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JEWISH CHILDHOOD TRANSFORMED: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF ART AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION IN PRE- AND POST-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA

Abstract

The present article studies the thematic ways in which Jewish childhood was represented in Russian Jewish art and visual media from the 1850s to the 1930s. During this period, Russian Jewry was undergoing important transformations. It saw the establishment of a traditional model of religious life, a subsequent process of modernization and acculturation, and finally the education of the "New Jew" as part of post-Revolutionary secular culture, as well as the seeding of extreme forms of radicalization that would develop in the Soviet era. Jewish art and visual media were always a documentary means of representing collective ideals, key among which was the value associated with Jewish children's future. The images preserved in art, photography, and print show how diligent study for boys and young men was extolled in traditional communities; this resulted in the formation of an intellectual elite that served as a bulwark of religious and spiritual self-consciousness against outside cultural influences. Along with historical-statistical studies and memoirs, these images recreate a psycho-emotional and social background for the traditional model of children's education. On the one hand, this model perpetuated the lifestyle and values established over the centuries, yet on the other, it sparked charges of anachronism and fanaticism, which intensified the antagonism of Russian society toward its Jewish minority. The same model proved to be extremely influential for the Jewish masses; it came by its iconic visual representation in various "Cheder" compositions and portraits of the "Talmudist Iluy." Both types of works brought out the value of religious education. Later artistic depictions demonstrated that upon passing through the grinder of the Soviet atheist system, this model inspired the zeal that Jews had for secular education and the prospect of their children's being granted equal opportunity, resulting in the loss of their ethno-cultural identity in the new Soviet reality.

The Ethos of Education amid Great Changes in the Jewish World

In 1916, with World War I at its peak, Moriah, a Jewish publishing house in Odessa, issued a Hebrew primer for Jewish elementary schools authored by Faina Shargorodskaya.[1] This was one of the first illustrated Hebrew textbooks in Russia, and it was published at a time when the printing of books using Hebrew fonts was illegal.[2] Despite wartime hardship and privation, the Jewish publishers included pictures in color, thus underscoring the visual primacy of learning despite the prohibitively high expenses of doing so. This, along with the primer's distribution patterns, makes it clear that the textbook targeted the general Jewish populace, particularly the children of Maskilim and Zionists, who were closest to the publishing enterprise.[3]

The same period saw internal tensions among Jewish religious groups and political parties reach an apogee. The appearance of the primer became a landmark of sorts, standing as a symbol for the radical changes that were taking place within Russian Jewry on the eve of the October Revolution. Jewish children, always vital to the Jewish community, were now in the eye of the storm.

The new textbook aimed to have children absorb the ideational structures of the era of change, which combined tradition with new currents and the realism of writing about the everyday with a modern pictorial style and the first signs of a Modernist aesthetic. This aesthetic would soon be swept away by the Revolutionary avant-garde, which used Yiddish banners to

[1] Faina Shargorodskaya, *Alef-Bet* (Odessa: Moriah Publishers, 1916).

[2] The ban went into effect in 1915 based on suspicions of espionage against the Jews; it affected areas in the immediate vicinity of the front as well as the capital city of St. Petersburg. In 1916, the ban became empire-wide, although some Hebrew material was still published in Odessa.

[3] According to Hillel Kazovsky's data, this edition's second printing went through at the same time in St. Petersburg; see Hillel Kazovsky, "*Novaya yevreyskaya illustrirovannaya kniga*," *Zerkalo* 32 (2008), http://magazines.russ.ru/zerkalo/2008/32/gi5.html Simcha Ben-Zion and Hayim Nahman Bialik, who in 1903 had started working as Hebrew instructors at an experimental *Cheder* (traditional schoolroom) in Odessa, were among the founders of the Moriah publishing house in Odessa in 1901, as were the writer Elchanan Leib Levinsky and the journalist, editor, and publisher Yehoshua Chone Ravnitzky. All these activists were Zionists with a special reverence for tradition.

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DOI:10.1163/18718000-12340114

announce the coming of the age of the "New Jew" and a new national culture.[4]

Hebrew publishing resumed with the fall of the monarchy and the lifting of Czarist censorship in 1917, but not for long. The Bolsheviks' coming to power was marked by militant atheism and the systematic eradication of Hebrew, which was defined as a language of religious worship; in 1919, it was outlawed as a subject of instruction.

Even so, the traditional model remained intact during this period; S. An-sky in the 1910s envisioned it as an essential element of the future "Jewish nursery."[5] The same traditional model was also supposed to demonstrate—through its use in art, among other media—the itinerary leading from the *shtetl* to the city, recording the ethos of Jewish learning and the Jewish way of life, both of which defined the Jewish heritage. Moriah's founders saw the ideal of Jewish education in precisely this way; Hayim Nahman Bialik, Moriah's ideational inspirer, who had traveled the road from *cheder* to the enlightened Jewish elite, provides an eloquent instance of this mood.

The primer documented the views of modernized city Jewry, shaped by centuries of living the Russian Jewish way of life and held on the eve of the dramatic transformation of the country into a new society—the future Soviet Union. The book's pictures clearly bore out its didactic approach and introduced the reader to the Jewish artistic tradition, which had by that time taken shape. The illustrations were no mere composition repertoire on Jewish themes, but traced the very gestation of tradition, pointing to its achievements and its contradictions.

The Jewish community as a whole was in the throes of opposition between traditionalism and modernism, especially in all that concerned children's education, where tradition and modernity were conceived of as two phases—often mutually exclusive ones—in the emergence of the individual. Beginning in the late 1800s, many Jews who had gone through *cheder* became critical of their childhood experiences, trying to free themselves of its burden, often in an attempt to find their own social niche. Thus, Boris Schatz, the founder of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, who had as a child inspired great hopes as a future Talmudist, unbeknownst to his family, later on in his youth sharply broke with Talmudic tradition, describing it—and the religious worldview overall—as the principal reason for all Jewish calamities: past, present, and future.[6] His case is symptomatic of the turn of the twentieth century, a time of radical change. Even so, most children's lives continued to be shaped by tradition up to the moment of "self-determination."

Jewish Instruction through Visual Images

In the accompanying pictures, the primer's authors used a stable set of Jewish ritual objects to stand for values that they wanted to inculcate in the younger Jewish generation. Common among the ritual objects used to represent religious tradition were the *lulav, the tallit*, the *Sefer Torah*, the synagogue, as well as entire genre scenes: compositions with Talmud students, *cheder* classes, blessings and ceremonies for the holiday of Sukkot, and synagogue rituals for Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Simchat Torah. These subjects, which had been nomadic within the Jewish cultural space since the 1800s, defined Eastern European traditional Jewish iconography.

Striking was the book's lack of artistic unity: it was a compilation of different painting styles and fragments of well-known artists' works that had become the visual idioms of old Jewry. Some of the illustrations had been taken from publications popular among the Jews, such as *The Jewish Encyclopedia* brought out by Brockhaus and Efron Publishers (1908–1913) and *The History of the Jewish People* (1914) brought out by Mir.[7] Thus, the image of the fortress-style Zhovkva synagogue (in present-day Ukraine) as depicted in the 1870 engraving by Jan Matejko had been lifted directly from these sources. Besides being a way for the publisher to reduce costs, the image became the embodiment of the immutability of Jewish tradition and of the establishment of the Jews in the Russian imperial lands.[8]

The primer made creative use of the artistic legacy of Ephraim Moshe Lilien, who was famous for the

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[4] Hillel Kazovsky, *The Artists of the Kultur-Lige* (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 2003), 34–40.

[5] Aleksandr Lvov, "*'Evreyskaya detskaya': Muzeefikatsiya religii dlya vospitaniya naroda*," *An-sky's Expeditions' Photo Archives: Volhynia, Podolia, Kiev Region, 1912–1914*, exhibition catalog (St. Petersburg: Petersburg Judaica Center, 2005), 4.

[6] Boris Schatz, "*Odin iz mnogih: Iz vospominaniy odnogo skul'ptora*" (publisher not listed, 1905): 36–40.

[7] Aleksandr Braudo, Marc Wishnitser, Yuly Gessen, et al., eds., *Istoriya evreev v Rossii*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Mir, 1914).

[8] Alla Sokolova, "*Arhitektura shtetla v kontekste traditsionnoy kul'tury*" in *100 evreyskih mestechek Ukrainy*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Aleksandr Gersht, 2000), 58.

works he had illustrated for publication in the early 1900s.[9] Lilien's pictures cast into visual form the whole of Jewish history, underscoring his own Zionist choices and finding conceptual and aesthetic ways in which to reflect ideas of "Biblical Zionism."[10] The Hebrew primer's illustrator made good use of Lilien's pictures, which had been reproduced from published works, as well as works of other authors, which were taken from the well-known, opulently decorated book about Lilien published in 1905 by the German Zionist writer and social activist Edgar Alfred Regener (1879–1922).[11] This made fragments of Lilien's works into visual idioms of the Jewish tradition. In some cases, they were used as a set of conceptual images for page composition (as in the image of a Jew mourning and praying, or the image of an old man poring over the Talmud in a room lit up by countless candles), while in others they were added to composite scenes as independent and complete compositional wholes.

In one such composition, made as an illustration for the holiday of Simchat Torah, the artist—issues of crediting original work notwithstanding—even incorporated his name into the signature: Sh. Goldman (fig. 1). He could have just as well written Lilien in, too, having borrowed at least two fragments from Lilien's work—the Torah ark itself and the old Jew, wrapped in a prayer shawl and holding a Torah scroll, standing to the left of the lectern (*amud*).[12] He might have also included Maurycy Gottlieb, a no less well-known Galician artist, from whose renowned *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur* (1878) he had taken part of the figure of an elderly Jew in a prayer shawl and holding a Torah scroll. There is an eye-catching contrast between the congregants about the Torah ark—who were all clearly adherents of traditional Judaism—and the Torah ark itself, which borrows features specific to Reform temples. The artist can hardly have given this much thought. Lilien's original drawing used Egyptian architectural motifs for the Torah ark pylons, a move in perfect conformity with Reform community leaders' search for ways to express identity through architectural forms; for Lilien himself, this was a commonplace appeal to Oriental motifs.[13] In addition, the author used the foreground to depict a group of children in secular Sunday dress—white sailor suits with dark lapels (fashionable since the late 1800s), short pants, and boater hats. The children hold little flags with Stars of David on a two-color background (the blue has clearly been worked over with darker stripes). The composition with children holding little Zionist flags contrasted sharply with traditional ways of visualizing Simchat Torah, which would involve a Torah ark and Tablets of the Law. The contrast was both social and conceptual, the "older generation" of people in the synagogue wearing overcoats and hats and wrapped in prayer shawls.

The artist is hardly likely to have intentionally unfurled the full spectrum of Russian Jewry in its unity and diversity in this heterogeneous mix; this was more probably a spontaneous depiction of what he had seen in daily life. The approach was testimony to the author's main goal, which was to use the visual to show the Jewish heritage, relegating aesthetics to the background. The author was here responding to the call of axiological objectives in Jewish children's education, using the forms, models, and imagery available in Jewish tradition and reflected in traditional art.

We should note that the primer far from exhausted the compositional diversity of Jewish artistic themes; in fact, it barely scratched the surface. Besides history and daily life, these visual themes included religious authority (rabbis, Chassidic rebbes, and their successors) and traditional figures taken primarily from the *shtetl* and the Pale of Settlement. The figures of children and young people in these artworks were an expression of the younger generation's ideals as pointedly shaped by the entire framework of Jewish education, which dictated models for emulation. This set of visual themes was an expression of inner Jewish ideals, which from the point of view of the surrounding Christian milieu would have been identified with the "alien"—that is, with isolationism and hostility. The opposition came naturally to be reflected in antisemitic stereotypes in the form of caricatures of the Jew as an old clothes-dealer, peddler, moneylender, or innkeeper out to fleece Christians. The tragic themes of *galut* –

[9] Richly illustrated gift editions should be singled out among these: Börries von Münchhausen, *Juda*, mit Zeichnungen von E.M. Lilien (Berlin: Egon Fleischel & Co, 1900); Morris Rosenfeld, *Lieder des Ghetto*. Übertragung aus dem Jüdischen von Berthold Feiwel, mit Zeichnungen von E.M. Lilien (Berlin: Marquardt, 1902); and Morris Rosenfeld, *Die Bücher der Bibel*, mit Zeichnungen von E.M. Lilien (Braunschweig: G. Westerman, 1908).

[10] On this notion, see Dalia Manor, "Biblical Zionism in Bezalel Art," *Israel Studies* 6, no. 1 (2001): 55–75.

[11] Edgar Alfred Regener and E.M. Lilien, *Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Zeichnenden Künste* (Berlin—Leipzig: F.A. Lattmann in Goslar, 1905).

[12] Ibid., 63, 104.

[13] Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning*, 2nd ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 72–78.

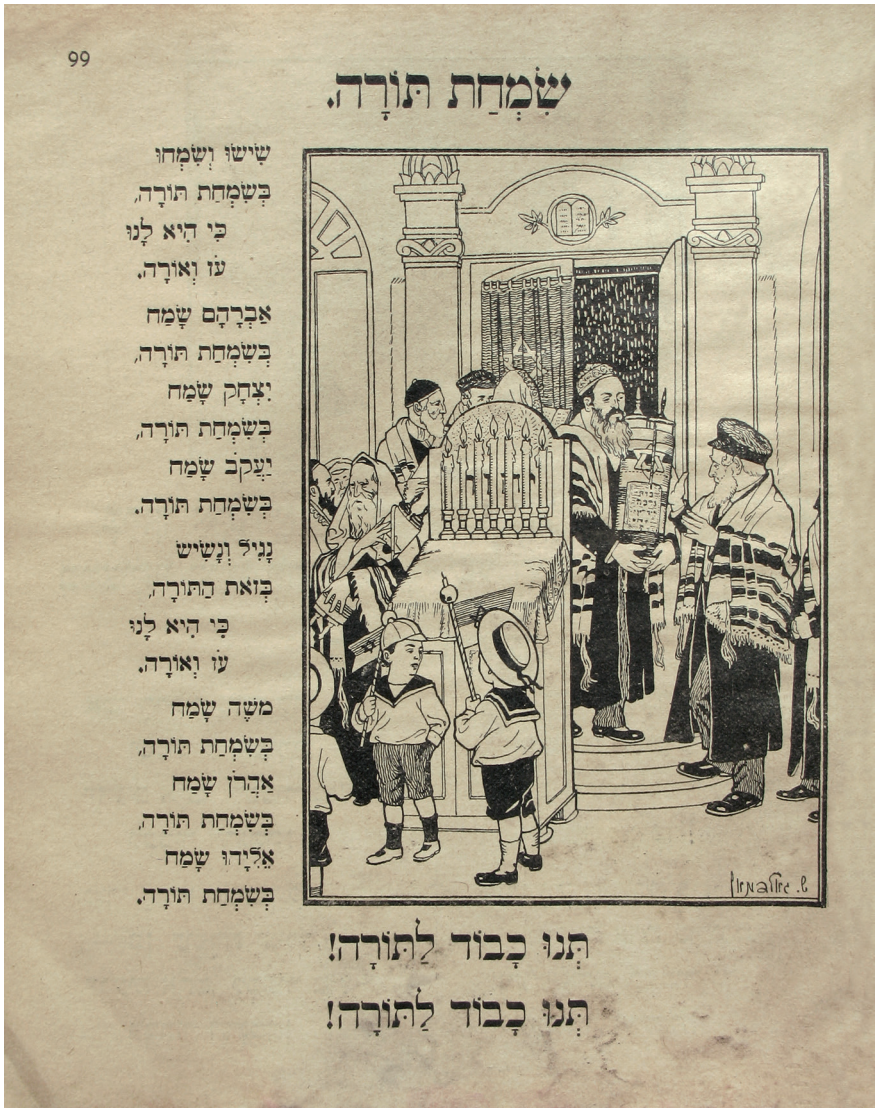

Fig. 1. Sh. Goldman, *Simchat Torah in the Synagogue*, 1916, Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. Drawing in Shargorodskaya's *Alef-Bet* primer. (Courtesy of Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine).

exile, persecution, and pogroms—became the extreme manifestation of this mindset, imprinting themselves on children's consciousness along with the entire set of ideas associated with being God's chosen nation and taking cognizance of the lofty purpose of the Jewish People. Yet the most important formative elements were still the same normative childhood molds that had been canonized by the Jewish tradition; they were the ones dictating children's itinerary toward adulthood and determining their outlook on life.

Ideal Jewish Childhood: Between Art and Reality

Images of children depicted in Shargorodskaya's primer included only males of the younger generation—it was to them that literacy was being transmitted along with age-old traditions. Boys were the focus of attention of both communities and parents, who did the utmost to ensure that their children would live up to the highest Jewish aspirations.[14] The Jewish historian Shimon Dubnov wrote about this with reference to

[14] A number of scholars, including Shaul Stampfer and Iris Parush, are of the opinion that a limited formal education for girls was seen as a way to ensure a future wife's obedience to family and society. See ChaeRan Freeze, "*Evreyskaya sem'ya v Rossii*," in *History of the Jews in Russia: From the Partitions of Poland to the Fall of the Russian Empire, 1772–1917*, vol. 2, ed. Ilia Lurie (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 2012), 255–256.

Jewish religious law (*halakha*), demonstrating that boys' education was one of the most important duties of parents, guardians, and, in the case of orphans, the entire Jewish community.[15] The same principle is made clear in many accounts of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement written by Russian and Jewish researchers beginning in the mid-1800s, as well as memoirs and works of fiction. Thus Aleksandr Alekseev,[16] a baptized Jew, in explaining the special elements of Jewish education to the Russian—that is, the Christian—reader, stresses that

> The Jew … takes his instruction from the ways of the fathers, knowing that study is essential for every Israelite—essential not for the sake of material advantage, but for higher aims: so as through learning to come to know God and all that is made by Him in the universe for the good of humanity; so as to come to understand the meaning of life and that which makes us different from the beasts, and that we have been created so as to glorify the Name of God. Inspired by thoughts of this kind, Jews study with zeal and eagerness. True enough, a young Jew has another reason to study diligently and to master the lore of the Talmud: to become a *chocham*, a wise man, and a *tanna*,[17] a man of learning, and to attain the much esteemed title of rabbi. This is what is most ardently desired by a young Jew: to become a rabbi is for him what it is for a Russian man of combat to become a general.[18]

The images of Jewish children in paintings and photographs of the late 1800s and early 1900s form the sequel to descriptions like Alekseev's. By and large, they conform to the same educational ideals. Yet it is worth noting that these were true ideals for those who believed themselves to be part of this tradition and who supported it. The tradition's critics saw such "ideals" as indications of isolationism, conservatism, and fanaticism,[19] which the Czarist regime fought against in trying to solve the "Jewish question" from the late 1700s and until the end of Czarist rule in 1917. A considerable number of Jews who underwent the process of assimilation and integration into Russian society upheld the same view.[20]

Artists worked with the same two points of view to orient their representation of the Jewish world; *Simchat Torah* (1889) by the Polish artist Tadeusz Popiel and *Victim of Fanaticism* (1899) by the Ukrainian Nikolai Pimonenko are both examples of this polarization.[21] Both paintings include children. The first is a picturesque display of the triumph of age-old Jewish tradition in all the glory of synagogue ritual, opulence of material wherewithal, and the community's spiritual unity. In a symbolic move, the artist transfers the celebration of renewal in the reading of the Torah from the old man with the scrolls and the entire procession following him to the Jewish boy dancing in the foreground (fig. 2). The figure of the boy stands for the new generation as it accepts the tradition being transferred through the ages. Many artists used a synagogue setting of this kind, turning the images of children into symbols of unbroken tradition. The same technique of depicting youth as embodying an ideal continues throughout the late 1800s-early 1900s in portrayals of scenes from everyday life, such as in the works of Lazar Krestin and Yakov Vaynlez, and later in works by the younger, modernist generation: Wilhelm Wachtel, Sigmund Menkes, and others imparted to children praying together with their mentors an uplifting sense of religiosity and spirituality. We see the same feeling reiterated in countless memoirs from this period.

The painting by Nikolai Pimonenko, based on a real event—the public excommunication of a young woman who had converted to Christianity[22]—illustrated the opposite, unfriendly attitude toward the Jewish world

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[15] Shimon Dubnov, "*Vnutrenniy byt evreev Pol'shi i Litvy v XVI v.*," in *History of the Jews in Russia*, vol. 1, ed. Aleksandr Braudo, Marc Wishnitser, Yuly Gessen, et al. (Moscow: Mir, 1914), 321.

[16] Aleksandr Alekseev (Wolf Nachlas, 1820–1895), a Jew originally from a Chassidic family and a writer, converted to Christian Orthodoxy and became an Orthodox missionary.

[17] Interestingly, Alekseev here uses a term traditionally associated with the sages of the Mishnah (the late first to the early third centuries CE), one which the Jews of Russia did not typically resort to in connection with learning in their own time.

[18] In his note to this text, Alekseev also emphasizes the special trepidation with which a Jew treats books: "They are his life-long inseparable companions; particularly painstakingly preserved are prayer books and the Pentateuch." See Aleksandr Alekseev, *Ocherki domashney i obschestvennoy zhizni evreev, ih verovaniya, bogosluzheniya, prazdniki, obryady, talmud i kagal* (St. Petersburg: Isdanie knigoprodavtsa I.L. Tusova, 1896), 25.

[19] See John Klier, "*Razvitie zakonodatel'stva o evreyah v Rossiyskoy imperii* (*1772–1881*)," in *History of the Jews in Russia: From the Partitions of Poland to the Fall of the Russian Empire, 1772–1917*, vol. 2, ed. Ilia Lurie (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 2012), 26–31.

[20] For instance, Grigory Bogrov believed that "taking one step away from its religious traditions could at once deliver it [Jewry] from all spiritual and bodily suffering." He also associated the unshakable authority of Jewish tradition and way of life with "mental stagnation and a sluggish look"; see Grigory Bogrov, "*Russkie evrei*," *Zhivopisnaya Rossiya* 5, no. 1, essay 5 (1897): 199–200.

[21] Both popular in their day. The creators often repeated these same compositions in their work and these images—especially Pimonenko's *Victim of Fanaticism*—were also frequently reproduced on postcards.

[22] See Evgeny Kotlyar, "Pymonenko, Krzemieniec, sztuka, Żydzi. 'Ofiara fanatyzmu' jako reakcja na 'kwestię żydowska' w Imperium Rosyjskim," in *Plenery krzemienieckie w latach trzydziestych XX*

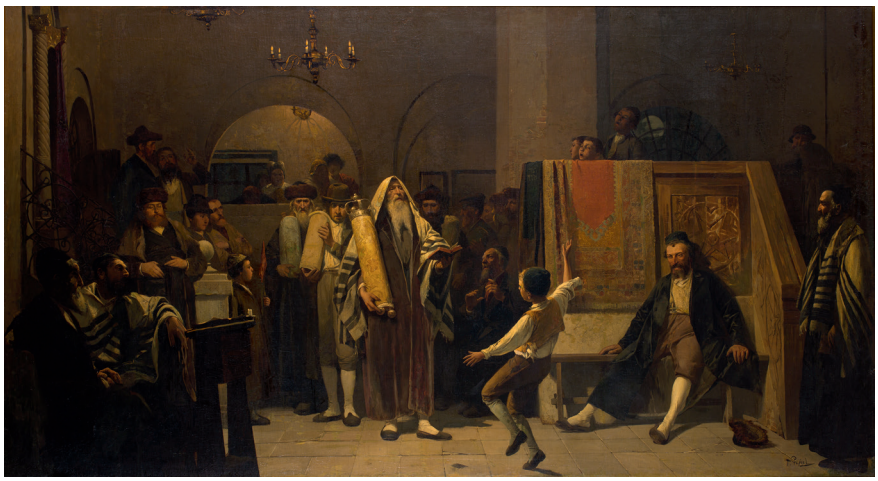

Fig. 2. Tadeusz Popiel, *Simchat Torah*, 1889, The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw. Oil on canvas, 91 × 165 cm. (Courtesy of The E. Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw).

as espoused by the Czarist regime (fig. 3). The artist was well aware of the laws of genre painting and of the principal conceptual symbols of the time: the terrified young woman, the rabbi clad in liturgical garb and brandishing his fists, the parents pronouncing their daughter's name anathema, and the furious crowd of Jews armed with sticks. Diagonally across from the main female protagonist, he places the Jewish children. A girl clutches the hem of her mother's dress in sheer terror, and the barefoot boy hurrying to the scene of the commotion adds to the overall dynamic. Even though the artist was not a Jew, his effort—made with the truthfulness that was typical of Russian painterly realism of the late 1800s—to make the public aware of the Jewish question in Russia made the painting achieve unprecedented popularity, especially among Jews. Traditionalists saw it as a warning against assimilationist tendencies and the threat of excommunication (*cherem*) for renegades, while the supporters of modernization read it as exposing the conservatism and wretchedness of the ghetto. If in the former case (Popiel) children become heirs to a tradition great in all respects, then in the latter (Pimonenko) they are being taught a moral lesson against disobedience, thus becoming insurance of sorts for Jewish ghetto mentality.

Whatever angle artists chose to cast light upon the Jewish theme from, they always represented the world of Jewish childhood against the backdrop of the unchanging landscape of tradition: on a Jewish street, inside or in the vicinity of the synagogue, surrounded by home and family, and, most importantly, in elementary religious school (*cheder*).

The diligent effort that Jews put into religious education, in which "auto-didacticism"—the term in use at the time for study on one's own—was seen as a key element, was highly valued. It is no accident that the composition with bears climbing up trees in search of honey became a hallmark of traditional Jewish art, especially in synagogue wall paintings (compositions with squirrels cracking nuts developed a similar semantic function) (fig. 4). Delving into the didactic meaning of the metaphor, researchers have stressed that the study of Torah was being compared in this composition to the search for honey, which is hard to find but sweet to eat.[23] But as Jewish memoirs make

wieku—tradycja, współczesność, perspektywy (Kraków: IRSA, 2013), 119–135. See also Ellie R. Schainker, "On Faith and Fanaticism: Converts from Judaism and the Limits of Toleration in Late Imperial Russia," in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 4 (2016): 753–780. Since Jewish excommunications were normally pronounced in synagogues, the setting in the painting may have been a conscious exaggeration staged for dramatic effect.

[23] Ida Huberman, *Living Symbols: Symbols in Jewish Art and Tradition* (Jerusalem: Modan, 1996), 85, n. to pl. 68. A variation developed in the iconography can be seen in a wall painting in the Khodoriv wooden synagogue (first third of the 1700s), where three bears are grouped around one tree. One of the bears climbs up, making imminently for the honey jars suspended from the branches, while the other two stand at the foot of the tree helping each other begin the climb. Ilia Rodov sees this as the metaphor formula for depicting different levels of ability in students and the system of education itself, in which everyone helps each other out.

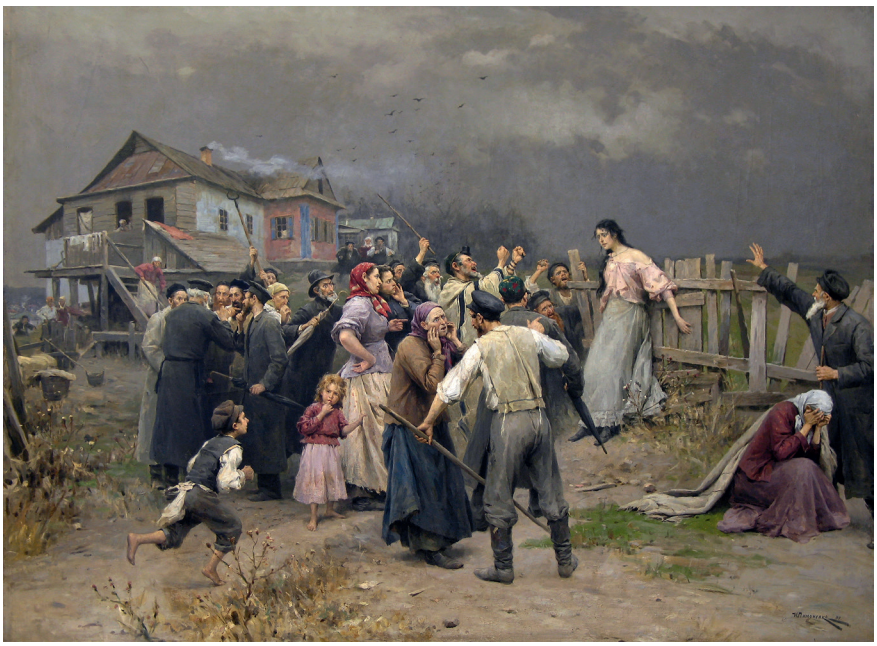

Fig. 3. Nikolai Pimonenko, *Victim of Fanaticism*, 1899, Kharkiv Art Museum. Oil on canvas, 180 × 244 cm. (Courtesy of the Kharkiv Art Museum).

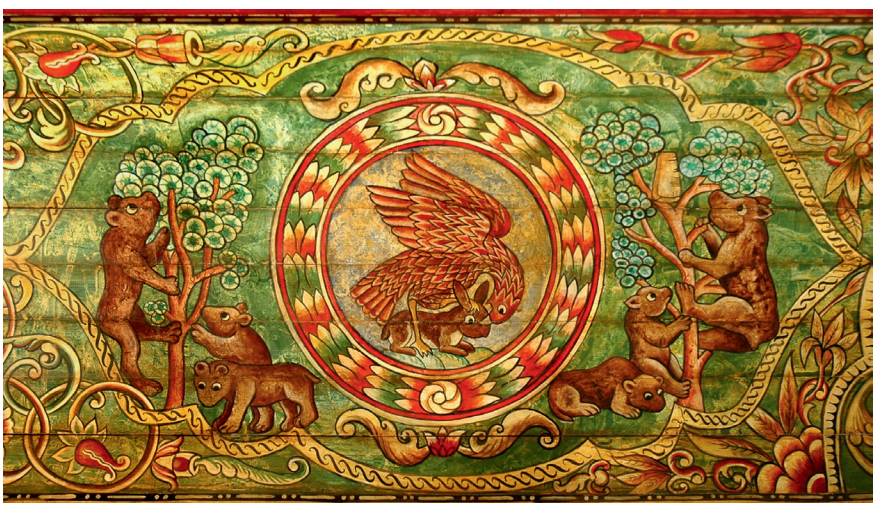

Fig. 4. *Bears Climbing up Trees in Search of Honey* (reconstruction).
Detail from the painted ceiling of the synagogue in Khodoriv, Poland (modern-day Ukraine). The paintings were made by Israel Ben Mordecai Lisnicki of Jaryczow in 1714. The Synagogue was built in 1652, destroyed in World War II. The Oster Visual Documentation Center. Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot, Core Exhibition (Courtesy of Beit Hatfutsot—Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv)

clear, this was no mere metaphor. Thus, Shemaryah Levin reminisces that, on the day when he was to be taken to *cheder* for the first time in his life, he was given a prayer book of his own, two pages of which had been smeared with honey. The boy was told to lick the honey, and, when he bent down to do this, all around him "a torrent of copper and silver coins descended." As his grandfather told him, the angels were responsible, knowing that the boy would become a conscientious pupil and wanting to encourage him in advance. At the end of the ceremony, his father wrapped him in a *tallis* and carried him in his arms all

the way to the *cheder*.[24] Rituals of this kind motivated a child to study, and the sweetness of knowledge was supposed to enable him to overcome challenges. The same Alekseev we have already mentioned reminisced about his father's words in response to his complaints about having to get up early and wait for his teacher for a long time in the cold:

> Indeed, not easy, my child, but what is there that is easy to get? Even material goods are difficult to obtain, so can it be easy to acquire the most exalted treasure—the Holy Law? But in recompense, think, once you have completed your studies, how great things will be! You will become a *chocham*—a wise man, and what can be higher than wisdom?
>
> Such consoling words deepened my love, as if chaining me to the study of the Holy Writ. All the daily joys—games, fun walks, pastimes—existed for me no longer, just as they don't exist for many other Jewish boys still. I knew one thing: strain my back perpetually over the Sacred Book, with only the Sabbath to allow the body to rest. But however hard study at school may have been, it was also pleasant, for I counted on great good to come of it in the future.[25]

With this taste of honey as their point of departure, children would experience difficulty and privation on the way to mastering knowledge, which was a long road for them to travel. This journey was sanctioned by age-old Jewish tradition but criticized by those who condemned this way of life. If we envision a particularly vivid and typical image of Jewish childhood in the Russian Empire, the foreground is invariably taken up by the visual idiom of the timeless *cheder*.

The Lessons of Cheder

The composition with Jewish children at study became a stable element of Jewish artists' repertoire in this period. This tradition was established in the late 1870s by two of the foremost European Jewish artists: Moritz Oppenheim (1800–1882), the creator of the famous *Scenes from Traditional Jewish Family Life* cycle,[26] and the French artist of Sephardi origin, Jacques Émile Édouard Brandon (1831–1897). True enough, their "Jewish classes" are remarkable in their tidiness, comfort, and European surroundings—they are the setting in which children from well-to-do Jewish families typically studied. Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921) worked in a similar key, making staple images of the younger Jewish generation with pensive looks or images of concentrating child prodigies intensively focused on Torah to attain its infinite store of meaning and to master the art of *pilpul*. The figures in his works, be it a young Talmudist or an old man instructing a quick-minded child in business savvy (in this regard, the boy is little different from the *cheder* pupil), often find themselves placed in the same setting, stationed at the same table and chair, which are detailed down to the minutest of nuances. The artist is no less intent on the spiritual and emotional ambience of the Jewish world than on the aesthetics of daily life, which is well provided for and of high quality. These scenes are rich in romanticism: they exude the odor of lacquered wood, conveying reflections of bronze light from the spider-shaped chandeliers and candleholders, and the spirit of noble age and tradition. The viewer is in the presence of mighty carved chests and bookcases overflowing with volumes in stamped binding—an element identified since time immemorial with Jewish wealth and aristocratic manner.[27]

All of these elements of the Austrian Biedermeier period in the life of a society that was Jewish in spirit but burgher in style combined to create a warm home atmosphere, which was in striking contrast to the same type of composition in Eastern Europe, in Poland, and

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[24] From the chapter titled "The *Cheder* Years" of Levin's autobiographical *Childhood in Exile* (1929), Trans. Maurice Samuel, https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/pakn-treger/cheder-years. Shmaryah Levin (1867–1935) was a deputy in the State Duma of the Russian Empire, a Zionist, and a publicist. Similar memories are elaborated in Boris Schatz's work. Instead of honey, Schatz mentions that on the way to *cheder* women shopkeepers showered him with "cane sugar in beautiful colored wrapping, kissing and admiring me, assuring me that my face was lit up by the Divine Spirit, they prophesied that I would be a great rabbi like my grandfather." See Schatz, "*Odin iz mnogih: Iz vospominaniy odnogo skul'ptora*," 6–8. On this custom in Jewish education, see Eliane Strosberg, *The Human Figure and Jewish Culture* (New York: Abbeville Press Publisher, 2009), 42.

[25] Alekseev, *Ocherki domashney i obschestvennoy zhizni evreev*, 20.

[26] *Cheder* (1878), a well-known painting by Moritz Oppenheim, is among a number of Oppenheim's compositions that became a point of reference for many Jewish artists at the turn of the twentieth century. See Shalom Sabar, "In the Footsteps of Moritz Oppenheim: Herman Junker's Postcard Series of Scenes from Traditional Jewish Family Life," in *Moritz Daniel Oppenheim: Die Entdeckung des jüdischen Selbstbewußtseins in der Kunst*, ed. Georg Heuberger and Anton Merk (Cologne: Jüdisches Museum der Stadt Frankfurt, 1999), 259–271.

[27] In the perception of Russian Jews, a religious library was also convertible capital; see Abram Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," in *Evrei v Rossii: XIX vek*, ed. Viktor Kelner (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000), 44.

especially in the Russian Pale of Jewish Settlement. Here, works by Lazar Krestin, Maurycy Trębacz, Artur Markovsky, Leopold Horowitz, and others show an incomparably more modest school setting—but one in which learning is also permeated with greater passion and emotionality. This is made clear not only by the vividness of the figures, but also by the manner in which the artists use chiaroscuro, with the light snatching out of the dark the figures and faces of the protagonists as they pore over Jewish learning in their family homes, *cheders*, Talmud Torahs, *batei midrash*, and yeshivas. The artists' attention is focused not on the outer trappings, but on the psychology of the scene as a whole, despite the fact that often enough the study environment of children of "Russian subjects of the Jewish faith" was thoroughly unappealing. A visiting card of sorts for the Russian *cheder* was the work by Horowitz, which, under different titles (*The Talmud* or *In the Cheder*) frequently appeared on postcards put out by Jewish publishing houses in Russia (fig. 5). On the one hand, it showed Jewish children attaining knowledge—that is, how they would spend half the day languishing in the squalid room where the *melamed* lived, waiting out their turn for an individual session. Knowledge came through persistence, patience, and repetition, as the composition with the bears on synagogue walls teaches us. On the other hand, the *melamed*'s poor home, both the teacher's and the children's worn and tattered clothing, and the overall sense of the joylessness of childhood gave the critics of the Jewish tradition occasion to dwell on its wretchedness, superstition, filth, and unsanitary conditions. Not only Jewish children's education, but Jewry as such became identified with all these miserable ills.[28] In a different spirit, Jewish publishing houses such as "Lebanon"—a mouthpiece of Zionism and love for Eretz Israel—used these postcards to show the burden of life in *galut* and the backwardness of the traditional way of life. This was the primary objective that publishers had in mind when choosing the compositions for mass reproduction; these pictures clearly lost when compared to the romantic views of colonizing Eretz Israel and Zionist leaders' portraits.[29]

Accounts of the education and life of Jewish children in the pre-reform years are marked by the contrast between the modernized city and the conservative countryside. These descriptions convey a holistic picture of the system of education, but they vary in their evaluations of the "childhood experience" of education provided by the *cheder*, as well as in the points of view assumed by the various researchers writing the descriptions. The difference in points of view is due to personal differences: there were the "neutral" clerks from the capital (Pavel Chubinsky) and the well-informed "educated Jews" (Moisei Berlin),[30] the Maskilim and the Christian converts, and the writers and the artists, with some of these categories often overlapping. All of them could hail from the *shtetl* and narrate its life based on their own childhood experiences.

Private elementary education at *cheder*, at home, or free of charge at a community Talmud Torah had a decisive impact on Jewish boys' future. Their immediate Jewish surroundings and schooling accounted for most of their life between the ages of 4–6 and 13, when they became *bar mitzvah*. The *cheder* consistently taught reading, Bible with Rashi's commentary, and Talmud; as the students got older, their numbers tended to decline noticeably.[31] At this stage, students would become acquainted with the structure of Talmudic presentation of content and its traditional form of study; later, a student would continue on his own or with peers, often leading a nomadic lifestyle.[32] The respect accorded to those who devoted themselves to religious study was so great that community law and Kahal directives required local communities to cover all such scholars' expenses, offering them "days" when they would be hosted by different households.[33] After *cheder*, the more talented and well-provided-for

[28] See Alla Sokolova, "*"Belyi gospodin" v poiskah ekzotiki: evreyskie dostoprimechatel'nosti v putevyh zapiskah i iskusstvovedcheskih ocherkah (XIX–nachalo XX veka)*," in *Russko-evrejskaya kul'tura*, ed. Oleg Budnitskii, Olga Belova, Victoria Mochalova (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 406–436.

[29] *Mir evreyskoy pochtovoy otkrytki: izdatelstvo 'Lebanon'* (Moscow: Dom evrejskoy knigi, 2006), 6.

[30] This is a reference to Moisei Berlin (1821–1888), the "educated Jew" at the Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Creeds Department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire.

[31] Pavel Chubinsky, *Trudy etnograficheskо-statisticheskoy ekspeditsii v Zapadno-russkom krae: Evrei Yugo-zapadnogo kraya*, vol. 7, issue 1, no. 1 (St. Petersburg: Imperatorskoe russkoe geograficheskoe obschestvo, 1872), 80–81, 201.

[32] Moisei Berlin, *Ocherk etnografii evreyskogo naseleniya v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya V. Bezobrazova i komp., 1861), 70–71.

[33] Different members of the community were responsible for feeding and hosting them on each of the seven days of the week; see Arkady Kovner, "*Iz zapisok evreya*," in *Evrei v Rossii: XIX vek*, ed. Viktor Kelner (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000), 180. This tradition continued even during the 1920s, when *cheders* and yeshivas had become illegal; see Genrikh Deuch, *Zapiski dlya detey i vnukov* (Moscow, 1997), https://web.archive.org/web/20090218063921/http:/jewish-heritage.org/deych2.htm.

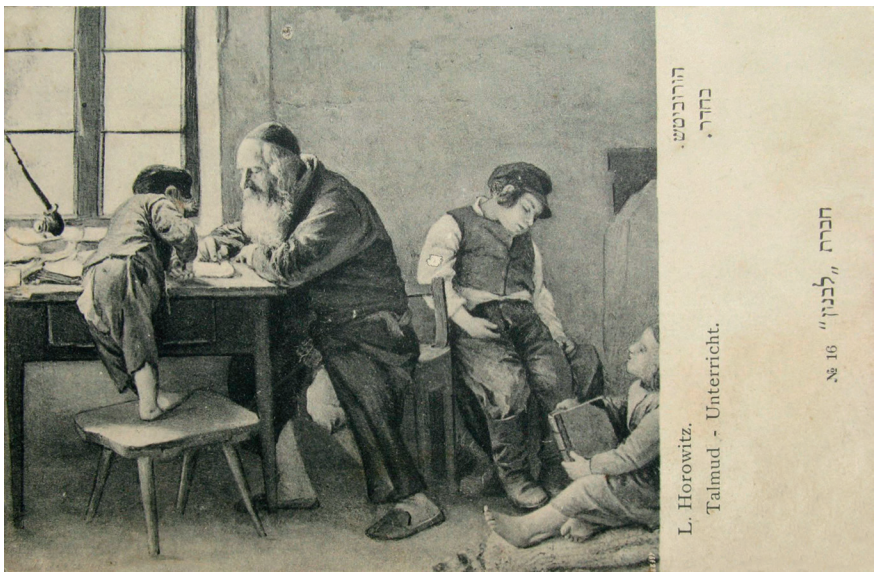

Fig. 5. Leopold Horowitz, *The Talmud* (*In the Cheder*), early 1900s, in a private collection in Kharkiv. Postcard published by "Lebanon."

would go on to study at a yeshiva, while the less studious turned to commerce or artisanal work,[34] a set of pursuits much less highly valued than learning.

Even though, beginning in the mid-1800s, the authorities made repeated efforts to control and reform this system by organizing state-sponsored Jewish schools and rabbinic seminaries,[35] traditional Jewish communities rejected these innovations, branding them heretical. In addition, the established practice of lessons at the *melamed*'s home prevented effective monitoring of *cheder* education. Disappointed in the attempt to assimilate the Jews, the authorities intensified the process of isolating them, which found its expression in the "percentage quota" for accepting Jews to educational institutions. This left most Jewish youths without an alternative.

Considering the poverty of most Jews living within the Pale of Jewish Settlement, it seems natural enough that the overwhelming majority of Jewish children spent their school years in *cheder*s and Talmud Torahs. Jewish communities and charities, such as the Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among the Jews, took charge of the have-nots and orphans, building separate—and often impressive-looking—Talmud Torah facilities, where hundreds of children would be given their schooling. Pupils of these schools peer out from countless pre-Revolutionary photographs along with staff and personnel, all posing against the backdrop of Talmud Torah structures and the row of *shtetl* buildings or in classrooms, or playing in the school courtyard. The pictures combine to convey the self-contradictory sense of insuperable poverty and disciplinary strictness together with the care and the persistent observance of much older educational traditions.

These would be the years leaving the deepest impression on a child's memory, evoking mixed feelings and, in many ways, prompting the younger generation to break with the world of tradition at a later stage. In more distanced evaluations—such as those of Aleksandr Alekseev or Moisei Berlin—the system of education would be objectively presented from the point of view of its contribution to developing the mind and the intellect, as well as from the point of view of the shortcomings that would distance the Jews from social reality and the harmonious development of the individual as a whole. Grigory Bogrov, a Maskil, having broken with the Jewish milieu, depicted for the Russian reader the filth and the superstition among the Jews, where wretched huts housed unwashed and underfed children being taught by half-illiterate *melameds*. His article on "Russian Jews," published in the multivolume illustrated collection *Picturesque Russia*,[36] is accompanied by abundant visual images of daily life among Russia's Jews. One of these is a curious scene titled

[34] As a rule, at ages 13 to 14 these children would be apprenticed to a tradesman or become a merchant's servants. See Dubnov, "*Vnutrenniy byt evreev Pol'shi i Litvy v XVI v.*," 324–325.

[35] See Martyn Piletzky-Urbanovich, "*Istoricheskoe obozrenie evreyskih uchilisch v Rossii,*" *Vospitanie* 12 (1862): 415–416.

[36] Bogrov, "*Russkie evrei,*" 197–226.

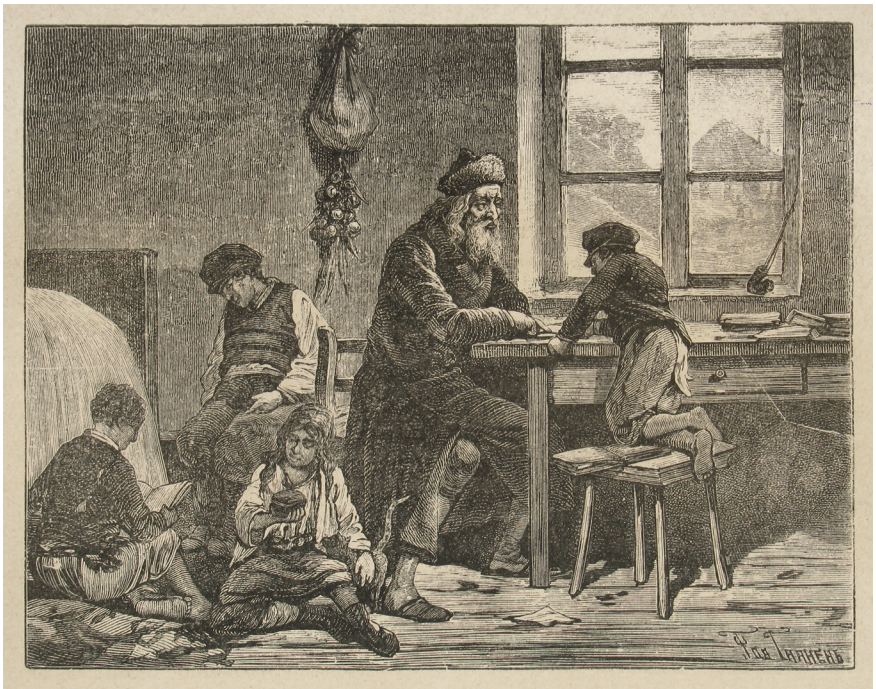

Fig. 6. Remi-Andreas van Haanen, *Jewish School*, 1897. Published in *Picturesque Russia* 5, no. 1, essay 5. (Courtesy of the K.S. Stanislavsky Kharkiv City Music and Theater Library).

"Jewish School." The engraving's author, who signed "von Haanen,"[37] created yet another composition with a *cheder* lesson in progress—a borrowing and creative reworking of the painting by Horowitz (fig. 6). The original painting is here inverted as if through a mirror, with the figures' postures and clothing and other details somewhat altered. The number of children is greater, making the image a better fit for Bogrov's description of Sabbath eves in a poor Lithuanian Chasid's family:

> The Chasid master of the house sits at the table, unbuttoned, his hair in all directions, a shabby sable hat with a tail on his head. Poking his index finger into one "marvelously wise" line in the great volume spread open before him, he pounds learning into the head of his seven-year-old son who sits next to him as he follows the father's finger with a hopeless, dumb, and stupid gaze. The boy is a perfect copy of the father, and even more tattered. The hut is filled with the din and devilish pranks of an entire gang of children, each one smaller than the next.[38]

Inserting this scene into the description of the Chasid's dwelling, which, as he tells us, seems a wretched, dinghy, damp, and filthy lair without layout or symmetry,[39] Bogrov—and following him, the artist who borrows from the well-known painting—create a negative and repulsive image of the Jewish home; a *melamed* would often receive children for lessons in the same kind of space.

Nearly all writers provide the same socio-psychological picture of the Jewish school, though with some differing nuances. The school is a cramped and uncomfortable room, often simply a dirty one, with half-naked, half-starved children crowded about a large table. They all attend to the words of a forbidding-looking old man, the *melamed*, with a grey beard, a long, old overcoat, a pointing finger, a whip, and a Talmud.[40] He embodies the Jewish tradition as such. Most descriptions of the *melamed's* home concur in this, just as they do in conveying the learning atmosphere in which the slow mastering of religious

[37] Remi-Andreas van Haanen (1812–1880), a Dutch painter and engraver, lived in St. Petersburg, where he became an honorary associate of the St. Petersburg Academy of the Arts.

[38] Bogrov, "*Russkie evrei*," 206.

[39] Ibid., 205.

[40] The accepted notion was that home instruction was a profession for people unsuited for any kind of work, even work in the trades. See Chubinsky, *Trudy etnograficheskо-statisticheskoy ekspeditsii v Zapadno-Russkom krae*, 80.

knowledge went hand-in-hand with fear of severe punishment.[41] Painters leave out the disciplining actions, but operate with the same images and visual elements in showing the scene in a modest room marked by objects of Jewish ritual observance and daily life and in drawing attention to the intensity of the learning.

Moving further east through the Empire, away from areas where Jewish life went on in ways sanctioned by centuries, these traditions, including Jewish attitudes toward the *cheder*, became more restrained. Children ended their "spiritual" education quite early, and went on to work as shop assistants or tradesmen.[42] We see almost no scenes of this kind in the repertoire of Jewish artists who graduated from the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg—not even in that of Yehuda Pen, who painted many genre scenes from Jewish life.[43]

Overall, Russia's unruly sociopolitical development and modernization during the *fin-de-siècle* years did not affect the *cheder* in any explicit way. The *cheder* remained canonized by the Jewish tradition as a necessary and ineluctable stage in children's transition to an adult "*Shulkhan Arukh*-type" life.[44] As such, the *cheder* environment changed little in the course of the 1800s and up to the first decades under Soviet rule; in Polish lands, this institution went on uninterrupted to the time of Soviet annexation and the beginning of the Holocaust in the late 1930s. Testimonies to this are photographs taken by Michał Greim (1880s), Solomon Yudovin (1810s), Alter Kacyzne (1920s), and Roman Vishniac (1930s). Over the span of over a half century, these photographers captured similar views of the *cheder* environment despite their different painterly angles and aesthetic goals.

Thus, for the ethnic Pole Michał Greim (1828–1911), a passionate collector and lover of antiquity, creating a Jewish series was his way of following up on the general interest in Ukrainian national culture in Poland, which had grown considerably during the second half of the nineteenth century.[45] The Jews, who accounted for at least 40 percent of the population in his native Kamieniec Podolski (in modern-day Ukraine), came to be the focus of his attention along with other ethno-social groups that Greim wanted to make part of a museum preserve by creating portraits of the most vivid faces and images of the everyday—which would be transferred into the space of his photography studio.[46] As a professional, he abided by the guidelines of staged ethnographic photography, which was a typical practice of mainstream 1870s ethnography.[47] To put the pristine nature of Jewry on display, Greim chose picturesque figures in liturgical garb praying or poring over the Talmud, images of venerated rebbes and famished Chasids redolent with Talmudic wisdom, religious fanaticism, or sickly malnourished looks. He staged scenes of *cheder* life in his own studio as a follow-up on these finds. In one of these, a *melamed* looks into the camera as he thrusts an enormous Talmud volume before a tiny boy seated on a small table along with two little girls (fig. 7). A school childhood ambiance is more obviously palpable in the photograph with a dozen teenagers clustering about a table, immersed in the tomes open before them (fig. 8). Shabbily dressed, some poor kids look preposterous, a few of them wrapped in woolen scarves—a hint as to the lack of functional heating in the school facility, which stands in sharp contrast to the pointedly carved table taken from "a different life." In a different series, Greim uses the same table to sit two Polish noblemen.[48]

The same contrast is underscored by the painted sets of a richly decorated molded interior that serves

[41] Schatz remembered his first day in *cheder* as the occasion when "the rebbe studied with me and did not whip me." Schatz, "*Odin iz mnogih: Iz vospominaniy odnogo skul'ptora*," 8. The fear of punishment at the hands of the *melamed* or his assistants became rooted in children's consciousness, a memory which Bialik also records.

[42] See Genrikh Sliosberg, *"Dela minuvshih dney,"* in *Evrei v Rossii. XIX vek* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2000), 262–267.

[43] Hillel Kazovsky, *Artists from Vitebsk: Yehuda Pen and His Pupils* (Moscow: IMAGE Advertising & Publishing House, 1992).

[44] An idiomatic turn of phrase borrowed from Abram Paperno, referring to the halakhic lifestyle of a religious Jew in keeping with the *Shulkhan Arukh* by R. Joseph Caro.

[45] Juliusz Garztecki, "*Znakomity Zapomniany* (*O Michale Greimie, 1828–1911*)" *Fotografia* 12 (1966): 269–276.

[46] *Fotografie Michała Greima* (*1828–1911*), http://etnomuzeum.eu/kolekcje/fotografie-michala-greima.

[47] See Ivanov, "*Opyty 'molodogo cheloveka dlya fotograficheskih rabot': Solomon Yudovin i russkiy piktoralizm 1910-h gg.*," An-sky's Expeditions' Photo Archives, 6.

[48] A photograph in a different one of the album's series: *Types of Polish Intelligentsia and Nobility in Podolia*. The album included photographs of virtually all ethnic types and social strata in Podolia and Bessarabia: peasants, Poles, Moldovans, priests, nobles, artisans, and beggars.

Fig. 7. Michał Greim, *Melamed with His Family*, 1880s, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, Inv. Nr. III/28/F/mek. From the *Jews of the Podolian Governorate* cycle in the photo album *Faces of Podolia and Bessarabia* (Kamieniec Podolski, 1883). Albumen print. (Courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków).

as a backdrop. Greim lines up some of the same boys in a scene reminiscent of the atonement ritual of *kapparot*. Detaching the *cheder* from its natural historical context, he manages visually to convey the principal content and social elements of a Jewish school childhood expressed through religiosity, poverty, and crowdedness.

All the same elements are prominent in the photographs by Solomon Yudovin (1892–1954), which were taken in Volhynia as part of An-sky's research expeditions nearly forty years later. Unlike the "studio man" Greim, the young Yudovin was a follower of a different, pictoralistic trend, attempting—like the artists of his time—to convey the spirit and the everyday

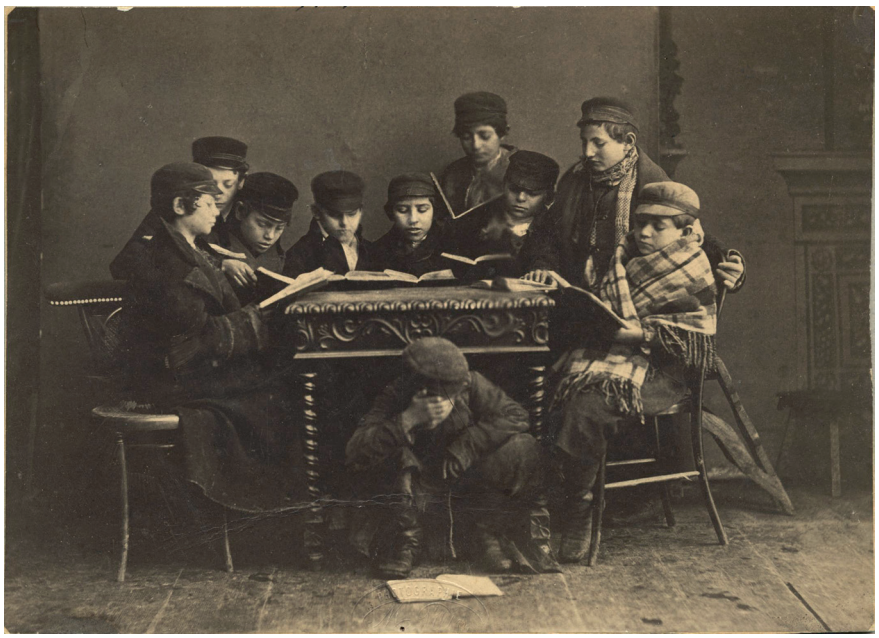

Fig. 8. Michał Greim, *Jewish School in Kamieniec*, 1880s, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, Inv. Nr. III/26/F/mek. From the *Jews of the Podolian Governorate* cycle in the photo album Faces of *Podolia and Bessarabia* (Kamieniec Podolski, 1883). Albumen print. (Courtesy of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków).

living conditions of the Jews in their natural, unadorned settings (fig. 9).[49] Besides, in the *shtetls* that he visited Yudovin himself came under the spell of what he saw of Jewish folklore and the Jewish way of life, something to which An-sky wanted to bring the artistic intelligentsia closer, as well.[50] The collective image of the people, which Yudovin's photographs create, his *shtetl, cheder*, and his overall picture of Jewish children's experience, is expressive of a profoundly pessimistic sense that an entire tradition is in the process of vanishing. Portraits of children in everyday and holiday family environments, especially in the familiar austere space of the *cheder* and the crowded Talmud Torah, become part of the study of the cultural anthropology of the *shtetl*, where the features established by Greim are supplemented by Yudovin's addition of a sense of isolation from a different, contemporary world—and a sense of being doomed.

Whatever the typological similarities are between the *cheder* as it appears in the photographs by Alter Kacyzne (1885–1941) and Roman Vishniac (1897–1990) from the 1920 and 1930s, respectively, and as it appears in the photographs of their predecessors, it is important to bear in mind that the former's work was done based on orders from the largest philanthropic organizations, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which intended to use the documented images of an unpresentable and dying Jewish world to raise money for its salvation. The instrumental function of their project led both photographers to search for the marginal in Jewish life, conveying this together with its emotional and psychological background. This spelled out a disregard for a reporter-like understanding of photographic coverage in favor of one that put artistry and imagery at the forefront. Thus old, massive tables and worn desks, and lonely kerosene lamps or fading light rays falling on old books in half-dark rooms full of children become more than symptoms of poverty: they are the hallmarks of a tradition, transmitted from generation to generation, of children's schooling in extremely austere conditions. Given this backdrop, the children themselves—barely reaching the table with their chins, inquisitive and concentrating with lively, burning gazes—make a very powerful impression.

The *cheder* system continued in existence under the Soviet regime even in the 1920s, albeit student numbers were minimal. The *cheder* quickly went underground

[49] Ivanov, "*Opyty 'molodogo cheloveka dlya fotograficheskih rabot': Solomon Yudovin i russkiy piktoralizm 1910-h gg.*," 9–15.

[50] Veniamin Lukin, "*'Akademiya, gde budut izuchat' folklor' (An-sky—ideolog evreyskogo muzeynogo dela)*," in *The Jewish Museum* (St. Petersburg: Petersburg Judaica Center, 2004), 72.

Fig. 9. Solomon Yudovin, *At the Cheder*, 1912–1914, Slavuta, Volhynia Province, The Center "Petersburg Judaica". Albumen print. (Courtesy of *Center* "Petersburg Judaica").

due to the ban on the study of Hebrew and the closing down of yeshivas[51]—a measure that was essentially tantamount to eliminating the possibility of religious education, of contact with rabbinic tradition, and, ultimately, of bringing up any future bearers of this tradition as it had once been.

Iluy: The Ideal Image of the Jewish Young Man

In educating boys, Jewish families sought to bring up intellectuals who would know no limits in their mastery of Talmudic knowledge; these young Talmudists were also the most sought after marriage partners for the daughters of wealthy families.[52] This *topos* of the Jewish child prodigy—the *iluy*, the future *gaon*—becomes the highest goal in the education of young men.[53] Ingenuity and subtlety in thinking were valued on a par with knowledge among the Jews; together, these qualities allowed one to take part and triumph in Talmudic debates, and to be unsurpassed among equals.[54] If *cheder* prepared, then yeshivas put the ultimate finishing touches on members of the intellectual aristocracy, which became an influential social class among Polish-Lithuanian Jews;[55] this classification later became part of Jewish life all over the Russian Empire.

The image of the brainy Jewish youth, on whom traditional Jewish hopes centered, found its typological reflection in painting and visual culture. Genre scenes and portraits by the same artists—Isidor Kaufmann, Samuel Hirszenberg, Maurycy Trębacz, Lazar Krestin, as well as Jan Moraczyński, Stanisław Dębicki, Leon Lewkowicz, Adolf Messer, and others—put the viewer face-to-face with Jewish children, teenagers, and young men as if stamped with the mark of being heirs to a

[51] Kenneth Moss, "*Revolyutsiya v evreyskoy kul'ture*," in *History of the Jews in Russia: From the Revolutions of 1917 to the Fall of the Soviet Union*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Beizer (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury), 74.

[52] See Alla Meleshenko, "*Najpopulyarnishi evrejsjki pochatkovi shkoly drugoi polovyny XIX–pochatku XX stolittya na Volyni*," *Naukovyj visnyk Uzhgorodsjkogo natzionaljnogo universytetu* 1 (2018): 141–144; and Shaul Stampfer, "*Hedernoe obrazovanie, znanie Tory i podderzhanie sotzial'nogo rassloeniya v traditzionnom evreyskom obshestve vostochno-evsopeyskoj diaspory,*" *Evreyskaya shkola 1* (1993): 53–64.

[53] On mental acuity among the Jews and its development as part of the education process, see Alekseev, *Ocherki domashney i obschestvennoy zhizni evreev*, 63–64. For Jewish children, developing intellectual ability became a contest of sorts for the position of leader. Uninterrupted study was the chosen way to achieve results, but there were also cases of taking fasting, prayer, and seclusion upon oneself in the hopes of becoming an *iluy* (an elevated one) and being granted mental enlightenment by God; see Kovner, "*Iz zapisok evreya*," 198.

[54] Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," 40–42.

[55] Dubnov, "*Vnutrenniy byt evreev Pol'shi i Litvy v XVI v.*," 334.

great tradition. Many of them are depicted studying, or simply holding large volumes of the Talmud—the symbol and attribute of their daily school learning. The glasses they typically wear make them look particularly studious. In most works, the children's figures are embodiments of exterior propriety (thus the social modality in Kaufmann) and inner concentration of the spirit, intensity of thought, and immersion in the depths of the Talmud and rabbinic casuistry. At the same time, artists sought not only to demonstrate the canonic ideal, but also the way leading to it through children's uniting with their heritage in the process of their education. This brought episodes central to a child's life onto the canvas: passing exams in the presence of both parents and the *melamed*[56] (*The Examination* by Isidor Kaufmann, late 1800s), or the daily school routine—a commonplace in genre painting. To visualize the taxing burden of study, a composition might show a child or a young man falling asleep over an open volume while the hand of his mentor continues in perpetual motion along the page. This kind of composition becomes symptomatic of a prevalent mood, which is evidenced in *Melamed with the Student Sleeping over His Book*, a 1920s canvas painting by Aleksandr Józef Kamiński,[57] and in a photograph from 1926 by Alter Kacyzne, in which the grandfather teaches his slumbering grandson to read.

Torah study and Talmudic rote learning occupied most of a boy's life for the most able and diligent. "Knowing the Talmud at the tip of a needle"[58] was a leading demand of the time. It required unremitting effort. Memories of Jewish childhood were often cloaked in mystique and messianic expectations, which led some young boys to attempt to come up with proof that they were among the elect who would achieve the status of *lamed-vovnik*.[59] Achieving such a status called for all-consuming intellectual effort. Mastering the knowledge of Torah, coupled with the kind of lifestyle which this required, dictated a certain bodily condition for the learned yeshiva *bochur* or young scholar: the development of a series of chronic illnesses, a feeble physique, and weak eyesight. All these have been noted repeatedly by researchers as an indication of poverty and exhausting schooling, lack of physical exercise and development, and the like.[60] For their part, observant Jews believed that Torah weakens the body of man, making physical infirmity and sickliness into indications of knowledge and Talmudic learning, the marks of a true "noble."[61] The physical decrepitude was outweighed by other qualities, emotional and intellectual ones: liveliness of gaze, acuity of mind, and profundity of knowledge, which made the man endowed with them into an "aristocrat of the spirit."

In the eyes of the learned and social elite, this was the ideal young Talmudist, the future rabbi and prospective bridegroom—a figure much more sought after than the man of physical prowess, a quality that was treated with disdain and equated with plebeian artisanship.[62] This image became part of Eastern European Jewish iconography: whether permeated with sentiment, refinement, or poverty, or translated into a Biblical setting, it canonized the lofty ideal of Jewish childhood as fostered for centuries by what An-sky called "the iron grip of religion."[63]

One of the greatest manifestations of intellectual genius was taking part in Talmudic debates with acknowledged masters of this style of grasping truth. An anthology-type illustration of this is Kaufmann's painting, *Discussing the Talmud* (1890s), with an enthusiastic young man explaining a difficult passage in the Talmud to his aged elders.[64] The faces of the old men are all lit up with admiration; together with the

[56] Children's examinations typically took place in the presence of the *melamed* and a large gathering of friends and relatives. This was a festive occasion for the extended family, especially the male line, and an emotional trial for the child. See Alekseev, *Ocherki domashney i obschestvennoy zhizni evreev*, 18–19.

[57] *Zydzi w Polsce: Obraz i slowo*, ed. Marka Rostworowskiego (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1993), 70.

[58] A species of test for the highest level of proficiency in Jewish texts. The expression refers to the practice of running a closed book through with a needle and then saying which words have been pierced on each page; see Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," 51.

[59] As per the belief that in every generation some secret thirty-six (hence the *gimatriya*-based appellation of *lamed-vovnik*) righteous individuals are alive, whose presence protects the world from destruction in recompense for human sins. See Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," 85–86.

[60] An entire series of ailments among the Jews (hemorrhoids, jaundice, consumption, diseases of the eyes) was typically thought of as associated with schooling from an early age, early marriages and childbearing, poor nutrition, and, most importantly, the systematic, perennial study of books for many hours at a stretch. See Chubinsky, *Trudy etnograficheskо-statisticheskoy ekspeditsii v Zapadno-Russkom krae*, 14; and Berlin, *Ocherk etnografii evreyskogo naseleniya v Rossii*, 2–3.

[61] Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," 99–100.

[62] Memoirists record this, reminiscing about their ardent childhood desire to become an *iluy* and achieve general recognition, wealth, and high status; see Paperno, "*Iz Nikolaevskoy epohi*," 85.

[63] Lvov, "*'Evreyskaya detskaya': Muzeefikatsiya religii dlya vospitaniya naroda*," 4.

[64] Isidor Kaufmann, *Discussing the Talmud*, 1890s, in a private collection. Oil on panel. 41,9 × 52,7 cm. See http://wikioo.org/it/

young boy standing motionless before them, they are the keepers and the heirs of this tradition. The young prodigy himself, his face also lit up, is a bearer not only of knowledge, but of an entire set of intellectual qualities that the adults can fully appreciate as they observe a youngster developing into a certain kind of Talmudist: a Torah scholar, a deft interpreter, a master of *pilpul*. Disputes of this kind seem to have transferred directly from *batei midrash* onto the canvasses of many artists (Hirszenberg, Trębacz, Markovsky, Vaynlez, Wachtel), who attempted to endow the protagonists with vivid psychological abilities such as concentration, observation, and illumination; they also complemented the images with emotional gestures.

The Talmudic ideals found their incarnation in *Dispute about the Talmud* by Mark Antokolsky (1868), who created two busts to represent the two principal types of Talmudists: the *harif* (a sharp mind) and the *baki* (expert in *halakha*, proficient in rabbinic texts). The first, the brilliant virtuoso of the word capable of using contradictions in the Talmud to come up with a surprising hermeneutical twist in the interpretation of the most intricate of religious issues, became the paragon of Jewish intellect.[65] Images of young *iluys* are expressive of inner focus and exaltation, but they are also delicate, fatigued, emptied, liturgically maniacal, or sickly and feeble. Their effervescence is invariably coupled with a longing in their gaze. This dichotomy of the bodily weak, but spiritually mighty Jews came eventually to shape the anthropological portrait of the Eastern European and later the Russian Jew, and it was associated with life in *galut*.

Max Liebermann makes original use of the image of the young *iluy*. In his painting *Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple* (1879), he transfers it from the Jewish into the Christian tradition, transposing it onto Jesus of Nazareth (fig. 10). In the biblical narrative, this demonstrates the young Jesus's uniqueness and inimitability among the Jewish teachers of Mosaic Law. Yet in reality, as Ziva Amishai-Maisels has stressed, Liebermann detaches Jesus from his historical context, depicting the Christian savior as an outstanding Jewish child who makes learned rabbis attend carefully to what he says.[66] The image operates in a twofold manner. On the one hand, the artist tries in his own way to combat the growing antisemitism in Europe, endowing the image with an atemporal quality. On the other hand, by using figures of Jews in Eastern European and German garb, he reproduces an idealized image of Jewish youth that was once functional in Jewish cultural life.

Rapidly changing life conditions and the availability of multiple options for young Jews to choose from later permitted many of them to put their *iluy* abilities to different use. For those not embarking on a spiritual career or even those breaking with tradition, this intellectual set—a well-trained memory, a quick mind, diligence, and a passion for learning—helped them overcome humiliating quotas to get an education and attain great heights in their professions and in public activism.

From the Yarmulke and the Talmud to the Budenovka, the Lathe, and the Soviet Book

Following the events of 1917, the traditional model of Jewish education loses its foundation, changing into a different ideal centered on socialization. Rapid transformations within the Jewish world led to a radicalization of various projects and processes in state politics and the spectrum of Jewish movements aimed at revamping the traditional Jewish way of life and creating the "New Jew." Whatever the differences among the means and approaches at their disposal, all of these movements yearned to bring about an end to the ethnoconfessional Jewish self so as to turn the feudal corporation—which is what, in essence, the traditional Jewish community was—into a modern entity. The Jewish identity of this modernized collective was seen by some as a step in the crystallization of Soviet selfhood.[67]

Tradition, including traditional education, remained largely in the closed circuit that was the Jewish family. But many parents avoided looking too closely at the fact of their children's departure from erstwhile unshakable values, understanding that the new departure would allow the children to become better integrated into the changing, Soviet society. The children were very grateful to them for this. As the children's generation accepted new spiritual and intellectual resources, as well as a new concept of schooling—secular and

paintings.php?refarticle=9GZHCS&titlepainting=Discussing%20the%20talmud&artistname=Isidor%20Kaufmann.

[65] Kovner, "*Iz zapisok evreya*," 200–201.

[66] Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "The Jewish Jesus," *Journal of Jewish Art* 9 (1982): 98–99.

[67] Israel Bartal, "*Konets vostochnoevropeyskoy epohi v istorii evreyskogo naroda?*," in *History of the Jews in Russia: From the Revolutions of 1917 to the Fall of the Soviet Union*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Beizer (Moscow: Mosty kul'tury, 2017), 459–461.

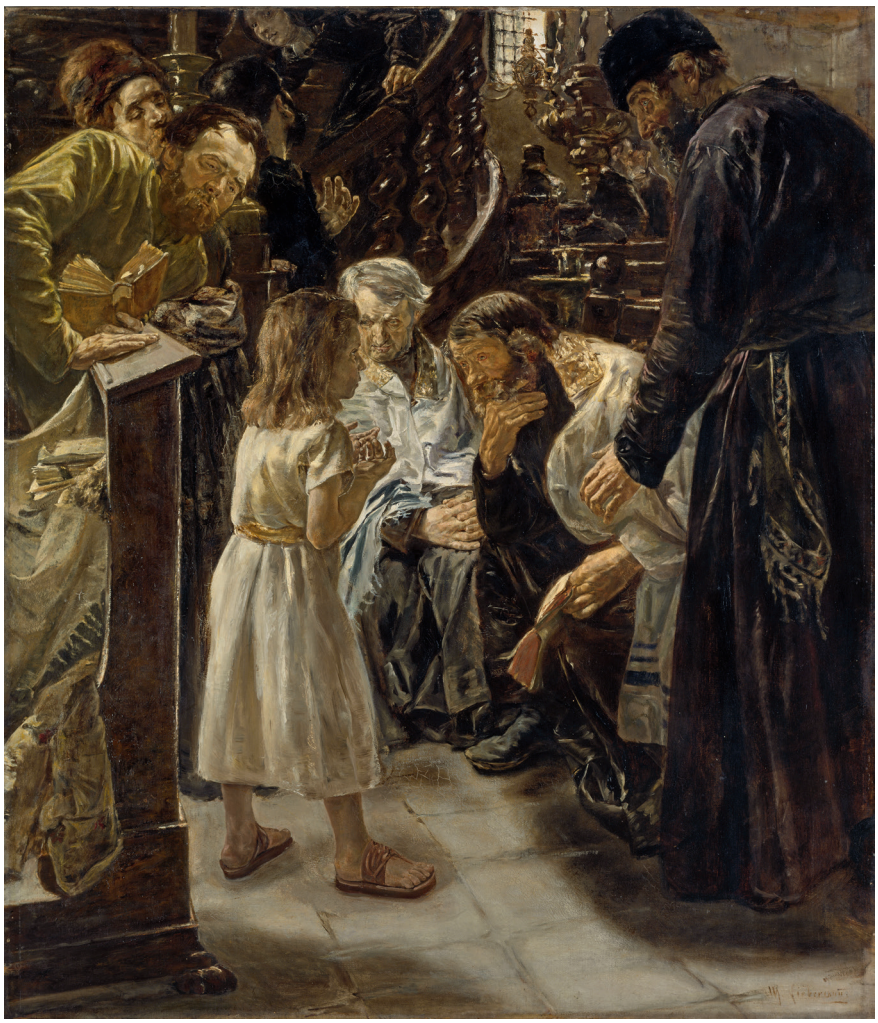

Fig. 10. Max Liebermann, *Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in the Temple*, 1879, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Inv. Nr. HK-5424. Oil on canvas. 149,6 × 130,8 cm. (Courtsey of Hamburger Kunsthalle).

atheistic—through a different kind of bookish tradition, they developed a different axiological orientation. They were the kernel of the new Soviet intelligentsia.[68] This intelligentsia was gradually coming to replace the old Orthodox or traditional standard with a new one that was bound up with the moral and spiritual categories of "being cultured" and the educational and intellectual benchmark of "being well-read." That is, the Jewish home had the old bookcase filled with religious texts removed from it; new bookcases and shelves lined with world classics were now brought in instead. As Galina Zelenina aptly notes, the Bible had been replaced by the works of Aleksandr Pushkin, which now served to rear—as well as to deprive of an identity of its own—the new Jewish generation.[69]

A new model type was now dominant in mass consciousness, one which was in praise of entirely different Jewish children and youth: the idealized younger generation was now active and strong, donning spiked felt helmets and posing with factories as their backdrop, having discarded their age-old cultural lore. The changes came to expression in the abundantly published and copiously illustrated Yiddish children's books, which employed many of the leading artists

[68] See the study by Galina Zelenina on the transformation of Jewish identity through bookish traditions: "*Vsya zhizn' sredi knig': sovetskoe evreystvo na puti ot Biblii k biblioteke*," *Gosudarstvo, religiya, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 3–4, no. 30 (2012): 62–63.

[69] Ibid., 73–74.

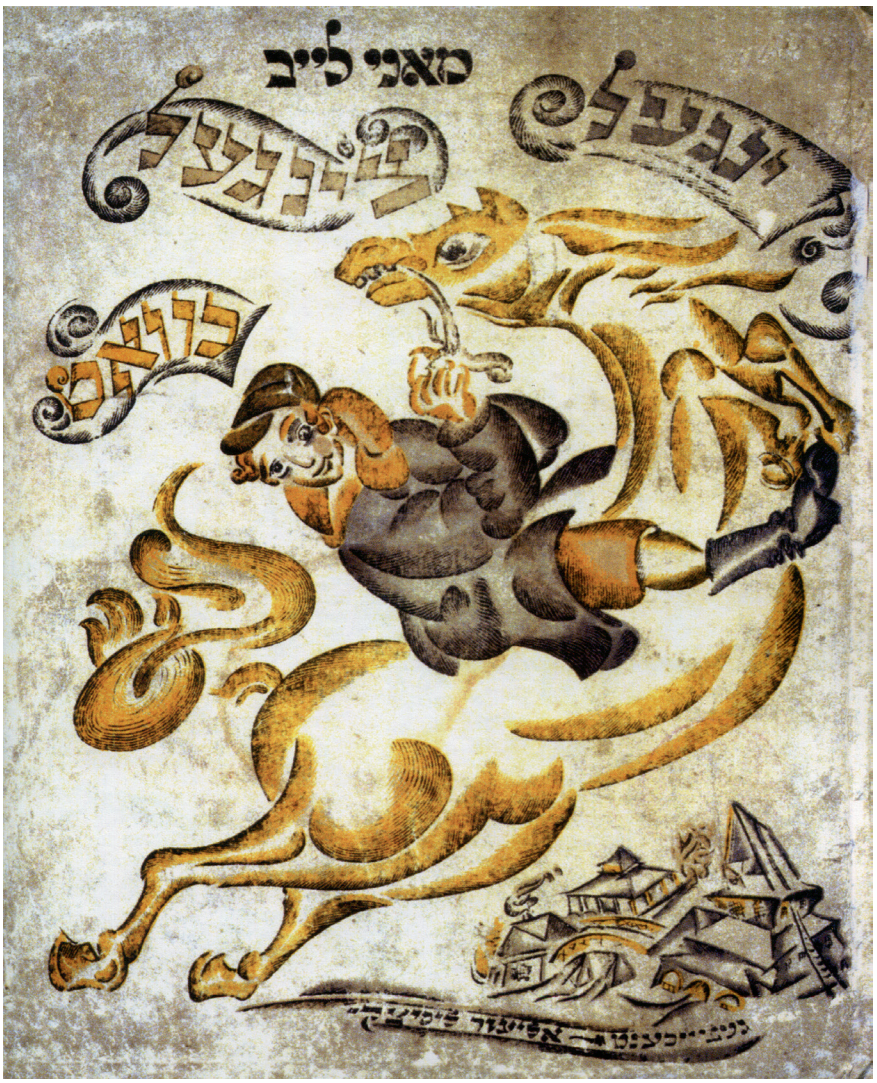

Fig. 11. El Lissitzky, front cover drawing for Mani Leib's poem, *Yingl-Tzingl-Khvat* (*Bold Fellow*), 1919, Petrograd, the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. (Courtesy of the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine).

of the Jewish Socialist Kultur-Lige organization: El Lissitzky, Joseph Chaikov, Issachar Ber Ryback, Mark Chagall, Sarra Shor, Mark Epstein, and others.

A hint as to the changing paradigm of children's education appears in an early drawing made by El Lissitzky for the cover of Mani Leib's poem, *Yingl-Tzingl-Khvat* (*Bold Fellow*), which was published in Petrograd in 1918–1919 (fig. 11).[70] Nearly the entire page is taken up by the figure of a Jewish Tom Thumb flying on a speedy steed as he leaves his native *shtetl* far behind with its row of Jewish houses and the wooden synagogue towering above them. This poetic idyll is supposed to convey a rejection of the old world by the young generation focused on the future.[71] The boy riding the horse is still dressed in traditional *shtetl* garb, but this does not stand in the way of his symbolizing the new protagonist of a different Jewish world—the one to which the Revolution is leading the Jews.[72]

Importantly, the old Jewish world in its entirety, which only a few years previously had been the embodiment of a living age-old tradition, was—before this generation's very eyes—being relegated to folklore,

[70] Mani Leib, *Yingl-Tzingl-Khvat*, illustrated by El Lissitzky (Petrograd: Yidisher Folks Farlag, 1918–1919).

[71] Kazovsky, *The Artists of the Kultur-Lige*, 101.

[72] Moss, "*Revolyutsiya v evreyskoy kul'ture*," 74.

turning into the accompanying visual formulas of tales and legends. Thus Joseph Chaikov, one of the most prominent artists making drawings for Jewish books, made abundant use of these images in his illustrations of children's literature. The cover of the songbook *Detki* (*Precious Little Ones*) by Aharon Reuveni[73] features Chaikov's composition with children playing "war"; riding a toy horse, one of them has his father's *tallis* draped over his shoulders as a military cloak. Many of the scenes with contemporary children's games combine in Chaikov's compositions with the patriarchal *cheder*, where the *melamed*, his hand unnaturally twisted, his index finger pointedly raised, is exaggeratedly indoctrinating his young charges. Chaikov's artistic manner, which succeeds, using the limited resources of xylography, in combining modernism with Jewish folk art, transforms the *cheder* by poetizing its privations. Chaikov delicately distances his young reader—the little "New Jew"—from the departing past, which he guides into the realm of the fairytale and of mythopoesis.[74] As per the summons of Yehezkel Dobrushin, the Kultur-Lige's key ideologue, to the creation of Jewish children's fiction based on Jewish folk art, which Dobrushin saw as the lively naïveté of childhood,[75] this visual language was taken over by many of the Kultur-Lige's adherents. Besides Chaikov, these adherents included Issachar Ber Ryback, Sarra Shor, El Lissitzky, and Mark Epstein. Taking the popular *lubok* woodcut as their point of departure, they used their creative differences and stylizing approaches to construct a national folklore that the new generation of Jewish children was going to swallow whole.

Jewish education and children's upbringing became part of what Israel Bartal associates with the Jewish "social engineering" orchestrated by the Soviet authorities, or—to be more exact—it was part of a movement countervailing the orchestrated process, an early form of which had really gotten underway back during the imperial period.[76] The first decades of Soviet rule made it seem possible that a Soviet Jewish identity might emerge that would be in accord with the well-known formula for the production of the person who was "national in spirit and socialist in content." But in practice all this met with a rapid demise under the pressure of a differently entrenched—and ultimately victorious—political slogan of "proletarian internationalism."[77] New cultural heroes were being propelled to the forefront in Yiddish literature: barefoot Jewish proletarians, Boy Nipper-Pippers[78] with spiked felt helmets on their heads, and the young Jewish pioneers. It would have appeared that their Jewish identity had been perfectly erased; yet artists found ways to bring it to the fore.

Thus, the well-known Adolf Strakhov (1896–1979), an artist of Jewish origin, designed the cover for Maria Barsheva's *Book about Lyon'ka* (translated into Yiddish by Aron Vorobeychik) with a lively propagandistic scene for Jewish children (fig. 12). A little boy and his father buy winter *valenki* (felt winter boots) from a peddler; the time and the place of the transaction are clearly marked by the red shirt of the proletarian father and the outsized spiked felt helmet with a red star on the head of the boy.

Another instance is the cover for a book of poems by Leib Kvitko, *A Pioneers' Book*, with artwork done by Issachar Ber Ryback.[79] Here, the artist literally brings the Yiddish font to life, using it as a representational motif in displaying the ideological and social world of the Soviet Jewish schoolboy. Constructing the word "pioneers" freely on the page, Ryback deploys extraordinary ingenuity in every letter. The first, visually capitalized, פּ is both background for the figure of the young bugler proclaiming the arrival of a new era and a strip underlining the word as a whole, with a red pioneer tie hanging down from it together with its *sine qua non* companion pieces, a drum and a book. The letter י has turned into a red flag with a star; א is assembled from a saw, hammer, and axe, symbolic instruments for constructing the dawning future; נ resembles a pioneer's campfire, a Soviet boy scout's

[73] Aharon Reuveni, *Far Kleine Kinder: Liderzammlung* (Kiev: Kiever Farlag, 1918).

[74] Hillel Kazovsky, *Book Graphics of Kultur-Lige's Artists* (Kiev: Spirit and Letter, 2011), 30, 154–159.

[75] Ibid., 25.

[76] Bartal, "*Konets vostochnoevropeyskoy epohi v istorii evreyskogo naroda?*" 460, 472.

[77] See Valery Tishkov, "*Natsional'nosti i natsionalizm v postsovetskom prostranstve: istoricheskiy aspect*," in *Ethnicity and Authority in Polyethnic States: International Conference Proceedings, 1993* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), 16.

[78] Positive and heroic character, paragon of commitment, and model for Soviet children, taken from the fairytale by Arkadi Gaidar, *Tale about a War Secret, about the Boy Nipper-Pipper, and His Word of Honor*; the negative counterpart of the model is an *enfant terrible*, and the two together form the Soviet interpretation of the struggle between Good and Evil.

[79] Leib Kvitko, *Pionern: Me Shlist oys Derfar—Bichel* (Kharkiv: Melukhe Farlag fun Ukraine, 1931). For image, see http://access.cjh.org/home.php?type=extid&term=119079#1.

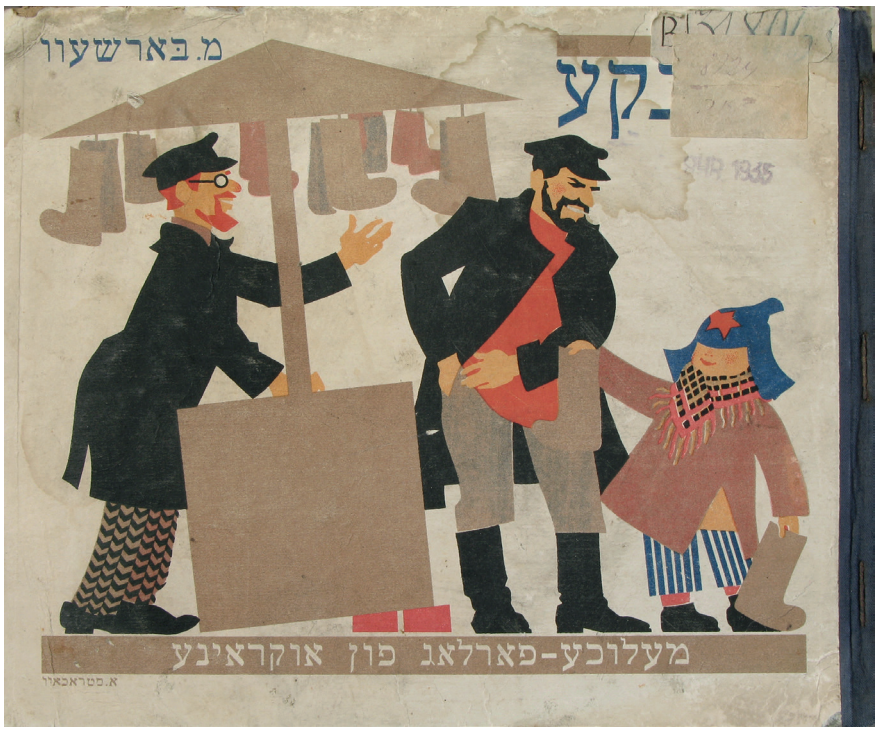

Fig. 12. Adolf Strakhov, front cover for Maria Barsheva, *Book about Lyon'ka: A Story for Young Children*, 1926, Kharkiv, the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. (Courtesy of the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine).

ritual element; ע is a production plant in operation with two smoking chimneys; and ר is a growing ear of grain, symbolic of bread and the harvest. The result is that the composition uses common Soviet visual symbols, conveying them by means of Yiddish culture to proclaim a new educational agenda for Jewish children. The new plan clearly indicates these children's bright future prospects: working every day at Soviet factories and *kolkhozes*. For Ryback himself, who was personally well acquainted with Jewish agricultural settlements (note his series of drawings *In the Jewish Fields* from 1926),[80] this way of seeing the future was a natural form of the new national life.

The pathos and the working reality of socialist building became the other side of the new Jewish reality, in which the new generation was growing up. Factories, production plants, industrial towns, and the proletarian lifestyle itself became the new setting in which Jewish children were brought up. This is clearly demonstrated in the writing and the pictures that made up children's books such as *The Factory Speaks* (1927) by the Jewish writer Rachel Akives and *Little Snowflake Friends* (1927) by the prominent ideologue of secular Jewish education in Yiddish, Aron Vorobeychik.[81] Jewish children frolic in this environment while their parents, working away in factories, ensure their bright future. The same smoking factory (such as in the illustrations by Sarra Shor to the book by Akives), with painted eyes and facial features (fig. 13), really becomes a new anthropomorphic deity for these Jewish children—as well as for their parents—determining their future path in life. In the artist's interpretation, the factory inculcates the children with its own *veritas* by means of the industrial fumes emerging from its mouth.

In fact, the factory is made into the new synagogue for Soviet Jews, towering above workers' towns just as old synagogues had once dominated the *shtetl* skyline in the past. This was far more than a visual similarity. The Soviet regime took steps, with consistency and cunning, to uproot the religious tradition from Jewish life and consciousness, redirecting the Jews toward new forms of public socialization.

[80] Issachar Ber Ryback, *Sur Les Champs Juifs de L'Ukraine* (Paris: A. *Simon,* 1926).

[81] Rachel Akives, *Fabrik Redet* (Kharkiv: Melukhe Farlag fun Ukraine, 1927); Aron Vorobeychik, *Shneyelekh-Chavertes* (Kharkiv: Melukhe Farlag fun Ukraine, 1927).

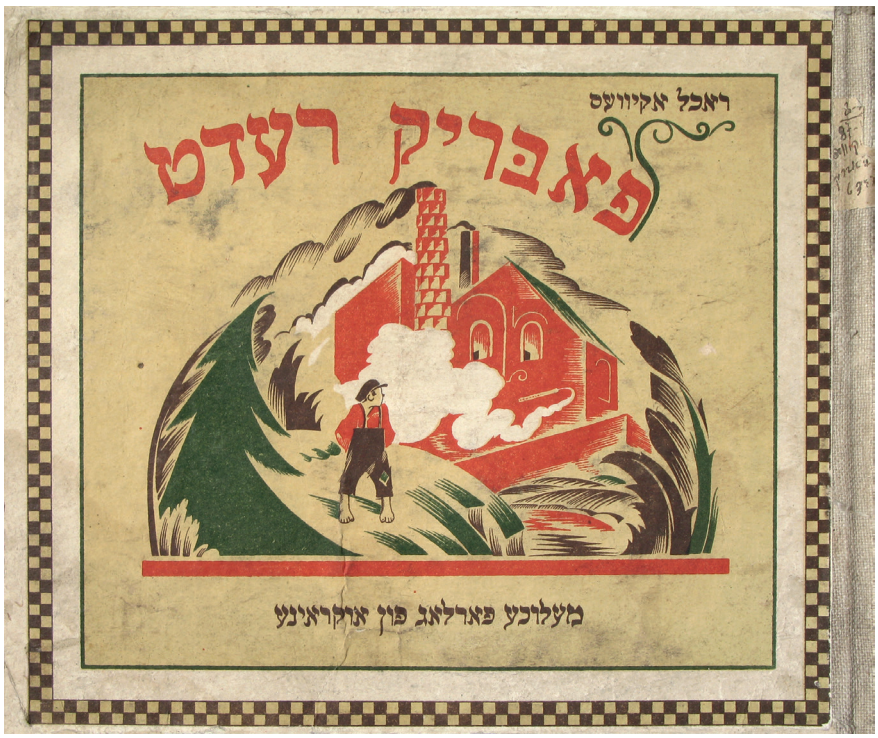

Fig. 13. Sarra Shor, front cover for Rachel Akives, *Fabrik Redet* (*Factory Speaks*), 1927, Kharkiv, the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. (Courtesy of the Manuscript Institute of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine).

Roads leading in new directions were being constructed for Jewish children by their own fathers, who were inspired by the revolutionary ideas of the new times; most of them had turned away completely from the legacy of the past. Soviet Jews met the challenges of their new life in the processes of mass urbanization, institutionalization, and (later) Sovietization.

Some of these efforts, especially at first, targeted the development of a new secular Jewish culture, as borne out, *inter alia*, by the multifaceted activism of the *Tarbut* and *Kultur-Lige* societies in many cities of the Soviet Union and abroad. This activism involved education and culture—that is, the opening of new Jewish schools, the consolidation of the Jewish cultural elite and creative intelligentsia, and the extensive publication of children's books in Yiddish,[82] which, as Anna Rivkina notes, were Soviet first and foremost and only then Jewish.[83]

A different segment of the activists, by this time free of any Jewish ethnocultural sentiment, was busy mobilizing the potential of the new Soviet society. Thus, the famous *March of the Enthusiasts* (1940) created by the Jewish musical duo of Isaak Dunayevsky (1900–1955) and Anatoly D'Aktil (Nos-Noachim Frenkel, 1890–1942) thundered throughout the country, summoning its people to the "workdays of great construction projects."[84] The new generation of heroes, dreamers, and scientists that this song—and the country—glorified needed to be brought up precisely for the sake of these construction initiatives. Both state and extracurricular education, which occupied children's and teenagers' free time, were devoted to this aim. This became a mass phenomenon in the mid-1930s, after the ratification of the order "Concerning Initiatives for Developing Extracurricular Work among Children in 1933." This is when a genuine boom began, with children's extracurricular centers popping up right and left, including Pioneers' Palaces and Schoolchildren's Houses. Pyotr Slonim (1908–2011), a native of the Jewish *shtetl* of Glukhov in Ukraine, played an enormous role in this

[82] Moss, "*Revolyutsiya v evreyskoy kul'ture*," 75–77.

[83] Hanna Ryvkina, "*Vidannya Yidishem dlya ditey u Viddili Fondu Yudayiky Institutu Rukopysu Natsionalnoyi Biblioteki imeni V.I. Vernadskogo*" in *Evreyska kulturna spadschina Ukrayiny* (Kiev: Dukh i Litera, 2018), 109.

[84] The opening line of the song's lyrics. *March of the Enthusiasts* became a hymn of sorts to Stakhanovism in the Soviet Union, and achieved unprecedented popularity among the Soviet public.

movement. In 1935, he opened the first Pioneers' and Little Octobrists' Palace in Kharkiv, made celebrating the New Year—with all the trappings, including the fir—part of the children's celebratory traditions, and became the founder of numerous children's theaters. All this Soviet Jewish activism provided an enormous push for the development of an ideologized Soviet society. Such activism also spent the last pre-World War II decade extirpating the remaining vestiges of Jewish "bourgeois nationalism":[85] it closed Jewish theaters, schools, and museums, putting a definitive end to any possible ways of manifesting Jewishness.

The ethos of Jewish education completely transformed from the earlier notion of the *iluy*, which now became identical with the "brainy Jewish head." Soviet Jews were especially focused on achieving an elite education in both science and culture, as well as in the arts. This seemed the only societal lever in a situation of growing state antisemitism; it afforded Jewish children respect and the status of informal leadership among themselves. Consequently, the Soviet professional sphere, which the Jews tried to penetrate, was gradually acknowledged by the changing Jewish milieu. The very meaning of intellectual giftedness, highly valued in Jewish culture, was altered into a means to acquire a profession and as a definition of one's place in life.[86] All this reshaped the basic values dictating the order of children's education and the very nature of Jewish childhood, which was rapidly dissolving in the Soviet ideational setting. A specifically "Jewish education" was no longer singled out in art. The general trend of Soviet Jewish parenting was to continue support for high levels of moral and educational achievement among the children, while attempts to link up with Jewish national values of any kind became the daring choice of individual families.

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to the blessed memory of my Jewish parents, Aleksandr Peysahovich (1934–2007) and Rita Kotlyar (1940–2016), whose childhood was marked by the challenges of pre- and post-World War II Soviet life in Kharkiv in Ukraine. They were perfectly isolated from Jewish tradition, but they honored it and were unabashedly proud of their roots and the humanistic values that this tradition inspires.

I want to thank Elen Rochlin for her translation of this article into English and for her help with editing it for publication.

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[85] Ideological cliché of the Soviet period; under its banner, the 1930s saw the repression of numerous national organizations, Jewish ones among them, along with their initiators and activists.

[86] See Anna Kushkova, "*Ponyatie yiches i ego transformatsii v sovetskoe vremya*," in *Shtetl, XXI vek: Polevyie issledovaniya*, ed. Valery Dymshits, Aleksandr Lvov, Alla Sokolova (St. Petersburg: European University in St. Petersburg Publishers, 2008), 114, 130–132. This was especially important at a time that saw the insistent social leveling of Jews and when education had become their sole advantage.