To Benjamin, Rebecca, and Sophia, whom I love.

Contents

List of Illustrations

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Note on transliteration:

I use the Library of Congress system in transliterating from Russian, with the exceptions of the adjectival ending "ii," for which I use "y" (so Dostoevsky, not Dostoevskii), and yo in Semyon. Also I use English standard forms of names when conventional forms exist. For Hebrew and Yiddish I observe the Library of Congress system.

INTRODUCTION

This book has two goals. One is to present the varieties of Jewish identities that were normative in tsarist times, and the other is implicitly to compare American- and Russian-Jewish consciousness. Despite the differences in the two countries and their times, Russian Jewry serves as a model in the attempt of secular Jews to integrate into the host society and still find a way to express their Jewish identity.

In some instances integration and identity were overtly political. Maxim Vinaver, among others, persuaded liberals in the Constitutional Democratic Party to give priority to Jewish rights. In another direction, Avram Idel'son, a Zionist, invented the doctrine of *Gegenwartsarbeit* (*Doigkeit*) in order to release Jewish political energies in the struggle for rights in the diaspora. Lastly, Semyon Dubnov looked to Russian culture as a source for his ideas of cultural nationalism. These various ideas were meant to promote a politics of synthesis (Jewish integration and separation simultaneously).

From another perspective, culture came to the forefront. Mikhail Gershenzon, for example, employed his "Jewish genius" in explicating Russian intellectual life of the nineteenth century. He was accused of "universalizing" and "de-nationalizing" Russian intellectuals, such as Pyotr Chaadaev and the Slavophiles. By refusing to convert, this "Jew in the Russian elite" functioned as a mirror of Russian chauvinism. In this regard he entered into polemics with Vasily Rozanov and also invited debates with Pyotr Struve, Georges Florovsky, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Nikolai Berdiaev on the meaning of Slavophilism, Russian Orthodox Christianity, and Russian power.

Historical scholarship offered an opportunity for secular Jews to "perform" Jewish identity. The study of Jewish history and the establishment of institutions for the publication of historical research supplanted more traditional, religious forms of Jewish expression. For example, the Jewish Ethnographic and Historical Society had its own journal, *Evreiskaia starina* (Jewish Antiquities). Philanthropy also played an operative role. For example, in Odessa of the 1880s and 90s, Mikhail Morgulis rebuilt the Jewish community through involvement

in educational reform and direct aid to the city's poor.[1]

It should already be fairly clear that the kind of Jewish identities depicted in the book depart from the familiar preconceptions of Russian Jews either as religious (orthodox or Hasidic) or anti-religious (revolutionary, socialist, or anarchist). They were neither assimilated nor traditional, they did not live in shtetls or avoid Russian culture. They were not rabbis or canters, moneylenders, industrialists, or merchants, and not musicians, artists, or writers. The Jews examined in this study lived primarily in Russia's capital cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Some were lawyers, others were journalists, teachers, and historians. The rise of an intellectual class reflects the maturation of Jewish society from a religious community into a multifarious, occupationally diverse and ideologically pluralistic body.[2]

The book also examines methodology and historiography. I employ a contemporary form of intellectual history that emphasizes the role of individual and inimitable experience in the construction of ideology. Ideas matter but they are not divorced from the context in which they originate and function. In this case, ideas such as nationalism, socialism, and liberalism operate in more than just a political context; they also play a part in other debates over economics, social change, religion, and gender. These debates in turn shaped individual discourse and identity.

Several essays deal with the approach of Jewish historians toward the topic of Jewish history in Russia. Research methods, knowledge, and identity evolved in response to, among other things, tsarist government policies. Historians from the era, such as Dubnov, had a preponderant influence on our understanding of the Jewish past. In recent years Jewish historians have liberated themselves from Dubnov's grasp.

The emphasis in these essays is on Jewish liberals who have been neglected by Jewish historians in their studies of the extreme political left or right. The liberal center has not received enough scholarly attention in part because its truncated existence following the October revolution. However, a Jewish political and ideological center has grown strong in the United States, and this Jewish center, removed by time and space from its Eastern-European origins, has much to gain from examining a

1 Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2009).

2 Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in the Late Russian Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Russian Jewry similarly engaged in the difficult synthesis of uniting the human being and Jew, citizen and Jewish interests, universalism and particularistic identities.

The collection is composed of two parts: 1) seven selected essays on Jewish history and historiography in Russia and 2) seven studies on the life and work of Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon in the context of Russia's modernist culture. Although some of the essays have appeared elsewhere, a number were published in foreign languages (Hebrew, German, and Russian). For the majority of the essays this is the first English-language publication.

I
Varieties of Russian-Jewish History: Liberals, Zionists, and Diaspora Nationalists

1. The Russian Roots of Semyon Dubnov's Life and Thought

Although it might seem self-evident to claim that Semyon Dubnov reflects the Russian environment from which he came, the subject of Dubnov's attitude toward Russia is not as simple or as clear as one might think. In his memoirs and other works, Dubnov emphasized European influences, chiefly the English philosopher John Stuart Mill, the German-Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz, and the French writer Ernest Renan.[3] In fact, scholars have considered the subject of Russia as part of their general studies on Dubnov, but the question of Russia's meaning in Dubnov's work has not yet been the object of a concentrated study.[4] What was the influence of Russia on Dubnov's life and work, and what was Dubnov's attitude toward Russia, the country in which he lived most of his life, and Russian, the language he preferred to all others. How does he use Russian themes in his self-presentation, when and why does he refer to Russian culture, and what do these allusions mean? In a general way, Russian influences can be divided into those that are direct and indirect. At the same time that one finds salient and easily documented parallels, one can also discover subtle and hidden borrowings in theme, structure, and language.

A re-examination of Dubnov's life and thought from the viewpoint of his borrowings from Russian sources demonstrate the degree to which Dubnov participated in and was influenced by the ideological, religious,

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3 See S. Dubnov's memoir, *Kniga zhizni: materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni, vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* (Moscow-Jerusalem: Gesharim, 2004), 113-16, 154-56, 181-85, and elsewhere.

4 V. E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii: zhizn' i trudy Semena Markovicha Dubnova* (St. Petersburg: Mir, 2008); Robert Seltzer, "Coming Home: The Personal Basis of Simon Dubnow's Ideology," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976); also Seltzer, "Simon Dubnow: A Critical Biography of his Early Years" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1970); Sophie Dubnov-Erlich, *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov, Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jonathan Frankel, "S. M. Dubnow: Historian and Ideologist," in *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 239-75; Benjamin Nathans, "Russian-Jewish Historiography," in *Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State*, ed. Thomas Sanders (Armonk, NY, London: M.E Sharpe, 1999); Yahudah Rozental, "Ha-historiografiya ha-yehudit be-rusya ha-sovyetit ve Shim'on Dubnov," in *Sefer Shim'on Dubnov*, ed. Simon Rawidowicz (London: Arat Publishing Company, 1954), 201-20; Jeffrey Veidlinger, "Simon Dubnov Recontextualized: the Sociological Conception of History and the Russian Intellectual Legacy," *Simon Dubnov Institute Yearbook* 3 (2004): 411-27.

1. St. Petersburg Choral Synagogue (photograph by William Brumfield).

and artistic ferment that took place in Russia. I hope to illuminate some of the contexts in which the larger Russian-Jewish interaction took place, contexts that helped shape Dubnov's worldview.

Dubnov was hardly a passive receiver. Mixing ideas and genres to build his original ideas of diaspora nationalism, he turned for inspiration to poetry, fiction, philosophy, and historiography. Russian literature in particular contributed to the development of his intellectual potential.

In contrast to the usual dichotomies in nineteenth-century Russian intellectual history—East versus West, Slavophiles against Westernizers, the idealists of the 1840s and the radicals of the 1860s—Dubnov takes ideas and approaches from contradictory sources. Engaging with Russians and Ukrainians of his own time, he also admires the poets and writers of the past, such as Mikhail Lermontov and Ivan Turgenev, and the radical critics of the 1860s. He was aware of the renaissance of secular Jewish culture that was occurring in Russia with the rise of Yiddish as a serious literary language and the expansion of Hebrew literature (in fact he announced the arrival of this renaissance).[5] He did not appreciate the Russian avant-garde of the day (Bely, Blok, and Merezhkovsky).

In the first part of this essay, I will discuss Dubnov's formation as an intellectual and treat the way he presented himself in his memoirs. Then I will turn to an analysis of his political theories of diaspora nationalism and its relations to Russian-Jewish life. Then I will examine indirect parallels, treating Dubnov's attitude toward the title "Russian writer," and concluding with a discussion of Dubnov's professed love for the Russian language.

In his memoir, *Book of Life* (*Kniga zhizni*), Dubnov expresses awareness of the tension between his inner world and the external events that occurred during his life. He writes from exile, geographically distant from Soviet Russia and intellectually alienated from Communism. "Due to a historical cataclysm, the century's intellectual currents, that were interwoven in my life and the lives of my contemporaries, have temporarily been interrupted. And we, the last representatives of this former epoch, are obligated to produce a monument to it. I am publishing my memoirs as the 'material for a history of my life'; at the start [it is] a

5 See Shmuel Niger, "Simon Dubnow as Literary Critic," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 1 (1946): 335-58.

history of an intellectual struggle and at the end, a political struggle."[6]

In this passage, written in the early 1930s while Dubnov was preparing the first volume of his memoirs for publication, one can sense the historian's emotional condition. He feels ripped from the intellectual world that gave order to his life, and feels an obligation to memorialize earlier times.[7] There are reasons why Dubnov cherished his life in Russia. Young maskilim in the 1860s and 70s, such as Dubnov, were animated by the changes taking place there. Committed to breaking with the past, they read forbidden books, joined reading circles, and found purpose in spreading the word about the possibilities of life outside the religious community.[8] The influence of the revolutionary movement was more important than the government, since young people emulated the behavior and discourse of the revolutionaries. The rise of a secular Jewish culture in three languages inspired many intellectuals of the time, and provided them with a sense of mission and purpose.

Russian culture played a large part in Dubnov's intellectual development. In *Book of Life* he wrote about his early teen years, "Having little work to do in school, I devoted myself again to reading books from the library of our [literary] circle. The universal melancholy of the young Lermontov was of course more to my liking than Pushkin's stylized poetry. Turgenev's romanticism captivated my imagination, and I found myself under its spell many years later. I was hopelessly in love with all those dreamy heroines of Turgenev's stories."[9]

As this passage shows, Dubnov was attracted to realist fiction and had significant limitations in his literary taste and sophistication. In his preferences he shows a strong attraction to Populist literary criticism of the 1860s.

Dubnov's interest in Russian realist literature had significant consequences for the development of his worldview since in his youth he attributed to literature a more profound purpose than mere entertain-

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6 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 23. All translations by Brian Horowitz except where noted. For more on Dubnov's life in Western Europe, see Simon Rabinovitch, "The Dawn of a New Diaspora: Simon Dubnov's Autonomism from St. Petersburg to Berlin," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 50 (2005): 267-88; Cecile Kuznits, "The Origins of Yiddish Scholarship and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research" (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 2000), 61-111.

7 On Dubnov in European exile, see Simon Rabinovitch, "The Dawn of a New Diaspora," 267-88.

8 Two paradigmatic narratives of rebellious maskilim, who fight Orthodox Jewry can be seen in the lives of Moses Leib Lilienblum and Shimon An-sky.

9 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 63.

ment or even art. Literature, he asserted, conveyed the emotional dimension of the human spirit and stood as a bulwark against an unlimited confidence in reason. He wrote in *Book of Life* about the mid-1880s:

> In essence I attributed to poetry a religious function in the realm of the unknowable and therefore assigned it serious demands: it should be an intellectual poetry of world problems and universal melancholy. In those summer days I allowed myself a treat: I reread Turgenev's stories and Goncharov's novels that I had read in my youth without giving them proper attention. Once, having finished Turgenev's "An Unhappy Girl," I covered my head in my pillow and cried.[10] There was no one in the room, but I was ashamed of my tears that brought me down to the level of the crowd and sentimental schoolgirls. Nonetheless, there was a lesson for me: I understood that it was wrong to separate reason and emotion so sharply, that a true work of art, even one without a definite underlying idea, can serve as a source for deep thoughts just like a fine philosophical treatise.[11]

The novella relates the life of a young Jewish girl, the illegitimate issue of a Jewish woman and a French nobleman who has moved to Russia. After her mother's death, she is left in the hands of hostile caretakers who inhibit her chances for love. The story ends with the young girl's suicide and a funeral that erupts in a senseless brawl. The girl's life is shown as bereft of joy and deeply tragic.[12] What is typical of the period is the attribution to literature of functions that are outside literary significance. The critics of Dubnov's time looked to literature to provide political commentary, a guide for behavior, and philosophical import.[13]

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10 Ivan Turgenev's story, "Neschastnaia," published in 1869, can be found in I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh*, 28 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1965), vol. 10, 71-160.

11 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 125.

12 The girl's Jewish background does not matter because she lives among non-Jews who are indifferent to her origins. Although it is hardly one of Turgenev's best stories, the treatment of Suzanna is at least not hostile to Jews, as is for example his infamous story, "Kike" ("Zhid") (1847).

13 Literature in nineteenth century Russia fulfilled many supra-literary functions. For a study of

An important stage in Dubnov's development was signaled by the shift from the binary opposition of universalism and national particularism, Western thought and Jewish culture, to the realization that Jewish history and culture could serve as a path to reach a higher universalism.[14] By studying Jewish history, he realized that he was better able to see the totality of world history since the Jews had existed since nearly the time of earliest documentary evidence and had lived in the largest and most important empires from ancient to modern times.

In the 1880s, Dubnov took over as *Voskhod*'s literary critic, a position that defined his intellectual path.[15] He concluded that, just as Western culture was thriving in its Jewish context, so too a study of the central issues of Western society could take place through a focus on Jewish history. He wrote in *Book of Life*:

> I felt that the fateful tortures of self-definition had come to an end, that I finally had to define my vocation, decide on one of the many plans of action that drew me in different directions. The twenty-seventh year of my life was a decisive moment for me. Until that time my ideas still dissolved in universal literary plans, although in fact I was working in Jewish literature. [...] It became clear to me that the general knowledge I had acquired and my universal strivings could give productive results when combined with the inherited treasures of Jewish knowledge and national ideals that had not yet been defined.[16]

Secular Jewish culture of the 1880s opened Dubnov's eyes to the idea that Jews could embody and contribute to the highest European ideas. Dubnov witnessed an explosion of secular Jewish creativity in such authors as Semyon Frug, Mendele Moicher Sforim, Itzak Leib Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, Lev Levanda, and Ben-Ami. In memoirs (published separately from *Book of Life*) Dubnov showed how he perceived Russian-

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the social critics, see Victor Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

14 Sophie Dubnov-Erlich treats this development; see *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov*, 52-59.

15 This argument is not entirely new and was first promulgated by Shmuel Niger in his article, "Simon Dubnow as Literary Critic," 335-58.

16 Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni*, 146-47.

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