

**RUSSIAN EMPIRE.** To understand the complex history of Jews in Russia, one must begin with a fundamental distinction, often effaced in the historiography and popular memory, between Russia as a state—the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and since 1991, the Russian Federation—and the geographically much smaller entity of ethnic Russia. Until the 1720s, there were essentially no Jews in the Russian Empire except for travelers and migrant merchants, and the Russian state forbade Jews from settling in its



A group of Jewish soldiers in the tsarist army, Troitskossovsk, 1887. (YIVO Archives)

interior, out of traditional Christian hostility.

It was only in the early decades of the eighteenth century, when the rulers of the Russian Empire started to expand westward, after more than a century of eastward inroads and annexation (into territories in which Jews did not

live), that Jews began to move into areas of the Russian Empire—not Russia proper. Thus, after Peter the Great conquered the areas connecting Muscovy and the Baltic Sea, and especially after Catherine the Great colluded with Prussia and Austria to divide and annex the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793, 1795), the Russian Empire gradually included the largest Jewish population in the world—a reality that persisted until the division of this territory in the aftermath of World War I. In this century and a half, however, the vast majority of Jews did not live in ethnic Russia itself but in the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire, and in the Kingdom of Poland, a region controlled by the tsars but not formally annexed to the empire. Throughout the nineteenth century, and especially in its latter half, Jews with special privileges settled legally in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and other Russian cities, where they were joined by larger numbers of Jews living there illegally. In the Soviet period, at first hundreds of thousands and then millions of Jews migrated to the interior provinces of Russia, particularly to the capital cities of Moscow and Leningrad. The substantial presence of Jews in these cities (with Leningrad reverting to its imperial name of Saint Petersburg) and in other parts of Russia continued in the post-Soviet period.

**The Russian State and the Jews.** Scholarly literature has described the history of the relationship between Jews and the Russian state in two fundamentally opposing ways. The traditional school, founded by the historian Simon Dubnow in the late nineteenth century, saw Jews as the preeminent victims of tsarist autocracy, whose treatment of the Jews was marked and defined by governmental antisemitism. Dubnow deemed the areas of the empire in which Jews were permitted to live—the so-called Pale of Settlement—the largest ghetto in the world, and considered all tsarist legislation regarding Jews as motivated by prejudice and hatred, culminating in pogroms that broke out against Jews in the late imperial period ostensibly orchestrated by the Russian government itself. This view entered into the popular consciousness and has shaped the way in which the descendants of Russian Jews have viewed their own history for over a century.

In sharp contrast, a new school of Russian Jewish history writing emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, first in the United States, then in Israel, and finally in post-Soviet Russia itself. This school views the Russian state's treatment of Jews comparatively, as part of the overall nationalities policy of the empire, a policy always marked by contradiction and bureaucratic ineptitude. In this view, antisemitism was not the motivating force of the government's treatment of Jews, which in general was consistent with, or in some cases milder than, its treatment of other groups. Jews were largely permitted to continue their traditional way of life and education of their young, as opposed to other minorities whose native languages and school systems were outlawed by the state. Perhaps most controversially, the new school of Russian Jewish historiography argues that pogroms against Jews were not orchestrated or even approved of by the state, but were rather spontaneous and unplanned outbreaks of urban violence caused by social and economic forces beyond the control of the Russian army or police.

Most broadly, Russian government policy toward Jews can be understood as the product of an unresolved tension between integration and segregation—a tension that resulted in contradictory laws and regulations, persisting from the days of Catherine the Great (r. 1762–1796) to the fall of the Romanov dynasty in the winter of 1917. Catherine's legislation regarding Jews at one and the same time fostered their segregation from the rest of the population by ratifying their communal autonomy and religious institutions *and* encouraged their integration into the new administrative institutions that she was creating—merchant guilds, urban government, and legally defined artisan associations. The new classification of the Russian population did not define Jews as an independent estate (called a *soslovie* in Russian), but included them in urban estates: either in the townspeople estate (*meshchantstvo*) or, if they were wealthy enough, in the merchant guilds (*kupechestvo*). However, the fact that in many areas, and particularly in Ukraine, Jews lived overwhelmingly in villages and rural settlements contradicted Catherine's policies from their inception because rural residence

was forbidden to members of the *meshchantstvo* estate. Thus, Jews were implicitly exempted from a basic prohibition incumbent upon most members of their estate. Periodically, this exception was lifted and Jews were banned from the countryside and forced to move to towns and cities; these actions (never terribly successful) were regarded by the Jews (and by some later historians) as discriminatory and oppressive.

In general, the basic rules regarding Jewish residence constituted an inchoate mixture of integrationist and segregationist intentions and realities: in a state and legal system in which no one enjoyed the natural right to live anywhere and where residence was regarded as a privilege extended by the state, Jews were permitted to reside in the areas of the empire in which they had lived at the time of annexation; legislation soon formalized these areas into the Pale of Jewish Settlement. Applications of individual Jews to live outside the Pale were almost always denied, but as the empire expanded, particularly into the area known as New Russia (southern Ukraine), Jews were permitted, and to some extent encouraged, to move into this new terrain, which included the city of Odessa, soon to be one of the major Jewish centers of the world. [*See Pale of Settlement; Odessa.*]

The tension between integration and segregation in Catherine's legislation on Jews was only exacerbated in the latter years of her reign, when in response to the French Revolution she retreated from Enlightenment-based policies of reform and toleration. The brief reigns of Peter III (1796) and Paul I (1796–1801) had little effect on Jewish policy, and the same held true for the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825), during which Jews basically retained the legal status they had held under Polish rule. Alexander I announced a new policy of offering Jews free land to work as farmers if they converted to Russian Orthodoxy, but this offer was not popular. Still, despite the lack of governmental initiative regarding Jews in these decades, the reality that they were living in a state vastly different from that of the destroyed Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth slowly began to become clear to the Jews. In 1803, the Russian government under Alexander I issued its first complete compilation of laws relating to Jews, known as the *Polozhenie* (Regulations) of 1803, but these had little practical effect on the Jewish community. More substantive was the invasion of the territory of the Pale of Settlement by Napoleon I in 1812, which resulted in legal changes in the Polish parts of the empire. But with the defeat of Napoleon, the situation returned to the status before the invasion.

That new reality became abundantly clear in the reign of Nicholas I (1825–1855) during which the tension between segregation and integration tilted to the latter pole, but—in sharp contrast to the experience of the Jews in the West—resulted in policies and realities deemed by most Jews to be formal persecution rather than an opportunity for liberation. Most crucially, Nicholas's government rescinded the laws exempting Jewish males from serving—like male townspeople—in the army, and required Jewish

communities to select and present for 25-year military service a stipulated number of males in every draft levy. In addition, the cantonist battalions first established by Peter the Great for the training of male children of soldiers (who belonged to the army from birth) were opened to Jews. Now Jewish communal leaders faced the option of sending young children off to the army in place of their fathers—a gruesome choice retrospectively redolent of the horrific dilemmas facing the Jewish Councils in World War II. A majority of Jews believed that most of the drafted children, and many of the adult soldiers as well, would be converted to Christianity, and would be lost to Judaism and their families. [*See Military Service in the Russian Empire.*]

The divisiveness and social dislocation that resulted from the conscription policy of Nicholas I left a permanent blight on the internal leadership of Russian Jewry, who were perceived to have favored their own sons, and those of the wealthy, learned, and socially connected. Communal leaders stood accused of persecuting the poor and politically weak segments of Jewish society. In another integrationist move with unexpected consequences, the Russian state in 1844 established special schools for Jewish children, meant to teach them Russian and basic secular subjects. *Maskilim*, the adherents of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, hailed these schools and administered them, but the traditionalist majority feared and hated them. Finally, that same year the government of Nicholas I formally abolished the *kahal*, the executive agency of the autonomous Jewish community, placing Jews under the formal control of local state authorities; at the same time, though, Jews were permitted to run their own affairs when these activities were considered aspects of Jewish religious practice. The distinction between religious and secular affairs, however, was never clearly defined, and continues to bedevil historians sorting through the surviving records of Russian Jewish communities in order to establish how they were run after the abolition of the *kahal*. [*See Kahal.*]

The reign of Alexander II (1855–1881), the Tsar Liberator, retained and expanded the policy of integration of the Jews into the Russian body politic, but under a far more liberal guise than that of his predecessor: conscription of children was outlawed, Jewish residence outside of the Pale of Settlement was expanded, and economic and educational restrictions against the Jews were lifted. Many Jewish intellectuals expected an imminent emancipation of the Jews as part of the Great Reforms that had remade Russian society and governance. But such emancipation was never forthcoming, and indeed, the pace of reform slowed substantially in the latter years of Alexander II's reign. Moreover, all of these efforts were reversed, after his assassination in 1881 by revolutionary terrorists, and the assumption to the throne of his son, Alexander III (1881–1892). Attempting to turn Imperial Russia effectively into a police state, the new emperor committed himself to stemming the tide of revolutionary sentiment in the

country by reversing his father's liberal policies in all areas of life, including toward the Jews.

The pendulum of integration versus segregation now swung back: new restrictions limited the number of Jews permitted in Russian educational institutions and in the professions, most especially the bar; Jews were increasingly blamed and penalized for the economic difficulties of the Russian state, and most importantly, for the rise of the revolutionary movement. Although, as mentioned above, current scholarship believes that the pogroms that broke out against Jews in Ukraine in 1881–1882 were not planned nor even approved of by the government, the anti-Jewish legislation of the state contributed to the nearly universal perception that these attacks were either contrived by or at least condoned by the tsarist regime. In 1882, the government issued laws aimed at reducing Jewish presence in the villages of the Pale of Settlement; these were known as the May Laws. Though frequently misinterpreted as prohibiting all Jewish settlement in villages, they in fact pertained only to new Jewish settlement outside towns and cities. After the issuance of these laws, the tsarist regime established a number of committees to investigate the status of the Jews in the Empire, the most noted and long lived of which was the Pahlen Report, which lasted from 1883 to 1886 and recommended even more restrictions on the status of the Jews in the Empire.

Similarly, the perception began to grow that both the growing emigration of Jews from the Russian Empire to the West and the beginnings of modern Jewish nationalism—movements that actually predated the outbreak of the pogroms—were caused directly and unilaterally by the antisemitic policies of Alexander III. This perception—transmuted into a virtual historical truism by Simon Dubnow and his followers, as well as by the adherents of the new nationalist movements—shaped the image of the Russian state's relationship to Jews for decades to come.

The reign of the last tsar, Nicholas II (1892–1917) was marked by a radical and highly complex swing from policies favoring segregation to those favoring integration of Jews. For the first 13 years of Nicholas II's rule, restrictions against Jews were retained and in some cases, intensified. During Passover of 1903, a major pogrom occurred against the Jews of Kishinev, then the capital of Bessarabia (now Moldova). Dozens of Jews were murdered and an unknown number raped. Although contemporaries at the time universally believed that the Russian government was either responsible for or sympathetic to this pogrom, recent research has argued that neither of these were the case; more causal was the low number and incompetence of Russian army forces and local militia in the area. But the pogrom was an enormous shock to the belief in the emancipation of the Jews in Russia then held by most Russian Jews, led to the organization of Jewish self-defense organizations, and likely accelerated emigration. [*See Kishinev; Pogroms.*]

After the Revolution of 1905, however, in the wake of which the tsar was forced to grant a measure of constitutional liberty to his subjects, many restrictive laws limiting Jewish participation in Russian civic life were eliminated. Jews were permitted to vote in elections to the new parliament and to form legal political parties. Thus, again in sharp contrast to the experience of Jews in the West, Jews in the Russian Empire effectively gained political rights before they were legally emancipated—perhaps the most glaring example of the persistent tension between integration and segregation. [*See Russian Revolution of 1905.*]

In Kiev from 1911 to 1913 there took place perhaps the most famous blood-libel case in modern history, alleging that a Kievan Jew, Mendel Beilis, had slaughtered a young Christian child for reasons of ritual murder. This led to a trial that was covered by the world press, and although the Russian government steadfastly campaigned for a conviction of Beilis, he was ultimately acquitted by a jury of non-Jews. Some of the outstanding Russian and Russian Jewish lawyers of the period participated in his defense, which was interpreted ideologically as both proof of the enormity of Russian anti-Semitism and the strength of the anti-tsarist forces in Russian society. [*See the biography of Beilis.*]

Contradictions intensified in the last years of Nicholas II's rule. On the one hand, regulations governing elections increasingly limited the franchise of Jews; on the other hand, as Russia entered the World War and the regions in which the largest Jewish population in the world were engulfed in battle, the Russian government was forced to abolish the Pale of Settlement in the summer of 1916, as a temporary measure aimed at dealing with the hundreds of thousands of Jews fleeing the battlefield and flooding the interior of Russia. At the same time, more than half a million Jews served proudly and bravely in the Russian army, even as their coreligionists faced charges of disloyalty and even treachery by the High Command. Thus, to the very last days of the existence of the Russian Empire, the tensions and contradictions between integration and segregation of Jews were manifested, until the Romanov dynasty itself disintegrated in February–March 1917. In one of its first acts, the new Provisional Government abolished all laws discriminating against any Russian citizens on the basis of religion or nationality; thus, the Jews were emancipated.

**Demographic, Social, and Economic History.** As a consequence of both the incompetence of the tsarist bureaucracy and the Jews' desire to avoid being counted for fiscal purposes, we have no accurate statistics about Jewish life in the Russian Empire prior to 1897, when the first the all-empire census was mounted. The best estimates propose that the Jewish population at the time of the Polish Partitions was approximately 1 million, and this figure would increase fivefold by the end of the nineteenth century—the official (if still imprecise) figure in the 1897 census was 5,198,401 Jews living in the Russian Empire, including Congress Poland—a little more than 4 percent of

the entire population. This number must be augmented by the nearly 3 million Jews who emigrated from the Russian Empire to the West from the 1870s to 1917. Thus, between 1772 and 1917 the Jewish population of this territory grew over eight times—an enormous increase, far greater than that of the non-Jewish population of the empire. Scholars have attributed this massive growth to a sharp diminution of the infant mortality rate—but, as yet, no one has successfully explained *why* the Jewish infant mortality rate dropped so precipitously over this period.

In any event, this demographic reality of Russian Jewry, compounded by the political reality that compelled most Jews to live within the economically restricted area of the Pale of Settlement, had far-reaching social and economic implications. First, as the number of Jews living in their traditional areas of settlement expanded exponentially, substantial numbers of Jews began to migrate to other parts of the Russian Empire open to them—at first, mostly to the southwest, and especially to Odessa. At the same time, as the autonomy of the Polish Kingdom diminished until it was virtually eliminated in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and hence the former Congress Poland was all but formally included into the Pale of Settlement, hundreds of thousands of Jews moved to the more economically advanced former Polish provinces as part of the so-called “invasion of the Litvaks.” Jews in large numbers also attempted to settle outside the Pale of Settlement, whether legally or not.

All of these migratory movements were part of an overcharging urbanization process, as hundreds of thousands and then millions of Jews moved from villages to towns, from towns to cities, and then to larger and larger cities. This migration reflected not only demographic growth and the need for jobs, but also economic changes in the Russian Empire and particularly its western borderlands. There, the emancipation of the serfs, the introduction of railroads, and the fleeting attempts at government-sponsored industrialization gradually displaced and all but eliminated traditional market economies. Thus, the vast numbers of Jews whose livelihoods had been based for centuries on serving as providers of goods and services to the peasantry at town markets, were now increasingly forced to seek alternate sources of income. Large numbers of Jews, including young women, began to work in small factories and workshops, while the owners of these factories and workshops joined the growing number of Russian Jews taking up white-collar professions and occupations.

By the end of the imperial period, then, the social stratification of Jews in the Russian Empire had changed dramatically: while the vast majority of Jews were still in what can be deemed the lower middle classes, they were more and more impoverished; some Jews entered the industrial working class (though the extent of large-scale industrialization remained very small), and significant numbers entered into the prosperous middle classes and even into the upper middle classes. A tiny number of extraordinarily wealthy Jews

became nobles. Their patents of nobility were almost always issued by German principalities and ratified by the Russian state.

The tiny Jewish upper class and the larger but still relatively small middle classes were largely uninvolved in the last, if most famous, migratory movement of Russian Jewry—emigration to the West, and particularly to the United States. Although popular imagination continues to link this emigration exclusively to the pogroms against Jews in 1881–1882, demographic and economic historians have argued for decades that the emigration movement both preceded the pogroms and reflected—like all massive migration movements—social and economic, rather than political factors. The Jewish demographic explosion was exacerbated by a series of crop failures, famines, and downward cycles of the Russian economy that led millions of other—non-Jewish—residents of the empire to seek a solution to their economic problems outside of Russia. Technically, emigration was illegal in Russian law, but the government largely closed its eyes and at times encouraged emigration, which began slowly in the late 1860s, gained substantial momentum in the 1870s, and then reached massive proportions in 1880 and early 1881, before the outbreak of the first pogroms that spring.

Undoubtedly, the pogroms provided an impetus to the emigration fever, and over the course of the next 33 years, approximately 3 million Jews would leave the Russian empire, mostly for America but also to England, France, and other parts of the West—as well as a tiny number for Palestine, connected to the Zionist movement. Demographers and historians are still trying to sort through the massive data relating to these emigrants, to determine their geographic, economic, social, and religious profiles. According to current research, the earliest waves of the Russian Jewish emigrants to the West seem to have come disproportionately from the northern provinces of the Pale (those, not incidentally, not directly affected by the pogroms that were concentrated in the south) and to have been males of working age; many seem to have first moved internally from areas of smaller to larger, habitation, and to have chosen emigration after that option did not work out. Since the rabbinical leaders of Russian Jewry emphatically inveighed against emigration either to America or to Palestine, the emigrants seem also to have been less devoted to traditional Judaism.

All of these characteristics would change over the course of the decades, as this mass migration, like all mass migrations, snowballed from its original core group to larger and larger circles of Russian Jews. What seems true is that unlike other emigrants from the Russian Empire, greater percentages of women, children, and the elderly eventually joined the emigration, whose purpose was permanent relocation. The most crucial if little noted element of the story of Russian Jewish mass emigration is that it only accounted for one-third of the Jewish population of the empire—in other words, two-thirds of Russian Jews stayed home.

**Religious and Cultural Changes.** Legal, demographic, social, and economic changes in the lives of Russian Jews went hand in hand with religious and cultural revolution in the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century. Most Russian Jews to the end of the imperial period remained traditional in their daily life and praxis, but Russian Judaism was hardly static or immune—if in complex and often contradictory ways—to the influence of creeping modernity. In the 50 years between the Polish Partitions and the reign of Nicholas I, Hasidism spread like wildfire through most of East European Jewry, capturing the minds and hearts of the majority of Jews in Ukraine and Congress Poland, where the courts of Hasidic rebbes flourished, amassing great spiritual, political, and even economic influence.

Only in Lithuania and Belorussia (strongholds of opposition to Hasidism and lumped together by the Jews as the term *Lite*) did Hasidism not win over the majority of the Jews, though even here important inroads were made by such groups as the Karlin Hasidim in the Pinsk region and the Habad movement, based in the small towns of Liubavich (Lubavitch) and Liady. The rabbinic and intellectual leadership of Lithuanian–Belorussian Jews—now called *misnagdim* or opponents of Hasidism (a paradoxical mark of the ascendancy of the latter!)—countered the appeal of Hasidism both ideationally and institutionally. Misnagdic leaders such as Rabbi Hayim ben Yitshak of Volozhin developed a new, more spiritualized theology that partook of Hasidic insights while remaining steadfastly committed to Talmudic intellectualism as the pinnacle and summum bonum of Jewish life. They also founded new types of highly intensive yeshivas that attracted students from all parts of Eastern Europe (and tiny numbers from the West as well). Such academies and their intellectual mentors attempted to stem the tide of secularization in Russian Jewish life, but some yeshivas—especially the most prestigious, the Volozhin yeshiva—ironically also served as the breeding ground for Haskalah among its students.

Another approach was founded by Rabbi Yisra'el Salanter (Lipkin), founder of the Musar movement. Salanter believed that increased attention to moral and ethical teachings, as well as an intensive disciplinary system that would inculcate these values, would protect traditionalist Jews from both the dangers of Hasidism and of secularization. A tiny modernist Orthodox movement developed at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries that sought to synthesize traditional Judaism and modern education. An even smaller number of Jews, drawn almost exclusively from the upper middle classes and living in large cities, embraced a Russian version of Liberal or Reform Judaism. [*See Lubavitch Hasidism; Musar; Volozhin, Yeshiva of; and the biographies of Hayim ben Yitshak of Volozhin and Lipkin.*]

Over the course of the Imperial period, more and more Jews began to abandon traditional Judaism. While the ideals of the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment, were propounded only by small numbers of Jewish

intellectuals—who eventually largely turned to the more radical movements of Zionism and socialism and their various intersections—the real lives of growing numbers of Russian Jews began to conform more and more to the goals of the enlighteners: first and foremost, millions of Jews in the Russian Empire began to speak Russian and to become consumers of Russian culture, even as they retained Yiddish as their mother tongue. More and more Jews began to attend Russian-language primary and secondary schools, and then universities as well. Just as in every other modern Jewish community, linguistic acculturation rigorously paralleled socioeconomic upward mobility and gender divides. This process of russification intensified in the Soviet period, when Russian rapidly became the primary tongue of most Russian Jews. In the Polish provinces of the empire, a similar process of polonization took hold among Jews. Acculturation was frequently accompanied by politicization.

Of enormous importance was the rise of the new political movements in Russian Jewry. The first stirrings of modern Jewish nationalism appeared in the late 1860s and the 1870s, as small numbers of Russian Jewish intellectuals applied the principles of modern European nationalism to the case of Jews. Figures such as Perets Smolenskin, Mosheh Leib Lilienblum, and Lev Pinsker at first believed that Jewish nationalism could be successful on Russian soil, though Eliezer Perlmann, later known as Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, argued by the late 1870s that Jewish nationalism could only be based in the Land of Israel, in a Hebrew-speaking Jewish commonwealth. This argument gained many adherents in the aftermath of the pogroms of 1881–1882, and a movement known as Hibat Tsiyon—Love of Zion—was established, committed both to spreading these ideas in Eastern Europe and to founding agricultural colonies in Palestine. [*See Hibat Tsiyon and the biographies of the principal figures mentioned above.*]

Although Hibat Tsiyon attracted a good number of Jewish intellectuals, it failed to make major inroads among the masses and appeared to be dying out in the 1890s, until it was ineluctably transformed by the creation of the Zionist movement in the West by Theodor Herzl. Hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews became adherents of the new Zionist movement, especially under the aegis of Herzl's opponent, the cultural Zionist thinker Ahad Ha-Am, but Zionism of any variety was vociferously opposed by the vast majority of East European rabbis, both Hasidic and misnagdic, who viewed the movement as heretical. They viewed with no less antipathy Jews attracted to the growing socialist movement. Socialism began to attract adherents among Russian Jews in the 1860s and 1870s and grew substantially in the aftermath of 1881–1882, and especially in the wake of the industrialization and proletarianization of hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers at the turn of the century.

Thus in 1897, the same year in which Theodor Herzl founded the Zionist party in Basel, Switzerland, the Jewish Workers Party, known in

Yiddish as the Bund, was founded in Vilna. This party came eventually to seek a synthesis of socialism and Jewish nationalism, of a distinctly anti-Zionist bent. The Bund came into early conflict with the Russian Social Democratic Party, which demanded full control over socialist agitation among all workers in the empire, including Jews—resulting in the temporary departure of the Bund from the all-empire party, an act that left Vladimir Lenin and his sympathizers in the majority of the Social Democratic Party (hence the term Bolsheviks, Russian for majority), as opposed to the Mensheviks (the minority), whose brand of socialism was actually far closer to that of most of the Bund ideologues. [*See Bund; Zionism and Zionist Parties; and the biography of Ahad Ha-Am.*]

Soon, moreover, various groups emerged that attempted to forge a synthesis between Zionism and socialism, as well as a far smaller group that sought an amalgam between Zionism and Orthodox Judaism. An even smaller group of Jews, who viewed their Jewishness as entirely superseded by their commitment to socialism, joined—and sometimes achieved leadership positions—in the Bolshevik Party, just as a significant group of Jewish intellectuals and professionals joined the Russian liberal party, the Constitutional Democrats, known as the Kadets.

The new nationalist intelligentsia, whether Zionist or socialist, found sources of expression in four new literary cultures created for and by Jews in the Russian Empire. First, the Haskalah movement engendered an enormously creative Hebrew literary renaissance, based especially in Vilna, Odessa, and Saint Petersburg, that numbered in its ranks scores of extraordinarily talented poets, essayists, novelists, and journalists. Though the scope of this culture was limited to those—mostly men, but also some women—who could read Hebrew, the success of this literary flowering can be gauged by the fact that in the late 1880s and early 1890s, there were two daily Hebrew newspapers in the Russian capital alone. By the 1890s the literature included the works of the greatest Hebrew poet of the modern period, Hayim Nahman Bialik.

A far larger audience was available for the nascent Yiddish literary movement, which also had its roots in the Haskalah but especially found support among a small group of intellectuals attracted by nationalist and populist thought. Particularly crucial to the success of modern literary culture in Yiddish were its three founding fathers—Mendele Moikher-Seforim (Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh), Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinowitz), and Y. L. Peretz. At the same time, as hundreds of thousands, and then millions of Jews were learning to read, write, and think in Russian (and smaller numbers in Polish), there emerged a fascinating Russian Jewish and Polish Jewish culture that fulfilled the needs of a growing number of Jewish youth who had a waning knowledge of Yiddish, and often no Hebrew training at all. These two cultures often appealed to Jews drawn to Russian and Polish liberal movements, which eschewed a Jewish separation while

fighting for the emancipation of Jews (and all other minorities) within the Russian Empire.

Between the Polish Partitions and the Russian Revolution, then, the largest Jewish community in the world had changed dramatically in every aspect of its existence. Russian Jewry was six times larger than it had been a century and a half earlier, and thus faced exceptional difficult economic and social challenges. It was rich and dynamic in cultural, religious, political, and literary creativity, but also more and more divided, and often bitterly, along new ideological and religious lines. Its legal and political status and relationship with a changing state and its institutions bore little resemblance to that of the early years of its entry into the Russian Empire. In sum, Russian Jewry in 1917 was both an extraordinary creative and a deeply troubled society, in ways no one could have anticipated and which scholars are still attempting to chronicle and analyze.

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