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Russifying Bureaucracy and the Politics of Jewish Education in the Russian Empire's Northwest Region (1860s-1870s)*

Mikhail Dolbilov

Introduction and Contextualization

Contemporary historiography has actively engaged the subject of the influence of Russian imperial authorities on the religious and national identity of the Jewish population.[1] As is clear from the most recent works, in spite of vacillation, disruption, and failure, the authorities' orientation toward inclusion of particular segments of the Jewish population in the estate (*soslovie*) structure of Russian society – "selective integration" in the terminology of Benjamin Nathans[2] – represented the most well-considered approach to the resolution of the Jewish problem.

This integrationist orientation reached its peak in the 1860s. Neither before this time nor after did state officials and educated society discuss the idea of abolishing the Pale of Settlement and incorporating particular segments of the Jewish population into the social and cultural life of Russia with such intensity. And yet for all of their emphasis on integration, those debates simultaneously reveal hidden connections between state projects for the transformation of Jews and the persistent Judeophobia of officials and publicists. Clearly discernable in those discussions is also the ambivalent logic that would later serve to justify the state's increasingly segregationist tendencies even to those who previously subscribed to integrationist views. Those tendencies would include

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1 Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews. The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983); Ely Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics. Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York-Oxford, 1989); John D. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Johanan Petrovskii-Shtern, *Evrei v russkoi armii. 1827-1914* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

2 Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, pp. 45-79.

not only concrete measures designed to limit the rights of Jews with respect to education and the professions, but also an undisclosed effort to promote Jews' cultural isolation, a retreat from cooperation with reform-minded Jews, and a growing desire to buttress that community's traditionalist elements in the hopes of capitalizing on its conservative potential.

Based on sources concerning the "Northwest region" (roughly the current territory of Belarus and Lithuania), this article analyzes the motives, forces, and cultural mechanisms that drove the imperial bureaucracy gradually to abandon its policy of "selective integration" in favor of one that connived at Jewish isolation. Beginning in the 1860s this region was the area of most intense Russo-Polish rivalry and the most bitter clash of nation-building projects expressing "Russianness" and "Polishness."[3] In their struggle to reduce the influence of the Polish elite and to integrate this borderland with the territorial core of the Empire, the central and local administration adopted a variety of measures designed to reshape ethnic and confessional identities. In the case of Jews, who constituted one-sixth of the entire population of the region and a majority in many cities, state-sponsored education was considered both a primary tool for making subjects loyal and a crucial prerequisite for extending civil rights. The pages below will focus on the realm of educational and religious policy, since it was precisely here that some of the most important causes of the evolution from integration to segregation are to be found.

I undertake this analysis of the Jewish policy of the state authorities in Vilna in the context of recent historiographical discussion concerning the confessional character of the Russian Empire.[4] It is true that the idiom of the "Orthodox Tsardom" represented a constituent part of the self-representation of

3 For studies of the post-1863 Russifying policy in the Empire's western provinces in general, see, e.g.: Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia. Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Witold Rodkiewicz, *Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863-1905)* (Lublin: Scientific Society of Lublin, 1998); Leonid Gorizontov, *Paradoksy imperskoi politiki: Poliaki v Rossii i russkie v Pol'she (XIX – nachalo XX v.)* (Moscow: Indrik, 1999); Henryk Głębocki, *Fatalna sprawa. Kwestia polska w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej (1856-1866)* (Kraków: ARCANA, 2000); Mikhail Dolbilov and Aleksei Miller, eds., *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), pp. 318-327 et passim; and the articles of the forum "Alphabet, Language and National Identities in the Russian Empire," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2005).

4 Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia," *American Historical Review* 108:1 (2003), pp. 50-83; Paul Werth, "Schism Once Removed: Sects, State Authority, and the Meanings of Religious Toleration in Imperial Russia," in Aleksei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, eds., *Imperial Rule* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), pp. 85-108; Virginia Martin, "Kazakh Oath-Taking in Colonial Courtrooms: Legal Culture and Russian Empire-Building," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5:3 (2004), pp. 483-514. See also contributions to the volume: Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovskii, eds., *Of Religion and Empire. Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

the monarchy and a central component of nationalist thought, and that Orthodoxy accordingly enjoyed the official status of imperial Russia's "ruling" religion. Nonetheless, in its day-to-day existence the empire depended on the institution of religion and on practices of religiosity in a more general sense – that is, without reference to specific confessions. In the words of Robert Crews, the empire was a "confessional state." Ascription to one or another recognized religion mediated the civil relationship of subjects to the state and served the latter as an indispensable instrument for administering and categorizing the empire's population. This order presupposed, at least in its ideal, a neutral attitude on the part the state toward the non-Orthodox confessions as long as they remained more or less open to administrative and, to a degree, even ecclesiastical control, and as long as their clerics fulfilled a set of predetermined administrative functions.

In this system of state regulation there was a curious dialectic: the intervention of the state and the "bureaucratization" of each confession brought in its wake not only the imposition of changes in religious services and rituals – at times extending (though this was generally not acknowledged officially) even to religious teachings themselves – but also certain privileges. These could include the elevation of the status of clerics of the given confession, a certain degree of protection from the proselytism of other confessions, the standardization of religious practices, expansion of the possibility for constructing temples, financial support for religious education, and so on.[5] In this sense, belonging to a confession recognized by the state was akin to belonging to a legal estate (*soslovie*): the acquisition of privileges at least partly compensated for subjection to obligations and restrictions. It is entirely logical that in a "confessional state" the bureaucratization of the "ruling" confession was the most extensive. Indeed, this principle was quite clear to a group of maskilim in Vilna, who in proposing a plan for the further etatization of the "religious affairs" of Jews asked rhetorically: "Having organized all the functions of the ruling religion of the empire with the most detailed forms of reglamentation, can [the government], without injuring the dignity of that religion, exempt from its supervision the functions of the heterodox religions of the empire?"[6] For a given confession, in

5 This dialectic of control and freedom was not entirely unique to the Russian empire in nineteenth century Europe. As C. Thomas McIntire has shown, by 1810 Napoleon created in France a "quadrilateral establishment of religion." The four state-recognized creeds were the Catholic Church of France, the Reformed and Lutheran churches, and Judaism: "All four religions accepted the paradox of membership in the religious establishment as the way to increase their religious liberty. The neglect or exclusion of other religions served to define the system." See: C. Thomas McIntire, "Changing Religious Establishments and Religious Liberty in France. Part I: 1787-1879," in Richard Helmstadter, ed., *Freedom and Religion in Europe and the Americas in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 254-260, the quotation is from p. 259.

6 Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives [hereafter LVIA]), f. 378 [Office of Vilna Governor-General], BS, 1869, b. 40, l. 337. On this project in detail, see below.

this formulation, state supervision would represent simultaneously an imposition and – since it applied to Orthodoxy as well – a privilege.

It is worth emphasizing that this imperial confessionalization was not a one-sided process and was not exclusively imposed from above. As is evident from the most recent research on these issues, the interaction of the state bureaucracy with already existing – or in the case of Judaism and Islam, newly created – institutions and agents of spiritual authority introduced dynamism into the lives of religious communities and created new possibilities for social mobility. Provoked by bureaucratic interference, disputes and conflicts among the members of such communities had great significance, as each rival group was compelled to seek ways of adapting to the empire's legal regime and incorporating themselves into its administrative spaces. The reaction of one or another group of believers to a given government initiative became one of the factors determining the sequence of subsequent actions on the part of the state.

In the present article the locus of interaction and dialogue – however unequal – between the state and Judaism is the institution of state-sanctioned education for Jews. I will focus on the system of separate state schools for Jews, established beginning in 1844, under the aegis of the Minister of Education S.S. Uvarov. Despite its violation of many traditional values, that system was built on the premise of the indissoluble link between education and faith in Jewish culture. Even in elementary schools, subjects related to religion – bible, prayers, religious codes, Hebrew – had greater weight in the program than did, for example, Orthodox catechism in institutions of general education. The Talmud was not included in the curriculum of schools of the first and second categories (the level of the district school), but was taught in the Rabbinical seminary (at the level of the *gimnaziia*). Rabbinical seminaries, established in Vilna and Zhitomir, trained students for two specialties: state Rabbi and elementary school teacher. The teaching of most religious subjects was conducted in German as the language of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), with the use of German language literature.[7]

A quite substantial literature exists about the system of separate Jewish education. Michael Stanislawski, revealing the different facets of the conflict provoked among Jews by the establishment of state schools, has shown that the higher bureaucracy, and most of all Uvarov himself, was moved in this undertaking not by missionary motives, but by rationalistic desires to promote enlightenment. The goal was both to render Jewish religion in Russia compat-

7 On the Rabbinical seminaries, see: Verena Dohrn, "Das Rabbinerseminar in Wilna (1847-1873). **Zur Geschichte der ersten staatlichen höheren Schule für Juden im Russischen** Reich," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45 (1997), pp. 379-400; idem, "The Rabbinical Schools as Institutions of Socialization in Tsarist Russia, 1847-1873," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 14 (2001), pp. 83-104.

ible with the contemporary concept of "civic-mindedness" (*grazhdanstvennost'*) and to raise it to the standards of reformed Judaism in European countries. Stanislavski advances a thesis about significant contributions of these institutions, most of all the Rabbinical seminaries, to the mentality and program of Russophile maskilim (proponents of Haskalah).[8]

John Klier's magnum opus on the Jewish question in the epoch of Alexander II elaborates the theme of Jewish schools in the context of discussions in the press. According to Klier, by the middle of the 1860s most of the Russian and Russian-Jewish press had come to the view that the government's involvement in the religious education of Jews was bankrupt.[9] Klier considers the turning point in the history of the Uvarov system to be 1864, when the Vilna General-Governor M.N. Murav'ev, obsessed with the goal of depolonization of the region, began to introduce Russian language into the elementary education of non-Russian groups and, more specifically, ordered the opening of "people's schools" (*narodnye shkoly*) for the Russification of Jews. Klier's assertion is apparently confirmed by discussion on the same question in the nationalist press, though the author's claim that Murav'ev may have "simply seized the state Jewish primary schools and turned them into 'Russifying schools'" is erroneous. Exaggerating the brutality involved, Klier's narrative draws a straight line from the establishment of people's schools to the abolition of the Uvarov system as a whole in 1873 and the introduction in the 1880s of the so-called *numerus clausus*, which drastically limited the access of Jews to institutions of higher education.[10] Proposing that the trajectory of events was in fact significantly more complex than Klier's account allows, this essay will show that in the first years after the suppression of the January uprising, the local bureaucracy undertook an effort to reinvigorate the separate and religion-based system of education and to effectuate a more decisive transformation of Jewish identity.

At the center of my analysis of the issue of education in the "Jewish question" are the activities of the Vilna Educational District, which have also been studied recently by Darius Staliūnas. Staliūnas examines changes in the state's linguistic policies with respect to Jews over the course of the 1860s, comparing them to the goals of the local administration concerning other ethno-confessional groups. On this basis Staliūnas concludes that efforts to introduce the Russian language into Jewish educational institutions and religious literature and to render attendance at primary schools compulsory for Jews reflected the aspiration of bureaucrats to promote the linguistic acculturation of Jews, but decidedly not their ethnic assimilation. Most officials regarded such assimilation as an unrealistic goal, and Staliūnas contends that even those Russian-speaking Jews who clearly demonstrated their loyalty to the regime failed to

8 Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, pp. 43-122, 65-66 ff., 201 note 51.

9 Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 222-244, 234-235 ff.

10 Ibid., pp. 160-162, 230 (the quotation), 237-238.

allay suspicions of bureaucrats concerning the insurmountable character of Jewish cultural otherness.[11]

I agree with Staliūnas about the trajectory of state policy on Jewish education in the Northwest region – a trajectory starting with a burst of initiatives designed to promote acculturation and leading later toward alienation from Jews. I nonetheless interpret differently the motivation of the historical actors who stood behind this process. In contrast to Staliūnas' assertion that the administration's efforts to promote the Russian language among Jews "went hand in hand ... with a diminished stress on the most quintessential attribute of Jewishness – religion,"[12] I demonstrate that at least until 1866 the religious identity of Jews remained at the center of attention for officials in Vilna and for their informants from among the maskilim. Furthermore, I argue that it was precisely interest in the possibility of reforming – or, to adopt the contemporary discourse, of "purifying" – the Jewish religion that served as one of the significant stimuli for promoting Russian-language education among Jews. In other words, the linguistic experiments of the time actually had specifically confessional goals in mind, and arguments about which language Jews should use for prayer had as much to do with the prayers themselves as with language.

I shall also demonstrate that disagreements within the bureaucracy, most notably between the Ministry of Education in St. Petersburg and its subordinates in Vilna, created greater possibilities for Jews themselves, both reformers and traditionalist believers, to impress upon authorities their own version of the question's resolution. The turn towards a more segregationist policy in Vilna at the end of the 1860s was accordingly the consequence not only of "certain metamorphoses in the views" of a single highly-placed official, the head of the educational district I.P. Kornilov.[13] In order to understand how and why a segregationist logic came to prevail within the Vilna bureaucracy, it is crucial also to consider the close connection between the earlier integrationist agenda and the idea, dating from the time of Uvarov, of disciplinary state intervention in confessional affairs. That idea served as the basis for conflicts between

11 Darius Staliūnas, "In Which Language Should the Jews Pray? Linguistic Russification on Russia's Northwestern Frontier, 1863-1870," in Jurgita Šiaučiunaitė-Verbickienė and Larisa Lempertienė, eds., *Central and East European Jews at the Crossroads of Tradition and Modernity* (Vilnius: Center for Studies of the Culture and History of East European Jews, 2006), pp. 33-78.

12 Ibid., p. 40. Staliūnas considers one of the primary manifestations of this "diminished stress" a loss by the authorities of interest in converting Jews to Orthodoxy (Ibid., p. 59 et passim). However, a retreat from the conversion policy did not necessarily entail the simultaneous disappointment about efforts to reshape the *Judaic* religious identity on the part of the authorities. On the bureaucracy's mistrust toward Jewish converts to Orthodoxy, see: Eugene Avrutin, "The Jewish Intelligentsia, State Administration, and the Myth of Conversion in Tsarist Russia," in Fiona Björling and Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, eds., *Words, Deeds and Values: The Intelligentsias in Russia and Poland during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Lund: Lund University, 2005 [Slavica Lundensia, 22]), pp. 99-118.

13 Staliūnas, "In Which Language," p. 59.

differing trends among local Jews. The gradual activization of orthodox Jews, who criticized the defects of Uvarov's system in the new cultural atmosphere of the 1860s, sowed substantial doubts in the minds of officials about the real possibilities of state regulation of Judaism. In turn these doubts had significant implications for evaluating the policy of "selective integration." Seen from this perspective, the curtailment of experiments with Jewish identity represents the result of a very complicated process of interaction among various groups within the state bureaucracy and the Jewish community itself. The principal goal of this article, then, is to analyze this complex interactive process.

* * *

The confessional dimension of the politics of Jewish education appears particularly important from the point of view of the borrowing of European experience in Russia. If in the terms of civic emancipation of the Jews, European states (even the Hapsburg empire) were significantly in advance of Russia, the experiments of Russian authorities with Jewish religiosity were more in tune with European developments. In France, Prussia, and the smaller Germanic states, full or partial civic emancipation preceded the posing of the question of Jewish rights as a religious community. Jews as individuals could already enjoy broad civil rights, but their traditional faith was still regarded by authorities as something of a superstitious sect with a cult that was unsightly for Christians.[14] One of the Uvarov's system's co-architects, the Bavarian reformed rabbi, Max Lilienthal, offered his services to Russian authorities at the beginning of the 1840s after the Ultramontane government of his native state refused to introduce the already approved reform of Judaism and demanded strict observation of Jewish orthodoxy in its teaching and ceremony.[15]

The disillusion of part of the bureaucracy with the Uvarov system, which became evident by the middle of the 1850s, also correlated with European experience. One of the first efforts to rethink the conception of religious education was proposed at the beginning of the reign of Alexander II in 1857 by N.I. Pirogov, then the Curator of the Odessa Educational District. A humanist educator, Pirogov was a Judeophile and one of the convinced advocates of a rapprochement of Jews with Christians in the empire,[16] though he had no strong sympathy for traditionalist Judaism. He enumerated the failures of Uvarov's

14 Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?," in Frankel and Stephen Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 11-23; D. Itzkowitz, "The Jews of Europe and the Limits of Religious Freedom," in Helmstadter, ed., *Freedom and Religion in Europe,* pp. 150-171.

15 Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity. A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (NY, Oxford, 1988), pp. 32-43, 104-105; Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, p. 91.

16 Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question,* pp. 40-42, 70; Dohrn, "The Rabbinical Schools," p. 92.

policies: the traditionalist Jews had not been dissuaded from their view that the new schools had been established for Orthodox missionary work, and those who nonetheless sent their children to them were not happy with the quality and extent of the religious education. On the question of the instruction of Jews in institutions of general education, Pirogov called not for direct but indirect struggle with "the deeply rooted moral and religious prejudices [of the Jewish] people": "Let us leave all these prejudices as if inviolate and make it appear that we pay no attention at all to them, and in the meantime let us destroy them gradually by means of the dissemination of humane and scientific information, which in the eyes of the commoner have no relation at all to his moral beliefs and his religious convictions." Pirogov concluded from this that Jews had to be encouraged to enter the general educational institutions and taught subjects "apparently having not the slightest relation to popular religious and moral superstitions and prejudices." He referred to the measures taken by Prussian authorities in Poznan, where mandatory education of Jews in state schools was introduced, and religious teachings were to be learned in free time from private tutors.[17]

In 1858-1859, the idea of educational non-intervention in religious affairs was reflected in the regulations of the Minister of Education and the special Jewish committee in Petersburg where it was combined with the legacy of the Uvarov system. In accordance with a resolution of May, 1859 (in the Vilna Educational District it was implemented in 1861), state Jewish schools of the second category were abolished; mandatory instruction was introduced for children of Jewish merchants and honorary citizens (*pochetnye grazhdane*) in institutions of general education, though implementation proved more difficult than issuing the measure. The Jewish Committee advocated leaving the religious instruction of children "to the care" of their parents, but at the same time planned to proceed to the gradual replacement of teachers in traditional schools (melamdim) by certified teachers, a measure that remained on paper.[18]

From the middle of the 1850s, "Jewish policy" began to involve new actors from central and local bureaucracy and varied groups among the Jews. The interaction of interests between center and borderland, between Jews and Gentiles in general, between currents among the Jews and departmental fractions in the bureaucracy in particular proved to be highly complex. In comparison to Nicholas's reign, the role of localities increased significantly. In Petersburg, the non-interventionist mood of the Alexandrine higher bureaucrats and the *shtadlanut* efforts of the Jewish merchant elite headed by E. Gintsburg led, as Benjamin Nathans has showed, to redirecting the "selective integration" policy from attempts to "fashion a (non-hereditary) elite, an officially trained rabbin-

17 Nikolai I. Pirogov, "Dokladnaia zapiska otnositel'no obrazovaniia evreev," in Pirogov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1 (Kiev, 1910), otd. 3, pp. 741-770.

18 Aleksandr I. Georgievskii, *Doklad po voprosu o merakh otnositel'no obrazovaniia evreev* (St. Petersburg, 1886), pp. 281-284.

ate," to "drawing economically 'useful' elements [of the Jewish population] into the Russian estate hierarchy."[19] But in Vilna, the methods of solving the Jewish question, based on confessional policies, had more defenders. Besides, Governor-General Murav'ev's campaign of Russification begun in 1863 gave local authorities greater freedom than they had before.

Vilna Project of Mass Education and the "Purification" of Judaism

The first innovation in the "Jewish" policy in Vilna was the so called people's schools. From the point of view of the higher administrators of the Northwest region, Jewish people's schools served above all the goals of the depolonizing of the region. The very chronology of M.N. Murav'ev's regulations attests to this. On January 1, 1864, he signed a circular eliminating of Polish language teaching from the program of instruction for peasants.[20] But besides the peasantry, other groups in the area remained vulnerable to the assimilative effect of Polish education, among them Jews. Only a few days later, on January 5, a regulation was issued opening in Vilna two people's schools consisting of two classes for Jews. These schools replaced the state school of the first category that had been in existence since 1847. They introduced free education – in distinction to the state school. The subjects taught included Russian language, Russian penmanship and arithmetic. Instruction was in Russian, with Yiddish used only for introductory explanations. Murav'ev announced that instruction in Russian grammar was compulsory for Jewish boys from age eight to seventeen. Parents who did not send their children to school were fined sums from eight to fifteen rubles.[21] By the end of 1865, six people's schools were in existence in Vilna – five with two classes and one with one. The pupils numbered 522 boys and 114 girls. The sums for their support came as before from the candle tax, i.e. in the final accounting, the Jewish population themselves supported the functioning of the free schools.[22]

In the context of the entire empire, the regulation about the people's schools for Jews is distinguished by two features. First, the principle of compulsory attendance of school was extended to the entire male membership of a numerous ethno-confessional group. There was no comparable precedent before that time in the Russian empire. By all appearances, the initiators of this measure took into account the experience of Prussia, where compulsory attendance of school had been introduced already at the end of the eighteenth century for children of all confessions (earlier than in England and France) and

19 Nathans, *Beyond the Pale,* pp. 68-69, 376-377.

20 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1862, b. 629, ll. 251-252.

21 LVIA, f. 567 [Office of Vilna Educational district], ap. 6, b. 1020, ll. 6-7.

22 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1138, ll. 1-3, 13; ap. 21, b. 80, l. 49. Cf.: [Aleksandr Postels], *Otchet chlena soveta ministra narodnogo prosveshcheniia Postel'sa po obozreniiu evreiskikh uchilishch s 7 maia po 7 sentiabria 1864 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1865), p. 65.

fining of parents by the police was widely practiced for violating this rule.[23] In practice, however, the Vilna authorities did not succeed in ensuring compulsory education. Even, if the police showed zeal and organized something like a raid on Jewish boys to force them into the schools, the space simply could not accommodate them, one could not speak of normal instruction, and it would have been necessary to send the children home.[24] Compulsory education, in contrast to Prussia, never became an active norm of law. In 1865, the curator of Vilna Educational District indicated that it was necessary to maintain obligatory attendance "at least for several years."[25] Attracting children to school even for a brief time was expected to increase more quickly the number of young Jews who had at least some acquaintance with Russian. After the balance of Polish, German and Russian among the Jews changed in favor of the latter,[26] it would be possible to weaken the rule of compulsory attendance, which had caused the authorities considerable trouble.

The second feature of people's schools for Jews, making them unique among the educational institutions of the empire, was the absence of religious subjects (unlike in the Uvarov schools). For a "confessional state" like Russia, this was extraordinary. Even among the "mixed" elementary schools in the Kazan Educational District, where Russian and Tatar children studied together, the latter were separately taught the principles of Islam.[27] The non-confessional character of the new Jewish schools in Vilna reflected the interests of different bureaucratic and Jewish actors. On one hand, such a type of school corresponded completely with the recommendations of N.I. Pirogov about the non-intervention of the Ministry of Education in religious affairs of the Jews. Following Pirogov's advice, the Ministry's influential expert Aleksandr Postels, who in 1864 inspected the separate schools for the Jews from Odessa to Riga and then authored the detailed report (published in 1865 by the Ministry in a single volume), suggested removing religion from their curriculum in the regions where "the fanaticism is still too predominant."[28] On the other hand, different groups of Jews agreed among themselves on the question of the people's schools. The Petersburg Jewish elite, led by E. Gintsburg and the So-

23 M. Lamberti, *State, Society, and the Elementary School in Imperial Germany* (NY, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. 18-23.

24 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1138, l. 9 (director of the Vilnius Rabbinical seminary Petr Bessonov to Curator of District Ivan Kornilov, 15 May 1865).

25 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1204, ll. 23-24.

26 On how this vision of linguistic acculturation of Jews interacted with the attitudes various bureaucratic actors held toward Yiddish and Hebrew, see interesting observations in Staliūnas, "In Which Language," pp. 41-46.

27 Wayne Dowler, *Classroom and Empire. The Politics of Schooling Russia's Eastern Nationalities, 1860-1917* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pp. 31-32; Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 136-138; LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1204, l. 14 ap.

28 Postels, *Otchet*, pp. 52-58.

ciety for the Dissemination of Enlightenment among Jews, which he financed, consistently spoke out for the removal of the state from the religious education of Jews and for the redirection of its forces towards secular education. In the moderate maskilic spirit, they held that teaching of the Jewish law was useless within the walls of a school called upon to give children the burning necessity of a secular education.[29] More radical Russophile maskilim in Vilna (for example the Vilna rabbi O. Shteinberg) helped the local administration to open people's schools, hoping that these institutions would succeed also in renewing the cadres of teachers and the methods of instruction in the traditional Jewish schools – heders and yeshivas. According to a regulation of January, 1864, teachers in the heders, *melamdim*, were charged with the obligation to make sure that their pupils attended a people's school in addition to the heder and learned Russian grammar.[30]

However, there was not a full consensus about a religiously neutral state education of Jews. In the spring of 1864, Ivan P. Kornilov was appointed curator of the Vilna Educational District. He was an ardent Russian nationalist, a supporter of identification of Russianness and Orthodoxy, inclined to Judeophobia, who understood little about "the Jewish question." But in the first years of his service he was tolerant of Judaism believing in the primacy of traditional religion in education – the education of a loyal subject. Kornilov limited the number of Jewish people's schools to approximately ten for the entire district, which comprised six provinces, and along with them preserved more than thirty-five of the previous (Uvarov) elementary state schools. Although in the latter the religious program was curtailed in order to free time for Russian language classes, the teaching of Hebrew and the Bible (officially in German) continued. Kornilov emphasized that the preservation of the Uvarov state school was "the single means to improve the system of teaching of *Jewish subjects*."[31] The same point of view was now held by part of the local maskilim, the graduates of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, for the elimination of religious subjects from elementary schools would have left many of them without work, all the more that their hope that *melamdim* would yield their schools to certified teachers proved to be illusory.

Petr A. Bessonov, the director of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, emerged in 1865-1866 as the ideologue of a separate Jewish education. He endeavored to adapt the Uvarov system of the "purification" of Judaism to meet the demands of the new policy of Russification. Bessonov was rather well-known in his time as a linguist and folklorist. In his political views he was very close to the Slavophiles. He had little specialized knowledge of Judaica or Hebraica.

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29 I. Cherikover, *Istoriia Obshchestva rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii, 1863-1913* (St. Petersburg, 1913), pp. 188-191, 200-201.

30 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1020, l. 7; Osip N. Shteinberg, "Graf M.N. Murav'ev i ego otnosheniia k evreiam g. Vil'ny v 1863-1864 gg.," *Russkaia starina* 2 (1901), pp. 312-313.

31 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1020, ll. 48-49.

Kornilov asked him to assume the office of director of the Rabbinical seminary, being confident that "the authority of the indisputable learning" of Bessonov "will flatter Jewish pride" and strengthen "the party of the so called Russian Jews," i.e. the Russophile maskilim.[32] Although the role of the Slavophiles in the "Jewish question" has attracted the interest of historians,[33] the activity of Bessonov has not yet become a subject of research.[34]

Bessonov appears as an unusual figure in the "Jewish" policy of the empire. Judeophilia coexisted in him with Judeophobia. Upon his arrival in Vilna, he established close contacts with the young Jewish maskilim pedagogues, openly protected them, and invited them to his home, where, according to the words of one of them, "for the first time a kind of friendship started between Christians and Jews."[35] He showed proper respect for the professional level of Jewish pedagogues and often with pride referred to the Rabbinical seminary as a university. But in spite of the Judeophile conduct and gestures, Bessonov did not divest himself of many prejudices regarding Jews that characterized Russian educated society.

Judaism struck Bessonov precisely because he perceived it as a complex social organism shaken by internal contradictions, but at the same time united and dynamic. As an adherent of Slavophile teachings, Bessonov could not remain indifferent to the fact that the enlightened Jewish elite in Vilna had not lost its ties with the common people, and that the majority had not become apathetic to religion. Jews had their own "society," which Russians in the Western Region lacked, and which the imperial state was trying to destroy among the Poles.

Bessonov was the first local administrator to connect "the Jewish question" not with the Polish, but the German threat. In his private correspondence, the danger of the Germanization of the Jews assumed a geopolitical dimension (of course, one must keep in mind that he wanted to appear as a "discoverer" and so tended to exaggerate the openness of the orthodox Jews to German influence).

> Instead of mindless Poles there emerged a gifted, deeply intelligent tribe [ethnicity, *plemia*]; instead of squanderers, misers; instead of ruin a strong financial operation; instead of gangs, a solid corporation; instead of alliance with the distant French, a close bond with friends whom they [Jews] can extend both arms from Vilna – the right to Baltic Germans, the left to the Prussians...

32 Manuscript Division of the Russian State Historical Museum in Moscow (hereafter OPI GIM), f. 56 [P.A. Bessonov], d. 338, l. 1 v. (Kornilov to Deputy Minister of Education Ivan D. Delianov, 3 February 1865).

33 John Klier, "Evreiskii vopros v slavianofil'skoi presse 1862-1886 g.: I.S. Aksakov i ego izdaniia," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta* 17:1 (1998), pp. 41-60.

34 More on Bessonov as director of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, see: Mikhail Dolbilov, "'Ochishchenie' iudaizma: Konfessional'naia inzheneriia uchebnogo vedomstva Rossiiskoi imperii (na primere Severo-Zapadnogo kraia)," in Oleg Budnitskii, ed., *Arkhiv evreiskoi istorii*, vol. 3 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), pp. 166-204.

> From Pomerania to the Finns, from Kovno and Vilna to Kamenets-Podol'sk and the Ukraine – all of this is one German realm of reformed Jews, intermediaries between the Prussians and the Russians. Then will come their emancipation, then their movement into the interior of Russia, by means of their capital, their corporation, their nihilism, and their atheism.[36]

The Jews appeared to Bessonov potentially as both the most dangerous and the most useful ethno-religious group for Russian domination of the Northwest Region, depending on which path of assimilation, German or Russian, the majority would follow.

This conclusion quickly affected the instructional program of the Rabbinical seminary. Bessonov assigned political significance to the question of German, the language, in which the Ministry of Education had prescribed religious subjects were to be taught. German in Jewish schools now was perceived not as the language of the Haskalah, but as the language of an alien nation with a powerful assimilatory potential. Bessonov demanded the swiftest transition from German to Russian, or at least (temporarily), to Yiddish. The students were to begin with the study of the Bible in Russian. Before this, the Vilna maskilim had argued for Russian language instruction for "Jewish subjects," but they hesitated before the serious obstacles of a confessional character. The text of a few books of the Old Testament had become available in contemporary Russian (not Church Slavonic) only recently in translations by scholars from Orthodox clerical academies. These translations were completed from the ancient Hebrew original, with extensive borrowing from the Greek text (Septuagint) and the inclusion of those passages which are not in the Hebrew bible (Tanakh).[37]

Bessonov, however, considered the problem of averting Germanization much more important than dealing with these religious "fine points." In 1865, the teaching of the Bible according to Synodal translations began in the Rabbinical seminary and then in a few elementary state schools.[38] This was not motivated by the direct intention to move Jewish youth to convert to Orthodoxy. It seemed much more important that Jews and Orthodox receive simultaneous access to a common (except for what in this light seemed details) biblical text in a language common to all. According to this logic, Jews should be lured by the gift of a translation of the Bible that even members of the dominant confession had so long awaited.[39]

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35 Evrei [M. Plungianskii] "Pis'mo k redaktoru," *Vilenskii vestnik* 14 (1867, February 2).

36 Manuscript Division of the Institute of the Russian Literature (Pushkinskii Dom) in St. Petersburg (hereafter RO IRLI), f. 3 [I.S. Aksakov], op. 4, ll. 11v, 23-23v (Bessonov to Ivan Aksakov, 7 March and 6 June 1865); Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 155-156.

37 Sergei S. Averintsev, ed., *Khristianstvo. Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1993), pp. 249-250.

38 OPI GIM, f. 56, d. 338, ll. 63-64v.

39 See, e.g.: S.K. Batalden, "The Politics of Modern Russian Biblical Translation," in Ph. Stine, ed., *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church. The Last 200 Years* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 68-80.

From Bessonov's point of view, it was necessary to maintain religious subjects in state educational institutions for Jews not only to serve as a conduit for Russian language. Jewish religiosity itself was also important. Placing his proposals in the imperial context of educational measures in regard to *inorodtsy* – aliens – he noted that, in terms of the resistance to assimilation, Jews were *inorodtsy* to an even greater degree than "Muslims, for example Tatars and Bashkirs": "The latter...do not have so ancient, so important, and unique a history as the Jews, lacking by the same reason their own special, uninterrupted historical education... [The Jews] ...have their immemorial, unique, original, ... stubborn, unyielding forms of upbringing and education..."[40] Unlike Pirogov, Bessonov did not draw the conclusion that religiosity based on so deep a tradition would not yield to direct state influence. He held that such influence was both necessary and possible, but for him it was necessary to use non-religious channels, such as the language of instruction in state institutions. "Russian language acts with full force on the ancient Hebrew language, the jargon [Yiddish] is giving way to Russian speech... Jewish religiosity is not violated, does not vanish: it is cleansed, ennobled and elevated... A boy, making use of the methods of science provided him, leaves any melamed at an impasse, whether it is in ancient Hebrew, in the understanding of the Bible or the interpretation of the Talmud."[41]

Moreover, in the eyes of the Slavophile Bessonov, the historical uniqueness of the Jews living in the empire became still another attribute of the uniqueness of Russian culture, its dissimilarity with the West. In a speech, delivered before the teachers of the Rabbinical seminary, on the occasion of his resignation, he said: "I from now on consider myself tied to you forever, we are linked specifically by Russian civilization on your Jewish soil, the fruits of Jewish thought and activity on Russian soil."[42]

It is understandable that separate Jewish schools seemed to Bessonov to be the most important instrument for the assimilation of Jews. In a programmatic memorandum of May, 1865, he emphasized that even the ten year course of the Rabbinical seminary was sufficient for becoming acquainted only with the bases of Jewish learning. Without the mediation of separate schools, with Russian language instruction of both secular and religious subjects, Jews would not receive the inclination for Russian culture. General educational institutions in Russia were for the time being too alien to the majority of Jews to expect a

40 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1204, l. 16 v.

41 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1204, l. 18-18 v. There is an intriguing parallel with later imperial attempts to modernize the teaching of religion for Muslims in the Kazan Educational District, especially in the Kazan Tatar Teachers' School. For a statement by the Orientalist and inspector of Kazan District, Vasilii Radlov, echoing Bessonov's earlier judgement about Judaism, see: Geraci, *Window on the East*, p. 144.

42 OPI GIM, f. 56, d. 332, ll. 87v-88.

flow of Jewish children into them. Bessonov defended this view with fervor, accusing opponents of a conspiracy with the Germans. In his opinion, conversations in the Ministry of Education about non-intervention of the state in matters regarding the Jewish faith were only a specious pretext for a reorientation of Jews toward secular educational institutions in Germany.[43]

Concern for the menace of Germanization (linked also with Slavophile doctrine) predetermined the ambivalence of Bessonov's project, its mixture of reformism and traditionalism. According to his idea, the introduction of Russian language instruction meant not so much to integrate the Jews as to create the conditions for their *future* integration into Russian society. In the immediate future, the chief goal was creating a barrier to the secularizing influence of the German reform Judaism. Such a concept of the dynamic of acculturation did not correspond with European experience. In European states, the Jews' adoption of the language of the dominant population proceeded more or less simultaneously with their gaining of new civil rights. In distinction to this model, Bessonov, who was so fearful of the competing project of assimilation, assigned special importance, along with Russian language, to the religiosity of Jews, and so considered it beneficial to limit the granting of those rights that might cause the secularization of Jewish identity. Neither in his official memoranda, nor in his private correspondence does one encounter opinions about the abolition of the Pale of Settlement. He did not wish to facilitate the flow of Jews into the *gimnazii* by introducing a course of Jewish religion (even in Russian).[44] He was not opposed to the entry of alumni of the Rabbinical seminary into the university, but limited this privilege to able pupils whom he took informally under his own patronage.[45]

At the end of 1865, the curator of the Vilna Educational District Kornilov approved Bessonov's view of maintaining separate Jewish schools and presented such a conclusion to the Ministry of Education. In it, the chief task of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary was defined to partly correspond with the conception of the instruction of *inorodtsy* by their Russified co-ethnics (exemplified

43 Ibid., ll. 20-20 ap., 21; RO IRLI, f. 3, op. 4, d. 45, l. 21 (Bessonov to Aksakov, 5 June 1865). The above-mentioned Aleksandr Postels was regarded by Bessonov as a principal coordinator of this alleged German-Jewish rapprochement. See: Dolbilov, "'Ochishchenie' iudaizma," pp. 191-192.

44 Contrary to the Russificatory trend of officials in Vilna, Minister of Public Education Aleksandr Golovnin insisted that Jewish religious instruction in *gimnazii* be conducted not in Russian, but in German, in accordance with the program for Jewish pupils in general schools sanctioned by the Ministry in 1863 (Staliūnas, "In Which Language," pp. 52-53; Georgievskii, *Doklad*, p. 243-245). Noticeably, in the Rabbinical seminary, Bessonov introduced Russian-language religious instruction in spite of the absence of official sanction from the Ministry.

45 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City (hereafter YIVO), Record Group 24, folder 135, folios 1-3; folder 136.

in the system of N.I. Il'minski in the Volga – Kama region).[46] The local educational officials saw in the graduates of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary the bearers of a hybrid identity combining secular education and fluency in Russian speech with Jewish religiosity. Only such teachers were considered capable of inculcating their "ignorant" fellow tribesmen with a taste for knowledge: "The problem is that to act on the convictions of the Jewish masses, and that is attained only under the condition that educated Jewish leaders are respected by the Jews themselves as learned and pious. Therefore even the pupil of the Rabbinical seminary, entering the university...can be considered lost for the enlightenment of the Jewish people..."[47] In opposition to the tendency of the heads of the Ministry of Education to encourage the merger of separate Jewish and general institutions, the Vilna Education District insisted that the Uvarov strategy of reforming Jewish identity through the "purification" of Judaism, had not outlived its usefulness.

In spite of the brief tenure as director (less than a year), Bessonov was able to unite the young maskilim teachers of the Rabbinical seminary around his project and to reinforce their missionary feeling. The turn towards Russian language education of religious subjects realized by Bessonov responded to their self-identification as "Russian Jews" and to their professional and career interests. They enthusiastically planned an attack, under Bessonov's protection, on such centers of traditional Jewish learning as for example the famous yeshiva in Volozhin.[48] Under Bessonov, the teachers of the Rabbinical seminary began to prepare translations of Jewish prayer books into Russian, text books on Jewish history, and even parts of the Talmud. A translation of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) was planned. In the following years, this activity continued, and a whole series of translations was published.[49]

"Kahalomania": State Non-intervention in the Religion and Segregationism in the Educational Policy

Although Bessonov's project of Russian language instruction of the Jews by the Jews themselves did not incur the (expressed officially) doubt of the local bureaucracy at least until the end of 1867, as early as 1866 a new turn in the "Jewish" policy of the Vilna administration became evident, and that was in the direction of the abolition of separate Jewish schools. However, now the motive was not the enlightened effort to secularize Jewish education, but an in-

46 On the similarities and differences between the system of N.I. Il'minski and separate Jewish schools, see: Mikhail Dolbilov, "Prevratnosti kirillizatsii: Zapret latinitsy i biurokraticheskaia rusifikatsiia litovtsev v Vilenskom general-gubernatorstve, 1864-1882," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2005), pp. 280-289.

47 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1204, l. 26.

48 OPI GIM, f. 56, d. 335, ll. 129-130, 137-138.

49 See also: Staliūnas, "In Which Language," pp. 48-49.

crease of the Judeophobic urge to segregation, and according to the expression of one official, to "make the Jews ignorant" (*onevezhestvlenie*) of the Jews. The sharpness of this turn should be no surprise. The changes in "Jewish" policy from the end of the 1850s to the first half of the 1860s did not at all touch the roots of cultural and emotional alienation of officials from the Jewish population. As a result of stereotyped ideas of Jewish distinctiveness and otherness, the position of the authorities in relation to the principle of separate education was subject to the influence of personal and irrational factors.

Owing to conflict with his superiors, for ideological as well as personal reasons, Bessonov left Vilna in the middle of 1866 in the midst of scandal.[50] Among the accusations leveled against him were reproaches for his excessive Judeophilia. In the same period, Iakov Brafman, a convert to Russian Orthodoxy from the Jewish lower classes, emerged in the role of expert on the "Jewish question." In a short time, appeared Brafman's ill-famed *The Book of the Kahal*, which would become a guide for Russian Judeophobes and a universal explanation of all problems connected with Jews. Brafman depicted the kahal (the organ of Jewish self-government abolished by the state in 1844) as an indestructible and ubiquitous institution – the treasured essence of the Jews' social life, and therefore the prime reason for all their vices. Relying on the Talmud, the kahal presumably had everyone and everything under its control and had extended its influence far beyond its boundaries.[51]

The views of Brafman have been well studied in the context of Russian Judeophobia. However, the connections of "kahalomania" with the idioms of Russification, on the one hand, and with the European tradition of discrediting Judaism, are more interesting for the historian. Brafman formed his narrative of the kahal in close cooperation with the so-called "pedagogical circle" in Vilna – an informal company of nationalistically minded officials and journalists, for the most part subordinates and protégés of Kornilov.[52] The members of the circle cultivated a populist notion of Russification as a weapon against particularistic, retrograde, and allegedly conspiratorial elites who prevented a face-to-face encounter between the reforming state and the "masses" of the people. At the basis of *The Book of the Kahal*, exposing the "Talmudic aristocracy," lay those same emancipatory and anti-elitist tropes that before then were used, for example, in the campaign against the Catholic clergy. The Russian officials lack of acquaintance with Jewish realities made the populist conspiratorology of Brafman especially plausible. E. Gintsburg's secretary Emmanuil Levin ex-

50 RO IRLI, f. 3, op. 4, d. 297, ll. 15v-16 (Mikhail Koialovich to Aksakov, 30 October 1865).

51 Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 263-283; Dmitrii A. Eliashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii: Ocherki istorii tsenzury, 1797-1917* (St. Petersburg-Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 289-300.

52 On the pedagogical circle's affection for Brafman, see mentions in the letters of the editor of *Vilenskii Vestnik* M. De Pule to Petr Bessonov: OPI GIM, f. 56, d. 515, l. 52 etc. (letters of 9-13 and 18 February 1867).

pressed this aspect of *The Book of the Kahal* well: "The accusations set forth in it represent a mixture of falsehood and *truth*, so skillfully woven together that not every Jew would be able to disentangle them...Brafman argues in this work not as the *enemy* of the Jews, but, to the contrary, as the *friend* of the indigent masses of the people and a defender of the poor classes against the rich, the *plebes*, as he expresses himself, against the *patricians*, and this lends great force to his philippic."[53]

In Vilna, Brafman was appointed a member of the special commission on Jewish affairs under the authority of the Governor-General, which also included several Russophile maskilim – Lev Levanda, Asher Vol' (one of the Rabbinical seminary's *bessonovtsy*), and later on Iona Gershtein. Differences between them and Brafman became increasingly evident during the course of the commission's activity. The first initiative of Brafman, however, was indirectly reflected in the fate of the separate Jewish schools. He proposed a plan of administrative unification of the Jews with Christians in the towns, the shtetls, and the settlements. A year later, in August 1867, Governor-General Baranov, developing an idea of Brafman, issued a well-known circular, sharply condemning any forms of Jewish "kahal" self-government and proposing the inclusion of all Jews residing in the shtetls and peasant settlements, in the volost, without providing them with land. Two years later, in 1869, a detailed project of Brafman, formulated on this basis, was subjected to bitter criticism at the conference with Jewish deputies and was rejected.[54] Brafman's goal was some kind of "shock" integration of the Jews: placed under the "constant and merciless supervision" of rural assemblies and elders (*starosty*), they would be compelled to engage in "productive" toil as landless laborers (*batraki*) and in this way, by Brafman's logic, be retrained as worthy Russian subjects. Without touching on the psychological motivations for such a cruel experiment, it is worth noting that Brafman actually thought about the integration of the Jewish population, although at the cost of cultural uniqueness and of their religion as well. But the bureaucrats taking an interest in his plan, hoped rather for an indefinitely long preservation of a new subordinate situation of the Jews within peasant volosts. In other words, Brafman's plans could be read both in an integrationist and segregationist sense.

The administrative fusion of Jews and Christians proposed by Brafman implied specifically the liquidation of all remaining autonomous systems of Jewish self government, including the special tax assessment, upon which the system of separate Jewish education depended. Therefore, the beginning of the discussion of this plan in Vilna in 1866 was perceived by lower officials in the Vilna Educational District and the teachers in the Jewish school as a signal

53 YIVO, Record Groups 80-89, file 756, ff. 63532-63533.

54 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, ll. 118-120; Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question,* pp. 173-181; Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, pp. 174-180. For the original copy of the project, see: LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, l. 350, etc.

of the precariousness of the system. Brafman, on his part, spared no effort in his polemic against the supporters of the separate Jewish schools. In his opinion, their very existence promoted separatism and the "Talmudic propaganda," which was understood as the art of evading integration with the surrounding non-Jews, the Gentile population. Brafman chose as his chief target the Rabbinical seminary, where in that period the administration sponsored transition from German language to Russian language instruction of the Bible and even the Talmud. In his letter to Kornilov, Brafman wrote: "...The Jewish ignoramus was better and less dangerous than the educated Jew, remaining in a systematic and sensible Judaism...who teaches Talmud in an attractive, sensible form."[55] From Brafman's point of view mitnagdim (adherents of traditionalist rabbinism) with their yeshivas and heders were less dangerous for the cause of Russifying the Jews, than the maskilim who mastered Russian speech. The latter, according to Brafman, were an incarnation of the "Talmudic" elite. Under the mask of devotion to the authorities, they devised a new strategy of separating their fellow believers from the outside world.[56]

In the same way, Brafman discarded the project of the improvement of religious education and the upbringing of the Jews going back to Uvarov. For him this project was erroneous in its very essence from its inception. Besides the closing of separate elementary schools, Brafman proposed removing religious subjects from the program of Jewish women's pensions and warned against permitting the teaching of Jewish religion in the *gimnazii*.

Brafman's discourse was not an expression of an extraordinary example of Judeophobia. In a comparative historical context, his ideas resemble techniques of discrediting Judaism in several European states (in particular, Prussia and the Hapsburg empire) of the first half of the nineteenth century. Michael Meyer calls such a policy "encouraging the dissolution of Judaism through inner decay." Intentionally distancing themselves from the regulation of the Judaic cult and taking the side of traditionalist Jews against the reformers, the authors of this policy calculated on discrediting Judaism in the eyes of their subjects, including the Jews themselves, as a backward sect with absurd rituals, and without a clergy recognized by the state.[57] Such a policy of non-inter-

55 Russian State Historical Archive (hereafter RGIA), f. 970 [I.P. Kornilov], op. 1, d. 103, l. 15.

56 Staliūnas also observes Brafman's enmity toward maskilim's idea of translating Jewish religious books into Russian, but does not treat it in a broader context of contemporary debates on how to reshape the Jewish religious identity (Staliūnas, "In Which Language," pp. 51-52, 57). Brafman was fearful not only of a legitimizing influence that Russian-language instruction was supposed to exert on Judaism as a state-tolerated faith, but also of the upgrading of the religious teaching itself.

57 Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 103-110, 146-149, the quote is from the p. 104; Itzkowitz, "The Jews of Europe," p. 162; Marsha Rozenblit, "Jewish Assimilation in Habsburg Vienna," in Frankel and Zipperstein, eds., *Assimilation and Community*, pp. 228-229. Later in the second half of the 19th century the Russian imperial authorities took a similar attitude toward Islam in Turkestan. See: Daniel Brower, "Islam and Ethnicity: Russian Co-

vention in religious affairs aimed at discrediting the Jews was advocated by Brafman in Russia in the 1860s. He associated any attempts at "regulating" or "cleansing" Jewish religion, especially through the system of education, with the machinations of a sophisticated or selfish elite. He thought that it was necessary "to help" the Jews to take Talmudic interpretations to complete absurdity, without introducing improvements in the traditional teaching of the Talmud. Brafman was confident that the publication of the Russian translation of the full text of the Talmud "in all its confusion" would make Judaism a laughing stock.[58] The officials of the Vilna Educational District heeded this advice. At first, they demanded an exact translation of the Talmudic tractates in order to convince Jews that the change in language would not affect the essence of faith. And after Brafman's advice they began to watch closely to make sure that the translations did not omit what was seemed to the Gentiles to be illogical or "indecent."[59]

Brafman's "theory of the kahal" was of course not the only reason for the reversal of policy toward Jewish education in Vilna. For officials of the educational administration, Brafman made it simpler to articulate Judeophobic emotions, which had already been aroused simply by the growth of the number of Jews in the sphere of Russian language instruction. In 1866, the newspaper *Vilenskii Vestnik*, under the control of the direction of the Educational district, was overflowing with Judeophobic materials.[60] Divergence from the Bessonov system became evident in practice as well: in the Jewish schools of the provinces that were furthest from Vilna – Mogilev and Vitebsk instruction in religious subjects was completely terminated. In other provinces Kornilov encouraged reducing the number of classes in Bible and Hebrew.[61] A few of Kornilov's

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lonial Policy in Turkestan," in Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 115-135; Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 50-61.

58 Ivan P. Kornilov, *Russkoe delo v Severo-Zapadnom krae. Materialy dlia istorii Vilenskogo uchebnogo okruga preimushchestvenno v murav'evskuiu epokhu* (St. Petersburg, 1908), p. 251; RGIA, f. 970, op. 1, d. 103, l. 15.

59 RGIA, f. 970, op. 1, d. 103, ll. 9v-10; Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg (hereafter RO RNB), f. 377 [I.P. Kornilov], d. 836, ll. 12v, 15v. (inspector of Vilna Educational District Vasilii Kulin to ex-curator Kornilov, 5 July 1869).

60 Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question,* 166-169. Contributors found pretexts for showing their Judeophobia even writing on apparently apolitical subjects, such as, for example, beekeeping: field bees in the region were reported to perish in great numbers because of overeating the "impure honey" produced mainly by Jews. A subsequent blunt comparison of idle drones with the "Polish lords" (*pany*) explicates the association of unfortunate field bees with Russianness ("Tsarstvo pchel (Posviashchaetsia uchenikam narodnykh shkol)," *Vilenskii Vestnik* 164 [3 August 1866]).

61 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1266, l. 12. There were 17 separate Jewish schools in Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces, and 21 in the four other provinces of Northwest Region.

subordinates, reacting to the change of mood in the district administration, presented reports that opposed the overemphasis on Russian language in the acculturation of the Jews: "To transform the Jews, to make them Russian, [it is insufficient] to simply teach them Russian language." They seconded Brafman who asserted: "That the Jew speaks Russian, will not bring great benefits; he remains the same Jew if he studied Russian from a Jew in a Jewish school." They even advanced the opinion that separate schools for Jews were an exclusive privilege, separating them from "other peoples and tribes."[62] The special status of Jewish education, wrote Kornilov's assistant, A.K. Serno-Solov'evich, prevented the authorities from recognizing the unconditional priority of the education of Russians, including the mass of the peasantry: "This broadens the intellectual horizon of our people..., provides them with a reliable means for competition with other peoples and tribes inhabiting Russia..." Only after education of Russians had progressed would it become possible for the Jews to do the same; they then willy-nilly would have to catch up to the "masses." As result of this, they "would begin to accept Christianity, or, at least, would cease to believe in the Talmud, and, consequently, would cease being Jews."[63]

So as early as 1866, the idea of discrimination against Jews in the sphere of education was expressed, though at first not officially. But it proved not so simple to move from words to practice. The integrationist policy of Uvarov was imprinted both on institutions and in the discourse about Jewish education, so that Kornilov and his assistants, as a result of the bureaucratic order, often would find they could not challenge the institution of the separate Jewish school. The situation was complicated by the fact that at the end of 1866 and the beginning of 1867, the voice of still another participant was added to the debate about Jewish education – the traditionalists (mitnagdim). This was one more reminder that different groups among the local Jews were not passive objects of government measures. The most notable were two evidently coordinated petitions from the Vilna and Kovno (now Kaunus) Jewish communities, signed by merchants and other well-to-do individuals. The petitioners sharply criticized the maskilim, particularly state rabbis and teachers, who numbered among the alumni of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, for ignorance of the Halakhah, open violation of Jewish law, and, most important, inculcating atheism in their students. Such complaints had come from mitnagdim earlier, but the tactic chosen by these petitioners was new. In the first place, they took into account the political changes taking place after the attempt of Karakozov on the life of Alexander II in 1866 – the importance of atheism and nihilism in the new hierarchy of administrative anxieties, and the related redefinition of the tasks of the Ministry of Education headed by Count D.A. Tolstoi. They stressed that

62 RGIA, f. 970, op. 1, d. 103, l. 15; LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1319, ll. 13-14. On how the Judeophobic point about Jews as a "privileged tribe" in Russia emerged in the press, see: Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 193-194.

63 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1319, l. 14-14 v.

Russian language without firm religious belief would not make "loyal subjects of the Tsar and true sons of the Fatherland" from Jews. Secondly, objecting to the Uvarov schools staffed by the Rabbinical seminary's alumni, the petitioners unexpectedly turned out the enlighteners more than did the maskilim. They asserted that at the present time there was no need at all for intermediary educational institutions for Jews and that their fellow Jews striving for education could enter the general educational institutions in Russia, up to the universities. The petitioners considered the Russian teacher in the elementary school more beneficial for Jewish children than the secularized graduate from the Rabbinical seminary. As a Gentile, his conduct did not offend the religious feelings of his pupils, and he "would inculcate in them much more of the spirit of Russian nationality."[64]

The petitions of the mitagdim prompted contradictory reactions among the heads of the Vilna Educational District. The web of interests that had formed around the question of Jewish education proved truly fantastic. Kornilov and his assistants were convinced (admittedly not without reason) that the unexpected benevolence of the mitnagdim toward Russian Orthodox teachers concealed an isolationist calculation – to scare all Jewish students away from schools with such teachers and to provoke the administration to close the schools completely. Rejecting the petitions, Kornilov was compelled to defend the credentials of the maskilim (which at the same time Brafman also attacked from his ultra-integrationist position) as enlighteners of the Jews.[65] However, only shortly thereafter, the conservative arguments advanced by the mitnagdim against the maskilim and the Vilna Rabbinical seminary, along with Brafman's invectives, were appropriated by bureaucrats to justify the abolition of separate Jewish schools.

The Fate of Separate Jewish Schools: Looking from Vilna and Petersburg

At the end of 1867, after a period of uncertainty about the question of Jewish education in Vilna, Kornilov decided to present a plan to abolish the separate schools. The misgivings of the maskilim, who already at the beginning of 1867 felt "contempt" in the dealings of the Vilna Educational District with the teachers of the Rabbinical seminary,[66] now proved justified. The circular mentioned above by Baranov about the prospective complete administrative fusion of Christians and Jews was the starting point. In his reports to Baranov, Kornilov relied on the fact that Jewish schools enjoyed an impermissible advantage: each of the 48 Jewish elementary schools (including both state and

64 LVIA, f. 577 [Vilna Rabbinical seminary], ap. 1, b. 16, ll. 35-36; f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1317, ll. 1-10.

65 LVIA, f. 577, ap. 1, b. 16, ll. 9-10, 17. See also: Dolbilov, "Prevratnosti kirillizatsii," pp. 287-288.

66 OPI GIM, f. 56, d. 515, l. 60 v. (Mikhail De Pule to Bessonov, 13 May 1867).

people's schools) received an average of 1100 rubles annually, while each of the approximately 100 parish schools, only 460 rubles. Since Jewish communities were richer, part of their means would be used for the good of their Christian neighbors. The curator of the Vilna Educational District proposed the abolition of the candle tax, of separate Jewish schools, and the introduction of a general tax for Christians and Jews commensurate with their economic status to support the elementary schools. In the spirit of Brafman's "theory," this measure was depicted as the rescue of the Orthodox peasants and the poor "majority of Jews" from the exploitation of Jewish upper class, for whom the candle tax was presumably a source of expenses "for the support of exclusively Jewish interests."[67] This proposal, segregationist in its essence, was covered with integrationist rhetoric to the effect that there was no more need for separate schools, since Jewish children were already prepared to enter general schools directly, and even parish schools. Kornilov thus repeated the very argument of the mitnagdim that he had considered hypocritical.

Kornilov's calculation of the positive fiscal effect of introducing a general tax was both unscrupulous and speculative. He completely ignored the question of how rural Jews could protect their economic condition and solvency after their incorporation in the volosts without allotments of land. The support of parish schools was just a pretext. The abolition of the institution of the separate Jewish school was the principal goal. The point is that by the end of 1867 the Jewish phobias of Kornilov and his assistants had reached critical proportions. The disagreements between the Vilna Educational District and the Petersburg Society for the Dissemination of Enlightenment among the Jews played an important role in this. The Petersburg Society was engaged in the publication and dissemination of literature providing secular knowledge in Hebrew, which Vilna bureaucrats saw as proof of the existence of the ramifying "kahal."[68] As early as fall 1866, Kornilov made a paradoxical remark that the protectors and leaders of the Society, which included Evzel Gintsburg, represented "a party of cosmopolitan-nationalists." He had in mind the presumed close ties of the Society with rich Jews abroad, "Rothschilds, Pereiras, Montefiores, etc." were being organized in order to "to keep the Jews nationally and religiously separate from other peoples and also to attain full equality with Russians in civil rights." Moreover, the Society was presumably "able to purchase or influence views in the press to its own benefit" and wished "to take Jewish education in government schools into its own hands, and use force to influence the appointment of teachers and rabbis."[69]

Blinded by this conspiratorial mystification, Kornilov ignored the serious disagreements between the Society and the Vilna maskilim of the Rab-

67 Kornilov, *Russkoe delo*, pp. 294-298 (Kornilov's report to Baranov, 11 November 1867); RO RNB, f. 377, d. 185, ll. 2-3v. (Kornilov's report to Baranov, 13 September 1867).

68 Cherikover, *Istoriia*, pp. 64-65, 79-80, 114-115.

69 RO RNB, f. 377, d. 185, l. 13 v.

binical seminary. The Society, as indicated above, was not at all a supporter of the Uvarov type schools, including Rabbinical seminaries, while the young maskilim in Vilna considered the Society's Hebrew-language undertakings a waste of money and energy. But the leaders of the Vilna Educational District conflated the two generations of maskilim and suspected both of being adherents of Jewish nationalism. In December, 1867, the director of the Vilna Rabbinical seminary N. Sobchakov composed a programmatic memorandum recognizing that the Uvarov project had collapsed and stressing that in the new era, with the spread of "the spirit of separatism," special Jewish schools would become particularly dangerous: "[They] promoted and still promote the strengthening of a distinct and autonomous Jewish nationality in Russia, which, *although it existed earlier, was not recognized by the representatives of Jews in Russia themselves...* [Italics is mine. – *M.D.*] Together with the dissemination of religious fanaticism, they are cultivating Jewish national fanaticism."[70]

This conclusion of the leaders of the Vilna Educational District may be described as a halfway insight. On one hand, the admission of the possibility of a modern Jewish national organization was a bold, innovative thesis for the discourse of Russian nationalism (even Bessonov, fearing the Germanization of the Jews in the sense of their entering into modern nationhood, did not imagine a specifically Jewish national community). On the other hand, these Russian nationalists could not conceive of real collisions of the modern Jewish nation-building and seriously exaggerated when they saw one of its forces in the Rabbinical seminary. The seminary fulfilled its function of acculturation of Jewish youth into Russian society fairly well, though not always the way the authorities had wished. Its graduates became imperial officials, scholars, teachers, state rabbis or radicals oriented towards the Russian populists,[71] but it did not become a laboratory of Jewish national thought.

The characteristic ambivalence of the imperial conception of assimilation is evident in the distrust and suspicions of the Vilna Russifying bureaucrats toward the Vilna maskilim. The formation of Russified elites in non-Russian ethnic or ethno-confessional groups was at once the goal and the fear of the Russifiers. So Kornilov in these years complained that Russian language schools for Lithuanians "were not capable of producing a single reliable and energetic Russian Lithuanian."[72] In the context of the Lithuanian case, the maskilim appeared as the ideal allies of the authorities – an entrepreneurial and loyal elite, ready to introduce their fellow Jews to Russian language and culture (though not to Russian Orthodoxy). But it was exactly their educational level and activism that prompted the doubts of the Russifiers about whether Russification

70 RGIA, f. 970, op. 1, d. 455, ll. 1-2. See also: Staliūnas, "In Which Language," pp. 56, 75-76 note 121.

71 Eric Haberer, *Jews and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 77-80.

72 RO RNB, f. 523 [N.N. Novikov], d. 711, l. 19-19 v.

had turned into a formulation of a modern mindset that could also promote indigenous nation-building. This makes it more understandable why the policy of Russification wavered between integration and segregation. The latter seemed a means of benevolent isolation of the population from the enticements of modernity. In a sense, the case of the Vilna maskilim proved paradigmatic of the imperial bureaucracy's eventual empire-wide loss of trust in the groups of educated non-Russians engaged in the gradual process of reshaping their co-ethnics' identity. Robert Geraci has aptly described this phenomenon regarding the Russifiers' vision of the Tatars: "Many Russians would have accepted the full Russification of the Tatars if it could be achieved by the wave of a magic wand..., yet felt they could not endure the intermediate stages in a more gradual process." The Vilna maskilim's falling out of favor of the local authorities anticipated a far later failure – that of the Kazan jadids to prevent a "bizarre alliance" between the government and traditionalist, conservative mullahs based on the former's wish to see Muslims "parochial and ignorant rather than enlightened and active citizens."[73]

By the end of 1867, Kornilov and his assistants were fully disposed to the abolition of the separate system of Jewish education. Nonetheless, no official resolution of this problem occurred. It turned out that the officials in Vilna and Petersburg understood the goal of abolition in different ways. At the same time as the reports of Kornilov to Baranov, the Minister of Education, Count D.A. Tolstoi ordered the heads of the educational districts in the west of the Empire to promote the entry of Jewish children into general educational institutions, particularly *gimnazii*. As an example, Tolstoi cited the *gimnaziia* of Odessa and other southern towns where Jews made up from a third to a half of the students.[74] As Benjamin Nathans has shown, in the 1860s and the 1870s, Tolstoi was a real advocate of selective integration of Jews by means of study in the *gimnazii* and the universities.[75] Tolstoi was dissatisfied with separate Jewish schools (including the Rabbinical seminaries) because he considered that they made too modest a contribution to the enlightenment of Jews. In contrast to Tolstoi, Kornilov wanted the abolition of separate schools not to promote assimilation but to isolate Jews (at least temporarily) from the sources of modern education. In response to the inquiry of the minister, the curator of the Vilna Educational District resorted to a conciliatory tactic. He tried to give the impression that no special measures to increase the flow of Jews into the general educational institutions were required in the Vilna Educational District: that

73 Geraci, *Window on the East*, pp. 151-152, 287-293, 346-349, quotations are from pp. 348 and 292. As was the case with the mitnagdim's denunciations of maskilim, in the 1900s the officials who were interested in fostering the cultural isolation of the Tatars took advantage of the conservative mullahs' correspondence to the Ministry of the Interior slandering the jadids.

74 LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1411, ll. 1-2.

75 Nathans, *Beyond the Pale,* pp. 259-260, 263-264, 271-272.

it would happen by itself.[76] Leaving the issue of separate Jewish schools in limbo, Kornilov wanted not to give Tolstoi a cause to abolish them on his own grounds, i.e, that Jewish students actually would stream into the *gimnazii* and other general schools.

Last Attempts at Preserving the Uvarov System: Maskilic Plan of Confessional Reform

The last major episode of this complex interplay of interests between the bureaucracy and the Jews was the effort of the Vilna maskilim to defend a separate system of Jewish schools. It seemed that favorable conditions arose for this in 1868. The new Governor-General, A.L. Potapov, an opponent of a hard line policy of Russification and, in comparison with other higher administrators, one sympathetic to the Jews, relieved Kornilov of his office. The working out of a plan to abolish Jewish schools came to a halt. Local initiative on "Jewish" policy shifted from the Vilna Educational District to the commission, mentioned above, under the Governor-General, where Brafman shared influence with Russophile maskilim. By the fall of 1869, members of the commission prepared a series of projects, which were not completely reconciled with each other, for discussion with Jewish deputies from the provinces. If Brafman relied on the plan to subordinate the Jews to peasant volosts, the maskilim and the Vilna Rabbinical seminary's alumni, Levanda, Vol', and Gershtein presented projects of reform of the Jewish religious administration and the system of Jewish education.

Both projects, like earlier proposals of Bessonov, who was respected by the maskilim, were based on the paradigm of state disciplinary intervention in the formation of the religious identity of the Jews. This was the maskilim's response to Brafman's version of the policy of confessional non-intervention that sought to discredit Judaism.[77] It was also an answer to the bureaucrats' suspicion that it was especially the Russophile maskilim who were promoting a sense of Jewish nationalism. The authors of the projects, without mention-

76 According to the data Kornilov cited, out of 54636 pupils (47873 boys and 6763 girls) of all the general secondary and elementary schools (that is, *gimnazii*, uezd schools, pensions, parish schools) in the Vilna Educational District, 1446 (1032 boys and 414 girls) were Jewish. (LVIA, f. 567, ap. 6, b. 1411, ll. 45-46, 49 – Kornilov to Tolstoi, 31 January 1868).

77 In John Klier's opinion, Brafman was one of the co-authors of the confessional project (Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, pp. 178, 473 note 42). However, as is clear from E. Levin's memorandum to be quoted further, in the debate Brafman declared himself an opponent to the draft. Most important, the draft by Levanda, Vol' and Gershtein *in principle* contradicted Brafman's idée fixe about state non-intervention in Jewish religious affairs. In his *The Book of the Kahal*, he sharply criticized the European experience of state-sponsored reforms of Judaism, particularly practice of giving the "rabbi's function" a clerical status. See: Iakov Brafman, *Kniga kagala. Materialy dlia izucheniia evreiskogo byta* (Vil'na, 1868), lxiii-lxxiv.

ing Brafman's name, refuted his point that "government intervention gives too much credit" to Judaism, and asserted that "intentional neglect will not destroy" one of the world's religions "based on revelation." On the contrary, "developing outside of government supervision, Judaism [in Russia] is turning from a religion, a confession into a unique nationality." The fault for this was placed on "the old generation," i.e. the mitnagdim, inimical toward "the youth, brought up in the Russian spirit... [who] do not want to know anything about Judaism as a nationality and who settle for Judaism as a religion..."[78]

If Brafman's plan revived the Prussian method of "encouraging the dissolution through inner decay," the measures proposed by the maskilic drafters recalled the effort at restructuring Judaism in other German states of the first half of the nineteenth century, where reform rabbis instilled elements of the ceremonial, liturgical and pastoral practices of Christianity. However, a significant difference was that Vilna project did not suggest the formation of a central religious administration on the model of the Jewish consistories in France and the German states.[79]

The project lifted the rabbi and the so called "rabbi's assistants" into some kind of semi-clerical office, above such traditional offices and titles of Jewish law as magid, dayan, shokhet, etc., and endowed the synagogue with the exclusive attributes of a parish church by forbidding "public prayers and devotions" in other traditional houses of prayers (like beit-hamidrash). In his administrative capacity, the rabbi resembled the Catholic dean or Orthodox *blagochinnyi* (superintendent). The rabbi and his assistant were assigned the obligations to supervise religious services, to deliver sermons and homilies regularly in Russian, and to restrict the custom of the interpretation of Jewish law to a circle of official individuals.[80]

The project of confessional reform was complementary to that of reform of the Jewish schools. Just as the new rabbinate was invested with status and powers comparable with those of the Christian clergy, the maskilim proposed giving rabbinical seminaries the status of special institutions for the education of the clergy. In regard to the curriculum of the rabbinical seminaries, the intention was to leave the program of Jewish subjects unchanged, but at the same time to raise the course of general sciences to the level of classical *gimnaziia* by introducing Latin, Greek and even Arabic, which were necessary "for the rabbinical specialty." The drafters tried to invoke the image of a rabbi of the new generation who was not only experienced in the fine points of Jewish law, but also erudite in secular learning. Separate elementary schools should be preserved because of the existence of "prejudices, accumulating in the dense masses of the Jewish population of Russia," and "the Orthodox direction" of rural schools. Instead of merger, the maskilim proposed to make the elemen-

78 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, l. 338.

79 See: Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 32-43, 104-105.

80 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, ll. 338-348.

tary Jewish schools functionally similar to the Christian ones. In the former, religious instruction should make up the essential part of the program, but it should assume the character of moral admonitions, education in the bases of the faith, and not the special study of texts according to Jewish tradition. As a result, according the ideas of the maskilim, separate Jewish schools and Christian rural schools would become two similar versions of elementary civic education, with approximately the same number of religious subjects.[81] As in the project of confessional reform, Judaism appeared like Christianity – not in the essence of its religious teaching, but in regard to civic institutions connected with religion. Of course, the maskilim gave free rein to their repugnance to traditional schools – yeshivas and heders. They summoned the authorities not to retreat from the realization of the rules promulgated in 1859, according to which melamdim should be replaced by certified teachers before 1875. The abolition of the institution of traditional Jewish education would become, it was proposed, a legislative norm: "Special private institutions for the study only of the laws of Jewish faith (heders, yeshivas and others) are not permitted."[82]

Both projects designated the boundary that the group of Vilna maskilim inspired by the ideal of militant enlightenment had reached in their effort to preserve their alliance with the authorities. The discussion of the projects at the conference with deputies in October, 1869, showed the isolation of these maskilim among the Jews. Even maskilim deputies, whom the projects of Levanda, Vol', and Gershtein promised advancement in their careers, sharply rejected them as a crude intervention in matters of conscience. Brafman criticized the confessional reform from his point of view: "It is not religion and Talmudists who ruin the Jews, but the tax collectors."[83] Governor-General Potapov supported the deputies and had all questions related to "the religious teaching of the Jews" taken off the agenda. When news of this spread through Vilna, the deputies had to dissuade their fellow believers from illuminating their synagogues in honor of Potapov. The maskilic drafters did not find understanding among officials of the Vilna Educational District, either. The officials were particularly irritated by the point about the attack on the yeshivas and heders, which threatened to draw the authorities into a conflict with the traditionalist Jews.[84]

At the beginning of the 1870s, the maskilim of Vilna tried to prevent the closing of the Rabbinical seminary by submitting petitions to the Ministry of

81 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, ll. 58 v.-62.

82 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, ll. 38-45 v.

83 LVIA, f. 378, BS, 1869, b. 40, l. 66 (the session of 8 October 1869); YIVO, Record Groups 80-89, file 756, folios 63441v-63442 v., 63443 (E. Levin's memorandum on the Commission's deliberations). On the Commission's sessions with the deputies, see: Nathans, *Beyond the Pale,* pp. 174-180.

84 RO RNB, f. 523, d. 114, ll. 12-20 (a memorandum by the inspector of the Vilna Educational District, N. Novikov).

Interior and Ministry of Education.[85] These petitions attest to the authors' uniquely anachronistic mode of thought. Hoping to regain the disposition of the authorities, they stubbornly appealed to the model of state supervision of Judaism, which, with the assistance of reformer rabbis, had been tested in the first half of the nineteenth century in several European countries. The applicability of this model in Russia a half a century later seemed indisputable to them, given "the backwardness" of the mass of Russian Jews, which allegedly required the benevolent intervention of the state in various spheres of their life. One could apply to these maskilim Benjamin Nathans's observation about "the limits of a diachronic analysis," drawing "the [seemingly compelling] analogies between Jews in late imperial Russia and their counterparts elsewhere in Europe fifty or one hundred years earlier."[86] In the new cultural context of the second half of the nineteenth century, to which various groups of Jews in Russia were sensitive, the very idea of state tutelage over Judaism was being rethought in modern terms as a violation of freedom of conscience. Professional bias and maskilic stereotypes prevented teachers who were defenders of the Rabbinical seminary from realizing that their proposals were playing into the hands of Judeophobe bureaucrats. The latter, while declining their proposals, took the opportunity to give the segregationist tendencies of Jewish educational policy the appearance of a liberal rejection of confessional supervision.

The Vilna maskilim decided too late, in 1873, to overcome their disagreements with the Petersburg Society for Dissemination of Enlightenment and its patron, Evzel Gintsburg, who had petitioned the government for the transformation of the Rabbinical seminary into a private institution, an autonomous center of reform Jewish learning.[87] Soon after the Society received letters from Vilna, the government reduced Rabbinical seminaries to the status of pedagogical schools graduating teachers for Jewish preparatory classes, i.e., the previous Uvarov system was brought down to an elementary level, while "the preparation of educated rabbis was left to the whim of fate."[88] As D. Tolstoi reckoned, many Jewish youth had even earlier begun trying to enter institutions of general education. However, that was an emphatically secular path of acculturation that would not mitigate the contradictions between selective integration and orthodox Jewish religiosity so characteristic of imperial Russia.

Conclusion

The complexities of the Jewish question on the Russian Empire's Western periphery can be better understood if we take into account two perspectives of

85 RGIA, f. 733 [Ministry of Education], op. 189, d. 433, l. 2.

86 Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 375.

87 YIVO, Record Groups 80-89, file 756, folio 63535 (a copy of memo of 5 October, 1871).

88 Cherikover, *Istoriia*, pp. 196-197 (quoting a resolution of the Society for Dissemination of Enlightenment).

Russifying policy after 1863 – the Russification of ethnically and confessionally diverse *population* and that of the *territory,* the land.[89]

In the first perspective, the Jews emerged as *inorodtsy*, as put by Petr Bessonov, to an even greater degree than Muslims in the Empire's eastern regions. Cultural alienation and otherness of orthodox Jews were striking in the eyes of bureaucrats who customarily described it in terms of "fanaticism" and "superstition." Throughout the imperial period, there were no serious attempts to introduce and even draft a hybrid of the Russian state schools and Jewish traditional ones, heders and yeshivas, like the so-called Russo-native schools (*russko-tuzemnye shkoly*) for Muslims in Turkestan or the "Russian classes" attached to Tatar mektebs and medresses in Kazan.[90] By means of the separate state schools for Jews, the authorities since the 1840s sought only to get some of them closer to secularized values of Russian culture and incorporate them in the Russian civilizational space, rather than assimilate the Jewish population or convert it to Orthodoxy.

However, the task of Russifying the territory of western provinces, made so crucial for the authorities by the challenge of the 1863 Polish uprising, came to reshape the bureaucratic perception of the region's ethnic heterogeneity. It implied a heavy accent on mental mapping and symbolic reconquering of the region as an inseparable part of the "Russian land from times immemorial." Symbols and spectacular signs of the Russian presence were given priority over step-by-step assimilationist efforts. In this perspective, there appeared a tendency to circumvent gradual acculturation of the non-Russian groups, including Jews, by imposing on them Russian-language education, banishing indigenous languages from public sphere (often without soberly assessing the state's potential for assimilation). As one higher official of the Vilna Educational District optimistically wrote in 1869,

> ...Lithuanians, Latvians and even Jews are eager to get Russified (*obruset'*), all of them understand and nearly all speak Russian. But even if there are those among them who do not speak Russian, then it is they who are obliged to learn the language of Government, not vice versa. All these small peoples (*narodtsy*) are not some pagans and savages (*ne kakie-nibud' dikari iazychniki*), while we are not missionaries among savages. We need not come down to their dialects and notions; rather, we should make them get up to our level (*podniat'sia k nam*)...[91]

The label *inorodtsy* (even in its informal usage) seemed to be out of place in the "ancient Russian land," and separate educational institutions, such as the Uvarov Jewish schools, as well as the very principle of instruction of non-

89 For an excellent analysis of different directions and versions of Russification, see: Aleksei Miller, *Imperiia Romanovykh i natsionalizm: Esse po metodologii istoricheskogo issledovaniia* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), pp. 54-95.

90 See: Khalid, *The Politics*, pp. 157-160.

91 RO RNB, f. 52 [P.N. Batiushkov], d. 28, ll. 1-2 v.

Russians by their Russified co-ethnics, became associated with separatism. What was still welcome in eastern borderlands proved to be unacceptable in the Western region. Characteristically, the Ministry of Education began to introduce its network of Russian-Tatar schools in the Kazan Educational District, partly modeled after the Uvarov Jewish schools, as late as 1870, i.e., when the latter themselves were evidently on the edge of being dismantled. (However, by 1910 the so-called new-method (jadid) schools – a fruit of the 1870s and 1880s cooperation between the reform-minded bureaucrats and the Muslim reformers – in their turn fell victim to the growing regime's fear of indigenous nation-building).[92]

Drawing Jewish children into *gimnazii* and declaring elementary Russian-language education mandatory for Jewish boys soon resulted in a new dynamics of bureaucratic Judeophobia. Paradoxically, the seeds of forthcoming segregationist policy were to be found in relative success of the state's efforts to integrate Jews. The enthusiasm the educated Jews showed at the prospect of the enlightenment of their coreligionists quickly aroused suspicion and anxiety among the Russifiers. The rapid success of Jews in education rendered the Russophone Jew a highly suspicious figure in the eyes of bureaucrats. No longer was he associated with loyalty and reliance. Instead, his linguistic skills were considered one more reason for mistrust. Such a Jew was regarded as a dangerous stranger, an unwelcome newcomer in a Russian milieu or an agent of the German reformed Jewry striving to secularize and Germanize the masses of Russian Jews, that is, to destroy their beneficial isolation.[93] Such were the misgivings of the Vilna bureaucrats of Ministry of Education who, under the cloak of integrationist rhetoric, strove to abolish the Uvarov system and at the same time hinder a reorientation of Jewish children toward general schools.

This vacillation between integrationism and segregationism overlapped with an important change in confessional policy. In the beginning of Alexander II's reign, the pattern of state non-intervention in Judaism was viewed by a number of bureaucrats and pedagogues as an alternative to Uvarov's interventionist attempt to enlighten Jews by means of "purifying" their religion. In Nikolai Pirogov's both humanitarian and condescending rendering, non-intervention in Judaism and Jewish religiosity meant neglecting what was considered "superstition" in order to facilitate secular education and secularization of Jewish identity. In the middle of the 1860s, Petr Bessonov of Vilna Educational District, supported by a group of Russophile maskilim in Vilna, tried to rehabilitate the role of religion in the state-sponsored education of Jews. He suggested combining the "purifying" approach to Judaism with Russian-language education, justifying his experiment by the alleged menace of secular Germanization of Russian Jews. His project was short-lived. From the middle of the 1860s,

92 Geraci, *Window on the East*, pp. 136-50, 287-293.

93 For a study of the Russian fear of assimilated Jews, see, e.g.: Gabriela Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in Imperial Russia (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000).*

the non-interventionist approach began to affect the "Jewish" policy more and more. However, unlike Pirogov, such "non-interventionists" as Iakov Brafman were more interested in a destructive aspect of neglecting Judaism. For them, it was a way of "encouraging the dissolution of Judaism through inner decay" (as put by Michael Meyer) – a pattern of policy that somewhat later found its proponents also among imperial bureaucrats dealing with Islam in Turkestan. In conjunction with educational policy, confessional non-interventionism that might have borne a resemblance to the liberalism of the 1860s Great Reforms contributed to legitimizing the abolition of the religion-based Uvarov system in 1873. In an indirect way, it interacted with the rise of segregationist sentiments among the architects of imperial "Jewish" policy. Thus, the imperial state's failure to play its traditional role of confessional supervision in regard to Judaism helped thwart Russifying efforts to integrate the masses of Jews into the imperial society through education.