

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Brian Horowitz. *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in 19th and Early 20th-Century Russia*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2009. 305 pp. \$24.95 paper. ISBN: 978-0-89357-349-2.

Brian Horowitz's book is a collection of fifteen essays about Russian Jewish intellectuals who wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The best known of these, the Jewish historian Simon Dubnov, the ethnographer Shimon Ansky and the Zionist leader Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky have been the subject of much recent scholarship. Other Russian Jewish intellectuals, quite popular in their time, are now almost forgotten, except among a narrow circle of specialists. In both cases, whether the author deals with well-known historical figures or the semi-forgotten, Horowitz reveals previously undisclosed aspects of their personalities and provides new interpretations of their writings and ideas.

Empire Jews comprises three parts, corresponding to these Jewish intellectuals' major contributions to Russian literature, history and philosophy. In part one, Horowitz analyzes the creative works of five Jewish poets and writers: Lev Levanda, Shimon Ansky, Shimon Frug, Leib Jaffe and Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Horowitz writes that Lev Levanda (1835-88), usually depicted as "a leading advocate of the Russification of the Jews of the Russian empire" (p. 13), actually possessed a more complex attitude that changed over time. In the 1860s-70s Levanda, like other Russian Jewish *maskilim* (adherents of *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment), called for the integration of Jews into Russian society and hoped that Jews would soon obtain equal rights in Russia. But the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms in 1881-1882 and increased government restrictions and persecutions dashed his hopes. Depressed by this gloomy reality, Levanda began to search the past for an idyllic time when Jews were happy and well received in Europe. In several historical novels and a historical sketch, he depicted the situation of Jews in Poland in previous centuries in an idealized light, as an alternative to the hostile environment for Jews in contemporary Russia. Horowitz explains Levanda's historical nostalgia as an attempt to lessen the pain caused by the failure of aspirations for equality and a better future for Jews in the Russian Empire.

The second essay describes the evolution of Shimon Ansky from a Socialist Revolutionary to a Jewish nationalist, ethnographer and writer. As soon as the populist Ansky "realized that the Jews too were a nation" (p. 49), he put all his efforts into working among Jewish people. With time Ansky's political views became more moderate and he developed a great interest in Jewish folk culture. During several ethnographic expeditions to the Pale of Jewish Settlement in the decade before World War I, Ansky gathered rich Jewish folklore: fairytales, legends, songs and artifacts. Some of these Hasidic legends

and fairytales inspired Ansky's creative works: he wrote Yiddish plays and stories, including his most famous play *The Dybbuk*, which was performed in many Jewish theaters and was later adapted for the screen.

The Russian and Yiddish poet Shimon Frug (1860-1916) was very popular in his time but is almost forgotten now. Horowitz writes that Frug was "apotheosized" by his contemporaries, who saw his poetry as "the voice of Diaspora Jewry." (p. 61) Frug expressed in his poems his national ideals, described Jewish suffering and the need for equal rights for Russian Jews. However Frug's poetry and prose do not have high literary merit, so when his ideas lost their topicality the poet was almost completely forgotten.

The literary heritage of Leib Jaffe, Russian Jewish poet and journalist shared the same fate. Horowitz focuses on Jaffe's Zionist ideas and their expression in his poetry and journalistic work, as well as on his partnership with the well-known Russian poet Vladislav Khodasevich. Jaffe and Khodasevich published Russian Jewish literary texts in *Evreiskaia antologiia* (Jewish Anthology) and *Sborniki Safrut* (Collections of Literature) in 1916-1918. These included not only Russian translations of Hebrew literature, but also the original poetry of Russian authors Valerii Briusov and Ivan Bunin, based on Jewish motifs. This literary collaboration between Russian and Zionist authors ceased when the Bolsheviks banned Zionism and the Hebrew language, including Hebrew literature. Jaffe escaped abroad in 1918 and later immigrated to Palestine, where he was killed during a terrorist attack in 1948.

Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the last of the five intellectuals examined in part one, was born and grew up in Odessa, to which he devoted one of his best novels, *Piatero* (The Five, 1936). Horowitz asserts that this novel "has bewildered the author's biographers" (p. 86), who have tried to provide some Zionist explanation for it. The plot of the novel is a story of an assimilated Jewish family in Odessa, in which all the children are quite well educated, but all of whom end up in one or another bad way. But, according to Horowitz, this is not just a typical Zionist denunciation of assimilation, because Jabotinsky shows sympathy in the novel for the assimilated family and indicates "his affiliation with Odessa's intellectual elite." (p. 88) Horowitz does not see any contradiction between Jabotinsky's Zionism and the "Silver Age decadence" of the novel. It seems to me that the novel expresses Jabotinsky's nostalgia for his youth and for *fin de siècle* Odessa, a city which had changed drastically under Communist rule and to which he could never return.

Part two of *Empire Jews* deals with debates about the future of Russian Jewry among Jewish "liberal nationalists," historians and civic activists. Horowitz not only analyzes their works, concepts and ideas, but also discusses the connection between the authors' historical and political views. Many of them hoped to improve the situation of Jews in Russia by spreading ideas of Enlightenment among their coreligionists, by way of liberal reforms in the country, and by the creation of Jewish cultural organizations.

Avram Harkavy, the only professional historian among the authors, engaged in an embittered dispute with Simon Dubnov, who argued that the

Jews came to Russia through Poland. Harkavy countered that Jews first came to Russia from the Khazar Kaganate. The two scholars' ambitions inflamed their confrontation: each sought recognition as the leading Jewish historian in Russia. Horowitz credits their sharp polemic with helping Dubnov develop his unique concept of the "hegemonic centers" of the Jewish diaspora.

In part two, Horowitz also describes the work of the most influential Jewish organization in Russia, the Society for Promotion of Enlightenment among Jews of Russia (OPE). The St. Petersburg branch of the OPE changed the shape of the Jewish community at the turn of the twentieth century, a transformation from rule by wealthy Jewish merchants "to a nationally oriented cultural and organizational center of pre-World War I Russian Jewry." (p. 138)

In this section of the book, Horowitz also analyzes the memoirs of the Jewish lawyer and writer Henrik Sliozberg, the publicist and civic activist Mikhail Morgulis, and the Jewish judge and criminal investigator Jacob Teitel'. Their memoirs are valuable sources on the history of Jews in late Imperial Russia and provide testimony of their political views. All three of them expressed the hope for a better future for Jews in Russia and rejected both radicalism and Zionism. They thought that political reforms could bring equal rights and national freedom to Russian Jewry. However their dreams were not realized. After the October Revolution Sliozberg and Teitel' emigrated from Bolshevik Russia; Morgulis had died in 1912 and did not live to see the collapse of his liberal and national aspirations.

The third part of the book describes the contribution of Jewish thinkers to Russian philosophical thought and their debates with Christian philosophers. The Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev and the Jewish intellectual Mikhail Gershenzon collaborated on the famous collection of philosophical essays about the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia *Vekhi* (Landmarks, 1909). Both of them criticized the intelligentsia for its radicalism, although they saw opposing solutions to this problem. Berdyaev held that the Russian intelligentsia should change its values, while Gershenzon denied "the intelligentsia any positive importance." (p. 201) The collaboration and friendship of the two philosophers faded with time due to the rising contradictions of their religious and political views. Berdyaev shifted further toward Christian religious philosophy; Gershenzon believed in "a pantheistic religion of the universe, which he called cosmic unity." (p. 217) The final split occurred after the October Revolution, when Berdyaev condemned the Bolshevik regime and Gershenzon enthusiastically supported it. Thus the former friends became ideological enemies. The Bolsheviks expelled Berdyaev from the country, while Gershenzon successfully continued his career in Soviet Russia. Gershenzon was elected the first president of the Moscow Union of Writers, and in 1922-25 he was the head of the Literary Section of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He died of natural causes in 1925.

Russian culture was very attractive for many young Jewish intellectuals in the *fin de siècle*. They consciously chose assimilation to Russian culture,

which opened for them the path for modern intellectual life. However, like the Russian Jewish thinker Lev Shestov, some of them later turned to Jewish heritage in their works, inspired by images from the Old Testament. Shestov's major work *Afiny i Ierusalim* (Athens and Jerusalem) shows the dichotomy of the worldviews of the Greek and Jewish civilizations, based on their religion and philosophy. Shestov thought that the Greek logical philosophy was opposed to "a free search for personal values." (p. 249) Shestov questioned logic from the standpoint of religious existentialism. He wrote that "the ancient Jews find their place primarily juxtaposed between Athens and Jerusalem, the struggle of faith against rational logic." (p. 248)

Fedor Dostoevsky's Judeophobic views are well known, but in spite of this many Jewish readers admired his writings. One of them was Aron Shteinberg, whom Horowitz calls Dostoyevsky's disciple, because Shteinberg wrote a number of works about the writer. For Shteinberg, to understand Dostoyevsky was the same "as understanding Russia." Shteinberg attempted to explain Dostoyevsky's anti-Semitism in terms of the conflicting messianic aspirations of the Russian and Jewish people. He claimed that "Dostoyevsky despised Jews because they occupied the messianic role that he wanted for Russians." (p. 254) Shteinberg believed that Dostoyevsky's ideas enriched not only Russian, but also Jewish thought.

While the majority of these Jewish writers, poets, historians and philosophers had hopes for a better future for Jews in Russia, many Russian Jewish immigrants held a very different opinion. Often the immigrants had a bitter experience with anti-Semitism, pogroms and persecutions, which influenced their decision to leave the country. Herman Rosenthal left Russia after the pogroms of 1881. In the United States he became one of the leading Jewish intellectuals and head of the Slavonic Division of the New York Public Library. Rosenthal was enraged by the news about the Kishinev pogrom in 1903, during which over forty Jews were killed, and also by the attempt of the Russian government to cover it up as if "nothing serious had happened." (p. 258) He was in correspondence with one of the leaders of American Jewry, Jacob Schiff, and together they put much effort into turning American public opinion against the tsarist government, which persecuted Jews and connived in the anti-Jewish pogroms. The two men achieved their goal: after they publicized information about Russian state anti-Semitism, U.S. bankers refused to provide loans to the Russian government during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905. Rosenthal and Schiff also advocated an open immigration policy for the U.S. They thought that this would help their coreligionists flee from persecution. Horowitz writes that their collaboration was quite fruitful, they were able to show the strength of the American Jewish leadership and to influence American-Russian relations.

Horowitz's work describes many important contributions of Jewish writers and intellectuals to Russian culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and examines Russian-Jewish polemics and dialogue on a number of literary, religious and philosophical issues. These Russian Jewish

intellectuals of late Imperial Russia paved the way for the even greater contribution by Jews to Russian culture in the twentieth century. The book is well structured and written; it is illustrated by photos of the major figures. It will be of interest to specialists in Russian-Jewish history, literature and philosophy as well as all those concerned with these topics.

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