Table of Contents

Introduction: William Craft Brumfield vi

PART I: Russian-Jewish Historians and Historiography 1

Chapter 1 The Return of the *Ḥeder* among Russian-Jewish Education Experts, 1840–1917 2

Chapter 2 'Building a Fragile Edifice': A History of Russian-Jewish Historical Institutions, 1860–1914 19

Chapter 3 Myths and Counter-Myths about Odessa's Jewish Intelligentsia during the Late Tsarist Period 38

Chapter 4 Saul Borovoi's Survival: An Odessa Tale about a Jewish Historian in Soviet Times 53

Chapter 5 The Ideological Challenges of S. M. Dubnov in Emigration: Autonomism and Zionism, Europe and Palestine 70

PART II: Russian–Jewish Intelligentsia's Cultural Vibrancy 85

Chapter 6 Semyon An-sky—Dialogic Writer 86

Chapter 7 Russian-Jewish Writers Face Pogroms, 1880–1914 111

Chapter 8 M. O. Gershenzon, Alexander Pushkin, the Bible, and the Flaws of Jewish Nationalism 123

Chapter 9 Battling for Self-Definition in Soviet Literature: Boris Eikhenbaum's Jewish Question 139

Chapter 10 Vladimir Jabotinsky and the Mystique of 1905 156

Chapter 11 Vladimir Jabotinsky and Violence 177

PART III: Jewish Heritage in Russian Perception 197

Chapter 12 Vladimir Solov'ev and the Jews: A View from Today 198

Chapter 13 Fear and Stereotyping: Vasily Rozanov and Jewish Menace 215

Bibliography 233

Index 275

Introduction

Brian Horowitz's work over the past two decades has provided us with a multifaceted examination of the Jewish intelligentsia in its quest for a proper place in Russian society. This quest was fraught with ambiguity, particularly in a tsarist regime that frequently attempted to delegitimize the Jewish presence. In these circumstances the discipline of history has assumed an urgent role in defining and claiming Jewish legitimacy in Russia. The pursuance of historical narrative has involved no less than an existential meaning.

The three parts of this book bring together various aspects of an enormously rich and complex enterprise. The efforts of Jewish historians and political activists to define as well as implement strategies for Jewish existence in Russia form a unifying element in this astute collection of essays. The essay form seems to play to Horowitz's eclectic strengths as a scholar, who in the midst of gathering significant archival material has not been limited by a narrowness of vision and interpretation.

In the first part Horowitz gives us a history of institutions, the *ḥeder*, newspapers, and works of history to show how a historiography developed—a self-consciousness of Jews in Russia. The pinnacle of that effort was richly embodied in the seventeen-volume *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, published by Brakgauz-Efron in St. Petersburg from 1907–1913.

Concurrently, he offers studies of two historians: Semyon Dubnov, the doyen of the East European school of Jewish historiography, and Saul Borovoi, a less-known figure, but critical for understanding the Soviet Jewish experience. They not only embody the writer's craft and the emotional dimension of a professional choice but also view their own experience through a socio-cultural lens that allows them to express the philosophical depth of interpretation in the twentieth century. (Dubnov perished during the Holocaust and Borovoi barely escaped).

In the second part Horowitz illuminates the writings of such pivotal figures as the folklorist Semyon An-sky, the Zionist and writer Vladimir Jabotinsky, the philosopher and historian Mikhail Gershenzon, and the eminent critic, Boris Eikhenbaum. The central point is not the conventional life and works, but an insight into the intellectual within a concrete historical context, an intellectual fashioning of a worldview at pivotal historical moments. For Jabotinsky it is 1923, the year he writes "The Iron Wall," for Gershenzon it is 1921 and 1922, when he returns to the origins of culture in order to make sense of Russia after 1917. For Eikhenbaum the shock comes in the early 1930s, when he must face Stalinist literary politics. What should he do? How will he preserve his place or create a new role?

The last part is devoted to studies of two Russians, Vladimir Solov'ev and Vasily Rozanov, and the role of Jews in the construction of a Russian idea. Despite his reputation as a philosemite, Solov'ev perhaps was not aware of his acceptance of the Enlightenment premise of Jewish conversion to Christianity. Rozanov acknowledged his disdain for Jews, yet they were essential to him in his reexamination of Christianity. The last essay deals with the little known topic of Jewish writing on the pogroms in the Russian language. Horowitz shows that deeply engaged writers despaired of the evanescence of integration that they saw vanish in their lifetimes.

Horowitz has combined studies of institutions and individuals in order to play both sides, so to speak, on the question of historical agency. Was the earnestly dedicated Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment an indication of the future for modern Jewish intellectual life in Russia? Equally compelling, it seems, are the personalities and complex experiences of those who did not participate in the organized Jewish collective. They all make their appearance in this stimulating and amply researched collection. The book concludes with a telling counter-narrative advanced by Solov'ev and Rozanov.

William Craft Brumfield, New Orleans, 2016

PART I

Russian-Jewish Historians and Historiography

CHAPTER 1

The Return of the *Ḥeder* among Russian-Jewish Education Experts, 1840–1917

The role of the *ḥeder* in the modernization of Jewish education in the tsarist empire is a fascinating, albeit little-known, story. Most laymen and even scholars view the ḥeder monochromatically. They repeat the criticisms of the *maskilim*[1] of the 1840s and later decades: the ḥeder was the obstacle to successful integration; nothing was learned there, the *melamed* beat the children, it was one of the vilest of religious institutions. However, there was a change in attitude toward the ḥeder at the beginning of the twentieth century among some of the most important specialists in the field of Jewish education in Russia. Some of these experts discovered in the ḥeder previously unnoticed dimensions that could be salvaged in future schools, while others saw parallels between the values of the ḥeder and the new national-leaning Jewish institutions. Still others were impressed by the ḥeder's longevity, its success with the public, and its low costs. The School Commission of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia (Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii, or, OPE) along with Zionists and Bundists were involved with these questions.

Research into the ḥeder and modern schools in the tsarist empire is largely divided between those who studied the question during tsarist times and those who approached these issues starting in the 1960s in Israeli and American universities. The kinds of questions each group posed were different because each group had its own political and cultural agendas.

1 A *maskil* was a Jew who was educated in a secular institution and strove for Jewish integration.

During tsarist times the ḥeder was the object of study by "activists": individuals, mainly men, who sought either to eliminate the ḥeder or to transform it. Attitudes changed, growing more positive around 1900 and reflecting the views on politics and the Jewish cultural ferment of the time. Experts—non-Zionists such as Menasheh Morgulis, Pinkhus (Petr) Marek, Leon Bramson, Jacob Katsenelson, Hayim Fialkov, and Saul Ginzburg—gradually and *grudgingly* discovered much to like in the ḥeder. The majority of these individuals were trained as lawyers but worked as journalists, teachers, or activists. Zionists, such as Avram Idelson and Chaim Zuta, admired the institution, although they demanded its modernization.[2] Incidentally, some of the statistical information and much of the anecdotal material come from studies produced in tsarist times.

The other group is composed of university professors in Israel and the United States. Individuals such as Zevi Scharfstein, Shaul Stampfer, Steven Zipperstein, Michael Stanislawski, Jacob Shatzky, Yossi Goldstein, Eliyana Adler, and Brian Horowitz intended to produce objective scholarship independent of political motives, although they relied on earlier statistics and to a degree on previous analyses. Despite their professed objectivity, these university-trained professors were sometimes influenced by revisionist thinking about Jewish history in Russia that was typical of the late years of the Cold War. Such thinking was characterized by the rediscovery of a good deal of positive aspects of Jewish life ("it was not all gloom and doom"). The "re-imagination" of Jewish life in Russia was undoubtedly connected with disappointment regarding Jewish life in the West, which was seen as decaying in spite or because of the free atmosphere for Jewish religious observance. Russian Jews, it turned out, had much to offer in the construction of Jewish community.[3] Although this chapter does not deal directly with the differences between these two groups and their agendas, it does implicitly show the premises that underlie sympathies toward the traditional ḥeder.

The history of the ḥeder in the Russian empire is connected largely with struggles between the religiously orthodox and the maskilim (supporters of

2 Yossi Goldstein, "'Haḥeder hametukan' berusiyah kebasis lemerekhet hahinukh hatsiyonit," *Inyanim beḥinuch* 45 (1986): 147–57. Chaim Zuta was an educator and social activist. For more on him, see Steven J. Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 49–52.

3 Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry*, 3–4.

the Haskalah). The maskilim emphasized Russian language learning, basic secular knowledge, and the acquisition of useful skills such as mathematics. Despite a good deal of support from the government, including subsidies and even free tuition, for most of the nineteenth century few parents would permit their male children to attend secular schools. Besides the religious obligation to teach their children Torah, study at a ḥeder conveyed prestige. Parents showed they could afford a place in a ḥeder and implied at the same time their assent to the established order in the community. In addition, a ḥeder education gave their boys a chance at upward mobility: success at the ḥeder might lead to study in a yeshiva and in some cases to a coveted rabbinic position.[4] With success in Torah and Talmudic learning came other potential tangible benefits such as marriage to the daughter of wealthy parents and status in the community. For these and other considerations, parents continued to send their boys to the ḥeder even when schools were available. Regarding the education of girls there were more options.

Alternatives to the ḥeder began to appear in the 1840s when the Russian government established special Jewish schools. The government's goals appear contradictory to us now, but at least some of the intentions were positive: to educate young Jews in order to facilitate their integration into Russian society.[5] The government opened over one hundred schools, as well as two teacher-training and rabbinical seminaries, in Vilna and Zhitomir. After the schools were up and running, the government still had trouble convincing parents to send their children there, because the government's intentions did not appear unambiguous to the Jewish communities: perhaps the schools were the first step toward conversion to Christianity, so why educate Jewish children for jobs that were closed to them?[6]

When OPE was established in 1863, its members devoted their energies to reforming government schools to make them more attractive to parents. The unanimous opinion of the early leaders was that the ḥeder was retrograde and unredeemable. From the mid-1860s until the 1890s the society spent the

4 Shaul Stampfer, "Heder Study, Knowledge of Torah and the Maintenance of Social Stratification in Traditional Eastern European Jewish Society," *Studies in Jewish Education* 3 (1988): 271–89.

5 Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicolas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 172.

6 Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, 72–76.

bulk of its resources on sending small numbers of students to universities. The idea was to produce university graduates who could serve as role models. What little the organization devoted to primary and secondary education was earmarked for private schools. Such schools appeared to satisfy society's goals of providing a secular education to Jews with the aim of both integrating them into Russian society and giving them vocational skills.[7]

Private schools for Jews promised instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, geography, and literature. The teachers of these schools purposely avoided religion and usually allowed students a choice of a half day of instruction in order to give boys the opportunity to attend ḥeder in the morning.[8] Private schools catered to primarily for girls, who, as Eliyana Adler has shown, had more choices than boys.[9] They could do without any education, acquire training in crafts, engage in home schooling, and attend a state school, a private Russian school, or even a modern Jewish school. Girls were permitted to study secular subjects more readily than were boys, since parents condoned non-religious education if it helped a woman acquire gainful employment so that her husband could devote his time to Torah study—the Jewish tradition asserted that the religious responsibilities for a woman were less onerous, and therefore girls did not need to study Hebrew or Talmud. It was enough to read the Pentateuch with simple commentaries in Yiddish translation (*The Tsenerene*). Adler notes that, in opposition to what many people think, in the nineteenth century "many [Jewish] girls were educated, and secondly, their educational paths differed significantly from that of their brothers."[10]

---

7 Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 55–56; Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 178–84. Benjamin Nathans gives the St. Petersburg elite enormous credit for its services to the Jewish people of Russia; Brian Horowitz similarly lauds the elite, while underscoring their limitations.

8 Ilya Cherikover, *Istoriia Obshchestva dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii, 1863–1913* (St. Petersburg: Komitet OPE, 1913), 23–24; Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment*, 17–20. Scholars of OPE such as Cherikover and Horowitz share the view that in its early period the society was top heavy with wealthy members who sought to create a small elite among university-educated Jews.

9 See Eliyana R. Adler, "Private Schools for Jewish Girls in Tsarist Russia" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2003), 55–90.

10 Adler, "Private Schools for Jewish Girls," 84.

Just as private schools found a way to supplement the local ḥeder, *shraybers* ("writers," or, itinerant private teachers of Russian and secular subjects) complemented the ḥeder by providing instruction in subjects that were not included in the ḥeder's curriculum. The *shrayber*s, mostly young unmarried men, gave lessons in private homes and were widely employed.[11] *Shraybers* underscored how a single institution could not fulfill the function of educating Russia's Jews: at least two, the ḥeder and something else, were needed.

The need for multiple educational institutions irked modern educators. In the 1890s experts—secular Jews who had studied the question of Jewish education—were still bewildered by the enormous popularity of the ḥeder. Although educators thought that private schools lost the competition because they were too costly, in fact, studies of the ḥeder found that massive sums were spent on its upkeep. What was especially disconcerting was the fact that the masses had the money to fund modern schools if they really wanted them. Jacob Katsenelson, a journalist on Jewish education, calculated that in Russia 700,000 families paid a minimum of thirty roubles for a ḥeder, *Talmud Torah*, or yeshiva, and therefore altogether 21,000,000 roubles were spent annually on Jewish education.[12] That sum was more than the total budget for elementary education in Austria and one and a half times the amount spent in Italy, a country of thirty million people. Clearly, the ḥeder could not be displaced because it was popular; and it was popular because it met the needs of the population. This at least was the conclusion of Katsenelson and Menasheh Morgulis—a lawyer, civic leader, and editor of the Jewish newspaper *Den'* from 1870 to 1871.

What were the needs of the Jewish community? According to Morgulis, who wrote a great deal about Jewish education, the existing schools did not meet the community's basic needs, among them, cheap child care.[13] Children

11 *Shraybers* are depicted in the fiction of Semyon An-sky (Rapoport) and Sholem Aleichem (Rabinovich). Sholem Aleichem was himself a *shrayber* in his youth.

12 Jacob Katsenelson, "Shkol'noe delo," *Ezhenedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* 9 (1894): 12. On the Korobochnyi sbor (meat and candle tax), see Yuly Gessen, "Korobochnyi sbor," in *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia: Svod znanii o evreistve i ego kul'ture v proshlom i nastoiashchem*, eds. L. Katsenelson and D. G. Gintsburg (St. Petersburg: Brakauz i Efron, 1908–13), 9:758–71; see also Yuly Gessen, "K istorii korobochnogo sbora v Rossii," *Evreiskaia starina* 3 (1911): 305, 484.

13 M. G. Morgulis, *Voprosy evreiskoi zhizni: Sobranie statei* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. N. Mikhailova, 1903), 200; originally published in *Evreiskaia biblioteka* 1–3 (1871–73).

arrived at the ḥeder early and stayed until late in the evening, thereby allowing mothers to spend longer days in the shop or market stall. By contrast, the schools let their pupils out in the early afternoon.

Additionally, the school had higher expenses (rent for a building, the teacher's salary) and sometimes its instruction offended parents' religious principles.[14] It was hard to argue with Morgulis, although a number of critics objected to his proposition that schools needed to provide longer hours.[15]

Among other reasons for the ḥeder's survival was its reliability. Parents considered that the ḥeder had served Jewish children well over the centuries. Nonetheless, Jews, especially in the southwestern region, began to favour Russian schools during the 1870s and 1880s until restrictions on Jewish enrollment were enacted in 1887. Significantly, these quotas had the twin result of enhancing the value of Russian schools and of reviving interest in the ḥeder, since Jews were now forced to attend exclusively Jewish educational institutions.[16]

The attitude of the modernizers toward the ḥeder did not drastically change in the 1890s. For example, in 1893, when OPE set out to design their ideal elementary school, its members divided the existing types of schools into four categories, according to the time spent on Jewish and general subjects. Ḥeders had only Jewish subjects; *Talmud Torah* schools concentrated on Jewish subjects, but included secular subjects as well; government Jewish schools had a mixture of religious and secular with an emphasis on the secular; and private schools gave preference to secular knowledge. In part because of the law of March 1893, which prohibited secular subjects from being taught in ḥeders, and perhaps because of a personal animus of the members of the commission, the members gave the ḥeder short shrift. They were convinced that the ḥeder could "not be transformed into a modern school."[17]

14 Morgulis, *Voprosy evreiskoi zhizni*, 200.

15 Saul M. Gintsburg, "Iz zapisok pervogo evreia-studenta v Rossii," *Perezhitoe* 1 (1908): 4–5.

16 Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment*, 80–96. Many scholars see the rise of Jewish nationalism as a response to the pogroms of 1881–82. Horowitz regards the government's educational quotas in 1887 as a large factor in producing activities that furthered national interests.

17 "Otchet o deiatel'nosti obshchestva za 1894," n.d., Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, St. Petersburg (hereafter RGIA), f. 1532, op. 1, d. 49, l. 15. Nevertheless, the members had noted that they had recently received indications that several *melamedim* in the southwestern region had petitioned the Ministry of Education for the right to offer instruction in Russian. Therefore, it was important to wait and see how the law was applied.

The organization and curriculum of OPE's modern Jewish school was conceived both in opposition to and in conformity with the ḥeder. The way the schools were organized—with proper ventilation, furniture, and a concern for the hygiene and health of the students, including breaks between classes and for lunch, as well as for proper bathing—showed a desire to break with the ḥeder. The request that the schools have their own buildings and that the classrooms not be used as the teacher's home was also directed against the ḥeder, since in the ḥeder the *melamed* lived in the same room in which he taught. In the ḥeder there was often inadequate lighting, few windows, and filth on the walls because of the smoke from the oven. Little thought was given to ventilation. In addition, there were no breaks between classes or concern about backbreaking benches.[18]

During the 1890s, administrators of OPE's education programs, such as Leon Bramson, slowly began to realize the ḥeder's strengths. In his 1896 essay "On the History of the Elementary Education of Jews in Russia," Bramson set himself the goal of explaining why Jews had remained isolated from Russian society, why government-sponsored Jewish schools had been necessary, and why Jews themselves now had to take control of their own education.[19] In addition, at the end of the essay Bramson sketched his ideal school. In contrast to those who wanted a completely secular school and those who preferred the ḥeder, Bramson sought a compromise: "In a modern school there should be enough of those subjects that attract Jewish children to the ḥeder, i.e., the Jewish religion, and one should give the school a vocational character as much as possible. In addition, instruction should be at the highest pedagogical level. Only in these conditions, so the advocates of this view contend, can the school be ready to replace our unique age-old institution."[20]

Although Bramson preferred vocational schools—he became the head of the Society for Trades and Agricultural Labour (Obshchestvo remeslennogo i zemledel'cheskogo truda)—others continued to see positive aspects of the

18 Goldstein, "Haḥeder hametukan' berusiyah," 147–48. It is important to realize that some modern historians view the ḥeder more positively as a place where students learned religious values, Hebrew, and the essential texts of the Jewish religion.

19 Leon Bramson, "K istorii nachal'nogo obrazovaniia evreev v Rossii," in *Sbornik v pol'zu nachal'nykh evreiskikh shkol* (St. Petersburg, 1896).

20 Bramson, "K istorii nachal'nogo obrazovaniia," 353.

ḥeder, especially as national feeling began to grow among the Jewish intelligentsia. The revival of Hebrew in particular had a strong influence on reconsiderations of the ḥeder, as did the emergence of political Zionism.[21]

There were many signs of Hebrew's revival in the Russian empire, but the school debates in the Odessa branch of OPE in 1902 embody best the relationship between schools, Hebrew, and the nationalist-leaning Jewish intelligentsia. Challenging the ideology of integration, so-called nationalists, predominantly Zionists, launched an attack on the number of hours of Jewish and secular subjects in schools subsidized by the society. Their goal was to get more hours of Hebrew and fewer of Russian. The Zionists called themselves "nationalists" and gave their opponents the mocking epithet "assimilators."

The nationalists were represented by Ahad-Ha'am, Ben-Ami (Mark [Mordecai] Rabinovich), Meir Dizengoff, Yehoshua Ravnitsky, and Semyon Dubnov. Dubnov was the only non-Zionist. They pressed the point that Jewish schools had to instill national values, since anything less would amount to yielding to assimilation. Preparing a vocation or advancing integration were less important than inculcating national feeling with a series of courses in Hebrew, the Bible, and Jewish history. Moreover, at least twelve of the thirty school hours in the week had to be given over to Jewish subjects, and Hebrew had to serve as the primary concentration of the curriculum in order to spur an interest in the "customs, way of life, and literary creativity of the Jewish people."[22] The study of the Bible, they wrote, also had the goal of "acquainting students with Judaism's main religious and ethical precepts."[23]

Although both the assimilators and nationalists were in favor of schools, the 1902 debates reflect a major change in attitude. Most significantly is the focus on Hebrew (rather than Yiddish) as the means to attaining the proper Jewish identity and purpose. With a cluster of hours devoted to Hebrew and the Bible, the nationalists' school curriculum had elements in common with that of the traditional ḥeder.

Similar positive attitudes toward the ḥeder appeared elsewhere. At the meeting of provincial representatives with the OPE board in 1902, the question of the ḥeder was widely debated and the seeds of a new, positive

21 Goldstein, "Haḥeder hametukan' berusiyah," 148.
22 Bramson, "K istorii nachal'nogo obrazovaniia," 353.
23 Ibid.

evaluation were detected. Lev Katsenelson, the long- standing leader of OPE and a well-known Hebrew writer, explained that "educated" Jews had long been convinced that even in the instruction of Hebrew the ḥeder was a worn-out institution that had to yield to the superiority of the modern school. However, results had proved otherwise: "Experts in Hebrew, which the ḥeder produced, did not emerge from the modern school."[24] In other words, the ḥeder gave rise to experts in Hebrew literature. Schools, in Katsenelson's view, had not produced that kind of brilliance.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the dominant viewpoint among nationalists was that the ḥeder provided Jewish children with an important part of a total educational package. However, the ḥeder needed to be supplemented by secular studies. Both the ḥeder and the school were needed, but ideally they would not be separate but joined in a single institution. Serious discussions of how to restructure the relationship between the school and the ḥeder took front-and-center place in the first journal devoted to Jewish education in Russia, *Evreiskaia shkola*. The journal, which appeared monthly for almost two years from 1904 to 1905, expressed the nationalist viewpoint that assimilation was the primary danger to the Jewish people and was much more dangerous than antisemitism. Among the contributors were some of the major intellectuals in the Jewish scene: V. O. Harkavy, Dubnov, Avram Idelson, Jacob Katsenelson, Mikhail Krol, Miron Kreinin, Pinkhus (Petr) Marek, A. Ravesman, Avram Konshtam, and Yakov Galpern.

Arguing in favor of the ḥeder, individuals such as Marek, Kreinin, and Idelson insisted that it be included in any comprehensive Jewish educational program. Marek wrote:

> Over the course of two centuries, fifty years after their appearance in Russia, our modern schools for boys (state, private, and community schools) have barely reached 400 in the Pale of Settlement (outside Poland). In the Pale of Settlement, several tens of thousands of ḥeders can be counted. The simple comparison of these figures shows how little the opponents of ḥeders have accomplished in half a century. And if, instead of a politics of neglect for the ḥeder, on the contrary, we had paid it serious attention, and if, instead of

24 Ibid.

> an unrealizable dream about uniting it with the school, we had studied the conditions for the joint, equal, and peaceful coexistence of both schools and tried to help them cooperate, then our schools would function better than they do now.[25]

Marek added that it was an illusion to think that the school would "swallow" the ḥeder. More likely, the ḥeder would swallow the school.[26] Because of the loyalty of Jewish parents to the ḥeder and the difficulty and expense of organizing two schools at once, the School Commission came to realize that no progress could occur without some idea of how the school interacted with the ḥeder. As one member put it, "naturally, the two contradictory systems of education cannot be justified by logical and practical considerations. A pedagogue must do everything in his power to diminish the abyss between the school and the ḥeder in order to bring them as much as possible closer together."[27]

Despite much hard work to promote the modern school, the fact became clear that a stalemate had occurred: the ḥeder could not replace the school, nor the school the ḥeder. Simultaneously, it was equally impossible to unite them in a single institution, as much as the educators wanted to. The problem was the uncompromising difference in programs and goals and the difference in the kind of teachers that each school required. For one thing, legally, secular courses could not be introduced into the ḥeder. Moreover, the institutions catered to different audiences: attendance in the ḥeder was the natural decision for parents in areas where traditional Jewish life was still strong, such as the northwestern territories, while secular schools were popular in the south. For example, in the southwest in 1903, there were eighteen reformed ḥeders (modern schools), which had been established by medical doctors.[28]

The idea of gaining information about ḥeders had actually been realized to an extent by the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, as early as 1895, OPE, in collaboration with the Russian Imperial Free Economic Society

25 Pinkhus (Pyotr) Marek, "Natsionalizatsiia vospitaniia i evreiskie uchebnye zavedeniia," *Evreiskaia shkola* 3 (1904): 9.

26 Marek, "Natsionalizatsiia vospitaniia," 10.

27 Pinkhus (Pyotr) Marek, "Nabliudeniia i vyvody po shkol'nomu voprosu," *Nedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* 20 (1902): 6.

28 Miron Kreinin, "Nabliudeniia po shkol'nomu delu," *Nedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* 5 (1903): 15.

(Imperatorskoe vol'noe ekonomicheskoe obshchestvo), set out to learn more about "Jewish home schools," their name for the ḥeders. Sending a questionnaire to several hundred state rabbis and civic leaders, the School Commission hoped to "gain a full portrait of folk education in [the] country."[29] The questions focused on the age and experience of the *melamed*, the number of students in each school, and whether the students attended other schools besides the ḥeder. In addition, members of the OPE School Commission wanted to know if Russian was taught and whether Yiddish was used in teaching Torah.

From this and from another survey conducted in 1898–99, members of the OPE School Commission were able to get reliable statistics about ḥeders.[30] According to the Jewish Colonialization Association (JCA), there were approximately 24,540 ḥeders in a population of 4,874,636 Jews. According to these statistics, there were thirteen students per ḥeder in the Pale, which meant that there were 343,000 children in ḥeders, plus another 20,000 in organized schools. Combined, these figures give a total of 363,000 Jewish elementary school students in the Pale.[31]

According to this survey, in ḥeders 95 percent were boys and only 5 percent were girls.[32] This fact was surprising because it differed radically from other groups in the empire. For example, although Muslims also refused to part with folk schools, 17 percent of the students in Muslim schools were girls. Educational experts also asserted that among students, the largest group in the ḥeder was under school age, seven years old (23 percent). In addition, the majority of students came from the so-called middle class (55 percent), as opposed to the poor (28 percent) or wealthy (17 percent). The concept of middle class may be misleading, however, since it meant a family with a single room to themselves.

---

29 S. Aviromov et al., "Sovremennyi kheder, kak ob"ekt issledovaniia," *Nedel'naia khronika Voskhoda* 12 (1895): 308.

30 *Spravochnaia kniga po voprosam obrazovaniia evreev: Posobie dlia uchitelei i uchitel'nits evreiskikh shkol i deiatelei po narodnomu obrazovaniiu* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvo dlia rasprostranenie prosveshcheniia, 1901), 287. In the second investigation, educational experts from the Imperial Free Economic Society took interviews from various locations and their findings were compared with responses from the OPE questionnaire. On the Free Economic Society, see Joan Pratt, "The Russian Free Economic Society, 1765–1915," (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1983).

31 Aviromov et al., "Sovremennyi kheder," 293.

32 Adler, "Private Schools for Jewish Girls," 74–77.

The study also found that for the most part the ḥeder teacher was either a representative of the synagogue—the *gabai*, for example—or someone who had failed at another profession.[33] He could be a former contractor, storeowner, confectioner, or craftsman. Often such *melamedim* were older men. Among the *melamedim* in the Kiev district, for example, 66 percent were between the ages of forty and sixty. The majority received some training in a yeshiva, although about 25 percent had left the yeshiva by the age of sixteen. The statistics supported prejudices regarding the average *melamed*'s lack of skill.

According to statistics from OPE, each student paid on average twenty-five roubles annually in cities and eighteen roubles in rural regions. Adding up the number of ḥeders with these prices, the investigators calculated that Jews spent between 6.5 and 7.5 million roubles on ḥeders every year. Furthermore, the ḥeder composed 31 percent of the total of "unorganized" schools in the empire, which showed that Jews were particularly attached to their traditional "folk" education.

In the years following the revolution of 1905, some educators had come around to the view that the best school was the so-called ḥeder *metukan* (improved ḥeder). Zionists in particular were enamored of the ḥeder *metukan* because it permitted a mixed curriculum and was designed to teach and use Hebrew in the classroom.[34] At the same time, under the influence of what appeared to be life-changing events, OPE professionals lost interest in the ḥeder as optimism grew in the society's ability to expand the school program throughout the country. Unfortunately, events unfolded in ways that were inimical to these plans.

In the last years before the First World War many intellectuals came out strongly in favor of the ḥeder, reversing their former views. In a meeting of OPE with its provincial members in 1912, speaker after speaker defended the ḥeder, attributing to it the virtue of keeping the Jewish people united and strong.[35] The thrust of the discussion pivoted around the indifference of Jews to Judaism, the threat of assimilation, and the potential dissolution of the Jewish people.

33 *Sovremennyi kḥeder po obsledovaniiu OPE* (St. Petersburg: s.n., 1912), 14.

34 Zevi Scharfstein, *Toledot hahinukh beyisra'el bedorot ha'aharonim* (Jerusalem: Re'uven Mas, 1960–65), 2:42–47.

35 The proceedings were published as *Otchet o soveshchanii komiteta OPE s predstavitel'iami otdelenii, 25–27 dekabria 1912* (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvo dlia rasprostranenie prosvesh-cheniia, 1913).

Hayim Nahman Bialik, the renowned Hebrew poet, fulminated against the intelligentsia's traditional attitude toward the ḥeder: "For the past fifty years 'smart thinking' excluded a concern with Jewish subjects, the Bible was something religious, rather than educational. Pushkin, yes, he's a poet, but Jewish poets—why should one know them? . . . Your child, the generation you brought up lies dead. The living child, the future Jewish generation, is ours. And we will not give him up!"[36] Bialik's hostility was perhaps too simple, since he characterized the Zionists as defenders of everything Jewish and everyone else as defectors from a just cause. Nevertheless, his passionate speech in favour of the ḥeder in 1912 was influential. For example, even Hayim Fialkov, the leading educator of OPE, changed his mind about reforming ḥeders: "Vilna's improved ḥeders show how one can initiate huge projects if one wants to meet the needs of the broad masses of Jews . . . I want to acknowledge respect for those who labour on behalf of these schools, whose activities do not entirely coincide with our educational ideals."[37]

Words went together with action. In 1911 the St. Petersburg OPE established a Ḥeder Commission.[38] The goal of the commission was to incorporate the ḥeder into the society's school program. As a consequence, St. Petersburg sent four educational experts to different areas: the southwest, Volhynia, Lithuania, and Poland. The research was published in 1912 in a volume entitled, *The Contemporary* Ḥeder *According to an OPE Study*.[39]

Acknowledging the importance of the ḥeder for Jewish life, the editors nonetheless expressed overwhelmingly negative opinions. That conclusion did not interfere with expressions of nostalgia, however:

> Despite our consciousness of the extremely anti-pedagogical, distorted and often distorting aspects of the ḥeder, we nevertheless feel that this special ancient school of traditional Judaism has left an intimate mark on our soul. The ḥeder with its unique Jewish atmosphere, in spite of all its dark aspects,

36 *Otchet o soveshchanii komiteta OPE* 19; see also Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry*, 48–57.

37 *Otchet o soveshchanii komiteta OPE*, 34.

38 It was the second in the society: Odessa had opened a ḥeder Commission in 1904.

39 *Sovremennyi kḥeder po obsledovaniiu OPE*. It was also published in *Vestnik obshchestva rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii* 17 (1912). The teachers who travelled to carry out the study were S. Avirom (south), I. Shulkovsky (Volhynia), F. Shapiro (Lithuania), and B. Alperin (Poland).