*–*1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 370.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 224.

Mussar movement' would take charge.<sup>221</sup> Blazer had been involved along with Salanter in allocating the founding donation towards the kolel and with Salanter had been closely involved with its management.<sup>222</sup> During Blazer's tenure in St. Petersburg, he had managed to amass substantial wealth, so that at the time of his arrival in Kovno he might have been 'the richest rabbi of his time'. 223 His departure from St Petersburg was attributed to continued controversy with the local maskilim as well as to rumours of his having embezzled local funds, although these allegations were never proven.<sup>224</sup> The study of Mussar and its philosophy had been a target of criticism from both maskilim who believed it undermined their goal of advancing the Enlightenment and as well from the traditional faction. This latter group, whose efforts were championed by Lipschitz, were opposed to the movement's philosophy, as advocated by Salanter, 'in which both intellect and spirit were to be cultivated and rejected the merely mechanical observance of religious precepts'. 225 Lipschitz had been a proponent of strict observance of all, even minor, laws and tradition and also believed that Mussar detracted from serious Torah study. This issue continued to pervade the Kovno Kolel throughout the 1880s, although it never became fractious due to the use of separate study halls at the kolel, allowing each student to pursue his own study interests and maintaining the presence of Spektor as a peace-keeping entity. Nonetheless, from 1883 onwards the maskilic press issued periodic attacks on the kolel, aimed predominantly at its Mussar teachings.<sup>226</sup> The attacks against the kolel and against Blazer in particular reached a crescendo in 1890, with the maskilic press implying mismanagement of the kolel's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement, p. 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 345.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Jacob Katz, 'Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective' pp. 3–17, in Peter Y. Medding, ed. *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 2 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 353.

finances, implicating Blazer and suggesting a misuse of funds, perhaps capitalising on the, 'odour of controversy' that followed Blazer from his time in St Petersburg.<sup>227</sup> In an article appearing in HaMelitz in January 1890 the editor Alexander Zederbaum (1816–1893) authored an 'open letter' to Spektor, attempting to bring to his attention the alleged mischief taking place at the kolel. 228 He prefaced his remarks with the comment that under normal circumstances he would not have aired the matter in public and instead would have written privately. However, he was convinced that the letter would never have been passed to Spektor by the latter's retinue. In the letter Zederbaum stated that a chilul hashem, a desecration of God's name, was being perpetrated by those who 'used' Spektor for improper purposes. This group of individuals, naming specifically Blazer and Lipschitz, had become 'royalty' via their use of Spektor's prestige and that Spektor was not aware of this - suggesting that Spektor needed to examine the *kolel*'s finances for himself. Following these public accusations Spektor appointed independent auditors to review the financial situation of the kolel. 229 Satisfied that same were in order he then chose to respond publicly and specifically to Zederbaum, in an article entitled 'Elbono shel Torah', the humiliation of the Torah, published in HaZefirah on 2 February 1890. In some respects, this article represented Spektor's most heartfelt statements and beliefs, as he began the piece with 'from a broken heart I pour my soul out to the believers of Israel, due to the humiliation of the Torah'. 230 Spektor felt personally insulted by the accusations against the kolel, an institution that was close to his heart and aligned with his objectives: the perpetuation of Torah and the training of traditional rabbis. He stated that it was for this reason he chose to respond, while under normal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Zederbaum, 'Divrei Shalom V'emet', p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 355.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Spektor, 'Elbono Shel Torah', pp. 77–78.

circumstances and even in the face of criticism against him personally, he had always chosen to remain silent, 'as a man of peace and one who honours every individual, as is recognised by all who know me'.231 It was only now 'that they come to steal the delight of my eye, the gathering of Torah scholars that my very life is intertwined with them' that Spektor felt the need to respond directly and powerfully. 232 Using unusually strong language directed at his accusers, including 'have they no shame' and 'unbridled insolence', he defended the Kolel as well as those who worked with him, presumably Blazer and Lipschitz, who had been the direct targets of Zederbaum's piece. In addressing the allegation that he was being 'used', Spektor responded vehemently that 'to those who say that I do not have a mind of my own, and worse that I am being used for other people's goals without my knowledge . . . I can only point to decades of rabbinical service, thousands of responsa, deep involvement with communal affairs and close connections with important leaders of our nation, both near and far – how can it ever be said that I am without knowledge and awareness'?233 Ending the piece. Spektor stated that he had said all he was prepared to say on the topic, that he had spoken from 'a heart torn to pieces' - he also preemptively mentioned that there would be those who would still allege that others had written his response, which indeed occurred as Zederbaum claimed Lipschitz's authorship of the piece, even though Spektor testified that the entire work was his own.234

### 1890s Heye Im Pipiot Appeals: Change of Strategy

In the spring of 1890, there were rumours that Jews in major cities might be subject to expulsion and these proved prescient as in 1891, when the Governor General of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas*, p. 355.

Moscow was replaced with Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, an order was issued to expel the Jews; not only the Jews that had settled there illegally but also the privileged Jews of Moscow, who felt that due to their economic status they would always be safe. In St. Petersburg as well it was reported that 'groups of Jews, including well-dressed women, are to be seen in the streets, under the escort of gendarmes, going to the police stations before they are started for the frontier'. 235 In reacting to this news, Spektor again issued a series of Heye Im Pipiot appeals, concerned that 'the ship of Israel, caught in a tempest was sinking. . . . and it is not within our power to save it'. 236 These appeals were initially addressed to the Alliance in Paris via Rabbi Kahn and subsequently sent to Rabbi Hermann Adler in London and Mendel Baumgarten (1828-1908) in Vienna. In these appeals he lamented the helplessness of Russian Jewry, who lacked their classic tools of shtadlanut and bribery due to insufficient funds and unhelpful government connections to mount an effective campaign. In a departure from the 1881 effort, and due to their failure to effect any substantial positive changes, and perhaps in an attempt to raise the stature of the traditional rabbinate vis-à-vis the government, his recommendations did not include an attempt to publicly shame the Russian government into changing their policies, as had previously been the tactic. Rather the opposite approach was adopted: appealing to local Russian ambassadors in western countries to influence the Russian government to provide better treatment to Jews, attempting to arrange a meeting for western dignitaries with the tsar to explain that his Jewish subjects were loyal, and to have published in local newspapers that also enjoyed Russian circulation the fact that Jews were faithful Russian subjects. He also advocated attempting to set a meeting with the tsar for the same purpose when he visited

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> 'Berlin Closed to the Exiles - Most of Them Coming Here', *The New York Times* (1 June 1891), vol 40, No.12,406 edition, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 3, p. 173.

Copenhagen without his ministers, whom the Jewish community blamed as the instigators of the poor treatment they were suffering.<sup>237</sup>

# The Shechita Controversy in England

During 1891, Rabbi Spektor became involved in a controversy which arose in England regarding shechita, ritual slaughter. Following the pogroms of 1881–1882 Jews had immigrated to England from the Pale, and to their surprise had found that the standards of Kashrut which prevailed there were, in their opinion, lax. 238 It was reported that the group organised by these immigrants, Hevra Machzikei Hadas, had approached the chief rabbi, Hermann Adler, with a request that such conditions be investigated and improved as might have been necessary. These approaches were apparently rebuffed by Adler, who termed the immigrants 'people who came over here uncultivated and uncivilised'. 239 As a result, the Hevra felt that there was no other option but to establish their own shechita board and appointed a well-known traditional scholar, Rabbi Abraham Abba Werner (1836–1912) to take charge. The London Bet Din, under the supervision of Rabbi Adler reacted immediately and placed a prohibition against any meat under the Hevra's supervision. The controversy became widely known, with the London rabbinate attracting support from the maskilic publication *HaMelitz*, which not only voiced support for the Bet Din but also maligned the Hevra as ungrateful immigrants and accused the society of enriching itself from the money it collected.<sup>240</sup> In order to conclusively support the establishment's position, Adler wrote to Spektor, asking that Spektor reaffirm the prohibition that the Bet Din had placed on meat supervised by the Hevra. Spektor responded immediately in the affirmative, utilising assertive language, stating 'I was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Ibid., pp. 175–76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> Shimoff, p. 113 (English section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> Article in *The Jewish World*, 20 November 1891, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> 'Ezrat Sofrim', *HaMelitz* (Peterburg, 1 December 1891), 257th issue, pp. 1–3.

shocked and pained to hear the bad rumour that a group from Russia and Poland, in the name of *Machzikei Hadas* in London want to break away and make a separate kehila of London, against the will of the chief rabbinate - this is very bad and shameful in my eyes and is categorically prohibited'. 241 Spektor further stated that those who attempted to challenge the authority of the chief rabbinate were ingrates, almost certainly in view of the home provided in England for refugees from the Russian Empire.<sup>242</sup> Spektor emphasised that unity of the community was paramount and that new immigrants should not be attempting to undermine the chief rabbi or the community's established institutions.<sup>243</sup> In retrospect, and based upon facts related by those who were present in England as well as Adler's own admission that 'only four of the ninety-six shops in the East End' sold meat of questionable kashrut, it was clear that the Hevra's concerns were valid, in that if any shops under a supervision were found to sell non-kosher meats, the supervision itself, under normal circumstances, would have been called into question.<sup>244</sup> In view of the fact that only a few days elapsed between Adler's letter to Spektor on 19 November and Spektor's response dated 25 November it seems probable that Spektor was motivated primarily by political concerns: ensuring that Adler and his community's support for Russian Jewry remained intact and keeping England a welcome home for potential refugees. Clearly Spektor's response in the matter of the London Shechita controversy differed considerably from his 1878 response to the controversy surrounding the use of chicory, cited earlier. In that case Spektor's response to the chief rabbi had merely been to apologise for becoming involved in what was an internal English matter while in the post-pogrom era Spektor had necessarily

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Letter from Spektor to Adler, 25 November 1891 in *Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan* vol 1, p. 337.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Shimoff, p. 118 (English section).

recognised the reality and political imperative of ensuring a continued home for refugees and incorporated this view in his response to the Machzikei Hadas encroachment on chief rabbi Adler's authority.

During the period that followed and despite declining health, Spektor remained active in communal leadership. Typical examples include his issuance of a kol korey, an appeal, published to solicit funds to ameliorate the effects of a famine which struck the Pale in 1892.245 As well, he issued an appeal for relief following multiple fires during the summer of 1895 which devastated at least eight towns, including Brest and Eishishok (now Eisiskes in Lithuania, located about 30 miles southwest of Vilna).<sup>246</sup> More significantly, the approach consistently adopted by Spektor of respect for the tsar and the government and through the time-tested medium of shtadlanut and cooperation was increasingly appreciated by both the government and the Jewish community. This position had been stressed by Spektor throughout his life, and was even included in his will written in 1888, published after his death in 1896, in which he specifically included the importance of reverence for the tsar and obedience to the laws of the country.<sup>247</sup> The realignment towards the traditional rabbinate and its leadership had already begun in the wake of the 1881-1882 pogroms in which the Jewish community realised the futility of asking for or expecting the granting of equal rights, marking the decline in confidence in the approach of the maskilim. The effort mounted by Spektor and Lipschitz in the Heye *Im Pipiot* appeals heightened the appreciation of the historic role of the rabbinate as caretakers of the nation, particularly in difficult times. From the government's position, the stability of the traditional rabbinate and their emphasis on obedience to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>245</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Kol Korey', *HaZefirah* (Warsaw, 26 January 1892), 12th issue, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, 'Ezrat Sofrim - Ezra B'tzarot', *HaMelitz* (Peterburg, 1 July 1895), 133rd issue, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> 'Ha-ataka Mi-tzvat Admor R' Yitzchak Elchanan, ztz'l Av Bet Din Kovno', *HaZefirah* (Warsaw, 12 April 1896), 71st issue, pp. 346–47.

the tsar and his administration contrasted with the aggressive and vocal demands of the maskilim at a time of general unrest within the empire. This instability, caused by the rise of socialism and Marxism, was worrisome to the government and the disaffected maskilic inclination to gravitate to those groups resulted in the government seeking more reliable partners.<sup>248</sup> If Jews could not be integrated into Russian society, at least they could be controlled as a loyal and separate group, which benefited the rabbinic leadership in the government's view as well.<sup>249</sup> This view manifested itself in the selection of members to attend the rabbinical commission scheduled to take place in 1893-1894. The traditional leadership mounted a popular campaign on behalf of its delegates, publishing and distributing posters promoting voting for the traditional slate of delegates. The Jewish community, as had been the case in the previous conference of 1879, again preferred traditional rabbis; however, in this instance in contrast to the attendees selected by the government in 1879, several traditional rabbis were selected to attend. These included Shmuel Mohilever and Tzvi Hirsch Rabinowitz, with the latter appointed as chairman, perhaps as a sign of respect for Spektor.<sup>250</sup> This trend continued even after Spektor's passing, building on the groundwork laid by Spektor and Lipschitz, as the government had realised that the Orthodox faction could 'provide a counterweight to the radical and left-wing elements in Jewish society, not only in terms of religious, but also political conservatism'. 251 As a result, by the next and final rabbinical commission held in 1910, almost all the delegates were Orthodox rabbis, a tribute to the careful, consistent and strategic work done by Spektor and Lipschitz throughout their productive partnership together.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Stanislawski, 'Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate', p. 430.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*, p. 249.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>251</sup> Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia*, p. 253.

### Conclusion

During the period of Spektor and Lipschitz's activity the Jewish people in the Russian Empire faced unprecedented threats. These included an undermining of religious traditional practice, the devaluation of the role of the traditional rabbinate, physical danger via riots and pogroms, and the continued stresses of everyday life in poverty. Spektor and Lipschitz proved to be the right men in the right place at this watershed moment in the long history of the Jewish nation. Although vastly differing in attitude, temperament, and approach, each in his own way, working in parallel and in partnership confronted each of these threats, provided a platform and model for the continuation of Orthodox Jewish practice and political leadership through a turbulent period and into the new century. Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz, as the leading public spokesman for the traditional movement, rose to effectively defend traditional Orthodoxy. Critically, he countered the maskilic domination of the press from his earliest written articles and throughout the 1870s as an aggressive and prolific writer. He not only defended the Orthodox position and practice but went on the offensive against the maskilim, and by doing so provided the traditional movement with renewed self-confidence and pride. His articles glorified the history of Jewish tradition in preserving the nation and at the same time demeaned those who chose to chip away at tradition. Lipschitz proved to be an important engineer of the transition of the Orthodox movement and its rabbinate in the Russian Empire from a defensive position, reacting to the rapidly changing social and religious environment to a proud, assertive and confident entity. His actions facilitated the traditional faction's re-claiming the initiative in assuming a leadership position both vis-à-vis the community and the government in the wake of the pogroms of 1881–1882. With the community under literal siege and with the failure of both the maskilim and the elite

in St. Petersburg to stem the violence and to provide protection, it was the traditional faction, including Hasidic leadership, on the basis of the respect it had historically attracted and resorting to time-tested and newly expanded, political shtadlanut which regained a central position in communal leadership within the Russian Empire. In conjunction with his widely publicised advocacy on behalf of tradition, Lipschitz was a zealous promoter of the primacy of rabbinic leadership. 252 With Spektor as his patron, Lipschitz's work enjoyed a great advantage and substantially increased his chances of success. Following Spektor's passing Lipschitz lost his platform and through the coming decades until his own death he attempted to secure alternate, prominent platforms, but was unable to replace the unparalleled authority which Spektor wielded. These efforts included seeking placement and publicising of his work, *Sefer Machazekei Hadas* via the Alliance, in which he cited support from 'great scholars of Israel' and which approach was promptly rejected by the Alliance via their note, 'we have no use for this publication'. 253

In Spektor it is quite likely that the model of the quintessential traditional rabbinic leader may have been identified. Described as 'a man of strong character and an independent turn of mind', he strove to keep in fine balance 'his people's immediate material needs with their continuing [religious] observance'. Throughout his life, and particularly during his tenure as rabbi of Kovno, Spektor kept several objectives clearly in focus: preservation of the ideal of Torah study and observance, the perpetuation of the traditional rabbinate and easing the everyday burdens of Jewish life via halakhic flexibility as a path to maintain a cohesive traditional Jewish community in changing and challenging times. In these goals, he was, during the

<sup>252</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 80.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>253</sup> 'Paris, le 25 Octobre 1903', 25 October 1903, The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem, Halperin Archive P127/258.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Vital, *A People Apart*, pp. 351–52.

period of his activity, overwhelmingly successful, while at the same time, and as a result of his efforts he earned the admiration and love of not only of Jews but also the respect of the broader Russian community. The press reported that 'the gentile Russian people spoke with respect of this rabbi'. 255 As well, in his final days, daily bulletins of his condition reportedly were published in the Russian newspapers, even in the antisemitic ones.<sup>256</sup>

In reviewing Spektor's legacy and his position as a figure of transition within the rabbinate, the question that begs attention is what made him unique in an era in which several distinguished scholars also operated, i.e. Rabbis Naftali Tzvi Berlin and Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. While some may point to Spektor's fame as part of the Kovno Circle, this activity was only one aspect of Spektor's empathetic goal of ensuring the safety of the Jewish nation. There were views that Spektor was manipulated by Lipschitz, i.e. 'whatever Lipschitz put in front of Spektor he signed'; however, it is more likely Spektor was acutely aware of his prominence and that he represented the Jewish community in the eyes of the government, causing him to consider his affiliations and public statements with great care. 257 Spektor's partnership with Lipschitz was one of 'eyes open', utilising the resources of the entire community, spanning practice and location in the greater interest of Russian Jewry. Other leading scholars, including Soloveitchik, 'felt the dangers to the traditional Jewish world, were eager to counteract them, yet at the same time were afraid of modernity'. 258 As a result, such prominent great halakhic figures eschewed serving in rabbinical posts, even if same would have been available in an environment when

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> 'Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, Oberrabbiner in Kowno', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 12 March 1896), 21st issue, pp. 425-26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>256</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 141.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>257</sup> Aryeh Leib Horowitz, '20 Shevat 1890' (Kovno), CZA, A9\71-3T.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> Levin, 'Orthodox Jewry and the Russian Government', p. 188.

many communities were dispensing with formal rabbinical leadership, and were part of a group 'who are reluctant to render practical decisions'. 259 In contrast, Spektor consistently and courageously confronted and empathetically adjudicated halakhic issues which arose from contemporary challenges as not only a great scholar but as a fearless posek. His ruling leniently in matters of agunot was particularly significant when one considers the gravity and consequences of such decisions. Women who remarried without the benefit of a get or a rabbinical ruling certifying the death of a previous spouse would be shunned and excluded from any traditional Jewish community. The prohibition on marriage without benefit of such release was biblical in nature and any children born of such a union would be considered mamzerim (bastards), permanently prohibited from joining from any Orthodox Jewish community.<sup>260</sup> Spektor's self-confidence and courage to rule when others were fearful of doing so set him apart.<sup>261</sup> It was reported that in cases when individuals and women in particular came before him, he saw the needs of the person, where other rabbis saw a legal case and commentaries. <sup>262</sup> Spektor went to every extreme legally possible to rule permissively, even in simple questions of kashrut, knowing that the poor needed the meat for the survival of their families, attempting to act as a bulwark against the trend of increased stringencies.<sup>263</sup> In responding to numerous questions regarding the situation of agunot, often from overseas, a classic response on the topic began with a description of the women themselves, 'I have been asked from America that there are women, sitting as agunot, destitute and pious', before ruling permissively to free them from their fate.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>259</sup> Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>260</sup> Joseph Karo, *Shulchan Aruch*, 2012th ed. (Jerusalem: Tzurat Ha-Daf), Even Ha-Ezer, Se'eef 4, Halacha 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>261</sup> Tchernowitz, *Pirkei Chaim*, p. 151.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>263</sup> Shimoff, p. 148 (English section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>264</sup> Spektor, *Ayn Yitzchak* vol 2, p. 11.

Spektor's support of Hibbat Zion and his interaction with the St Petersburg elite were likely a function of his desire to save the lives of persecuted Jews, as he referred to these endeavours as pikuach nefesh. His constant involvement in the needs of the Jews in the Russian Empire and abroad endeared him to and connected him with Jewish communities everywhere: 'all of Israel, mitnagdim, Hasidim, Hareidim and maskilim all loved rabbeinu, and he loved them all', and marked him as the ideal of a traditional rabbi, facilitating the transmission of this role into the future. 265 As was recorded in one of the many obituaries, 'His example awakened emulation, his wise tolerant behaviour contributed significantly to inhibiting the threatened split between fathers and sons, bringing them closer together and keeping their mutual relationship peaceful'.266 The admiration and outpouring of grief at his passing marked how universally beloved Spektor was, which was also represented by the production of an unusual posthumous medal as testimony to the high regard in which he was held by the Jewish community, with the medal featuring his image on the obverse and his ohel, gravesite, on the reverse (Appendix item 22). The piece was produced in several dimensions and substrates, including brass and silver, and was widely commercialised, likely catering to wider community of those who venerated and held the rabbi in such high esteem. As well, most of the surviving medals were or had been affixed with hooks, so it is entirely possible that the piece could have been carried as an amulet, as was a practice in the period.<sup>267</sup> His image continued to be revered, joining the pantheon of similarly honoured rabbinical figures as depicted in a

<sup>265</sup> 'Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan Einenu', *HaMelitz* (Peterburg, 8 March 1896), 47th issue, p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>266</sup> 'Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector z'tzl', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 26 March 1896), 25–26th issue, pp. 537–39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia: Select Documents, ed. Freeze and Harris, p. 222.

lithograph from the early twentieth century displayed in Germany and possibly in Helsinki as well (Appendix item 23).<sup>268</sup>

Spektor's affiliation with the Kovno Kolel may have been his most lasting legacy; enabling him to preside over the training and ordination of a new generation of rabbis, 'he ordained more rabbis than any of his contemporaries'.<sup>269</sup> In doing so, the *kolel*, with Spektor's support, attempted to imbue its graduates with leadership qualities 'that could withstand the modernising trends', ensuring the survival of tradition into the future.<sup>270</sup> A witness to Spektor's success in this objective was the renaming in 1896 of the nascent and now leading Orthodox rabbinical seminary in New York as the Rabbi Yitzchak (Isaac) Elchanan Theological Seminary, 'RIETS', as a tribute to this truly outstanding individual.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>268</sup> Courtesy of Professor Simo Muir, University of Helsinki.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>269</sup> Shimoff, p. 9 (English section).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>270</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 180.

## **Chapter 5: Rabbinic Roles: Choices Made, Challenges Met**

As a result of the environmental and societal changes and challenges to the traditional rabbinical office in both the West and East described in the previous chapters, it became incumbent upon rabbis to react, whether to modernise, compromise and accommodate, resist the new societal trends and influences or adopt a new mission altogether. In doing so, rabbis could make choices as has been demonstrated in the discussion of three high profile rabbinical figures; personal and communal, enabling them to further develop and exploit their 'soft skills', including mobility, philanthropy, or political action and to exercise leadership via new or parallel paths other than legal scholarship, their traditional 'hard skills'. In response to these historic challenges, the period presented opportunities for outstanding individuals to depart the insulation and familiarity of traditional rabbinical responsibilities and reconfigure the platform of their historic role, with an imperative of urgency. Rabbis found that their authority, which previously rested on halakhic scholarship, adjudication of disputes and upholders of tradition was becoming less relevant in an environment in which such ideals increasingly failed to address the growing communal divide, the often-urgent needs of their constituents or the availability of alternative and less demanding and thus attractive religious ritual. Similarly, rabbinical jurisdiction, its sphere of influence, the extent or range of a rabbi's authoritative power, which depended upon those who sought, recognised or considered themselves bound by his authority, was in jeopardy.

The challenges to the office of the rabbinate during the period of study were, in some respects, unique to the era, and in other ways marked an ongoing and evolving process which originated earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which continued with greater intensity in conjunction with the rise and influence of the press. Rabbis in earlier

periods had also dealt with pressures facing the community and the office, which differed in both West and East. In the West, 'emancipation and acculturation were the basic issues determining the course of German Jewish history between 1780 and 1871'.1 The loss of rabbinical authority in civil and religious matters contained in paragraph 30 of the Emancipation Edict of 1812, 'was accompanied by a decline in the rabbinate itself'.2 Traditional rabbis, foremost among these was Rabbi Akiva Eger (1761–1837), attempted via his responsa to uphold the primacy of religious authority and oppose any innovation in the religious structure or practice. However, due to the increased incursion and appeal of the reform movement, by the 1830s the rabbinate itself was undergoing change and was no longer associated solely with the Orthodox. In an 1838 front-page advertisement in the AZJ for an assistant rabbi for the significant congregation in Breslau the candidate was referred to as a, 'Theologen' rather than as a rabbi, and was expected to have, 'wissenschaftliche Bildung', academic training.<sup>3</sup> It was also noteworthy that the successful applicant, despite strong traditional opposition, was Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), considered to be one of the founders of Reform Judaism, 'marking the first time in Germany an avowed Reformer assumed a rabbinical position in one of the largest Jewish communities in Germany.'4 Thereafter, and through the 1840s, which also witnessed the professionalisation of the western rabbinate through the acquisition of secular education and increasingly doctoral degrees, German Jewry remained divided between the traditional and reformers. The traditionally observant and its rabbinate faced an increasing loss of position and by the 1850s a movement to segregate itself from the reformers began with the founding in Frankfurt am Main in 1850 of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Meyer, vol 2, p. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> lbid., p. 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> 'Eröffnete Concurrenz für Rabbinats-Assessor-Stelle', *AZJ* (Liepzig, 12 April, 1838), no. 44 ed., p. 173

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Meyer, vol 2, p. 159.

Israelite Religionsgesellschaft (IRG), which by 1853 boasted a membership of 180 families, a school and Rabbi S.R. Hirsch as its rabbi, a movement which was formalised following the 1876 government ruling allowing for secession from the general Jewish community. From the late 1870s onwards, the Jewish community in general and also the rabbinate faced the new challenge of political antisemitism, represented among others by Wilhelm Marr, Adolf Stöcker and Heinrich von Treitschke, as described in a previous chapter, and which occasioned a forceful response from Rülf. The emergence and growing appeal of Zionism from the 1890s onwards was mostly opposed by the western rabbinate, with their position that Judaism was a universal religion rather than national, which occasioned a response from Herzl, terming the rabbis, *Protestrabbiner*. §

In the East, the interference by the Russian government with communal affairs, including the rabbinate, emerged as a prominent challenge to the authority and jurisdiction of rabbis. This interference included measures such as the appointment of Crown Rabbis, the attempt to impose secular education on Jewish students and the dissolution of the Kahal, covered in previous chapters. The dissolution of the Kahal structure in particular had created a void in communal leadership and set off a struggle for primacy by contenders for leadership and representation of the Jewish community to the Russian government, particularly between the maskilim and the rabbinate and also between Hasidim an non-Hasidic leadership, essentially a conflict over power and influence.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the increased dislocation, urbanisation and attendant economic deprivation of the Jewish population in the wake of the end of serfdom in 1861 by the 'Liberator' Tsar Alexander II, represented important

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Meyer, vol 3, p. 293.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Biale et al., p. 270.

challenges for the rabbinical leadership. The Jewish community's economic structure had been in many respects intertwined with the feudal system and its end caused considerable loss of place, impoverishment and relocation. Jews had been, 'overconcentrated in a decrepit semi-feudal economy' and, 'the immediate effect was to loose an economic crisis upon Russian Jewry, observed in the growing pauperization of large numbers of Jews', particularly in rural areas.<sup>8</sup> The traditional rabbinate was also threatened by the growing influence of the maskilim, whose political stature registered a significant increase with the founding of the OPE in 1863. This agency, founded and funded by the wealthy metropolitan Jewish elite, advocated for religious reform and encouraged direct attacks on the rabbinate through press outlets they equally controlled. The exchange of articles between Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz and Shmuel Mohilever, which played out in full view of public opinion via the press epitomized the debate between the factions. This exchange of views echoed earlier periods, i.e. during the reign of Nicholas I in which Rabbi Yitzchak Volozhin had been receptive to the government's initiative to introduce secular subject to Jewish schools with this position opposed by both Yisroel Salanter and Mechem Mendel Schneerson. Indeed, the Hasidic leadership, 'while adopting modern political methods, vehemently rejected the values of the modern world'.9 Lipschitz's aggressive and absolutist position in support of restrictive Orthodoxy and Mohilever's advocacy for limited compromise, both represented efforts to reset rabbinical roles in a changing environment. Their debate and its principal focus regarding visions for societal unity continued with increased intensity in the wake of the pogroms of 1881. Mohilever's support of Hibbat Zion and Lipschitz's vocal opposition to the organisation and its objectives of emigration and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881*, p. 287.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Biale et al., p. 523.

settlement of Palestine continued against the background of the struggle for leadership within the Russian Jewish community.

This thesis has focused on the options available, and choices made by four individuals, including three key rabbinical figures operating within their traditional rabbinical roles during the principal period of study, 1865–1902, to transition their authority and jurisdiction beyond that which had historically defined their communal functions and to establish new platforms and initiatives upon which to engage creatively within Jewish societal realities. Rabbis Rülf, Mohilever and Spektor, the latter in important, targeted cooperation with his secretary, Yaakov Lipschitz, viewed themselves as wholly within the broad envelope of tradition and utilised this platform as a basis for action. Isaac Rülf, from his location in the northeastern-most reaches of Prussia, was uniquely positioned to experience and address the crises affecting Jews on both sides of the border and to have pioneered in attempting to erase the divider between the 'primitive' East and the 'civilised' West in advocating for a broader definition of Jewish community. He could be well described as 'a man in the middle', with dual foci in both East and West, responding to the crises, issues and rapid societal transition facing Jewish communities on both sides of the border. Shmuel Mohilever, based in Polish lands, was a witness to the erosive impact that maskilic culture was having upon traditional observance and even more critically the damage that the raucous public debate between the traditional and maskilic factions was having upon the unity of the Jewish community. Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor from his position in Kovno, operating as the leading *posek* of the generation, witnessed first-hand the pain being suffered by Jews as a result of both persecution within the Russian Empire and the needs of individuals living in poverty, attempting to function within the bounds of an increasingly restrictive traditional practice. Each of these

figures, originating from different backgrounds and circumstances, represented paradigms of a reconfigured rabbinical function, an office transformed by the approaches of these personalities in response to the challenges of the era. For the most part, each individual acted alone, forging their own unique paths, including via use of the public sphere and political action, attempting to redefine and innovatively expand the authority, jurisdiction and influence of the office beyond what it had been to what it could be.

With respect to Isaac Rülf, an original, virtually unknown and understudied historical figure, an individual without precedent in the transformation and use of the platform of the rabbinical office, this thesis has identified his use of the press, mobility and advocacy for cross-border solidarity as important features of his rise to international prominence. In view of his modest background, and his occupying a minor rabbinical position in a relatively remote western geography, Rülf's options in transforming his role were limited. Indeed, even in his immediate area his authority in the traditional halakhic realm was circumscribed, with the same being provided by the local *moreh* zedek. Taking advantage of his writing ability and his use of the media to publicise his special projects and world view provided a narrow means, initially via philanthropy, to expand his jurisdiction. Rülf's extraordinarily successful collections for eastern Jews in the famine of 1868/9, discussed in detail in an earlier chapter, provided insight into the extensive geographic reach and organisation of his efforts. His philanthropic work to support individual refugees and communities under stress was at the time renowned, as was his participation in the Kovno Circle and his standing as shtadlan in correspondence with Chancellor Bismarck in connection with Prussian expulsion decrees of 1885. Rülf's activities in the period of study ran in parallel to the more prominent debate regarding reform in the West and the struggles

for communal leadership and the outsized influence of the maskilim in the East and instead focused on the unifying work of philanthropy and equality of culture.

Much of the limited existing scholarship concerning Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever has appeared in connection with his work as part of the Hibbat Zion organisation and his founding of the *Mizrachi* movement within that group. Indeed, as termed by Yosef Salmon, he is primarily known, if at all, as 'the Rabbi of Hibbat Zion'. 10 This study expands the knowledge of his previously underestimated activities and presents Mohilever in a new light, in the role of peacemaker and advocate for change and compromise during the 1870s, a time of significant religious upheaval and during a period in which scholars believed served as a crucible for the development of a more restrictive Orthodoxy. Indeed, existing scholarship has focused primarily on the traditional faction's efforts to strengthen observance and to distance itself from any innovation or reform and has not adequately reflected the efforts of the main figure of compromise in the period of study; Mohilever. Scholarship dealing with the rabbinate during the period of study has instead dealt primarily with the rabbinical elite which group 'began to adopt a defensive position'. 11 This inward-looking strategy to isolate adherents from any modernising trends found root as well in the Mussar movement, which sought to 'immunize' its students against 'the 'dangerous influences' of the maskilim. 12 Emphasizing the traditional and intense study of Torah as a bulwark against outside influences has also been described as a foundational motivation in the establishment of veshivas such as the prominent school in Telz (now Telšiai about 50 miles northeast of Klaipėda in Lithuania), in the late 1870s in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Salmon, *Religion and Zionism*, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Bartal, The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772 - 1881, p. 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement, p. 152.

order to, 'regain former [traditional] glories, not only in Telz but in other places where the Haskalah had begun to spread'.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the mainstream traditionalists, Mohilever's role as an advocate of compromise and as an attempted peacemaker sets him apart. Although a traditional figure by upbringing, education, and Talmudic erudition, he was also the sole protagonist of this study to have had experience engaged in a commercial career. This likely provided him with an ability to view nuance and compromise as a viable path, which he continued to pursue throughout his career. Mohilever addressed the challenges and conflicts of the era by positing radical stances as almost a lone voice in the Orthodox camp. He used his substantial halakhic standing and authority as the principal public avenue available to him in a new and transformative manner; to expand his jurisdiction via the press and through mobility in advocating dialogue and reform to avoid what he viewed as destructive internecine fighting. His positions included adopting several of the reforms advocated by the maskilim, i.e. the importance of local languages, and critically, he broadened the definition of community to include those who might not be fully observant, but who worked for the good of the Jewish people, offering a radical, third path to inclusion other than 'in or out'. His mostly unsuccessful calls for compromise and civil dialogue among factions who held different viewpoints were equally important and stood out in an otherwise contentious environment.

Scholarship relating to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor has largely been limited to either his extensive written halakhic works, focusing primarily on the topic of *agunot* or his efforts along with Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz as part of the Kovno Circle. This thesis, while incorporating and building upon existing work, has centred upon

<sup>13</sup> Stampfer, *Lithuanian yeshivas*, p. 287.

Spektor as a transitional figure, who utilised the authority of his rabbinic platform and halakhic expertise to adapt traditional law to the changing times. His rulings in the case of agunot and in other areas of Halakhah reveal Spektor to have been an astute, politically aware individual, unafraid to challenge recent trends which had sought to impose added legal stringencies upon the observant community. His broadening of the concept of pikuach nefesh, the saving of lives, as a halakhic imperative to include economic suffering and especially emigration allowed him to become an early, albeit careful supporter of the Hibbat Zion movement. Spektor's flexibility and courage, in part formed on the basis of his independent rabbinical training and the poverty and attendant deprivation he and his family experienced as a young rabbi, underpinned his willingness to rule in complicated legal controversies in which other contemporary noted halakhic authorities refused to become involved, likely due to the gravity of the issues. By virtue of his empathetic and widely disseminated rulings, which stood in contrast to other contemporaneous trends towards more restrictive Orthodox practice, Spektor's authority became firmly grounded and internationally recognised. Using his renowned scholarship and responsa as a platform, his jurisdiction expanded considerably beyond his home position in Kovno. These efforts marked him as a key figure in attempting to preserve the traditional Jewish community within the bounds of historic, traditional observance. The reputation and great respect he earned by virtue of his scholarly activities allowed him to bestride the divide between religious and secular factions and to thus orchestrate a unified effort acting as shtadlan in defense of the manifold persecutions which the larger Russian Jewish community faced during the era. Yaakov Lipschitz distinguished himself through his continued and aggressive presence in the media via his authorship of numerous articles publicised in the press as well as the issuance of printed broadsides as an effective strategy of the Black Office, directed at preserving, strengthening and transitioning the traditional rabbinate in the Russian Empire to a self-confident and assertive central position. The influence of his activism was heightened by his privileged access to Spektor's scholarship and reputation.

The emergence of the Orthodox movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to threats from reform as a departure from the unitary traditional observance and practice that preceded it, extending into the period of this study, differed considerably from its manifestation in the West and East. In the West, communities were, 'open to the currents of the time and to German culture', allowing for the rapid incursion of religious reform.<sup>14</sup> In many Orthodox communities, there was a belief that they, 'were a minority among their co-religionists and their defense activities concentrated on specific issues', i.e. worship.<sup>15</sup> In response rabbis could attempt openness to secular influences without compromising their dedication to tradition in a way attempted by Hildesheimer. Alternatively they could segregate their adherents into insular units within the local Jewish community, adopting a position of *Austritt*, forming separate groups of traditional practice which would allow them to avoid contacts or interaction with others of the Reform movement, as was the case in the Frankfurt community led by Hirsch.

In the East, the majority of the Jews remained traditionally observant and there was no attempt to create separate Orthodox communities.<sup>16</sup> There was however an undertaking by the rabbinate to preserve, promote and control increasingly stringent traditional observance for the overall, unified Jewish community. The periodisation of this effort, in particular regarding the emergence of Orthodoxy in the Russian

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Bartal, *True Knowledge and Wisdom*, p. 186.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Levin, 'Denying Tradition: Academic Historiography on Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe', pp. 262-5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Empire as distinct from the unitary traditional practice that preceded it has been the subject of ongoing debate among scholars. Scholars disagree about the inception of Orthodoxy understood in this way, described by Jacob Katz as being 'not a direct continuation of traditional Jewish society'. 17 Changes in an earlier period (ca 1840 -1870) include the continued growth of Hasidic sects and the effort by Yisroel Salanter's advancement of the Mussar movement and his launching of the *Tevunah* journal to promote the primacy of Torah learning and rabbinic authority. The latter work, which presaged the evolution of Daas Torah in later periods, with complete authority vested in the rabbinate, also represented a departure from the traditional pattern of halakhic discussion and rulings. 18 The 1880s and 1890s featured the struggle of the mainstream traditional rabbinate in reaction and opposition to the increased activities of the Hibbat Zion movement and in the 1890s the rise of political Zionism. The period covered by this thesis equally featured important developments in the transformation of traditional observance, and is supported by its findings among others, by the aggressive and widely publicised articles authored by Lipschitz in reacting to the attacks directed against the rabbinate by the maskilim, as well as the work of the Black Office. Further, as outlined by Israel Bartal, 'Orthodoxy in eastern Europe was not a reaction to reforms in religion but a response to the crisis of traditional Jewish society caused by the social and economic changes of the 1860s and 1870s'. 19 The dislocation and economic deprivations caused by the end of feudalism and the suffering of the famine of 1868/9 served as background causes for the defense activities of the rabbinate, spearheaded in the press by Lipshitz. The efforts of the rabbinate in the East were also imbued by a political element, mostly absent in the West, as rabbis sought to establish communal leadership and influence

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 258, 268–73.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 260, 271.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

with the Russian government. Spektor's efforts in shtadlanut through his Heyeh Im Pipiot missives and Rülf's attempts to involve himself in resolving the Jewish question through his meetings with the Kovno governor also represented aspects of these actions. Similarly, the Hasidic leader Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson (1860 -1920) established an independent network of wealthy merchants and businessmen who were charged by the Rebbe to, 'vie with other channels for both representation and influence'.20

In assessing ways in which rabbis addressed the challenges posed by the rapidly changing environment three critical areas of operation represent relevant and important criteria: jurisdiction and authority, the public sphere and political activity. In each of these arenas, rabbinical activity transitioned in response to threats to the traditional functions of the office to new and impactful means of serving the greater Jewish community.

Jurisdiction and Authority: Meeting the Needs of a Rapidly Changing Environment

A rabbi's traditional jurisdiction, the range of his juridical authority was typically local, with each rabbi's circumscribed sphere of influence thus defined and carefully defended, with inter-community rabbinical interference in local matters usually avoided. In some exceptional instances, however, a rabbi's authority, his right to promulgate and interpret laws and issue rulings, would be sought beyond his own community, with such extended jurisdiction achieved as a result of the widespread reputation of a rabbi's halakhic erudition, often publicised through his network of students or correspondents.<sup>21</sup> With the advent of the Enlightenment, emancipation, the attendant economic advancement, and the rise of the Reform movement in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Biale et al., p. 521.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Lowenstein, 'Old Orthodox and Neo-Orthodox Rabbinic Responses', p. 485.

West, the traditional rabbi's control within his community was undermined, with rabbis losing legal jurisdiction over entire Jewish populations.<sup>22</sup> Within traditional observant communities, submission to rabbinic authority had been the norm, with community members reluctant to challenge rabbinic authority.<sup>23</sup> The Reform movement, however, legitimised by its rabbis, allowed Jews freedom of choice to feel religiously connected and still remain part of a greater whole in what had become a voluntary religious affiliation. Many German Jews had 'compartmentalised their activities and even their consciousness and restricted the realms in which Judaism held sway', leaving rabbis with much-reduced influence.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the loss to traditional observance was such that by the close of the nineteenth century, 'Orthodox strength was estimated at only 10 to 20 percent of the German-Jewish population'.25 By that time the term Orthodox had come to mean those who resisted and actively opposed reform, and had already become a label utilised by traditionally observant Jews to describe themselves.<sup>26</sup> Despite holding official positions, the loss of constituency left traditional rabbis in the West seeking a new purpose or way to exercise authority, retain jurisdiction, or to even remain relevant. In the East, the office of the rabbinate was still respected, to the extent that, 'even the most radical maskilim were forced to concede that the status of the rabbis, the extent of their influence, and the allegiance of their supporters increased during the last half of Nicholas I's reign'; however thereafter it was under constant threat from the integrationist maskilim who enjoyed government support and outsized public

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ferziger, 'Constituency Definition', p. 535.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 33.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Poppel, 'Rabbinical Status and Religious Authority', p. 188.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Lowenstein, 'Religious Life', in Meyer et al., vol 3, p. 104.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Jeffrey C. Blutinger, 'Orthodoxy Then and Now. Becoming Orthodox: The Story of a Denominational Label', *AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association of Jewish Studies* (Spring 2008), pp. 9–11.

influence due to their early domination in the pages of the nascent Jewish press.<sup>27</sup> The appointment of Dr Max Lilienthal (1815–1882) in 1841 by the Russian Minister Uvarov to 'formulate a new strategy for the enlightenment of the Jews' was aimed at a widespread effort to bring all Jewish schools under government control, with the objective of integrating Jews into Russian society, a central goal of the maskilim.<sup>28</sup> Uvarov's assuming charge of this effort ensured that the Haskalah had become 'the official policy of the Russian government'.<sup>29</sup> Education as a means of integrating Jews into greater society had become an important and wider objective, also in the formerly Polish territories of the Habsburg Empire. A 'policy of toleration' had also been promulgated during the reign of Habsburg Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790) which 'awakened confidence and faith in the power of education guided from above as a means to promote civil equality'. 30 Such policy was exemplified by the founding in 1813 by Joseph Perl (1773–1839) in Tarnopol (currently Ternopil in Ukraine) of a pioneer school in which Jewish children were taught not only Bible and Talmud but secular subjects were equally incorporated in the curriculum. As well, Herz Homberg (1749–1841), 'a radical champion of reform in Jewish schools', had been recruited by the government to establish dual program German-Jewish schools and he later served as the Imperial inspector of such schools in Galicia.<sup>31</sup>

In assessing the wider impact of maskilic influence and the erosion of traditional observance in the East, while the same has been termed 'outsized' it would seem that even in Rabbi Spektor's hometown of Kovno Sabbath observance, a basic tenet of tradition, was under threat. In Spektor's final instructions, written in October 1888,

<sup>27</sup> Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 137. <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

he adjured his community to be vigilant in the observance of mitzvot in general and felt the need to highlight in particular keeping the Sabbath as a day of rest, likely either because so many had become non-observant or due to Spektor's realisation that the maskilic threat to tradition was acute.<sup>32</sup>

As rabbis searched for other means to retain their authority and to potentially increase their jurisdiction, for those in the traditional rabbinate, modern culture was viewed 'with the utmost suspicion' and the ability to retain authority over their followers could actually be enhanced by a strategy of 'closing the tent flaps', in which 'a more stringent position was particularly called for in those periods in which the protective walls surrounding Judaism had been breached'.33 This response had been pioneered by the Hatam Sofer, who, together with his followers recognised that the rabbinate and traditional religious observance was beleaguered, acknowledging that a substantial part of their constituency was being actively seduced by alternative ideology and leadership.34 Furthermore, this ideology was proving to be attractive due to its lessened demands upon its adherents. In the West as previously mentioned, validation from the new Reform movement's rabbis allowed followers to ease the burden of affiliation without feeling disconnected from their religious heritage.35 In response, Sofer formulated a path to erect barriers between strict observance and any deviant behaviour, which presaged, as termed by Michael Silber, 'The Emergence of Ultra- Orthodoxy'. 36 This group emphasised observance of even the most minor rabbinical strictures, customs and traditions, transforming them

<sup>32</sup> Igrot R' Yitzchak Elchanan vol 2, II, pp. 655–59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Samet, pp. 249–69 (pp. 250, 257).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ruderman p. 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Jacob Katz, 'Orthodoxy as a Response to Emancipation and the Reform Movement', in *Kehal Yisrael, Jewish Self-Rule Through the Ages*, vol 3: *The Modern Period*, ed. Israel Bartal (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2004) pp. 135–47 (p. 136).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Michael K. Silber, 'The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition', in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York and Cambridge, MA: Jewish Theological Seminary of America; distributed by Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 23.

into rigid and biblical-like injunctions; essentially terming itself 'the only authentic version of Judaism'. <sup>37</sup> As posited by Jacob Katz, the adherents of this new tradition evolved into the core of Ultra-Orthodox communities which depended upon their rabbis as repositories of undisputed *Daas Torah* to guide them through difficult times. <sup>38</sup> This strategy necessarily resulted in the limiting of rabbinical jurisdiction to a more circumscribed following, but conversely increased rabbinical authority in such circles considerably beyond what it had been. This represented a transition of rabbinical roles from one based on scholarship and adjudication to one based predominantly on force of charismatic personality; no longer would pronouncements need to be fully grounded in Halakhah alone, as had long been the case. <sup>39</sup> This position echoed the early Hasidic movement's insistence on the duty to respect and obey the 'holy man', or tsadik, rather than solely on the obligation to study Torah. <sup>40</sup> As well, the ascension of the rabbi to an authoritative, central position in Ultra-Orthodox society had the attendant benefit to the rabbinate of having relegated the role of the lay communal leadership to a secondary position. <sup>41</sup>

What remains clear is that the role of the rabbi in the period of study was in transition and represented a unique opportunity to redefine and assume positions of leadership and authority, i.e. both within the Reform movement, with rabbis validating the new religious practice and in the Ultra-Orthodox with a view towards the preservation of traditional observance. Other rabbinical figures as well attempted to identify new platforms and constituencies by appealing to a wider audience. These rabbis would need to exercise their authority and expand their jurisdiction by other methods, often

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ruderman, p. 149.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Katz, p. 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Schwarzfuchs, p. 60.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

aided considerably by means of the increasingly important and wide range of the public press.

In describing the types of authority which could be wielded by rabbis, Immanuel Etkes has highlighted several characteristics, including personal or charismatic authority, authority gained by virtue of the nature of an innovative special project or authority and respect gained through position and reputation as a great Torah scholar.<sup>42</sup> In the West, Simone Lässig highlighted the importance of preaching and written speeches which had become of critical importance, thereby gaining a rabbi greater renown, which could serve to increase his jurisdiction.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, however, the rise in importance of preaching as a tool to enhance a rabbi's reputation did little to raise the profile or status of the office itself, and might even be viewed as demeaning, relegating the preacher to an occasionally visible or influential figure, if that.<sup>44</sup>

In both the East and West, rising via action in response to distress within the community with a plausible and timely strategy to alleviate suffering would also garner a following, providing a rabbi with greater standing and respect. Access to and control of financial resources allowed a rabbi to speak with greater authority and the ability to extend his jurisdiction. This was the case with Rülf taking a strong position in dictating terms to the Kovno relief committee as outlined in a previous chapter based solely upon his power of the purse, despite his lack of halakhic authority and notwithstanding that the rabbinate of Kovno was occupied by the beloved and widely respected Spektor. Rülf's adoption and mastery of philanthropy

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Immanuel Etkes, 'Three Religious Leaders Cope with Crisis, A Comparative Discussion of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin, and Rabbi Israel Salanter', in *Jewish Religious Leadership vol 2*, pp. 403–28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Lässig, p. 323.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Breuer, *Modernity within Tradition*, p. 243.

as a modern technique of expanding rabbinical jurisdiction also importantly allowed him to exercise authority beyond his own city's borders, abrogating an age-old custom of non-interference in another rabbi's jurisdiction; even as Spektor's authority and local jurisdiction, based on traditional scholarship and his occupying the local pulpit would normally have precluded another from presuming to do so. As well, a rabbi's mobility could serve to extend his jurisdiction, as it did with Rülf's travels within the Russian Empire, particularly when such travel was regarded as daring and potentially dangerous, with his issuance of subsequent, vivid first-hand reports. Mohilever's extensive travels within Europe and Palestine, regarded as atypical for a traditional religious scholar, and which standing earned him a receptive audience, served as well to burnish his reputation for first-hand knowledge of and dedication to the positions he was advocating. Scholarship, personal piety, and ethical integrity were particularly valuable when combined with activism on behalf of the community, such as Mohilever's utilizing his standing as a recognised Torah scholar as a platform for promoting dialog between factions. As well, his work following the 1881 pogroms and subsequent advocacy for settlement in Palestine served as a basis for expanding his jurisdiction in advocating for Jewry more broadly, as the pogroms had been concentrated to the east of Congress Poland, Mohilever's base.

Spektor similarly expanded his jurisdiction through his profound erudition and courage in his willingness to issue permissive rulings in contrast to others who were reluctant to do so. In particular, he is renowned for his decisions with respect to agunot, which as part of the increased concern for women's rights had become a critical issue in the period. Specifically, 'in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Orthodox and secular circles alike were increasingly engaged in public debate on the inner problems besetting the traditional Jewish community in eastern Europe. . .

including marriage and divorce – especially the issue of agunot'. While many contemporaries were focused exclusively on study and on the promotion of traditional practice as established by earlier Jewish authorities, Spektor was prepared to act in issuing rulings which deviated from the past or were groundbreaking in attempting to alleviate the community's suffering. This position stood in contrast to mainstream Orthodox rabbinical practice, especially regarding women's rights. As generally expressed by Iris Parush, rabbis 'hid behind' the excuse that they were unable to rule leniently, viewing themselves as inferior to their ancestors so that ancient sages' pronouncements became the sole basis of legitimacy. Spektor's description of women in need of relief from their fate as agunot underlay his permissive responsa, 'I have been asked from America regarding religiously observant women who are deserted and poverty-stricken'.

Spektor's leadership in the issuance of empathetic and lenient responsa and his central role in the Kovno Circle was based on his reputation as a Torah scholar and *posek*, with his authority 'based upon the combination of religious scholarship and unusual personal engagement'. This standing enabled him to greatly extend his jurisdiction, as a correspondent of far-flung Jewish communities and as a recognised halakhic resource in their local disputes, as was the case in both the London chicory and shechita controversies. Mohilever and Lipschitz, whose wide jurisdiction had been established via the press due to their advocacy for and activity on behalf of their constituencies, were described by Yosef Salmon as 'enlightened rabbis'

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Gershon C. Bacon, 'The Rabbinical Conference in Krakow (1903) and the Beginnings of Organized Orthodox Jewry', *Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Eastern European Jews, Presented to Immanual Etkes*, 2: Haskalah, Orthodoxy and the Opposition to Hasidism (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2009), pp. 199–225 (p. 200).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women: Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, Brandeis Series on Jewish Women (Waltham, MA and Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Spektor, Sefer Ayn Yitzchak vol 2 (Vilna, 1895), p. 11, Even HaEzer, Siman 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Kleinmann, *Neue Orte* p. 300.

(rabbanim maskilim), by virtue of their having recognised an urgent need for action and having risen to prominence in response. 49 Notwithstanding that Lipschitz himself had not received semicha/ordination, his role in elevating the status of the rabbinate at a time of crisis through his frequent and aggressive presence in the press and his founding and leadership of the Black Office was of critical value to the subsequent elevation in importance of the office within traditional circles and vis-à-vis the Russian government. 50 As highlighted by Shaul Stampfer, the partnership between Spektor and Lipschitz hinted at a fundamental change in the world of the Eastern rabbinate; the combined talents of a traditional Rav working closely with a secretary well versed in in the area of printed media increased Spektor's prominence in the public sphere.

# The Public Sphere: Tools, Strategy and Ethos of Action

The rise in importance and reach of the press greatly expanded the Jewish public sphere, providing an arena for the expression of views and for positions to be advocated, opposed, generally debated and importantly, to be widely disseminated, and its impact cannot be underestimated in the era. Having been able to secure the office of rabbi in Memel as perhaps his only means of support for himself and his family Rülf sought a platform for his rabbinate greater than that of a local pulpit. He viewed himself not only as a clerical figure but as a philosopher, publishing a four-volume 'System of a new Metaphysics', which received scant public recognition. Of greater impact, he worked to extend his constituency beyond Memel's German-speaking Jewish community to act as a self-appointed spokesperson to the West for the entire Russian Jewish population and to redefine the breadth of Jewish solidarity.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Yosef Salmon, 'Enlightened Rabbis as Reformers in Russian Jewish Society', in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, ed. Shmuel Feiner, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), p. 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Lipschitz, Sefer Zichron Yaakov, part 2, p. 39.

He strove to expand the definition of *Bildung* to encompass not only western, secular training and culture but also to include eastern Talmudic prowess and tradition on an equal footing. Driven by a potent combination of ambition, audacity and selfconfidence, he expertly made use of the vehicle of the press to great effect in the famine relief efforts of 1868/9, successfully establishing himself in the West as the authority on all things relating to the misery affecting the Jewish community across the eastern border, securing the confidence of his donors via the use of his rabbinic identity and platform. Having been raised in modest circumstances, he likely possessed a genuine empathy for those affected by poverty, with this humble background possibly also serving as an impetus to secure public and mainstream professional acceptance. His early Aufrufe, initially for local needs and later greatly expanded to address the famine east of the border, were clearly based upon his role as a rabbi, with his signature identifying him as 'Preacher of the Synagogue Community'.51 In this manner, Rülf attempted, via the wide reach of the press, to transition his jurisdiction from simply acting as the rabbi of Memel to becoming a rabbi serving initially the Russian Jewish population and then aspiring to become an important voice within the greater international Jewish community. Indeed, in tracking the transition of Rülf's use of his rabbinical platform, his early signature as a preacher of his local community evolved along with his success in philanthropy and increased authority and jurisdiction to his simply signing his Aufrufe and correspondence as 'Dr Rülf', so prominent had his reputation become. This contrasted with Spektor, who would achieve prominence via his erudition and scholarship, communicated via responsa, whereas Rülf had achieved a similar objective via philanthropy. Rülf's growing authority was also a result of the 'special nature' of the relief projects, which, when proven successful, engendered a following

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Rülf, 'Aufruf!', p. 82.

of like-minded rabbis, seeking to emulate and participate in his work. 52 Through his travels across the eastern border, viewed as somewhat dangerous and adventurous. Rülf also burnished his reputation by having personally viewed and reported upon the situations he was describing. He boldly attempted to assert his authority in the East, circumventing local rabbis and officials in consultation with a local Russian governor recommending global solutions to the suffering of Russian Jews. Having attracted an international constituency through his mobility, the medium of the press, and as a result of the success he enjoyed in the 1868/9 relief campaigns, his reputation as a man of action became firmly grounded, his supra-national authority established, and the stage was set for further recognition and productive activities. Throughout his career. Rülf continued to exploit his rabbinical platform, transforming the office beyond its historical and geographic boundaries, using his position and the media to communicate on all issues affecting the overall Jewish community, both local and abroad. It would have been obvious to a reader of Rülf's substantial written materials that 'this Preacher aspired to be more than a pastor (Seelsorger)'.53 Similarly, a fellow rabbi from Hanau commended Rülf and encouraged him to continue his widespread public endeavours, 'which will give you more recognition than if you pay the most scrupulous attention to the fact that someone does not carry an umbrella on Saturday in rainy weather'.54 In addition to advocating solidarity and trans-border Jewish national identify Rülf established an expanded role for the rabbinate and became a model for other western rabbis who sought to emulate his success by joining Rülf's philanthropic campaigns; i.e. rabbis Azriel Hildesheimer, Samuel Wormser, Menachem Menko Berlinger and Marcus Gerson (Mordechai) Wetzlar, as described in a previous chapter and he became a magnet for appeals

<sup>52</sup> Etkes, 'Three Religious Leaders Cope with Crisis', p. 427.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Michael, p. 130.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Leopold Eichelberg, 'Hanau 26 February 1886', 26 February 1886, CZA, A1\72 p. 15.

from eastern rabbis including Spektor. The exceptional and widespread reputation earned by Rülf while in the Memel pulpit can be contrasted with his colleague Rabbi Jeshayah Wohlgemuth (1809–1899) who served as *moreh zedek* in Memel for over 42 years, from 1838 to 1881.<sup>55</sup> In this capacity Wohlgemuth was responsible for rendering halakhic decisions, a role which was typically a function separate from that of the town's rabbi.<sup>56</sup> Wohlgemuth was described as 'the old kind of Rav', traditionally learned and an outstanding teacher who was known for his compassion and erudition, yet whose activities, authority and jurisdiction did not extend substantially beyond the confines of Memel.<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to Rülf, as described above, who lacked the ability to exercise either authority or jurisdiction by means of his learning, Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever enjoyed an established reputation as a rabbi and scholar, indeed as a *gaon*, with recognised and accepted halakhic authority within the traditional Polish Jewish community and beyond. His authority and reputation for scholarship was considerable, and he was consulted by rabbis in other localities for Jewish legal opinions which were widely respected, i.e. in his landmark lenient ruling during the *Shemita* controversy of 1888/9, described earlier. Reacting to the encroachment of the Haskalah upon traditional religious observance, Mohilever departed from the comfort of a respected rabbinical position and embarked upon an effort through articles published in the press, almost unique among traditional circles, to bridge the growing and often acrimonious divide and advocated compromise and tolerance. Mohilever's overall objective, always kept in clear focus, was the preservation of community: religious

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Wohlgemuth's signature as 'Moreh-Zedek' appears in: 'An unsere Glabensgenossen', 1870, Center for Jewish History, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Part 7, pp. 3–4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> V. Levin, 'Moreh Tzedek', *Jewish Galicia and Bukovina*, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://jgaliciabukovina.net/node/134247">http://jgaliciabukovina.net/node/134247</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> 'Rabbi Jeshayah Wohlgemuth of Hamburg', *The Jewish Chronicle* (London, 6 January 1899), 1,553rd ed., p. 10.

and physical. His well-known authority acquired as a learned rabbi of stature reinforced and served as a foundation for his other work and allowed him ready access to the press. His frequent early articles, signed as Rav of Radom, clearly highlighting his rabbinical platform as a validation of his stature, enabled him to expand his influence beyond scholarship alone to advocate for compromise and tolerance on a public scale.<sup>58</sup> His writing was clear and attractive to many readers, replete with biblical and Talmudic references and respectful of all viewpoints, finely balanced and perhaps evocative of an earlier neutral juridical role.

Exceptionally for a traditional scholar, Mohilever was vocal in favour of certain aspects of reform, particularly in the area of education, which as described earlier was a target of the maskilim, and in promoting as a critical imperative the acquisition of local language skills.<sup>59</sup> The emphasis on learning local languages placed Mohilever in direct opposition to others in the traditional rabbinate, which advocated strict adherence to the principle of *shalem*; unaltered preservation of Jewish name, speech and dress (*Shem, Lashon, Malbush*), with speech defined within Eastern Europe as referring to Yiddish.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in order to maintain separation from the Gentile communities, several factions within Orthodoxy had 'advanced the claim that the preservations of these three items were actual commandments'.<sup>61</sup> This concept had similarly been expressed in the Last Will and Testament of Moses Sofer in which he adjured his descendants, 'Be careful not to change your Jewish name, language and dress, heaven forbid'.<sup>62</sup> In this, Sofer was likely reacting to a growing trend in which 'Jews had become and growing numbers aspired to become, less easily

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Shmuel Mohilever, 'El chevrat marbei Haskalah b'Yisrael v'el harabbanim b'Russia v'Polin', *Ha-Levanon* (Mainz, 31 July 1872), 47th ed., pp. 992–93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Maimon, p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Silber, 'The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition', p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds., p. 196.

distinguishable in dress, speech social habits, names, and educational attainments from their Christian counterparts'. 63

In an effort to advocate for a tolerance that he viewed as essential for the preservation of the Jewish community, Mohilever radically posited the concept that religious observance was a personal choice, emphasizing that working on behalf of the community represented a higher spiritual level than observing mitzvot or learning Torah.<sup>64</sup> His vision, and later his exhaustive public activity as part of Hibbat Zion after the 1881 pogroms in Russia, which included wide and frequent travels on behalf the settlement of Palestine, remained centred on preservation of the unity of the greater Jewish community and on creating a broad tent for its membership. Mohilever's renown as a traditional rabbinic scholar allowed him standing to successfully, albeit temporarily, persuade otherwise reluctant traditional leaders such as Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik to initially support Mohilever's call for emigration to Palestine. During his efforts in support of Hibbat Zion while in the pulpit of Białystok, Mohilever's pioneer inclusion of women in the society's activities and 'through radically new organisational tactics, such as sponsoring frequent social and political events', the public sphere and appeal of the organisation was expanded. 65 Mohilever transformed his rabbinical role from one of scholarship alone to a trans-national hybrid enterprise consisting of both traditional erudition and use of the press to advocate reform, compromise, and critically, tolerance and understanding among Jewish community factions, and the settlement of larger numbers of Jews in Palestine.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Emile Marmorstein, *Heaven at Bay: The Jewish Kulturkampf in the Holy Land* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 35.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Maimon, p. 138.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, p. 50.

In his use of the press as a platform for expression, Mohilever was often moved to write in opposition to Yaakov HaLevi Lipschitz's articles in which Lipschitz decried the incursions of the Haskalah and urged absolute rejection of any tolerance, compromise or change in religious observance and customs. Whereas Mohilever had supported reform in education and linguistic acculturation, Lipschitz, as a public voice of the Ultra-Orthodox took the opposite position, rejecting any openness to reform, as part of his providing a forceful traditional response. Both Mohilever's and Lipschitz's positions differed from the stance taken by their contemporary, Rabbi Akiva Joseph Schlesinger (1837-1922). On the subject of settlement of Palestine, which Lipschitz opposed, Schlesinger advocated same as a refuge for Jews but also as a means to preserve traditional Orthodox practice without any compromise, suggesting that even a minor change from tradition should be avoided. He stated that 'it is incumbent upon the Jew to resist, even to change his shoelaces, even at the cost of his life', in stark contrast to Mohilever's more nuanced views. 66 While Lipschitz glorified the yeshiva and elevated learning of Talmud as an ideal, Schlesinger stated that 'once a young scholar reached fifteen, he should devote a few hours a day to vocational training, a position which would have been an anathema to Lipschitz.67

Lipschitz had witnessed early in his career the widespread appetite for press readership among the youth, almost serving as 'a new Torah' with its growing penetration and impact and as such he realised the possibilities of influencing and shaping public opinion via the media. His subsequent and continuous use of the press in promoting traditional observance and the office of the rabbi was unique and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Silber, 'Alliance of the Hebrews', p. 125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 124.

unprecedented, not only via his prolific articles published in the newspapers, but through the founding of the Black Office. In the latter capacity, Lipschitz became an aggressive user of the wider print media to gain recognition in the public sphere through the use of broadsides and caricatures which were directed at a wide audience and proved impactful. His later compilation of the rabbinic-centric autobiography and history, Zichron Yaakov, earned him the accolade, as suggested by Gershon Bacon, to be 'in many ways the father of Orthodox historiography'. 69 Lipschitz was intently focused on the media as an instrument for influencing the Jewish public sphere, and espoused the position that remaining silent in the face of saturation of the press by maskilim might be perceived as agreement. 70 In furtherance of this position, his early adoption of HaLevanon as a vehicle to disseminate the Orthodox viewpoint proved to be prescient. 71 In doing so, he, as well as other contributors to the periodical, was able to develop important 'public activism' with the paper serving as 'the infrastructure for the creation of a meaningful political orthodox establishment'. 72 He continued to promote a trend among the Orthodox, which found its roots in the views of the Hatam Sofer, to elevate even minor rabbinical strictures and customs to the level of biblical injunctions, in order to insulate traditional observance from outside threats. This position had the attendant effect of elevating the position of the rabbinate as repositories of tradition to new levels of near-infallible religious authority, known as Daas Torah. Indeed, the function of the local rabbi as a bulwark against reform was evident in that 'it was easier to push through changes in liturgy and religious practice in smaller

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Gershon C. Bacon, 'Messianists, Pragmatists and Patriots' (presented at the Strangers, Neighbors, Citizens: Polish Jewry in History and Historiography, Jerusalem, 2021), minute 41/57:44 <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEAgs9wlAgg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEAgs9wlAgg</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Yaakov Halevi Lipschitz, 'Ha-leum v'ha-achdut', *HaLevanon* (Mainz, 17 January 1872), 19th ed., pp. 145–46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Lipschitz, *Sefer Zichron Yaakov*, part 2, p. 99.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Beer-Marx, p. 8 (English section).

communities, where there was often no rabbi<sup>1,73</sup> Lipschitz took this position to new heights, publicly and aggressively going on the offensive, in unapologetically promoting the strict preservation of traditional practice and the rabbinate. As has been discussed in more detail previously, a contemporary described Lipschitz as being wily, energetic and determined; he continued to seek ways to promote both his personal standing and viewpoint. Initially this was accomplished via his authorship of many strongly worded articles in the press, but he achieved increased success once he secured the position as secretary to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, which lent further credence to his voice through association with the revered Spektor. Lipschitz's continued and efficient use of the media to influence the Jewish public sphere had a substantial impact on the transition of the traditional rabbinate to a leadership position with the Russian Empire. Although personally lacking rabbinical ordination, Lipschitz's shepherding the role of the traditional rabbinate through a challenging and transitional era marks him as an important figure in the preservation and promotion of the Orthodox rabbinical office.

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor was a reluctant presence in the non-halakhic public sphere; however, he exercised his substantial influence as the era's recognised *posek* in the arena of traditional authority and jurisdiction. He operated predominantly by focusing on preservation and promotion of the rabbinate through establishment of the Kollel Perushim in Kovno and via his vast scholarship as a means to serve the Jewish community in a broad sense. In contrast to Lipschitz, who through his writing sought to force the community to conform to the strict confines of religion by strengthening observance of even minor strictures, Spektor worked from the opposite direction: to provide as much flexibility as the Jewish legal code would

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 1, p. 236.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Tchernowitz, p. 141.

allow to best support the community and its needs. His ability to engage within the Jewish public sphere via his empathetic view of the law is apparent throughout his many landmark and innovative rulings. Examples include several cases of agunot in which he employed the concept of 'double majority' or in the Shemita case, in which he, as the leading posek of the era, permitted what had been an explicit biblical prohibition. These rulings stand out in the annals of a period in which most traditional scholars were doing the opposite. These latter figures, 'in order to preserve tradition uncompromised..., employed methods in arriving at halakhic decisions which departed from what had been the accepted norm' and constructed an ultraconservative 'myth' of authentic Judaism.75 In his many responsa Spektor was focused on providing pragmatic rulings and as a result his petitioners often approached him with the question 'what would be the law as halakhah l'maaseh; as a practical matter', hoping for and often receiving a lenient ruling. 76 Through such adjudication, Spektor was attempting to reverse a trend which had begun with the Hatam Sofer, and instead he harked back to an earlier era in which leading rabbis had worked to find leniencies to accommodate the challenges of the time. The ability to find relative flexibility in the law had been part of a long-standing movement, dating as early as mediaeval times, during which 'considerable effort had been made to adapt the laws set out in the Bible and the Babylonian Talmud'. 77 'If rabbis failed to integrate modern life into the framework of the law, they threatened to render the latter irrelevant'.78 As the Haskalah began to make inroads into traditional society, leading Orthodox scholars, clearly acknowledging the possibility for a permissive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Silber, 'The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy', p. 26.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> Spektor, *Sefer Ayn Yitzchak* vol 1, p. 256, Even HaEzer Siman 27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol 1, p. 115.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Edward Fram, *Ideals Face Reality: Jewish Law and Life in Poland, 1550–1655*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College, no. 21 (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), p. 2.

ruling, feared to do so, adopting a 'bunker mentality'. 79 As expressed by the son of the Hatam Sofer, known as the Ktav Sofer, in his responsa published in 1873, 'although the Halakhah is permissive, my heart does not allow me to rule leniently. This generation is exposed to widespread desecration of the Sabbath and festivals, which is to be found in all places where Jews reside'.80 In contrast, in an instance of Gentiles performing work for Jews, Spektor cited the basis of the prohibition as rabbinical and ruled permissively, particularly as the case presented to him related to performing tasks for the purpose of a mitzvah.81 Spektor's responsa, communicated widely through his publications and extensive correspondence, served to expand his influence within the Jewish public sphere, extending his jurisdiction substantially beyond Kovno. Spektor's reputation in the Jewish public sphere was unusually extended even after his passing, with a front-page article appearing in *Der Israelit* on the first anniversary of his death, terming him 'the most enlightened, noblest and energetic of his time'.82 As well and importantly, a posthumous medal was produced depicting his image on the obverse and an engraving of his Ohel, literally tent or gravesite on the reverse. This medal was produced in several shapes and substrates, including brass and silver and featured a hook for either hanging or carrying, possibly as an amulet, and was unique to Spektor as compared with either Rülf or Mohilever.

### Political Activity

An important question for this period is to define the role of officiating and leading rabbis and figures in the rapidly evolving political arena. During the last third of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Miller, p. 66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, *Tshuvot Ktav Sofer*, Orach Hayyim (Pressburg, 1873), Siman 41.

<sup>81</sup> Spektor, Sefer Be'er Yitzchak, p. 31 (Hebrew numbering), Siman 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> H. Ehrmann, 'Das Lebensbild eines Talmudjuden', *Der Israelit* (Mainz, 22 February 1897), 15th ed., pp. 280–86 (p. 280).

nineteenth century Rülf, Mohilever, Spektor and Lipschitz each utilised their public standing and platforms to various extents in political action in rapidly changing and challenging environments. In the German lands, Rülf was faced with ongoing crises across the eastern border in the form of famine, fires and a continuous flow of refugees and in the West, the Reform movement had continued to make inroads in traditional religious practice. As outlined in a previous chapter, orders of expulsion of non-citizens promulgated by the Prussian government, which affected many Jewish Memel residents, as well as the threat of rising antisemitism and a growing debate regarding Zionism all claimed his attention. In the East, the dissolution of the Kahal marked the end of Jewish self-government and created 'a political vacuum'.83 Additionally, economic stresses were exacerbated by 'the gap that had widened between a very small, favoured minority at the top and, below them, a population of five million of the underemployed, underfed, and un-statused.'84 These factors contributed to the considerable challenges facing the Jewish community, which 'spawned new leadership groups' which sought to secure political standing in an effort to secure the security of the community.85 Rabbinical involvement in politics also became more pronounced as both Hasidic tsadikim and traditional scholars worked to hold the community together, engaging more often and openly in shtadlanut, both on a local and state level.86 This phenomenon was in evidence as early as at an 1816 political conference held in Zelva, whose objective was to provide support for the Jewish representatives in St Petersburg. The memo of agreement following the meeting was signed in the first place of honour by one of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Mahla, p. 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Eli Lederhendler, 'Classless: On the Social Status of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50, no. 2 (2008), pp. 509–34 (p. 522)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> David Assaf and Israel Bartal, 'Shtadlanut V'Ortodoksia: Tsadikai Polin b'mifgash Im haZemanim haChadashim', p. 69.

period's leading rabbis, Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, who remained an important resource for the conference's delegates.87 Rabbinical activities were often organisational, such as Mohilever's extensive involvement in Hibbat Zion, or governmental both on a local and state levels, i.e. Rülf's meeting with the Russian governor of Kovno in an early attempt to solve the 'Jewish Question' and his correspondence with local and national officials in connection with the Prussian expulsion edicts of 1885. In responding to the crises facing each rabbi individually and communally, their embracing a more overtly political understanding regarding the role of the rabbi as a central communal figure led to a politicisation of their rabbinical positions and became an important tool in claiming authority to address these challenges. As well, the rise in importance of the press in the period represented a new form of politics. Letters, articles and organised appeals enabled rabbis to embrace a more overtly political understanding regarding the role of the rabbi and provided an opportunity to disseminate viewpoints and projects more widely than had previously been possible.88 For Rülf, his confronting the famine across the eastern border provided a basis for his establishing a widely recognised and supra-nationally supported organisation for relief. The Memel relief committee, of which Rülf was its heart and soul, became widely known not only for its eloquently worded and highly effective appeals, but as well for the meticulous accounting of donations received and outflows. Rülf's success and renown in the famine relief efforts set the stage for a lifetime of cross-border, organised fund raising, with himself becoming an exemplar of the genre, pioneering a new and expanded role and platform for the rabbinate, essentially turning 'hunger into power'. 89 His ability to secure donations from a wide geographic range was also notable in that historically the traditional use of charity

<sup>87</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, pp. 68–69.

<sup>88</sup> Volovici, pp. 46–47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Levitats, p. 163.

had been prioritised for local needs. 90 As such, Rülf's ability to attract contributions via the remote Memel for further distribution to Russian Jewry represented a significant accomplishment; moreover, his advocacy for a wider national Jewish consciousness may have importantly served to re-define and significantly broaden the concept of 'local' philanthropy. Rülf's substantial and widespread philanthropic activities secured for him significant public recognition and capital which allowed him to increase his standing in the political arena. Such standing allowed Rülf to become active in both local and state shtadlanut; in the latter instance writing to both Landgraf Cranz, the government's local administrator in Memel and to Chancellor Bismarck in connection with the deportation orders in 1885, with his signature clearly identifying his standing as a community rabbi. His authorship of Aruchas Bas Ami and later support of the nascent Zionist movement through his contributions to the organisation's organ *Die Welt*, marked his efforts in the early political movement. Aruchas Bat Ami served as a basis for Rülf's view that there was only one political solution to the problem of antisemitism in Germany and that was for Jews to understand that they were Jewish citizens of Germany and not German citizens of the Jewish faith: members of a Jewish nation first and foremost. He was however less successful in his attempt to integrate himself into the central issue of growing antisemitic tendencies in Germany, in which, for example, his response to the publications of Heinrich von Treitschke was at best ineffective. Rülf was unable to gain recognition as a political actor of the first order. Thus, while the Alliance Israélite Universelle recognised the impact of Rülf's charitable work, it refused to acknowledge him as an internationally relevant communal leader. His unsuccessful attempt to found an alternative umbrella organisation to the Alliance reflects his frustration at these repeated snubs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> The Babylonian Talmud (London: The Soncino Press, 1936), Tractate Bava Metzia p. 71a.

With respect to the traditional political interaction between a rabbi and community leaders, Rülf took an early stand in favour of the independence of the rabbi. The traditional conflict in German congregations between the community's board and the rabbi had reached significant heights, as expressed by Samson Raphael Hirsch: 'the dictatorial power of the board increased to such a monstrous size that it would not tolerate any authority beyond it'. Rülf's assuming the editorship of the *Memeler Dampfboot* assured that his earnings would not be solely dependent upon his salary as a rabbi, allowing him both the means to support his family of six children in dignity and allowing him the independence to devote his energies to his many global philanthropic activities and to his philosophical writing. As well, Rülf did not hesitate to level sharp criticism against other Western rabbis, who occupied important pulpits in large cities, accusing them of catering to the whims of their wealthy *balei batim* while collecting high salaries and ignoring the needs of their congregants. Page 1921

The 1881 pogroms in southern Russia created 'a revolution in modern Jewish politics', with various factions within the community struggling to find their footing following a wholesale loss of confidence in the Russian Jewish elite in St Petersburg. The actions of the Kovno Circle, nominally headed by Spektor, with key roles filled by Lipschitz, with Rülf as a further conduit to the West, represented a direct attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Russian government to ameliorate the situation of Jews in the empire. As covered in a previous chapter, Spektor had been a supporter of the Günzburg-led elite, reflecting his loyalty to the government and having attended meetings in St Petersburg for the objective of securing more favourable treatment of the Russian Jewish community. With the failure of this effort

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Brämer, p. 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Rülf, 'Erklärung gegen Erklärung', pp. 1–3.

<sup>93</sup> Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, p. 49.

to achieve any meaningful results other than further publication in the West of information that was already known, Spektor displayed flexibility and political insight in his later appeal via the 1891 *Heye Im Pipiot* missives, which shifted focus by no longer attempting to shame the Russian government, but rather on emphasizing Russian Jewish support for the government as loyal citizens. Spektor also remained a central figure in Jewish communal politics, both locally as titular head of the Kollel Perushim, where he remained neutral in the wider conflict over the introduction of Mussar studies and internationally as arbiter of the London shechita controversy and as a careful, but documented supporter of Zionism. His renowned position as a decisor and a religious communal leader allowed Spektor to rise above normal communal-rabbinical politics, allowing him the luxury of dedicating himself to his writing and wide-ranging responsa.

Beyond Lipschitz's significant contribution to the functioning of the Kovno Circle, his activities in the political arena often focused on organisational matters but were always driven by an ideological core. His focus was exclusively Russian Jewish in nature, and he remained dedicated to the promotion of traditional observance and upon the role of rabbis as the Jewish community's supreme, unchallenged authority. Lipschitz's view regarding Jewish political affiliation included loyalty to the Russian tsar and government, but first and foremost that Jews owed allegiance to tradition, i.e. 'Torah is a source of identity that requires neither land, army, wealth, nor institutions, but simply the commitment of the faithful'. 94 His organisation and leadership of the Black Office with its outsized influence and support of Machzikei Hadas societies was aimed at both limiting the influence of Hibbat Zion and controlling the Russian Jewish religious scene in elevating traditional observance,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Chaim N. Saiman, *Halakhah: The Rabbinic Idea of Law*, Library of Jewish Ideas (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 58.

hearkening back to an earlier era during which unity of practice and reverence for the rabbinate seemed universal. Using his position as secretary to Spektor to bolster his increased visibility and impact, he acted effectively as 'doorkeeper' for Spektor, ensuring that all who sought Spektor's support would need to first go through him. Lipschitz's most impactful accomplishment was in his work to actively promote Orthodox rabbinic leadership within the Russian Empire. This effort bore fruit as evidenced by the increased Orthodox presence in later government-sponsored rabbinic conferences, marking a transition in the balance of power within the Russian Jewish community from the leadership of the Jewish intelligentsia to the Orthodox rabbinate.<sup>95</sup>

Mohilever's activities in the political arena likely began with his successful intervention in the aid of local political prisoners in the wake of the Polish revolt of 1863, which marked a public exercise of authority. His signature on the scroll prepared for Sir Moses Montefiore's eightieth birthday in 1864, which also served to honour the latter's efforts in shtadlanut in connection with his achievements in Morocco and paid tribute to his global perspective, likely influenced Mohilever to appreciate opportunities for an expanded rabbinical role beyond his immediate jurisdiction, activity which reached new heights following the pogroms of 1881. Mohilever was a multi-dimensional figure, moving easily between factions, and he had already positioned himself as being prepared to work with any group willing to support his initiatives, whether it was with Hasidim in Radom or cooperation with the OPE regarding educational reform. Mohilever's active engagement with the OPE to promote reform and fluency in local languages was particularly significant for his position as a traditional leader, inasmuch as Orthodox control over literacy and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Freeze, Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia, p. 245..

education was a key strategy in its effort to 'seal off society from the inroads made by modernity and maskilic ideas'. 96 Mohilever was quick to view emigration to Palestine as a potential solution for a Jewish community under threat, notwithstanding that the group which later most vocally advocated this position were maskilim. Following the pogroms there had been 'an image of a new exodus, a going-out from the land of bondage to a promised land', which became dominant on the Russian Jewish political stage. 97 Immediately following the atrocities, Mohilever visited Lvov to personally view the refugee crisis, and this experience convinced him that the time had come for emigration as a solution in general and emigration to Palestine seemed advantageous as a path to also preserve Jewish communal unity and religious observance. Although the Hibbat Zion movement, prior to Herzl's early political Zionism, was 'pre-eminently a movement – and a minority movement at that' and largely ineffective, Mohilever directed his substantial prestige and energy towards its objectives and notwithstanding that his renown as a scholar was not as highly valued by the maskilic-controlled organisation, Mohilever exercised considerable political insight and strategy in an effort to control its political agenda.<sup>98</sup> Following the conference in Druskinikai, his founding of the 'Merkaz ha-Ruhani', known in abbreviated form as 'Mizrachi', was perhaps Mohilever's most impactful and lasting accomplishment, as it grew into a political entity, aiming 'to press the Orthodox agenda within the Zionist framework'. 99 Indeed, Mohilever's activities in connection with early Zionism represented the highest level of contemporary political engagement of the rabbinate. 100 In other arenas as well, Mohilever remained open to co-operation with organisations and movements which could contribute to improving

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Parush, *Reading Jewish Women*, p. 5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Frankel, *Prophesy and Politics*, p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*, p. 154.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition*, p. 27.

<sup>100</sup> Guesnet, Polnische Juden im 19 Jahrhundert, p. 394.

living conditions for the Jewish community, i.e. in his reported acceptance of the Bund as 'the representative of the Jewish proletariat'. <sup>101</sup> His assumption of the pulpit in Białystok had also been specifically contingent on the community allowing him full freedom to pursue outside activities. In extending this view to the role of the rabbi in general, Mohilever was quoted as observing that a communal rabbi who depended on the opinion and permission of others was the mark of a community lacking in leadership. <sup>102</sup>

The activities of this study's protagonists via their political involvement and in the public sphere augured the emergence of new types of Jewish leaders in the post-1881 era. The transformative events of 1881 in the Pale served to reinforce the sentiment that the government was unable to provide for the security of the Jewish community, notwithstanding Mohilever's own comment that, 'were it not for their fear of the government we would have been lost'. 103 The loss of confidence in the St Petersburg elite to shield the community from the worst elements of persecution provided opportunities for new groups to attempt to lead, facilitating, 'the discovery of people's will as the foundation for a new type of political community'. 104 This transformation of the public sphere, an attempt to create a new national Jewish political reality, with broad communication via the press, publications, debates, elections and later congresses all served to advance a new national consciousness. 105 The policies advocated by Mohilever, initially via his political activity in Hibbat Zion, which promoted the idea of a return to the holy land as a means of communal unity and later via his founding of the *Mizrachi* movement

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers; Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Maimon, p. 173 (recollection of Y. L. Appel, meeting with Mohilever, summer of 1883).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Maimon, p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 155.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-157.

provided the groundwork for the later activity of political Zionism. His address to the first Zionist Congress however already displayed an underlying tension by identifying Zionism with a religious aspect, in view of a movement which understood itself as being essentially political. 106 Mohilever's continued assertion of his and the *Mizrachi* belief regarding the coming of the messiah also increasingly stood in contrast to the transformation of that belief by the growing socialist movement, attracting Jews, 'because it represented a secularised version of the age-old Jewish messianic longing'. The use of the press by Rülf as a means of achieving cross-border solidarity and his channelling of Pinsker's *Autoempancipation* call towards settlement of Palestine presaged the dissemination of this idea to the overall Jewish community in general and to youth audiences in particular. The increasingly frequent invitations Rülf received and his renewed popularity as a speaker at student gatherings in the late 1890s evidenced the strengthening influence and importance of this group within the Jewish community. This element, 'would gain force during the late imperial period, reaching its peak in the form of student demonstrations that rocked cities across Russia between 1899 and the Revolution of 1905'. 108 Spektor's incisive and strategic change of tactics via the Heyeh Im Pipiot letters of 1891, in which he centred his appeal for relief on the loyalty of the Russian Jewish community to the tsar and government was in concert with the rise of the Orthodox rabbinate, viewed as an increasingly important and reliable partner as well as a useful tool by the Russian government. This position had been widely and effectively promoted through Lipschitz's many articles and his ongoing use of the Black Office's aggressive publicity, activity which continued throughout the 1890s.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Shlomo Avineri, 'Zionism and the Jewish Religious Tradition', in Almog, ed. *Zionism and Religion*, The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series, 30 (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia. Vol. 2: 1881 to 1914*, p. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Nathans, p. 239.

willingness to circumvent the established St Petersburg elite shtadlanut channels could also have convinced the latter group that itself required a reorientation from their previous ineffective leadership and advocacy of an integrationist philosophy. Indeed, this group, rather than disappearing, 'not only survived the crisis of the pogroms but reinvented themselves in a thoroughly modern idiom'. It was reported that when Tsar Alexander III withdrew the informal status that had been enjoyed by the Günzburg family, they adopted a new strategy, attacking many of the discriminatory laws directed at Jews from a legal basis. The OPE as well, rather than being regarded as a 'dead institution' continued into the 1890s as 'an engine of change in Jewish life', exemplified by the work of the Odessa branch in providing educational resources and vocational training for displaced Jews.

### Conclusion

The Mishna in Avot states, 'The world stands on three pillars: on the Torah, and on the divine service, and on acts of loving kindness'. This observation could be interpreted as representing the law, community service and acts of humanity towards fellow men. Each of the four exceptional subjects of this study were emblematic of at least one of these attributes in furthering the reconfiguration of the rabbinate during a period of extreme stress as a means to redefine, expand and preserve the 'world' of a unified Jewish community and to expand the office and to redefine and broaden the meaning of rabbinical jurisdiction in serving the Jewish community at large. Each possessed unusual courage, self-confidence, drive, and vision that enabled them to recognise and meet the challenges of the era. Through their actions, including in the case of Rülf, Mohilever and Lipschitz continuous and efficient use of the press and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Horowitz, Russian Idea - Jewish Presence: Essays on Russian-Jewish Intellectual Life, p. 79.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Sage Advice: Pirkei Avot, ed. Irving Greenberg (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2016), p. 15.

Spektor's steady issuance of responsa, they reconfigured and expanded the role and geographic reach traditionally assigned to a communal rabbi from scholarship and local jurisdiction alone to achieve wider impacts and set the stage for an activist and dynamic rabbinate. Rather than their actions representing a dilution of traditional authority, the office and its possibilities were transformed through the adoption of new roles and possibilities, represented by the work of this study's subjects. These figures shared a common goal: to preserve and promote Jewish solidarity and community in the face of unprecedented external challenges, both physical and spiritual. Their actions to achieve this objective differed in approach, dictated by individual backgrounds and local circumstances, in method, and in their definition of community.

Isaac Rülf was a man who made a difference in thousands of lives, providing relief for famine-stricken communities and to fire-ravaged towns and tendering aid and advice to impoverished refugees, gaining wide recognition as a humanitarian, 'Dr Hülf'. Rülf's early and vocal advocacy for a supra-national Jewish community and his extraordinarily successful crowd-sourcing activities in the famine of 1868/9 marked him as a rabbi-activist worthy of emulation and as a pioneer in trans-national philanthropy, which, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw philanthropy and communal welfare become a critical element in Jewish politics. 113 In contrast to Lederhendler's focus on the re-creation of a national political community as a principal way to access power, Rülf's philanthropic work as a clerical figure displayed a separate path to leadership via efforts to provide for basic communal needs. 114 His attempt at lasting fame through his philosophical treatises substantially unacknowledged. was notwithstanding his extensive work through which he had attempted to solve 'the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Ben-Ghedalia, p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 155.

highest problems of thought and science'. 115 His Aruchas Bat Ami and subsequent pro-Zionist writings were mostly undervalued during his lifetime and have not yet been fully recognised. In his opposition to 'Germans of the Mosaic persuasion' Rülf supported the concept of 'dual citizenship', with primary membership in a transborder Jewish nationality as well as having loyalty to Jews' countries of residence, an issue which long confronted Jewish communities and which rose to greater prominence following the emancipation of Jews in western and central Europe. His activities, irrespective of motivation, set a high bar for a wide range of rabbinic action in the face of adversity and represented an impressive reconfiguration of the office and expansion of rabbinic authority from scholarship to activism. While Rülf failed to obtain recognition as a rabbi of the first order by his German rabbinical contemporaries he was a harbinger of change for the office. His actions served as reconfiguration of the role of a rabbi and a new definition of 'first order' through his cross-border communal empathy, far-reaching philanthropy, and mobility. The substantial legacy of his wide-ranging work, spanning a transitional and critical period in both western and eastern Jewish communal history serves as a model for an expanded role for future rabbinical activism and demonstrated alternative paths for rabbinic roles and responsibilities.

For Shmuel Mohilever, his legacy remains narrowly connected with Hibbat Zion and the early Zionist movement and through his founding of the *Mizrachi* movement. Through his prolific use of the press to appeal to the Jewish public Mohilever attempted to enlist, as described by Lederhendler, the 'will of the people' in support of moderate reform, an important objective of factions competing for leadership throughout the 1870s.<sup>116</sup> Regrettably however, the very substantial energy and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Rülf, Wissenschaft Des Weltgedankens, Vorwort, p. x.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, p. 156.

courageous efforts of his life's work regarding outreach, inclusion, tolerance, and reform as a path to ensure the survival of an intact Jewish community were largely ignored during the period of his activity and have been subsequently overlooked. His view that observance was a personal choice and that service to God could be defined in ways other than traditional observance of mitzvot was revolutionary for the time and has not been sufficiently acknowledged and should be considered as a more substantial and impactful legacy than his work within the Hibbat Zion movement. Even with respect to Mohilever's activities connected with that organization, his founding of *Mizrachi* in 1893 as an independent entity within that group could be viewed as a retreat from his lifelong position that sought a bridge between the traditional and non-observant. While Mizrachi continued as part of the Hibbat Zion movement, its establishment represented a public acknowledgment of the failure to integrate the traditional and non-observant under the same banner. Nonetheless, it was on the basis of this entity that Mizrachi transitioned in the following century to the political party of religious Zionism and it with this accomplishment that Mohilever's reputation has been mostly connected.

Spektor's attempt to transform Halakhah into a more tolerant and empathetic vehicle represented an effort to restore the traditional Orthodox practice which had always evidenced a considerable degree of openness and flexibility in its adaptation to societal changes. His responsa, which were well grounded in Halakha and typically biassed towards leniency, represented a similar effort to retain this historic rabbinic sensitivity. These efforts, including his participation in the Kolel Perushim, were part of an endeavour to perpetuate a legacy which embodied this philosophy. This agenda however was largely overshadowed by his own secretary's promotion of inflexible halakhic observance, rulings, and strict reliance on *Daas Torah* as a way to

retain a core of an observant community together and which also represented a departure from classic rabbinic, halakhic-based rulings. Spektor could be criticized however for his reluctance to utilize the press to more widely to circulate his legal leniencies instead relying solely on responsa, which were primarily addressed to rabbinic colleagues. Following the activities of the Kovno Circle, and likely prior thereto, Spektor would have certainly witnessed and been aware of the influence, power and possibilities of the media and his utilization of the press could have had a positive effect in countering the trend toward religious extremism that was already evident. Absent such action, Lipschitz's views, widely circulated, would serve to expand the traditional prestige of the Orthodox rabbinate; however it may be questioned whether such a position achieved maximum utility in preserving the greater Jewish community; a question that still bears relevance in today's world.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> Levin, *'Denying Tradition: Academic Historiography on Jewish Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe'*, p. 260.

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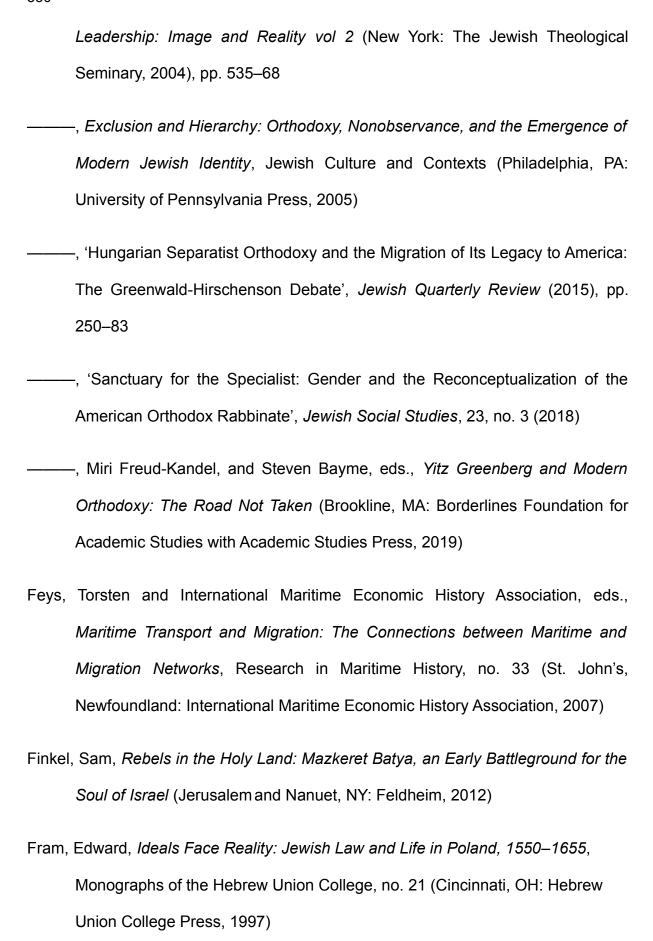
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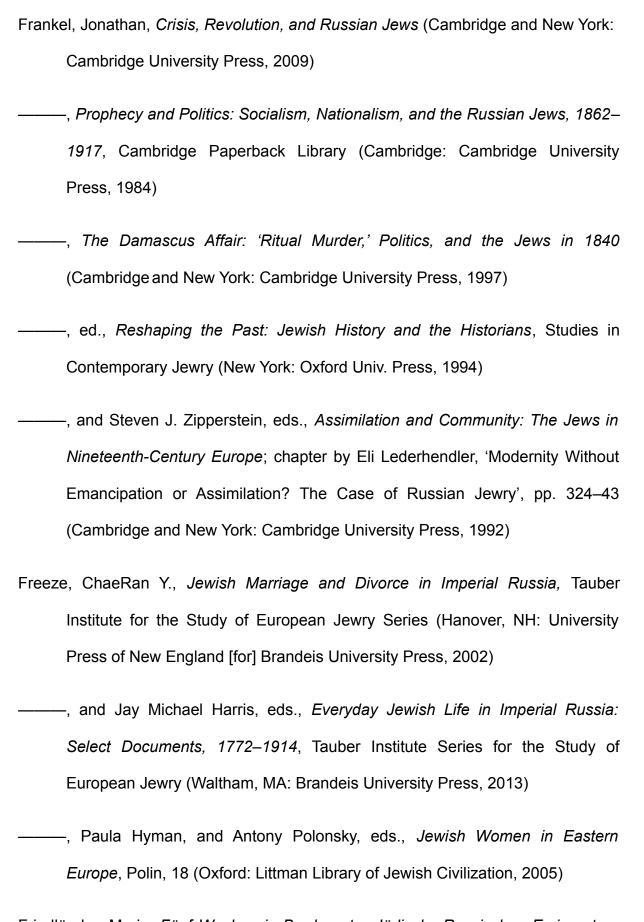
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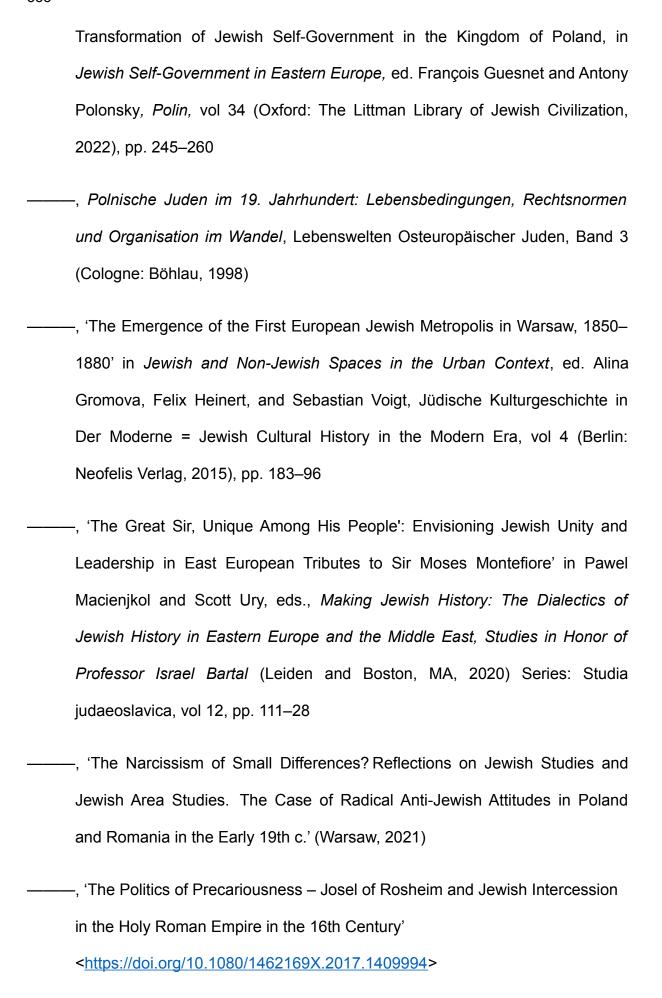
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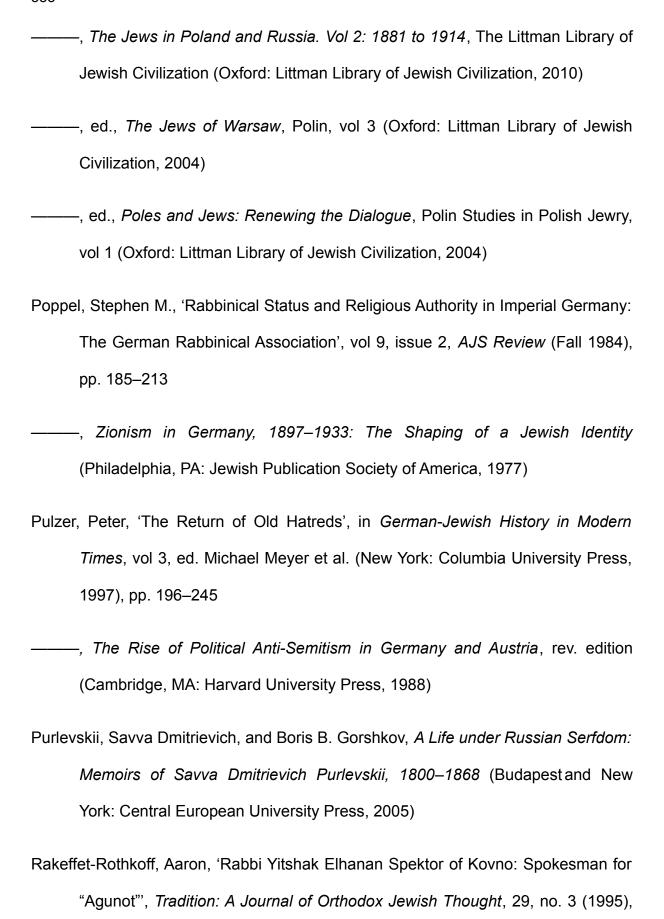
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#### **Appendices**

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- color lithograph. [Germany, early 20th century]

# Appendix 1: Excerpt raw data – Collection 1869 for Westrussia published in *Der Israelit*

		В	C	D	E	F	G	Н	I	
T	ype 🕨	Date of Publication	synagogue Gemeinde	Individual Donor	City	Name of Place - 2018	Current Country	Current Zip	Thaler	S
L	IODAELIT WEOTBUOOLA	January 2046			Bischofsheim	Bischofsheim	C	65474		0
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		durch Lehrer Lakowski: Frau Witwe Walterstein			Germany	97222		5
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		S. Gundersheim	Rimpar	Rimpar	Germany			5
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Rabbi Löb Sulzbach	Darmstadt	Darmstadt	Germany	64283		0
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Frau Kahn	Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Germany	60311		5
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Ungenannter	Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Germany	60311		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Ignaz Richter	Szarvas	Szarvas	Hungary	5540		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Moses Haas	Michelstadt	Michelstadt	Germany	64720		1
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		U. R.	Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Germany	60311		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Pinkas Zimmels	Wieliczka	Wieliczka	Poland	32-020		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		S. U. H, Von ihm und einigen Freunden	Frankfurt	Frankfurt	Germany	60311	/	4
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Jakob <u>Bickard</u>	New York	New York City	USA	10001		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Lehrer Heß, bei einer Beschneidung bei Carl Giß		Zheleznodorozhny	Russia	238410		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Jakob L., 6. Spende, aus der Almosenbüchs	se zu L.					
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Frau Maria Pollak	Wien	Wien	Austria	1082		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Simon Mayer	Griesheim	Griesheim	Germany	64347		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		G. M.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Salomon Falk, Lehrer in Aub, das. Und in	Woldmannshofen	Waldmannshofen (Creglingen)	Germany	97993		1
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		L. H. Lippmaun	Mainz	Mainz	Germany	55116		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Sal. Jonas, gesammelt durch - r -	Schermbeck	Schermbeck	Germany	46514		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		S. Bamberger	Sulzburg	Sulzburg	Germany	79295		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Ungenannter	Hanau	Hanau	Germany	63450		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Sußmann Mayer	Eickershausen bei Ritzingen	Ritzingen?	Germany	3989		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Ungenannter	Mainz	Mainz	Germany	55116		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		B. C.	Altona	Bezirk Hamburg Altona	Germany	22765		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		S.	Fürth	Fürth	Germany	90762		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		Bei einer Brith Milab bei Jakob Weinberg ir		Nottingham	United Kingdom	ng1 1da		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		durch Moses Kastanienbaum*	Külsheim	Külsheim	Germany	97900		1
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		durch Raphtali Strauß*: Chebra Kadisha 15		Niederstetten	Germany	97996		2
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		durch Adolph Philipp Reichenbach*	Ballenstädt	Ballenstedt	Germany	0-6493	+ - '	-
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	January 20th		durch M. L. Königshöfer*	Uffenheim	Uffenheim	Germany	97215		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	February 3rd		Bernard Levy	Münstereifel	Bad Münstereifel	Germany	53902	+	1
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	February 3rd		Ploni bar Ploni Segal	Fürth	Fürth	Germany	90762		1
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	February 3rd		Adolph Reichenbach	Ballenstedt	Ballenstedt		06493	N/A	
							Germany	38855	IN/A	
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	February 3rd		M. Heift	Heudeber Mainz	Heudeber	Germany			
-		February 3rd		Joseph Hirsch I.		Mainz	Germany	55116		
	ISRAELIT WESTRUSSIA	February 3rd		Vorsteherin Frau Ww. H. Feist	Mainz	Mainz	Germany	55116		

Appendix 2: Example of donations published by the Memel committee in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, Issue 15, April 4th 1868, page 297

Demel ben 16. Darg.

Beitere Gaben, welche bei ben Unterzeichneten theils fur hief nothleibenbe Ifraeliten, theils fur ben "Berein gur Abmehr bes

Rothftanbes" eingegangen find :

D. S. Bing, Sannover, zweite Babe 3 R; Rofenthal aus Burgburg 50 Re; 2. aus hamburg 20 Re; beutsch:ifr. Be: meinbe, Samburg 50 Re; Synagogen: Bem., Bonn 14 Re; Babette Bulbenftern burch Dr. Philippfon 6 Re. 23 Mgr.; Dr. Bhilippfon 10 Re. 10 MR; Chemra-Rabifcha ju Sohenems 20 Re; Synagogen: Bem. Dagbeburg 10 Re; Rechtsanwalt Det, Beterehagen 3 Re ; S. Bafch, Erfurt 4 Re; 3. Mener gt. Eppftein, Lebrer gu Gemunden 1 Re. 11 Mge 6 6: Deutsch= ifr.: Bem. Samburg zweite Genbung50 Re; Beh. Commerzien: rath Mor. Simon aus Ronigeberg 100 Re; Berr Rabb. Dr. Lehmann aus Maing 1000 Re.; R. B. & Co. in Berlin 50 Re.; Bezirferabb. Dr. Salvenbi aus Durfheim 85 ff. 30 fr. und zwar aus Muffbach 8 ft. 18 fr.; aus Bohl 12 fl 30 fr.; aus Groß: und Rlein Bodenheim 20 fl. 25 fr.; aus Reu Leiningen 11 fl. 55 fr ; aus Rheingoenbeim 8 fl. 45 fr.; aus Lachen 4 fl. 18 fr.; aus Mutterftadt 19 fl. 19 fr. - Leon Bolpert aus Berlin 10 Re: Martin Stettiner 2 Re; Schlefinger aus Berlin 5 Re; Joseph Leipziger aus Berlin 25 Re.; Deutsch:ifr. Gemeinbe in hamburg 100 R: M. N. v. Rothichild & Gohne in Frants furt a. M. 100 Re; Schlom Klugmann in Leipzig 1 Re; Sofch, Rantor in Neife 1 Re; burch Robert Dalberg, Borfteber ber jubifchen Gemeinde ju Buttenfcheib, 8 Re.

Glaubensbrüber! Es find Taufenbe, welche in Noth und Elend verschmachten, und jest naht bas Besachsest heran, bas Pjund Mazzoth wird bei dieser furchtbaren Theuerung aller Lesbensmittel 6—7 Sgr. fosten. Biele Tausende haben vielleicht nicht soviel um aus eigenen Bermögen auch nur ein Bjund kausen zu können, wenn wir sie nicht unterstüßen, so ist von keiner Seite her eine Huste ersichtlich. Beeilt euch und sendet nur immer reichere Gaben. Wir werden von Monat zu Monat in diesem Blatte von unserer Wirksamfeit Rechenschaft ablegen.

Das Comite

Elias Lewinsohn, Schatmeifter. Dr. Rill, Schriftführer.

### Appendix 3: Appeal for Relief, early 1868 in Hamagid, Issue 7, February 12th 1868

ביק, כ"א שכט התרכ"ה ליצירה. Eyck, den 12. Februar 1868.

#### חוכן הענינים.

למעשה הצדקה, עסטרייך: קרמקמ, רוסלאנר: קמוונמ, וופרשמ, וופרשמ. במעשה הצדקה עסטריע, כובמלק, שוועדען: שפפקהמלס, אזיען:

ירוסליכ. ב<u>ייכנ</u>ס. מסעות הח' האבי"ר לארץ הקרושה. חרשות שונות. הצופה.

אבל ליחיד היקר בדודו קינה מחת מרזכי בן דוד סערעליסקער. תולדות רבנו רפאל מילדולה מחת יהושע לשויחתהן.

תקונים שונים לדברים חדשים גם ישנים מזת שמאור זקש. בשורת ספרים, הודעות. ע"ר חברת מקיצי נדדמים, תשובה כללית.

## למעשה הצדקה.

אחרי שערכנו דברינו, בגליון הקודם, לאחב"י ילידי רוסלאנה המתגוררים בארצות אחרות ועוררנום לבוא לעזרת אחיהם בארץ סולרתם הנתונים בצרת הרעב והעוני הגרול מאד, הגיע לירנו היו"ל בעיר (Israelit) היו"ל בעיר איזראעליט" מגנצא ע"י ירירנו הרב הנכבר י"א הר"ר דר' לעהמאוני המוריע בי גם לו הגיעו מכתבים מעירות אחרות אשר על גבול פרייסען, וביחור מעיר מעמעל אשר כותביהם מודיעים מהרבה אחב"י ילידי רוסלאנד המתגוררים בתוכם וגועים ברעב וכו', והמו"ל הנכבר הנ"ל כודיע כי בנפש חפצה חנהו מוכן לצאת לעזרת אחיו הנתונים שמח בצרה לאסוף נרבות נדיבי לב לתכלית הקרושה הזו ולעורר את אחב"י בכל מקום אשר דברו מגיע אליחם ונשמעים באזגיהם לטצוה הקרושה הזו, רק דבר אחר נצב עוד לשטן על דרכו זו והוא שאיננו יודע למי לשלוח כסף המקובץ באופן שהמתנדבים יוכלו לחיות בטוחים כי יתחלם כסף הצדקה כראוי לכל הראוי לעזרה, וע"כ זאת עצתו שיתיסרו הברות (סאמיטעעם) בין אחב"י בהערים בפרייסען הסמוכים לגבול רוסלאגד לקבל הכסף וכו'.

והנה בהיותנו גם אנחנו יושבים על הגבול ויודעים הדבר היטב עפ"י ראיה ושמיעה, ע"כ מצאנו מחויבים לדבר בזה דברים אחדים. — אמת נכון הדבר כי בעירות אחדות הממוכות אל הגבול מתגורדים גם עניים מאחב"י מרוסלאנד וביחוד בעיר מעמעל ומילזים ואין כל ספק כי המצוח רבה היא לחלצם מרעה ולהחיותם ברעב; אבל בכלל אין אסונם גדול כל כך. לא כאלה חלק הרבה אלפים משפחות מב"י היושבים במקו מותם בארץ מולדתם. כן אלה הסמוכים לגבוד פרייסען, וכן בפנים ממלכת דומדאנד ופאלען אשר שם מתים הם ממש ברעב וקצרה יר אחיהם העשירים לעזור לכלם, אלה העניים היכולים לעזור מכומם ולבא לפרייסען לעזור לכלם, אלה העניים היכולים לעזור מכומם ולבא לפרייסען

רעתם לא גדלה כל כך לפי ערך רעת אחיהם לאלפים היושבים בכתיהם במצוק ומתים ברעב מאין עוזר ותומך! בעבור אלפי משפחות אומללים ההם נחוץ ישע ועזר ביתר שאת ועוז. והנה מה שוב יה" הדבר אם יתיסרו חברות בערי פרייסעו הסמוכים על הגבול כעצת המו"ל את האיזראעלים, אך תועלתו לא תהי רק למובת העניים מרוסלאנד המתגוררים בתוכם ואולי גם לעניי הערים ברוסלאנד הסמוכים ג"כ אל הגכול -- אבל להאומללים היושבים הרחק מהגבול בפנים פאלעו ורוסלאגד לא תועילינה חברת כאלה לתכלית הנדרשת מאת המו"ל ממעם המובן. ואנחנו אחת דברנו כי ההכרה היותר גדול הוא למהר לעזרת האומללים הרבים מאד אשר בפנים רוסלאנד ופאלען! ע"ב אין תחבולה אחרת רק אשר יתעוררו אנשי שם מאחינו ב"י הרבנים המפורסמים וקרואי הקהלות הגדולות ברוסלאנד הידועים לעושים מלאבתם באמונה, וייסרן בתוכם ומתוכם חברות כאלה לקבלת הגרבות מחוצה לארצם אחרי השיגם רשיון ממשלתם על זה, ויודיעו שמות ראשי התברות ברבים, למען ישולת לידם כסף החרומה. - ואל ידידנו המו"ל את "הישראל" הננו קוראים: כך

בנוגע לשליחות הכסף למחוז החפץ עפ"י רציון המתגדבים.

ואל הרבנים הנכבדים וראשי אלפי ישראל בפאלען ורוםלאנד

הננו דורשים כזה שיעשו כעצתנו הנוכרת ליסד מתוכם הברות
לקבלת הנדבות מחו"ל ולחלקם להנצרכים, ויודיעו שמות ראשי

החברה ברבים, כי בעזהי"ת תוכל לעמוד ריוח וישועה לא מעמת
לענייהם המתים ברעב על ידי עזרת אחיהם רחמנים בני רחמים
יושבי ארצות האחרות אם רק ידעו המתנדבים כי נדבותיהם יגיעו
ימחון הפצם ויתחלקו כראוי. — עיקר הדבר, כי כל מי החפץ
לפעול ולעשות באשכנו ובארצות אחרות לטובת אחיו האומלים
המתים ברעב ברוסלאנד ופאלען, ומהר ויחיש מעשהו לעת עתה,
והררך הנכונה המובילה אל המשרה תמצא אי"ת בלאין כל ספק.
נם אנחנו לקבל נדבות נריבי לב גם לשלחם למחוז החפץ כרצון
נם אנחנו לקבל נדבות נריבי לב גם לשלחם למחוז החפץ כרצון

על דרכך בקודש והרם כשופר קולך אל כל אלה אתב"י אשר אחרי

דבריך לא 'ישנו, ואסוף נדבות' נדיבי לב לתכלית הקרושת הזו, ויכול תוכל כאשר פעמים רבות הראית כחד במעשת הצרפה

נרול המעשה יותר מן העושה" ואספת כסף הרבה למעשה הצרקה,

בענינים שונים כנורע לכל, וגרול שכר המקיים נפש אחת מישראל

אף כי לאלפי משפחות הגועות ברעב. אין כל ספק כי אחב"י

העשירים בארצות אשכנו וכוי לא יקפוצו ידם מלהחיות ברעב גם

נפשות אחיהם הרחוקים, אחר המרבה ואחר הממעים. וכן כל מי

מאחב"י בארצות אשכנו ענגלאנד וצרפת וכו' אשר נגעה אהבת

אחיו האומללים עד לבו יתעורר נא למצוה הקרושה הזו ויאסוף

לתכלית חנ"ל עכ"פ ואין כל ספק כי המצא המצא הדרך הישרה

המו"ל.

#### 

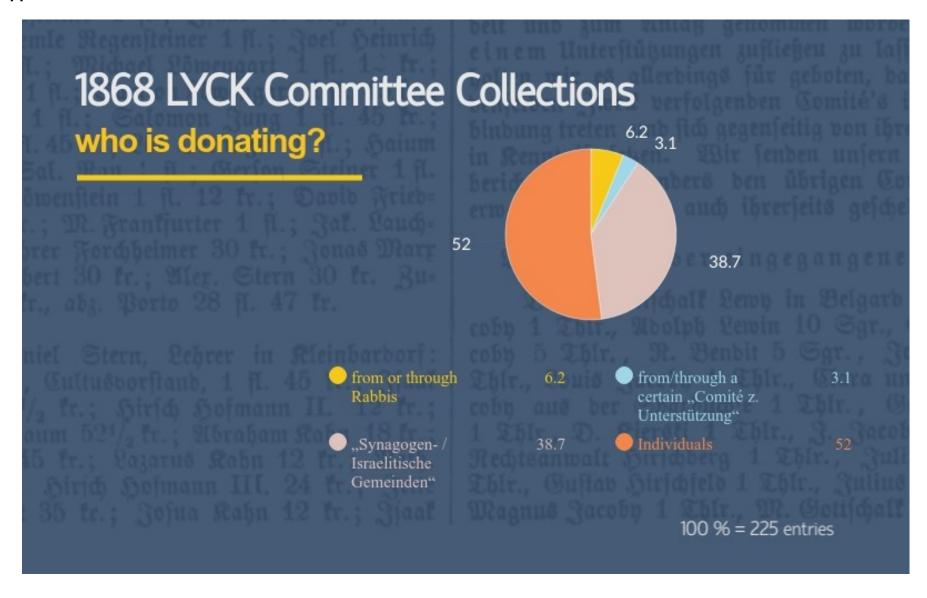
# חדשות וקורות חימים.

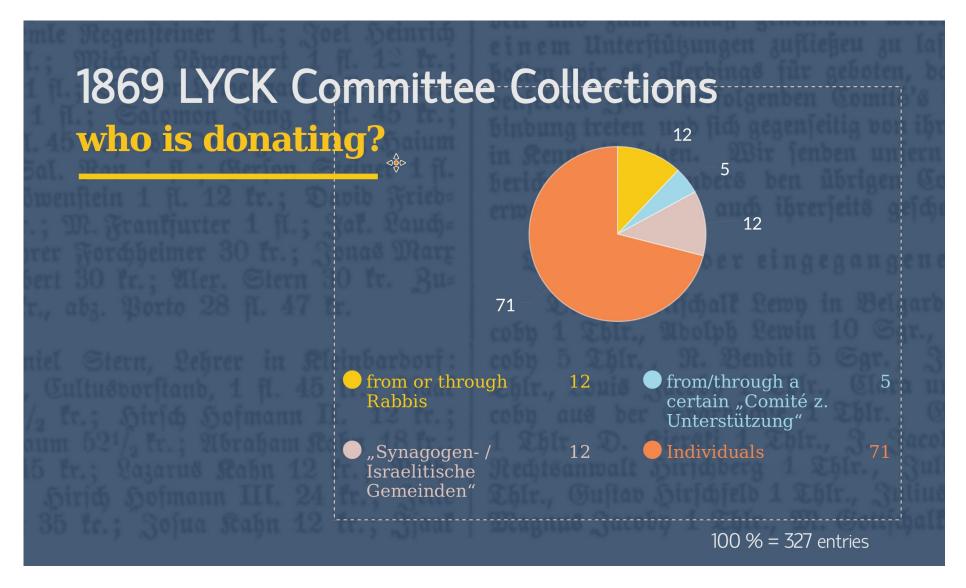
יגיד ליעקב מהגעשה והנשמע בכל חלקי תבל בין כל יושבי חלד אשר ינעם ואשר ראוי לדעת לכל איש ישראלי לתועלתו ולתועלת השפה העבריה.

מאתי

אליעזר ליפכואו זילבערכואו.

וְהָאֶמֶת וְהַשְּלוֹם אֲהָבוּ (זענים מ').





Appendix 6: Comparison collections 1868 by committee

collecto	Rülf for Memel Comité	ISRAELIT Russia and Poland	ISRAELIT for EAST PRUSSIA	Lyck Comité	Schippenbeil Comité			
MONTH in 1868								
February			16 Thir		242 Thir			
March	1702 Thir	1082,5 Thir	109,5 Thir		3462 Thir			
April	1697 Thir	4699 Thir	1599 Thir	2601 Thir	2421 Thir			
May	7154 Thir	1160 Thir	59 Thir	1799 Thir	1716 Thir			
June	1760 Thir	1365 Thir	34 Thir		~ 2688 Thir			
July					1187 Thir			
August	2338 Thir	4184 Thir	44 Thir	3222 Thir				
October	550 Thir	49,5 Thir	20 Thir					
November		20 Thir	10 Thir					
TOTAL 1868:	15201 Thir	12560 Thir	1891,5 Thir	7622 Thir	11716 Thir			

# Appendix 7: Comparison collections 1869 by committee

TOTAL BOTH YEARS:

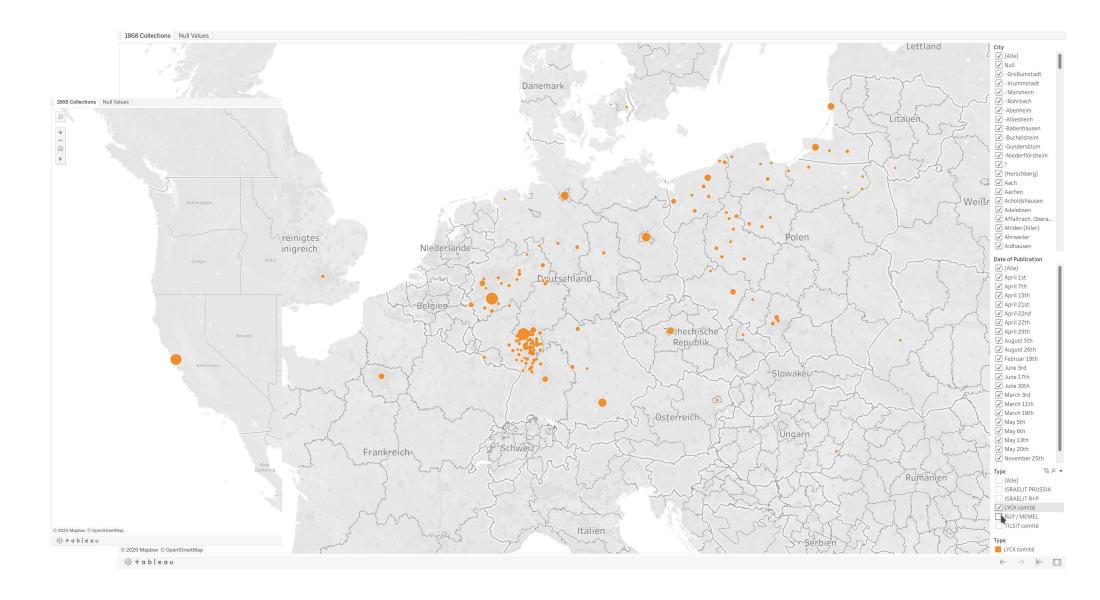
80838 Thir

collector MONTH in 1869	Rülf for Memel Comité	ISRAELIT for Westrussia	Lyck Comité
January		182 Thir	2715 Thir
		16 FI 50 Kr öW	
February	6526 Thir	743 Thir	
,,	194 FI 214 Kr öW		
	100 Rubel		
	3100 Francs		
March	10672 Thir	1452 Thir	4862 Thir
	30 Rubel	3 Fl öw	155 Rubel
	2000 Francs	13 Francs	
April	8427 Thir	4888 Thir	5454 Thir
	2 Fl öw	120 Fl öw 100 Francs	31 Rubel
May	10932 Thir	1179 Thir	
•	60 FI öW	5 Fl öw	
June	29080 Thir	1035 Thir	8028 Thir
	75 FI öW	79 Fl öw	186 FI 107 Kr öw
	20 Rubel		36 Rubel
	2000 Francs		
TOTAL 1869:	65637 Thir	9479 Thir	21059 Thir
TOTAL TOUS.	7100 Francs	113 Francs	21000 11111
	150 Rubel		222 Rubel
	331 Gulden 214 Kreuzer (öster.)	223 Gulden 50 Kreuzer (öster.)	186 Gulden 107 Kreuzer (öster.)

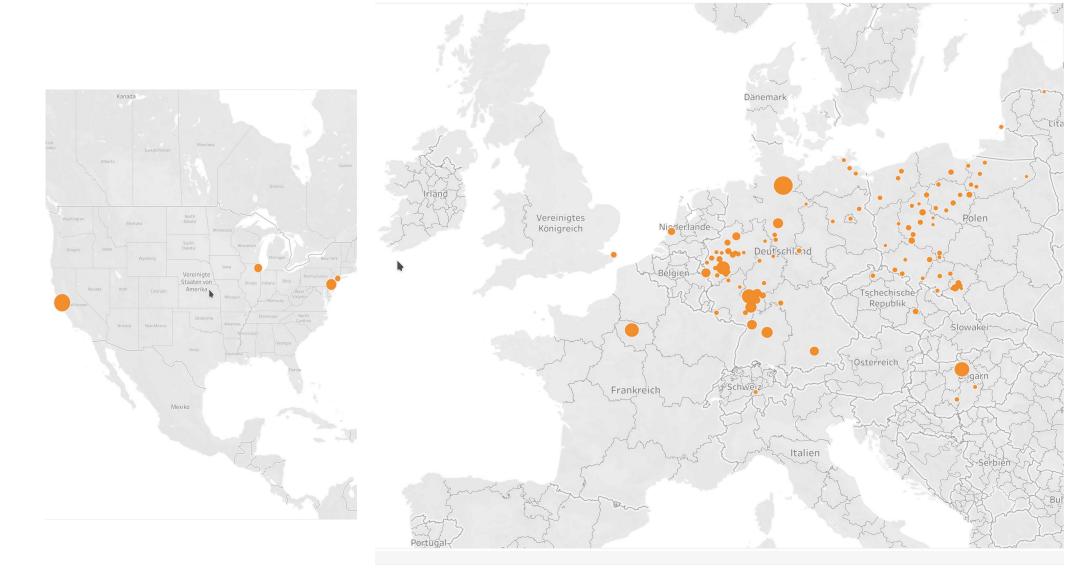
22039 Thir

28681 Thir

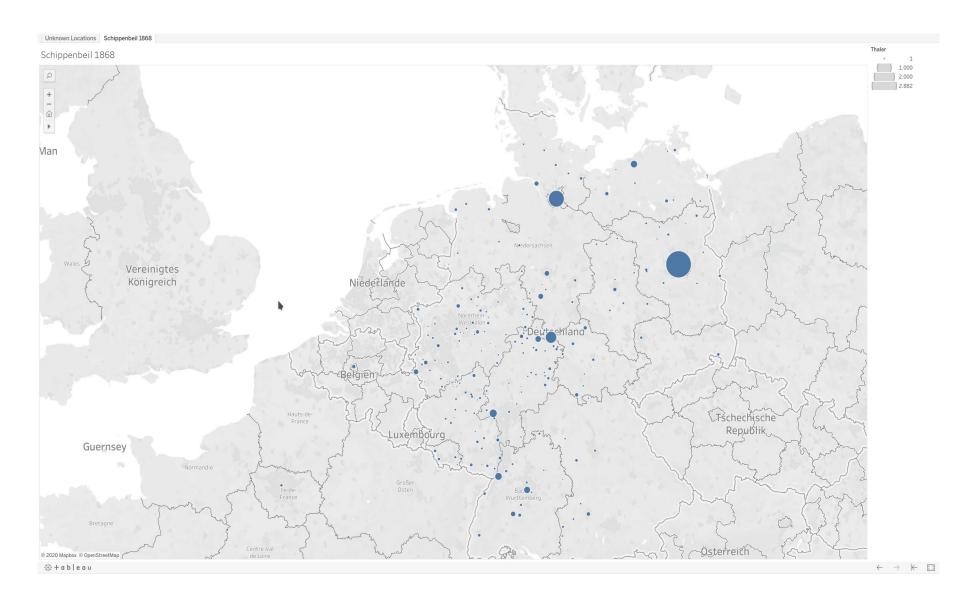
Appendix 8: Relief collections\* by geography for the Lyck committee, 1868 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler

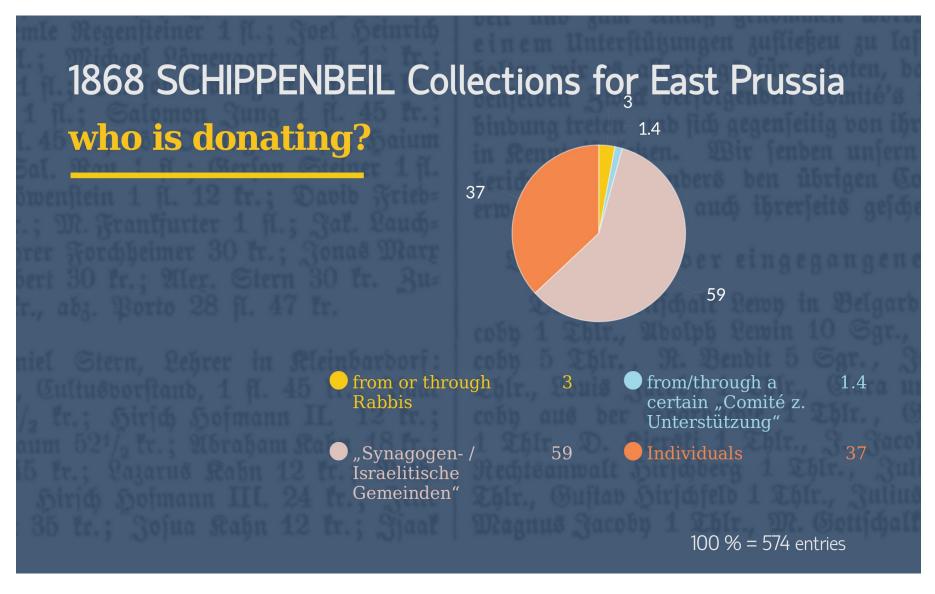


Appendix 9: Relief collections\* by geography for the Lyck committee, 1869 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler

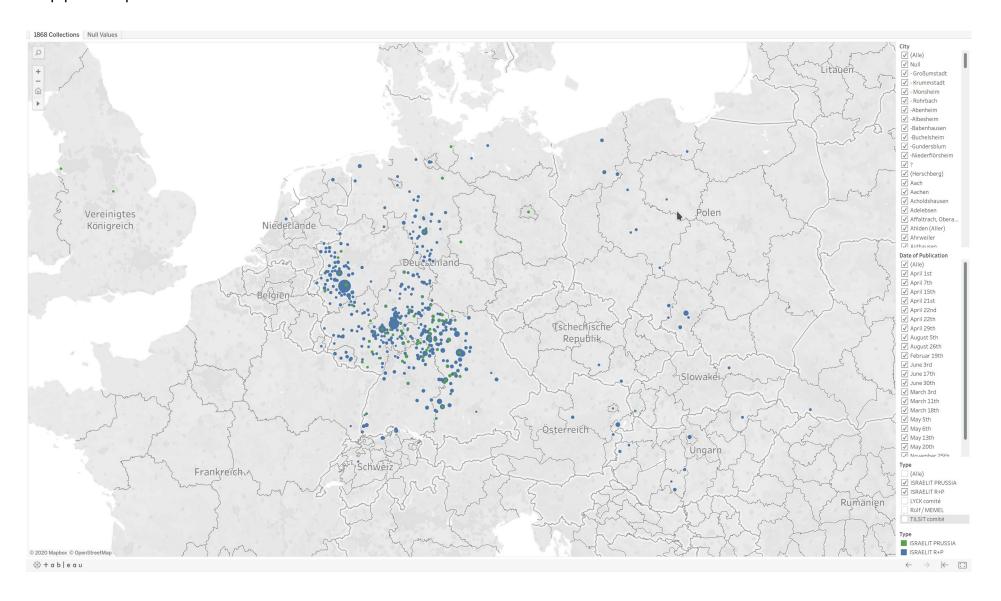


Appendix 10: Relief collections\* by geography for the Schippenbeil committee, 1868 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler

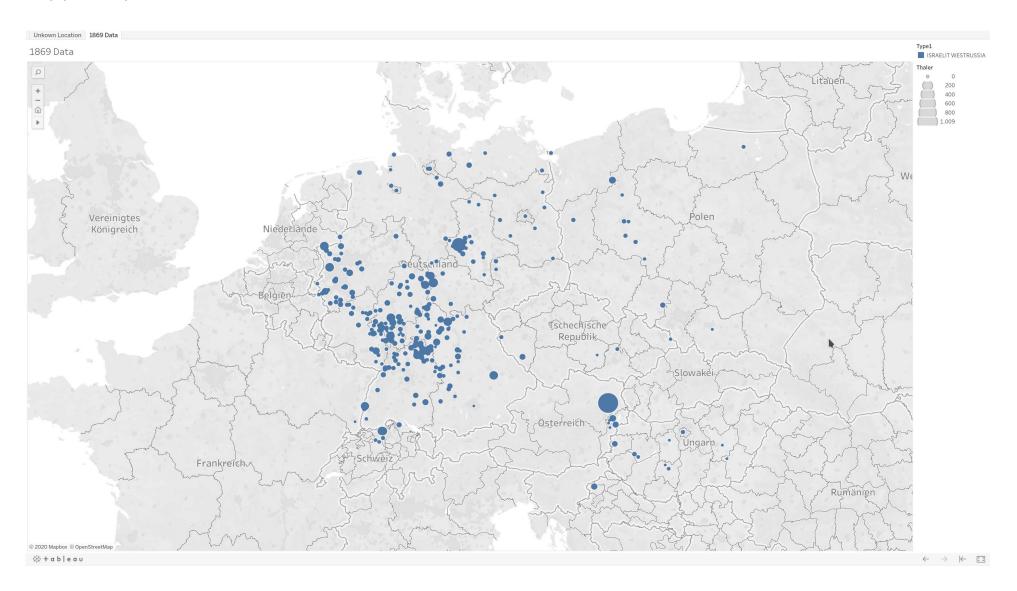


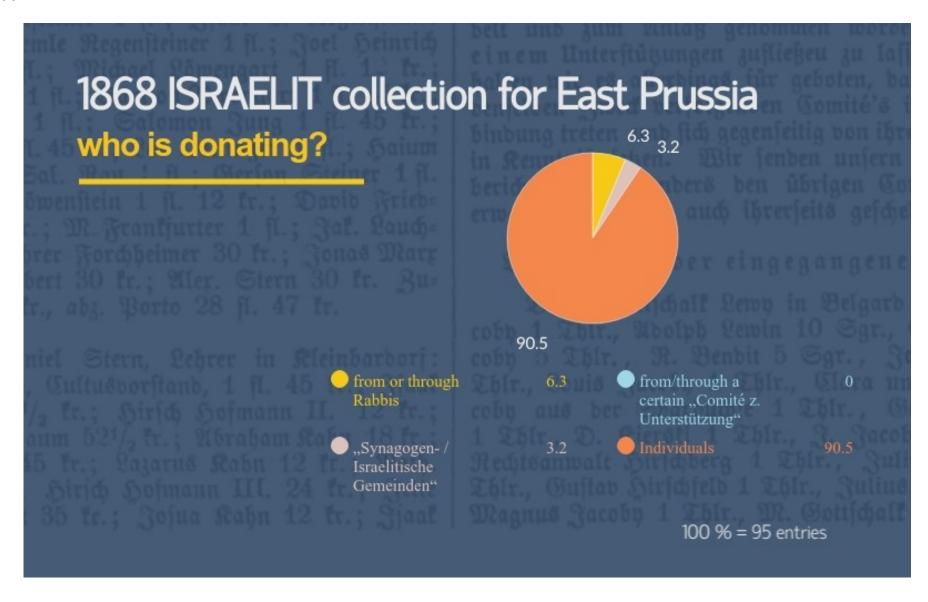


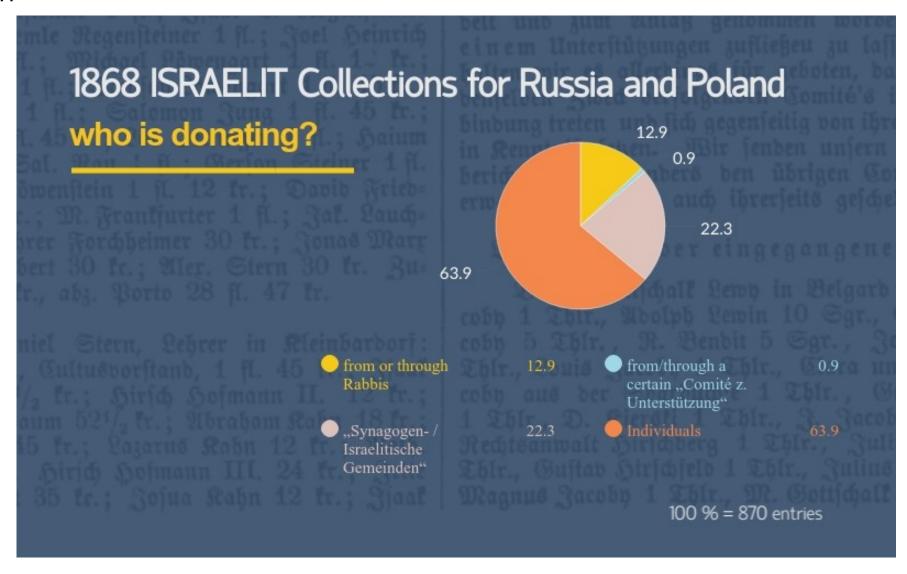
Appendix 12: Relief collections\* by geography for the Israelit committee, 1868 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler

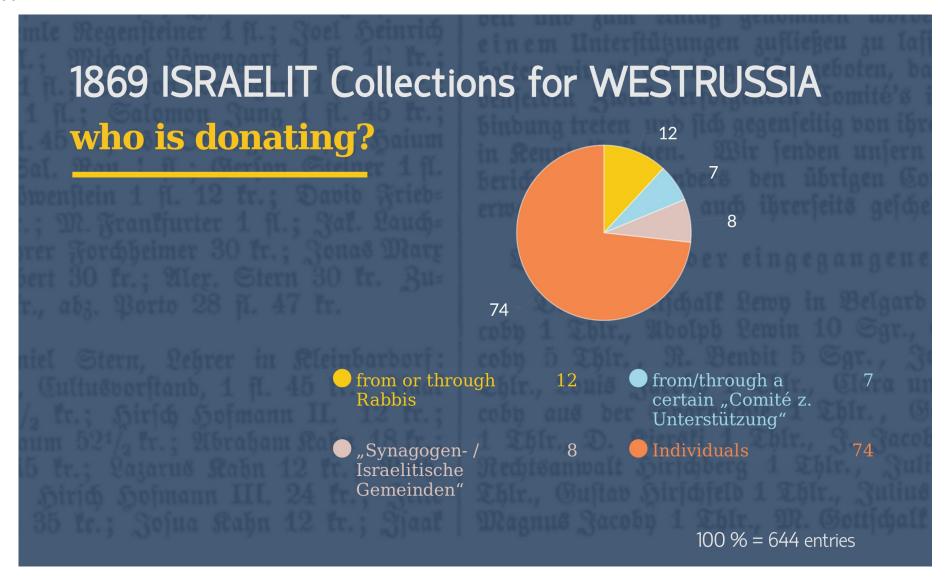


Appendix 13: Relief collections\* by geography for the Israelit committee, 1869 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler

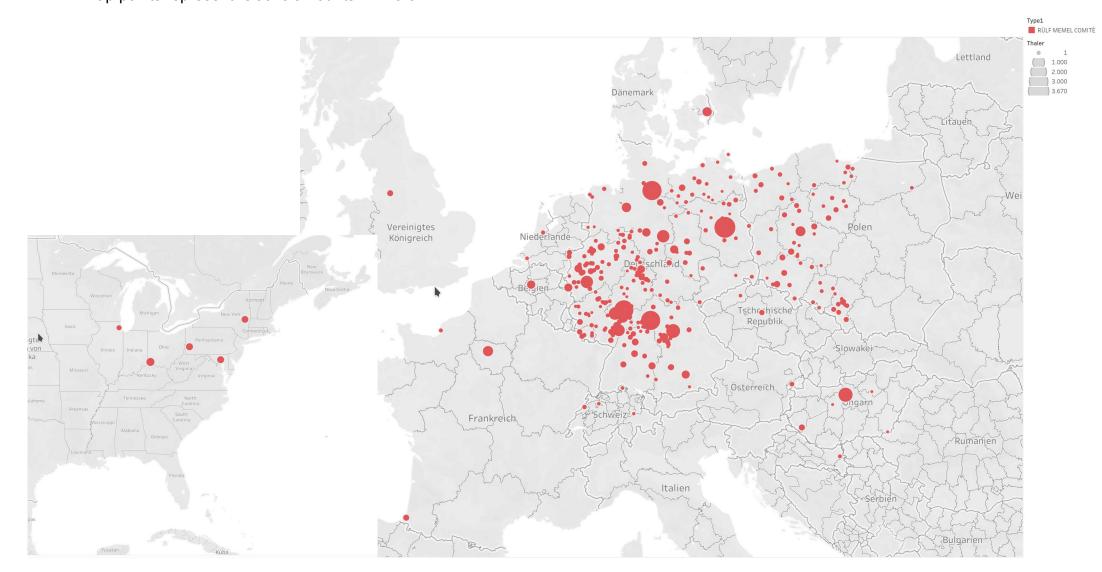


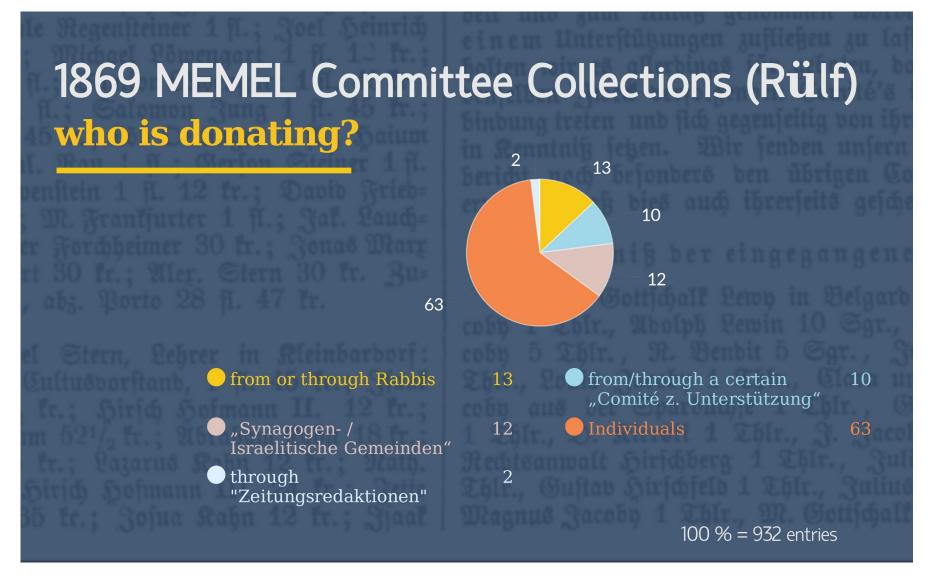






Appendix 17: Relief collections\* by geography for the Memel/Rülf committee, 1869 \*map points represent relative amounts in Thaler





Appendix 19: Memel, October, 6th 1885 - Isaak Rülf letter to Reichskanzler Bismarck

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Appendix 20: Memel, November, 11th 1885 - Isaak Rülf letter to Landgraf Cranz

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Memel, 11 Rosimbres 1885	
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Appendix 21: Rülf at the 2nd Zionist Congress in Basel (1898)



Appendix 22: Medal in Memory of Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor



<sup>\*</sup>Image courtesy of William Gross, Gross collection Hebrew University, Jerusalem.



Appendix 23: Portraits of the Gaon of Vilna and R. Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor Rabbi of Kovno - color lithograph. [Germany, early 20th century]

