

Lenin's Jewish Question

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Preface: How and Why This Book Was Written

When Jonathan Brent, my guardian angel from Yale University Press, suggested that I write a book on the Jewish origins of Vladimir Lenin, my answer was a grateful but firm no. By that time I had already seen a number of recently declassified documents about Lenin's Jewish ancestors in East European depositories and was aware of the heated debates on this issue among Russian historians and archivists. What I learned about Moshko Blank, Lenin's maternal great-grandfather, and Moshko's son Alexander Blank, the father of Mariia Aleksandrovna Ulianova (née Blank), did little to change my understanding of Lenin as the founder of the first communist state. Despite Lenin's genealogy, there was hardly anything Jewish about Lenin's Marxist upbringing or Lenin's party leadership. Lenin, I reckoned, was a revolutionary idealist of consistent internationalist convictions, perfect revolutionary pragmatism, persistent class consciousness, insatiable thirst for power, and graphic dictatorial proclivities. Jews were too cumbersome and particular for Lenin's universalistic thinking, which had no place, apparently, for his purported Jewish heritage or Jewish concerns.

I had reason to doubt the existence of a “Jewish Lenin.” As a college student in the Soviet Union, I was obligated to take about five hundred hours of coursework on the theory and practice of communism. A mere list of courses would spark envy among my leftist-minded colleagues in California. I learned to apply Marxism, think Marxism, write Marxism, and live Marxism. I was quite successful with the first two pursuits and rather clumsy with the second two. Much later, as a skeptic seeking more nuanced methodologies than the wooden Soviet dogmas, I took courses at Brandeis University in modern and East European Jewish history. To my sheer dismay I found out that communism and internationalism quite often did not get along and that the class struggle could account neither for the rise nor for the demise of such a key phenomenon of the twentieth century as, for example, Stalinism. More importantly, my new studies provided me with a comparative and critical view on the Russian revolution, which I no longer considered the triumph of class theory put into practice in one single country. Now I could avoid trivial answers to historical problems such as the overrepresentation of Jews among Russian revolutionaries—all those easy-to-digest, myth-making, and substance-free answers about inherent Jewish cosmopolitanism that are becoming increasingly popular.

My reluctance to undertake the proposed project stemmed from a conviction: discussing Lenin’s Jewish relatives neglecting who Lenin was, how he treated the Jews, and what the Jewish question meant to him was tantamount to discussing a Jewish Lenin. And to call Lenin Jewish was to explain the Russian revolution as a largely Jewish enterprise. I resisted telling a story about Lenin’s alleged Jewishness because for many who suffer from a national inferiority complex it would provide

just another proof of the extraordinary role of Jews in the Russian revolution: its causes, character, and results. Antisemites readily argue that the Russian revolution was Jewish through and through, and in this manner they condemn it as contraband that filthy non-Russian aliens smuggled into pristine Mother Russia. Philosemites do the same, emphasizing instead the true internationalist character of Russian communism and focusing on what they see as the inborn cosmopolitanism of the Russian Jews. Why should I join either side? Through my research into that period I realized that Jews performed a secondary role—and the role they performed was not Jewish, whatever it signified at that time, or at least had nothing to do with their ethnic origin. Even if Lenin's remote relative was a shtetl Jew, I found it inconceivable to tell a highly marginal story about a person who, simply put, did not belong in my version of Russian-Jewish history.

And yet the idea puzzled me. However unimportant Lenin's genealogical Jewishness was for the socialist revolution, its *perception* by Russians has been a convoluted, highly charged, and significant subject. Because of this significance, attempts to make sense of Lenin's Jewishness went through many phases, including scornful neglect, bans on archival quests, the heated exchange of ideas, sensational discoveries, and a crushing government-orchestrated silence. Starting in the 1920s, people proving or denying Lenin's Jewishness produced hundreds of pages worth of memoirs, journalistic essays, and volumes of scholarly and quasi-scholarly writings. Hardly any memoir or book was ignored. Debates shifted from the kitchens of the USSR to the dining halls of New York involving Russian dissidents, far-rightists and Soviet authorities, socialist émigrés with a vested interest in the subject matter, and indiscreet historians. In 2009, the Russian-language web

generated between nine hundred thousand and a million responses to a search on two words combined, “Lenin” and “Jew.” The discussion of Lenin’s Jewish roots triggered bitter accusations among many online connoisseurs of Russian history and culture, followed by fierce rebuffs from their no less educated and numerous opponents.

Even if Lenin’s Jewish roots changed little about my understanding of Lenin, the attitudes toward a “Jewish Lenin” complicated my vision of the Russian and Soviet treatment of Jews—as well as the self-identification of revolutionaries of Jewish descent fully assimilated into the socialist milieu. Lenin’s great-grandfather hated his Jewish identity, and his son—Lenin’s grandfather—flatly rejected it, while Lenin’s mother passed over it in silence. Lenin in some cases considered himself a Russian and in others disassociated himself from any national identity. His fellow party members of Jewish descent eagerly sacrificed their questionable Jewishness for the sake of a revolutionary internationalism that redeemed them from the ethnic conflicts in Russian society.

The century-long perception of Lenin’s purported Jewishness is a history in and of itself. When archival research proved a Jewish relation, Stalin forbade Lenin’s kin to mention Lenin’s Jewish ancestors. In the 1960s, under Brezhnev’s regime, people who dared research Lenin’s uncomfortable genealogy were laid off, and the documents they found were purged. Russian right-wing activists and writers considered the Jewish origins of many left-wing leaders scandalous, particularly after the October 1917 revolution, yet until late in the twentieth century they knew nothing about Lenin’s Jewish roots. When documents on Lenin’s origins finally saw the light of day, post-communist journalists evoked Lenin’s Jewishness to condemn the Russian communist experiment as a destruc-

tive Jewish endeavor. After all, the perception of Lenin's Jewish roots—whatever its historical accuracy or significance—was a secondary yet peculiar aspect of the Jewish question in Russia. As such, it deserves its own story. Against the grandeur of the Russian socialist revolution Lenin's Jewishness was a minor nuisance, but the history of this nuisance turned into a major issue.

Let me set things straight. Lenin's maternal great-grandfather Moshko Blank was a Jew; he converted to Christianity after his Jewish wife Miriam passed away. Lenin's maternal grandfather Alexander Blank was born a Jew, and he converted to Christianity before his father did. Alexander Blank converted to Christianity as a teenager and married Anna Grosschop, a Christian of German origin. Thus, in the strictest terms of Jewish tradition, Lenin's mother, Mariia Blank, was born to a family of a Christian convert, married someone Russian Orthodox, and was not Jewish on either side. Neither was Lenin. Had his mother presented the birth certificate of her grandmother, she could have had the chance to make *aliyah* and settle in Israel according to the right of return. Lenin would be flatly denied that opportunity even by the most liberal Jewish agency. However vociferous the arguments of the champions of the racial theory, in empiric reality there was nothing Jewish about Lenin. From this viewpoint, a "Jewish Lenin" did not exist in either Russian or Jewish history.

But in the imaginary reality of Russian communists Lenin suddenly emerged in the 1920s with his Jewish entourage in the context of Russia's Jewish question—and this issue embarrassed and annoyed them immensely. They took pains to disassociate Lenin from his Jewish relatives consistently for some seventy years. The more they tried to suppress information about Lenin's Jewish roots, the more historically

relevant the mystery became. Lenin's nineteenth-century relatives from Starokonstantinov and Zhitomir had nothing in common with the Russian communists. But by trying to obliterate them from Lenin's record in 1924, 1932, 1938, 1965, and 1986, the Soviet Union's communist party made them a secret, and secretly vital, part of its own self-identification.

This came to me as a revelation. The issue was not Lenin's genealogy but the perception of his genealogy, its cultural ramifications, its "Jewish question" broadly conceived. Whether he was or was not Jewish is much less important than what being Jewish meant for him. At that point I wrote Jonathan Brent a letter outlining what I thought might be a possible approach to this tricky subject matter. As I had already said no, I suggested that whoever writes a book on Lenin's Jewish roots should cover five themes. First, the sociocultural context of the Jewish community of a small shtetl called Starokonstantinov, the site of bitter conflicts between the community and Moshko Blank, Lenin's maternal great-grandfather. Second, the story of Moshko Blank, whose name was often evoked in connection to Lenin: Who was he? Was there any link between him, a conflicted Jewish convert to Christianity, and the revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin? Third, Lenin's treatment of the Jewish question and the Jews: Was the fact of his Jewish roots—now undeniable—in any manner relevant to his attitude toward Jewish socialists or toward the Jewish question in the Russian Empire? Did he care about Jews at all? Fourth, the treatment of Lenin's Jewish relatives by the Soviet leadership: Why all those drastic remedies to hush anybody who dared mention Lenin's Jewish relations and the extraordinary efforts to keep this issue a party top secret? Fifth, the treatment of Lenin's—and other revolutionaries'—Jewishness by Russian far-right writers, whose ideas, allegedly suppressed under

the Soviet regime, became increasingly popular after the collapse of communism. Somebody should solve the riddle: How could the right-wing writers reconcile their condemnation of what they consider Jewish socialist revolution with the hosanna they sing to the Soviet state, apparently built and ruled by those whom they called the communist Jews?

These, I thought, should be the important questions to cover in the book—and I would like to be the first to review it for an academic journal. In response, Brent sent me a contract. I was stuck: Lenin was looking at me, winking his right eye, his thumbs under his vest and his head tilted to the side: “What are you going to do, comrade?” I decided to do two things: thank the perspicacious Jonathan Brent and write the book.

I decided to construct this story based on a number of assumptions. I have always claimed that an accurate—that is to say, immediate—context helps solve vexing historical issues. Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, Bulgarians, Georgians, and Jews joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (*Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia*—hereafter, RSDRP) as revolutionaries, not as Jews, Lithuanians, Russians, and Poles. One could be a Jewish Marxist as a member of the Bund, but one could not be a Jewish Bolshevik as a member of the RSDRP. To become a member of the Russian socialist democracy signified entering an emancipating, universalistic, utopian revolutionary milieu that did not recognize Greeks or Jews. That is: this revolutionary milieu recognized the particularity of its ethnic minority members but did not acknowledge it; knew but ignored. Counting non-Russians among the Bolsheviks or in the Soviet apparatus is a good mathematical exercise, yet it says nothing historically relevant. Overrepresentation of the Jews does not signify Judaic overrepresentation. Once you join the Bolsheviks, you think class, not eth-

nicity. Moreover, when you join the RSDRP you obliterate your ethnicity and become a class. Jews joined the RSDRP seeking exactly that—to discard their Jewishness. Anyone who sought different options followed the Bund, the Zionists, or the Father Pilgrims.

To impose ethnic identity on individual Bolsheviks is a fascinating yet hardly productive experiment in anachronism. Jews did play some role in the Russian revolution, but their role in it was not Jewish. Even if one assumes that Lenin was a shtetl-born Jew, which he never was, to call Lenin Jewish would be to deny his key role as a revolutionary Bolshevik. However, to omit his Jewish relations, relatives, colleagues, and friends from historical records would be just another attempt to create a racially pure version of the Russian revolution, something which the communists in the USSR sought to create. The “Jewish Lenin” is a stifling oxymoron, whereas “Lenin’s Jewish Question” might indeed refresh the discussion.

In Chapters 1 and 2, this question is taken literally: I analyze Lenin’s (quite distant) Jewish relatives, placing them in their immediate sociocultural context. In Chapter 3 the question is taken metaphorically; I seek to explain how Lenin treated the Jewish question in Europe in general and in Russia’s socialist movement in particular. In Chapter 4, I explore the Bolsheviks’ allergy to allegories and their addiction to symbols, which led to their attempt at concocting a Russified Lenin and suppressing any further perusal of “Jewish questions” in connection to him. In Chapter 5, I look at Russian xenophobes interested in Lenin’s Jewish answer. Seekers of the ultimate meaning of things and events—known to academics as anagogic—the Russian far-rightists embed an unquestionably Jewish Lenin into their concepts of Russian history, in which alien Jews manipulate the pure soul of Mother Russia.

Historical complexities make one question established terms and notions. In modern historical studies of East Europe, antisemitism has become as broad and senseless as the idea of Jewish conspiracy among those enchanted by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. I hope to offer a more subtle vision of Russian xenophobia, without making antisemitism an easily accessible key that opens each and every secret door in the frightening dungeons of Russian history. I will claim that in some cases Russian authorities achieved the heights of outright racism—on a par with the Nazi regime—but in many cases they could not even be given the vulgar title of antisemites.

Finally, in the humanities, the more sizable the phenomenon, the higher its internal diversity. Some Soviet Jews were Russian-speaking internationalists, but to present all of them as cosmopolitan nomads with leftist proclivities, as they appear from the writings of some postmodern globalized intellectuals, is just convenient reductionism. Jews were hardly a homogeneous people of common goals, values, and fate, as they appear from the writings of Russian conservative thinkers and their Jewish critics. By the same token, if one argues that a group as numerous as Russian Jews was anything but homogeneous, it would be sound to recognize the internal diversity of a country as big as Russia or the USSR. Some of the highest Moscow-based communist party hierarchs shared an antisemitic bias, while others in Minsk or Zhitomir or Novosibirsk did not. Perhaps within the boundaries of the Sadovoe Circle, circumscribing the center of Moscow, the Soviet Union appeared to be a totalitarian country; but not if one ventured to the territory between Leningrad and Vladivostok.

This study, particularly Chapters 1, 3, and 5, sheds new light on various contexts of Lenin's Jews. In Chapters 2 and 4,

I draw heavily from a number of careful and painstaking genealogical reconstructions of Lenin by Russian scholars. For the Blanks' story and the search for the Blanks in the Soviet Union I am indebted to studies and publications by Galina Borodulina, Genrikh Deych, Efim Melamed, Tatiana Kolskova, Vsevolod Tsaplin, and particularly Mikhail Shtein. Few among modern scholars can compete with Shtein in diligence and accuracy, although his interpretative skills and knowledge of Jewish context leave much to be desired. What I am adding to the existing studies is context and interpretation—or, to be precise, context as interpretation. As I am looking to reconstruct how certain aspects of Lenin's genealogy were treated, I focus only on the Blanks and do not take into consideration other aspects, such as the German-Swedish Grosschops and Essens. Thus, among other things, this study is a consideration of the genealogical works on Lenin—and of genealogy in general.

Genealogy today is in high esteem in the United States. People pay big money for a copy of a genealogical record of their grandparents and are crazy about genealogical studies. Most, but not all, are of the opinion that to find the birth certificate of one's grandmother is to understand who she was, how she lived, and what her environment was. Modern genealogists think that to identify one's ethnic origins is to define one's identity. Neglect of the immediate historical context among genealogists is ubiquitous. I spent many futile hours trying to prove to genealogical societies the necessity of thorough historical study. Mass consumers of genealogy need dates, facts, and figures. They consider blasphemy the thought that one's cultural milieu defines a person much more than ethnic origin. The family tree is their idol. But they love the branches much more than the foliage.

While I argue in this study against the very possibility of a Jewish Lenin, I suggest a way of looking at Lenin's Jewish question. I seek to identify the Jews eager to sacrifice their Jewish particularity for the universal at the expense of a total obliteration of their particularity. And I suggest how to deal with the internationalist Marxists of Jewish descent who allowed themselves a teaspoonful of Jewish hatred, a minor exception to their otherwise highly commendable internationalism.

I

From Nowhere to Zhitomir

In the beginning there was a scandal. It took place in January 1841 in the civil court of Zhitomir, the central town of Volhynia province of the Russian Empire. Finkelshtein, a Jewish woman dwelling in Zhitomir, sued a man named Blank. Or perhaps Blank sued Finkelshtein. An unpaid debt worth several dozen rubles was at stake. In the courtroom the litigation turned into an animated exchange. Blank's allegations and her own plight as an impoverished Jewish woman drove Finkelshtein mad. She turned to scolding, expressing herself in impeccable Yiddish. First she yelled at Blank, a miserable Jew, who allowed his sons to accept Christianity and become Russian Orthodox. Then she dubbed Christianity a pagan creed, obviously an exaggeration from her side, and claimed that Blank's sons, now pagans, would die like dogs. Finkelshtein concluded her reprimand by confirming that Blank, a Jew, would also die like a dog.

The archival document unfortunately omitted some of Finkelshtein's insights into the bright future of the Blank family. Finkelshtein's rich Yiddish idiom is also lost to us. But even

if we could have captured Finkelshtein's picturesque speech, it would have made no sense to the Russian Orthodox court clerks. None of them—the judge, his assistant, and a court scribe—knew any Yiddish. Yet, besides the litigants, there was at least one person present in the court who knew some Yiddish. This person, a visitor from St. Petersburg whose name remained unidentified, turned to Finkelshtein with a question and a reproach. “Madame Finkelshtein,” he said out loud, “you have no reason to rebuke Mister Blank because his son, Alexander Dmitrievich Blank, became a medical doctor in St. Petersburg, merited the rank of Russian state official, and married a lady who was none other than a sister of Karl Ivanovich Grosschop himself.”

So far Moshko Blank was just listening. But when he heard the name of his son's father-in-law, a state clerk in the capital city of St. Petersburg, he could restrain himself no longer, if one can believe his own description of the event. Blank admitted that at that particular moment he felt very much like spitting straight into Madame Finkelshtein's face. And yet, gentleman that he was, he managed to pull himself together and instead spat on the floor near Finkelshtein. Then he stated out loud, in Russian, that one should always spit on such words as hers.

This incident sealed his fate. The Russian court clerks could tolerate Finkelshtein's Yiddish curses, as they could make neither head nor tail of them. But they clearly witnessed Blank's spitting and heard him dropping a clear-cut comment in Russian. This was interpreted as a verbal confirmation of his public offense. What he did they understood without translation. They considered Blank's act wanton and brazen, had Blank arrested on the spot, and condemned him to imprisonment for insulting the district court, a Russian imperial official

institution, the members of the court, and the entire Russian legal system. Broken and depressed, Blank filed a complaint with Lieutenant General Bibikov, governor general of Kiev, Podol, and Volhynia provinces. Blank related the entire episode in detail, accused Finkelshtein of infuriating him, bemoaned his fate as a prisoner who had already spent nine weeks in confinement, praised the political correctness of his sons who had accepted the mainstream religion of the empire, and claimed innocence.¹

This episode in the life of Moshko Blank could be just another unimportant vignette in the story of the Jews in the Russian Empire, if not for two significant details: the attitude of a shtetl Jew from the Pale of Jewish Settlement toward converts from Judaism, and the fate of the Blanks. The Pale of Jewish Settlement, or simply the Pale, as it was usually called, was populated in the early 1800s by some 1 million Jews. It represented a territory of fifteen provinces, which the Russian Empire acquired late in the eighteenth century as the result of three partitions of Poland. Previously not allowed into Russia, Jews now found themselves under Russian rule—in the empire's western and southwestern borderlands. Although they were the Russian tsar's subjects, most Jews were not allowed to reside outside the Pale of Settlement before the era of Alexander II's Great Reforms, except for several categories of guild merchants (the wealthiest members of the trade estate), exiled convicts, and retired soldiers. St. Petersburg, where the two sons of Moshko Blank had settled, was Russia's northern capital far beyond the Pale—outside the geographical realm associated with Jews, far from the Jewish community, in no-Jews-land. Madame Finkelshtein considered moving there and accepting Christianity an act of treason, a betrayal of shtetl values, of the forefathers' heritage, and of what she probably

called *yidishkayt*—the Jewish tradition. She thought Blank deserved nothing but a curse, and she articulated her condemnation with gusto.

Moshko, or to be precise, Moisei Itsikovich Blank was of a different opinion. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Moshko considered the Jewish shtetl dull and empty, his fellow Jews backward fanatics, and their Judaic traditions corrupt and nonsensical. From Moshko Blank's viewpoint, Jews were profoundly unpatriotic, arrogant, and subversive—take, for example, Madame Finkelshtein's aversion toward the enlightened or, God forbid, the Christianized Jews who made it to the capital of the empire and became doctors. On the contrary, he, Moshko Blank, was a loyal subject ready to serve the tsar and the fatherland, and, in the future, the Russian God, too. What we know about Blank suggests that he worshipped the Russian Empire—its religion, its language, its education, and its bureaucracy—just because it embodied power. He loved what he imagined as powerful imperial Russia and he hated the Jews, those sheepish losers. Blank shared the values of the Russian petty clerks and mid-rank bureaucrats who dreamed about a promotion to state service as Madame Bovary dreamed of Paris. What he did not dare do in the courtroom to Madame Finkelshtein he had done to her relatives many times before. He spat in the face of the Finkelshteins, his fellow Jews—and quite literally.

Moshko Blank was the father of Alexander Dmitrievich Blank, whose daughter Mariia Alexandrovna Blank gave birth to Vladimir Ulianov, better known as V. I. Lenin. Among Russian historians there are some who portrayed Lenin as a version of Moshko Blank—both, as it were, shared similar hatred of their own people. Of course Blank cannot take the role of great-grandfather of the Russian revolution: this position is

already occupied by another baptized Jew, Karl Marx. Yet, as Lenin's maternal great-grandfather and a skeleton in the Russian Bolshevik closet, Moshko deserves scrutiny. To portray Moshko Blank one has to place him back in his native Starokonstantinov, where he lived as a Jew, and then move him to his house in Zhitomir, where he died as a Christian.

The Middle of Nowhere

The Old Town of Constantine (in Russian, Starokonstantinov), appears as Konstantin yashan in the Hebrew records of the town's Jewish community. It is situated in a small triangle formed by the merging rivers Sluch and Ikopot. The town emerged as a village around 1525, and in 1561 it was sold into private Polish possession. Initially it belonged to, and was named after, Count Konstanty Ostrogski (or Constantine Ostrozhsky, 1526–1608), one of the wealthiest Polish magnates appointed a palatine of Kiev and Volhynia lands as compensation for his service to the crown. Constantine erected towers around the town, connected them with ramparts, fortified them with guns, and hung heavy gates at the town's entrances. He also invited Tartars, Poles, and Jews to settle locally and engage in trade. In 1637, Polish King Władysław IV granted the town Magdeburg law. Starokonstantinov dwellers, predominantly Jews, obtained the privilege to establish regular annual fairs and deal in wine, liquor, mead, and beer brewing. Initially the owner did not overtax his subjects: they paid one grosz per wagon and two per store during the fairs.

A Tartar invasion demolished the town in 1618, and the Cossack revolution devastated it in 1648, yet by the end of the seventeenth century Starokonstantinov rose from its own ashes and rebuilt its unsophisticated trade. In 1766, Stanisław

Lubomirski and August Czartoryski established new fairs furthering the local mercantile economy. Because of the vicinity of such an extraordinarily important place as Berdichev, a center of international trade, Starokonstantinov remained a small and underdeveloped trading town. It was almost entirely made of wood, with houses coated in clay, stoves made of bricks, and roofs covered by straw or shingles. No wonder that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fires repeatedly destroyed the town.

As an article of trade in itself, the town changed hands. Starokonstantinov had been passed on to Countess Konstancja Rzewuska, a scion of the Rzewuski and Lubomirski landlord families.² After the third partition of Poland, Rzewuska—like a number of other Polish magnates in nearby private towns—sank deeper and deeper into debt. She loved luxury and amused herself in Vienna and Paris. She amassed debts of about 2.3 million rubles. Her son, a composer, adventurer, and Orientalist, also enjoyed life: he spent 2 million złoty just on his seventy Arabian stallions. In 1818, Rzewuska arranged a glamorous ball to please the Russian tsar Alexander I, had a carpet cover spread over the muddy Starokonstantinov streets, and lavishly fed the quartered Russian troops with free mead, vodka, and meat. To recompense herself, she charged her subjects exorbitant taxes and petitioned the tsar to establish a special commission in charge of her debts.

This was not to the liking of the newly arrived Russian administration. After the Polish rebellion of 1830–31, the authorities intended to make Starokonstantinov, as well as many other private Polish towns, formally Russian, economically a crown asset, and politically an imperial district center. Russian state hierarchs took pains to remove the town from Polish private status and place it under control of the state treasury.

They went so far as to discuss the drastic need of purchasing the town from Rzewuska, a measure that would allow her to pay debts to her multiple creditors and the town to contribute directly to the Russian imperial treasury. The commission embezzled about half a million rubles and did little to settle Rzewuska's matters, leaving her to die in poverty and distress. In the late 1850s the town was auctioned, partially bought by the state and partially by Countess Anna Abamalek.

Moshko Blank might not have known the details of the Russian-Polish dispute over Starokonstantinov, but he certainly knew that his town was predominantly Jewish and Polish with a slowly growing Russian presence. Power, wealth, and influence were spread unevenly among the three groups. Starokonstantinov had in the 1830s about 5,483 male and 5,453 female urban dwellers. The impoverished and embittered gentry comprised ninety-nine men and eighty-four women mostly Catholic of Polish origin who were no longer able to rejoice in Polish political and military grandeur. The town had a Capuchin monastery with twenty-six monks, a reminder of the vanishing Catholic domination over East European lands. The Russian Orthodox Church, previously providing services mostly to the peasantry, now firmly established itself as a legitimate presence in the town. Out of four Starokonstantinov Russian Orthodox churches, two were sequestered from the Catholics and reconstructed in the Byzantine Christian architectural style. Thirteen families of the Russian Orthodox clergy settled there and made themselves available to the local urban population. Russia modestly marked its presence in town militarily. It allowed some fifty-six retired soldiers and their sixty-seven female relatives to settle locally. Ninety-one internal guards and their thirty-one female family members also lived permanently in town as registered dwellers. The town had a

small unit of forty-nine cantonists—Russian soldiers' children serving in the military battalions but temporarily distributed among the dwellers as a cheap labor force.³

Starokonstantinov was a typical town—a shtetl with a marketplace, established trading days, a well-developed liquor industry, and rudimentary urban self-rule. However, it also seemed, most probably in the eyes of Moshko Blank, no more than a village. Peasants of three groups, most of them Russian Orthodox, lived on the outskirts of the town: 109 male and 118 female among them paid their dues to the state, 886 and 954, respectively, to the gentry, and, respectively, 34 and 43 to the Russian Orthodox priests. The town had 1,402 houses, 756 of them belonging to Russian Orthodox peasants, 158 to the Catholic gentry, and 488 to Jews. Fifteen hundred residential houses might seem an impressive number for a small town, yet only four of them were made of stone. Most peasants' houses were village huts. The houses stood along the rivers; the dwellers poured all their refuse into the water. The streets were unpaved and not illuminated, even in the market square. Several Jewish butcheries stood at the very heart of the town. In the market square the incoming traders sold manufactured goods, groceries, and dairy products from wagons that served as storage containers, stores, and counters. Cows and goats wandered through the damp streets between the houses, which had no separating fences. If one adds the constant soft smell of manure and the reek of the butcheries facing the market square, one can easily imagine the bouquet of Starokonstantinov—a small town and a village at the same time.

Starokonstantinov did not change much throughout the nineteenth century. Consider the impressions of N. Zuts, a broad-minded officer of the 45th Azov His Imperial Majesty

Grand Duke Boris' infantry regiment. He wrote in the 1880s, "We know that Starokonstantinov is dirty beyond any measure: but if we bother ourselves to learn the reasons for this situation, we would perhaps find out that even the Jews, whom one usually blames, have nothing to do with it. . . . To drive through the streets of the town is a real challenge, as there is no pavement. Stones once paving the road have long sunk into the soil. When it is raining, they do nothing but prevent movement." He added, "The sanitary condition of the town is highly unfavorable regarding the health of the town dwellers."⁴

Urbanizing the Shtetl

While local Russian Orthodox peasants shaped Starokonstantinov's rural outlook, Jews contributed to making the town more urban. They built most houses as inns and taverns for travelers. Early in the nineteenth century there was only one Christian merchant of the third guild (the lowest level of the trading elite) registered in Starokonstantinov—and twelve Jewish. Plus there was a second guild merchant (the second wealthiest position in the trading estate), also a Jew, most likely Duvid Shteinberg—a tycoon according to the highest economic standards of the times. In 1796, Starokonstantinov Jews established the kahal, a local Jewish communal umbrella organization, electing Shteinberg, the wealthiest person in town, among its sixteen elders, as well as Moshko Berman, a guild merchant who traded in salt.⁵ If one adds to that number some 102 Jewish elite family members, one would have a good idea of the size of the upper-middle-class Jewry in town. Indeed, they represented a bit more than 1 percent of the towns' Jews. While Christian urban dwellers (in addition to

peasants) amounted to 300 male and 286 female, Starokonstantiniv boasted 7,313 Jewish dwellers, 3,625 male and 3,688 female—67 percent of town's population.

Jews contributed the lion's share of the town's economy, still mediocre and undeveloped. Excluding grain and crop sales, the town yielded an income of 24,450 silver rubles to the Rzewuski treasury annually. Traditionally engaged in businesses such as leasing inns, fishing ponds, mead and wine breweries, and mills (but not into agricultural labor, which was not yet allowed to them), Jews paid 16,286 silver rubles to Rzewuska just for leasing privileges. They established about forty-six inns in the district. Together with other town dwellers, they paid *czynsz*—a rental payment for their real estate—of about 8,163 silver rubles per year.⁶ Since Jews owned one third of all the houses in town, they probably contributed about one third of the rental sum. If this is true, they, 67 percent of the population, were responsible at least for 75 percent of the town income.

The wealthiest among them made most of their money in trade. Isaak Grunberg, Abram Monita, and Ios Kaplan purchased merchandise in Austrian Brody wholesale and retailed it in Zhitomir, Berdichev, and Starokonstantiniv.⁷ Yet one should not overestimate Jewish personal wellbeing. While about three peasants lived in a hut, there were about fifteen Jews per house. Unlike peasants, Jews were free, tax-paying subjects, although many of them could hardly make ends meet, let alone pay their taxes.

Moshko Blank could pay his taxes, and he sought to join the Starokonstantiniv economic elite, yet living in a town with a two-thirds Jewish population, most of whom lived from hand to mouth, was a bit too much for him. He particularly disliked the overwhelmingly traditional outlook of the town.

In the mid-nineteenth century Starokonstantinov had twenty-five prayer houses with about 1,379 men regularly attending (women were routinely not counted by the tsarist inspectors). Five officially registered private teachers took care of 26 students of Talmud in several *yeshivas*, low-profile Talmudic academies. There were 263 children attending 21 elementary Jewish schools, *heders*. As there were no specially designated premises, ten to fifteen students had to squeeze into the dining room of the teacher's house, closer to the heating stove.

Starokonstantinov Jews held traditional learning in high esteem. Hebrew books, such as homiletics, Torah with commentaries, legal treatises and responsa, ethical *Musar* compositions, and Kabbalah were costly, between 70 kopeks and 2 silver rubles, and yet Jews spent their meager income to purchase books.

At that time people bought books to read, not just to keep. A wealthy guild merchant from the nearby town of Radzivilov informed the central authorities that there were about a million Hebrew books in the entire Volhynia province, and “in Starokonstantinov alone there were about 20,000 books.”⁸ Even if he exaggerated considerably, his estimate implied that every male Jew had two or three books at his disposal. This is fascinating given that a Hebrew book amounted to the price of a goat. At any rate, when Russian clerks were taking inventory of Jewish educational establishments in the 1820s, they did not find either Jews attending Russian schools or any established Russian state schools for Jewish children—an eloquent testimony to the traditional outlook of the Jewish community, untouched by what the Russian administration called *obrazovanie*—secular education.

The situation hardly changed in a quarter of a century. In 1846, none of the Starokonstantinov elementary schools with

their government certified teachers had the Russian language in its curriculum.⁹ And in 1847 there was no Talmud-torah, an elementary school usually supported by the government, where secular subjects and the Russian language were taught. Instead, there were about 54 mid-level *heders* serving 412 students, 77 elementary-level *heders* serving 1,434 students, and 162 private tutors taking care of about 600 more advanced students.¹⁰ Only in the 1860s would Starokonstantinov Jews agree to the establishment of a new type of Jewish school with the Russian language and secular subjects. Yet out of 25 enrolled students only 10 regularly attended.¹¹ Moshko Blank considered assimilation with the dominant Russian culture a redeeming escape from the uncivilized and rustic Jewish environment filled, as he thought, with obsolete rites and superstitions. No wonder he dreamt of a town with less Jewish tradition and more Russian administration.

Starokonstantinov Jews were a profoundly divided community—and not only economically. Like many other shtetl dwellers elsewhere, they disagreed about which prayer house was warmer and in whose tavern the wine was sweeter. They competed with one another over visitors coming to stay at an inn or customers coming to purchase a bolt of fabric. They took sides in the ongoing quarrel among the wealthiest merchants in town and bargained over the retail prices of pickles. They made it an issue with the kahal elders if they had to host three officers of the Russian infantry regiment billeted in town while their neighbor had to accommodate only two. They competed for influence over the Jewish community by investing in the town's urban infrastructure. Thus, for example, a non-Jewish observer praised the activities of Izrail Epshtein and Avram Krasnoselsky, local Jewish philanthropists, who in the mid-nineteenth century sponsored the establishment of

the town Jewish hospital for twenty people, a public library, and the first secular Jewish school. Indeed, Jews also squabbled about whose *tsadik*—Hasidic master—had greater powers, which preacher was better, and whose son knew by heart more pages from the Talmud.

In addition to its synagogue-goers and Talmud learners, the town had its own Jewish smugglers, in good standing with the Russian customs officers; Jewish drunkards, known to the local innkeepers for their debauchery; and Jewish vagabonds, as homeowners believed, prone to stealing. Jewish smugglers regularly paid Starokonstantinov court and customs clerks a certain amount of their revenues—either in cash or in coffee, absinth vodka, sugar, or colonial tea. Those who did not share their income from contraband trade became victims of the arbitrariness of local courts.¹² An anonymous informer tells a fascinating story of the Starokonstantinov chief district clerk Konstantin Grek, who walked drunk through the town streets supported by two tipsy Jewish prostitutes, followed by a Jewish orchestra performing the Kossuth march, and watched by dozens of merry town dwellers, Jews and non-Jews alike, mockingly shouting out “Hats off, hurrah!”¹³

How They Worshipped

However motley the town population, Jewish outcasts and loyal town dwellers alike shared values such as a warm dwelling, healthy children, loyal customers, and hot food, but particularly they valued a *brukhe fun a tsadik*, the blessing of a Hasidic master, whose extraordinary mystical powers and proximity to God were believed to secure for a Jew all those things put together. Hasidism emerged as a movement of religious enthusiasm that captured minds and hearts of thou-

sands of Jews, male and female alike. Hasidim were ubiquitous and very popular in Volhynia and in Starokonstantinov. Jews supported new Hasidic leaders, who uplifted their followers from all walks of life by preaching a new message. Hasidim taught that one could cleave to God also through regular prayer, not only through Talmudic study. They preached that even such lowly creatures as women had a divine spark and deserved spiritual uplift—quite an unusual view for the overtly misogynistic Jewish and non-Jewish society.

Both wealthy and rank-and-file Jews sought the help, advice, healing, and blessing of the Hasidic leaders. The Jews considered the courts of the *tsadikim* a new Jerusalem Temple, their table an altar, their leftovers the remnants of sacred offerings, and their words a revelation of the divine. The Starokonstantinov merchant Pinkhas Bromberg, purveyor to the Zhitomir military hospital, wrote in a letter from St. Petersburg to his wife that he owed his enormous wealth and influence exclusively to the spiritual protection of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, known in Yiddish as the Ruzhiner Rebbe, perhaps the most influential Hasidic master in the Pale of Settlement in the 1820s–1830s. By spiritual protection Bromberg implied that Israel from Ruzhin interceded on his, Bromberg's, behalf with the Almighty and prayed for Bromberg's prosperity and success. Loyal to the Russian Empire and to his Starokonstantinov Hasidic customs, Bromberg wore a green civil suit when meeting Russian ministers in St. Petersburg, but on Shabbat, even in the Russian capital, he put on his *shtrayml*, a round Hasidic fur hat.¹⁴ Moshko Blank despised Hasidim. As will be shown in Chapter 2, Blank exposed them to the government as subversive not only because he took them for charlatans, but also because he hated to see the representatives of the Jewish economic elite supporting them.

The Jews of Starokonstantinov prayed in their multiple prayer houses. For the High Holidays, however, they gathered in the town's main synagogue, which they tenderly referred to as "she"—*bey-knesses ha-gedule*, the Great Synagogue, as reflected on the title page of the communal records. This synagogue was a pompous stone building covered with tin. It embodied resistance against the encroaching rites and traditions of the Hasidim, forbidding the usage of Hasidic liturgy and Hasidic prayer books, permeated with Kabbalah. However, the elders of the Great Synagogue were forced to be politically correct: a variety of Hasidic societies surrounded their steadfast Lithuanian-style religious institution. The elders permitted Hasidim to use the synagogue as a depository for their valuable religious artifacts. The followers of Hasidic and Kabbalistic rites gathered mostly at the local prayer house and at the Hasidic house of study, dubbed *Miaskivker kloyz* after the late wealthy butcher Yosef Miaskivker. In addition to newly emerged Hasidic prayer houses, there were at least five Hasidic-oriented volunteer institutions: the Eternal Light society, the Shelter to Travelers, the Mishnah and Talmud Study, the Holy Minutes Society, and the Great Prayer House Mishnah Study Society. All of them utilized Kabbalistic rituals and promoted Kabbalah learning, and all of them were engaged in philanthropy. Some of them sponsored the visit to town of none other than the famous Hasidic Rebbe Avraam Yehoshua Heschel, residing permanently in nearby Medzhibozh, who blessed the societies and signed their minutes.¹⁵ The members of these societies represented the town intellectual elite, the most theologically educated group of Starokonstantinov Jews. Moshko Blank was never one of them.

The Great Synagogue and the Hasidic Great Prayer House represented the town's two main religious powers. The third

power was socioeconomic: the kahal, the town Jewish communal umbrella organization responsible for taxation, philanthropy, vital records, and, after the introduction of personal conscription for Jews in Russia in 1827, draft lists. The Starokonstantinov kahal was composed of four elders and headed by the guild merchant Moshko Berman, a wholesale salt dealer from the local economic elite. The Jewish umbrella organization was pietistic in form, pragmatic in function, and mercantilist in substance.¹⁶ Members of the kahal also acted as heads of the *Hevrah kadishah*, the Burial Society, the wealthiest and most influential Jewish traditional institution in town. The Burial Society distributed the donations of the town shopkeepers evenly among the Hasidic and non-Hasidic institutions, according to its neatly arranged list of town donors and recipients, preserved in the minutes of the Great Synagogue. The interaction between Hasidic and non-Hasidic institutions in Starokonstantinov suggests that the local leadership found ways to incorporate the religious revivalism of the pietistic Hasidim into the town's religious mainstream. When Moshko Blank decided to go against the Hasidim, he thought he was fighting the obscurants and their obfuscating Kabbalistic beliefs, while he was really going against the kahal, the Great Synagogue, and the Hasidic groups—in a word, against the entire community. And, as we shall see momentarily, the community, although divided along cultural, social, and economic lines, responded to Moshko almost unanimously: with shared hatred toward an informer.

The Worst of Plagues

Jews in the Pale of Settlement were less afraid of the danger of personal conscription to the Russian army than they were

afraid of fires, which were a seasonal disaster in the Pale. Archival documents from Volhynia, Podol, and Kiev provinces testify that in the first half of the nineteenth century fires were catastrophic for shtetl dwellers and for the urban administration. In the 1820s–1840s fires left hundreds of Jewish and Christian families homeless in Balta, Gaisin, Letichev, Litin, Shepetovka, Sokal, Sudilkov, and dozens of other towns in the Pale. The 1843 fire in Satanov destroyed twenty-one Christian and nine Jewish houses, and also a Jewish bath house (*mikve*), hospital, and butchery. It took the 1842 fire in Medzhibozh about forty-five minutes to demolish twenty-seven Christian and twenty-one Jewish houses in town. Stormy weather and drought in 1841 caused a fire in the town of Makhnovka that demolished four brick and twenty-three wooden houses, a school building, and a town magistrate; a battalion of the Selagin regiment reinforced by the Makhnovka fire command and police could do nothing to check the disaster.¹⁷

Sometimes the fires destroyed entire cities. A few years before the disastrous 1808 blaze in Starokonstantinov, a fire in the neighboring town of Lutsk destroyed 96 stone houses, 200 wooden houses, 23 stone stores, 25 stone basements, 50 wooden basements, and 220 storage huts, causing damage assessed at about 215,830 silver rubles.¹⁸ Another fire hit Lutsk during the dry and windy summer of 1848. In addition to wooden and stone houses, all the town granaries and two sturdy Catholic monasteries, the Bernadine and the Dominican, also burned. The provincial authorities had to resettle residents in nearby villages and petition the imperial capital to allow the use of lumber from state-owned forests for new houses.¹⁹

Starokonstantinov saw a number of devastating fires, such as in 1709–1710 and 1818. Years later, when Moshko Blank

was already residing in the Volhynia provincial center of Zhitomir, on August 3, 1836, another fire hit Starokonstantinov. The fire spread from a chimney on the roof of Zisia Toporovski's house, consuming the straw on his roof, then jumped to three nearby Jewish houses, razing them and burning the pillars supporting iron gates—the gates then fell, killing two Jews. Scared and suspicious Starokonstantinov dwellers established night guards and brought to trial two vagabonds suspected of having set the fire, but could not prove their guilt.²⁰

More fires followed. In 1844 a blaze swallowed the building of the magistrate and crown assets management, Jewish stalls in the marketplace crucial to the town's economy and philanthropy, and most of the town's wooden houses. About 170 Jews lost between 50 and 200 rubles of property each; about 120 Jews lost between 300 and 2,000 rubles, and 30 landlords and clerks lost about 600 rubles worth of property. The chief of the local police calculated the overall damage at about 150,000 rubles, an astronomical sum for that time. Minister of the Interior Lev Perovsky was so upset by these figures that he ordered an immediate compensation of every town dweller of 3 silver rubles each and freed the town from payments of arrears and taxes to the treasury for a couple of years.²¹

Fires demolished the shtetl long before pogroms and revolutions came to the fore. After their dwellings burned many Jews resettled in bigger towns. District or province centers had more stone buildings, better-equipped firemen, and more efficient town administrations, in addition to better sanitary conditions and job opportunities. These provided better protection against seasonal summer fires, but they could not offer protection from the radical reforms that Nicholas I had in store for the Jews. In 1827, Nicholas I introduced military conscription for Jews, turning the draft into one of the most

painful issues for the local community. What the state administration designed in order to better integrate Jews into the fabric of the society, Jews in the Pale dubbed a *gzeyre*, Yiddish for calamity or divine punishment.²² Starokonstantinov became perhaps the only Russian shtetl in which the communal reaction to the conscription scared the government out of its wits and led it to establish draconian measures to nip in the bud what it considered public disobedience.

In late September 1827, two to three weeks after the Law on Personal Conscription of the Jews was issued, it became clear that the tsar had no desire to abolish the draft—contrary to what Jewish deputies expected when bribing the tsar’s highest officials—and that local administrators and Jewish communal elders would have to implement the law. Police officer Krukovsky went to confirm this with the kahal elders, who had gathered for this purpose in the house of one Iosi Garshtein. Iudka Rubinshtein, Shmul Lande, Abraham Krasnoselsky, Shmelke Zinkovetsky, and other Jewish guild merchants, members of the town’s economic elite, also were present. Rank-and-file Jews began gathering around the kahal house in big crowds. They realized that all the fundraising aimed at preventing conscription had been doomed and that every last penny they had collected for the Jewish deputies in St. Petersburg had been spent in vain. They grew frustrated and furious. When none of the town Jewish elite came out to calm them down, the mob began vandalizing the houses, inns, and stores belonging to the local Jewish economic oligarchy. The town head (*gorodnichii*) then ordered the police to disperse the crowds and restore order. Some ran away, but others did not. In the end, six Jews were arrested, none of whom was associated with the kahal elders or merchants. Later the town head asked for an additional army unit to be deployed locally

to prevent further clashes. The authorities ordered an investigation, allowed the local administration to court-martial anyone who persisted, and eventually called the disturbances in town nothing short of an anti-conscription rebellion.²³

One should see the Starokonstantinov revolt in a different light. Certainly it was not an organized attempt at active resistance against the extension of personal conscription. Most likely the indignation of the town dwellers targeted the Jewish communal—that is, economic—elite rather than the tsarist authorities. In the mid-1820s, Starokonstantinov Jews, as well as thousands of Jews throughout the Pale, readily gave their last pennies to support a group of Jewish deputies that the communities had dispatched to St. Petersburg. The deputies planned to use their leverage with Russian state officials to prevent the introduction of a personal draft for the Jews. Once their plan failed and the law on conscription was passed, ordinary Jews were left without money and with the prospect of seeing their sons drafted. They knew that a Jewish guild merchant or a kahal elder would do his best to help his own son or nephew avoid conscription. Shtetl Jews en masse were deeply opposed to sending their sons to the army, but they were no rebels. They had neither the power nor the foolhardy courage to challenge the authorities. Shtetl Jews could appear in Blank's denunciations as disloyal elements, arrogant subjects, and subversive fanatics only from the secure distance of the crown town of Zhitomir.

The Town of One's Dreams

Zhitomir became for Moshko Blank everything that Starokonstantinov was not. Unlike Starokonstantinov, Zhitomir had never been a muddy, flat shtetl. On the contrary, it boasted of

its beautiful urban landscape. And it was dry. Situated on the River Teterev, Zhitomir went up and down the picturesque hills, mostly of quartz and granite. Like Kiev, Minsk, and Vilna, it was an important imperial administrative town. Established perhaps in the times of Kievan Rus, Zhitomir had long been a provincial (*województwo*) center in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The town had benefited from the Magdeburg laws since the mid-fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century it became a Catholic educational center. The Russian administration confirmed its central status in Volhynia province after the 1793 Polish Partition. On the eve of the war with Napoleon, the town hosted Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov and later General Petr Bagration.²⁴

For a visitor from St. Petersburg, Zhitomir looked provincial indeed, but it was a central town. The Polish presence was quite palpable. From the early nineteenth century the town could boast a robust stone building—St. John of Duklya Catholic seminary; an impressive edifice—St. Sofia Cathedral; and a set of baroque stone buildings forming the St. Bernadine monastery. Early in the nineteenth century the Russian central government established in Zhitomir a number of Volhynia province administrative institutions such as district and land courts, town offices, a trade management office, a prison, a district school, and a magistrate. To house these institutions the administration by the 1820s commissioned and constructed stone buildings in the Russian classical style. In the 1820s–1830s there appeared in the town center a number of pompous Russian-baroque Orthodox churches, also from stone, including the church of the Holy Cross. In the mid-nineteenth century the town commissioned the construction of brick post office buildings, including a hotel, stalls, cabmen facilities, and facilities for post office management.

Despite its old-fashioned Catholic buildings and the forty-three manufactories in the possession of Polish magnates, Zhitomir was unequivocally Russian. The liveries of the civil clerks and the uniforms of the town military garrison marked the presence of the Russian imperial bureaucracy. Unlike Moshko Blank's previous dwelling-place, Zhitomir in the 1810s was much less Jewish: Jews made up one-third of the population. In contrast to their predominance in Starokonstantinov, Jewish merchants were much less of a presence, constituting about 25 percent of all Zhitomir's merchants. Seeking to enhance the town economy and improve its urban outlook, St. Petersburg created premises to attract the well-to-do to Zhitomir and to suppress what it considered the unruly, uncontrolled, highly competitive, bourgeoning, and influential nearby town of Berdichev. Berdichev was at that time a major trading center in the Pale, situated forty miles south of Zhitomir and still a *shtetl*—a private town in the possession of Count Matvei Radziwiłł.

To elevate one town at the expense of another, the Russian administration instigated a major ongoing clash between Zhitomir, where all administrative offices were situated, and Berdichev, which had neither a trading management office nor a magistrate. More than a hundred Christian and Jewish merchants appealed to the central government asking it to establish in Berdichev *prisutstvennye mesta*—town magistrate offices. They complained that each time they needed to make tax arrangements, renew certificates, obtain trading permits, or engage in litigation they had to travel to Zhitomir, to whose magistrate the town of Berdichev was subsumed. They claimed to represent about a thousand Berdichev trading Jews, who had to spend about 10 rubles for a round trip to Zhitomir, in addition to expenditures in Zhitomir itself. Trading townsmen

and merchants spent about 20,000 rubles a year on these trips without any benefit to their own town economy, which was detrimental to Berdichev.²⁵

The government implied that it was interested in an amicable settlement between the two towns and turned to the Zhitomir Jews for their opinion. The latter acknowledged that they would lose enormously should the government agree to make Berdichev administratively independent. The Russian administration faked benevolence toward the Zhitomir Jews and rejected the petition of the Berdichev merchants. While the war between the towns continued for several years, bureaucrats from St. Petersburg and Kiev continued to tacitly favor Zhitomir. They did not care much about Berdichev's Jewish merchants, who, by the way, contributed annually about 122,500 silver rubles to the town treasury. The authorities wanted to preserve Zhitomir's central administrative status—without losing a solid part of the revenues from the Berdichev Jews.

This situation led well-to-do Jews to move to Zhitomir. Moshko Guberman and Yakov Galperin, Jewish tycoons from Berdichev, moved their headquarters to Zhitomir. Second guild merchant Vainshtok, purveyor to the army and lease-holder of the production and sale of vodka, also settled there. Like Moshko Blank, Pinkhas Bromberg moved his family from Starokonstantinov to Zhitomir, where he purveyed to one of the biggest military hospitals. By 1830, Zhitomir boasted a sizable Jewish elite providing services to the Russian state bureaucracy. Staff doctor Trakhtenberg, a Jew, served for thirteen years in the Zhitomir magistrate until 1833, when St. Petersburg ordered local administrative institutions to get rid of Jews who held office. Wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs and guild merchants served as lease-holders of Zhitomir post offices:

Leyb Brodsky provided seventy-two horses, Feivel Gisherman, thirty-three, and Binyamin Ratner, twenty-eight. Zhitomir's Jewish merchants were so convinced that they were useful to the state that in 1828 they dared petition the central administration to be exempt from conscription. Even crime in Zhitomir was of a white-collar type: it entailed the thoughtful and well-organized counterfeiting of Russian silver coins, carefully crafted from soldiers' buttons, rather than violent robbery or reckless smuggling.²⁶

St. Petersburg used Zhitomir as a testing ground for the new state politics of Jewish reform. By the late 1830s the tsarist administration had shut down all the printing presses in the Pale to prevent publication of what it considered harmful books—that is to say, of Hasidic or Kabbalistic content. The only two publishing houses the administration allowed to remain were in Vilna and in Zhitomir. The brothers Shapiro, former owners of the much acclaimed Slavuta press, offered the highest bid at a state auction, thereby winning permission to establish their printing presses in Zhitomir, where they settled permanently. Their seven presses, producing tens of thousands of books annually, created an entire generation of Jewish and Christian printers working together in what was for thirty years one of the biggest Jewish publishing enterprises in Europe.²⁷ The Zhitomir press contributed directly to the establishment and maintenance of the new state schools for Jews, about 4,350 silver rubles annually.²⁸ Later, in 1840, the authorities established a rabbinical seminary in Zhitomir, a center for forging crown rabbis—a new type of loyal, docile, secular-oriented and Russian-speaking Jewish clerics responsible for vital statistics and reporting directly to the government. Although in disfavor with local traditional Jews, the

school attracted illustrious *maskilim*, representatives of the Jewish enlightenment, such as Yakov Eichenbaum and Abraham Ber Gottlober. Hayim Selig Słonimski, mathematician, astronomer, calculator designer, and Hebrew poet, served as the seminary director.²⁹ In addition to some crown rabbis, the seminary produced a number of outstanding Jewish writers, journalists, publishers, and scholars, the *crème de la crème* of the Russian Jewish intelligentsia, Lev Binshtok and Mendele Moykher Sforim included. In the 1860s, following the policy of turning Jews into useful subjects of the empire, the authorities supported the establishment of the Zhitomir Jewish vocational school, the first of this type in the Russian Empire.

The Zhitomir Jewish community was much more at home with the Russian authorities and the Russian language, yet it was also by and large traditional. When the rabbinical seminary appeared in town, quite close to the central market square, the local Jewish community was scandalized by the seminary's nontraditional and nonobservant character—to the extent that it forbade trading merchants to attend the seminary prayer services, considered absolutely *treyf* (unfit), unbecoming a good Jew. There were also some Hasidim in Zhitomir—for example the followers and admirers of Zeev Wolf, a prominent Hasidic master, a disciple or colleague of Israel ben Eliezer (the Ba'al Shem Tov, ca. 1700–1760). There was a small Hasidic prayer house, called the *kloyz*, which hosted a voluntary Talmud study society. Most likely the prayer house was named after Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhirich, a close disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov. Its members considered themselves followers of Rabbi Mordekhai, most likely—Mordekhai Twersky of the Chernobyl dynasty of Hasidim.³⁰ In one of his “Red Cavalry” stories Isaac Babel por-

trayed Zhitomir as a moribund Jewish town, with its Jewish dwellings empty, like a morgue, and a Hasidic rabbi Motale “sitting at a table surrounded by the liars and the possessed.”³¹

But for the Russian administration, Zhitomir was a town of useful Jews, not of senseless Hasidim. Consider the following example. At the time when Moshko Blank was writing to the tsar, Zhitomir’s smiths, members of the guild, were complaining of their Jewish colleagues to St. Petersburg. Jews, they said, were not members of the guild, did not have permits, and yet functioned as smiths in town, and quite competitively. The Russian administration usually protected the few Christian artisans in western provinces, yet in this case it favored the Jews. The Russian administrators argued that since Jews were smiths, they already were useful Jews, and should be protected as such. The governor general of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podol allowed Jewish smiths in Zhitomir to pay taxes as Christian guild members, and the Senate claimed they did not need certificates, as they learned their craft through experience.³² By the 1850s the Russian administration had proved instrumental in creating a flourishing yet controlled Jewish community in Zhitomir, now the largest in the region, triggering the demise of Berdichev.

For Moshko Blank, Zhitomir was a haven. He found in Zhitomir what he had sought when defecting from his shtetl: an imperial town, the embodiment of Russian power, with its cheerful Russian Orthodox churches and loyal Russian state clerks. In Zhitomir Moshko arranged for the secular education of his children. He befriended court clerks who helped him put on paper his denunciations against his fellow Jews, enlightened Jewish scribes who assisted him in articulating his proposals to the Russian tsar, members of the Russian Ortho-

dox clergy and local Russian military and state bureaucrats who helped him to convert to Christianity. Moshko died peacefully in Zhitomir in his mid-nineties, most likely in the house of his daughter. Having delved into Moshko Blank's urban context, one should take a glimpse into his life story to find out whether the prophecy of Madame Finkelshtein came true.

II

The Imperial Moshko

Genealogists tell us that Moshko Itsikovich Blank was born between 1758 and 1763.¹ His place of birth is unknown. No doubt he was an Ashkenazic, Yiddish-speaking Jew, born to a traditional Jewish family in the pre-partitioned Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Blank was not a normative Polish-Jewish last name, but not a rarity either. There were a number of Blanks in the vicinity, not necessarily relatives of Moshko Blank from Starokonstantinov, including Faivel Blank, a purveyor to the Russian army from Odessa, and yet another Moshko Blank, a guild merchant from Kamenets.

Miriam Froimovich, Moshko's wife and Lenin's great-grandmother, was a native of Starokonstantinov, born about 1764. She also came from an Ashkenazic Jewish family. Her last name came into being as an adaptation of her patronymics—her father's first name, Froim, Yiddish for Efraim. Because of low sanitary standards and high child mortality, Miriam Blank most likely gave birth to a number of children, only three of whom survived—Abel, born in 1794, Liba, born around 1799,

and Yisroel, born in 1804. Later in the nineteenth century Abel took the name Dmitrii, Liba turned into Liubov, and Yisroel became Alexander.

The Town Pest

Unlike his namesake Moshko Blank who invested in the urban modernization of Kamenets, Moshko Blank from Starokonstantinov had no interest in improving his town's appearance. Instead, Moshko decided to improve his town's morals. And unlike Faivel Blank, who provided the Russian navy with hemp and fodder, Moshko provided Russian authorities with paperwork.² Throughout his life Moshko bombarded the town administration, the district authorities, and the provincial governor with proposals, appeals, notes, protests, allegations, claims, and denunciations. When he turned eighty-five he wrote directly to the tsar. What we know about Moshko comes from the bulk of bureaucratic documentation brought to light by his multiple litigations and trials. Moshko was a difficult individual at odds with his family, his relatives, his brethren, his partners, and his immediate authorities, both Russian and Jewish. Although the twentieth-century Soviet administration thoroughly purged the archives in Russia and Ukraine to eliminate the memory of Lenin's Jewish roots—this story will be told in Chapter 4—East European archives still contain a wealth of materials that shed light on the stormy life of Moshko Blank.

Blank was neither the wealthiest nor the poorest Starokonstantinov dweller. As he was registered as an urban dweller, not a guild merchant with a stated capital and fixed payments to the treasury, he obtained permission from the local kahal to go in for trade, paid the required half-ruble to the magistrate,

and became a middleman. He leased fields growing chicory, purchased wholesale agricultural produce from peasants, and retailed wine and vodka to residents and visitors. He built several small wooden stores attached to his house, and through their big windows and wide windowsills he sold merchandise. During market days, and particularly during the annual fairs, Moshko leased his stores to the itinerant salesmen—as did many homeowners residing near the marketplace. Used as a small inn, warehouse, and store, Moshko's house provided him with regular income, although Moshko was brazenly bragging when he claimed that his house alone brought him 10 silver rubles per week.

Hardly anything distinguished Blank from his fellow Jews, except his amazing ability to scandalize his customers and neighbors. While some accusations against Blank were laughable, others were much less so. Starokonstantinov Jews took Blank for a thug. Blank allegedly stole straw: there seems to have been an unresolved accusation against him in 1803, when he was legally exonerated but left under serious suspicion. He cheated his customers: he sold regular vodka in lieu of fruit vodka. To make bad things worse, he did it over Passover. This was not merely cheating. Regular vodka was made of grain, and Jewish law therefore considers it a liquid *homets* (a product made of leavened bread or grain) and forbids its use over Passover. However, Judaic tradition allows fruit vodkas for Passover use. By selling regular vodka over Passover Blank deliberately mocked Judaic prohibition to extract benefit from *homets*, including its consumption and sale. Furthermore, he made other Jews, who trusted him and bought from him, violate one of the basic Judaic proscriptions. To say this was a blasphemy would be to underestimate the rage, dismay, and indignation of Moshko Blank's brethren.

The kahal elders of the town made it known to Moshko Blank that his conduct was an abomination and would not be tolerated. In response, Moshko blackmailed the kahal. He informed the authorities about its illegal activities, purportedly endorsed by Duvid Shteinberg, one of the elders. Moshko complained that the kahal did not record in timely fashion the births of baby boys, or did not record them at all. This was a cunning way of the Jewish communities to circumvent a heavy per capita taxation—a trick not unknown among the surrounding Russian Orthodox urban dwellers and peasants. Moshko also made it known to his fellow Starokonstantinov Jews that they could buy his silence. He would condescendingly accept, he was reported to have said, a handsome 100 rubles in banknotes from every family not registered properly. This was particularly horrible in the eyes of his fellow Jews, as he himself had not registered his sons in a timely fashion. It is not known whether he ever received any bribes, yet the reputation as a blackmailer stuck to him and prefigured his future notoriety as an informer.

Before the kahal decided to take action against him, Moshko Blank was also reported to have “damaged the reputation” of the Starokonstantinov Jews. Such accusations usually implied that the dealings of a Jew with a Gentile were so blatantly fraudulent on the Jewish side that they were considered harmful to the entire Jewish community. At least this is what the communal elders thought; but Moshko was of a different opinion. He considered his coreligionists corrupt through and through. He, a progressive-minded individual, as it were, maintained that he had a right to judge his brethren and inform against them—individually and collectively. He was only formally a Jew. Apparently he did not follow any precepts of Judaism: later he proved his allegiance to the Russian

Christian customs by emphasizing that he had enjoyed eating and drinking *treyf* when still in Starokonstantinov.

Moshko consciously and deliberately split himself off from his brethren—he hated Judaic piety, disdained Jewish spiritual leadership, accused his brethren of hypocrisy and disloyalty, and maintained that Jews exploited the local Christian population. At the same time, Moshko worshipped imperial power, bowed down to what he understood as Russian education, and considered Russification the only panacea for Jewish fanaticism and obscurantism. As will be demonstrated below, Moshko looked at his fellow Jews from the heights of what he assumed was his imperial identity, if not of his not-yet-formalized Christian identity. Jews, he thought, fully deserved his scorn. In turn, the town dwellers accused him of adultery, dishonesty, and robbery.

The first time Moshko Blank fell from grace was on September 29, 1808. On that date, as already mentioned, the town went ablaze. Most likely Iakov Timanitsky's house had a chimney reaching the attic but not the roof. And he had straw stored under the roof. Sparks from the chimney set the straw on fire. The flame spread to the wooden shingles, then to the roofs of the surrounding houses, burning in a couple of hours twenty-three homes, including the one belonging to the Blanks. Local authorities conducted a routine investigation. In other similar cases shtetl dwellers pointed to vagabonds, unregistered dwellers, and traveling workers as those to blame for setting fires. Almost always, however, it was impossible to prove their guilt, so the accused were left under serious suspicion but not convicted. The consequences of a fire were different if a shtetl informer fell under suspicion. For example, the Satanov kahal had arrested one Shaya Rabonovich, an infor-

mer whose unproven denunciations had ruined a number of families. The kahal found Shaya guilty of arson and had him sentenced and exiled to Siberia.³

The case of Moshko Blank moved in the same direction. Although Blank in this case—unlike in many other cases relating to him—was most likely not to blame, his fellow Jews decided to settle accounts. In the aftermath of the fire, twenty-two Jews from Berdichev, Kremenets, and Starokonstantinov, including local Jews and those registered with the Starokonstantinov kahal but resettled elsewhere, accused Blank of arson. The plaintiffs supported their accusation by pointing to Moshko's subversive activities, vengeful claims, and nasty character, and brought him to justice. The Starokonstantinov kahal elders firmly stood behind the accusation: Moshko, they reckoned, deserved punishment in any case. Local authorities considered the accusation valid.

While the land court considered the case, Blank spent about a year behind bars writing his appeals to the authorities. Meantime, his chicory fields were neglected and destroyed by cattle. His wife, Miriam, spent about 100 rubles coming and going to Novograd-Volynskii, where Moshko was jailed. Apparently while he was still under arrest the local Starokonstantinov Jews decided to get rid of him and forged acquisition papers on the Blanks' house, if one is to believe Moshko's subsequent complaints. But Moshko's appeals hit a sensitive chord, particularly because of his references to religious persecution of which he allegedly was a victim, and the authorities ordered a review of the case. The Novograd-Volynskii district court sent it to the Senate in St. Petersburg. The Senate found Moshko Blank not guilty. He could go home—ruined, humiliated, and maddened.

On the Altar of Enlightenment

Moshko had nothing to lose in Starokonstantinov. He made a quick yet felicitous decision to move to Zhitomir and settle there for good, although he remained registered with the Starokonstantinov kahal for fiscal matters. Moshko sought to do whatever he could to escape what he called his undeserved persecution by Starokonstantinov religious fanatics. On top of that he intended to get closer to the government clerks: Zhitomir, as we already know, was the center of Volhynia province. Moshko paid a considerable sum to bring his family to Zhitomir and rent a house there, albeit the 150 rubles for the move and 240 for the rent he mentioned in his complaint to Nicholas I, like many other details in his letters, seem to have been greatly exaggerated. After renting premises for more than fifteen years, in about 1825 Moshko purchased in Zhitomir a modest house of his own, for 125 rubles.

Zhitomir did not change Moshko. Here he decided to take moral revenge—long before he managed to take financial revenge—to recompense himself for the humiliation, suffering, and financial loss he had experienced in Starokonstantinov. Bringing his intent to life was not a trivial task: Moshko possessed neither basic material wealth nor the social position necessary for this kind of an enterprise. Furthermore, he had undermined his links with his commercial partners and Jewish communal authorities. The only way out for him was to seek protection from the state and cleave to everything associated with its power—Russian officialdom, Russian religion, Russian language and culture.

There was one serious obstacle: his wife. Miriam did not support her husband's attitude toward things Jewish, as Moshko explained much later, and prevented him from converting to

the state religion of the empire, Russian Orthodoxy. What Moshko could not accomplish himself he decided to do for his sons. He undertook a step that very few Jews dared undertake at that time. Moshko had two sons, Abel and Yisroel. He refused to send them to a Jewish school or to hire a private teacher. Instead, he enrolled them in a newly established local district school (*povetovoe uchilishche*). For the Jews of Starokonstantinov and Zhitomir who knew the Blanks, this was a public affront. Newly established state district schools served the Christian population, had classes in Christian Divine Law, and enrolled Christian students. It would be thirty or forty years before Jews started to enroll their children in state schools—but under altogether different conditions.

Mosko scandalized not only his community but also his family. Consider his quarrel with his son. Abel, the elder son, in November 1816 married a certain Malka Potsa. Some time after the wedding Moshko stopped by his son's house. Abel was absent. Malka was at home. She reminded Moshko that he had promised to give his son some wedding money and had not kept his promise. Moshko responded in his not particularly polite manner. Malka replied in the same tone. A fight ensued. Curious neighbors came to observe the quarrel. Abel also came back. While Moshko was yelling at Malka, somebody hit him from behind. A Jewish second-hand dealer who was present pointed to Abel. Moshko Blank sued his son for beating him, sent a corresponding accusation to the governor, and had his son arrested. Ten days later Moshko regretted his step, requested that the governor release his son from his detention cell, and petitioned to cancel the case because his son, he now claimed, had become a victim of calumny.⁴

This and similar cases are illuminating in many different ways, yet for my narrative they are important as testimonies to

Blank's conduct. Moshko made irrational decisions, trusted sleazy people, sent his nearest kin to jail for nothing—and then cooled down and undertook extraordinary efforts to turn back the wheel of justice. His behavior was irrational and unruly. Perhaps the Volhynia province governor was less amazed to see Moshko's complaint than to receive his petition that the case be closed. The puzzled governor sent the paperwork to the Volhynia province court asking it to check the validity of Blank's requests and find out what kind of people the Blanks were. Court clerks interrogated twelve Zhitomir dwellers about the Blanks and obtained positive descriptions. Yet the court knew the Blanks were newcomers in town and decided to interrogate Starokonstantinov dwellers, too, as they would have known the Blanks much better. Twelve Starokonstantinov dwellers produced negative descriptions. They maintained that Moshko was a dreadful person and a horrible Jew: he had engaged in criminal activities, had taken part in robberies, and had committed adultery. We do not know whether this was yet another attempt by the Starokonstantinov Jews to denigrate Blank or a credible reflection of his behavior. However, the Zhitomir magistrate concluded that the Blanks were morally dubious and offered either to release the son on bail or to exile both, Moshko and his son, to Siberia. In the end, Abel was released, whereas Moshko paid 50 rubles' fine for initiating and abruptly terminating the case—in other words, for confusing the court. The court also made Moshko sign a paper promising that he would never again write nonsensical letters to the governor.

However violent and unruly were Moshko's actions, he had a plan concerning his sons. Moving from the forlorn Starokonstantinov to the imperial Zhitomir helped him to implement it. In spring 1820, Senator Dmitrii Baranov arrived in

Zhitomir on a business trip. Baranov was known as a moderately enlightened Russian official who thought, as only the liberal-minded people around him did at that time, that Christianization was the best way to integrate Jews. Unlike his more conservative colleagues, who found the idea appalling, he reckoned that corrupt Jews were inherently good and hence deserved to become Christians. Yet Baranov was hardly a match for French enlightened thinkers such as Marquise de Mirabeau, Abbé Grégoire, or Count de Clermont-Tonnerre, who envisioned a step-by-step integration and acculturation of Jews into society, leading to their subsequent conversion. As a typical Russian enlightened bureaucrat, Baranov thought that Christianization should precede integration.

Baranov was charged with inspecting Volhynia province. His special interest was the arrears—and Jewish communities loomed large among the debtors to the state treasury. We do not know how Moshko Blank managed to meet with him—not a trivial task at that time given the social, religious, linguistic, and cultural gaps between them. While there is no documentary evidence, one can speculate that Blank wrote Baranov a note asking for help and depicting himself as a progressive-minded Jew persecuted by his obscurantist brethren. Moshko explained that he sought to bring up his sons in the spirit of the state religion, provide them with good Russian education, and teach them useful professions. One can find similar parlance embedded in Moshko Blank's letters to Russian authorities written in the 1830s and the 1840s. It is not impossible that Blank did what many other informers seeking empowerment did: promised to reveal to Baranov the corruption and arbitrariness of the Volhynia Jews in exchange for Baranov's support. Be that as it may, the Blanks met with Baranov in Zhitomir and agreed about the father's plan to provide

his sons with Russian education. At the same time Baranov petitioned other high-ranking Russian bureaucrats in St. Petersburg to help accommodate the two sons of Moshko Blank.

Moshko's plan was immediately executed. In May 1820, circumventing the kahal, Abel and Yisroel obtained through Baranov's mediation special permission from the local authorities to travel outside the Pale of Jewish Settlement and arrived in St. Petersburg. In June they submitted a request to undergo baptism. Instead of subjecting them to the required probation period, the church authorities took into consideration that they had studied in a Christian school before and that Russian state authorities supported their petition. The brothers received intensive training, and in just a couple of weeks the priest Fedor Barsov of St. Sampson the Hospitable Church conducted the brothers' conversion ceremony. As prescribed by the Russian Orthodox Church, Abel and Yisroel gave an oath, solemnly cursed the Jews still observing Jewish rites and festivals, received the Eucharist, and then turned, respectively, into Dmitrii and Alexander Blank. Baranov, the godfather of one of them, and his wife Varvara, the godmother of the other, facilitated the enthusiasm of the participants and the uplift of the procedure.

In July, the now fully fledged Christian Blanks petitioned the Minister of People's Education and Spiritual Affairs, Count Alexander Golitsyn, to allow them to study at the Medical Surgical Academy. Golitsyn looked at the transcripts and realized what the admission committee had realized before him: the Blanks' mastery of Latin was insufficient for medical school. Yet as he had been instrumental since 1817 in promoting the missionary Society of Christian Israelites, Golitsyn was benevolent toward the brothers and allowed them to be admitted to the prestigious Medical Surgical Academy. He considered

that the brothers deserved the opportunity to study “due to their behavior and orphan status.” By “behavior” Golitsyn implied their willingness to join Christianity and by “orphan status” he meant that as converts they had lost their physical parents and acquired spiritual ones—their godparents. Thus, Alexander, the younger brother at barely seventeen years old, became a full-time student, whereas Dmitrii, the elder brother, became an auditor (*vol'noslushatel'*), since he had already turned twenty-six and therefore could not enroll on a regular basis.⁵

Eye for an Eye

Back in Zhitomir, Moshko Blank exulted. His sons now lived legally in the empire's northern capital. They studied at a prestigious medical academy. They studied real science, spoke Russian, and lived among genuine Christians. They assisted medical doctors during operations, worked as nurses in hospitals, performed bloodletting, and wrote prescriptions. In early summer 1824 they received certificates as medical and veterinary doctors. Now on state service, they were excluded from the lists of taxpaying Zhitomir Jewish urban dwellers, disrupting what was perhaps their last legal link to the Pale of Settlement. Finally, they received their first appointments: Dmitrii as a private medical doctor attending to St. Petersburg police staff, Alexander first as a district doctor in Smolensk province—and soon, due to the efforts of his brother, also as a police doctor in St. Petersburg.

As soon as his sons were out of college, Moshko decided that the time was propitious to cast a final blow on the Starokonstantinov Jewish community. He made up his mind to get even with all those who had found him guilty of the 1808 fire.

He calculated all his damages, his lost harvest of chicory, his unsold vodka, the revenue he could have obtained for his burned house, and came out with the astronomical figure of 15,100 silver and 4,000 banknote rubles in damages. Moshko no doubt exaggerated considerably, and not without purpose. He thought this would underscore his excellent business capacities and portray him as a victim of the horrible arbitrariness of his former community. A Zhitomir attorney wrote an appeal for Moshko, which eventually made its way to the Senate.

Moshko's sons had become Christians, turned into government officials, were fluent in Russian, and had contacts with St. Petersburg statesmen. Now they could help their distant father, still a Jew from the Pale, appeal to the Senate to obtain justice. To make sure his intercessors in the northern capital had clean records, in 1826 Moshko asked the Volhynia district court to revisit his case against his son. The court found Abel (Dmitrii) not guilty, made Moshko pay another 25 rubles' fine, and closed the case. The conflict was resolved, yet it still marred Dmitrii's relations with his father. For that reason Moshko turned to Alexander for help. That same year Alexander petitioned his superiors to let him stay in the capital to assist in a 35,000 ruble case in the Senate. Although his petition was rejected, the incident proves that Alexander took steps to help his father and that Moshko knew he could rely on his younger son's assistance.

The Senate received the appeal, requested all the court paperwork, and revisited the 1808 case. It arrived at a decision that the fire had been caused by the chimney in Timanitsky's house and that Blank was not guilty and should not have spent time in jail. It also ordered that the twenty-two people who accused Moshko should recompense him for his losses. The dis-

strict court in Novograd-Volynskii received the decision of the Senate but did not rush to call Blank's former accusers to account. As the local authorities procrastinated, the anxious Blank complained to Nicholas I. The tsar supported his appeal, confirmed the decision of the Senate, and demanded an immediate implementation of the letter of the law. Grudgingly, in 1827, the Novograd-Volynskii magistrate had eleven people arrested. As the trial against Blank had taken place almost twenty years before, most of those arrested were the relatives, sometimes distant relatives, of Blank's one-time accusers: they might not even have heard of the 1808 fire and Moshko Blank. Furthermore, none of them could pay anything close to the requested amount. But the tsar's order left no doubt that Blank should be accommodated monetarily, that Blank had appealed to the highest authorities and most likely would appeal again unless local administrators took action. The Volhynia province governor ordered that the real estate of the eleven people arrested be auctioned off. State clerks prepared an inventory, and the local provincial newspaper announced the date of the auction. Several houses in the range of 1,300 to 4,000 rubles each, with basements and attached wooden or stone stores, had to go. Blank rubbed his hands in anticipation, but he had underestimated his fellow Jews.⁶

The tsar could order Jewish property to be sold, but he could not order it to be purchased. Nobody came to the auction. Perhaps Starokonstantinov Jews, as well as Jews from nearby towns, always ready to bargain, were well aware that the auction represented a state-endorsed robbery, not an act of justice. The authorities set another date, and again the local provincial newspaper published an ad about the auction, and again nobody showed up. Local authorities and local Jews seem to have been in the same boat: they looked for and found

ways to circumvent the highest authority. Moshko Blank terrorized the court with complaints demanding an enforced sale of the inventoried property. He complained about the Starokonstantinov Jews to the Volhynia district court, about the Volhynia district court to the province governor, about the governor to the Senate, and about the Senate to the tsar. Four years later, in May 1831, the State Council, obviously responding to Blank's round of complaints, made yet another decision to auction the houses of Aron Shapira, Duvid Rubinstein, Naf-tula Lisianski, Leizer Ratenberg, and others. Nicholas approved the decision, urging local authorities to take action.

At this point the Blanks were struck by another disaster: the tragic death of their elder son, Dmitrii. In the summer of 1831 a cholera epidemic hit St. Petersburg, taking the lives of some five thousand people. Increasingly suspicious of medical doctors and instigated by xenophobic prejudice, a mob of Petersburgers attacked the medical personnel at the cholera hospitals, seeking revenge for what they considered inadequate treatment. Late in June the enraged *déclassé* urban dwellers rushed into the hospitals. They decimated the labs, destroyed the facilities, and defenestrated doctors and nurses. They threw Dmitrii Blank out the third-floor window of the Central Cholera Hospital. The police could do nothing to help. It took Nicholas I's courageous attempts to calm the mob in person, and the involvement of several regular army battalions, to check the rebellion. The doctors, however, were gone. Probably by late August the sad news had reached Zhitomir. Moshko was deeply hurt: his son's murder was a blow to his assimilationist optimism and his belief in imperial power. Miriam, suffering from remorse, blamed Moshko for the calamity. She saw what had happened as God's punishment for Moshko's efforts to bring their sons to Christianity. The widowed Malka

Potsa, who most likely had been friendly with Miriam after Abel's (Dmitrii's) departure for St. Petersburg, now had good reason to pour out her rage on Moshko. One can well imagine what the family was going through.⁷

Yet life had its positive surprises, too. In 1831, five years after the case began, the auction finally took place. Although it yielded a low 727.42 rubles, nothing close to Moshko's expectations, it was still a victory. With what he managed to redeem he started a small moneylending business with his daughter, Liubov, who was now also settled with her husband in Zhitomir. Moshko was an aggressive, harsh, and risk-taking moneylender, an unusual occupation for a Jew in the Pale of Settlement. In the mid-1830s he partially invested his gains in a Zhitomir brick factory that he apparently owned with Duvid and Gabriel Rozenblit.

His life seems to have improved—and yet for another ten years he persecuted the relatives of his former Starokonstantinov offenders. The vindictive Blank did not satisfy himself with the real estate of his former twenty-two Starokonstantinov accusers—he continued to claim whatever he could from their heirs, including private houses, granaries, stores, trading stalls, and stone basements. In 1836, almost thirty years after the 1808 fire, he claimed one of the stone houses and two stone stores of Shmuel Toporovsky, an unfortunate relative of one of the twenty-two, who complained about the arbitrary actions of Moshko Blank to the governor.⁸ The same year another Starokonstantinov dweller, third-guild merchant Shlioma Chatskis, also complained that Blank illegally seized his store and half of the stone cellar—a purported compensation for the damages he had suffered in 1809.⁹ Most likely Blank bribed the police, displayed the 1827 and 1831 decisions, and argued that they had not been implemented. In yet another case, now with

a Zhitomir Jew, Blank sued his debtor and had his furniture and piano auctioned to cover his debt. From these documents Blank appeared greedy and pitiless. Soon luck again turned its back on him.

For the third time Moshko suffered a fiasco. In the summer of 1839 the Rozenblit family, the co-owners of the brick factory, sued him and won the case. Blank had to pay Duvid Rozenblit 425 silver rubles and had also to accommodate his relatives, Gabriel Rozenblit, his wife, Dvora, and Dvora's sister Gitl, with another 360 silver rubles. Blank lost his stake in the brick factory, which was now transferred to the Rozenblits. The factory covered part but not all the debt. Now the Rozenblits treated Moshko the way Moshko had treated other Jews throughout his life. District policeman Fotinsky came to the Blanks and composed a detailed inventory of their belongings, including all Moshko's papers and the contents of his wife's trunk. Moshko tried to protest, but in vain. He suggested that the Rozenblits satisfy themselves with real estate that he owned elsewhere. But on September 6, 1839, either Duvid or Gabriel Rozenblit came to his house followed by policeman Shostak, who confiscated everything he found fit in Rozenblit's favor: a trunk, a pound of tea, several pounds of milled coffee, four bottles containing 1.25 gallons of vodka, several pounds of Turkish smoking tobacco, and even the spectacles Moshko wore every day.

Infuriated, Blank filed a complaint with Governor General Bibikov. He irrigated his complaint with bitter tears bemoaning the fate of an elderly, humble, and ruined man. Everything, he argued, except his real estate had been confiscated for Rozenblit, whereas Rozenblit could have taken Moshko's house, still available in Starokonstantinov. The complaint produced a mixed result. Bibikov personally ordered that Moshko

Blank be protected from the disruptive and arbitrary actions of the local police. Yet the Zhitomir authorities did not acquiesce and left things where they were. The local authorities knew only too well what was going on. They were aware that Rozenblit was a well-settled urban dweller and good manager, as they put it, while Moshko Blank was a pain in the neck, a “nasty man,” as the governor of Zhitomir observed. Local authorities also knew that Blank was trying to obstruct justice by pretending—half a year later—that artifacts taken from him allegedly belonged to one Meer Lekhterman, who had purportedly left them with Blank for safe keeping, and now should therefore be returned.

The police clerks were still seeking to extract 365 rubles from Moshko Blank when they discovered that Blank had deceived them. While they were trying to help achieve an amicable settlement between the Rozenblits and Blank, before transferring the case to the court, Moshko had taken a 500-ruble carriage from Itsko Finkelshtein as a pawn for Itsko’s debt, sold it for 185 silver rubles, and gave the money to Finkelshtein—obviously to hide his money and avoid further payments to the Rozenblits.¹⁰ As for the Finkelshteins, Blank’s dealings with them triggered another court case featuring Madame Finkelshtein, with her Yiddish imprecations directed at Moshko Blank, discussed in Chapter 1. Considering these circumstances, the local authorities decided to act according to their common sense and ignore the order from the governor general.

What could Moshko Blank do? Somebody else in his situation might have laid low. Or perhaps moved to his daughter’s and accepted things as they were. Or even enjoyed his old age—in the 1840s Moshko, after all, was in his mid-eighties. Someone else would have been satisfied with these options, but not Moshko, although he did settle in with his daughter.

However, at that point he decided that he had had enough of complaining about the Shternbergs or the Rozenblits, Jews from Starokonstantinov or from Zhitomir. His wife had already passed away. Her too Jewish lamentations, which Moshko most probably detested, could no longer prevent him from making vital decisions. After all, he, Moisei Itsikovich Blank, was a Russian subject, albeit still formally a Jew. True, he understood Yiddish, lived in the Pale of Settlement, and dealt mostly with Jews. But in the depth of his soul he had long been a Christian. The time had come for Moshko to join the Russian people.

For the Glory of God

One can only wonder why Moshko decided to formalize his long-lasting relations with the Russian Church when he turned eighty. If his wife died in 1844, and not in 1834, as appears from some documents, then his decision is easy to explain. Miriam was a devoted Jew, and Moshko did not want to offend her. Whatever his hatred of traditional Jews, he had spent half a century with his wife. In his letter to Nicholas I, Blank explained that he desired to convert but could not do so while his wife was alive so as not to hurt her feelings. If his explanation is honest, then Blank considered himself a proud and imperial Russian Orthodox, no longer a lowly shtetl Jew, much earlier than the date of his formal conversion. Yet only now was he free to make decisions on his own. In September 1844, Moshko Blank petitioned Volhynia vicar Anatoly to bring him to Christianity. He explained that he did not share the Talmudic understanding of the coming of the Messiah and was of poor health and did not want to compromise his salvation.

Moshko's reference to his health is self-explanatory, but

his reference to the Messiah is intriguing. Moshko spelled out what he disliked in the Talmud. According to him, the Talmud claimed the Messiah would come when all Jews would be either righteous or sinners. Apparently Moshko knew that this particular Talmudic vision of the coming of the Messiah was one of the dozens of various descriptions of the Messianic times to be found in the eleventh chapter of the tractate *Sanhedrin* of the Babylonian Talmud, in Jewish homiletic literature, and in the *Midrash*, collections of popular rabbinic narratives. Moshko could not but know that this understanding of the Messianic era, which he presented as central to the Talmud, had nothing to do with mainstream Judaic practices and beliefs. This vision of the Messiah did not appear among the 613 commandments prescribed to an observant Jew. Yet Blank knew his addressee. He intended to indicate that he parted ways with Judaism on the issue that was key for Christianity: the Messiah. And exactly this issue was the focus of missionary efforts of Christian church fathers, of the Western European mendicant preachers, and of the Society of the Christian Israelites established in tsarist Russia in 1816 with approval and support of the pietistic-minded Alexander I.

Before he converted to Christianity, Moshko disagreed with Judaism as a Christian, not as a Jew. To consummate his departure from Judaism, on December 31, 1844, Blank took the Eucharist, converted to Russian Orthodoxy, and became Dmitrii Ivanovich Blank. His baptismal certificate indicated that he was at that moment eighty-six years old and was the father of Alexander, forty years old, and Liubov, forty-six years old.¹¹ His godfather was the Volhynia Province topographer Major General Ivan Iakovlev and his godmother Olga Savitsky, the wife of a local titular chancellor. Moshko chose for himself the name Dmitrii—most likely to match the baptismal patro-

nymics of his son Alexander (Yisroel), who had become Alexander Dmitrievich (the son of Dmitrii, his godfather). After 1844, Moshko Blank emerged as the newly born Dmitrii Blank.

A couple of months later Moshko Blank decided to reaffirm himself as His Majesty's most loyal subject who had assimilated to the mainstream religion of the empire. The time had come, he reckoned, to advise the tsar about how to reorganize Russia's Jews. Moshko could read, speak, and understand Yiddish and Russian, and he could read Hebrew from the prayer book, yet his ability to write in any of these languages was poor, as usually was the case with Jews in the Pale. Therefore Moshko commissioned somebody quite dexterous to put his thoughts on paper. The scribe, at home with the written Hebrew style, adorned the text with flowery phrases from rabbinic vocabulary. The letter contained such classical Hebrew elements as a blessing of a non-Jewish ruler and a Hebrew acronym standing for "may His glory be esteemed" after mentioning the tsar's name. The scribe also inserted some biblical language, such as *be-hukotehem al telekhu*—"do not follow their laws" (from Lev. 18:3), to convey and support Moshko's rejection of the Jewish attitudes to Gentiles.

Moshko, in turn, larded the letter with words, notions, and expressions of Russian origin, used in colloquial Yiddish as references to the dominant culture. He wished linguistically to underscore his loyalty and his successful assimilation. Perhaps he also wanted to be better understood. He called the tsar's orders *ukaz*, the schools *shkole*, the church *tserkov*, the prayer for the government *moleben*, medical education *meditsinske nauka*, a loyal subject *vernopoddannyi*—the last word appeared at least four times in different variations. Although somebody else composed the letter for him, we still hear

Moshko's voice in it—with his sycophantic references to the authorities.¹²

His letter went from Zhitomir to Kiev to St. Petersburg and passed through the hands of Ivan Kamensky, the province governor; Ivan Funduklei, governor general of Kiev, Podol, and Volhynia; and Duke Aleksei Orlov, the Head of the Third Department of His Majesty's Chancellery. The last commissioned the Head of the Gendarmes Corps Lieutenant General Leontii Dubelt to translate the letter from Yiddish—and then Russia's highest authorities could familiarize themselves with Moshko Blank's proposals. Since Blank did not receive any message from St. Petersburg about the feedback to his, as he thought, milestone ideas on Jewish reform, a year later he sent another letter to the tsar. With minor variations, he repeated his key statements, adding at the end that he was afraid that Jews had found ways to prevent his previous message from reaching His Majesty. In 1846, Minister of the Interior Duke Lev Perovskii showed the translated version of Blank's letter to Nicholas I, who read it, left his approving sign on it, and ordered it sent to the Jewish Committee, an advisory body on the matters of governmental policy regarding the Jews.¹³

Moshko's letters are remarkable documents. Within the larger corpus of denunciations by Russian Jewish informers, censors of Jewish books, and converts from Judaism, his letters can serve as classics of the genre. Yet they tell more about their author than about the Jews. Moshko had concocted an anti-Jewish denunciation, a proposal for top-down reform, and a personal statement. Like converts from Judaism to Christianity such as Johannes Pfefferkorn before and Yakov Brafman after him, Moshko justified his own hatred of Jews, quite real, by the alleged Jewish hatred of Gentiles.¹⁴ Translating personal and particular into general and universal, he denounced all

Jews as a Christian-hating people. Jews, he claimed, were horrible because they were different from Christians. Poor and illiterate people, they allowed their obscurantist elders to turn them against useful customs and the ways of other nations. Jews were suspicious and disloyal subjects: bad patriots who routinely violated the oath of allegiance to the state. In their prayer houses they did not read the prayer for the tsar, not even on Yom Kippur—but they did pray for the coming of the Messiah and their redemption from bondage, as if Russia was a prison from which they were trying to escape. Furthermore, Moshko was struck by their hypocrisy: they treated Christians as evil while they largely depended on Christians without whose help they would be unable to perform certain religious rituals. Some Jews, suggested Moshko, dreamed of leaving Judaism, but could not do so for economic or family reasons.

Moshko then proceeded to his proposal. He suggested drastic measures. Jews should be treated as sick people who rejected medicine—with force. The government had to help rid them of their superstitions and make them love and respect Christians and the Christian state. Any obstacles on the way toward this goal should be eliminated. Jewish religiosity was the first on his list. The government should severely restrict the visits of the Hasidic masters to their followers and block any gatherings of Jews at the Hasidic courts, those nests of mysticism and backwardness. A special regulation should completely ban the daily Jewish prayer on the coming of the Messiah and final redemption, which Moshko found atrociously anti-patriotic, highly ungrateful, and surreptitiously anti-Christian. Instead, Jews should recite an obligatory prayer for the tsar and his family, a measure that would buttress their loyalty. The government should forbid Jews from using Christians for help: either for milking cows or for lighting fire over

the Sabbath. These restrictions, it was his hope, could prevent Jews from exploiting the good will of the surrounding Christian population. Should these measures be implemented, Jews would appreciate and be willing to adopt Christianity, the mainstream religion of the society, exactly as Moshko had done.

Moshko made some personal statements, no less revealing. He praised the tsar for his consistent attempts to educate the Jews, to send them to state-supported schools, to change their dress, and to make them look and sound like civilized people. Thus he completely approved of Nicholas I's reforms of the 1840s—ones that his contemporaries, as he admitted, dubbed *gzeyres* (Heb.: *gezerot*), calamities or catastrophes, disrupting their traditional way of life. Moshko claimed that he had rejected Jews—not only Judaism!—forty years ago (in his first letter he said thirty years), *ex post facto*, making sense of his desire to enroll his sons in a Christian school, and then send them to study medicine in St. Petersburg. He admitted that one of his sons “died during the cholera,” omitting the fact that he was killed by a mob during the cholera riots. Indeed, Moshko knew that conversion did not necessarily spare a baptized Jew from a pogrom, yet he preferred to pass over this slippery topic. Finally, he claimed that if the emperor approved his proposal, the happy Moshko would pass to the better world as a person who had helped save the Jews from their misguided beliefs.

Not only did the letters convey his agenda, they also betrayed his feelings. Moshko Blank used words that he hoped would resonate with the tsar and his ministers, proponents of the enforced Jewish integration into the Russian society. The letter had it black on white: the tsar praiseworthily desired to make Jews educated, *zolen zayn obrazovn*. Moshko combined a Yiddish modal verb *zoln*—“must,” “should be”—and a neolo-

gism adverb derived from the Russian word *obrazovan*, “educated.” Thus he pointed out his familiarity with the program of the new Jewish schooling, *obrazovanie*, which in the mid-1840s epitomized Nicholas I’s Jewish reform. However, he did not use in his letter the word *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment, or *maskil*, the enlightened thinker: Moshko, as will be explained shortly, radically disassociated himself from the Jewish proponents of acculturation.

In the letters Moshko revealed what he really thought about Jews: *der grober narod fun yehudim farshteyen nit dem hesed*, said he. Binyamin Lukin, the first to publish this letter in the Yiddish original with Hebrew translation, wittily suggested *am ha-arets she-ba-kerev ha-yehudim*—“illiterate people among Jews do not understand the (tsar’s) mercy.”¹⁵ It seems more accurate to translate *grober* as “uncultured,” “uncivilized,” “rustic,” “redneck,” “uneducated,” and “vulgar.” Moshko uses the charged word of the Russian origin, *narod*, that signified at that time simply the “population” or the “public,” not the neutral Yiddish *folk*, “the people.” He implied not some silly people among Jews but Jews in general, all the Jews, this coarse, vulgar lower class—much more in tune with Blank’s other outbursts. Those silly Jews did not understand the monarch’s benevolence toward them, Moshko said. And he went on: Jews do not deserve mercy. While Moshko denied mercy to Jews, he considered himself an *obrazovan*, educated, Russian Orthodox, loyal subject of His Majesty the Russian tsar who merited benevolence. Amusingly, he delivered his bizarre anti-Jewish diatribe in his idiosyncratic Volhynia Yiddish.

Some students of Lenin’s genealogy have attempted to set Blank in the context of the European Jewish enlightenment and contextualize him as a proponent of enlightening reforms. True, the language and the ideas Blank expressed in his letters

to the authorities in places resemble the parlance of Jewish thinkers, *maskilim*, proponents of Jewish enlightenment. Maskilim championed Jewish acculturation—they called it assimilation, a notion charged at that time with highly positive meaning. The enlighteners sought to bridge the gap between the Jewish and the majority populations by introducing a number of reforms, above all educational. The reformers sought to teach Jews useful trades, the imperial language, and secular subjects. Enlightened reformers ardently argued against Hasidim, who, they claimed, brainwashed the Jewish masses with such outrageous ideas as magic and Kabbalah.

In fact, however, Moshko's critique had nothing to do with the Jewish enlightenment. Unlike maskilim of his time, Moshko Blank did not propagate the knowledge of what were considered the languages of civilization—German or Russian—among Jews. Nor did he claim that Jews should introduce secular subjects into the secondary school curriculum, as many enlighteners did, although he approved of the Nicholaevan reform of Jewish education. Moshko never argued for rapprochement between Russians and Jews, which was a key point in the program of the East European enlighteners, such as Minister of Public Education Sergei Uvarov. While Moshko wrote to Nicholas I, Jewish enlightened thinkers in East Europe channeled their ideas through Hebrew-language pamphlets, through their correspondence with one another, through their abrupt attempts to publish periodicals, and through their epistolary attempts to reach out to the government. The champions of the Haskalah, well aware of the aversion of most Jews to assimilation, revealed their ideas only to a few.

Moshko Blank was never part of their network. He could not make sense of a sophisticated Hebrew pamphlet. His goal was to make Jews assimilate through conversion, not to reform

or integrate them into the fabric of society as Jews. He was neither enlightened nor a thinker. And in the eyes of his contemporaries he was also a bad Jew. Yet he was clever enough to understand the utility of the language of the enlightenment in explaining his conflicts with his fellow Jews and his rejection of Judaism.

Moshko Blank appeared in his letters as a progressive-minded individual sharing the views of the government who found himself persecuted by his malevolent brethren. In his appeals to the authorities he concealed his genuine intentions. He evoked the *obrazovanie*—Russian for “education” and synonym to “enlightenment”—to justify his sons’ conversion to Christianity. When he denounced Starokonstantinov Jews for concealing and dissembling the births of their sons in the communal and town registers, he justified his denunciation as a token of his allegiance to state order, justice, and loyalty. He did not use these words to better the plight of his fellow Jews. Enlightenment served for him as a disguise, not a credo. On the other hand, Moshko’s critique of Jews and Judaism went far beyond a much more moderate governmental understanding of who Jews were and what could be done to them. The Russian government applied a radical reform of the Jews as a stick, but it also had a carrot for them. Blank envisaged no carrots.

Moshko Blank might seem a unique type of informer who denounced the entire Russian Jewry, not just this or that community, group, or individual. A student of Russian history shrewdly observed that Jewish informers were “psychopaths in an era before the condition was clinically identified.”¹⁶ Moshko’s paranoid fixation on the prayer for the Messiah is a striking example of his departure from Haskalah. It is common knowledge that the Judaic prayer Moshko quoted to re-

inforce his point—“I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah . . .”—is a recommended addendum, not, by any means, an obligatory daily prayer. It is one of the thirteen principles of faith, a Jewish credo, formulated in the times of Jewish engagement with Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic thought in medieval Spain. And it belongs to Moses Maimonides, a Jewish rational thinker par excellence. His involvement with Hellenistic and Arabic philosophy, his deep engagement with secular subjects, and his attempts to rationalize the system of beliefs made Maimonides a key figure of the Jewish culture of the past among the harbingers of Jewish enlightenment and the champions of Jewish religious reform. If Moshko intended to criticize Judaic beliefs from the enlightenment perspective by negating one of Maimonides’ principles of faith, he missed the point. Exactly at that time the enlighteners throughout Europe argued that it was high time to replace a cumbersome Judaic learning with a transparent system of beliefs, a catechism, fashioned along Maimonidean principles. Vainglory and self-hatred motivated Moshko Blank, not the ideas of the Jewish enlightenment.

Was Moshko a proponent of the Jewish religious reform? Starting from the Westphalia-based Rabbi Israel Jacobson and through the preachers in the newly erected Temples in Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Berlin, the rising Jewish reform movement modified Judaic liturgy. The champions of the religious reform maintained that Jews should introduce radical changes into their rites, mimicking the changes Luther had once introduced into Christian liturgy in defiance of Catholicism. The Jewish reform movement initiated iconoclastic changes. Down with the ram’s horn, that unnecessary religious artifact with a heartbreaking sound that had nothing to do with religious music. Down with the breaking of the glass under the wedding

canopy as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple—who needs the Jerusalem Temple in the progressive and liberal nineteenth century? Let us get rid of references to the Land of Israel in the daily Judaic liturgy: contemporary Jews loved their German land and considered it their native land, not a place of painful exile. The idea of returning to the Holy Land could also rest in peace.

Likewise, the reform rabbis argued that Jews needed no Messiah, since the era of enlightenment, of emancipation, and of Jewish equality in itself was redemptive. Blank emphasized the Holy Land and the Messianic references in Judaic liturgy as manifestations of Jewish disloyalty to the fatherland—following the claims of the champions of the Jewish reform movement. And yet Moshko Blank was no Judaic reformer. Unlike German Jewish religious reformers, he sought ways to turn Jews into Christians rather than make them into loyal Jewish subjects of His Majesty. The champions of the Jewish reform movement eliminated references to the Messiah, the Jerusalem Temple, and the Holy Land from the otherwise entirely kosher Judaic liturgy. Moshe Blank proposed to eliminate references to the Messiah in order to supplant the Judaic liturgy altogether.

The First Among Equals

That Moshko Blank was not a proponent of progressive and liberal trends in Judaism does not make him a devil incarnate. Moshko was no better and no worse than most Jewish informers, many of whom also denounced the entire community. Take, for example, the much more inventive yet less lucky Shlioma Kozlinsky, a well-to-do third-guild merchant from Nemirov. Kozlinsky promised to reveal the secrets of Jewish commerce and to denounce Jewish counterfeiters in a private

conversation with the tsar. He asked for an appointment as a supervisor of all Jewish guilds as recompense for his much sought after revelations.¹⁷ Consider Gershko Grimalovsky from Zhvanets, known to the Russian authorities as a drunkard and blackmailer. Gershko complained that the Kamenets kahal hid Jewish souls from taxes and spent most of its revenues to grease the palms of local clerks. Gershko petitioned the governor for an opportunity to meet with him in person and to appoint him (Gershko) as a state-paid clerk who would then prove that his accusations were true.¹⁸

Some informers made the same points as Moshko Blank about Jewish disloyalty and subversion. Gershko Kopershmit from Starokonstantinov, a former purveyor to the Russian army Hussar regiment arrested in the 1830s, informed the Russian secret police that Jews purchased powder in Zhitomir and Kiev and sold it to the rebellious Polish gentry; that they used their barbers to disable Jews on the conscription lists; and that they were dexterous counterfeiterers undermining Russian finance.¹⁹ A notorious informer, Yakov Lips, denounced Jewish communal leaders for cleaving to Hasidim, ignoring Russian legislation and the Russian language, and supporting the publishers of forbidden Jewish books.²⁰ Avrum Kuperbant sought a private meeting with Nicholas I to reveal to him in person that Israel Friedman, the famous Hasidic Rizhiner Rebbe, had devised a magic prayer—to be recited during the burning of the leavened bread on the eve of Passover—to get rid of the tsar.²¹

Some informers were much more inventive than Blank. Abram Knokh from Belitse, accused of false denunciations, reported from prison that he wanted to save the Russian throne and the emperor's family. While Blank emphasized that Jews were not loyal subjects, Knokh discovered that Jews cursed the Russian state in their prayer books. As proof he cited a line

from the Eighteen Benedictions prayer recited three times daily, which he carefully transliterated into Russian: *u-malkhut ha-rasha ke-rega toved*. The line suggested that “the evil kingdom should be immediately destroyed.” What was that evil kingdom, *malkhut ha-rasha*? Knokh pretended to reveal top Jewish secrets. He claimed that the words of the prayer actually referred to the “Russian” kingdom—he read Hebrew *rasha* (evil) as *Russia*, not without some sinister logic. Second, he claimed the prayer had been introduced recently in the prayer book of the Chabad-Lubavich Hasidim, who hated the Russian government, whereas the previous Ashkenazic prayer book did not contain this prayer. Russian authorities quickly discovered that the prayer was to be found in any Jewish prayer book and that it had been canonized about a thousand years before Russia came into being.²²

Russian authorities carefully investigated most of the informers’ denunciations. They realized, for example, that one informer had evaded conscription and, when he was apprehended, denounced illegal Jewish practices used for conscription avoidance. Another was caught for swindling, tried to avoid imprisonment, and therefore promised in his letters to the tsar to reveal Jewish connections with Polish rebels and the Decembrists. Informers annoyed Russia’s highest clerks. In response, Russian state bureaucrats put their pleas on a high shelf. Thus, for example, Yakov Zandiman from Uman, under arrest in Zvenigorodka for drunkenness and illegal trade of brassieres, repeatedly sent his insinuations to St. Petersburg. He annoyed the authorities to such an extent that Count Benkendorf ordered Kiev officials to forbid Zandiman to bother the authorities with his baseless insinuations.²³

Who were these informers? Some of them felt themselves aggrieved by a neighbor—or a business partner—and sought

ways to bring down the wrath of the Russian government on those who had wronged them. Others were in conflict with local Jewish authorities and schemed to denounce the kahal elders to the police. Many informers were desperately trying to reach to the highest administration in order to escape prison, circumvent punishment, or avoid litigation. Some of the informers dreamt of becoming state-paid clerks—and solve in this way personal financial problems. But almost all of them, like the majority of converts, were the “destitute and desperate,” who turned to the Russian government seeking to be empowered.²⁴ They knew that the Russian administration had already empowered some Jews—censors, expert Jews advising the governors (the so-called *uchenye evrei*), Jewish translators, some lower municipal clerks. Having lost their money, they now cleaved to the only other value available in the empire: power. Many of them appealed to the government with one and the same request, perhaps most eloquently articulated by Haim Vorms from Ostrog, a Russified French subject and adventurer, who asked to be appointed a secret agent reporting directly to the Third Department.²⁵ They sought to become Jews in livery.

In the 1810s–1830s, the Third Department saw dozens of vociferous denunciations whose authors appealed along these lines: “Your Highness, order your most humble servant to appear in front of you in St. Petersburg and I will reveal to you personally the secrets that will help protect you and your family from the perfidy of my fellow Jews.” The informers asked to be given money, to be granted the privilege to travel outside the Pale of Jewish Settlement, and to be allowed to appear before the emperor in whose presence they would reveal a secret of high importance for state security. They did not plan to put their revelations on paper. Instead, they aggressively requested

a personal meeting with the tsar, who was otherwise threatened with inconceivable consequences. They also claimed—as Moshko Blank did—that their adversaries, the detractors of the throne, would find ways to prevent them from revealing what they considered the truth. They sought power—and money—as an indispensable addendum. Quite often the chief of Gendarmes Corps wrote on their self-promoting requests: “Not needed” (*net nadobnosti*).

Informers sometimes were quite well-known individuals, for example, some leading *mitnagdim*, the opponents of Hasidism, such as Rabbi Avigdor from Pinsk. Among many anti-Hasidic rabbis there was a certain Moisei Katsennelenbogen, who accused Jewish printers of publishing Kabbalistic and Hasidic books permeated with what he considered dreamy illegality (*mechtatel'noe protivozakonie*). Indeed, as in many other cases, this rabbi was more interested in acquiring power than simply in denigrating his coreligionists. He asked the authorities to appoint him as supervisor over rabbis in Kiev, Volhynia, Podol, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, and Kherson provinces in order, as he put it, to uproot evil.²⁶

Denunciations of the early nineteenth century, including Blank's, had a curious common feature. Instead of reporting the situation on the ground, the informers' denunciations matched the concerns of the government. In the 1810s–1820s, for example, the Russian government took pains to check Jewish smuggling across the Austrian border. During these years, informers denounced the corrupt state officials with whom Jewish contrabandists shared their spoils. In the 1820–1830s, the authorities tried to prevent draft evasion; in those years, informers denounced kahal officials as chief manipulators of the draft lists. After the Polish rebellion of 1830–1831, the informers reported on Jews who had allegedly supplied horses

and powder to the rebellious Polish gentry. In the late 1830s, when the government closed most Jewish printing presses, they pointed to illegal Jewish book printing and trade. In the wake of the ill-planned educational reform of the 1840s, they denounced Jewish aversion to Russian culture and lack of loyalty. The informers were belated sycophants: they knew well what the government planned to do regarding Jews. In their denunciations they emphasized that these plans would not work unless the government made them, the informers, its accomplices, advisors, or collaborators.

Although Moshko Blank did not aspire to a state-paid post, he belonged in this group. Continuous litigation against members of his community shaped his decision: to inform against his fellow Jews, then against the kahal, and finally against Russian Jews in general. By the 1840s he had grown from a common informer pursuing his own lowly interests into a renegade denouncing his entire community. That did not signify any change in Blank's egotistic goals. Blank was trying to make himself available to the authorities, to become known as an important source of intelligence on the Jewish community, and perhaps to be remunerated. In 1850 he and his daughter, long engaged in the money-lending business, declared bankruptcy.²⁷ At that time Moshko was not a beggar, yet he could expect—and even cherish the idea of receiving—some handsome compensation from the tsar for his far-fetched proposals, as had happened in some other cases. By that time ambition and disappointment, not just Jewish self-hatred, were his driving mechanisms. In the end, Moshko was rewarded: in 1846, the St. Petersburg Jewish committee considered his proposal, consulted the governors of several western provinces, and following the suggestion of the minister of the interior requested the Rabbinic Commission to compose a

standardized text of a prayer for the tsar and his family. The Rabbinic Commission issued a new prayer, recommended its inclusion in all prayer books, and obligated the rabbis and cantors to recite it on the Sabbath, Jewish holidays, birthdays, the days of coronation, and the days of angel of the emperor and empress.²⁸ Of course, making Jews obey the regulation was far beyond the Rabbinic Commission's and Moshko Blank's control, particularly in the times of Nicholas I.

Moshko could congratulate himself on a great accomplishment. He had his disappointments, of course. He did not become well-to-do, he survived his elder son, he had to leave Starokonstantinov, and he lost almost everything he had gained in dozens of litigations. Yet he saw his dream come true: his son Alexander became a medical doctor and married a woman of noble origin, then built a Christian family, fathering six children. In the late 1830s Alexander spent several months with him in Zhitomir, giving his crypto-Christian father a *shtik nakhes*, a great joy.

Moshko managed to cut himself off from those dreadful Jews. Like his sons, he also became a Christian, and considering his godparents one may surmise that he was in good standing with mid-rank state clerks and functionaries in Zhitomir. His proposals reached the receptive ear of the tsar. One may talk about Moshko's career—and even about his success, marked as it was by upward social mobility and significant spiritual growth. He moved from what he considered the horribly Jewish Starokonstantinov sixty miles east to what he saw as the imperial Zhitomir. He abandoned what he despised as filthy Judaism and embraced his highly cherished Christianity. And he excelled as a master of denunciations.

The prophecies of Madame Finkelshtein reached the ce-

lestial authorities in a truncated version and were accepted only partially. Moshko Blank died as a proud Christian, albeit for Jews he remained a lowly sycophantic shtetl dweller who had bowed down to the imperial authorities. Even as a Christian convert he remained for the rest of his life a self-hating Jew who articulated his hatred toward his brethren in Yiddish. While he should be credited with helping his two sons become Russian medical doctors, their professional and personal upbringing had nothing to do with his own Jewish self-hatred. Dmitrii and Alexander lived on a different planet. Now it is time to turn to the question of whether Moshko Blank's great-grandson inherited any character traits of his distant Jewish relative, whom he never knew.

III

Lenin, Jews, and Power

In June 1870, Lenin's parents, Mariia Blank and Il'ia Ulianov, arrived in the village of Kokushkino with their newborn baby boy. That summer, Alexander Blank's five daughters, sons-in-law, and multiple grandchildren came together at the family estate. Spending vacations in Kokushkino had long been the family tradition. This visit, however, was a special occasion for Mariia Blank and Il'ia Ulianov. They were coming to the Blanks' estate to introduce two-month-old Vladimir to his sixty-six-year-old grandfather, an experienced medical doctor and specialist in obstetrics and in naturopathic and balneal medicine. The baptized yet circumcised Alexander Blank examined his uncircumcised and baptized grandson and found him in perfect medical condition. What did Alexander Blank feel? What was he thinking during this medical checkup?

Dr. Blank was satisfied. He held in his hands yet another grandchild, a warm two-month-old human being, whom he felt with his cool and dexterous palms. He had too many daughters—five!—and his only son, psychologically unstable,

had taken his own life, but here he had a real baby boy, a grandson. He was proud indeed. Vladimir was born to a family of mid-rank Russian nobility: Il'ia Ulianov was an inspector of public schools with the rank of state chancellor and the state salary paid by the Ministry of Education. Alexander Blank probably also felt safe. Mariia Blank and Il'ia Ulianov belonged to the well-educated Russian cultural elite. Their family life seemed stable and predictable, and Vladimir had a secure future.

Blank probably rejoiced that his grandson would be spared all the evil he himself had seen, first as Yisroel, then as Alexander: the moral abuse from his conflicted father, Moshko, in Starokonstantinov; the quarrels between his father and mother in Zhitomir over the Christianization of their family; the scorn and envy of his Jewish brethren; and the repugnant suspicion, if not mistreatment, from some of his bosses in Smolensk, Kazan, and Perm provinces. Blank may have regretted that his own father, Moshko Blank, resting in peace as Dmitrii Blank, had not lived to see a Christian boy born to the Blanks far from the wretched Pale of Settlement. Dr. Blank knew that little Vladimir would have a very different destiny. He would not have problems with Latin. He would go to a good Gymnasium. He would become a doctor or a lawyer. He would live in St. Petersburg and would see the glory of the world!

This was the first and last contact between the Blanks from Starokonstantinov and Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) from Simbirsk. Doctor Blank died a few weeks later. He was remembered in family legend as a strict and witty man, a helpful family doctor, and a democratic-minded individual who attended to the peasants for free, a person whose liberal convictions, if not his origins, caused conflict with the administration.

Lenin and his sisters knew that their mother, Mariia

Blank, came from the family of Dr. Blank. Perhaps they also knew that Mariia Blank's mother was Dr. Blank's first wife, Anna Grosschop, who belonged to a profoundly Russified German-Swedish family. Ekaterina Essen—Aunt Katya, as the family called her—her mother's sister and, after her mother's death, the civil wife of Mariia's father, brought her up. Taking into consideration the German and Swedish roots of Anna Grosschop and Ekaterina Essen, the assumed German provenance of the Blank family sounded logical. The Ulianovs—Lenin and his siblings—did not doubt it.

To speak of someone's ethnic origin in the Ulianovs' milieu was the height of bad taste. Deeply rooted in the values of the enlightenment, the family abhorred any ethnic labeling. For the Blanks and the Ulianovs, identifying somebody as a Jew was tantamount to conjuring antisemitic stereotypes. Both families were Russian Christians, dwelt in Russian towns on the Volga River, and spoke Russian. They belonged to the self-made, mid-rank Russian nobility of the first or second generation: people with strong family dignity but without any inherited capital. The village of Kokushkino was pawned again and again: it was a liability rather than an asset. The family had colorful origins—from Kalmyk to Swedish to Jewish to German—but the Ulianovs were aware only of their Russian and German roots and felt entirely assimilated in Russian culture. They had never been to the Pale of Settlement and had no contact with Jews. When Lenin visited Poland as a thirty-year-old socialist he saw traditional Jews for the first time in his life. In a warm letter to his mother, he compared them to Russians: this was the only frame of reference he had.¹

Even if Mariia Blank knew that her father, Alexander, Lenin's grandfather, was a Jew Christianized into Russian Orthodoxy, she would have felt uncomfortable discussing the

matter with her children. Most likely she never mentioned it. Her sons and daughters were introduced to many relatives on their father's side but knew nothing about their grandfather Alexander's family. As we shall see in Chapter 4, Lenin's sister Anna discovered Alexander's Jewish roots only after Lenin's death, in 1924. The discovery amazed her, and she regretted that her brother had never been aware of it. Lenin did not like answering questions about his ethnic origins in party questionnaires. When he had to, he either skipped them or simply wrote "Russian." He did so because he found any discussion of ethnicity awkward, not because he was reluctant either to lie or tell the truth about his origins. Therefore there are serious reasons to doubt that there is anything to the statement made by a historian of Russia that Lenin "took pride in the Jewish ingredients in his ancestry."²

Scholars of Russian history have argued endlessly about whether Lenin knew of his Jewish roots, but to me it seems irrelevant whether Lenin knew or did not know about the Jewish origin of his maternal grandfather. The key question is what Lenin's attitude was toward Russian Jews, how he treated his colleagues of Jewish origin, and what being Jewish meant to him. While the question of whether Lenin knew about the Blanks' origin remains entirely in the realm of historical speculation, the question of Lenin's treatment of Jews and, broadly defined, the Jewish question, is a more accurate way of situating Lenin vis-à-vis his own ancestry.

A Theatrical Encounter

Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) grew up in Simbirsk, a town on the Volga, located some one thousand miles east of Starokonstantinov, Zhitomir, and the Pale of Jewish Settlement. The popu-

lation of Simbirsk was 83 percent Russian Orthodox, 3 percent Catholic, and 8 percent Muslim. An almost invisible local Jewish community consisted mostly of former Jewish cantonists and soldiers who had served in the Russian army under Nicholas I and whom the military had allowed to settle in the place of their service.³ They were petty traders and artisans, and in the 1860s–1870s, in the wake of the Great Reforms of Alexander II, a number of Jewish guild merchants joined them. The local Jews were profoundly acculturated into Russian society: they spoke Russian, not Yiddish, and wore Russian clothes, not traditional Jewish dress. By the end of the century there were three or four Jewish prayer houses in town, yet even after a major relocation of the Jews from the Pale into the interior of Russia during the pogroms of World War I, the Jewish population of Simbirsk did not exceed 1 percent.

The Ulianovs belonged to a different social and cultural realm. Il'ia Ulianov, a teacher of physics and mathematics, took a new position in Simbirsk as a public education inspector. He helped establish new schools and libraries, encouraged female teachers to take jobs, introduced quality control of the curriculum, and promoted education for ethnic minorities such as the Mordva, Chuvash, and Tartars. During his tenure, he fostered the establishment of about 350 new public schools in the district, enrolling twenty thousand students. For his faultless and diligent service, which undermined his feeble health, he was awarded the St. Stanislaw, St. Anna, and St. Vladimir orders.⁴

The Ulianovs exemplified one of many unassuming families of the enlightened Russian petty nobility. They believed in the redemptive role of education and relied on their only income—a state salary. In Simbirsk, the Ulianovs lived in a wooden one-and-a-half-story house with an attic: there were

seven windows on the front façade, five rooms on the ground floor, four rooms upstairs, and a small backyard with a hand pump and a well. Mariia Blank brought up the children as modest and disciplined workaholics. The children focused on schooling, self-perfection, and helping each other. Chess, music, and reading were their main hobbies. The Ulianovs were Russian Orthodox, as were their friends and acquaintances—mostly teachers, but also some lawyers, clerks, and doctors, and they sometimes relied on a Russian Orthodox priest to tutor their children for Gymnasium.⁵ Much later, Lenin, already a stalwart Marxist, grudgingly recalled that he grew up a devout Russian Orthodox young man. Lenin split from Christianity when he turned sixteen—the year after his father died and a year before his brother Alexander was executed.

When and how did Lenin encounter Jews? In his timid, heavily self-censored memoir, Lenin's younger brother Dmitrii related an episode that unexpectedly sheds light on this tantalizing question. When they were in their late teens, Dmitrii and Vladimir went to see Jacques Fromental Halévy's opera *La Juive* (The Jewess). This is the story of the love and suffering of Rachel, foster daughter of Eleazar, a Jewish silversmith, and Leopold, a Swiss prince. Premiered at the Paris Opera in 1835, *The Jewess* brought spectators back to the early fifteenth century, demonstrating the cruelty and brutality of the Catholic Church toward the Jews and bemoaning their plight in late medieval Europe. The opera deftly exploited popular clichés, making Rachel into the lost daughter of the cardinal, who had to wield the weapon of state religion against his own child. The opera features many scenes of events that Vladimir and Dmitrii had never seen in their lives, including a Passover seder. Most likely this was Vladimir Ulianov's first encounter with Jewish history, Jewish religion, and Jewish images. He might

well have been deeply impressed by the final scene of the opera, in which the steadfast Rachel and her father reject redemptive escape to Christianity and meet their death by being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil.

Dmitrii recalled that his brother had been overwhelmed. When they came home, Vladimir could not fall asleep; he paced around his room singing arias from *The Jewess* such as “Rachel, you are given to me. . . .” Yet most of all Vladimir loved Eleazar’s aria, in which the silversmith epitomizes his ethics: “I hate Christians, I choose to scorn them, but when I can enrich myself—why not extract from them some money!” This aria particularly inspired Vladimir, and he repeated it over and over again.⁶ Thirteen years later, in September 1901, Lenin spent some time in Munich and wrote to his mother that he was at the opera where “with great enjoyment” he watched *The Jewess*. He mentioned in passing that he had heard it in 1887 or 1888, yet “he could still remember some of the musical themes.”⁷

Lenin identified with the Jews onstage, as an agitated spectator in a provincial Russian town identified with the performers of the French grand opera, who revitalized for him the fifteenth-century despair, passion, honor, and suffering of a persecuted minority. For Lenin, Jews were the characters on stage—sometimes melodramatic, sometimes heroic, and always artistic. He sympathized with them as with the suffering of the Other. He wrote about *The Jewess* no differently than he would have about a successful performance of *Carmen* or *Rigoletto*.

Had he known anything about the Jewish roots of the Blanks he would have been much more sensitive. He wrote about *The Jewess* in his letter to Mariia Blank, whom he loved dearly, called an “angel,” and always tried to accommodate and

protect, especially after his elder brother Alexander was hanged for attempting to kill the tsar. It is thus very unlikely that he knew anything about the sensitive issue of his mother's origin. It is also not surprising that he went to see Halévy's masterpiece twice: *The Jewess* was a very popular and widely staged grand opera production highly praised by Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz, and Gustav Mahler. Lenin did not mention the plot, as if his mother knew it, but did mention the music. It is fascinating that he was less impressed by Halévy's medieval Swiss *couleur locale*, luxurious costumes, and visualized Judaism and Jewish images than by the pragmatic, borderline cynical stance of the silversmith Eleazar. The character easily discarded his grotesque hatred of zealous Christians—very much reciprocated in fifteenth century Central Europe—once his financial interest was at stake. Eleazar did not hesitate to sacrifice ideology for a profit.

Lenin's reaction to Halévy's opera can be juxtaposed with his impressions of reading Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *Chto delat?* (What Is to Be Done?), arguably the literary work that was most important in the shaping of Lenin's worldview. Written by an admirer of French utopian socialism, this novel taught the basics of pragmatic socialist rhetoric. On a superficial level, it is the story of a love triangle, of the liberation of a young woman from petit bourgeois family oppression, and of the manufacturing business. Yet the novel contains hidden references—for example, the dialogues of Vera Pavlovna and Lopukhov, who knew that their conversation was being monitored—suggesting that one should read the novel above all allegorically. And as an allegory the novel is about the emancipation of class and gender, the revolutionary changes in society, the rise of the new socialist-minded intelligentsia, and ultimate social liberation. Built on doublespeak

stylistically and structurally, the novel taught Lenin how to say “bride” and imply “revolution” and how to manipulate the language and interests of one’s adversaries for one’s own immediate benefit.⁸ Nabokov shrewdly satirized this novel, this “little dead book” built on “ghostly ethics” and propagating utilitarianism as a driving force of human conduct. It is difficult to find out whether Lenin saw in Halévy’s *Eleazar* a Chernyshevsky-esque image or in Chernyshevsky’s protagonists the pragmatic character from Halévy’s opera. Yet Lenin’s attitude toward Jews and toward his revolutionary colleagues of Jewish descent indicates that he mastered the art of manipulating ethnic and national minority issues toward his own goal. This is particularly evident in his first encounters with individual Jews.

Marx Versus Marks

When Lenin met Yulii Tserderbaum (known among Russian Marxists as Yulii Martov), Jews came down from the theatrical stage, donned their worn revolutionary jackets, and became a reality. Lenin perceived this reality through his Marxist lens. From the Siberian village of Shushenskoe, where he spent three years in exile for his political activity, Lenin wrote to his mother about his trip to nearby Minusinsk. In 1897, there were several revolutionaries, his friends and acquaintances, who had been exiled to that distant Siberian region for their political activities. Lenin described the situation of each of his colleagues. Sometimes he mentioned party affiliation (“a People’s Will member”), rarely nationality (“a Pole”), and almost always class identification (“worker”). In one of these letters to his mother, Yulii Martov was only Yulii, although Lenin was well aware of the strong Jewish roots of his then best friend.

Perhaps referring to him as a Jew would have been vulgar for Lenin and for his mother. Not only Lenin's Marxist stance but also the Ulianovs' democratic convictions made the word "Jew" unacceptable.

Martov was born to a mid-rank bourgeois family: his father worked in the Russian Steamship and Trade Company in Constantinople and later moved to Odessa and then to St. Petersburg. Yulii's mother came from a Sephardic Jewish family, yet the Tsederbaums were profoundly acculturated into the secular and mid-rank European and Russian bourgeoisie. Yulii owed his superficial familiarity with Judaism to the stories of his grandfather, Alexander Tsederbaum, a founder of the Russian Jewish Hebrew press and one of the leading champions of the Russian Jewish enlightenment. The influence of his illustrious grandfather notwithstanding, Yulii was never exposed to Jewish rites and customs. His acquaintance with the Hebrew language was cursory; his sister recalled that they could never read *Ha-Melits*, their grandfather's newspaper. On the contrary, Russian literature and culture meant the world to him. Physically disabled—he had a bad limp from early childhood—Yulii grew up a keen reader and devoured entire tomes of such Russian democratic writers as Alexander Hertsen, Nikolai Ostrovsky, and Vladimir Korolenko. If Yulii later sympathized with the situation of the Jew in the Russian Empire and inspired the establishment of Marxist units of Yiddish-speaking proletarians, he did that as a liberal internationalist, a representative of Russian democratic intelligentsia, and a sympathetic Russian outsider.⁹

At the early stages of his political career, Lenin adored Martov, wrote warmly of Yulii's work, called him a "non-despairing lad," and often expressed concern about Yulii's unhealthy environment and his psychological state.¹⁰ Lenin was

reported to have sung a revolutionary song that Martov wrote. Built on revolutionary romantic metaphors, it helped Lenin endure the hardships and solitude of the Siberian exile. The first question he asked his relatives once he returned from exile was about Yulii—his health, his news, his return.¹¹

Martov was for Lenin a Russian social-democrat, a Marxist. Lenin most certainly knew that in the mid-1890s Martov had not only suggested creating a special Jewish proletarian organization before such an organization was officially established, but also that he had insisted on the integration of Jewish organized workers within other internationalist proletarian groups.¹² Yet Lenin saw Martov above all as his most promising colleague for the future all-Russian social-democratic newspaper.¹³ Trotsky portrayed Martov in the first years of the twentieth century as Lenin's closest friend, although he was, according to Lenin, "too soft."¹⁴ This softness was Martov's commitment to democratic standards and humanism in politics. For example, when Lenin disagreed with his opponents, he labeled them criminals, whereas Martov insisted on a thorough critique of their viewpoint.¹⁵ The difference between "hard" Lenin and "soft" Martov eventually led to the disruption of their friendship.

The first major rift between the two dates to the 1903 Second RSDRP Congress, when Martov and Lenin radically diverged on the issue of party membership. Their famous disagreement resulted in the split of Russian social democracy into the Mensheviks (who supported Martov) and the Bolsheviks (who followed Lenin). Martov put forward a definition presupposing an open party organization with affiliated membership, whereas Lenin insisted on a membership restricted to actively involved individuals. Martov sought to establish a democratic party with a wide range of participation. Lenin

planned to create a party of elitist professional revolutionaries. The Jewish social democrats supported Martov and secured for him the majority (thus the Bolsheviks, literally “the majority,” remained for some time a party minority). Despite the Mensheviks abandoning their position and accepting the Bolshevik membership rules at the fourth party congress in 1906, one biographer of Martov noted that the centralized party to which Lenin aspired “became a blueprint for the super-centralized Soviet state also created by Lenin.”¹⁶

After the second party congress, friendly relations between Lenin and Martov came to a halt. Trotsky recalled that when Lenin and Martov had to speak to one another, Lenin looked aside and Martov’s eyes became frozen. At the congress, summarized Trotsky, Lenin “lost Martov—forever.”¹⁷ From then on Lenin used each and every opportunity to defame Martov. When Martov joined the liquidators, Lenin labeled him a well-known slanderer. In a private letter to his sister Anna, Lenin dubbed Martov a scoundrel and a black-mailer who should be thrown out of the workers’ movement and whose ilk Lenin hoped to smash. But even after their schism Lenin corresponded with Martov, inviting him to work for the socialist press—and even offering him membership on the editorial committee of the party’s main publishing organ, despite Martov’s attachment to various non-Bolshevik trends in the social democratic movement.¹⁸

Thus Lenin treated Martov on the basis of the latter’s attitude toward what Lenin considered at that very moment an immediate revolutionary task. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Lenin knew only too well that Martov was the most effective journalist among the Russian Marxists—hence it would be beneficial for the party and the socialist revolution to co-opt him. Since Martov could be profitable for the party,

Lenin's attacks against Martov could be halted. Lenin assessed his colleagues, Jews among them, from this standpoint alone: their readiness to sacrifice any group, ethnic, class, or national interests for the sake of the issues to which Lenin assigned much greater significance.

The problem was that Martov was too "soft" for Lenin, not that he was or was not Jewish. Martov was not ready to sacrifice his democratic principles for belligerent Bolshevism. His alternative vision of party membership had far-reaching consequences. A democratic-minded humanist, Martov after 1917 condemned the October militaristic coup of the Bolsheviks, called for the unification of all truly international-minded and peace-loving democratic constituencies of the Second Congress of Soviets, and mobilized European intellectuals to protest the brutality of the Bolshevik regime.¹⁹ When this happened, Lenin cursed him as a renegade of the socialist party, not as a Jew.

Off the List of Nations!

While Lenin knew first-hand a number of deeply Russified revolutionaries of Jewish origin such as Martov, his familiarity with Jews as a people of 5 million secluded in the Pale of Settlement was second-hand. Lenin's knowledge of the Jews was superficial, shaky, and biased. He drew his information from the Russian press and his conceptualization from German socialist publications. It is likely that Lenin also knew of Marx's early essays on the Jewish question. In them, Marx calls bourgeois all those socioeconomic conditions, which radically limited Jewish professional pursuits and triggered the rise of the stereotypes about Judaism—a bourgeois system in which "money" served the "worldly God of the Jews." In a witty rhetorical twist, Marx used this stereotypical Judaism as a foil

for the German capitalism and called for the elimination of the socioeconomic conditions generating them. Just as the emancipation of the proletarians depended on the liquidation of capitalism, the “*emancipation of the Jews*” required the “emancipation of mankind from *Judaism*.”²⁰

Lenin’s own studies of the political situation in the multi-ethnic Russian Empire brought him to a more accurate understanding of the situation of the Jews, whom he called “the most oppressed nation” in East Europe. Lenin underscored that the Russian regime had turned Jews into the objects of a blatant hunt, particularly on the eve of World War I. Lenin considered the Jewish predicament in Russia to be worse than the predicament of Negroes in America. He observed in passing that only in tsarist Russia could there occur a medieval blood libel—the accusation of Jews using Christian boys’ blood to bake their matzos—such as the notorious Beilis case (1911–13).²¹

To better situate the Russian Jews, Lenin designated two types within the world Jewish population. One group, which he defined as the larger half of the 10 million people, dwelled in the semi-barbarian countries of the Habsburgs or the Romanovs. These two countries, Austria and Russia, treated Jews violently and segregated them into a caste, a class of petty merchants. Another part of the Jewish population dwelled in the civilized world, in Western Europe and North America, where Jews had been emancipated and successfully assimilated into the mainstream culture. West European and North American Jews manifested what Lenin saw as their genuine ethnic features: strong internationalist leanings and a proclivity for modern progressive movements.

Thus in the early 1900s, Lenin understood Jews in Russia as an oppressed, self-contained ethnic minority with a clear-cut economic profile, and Jews in Europe as assimilated leftist-

minded internationalists. Lenin maintained that on their way toward emancipation Jews should reject their East European identity and strive toward the West European one. After all, East European Jews were for Lenin an inconvenient class entity: petit bourgeois. In order to lose their oppressed social and economic status, Jews should leave their ethnic ghetto and join the socialist revolution. And social democracy would successfully solve the Jewish question through assimilation. Jews should seek assimilation into a denationalized and proletarian international culture, not the Russian imperial one. Like the proponents of Jewish emancipation, Lenin perceived assimilation as a highly positive experience. It informed the life of Jews in the civilized world and was one of the most powerful mechanisms for transforming capitalism into socialism. The more Jews assimilated themselves, the better it was for the world proletarian revolution.²²

Those Jewish Marxists who did not kowtow to the separatism of the Jewish social democracy continued what Lenin considered one of the best traditions of the Jewish people. Marxists and revolutionaries with an internationalist agenda were genuine Jews; those who merely defended the rights of the Jewish workers in the Pale were false ones. Lenin went as far as to ask whether the Jewish proletariat needed an “independent political party.”²³ Certainly, from Lenin’s point of view, it did not. Therefore Vladimir Medem was a bad Jew; yes, he was Christianized into Russian Orthodoxy and was a Russian-speaking Marxist—but he still headed a separate Jewish national democratic party. On the other hand, Leon Trotsky, at least sometimes, was a good Jew as a Marxist, assimilationist, and member of the Russian social democracy. The less one was Jewish, the better Jew one became.

Assimilation for Lenin was the mission of the Jews. He

did not invent it. He took it verbatim from the West European champions of complete Jewish dissolution in European cultures. When Lenin wrote that no great European Jews protested against assimilation, he upheld the denationalized socialists—Austrians such as Otto Bauer and Germans such as Karl Kautsky. In his draft notes for his article on the national question, Lenin wrote: “National curia in schooling. Harmful. Jews, predominantly merchants. In Russia Jews are separated as a caste. Way out? 1) this or that way to strengthen it; 2) rapprochement with the democratic and socialist movement of the Diaspora countries.” And then, as if to emphasize the main idea of his future essay on the national question, Lenin made his key point using a quotation that his commentators (and the author of this book) were unable to identify: “Beat the Jews out of the list of nations.”²⁴

This is what Lenin suggested doing to the Jews: assimilate them to the point where nothing would remain of their status as a nation. And then they would become leftist supporters of social democracy. Helping them to get rid of their petit bourgeois self-understanding as a nation and integrating them with socialism would accomplish the task. While Marx emphasized the obstacles preventing Jewish emancipation such as contemporary Jewish socioeconomic pursuits generating what Marx called “practical Judaism,” Lenin identified only one significant hindrance on the Jewish path toward emancipation: a cumbersome group of Jewish Marxists, the Bundists.

Red Jews and Bad Jews

The Bund, the shortened Yiddish name for the General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, was a leading Jewish revolutionary group in turn-of-the-century Russia.

Created officially in 1897, it brought together various cells of Jewish Marxist workers responsible for preparing and conducting dozens of successful strikes in the western borderlands of the empire—and even for establishing one of the first short-lived Soviets. The Bund had an effective yet pluralistic leadership, a wide network of agitators, a rapidly growing Yiddish-language press, an impressive fundraising apparatus, and the charisma of a combatant organization of Jewish proletarians. The Bund relied on the increasingly segregated, profoundly impoverished, radically urbanized, and rapidly growing class of Jewish workers—perhaps the most rapidly growing proletarian group among the East European ethnicities.

The Bund was sharply critiqued by Lenin, as were other Marxist groups representing national minority proletarians. Lenin deeply disliked their ethnocentric trend, which he found nationalistic. No socialist group sporting an ethnic agenda, be it all-Russian, Lithuanian, Jewish, Polish, Georgian, or Ukrainian, escaped his rage.²⁵ Lenin wrote consistently, without fear of being repetitive, against such groups. Whereas Lenin sought to integrate all Marxist groups into the Russian social democratic movement, he protested some programmatic tasks of the national minority Marxists. Above all, Lenin deleted their ethnocentric paragraphs: demands for a national language, national schooling, and, most importantly, national-cultural autonomy for oppressed imperial ethnicities.²⁶ Various worker groups, Jewish, Ukrainian, Polish, and Georgian among them, insisted on the inclusion of these issues in the social democratic party program. For Lenin, however, the mere existence in Marxist parlance of notions such as a national culture or language was blasphemy against proletarian internationalism. For Lenin, these notions were a means to which the nationalistic bourgeoisie resorted in order to divide the workers' move-

ment. There was no such thing as national culture, which in fact was the culture of landlords, the bourgeoisie, and the clergy. For Lenin, true culture was always internationalist, class-based, and proletarian. Ethnic conceptualization was out of the question.

Before the 1905 Russian revolution and thereafter, the case of the Bund, with its understanding of Jewish national culture, turned out to be more acute than that of the Georgian or Polish social democrats. After all, no one doubted that the Georgians or the Poles constituted a nation. The Bund also took for granted that the Jews constituted a nation. Lenin agreed with Georgian and Polish Marxists but disagreed with the Bund. Although in his polemical exchanges with the Bund Lenin sometimes agreed to call the Jews a nation, elsewhere he argued against applying this notion to Jews. Lenin followed Karl Kautsky, who maintained that Jews did not have a permanent territory and therefore were not a nation. Lenin also followed Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whom on other occasions he had sharply criticized for his clericalism. Perhaps he did not agree with Hegel's (in fact, Pauline) vision that Jews were not a living historical identity, yet he agreed with him that Jews did not have a future as a nation.²⁷ For Lenin—and as will appear in Chapter 4, also for Stalin—Jews had no common language, no common territory, and thus were not a nation and not even a people. If he did call the Jews a nation, Lenin put the word “nation” in quotation marks.²⁸

For Lenin, Jews had no chance of ever becoming a nation. He categorically rejected Johann Gottfried Herder's romantic concept of ethnic teleology. Herder preached that people bereft of their own territory tended to acquire one. Any *Volk* aspired to have a *Staat*. Nachman Krochmal, one of the earliest Jewish proto-Zionists, used Herder to demonstrate

that Jews—in a teleological perspective—would become a unified nation and would reclaim their land.²⁹ The proto-Zionist Moses Hess also used Herder's ideas but with a socialist twist.³⁰ A concoction of romantic nationalism and liberal individualism shaped the ideas of Simon Dubnow, the father of East European Jewish historiography, and generated the concept of national-cultural autonomy for the Jews, which the Bund adopted as one of its key political goals.³¹

For Lenin, this was an abomination. In his rebuff of the Bund he mockingly suggested that Jewish social democrats invent a concept of a separate nationality such as the Russian Jews, with Yiddish as its language and the Pale of Settlement as its territory. Since for Lenin there was no such entity as the Russian Jews with a national language and separate territory, Lenin advised against engaging in parish-centered socialist work he sarcastically dubbed "Poshekhonsk social-democracy," paraphrasing Saltykov-Shchedrin's use of the name of a provincial, old-fashioned, and distant Russian town.³² For him, the whole issue of Jews as a nation was a laughable, parochial concept, a reactionary falsehood contradicting the interests of Jewish proletarians. Therefore a true Marxist should deny it.³³

From the first years of organized work of the Russian social democracy, the Bund emerged on Lenin's political agenda as one of his two major opponents, no less important than the Mensheviks. From Lenin's point of view those Jews who fought for their national minority rights, for the acknowledgment of Yiddish as the national Jewish language, and for their national-cultural autonomy brought Jews back into the ghetto. Those who, like the Bundists, defended the idea of a Jewish national culture deserved nothing but scorn. The workers' party, declared Lenin, should smash the "foolishness of cultural-national autonomy."³⁴

The Bund, despite its militant Marxist character, represented for Lenin the bad Jews. In a letter to the party's Central Committee, Lenin found Bundists "stupid," "self-praising," "fools," "idiots," and "prostitutes."³⁵ Lenin complained that he had no patience for the Bund, yet in his public appearances he was much more restrained. The Bund's ethnocentric zeal, Lenin argued, separated nations in their fight against capitalist oppression. Insisting on its own exclusivity, the Bund, Lenin maintained, represented a logical contradiction: an ethnic part claimed that it was more than the international and class whole.³⁶ Lenin treated the Lithuanian Marxist groups and the PPS—Polish socialists, whom he accused of many capital sins against proletarian internationalism—along the same lines. He used a Russian proverb to describe their position, which he saw as the guiding principle of all those socialists who did not care a bit about the tasks of the world proletarians: "My hut is at the end of the village," meaning—"We take care of our needs and do not care about you."³⁷

Yet with their claims of representing all Jewish workers, Jewish social democrats were worse than the Poles, Georgians, Latvians, and Lithuanians.³⁸ Lenin found the activities of those Marxist groups to be the most harmful form of nationalism, a bourgeois idea smuggled into the workers' milieu.³⁹ Lenin agreed that social democrats should fight against national oppression, but not that they should fight for national development.⁴⁰ The party task, he claimed, was to foster the independence of the proletarians of different nationalities, not of nations.⁴¹ Therefore, the only option for the Bundists was to repent and join the RSDRP. If the Jewish question could be solved through assimilation, then the Bundist problem could be solved through their dissolution in Russian social democracy. In May 1903, Lenin wrote in a letter to E. M. Alexandrova:

“We need to be politically correct and loyal with the Bund (and not hit them directly in the mouth), but at the same time we should be austere and buttoned up while dealing with them and we should suppress them mercilessly and incessantly.”⁴² Both attitudes were part of Lenin’s agenda: the Bund had to be tolerated and even incorporated for the same reason that it had to be marginalized and kept down.

For the Oneness of the Party

Lenin’s continuous struggle against the Bund correlated with the assimilating or dissimilating Jews only indirectly. He discussed national minority agendas in the party program only as a pretext for a very different and apparently disconnected issue: unification and centralization, and centralization through unification—principles he considered a cornerstone of the party management. He argued that the party committee must be one entity, vertically oriented—responsible from the bottom up and managed from the top down. In order to become *the* leading workers’ party the RSDRP should reject any old-fashioned forms of autonomously functioning cells. There should be rigid and unequivocal submission to the party center, as in an army at war. Lenin categorically refused to consider the option of groups or individuals loosely affiliated with the Russian social democratic party. He opposed Yulii Martov’s concept of party membership because it entailed a much less controlled relationship between the party member and its center. For the same reason he rejected the Bundist version of the party based on the federalist—horizontally oriented—principle.

Lenin did not care about Martov as Yulii Tsederbaum; he cared even less about Poles, Jews, or Latvians. What he did care

about was the control of the Russian social democratic party over all Marxist groups in the Russian Empire. He failed to accurately contextualize the Jewish proletarians in Poland and Russia because he saw them through the prism of party centralism, not because he was too much focused on assimilated West European Jews and missed the “real Jew” of East Europe.⁴³ Lenin sought to place the Bolsheviks firmly at the center of the party’s management. Therefore, he was arguing not so much against Jewish social democracy as against the Bundist principle of a federalist-based party structure, which diminished party control. The fact that nothing more than power was at stake became clear in Lenin’s earliest clashes with the Jewish Marxists. For example, Lenin argued in 1901 that the Bund could not act as an independent power in negotiations. He grudgingly allowed the Bund autonomy on questions related to Jewish proletarians. On another occasion, Lenin wrote to P. A. Krasikov: “Be strict with the Bund; reduce it to a minimum so that it cannot acquire importance.”⁴⁴

If Lenin saw the Bund as a vicious organization bordering, as he claimed, on Zionism, clericalism, and capitalism, then what were his reasons for wooing it? Again, it was not about winning over the Jews, but about winning power. After the split of the RSDRP and the Bund in 1903, Lenin needed the Jewish Marxists back as the best-organized social democratic group in Russia, with excellent fundraising, outreach, and propaganda. He critiqued the Bund in order to bring an important segment of the workers’ social democratic movement under the aegis of the RSDRP. Therefore he addressed his staunch adversaries in the Bund with an invitation: “Join us! Let us go together!” He very much regretted the 1903 split and insisted on the inclusion into the protocol that the party congress work toward restoring unity between the Jewish and

non-Jewish workers' movements.⁴⁵ Lenin was ready to sacrifice his own disdain of the Bund for the sake of long-term benefit to the party.

It is in this context that one should place Lenin's harsh critique of Jewish Marxists, who argued for a horizontally and pluralistically organized party. Anyone who set up roadblocks on Lenin's path toward a centralized party was removed by Lenin from the political arena—Jewish Marxists, socialist Poles, Russian Mensheviks, or Socialist Revolutionaries. One had no choice but to accept Lenin's vision, submit to Bolshevik leadership, assimilate into Russian social democracy, and bow down to a new monotheistic deity called the Party.

Side Effects of Centralism

After 1905 and especially on the eve of World War I, Lenin became increasingly aware of the rising nationalistic trends in the empire's borderlands. He realized that centrifugal tendencies could bring down the Russian Empire and fragment it into separate entities. Lenin welcomed anything that would trigger the collapse of the tsarist regime. He fiercely criticized tsarist policy toward ethnic and national minorities. He saw Russification as an imperial measure to suppress and control proletarians of various ethnicities.⁴⁶ Yet his attitude toward tsarist ethnic policies was Marxist only on the surface.

As long as his critique of Russia's imperialist policies went against the autocracy, it was valid. Furthermore, it was valid only until the demise of the autocracy. Once the regime turned into a thing of the past and the victorious proletarian state emerged in its stead, it would be time to revisit the question of Russification and the Russian language. At that moment, however, the language issue should be reconsidered

from a moderate, well-measured, and class-based perspective. Lenin maintained that in the triumphant proletarian state, nations should not be pushed to accept the Russian language and culture. Rather, sooner or later workers from different nationalities and ethnic groups would realize without any external pressure the advantages of living in a big state. They would understand that they needed a language to communicate. And this language would be that of international social democracy. Proletarians in Georgia or in Ukraine would find out that having one language in a multi-ethnic state was convenient for trade and cultural exchange. The requirements of economic development would eventually lead to a unified language and culture.

Lenin was confident that this language would be Russian. He loved the Russian language and maintained that every dweller in the future proletarian Russia would have the opportunity to study it. Russian as the working-class language could become the language of the state. The only measure Lenin hesitated to endorse was that of enforced assimilation of ethnic minority proletarians into Russian proletarian language and culture. The party should not use a club to drive people into the paradise of Russification. Yes, Lenin argued, Russian Marxists were against one obligatory state language. However, in a centralized proletarian state the Russian language would become the language of the state and would be accepted by all its constituencies. Russian minorities would recognize their ridiculous overemphasis on their respective national cultures and would push themselves into the realm of the great Russian language. People would choose Russian as the language of power, not as a language that was better than Georgian or Lithuanian. There was no reason for the Russian Marxists to argue for the predominance of Russian language and culture.

They should instead insist on party centralism. The rest would be a matter of time.

Lenin reckoned that once the centralized role of the Russian-speaking Bolsheviks was secured, the Russian language would be accepted irreversibly as the language of the state. United around Russian Bolsheviks, the multi-ethnic and multicultural workers' movement would become Russian-centered. And the world workers' movement would become Russian-centered too. This connection between centralization and Russification was exceptionally strong among Lenin's colleagues. It is no wonder that Stalin was naïvely convinced that when communism achieved its ultimate victory, Russian would become the main language of international communication.⁴⁷

This vision was hardly Marxist. Instead, it was a new yet recognizable version of Russian chauvinism dressed in a red proletarian shirt. What had happened? How could Lenin, who so venomously poked fun at Russian chauvinism, ignore the consequences of his program? Was Lenin incapable of seeing the paradoxical similarity of his (and the party's) aspirations and Russia's imperialist traditions? Lenin angrily dismissed any references to the time-worn mechanisms of Russian power or Russian traditions of statehood: this was all clericalism, *popovshchina*, to use his favorite derogatory expression. The dogmatic nature of Lenin's Marxism did not allow him to think through certain historical processes and trace analogies. Finding out that they simply could not be applied to the social reality, Lenin chose to sacrifice his Marxist principles after 1917, and then the social forces he could not fully understand overrode his Marxism in the 1920s. As soon as they transcended the specific historical context that brought them to

life, Lenin's humanistic and universalistic Marxist principles turned blatantly imperial and chauvinistic.⁴⁸

For Lenin, acknowledging the right of nations to self-determination did not exclude proselytizing against their self-determination. He even claimed that the party should spare no effort to prove that the implementation of this right in a proletarian state was a gross mistake. This was not a random thought, but one that he repeated over and over.⁴⁹ Social democrats had to assess the utility of the separation of this or that nation according to the universal goals of the proletarian struggle for socialism. A big state under proletarian dictatorship was easier to build and defend, better for the development of productive forces, and ultimately more beneficial for world proletarians.⁵⁰ Thus Lenin encouraged the party in power to monitor the self-determination efforts of national minority groups and reject them.⁵¹ In so doing, Lenin sought to replace imposed Russian imperial nationalism with an imposed Russian-centered internationalism. While one can debate to what extent the operating policy of the USSR toward its republics after Lenin's death stemmed from Lenin's vision of the Bolsheviks' national policy, it is quite evident that Lenin was not deaf to national minority or nationality issues altogether.

Pragmatic Sensitivity

Lenin was sensitive to national issues when resolving them turned out to be absolutely essential for establishing, advancing, and maintaining Bolshevik control over the revolutionary movement in Russia. To that end Lenin was ready to compromise his previous diatribes against ethnic-based Marxist political parties. When the promotion of the revolution and the ex-

pansion of Bolshevism to new territories were at stake, Lenin preached flexibility, courteousness, and caution. He asked Antonov-Ovseenko, his envoy in Ukraine, to be especially sensitive to Ukrainian national questions. "Offer Ukrainian socialists all possible sovereignty," he instructed. What reason was there to be sensitive to the question of Ukrainian independence, an idea Lenin abhorred? The answer is obvious. In 1918, Lenin needed peace with the Kharkiv-based Ukrainian social democratic workers' party Central Committee—a peace that would bring Ukraine under the aegis of the Russian-speaking Bolsheviks and eventually into the USSR. Furthermore, Lenin badly needed the assistance of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks in a new campaign against the Central Rada troops, centered in Kyiv.

To make sure that Ukraine remained within the Bolshevik geopolitical realm, Lenin was also ready to sacrifice his disdain toward the concept of national language.⁵² Pragmatic reasons required putting the purity of ideology aside. The issue was not about Lenin's sensitivity or sympathy toward the self-determination of the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian language, or the independence of Ukraine. Just a year later, in 1919, Lenin discussed sending Adolf Ioffe, an experienced diplomat, to Ukraine to work there *against* Ukrainian proclivities toward independence. Lenin was very consistent in his imperialistic policies; he was also a good strategist who knew when to pause and when to advance. Power was more important than Marxism.

Lenin's attitude toward other ethnicities was the same. During the 1920 Red Army campaign in Dagestan, North Caucasus, Lenin instructed Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Leon Trotsky to demonstrate with maximum show their good will toward the local Muslim elites. The Red Army leadership, he

opportunistically urged, should openly sympathize with Dagestan's striving for autonomy and independence.⁵³ Lenin insisted they confirm that Russian communists were not against the right of Muslims in Dagestan to self-determination, national culture, national-cultural autonomy, and separate schooling. However, once the North Caucasus was under communist control, it would then be up to the Russian Bolsheviks to decide whether it was a good idea to grant Dagestan autonomy and allow it to separate itself politically. Students of history know what the Bolshevik answer was: a resounding no.

Lenin instigated class hatred and the purging of the class enemy among the Russians, but beyond the Russian ethnic realm he did not hesitate to encourage the suppression of entire national minority enclaves regardless of their class stratification. When Trotsky besieged Kazan, Lenin demanded that he not feel sorry for the local population, particularly since Trotsky had enough artillery. "We need a merciless destruction [of the city]."⁵⁴ To the Red Army commanders responsible for the advance in Azerbaijan he also ordered preparations "to burn Baku to the ground."⁵⁵ During the Red Army advance in Ukraine, Lenin suggested treating "Jews and urban inhabitants in Ukraine with an iron rod, transferring them to the front, not letting them into governmental agencies." He added in the margins, almost in the spirit of Chernyshevsky's remarks: "Express it politely: Jewish petty bourgeoisie."⁵⁶

Party Loyalty, Not Personal Identity

Lenin's concern about revolutionary power explains his attitude toward ethnic minorities such as Jews and their political representatives such as the Bund. Yet what about individual Jews? A close reading of the fifty-five volumes of Lenin's *Com-*

plete Works, particularly of his letters—about ten 800-page volumes—demonstrates that Lenin did not differentiate between Russians and Jews. Nor did he differentiate between Russians and other Russians. Apparently Lenin did not treat people on the basis of who they were ethnically, culturally, or nationally, even in terms of class. He discussed his colleagues as “useful comrades.” To say that Lenin praised individual people but was critical toward groups and organizations would also be untrue, yet so would the opposite argument. There is sufficient evidence to prove that Lenin deeply disliked Zinoviev and Trotsky, but it is equally possible to demonstrate that Lenin agreed with them.

Lenin treated people as the immediate implementers of a *hic et nunc* party task. They were the functionaries of the world proletarian revolution, the derivatives of Lenin’s will. What the party comrades did for the revolutionary cause was important; who they were, was not. When talking to Lenin, one of his most reliable interlocutors once pointed to the indecent behavior of a certain B., much discussed in party circles. Lenin retorted, “You are following the same path that Martov, Zasulich, and Potresov went down two years ago when they got hysterical regarding several episodes from the personal life of comrade B. I told them: B. is a highly useful person, loyal to the revolution and to the party, I do not care about anything else.”⁵⁷ This “I do not care,” corroborated by other memoirists, explains Lenin’s favorite German word, *Privatsache*, with which he scornfully referred to personal, ethnic, or national issues of his closest colleagues. Georgii Solomon (Isetsy), immune to Lenin’s spell, recalled Lenin’s “vulgarity, mixed with an unshakable feeling of smugness and, I do not find a different word, a deliberate ‘I-do-not-care’ [*naplevizm*] toward his interlocutor.”⁵⁸ Aleksei Kuprin, one of the key dem-

ocratic writers of Russia and renowned philosemite, wrote of Lenin's "algebraic will, his cold anger, his mechanical mind, his endless scorn toward the humanity he was saving."⁵⁹

Obsessed with the purity of ideology and revolutionary pragmatics, Lenin was venomous in his critique of others. A student of the European workers' movement wrote that "Lenin's work was characterized by an iron conviction of his own correctness, by a strong propensity to mockery and ridicule, and by vicious *ad hominem* attacks."⁶⁰ Lenin gave devastating critiques of his opponents and resorted to the most outrageous vocabulary and denigrating metaphors because *homo*, the human being with his or her emotions and feelings, did not exist for him. A crude materialist in political economy, Lenin was a radical idealist in his evaluations of people. He viewed people through the prism of Marxist teleology, seeing in them what he thought they would become as political visionaries, not what they were as human beings. He rebuffed someone who dared criticize Lenin's personal attacks: "You are, as it were, sick of the party atmosphere, so different from that of the Institute for Noble Girls. These are old-fashioned songs of those willing to make milksops out of revolutionary fighters. God forbid, do not hurt Ivan Ivanovich with your words. God protect you, do not offend Peter Petrovich. Argue with one another while doing a curtsy. Had social democrats resorted to harmless words that hurt nobody in their policy, propaganda, agitation, and polemics, they would have looked like those melancholic pastors pronouncing their useless Sunday sermons."⁶¹ For Lenin, the human beings with whom he dealt embodied programs and ideologies. Lenin attacked his opponents as ideologies embodied, as materialized political programs, and as substantiated partisanship.

Relations between Lenin and Trotsky serve as a good ex-

ample of how Lenin treated his colleagues, including those of Jewish descent. Although routinely associated with the East European Jews, Trotsky always insisted on his being a communist, not a Jew. He wrote that the “national aspect did not occupy an independent place” in his psyche. His universalistic penchant and assimilationist convictions made him prefer “the general” over “the particular,” “law” to “fact,” and “theory” to “personal experience.”⁶² Yet Lenin never missed a chance to disparage Trotsky. This was part of his social-democratic style of work and the way to teach some fighting skills to his (to his mind) feeble, refined colleagues. In his 1908 letter to Gorky, Lenin wrote that Trotsky was “snobbish” and that he was “showing off.” On another occasion he called Trotsky an “intriguer and slanderer.” In regard to Trotsky’s misunderstanding of Polish socialism and issues of national independence, Lenin claimed that a subservient Trotsky was “more dangerous than the enemy.” When Trotsky published his first series of essays on the socialist party in his newspaper *Put’ pravdy*, Lenin criticized him for distorting the entire party history. On yet another occasion, Lenin rebuffed Trotsky for the absence of solid Marxist ideas. Quite often Lenin argued *ad hominem*, viciously criticizing Trotsky and using mocking epithets to belittle him.⁶³

Though Lenin resorted to very sharp language when scolding Trotsky, he immediately changed his attitude once Trotsky adopted a position Lenin saw as productive.⁶⁴ In 1908–9 Lenin invited Trotsky to cooperate for the sake of party unity, was ready to avoid a “battle” with him when Trotsky joined the Mensheviks, and regretted that Trotsky disagreed.⁶⁵ He commissioned Trotsky to deal with the conflict between the Russian and Georgian communists because he, Lenin, could not rely on the impartial treatment of this case by Iosif Stalin and

Felix Dzerzhinsky. This does not imply that Lenin agreed with Trotsky in principle or with Trotsky as a Jew or with Trotsky as an old party comrade or with Trotsky who had always been impartial. Lenin changed his attitude toward Trotsky when he felt that Trotsky was ready to sacrifice his ambitions for the sake of the revolutionary cause. In other words, when Trotsky was ready to accept Lenin's leadership and join the Bolsheviks.

The party was a living mechanism and people were gears. When Valentinov supported Lenin in his dispute with other party members, Lenin liked Valentinov. But once Valentinov expressed his skepticism about Lenin's stance on an internal party issue, Lenin refused to join him for lunch as he had no desire "to sit down at the same table with Philistines." Individual Marxists existed for Lenin inasmuch as they acted in favor of or against the social democratic party. He was interested exclusively in people's loyalties, not their origins—ethnic, religious, class, or cultural. As long as they implemented Lenin's orders and worked productively for the sake of the socialist revolution or the proletarian state, Lenin did not care who they were, where they came from, what their education was, or how long they had served the party.⁶⁶

Lenin turned to other Marxists of Jewish descent—including B. Goldberg, A. Ioffe, M. Movshovich, A. Paikes, A. Rozengolts, L. Shapiro, B. S. Veisbrod—because of their diligence, obedience, punctuality, and desire to work with the Bolsheviks, not because of where they had come from.⁶⁷ These people merited Lenin's benevolent and friendly attitude only insofar as they were useful party members. Without the party they signified nothing. With the party, they were humble and obedient servants of what Lenin considered the great revolutionary cause. Consider Lenin's marginal note on a letter from André Guibeaux, a French socialist-minded journalist who

planned to write about revolutionary and Soviet state leaders. Lenin answered his request succinctly: “It is not worthwhile writing about individuals” (*ne stoit o litsakh*).⁶⁸ To write about individuals implied disregard for the centrality, homogeneity, and universality of the communist party.

Jew-in-the-Box

Of course, Lenin did refer to the ethnic origins of his colleagues—but only in cases when Bolshevik party success was at stake. Yet even in these cases Lenin did his best to avoid using the word “Jew,” which from his standpoint compromised his Marxist integrity. For example, he needed somebody’s help in the smuggling of revolutionary literature and newspapers. Apparently the network was Yiddish-speaking. Lenin did not ask his addressee: “Do you know a reliable Jew?” Rather, he asked in Chernyshevsky-style Aesopian language: “Do you have a *comrade* who knows the Jewish language?”⁶⁹ In the wake of the Bolshevik-orchestrated anti-church campaign Lenin wrote a top secret document and gave instructions to leave no copies. In it he said, “Comrade Trotsky should at no time and under no circumstances speak out [on this matter] in the press or before the public in any other manner.”⁷⁰ Lenin advised that Trotsky keep a low profile on this matter so as not to create the impression that the campaign was a Jewish plot against Christianity. Lenin did not use the word “Jew” in connection with Trotsky, yet he recalled that Leon Trotsky was Leyba Bronshtein. Only when Trotsky’s commonly known ethnic origin might seriously jeopardize the success of the party’s atheistic campaign did Lenin take it into account.

Lenin demonstrated an awareness of Jewish persecution for the same reasons that he manifested sensitivity toward na-

tional minority strivings. Lenin used accusations of antisemitism to strike an additional blow at Russian imperial policies or to denigrate his external political enemies. Lenin did so to bring down tsarist power, not to argue against antisemitism.⁷¹ At the same time, Lenin did not hesitate to neglect testimonies of grass-roots antisemitism when it did not serve his agenda or advance the party's leadership. Antisemitism was for him nothing but a class-based phenomenon. International capital spread and maintained it purposefully in order to distract the proletarians from their struggle and check the advance of socialism. Antisemitism could not exist among proletarians.⁷² Lenin heaped sarcasm on the Bundists when they maintained that anti-Jewish hatred had penetrated the working masses.⁷³ This accusation contradicted class theory. And that which contradicted class theory could not and did not exist in empirical reality. For those detractors who dared say anything against class theory Lenin had a very effective argument: "V mordu!"—"[Beat him] in the face!"

Consider Lenin's feedback to an appeal of the Central Bureau of the Jewish Sections of the Russian Communist Party Central Committee, dispatched on July 6, 1921. The appeal asked that Jewish trade union members in Gomel and Minsk provinces be allowed to bear arms, as the Jewish population there was being systematically exterminated. The bureau also asked that investigations of anti-Jewish atrocities in these two provinces be conducted. Lenin wrote in the margin: "into the Central Committee Archive."⁷⁴ Perhaps one should not make sweeping conclusions on the basis of a marginal note. One can hardly use it as proof of Lenin's antisemitism. Rather it proves that Lenin simply dismissed the issue of antisemitism when he could not play it as a trump card. Jews as such did not interest him in the least. His actions betrayed indifference, if not

the skills of a deft political manipulator, rather than anti-semitism. Jews conscious of their Jewishness, assimilationist Jews, baptized Jews, communist Jews, and self-hating Jews—be they the Trotskys or the Blanks—had vested interest in the issue and reacted quite differently.

In his famous memoir about Lenin, Gorky portrayed the leader of the world proletarians as a truth-seeking and truth-loving, open-minded, strong-willed, and compassionate individual. Gorky presented Lenin as the most humane of human beings, to use a metaphor from another Russian source. In the first edition of the essay, Gorky included Lenin's observation—censored from later editions—conveying his attitude toward the Jews. Lenin mentioned to Gorky that a clever Russian “was almost always a Jew or a person with mixed Jewish blood.” This statement has been taken out of the context of Gorky's portrayal of Lenin and presented as proof of Lenin's sympathy for the Jews. Gorky was a philosemite who sought to discover and emphasize philosemitism in others, especially among his personal friends. In that context, Lenin's philosemitic statement says more about Gorky's attitude toward the Jews than about Lenin's.

One final example illustrates my point. Trotsky recalled how he and Lenin went sightseeing in London. Whenever Lenin was excited by the architecture or technical discoveries, he would separate himself from what he saw. He would say once in a while: this is what “they” have. This “they,” explains Trotsky, implied “the enemies,” not “the British.” Trotsky added: “An invisible shadow of the class of exploiters cast itself over all of human culture, and he perceived this shadow with the certainty with which he perceived the light of day.”⁷⁵ Lenin measured people—and ethnicities, including the Jews—with

the yardstick of party and state, not that of class. He turned his back on Jews of proletarian origin, social-democratic and communist-minded Jews, if they were not ready to accept his concept of the dictatorial state and the centralized party unquestionably. Power, not class, was the key to his perception of people of various nationalities. Some social democrats of Jewish origin such as Kamenev and Trotsky supported Lenin's quest for the party's absolute power; most of them, such as Medem and Martov, opposed it.

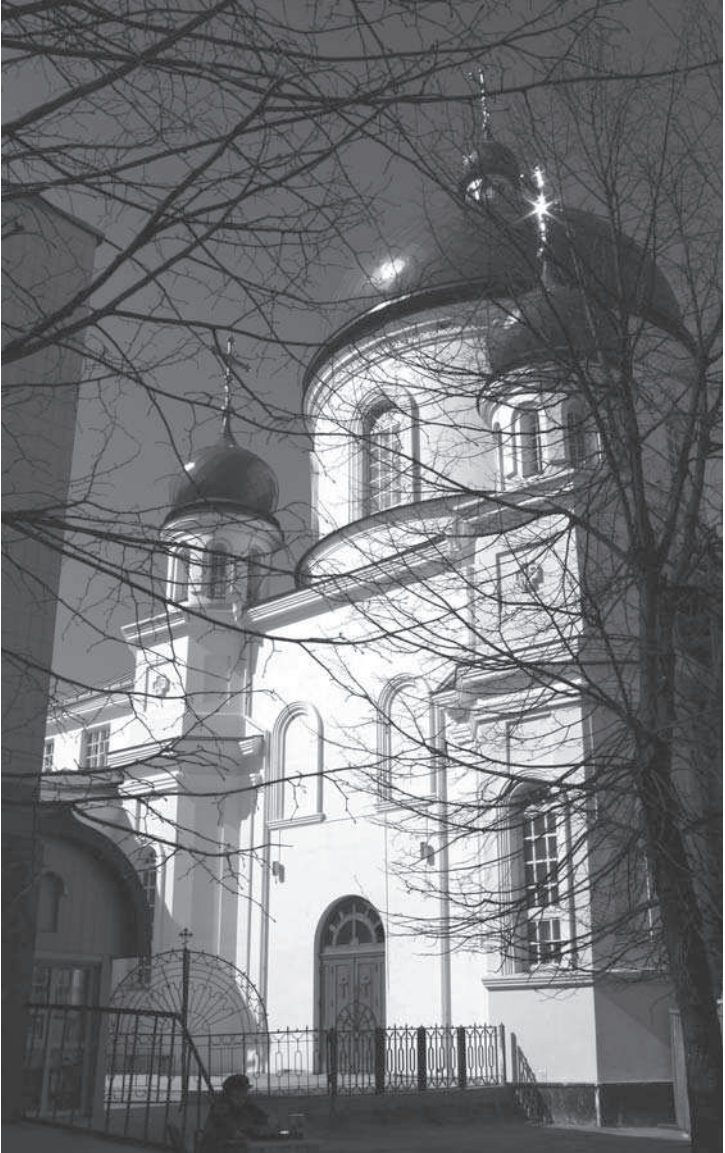
When Lenin's sister discovered that the Blanks were of Jewish origin and intended to announce it—to help check growing antisemitism and demonstrate historical correctness—she encountered the unified resistance of the party leadership. She could not understand that speaking about a Jewish Lenin undermined the Russian-centered identity of the party and was perceived as a surreptitious attack against its power. A true disciple of Chernyshevsky's doublespeak, Lenin knew that in the language of the Bolshevik imperialism the “power” signified the “Russian Bolshevik power” and the “Jews”—as well as the Ukrainians or Lithuanians or Georgians—were “detractors.” As will become clear in the next chapter, the Blanks had no chance of entering Lenin's official genealogy precisely because of Lenin's conceptualization of Russian Bolshevism, the driving force of revolution—and assimilation.



The Palace of Prince Konstanty Ostrogski, Starokonstantinov, late sixteenth century. Courtesy of Petr Vlasenko.



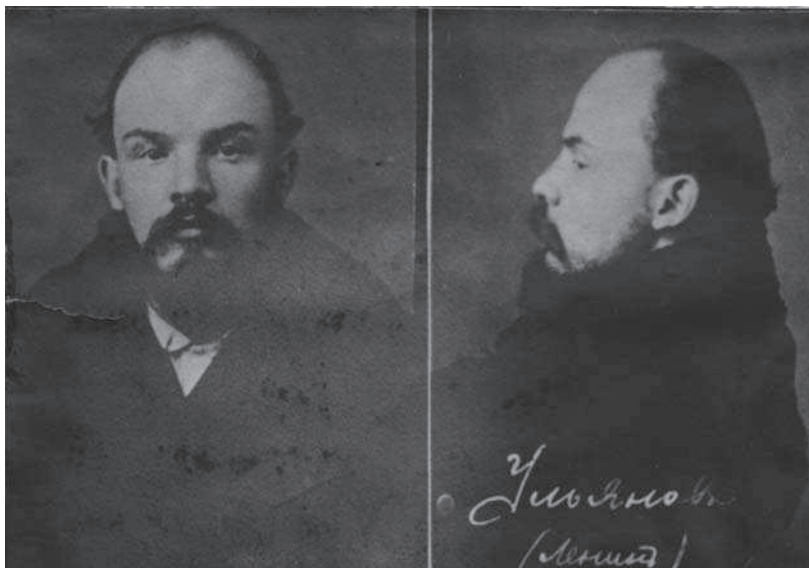
Record Book of the Great Synagogue of Starokonstantinov (Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine, Orientalia Division, Pinkasim collection, f. 129, spr. 86). Courtesy of Vitalii Chernoiivanenko.



St. Michael Church, Zhitomir, mid-nineteenth century.
Courtesy of Yaroslav Dimont.

Сомнительно предпринятому иному лицу
идеи Стараго Суда и Окружного повета
кому сегоднемъ въ тайно въста Трапезникова
и въ кесаковъ и притомъ кесарю и въ шибидаръ
дано законное возмужу и въ притомъ возмужу
и въ таково постранитъ пошлѣ законо
калей предикомъ и постановленна въста. О кесарю
проектанта и Ваши и Милохо Председатель и въ
притомъ и въ Ваши и Милохо Председатель и въ
МОШКО БЛАНКЪ

Moshko Blank's signature in Russian at the bottom of his complaint of the arbitrary decision of the provincial court. Courtesy of TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 150, spr. 82, l. 2b.



Vladimir Lenin (Ulianov), photo of 1895 from the police file of 1907.
Courtesy of GARE, f. 1742, op.1, d. 37015, l. 1.



Yuli Martov (Zederbaum), 1917.
Collection of D. Zaslavsky. Courtesy of Alexei Litvin.



Leon Trotsky, Vladimir Lenin, and Lev Kamenev at a meeting, June–
July 1919. Collection of D. Zaslavsky. Courtesy of Alexei Litvin.



Gennadii Belov, director of the Central Archival Administration (Glavarkhiv). Mid-1960s. Courtesy of Alexei Litvin.



Vassili Shulgin, ca. 1920.
Courtesy of Alexei Litvin.



Popular Russian antisemitic books by Vadim Kozhinov, Vladimir Soloukhin, and Oleg Platonov on the sinister role of Jews in the Russian revolution.

IV

Glue for the Vertebrae

In one of his poems Osip Mandelshtam asked, “My epoch, my beast, who will dare look into your eyes, who will glue together with his blood the vertebrae of two centuries?”

The revolutionary regime had an answer to this question. The Bolsheviks would glue the centuries together with the imperial blood of Russian statehood. The autocracy of the tsar became the autocracy of the party, the iconic symbols of the empire turned into the iconic symbols of communism, and the old tsarist administration merged into the new communist bureaucracy. Furthermore, Soviet identity inherited the all-Russian identity; as under the tsars, Russia remained the paternalistic Big Brother of the national borderlands and ethnic minorities. The imperial motto of tsarist Russia, “Autocracy, orthodoxy, the people,” turned, after 1917, into the popular slogan “Lenin, the party, the people,” in which the communist party assumed the role of national religion. Although the Bolsheviks glued together the vertebrae of two centuries, their borrowing from the patterns of Russian statehood was a package deal. It presupposed importing into the

Soviet state system methods of Realpolitik that had nothing to do with communist ideology.

A historian of East Europe observed that the Bolsheviks “adopted the nationalist non-liberal Russo-centric program of state-building.”¹ Of course, once Stalin identified the population of the USSR with the Soviet state rather than with a revolutionary class, he paved the way for the replacement of class identity with a national and eventually ethnic identity. In the 1930s the party affirmed the centrality of Russianness within a complex system of Soviet identities. The regime radically shifted from internationalism to chauvinism, which now became state policy.² The centrality of Russianness was epitomized in propaganda and state symbols. The anthem of the USSR affirmed in its opening lines that “the Great *Rus* forever brought together the free republics in an unbreakable union.” The Russification of the Soviet people and the Soviet state led to promoting Russian chauvinism, enhancing Russian paternalism toward ethnic minorities, and nurturing popular xenophobia. Although this process did not reach its apogee until after World War II, it presupposed the creation of a pure Russian image of Lenin as early as the 1920s.

Filling in the Blanks

Once Lenin died and was embalmed and entombed as a Russian Orthodox saint in a shrine, the Soviet masses pledged allegiance to the familiar Russian vision of who could and who could not assume state power.³ It was a common perception among urban dwellers of Soviet Russia that power in the Bolshevik state should be ethnically Russian. The reports of the secret service on the reaction of the country to Lenin’s death left no doubt that the key reasons for the postrevolutionary

populace to choose one candidate over another were ethnic and national, not ideological and professional. However communist and class-based the faith of the Bolsheviks of Jewish descent, secret services established that rank-and-file Soviet people preferred Mikhail Kalinin and Aleksei Rykov to Lev Kamenev and Leon Trotsky, because in the popular imagination the former were Russians and the latter, Jews.

A student of Russian history observed that national values come to the fore as key organizing principles during social cataclysms. The Russian security apparatus noticed a strong tendency to identify Lenin as Russian and separate him from the Politburo members of Jewish origin fighting for power after his death. Ever since the Russian Bolshevik party had emerged as the gatherer of the empire's fragments, ready to assemble them into a new whole, it was assumed that the founder of the party and the state could only be Russian.⁴ The Russianness of Lenin helped the Bolsheviks unite all the oppressed ethnicities and classes of the former empire around his iconic image. It also strengthened assimilation within Russian culture as the right political choice, one which demonstrated loyalty to Lenin. The romantic irony in Vladimir Maiakovsky's famous line "I would learn Russian because Lenin spoke it," became an imperative in the Bolshevik party identity doctrine. To be a Russian communist and a Soviet patriot, one had to assimilate and join the Russian culture of Lenin.

In the early 1920s the Bolsheviks supported their claim to the leadership of the international socialist movement with a claim to its documentary heritage as well. The party Central Committee allocated considerable sums to photocopy the archive of Marx and Engels, to obtain original papers of the founders of scientific communism, and to purchase entire archives of leading West European socialists, including those of

Gracchus Babeuf, August Bebel, Bruno Bauer, Charles Fourier, Ludwig Feuerbach, Moses Hess, Karl Kautsky, Paul Lafarge, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mering, and Henri de Saint-Simon. The party Central Committee established the Istpart—Institute of Party History—to study the history of the Bolsheviks from utopian socialism to Marx to European and Russian social democracy.

Simultaneously, the Central Committee established the Institute of Lenin and commissioned Anna Elizarova-Ulianova, Lenin's sister, to compile sources for Lenin's biography.⁵ In 1924, she searched for documents in the archives of Leningrad. While looking through the collection of the Department of Police of the Russian Ministry of the Interior, she came across the professional records of Alexander Blank. The documents testified that he was a Starokonstantinov Jew who had converted from Judaism to Russian Orthodoxy and had later become a medical doctor. Elizarova-Ulianova compared what she found out about her grandfather with the stories she had heard from her mother, Mariia Alexandrovna Blank, and only then understood why she knew many of her father's relatives but did not know any on her mother's side.

She was astonished, to put it mildly. Just a year before the discovery, her sister had suggested that, according to a not very reliable family legend, which apparently surfaced in the 1920s, their grandfather could have been a Jewish orphan raised by a poor Jewish family. In response, Elizarova-Ulianova asked her sister not to spread such heresy about their grandfather.⁶ Now Anna Elizarova-Ulianova realized that she had been wrong. With her discovery firmly in hand, she hurried to show it to Lev Kamenev, at that time director of the Institute of Party History. Kamenev petitioned a number of archives to release relevant papers, which supported Elizarova-Ulianova's find-

ings. However, Kamenev judged the discovery unfit for dissemination, ruled against publication of documents on Lenin's Jewish relatives, and instructed Elizarova-Ulianova to keep her discovery a secret. Everyone dealing with this issue after Kamenev—Stalin, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev—arrived at the same decision.

Kamenev's reaction deserves consideration, particularly since it was reenacted by Soviet leaders of a variety of ethnic origins (Georgian, Ukrainian, and Russian) and in various political situations. Apparently Kamenev, himself a Russified Jew profoundly assimilated in the Bolshevik milieu, had his own good reasons for blocking publication of Elizarova-Ulianova's findings. At that time, he was acting chairman of the Soviet Commissariat and head of the Politburo: together with Stalin and Zinoviev he was one of the three most powerful individuals in the country. In the mid-1920s the three communist party leaders (called the triumvirate) grouped together to attempt to marginalize Trotsky. It was not part of Kamenev's plan, internationalist in form and partisan in content, to advertise Lenin's Jewish connection. However firm Trotsky's internationalism, in the West he was widely identified as a Jew; Polish xenophobic posters portrayed him as an armed Satan, with graphic Semitic features, sitting on a mound of skulls and supervising the shooting of the Russian people. Emphasis on Lenin's Jewish roots could strengthen the imaginary bond between Trotsky and Lenin and mar the reputation of the founder of the Soviet state.

The assimilationist Kamenev did not want to see this happen. He found the best way to deal with the problem: suppress it. In so doing, he hit two birds with one stone. By hiding Lenin's quite distant Jewish relatives he was also hiding his own. He knew only too well that in the Western press the name

Trotsky was “Bronshstein” in brackets, and he did not want to see his own name followed by “Rosenfeld,” let alone Lenin’s followed by “Blank.” On the other hand, Kamenev’s stance was not a personal innovation: he was continuing the party line of creating an internationalist communist identity centered in the Russian one. In addition to citing political reasons, Kamenev could have ruled to keep Lenin’s distant Jewishness secret because he was a Russian assimilationist. Kamenev needed a pristine, revolutionary Lenin. The purity of the revolutionary experiment required the pure blood of its leader. Perhaps if he had been confronted Kamenev would have asserted that a Jewish great-grandfather could change nothing about Lenin’s Bolshevik image. But by sealing off information on Lenin’s Jewish roots Kamenev had tacitly recognized the power of a racist popular belief: once marred by Semitic blood, an individual was never able to wipe it off.

Perhaps the new party policy on indigenization (*korenizatsiia*) of previously segregated national minorities was another factor shaping Kamenev’s decision. In 1924–25 the party launched a campaign aimed at the creation of loyal national elites that would assume responsibility for implanting communist ideas in the ethnic groups they represented. This two-fold task—creating manageable elites and integrating ethnic minorities through communist ideology—targeted many USSR ethnicities, including Kazakhs, Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Jews. The party planned to turn ethnicities into indigenous dwellers of the socialist state—especially those ethnic groups that maintained their expectations for relative autonomy within the USSR along with what Lenin called a petit bourgeois outlook. As far as the Jews were concerned, the government created unprecedented opportunities for the development of Soviet proletarian Yiddish culture. Dozens of former

émigré writers and poets returned to the USSR to take positions in newly created newspapers and publishing houses. In Ukraine and Belorussia, the party established Yiddish-language Soviets and courts. The state sponsored the creation of Yiddish theaters and Yiddish-centered institutes of Jewish proletarian culture. Advertising Lenin's purported Jewishness in this context would have overemphasized the importance of the emerging elites, in this case the Jewish one, and perhaps justify their claims to power. On the other hand, the issue of the Blanks was certain to cause a political scandal of national magnitude. The party leaders with whom Kamenev consulted—including Nikolai Bukharin and Grigorii Zinoviev—decided that the time was not propitious for the publication of the Blank documents.

A loyal party member, Elizarova-Ulianova kept silent until the beginning of the 1930s. In December 1932, however, she decided again to raise the issue of the Blanks. She wrote a letter to Stalin asking him to allow her to publicize the documents on Lenin's Jewish connection. She mentioned that in 1924 she had amassed documentary evidence and that the institute bosses had asked her to keep her findings private. Now, she thought, in view of the rising antisemitism in the USSR particularly palpable among the party leadership, times were more propitious for publication. She emphasized: "We have no reason to conceal this fact, which is yet another proof of the exclusive talents of the Semitic tribe and of the advantages of tribal merging—an opinion that [Vladimir] Il'ich always held."⁷ She asked for permission to compose a newspaper article and promised to submit it for Stalin's perusal and approval.

In her letter to Stalin, Elizarova-Ulianova mentioned antisemitism as one of her immediate concerns and stated that, to her mind, Lenin's Jewish origins would help neutralize the antisemitic mood among the party leadership. However, she might

have had a different reason to act. By 1932 it had become clear that her previous boss, Lev Kamenev, and his closest colleague, Grigorii Zinoviev, had lost their influence in the party and turned into lackeys of Stalin. Trotsky had also been expelled and banished from the USSR. Stalin did not target either of these communist leaders as Jews—he just needed to get rid of the formerly most influential party leaders and secure his own absolute and unchallenged control over the party and the country. Elizarova-Ulianova may have thought that assimilated and entirely Russified Jews such as Kamenev had not dared endorse her publication for personal reasons, whereas Stalin, a Russified Georgian, had no reasons to hide Lenin's Jewishness.

She was wrong. The time was again not right for publication, either within or outside the country. First and foremost, judging from his private correspondence, Stalin had much more important issues to take care of: the reconstruction of the security organs and the famine in Ukraine.⁸ Yet Jewish issues could also have played a role. In 1932 Stalin was conducting secret negotiations with German diplomats, using his high-ranking military commanders. One of the German negotiators, Fritz von Twardowski, was wounded as the result of a terrorist attempt by a certain Yehuda Shtern, whose motives are still held secret.⁹ In the center of Moscow, a Jew had attempted to disrupt—or perhaps to test—the USSR's secret rapprochement with Germany! This was an affront. Internally, the country had just experienced the results of abandoning the New Economic Policy: thousands of petty traders and artisans, previously engaged in legal self-employed business or manufacture, were stripped of their civil and political rights and became *lishentsy* (déclassé). Jews, the most urbanized minority in the country, were highly overrepresented in this social group.

Linking Lenin to the Jews in 1932 could signify an oblique connection of the leader of the world proletariat with the destroyed party opposition, or with the detractors of Soviet diplomatic efforts, or with the disenfranchised populace labeled as socially hostile to Soviet power.

Perhaps Stalin also grasped what Kamenev had understood before him—that Lenin’s Jewishness would undermine Lenin as a symbol of the Russian revolutionary leadership. Stalin could be a Russified Georgian, Lazar Kaganovich a Russified Jew, and Anastas Mikoian a Russified Armenian, but the founder of the party and the state had to be Russian. No other ethnicity could be privileged. A Russian Lenin justified the state’s Russification policies and a profound personal Russification of the party leadership. Stalin could now turn Maiakovsky’s famous adage, “We say ‘the party,’ we mean ‘Lenin,’” into an instrument of party policy. If the party was all-Russian, Lenin could not have Jewish roots. What the centralized Russian social democratic party had been for Lenin, the Russian Lenin now became for the centralized communist party: a mechanism of control. Any doubts about Lenin’s Russianness would be considered blasphemy, an iconoclastic act, a political crime. Other political crimes could be discussed in public and condemned, but there was only one way to deal with this one: silence.

Stalin sent his answer to the rebellious Anna Elizarova-Ulianova through the subservient Mariia Il’inichna Ulianova, who agreed with the party line on the matter.¹⁰ According to Mariia Ulianova, Stalin ordered her sister to keep “absolute silence on this matter.” Elizarova-Ulianova obeyed, waited a year and a half, and wrote yet another letter, even more eloquent and insistent, albeit not without naïve suppositions and sycophantic courtesies. She said that she had fulfilled Stalin’s order

to keep her mouth shut. She hoped that the times now were more befitting the publication of an article shedding new light on Lenin's genealogy. She referred to her poor health and suggested that if not hers than at least someone else's essay based on her findings should appear in the press. As in her previous message, she referred to the growing antisemitism in the country and the drastic necessity to fight this disgrace. The article on Lenin's Jewish relatives, she thought, would help check the wave of antisemitism and reinforce the party's internationalist stance.

Elizarova-Ulianova offered a theoretical Marxist and scientific anthropological vindication of her idea. To her mind, Lenin's Jewish relatives did not contradict the party's conceptualization of the equality of nations. On the contrary, the Blanks fit well in the Marxist understanding of ethnic development under capitalism. The Blanks were yet another proof of the importance of assimilation and fusion of nations, which produced such amazing results as Lenin, who had inherited German, Russian, Jewish and perhaps Tartar blood. She argued that her findings also corroborated the scientific concept of a genius, whose appearance had to be preceded by a number of generations of well-educated ancestors. The Ulianovs demonstrated that there was one such generation before Lenin, while the Blanks provided two. In addition, the Jewish genealogical branch testified to the Marxist vision of the inexhaustible potential of the *narod*, the ordinary people, capable of producing such outstanding individuals as Lenin. Ultimately, Lenin had esteemed the Jews' revolutionary proclivities, stressed their tenacity in the revolutionary struggle, and underscored the importance of the Jewish element for the strength of revolutionary cells.

Elizarova-Ulianova was positive that the sooner the dis-

covery of Lenin's Jewish roots was made public the better. She asked with embarrassment: "Why should the party conceal the fact of Lenin's Jewish genealogical connections?" The communists would have made a lot of fuss should he be found to have been an Italian—there was no reason for the party to be silent about his Jewishness. The party, she stated adamantly, should produce its own conceptualization of Lenin's genealogy—all-embracing, scientific, and thoroughly documented. After all, the data on the Blanks would inevitably appear in future party-approved volumes of Lenin's biography. In a word, Lenin's Jewish connection should by all means appear in the press—this would be the right decision from a psychological, biographical, cultural, scientific, political, and Marxist point of view.

Stalin did not find her proposal justified from any viewpoint. As the bona fide chief editor of many important party publications—including the *Brief History of the Bolshevik Party*—Stalin was not going to endorse any mention of the Blanks' origins in Lenin's official biography. It would simply and squarely contradict party policy, both international and domestic. In the 1930s, Stalin's regime sought to make radical cuts in ethnic constituencies at the highest levels of the communist party and state apparatus. Rotation and purges reduced the numbers of certain ethnicities among the Soviet state leadership from two-digit figures to decimal fractions. While in the 1920s, for example, the security apparatus exploited Jewish loyalty to the Bolsheviks and Jewish animosity toward the representatives of the oppressive tsarist regime, in the 1930s the NKVD eliminated most of its Jewish staff. In 1934, Russians represented 30 percent, Jews—of course, who saw themselves as socialists—37, Ukrainians 5, Poles 4, Latvians 7, Germans 2, Georgians 3, and Belorussians 3 percent of the leading NKVD cadre. By 1941, Russians grew to 65, Ukrainians to 28, and Georgians to 12 percent, whereas Jews dropped to 10

percent, Latvians to 0.5, and Azerbaijanis disappeared from the spectrum altogether.¹¹ Those Jews who remained in the security organs had never been members of any revolutionary movement before 1917; those who had been active in the Bund, Socialist Revolutionary Party, the RSDRP, or the *Po'alei Tzion* were purged.¹²

Stalin's attempt to purge Jews from the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the security services was only one superficial side of the problem. Another side was intellectual and philosophical. The Blanks presented a particular challenge because Lenin's Jewish roots unsettled Stalin's theory of nationality. In his classic essay "Marxism and the National Question," written in Vienna in 1913 and most likely edited by Lenin, Stalin offered his conceptualization of nationality and theoretical vision of the Jews.¹³ Jews, he wrote, had no connection to the land and no national market. They were a "paper" nation without national soil. The Jews provided their services as manufacturers and merchants to "alien" nations. They lacked two of the five key characteristics of nations: unity of language and unity of territory. Stalin mocked Otto Bauer's conceptualization of Jews as a nation that had neither common language nor territory, yet shared a common fate. Stalin found Bauer's theory idealistic, since he failed to differentiate between a nation and a tribe. Stalin summarized: Jews were a nation with no future whose existence had yet to be proven.¹⁴

Stalin still had not identified Jews as rootless cosmopolitans, but the key elements of his later doctrine were already in place. Publicizing Lenin's Jewish roots for him was tantamount to acknowledging Lenin's tribal origins. Ironically, the Blanks supported Stalin's theory of nations, particularly concerning Jews, the cornerstone of his most important contribution to Marxism. The Blanks, according to his theory, should dissolve themselves in the Russian people undergoing a com-

plete assimilation. As Jews, they had no future. But the existence of the Blanks was meticulously documented, and their future had been Lenin! While this was an excellent proof to his theory of nations, Stalin's vision of the communist party and the Soviet power had no room for a Jewish Lenin, the father-founder of the state and the party. Stalin either had to revise his Marxist theory or hide the proof that unsettled his vision of the Russian-centered origins of the first socialist state. Stalin chose the second option—he did not even bother to answer Elizarova-Ulianova. Dogma was more important than reality and ideology than human beings, even if that human being was Lenin himself.

There was also a deep psychological and personal side to the problem. If Kamenev disliked being addressed as Rosenfeld, Stalin had good reason to avoid being referred to as Dzhugashvili. He made himself into a Russian and was entirely assimilated in Russian culture, although he had grown up a Georgian and spoken and written Georgian until the age of thirty. Yet in the 1930s, as a leader of the state he, Soso Dzhugashvili, wanted to be seen as Russian through and through: his Caucasian accent would not overshadow his stalwart all-Russian chauvinism, his pretensions to being a Russian monarch, and his populist references to the great Russian people. Stalin promoted Georgians to various high party positions as people upon whom he could rely, but this gesture had nothing to do with his purported Georgian nationalism. His daughter observed that she knew no Georgians who could forget their national features and so profoundly come to love everything Russian as did her father. Stalin's Georgian roots came as a revelation to his son, Vassili, who unwittingly observed in a conversation with Svetlana Allilueva, his sister: "You know, our father used to be a Georgian."¹⁵

Stalin did not want anyone to undermine either his or Lenin's Russian identity. This identity justified his power as the leader of the all-Russian communist party; those who questioned it undermined his power, which Stalin would do anything to prevent. Later in the 1940s he was reported to have dropped on a number of occasions, "we, the Russians." One might also ask whether Stalin's decision to remove the Blanks from Lenin's history testified to the penetration of racial discourse in all spheres of European political life by this time—including communist party discourse. After all, discourse is not only a figure of speech but also a figure of silence. And absolute silence on the matter was exactly Stalin's response.

The Russian Lenin

Lenin's image was instrumental for the communist party's Russification campaign. The introduction of poetry on Lenin in the obligatory school curriculum facilitated the success of the party's Russo-centric propaganda. Maiakovsky's futuristic verse, permeated with leftist utopianism, portrayed Lenin against the backdrop of an international revolution of universalistic magnitude centered in Russia. It was ideologically satisfactory but stylistically complicated. Better suited to party goals was the poetic imagery of Lenin advanced by Nikolai Kliuev, a traditionalist and peasant-centered poet. Kliuev penned:

There is the spirit of an Old Believer in Lenin
The cry of a monastery elder in his decrees
As if he looks for the causes of ruin
In the "Pomora Responsa" creed.

"Est' v Lenine kerzhenskii dukh," 1918

While this back-to-the soil, Russo-centric vision of Lenin fit into the Bolshevik agenda, Kliuev as a poet did not: in the 1930s he was arrested, exiled, and shot for his alleged anti-Soviet activity.¹⁶

Kliuev's quasi-religious imagery of Lenin was firmly established in the Soviet poetry of the 1930s–1970s. Il'ia Avramenko, Semen Olender, Nikolai Braun, and Mikhail Isakovsky celebrated the Russian features of Lenin: his love of the Russian landscapes, his pride in Russia's geographic greatness, and his identification with "Russian truth."¹⁷ Soviet poets competed with one another trying to Russify Lenin. Nikolai Maiorov imagined Lenin as a Russian Messiah who sparked millenarian hopes among his people. Aleksei Surkov evoked a Lenin who "made the Russian land immortal." Mikhail Lukonin called Lenin the "son of Russia." Alexander Gatov rejoiced in the fact that Lenin "was a Russian." And during the war years, Nikolai Tikhonov patriotically raised "the banner of Lenin" over "the Russian regiments." Also, the Russification of Lenin manifested itself in a graphic change of emphasis from his charming burring of the letter R to his pronounced cheekbones. Lenin's burred Rs came to be associated with the wrong class and perhaps ethnic identity (intelligentsia and Jews), whereas his cheekbones showed his proletarian roots and Eurasian origins.¹⁸

While carefully Russifying Lenin, the party authorities took several measures to keep Lenin's ethnic background hidden. The Party History Institute forbade any individuals or institutions from publishing documents on Lenin's life without its permission. The documents discovered by Elizarova-Ulianova were classified, sealed in a folder, and sent for preservation to the Central Party Archive, a subdivision of the Party History Institute. Books and brochures containing informa-

tion on the Blanks such as their place of origin did not see the light of day, never made it to bookstores, or disappeared from libraries. The collection *Materials for Lenin's Biography*, compiled in 1925 by Alexander Arosev, who was aware of Elizarova-Ulianova's findings, passed through censorship by the Party History Institute and appeared without any mention of the Jewish roots of the Blanks. A meticulously documented monograph by Il'ia Zilbershtein, *The Young Lenin in Life and in Work*, already in print in 1929, was confiscated, and the entire print run, except for a couple of copies, was destroyed. Western publications on Lenin's genealogy—among many other publications on Russian revolutionaries and the social democratic movement—ended up in the classified collections of the Party History Institute to which only highly select and ideologically immaculate researchers had access.

Perhaps it was easy to hush the discipline-bound party members, but it was almost impossible to check individual enthusiasts and worshippers of Lenin eager for any information on the object of their idolatry. In the mid-1930s, then literary celebrity Marietta Shaginian joined the seekers of riddles in Lenin's genealogy. Shaginian was a highly ambitious, energetic, and prolific writer, and her intellectual pursuits put her most gifted contemporaries to shame. In the first two decades of the twentieth century she cleaved to anthroposophist circles, read Rudolf Steiner, studied Hellenistic philosophy and the Latin Church fathers, and flirted with the ideas of Russian Orthodox philosopher Sergei Bulgakov. She wrote decadent verse filled with Orientalist motifs, graphic eroticism, and Platonic self-cognition. She boasted of long-lasting relations with Russian Silver Age poets such as Valerii Briusov, Zinaida Gippius, Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, and Marina Tsvetaeva. She befriended the composer Nikolai Mettner and dedicated her first

book of poems to Sergei Rachmaninoff. In the mid-1910s she studied at the University of Heidelberg, focusing on German idealist philosophers who gave additional impetus to her romantic exaltation and shallow mysticism and threw her into the embrace of the Bolshevik revolution.¹⁹

The 1917 Russian revolution came to Shaginian as a divine annunciation; she gave herself to Marxism with the self-abnegation of a neophyte and cast revolutionary enthusiasm in the mold of idealistic philosophy. The revolution helped reveal her new talents but also underscored her striking superficiality, which eventually saved her. Shaginian dedicated herself to journalism for Bolshevik newspapers, covering the rising state industry and the making of Soviet proletarians. She was proud that Lenin admired her essays and told Stalin about her.²⁰ In the mid-1920s, Shaginian turned to prose narrative. She gained renown among mass readers through her *Mess-Mend: The Adventures of Yankees in Leningrad*, a satirical antibourgeois fantasy novel on the class struggle of the proletarians in the West, a primitive piece of Soviet propaganda, now forgotten. Combining her superficiality with internationalism, in the 1940s–1950s Shaginian published scholarly studies on Goethe, the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, and the Czech composer Josef Myslivicek. In the 1960s, when allowed out of the country, she returned with several volumes of travel impressions from Italy, Czechoslovakia, Holland, France, and England. Her multiple endeavors included teaching about textiles and geology and produced countless journalist essays on biology, geology, mathematics, physics, industrial exhibitions, and botany—all of them energetic, vivid, permeated with insatiable curiosity as well as astonishing vanity.²¹

Shaginian worshipped Lenin and remained an ironclad

Leninist to her last breath. For her, Marxism was a theoretical belief, not a practical method; she remained a believer in the immortal ideas of Lenin and Stalin, who indicated a path to the bright communist future. “A tough hag Marietta Shaginian is an artificial ear of workers and peasants,” was a popular 1960s epigram conveying her stalwart dogmatic Marxism of the 1920s and her poor hearing. When Lenin died, Shaginian wrote a poem about him built on redemptive Christian metaphors. Before she turned to Lenin in her series of novels, the leader of the international proletarians appeared in many of her essays. In them, Shaginian carefully reconstructed the ways in which people of various backgrounds, ethnicities, and classes reacted to him. In the 1930s, Shaginian’s interest in Lenin brought her to the Moscow Lenin museum. There, her inquisitive eye caught a discrepancy: the exhibits told of Lenin’s birth and his mature years as a revolutionary leader. There was nothing on his childhood, his family, or his adolescence. Shaginian felt that the exhibition lacked a “living sense of history.” To assuage her curiosity she turned to literature and realized how wooden and inauthentic the literary representations of Lenin seemed. She chose to fill the void and tell the story of Lenin’s parents, Lenin’s childhood, and Lenin’s coming to maturity as a Marxist. She decided to focus not on Vladimir Lenin the revolutionary but on Vladimir Ulianov and his family, school, and social environment.

Humanizing Lenin was a noble and daunting task. Shaginian spent almost three winters in Ulianovsk (former Simbirsk) discussing the Ulianovs with Lenin’s former classmates and his father’s former colleagues. She interviewed elderly inhabitants of Kokushkino, who still remembered Dr. Blank and his daughters. She collected each and every rare memoir on Lenin’s childhood, looked through thousands of pages of news-

papers to which the Ulianovs subscribed, read books Lenin's parents had read, and spent months in the archives in Kazan, Samara, and Astrakhan. With this new baggage she went to talk to Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's widow; Mariia Ulianova, Lenin's sister; and Dmitrii Ulianov, Lenin's brother. She managed to put together bits and pieces to reconstruct the life of a family of Volga-region Russian intelligentsia.²²

Shaginian's project was ambitious: to depict the Ulianov family's cultural environment and psychological and ideological tensions against the backdrop of social clashes in Russian society. Shaginian felt that the deeper she went into family history, the better. Genealogy intrigued her. Yet she could not find anything substantial about the Blanks; in her novel she repeated what she had read in Lenin's sister's memoirs: Alexander Blank was a "Maloross" (the Russian imperial term for Ukrainian). However, she also used the results of her foray into Nikolai Ulianov's genealogy in the novel. It turned out that Lenin's father was of Russian and also Kalmyk origin. For Shaginian, an internationalist of Armenian descent, this was a real discovery: it demonstrated that Lenin was of different nationalities. In 1937, before sending the novel to a journal for publication, Shaginian asked several people to take a look at it and share their critique. Krupskaya replied: "Reading your manuscript, I understood how accurate your approach to the issue was. Only an experienced writer can portray that epoch based on archival materials. I liked not only your conceptualization but also the manuscript." Dmitrii Ulianov echoed Krupskaya's opinion, emphasizing that Shaginian used "fantasy to create the images" but "had not distorted historical facts" and had "created a trustworthy picture of life."²³ The novel seems to have been destined for success—with both readers and the authorities.

The journal *Krasnaia nov'* (Red Novelty) published *A History Exam Ticket* in the spring of 1938. For several months Shaginian heard nothing but praise from literary critics and some high-ranking party officials, including Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. There was a unanimous sense that, for the first time, a book on Lenin had been written in "live, expressive language." But in late summer the reception for the novel suddenly changed. In its August 1938 resolution, the communist party Central Committee censured the publication of Shaginian's novel as ideologically hostile. Shaginian later explained that this resolution was the result of a publication in a German newspaper, which made racist statements regarding Lenin's Kalmyk origins, revealed by Shaginian. Most likely Shaginian used this argument to defend the communist party and blame the racist Nazis instead.

Following the party resolution denouncing the novel, *A History Exam Ticket* appeared on the agenda of two consecutive meetings of the Presidium of the Union of Writers of the USSR. The six leading members of the union subserviently approved the party's assessment of the novel. Shaginian, they claimed, had placed the Ulianovs outside the class struggle characteristic of nineteenth-century Russia and beyond the historical circumstances in which Lenin grew up. She had isolated Lenin's family and portrayed it in a vulgar, petit bourgeois context. Finally, she had allowed herself to be driven by the pseudo-scholarly genealogical method and had given "a twisted portrait on the national profile of Lenin, the great proletarian revolutionary, genius of humankind, produced by the Russian people and considered its national pride."²⁴

That the heads of the Union of Writers scolded Shaginian for lack of emphasis on the social struggle is no surprise, as

this was a *sine qua non* for socialist realism, the approved leading trend of the 1930s. One could never have enough class struggle in one's literary product. However, the critique of genealogy was a novelty. It was probably the first time that Lenin was defined as the "national pride" of the Russian people in a Soviet document, implying that no other nation except Russia could claim the privilege of being the nation of Lenin. Shaginian and the entire editorial board of the journal *Krasnaia nov'* received a harsh reprimand. Krupskaja was publicly scolded for supporting Shaginian. The party squeezed from Dmitrii Ulianov a clumsy essay that disparaged the novel he had praised half a year before. For twenty years—until the late 1960s—Shaginian had no chance of reprinting her novel. Even after the 1957 party plenum rehabilitated the novel and annulled the 1938 resolution, Shaginian was not allowed to speak publicly about the ban. Ludmila Skorino, a friend of Shaginian's and the author of a Soviet monograph on her literary career, was not allowed even to mention that Shaginian had conducted research on Lenin in the 1930s.²⁵ Shaginian's genealogical quest and discovery, combined with the subsequent ban on her novel, all led to the communist chamber of secrets: the archives.

Challenging the Purity of Blood

Soviet authorities knew better than anyone that the archives contained a wealth of information on the history of the social democratic movement. They felt that this information could undermine the reputation of the regime and, potentially, its stability. Under Stalin, all archives answered to the Central Archival Administration, between 1932 and 1962 a subdivision of the Ministry of the Interior. Archives were under strict po-

lice surveillance. Entire collections of historical or politically important documents were classified or transferred to the archives of the security organs. The closer to the Soviet era a researcher's theme, the smaller the chances of gaining access to primary sources. Access to those collections that were available to the public was restricted. An independent scholar had no chance of getting to the documents. To work in an archive one had to get special permission from an authorized Soviet institution, which still did not guarantee access to the necessary files. An affiliated researcher could order no more than five files per day. The archival authorities could reject access to a file or a collection under any pretext. They routinely reported to the security organs regarding which documents had been ordered, who ordered them, and what organization authorized the quest. The NKVD or MGB or KGB closely monitored those seeking access to information.

Once a person was allowed into the archive, he or she could not see whatever documents were in the collection—in fact, only the documents within a narrowly defined topic were made available. The archive manager could easily write: “This file is beyond your theme” or simply “not found.” One had to fight the red tape of archive management to convince staff that certain documents were directly or indirectly related to one's research. In addition, finding the long-sought documents did not mean that one could copy them and use them in research. Clerks supervising the reading rooms required that the researcher present to them handwritten notes: only parts of a document could be copied, not the entire text. There were no copy machines in the Soviet archives, and by bringing a camera into the archive one risked losing reading privileges forever.

In the late 1950s to early 1960s, during the short period of

Nikita Khrushchev's rule that thanks to Il'ia Ehrenburg became known as the Thaw, some archival practices underwent transformation. In 1962 the Central Archival Administration became part of the Council of Ministers of the USSR: now civil authorities, not security authorities, were responsible for day-to-day archive supervision. However, new liberalization trends also prompted even more severe measures of state control. For example, to prevent public interest in family genealogy, particularly attempts to reconstruct Russian noble or military origins, several collections of the tsarist army regimental records were separated from the bulk of the Russian historical and military archive and moved to a small town in eastern Siberia. In a number of archives the staff used its power to prevent leading scholars from seeing the documents they needed. In other cases, the cadre of the security and party apparatus established sole proprietary control of collections of outstanding cultural significance—as happened, for example, with the collection of Mikhail Bulgakov in the department of manuscripts of the Lenin Library in Moscow. The formal procedure of getting into the archive seems to have been the only restriction that was loosened. Once a person received the permit from the corresponding Soviet institution authorizing access to certain documents, archive management gave its consent automatically, without turning to security organs. Revelations followed immediately.

In fall 1964 the retired military man Alexander Petrov, then a member of the advisory board of the State Museum of the History of Leningrad, was looking for the address of the house where Mariia Alexandrovna Blank had been born. His quest led to unexpected results: he uncovered multiple documents covering the medical service of Alexander Blank and containing a detailed listing of his positions, from his gradua-

tion through the end of his career. Petrov uncovered documents on the Christianization of the Blank brothers, papers concerning their studies at the St. Petersburg Medical Surgical Academy, and ministerial reports on their professional appointments. Petrov sent a request about the Blanks to the Zhitomir District Archive and informed Marietta Shaginian of his discovery. In her mid-seventies at the time, Shaginian, who had by then written three new novels on Lenin, was skeptical of the documents. Did they belong to one and the same person? Was this really a Zhitomir- or Starokonstantinov-born Alexander Blank? She conveyed her doubts to Petrov, mentioning that of course she was a doctor of philology who had spent a lot of time in the archives.

The frustrated Petrov replied that he was a communist from civil war times, a technician by profession who knew what scientific precision was about, and who hated seeing lies in print. He suggested that Shaginian come to Leningrad to see the documents for herself.²⁶ Shaginian did, then studied the documents and realized that they reflected the career of one and the same person. She became convinced that Alexander Blank was a baptized Jew born in Starokonstantinov, that Moshko Blank was his father, and that Mariia Blank, Lenin's mother, was his daughter. In January 1965, Vera Melamedova, head of one of the Leningrad Historical Archive departments, helped Shaginian obtain photocopies of the Blanks' acceptance to the Medical Surgical Academy, which Shaginian then took to Moscow.²⁷ Meanwhile, Petrov remarked in his diary, cautiously avoiding names: "We will have our mouths sewn shut because of the grandfather."

Further developments proved Petrov's remark to have been prophetic. In February 1965, Mikhail Shtein, a Leningrad instructor of economics at the Industrial College, also ob-

tained from his institution a permit to grant him access to archival collections. When he began working in the Leningrad archives he also found a number of documents on the Blanks. Like Petrov before him, Shtein realized that genealogical research on the Blanks led to Zhitomir, and he petitioned David Shmin and Evgeniia Shekhtman, the director and senior archivist of the Zhitomir District Archive, respectively, to search there for information on the Blanks. Shmin and Shekhtman found additional documents covering various episodes involving Moshko Blank. They discovered a detailed account of the fire in Starokonstantinov and the accusations of the twenty-two members of the community against Moshko. Inspired by his findings, Shtein also informed Shaginian. Shaginian, already convinced of the Blanks' Jewish origins, replied on May 7, 1965, from Yalta: "I consider nationality exactly as you do—that is, I do not give any importance to it, except empirical and historical. But let me remind you that my book *The Ulianovs* was banned for 22 years (and I was persecuted because of it) because I found the Kalmyk origins on the father's side and this was used by the German Nazi newspapers in 1937."²⁸

The Thaw of the early 1960s still fed the imagination of the Soviet intelligentsia. Everyone participating in the archival hunt was eager to publicize his or her discoveries, forgetting personal caution and the vigilance of the authorities. Shtein wrote an article on Dr. Alexander Blank, Lenin's grandfather, and sent it to a medical journal. Shmin realized that he and Shekhtman had uncovered unique materials on Lenin's maternal relatives and reported their discovery to the Zhitomir district party ideologist and to their bosses at the Ukrainian Central Archival Administration. Shaginian showed the copies of the Blank documents to Petr Pospelov, head of the Institute of Marxism and Leninism (formerly Istpart), and to

Leonid Ilichev, head of the Central Committee Department of Ideology. She hoped that the highest ideological authority on Lenin would grant her permission to use the uncovered data for a new edition of *The Ulianovs*. However, early in March 1965, several state and party authorities informed the Central Archival Administration that too many people had received access to Lenin's genealogical documents and ordered immediate action.

The loosening of control over archival sources resulted in a loss of party control over what was considered highly classified information. The unleashed information seemed more dangerous to party ideologists than an uncontrolled nuclear reaction. Lenin was untouchable. He was the Russian Lenin. Any assault on his faultless Russian image and pure blood was an assault on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Independent genealogical research questioned the party's monopoly on Lenin's legacy. Genrikh Deych, one of the leading Soviet-era specialists on archives, noted that the party ideologists required that all the documents related to Lenin be preserved only in the depository of the Institute of Marxism and Leninism. He added that "the violation of this rule was considered a violation of national secrecy."²⁹

According to Soviet archival regulations there certainly had been a "violation." Iurii Kondufor, a notorious conservative and then head of the Culture and Science Department of the Ukrainian Communist Party Central Committee, articulated the substance of the crime in his straightforward, iron-clad style. He wrote to the Zhitomir party authorities that the local archive had no right to conduct a search of any documents related to Lenin—either by their own initiative or on request of individual scholars; the staff of the archive had violated the exclusive right of the Institute of Marxism and Lenin-

ism, and the violators should be held responsible. Kondufor informed his Moscow party colleagues. Once the Ideological Department of the Central Committee realized that the “violation” had already taken place and the information was out of control, it gave unequivocal orders: stifle those who had obtained information, punish those responsible, and sequester and classify any information available on the subject matter.³⁰

A month after the rediscovery of the Blanks, Shmin and Shekhtman from the Zhitomir archive were accused of having violated the rules for use of archival documents and were fired. Melamedova from the Leningrad National Russian Historical Archive was also fired. Gennadii Belov, head of the Central Archival Administration, gathered the staff of the Leningrad archives, rebuked them for lack of vigilance, and urged them to restrict readers’ access to the documents of the Soviet period, particularly of Stalin’s era. Not surprisingly, he was also accused subsequently of lack of vigilance, administratively disciplined, and fired under a minor pretext. The Zhitomir District Party Committee advised colleagues in Leningrad to take measures against Petrov and Shtein for expressing interest in the Jewish genealogy of Lenin. In response, party authorities strongly admonished Shtein and Petrov against continuing their research. Iurii Sapozhnikov, the vice director of the Propaganda Department of the Leningrad District Party Committee, scolded Shtein for having “shamed Lenin” with his genealogical research and discussion of Lenin’s Jewish roots.³¹

Shaginian also received her due for participating in the unsupervised and unauthorized genealogical research. A Marxist of the 1920s, Shaginian was shocked by the efforts the ideologists undertook to cut short her research on Lenin’s ethnic roots. On May 15, 1965, she wrote to Shtein: “I still hope that people’s brains will be purified and they will stop committing harmful foolishness!” She suffered indeed: the party ideolo-

gists prohibited her from publishing new data on Lenin's Jewish relatives and challenged her belief in communist justice and internationalism. In response, Shaginian refused to publish *The Ulianovs* without the data. A year later, in March 1966, upon realization that the people who had facilitated the research had been laid off, she wrote to Shtein:

You have asked me when *The Ulianovs* [series of novels] will be republished. They forbade me to mention new archival data on Lenin's mother's genealogy in the new edition and I refused to publish *The Ulianovs* without this data. I could not have done more and this incomprehensible ban makes me *sick*. It is not only horrible but also politically stupid. If you see Petrov, tell him that I was just shocked when I realized that the archival staff had problems. If you can comfort them, tell them I myself feel awful about it. I never thought things would turn out this way.³²

More than a million copies of Shaginian's four novels on Lenin were published, yet without the first part—the novel about the Ulianovs. Four years later, Shaginian agreed to reprint the first part with a provincial publishing house. She surreptitiously added a revealing reference to Starokonstantinov, the birthplace of Alexander Blank: she called it a *mestechko*, a word which to the Russian ear implies the shtetl. This was the beginning and the end of what she could do under strict party ideological surveillance. Petrov was right: the authorities managed to sew closed the mouths of those who dared to look into the annals of the Ulianovs and the Blanks. But this was not enough for the vigilant party ideologists.

After stifling the researchers and archivists who dared

discover and share this inconvenient data, the party watchdogs launched a secret campaign aimed at eliminating any record of Lenin's Jewish origins in the USSR depositories. The Central Archival Administration dispatched its top-ranking clerks to a number of archives in Moscow, Leningrad, and Zhitomir. Their instructions were crystal clear: to conduct a rigorous search, identify any documents related to the Blanks, prepare an inventory, and report on everyone who had access to them. The clerks also had to recommend how to remove the documents from the established archival collections and transfer them to under party control. Moscow-based archive managers mobilized local colleagues. Dozens of additional documents were found, including military medical records for Alexander and Dmitrii Blank and small claim court records of cases involving Moshko Blank. The chief clerks recommended withdrawing the documents (even individual pages from files) and leaving no copies. The archive staff meticulously fulfilled their instructions. Pages of the remaining files were renumbered to create the appearance that nothing had disappeared.

The withdrawn documents were sent to the Central Archival Administration. Its head, Belov, still in control, requested further instructions from the Central Committee of the Communist Party. All correspondence on this topic was enveloped in secrecy. The typist who copied the Central Archival Administration request to top party hierarchs received instructions to leave the space for the last name of Moshko and his sons unfilled—even she did not know whose family history she was typing. The last name was supposed to be filled in by hand to prevent the leak of information.³³ There was no answer from party authorities.

In April 1965, two months after the rediscovery of the Blanks, Belov sealed 285 pages of files and documents from six

different archives and put them into a vault in the Central Archival Administration—as far from his own staff as possible. He also informed the Communist Party Central Committee about penalties imposed on those who had violated the rules of preservation and had granted access to Lenin's documents. In May he sent his request again, expecting Mikhail Suslov, the party chief ideologist, to provide him with guidance on what to do with the dangerous documents. The party apparatus remained silent. A historian of the Soviet archive service commented: "Belov asked for written instructions from the Central Committee and did not understand that the reticence of Suslov and his apparatus was already the instruction. That the documents later 'disappeared' after Belov was fired was the logical ramification of their reticence."³⁴

In 1972, on the eve of his forced retirement, Belov dispatched the documents and the copy of the inventory—with no names mentioned—to an unidentified Level of Authority (*Instantsiia*). This authority was most likely the archive of the General Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev, reputedly an open-minded liberal and then the CPSU secretary general, had the documents collected as File No. 3 and wrote: "Open only with permission of the Head of the General Department of the [Communist Party] Central Committee."³⁵ That is to say, he considered it, as had all his party predecessors, top-secret information. His private remarks to the Politburo members made in the 1980s testify to his own racial prejudice, largely overlooked in the West. Until the last years of perestroika and the collapse of communism, Lenin's Jewish relatives remained beyond his family history. The party could congratulate itself on the successful suppression of what its hierarchs thought was dangerous and subversive information. Curious readers

who study primary sources could satisfy themselves with the information from the novel by Marietta Shaginian or from the endorsed memoirs of Lenin's relatives. And particularly inquisitive readers who sent requests to the Institute of Marxism and Leninism received the official reply that Blank was a "Rus-sified German."

Lifting of the Ban

In the early 1990s, the state monopoly on the image of Lenin was lifted. Like many other historical secrets kept out of the public eye, Lenin's Jewish origins surfaced just before and immediately after the collapse of the USSR. The participants in the archival searches—Deych, Shekhtman, Shtein, Tsaplin—made their discoveries public and related their archival travails. Most students of history found their findings convincing, yet some, including Olga Ulianova, Lenin's niece, continued to deny Jewish relations. Debates in the press ensued: postcommunist historians, writers, and journalists used new liberal opportunities to advance their own conceptualizations of the "ban on the Blanks."

For most of them, if not all, the seventy-year suppression of discussion of Lenin's Jewish relatives was proof of the anti-semitism of the regime. One Russian journalist called the handling of Lenin's genealogy by the communists a "fig leaf covering the outright fascist nakedness" of Stalin's rule.³⁶ For him, it was clear that the party's attitude toward the Blanks was of a racial character. Anna Veretennikova (née Blank) was able to safely discuss the alleged German roots of the Blanks, which, as she thought, explained such features of the party leader as his amazing punctuality and diligence. But the nomadic

Kalmyk and Semitic Jewish lineage were problematic, as they rendered Lenin's image ethnically and racially impure.

Puzzled by the continuous efforts of the party apparatus to conceal Lenin's Jewish origins, another Russian journalist asked out loud: What was so extraordinary about the Blanks' nationality that it made the autocratic communist leadership classify it as a state secret? It made no sense, given the equality of nationalities and ethnicities declared in the USSR. He found a single answer: "Someone had approved a sort of ranking order, according to which several nationalities, such as Jews, remained throughout Soviet times among the second-rank, and to belong to them compromised your integrity. This signified the end of a yet another myth of Soviet reality—the Soviet myth of the equality of nations."³⁷

Antisemitism often appears as a convenient argument explaining every mistreatment of the Jews in the Soviet Union, the suppression of the Blanks included. The last decade of the twentieth century into the first decade of the twenty-first brought the publication of thousands of documents covering the state-sponsored antisemitism of the Soviet regime and particularly the antisemitism of Stalin. There is hardly any reason to doubt the role of prejudice in shaping Stalin's or Brezhnev's policies toward Jews. And yet, given that Leon Trotsky, the communist of Jewish origin, was the first among party leaders to start emphasizing Lenin's role as a Russian national symbol; that Lev Kamenev, another communist of Jewish origin, was the first to remove the Blanks as Jews from public discourse; and that Mikhail Gorbachev, much praised for his sympathy toward the Soviet Jews, tacitly reinforced the ban, it does not seem plausible that antisemitism wholly explains the travails of the Blanks under communism.

The explanation seems to rest with the Soviet Union's national policies, which reinforced the centrality and primordial importance of Russian identity in the vertically oriented system of Soviet ethnicities. The party utilized the cult of the Russian Lenin to forge the centrality of the Russian people, its dominant role in the country and in the world communist movement. The existence of the Blanks brought into question the unique role and the centrality of Lenin's Russian identity. Ironically, two or three nineteenth-century Jews, private individuals hardly visible on the vast Russian historical horizon, were deemed sufficient to destroy the idea of Lenin as Russian national patrimony, undermine the centrality of the Russian Soviet identity, and challenge party control over ethnic policies. The Blanks destabilized the attempts to create a cult of a universalistic yet Russian-centered Lenin precisely because of their unimportance and particularity.

Even worse, those insignificant Jews from the Pale of Settlement made the very principles on which Lenin established the party and on which the party established its cult of Lenin problematic: centralism, Russianness, and a vertically oriented system of power. The organization that controlled one-sixth of the earth's surface, possessed atomic power to protect itself, and developed one of the most advanced world economies was afraid of the scoundrel Moshko Blank and of the modest provincial doctor Alexander Blank. The treatment of the Blanks in the Soviet Union reveals nothing new about their family of Jewish converts to Christianity, but it speaks volumes about the self-perception of the communist party.

One can find a rational and nuanced explanation of the attitudes toward Lenin's Jewish roots in the Soviet Union without resorting to such buzzwords as antisemitism. On the other

hand, one must also reflect on a different aspect of this problem. The communist ideologists created and successfully controlled a cult image of Lenin as an individual of pure Russian blood. They were uncomfortable with his Jewish roots but quite comfortable with his racial purity. Apparently, this perception was never publicly acknowledged and always tacitly assumed. Judging by what communist party leaders said out loud and what they tried to hide, their internationalist double-speak turned out to be a superb cover for their racial discourse. They certainly abhorred Nazi propaganda, yet they accepted Nazi logic. Paradoxically, what the communist ideologists accepted tacitly, their far-right opponents in Russia and in the West stated directly and declared vociferously. The discussion of an essential similarity between the attitudes of Soviet state officials and the Russian far-rightists toward Lenin's Jewish origins is now in order.

V

How Lenin Became Blank

The communist ideologists who expurgated the Blanks from Lenin's genealogy and the Russian fascists seeking to banish Jews from the annals of Russian culture converged in the view that Jews had no place in Russian history, either Imperial or Soviet. It is owing to this improbable commonality that Lenin was identified as a Jew after the collapse of communism. To contextualize the Judaization of Lenin by the post-communist far right, one must sketch the conceptualization of the Russian revolution in Russian conservative thought in the twentieth century—a task which in itself deserves a series of solid studies.

The Rise of Russian Racism

Russian conservative thought of the early twentieth century inherited various forms of religious anti-Judaism and political antisemitism and revitalized them with new racial ideas. In the wake of the 1905 revolution, tsarist officialdom reluctantly introduced some bourgeois freedoms, including the freedom to

organize political parties, freedom of the press, and freedom of conscience. The newly established Union of the Russian People (URP), a far-right xenophobic and ultramonarchist party, used these freedoms to challenge their very existence and denigrate those who had brought them about. The URP declared a crusade against liberal reforms and social revolution—the events that had allowed the URP to speak up and be heard. What the Russian people had acquired as a result of the bourgeois revolutionary changes in an autocratic society was viewed in far-right parlance as the result of a foreign conspiracy against Russia.

According to the URP, the Russian people constituted a unified entity that did not know social animosity. The tsar loved his gentry, the gentry loved the people, and the people rallied around the tsar. The tsar, the gentry, and the people were profoundly religious, highly moral, bound to the soil, ethically pure, and faithful to the monarchy. The far-rightists believed that the Russian authorities—the pristinely clean tsar and his loyal and honest coterie—were unable to pollute the country with detestable liberalism and democracy, two evils that the URP saw as undermining the very foundations of Holy Russia. If this pollution had occurred, it could have happened only as the result of an insidious outside invasion.

Because the Russian people were holy, highly moral, monarchic, and loyal, anything associated with the secular, democratic, and subversive could not be Russian. It was alien. And Jews in Russia were *inorodtsy*, legal aliens. Therefore, class conflicts in Russia were of Jewish origin, the revolutionaries instigating them were Jews, and socialism was a foreign Jewish concoction. Developing this approach into a political myth, the URP dubbed any liberal trends and any class struggle a Judeo-Masonic falsehood. The liberals of unquestionable Rus-

sian origin were for the URP despicable slaves of the Jewish kahal and international capital.

On the eve of the First 1905 Russian revolution, the Russian far right, in conjunction with the secret police, orchestrated the fabrication and dissemination of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This forgery was commissioned by Petr Rachkovsky, the chief of the Russian secret police in Paris, and apparently composed by the third-rank Russian journalist Matvei Golovinsky.¹ The *Protocols* sought to divert the attention of the reading public from the social conflicts of the early twentieth century and stream it toward the ethnic. The *Protocols* claimed to reveal the sole cause of the crisis: a hideous Jewish government manipulating European powers in order to establish the Jews' control of the world. Thus *Protocols* offered a reader-friendly, black-and-white vision of decadent fin-de-siècle European society, and emerged as a masterpiece of the rising twentieth-century propaganda. Published first in 1903 in a provincial newspaper, the *Protocols* appeared in 1905 and 1907 in book format, edited and with commentary by Sergei Nilus, an ultraconservative Russian Orthodox mystic, and by Georgii Butmi, an unscrupulous URP journalist.

The book was a great help in furthering the URP's insinuations. It conveniently labeled the gains of social struggle as the results of a foreign anti-Russian invasion. The rise of capitalism, the emerging proletarians, and the claims of the Russian bourgeoisie turned out to be the manifestations of Jews' encroaching on Russia's mainland. Heavily relying on the rich repertoire of antisemitic metaphors in the *Protocols*, the URP leadership presented the idea of freedom as a subversive Jewish fabrication, smuggled into Holy Russia to destroy the Russian people and the Russian church. Utilizing the *Protocols* as a new Apocalypse, the URP could now refer to purported

documental evidence to prove that Russia's modernization—including the introduction of a convertible ruble—was Jewish, alien, and harmful. Even the activities of Christian sects such as the Shtundists and the Baptists, never mind the Ukrainian national revivalists and the Masons, were deemed by the all-Russian congresses of the URP to be menacing Jewish undertakings.²

The new antisemitic mythology stemming from the *Protocols* pointed to an imminent ethnic danger that had to be addressed immediately. To instigate government action against the Jews and the revolution, the URP did not hesitate to recycle medieval anti-Judaic accusations such as the blood libel. When, in 1911, a Kiev gang headed by Vera Chebriak murdered Andrei Yushchinsky, an inconvenient witness to their criminal dealings, the URP used its network among tsarist hierarchs to turn the accusation from a criminal act involving Christians into a ritual murder performed by a Jew. Instead of the gangsters and murderers of Russian Orthodox origin, the court arrested Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jewish clerk in the local brick plant, and charged him with the murder of a Christian boy with the aim of using his blood for baking Passover matzos. The ensuing court debates featured key URP lawyers who spared no effort to prove the guilt of the Jews, whom they labeled as bloodsuckers victimizing Russian Christians. Although Beilis was found not guilty, the court did not dismiss the validity of the accusation. Like the *Protocols*, the Beilis case successfully reoriented Russian public opinion from social to ethnic and provided a clear-cut identification of Russia's staunch enemy: the Jew—blood-and-power-thirsty detractor of the Russian people and of Russian Orthodoxy.

The more irreversibly the Russian regime slid down the precipice to World War I, the more vocally the Russian far-

rightists argued for a radical departure from the traditional Russian policy toward Jews. Segregation and marginalization of Russian Jews was insufficient from their viewpoint. The right-wingers bombarded Russian cabinet ministers with proposals to banish Jews from all the interior provinces in Russia back into the Pale of Settlement, to expel the Jews from the army as unpatriotic and harmful aliens, and to forbid them from serving as Duma deputies, those who were sixth-generation converts to Christianity included. The URP appealed to the government to stop the unpatriotic Jews from sending their children to Christian schools, from joining state service, and from using Christian names. When World War I broke out, the Russian army leadership was so contaminated by antisemitic propaganda that it was pulled into a massive antisemitic campaign. In the midst of the upheavals and military failures of World War I, the Russian Main Staff indiscriminately accused Yiddish-speaking Jewish civilians in the frontier regions of being German spies. Augmented by war propaganda, the anti-Jewish hysteria resulted in unsubstantiated trials, pogroms, and mass expulsions of Jews from the frontier regions of the Pale of Settlement, particularly from Eastern Galicia.

Russian far-rightists sought and found a strong theoretical basis to support their far-reaching proposals. They evoked the ideas of Arthur de Gobineau, author of racial theory who transformed his aristocratic scorn toward the African colonial people and American blacks into a historiosophy of racial inequality. The URP writers utilized Gobineau to amplify religious anti-Judaism and political antisemitism with biological racism. In so doing, the URP departed significantly from the nineteenth-century Russian conceptualization of identity, which was shaped by religion and which assumed that Christianiza-

tion could turn an alien into a Russian with all the privileges granted to full-fledged Russian subjects. “Zhid kreshchenyi—chto vor proshchenyi” (A baptized Jew is no better than a pardoned thief), argued the URP leaders, backing their racism with a Russian proverb. They claimed that neither Christianization nor Russification could change a Jew. Not even baptism could erase the indelible mark of a Semite.

The URP identified all Jews as spiritually Jewish, including those who were entirely modernized, atheistic, assimilated, indifferent, illiterate, acculturated, or baptized. Furthermore, the URP believed that the concept of “Jewish” was cohesive, unified, and steeped in tribal hatred and xenophobia dictated by the homophobic Talmud. Of course, the conservative ideologists drew their knowledge of the Talmud from the anti-Judaic insinuations of Christian propagandists, from Raimundo de Peñaforte (1175–1275) and Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469–1523) to Hippolyte Lutostanski (1835–1915) and Yakov Brafman (1825–1879). In short, from the URP viewpoint there were no Jews, no multilingual and multicultural people of different political trends, religious backgrounds, and social pursuits; but only a single, unified and frightening, “Talmudic Jewry.”³

Exactly as Lenin had suggested and Stalin had developed in his famous essay on Marxism and the national question, the URP ideologists maintained that Jews were a race and a tribe, not a people or a religion. Yet, going further than Lenin and Stalin, Russian far-rightists affirmed that Jewish behavior also betrayed a tribal agenda. Whenever they got together, Jews formed a clandestine government. Furthermore, even a fourth-generation Russian-speaking Jew still secretly rejected Russian values and cherished his anti-Russian intentions. You could change the religion of a Jew, teach a Jew some Dostoevsky or Pushkin, and make a Jew respect the Russian symbols of

power, but the Jew would still remain a shameless individual bereft of ethical principles. “Jews assimilate physically, but not spiritually,” declared the URP. Making Jews into equal citizens was an impossible task. One could take a Jew out of the Talmud but one could not take the Talmud out of a Jew.⁴

Aryan Russians and Their Jewish Demons

The URP generously sponsored its passionate propagators such as Aleksei Shmakov (1852–1916), Georgii Butmi (1856–1927), Georgii Zamyslovsky (1872–1920), and Mikhail Menshikov (1859–1919). Perhaps Menshikov was the most representative and talented among these nonentities—particularly since he was a journalist with *Novoe vremia*, a respectable and widely circulating conservative Russian newspaper. A leading modern connoisseur of nineteenth-century Russian culture emphasized that Menshikov was a third-rate journalist who drew his ideas from the “pot of the feuilleton leftovers.”⁵ Once Menshikov turned to far-right journalism, Anton Chekhov called him a scoundrel, Leo Tolstoy cut off their relations, the minister of education dubbed him a swine, and Count Sergei Witte dropped in passing that his ideas surpassed even the most reactionary. Yet it would be premature to write off Menshikov as a literary nonentity: a popular though shallow writer, Menshikov shaped key antisemitic myths that nurtured—and continue to nurture—Russian writers, poets, journalists, and thinkers throughout the twentieth and well into the twenty-first century.

Menshikov masterminded Russian xenophobia in the same way that the *Protocols* served as a blueprint for European antisemitism. He was among the first Russian far-rightists to make use of biological racism. He infused Russian conserva-

tive thought with the Gobineau theory of Aryan superiority, which he followed doggedly. In his racist appeals, later collected in the volume *Letters to the Russian Nation*, he propagated the supremacy of the caste of the Russian aristocracy and the inferiority of all those foreigners who did not belong in Russia. He hated ethnic aliens, whoever they were, including Baltic Germans, who were widely known as highly urbanized, profoundly Russified, increasingly militarized, and staunchly patriotic. He also scorned the Dutch, Greeks, Italians, Poles, and Ukrainians in Russian state service—all aliens whose presence he considered harmful to the Russian titular nation. They could not grasp nor possess what Menshikov called the spirit of the Russian race, their loyalty and education notwithstanding. Jews, however, were to Menshikov by far the worst Russian aliens. And while one should do one's best to get rid of ethnic aliens among Russian bureaucrats, both central and local, Russia needed to be cleansed of Jews altogether. In this he saw the only way out of what Gobineau saw as the "inevitable decline and fall" of the white race.⁶

In his dependence on French, German, and Polish sources, Menshikov continued the tradition of Russian reactionary thinkers who heavily drew from Western thought. An apologist for Russian racial purity, Russian Christian Orthodoxy, and Slavic national spirituality, Menshikov peppered his borrowings from Wilhelm Marr and Arthur de Gobineau with the centuries-old insinuations of anti-Jewish Catholic propaganda, brought to light by Father Pranaitis, the Catholic expert on Jewish ritual murder who was an advisor in the Beilis case. Only at first glance did Jews look like ordinary people, maintained Menshikov. In reality they were yellow-skinned Asians, a lower race whose Semitic blood had become mixed over millennia with the blood of Negroes.⁷ As far as their political

predilections, Jews throughout the world—from America to the Pale of Settlement—were united in a kahal-centered conspiracy against Russia. Jews captured leading positions in Russian arts, literature, and journalism because they were professional falsifiers and imitators, not because they were more talented than Russians. Historically, Jews had always been moneylenders, dishonest exploiters, pimps, seducers, and provocateurs, an amoral species of a lower type. Essentially Jews were swindlers who falsified medicine, silver, food, textiles, construction, bread, and even virginity.⁸

A social Darwinist, Menshikov compared Jews to infectious bacilli contaminating the healthy body of the Russian people. Jews, he argued, schemed to humiliate Russia and poison the Russians. They felt deep animosity toward Christians and sought ways to hurt them. To that end, Jews inundated Russia with ideas of equality, a product of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy against the pure Aryan Russian race. Jews had also used Mendel Beilis to perpetrate the ritual murder of the Christian boy Andrei Yushchinsky, reenacting the ritual murder of Jesus Christ. It did not matter whether Beilis was or was not exonerated by the jury: Menshikov reassured his readers that all of Jewish history was a ritual murder of the peoples in whose midst Jews lived. Again, long before Bolsheviki of Jewish origin appeared among the communist party Politburo members, Menshikov was among the most consistent adherents to the idea that there was no such thing as the Russian revolution, because the revolution in Russia was Jewish. Menshikov had no doubt that “social progress could be achieved through selection of the fittest” and hoped that the Russian nation would ultimately get rid of East European Jews.⁹

The state-orchestrated anti-Judaism and populist far-right antisemitism of the ancien régime exacerbated the plight of the Russian Jews and pushed thousands of them into the

embrace of the revolution. A leading student of the subject argued that “Jews were at times attracted in disproportionate numbers to the Communist movement precisely because it promised an escape from the realities of life within a minority marked off variously by ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic boundaries into a new world where all such boundaries would be eliminated.”¹⁰ After 1917, those who had joined the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the Bund found themselves in leading positions in the Soviet state apparatus. Although Jews in governmental posts in the Soviet Republic constituted a fraction of 1 percent of Russia’s Jewish population, for the far-rightists the Jewish overrepresentation among state and party leaders came as a justification of their worst expectations. If the revolution of 1905 was seen as the result of some secret conspiracy of international Jewry, the revolution of 1917 was for the URP the empirical reality of this conspiracy. Seeking a new haven in the revolution that had replaced ethnicity with class, the Bolsheviks of Jewish descent inspired the revitalization of an old myth and gave it new impetus. Now the far-rightists could have legitimate discussions about Jews seeking power and vengeance against Christians.

The problem of empowered Jews in state service had its historical explanation. The Russian tsarist regime’s anti-Judaic bias had in principle excluded Jews from state service. Between the 1790s and 1830s there were Jews serving as members of the *shtetl* magistrates (later removed), and between the 1850s and 1917 there were some 150 expert Jews (*uchenye evrei*) advising the governors and a couple of dozen state-employed censors of Jewish books. But the Russian population at large had never seen Jews in the role of statesmen. Expert Jews could advise state ministers and provincial governors, but Jewish statesmen were unheard of.

The state identified its subjects according to religion

and respected religious conversion: once Russian Orthodox, Nicholas I declared, a person was no longer Jewish. Only those Jews who underwent baptism could take a post. The attempts of Alexander Solzhenitsyn to count such prominent statesmen as Petr Shafirov and Egor Peretts among Jewish Russian statesmen betray Solzhenitsyn's racial prejudice and should not be taken seriously.¹¹ (Shafirov and Peretts were third- and second-generation Russian Christians.) Daniil Chwolson, a prominent Orientalist, and Mikhail Grulev, an army general, both born Jewish, enjoyed upward mobility in the academy and the military only through their adoption of the state religion. Abram Harkavy, the founder of Russian Judaic studies, refused baptism and could never become a university professor. Only Leonid Pasternak, an outstanding Russian painter, refused baptism and yet obtained a professorship at the Academy of Arts. For centuries the ban on Jews from government office fed the popular assumption that a Jew in power was an anomaly.

After 1917, the Russian mass imagination—across the political, ethnic, and cultural spectrum—grew increasingly suspicious of the abnormally high presence of individuals of Jewish descent in leading administrative and party positions, notwithstanding their Russian pen-names, charisma as revolutionary martyrs, and profound Russification. For the Russian peasant masses or the urban petit bourgeoisie, Bolshevik power was Jewish power, and the Bolsheviks were Jews. The paradigm of people versus power that shaped the Russian cultural mentality throughout the nineteenth century also cemented the popular belief that Jewish power had come to oppress the Russian people.

Not only far-right activists but even liberals took this stance. Summing up his impressions of the revolutionary

events of 1917, Simon Dubnow, the founder of Russian-Jewish historiography, shared his gloomy premonitions: “They would remind us [the Jews] that Jewish revolutionaries took part in the Bolshevik terror. Lenin’s colleagues—Trotskys, Zinovievs, Uritskies, and others—would out-shadow him. Later, people would talk loudly about that, and Judeophobia would strike the very roots of Russian society.”¹² The monarchist emigrants relished popular sayings that compared revolutionary leaders with prerevolutionary tycoons of Jewish descent: “Sugar of Brodsky, tea of Wissotzky, Russia of Trotsky.”¹³ In 1925, a year after Lenin’s death, a trustworthy observer known for his sympathy toward Jews noted a contemporary urban exchange. Alexander Granovsky’s movie *Jewish Luck* had appeared in the movie theaters of Kiev. Outside a theater, somebody asked when the film *Jewish Luck* was to start. “It started eight years ago,” was the answer. That is to say, with the Bolsheviks in 1917.

After the Bolshevik revolution the antisemitic myths of the old regime—including the *Protocols*, semiforgotten by the late 1910s—became widespread among Russian conservative thinkers in exile. Now the concept of a Jewish revolution garnered support and popularity. The fact that many former far-rightists ended up being shot by the Cheka (including Menshikov) allowed them to be beatified in the émigré imagination as Russian martyrs of the Jewish persecution. Menshikov had many followers, but perhaps no one imitated him as closely as Vassili Shulgin, a pre-1917 Russian Duma member and a thoughtful speaker, who personally facilitated the abdication of Nicholas II and supported the bourgeois provisional government.

In the 1920s, Shulgin, an anti-Bolshevik émigré, found himself unexpectedly trapped. The Soviet secret services organized a propagandist trip to Russia for him, whereas Shulgin

thought he was traveling incognito. He came back from the USSR to his residence in Belgrade as a man with a marred reputation, if not as a suspected Bolshevik agent. Shulgin tried to exonerate himself in the eyes of the xenophobic Russian émigré community by publishing his influential pamphlet *What We Do Not Like in Them*, which later became a favorite source for Russian xenophobes such as Vladimir Soloukhin, Vadim Kozhinov, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Shulgin explained to the Russian monarchist-minded émigrés that there was only one cause of their exile, humiliation, and destitution: the Jewish revolution. There had been no Russian proletarian strikers, no increasingly impoverished peasants, no anarchic navy, no profound economic crisis, no inept and badly managed army, and no corrupt autocracy. The Russian revolution succeeded because the Jews had captured the Russian press, appropriated Russia's political life, and gained the sponsorship of the American Jew Yakov Schiff in their rebellion against Holy Russia. Instead of analyzing the complex fabric of Russian life at the time of the revolution or the vocabulary and activities of the Russian revolutionary parties, Shulgin boldly claimed that not all Jews were communists and not all communists Jews, but among communists, Jews had power inversely proportional to their numbers among the Russian population. Shulgin had no idea about Lenin's Jewish relatives—otherwise, he would gladly have used this information. But even without this knowledge he argued that, after 1917, Jews had become Russia's rulers and Russians had turned into slaves of the Jews.¹⁴

Shulgin knew Jews firsthand, but he resorted to URP myths much more often than to his own experience. Shulgin saw all Jews as hunched over, dandruff stricken, myopic, and sharp voiced. It was not individual Jews or organized groups of Jewish proletarians who participated in the revolutionary

struggle, but a multimillion-strong Israel. Shulgin ignored the fact that 99 percent of East European Jews could not be identified with Bolshevik power. He did not bother with an analysis of Jewish economic, religious, political, legal, or cultural conditions before 1917. Nor did he trouble himself to analyze why other minorities he mentioned—Latvians, Lithuanians, Georgians, Armenians, and Poles—had also participated in the revolution disproportionately to their numbers among the Russian population. Racial discourse was his unquestionable credo, although he feigned to have been an inconsistent racial antisemite.¹⁵ Once he identified the Jews as guilty, he needed nothing more in order to explain how the Russian revolution had occurred. However, he did single out one positive undertaking of the Judeo-Bolsheviks: they had started reconstructing Russian imperial statehood, a tendency that Shulgin could not help but admire.

Shulgin's ideas helped many myth-seeking Russian emigrants explain their personal catastrophes, yet his invective did not have solid historical justification. This was achieved by one Andrei Dikii (Dikoi), a former White Guard officer, imperialist thinker, and self-proclaimed historian residing in the United States. Dikii made an extraordinary effort to structure his narrative of the Russian revolution on the key xenophobic invectives of Menshikov and Shulgin. Before Solzhenitsyn's infamous *Two Hundred Years Together*, for half a century Dikii's *Jews in Russia and the USSR* was the blueprint for any antisemitic discourse of Russian history. His was perhaps the first attempt to tell the story of the East European Jews—focusing on the Russian revolution—from the perspective of the far right. Following Menshikov and Shulgin, Dikii saw Russian Jews as a mythological, terrifying, unified, and homogeneous group with shared interests. "All Russian Jews," he wrote, "despite

sharp social diversification and class contradictions, represented one monolithic whole.”¹⁶

Dikii translated Shulgin’s metaphors of “Jewish rulers” and “Russian slaves” into a historiosophic narrative dotted with names, figures, and statistics. One of the most important of Dikii’s achievements was his portrayal of the Soviet ruling elite. It sufficed for him to write the real Jewish name after the revolutionary pseudonym of a Soviet state leader in order to prove that Jews had captured power in Russia. Himself a monarchist and xenophobe who could not come to grips with his political loss, Dikii did not care where those Soviet leaders had come from, how many years they had spent in exile or in prison, and what they had done before 1917. Such information would portray Jews as a people who had suffered for the sake of Russia’s oppressed classes or shared the fate of the Russian political opposition, something Dikii was definitely not interested in proving. His portrayal of the Jews in power left little doubt: the ruling elite in the USSR was a Jewish elite. And what the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* only prefigured or had warned against, Russian Jews apparently had implemented in the USSR. Like his far-right predecessors, Dikii maintained that there were no Russian or European or American Jews, but only one united world Jewry—fearsome, cohesive, and aggressive. Dikii’s image of the Jews was the same as Menshikov’s Talmudic Jewry or Shulgin’s multimillion-strong Israel, who had come to enslave Russia.¹⁷ Dikii’s ideas and lists of empowered USSR Jews informed the efforts aimed at Judaizing Lenin.

Enemies of the People Unmasked

Although Menshikov, Shulgin, and Dikii were banned in the USSR, the communist party’s policies toward Jews paved the

way for the subsequent success of far-right antisemitic theories among the Soviet elites. Stalin's reconceptualization of class struggle buttressed this process. A student of Russian history wittily observed that "classes were made and unmade depending on abrupt changes in the Bolshevik discourse."¹⁸ The same is true about "enemies of the people." Having eliminated those whom Stalin labeled bourgeois elements such as the kulaks, the old (pre-revolutionary-trained) specialists, and the party opposition, Stalin's post-1945 regime identified a new enemy. These were the rootless cosmopolitans, a euphemism for Soviet elites of Jewish descent. In 1948 this group was singled out as being seduced by the West, suspiciously unpatriotic, ideologically harmful, and allegedly involved in espionage against the Soviet state. They comprised literary and theater critics, members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Yiddish writers, and Kremlin doctors. The beginning of the Cold War and the rise of the State of Israel serve as a crucial political background for the understanding of the new Soviet witch-hunt against an internal enemy, the Jews. In the USSR, practically no one had any doubt that the object of persecution was in fact the Soviet Jews, until now considered the most loyal ethnic minority in the country.

The anti-Jewish slogans of the late Stalin regime bore a striking resemblance to the far-right allegations, although the former still maintained a class-based label (*intelligentsia*) whereas the latter openly used ethnic concepts (Jews). Jewish intellectuals appeared in Soviet discourse as harmful parasites, masked spies, and serfs of the international Zionist bourgeoisie. They treacherously hid their origins beneath their Russian pseudonyms. The goal of Soviet citizens was to unmask them as enemies of the people. The regime successfully accomplished this task by arresting the members of the Jewish

Anti-Fascist Committee, cleansing Soviet scientific institutions of Jewish specialists and state establishments of Jewish clerks, shutting down Jewish theaters and publishing houses, executing the most prominent Yiddish writers, and bringing the country to the brink of a full-fledged anti-Jewish pogrom in the wake of the arrest of the Kremlin Jewish doctors, accused of poisoning the leaders of the Soviet state. To be sure the post-Stalin communist leadership rejected the blatantly antisemitic campaigns of the 1940s and early 1950s and rehabilitated most of the victims, yet Stalin's regime at its postwar height came to be strongly associated with state-orchestrated antisemitism. Moreover, this period of anti-Jewish persecution introduced into the popular mentality far-right clichés that until then either had not been identified as outright antisemitic or had been dismissed as ethnically biased. Recently declassified Supreme Court reports on mass post-Stalin sedition testify to an endemic racist prejudice among rank and file Soviet citizens from all walks of life.¹⁹

After the 1950s, antisemitism became a pronounced trend among the Soviet ruling and cultural elites. Trained by the Stalinist hardliners in the 1940s and 1950s at the Higher Party Institute (*Vysshaia partiinaia shkola*), future communist hierarchs—from the Komsomol leader Semichasnyi to the party leader Gorbachev—absorbed an antisemitic bias together with their basic communist education.²⁰ Split along pro-Stalin/anti-Stalin lines during the Khrushchev Thaw, various party groupings sought to advance their agenda by utilizing the public media. The anti-Stalinists endorsed the liberalization reflected in such literary journals as *Novyi mir* and *Iunost'*. The hardliners, in turn, favored such solid literary journals as *Molodaia gvardiia*, *Nash sovremennik*, and *Moskva*, which served as platforms for various cultural groupings with

pronounced nationalistic proclivities known as the informal “Russian party.”

While the liberals attempted to dismantle the vestiges of Stalinism and restore what they called Leninist party norms, the Stalinists sought further to suppress the visibility of the Jewish intelligentsia in order to “advance the interests of the country’s dominant nationality.”²¹ Indeed, the party liberals used Marxist terminology and appealed to classical Marxism; the hardliners used the terminology of state, ethnicity, and nation.

Fostering Russian exclusivity in the guise of Soviet patriotism, the conservative literary journals doubled their circulation between 1971 and 1981, with the endorsement of the hardliners. These journals specialized in various forms of ethnic xenophobia, which they did not even bother to camouflage as class struggle. They experimented with variegated forms of Eurasianism, Arianism, racism, neo-positivism, Russo-centrism, Russian national etatism, xenophobia, and anti-semitism. For some twenty years before the SPCU secretary general Yurii Andropov came to power they enjoyed unheard of freedom of expression. Impressed by the lenient attitude of the Soviet hierarchs toward these journals, one student of Soviet history questioned their “dissident” status and suggested that they be seen as part of the official discourse.²²

In the Brezhnev era, these journals directed their patriotic anger against the urban, westernized, and liberal-minded intelligentsia, routinely portrayed as ethnically Jewish. Discussed by a wide range of readers in the USSR, *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia* offered a mythological explanation of history and society that was shallow and reductionist, yet eschewed official Leninism and was hence attractive. These journals can be grouped with the xenophobic weekly newspaper

Literaturnaia Rossiia, the weekly journal *Ogonek*, and *Roman-gazeta*, a mass reprint of party-line prose narratives that had a circulation of 3 million to 4 million copies. These media created a form of outreach that allowed party ideologists to manipulate the class and national identification of society's harmful elements. They were thus an indispensable propaganda tool and an effective instrument of state control. The party hardliners masterfully utilized the antisemitic bias in mass media: above all, it helped rehabilitate Stalin, whose cult of personality had been publicly denounced by the communist party under Khrushchev's rule. Antisemitism was also instrumental in reorienting the rage of Soviet citizens from the increasingly inept party leadership to the intelligentsia and the Jews.

In turn, the newly legalized literary conservatives sought to reeducate the mid-rank party leadership in the spirit of nationalism, xenophobia, and Russian exclusivity. Virtually everything published in *Molodaia gvardiia* and *Nash sovremennik*, ranging from literary criticism and poetry to philosophical essays and prose narrative, drew from the same pool of far-right ideas. The Judaization and denigration of the Russian revolution in general and of Russian liberalism in particular was the focus of the far-right literati. They also advanced new positive values as alternatives to what was perceived as Judaic and liberal. Consider, for example, Valentin Pikul's pseudo-historical adventure novel *U poslednei cherty* (At the Brink of the Abyss), about Grigorii Rasputin and the last years of the Russian Empire (*Nash sovremennik*, 1979, no. 4–7). Manipulating historical facts to please his readers, Pikul identified the reason behind the decline and fall of the old regime to be the international Zionist conspiracy against the Russian monarchy. Vadim Kozhinov, an insightful literary scholar and disci-

ple of the Russian philosopher and humanist Mikhail Bakhtin, published in *Nash sovremennik* his much-discussed essay on Dostoevsky, in which he celebrated the author's xenophobia, his insistence on the preponderance of the Slavic spirit, and his emphasis on the Aryan character of great Russian literature. Published regularly in *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia*, Stanislav Kuniaev, in verse, scorned sentiments such as true friendship and selfless love and praised instead the power of the elements and physical violence. Choosing another solid literary journal, Tatiana Glushkova published her notorious essay on Pushkin's "Mozart and Salieri," which presented Wolfgang Mozart as intuitive, popular, spontaneous, irrational, devoted, and therefore "our" Russian genius, whereas Antonio Salieri was a rationalist and skeptic, a cold intellectual, and therefore a murderer and an alien to the Russians.²³ Most importantly, Vladimir Chivilikhin's historical and philosophical novel *Pamiat'* (Memory) emphasized the supremacy of the Russian spirit, dismissed any foreign influence on Russian nation-building, and portrayed the Old Rus as the cradle of the Indo-European Aryans.

In the USSR under Brezhnev, seekers of far-right revelations were provided a whole array of legally published sources. Intellectuals interested in historical sensationalism could indulge themselves by reading such Russian neo-romantic historians and ethnologists as Lev Gumilev. The son of Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev, Russian Silver Age poets par excellence, Lev Gumilev developed a unique interpretation of the history of Kievan Rus. He presented it as a battle between Slavic statehood and the parasitic, short-lived Khazar state, whose nomadic elite adopted Judaism in the late eighth century and which was widely identified as Jewish. Unlike the Slavic tribes with their highly productive fusion of

ethnicities, Judaic Khazars, the alleged forefathers of the Ashkenazic Jews, represented a “chimeric” mixture of ethnicities, which made them particularly harmful to the host societies in which they dwelled.²⁴ Those interested in Russian Orthodox antiquity had Vladimir Soloukhin—a gifted *po-chvennik* (back-to-the-soil writer) and one of the chief editors of the *Molodaia gvardiia*. While any discussion of religiosity in a positive light was considered religious propaganda and penalized as a criminal act, Soloukhin innocuously discussed his experience as a collector of Russian Orthodox icons (*Moskva*, 1969, no. 1). Connoisseurs of high-brow literature could turn to Valentin Kataev, an extremely gifted Russian stylist, who portrayed revolutionary Odessa in his novel *Uzhe napisan Verter* (Werter Has Already Been Written), published by the liberal *Novyi mir* (1980, no. 6). His main characters, the Cheka members, were all Jews—as if only the Jews, lowly Yiddish-speaking and communist-minded radicals, bore the entire burden of responsibility for purges of the Russian elites and the destruction of Russian culture.

The reading preferences of the Russian xenophobes betray their familiarity with the classics of Russian antisemitica. Several Russian far-rightists found their way to Shulgin, who spent his last years in the town of Vladimir near Moscow, after he was arrested in Belgrade, served his term in the Gulag, and was amnestied in 1956. Il’ia Glazunov, celebrated Russian artist and a leader of the clandestine monarchists and chauvinists, recommended Dikii’s *Jews in the USSR* as reading to the members of his group.²⁵ Other far-rightists rediscovered Menshikov, Butmi, and Nilus.²⁶ Alarmed by the wave of antisemitism and xenophobia among Russian intellectuals, particularly palpable among those disappointed in Marxism, Father Alexander Men’ chose to write about the inhuman and violent

Protocols of the Elders of Zion. A leading liberal-minded Russian Orthodox priest, he hoped to check the spread of anti-semitic myths in his immediate Russian Orthodox milieu.²⁷

While conservative intellectuals indulged themselves in ethnocentric and nationalistic reading, millions in the USSR found their own ways to mock the hypocrisy of the regime. Anonymous urban folklore abounded—vulgar folk rhymes, chauvinistic White Guard songs, erotic romance, and nationalistic political jokes suiting all tastes. In the 1960s and 1970s, a folksong with the refrain “Jews, Jews, only Jews are around,” with full rhymes and easy rhythm, was nearly ubiquitous. In one verse, the French film antihero Fantomas is ironically assumed to be Jewish, and, about Lenin, the rhetorical question was asked: “Mausoleum holy shit, who believes he’s not a Yid?”²⁸ Antisemitic jokes about the Russian revolution were also enormously popular among both Jews and Russians. Unaware of Lenin’s Jewish roots, the Soviet Jews in self-serving manner depicted the Bolshevik Central Committee Politburo as a gang of religious Jews—as “our” Bolsheviks. When its members needed a break, Trotsky would count the ten members of Jewish origin in the room, point at Lenin and say in a mixture of twisted Russian and Yiddish: “*Ob der doziker goy goes avek, we will have a minyan and can doven minhe*” (If this non-Jew leaves the room we will have a prayer quorum and can have our regular afternoon worship). Although Lenin did not appear in that joke as a Jew, the other Bolsheviks did, and Lenin was portrayed as helplessly dependent on them.

This mockery was by no means innocuous. It took for granted the essentially Jewish character of the Bolshevik party leadership and the revolutionary essence of the Jew. The question, however, was not whether this and similar jokes were anti-semitic: the whole point was to poke fun at the official state

discourse that ignored ethnic problems in the state, covering them with the fig leaf of class struggle. Jews, an allegedly disloyal and increasingly marginalized minority in the USSR, felt that their contribution to the revolutionary cause had been dismissed or ignored, and they sought to recompense themselves through a humorous version of history. In yet another joke, the security services summon an Odessa Jew bearing a striking resemblance to Lenin and order him first to change his vest, then get rid of his proletarian hat, and finally to shave his beard, thus removing any visual allusions to Lenin. The Odessa Jew obeys, but at the first opportunity he asks the security officer, "The hat I have changed, the beard I have shaved; but what can I do with my thoughts?" This joke deftly captured the popular ethnic-based responses to official party history: only a cunning Odessa Jew could have features and thoughts replicating the thoughts and features of Lenin. After the collapse of communism, such jokes, based on racial profiling, found their way into popular books on history and were seen as directly antisemitic.²⁹

The split between nonofficial ethnocentric and official class-based discourse exemplified a dualistic—or, as a leading Russian historian put it, a Manichean pattern of Soviet discourse about identity.³⁰ Whatever the level of outward xenophobia in mass media, literature, and folklore, the party remained loyal to its class-based phraseology. Jews eager to leave the USSR were treated by the party and the trade-union committees as traitors who betrayed the flourishing Soviet state by choosing instead some dubious privileges of rotten capitalism. Jewish dissidents, distributors of Samizdat, or teachers of Hebrew appeared in the courtrooms as hooligans, agents of foreign intelligence, religious agitators, or criminals—that is to say, as outcasts who challenged the peaceful life of Soviet citi-

zens or who slandered communist ideology. The regime used vague class markers seeking to cover the harmful elements in society, whose national or noncommunist identity was only too evident: Jews seeking to leave the country; Ukrainian dissidents and human rights activists protesting Russification; “rotten intelligentsia” demanding liberalization; Russian Orthodox religious activists; and Zionist activists or teachers of Hebrew. The Kremlin orchestrated the adoption of the 1975 U.N. resolution no. 3375 equating Zionism with racism and articulated its anti-Zionist stance by cursing Israel as a sycophantic petit bourgeois serf of Uncle Sam and the imperialistic oppressor of the freedom-seeking Palestinian national democracy. The collapse of the USSR, however, vividly demonstrated that the class-based communist vocabulary was a very thin and inefficient veil for the Russocentric xenophobia of Soviet officialdom.

Surge of Racist Storytelling

The collapse of the USSR turned many away from troubled Marxism toward a national and ethnocentric worldview. In the 1990s, Shulgin, Dikii, and Menshikov made their way into the Russian press. Their works appeared in several legal editions and pirated publications. Unlike other dinosaurs from the early stage of Russian antisemitism, Menshikov entered the Russian conservative tradition as a great national journalist, a man of true integrity, a Russian patriot concerned with the fate of his people, a peace-loving Russian intellectual, and a martyr shot by the Jewish Cheka. Sergei Nilus, the publisher of the *Protocols*, appeared in Russian Orthodox publications as a Russian holy elder, practically a saint. In the next stage, living Western xenophobes, Holocaust deniers, and racists of various levels

found their way to the Russian Federation, where they were greeted by the newly legalized far-rightists.

Consider the appearance in Moscow of David Duke of the Ku Klux Klan. Alexander Prokhanov, who had actively published with *Nash sovremennik* and *Molodaia gvardiia*, and who published the popular Stalinist, xenophobic, and racist *Zavtra* (Tomorrow) newspaper, facilitated Duke's trip to Russia and organized his presentations at the Maiakovsky Museum in the heart of Moscow. By that time Soviet officialdom had stripped Maiakovsky of his internationalist utopianism, dismissed his Heine-esque irony and his futuristic imagery, and suppressed discussion of any links between him and Lilia Brik, a Jewish woman who inspired his lyrics and contributed as no one else to his posthumous reputation as a great Soviet poet. The Soviets transformed Maiakovsky into a rhapsodist of socialist construction and herald of the proletarian state. They built for him a huge museum next to the infamous KGB headquarters, Lubianka. But this was not enough: now they were allowing a knight of white racism to give presentations in the Maiakovsky Museum. In front of Maiakovsky's books and posters, David Duke held his audience, mostly young people, spellbound, explaining to them how Jews control the U.S. media and how they impose the myths of their suffering during World War II, seeking to effectively manipulate American public opinion. It seems his audience liked him there—Duke was repeatedly invited to give more presentations at the museum.

The paradoxical adoption of “foreigners” in the Russian far-right milieu took place for a number of reasons. Duke proved that even in liberal America people were troubled by the Jewish conspiracy. Dikii had broken the seventy-year taboo on the discussion of a key role played by a national minority in

Russian history; that his writings first appeared in the West raised Dikii's credibility in the eyes of the anticommunist-oriented Russian intelligentsia. Shulgin, in turn, gave a clear-cut answer to the century-old Russian historiosophic questions: what went wrong and who was to blame. Ultimately, such writers as Menshikov managed to save the reputation of good old Russia. The alien Jews were responsible not for the collapse of the autocratic, corrupt, and brutal Russian tsarist regime, but for the collapse of the great empire—an idea that resonated with many Russians in the mid-1990s amid disastrous inflation, economic collapse, and the rise of new oligarchs of Jewish origin.³¹

The newly available racist writings honed the skills of Russian xenophobes, fostered their renewed attempts at writing Soviet history, and produced new anticommunist Russian historiography—a popular parascience.³² After the revealing publications on the Blanks in the 1990s by Shtein, Tsaplin, and others, Vladimir Soloukhin declared Lenin's nationality the most important issue for understanding the Russian revolution.³³ For Soloukhin it was enough to establish that Lenin was of Jewish origin in order to make sense of each and every action he had undertaken against Mother Russia. Soloukhin closely followed the research of Marietta Shaginian and Mikhail Shtein, cited the baptism documents of Abel and Yisroel, and dismissed altogether the impact of baptism on what he claimed to be the indelible Jewishness of the Blanks.

The racist Soloukhin knew that to reveal somebody's Jewishness was enough to explain history. Therefore, if the discovered Jewishness was only partial, he needed to bend over backwards to make it complete. Soloukhin proceeded to discuss the possible Jewishness of Anna Ivanovna Grosschopf, the Christian wife of the Christian Alexander Dmitrievich Blank.

He referred to Mariia *Alexandrovna*, Lenin's mother, a second-generation Christian born to Christians, as Mariia *Izrailevna*, using a Jewish patronymic that she did not have. He claimed she had not had even a gram of Russian blood and was either half or completely Jewish. Then Soloukhin turned to a murky history of Lenin's father, of Kalmyk origin, and established as fact that Il'ia Ulianov had a peculiar speech disorder—he burred his letter R. Since burring the R in the Russian cultural tradition is almost always associated with alien intellectuals or Jews, Soloukhin asked sarcastically whether his readers had ever seen a Kalmyk burring his R. Thus, Soloukhin maintained that not only Lenin's mother but also his father was Jewish—both facts carefully concealed by the Bolsheviks. While Soloukhin admitted that Lenin himself was linguistically and culturally Russian, spiritually, Soloukhin argued, Lenin was still a Jew.

Soloukhin's logic was as shocking as it was irresistible. To prove this genealogy Soloukhin resorted to psychology that was no less racist. While the Abyssinian Pushkin and the Scottish Lermontov loved Russia, Lenin did not. His so-called proletarian dictatorship, the backbone of revolutionary power, was nothing but an oligarchy of petit bourgeois Jewish riffraff. Lenin was a merciless executioner who had murdered the Russian intelligentsia, Russian gentry, Russian clergy, and Russian peasantry. He was personally responsible for the murder of great Russian poets such as Nikolai Gumilev and Alexander Blok.³⁴ As a human being, Lenin was the embodiment of evil, a man who hated Russia, twisted ethics and morality, worshipped power, and endorsed terror. These were, in Soloukhin's mind, the essential qualities of a Jew. If a person was found to have these qualities, one could firmly establish that he was Jewish. To Soloukhin, Lenin's Jewishness was so obvious

that he referred to it in the bulk of his book without further explanation. Essentially, maintained Soloukhin, whatever language they spoke and culture they claimed, Jews were liars, murderers, godless cynics, and terrorists. Lenin was all of the above. Ergo, Lenin was a Jew.

Soloukhin's Lenin was, like his Jewish colleagues Yaroslavsky and Trotsky, an outward liar who twisted facts as he saw fit. The Russian revolution, an utter falsehood, was made in his image. Lenin knew that Marxism was doomed, yet he used it as a tool to gain power, which was all he and his fellow Jews cared about. Soloukhin reinstated the concept of the Russian revolution as a Jewish enterprise with a Jewish Lenin at its epicenter. Poets such as Mikhail Svetlov who celebrated murderous revolutionary terror were also hidden Jews. Soloukhin ended his book with a verdict on Lenin—and by default, on all those who had assisted him. Lenin and his Jewish accomplices should bear responsibility for what they had done, that is, for destroying long-suffering Mother Russia. The Jews, maintained Soloukhin, as an entire nation, should be brought to trial.

Soloukhin's colleagues from the far right, such as Kozhinov, criticized him for his shallow Judaization of Lenin. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kozhinov moved from literary criticism to historical writing and entirely discarded the humanistic heritage of Bakhtin, whose disciple he once claimed to have been. Yet Kozhinov familiarized himself with key historical sources on East European Jewish history published in Russia and in the West. Unlike his colleagues from the Russian far right, he wrote lucid and highly nuanced prose. He claimed to have treated the role of the Jews in the Russian revolution with the sincere intent of an unbiased scholar. Kozhinov was well aware of the complexity of Lenin's Jewishness. He

accurately told his readers the story of the Blank family but emphasized the importance of Russian Orthodox culture for Lenin's upbringing and cast doubt on the significance of Lenin's Jewish genealogy.

Kozhinov masterfully neutralized the expectations of those aware of his xenophobic bias.³⁵ He celebrated the Bolshevik reconstruction of Russian statehood and revival of Russian military glory. He soundly observed that senseless violence and brutal terror equally characterized Stalin and Bukharin, Rykov and Trotsky, the NKVD and the Russian peasants. He dismissed the idea of specifically Jewish terror in Russia: the revolutionary Jews shared their brutality with the rest of the society. He rightly spoke about Stalin's Russocentric take on the socialist revolution in the 1930s, which overtook the internationalist revolutionary values of the 1920s together with those who cleaved to them. Paraphrasing Shulgin, Kozhinov even said that Jews fulfilled a positive function in the revolution.³⁶

According to Kozhinov, any revolution needed foreigners to do the dirty work. After the February 1917 bourgeois revolution, which Kozhinov dubbed Masonic, Russia badly needed someone to do this job. Due to the bourgeois, that is, Masonic, February revolution, the country was in a downward spiral. In October of the same year the Jews came to the rescue. They flooded Russia with blood, yoked the rebellious country, established institutes of terror, and paved the way to power for people of Russian descent who eventually reconstructed Russia along imperial lines. Kozhinov sarcastically maintained that Russians would have never been able to do what the Jews did. Simply put, Russians were not capable of acting so ruthlessly toward their own people. Yet the aliens—the Jewish revolutionary saviors—were willing and able, since Russia and

Russians signified nothing to them. Jews who came to power after 1917 were cynics, people without values, hypocrites. They scorned Russian culture, disdained the traditional values of the Russian people, did not understand Russian ethics, and readily resorted to outward violence to protect themselves as the newly established elite. Thus were they so disproportionately represented in the security organs, Kozhinov argued.

To prove his point, Kozhinov manipulated inaccurate data on Jews in the Soviet of People's Commissariats (Sovnarkom), the party's Central Committee Politburo, and particularly in the NKVD, which he borrowed from Dikii. Given the number of Jews in top positions, the Great Purges seemed to Kozhinov to be self-explanatory. In the 1930s, the country turned away from leftist internationalism toward more introverted and Russocentric values. Once the alien Jews had performed their revolutionary function, they were no longer needed. They now helped, in a suicidal manner, to make themselves vanish from the political scene. The Great Purges demarcated the period in which the Jewish ruling elites consumed themselves in fearsome rotation as executioners and victims. Then the ordinary Russian statesmen and party bureaucrats stepped onto the political stage and took power.³⁷

As an insightful thinker, Kozhinov scored a number of points. Yes, the Great Purges created a new, predominantly Russian, Soviet elite, and marked the Soviet departure from internationalist revolutionary ideology once and for all. At the same time, the right-wing turn of the USSR had many variables and stemmed from a variety of factors, including ethnicity. To reduce such a phenomenon as the purges to mere removal of Jews from power, as Kozhinov did, is trivial reductionism. As a result, a complex historical phenomenon was reduced to a sole cause: the Jews.

Still, Kozhinov did not write off Jews altogether. On the contrary, he welcomed them into Russian history—as enemy aliens. He recycled the old xenophobic conceptualization of Russian history as a clash between the alien international Jew and Russian statehood. However, Kozhinov suggested a new twist. Jews were inherently evil, yet they fulfilled a positive function in Russian history, which, at that particular period, needed Jewish disdain, hatred, and violence. Kozhinov implied that Jews performed their positive role in the Russian revolution not because of their specific ethno-cultural, political-economic, or socio-historical conditions. They could accomplish the dirty work because of their essential ethnic qualities: they were rootless aliens, people of tribal hatred, Russophobes, innate terrorists, and lovers of violence. Lenin, according to Kozhinov, knew of these innate Jewish qualities and effectively manipulated them toward his own political ends. Yet, Kozhinov acknowledged magnanimously, Lenin was a Russian.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn shared this vision. In his much acclaimed and largely misunderstood two-volume *Two Hundred Years Together*, he told his story of Russian-Jewish relations. In his book, Solzhenitsyn reenacted all those mendacious, threatening, baseless, and ultraconservative perceptions of Jews elaborated by the likes of Menshikov, Dikii, and Shulgin. Among other books by Solzhenitsyn, *Two Hundred Years Together* should be placed next to *The Red Wheel* series of novels as a narrative about Russian antiheroes who, together with the Russian Left, destroyed Russia. Solzhenitsyn closely followed Shulgin's scenario yet sweetened his predecessor's invectives with profound ethical observations of his own, so misleading that most of his open-minded critics rushed to praise him for objectivity. Solzhenitsyn confirmed that Lenin was a Métis of origins such as Swedish, German, Kalmyk, Chu-

vash, and Jewish (Lenin's Russian blood did not appear on Solzhenitsyn's list). Spiritually he was alien to Russia, but we, the Russians, cannot renounce him.³⁸ Despite his mixed origins, claimed the author of *Two Hundred Years Together*, Lenin was Russian. He should be accepted into Russian history—as an anti-Russian alien and together with his other anti-Russian aliens, the Jews, who also should not be dismissed. Compared to Menshikov or Kozhinov, Solzhenitsyn approached the Russian revolution from a mildly moderate perspective. What they said out loud, he carefully hinted at. The question, however, remains, whether his apparently moderate approach is any different from their racist one.

Such thinkers as Kozhinov and Solzhenitsyn were too highbrow for the mass reader, who preferred less sophisticated answers. Take for example Akim Arutiunov, a technocrat with no background in humanities and no historical skills, who compiled a two-volume biography of Lenin. In it, Arutiunov unscrupulously borrowed data on Lenin's genealogy from several scholarly publications—together with references—and peppered the plagiarized material with racist interpretations. Arutiunov portrayed Lenin's father as a true Russian man. Il'ia Ulianov was a selfless populist concerned about the education of the Russian people, a self-abnegating enthusiast entirely dedicated to his call of duty and hence negligent of his own family. On the contrary, Lenin's Jewish mother inherited the worst Jewish traits of Moshko Blank. While her husband was elsewhere inspecting public schools, she was in full charge of bringing up her children. Due to her harmful influence, they all grew up into revolutionaries, terrorists, tsar-killers, rebels, and antichrists.³⁹

This viewpoint garnered renown through Oleg Platonov, the most popular historian of the Russian far right. The author

of several dozen books on Russian history, Platonov made good use of bogus documents, false attributions, and non-existent sources in his writings. He plagiarized his masters without mentioning their contribution to practical anti-semitism. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, his books were published for the mass reader with bright jackets, large type, and generous line spacing. The Russian Orthodox Church commissioned him to compose an encyclopedia of Russian civilization—obviously excluding all “aliens”—and honored him for his service.

Platonov turned every issue into a Judeo-Russian struggle and passed over any other historical narratives. According to Platonov, the Russian Duma was established because of Judeo-Masonic interference, Jewish capital made the Russian revolution possible, all European governments at the beginning of the twentieth century, including Russia’s, were Jewish, all Russian revolutionaries were Jews, and the revolution itself was Jewish. Not only the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* but also all the documents on which the *Protocols* was based, among them Maurice Joly’s *Dialogue in Hell Between Macchiavelli and Montesquieu*, had been produced by Jews. Lenin and Trotsky embodied the Jewish International, while Stalin and Molotov, Russian statehood.⁴⁰ Platonov suggested casting off all euphemisms: postcommunist Russia underwent a national revival, false concepts were removed, and the open fight of Christian Russia against the conspiring Blanks had reached its apocalyptic peak.

Yes, Kozhinov was more nuanced and insightful than Soloukhin, Solzhenitsyn more cautious than Dikii, and all of them much better thinkers and writers than Menshikov and Platonov. Yet they all shared a disdain for social concepts and an admiration for nationalist ones. They all depicted the Rus-

sian revolution as a Jewish matter, and they all needed to say “Jew” in order to say “alien,” and “Jewish” in order to say “fake.” Russian Jewry was an oxymoron for them. However significant Jews were to Russian history, they did not belong there. If they did, then it was only as enemies of the Russian people and as aliens to the Russian soil and spirit. It does not matter whether Lenin was Jewish: the Bolsheviks were, and Lenin was their founding father. Thus, Russian far-rightists used the Bolsheviks to dismiss the Jewish contribution to Russian history and culture. They evoked the Bolsheviks and a Jewish Lenin in order to disassociate Russian historical achievements from Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The Russian far-rightists also claimed that they abhorred physical violence against Jews—and this was perhaps the only point on which their readers and admirers among the rising postcommunist far-right groups and parties disagreed with them.⁴¹

Inciting the popular reader against a multi-ethnic vision of culture and history, Russian conservative thinkers failed to assume responsibility for the entirety of Russian history and culture. Their xenophobia and antisemitism (of various degrees and proportions) did not allow them to create an integral historical model or explain the phenomenon of the Russian revolution. They always needed Jewish Lenins on whom to place the burden of responsibility. They focused on Lenin’s origins and attitudes, not his deeds and actions. Far-right thinkers were frozen in an immobile, static, and repetitive conceptualization of Russian history—and so far, Russian history has never been static, repetitive, or immobile.

One may claim that Russian conservative writers from Menshikov and Shulgin to Kozhinov and Solzhenitsyn failed to think critically; my point is that they failed to think histori-

cally. They called themselves Russian historians, implying that they could speak and think about history in a particularly Russian way. As a result, they created a xenophobic, anti-semitic, imperialistic discourse that might very well be Russian but is hardly historical. They replaced the study of Russian history, so rich, variegated, and complex, with shallow myth. Russian far-rightists knew how to use the mass media to reach out to the populace—and they did so successfully. The internet, multiple popular history books, and Russian Orthodox Church media constantly pointed to Lenin-Blank as a universal answer. As a result, the myth of a Jewish Lenin moved from the salons of the elitist champions of blood and soil into the streets of the Russian provinces. Recently, activists from an antisemitic group of Nazi character were reported to have called their informal gatherings near the Lenin Museum “u Blanka”—“near Blank.”⁴² Unlike popular xenophobes, most Russian historians treat Lenin’s Jewish roots as a curiosity that changes nothing about Lenin or the Russian revolution. Whether their voices reach out as well as the voices of the Russian nationalists is a different question.

Conclusion

We are told that history books should ask serious questions and provide serious answers. I followed a slightly different direction by asking an irrelevant question and seeking relevant answers. Some of the answers to Lenin's Jewish question, however, may be more relevant than others.

By the time Mariia Aleksandrovna Blank became Mariia Ulianova, the Blanks had become spiritually, religiously, biologically, and culturally Russian. A historian calling Lenin's mother a Jewess should be considered a psychiatric case rather than a racist. Focused on power and centralism, Lenin hardly cared about Jews at all. And Jews had little, if any, place in his cultural or political imagination. Lenin treated and mistreated the Jews according to his immediate pragmatic needs. His attitude toward Jewish socialists demonstrates that he was more prone to scorn than to like the Jews. Of course, his attitude toward other ethnic groups was perhaps no better. Harsh statements he made about Russians went far beyond his critique of the Jews, although Russians were a nation and had a future. At

the same time, two or three of Lenin's philosemitic statements, reiterated by the memoirists, are eclipsed by Lenin's multiple and consistent attempts to deny Jews their nationhood—and future.

Once the Bolsheviks discovered Lenin's Jewish roots they reacted exactly as Lenin would have: by dismissing them. The Bolsheviks needed Lenin to be Russian. The Russianness of the leader of the party and founder of the state helped them to create a state-based and Russian-centered Soviet identity. A Jewish Lenin undermined their state-building efforts. Persecution of those who uncovered the Blanks was a sign of the chauvinistic and Russo-centric rather than the internationalist character of the Bolshevik state. At the same time, these persecutions also revealed racist tendencies dormant among the Russian cultural and political elites. Otherwise, it is impossible to explain the consistent attempts of some party hard-liners to endorse the conceptualization of Russian history as an overarching narrative in which international Judaism was fighting against Russian statehood.

Russian historians, both communist- and conservative-minded, failed to transcend the class versus nation dichotomy in their historical writings. Despite coming from opposing theoretical positions, the leading communist party ideologists, with some exceptions, and the far-rightists with no exception produced equally racist results. The imperial idea of Great Russia was their common denominator. Chauvinism shaped their common discourse, and Judeophobia became their common spiritual malady. The backward conversion of Lenin into Blank in postcommunist Russian discourse helped Russian far-rightists to dismiss the Russian revolution as a horrible and terrifying Jewish contribution. Their efforts, by no means exhausted, demonstrate that neither Russian conservative forces

nor Russian communists were able to understand Russian history, explain it, and assume responsibility for its entirety. Among other things, this failure of Russian xenophobes on both the political left and right occurred because they used Lenin to answer questions, Marxist or Russian, and never to ask a question, let alone the Jewish one.

After all, the main character of this study—a Jewish Lenin—is a fictitious artifact that belongs on a dusty shelf of the East European Historical Old Curiosity Shop—together with its researchers and the author of this book. There was no Jewish revolution in Russia, no Jewish power, and no Jewish Lenin. The only problem is that there are far too many curious visitors in that imaginary shop eager to see, hear, discuss, and touch this artifact. In the end, what should we do with Lenin's ethnicity to better understand his role in the Russian revolution?

Leave it blank.

Acknowledgments

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Vladimir Toltz and Olga Edelman invited me to share my work-in-progress with the listeners of Radio Liberty/Free Europe and made me sweat in front of a microphone seeking the best way to answer their uncomfortable questions about the Pale of Jewish Settlement, Starokonstantinov, and Moshko Blank.

And, as promised in the Introduction, thank you to Jonathan Brent for believing that I would be capable of writing this book. I did my best to meet your expectations, yet the paradoxical outcome is entirely my responsibility.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the Notes.

ark.—*arkhush*, page

CAHJP—Central Archive of the History of the Jewish People (microfilm collection; Jerusalem, Israel)

d.—*dilo*, *delo*, file

DAKO—*Derzhavnyi arkhiv Kyivs'koi oblasti* (National Archive of Kyiv District, Kyiv, Ukraine)

DAZhO—*Derzhavnyi arkhiv Zhytomyrs'koi oblasti* (National Archive of Zhitomir District, Zhytomyr, Ukraine)

f.—*fond*, collection

GARF—*Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (National Archive of Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia)

l.—*list*, page

NBU—*Natsional'na biblioteka [Akademii nauk] Ukrainy im. V. I. Vernad-s'koho* (National Vernadsky Library of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine)

NKVD—*Narodnyi kommissariat vnutrennikh del* (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)

ob.—*verso*

op.—*opys*, *opis'*, inventory

PSS—*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Complete Works of V. I. Lenin)

RGAVMF—*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv voenno-morskogo flota* (Russian National Archive of the Navy, St. Petersburg, Russia)

RSDRP—*Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia* (Russian Social Democratic Workers Party)

TsDIAU—*Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istorychnyi arkhiv Ukrainy* (Central National Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine)

TsGALI—*Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva* (Central National Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow Russia)

URP—Union of the Russian People

zv.—verso

Notes

Chapter One: From Nowhere to Zhitomir

1. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 150, d. 82 (“Po zhalobe starokonstantinovskogo meshchanina Moshki Blanka,” 1841), ark. 1–2zv.

2. TsDIAU, f. 486, op. 3, spr. 335 (“Po isku chinovnika Tamochkina,” 1865), ark. 138.

3. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 789a, spr. 298 (“Po predstavleniiu Zhitomirskogo gubernatora o vrede i neudobstve imet’ uezdnye goroda,” 1839), ark. 10–13.

4. [Pekhotnogo 45-go Azovskogo E. I. V. Velikogo kniazia Borisa Vladimirovicha polka] Poruchik N. Zuts, *Opisanie goroda Starokonstantinova ot nachala osnovania do nashikh dnei (1561–1884)* (Starokonstantinov: S. Arenberg, 1884), iii–iv, 21–22.

5. CAHJP, HM9309.6 (original in TsDIAU, f. 210, op. 2, spr. 24, “Podol’skoe namestnicheskoe pravlenie o sostavlenii evreiskikh kagalov, 1796), ark. 7–8.

6. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 789a, spr. 298 (“Po predstavleniiu Zhitomirskogo gubernatora o vrede i neudobstve imet’ uezdnye goroda,” 1839), ark. 10–13.

7. CAHJP, HM2/9453.12 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 789a, spr. 120, “Po otnosheniiu ministerstva finansov s prilozheniem spiska priezhzhaiushchikh v Brody dlia zakupki tovarov,” 1839).

8. CAHJP, HM2/8968.11 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 4658, “Po zhalobe radzivilovskogo kuptsa [Danielia] Gartenshteina na Volynskoe gubernskoe pravlenie za konfiskatsiiu i sozhzheniie prinadlezhavshikh emu knig na evreiskom iazyke,” 1842), ark. 1–8.

9. CAHJP, HM2/9343.1 (original in DAZhO, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 774, “Spiski uchenikov khederov i ikh soderzhatelei po Dubenskomu, Rovenskomu i drugim uezdam,” 1846), ark. 96–97.

10. CAHJP, HM2/9342 (original in DAZhO, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 771, “Svedeniia o evreiskikh uchebnykh zavedeniakh Volynskoi gubernii,” 1847), ark. 14; CAHJP, HM2/9344.15 (original in DAZhO, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 985, “Svedeniia o sostoianii evreiskikh uchebnykh zavedenii Volynskoi gubernii, 1852), ark. 2.

11. Leon Bramson, *K istorii nachalnogo obrazovaniia evreev v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: A. E. Landau, 1897), 34; Samuil Kraiz, “Batei sefer yehudiyim ba-safah ha-rusit be-rusya ha-tsarit” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1994), 73.

12. CAHJP, HM2/9480.3 (original in TsDIAU, f. 444, op. 1, spr. 139, “Uchrezhdennoi po vysochaishemu povelenniu sekretno komissii dlia poimki kontrabandy,” 1824), ark. 20.

13. GARF, f. 109, First expedition, op. 40, d. 24, ch. 22 (“Po donosu za podpis’iu Aleksandra Veronina o zlupotrebleniiakh nachal’nika generalmaiora Chertkova, 1865–1867), ll. 12–17.

14. GARF, f. 109, op. 13, d. 241 ([“Bromberg”), 1838), ll. 2, 17–170b.

15. NBU, Orientalia Division, *Pinkasim* collection, f. 321, op. 1, spr. 86 [129]: *Pinkas shel b[et] ha-k[neset] ha-gedolah shel konstantin yasan* (Starokonstantinov, Volhynia Province, 1836–1929), ark. 1–4, 17. For the relations between Hasidic and non-Hasidic groups in Starokonstantinov, also see f. 321, op. 1 spr. 83 [74]: *Pinkas shel [hevrah] magidei tehillim* (Starokonstantinov, Volhynia Province, 1802), ark. 2–7; f. 321, op. 1, spr. 85 [76]: *Pinkas de-hevrah mishnayot* (Starokonstantinov, 1823. Copy: ca 1911–1912. Copyist: Avraham Rechtman). I analyzed the social and cultural ramifications of these primary documents in my essay “Hasidism, *Havurot* and the Jewish Street,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2004): 20–54.

16. CAHJP, HM2/9309.6 (original in TsDIAU, f. 210, op. 2, spr. 24, “Podol’skoe namestnicheskoe pravlenie o sostavlenii evreiskikh kagalov,” 1796), ark. 7–8.

17. CAHJP, HM2/9307.11 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 5154 [“Delo o pozhare v m. Satanov”), ark. 1–3; CAHJP, HM2/4778.25 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 4778, “Donesenie o pozhare v m. Medzhibozh Letichevskogo poveta Podol’skoi gubernii,” 1842), ark. 1–3; CAHJP, HM2/9306.15 (original in TsDIAU, “O pozhare v g. Makhnovke,” 1841), ark. 1–4.

18. See HM2/9316.15 (original in RGIA, f. 1286, op. 1, d. 205, “Po pros’be poverenykh ot Lutskikh evreev Meizlisha i Goldfarba o ssude im 10,000 rublei,” 1808), ll. 9–11.

19. CAHJP, HM2/9529.3 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 7628, “O vydache posobiaia postradavshim ot pozhara zhiteliam gg. Ostroga, Kovlia, Teofilia i Kremensa,” 1848), ark. 1–6.

20. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 2236 (“O pozhare, proisshehdshem v Starokonstantinove, Volynskoi gubernii,” 1836–1838), ark. 1–9.

21. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 5865, ch. I (“O pozhare v g. Starokonstantinove, Volynskoi gubernii. Po raportu Starokonstantinovskogo politzmeistera,” 1844), ark. 1–4zv., 14, 24, 28, 49–58zv.

22. For more detail on this subject, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Stern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38–54.

23. GARF, f. 109, Fourth expedition, op. 166, d. 126 (“O vozmushchenii evreev v gorode Starokonstantinove pri ob’iavlennii im ukaza ob obraschenii ikh k ispravleniiu rekrutskoi povinnosti,” 1827), ark. 1–2, 7, 13–13ob.

24. Ia. M. Shulman, *Goroda i liudi evreiskoi diaspory v Vostochnoi Evrope do nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Faktors, 2002), 51–62; A. E. Opanasiuk, Iu. L. Kapovskii, *Zhitomir* (Kyiv: Mystetstvo, 1989), 10–11; Benyamin Lukin, “Zhytomyr,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 2: 2122–2123.

25. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 1260 (“Po prosheniui berdicevskogo evreiskogo meshchanskogo obshchestva ob uchrezhdenii magistrata ili ratushi v Berdicheve, Volynskoi gubernii,” 1832–1834), ark. 2–4zv., 7–10, 19–23zv., 32–37zv.

26. CAHJP, HM2/9893.11 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 153, spr. 89, “Po pros’be zhitomirskikh pervoi gildii kuptsov berdicevskikh bankirov Gal’perinykh,” 1844), ark. 1; CAHJP, HM2/8924.5 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 1, spr. 1441, “O predstavlenii svedenii o litsakh evreiskoi natsional’nosti ne priniavshikh pravoslavie i nakhodivshikhsia na gosudarstvennoi sluzhbe,” 1833), ark. 7; V. O. Levanda, *Polnyi khronologicheskii sbornik zakonov i polozhenii kasaiushchikhsia Evreev, ot ulozheniia Tsaria Alekseia Mikhailovicha do nastoiashchago vremeni, ot 1649–1873 g.* (St. Petersburg: K. V. Trubnikov, 1874), 253–255; CAHJP, HM2/9483.7 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 150, spr. 182b, “O evreiaikh delaiushchikh v Zhitomire monetu iz nizkoprobnogo serebra,” 1845), spr. 477–48zv., 119–120.

27. CAHJP, HM2/8345.3 (original in GAZhO, f. 396, op. 1, spr. 8, “Kniga dlia zapiski i polnoty rukopisei postupaiushchikh k pechataniiu v Zhitomirskuii evreiskuii tipografii,” 1847), ark. 2–5.

28. CAHJP, HM2/7987.1 (original in TsDIAU, f. 707, op. 87, spr. 1153, “O evreiskoi tipografii, prednaznachennai k uchrezhdeniiu v Zhitomire,” 1845), ark. 121–124, 191–199.

29. Efim Melamed, “The Zhitomir Rabbinical School: New Materials and Perspectives,” *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 14 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 105–115.

30. For the society status, see NBU, Orientalia collection, spr. 28 [56], “Pinkas de-hevrah sha”’s me-ha-kloyz shel ha-maggid” (early 20th-century copy of the lost original; the text has notes dating to 1775, 1850, 1865), ark. 1–8.

31. Isaac Babel, *The Collected Stories*, ed. and trans. Walter Morison (New York: Criterion, 1955), 78.

32. Levanda, *Polnyi khronologicheskii svod zakonov*, 652, M. G. Morgulis, *Voprosy evreiskoi zhizni: sobranie statei*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Pomoshch, 1903), 308.

Chapter Two: The Imperial Moshko

1. V. V. Tsaplin, “O zhizni sem’i Blankov v gorodakh Starokonstantinove i Zhitomire,” *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, no. 2 (1992): 38–46, here 39; M. Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny: semeinye tainy* (St. Petersburg.: Neva, 2004), 30. For a brief description of Moshko Blank, see Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 16–18.

2. For Faivel Blank, see CAHJP, HM2/9449.1–30 (original in RGAVME, f. 243, op. 1, d. 1174 (“Postavshchiki Chernomorskogo flota,” esp. the period between 1815 and 1818); for Moshko Blank from Kamenets, see CAHJP, HM2/9453.21 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 67, spr. 362, “O postroike dereviannykh lavok v Kamentse,” 1835).

3. CAHJP, HM2/9480.2 (original in TsDIAU, f. 444, op. 1, spr. 118, “Berenshtein David Mendelevich donosit o vyvozimoi za granitsu Satanovskimi evreiami Rossiiskoi serebrianoi monety,” 1824), ark. 150.

4. Tsaplin, “O zhizni sem’i Blankov,” 40–41; Abramova, Borodulina, Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinnoi: ob istorii spekuliatzii vokrug rodosloviia V. I. Lenina* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, 1998), 116–118; Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 32–33.

5. Genrikh Deych, *Evreiskie predki Lenina: neizvestnye arkhivnye dokumenty o Blankakh* (New York: Telex, 1991), 15–16; Abramova, Borodulina, Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinnoi*, 53–54; Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 71–80.

6. Tsaplin, “O zhizni sem’i Blankov,” 42–43; Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 42–43.

7. For more detail on the epidemic, see Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 91–94.

8. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 144, spr. 46 (“Po zhalobe starokonstantinovskogo meshchanina evreia Shmuelia Toporovskogo za nepravilnoe zavladenie doma evreem Moshko Blankom,” 1836), ark. 1–3.

9. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 144, spr. 47 (“Delo po zhalobe Starokonstantinovskogo kuptsa Shliomy Chatskisa za nepravilnoe zavladenie evreem Moshko Blankom lavkoiu i polovinoiu kamennogo pogreba,” 1836), ark. 1–3.

10. TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 147, spr. 888 (“Po zhalobe evreia Moshki Blanka na otobranie u nego Zhitomirskoiu politsieiu vsego imushchestva na udovletvorenje pretenzii k nemu evreia Rosenblita,” 1838–1844), ark. 1–1zv., 5, 8, 10–10zv., 17, 19zv., 22.

11. Efim Melamed, “‘Otrekis iudeiskoi very . . . ’ (Novonaidennye dokumenty o evreiskikh predkakh Lenina),” *Solnechnoe spletenie* (Jerusalem and Moscow), no. 3–4 (22–23) (2002): 202–207.

12. GARF, f. 109, First expedition, 1845, d. 131 (Po vsepoddanneishemu doneseniiu vykresta iz evreev Dmitriia Blanka (ili Bloka) otnositel’no uporstva evreev v ikh zabluzhdeniiaxh), ll. 1–4.

13. I. V. Medvedev, a bogus expert in Jewish manuscripts from the Lenin National Library in Moscow, misled a number of Russian scholars with his hilariously illiterate commentaries about the origins of this letter, saying it is written in a special script developed among Hasidic Jews (which, certainly, does not exist in Jewish paleography). See Abramova, Borodulina, Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinnoi*, 121–132; Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 43–53. For the publication of the letter of Lev Perovsky, see Deych, *Evreiskie predki Lenina*, 20. For a much more accurate interpretation of Blank’s letters and their first publication in the original, see Hadassa Assouline, Binyamin Lukin, “‘Adonenu ha-kaysar gomel hasadim rabim le-yehudim,’ Mikhtavo shel ha-momer Dmitri Blank, avi sabo shel Lenin, el ha-tsar Nikolai harishon,” *Gal-ed*, vol. 20 (2006): 125–134.

14. See my “Yakov Brafman,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1: 222–223.

15. Hadassa Assouline, Binyamin Lukin, “Mikhtavo shel ha-momer Dmitri Blank,” 133–134.

16. Charles van Onselen, “Jewish Police Informers in the Atlantic World, 1880–1914,” *Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2007): 119–144, here 119.

17. CAHJP, HM2/9479.1 (original in TsDIAU, f. 444, op. 1, spr. 8, “Po donosam otlichivshegosia v razoblachenii falshivomonetchikov kuptsa Sh. Kozlinskogo o kontrabandnoi torgovle evreiami m. Nemirov,” 1822–28), ark. 1–26.

18. CAHJP, HM2/9307.19 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 142, spr. 539

“Delo po zapiske evreia Gershka Grimalovskogo o zloupotrebleniakh po kamenetskomu uezdu,” 1835), ark. 2; also see CAHJP, HM9452.17 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 785, spr. 45 (“O evree Kamenetskogo uezda Gershke Grimalovskom,” 1835), ark. 1–2.

19. GARF, f. 109, First expedition, op. 10, d. 164 (“O zhelanii evreia Girshki Kopershmita otkryt’ izvestnuiu emu tainu,” 1835), ll. 2–5ob.

20. CAHJP, HM9452.24 (original in TsDIAU, f. 442, op. 786, spr. 211, “Bumagi, prinadlezhashchie Iakovu Lipsu,” 1836), ark. 2, 3, 14.

21. CAHJP, HM2/9423 (original in GARF, f. 109, First expedition, d. 277, “Po donosu evreia Avruma Kuperbanta o prestupnykh zamyslakh evreev protiv gosudaria imperatora,” 1846), ll. 10, 14, 16ob., 23.

22. GARF, f. 109, op. 5, d. 207 ([“Abram Knokh],” 1830), ll. 29–35ob.

23. DAKO, f. 2, op. 1, spr. 4824 (“Delo o vnushenii evreiu Zandinmanu, chtoby on ne utruzhdal vysochaishikh osob neosnovatel’nymi pros’bami,” 1834), ark. 1–2.

24. See the classification in Michael Stanislawski, “Jewish Apostasy in Russia: A Tentative Typology,” in Todd Endelman, ed., *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 189–205; on Jewish converts to Christianity in East Europe also see Endelman, “Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis,” *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1997): 28–59; Endelman, “Jewish Conversion from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 40 (1995); Endelman, “Jewish Self-Hatred in Britain and Germany,” in Michael Brenner et al., eds., *Two Nations: British and German Jews in Comparative Perspective* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 201–210; ChaeRan Y. Freeze, “When Chava Left Home: Gender, Conversion, and the Jewish Family in Tsarist Russia,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 18 (2005): 153–158; John Klier, “State Policies and the Conversion of Jews in Imperial Russia,” in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92–112.

25. GARF, f. 109, op. 5, d. 233 (“O zHITELE g. Ostrova evree Vormse, iz’i-avivshem zhelanie otkryt’ tainu”), l. 80.

26. HMF 777 A-B (GARF, f. 109, First expedition, 3 otd., d. 53, “Materialy po donosu ravvina M. Katsenellenbogena o sushchestvovanii v Mogilevskoi, Kievskoi, Volynskoi, Podolskoi, Poltavskoi, Khersonskoi, Ekaterinoslavskoi i Bessarabskoi gubernii khasidskikh sekt,” 1836), ll. 2–33.

27. Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 43.

28. Mariia Eitingina, “Da sodelaemsia vernymi slugami . . . ’ evreiskaia molitva za rossiiskogo imperatora,” in Mikhail Boitsov and Igor Danil-

evsky, eds., *CASUS: The Individual and Unique in History* (Moscow: Nauka, 2007), 334–360, here 339–344.

Chapter Three: Lenin, Jews, and Power

1. V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. 55 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo politicheskoi literatury, 1967–1970), 55: 328. Hereafter PSS.

2. Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 28.

3. For more detail, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917: Drafted into Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 69–71, 85–88.

4. Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 286.

5. A. I. Ulianova-Elizarova, *O V. I. Lenine i semie Ulianovykh. Vospominaniia. Ocherki. Pisma. Stat'i* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia literatura, 1988), 25–27, 37, 107–111.

6. D. I. Ulianov, *Ocherki raznykh let* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1976), 112.

7. PSS 55: 202.

8. Irina Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism: A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).

9. *Martov i ego blizkie: sbornik* (New York: Rausen, 1959), 11–12, 24–25.

10. PSS 55: 57, 84, 92.

11. Ulianova-Elizarova, *O Lenine*, 156–157.

12. I. Kh. Urilov, *Iu. O. Martov: politik i istorik* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 138.

13. For more detail, see Kh. Urilov, *Istoriia rossiiskoi sotsial-demokratii (menshevizma)*, ch. 2 (Moscow: Raritet, 2001), index.

14. L. D. Trotsky, *O Lenine: materialy dlia biografa* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1924), 19–22.

15. N. Valentinov, *Vstrechi s Leninym* (New York: Izd. Im. Chekhova, 1953), 312–313.

16. Urilov, *Martov*, 150.

17. Trotsky, *O Lenine*, 46.

18. PSS 25: 343, 55: 350, 47: 253, 270–271.

19. Iu. O. Martov, *Pisma, 1916–1922* (Benson, Vt.: Chalidze, 1990), 165–167, 179–181.

20. Written in fall 1843 as a review of Bruno Bauer's publications on the Jews, it was published in February 1844 in *Deutsch-Französische Jahr-*

bücher; see Karl Marx, *Frederick Engels: Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 3: 146–174.

21. PSS 24: 122–123; 25: 16–18, 64, 86; Lenin watched the film about the Beilis case and did not like that the director had transformed such an important sociopolitical issue into a mere melodrama; see PSS 55: 353.

22. PSS 24: 113–150.

23. PSS 7: 117–122; 25: 144–145. Cf. with his approach to Czech Marxists endeavors: PSS 23: 123–124.

24. PSS 24: 394.

25. For Poles and Ukrainians, see PSS 48: 59, 277–278.

26. On national-cultural autonomy dividing the nations, see PSS 24: 142; on the separation of the Jewish schools, see PSS 23: 376.

27. Irmiyahu Yovel, *Dark Riddle: Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Jews* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 95–97.

28. PSS 8: 27.

29. Jay Harris, *Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

30. Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Moses Hess and Modern Jewish Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 48–49, 72–73.

31. Simon Rabinovitch, “Alternative to Zion: The Jewish Autonomist Movement in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia” (Ph.D. diss, Brandeis University, 2006), 28.

32. PSS 46: 139.

33. PSS 8: 72–75.

34. For Lenin’s sharp critique of the Bund’s ideas to conduct education in national minority language, PSS 8: 47; for his deafness toward national culture and for his sharp rebuff of its “obscurantist” essence, see PSS 24: 8–10, 48: 291.

35. PSS 47: 64.

36. PSS 8: 67.

37. PSS 7: 240–241.

38. PPS 24: 342, 366–367.

39. PSS 24: 174–178, 222, 225, 319.

40. PSS 24: 132.

41. PSS 7: 223.

42. PSS 46: 287–288.

43. Cf. Yoav Peled, “Lenin on the Jewish Question: The Theoretical Setting,” *Political Studies* 35 (1987): 61–78.

44. PSS 7: 9, 16, 21, 92, 245, 766; 23: 150, 209–211, 229–230; 46: 111–112; 48: 232. In 1913, Lenin ordered I. A. Piatnitsky to start collecting materials on

the separatism of the Bund—most likely, to despoil them subsequently from any power. See PSS 48, 147–148.

45. PSS 7: 300–301, 323.

46. PSS 24: 115–117.

47. B. S. Ilizarov, *Tainaia zhizn Stalina: po materialam ego biblioteki i arkhiva* (Moscow: Veche, 2002), 144.

48. For more detail, see his “On the National Program of the RSDRP,” PSS 25: 255–320.

49. PSS 23: 315; 24: 29; 25: 278.

50. PSS 24: 324–326.

51. A recently advanced idea that Lenin allegedly envisioned a territorial autonomy for the Jews seems superficial, baseless, and inconsistent with Lenin’s stance on national autonomy issues of ethnicities other than Jews. See Mattityahu Mintz, “Lenin’s Hidden Formula on the Jewish Question and Its Presence in Soviet-Jewish Discourse,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, no. 227 (2008): 301–312.

52. PSS 50: 34–35, 294.

53. PSS 50: 125.

54. PSS 50: 106, 178.

55. Richard Pipes, ed., *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 46 (Doc. 21).

56. *Ibid.*, 76–77.

57. Valentinov, *Vstrechi s Leninym*, 331; PSS 53: 119; see a similar example, 54: 260.

58. Georgii Solomon, *Sredi krasnykh vozhdai* (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1995), 454.

59. *Rassvet* (Paris), 1926, no. 9, stlb. 9. Quoted in Savelii Dudakov, *Paradoksy i prichudy filosemitizma i antisemitizma v Rossii: ocherki* (Moscow: RGGU, 2000), 402.

60. Gary Steenson, *Karl Kautsky, 1854–1938: Marxism in the Classical Years* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978), 211.

61. Valentinov, *Vstrechi s Leninym*, 333.

62. Lev Trotsky, *Moia zhizn: opyt avtobiografii* (Berlin: Granit, 1930), 109–110.

63. PSS 47: 136–137; 48: 69; 25: 201, 202, 312.

64. See Lenin’s letters and notes to Trotsky, PSS 50: 178–179, 235–236; Lenin supports Trotsky against Stalin regarding the advance in the Crimea, PSS 50: 127; agrees with Trotsky’s military opinion and orders, PSS 51: 121.

65. PSS 47: 208–209.

66. PSS 50: 66; 51: 28, 64.

67. PSS 50: 518; 51: 52; 52: 32, 100; 54: 52–55.

68. PSS 50: 358.

69. PSS 46: 79 (emphasis mine).

70. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, 151 (Doc. 94).

71. PSS 22: 137; 50: 305; 54: 310.

72. For the English text of Lenin's 1919 speech on the class essence of antisemitism and its Russian gramophone version, visit <http://www.marxists.org/romana/audio/speeches/antsem.htm>.

73. PSS 7: 120–121.

74. Pipes, *Unknown Lenin*, 128–29 (Doc. 71).

75. Trotsky, *O Lenine*, 6–7.

Chapter Four: Glue for the Vertebrae

1. Roman Szporliuk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friederich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 218–220.

2. For more detail, see G. V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2001), 162–177.

3. For more detail on religious (Russian Orthodox) aspects of Lenin's burial and indignant reaction of leftist Marxists to it, see Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 174–175.

4. Olga Velikanova, *The Public Perception of the Cult of Lenin Based on Archival Materials* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 2001), 85, 207–209 (in Russian).

5. See on her N. S. Gudkova, *Sem'ia Ulianovykh* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia literatura, 1982), 139–188.

6. From a letter of T. Zhakova-Basova (great-granddaughter of Alexander Blank) to Vsevolod Arnold, local historian from Kuibyshev; published in Abramova, Borodulina, Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinnoi*, 31.

7. Published in E. Kirillova, V. Shepelev, “‘Vy . . . rasporiadilis' molchat' . . . absolutno' (neizvestnye pisma A. I. Elizarovoi-Ulianovoi I. V. Stalinu i nabrosok statii M. I. Ulianovoi o vyjavlennykh dokumentakh po ikh rodoslovnoi),” *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 4 (1992): 77–78.

8. L. Kosheleva et al., eds., *Pisma I. V. Stalina V. M. Molotovu, 1925–1936* (Moscow: Rossiia molodaia, 1995), 240–244.

9. Yehuda Shtern, the brother of my grandfather, was arrested by the

security organs within minutes of his attempt on the life of von Twardowski. After what seems to have been a two-day trial, he was accused and executed. In 1997, Lieut.-Colonel Kalganov, the KGB officer responsible for rehabilitation, refused to show me the file containing interrogations, court proceedings, the verdict, and a post-execution photo (as Shtern had not been rehabilitated). Kalganov maintained that the file provided no information as to possible reasons behind Shtern's attempt.

10. Katy Turton, *Forgotten Lives: The Role of Lenin's Sisters in the Russian Revolution, 1864–1937* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 131–132.

11. N. V. Petrov, K. V. Skorkin, N. G. Ohotin, and A. B. Roginskii, *Kto rukovodil NKVD, 1934–1941: Spravochnik* (Moscow: Zven'ia, 1999), 495.

12. *Ibid.*, 499.

13. For multiple debates about Stalin's authorship of this essay, see N. I. Kapchenko, *Politicheskaia biografiia Stalina. Vol. 1 (1879–1924)* (Tver: Severnaia korona, 2004), 279–298.

14. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1946), 2: 302, 304, 331, 334, 340.

15. Svetlana Allilueva, *20 pisem k drugu* (Moscow: Vsia Moskva, 1989), 29.

16. On Kliuev's poetry, see J. Alexander Ogden, "Overcoming the Destruction of Peasant Russia: The Epic Impulse in Nikolai Kliuev Epic Poetry," *Enemies of the People: The Destruction of Soviet Literary, Theater, and Film Arts in the 1930s* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press), 53–74.

17. Z. Kondratieva, ed., *Stikhi o Lenine* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969), 17–20, 27, 38, 161.

18. R. B. Valbe et al., eds., *Lenin v sovetskoi poezii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1970), 418–419, 487, 488, 605–608, 643.

19. M. Shaginian, *Chelovek i vremia: istoriia chelovecheskogo stanovleniia* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1980), 238–239, 251–325, 438–451, 558, 611–612.

20. Marietta Shaginian, *Sobranie sochinenii v 9-ti tt.* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1988), 5: 702–703.

21. For a sharp critique of Shaginian, see Mikahil Lifshits, "Dnevnik Marietty Shaginian," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1954): 206–231; for a balanced critical approach, see David Shepherd, "Facts versus Figures: Marietta Shaginyan," in his *Beyond Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in Soviet Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 64–89.

22. R. S. Goldina, *Leninskaia tema v tvorchestve Marietty Shaginian* (Erevan: Aiastan, 1969), 33–36, 46–47, 53–69; L. I. Skorino, *Marietta Shaginian-khudozhnik: zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1981), 285–298;

N. M. Shchedrina, *Leniniana Marietty Shaginian* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1984), 29–30.

23. Shaginian, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5: 684, 721.

24. Documents published in T. I. Bondareva and Iu. Zhivtsova, “Iz’iatie proizvesti bez ostavleniia kopii (gde khranilis’ i kuda peredany dokumenty o predkakh Lenina),” *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 4 (1992): 70–71.

25. For the passing mention of this theme, see L. I. Skorino, *Marietta Shaginian-khudozhnik: zhizn’ i tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1981), 285 note 2.

26. See the collection of documents from Alexander Petrov’s archive in I. I. Ivanova and M. G. Shtein, “K rodoslovnoi Lenina,” *Iz glubiny vremen*, vol. 1 (1995): 8–50, here 47.

27. Abramova, Borodulina, Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinnoi*, 24–26.

28. For the letters of Shaginian to Shtein, see Ivanova and Shtein, “K rodoslovnoi Lenina,” 36.

29. Deych, *Evreiskie predki Lenina*, 9.

30. Efim Melamed, “Kak iavnoe delali tainym. Iz istorii zasekrechivaniia evreiskikh stranits rodoslovnoi Lenina,” *Lehaim* 7 (183) (2007): 48–52.

31. Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 18–19.

32. Ivanova, Shtein, *K genealogii Lenina*, 36–37.

33. Bondareva and Zhivtsova, “Iz’iatie,” 56–75.

34. T. I. Khorkhordina, “Gosudarstvennaia arkhivnaia sluzhba: 90-letnii iubilei,” in *Sluzhim vechnosti. Istoriko-dokumental’naia vystavka, posviashchennaia 90-letiiu gosudarstvennoi arkhivnoi sluzhby Rossii* (Moscow: Ministerstvo Kultury Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2008), 85–86.

35. Shtein, *Ulianovy i Leniny*, 22–23.

36. Lev Kolodnyi, *Lenin bez grima* (Moscow: Golos, 2000), 12–13.

37. Evgenii Danilov, *Lenin: tainy zhizni i smerti* (Moscow: Ast and Zebra, 2007), 20–21.

Chapter Five:

How Lenin Became Blank

1. Vadim Skuratovskii, *Problema avtorstva “Protokolov Sionskikh Mudretsov”* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2001).

2. *Pravye partii: Dokumenty i materialy*. Vol. 2: 1911–1917 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), 47–48, 67, 71.

3. *Pravye partii*, 2: 47–48, 73, 76, 82, 263, 345, 355, 432, 508–509.

4. *Ibid.*, 180, 220.

5. See A. Reitblat, “Kotel fel’etonnnykh ob’edkov’: sluchai M. O. Menshikova,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 2 (1999): 3–8.

6. On Gobineau, see C. Loring Brace, “Race” *Is a Four-Letter Word: The Genesis of the Concept* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 119–124.

7. M. O. Menshikov, *Pis’ma k russkoi natsii* (Moscow: “Moscow” Journal Publishing House, 2000), 221, 246.

8. Menshikov, *Pis’ma k russkoi natsii*, 76–77, 132–133.

9. *Ibid.*, 65, 232–239, 246–253, 272–274, 322, 397, 405–411.

10. Dan Diner and Jonathan Frankel, “Jews and Communism: The Utopian Temptation,” in Frankel, ed., *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism. Studies in Contemporary Jewry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20: 4.

11. For the critique of Solzhenitsyn’s biased approach to the Jewish issues, see my review essay “Sud’ba ‘srednei linii,’” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, no. 4 (18) (2001): 38–49, and its shorter English version, “On Solzhenitsyn’s ‘Middle Path,’” *POLIN*, no. 18 (2005): 381–392.

12. S. M. Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni: vospominania i razmyshlenia. Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie, 1998), 397.

13. A. Dikii, *Evrei v Rossii i v SSSR. Russko-evreiskii dialog* (Novosibirsk: Blagovest, 2005), 134.

14. V. V. Shulgin, “Chto nam v nikh ne nraivisia . . .” *Ob antisemitizme v Rossii* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1994), 56–61.

15. *Ibid.*, 15.

16. Dikii, *Evrei v Rossii i v SSSR*, 73, cf. similar idea about political unity of the Jews in the whole world in post–Six-Day War times (484).

17. *Ibid.*, 63, 73, 150–151, 165, 181, 197, 198, 207.

18. Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 335–336.

19. V. A. Kozlov, S. V. Mironenko, and O. V. Edelman, *Kramola: Inakomyслиe v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953–1982 gg. Rassekrechennyye dokumenty Verkhovnogo suda i Prokuratury SSSR* (Moscow: Materik, 2005), 84, 165, 200, 259, 294, 335; V. A. Kozlov, S. V. Mironenko, and O. V. Edelman, 58–10. *Nadzornyye proizvodstva Prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi propaganda. Mart 1953–1991* (Moscow: Fond “Demokratiia,” 1999), 521, 545, 610, 655, 702, 726, 733–34, 738, 750, 782, 809.

20. For more detail, see the excellent study by Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR. 1953–1985 gody* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 82–83, 86–87.

21. Kevin O’Connor, *Intellectuals and Apparatchiks: Russian National-*

ism and the Gorbachev Revolution (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2006), 45–71, here 51.

22. Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Le rouge et le noir: Extrême droite et nationalisme en Russie* (Paris: CNRS, 2007), 24–26.

23. T. Glushkova, “Pritcha o Salieri,” *Voprosy literatury* 4 (1982): 114–153.

24. For more detail, see Vadim Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002), 72–97.

25. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 209, 346–347.

26. For multiple usages of Menshikov and Shulgin by modern Russian ultraconservatives, see I. R. Shafarevich, *Trekhtysiacheletnaia zagadka* (St. Petersburg: Bibliopolis, 2002), 145–152, 171, 176, 189; for the impact of Shulgin’s ideas on racial antisemitism among other Russian émigré far-rightists who reemerged in post-communist Russia, see Konstantin Rodzhevskii, *Zaveshchanie russkogo fashista* (Moscow: FERI-V, 2001), 197–209.

27. For more detail, see my review essay “Contextualizing the Mystery: Three Approaches to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,” *KRITIKA: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2 (2003): 395–409.

28. In Russian: “Kto poverit, chto ne zhid /V Mavzolee lezhit?”—which literally means “Who would believe that the one lying in the Mausoleum is not a Yid?”

29. G. V. Andreevskii, *Povsednevnaia zhizn Moskvy v stalinskuiu epokhu, 1930-e—1940-e gody* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2003), 67–72. Andreevskii does not lose a single opportunity to quote verbatim German propagandist antisemitic statements and rejoice in their spread among the Russians in the 1940s; for more overtly antisemitic passages, see *ibid.*, 166–167, 222, 261, 276.

30. The metaphor is taken from Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Two Faces of Anastasia: Narratives and Counter-Narratives of Identity in Stalinist Everyday Life,” in Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds., *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 24–25.

31. On post-communist Russian racism, see Thomas Parland, *The Extreme Nationalist Threat in Russia: The Growing Influence of Western Rightist Ideas* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 150–181; Yitshak Brudny, ed., *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 160–178; Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm v politicheskom prostranstve* (Moscow: Franko-rossiiskii tsentr gumanitarnykh i obshchestvennykh nauk, 2007), 336–355.

32. Marlène Laruelle, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm: sotsial’nyi i kul’turnyi kontekst* (Moscow: NLO, 2008), 87–101.

33. V. Soloukhin, *Pri svete dnia* (Moscow: N. p., 1992), 28.

34. *Ibid.*, 45–47.

35. See, among other things, his chapter “The Truth About Pogroms” (in Russian) contextualizing anti-Jewish violence in Russia as the response of unarmed Russians to Jewish terrorism, in Vadim Kozhinov, “*Chernosotentsy*” i *Revoliutsiia (zagadochnye stranitsy istorii)* (Moscow: Prima B, 1999), 81–110; his essay “The German Führer and the ‘Jewish King’: On One of the Most Horrible Secrets of the 20th Century” (in Russian), in which he equates Nazism and Zionism, in Vadim Kozhinov, *Pobedy i bedy Rossii* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2000), 340–249; and his discussion of Jews’ control of the mass media, in Vadim Kozhinov, *Piatyi punkt* (Moscow: Iauza, Eksmo, 2005), 253–384.

36. Vadim Kozhinov, *Rossiia: vek XX (1901–1939)* (Moscow: Algoritm, 1999), 251–287.

37. I am summarizing the main ideas of his chapter “The Riddle of 1937”; see Kozhinov, *Rossiia: vek XX*, 288–426.

38. A. Solzhenitsyn, *Dvesti let vmeste*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Russkii put, 2002), 2: 76.

39. Akim Arutiunov, *Lenin: Lichnostnaia i politicheskaia biografiia*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Veche, 2002–2003), 1: 52–53 (series *Dos’e bez retushi*). Archival records prove that Arutiunov had not seen the documents he claims to have discovered.

40. Oleg Platonov, *Evreiskii vopros v Rossii* (Moscow: Iauza, 2005), 185–204, 284; Platonov, *Bich bozhii: epokha Stalina* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2005), 9; Platonov, *Zagadka Sionskikh protokolov* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2004), 210–222.

41. For xenophobic ideas identical to those of Russian high-brow intellectuals permeating early 21st-century Russian fascist propaganda, see Viacheslav Likhachev, *Politicheskii antisemitizm v sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Moskovskoe biuro po pravam cheloveka; Academia, 2003), 96–133; *Ksenofobiia, svoboda sovesti i antiiekstremizm v Rossii v 2007 godu: sbornik ezhegodnykh dokladov Informatsionno-analiticheskogo tsentra “Sova”* (Moscow: SOVA, 2008), 11–13, 27–30; for the negligence of the Russian ruling elites to these phenomena, see Aleksandr Verkhovskii, ed., *Russkii natsionalizm: idelologiya i nastorenie* (Moscow: SOVA, 2008), 24–27.

42. See Viacheslav Likhachev, *Natsizm v Rossii* (Moscow: Panorama, 2002), 138.

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