To my young grandson, Ephraim Samuel Epstein

הבן יקיר לי אפרים

Jeremiah 31:20

Contents

Abbreviations of Works by Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg

Ateret	*Sefer Ateret Tiferet* (1931)
Brivele	*A Brivele Fun di Zisse Mame Shabbes Malkesa* (1924)
Darsha	*Sefer Darsha Tsemer u-Fishtim* (1912)
Derekh Erets	*Derekh Erets*, unpublished manuscript, RFA, Savannah (written 1896)
Eliyahu	*Sefer Eliyahu ha-Navi'* (1910)
Goral	*Sefer Goral ha-'Assiriyot* (1904)
Greiditser	*Der Greiditser* (1913)
Haggada	*Haggada shel Pesaḥ 'im Perush R. Yehuda Liva'* (1905)
Haqqafot	*Seder Haqqafot le-Shmini Atseret ule-Simḥat Torah* (1909)
Homeopatia	*Homeopatia (1912)*
Ḥoshen	*Sefer Ḥoshen ha-Mishpat shel ha-Kohen ha-Gadol* (1913)
Qeri'ah	*Sefer ha-Qeri'ah ha-Qedosha* (1919)
Krizis	*Der Krizis fun Lodz Varsha* (1912)
KT	*Sefer Kol Torah* (1908)
Me'or	*Sefer Me'or ha Ḥashmal* (1924)
Miqveh	*Miqveh Yehuda* (1917–1919?)
Omer	*Omer va-Da'at* (page proofs, 1934; partial publication, 1996; full publication, 2007, 2020)
Nifla'ot	*Sefer Nifla'ot Maharal mi Prag 'im ha Golem* (1909)
NZ	*Nifla'ot ha-Zohar* (1927)
PY	*Peri Yehuda* (1935)
Prozbul	*Seder ha-Prozbul* (1910)
Refa'el	*Sefer Refa'el ha Mal'akh* (1911)
Refu'at	*Sefer Refu'at ha-Nefesh u-Refu'at ha-Guf* (1913)
Segulot	*Sefer Segulot u-Refu'ot* (1910)
Sha'arei	*Sefer Sha'arei Zohar Torah* (1905)

Shlomo	*Sefer Divrei ha Yamim le-Shlomo-ha Melekh* (1913)
Shpole	*Sefer Tif'eret Mahar'el mi-Shpole* (1912)
Yadot	*Sefer Yadot Nedarim* (1902)
ZK	*Sefer ha-Zohar ha-Qadosh* (two volumes, 1929–1930)
ZT	*Sefer Zohar Torah* (five volumes, 1924–1926)

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

BMA	Ben-Meir Family Archive (Jerusalem)
KA	*Keneder Adler* (Montreal)
RFA	Rosenberg Family Archive (Savannah)
THJ	*Toronto Hebrew Journal* (Toronto)

Preface

I first came across the name of Rabbi Yehuda Yudel Rosenberg, the subject of this volume, quite by accident. In 1981, Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa put on an exhibition of rare Judaica and Hebraica from its then recently acquired Jacob Lowy collection. In this exhibition, the then curator, Brad Sabin Hill, presently Dean of the I. Edward Kiev Judaica Collection at George Washington University (who, I later discovered, was related through marriage with the Rosenberg family), inserted one volume of Rosenberg's Hasidic homilies entitled *Peri Yehuda*, of which you will hear later in this book. The exhibition catalogue called Yudel Rosenberg "Chief Rabbi of Montreal," and indicated that Rosenberg was "best known for his Hebrew edition of the *Zohar*, aside from several volumes of legends, folk-medicine and sorcery in Yiddish."[1]

This description piqued my curiosity. On the one hand, I was and am still interested in the history of Kabbala in general, and especially its popularization in modern times. I also maintain a scholarly interest in the development of Orthodox Judaism in North America. Rabbi Rosenberg, apparently, was a man who combined both areas of my scholarly interest in his career. Beyond that, he was also a Montrealer, for whom material might well be available in my own back yard.

I had no opportunity to pursue the matter further at that time, but Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg remained in my mind. A few years later, I began to follow up some of the leads I had acquired concerning him. These leads took me on an adventure of discovery, lasting more than three decades, which I share with you in this book.

Mi-kol melamdai hiskalti. I have learned from many people and benefited from the aid of many librarians and institutions in the course of researching and writing this book. I would like to acknowledge their help, however inadequately.

1 Brad Sabin Hill, ed., *Incunabula, Hebraica & Judaica* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1981), 31.

I begin with my parents, Jacob and Hannah Robinson, who launched me at an early age on a voyage of discovery of Judaism and Jewish history that has lasted to this day. Their love and care never abated. Their personal intervention at a critical juncture of the research for this book is fondly remembered. The memory of my father, Jacob Robinson, who passed away in 1998, and of my mother, Hannah (Miller) Robinson, who died in 2007, remains a constant blessing to me.

The late David Rome, guide to generations of researchers into Canadian Jewry,[2] gave me my first solid information on Rosenberg. Though in many ways my research has tended to change the picture of Rosenberg he originally painted for me, without him, this book would likely not have even been attempted. Rosenberg's daughter Leah (Lilly), who was still among the living at the time I began my research, graciously gave me the benefit of her memories and her hospitality.[3] Other members of the extended Rosenberg family, including Lionel Albert, Yehoshua Ben Meir, Dr. Avrum Richler, Mordecai Richler, Baruch Rosenberg, and Dr. Lawrence Rosenberg have generously supplied me with information and documents over the years.

Yudel Rosenberg's surviving manuscripts and papers are to be found in several places. In Montreal, the Jewish Canadiana collection of the Jewish Public Library contains the largest single public collection of Rosenberg's works. The entire Jewish Public Library staff has helped me in one way or another. To single out the names of Claire Stern, Ronald Finegold, both now retired, Shannon Hodge, who has left the Library for another position, and Eiran Harris, who is still active, merely indicates that they maintained an interest in my work that went far beyond the call of duty. Janice Rosen of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives was equally helpful. During my research I had occasion to travel to Savannah, Georgia, where Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's youngest son, Abraham Isaac, was rabbi for many years. Abraham Isaac Rosenberg had inherited his father's library and papers. Much of that library is now housed in the Ner Israel Yeshiva in Toronto. What remained of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's books, papers and manuscripts, however, were at that time to be found in Savannah, where Abraham Isaac's widow, Sylvia Mayta Sura Rosenberg generously allowed me access to examine them and photocopy extensively. Another

2 Ira Robinson, "David Rome as an Historian of Canadian Jewry," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 3 (1995): 1–10.

3 Leah Rosenberg's memoirs are published under the title *The Errand Runner: Reflections of a Rabbi's Daughter* (Toronto: Wiley, 1981).

important set of papers is found in Jerusalem, Israel where the descendants of Yudel Rosenberg's eldest son, Meir Joshua, reside. My thanks go to Rabbi Yehoshua Ben-Meir, who allowed these documents to be photocopied.

My search for Rosenberg publications and materials took me to the libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary, the YIVO Institute (now part of the Center for Jewish History), the New York Public Library, Harvard University, the Jewish National and University Library (Jerusalem), the Schocken Library (Jerusalem), the Municipal Archives of Tel-Aviv, Library and Archives Canada (Ottawa), the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal, the Archives Municipales de Montréal, the Archives of the Quebec Ministry of Justice, (Montréal), and the Ontario Jewish Archives of Toronto. All of the librarians and archivists of these institutions were most helpful.

Aspects of this book have been seen and commented upon by my colleagues Morris Faierstein, Steven Lapidus, Sid Leiman, David Roskies, Marc Shapiro, Robert Shapiro, the late Stephen Speisman, and Eli Yassif. I received some important material and insights from Zanvil Klein, David Hoffman, and Marcin Wodziński of the University of Wrocław. Michael Stanislawski of Columbia University and Yakov Rabkin of l'Université de Montréal have helped me with some Russian language material. I am grateful to all of them for their time and effort. I have learned much from them, and particularly from Yassif's and Leiman's studies of Rosenberg. For part of this work, the late Henriette Kallus served as my research assistant. I am grateful for her help and fondly recall her friendship. I thank the Office of the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism of the Government of Canada for its partial funding of my research.

Special thanks go to my friend and colleague, Professor Simcha Fishbane of Touro College. While a doctoral student at Concordia, Fishbane took a personal interest in this project. He not only served as a sounding board for many of my ideas, but he also accompanied me on my research trip to Savannah, and was instrumental in obtaining material from the Ben Meir family in Jerusalem.

This book might have been completed well over a decade ago, save for my conviction that the documentary material relevant to Rabbi Rosenberg's career in Montreal had not yet been fully exploited and digested. Thus while I could say with certainty that I knew a great deal about Rabbi Rosenberg himself, I felt I still knew too little about the environment in which he functioned. Knowing, for instance, that he was preoccupied during much of his time in Montreal with his professional rivalry with Rabbi Hirsch Cohen, I could not responsibly write that chapter of the book without fully examining Rabbi Cohen himself, and the hundreds of letters Rabbi Cohen wrote which are extant in the Alex

Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal. Much of that time, therefore, was devoted to research on the Jewish community of Montreal in the early twentieth century, and particularly its immigrant Orthodox rabbinate. That research has now been published,[4] and its completion cleared the way for the fruition of this project.

Portions of the book have appeared in somewhat altered form in the journals *American Jewish Archives*, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, *Canadian Jewish Studies*, *Jewish History*, *Journal of the Society of Rabbis in Academia*, *Judaism*, *Modern Jewish Studies*, and *Polin*. Their permission to republish the material is gratefully acknowledged. Special thanks to Stanley Diamond, Executive Director, Jewish Records Indexing–Poland, for sharing with me his discovery of Yudel Rosenberg's birth record.

My thanks go to my wife, Sandra Moskovitz Robinson and our children, Sara Libby and Yosef Dov, who managed to bear the inevitable strains that a project of this magnitude entail and, especially, my distractedness from everyday affairs while running down yet another lead. Whatever I have been able to achieve has been because of them. This book is theirs as well.

This book is dedicated to my young grandson, Ephraim Samuel Epstein. Every contact with him renews my faith in the future.

Montréal, Québec, Canada
January 3, 2020

4 Ira Robinson, *Rabbis and Their Community: Studies in the Immigrant Orthodox Rabbinate in Montreal, 1896–1930* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg and the Paradigms of Jewish Modernity

The modern era constitutes one of the great turning points in the course of Jewish history. Its coming presented Jews with unprecedented existential choices. It engendered a fundamental rethinking of the social, religious, and economic position of Jews who had hitherto lived separate, largely autonomous lives within Christian- or Muslim-dominated societies. Rethinking the position of Jews in society inevitably brought about a thorough reimagining of what Judaism and its traditional teachings might signify under radically new conditions. The many issues and movements that emanated from the turning point of Jewish modernity have significantly defined the directions Jews and Judaism have taken from early modern times to the present day. In the past, historians of the Jews and Judaism have most often considered the watershed of modernity through the prism of the dramatic and significant events, personalities, and movements mainly active in Western and Central Europe.[1] Gershon Hundert, however, has more recently argued that we should consider the importance of understanding Jewish modernity and all that it entailed from the perspective of the major Jewish population center of Eastern Europe that existed and functioned under significantly different conditions than obtained in Western Europe and that found its own path to modernity.[2] Eli Lederhandler and Arthur Green ably second Hundert's insight with respect to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] More particularly, Glenn Dynner points out that:

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1 For a statement of this position, see Michael Myer, "Where Does the Modern Period of Jewish History Begin?" *Judaism* 24, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 329–338.

2 Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

3 Eli Lederhandler, "Modernity without emancipation or assimilation? The case of Russian Jewry" in *Assimilation and Community: the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 324,

> Theorists of modernity have begun to question historians' assumptions about the inexorable weakening of custom, tradition, and religious belief. … Many now characterize modernity as a radically heterogeneous condition in which some individuals strive for … freedom and autonomy while others opt instead for movements that privilege piety, humility, and self-denial.[4]

The scholarly interpretation of the complex processes that influenced the development of Judaism in the modern era thus tended to create narratives focussing on the decline, if not the actual fall, of traditional Jewish observance[5] as well as the emergence of other interpretations and restatements of Judaism, most notably Reform, which had its largest impact in Western Europe and North America.[6] Orthodoxy and its rabbis were all too often dismissed as a reactionary force, if not worse, echoing the sentiments of nineteenth-century advocates of Jewish westernization (*maskilim*) like Moses Leib Lilienblum 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; they do not know the suffering of their own people. … I have no doubt whatsoever that the rabbis would be satisfied if the Jews did not win equal rights, just as long as every iota of the prayers inherited from our ancestors could be preserved.[7]

The firm conviction of Orthodoxy's opponents at that time was that the progress of nineteenth-century civilization was working decisively against Orthodoxy,

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338; Arthur Green, "Three Warsaw Mystics," in *Kolot Rabbim: Essays in Memory of Rivka Shatz-Uffenheimer*, ed. Rachel Elior (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 1–58.

4 Glenn Dynner, "Replenishing the "Fountain of Judaism": Traditionalist Jewish Education in Interwar Poland," *Jewish History* 31, nos. 3–4 (2018): 229–261.

5 Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996), 9–11; Cf. Glenn Dynner, "Jewish Traditionalism in Eastern Europe: The Historiographical Gadfly," *Polin* 29 (2017): 285–286.

6 Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749–1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967, 1984); idem, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For the impact on Reform Judaism in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, see Michael Stanislowski, *A Murder in Lemberg: Politics, Religion and Violence in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 34ff.

7 Cited in Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009–2012), vol. 1, 438. Cf. Lederhandler, "Modernity without Emancipation or Assimilation?," 332.

or, in the words of Morris Winchevsky, writing to Perets Smolenskin in 1878: "Each new machine, each new railway station, each new telegraph, each new invention works against Hasidism."[8]

However, as Jay Berkovitz points out, this widespread scholarly preoccupation with the decline of Orthodox Judaism tends to obscure some important trends in cultural and intellectual Jewish history, especially those related to the role of Jewish law (halakha) and other aspects of Judaic religious life in this era.[9] These trends are among the matters that this book seeks to illuminate through its treatment of the life and times of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg (1859–1935).

Certainly this book contends that there is a definite need to reconceptualise our understanding of these trends in the way suggested by Joshua Rothenberg:

> But the "modern" did not destroy or take over the "traditional". The "modern" galvanized the great mass of the hitherto inactive, and forced the traditional segment of the community to increase its efforts to compete with the new forms of Jewishness.[10]

This book also engages what Jack Wertheimer has called "Jewish continuity" as a factor in Jewish modernization:

> … the persistence of tradition in modern Jewish life … the Jews who have resisted change or managed to evade the powerful impress of modern culture in order to maintain a degree of fidelity to the traditions of the past … emphasizing continuity rather than change.[11]

Likewise, we attempt in this book to understand in a more profound way the insight of David Biale, who points out that the Eastern European Jewish

8 David Assaf, "Hebetim Historiim ve-Ḥevratiyim be-Ḥeqer ha-Ḥasidut," in *Zaddik and Devotees: Historical and Sociological Aspects of Hasidism* [Hebrew], ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2001), 19–20.

9 Jay R. Berkovitz, "The Persona of a Poseq: Law and Self-Fashioning in Seventeenth-Century Ashkenaz," *Modern Judaism* 32, no. 3 (October 2012): 251–252.

10 Joshua Rothenberg, "Demythologizing the Shtetl," *Midstream* 27, no. 3 (March 1981): 30.

11 Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), x.

community of the nineteenth century created an "Orthodox Jewish culture which was every bit as 'modern'—in the sense of 'new'—as that of the modernizers."[12]

This book proceeds methodologically with the conviction that the insights of Langermann and Morrison are of prime importance in the sifting of historical evidence, particularly texts. As they state:

> The study of all … themes in the production, preservation, and communication of knowledge begs for theoretical formulations, models that apply to a wide variety of historical instances. As in the natural and exact sciences, theory must be grounded in close observations of a sufficient number of cases. We are conscious of how, in the social sciences and humanities, theory sometimes must be reined in by the evidence, and influential theoretical models can cause scholars to overlook important evidence. Hence, as historians, we prefer weak versions of theories. We approach the data with theoretical considerations in mind, but do not allow existing theories to assert full hegemony over all of the data. Above all, we aim for insights about the nature of the texts themselves and of their transits. History is not an exact science; the available evidence must be read not only with philological rigor but also with imagination. Judiciously applying creative historical interpretation to new or forgotten texts, we hope to make a significant contribution to the history of texts, their contents, and their transits.[13]

Through its presentation of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's diverse rabbinic activities in Poland and North America, this book aims to join those studies that have sought to modify the previous narrative of nineteenth-century Eastern European Judaism[14] by showing that Eastern European Orthodoxy could itself serve as an agent of modernity no less than its religious and ideological opponents.[15]

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12 Cited in Polonsky, *Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. 2, 275.

13 Y. Tzvi Langermann and Robert G. Morrison, "Introduction," in *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Robert G. Morrison (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016), http://www.psupress.org/books/SampleChapters/978-0-271-07109-1sc.html, accessed October 30, 2016.

14 Cf. David E. Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews: the Jews of Shklov* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

15 See Nahum Karlinsky, "The Dawn of Hasidic-Haredi Historiography" *Modern Judaism* 27, no. 1 (February 2007): 20–46; David Sorotzkin, *Orthodoxy and Modern Disciplination: The*

It will examine how an individual Eastern European Orthodox rabbi attempted to address contemporary issues through adapting new methods, forms and ideas in the service of the Orthodox message, in an atmosphere of perceived crisis, with the hope that they might resonate with his community's values.[16] In the eyes of many Orthodox Jews of that era, the solution to their perception of crisis could only be the coming of the messiah.[17] As we will see, messianic expectation played a key role in Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's thought and writing and he often channelled his literary and publication efforts with the messiah in mind.

Through telling Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's story, this book also attempts to better understand the complex role of the Orthodox rabbinate, a crucially important institution in an era in which modernity was both accommodated and resisted by Jews.[18] A comprehensive study of the Eastern European Orthodox rabbinate has not yet been written,[19] possibly because, as Ismar Schorsch has written in the context of the nineteenth-century German rabbinate, "the familiar is always difficult to define."[20] In fact there is not all that much scholarly literature on the institution of the rabbinate in Russia and Eastern Europe, considering its importance,[21] with the only study that attempted to define the institution in broader strokes, Simḥa Assaf's early monograph *Le-Kor'ot*

Production of the Jewish Tradition in Europe in Modern Times [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuḥad, 2011), 15.

16 Cf. Berkovitz, "The Persona of a Poseq," 253.

17 Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition*, 64–67. Cf. Michael Stanislawski, "Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate" in *Jewish Religious Leadership: Image and Reality*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), vol. 2, 440; Allan Nadler, "The War on Modernity of R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkacz," *Modern Judaism* 14 (1994): 236.

18 On accommodation and resistance as heuristic categories with respect to Orthodox rabbis in early twentieth-century North America, see Jeffrey Gurock, "Resisters and Accomodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983," *American Jewish Archives* 35 (1983): 100–187. Reprinted in *The American Rabbinate: A Century of Continuity and Change, 1883—1983*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus and Abraham J. Peck (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav), 1985.

19 Simon Schwarzfuchs, *A Concise History of the Rabbinate* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), ix.; Haim Gertner, *The Rabbi and the City; the Rabbinate in Galicia and Its Encounter With Modernity, 1815–1867* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2013), 18; Mordechai Zalkin, *Rabbi and Community in the Pale* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2017), 1–2.

20 Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: the Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 10.

21 Gershon Bacon, "Ha-Ḥevra ha-Mesoratit be-Temurot ha-'Itim: Hebetim be-Toldot ha-Yahadut ha-Ortodoqsit be-Polin uve-Rusya, 1850–1939," in *Qiyum va-Shever: Yehudei Polin le-Dorotehem*, ed. Israel Bartal and Yisrael Gutman (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2001), vol. 2, 453 ff.

ha-Rabanut: be-Ashkenaz, Polinyah, ve-Lita' (Tel-Aviv, 1922), now nearly a century old.[22] Similarly, Eliahu Stern writes of:

> … the paucity of academic histories of modern rabbinics. … Over time what has come to pass for the academic study of modern rabbinic thought has been either the debunking of ultra-Orthodoxy's historical claims, showing the influences of "secular" ideas on the bearded and black hatted or, conversely, proving the endurance and so-called brilliance of Talmudic casuistry and exegesis.[23]

For Gershon Bacon as well the rabbinate is a subject scholars are only beginning to adequately investigate. [24]

In this connection, Michael Stanislawski has cogently pointed out that:

> … contrary to received stereotypes, traditional Jewish society in Russia, including the rabbinate, were hardly static in the imperial period, either ideationally or sociologically … rabbinic leaders were not relegated to the sidelines of life.[25]

Stanislawski has indeed presented a challenge to historians of the rabbinate with his interesting speculation that:

> The centuries-old system of Jewish self-government [in the Russian Empire] seems to have withered away slowly but substantially. To be sure, the Jewish community survived in law and in life, but it is not clear who was running the show. Perhaps some of the slack was taken up by rabbis and other religious functionaries; we can only speculate on the implications of such a radical change in Jewish self-rule. But we know even less about the role of rabbis in the administration of Jewish society in Russia than we do about the lay leadership. Put simply, traditional society in Eastern Europe has not yet been studied by secular historians, and history

22 Yedida Sharona Kanfer, "Lodz: Industry, Religion, and Nationalism in Russian Poland, 1880–1914" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2011), 139.

23 Eliyahu Stern, review of David B. Ruderman, *A Best-Selling Hebrew Book of the Modern Era: The Book of the Covenant of Pinḥas Hurwitz and Its Remarkable Legacy*, *AJS Review* 40, no. 2 (2016): 433.

24 Bacon, *Politics of Tradition*, 10–11.

25 Stanislawski, "Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate," 432.

> writing was not regarded as a suitable enterprise for the learned in traditional East European Jewish culture.[26]

This book is certainly indebted to the pioneering work of Gershon Bacon on the Eastern European rabbinate. Bacon has pointed out that:

> The fact that this most conservative of Jewish institutions underwent some degree of modernization and adaptation raises questions about the "master narrative" of Polish Jewish history. We customarily present the story of Polish Jewry as the slow but sure victory of the national approach to Judaism as the successor to both traditional Jewish society and to small but influential assimilationist minorities. At best, historians have widened the definition of "national" to take in movements such as Agudat Yisrael or the Bund, but the model remains the same. … The traditional community suffered severe erosion, but its varied reactions to the challenges of the twentieth century have not received significant monographic treatment.[27]

Focussing on the rabbinic career of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, this book will attempt to arrive at a clearer and more nuanced understanding of the Eastern European rabbinate as a whole.

Along with Stanislawski and Bacon, this book will pay heed to other students of Jewish life in Imperial Russia, like Steven Zipperstein,[28] who have attempted to combat the common misconception that Jewish urbanization was a Western phenomenon and that Jews in Eastern Europe, until the convulsions of 1917, largely remained in culturally insulated small market towns

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26 Michael Stanislawski, "The Transformation of Traditional Authority in Russian Jewry: the First Stage," in *The Legacy of Jewish Migration: 1881 and Its Impact*, ed. David Berger (New York, Brooklyn College Press, 1983), 28. For broader speculations on Russian Jewry in this era, see Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil?: Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); idem, "Reflections on the Russian Rabbinate," 432–433, 442.

27 Gershon Bacon, "Warsaw-Radom-Vilna: Three Disputes Over Rabbinic Posts in Interwar Poland," *Jewish History* 13 (1999), 122. Cf. idem., *The Politics of Tradition*, 9–11.

28 Steven Zipperstein, "Russian Maskilim and the City," in David Berger, ed., *The Legacy of Jewish Migration: 1881 and Its Impact* (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1983), 32. Cf. Steven Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

[*shtetl*].[29] Up to the nineteenth century, the Jewish population of the Russian Empire had indeed been primarily rural in character. In the nineteenth century, however, partly due to economic factors and partly due to a conscious policy on the part of the Russian government, Jews became increasingly urbanized. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century, a majority of Jews in the Russian Empire lived in urban areas, many of them eking out a marginal existence.[30] The process of nineteenth-century Jewish urbanization in Eastern Europe was often painful, especially for the Orthodox, who in a sense had the most to lose with the increasing abandonment of the insulated, close-knit community and the social consensus of the small towns that had allowed their customs and lifestyle to prevail.

In the city, the Orthodox lifestyle was often challenged, in large measure because it was placed in competition with other Jewish lifestyles and religious choices that attracted numerous Jews. Furthermore, Orthodox Judaism in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century was in the process of making a crucial and often painful transition from the premodern situation in which halakha and its lifestyle largely defined the Jewish community as a whole to the modern one in which adherence to halakha became essentially voluntary. This was an especially difficult transition since Orthodoxy could not constitutionally recognize the legitimacy of non-halakhic ideologies and lifestyles. This book will contend that halakha and the issues arising from it can usefully inform our understanding of the several alternative paths to Jewish modernity taken by Orthodox Jews and that the halakhic positions taken by Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg can help clarify our understanding of the nature of urban Orthodox Judaism and its halakhic issues. It will thus augment and nuance our still somewhat fragmentary picture of twentieth-century halakhic issues, in which Menahem Elon's magisterial treatment of Jewish law devotes only a few pages to twentieth-century developments in this area.[31] Though modern halakhic texts often need to be coaxed to tell their tales, it is as important to understand them as it is to understand the implications of halakhic texts for previous eras of Jewish

29 Antony Polonsky, *The Shtetl: Myth and Reality* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

30 Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers: the Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 53.

31 Menachem Elon, *Jewish law: History, Sources, Principles. Ha-Mishpat ha-'Ivri* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1994), vol. 3, 1447–1451, 1495–1499.