

For One's Brothers:

Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son and the "Jewish Question" in Russia

1819-1911

by

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ABSTRACT

One of the great hallmarks of Russian life during the nineteenth century was the proliferation of alternative identities at nearly every level of society. Individuals found, created, or adopted new ways of self-identifying oneself vis-à-vis religion, nationality, and politics. This project examines the life of Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son (1819-1911) and his understanding of his identity—from poor Lithuanian Jew to German educated scholar, to leading defendant of Jews accused of ritual murder, to renowned university professor. Khvol'son is often mentioned in works of the period but remains understudied and, as a result, poorly understood. This dissertation is the first to examine the man's life and times, his scholarly and public writings, as well as available commentaries about him from former students, opponents, and colleagues.

This project is based on the available archival sources housed in the central archives of Russia and draws upon the different literary venues in which Khvol'son published during his lifetime. While it provides a broad biography of the man, more importantly, it takes on the content of his writing, the themes he explored, and the ways in which his contributions were viewed within their own time.

This project argues that the aim of Russian imperial policy toward Jews was based on a hopeful, if hesitant, desire to gradually bring Jews into the state's service. Khvol'son was among the most successful of those candidates who received a world-class German education, a position within the state, and an opportunity to participate fully within Russian intellectual circles. However, Khvol'son's legacy is complex because he promoted a radical rethinking of Christian understanding of Jews and Judaism

and by doing so, he challenged the Orthodox world to reconsider in a deeply personal way the ongoing persecutions of Jews based on false tales about them and their religion. Khvol'son painstakingly challenged the blood libel and sought to prove that it was not based in any identifiable reality but perpetuated an un-Christian worldview that demonized and vilified Jews. In doing so, Khvol'son formulated a controversial self-understanding for his position in society as situated between two diametrically opposed worlds—one Christian, the other Jewish.

DEDICATION

For my dear Kaylyn, without whom this project would likely reside in a dustbin in a distant land. Your enduring support and selfless attitude rest behind each printed word on these pages. You shared me with an old dead professor – a task nobody could bear as patiently as you! At the most challenging moments, a loving home and kind words buoyed my spirits. I hope the finished project serves as a reminder of our life together – may it inspire us to accomplish much more in the years to come.

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Finally, for Mom and Dad – who supported a dream that others questioned and many thought futile. You exceeded your responsibilities as parents and grandparents – much to the delight of your grandchildren. Dad taught me early to read widely, ask big questions, and seek answers. Thank you for keeping the cars running while I was away! Mom taught the value of a job well done and encouraged me, above all else, to enjoy the journey, especially when it crossed a fairway. Though I cannot repay their many sacrifices, I hope that I have in some small way made them proud.

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INTRODUCTION

This study of Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son (1819 -1911) addresses a central contributor to Russian scholarship in the nineteenth century and leading participant in an effort to bring Jews and Christians together in a new discourse that emphasized increased tolerance and understanding. In doing so, I examine Khvol'son's life through his major writings on Jews and Christians as well as his contributions to the public debates about the "Jewish Question." The "Jewish Question" was a discursive arena for negotiating the future of Russia, its minorities, and the role of the state in regulating a non-Orthodox religious national culture. Khvol'son was concerned with all of these arenas as a public intellectual. This examination of his interactions with scholars, theologians, and students, is guided by two objectives. The first is to provide a full biography of "the most famous Russian Jewish apostate" in nineteenth-century Russia.¹ To date, only short obituaries and remembrances published after his death and a series of newspaper and journal articles written for celebrations of his academic life in 1899 and 1909, coupled with a few brief encyclopedia entries, shed light on the oft-mentioned scholar.

The work of Michael Stanislawski, Harriet Murav, and Nathaniel Deutsch provide excellent models for examining extraordinary Jewish lives.² Their exemplary studies of

¹ Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985), 146.

² Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Harriet Murav, *Identity Theft: The Jew in Imperial Russia and the Case of Avraam Uri Kovner*, *Contraversions: Jews and other differences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

individual Jews have all contributed to the dismantling of the old belief that Jewish life in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia could be painted with broad uniform brush strokes. Insisting instead that, like all sectors of Russian life, Jewish society was a colorful tapestry of lives and alternate paths to modernity, these studies provide snapshots of the complex relations between Jews and Christians, minority populations to the majority, and individual to state in late imperial Russia. In so doing, these studies altered scholars' awareness of the varieties of religious life in the empire and illuminated the central issues that mattered to Jews and Christians.

One of the results of these scholars' efforts is the realization that a good many Jews chose to create "synthetic identities" based on a conscious selection of Russian and Jewish cultural, political, and religious practices. Brian Horowitz's collection of essays on Russian-Jews who formulated "hybrid" identities and participated fully in Russian literary and cultural life illuminates this path toward acceptance of these individuals by Jews and Russians as full participants in modern Russia.³ Other Jews chose a complete rejection of the modernity project in favor of preserving and defending traditional Judaism. Still others moved toward a centralist position between the poles of extreme secularization of Jewish identity and stringent defense of traditional communal values and structures, in turn formulating other identities that balanced their Judaism in different ways. What these studies prove is the obvious point that there was not a single path to modern selfhood and that individuals freely chose (often with dramatic consequence) which elements to emphasize.

³ Brian Horowitz, *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth Century Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2009), 1-8.

Through the examination of Khvol'son's interactions with those around him, it is clear that he too, participated in this process of identity formation. The identity that he constructed reflected a unique and controversial understanding of his place in the empire. The second task of this dissertation is to understand Khvol'son's identity through his recasting of the traditional Christian narrative so familiar to Orthodox Russians in the nineteenth century. Khvol'son asserted a self-understanding that tested the boundaries of acceptable identities, becoming in the process a true hybrid of Russian and Jewish culture. The standard accounts of Khvol'son's life begin after his conversion to Russian Orthodoxy in 1854 and after he became the respected professor at St. Petersburg University. Khvol'son is viewed in this way as an apostate who abandoned his traditional Jewish childhood, community, and family for a university post and scholarly fame. By this account, Khvol'son's abandonment of his fellow Jews was selfish, greedy, and motivated by economic prosperity. I take issue with this perspective because it has limited scholarly investigation, truncating Khvol'son's ability to influence and participate in Jewish culture even after his conversion.

As I show in this dissertation, such a reading of Khvol'son's life is the product of interpretations of the man and his work that fail to consider both the content of his scholarship and the views that Jews and Christians held of him through the end of his life. My aim is not to pile undue praise upon the man, though he was at times worthy of it. Rather, the goal is to see in Khvol'son a challenging subject with moments of brilliance and periodic failures. I have tried to be fair and follow Richard Bushman's sage advice,

when he argued, “flawless characters are neither attractive nor useful.”⁴ Khvol’son’s personal life, religious conversion, and scholarship were far more complex than earlier scholarship suggests. In order to prove that earlier opinions were overly narrow and simplistic, I examine Khvol’son’s life and writings across the better part of nine decades.

The Abrahamic Traditions – A lifelong pursuit

Khvol’son’s academic publications and his popular articles written for broad readership in Russian and German (and occasionally English), centered on a single issue—the relationship of the three “Abrahamic” traditions to one another. This dissertation seeks to add Khvol’son’s voice to this now fashionable topic.⁵ He was highly trained in Talmud and Jewish literature, began his prolific academic career in Arabic sources and Islamic texts, and in the final essays produced in the last months of his life Khvol’son returned to his examination of the Sadducees, Pharisees, and the death of Jesus. The academic study of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity in interaction is a popular and significant field among scholars of religion, history, and literature today. In part this interest emerged out of the post-Holocaust reality and the recognition that the catastrophic events of the war were due in part to religious hostility. With the foundation of new research and teaching centers focused on a reexamination of the past and the

⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), ix.

⁵ Peter Berger, a well-respected commentator on religious studies and scholar, issued a provocative piece on the subject. Peter Berger, “Do the Three Abrahamic Faiths Worship the Same God?” *The American Interest: Policy, Politics, & Culture* (11 December 2011), [online] available at <http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/berger/2011/12/14/do-the-three-abrahamic-faiths-worship-the-same-god/> (accessed 25 June 2013). Stephen Batalden directed me to this article.

causes of religious intolerance, scholars are at times tempted to think that the models and literature produced in the past two or three decades are fields without precedent.

Khvol'son's work, however, shows that there were earlier strands of this line of thinking, even in Russia during the nineteenth century.

Khvol'son's work, though not free from his prejudices and hostilities toward detractors and critics, shows a scholar who firmly believed that good scholarship and solid teaching would improve relations between these religious traditions. More importantly, Khvol'son firmly held to the hope that his efforts to master the languages, histories, and texts of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity would help usher in a day of universal humanity when Jews and Christians (and Muslims as well) could build upon common desires and aspirations. Before this could happen though, Khvol'son knew that the teaching of this common history and theology needed to be corrected and improved. It is true that Khvol'son trained many of the priests, prelates, and scholars who participated fully in the Russian Orthodox and Catholic churches in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is equally true, however, that he sought to temper their opinions and perceptions of Jews during the critical decades of Russia's transformation from serfdom to revolution.

Part of Khvol'son's effort centered on indirectly challenging the idea of what we today might call "fulfillment theology," generally interpreted as the ushering in of a (or most often "the") messianic age in the life of Jesus. From this perspective, Judaism was the older, antiquated brother of Christianity and therefore no longer possessed the central place in God's relation with humanity. Given the long tradition of Christian teaching,

only recently have scholars really attempted to grapple with the possibility of finding another interpretation of Christianity—and the Jesus message—that affords at least nominal credit to Judaism and Islam as viable, perhaps even essential components in the future perfection of the world. This is a critical point because ultimately it means that Christians have to rethink the entire relationship between Jews, Jesus, the apostles, and the Gospels’s message.⁶ While Khvol’son did not say that Christians needed to abandon their Christology, he believed they ought to better embody the message they supposed Jesus to have taught—kindness, tolerance, and love. Khvol’son was often critical of ecclesiastical authority. Of all the varieties of Christianity, Khvol’son was more drawn to the Protestant model than to Popes and prelates. And yet, he was central to the Orthodox and Catholic projects (Biblical translation and seminary education) for both communities, and the most staunch defender of Jews against ritual murder charges. This is to say, above all, that Khvol’son and his conversion are more complicated than scholars have suggested.

Philosemitism and Jewish Contributions to European Culture

Among the themes explored in this study is the phenomenon of philosemitism. Philosemitism—the idealization of Jews and an affinity of Judaism—was very much a part of European culture in the nineteenth century. The term “philosemitism” shares a common history with its antonym, anti-Semitism. Both originated in the last two or three

⁶ See the discussion between John T. Pawlikowski (a Roman Catholic) and Thomas Hopko (an Orthodox Theologian) in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era*, edited by Eva Fleischner (New York: Ktav, 1977).

decades of the nineteenth century to describe attitudes toward Jews.⁷ Philosemitism was originally a negative attribution laid upon those who opposed anti-Semitic claims about Jews.⁸ According the nineteenth-century usage of the term, Khvol'son was a philosemite *par excellence*. Even when he tried to be fair to sound criticisms against Jews, Khvol'son found it difficult to accept claims against them. He was deeply connected to their understanding of history and their experience among Christians. He lauded his Jewish ancestors who graced the world with their intellect and their scientific achievements. Jews, he argued, gave the world the foundations of the three great Abrahamic traditions, specifically monotheism. As the chapters examining Khvol'son's writings show, he held firmly to his belief that Jews had much to offer the world, and that a proper treatment of their historical interactions with Christians and Muslims would prove this to be true. Philosemitism manifested itself in various ways, and attempts have been made to categorize these efforts as either sincere or as cloaking anti-Semitic beliefs. While classifying the nature of philosemitic writings may be useful, this study attempts to better understand how sincere desires to improve Jews operated in an intellectual and cultural space that was rapidly becoming aggressively hostile to Jews. In doing so, I follow Alan

⁷ A number of works address Philosemitism, its origins, and history. See William Rubinstein and Hilary Rubinstein, *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support for Jews in the English-Speaking World, 1840-1939* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); David Katz, "The Phenomenon of Philo-Semitism," in *Christianity and Judaism: Papers Read at the 1991 Summer Meeting and the 1992 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 327-61; Salomon Rappaport, *Jew and Gentile: The Philosemitic Aspect* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1980).

⁸ Adam Sutcliffe and Jonathan Karp, "A Brief History of Philosemitism," in *Philosemitism in History*, edited by Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

Levenson's observation about philosemitism in nineteenth-century Germany. Levenson argued that scholars should not speak of "philosemitism" as any kind of coherent movement, but rather, "one can only explore, episodically, a minority outlook that deserves recognition and contemporary cultivation."⁹ Exploring Khvol'son's writing and interactions with those around him as an episode of philosemitism rather than a rigid model, allows for a more nuanced, and I argue complete, picture of his motivations both in his conversion and in the trajectory of his academic work.

Russia as a Confessional Empire

In recent years, methods and approaches for studying the history of empires, particularly those composed of diverse ethnic and religious communities have undergone significant development. As a result, the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century now appears more fluid and uneven than previously believed in its policy toward Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and a broad range of ethnic groups.¹⁰ Among nineteenth-century Russian academics those associated with the field of Oriental studies (*vostokovedenie*) were frequently regarded highly by peers and government officials. In his study of such scholars in nineteenth-century Europe, Edward Said argued that many who studied non-European subjects of the various empires, contributed to and were often complicit in, the

⁹ Alan T. Levenson, "From Recognition to Consensus: The Nature of Philosemitism in Germany, 1871-1932," in *Philosemitism in History*, 192.

¹⁰ Among the major recent works in this category, see; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (Essex: Pearson, 2001); Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

formulation and fulfillment of imperial policy.¹¹ Said's work received significant coverage among scholars of Europe, Islam, and, recently Russia.¹² Vera Tolz, no fan of Said, appreciates at least the theoretical development within the field as a result of the claims made in *Orientalism*. Scholars of Russia and their studies of imperial policy concerning the minorities within the empire in the eastern and southern provinces, according to Tolz, need to take into account the various roles that "experts" occupied in nineteenth-century Russia.¹³

The Russian "expert" became an important office within the various ministries of the empire because they were usually individuals who understood, or at least claimed relevant knowledge of Russia's diverse web of nationalities, religious groups, linguistic families, and regional dialects. Although taken as a collective body of authorities, these experts need to be seen in their respective roles as participants in very different, and at times, conflicting processes.¹⁴ These experts worked in the imperial universities as

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹² For works focused on Said and Russia, see; David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Vera Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia," *The Historical Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Mar., 2005): 127-150.; Vera Tolz, "European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2008): 53-81; Nathaniel Knight, "Grigor'ev in Orenburg, 1851-1862: Russian Orientalism in the service of empire?" *Slavic Review*, vol. 59, (2000): 74-100.; Robert Geraci, *Window on the East*; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic mirrors: Russia and the small peoples of the North* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Michael Kemper and Stephan Conermann, eds., *The Heritage of Soviet Oriental Studies* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹³ Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity," 130.

¹⁴ Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State," 52-53; Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity," 130-132.

professors, or in the various spiritual academies (*dukhovnye akademii*), and in the government ministries as ministers or officials (*chinovniki*), within the military apparatus, or in any number of other official positions. Many of them, like Khvol'son, crossed boundaries at times by holding dual appointments. Their broad linguistic, literary, and administrative skills make this a very difficult group to categorize as in any way unified in purpose or method. Many of these individuals harbored personal interest in the regions or peoples they studied and as a group they often expressed quite diverse prescriptive understandings of imperial policy.

In this same vein, viewing Khvol'son as an active participant in the empire-building project allows for a more developed understanding of how he envisioned the future of the empire as multi-confessional and one that provided legal space for non-Russian and non-Orthodox peoples to thrive to the benefit of the state. Khvol'son was a true son of the empire who obtained his posts in St. Petersburg through his relations with prominent figures in positions of authority. By viewing Khvol'son in this light—as simultaneously devoted to tsar, Russia's Jews, and the ideal of “Russian” culture, this study seeks to contribute to scholarly discussions about how individuals relate to, participate in, or reject empires.¹⁵ Even in the dark days following the Saratov Affair (a

¹⁵ Mark von Hagen suggested that historians generally have “undertheorized” their studies of empires and multinational states. While this project provides a narrowly defined glimpse at the individual and empire in Russia, the uniqueness of the Khvol'son experience provides a window for thinking about the Russian imperial project in a very concrete way. I use Khvol'son in this sense as a case study, though more will need to be done to find similar comparative examples in the future. See Mark von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire: The Perspective of Federalism,” in Catherine Evtuhov, Boris Gasparov, Alexander Ospovat, and Mark von Hagen, eds., *Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg: Multiple Faces of the Russian Empire* (Moscow, 1997), 394.

ritual murder trial in the 1850s), Khvol'son viewed himself as a Russian and as such was fully committed to the state's efforts to modernize alongside European states. At times this unquestioning faith in the imperial system may have interfered with his relations with others (most notably the enlightened maskilim). However, his squabbles with individual scholars and activists did not undermine his desire to see a new future for Russia as an enlightened protector of minorities. Khvol'son conceived of an alternative identity for himself that could serve the needs of the confessional state while also strengthening and defending Jews and others against unfair oppression and prejudices.

The Russian Empire incorporated Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists, as well as countless followers of a wide range of indigenous, animistic belief systems. The Russian Empire and the tsarist government, so closely intertwined with the Russian Orthodox Church, became in theory a conversion-minded state that frequently, though unevenly, sought to convert non-Christians to the official religion. In recent years, conversion and missionizing policies of the Russian state have become important themes for scholars interested in Russia's religious history, the history of the empire, and indigenous studies. Almost without exception however, these studies of conversion in the nineteenth century focused on state policy and state directives regarding religion and conversion.¹⁶ These studies vary in their approach but tend to look at specific religious

¹⁶ Traditional studies of conversion within the Russian empire do not focus on the individual convert, rather they focus on state politics, ideology and practice that led to, and reinforced, conversion as a viable alternative to the economic and legal restrictions. The major shift in the historiography moves away from a centralist position whereby the state reigns supreme and dictates conversionary politics toward a more nuanced explanation of the empire through its confessional involvement of minority religious leaders. For the question of Jewish converts, the most important include the now classic study of Jewish life by Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 3 vol. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916-

groups and the policy imposed on them by the government.¹⁷ These studies have emphasized the state and government policy without considering the actions, decisions and impact of such policies at the ground level, among the various subjects within the empire. Russian efforts to transform the Jewish community within its borders depended upon a network of affiliated individuals who were loyal to the government's aims but also able to work within the existing religious and communal structures. Khvol'son was a product of this system and remained committed throughout his life to the idea that there was much he could do to help encourage greater cooperation between Russians and Jews. As I show in this work, Khvol'son was deeply invested in the process of identifying traditional Jewish contributions to Russian and European society as a means of breaking down many of the artificial barriers constructed by anti-Jewish politicians, clergy, and writers.

1920); John D. Klier, "State Policies and the Conversion of Jews in Imperial Russia" in Robert Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 92-112. In recent years, a growing number of important works on Russian and non-Orthodox communities and conversion has emerged: see for example, Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827-1905* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); ChaeRan Freeze, "When Chava Left Home: Gender, Conversion, and the Jewish Family in Tsarist Russia," *Jewish Women in Eastern Europe*, Polin Studies in Polish Jewry, vol. 18 (2005): 153-188; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ See, for example: L. I. Klimovich, *Islam v tsarskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 1936), A. I. Klibanov, *History of Russian Sectarianism in Russia, 1860s-1917* (Oxford, 1982); John S. Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia* (New York, 1965).

The Blood Libel Charge in History

A central focus within this project is the persistently present ritual murder or blood libel accusation against Jews that surfaced on a number of occasions within Khvol'son's lifetime. The accusation that Jews killed Christian children had roots in Europe during the medieval period and then gradually the myth migrated eastward toward Russia, with the nineteenth century being the heyday of such accusations. The ritual murder myth became one of Khvol'son's major intellectual concerns beginning shortly after his arrival in St. Petersburg and lasting through the last years of his life. The historiography of the blood libel is extensive, but a few key points are emphasized to help situate the three middle chapters of this project.

Scholars have used the terms ritual murder and blood libel interchangeably. Alan Dundes differentiates between the two terms as follows:

Ritual murder is a general term referring to any sacrificial killing—of either animal or human victim for some designated reason, e.g., to place in a cornerstone so as to ensure a successful building or bridge. Jewish ritual murder, in particular, refers to Jews killing Christians for some alleged religious reason. The blood libel is a subcategory of Jewish ritual murder. Not only is a Christian killed—usually a small child, typically male—but the child's blood is supposedly utilized in some ritual context, e.g., to mix with the unleavened bread eaten at Passover.¹⁸

In the specific cases examined here, the various parties involved emphasized both definitions. The nineteenth-century Russian versions of the accusations built on both ideas—that Jews ritually killed Christians and that the killing involved some form of religious usage of the blood drawn from the victim. In the cases examined here, the

¹⁸ Alan Dundes, ed., *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), vii. Italics in original.

Russian terms “*ritual’noe ubiistvo*” denote the belief that Jews ritually killed Christian children, while “*krovavyi navet*” makes specific reference to the use of the child’s blood in Jewish religious ceremonies. Attached to these two general definitions was a broad range of medicoreligious therapies, practices, and mystical rituals. The latter became more prominent in the connection with the Beilis trial in 1913, while the former was the more popular choice in the middle to late nineteenth century. Throughout the nineteenth century Russian and Jewish writers did not always differentiate between these two meanings, with the idea of ritual murder typically being connected to the idea of blood (*krov*). In his rebuttal of the charges, Khvol’son went to great lengths to disprove both versions of the accusation, as he believed that they were equally damaging to perceptions of Jews.

The earliest cases where accusations of ritual murder were raised against Jews occurred in the twelfth century, when Jews in England were accused of killing young William, a Christian boy from Norwich. Nicholas Vincent, in his examination of the thirteenth-century “Holy Blood” relic (some claimed it was the actual blood of Jesus Christ), argued that blood was a central concern for Christians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries due to internal transformations within their own religious community. It was during this time that scholastic theologians ferociously debated the idea of transubstantiation — the idea that the Eucharist embodied the blood and body of Christ — which raised questions about the possibility of Christians consuming the flesh of Christ. Vincent suggested that even after lay parishioners commonly accepted the sacrament in the form of the consecrated host only; it was still widely believed that the

blood was present in the wafer as well.¹⁹ Gavin Langmuir has argued that during this critical period, Christians found comfort in projecting fears of their own religious consumption of the body of Christ (within the doctrine of transubstantiation) at the root of the blood libel charge.²⁰ Langmuir, like Khvol'son a century earlier, suggested that anti-Semitism (defined as “chimerical beliefs or fantasies about “Jews”) developed in medieval Europe around the twelfth century.²¹ The shift from anti-Judaic to anti-Semitic, according to Langmuir, occurred when Christians began attributing to Jews unobserved characteristics.²²

David Biale's *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* argued that the blood libel myth developed as an ongoing discourse between Jews and Christians and echoes some of Langmuir's understanding that blood was a

¹⁹ Nicholas Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 34-35. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12-35.

²⁰ Gavin I. Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Anti-Semitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 266-281. See also Gavin I. Langmuir, “Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder” *Speculum*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Oct., 1984), 820-846. Another work, focused on a 1901 case stressed this idea of Christian fear, even in the twentieth century. See, Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002). Smith argued: “To put it in terms of the relational structure of the two rituals, one imagined, the other real: ritual-murder accusations represented a projection onto Jews of the ineffable – that in the celebration of the Eucharist, Christians, not Jews, practiced ritual cannibalism” (97).

²¹ Gavin Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 297-298.

²² *Ibid.*, 298-302. Langmuir argued that a long line of familiar charges against Jews by Christians can be traced back to this critical period in the history of interactions between them. He notes specifically that accusations of ritual murder of Christian children, Jewish use of blood for ritual purposes, host desecration and the blaming of Jews for the Black Death were Christian fantasies that emerged by the late Middle Ages out of a Christian psychological need to project self-criticism onto “the other.”

central theme in part because rabbinic Judaism rejected blood consumption while “Christianity mandates the drinking of, at least, the symbolic blood of Christ in one of its central sacraments.”²³ Biale brings to the historical study of blood libel an important contribution, namely, he places the debate squarely at the intersection of Jews and Christians, rather than heaping everything on one camp or the other. Biale is not arguing that Jews were complicit in the emergence of the ritual murder charge, only that once it appeared there were distinctive Jewish and Christian responses that possessed a discursive nature rather than one characterized by one side or the other. Israel Yuval examined the misconceptions, misinterpretations, and local historical contexts to show how the charge of ritual murder emerged over centuries.²⁴ Yuval argued more specifically that Jewish martyrdom in the First Crusade made possible, or at least contributed to, the charge of ritual murder fifty years later.

In a similar approach to those of Langmuir and Smith, Ronald Po-Chia Hsia claimed that Christians found meaning in the sixteenth and seventeenth century by projecting claims of human sacrifice onto Jews.²⁵ By projecting otherness or barbarity onto Jews, he suggested, local Christians could more easily assume moral, religious, and political superiority. Hsia’s work on Trent is an extension of his earlier work on ritual

²³ David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol Between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 3.

²⁴ Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

²⁵ Ronald Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988). See also Ronald Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

murder in Germany where he argued that the myth of ritual murder was the product of three elements of medieval life in Western Europe that when combined, provided the basis for the myth. First, the perception by non-Jews that Jews were magicians who placed value on symbols and word symbolism (Kabbalah); second, an expansion of religious and medical beliefs about blood; and third, the “salvific power” associated with human sacrifice.²⁶ For Hsia, the existence of folklore about demons and evil in the medieval world presented the cultural and intellectual fuel for expanding social and religious fears of Jews. In a world where religion and religious views explained the natural world for the common individual, such explanations provided an interpretive model for understanding, and separating Christians from Jews at a time when the Catholic Church and developing kingdoms and countries needed to identify more completely with Christianity as a unifying force to promote their expanded authority.

The ritual murder charge was virtually absent from the Russian Empire before the nineteenth century, but so too were Jews. In terms of a similar expansion of the myth and the associated claims of Jewish ritual murder in Russia, Hsia’s approach provides a useful hypothesis, but one that needs to be refined for an expansive empire on the cusp of modernity. Although many historians characterized Russia of the nineteenth century as backward, barbaric, and exceptionally non-European, such a claim does not provide a sufficient answer to the emergence of the repetitive ritual murder cases in late imperial Russia. The thesis that it was the medieval worldview that provided the framework for

²⁶ Ronald Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 6-7.

Christian claims of ritual murder among Jews negates the evidence that there was something particularly modern about the ritual murder cases in Russia.²⁷

Hannah Johnson's recent book on the subject is less concerned with the historical cases for and against these charges of ritual murder, and more focused on analyzing the work of scholars such as Langmuir, Israel Yuval, and the problematic book by Ariel Toaff, *Pasque di sangue (Bloody Passovers)*. Toaff has suggested, at least generally, that there were instances in the long history of the blood libel where some degree of fact actually supported the events that led to the murder charges. Johnson argued that in their efforts to understand how this tradition of blood libel emerged, scholars (specifically Yuval, Toaff, and Langmuir) show that the matter of blood libel remains relevant for scholars even today because the ethical and political implications cannot be separated out from their studies.²⁸ "A limit case," Johnson argues, "is a point in historical thinking where questions of cultural meaning and scholarly method surface in tight relation to one

²⁷ For more on this question of why the modern blood libel might be different from medieval occurrences, see Charlotte Klein, "Damascus to Kiev: *Civiltà Cattolica* on Ritual Murder" in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 180-196. Klein argues that "It is perhaps easier to understand the men of the Middle Ages for whom the Jews were weird, mysterious beings, since their religion, their customs, their resistance to the religious and cultural values of the majority, their life as a tightly knit group, seemed a threat to Christianity. But this was 1882 [Damascus], in the age of democracy, of the Industrial Revolution, cheap books, and the spread of education. Hebrew was no longer a secret language; the Jews had been emancipated and had adopted the speech, dress, and customs of the nations among whom they lived... Is it possible to ascribe to these nineteenth-century Christians the same motive which was at least partly responsible for the Jew-hatred of medieval times—namely fear?" (189). Taking Klein's argument seriously, the cataclysmic times in Russia between the Great Reforms and the Revolutions of 1917 suggests that perhaps fear provided the impetus for invoking the ritual murder charge.

²⁸ Hannah R. Johnson, *Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

another, challenging conceptual boundaries of historical thought.”²⁹ Blood libel, which was classified as a limit event by Johnson, functioned in this way because it demanded constant reinterpretation with every instance in history. At the same time, these cases “resist satisfactory explanation.” The blood libel attracts scholars today because despite the highly effective efforts at debunking the myth over centuries, the charge continues to show up today in various parts of the world. As Johnson identified, “The charge is specific, and its claim is collective, transhistorical, and encompassing.”³⁰ One of the findings of my research suggests that scholars today—despite our vantage point from an assumed objective and distanced perch—are not the only individuals who were privy to the realization of Johnson’s claim. The sources examined here reveal that the actors involved in the Saratov case in 1853-1860 were well aware of this duality as well. In the leveling of specific charges against Jews, Christians began their reports by showing the “facts” of the case. Then, in almost formulaic fashion anti-Semitic promoters of the myth asserted (with varying degrees of subtlety) an extension from one Jew to many Jews, even all Jews. Johnson’s use of the limit case is central to my examination of Khvol’son and those he responded to because he viewed the gradual eradication of the myth through the achievements of scholarship and sound moral judgment—and the two were not entirely separate activities.

The Beilis case (1911-1913), discussed in Chapter 4, is one example of these ‘limit cases’ because it flies, according to some scholars, in the face of reason. Why did

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰ Ibid., 47.

such a case appear in twentieth-century Kiev and why did it gain the place of prominence within the historiography. While certain nineteenth-century cases (e.g., Damascus and Saratov) certainly gained the attention of the public, the Kiev case forced its way into broad public awareness in part because it did seem out of sorts with its time. However, this explanation needs greater clarification if it is to make sense of the functionality of the ritual murder charge against Jews. While there is hardly room here to cover the broad historiography of the Beilis trial, a couple of critical points should be identified. First, the development of the Russian understanding of ritual murder and blood libel developed largely in the nineteenth century and coincided with the emergence of lively discussions about Slavic uniqueness, Russian identity, and nationalism. Early contributions to the historiography of Beilis suggested that the trial was the result of official anti-Semitism among Russian bureaucrats and government officials.³¹ In the 1890s and early 1900s, a growing sense that Jews hoped to become a “nation” in the modern sense of territory, language, and culture, butted against European definitions of Czech, German, or Russian identity.³² Thus, the perceived threat of Jewish ritual murder adopted a contemporary theme that also blended with traditional religious rhetoric. With this shift, the immediacy of the political ramifications of the charges, and increasingly the legal proceedings became a barometer for measuring national concerns otherwise unrelated to the blood libel. Hans Rogger, who rejected the Tager thesis, argued that the Beilis trial gained its

³¹ Aleksandr Tager, *Tsarskaia Rossiia i delo Beilisa* (Moscow: 1934).

³² Hillel J. Kieval, “Representations and Knowledge in Medieval and Modern Accounts of Jewish Ritual Murder,”; Hillel J. Kieval, “Death and the Nation: Ritual Murder as Political Discourse in the Czech lands,” *Jewish History*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1996), 75-91. See also Smith, *The Butcher’s Tale*.

momentum from the fringes of society, that is, from outlying nationalistic, anti-Semitic groups.³³ The second trend that deserves comment within Beilis historiography is the emphasis in recent years to understand the events within a growing realm of mystical and occult practices. The prominent individuals in this included Vasilii Rozanov and others who claimed insight into Jewish secret religious knowledge, and thereby assumed authority on the subject.³⁴ Murav argues against the evidence of an identifiable religious aspect of the trial. In doing so, Murav placed greater emphasis on viewing the Beilis Affair through Silver Age Symbolist writers. Leonid Katsis argued that literary elites and the cultural producers of the age tended toward the understanding of Jewish ritual murder as evidence of “secret” practices in Jewish Kabbalah.³⁵ The charge of ritual murder against Jews in the nineteenth century served as a catalyst for other debates about the Jews and their role in larger societal issues. The issue did not disappear within Khvol’son’s lifetime despite his best efforts to overturn the tide of anti-Semitic literature and claims against Jews.

Chapters Outline

The chapters of this dissertation are organized, with the exception of Chapter 5, chronologically. Chapter 1 places Khvol’son at the epicenter of debates about how to

³³ Hans Rogger, “The Beilis Case: Anti-Semitism and Politics in the Reign of Nicholas II” *Slavic Review* 25, No. 4 (1966), 615-629.

³⁴ See Harriet Murav’s insightful article on the Rozanov case. Harriet Murav, “The Beilis Ritual Murder Trial and the Culture of the Apocalypse,” *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter, 2000), 243-263.

³⁵ Leonid F. Katsis, “Delo Beilisa v kontekste ‘serebriianogo vek’a” in *Russkaia eskatologia i russkaia literatura*, (Moscow: OGI, 2000), 34-61; Leonid F. Katsis, *Krovavii navet i russkaia mysl’* (Moscow: Mostii kulturii, 2006).

modernize Russia's Jews in the 1830s and 1840s. While Khvol'son was not guiding, nor directly participating in those discussions, he was one of the most successful outcomes of the imperial project meant to help Jews move from their supposed "backwardness" to become contributing members in Russian culture and science. Khvol'son's success within this state-led project depended upon influential individuals around him who guided his development as a scholar in Vilna, Breslau, and later Leipzig. A combination of imperial initiatives and local Jewish communal leaders sent a select group of young Jews to German universities where they were trained by leading scholars. This chapter highlights the importance of those connections with rabbis, scholars, and government officials while also examining the broad network of Jews who cooperated with the Russian government indirectly (e.g., Max Lilienthal). It was through this network that Khvol'son met the necessary people to earn his doctorate and later, gain permission to live in St. Petersburg beyond the Pale of Settlement (*cherta postoiannoi evreiskoi osedlosti*), convert to Russian Orthodoxy, and obtain his much desired academic post in the university.³⁶

In Chapter 2, the focus shifts from Khvol'son to Saratov, a growing city on the Volga frontier where two Christian boys were brutally murdered in 1852-1853. The events surrounding the deaths led some investigators to assume Jews (of which there was a small community in the city) had carried out a ritual murder. The possibility of ritual murder sparked interest within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and even reached the ear

³⁶ The Pale of Settlement originated under Catherine II and subsequent rulers, especially Paul. The now standard work on the creation of the Pale is Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, see especially chapters 3 and 4, pp. 53-115.

of emperors Nicholas I and Alexander II. This chapter reveals the degree to which the most central government offices and ministries concerned themselves with events in far off locations from the capital. Shortly after the discovery of the mutilated bodies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated a broad search of Saratov's Jews looking for the culprits. During the search for guilty Jews, government officials and bureaucrats exposed their anti-Semitic beliefs that led to hostility toward Jews. Khvol'son, as a newly minted university professor and expert on the Jewish literature, joined an elite group of scholars and priests tasked with examining the full corpus of Jewish literature for evidence of ritual murder. It was this assignment that introduced Khvol'son into a life-long effort to overturn anti-Semitic claims against Jews and correct Christian perceptions of their own history.

Khvol'son took up the history of the blood libel and provided several lengthy works of scholarship examining the roots of the accusations and the historical development throughout medieval and early modern Europe. In his rebuttal of the charges frequently leveled against Jews, Khvol'son identified key turning points in the shared history between Jews and Christians. His important 1861 *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev: istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam* (*Some Medieval Accusations against Jews: A Historical Study according to the Sources*) became one of, if not the central, text for the nineteenth-century defenders of Jews.

Chapter 3 examines in detail Khvol'son's 1861 book and its central tenets, particularly the effort to reeducate Christians to better understand the early centuries of their religion and its close relationship to, and origins in, first-century Judaism. Out of the

analysis, we see that the 1861 text served as a microcosm of the key questions that occupied Khvol'son in his other scholarly works. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Khvol'son's work is the mirroring of efforts today to try to rewrite the history between Jews and Christians as one that overcomes some of the most oppositional elements between them.

Even though Khvol'son published a full-length book on the blood libel charges and felt in 1861 that he had accomplished his goal of ridding Russia of such a charge, he was mistaken. In the decades that followed and through the end of his life, similar cases periodically appeared. With each successive case, Khvol'son and his text were revived in various forms and expanded editions. Chapter 4 seeks to understand the seeming failure of the 1861 text to quell the tide of anti-Semitism, while recognizing that Russia was rapidly changing during the last four decades of the nineteenth century, and the blood libel charges followed in like fashion. The chapter concludes with the most famous of Russia's ritual murder cases, the Beilis Affair, through which we see the lasting legacy of Khvol'son—as evidenced by his students who defended the accused Mendel Beilis at the trial in 1913.

In the final chapter, a number of Khvol'son's other scholarly works, and the debates that they occasioned, are examined. In doing so, Khvol'son's three main areas of scholarship—oriental studies, biblical translation, and the search for the historical Jesus—are situated within the world of the nineteenth-century Russian scholar. His profound intellect offended some, irked others, and won him the praise of many. Whenever another scholar or theologian challenged him, Khvol'son considered the

criticisms, regardless of their absurdity. In nearly every case, he published a rebuttal or comment on those accusations. Like the first chapter, this examination of the body of Khvol'son's scholarship contextualizes his interactions with those around him, including: their comments on his work, his personality, and teaching at the institutes, academies, and university where he worked during his professional life.

CHAPTER 1

“GOD ALONE KNOWS WHAT’S IN MY HEART”: KHVOL’S SON’S EDUCATION AND CONVERSION

The subject of this study is the life of Daniil Avraamovich Khvol’son (born Iosif Solomonovich Khvol’son), a figure who rose to prominence in Russian-Jewish society, reflecting in the process the shifting waves of government intervention with the Jewish community from 1819 to 1855.¹ In this first chapter I situate Khvol’son within the context of the nineteenth-century Pale of Settlement, the Haskalah movement that dramatically influenced his personal and academic life, and his personal apostasy from Judaism and his conversion to Russian Orthodoxy. This biographical sketch of his early years also focuses on the influential mentors and acquaintances that Khvol’son encountered during his teenage and university years. In the process, I examine specifically the influence of German education and official Russian efforts to bring German scholars into their service, the contested nature of Jewish communal life and religious developments, and the introduction of the “expert Jews” (*uchenye evreiv*) within imperial policy. Situated as it was in the social and economic structures of the Russian Empire in the first half of the nineteenth-century, the Jewish community was the perpetual “other” among minorities. In an empire where the Russian Orthodox confession reigned supreme among diverse religious communities, relations between the Orthodox and non-Christian faiths were often tense encounters. For both the ruler and the ruled, this relationship was constantly in flux and policies often changed at a moment’s notice due

¹ The transliteration of Khvol’son’s name varies. It is often based on the German rendering, Chwolson or Chwolsohn.

to circumstance. Additionally, although Russian law protected non-Orthodox religions, such protection did not rule out discrimination by local and regional officials.

How are we to understand the question of confessionality and religious difference in an empire that promoted Orthodox Christianity but was comprised of nearly every variant of major religious affiliation, including the several branches of Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, Buddhism, and diverse animistic communities? In the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire faced the challenge of competing with, and protecting itself from the growing empires that bordered its southern and western lands. In building the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century, Russian officials employed creative, though not always effective, models for integrating subjects who often identified religiously with communities outside the Russian borders. In the need for protection from Ottoman and European threats, imperial authorities needed a process by which they could draw populations that might otherwise side with invading armies because of common religious ties. As Robert Crews shows in his examination of Muslim populations and Russian Imperial policy, authorities and Muslim leaders formed bonds of cooperation, or “tactical alliances,” to the benefit of both parties.² For Russian authorities in the Caucasus and elsewhere, the development of a loyal Muslim population helped protect against predatory politics from the Ottoman threat and helped strengthen Russian presence in the region. Muslims who participated in these alliances received in return for loyalty, Russian protection against heretical movements that competed for local religious and communal authority and autonomy.

² Robert Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 1, (2003), 52.

Although Crews focused on Russian and Muslim relations in the late imperial period his approach is useful for the Jewish case as well because it breaks apart the long-held notion that Russian relations with religious minorities should be understood as dichotomous and hostile. Earlier interpretations of the Russian Empire viewed the state as a heavy-handed opponent to any non-Orthodox religion. While Russian Orthodoxy was central to state policy and Russian identity, authorities depended upon loyal members of non-Orthodox and non-Christian communities to help draw widespread loyalty from their fellow religionists. In order to secure support from non-Orthodox communities, the Russian government fostered, trained, and in some cases educated select individuals who later became liasons between ruler and subject. In this way, government officials brought up an elite class of intellectuals and functionaries committed to the cause of empire. This dissertation explores in greater detail the process by which one individual contributed to both the Russian and Jewish communities and the interpretation of his contribution. Resting behind this examination is this issue of confessionality and the understanding that conversion altered an individual's relation to the state.

The Russian government's adjustment to the newly acquired Jewish population following the partitions of Poland brought little, if any, change to Jews and their everyday lives.³ At the same time, Russian relations with Jews were forever changed by this early encounter. The government's initial approach to the Jewish community was largely a

³ John D. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 3-4. Klier argues at a later point in his book (p. 53) that during this early period "Russian administrators encountered organized Jewish communal life as a tabula rasa, since the few Jews who lived in Russia before 1772 did so as illegal residents of St. Petersburg or as settlers of unknown nationality in New Russia."

continuation of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth allowance for a semi-autonomous Jewish government that Jews had enjoyed previously. Although the early relationship between the Russian government and Jewish communities within its borders was one of ambivalence in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, from the early decades of the nineteenth century the policies revealed a concerted effort to control more tightly its subjects in the west.

To understand the world that Khvol'son was born into, it is useful to look briefly at the history of the partitions of Poland and the adoption of large Jewish communities into the Russian Empire during the reign of Empress Catherine II and her successors. In the early modern period, Jews proved useful to central European rulers as moneylenders. Although serving a similar function in Eastern Europe, Jews aligned themselves with wealthy Polish magnates and became managers or arendators. By forming a system of alliances based on common interests, Jews were granted a relatively high level of cultural and communal autonomy under their Polish rulers. Since the 1550s, the Jewish kahal (*kehillah*), or local governing body for internal religious and communal life, wielded extensive local autonomy and was recognized by official decree.⁴ If the Polish nobility

⁴ For one of the more detailed histories of the kahal's origins and during the critical period of partitioning, see Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1-22. The traditional *kahal* existed, at least in name, until 1844 in the Russian Empire. Debates raged fairly early in the nineteenth century regarding its existence and function, as more and more it became a site of contested authority within the Russian Empire. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the traditional kahal was on the brink of disintegration due to internal Jewish competition for authority. When the Russian government stepped in to prop up the kahal, the body gained greater resiliency to withstand such opposition from within. In later periods, there were Jewish efforts to replicate the network of community bodies, the most notable of which was the *Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdu evreiami v Rossii* (OPE, Society for the Promotion [Dissemination] of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia) that originated in 1860 in St. Petersburg. See Brian Horowitz, *Jewish*

were to achieve their economic goals, it was in their best interest to provide a modicum of authority to Jews to whom they leased land and businesses. As was the case with the court Jews of Spain, Polish nobility found Jews willing and able to carry out responsibilities for them—thus making them essential agents or instruments of the state. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the kahal’s extensive autonomy allowed Jewish life to flourish in the Polish lands. The rights extended to the kahal included the ability to appoint rabbis and settle internal legal matters. The seventeenth-century expansion of the kahal to the “Council of the Four Lands,” served as a broad congress for local Jewish authorities to meet and address matters relevant to Jews in Poland and Lithuania. This “council,” or *va’ad*, was comprised of local delegates who convened “fairs” or sessions where leaders from Poland, Lithuania, and the regions of Podolia, Galicia, and Volhynia discussed pressing matters of broad Jewish interest.

Until the middle of the sixteenth century the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was one of the more tolerant European kingdoms toward Jews. However, as Catholic influence in Poland solidified and greater interest from economic competitors developed, combined with threats of Russian expansion, Poland too witnessed the anti-Jewish violence so familiar to western territories. During the seventeenth century, a series of wars further challenged the stability of the region and the relations between the various religious groups—the most notorious was the attack of Hetman Bogdan Khmel'nitskii in

Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009), 7-9.

1648.⁵ During the 1648 rebellion, Polish rebels, led by Khmel'nitskii and Crimean Tatars, attempted to reject through force the Polish *szlachta* and, by extension, the Jews who worked for them. Although Khmel'nitskii's victory over the Polish elite led to the creation of a Cossack state in 1648, the long-term effect was the extension of Russian control over the hetmanate in 1654 when Khmel'nitskii signed the Pereiaslav Treaty.⁶

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries further splintered the Jewish communities with the rise of *Hasidism*, its opponents the *Mitnagdim*, and the spread of Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*). The historiography on this splintering is broad and in general has followed two major trends. The first employed a "generational" approach to the transformations within Jewish society; from tradition, to reform, to secularization, and concluded in the twentieth-century with the formalization of Zionism and political activism.⁷ This approach focused heavily on state relations with Jews and Jewish responses to the state. The second, more recent branch, drew upon an alternate interpretation of Russian-Jewish history that sought to understand the varieties of Jewish

⁵ Rachel Elior, "The Origins of Hasidism," *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, vol. 10 (2012): 85-109. Among others, the major moments of conflict included the Russo-Polish War that began in 1654 and the First Northern War (1655-1660).

⁶ The Pereiaslav Treaty's initial aim, at least as Khmel'nitskii envisioned it, was meant to protect Cossack territories from further Polonization and the spread of Catholicism into Ukrainian lands. The treaty presented the opportunity to entrench Orthodoxy and, of necessity for this to occur, Russian control.

⁷ Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Darius Staliunas, *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*.

life in the nineteenth century through a different lens that focused on identity and Jews who attempted to fashion new forms of being within, rather than necessarily opposed to, the broader cultural and political environment.⁸ This second approach placed individual autonomy at the forefront of the investigation and measured the ways that Jews attempted to assimilate, or acculturate, to the world around them while often preserving the uniqueness of their Jewish identity. Much of this later work focused on the period after 1860 when the early experience under Nicholas I had already given root to Jewish Enlightenment movements among small groups of Jews in Odessa, Vilna, or St. Petersburg.⁹

The partitioning of Poland was a twenty-two year process in which Prussia, Austria, and Russia gradually chipped away at the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The partitions were, first and foremost, the result of international affairs and territorial compensation for Russian victory in 1772 during the Russo-Turkish war.¹⁰ The Russian Empire absorbed the northeastern region around Mogilev, Vitebsk, and north to the region south of Riga. This initial population of Jews was remarkably small,

⁸ See Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also, Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) and Brian Horowitz, *Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in 19th- and Early 20th-century Russia* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2009) in which the author argues for a particular development of Jewish affinity for Russian culture and language, albeit one with German roots.

⁹ Horowitz, *Empire Jews*, 4-5; see also, Alexander Orbach, *New Voices in Russian Jewry: A Study of the Russian Jewish-Press in Odessa in the Era of the Great Reforms, 1860-1871* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ I follow John Klier's description of this process of dismantling the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. See Klier, *Russia Gather's Her Jews*, 17-20.

compared to the regions that would eventually enter the empire during the second and third partitions. Austria benefited through this transaction with the incorporation of large sections of Galicia, including Lemberg (L'vov, L'viv) and to the borders of Krakow. In the second partition in 1793, Russia gained much of the territory of Ukraine and most of Belarus. This included the major Jewish cities of Minsk, Pinsk, and Zhitomir. During this second partition of Poland a massive Jewish population was brought into the empire almost overnight. The final partition two years later brought Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, and other Baltic cities into the Russian Empire that provided further access to the Baltic Sea and firmly established Russian influence much farther west. For the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian Empires the Jewish populations (and the other ethnic groups in each region) integrated into their borders led each government to formulate distinctive patterns of governance to address the religious, ethnic, and economic questions raised by the new territories. Internally, for Jews, this period marked the climax of nearly a century of transformation that “uprooted and shattered centuries-old social and cultural structures and practices, exposing the Jews to the transformative power of modernity.”¹¹ In the Russian case, the question of empire was complicated by the broad religious, ethnic, linguistic and economic needs of its diverse population. The realization that no single policy or approach would effectively manage the burgeoning empire forced the government to think about Russia as an “empire” in very different terms.

After the partitions of Poland, Catherine II and her successors gradually moved to the question of what role Jews, as a cohesive class would occupy within the Russian

¹¹ Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, 2.

Empire. The question was one of real import in an empire based on a system of *soslovie* or estates that had distinctive social roles, functions, and occupations. Though efforts were made to define the Jewish population's role in the *soslovie* system and empire, they had yet to take shape when Catherine II died in 1796. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, under the reign of Alexander I (1801-1825), a reformist tendency developed with regard to the Jewish population. This reformist strand focused heavily on education and served as an avenue for Jews to enter into the service of the empire. This move coincided with other reform policies, including Alexander's efforts at university reform. However, this effort eventually collapsed due to international concerns of war and a shift from reform minded policies characteristic of the 1804 Statute to the return to retrenchments associated with the reactionary "Arakcheevshchina" during the final years of Alexander's reign in years after the Napoleonic War.¹²

During the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855) the Jewish question was a matter of constant concern for the government as the tsar attempted to create methods to secure greater control over the western populations as a means of strengthening its ability to tap into the economic resources and potential military recruits. Nicholas's reign was one of mixed results, characterized largely by the efforts of Sergei Semenovich Uvarov (1786-1855) and the attempt to create a useful class of Jews for state service through education.

¹² Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 116-143. The 1804 Statute had far reaching implications for Jews, some of its elements were aimed at broad changes among Jews, particularly in the field of education and occupation. However, many of these, particularly those intended to improve Jewish integration into the empire were ultimately "still born." "Arakcheevshchina" is the name commonly applied to the reactionary policies of Aleksei Andreevich Arakcheev (1769-1834), who served within the State Council and was responsible for military affairs. From this position, he was able to control and direct the State Council and became Alexander's right hand man.

At its most basic core, the Nicholaevan government was less concerned about regulating Jews and other populations directly than assuring that they fulfilled their obligations to the state, including taxes and military enrollment.¹³ Jewish policy during the reign of Nicholas was marked by a period of transformation that would dramatically pick up after 1864 and then come to an abrupt halt after 1881. The transformations within the Jewish community between 1825 and 1855, while aided by the government's effort to "gather" Jews, were much more directly the result of internal conflicts about authority, especially after the 1844 abolishment of the kahal. Even after the kahal disappeared in name, it continued to function as it had in earlier years—particularly in the two areas where the community faced tangible responsibility to the tsar, collection of taxes and military recruits. In 1827, the Nikolaevan government extended military obligations to Jews in the Pale of Settlement and left the fulfillment of it in the hands of the local kahal leaders.

It was within this period of rethinking and repositioning Russian policy vis-à-vis the newly incorporated populations in the western borderlands that an important figure was born who would become emblematic of this process of change. Khvol'son was born on 21 November 1819 near Vilna (modern Vilnius).¹⁴ The Khvol'son home was rich in

¹³ Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 126.

¹⁴ A number of short encyclopedia articles exist related to Khvol'son. See for example, Iulii Gessen, "Khvol'son, Daniil Avraamovich," in *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 9, (St. Petersburg, Brokhgaus-Efron, 1914), 584-87; "Khvol'son, D. A." *Biograficheskii Slovar' Professorov i Prepodovatelei Imperatorskago S.-Peterburgskago Universiteta za istekshuiu tret'iu chetvert' veka ego sushchestvovaniia 1869-1894*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: B.M. Vol'f, 1896), 305-307; D. E. Bertel's, "Daniil (David) Abramovich Khvol'son" in E. M. Zhukov, ed., *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: 1976), 559; P. N. Sen'ko, "Khvol'son, Daniil Abramovich," *Russkie tserkovnyi deiateli-chleny akademii nauk* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo "LANS", 1995); V. V. Grigor'evym, *Imperatorskii S. Peterburgskii Universitet v-techenie pervykh piatidesiati let' ego sushchestvovaniia* (St. Petersburg: V. Bezobrazova, 1870), 278-280;

Jewish wisdom, though less so in bread and other necessary provisions. According to one report, the family's four young children frequently retired to bed hungry as all the Talmudic knowledge brought spiritual food but provided little for supper.¹⁵ Khvol'son's mother was a seamstress and worked long hours to provide a meager income for the family. Khvol'son's father descended from a respected line of local Talmudists, and in keeping with tradition and like many Jewish boys of his generation, young Iosif (Daniil) studied in the local *heder* where he showed great promise.

Khvol'son's early Talmudic and Hebrew training came at the hands of Rabbi Israel Gintsburg and other well-respected teachers.¹⁶ David Gintsburg (1857-1910), one of Khvol'son's students and strongest advocates late in life, published a laudatory piece on the occasion of Khvol'son's eightieth birthday. In it Gintsburg reflected on Khvol'son's early years:

Life was harsh to him as a child, he grew up in poverty, there was darkness all around him, but as soon as his conscience grew stronger, he began to struggle, straining in the strength of youth to achieve knowledge... But he prevailed, and went out from the crucible a tried man, full of knowledge.¹⁷

Ivan Troitskii, "Professor D. A. Khvol'son," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia*, n. 34 (1911), no. 8, otd. 4: 90-9.

¹⁵ E. A. Khvol'son, "D. A. Khvol'son, (Orientalist) 1819-1911, Zhivnennii put samouchni-potchetnogo chleni Akademii nauk," SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 54, l. 3. This document is a short handwritten manuscript (21 pages) by Khvol'son's grandson, Evgenii Antonovich after Khvol'son's death. It is unclear when the document was originally written but it must have occurred some time after the First World War as it references Khvol'son's declaration about the potential origins of war ten years before the war began.

¹⁶ Israel Cohen, *Vilna* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1992), 489. Cohen's work was originally published in 1943 as *Jewish Community Series: Vilna*.

¹⁷ David Gintsburg, "80-letie D. A. Khvol'son," *Novosti*, (November 21, 1899).

Despite the economic struggles of the Khvol'son family, young Iosif (Daniil) excelled in learning, drawing every bit of knowledge he could out of the local *melamed*. The *melamed*, or local teacher in the heder, during the early decades of the nineteenth century was hardly a highly sought after position. The experiences varied widely among the teachers in the early nineteenth-century *heder*. According to Shaul Stempfer's analysis of the *heder* in the Russian Empire, these Jewish institutions served a valuable role within the community by maintaining socio-economic hierarchies that could not be maintained otherwise.¹⁸ Jewish education equalized every male in the community, because as young boys, they attended the *heder* together and all of them were expected to study and learn to pray in Hebrew. The paradox however, for Stampfer, is that by allowing all young boys to participate in the tradition of learning, a natural division occurred between those who possessed a specific talent for learning and those who did not.¹⁹ Another aspect of this socio-economic hierarchy reflected the broader division based on family wealth. Fathers who could afford to hire private tutors and instructors often did so—to the benefit of their sons. The *heder*, which young boys entered around the age of three or four, served to train them for lives as scholars. Those who showed particular talent and aptitude advanced on to further studies in the *yeshiva*, the next step for those who excelled in the local heder, or in the communal private study halls. The requirements for working as a teacher of these young boys were minimal, salaries were notoriously meager, and many

¹⁸ Shaul Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis, and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 163-164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

teachers were “highly unqualified and were neither learned nor creative.”²⁰ Among Jews, a running list of jokes often centered on the local *melamed*’s poor state of affairs. One such joke highlights the squalid life of the local teachers: “If all else fails you can kill yourself, or become a melamed, the former is preferable.”²¹ The degraded conditions of the Jewish schools and greater bureaucratic interest by the state in Jewish education made it a major concern for Jews, the Russian authorities, and local population.²² Khvol’son was a product of his times and the influence of education and educational policies, both in its earliest form and later as he pursued advanced degrees, placed him on his path in life. Khvol’son maintained a respect and warm relations with those individuals who taught him during his formative years.

Jews were commonly referred to as the “People of the Book,” suggestive not only of the biblical text for which they were responsible, but also because they fostered a love of education, of intellectual tradition, and revered those individuals who succeeded in acquiring knowledge. Among nineteenth-century East European Jews, this tradition remained a central pillar of Jewish life. With time, however, the question of education became representative of the currents of change within traditional society. The ability to read Hebrew meant that one could participate in prayer, a milestone in Jewish religious life. It was for this reason that the first lessons for young boys was to read from the

²⁰ Ibid., 150.

²¹ As quoted in Steven J. Zipperstein, *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 43.

²² Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshchenie mezhdou evreiiami v Rossii, *Sovremennyi kheder*, (1912), 1-90. The accounts in *Sovremennyi kheder* are overly negative and carry much of the same doubt over the effectiveness of these educational institutions.

prayer books, providing a practical as well as pedagogical value. However, to understand and think about commentaries and texts was a marker of proficiency that most Jewish boys did not realize before the end of their years in the *heder*. Khvol'son's proficiency was notable in this regard and he advanced quickly to the local yeshiva for further study.

Community and Empire in Transition

The region around Vilna at the time of Khvol'son's birth and into his adolescent years enjoyed prominence among Jews in the Russian Empire as one of the major intellectual centers.²³ Although Vilna had long been a home to Jews, it was the Gaon of Vilna, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720-1797) and his legacy as one of the most respected scholars of the Torah that brought the city its nineteenth-century fame. During his lifetime Rabbi Elijah was a firm defender of Rabbinic Judaism, opponent to Hasidism, and an increasingly divisive figure. At the same time, he encouraged Jewish boys to learn something of the wider world, though one could hardly call him a reformer or promoter of secular education. For the Vilna Gaon, education must be rooted in the Talmud and the texts of traditional Judaism. The supplemental "secular" subjects were to be complementary to that study, not in opposition to it. Immanuel Etkes's recent book focuses on the divisive nature of the Vilna Gaon and places him at the center of the debate between two opposing forces among Lithuanian Jewry, on one side the Haskalah and on the other the growing Hasidic movement.²⁴ The juxtaposition of these two

²³ "Vilna," *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 5: 588-590.

²⁴ Immanuel Etkes, *The Gaon of Vilna: the man and his image* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002).

variants is useful because, as Etkes points out, images and characterizations of the Gaon worked equally well for both proponents of Haskalah as well as Hasidism.²⁵

As one of the intellectual centers of east European Jewry, Vilna was also a seedbed of heated debates about the future of Judaism and the value of education in its various forms. During the nineteenth century, Vilna witnessed every interpretation of modernization, traditionalism, secularization, and cultural warfare imaginable. In other words, as the historian Nathans observes, “Russian Jewry was not simply a reservoir of tradition but a cauldron of intramural conflicts whose effects were to have a vital impact on the Russian-Jewish encounter.”²⁶ One of the most persistent of these was the battle between the emerging Hasidic movement and those who treasured and defended the rabbinical texts and Rabbinism more generally. The Hasidic movement likely originated with Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), known by the acronym “Besht.” While a Hasidic challenge to traditional east European Jewish religious communities occurred in the mid-1700s, by the final decades of that century, the battle had become as much a culture war as a religious dispute.

In the late eighteenth century the *Hasidim* found collective opposition from the *Mitnagdim* (‘the opponents’) who demanded that religious authority rest in the classically trained rabbis who valued traditional religious behavior and adherence to Torah and Talmud. The *Hasidim* challenged the *Mitnagdim* by questioning their piety and the necessity of the rabbinical texts for Judaism. The demands by Hasidic followers were

²⁵ Ibid., on the use by maskilim, see Etkes’s chapter 2, pp. 37-72; on the Hasidic views see chapter 3, pp. 73-95.

²⁶ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, 6.

threatening to the point that the Vilna Gaon issued an order of excommunication for all Hasidim in the early 1770s. From that point forward, Vilna Jews fortified their efforts to secure their religious traditions and practices. However, it was not just an external threat from a Jewish sect that threatened east European Jewish life. From within Judaism another challenge brewed in nearby Berlin.

By the end of the Vilna Gaon's life, he secured a broad group of disciples who continued his legacy of intellectual religious study as well as his anti-Hasidic politics. At the turn of the century, however, a second challenge arose that would become one of the most contentious and influential in modern Jewish history. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) promoted a new approach to Judaism that encouraged Jews to study secular subjects, including: law, history, philosophy, and philology in their own right, and not just to improve their understanding of Torah and Talmud. The study of secular subjects, for Mendelssohn, also began to tear down the walls that isolated Jews from their neighbors. If Jews became literate in the subjects being taught in German universities for instance, then Jews might also gradually obtain legal rights comparable to the Christian majority.

Khvol'son's limited exposure to subjects outside of the yeshiva meant that by his late teens, he was able only to speak Yiddish, known as *zhargon* (jargon) to many local Jews. Khvol'son's recounting of his educational situation to his family later in life paints a bleak image of his perceptions about the possibilities before him. Jews, who understood only their "*zhargon*" struggled to learn any language, because they "did not know the

foundations of grammar, and they had no dictionaries in their mother tongue.”²⁷ While this image may be exaggerated, and I think it is, it reveals the aged Khvol’son’s perception about his Jewish upbringing and the disadvantageous position that caused him to leave his native Vilna.

When he was eighteen, a good friend taught Khvol’son the Latin letters, which he practiced by observing Polish signs on the street. In order to continue his study of Latin letters, Khvol’son secured a German book, which he employed as a way of reading Latin, and ended up teaching himself the foundations of German that would become his preferred language of scholarship later in life. From this humble beginning, Khvol’son’s abilities with languages and texts became legendary, all the more so because he claimed that much of his learning came without specialized training until he attended the university. While such a stark portrayal of the man’s lack of training should be accepted cautiously, it serves the Khvol’son myth well. How could a young man, so pathetically trained and uneducated resist the opportunity to leave the community? Drawing upon his desire to learn German, and perhaps feeling the draw of a gradual, yet significant Jewish exodus from traditional Polish/Baltic lands toward German speaking regions, Khvol’son left Vilna in the early 1840s.²⁸ The historical record is vague about the time frame for Khvol’son’s departure from his hometown, though Cohen suggests he was twenty-two

²⁷ Stampfer, *Families, Rabbis, and Education*, 3-4.

²⁸ Abraham Geiger, Max Wiener (ed.), *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism: The Challenge of the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), 17.

years old when he left.²⁹ If Cohen's dating is correct, then the departure occurred sometime in late 1841 or 1842.

During these years the Vilna community, like others with substantial numbers of Jews, witnessed the intensification of the "culture war" over education.³⁰ Efforts to employ Russia's Jews in new ways marked a rare occurrence of state-led reform (albeit limited) in the decade leading up to the 1848 revolutions in Europe. The limited reforms of Nicholas I's reign have tended to be overshadowed in accounts of nineteenth-century Russia by historians focused on the much larger reform plans of his son, Alexander II. However, in the context of Russian-Jewish relations, the 1840s marked a critical period because it was then that a select group of Jews were encouraged to begin to qualify for state service in new ways. As Nathans argues, government officials were "enlightened in the specific historical sense of using the power of the state to increase the productivity of the population by rationalizing, centralizing, and standardizing legal norms."³¹ Although the specific aims of the reform efforts may have failed on the larger scale, in the case of Khvol'son they succeeded in their aim to create a pool of talented individuals within minority populations that could serve as intermediaries between government and community. The development of minority groups who could be of use to the state mirrored the expanding state bureaucracy. By 1860, the number of state bureaucrats increased to nearly 100,000, a remarkable transformation considering that at the turn of

²⁹ Cohen, *Vilna*, 433.

³⁰ Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 367.

³¹ Nathans, *Beyond the Pale*, 31.

the century about 15,000 were in the employ of the state.³² It was during this period that the idea of the expert Jew and the “Jewish notables” (wealthy Jews with connections to the imperial bureaucracy) became linked to state policy and the expanding bureaucratic structures. In an increasingly diverse and expanding empire, minority populations attracted greater attention from the bureaucracy and demanded new methods for addressing their communal needs. More importantly, in an age of fear over insurrection the tsar placed hope in these middlemen to encourage co-optation of his subjects. In order to build an efficient and loyal “enlightened bureaucracy,” the state needed to educate those individuals according to the standards of science, enlightenment thought, and political ideas.³³ The historian Bruce Lincoln’s work on the growth of the bureaucracy under Nicholas I, showed how a group of low-level officials came of age during the 1830s and 1840s only to emerge as central figures in the emancipation process in the late 1850s and early 1860s.³⁴ This group, mentored by an elite group of government ministers, specifically, Pavel Dmitrievich Kiselev (1788-1872) and Lev Alekseevich

³² P. A. Zaionchkovskii, *Pravitel'stvennyi apparat samoderzhavnoi Rossii v XIX v* (Moscow: 1978), 67-71. Other key works on the workings of the Russian bureaucracy and ministers during this period include: Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky, Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839* (The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1957); Walter M. Pinter and Don Karl Rowney, eds., *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); and Daniel T. Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1802-1881* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

³³ Alexander Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change, 1814-1914* (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), 43.

³⁴ Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986). Richard Wortman’s work on Russian legal developments reaches similar conclusions about this period; see, Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Perovskii (1792-1856), also shared intellectual interests with leading scholars and members of the intelligentsia, particularly the desire to strengthen Russian autocracy by reforming government without abandoning Russian traditional institutions.³⁵ This group of bureaucrats were part of a unique group, distant from the social and political elites that formed the tsar's inner circle, yet close enough to form progressive (not radical) ideas about the path forward for Russia.

To meet the needs of the state, Nicholas I depended upon the Ministry of Education to further his aims. Alexander I created the Ministry of Education in 1802 as part of the reorganization of the empire's bureaucratic structure—one of his first consequential acts as tsar. One of the major ambitions of Alexander I was the creation of a university system, noticeably absent in Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moscow University was founded in 1755, but the next half-century witnessed little innovation outside of that single institution. Alexander I was well aware of the need for Russia's modernization. As part of that modernization, new universities were established in Kazan, Kharkov, St. Petersburg, Vilna, and Dorpat (modern Tartu, Estonia). With Moscow, the total rose to six universities as part of the 1804 education reform.

An effective and modern university system depended upon an education system that prepared pupils for the demands of university life. Thus, between 1825 and 1849 the government set out on a widespread reform of elementary and secondary education. In 1833, Nicholas I appointed Sergei Uvarov (1785-1855) as the Minister of Education.

³⁵ Kiselev, a decorated war hero from the Napoleonic War (Battle of Borodino) was appointed to the State Council (*Gosudarstvennyi Sovet*) in the mid-1830s. Kiselev was one of the leading reformers within Nicholas I's government.

Uvarov remained at the head of the ministry until 1849, when the reactionary Nicholas withdrew from reform. Uvarov is perhaps best known today as the one who most succinctly summarized the Old Regime ideology of Nicholas's government in 1833. "Official Nationality," Uvarov argued, consisted of three pillars or principles: "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality." These three pillars provided a general platform for administering the empire, and it was in them that Uvarov grounded his efforts to address the Jewish communities and their traditional education programs.

Uvarov's plan sought to incorporate Jews into the Russian Empire by modernizing them and educating a small portion of the population, making them fit for civil service and providing a critical link to the traditional Jewish communities. The Jewish community in Riga sent a request to the German rabbis and scholars seeking a "German teacher and preacher" to fill the post at the local school. The Riga Jewish community obtained government permission to conduct a search for a German rabbi or teacher for the school in 1838. Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889), the editor of the weekly Jewish newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, suggested to twenty-four year old Dr. Max Lilienthal (1814-1882) from Munich that he apply straightaway for the position. A series of articles that the young Lilienthal sent Philippson in 1838 impressed him (also a moderate reformer) to the point that the editor sought to help the young rabbi find gainful employment. Thus, when Philippson learned of the Russian government's desire to bring in reform-minded rabbis who could assist in the process meant to modernize Jewish society, he recommended Lilienthal straightaway. The rabbinical post had the benefit of its location in Riga because the city contained a sizable German-speaking

Jewish population. Lilienthal continued the use of German in his sermons and administration of his responsibilities. The dependence on German is perhaps best noted by the fact that German was used as the language of instruction in the Vilna Rabbinical Seminary until the mid-1860s.³⁶

It is important to understand Lilienthal's story if we are to make sense of his role in young Khvol'son's life. Lilienthal was the son of a relatively wealthy family in Munich. As a student he had excelled early on in his Talmudic training, and as a result promised his dying mother (who died when he was ten years old) that he would become a rabbi. After completing his doctorate in Munich in 1837, Lilienthal worked for a brief time at the Royal Library as a researcher. During his childhood, the battle intensified between those who sought to preserve the traditional Jewish ways of life, and those who sought an assimilationist approach. In addition to his traditional Jewish education, private tutors exposed the young boy to the sciences.³⁷ This early training in sciences, regardless of the level of rigor, suggests that the Lilienthal family found value in the possibilities that a secular education provided, when paired with his religious education.

³⁶ Iulii Gessen, "Ravinskie uchilishcha v Rossii," *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 13: 258-63.

³⁷ Bruce L. Ruben, *Max Lilienthal: The Making of the American Rabbinate* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 7. Ruben's book served as a much-needed updated look at Lilienthal's life. The other major work that scholars have depended upon is the 1915 collection of his writings, letters, and a fawning personal history by one of his students. See David Philipson, ed., *Max Lilienthal, American Rabbi: Life and Writings* (New York: Bloch, 1915). Philipson's book is, however important because it contains personal letters and the extended essay by Lilienthal, "My Travels in Russia." Lilienthal's "My Travels in Russia" were composed in the mid-1850s and were serially published in *The Israelite*, in Cincinnati, Ohio, between 1855 and 1857. While it is an important record because it does provide insight to the experiences and the events of that formative period between 1840-1845 while he was in Russia, it was recorded about ten years later and therefore may contain embellished elements, as Lilienthal was wont to do on occasion.

When Lilienthal was hired for the position in Riga, he appeared to have been excited by the opportunity both for professional advancement and for the chance to help East European Jews. Whatever his perception of the Jews in Russia, he was motivated to improve the Jewish condition and hopefully impart to them some of his learning and his experience. There existed among many German Jews a sense of superiority—evidenced by religious, social, and economic matters—over their neighbors to the east. Lilienthal was no exception. In his “My Travels in Russia,” he wrote:

I accepted this call at once, as Rev. I. N. Mannheimer, the renowned preacher of Vienna, had convinced me in a correspondence which I conducted with him, that something had to be done for the Russian Jews, who alone of all their coreligionists were behind the civilization of the age. The sphere of activity in such a vast empire flattered my youthful vanity, and hoping for the best results of my sincere endeavors – to raise millions of Jews to a higher standard – I asked the Russian ambassador in Munich for my passport.³⁸

While this feeling would fluctuate during the nineteenth century, it remained for many a constant marker of western superiority throughout the nineteenth century.³⁹ Evident in

³⁸ Max Lilienthal, “My Travels in Russia,” in *Max Lilienthal, American Rabbi: Life and Writings*, ed. David Philipson (New York: Bloch, 1915), 159.

³⁹ David Fishman also provides an example of non-Jews who maintained the same disdain for the parts of the Russian Empire. See, David Fishman, *Russia’s First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 47. Fishman notes that the German Christian Julian Schlegel—an official delegate visiting the Russian Empire—wrote specifically about the backwardness and uncultured nature of the area around Shklov, but found particular delight in the comfort and extravagant nature of one of the wealthy homes. For a larger discussion of Enlightenment commentaries on Eastern Europe, see Larry Wolff, *Imagining Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). For views of European Jews views on Eastern Jews, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); and for the same issue in the late nineteenth-century see for example, Paul E. Kerry, “Views from Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Zionist Images of Eastern Jewry in *Die Welt*” in *Ghetto Writing and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Prose*, eds. Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), 111-25.

this passage and many others like it, is the disdain of eastern Jews not only because of their socio-economic conditions but also their intellectual outlook. While this perspective drew upon a sense of superiority, it also motivated some of the better-trained Jews to seek paths for improving their fellow Jews. In many ways, Lilienthal represented a certain strand of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*, which held at its core, the values espoused by the wider European Enlightenment. The desire to improve oneself through education and moral refinement, modeled on the German idea of *Bildung*, lay at the heart of the Enlightenment program.⁴⁰ At the same time, it carried with it the added dimension of improving Jewish life. Many rabbis and scholars found in their intellectual work, a public mission. In part, the desire to become “modern” was a motivating force. Once one achieved that goal, their mission became that of improving other Jews.

Lilienthal, with his early tutorials in science, his rabbinic training in Munich and Fürth, and his doctoral degree from the newly founded University of Munich, was well positioned to spread Enlightenment thought to the Jews of Riga.⁴¹ The attainment of the doctorate from Munich set Lilienthal apart from many of his contemporaries; even further so with respect to the Jews of the Russian Empire. Although there was a rich tradition of learning among Polish Jews beginning in the sixteenth century, who attained significant

⁴⁰ Ruben, *Max Lilienthal*, 20. See chapter one of Ruben’s book for the larger discussion of *Bildung* as a part of the nineteenth-century German education psychology. For more on the meaning of *Bildung* see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12. Ruben’s discussion of the implications of a university education and the connection between the *Haskalah* and secular studies is one of the most coherent in the secondary literature. Ruben suggests that Lilienthal may have been only the third Jew to study at the University of Munich, which was founded in 1826.

acumen in sciences by attending universities in the west, they remained a minority, even through the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴²

Even before he began teaching in Riga, the community asked him to visit the Russian capital in hopes of gaining the ear of some high level official and plead their case. For the young Lilienthal, the thought of being sent on official business by the community to St. Petersburg fit well with his understanding of his role. The historical details get a bit muddled about how this unfolded, but needless to say, his initial reception was less spectacular than he hoped. He had planned to meet with Uvarov, the head of the *Ministerstvo Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia* (Ministry of Education). Lilienthal found the initial experience difficult, in part because he found it near impossible (in his mind) to find a kosher meal. Again, some of the details may be exaggerated, including the fact that he apparently nearly starved for almost two weeks rather than eat an unclean meal. Part of the delay in his meeting with Uvarov was due to the fact that the minister was out of town. However, once they met, they formed a congenial, if not a close, friendship. After their first meeting, Uvarov again invited him for a second meeting and recommended him to the acting Minister of Internal Affairs, Count Alexander G. Stroganov.⁴³ Lilienthal was less enamored with Stroganov than with Uvarov. Stroganov represented part of the ranks of military officials who entered into the civil service during the reign of Nicholas I.⁴⁴ Lilienthal remembered him as “less a statesman than a

⁴² David Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*, 6; 24-28.

⁴³ Lilienthal, “My Travels in Russia”, 191.

⁴⁴ See Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century*, 36-44.

general.”⁴⁵ Uvarov, however, symbolized the ideal of the statesman for Lilienthal. He was insistent that Lilienthal create a model Jewish school (along the lines of the German schools) that could then be used to encourage others to follow. From 1840 until 1845, Uvarov and Lilienthal formed a team that worked closely together to spread “enlightenment” to Russia’s Jews. The program to improve Jews through education fit well with the imperial hope of bringing Jewish communities further within the scope of civil government and also with Lilienthal’s aim to improve the training of his fellow co-religionists.

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Riga, the young doctor rabbi began the process of evaluation of the school and reported his progress to Uvarov. Lilienthal received direction from Uvarov to travel to the various posts and get a sense of the population’s willingness to reform. Lilienthal was highly ambitious, if naively so, in his hopes of solving the Jewish question in Russia through educational reform. Lilienthal’s hope was to gradually transform Jewish youth through improved schools and advanced learning, thereby opening avenues of assimilation for them into Russian society. Anticipating a warm reception across the Pale of Settlement when he visited the various cities, Lilienthal met staunch resistance in some places and a hero’s welcome in others. Though Khvol’son said very little about his childhood, others who wrote memoirs of their childhood years in Lithuanian towns and villages provide insights into the intellectual and religious climate in the region. In her memoirs of life in Brest in the 1840s, Pauline Wengeroff mentions specifically the excitement caused by Lilienthal’s

⁴⁵ Lilienthal, “My Travels in Russia, 191.

visit after 1840.⁴⁶ As the daughter of a well-to-do Jewish family, she noted that her brothers-in-law began collecting, reading, and discussing secular books instead of studying Talmud. When Lilienthal visited the town, her father declared that he would be accompanying the young men to visit the rabbi. Her mother protested on account of Lilienthal's reputation and, by this point, his appointment as a government official responsible for Jewish education. Wengeroff notes that Lilienthal made it a point on such visits to gather around him the young men in the city and discuss with them their education, specifically their awareness of Western secular subjects, and of European languages (Russian, German, Polish).⁴⁷ At the same time, he also introduced the young men to philosophical and literary works popular among many German Jews, including those by Freidrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832), and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786). The emphasis on Schelling is not surprising, given Lilienthal's exposure to his ideas while at the university in Munich. Schelling resided in Munich from 1806 to 1841 and taught in the philosophy faculty there. Goethe's influence is also not surprising, given his efforts to spread Enlightenment among Jews and Germans.⁴⁸ Of these three writers included in this short list, the work of Mendelssohn was the most important for this generation of young Jews, particularly his

⁴⁶ Pauline Wengeroff, *Rememberings: The World of a Russian-Jewish Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Henny Wenkart, edited with an afterword by Bernard D. Cooperman (Bethesda, MD.: University Press of Maryland, 2000), .

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁴⁸ For an introduction to Goethe and his writing about Jews, see Paul E. Kerry, *Enlightenment Thought in the Writings of Goethe: A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (New York: Camden House, 2001), 177-192.

translation of the Bible into German.⁴⁹ Lilienthal promoted the use of German among the population. For most Baltic Jews, this was a relatively painless transition from Yiddish, and in the early years Russian authorities did not discourage pupils from learning German, as it was still a language of importance in bureaucratic and official circles. Later policies turned toward Russification of the local populations and discouraged privileging German before Russian for Jews.⁵⁰

The importance of this western influence for Khvol'son, as for the Lithuanian Jewish community as a whole, was tremendous. For some, the encroachment of secular ideas funneled through Uvarov and Lilienthal's new schools threatened the very foundation of Jewish life while others found this a liberating moment. Khvol'son apparently found Lilienthal's ideas transformative to the point that he sought out the doctor-rabbi in Riga. The decision to visit Lilienthal in Riga placed Khvol'son on a path from which he would never return, at least not as a religiously observant Jew. Though he left behind family and friends, Khvol'son was aided during his subsequent years abroad by several mentors who looked after his physical and intellectual wellbeing. Khvol'son's path out of the Vilna region coincided with efforts by the tsarist government under Nicholas I to bring Jewish educational structures under closer surveillance. In the early 1840s, the government, through the Ministry of Education, began identifying individuals

⁴⁹ Mendelssohn's *Sefer Netivot Hashalom* was published between 1780 and 1783. Informally, the work was known as the "*Bi'ur*."

⁵⁰ Mikhail Dolbilov, "Russifying Bureaucracy and the Politics of Jewish Education in the Russian Empire's Northwest Region (1860s-1870s)," *Acta Slavonica Iaponica*, vol. 24 (March 2007): 112-143.

who were open to cooptation, willing to employ their knowledge of Jewish networks and Judaism in the wider reform effort.

“That Noble Man Took Me in as a Father”

Khvol’son’s journey from Vilna to Riga to Breslau and later Leipzig was remarkable for several reasons. According to his grandson, he hiked on foot the entire journey, stopping at the occasional home or shop to ask for provisions.⁵¹ At night, he slept in the fields along the road. Later in life, Khvol’son reflected at times on this journey, often retelling the many encounters he found along the road. In one self-deprecating instance, he recalled that a man he met along the road—when he discovered the young Jewish boy was traveling alone—asked, “Are you not afraid?” Khvol’son noted that his immediate response was, “What does it mean to be afraid?”⁵² Khvol’son remembered his younger self as ignorant and detached from the larger trends and movements in society, isolated within his small Jewish world. According to his grandson, Khvol’son’s retelling of his story often included grateful mention of the many unknown individuals who provided occasional meals or provisions and small sums of money to help him on his way.

When Khvol’son arrived at Riga, he visited with Lilienthal who was Khvol’son’s senior by just five years. As noted above, this meeting occurred while Lilienthal was heavily involved in the state directed program to improve Jewish schools. At the same

⁵¹ SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 54, l. 4. This story is also mentioned briefly in Dawidowicz, *Golden Tradition*, 335.

⁵² SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 54, l. 4.

time, he sought to find individuals who could fill the categories of “useful” Jews fit for service in the empire. It is somewhat unclear the order of events that led from Riga to Breslau. Whatever the context may have been, it is clear that Khvol’son depended upon a network of rabbis to facilitate his journey. Lilienthal provided a letter of recommendation on Khvol’son’s behalf to the young, though already controversial German rabbi, Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) in Breslau.⁵³ The fact that Rabbi Lilienthal recommended Khvol’son to his colleague in Breslau is significant for a number of reasons. First, it shows the dependence of Russian Jews upon their German co-religionists. This dependence took many forms, including, but not limited to, financial, religious, socio-cultural, and political, and in this case, interpersonal. Second, the connection between Lilienthal, himself a product of German Jewish culture, and Geiger was not limited to just a recommendation, but suggested a broad project of bringing German Jewish intellectuals and rabbis into the service of the East European Jews—with the anticipation of spreading Enlightenment.

In his effort to enjoin rabbis and teachers sympathetic to his cause, Lilienthal (under the direction of Uvarov) asked Geiger to accept a position in the Russian Empire.

⁵³ Iulii Gessen, “Khvol’son, Daniil Avraamovich,” in *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*, vol. 15 (St. Petersburg, 1914), 584-587. Khvol’son joined Geiger in Breslau, where Geiger had recently founded a school the study of religion and Hebrew philology. Iulii Gessen (1871-1939) was born in Odessa and grew up under the tutelage of prominent Odessa figures such as Simon Dubnow and Ahad Ha’am, among others. He was a devoted socialist, historian, and also, a contributor to the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment Among Jews of Russia (OPE) and the Ethnographic Society. He was also a major contributor to the *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*. Gessen is mentioned throughout this work as he was one of the major compilers of information about Khvol’son (he lived in St. Petersburg/Leningrad from 1895 or 1896 until the end of his life. He was a transmitter of the Khvol’sonian legacy to the younger generation. Gessen developed a personal interest in the work of Khvol’son in the early twentieth century as a result of the blood libel issue that both men wrote about at length.

In response to the request from Uvarov and Lilienthal, Geiger indicated he could not take up the post as:

“There is still much that needs to be done in the Fatherland, which is the center of this progress. Would I not then be remiss in my duties if I were to leave here in order to give of my energies to another country, where at present only the after-effects of our own achievements can be felt?”⁵⁴

Geiger’s position, like many Jewish intellectuals gazing to the east, believed fully in the German reform movement as central to the Haskalah. As fully committed supporters of improving the lot of Jews in German lands these individuals maintained a hope that Christian society would soon open up fully to the emancipation of the Jews in every realm of life, if only Jews could eliminate those elements that prevented their full integration. Beyond the prescient hope for citizenship in German society, these individuals were also deeply tied to their familiar surroundings. This was, after all, the age of growing national identities, albeit loosely defined in the pre-1848 world. In his letter to Lilienthal, Geiger conceded, “I might as well admit—despite the fact that her authorities reject me because I am a Jew, I still love Germany.”⁵⁵ Given the gradual, though not insignificant achievements of Jewish communities during the 1830s and 1840s in the German territories, Russia likely provided little incentive for those even remotely aware of the situation to their east. However, the lack of positions available to well-educated Jews drove some to consider working in the east. Further, as Geiger

⁵⁴ Abraham Geiger, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism: The Challenge of the Nineteenth Century*, compiled with a biographical introduction by Max Weiner, trans. Ernst J. Schlochauer (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 110-111.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 111.

suggested in a letter to Joseph Naftali Dernburg on August 3, 1840, matters of “universal Jewish concern” were felt:

...among those Jews who comprise the upper stratum of Jewry...[that is] the Jews who reside among civilized nations, particularly Germany, and who will later be emulated and followed by those who now are still among the uneducated. That which goes on among the Jews living in the uncivilized countries, on the other hand, is of trifling importance only, even if it were to be of general import in those particular lands.⁵⁶

The German-Jewish efforts for political, social, and religious emancipation in Germany were believed to be a model for Russia. Geiger understood that regardless of whatever minor achievements might be made in Eastern Europe, his mission and heart remained in his homeland. For Jews outside of Russia, there remained an abiding concern for their neighbors to the east, but many, like Geiger recognized that without real and profound success in their own struggles for emancipation in their own countries they could do little to aid those in the Pale of Settlement. Although he rejected the Russian offer, Geiger did not abandon the Russian project altogether. As a newly married and recent appointee to the Breslau rabbinate (assistant rabbi), he welcomed Lilienthal’s recommendation to assist the young Khvol’son in gaining a position in a German university. Khvol’son was still untrained in classical languages—a prerequisite for his entrance into the German academy.⁵⁷ Geiger, an orientalist steeped in a number of languages, worked with Khvol’son on his language skills, and, within four years helped prepare his student for

⁵⁶ Ibid., 87. See also *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, XVIII, no. 22, 258.

⁵⁷ Ilia Troitskii, “Pamiati professora Daniila Abramovicha Khvol’sona 23 Marta 1911,” *Tserkovnyi Vestnik*, no. 14-15 (April 7, 1911), 430.

university. The details of their relationship are unclear, though based on Khvol'son's comments, and those of his family, it was a richly warm and positive one.

When his dissertation was published as a two-volume work in 1856, Khvol'son remembered several of those who assisted him along the way. If Khvol'son family lore is believed, then the arrival in Breslau (sometime after his eighteenth birthday) was indeed a pitiful one. His acknowledgement of Breslau's rabbi, Abraham Geiger, illuminates the deep sense of respect and gratitude that Khvol'son possessed for the man. He gratefully acknowledged Geiger's efforts on his behalf:

Finally, my heart urges me to express here my gratitude to a man who is in no way affiliated with this book, but to whom I have endless thanks, I mean the honorable, well-known, Dr. Geiger in Breslau. Many years ago I was in Germany, a country where I knew nobody and was known by no one, and I might have rotted intellectually and physically, that noble man took me in as a father, he sheltered and nurtured me physically and spiritually, and it is to him primarily that I owe great thanks that I have achieved the academic level which I now possess.⁵⁸

The impact of Geiger's generosity is clear; he served Khvol'son at a time when the migrant student was "penniless" and destitute—actions which placed Khvol'son in his debt emotionally and temporally. At a time when Khvol'son felt orphaned in his new country, to have one whom he could respect and learn from proved critical to his success and helped set him on a course that he maintained for the rest of his life. Additionally, one of the lesser-recognized debts that Khvol'son owed his Breslau mentor was intellectual. Even after his dissertation was published, it is unlikely that Khvol'son fully understood the influence of Geiger on his future scholarship. As Susannah Heschel's work on Geiger suggests, the central concerns of Geiger's intellectual project became the

⁵⁸ Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* (St. Petersburg, Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856), xxi.

foundation for Khvol'son's own intellectual endeavors.⁵⁹ The continuation of Geiger's work by his student is highlighted by Heschel, but for Khvol'son the formative period with Geiger became an essential building block for his later life, perhaps even more than his homage quoted above suggests.

Geiger was accepted as an assistant rabbi in Breslau in January 1840, after a prolonged challenge from Orthodox rabbis, including Solomon Tiktin and his conservative congregants in the city. In late summer of the same year he took up the post in Breslau where he was responsible for religious education. Geiger was already well respected in intellectual circles (Christian and Jewish) for his doctoral dissertation, *Was hat Mohammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*⁶⁰ In that text, Geiger challenged the idea that Islam was an original religion by suggesting that the theology of Islam developed out of rabbinic sources—particularly out of the rabbinic summaries and commentaries on biblical stories.⁶¹ Geiger argued that the problem with the traditional perception of the rise of Islam and its foundations was that it placed Christianity as the center and external source that provided theological impetus behind the new religion. Geiger took issue with scholars and theologians who claimed “scientific” evidence and

⁵⁹ Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 219-221. Heschel argues that Khvol'son was “one of the most unusual figures to extend Geiger's arguments.”

⁶⁰ Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Baden, 1833). This work, originally a prize-winning essay, was republished in 1902. F. M. Young, *Judaism and Islam* (Madrassa: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898). This was republished as Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (New York: Ktav, 1970). This is a reprint (with new introduction by Moshe Pearlman) of the 1898 edition.

⁶¹ For a more detailed description of this work, see Heschel, *Abraham Geiger*, 30-31; 51-75.

yet produced works that were deeply flawed and untrue to the historical context of early Christianity, Second Temple Judaism, and the advent of Islam. Thus, Geiger remained committed, as was Khvol'son later, to recast the three Abrahamic traditions as connected to each other through a common history and, to some extent, theology.

Not only did Geiger provide material support and foundational knowledge for Khvol'son's academic career, he also introduced the young man to a number of Christian and Jewish scholars. Two of the most important contacts made by Khvol'son during this period in Breslau were two recognized orientalists. The first was Franz Karl Movers (1806-1856), the famed Roman Catholic orientalist in Breslau who helped teach Khvol'son languages and encouraged his research. Khvol'son's first lessons in Arabic and ancient languages came from Movers. After Khvol'son completed his studies, reviewers of his work frequently commented that he maintained the high standard for scholarship that one came to expect from students of Movers. The second, and perhaps most important individual for Khvol'son's academic career, was the acquaintance of Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888). Fleischer was educated at Leipzig and Paris before returning to Leipzig in 1836, where he took up a post as professor. Fleischer helped Khvol'son in many ways, not the least of which was to help secure his doctorate from the University of Leipzig. Khvol'son came to know of Fleischer through his two Breslau mentors, Geiger and Movers. During Khvol'son's time in Breslau, he completed his work at the university there and under the supervision of Movers conducted an ambitious study of the Sabians, a non-Muslim group written about in the Qur'an and Arabic texts. Khvol'son first found interest in the Sabians after he read Maimonides's

Guide for the Perplexed, even though the two differed in their understanding of who the Sabians were. For Maimonides, they were not a “people,” while for Khvol’son they were a culturally identifiable group. The Sabians appear in a number of Arabic texts and were described variously as pagans, sometimes barbaric, but in other places they were understood by some to be culturally refined and deeply involved in philosophical and mathematical endeavors.⁶² Khvol’son compiled an impressive number of texts about the community and provided a profound introduction and analysis of this group and their culture. Ultimately, Khvol’son concluded that the Sabians referred to in Quran should be seen as Mandeans who developed a Gnostic religious system. Prompted likely by Movers and Geiger, Khvol’son sent a draft of the first part of his work to Professor Fleischer in Leipzig. Fleischer received Khvol’son’s text at the beginning of February 1850 and it was so well received in Leipzig that Khvol’son obtained the doctorate by 20 February 1850—even before Fleischer could see all of Khvol’son’s work that he did not initially send! Fleischer wrote to colleagues, “if God gives him health and he continues to

⁶² The earliest identifiable descriptions of the Sabians appeared sometime during the tenth century, though Khvol’son and others suspected that there were indeed missing manuscripts and texts that could reveal more if they could be recovered. The Sabians were also of interest to Maimonides—and we can see evidence that Khvol’son read Maimonides and drew some of his insights from him, particularly in regards to the great philosopher’s translations of texts. See Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 84-86. Stroumsa shows how Maimonides understood the Sabians as a “*milla*” comprised of various peoples who existed around the time of Abraham and possessed a fully functioning religious group. See also Jonathan Elukin, “Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of the Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Law and the Limits of Scholarship,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 63, no. 4 (Oct., 2002), 619-637.

work [he] ... will soon rank among the top scholars of his nation (by which I understand Russians and not Jews.)”⁶³

Fleischer and Khvol'son the Young Orientalist

Initially the German school of orientalism depended upon the French school for its methods and, more importantly, for its training. While France in the early decades of the nineteenth century led the charge in Oriental studies, it was eclipsed in the 1830s and 1840s by its German neighbors as more students trained in France took positions in the East. The leading French orientalist, Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838) not only built up the French school of oriental studies, but also proved critical for the transformation of the German school through one of his students, Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer.⁶⁴

Fleischer, who later became Khvol'son's mentor and promoter, transformed the intellectual and professional expectations in the German universities from relatively weak philological skills to deep methodical research and rigorous linguistic training in languages like Chaldean, Persian, Syriac, Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew. As Schorsch argued in his short study of Fleischer's influence on the German orientalists, during the 1840s faculties that previously housed these scholars (theology) yielded them to faculties

⁶³ As cited in Ismar Schorsch, “Converging Cognates: The Intersection of Jewish and Islamic Studies in Nineteenth Century Germany,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55, no. 3 (September 2010): 18.

⁶⁴ Although nothing came of it, de Sacy attempted to help Fleischer gain a position in St. Petersburg upon completion of his studies.

of philosophy.⁶⁵ The move from theology to other faculties profoundly altered the scope of subjects and methodologies employed by orientalists, thus unbinding—at least partially—the Christian worldview from the study of Islamic and Jewish civilizations.⁶⁶ Under the intellectual guardianship of Fleischer, the Lutheran university at Leipzig became the flagship for Christians and Jews interested in studying ancient languages and cultures not out of religious conviction, but as subjects worthy of study on their own terms and, importantly, through their own sources. The increase in Jews who studied at the university during this period and Jewish orientalists who, although not offered academic positions conceived of their work in a scholarly way (e.g., Geiger and others), allowed the rabbinical seminaries in Breslau and elsewhere to provide an outlet for Jewish orientalists in German cities. Efron argues that Jewish orientalists, especially Geiger, “approached orientalism with a different set of assumptions and prejudices than Gentile orientalists,” and that they tended to view Islam, Qur’an, and Muhammad differently than their Christian counterparts. For Geiger, Islam was an outgrowth of the very best form of Judaism that valued above all else, monotheism, revelation, and prophecy.⁶⁷ Islam became a way for Ashkenazic Jews in Germany to evaluate, and increasingly critique, the possibility of a more equal and peaceable relationship with the surrounding majority. With medieval Spain as their model, Jewish orientalists aimed to

⁶⁵ Schorsch, “Converging Cognates,” 6.

⁶⁶ John Efron, “Orientalism and the Jewish Historical Gaze,” in *Orientalism and the Jews*, edited by Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 80-93.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

show where greater religious freedom (or at least indifference by the majority) contributed to an expansion of Jewish life and culture built on literature, philosophy, and education. Though Geiger criticized Muslims and their society at times, he also praised them for adapting Judaism as the model and basis of their religious texts and ideas.⁶⁸ Islam, he argued, adapted from the very best that Judaism had to offer and though the relationship was not always congenial, exhibited extraordinary capacity for peaceful coexistence—something that Christian Europe largely failed to accomplish.

Khvol'son walked, quite literally, into this intellectual world perhaps unwittingly, but with a sincere longing (as many young Jews had during this period) for secular education and a greater awareness of the ideas and principles that influenced, and were in turn shaped by, his own Jewish heritage. Geiger was well connected to that world and served as an intermediary between traditional Jewish education and the German university for which Khvol'son was headed. In order to see Khvol'son's early work and its genesis in proper perspective, he must be viewed as a participant in the milieu of nineteenth-century German orientalism.

When Khvol'son submitted his dissertation work to Fleischer in 1850, he immediately gained the respect of that great scholar and placed himself, in large part due to their relationship, at the forefront of contemporary scholarship. After reading the complete dissertation manuscript, Fleischer is reported to have praised Khvol'son's

⁶⁸ Geiger promoted this idea, first and foremost in his essay, which later became his dissertation that examined the Jewish contributions to the Islam and its foundations.

genius in working with these texts. “You begin,” he noted, “where others would end.”⁶⁹ Fleischer’s generous approval helped raise awareness of Khvol’son’s ability as a scholar and of the promising future ahead. When it was finally published in 1856 in German by the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, it extended to over 1700 pages spread across two volumes. Khvol’son dedicated it to Minister A. S. Norov “with sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks.”⁷⁰ In the first volume, Khvol’son provided an introduction to the Sabians and their culture along with his efforts to assign a date to many Sabian texts. The second volume amounted to the translation of a broad range of primary texts and transcriptions that he collected related to the Sabians. Indeed, Fleischer, a busy scholar in his own right, decided upon meeting Khvol’son to take the work on as an editorial project to help prepare the manuscript for publication. Fleischer edited the German mistakes and improved the overall presentation, although he did not alter Khvol’son’s Arabic translations and transcriptions.⁷¹ Khvol’son was indebted to Fleischer intellectually and acknowledged as much in a letter to his mentor, dated 8 June 1850:

I want to assure you that the manner in which you have treated me, which exceeded all my expectations, has instilled in me the firm resolve to relate to others exactly like you and to dispense as much blessing and joy as you do to those whom I will come in contact with. No one could be more solicitous and giving than you. I could never have imagined that you would revise my work with

⁶⁹ E. A. Khvol’son, , “D. A. Khvol’son, (Orientalist) 1819-1911, Zhivnennii put samouchni-potchetnogo chleni Akademii nauk,” SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 54, l. 9.

⁷⁰ Khvol’son, *Ssabier und Ssabismus*, vol. 1, frontmatter dedicatory page.

⁷¹ Schorsch, “Converging Cognates,” 18-19

such care. You cannot possibly be more scrupulous with your own. The revision must have robbed you of so very, very much time.⁷²

In perhaps the most fitting legacy of Fleischer's profound influence on Khvol'son, as on others of his students, Khvol'son attempted to live up to such a promise, as the testimonies of his students and colleagues attested to in the years preceding his death.

Fleischer became a lifelong promoter of Khvol'son and his work, and sought to assist him to secure employment in St. Petersburg where his obvious talents could be recognized. After meeting with Khvol'son in March 1850, and reviewing the entirety of his work, checking his textual translations, and considering the full import of his arguments, Fleischer submitted a letter of recommendation to Bernard Dorn (1805-1881) in St. Petersburg. Dorn, a Leipzig connection of Fleischer's, was once a professor at Kharkov University, but in 1850 was the leading orientalist in St. Petersburg, where he taught at the Institute of Oriental Languages and St. Petersburg University.⁷³ Fleischer also encouraged Dorn to consider publishing Khvol'son's work in St. Petersburg—which in retrospect was a strategic move on Khvol'son's part when it was finally published. Though Fleischer's letter did not help place Khvol'son in a professorial appointment immediately, it certainly helped bring him to the attention of those who would later play a role in his career.

⁷² Ibid., 19. I draw upon Schorsch's translation as these letters from Khvol'son are unavailable to me at this time. Schorsch indicates the letter is contained in the Royal Library Copenhagen, Fleischer papers, Chwolson file.

⁷³ Dorn later was elected to the Russian Academy of Sciences and director of the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg.

Through his connection with Geiger, Khvol'son was introduced to the German Enlightenment principles—becoming a disciple who espoused the values of pure reason and universal truths characteristic of the eighteenth-century movement. In order to understand the Jewish Haskalah and Geiger's reform movement, as well as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, these developments must be seen as part of the broader, earlier European Enlightenments in France, Germany, England and elsewhere.⁷⁴ Historians have analyzed at length the European Enlightenment and the Jewish Haskalah.⁷⁵ Like the Enlightenment, which Dorinda Outram has called a “process”—betraying a once popular idea that it was a “project” that had reached a definite end—the Haskalah unfolded over decades and witnessed many different actors.⁷⁶ With its origins in the middle and late eighteenth century, the Haskalah began as an effort at reshaping

⁷⁴ The Enlightenment, though often considered to be a single unified movement, is often thought of in terms of a series of loosely connected movements that centered on a generally accepted set of values.

⁷⁵ For reference to the European Enlightenment, see: Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Norton, 1966-1969). For major contributions to the historiography of the Haskalah, see Adam Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1973); Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*; Shmuel Feiner, “Mendelssohn and Mendelssohn's Disciples: A Re-examination,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 40 (1995): 133-67; Fishman, *Russia's First Modern Jews*; Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the French Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle*, trans. J. M. Todd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). For a set of works that argue for understanding the Enlightenment generally as a religious movement and the Haskalah as a part of the broader movement, see David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000); Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁷⁶ Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, *New Approaches to European History* 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

and revitalizing Judaism and Jewish culture as a means of fostering the emancipation process. As one of the principal proponents, Moses Mendelssohn became symbolic of the effort. Mendelssohn sought to make Judaism more palpable for the surrounding population through education and modernization—elevating in the process Jewish self-perception. Shmuel Feiner argued that as part of the Haskalah movement, Maskilim adopted a new approach and understanding of historical time and relationship between their current day and the past.⁷⁷ The modern period, often associated with the French Revolution in European History, also signaled a major breakthrough for Jews when in post-revolutionary France, Napoleon attempted to incorporate Jews as citizens. The position of Jews within European society was one of the most contested cultural battles during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Jews, like Christians, responded to that debate in various ways. As Adam Sutcliffe so clearly argued:

Judaism was thus profoundly ensnared in the relationship between the Enlightenment and the Christian worldview from and against which it emerged...Judaism during the Enlightenment can only be understood in the context of this relationship, and concomitantly, that the complexities clustered around Judaism are of central importance for a general understanding of the Enlightenment itself.⁷⁸

If the foundational values of the Enlightenment—toleration, justice, and rational thinking—were at the core of the eighteenth-century political and social discourse, then it makes sense that Jews would understand their position as on the brink of potential improvement. From here, maskilim of the first decades of the nineteenth century found

⁷⁷ Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, trans. Chaya Naor and Sondra Silverston (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004), 44-47ff.

⁷⁸ Sutcliffe, *Judaism and Enlightenment*, 6.

root for internal reform movements aimed at education, language adaptation, and modernization of Jewish religious ritual and more generally, cultural modernization.

Internally, while many maskilim agreed that transforming Jewish culture and life was essential in Germany and elsewhere if Jews were to achieve emancipation, the question of religious reform sparked heated debates. The same was true of Jews in the Russian Empire. One of the major differences in the 1840s particularly between German Jews and their Russian counterparts was the concerted effort of the government to speed that process along. Many Jews successfully integrated (at least moderately) into German society over the course of forty or fifty years. Russia sought to develop a similar program though the common belief was that in Eastern Europe, the movement would not be organically derived from within the Pale of Settlement, rather it needed to be driven from the outside.

Within Russia a small group of maskilim held firmly to the belief that Jewish existence in the empire was about to change for the better. Jews were beginning to live outside the Pale in greater numbers and some were beginning to find access to economic and cultural resources. Jews needed to improve themselves through education and modernization. In so doing, proponents of the Haskalah argued, the state would then find a tremendous resource from which to draw into its service.⁷⁹ Central to this project was a reconceptualization of Jewish history that emphasized a consistent approach to reform and adaption across the entire spectrum of Jewish history. Within this movement for rewriting history, Khvol'son found the roots of his approach. Khvol'son understood that

⁷⁹ Feiner, 159. Feiner argues that this movement, even in the 1840s, was quite limited, perhaps as few as 200 maskilim lived in the Lithuanian territory.

the modern age was, or at least should have been, very different from the age of the barbarians, in other words the tenth to fifteenth-centuries. At the same time, Khvol'son, like Geiger, developed a deep interest in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and sought to better understand their relationship theologically and historically. As the subsequent chapters show, this became a major element of Khvol'son's scholarship, and he owed the debt to the Haskalah and Geiger that first fostered these ideas for him.

From the Ministry to the Church

For Khvol'son, many individuals, several of whom he acknowledged openly, aided his road to St. Petersburg. Likewise, his journey would not have occurred if it began ten years on either side of his departure from Vilna. The Russian imperial project that aimed to bring Jews into the service of the state apparatus found in Khvol'son one of its most successful participants who integrated into wider social and intellectual circles. The Ministry of Education, which jump-started the ambitious program, remained an important state institution involved in the reform process for the next half-century. It was through this path that Khvol'son was gradually brought into the state bureaucracy and ultimately into the leading academies in the capital. Khvol'son was one of the individuals that clearly fit into the "useful" category because of his expertise in Jewish affairs. Although his path unfolded over decades, his faith in the system served to forever mark him as one of this generation of Jews who were encouraged to attach themselves to the needs and functions of the state. By doing so, Khvol'son and others were able to successfully incorporate into Russian society.

The opening of Russian Jewish policy, inaugurated by Sergei Uvarov just before 1840 until the mid 1850s, allowed Khvol'son the opportunity to leave the empire and receive a German university education, including a doctoral degree. This was part of the Uvarov effort to create a class of intellectuals who could help elevate the Russian university to levels on par with their German competitors. Armed with a broad set of skills and knowledge, Khvol'son was then gradually incorporated into Russian culture in St. Petersburg. Khvol'son first arrived in the capital city after completion of the dissertation for which he received the doctoral degree from Leipzig University in 1850.⁸⁰ He immediately went to work within the Ministry of Education and acquainted himself with many Jews in St. Petersburg. Within the Ministry of Education, Khvol'son was assigned to work on the committee for the supervision and censorship of Hebrew texts. The committee worked under the supervision of the state censor and belonged to a broad network of similar groups in the Pale of Settlement (including local departments in Vilna and Kiev). In the same way that Uvarov incorporated Lilienthal into his reform efforts, others brought Khvol'son within the purview of official bureaucratic structures—to the immense benefit of both parties.

Avraam Sergeevich Norov (1795-1869) was the head of the St. Petersburg Censorship committee (*Glavnoe upravlenie tsenzury*), of which the division for Jewish publications was a part. Norov served in this role from 1850 to 1858, and jointly served as deputy Minister of Education for part of this period. A year after the death of his predecessor Shirinskii-Shikhmatov in the Ministry of Education in 1853, Norov was

⁸⁰ SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 12, l. 1.

appointed Minister of Education by Nicholas I.⁸¹ As one of Uvarov's successors, Norov proved a critical figure for Khvol'son's incorporation into the St. Petersburg academic circles and also the Ministry of Education. Norov was part of the gentry in pre-reform Russia, the son of a military officer and provincial authority. As a persistent promoter of literature and scholarship, Norov also associated closely with important scholars and intellectuals—as his frequent evening gatherings with figures like Vladimir Dal', A. N. Murav'ev, and others suggest.⁸² Peter Weisensel characterized Norov as a good example of a large group of Russian bureaucrats in the decades leading up to the great reforms who were “those of less flashing brilliance” and who functioned as “transitional” figures between the two hallmark posts of “liberal” and “enlightened.”⁸³ Highly functional in taking directives as a mid-level bureaucrat, Norov was figuratively crippled by ministerial responsibilities later when he occupied the position of Minister of Education post (1854-1858).⁸⁴

It is unclear when Khvol'son and Norov first crossed paths, though they were aware of each other by September 1850 when Khvol'son wrote Norov regarding his

⁸¹ Norov was familiar with the position of Minister before his ascension because he covered for the often ill Shirinskii-Shikhmatov at State Council meetings and affairs between 1850 and 1853.

⁸² Peter R. Weisensel, *Prelude to the Great Reforms: Avraam Sergeevich Norov and Imperial Russia in Transition*, Minnesota Mediterranean and East European Monographs, A *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* Supplement, no. 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), 66.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 70-71. Norov was literally crippled early in his military career when he was seriously wounded at the Battle of Borodino—which resulted in his left leg being amputated. He was fitted with a wooden prosthetic for the rest of his life.

position in St. Petersburg.⁸⁵ Norov followed Khvol'son and the preparation of the manuscript of his dissertation closely while the young scholar worked in the offices of the Ministry of Education during his first years in St. Petersburg. Norov had clearly noticed the young scholar's intellectual prowess by 1856 when Khvol'son's dissertation was published in St. Petersburg after the young scholar took a position at the university. In a letter to an unnamed university (St. Petersburg) official regarding a copy of *Ssabier und der Ssabismus* that he received, Norov wrote: "having received from Your Excellency Mr. Khvol'son's essay, entitled "Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus," I ask you to take the trouble to express to the learned author of this remarkable work, my sincere thanks for giving me a copy."⁸⁶ There was much in the figure of Norov that Khvol'son likely found intriguing and worthy of emulation. In his own right, Norov published a series of works about the history of Orthodox religious sites.⁸⁷ Norov traveled to Egypt and Palestine in 1834 while on assignment from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the volumes that emerged from that trip placed him in good stead with Russian government officials because they found in him a crucial "expert bureaucrat" and scholar on all matters

⁸⁵ OR RNB f. 531, d. 416, "Khvol'son, D. A. pis'ma A. S. Norovu," 18 September 1850.

⁸⁶ SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 57, l. 1 "Pis'mo velikogo kniazia Konstantina Norovu A. (S vyrazheniem blagodarnosti za prislannuiu rabotu Khvol'sona, D. A.)" (15 May 1856).

⁸⁷ See, for example, the republished volume, Avraam Sergeevich Norov, *Puteshestvie k semi tserkvam upominaemym v apokalipsise* (St. Petersburg: Tip. III ontel'neniia Sobstvennoi e. i. v. kantseliarii, 1847) [reprint St. Petersburg: Tip. P. P. Soiskin, 1890; Moscow: Indrik, 2005.] His other volumes included: *Puteshestvie po Egiptu i Nubii v 1834-1835* (St. Petersburg: Tip. III ontel'neniia Sobstvennoi e. i. v. kantseliarii, 1835); *Puteshestvie po Sitsilii v 1822 g.* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. Smirdina, 1828); and *Puteshestvie po Sviatoi Zemle v 1835 g.*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. Smirdina: 1838).

dealing with the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁸ In the years leading up to the Crimean War, Russian-Ottoman and Russian-Muslim relations were at a critical juncture.⁸⁹ Norov judged the relations between Christians and Muslims hopelessly: “Christianity and Islam are separated by a terrible gap, and who knows when it will be filled.”⁹⁰ That Norov found his way to this conclusion, even when he at times offered laudatory praise to Islamic society, suggests something of the nature of nineteenth-century understandings of religious perspectives of other religions. At the same time, it offers some insight into why Norov was so impressed by Khvol’son’s work in 1856, in which he attempted to bridge the two societies through scholarship.

Norov’s kind, albeit somewhat distant, comment regarding the copy of *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* shielded their earlier personal relationship forged within the Ministry of Education before Khvol’son’s conversion. Khvol’son and his twenty-six year old wife, Fanni Iakovlevna Khvol’son (1828-1883), chose to convert to the Russian Orthodox Church and were baptized on 18 December 1854.⁹¹ At the time, the young couple had two sons who also converted at the same time; Orest Daniilovich (1852-1934), who later became the highly renowned physicist in late imperial and Soviet

⁸⁸ Wiesensel, *Prelude to the Great Reforms*, 22-31.

⁸⁹ Robert Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” 50-83; Stephen K. Batalden, “Musul’manskii i evreiskii voprosi v Rossii epokhi Aleksandra i glazami shotlandskogo bibleista i puteshestvennika,” *Voprosy Istorii* (2004): 46-63.

⁹⁰ Norov, *Puteshestvie po Egiptu i Nubii v 1834 i 1835 gg.*, 1:375. Khvol’son and Norov discussed Egypt and the Holy Land in a series of letters written between 1854 and 1859, see OR RNB f. 531, d. 631, “Khvol’son, D. A., orientalist, pis’mu Avraamu Sergeevichu Norovu, 1854-1859, Die Erbauer der Piramiden.”

⁹¹ Fanni’s maiden name was Cohn.

science and Anatolii Daniilovich (1852-19??) who became a jurist in St. Petersburg.⁹²

Regarding his decision to convert, Khvol'son wrote in a letter to Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888), the well-known German orientalist and Khvol'son's *doktorvater* at Leipzig:

A few days after receiving your letter of 5 November 1854, I began collating [the pages of my book],⁹³ which took me until New Year's Eve to finish. But what a chasm in between! I began the work as a Jew and finished as a Christian [...]! As my first child lay dying from his circumcision, I made the initial decision to convert to Christianity, and after two years of vacillating the decision had ripened sufficiently to carry out. The pale face of my poor, wretched and sickly child admonished me constantly and thus fourteen days ago, I, my wife and my two small children (the second is only ten weeks old and not circumcised) converted to Christianity. We would have preferred to become Protestants... but a variety of circumstances, which I cannot spell out here, prompted me to convert to the Greek [Orthodox] Church. This step is judged differently by different people, though God alone knows what was in my heart.⁹⁴

This is the most complete statement offered by Khvol'son and is remarkable for many reasons. First, it suggests a fairly long gestation process for his decision, and yet, the tone speaks to an almost exasperated frame of mind given the emotional tug of his son's condition. The statement about his desire to become a Protestant is intriguing because the same full rights would have been extended to him if he had followed that path. From this statement we might conclude that Khvol'son understood this decision as one of opportunity, even when he likely felt some guilt in abandoning his former religion. And

⁹² SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 28, l. 1 (22 Jan. 1855)

⁹³ The book referenced here is the published version of his dissertation *Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, published in St. Petersburg in 1856.

⁹⁴ As cited in Ismar Schorsch, "Converging Cognates," 19. This letter (dated 29 January 1855) from Khvol'son to Fleischer is housed in the Royal Library Copenhagen, Fleischer papers, in a separate file related to Khvol'son.

yet, evident in this short statement to his mentor is evidence that Khvol'son weighed the option over the course of several years—and only after a protracted period did he finally take action. Khvol'son's conversion is central to this dissertation because his apostasy from Judaism became the defining attribute applied to him by both Jews and Christians and the matter remains contentious even today.

As some of the last converts in 1854, the Khvol'sons were among 4,439 Jewish converts that year.⁹⁵ As a marker of the conversion and their new Christian identities, they adopted new names. Iosif Solomonovich became Daniil Avraamovich (often Abramovich/Abraamovich) while his wife remained Feofaniia Iakovlevna. The Protopresbyter Chief-Priest of the Army and Navy attested both baptisms. Khvol'son chose as his godfather (*vospriemnik*) the Minister of Education, Norov—hence the adoption of the patronymic Avraamovich after his baptism. Feofaniia chose as her godmother a highly respected and well-known figure in St. Petersburg society, none other than Tatiana Borisovna Potemkina (1797-1869), the wife of Aleksandr Mikhailovich Potemkin.⁹⁶ Potemkina, of noble birth (née Golitsyn), often associated with the tsar and his family and was “so well known for her piety and charity.”⁹⁷ Potemkina's many philanthropic activities included contributions to the 1850 restoration of Sviatogorsk

⁹⁵ Ellie Shinker, “Imperial Hybrids: Russian-Jewish Converts in the Nineteenth Century,” PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010, (ProQuest 3414113), 4.

⁹⁶ SPFA RAN f. 959. op. 1, d. 27, l. 11.1-2.

⁹⁷ Joe Peschio, *The Poetics of Impudence and Intimacy in the Age of Pushkin* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 18.

Monastery in eastern Ukraine, orphanages, poor houses, and Orthodox missions.⁹⁸ In their selection of Christian exemplars the Khvol'sons linked themselves with the upper echelons of Petersburg society. In Daniil's case, Norov was instrumental in his entrance into the Ministry of Education and later St. Petersburg University. Feofania's choice, although perhaps not as personal, represented a conscious decision to emulate a familiar, extraordinary form of civic-mindedness among nineteenth-century Russian women. For the Khvol'son family the choice to convert to Russian Orthodoxy brought with it many benefits; some occurred almost immediately. The Ministry of Education, likely at the behest of Norov himself, assisted Khvol'son in obtaining permission to remain in the city and procure a six-month lease of an apartment in St. Petersburg for his young family.⁹⁹

It was important that Fanni Khvol'son convert along with her husband due to an 1835 law that prohibited a mixed Christian and Jewish couple from living outside the Pale of Settlement if one of them had not converted. As a bachelor, Khvol'son would have been permitted to live in cities outside the Pale, but inasmuch as he and Fanni were married earlier, his continued existence in St. Petersburg could have been challenged and he would have been forced to give up his right to reside in the capital. There were cases

⁹⁸ *Russkii biograficheski slovar'* XIV, 646-7; Robin Wheeler, *Palmer's Pilgrimage: The Life of William Palmer of Magdalen* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 100.

⁹⁹ SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 28, l. 1.; other letters from Norov to the Minister of Finance Petr Fedorovich Brok (1852-1858) with regard to Khvol'son include those found in RGIA f. 571, op. 3, d. 35, l. 1-2 (June 1855); also, from the same file l. 4 a letter to the Department of Various Taxes and Fees (*Departament raznykh podata i sborov'*) regarding Khvol'son. These communications with the Ministry of Finance and its internal departments highlight, first and foremost, the potential for immediate economic and residential benefits for Jews who converted.

among converts where legal precedent and earlier laws could be enforced to restrict mixed marriages from living outside the Pale.¹⁰⁰

Historically, religious conversion was messy business for religious and government officials—and for the newly converted. One leading theorist on conversion and national identity formation noted:

In its most transparent meaning as a change of religion, conversion is arguably one of the most unsettling political events in the life of a society. This is irrespective of whether conversion involves a single individual or an entire community, whether it is forced or voluntary, or whether it is the result of proselytization or inner spiritual illumination. Not only does conversion alter the demographic equation within a society and produce numerical imbalances, but it also challenges an established community's ascent to religious doctrines and practices. With the departure of members from the fold, the cohesion of a community is under threat just as forcefully as if its beliefs had been turned into heresies.¹⁰¹

As Viswanathan suggests, religious conversion in modern Europe cannot be understood without placing it within the debates about minority emancipation and the attached discussions about broadening economic and political rights, nor should it be viewed as separate from a majority population's understanding of their own identity. How then do we understand Khvol'son's decision to seemingly abandon Judaism for Christianity?

In her study of confessionality and empire, Viswanathan focuses on colonial relations and religious conversion and the negotiations of new political and social spaces

¹⁰⁰ RGIA, f. 797. op. 92, d. 120, fo. 7, this document mentions the statute from 9 April 1851, which referenced the earlier 1835 legal restrictions. Simon Dubnov also wrote about this period and the 1835 restrictions in a set of historical articles published in the journal *Evreiskaia Starina*: Simon Dubnov, "Evrei v Rossii v epokhu evropeiskoi reaktsii (1815-1848)," *Evreiskaia Starina*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1912): 274-288; vol. 4, no. 4 (1912), 370-389. Pages 380-389 address the 1835 regulations in particular.

¹⁰¹ Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xi.

through religious apostasy. The idea that conversion from one religion to another challenges the very foundations of imperialism is helpful here in placing Khvol'son and his conversion at the epicenter of a critique of religious identity—and therefore Russian identity—in the middle of the nineteenth century. Khvol'son's conversion, because his motivations are not clearly understood, remains problematic for Jews as well as Russians even today. Whether maligned or praised, Khvol'son as convert is a contentious topic because he represented a model of Russian life and identity that often crossed, rather than reinforced, existing legal, social, or religious boundaries.

Converts who were kind to historians left records to explain their motivations, their joys and sorrows, as well as their understanding of their old and new religious lives. Those who left copious personal records of this process, whether it occurred in an instant or over a lifetime, help historians know “what they knew.”¹⁰² In the Russian territories, unpacking some of the official documents is difficult because a great majority of the documents were written as persuasive either for or against one's conversion—and sometimes the motivations are all too clear while others were quite vague. The standard process of applying for permission to convert usually involved a formulaic letter to petition the local church (regardless of confession). The first and foremost responsibility of the convert in this process was to assure the local authorities of their sincerity by

¹⁰² Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7. In the case of converts, sometimes the personal journals or diaries left behind help historians understand their world, but might also require a significant amount of work to sort through the “memories” and their historical accuracy. For more on the intellectual problems for these cases, see, for example, Rachel Cope, “In Some Places a Few Drops and Other Places a Plentiful Shower”: The Religious Impact of Revivalism on Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women,” PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2009. (ProQuest 3381568), 6-9, 282-291.

proclaiming Christianity as superior to Judaism. More prominent cases were passed along to departments within the Holy Synod. Many of these records exist for converts, though they tend to be quite similar in approach and tone.¹⁰³

Religious conversion was a tightly controlled process in Russia, suggestive not just of the bureaucratic network concerned with conversion, but also of the importance of managing diverse communities and limiting the crossing of identity boundaries.

Separating out the formulaic aspects from the true intentions or motivations can be challenging, as Stanislawski, Freeze, and Shainker have all argued. For other reasons, as Khodarkovsky explains, the study of conversion in the Russian Empire remained a hidden subject in the historiography:

In contrast to the abundant literature on conversion and missions of the Catholic and Protestant churches in the New World and elsewhere, it is remarkable how little has been written about religious conversion in Russia. The elusiveness of the subject, the paucity of sources, and the ideological preferences of Soviet historiography all conspired in making historians abandon the subject to the dilettantish exercises of nineteenth-century church writers, leaving it in relative obscurity in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴

In many of the Russian cases, we have official documents submitted to the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod and other bureaucratic institutions by witnesses commenting on the sincerity of the decision or other matters related to it. While many of these documents provided only scant details, on occasion they were rich in detail and

¹⁰³ Freeze, "When Chava Left Home," 155-165. Freeze examines in great detail the often used records of the archival materials from the Vilna Roman Catholic consistory and the Holy Synod records to examine such petitions from children, adults, and the family relations among Jews and converts following the apostasy.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Khodarkovsky, "'Not by Word Alone': Missionary Policies and Religious Conversion in Early Modern Russia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Apr. 1996), 267.

meaning. One of the richest of these documentary troves is the file associated with a German-Jewish rabbi Levison. Vasilli Abram Levison (1814?-1869), with whom Khvol'son's path crossed many times in the Ministry of Education and in their various bureaucratic and scholarly activities, has remarkable documentation of his conversion in 1839. The Levison files provide evidence of these types of petition that likely accompanied Khvol'son's own conversion years later. Friends and colleagues of Levison provided letters on his behalf and Levison also submitted a lengthy letter about his desires and career goals.

In a July 1839 letter from the Archpriest in Weimar (Stefan Sadinii) to the synodal Ober-prokurator N. A. Protasov (1798-1855) there is a striking commentary on Jewish conversion and the process by which one convinced the necessary authorities that one was sincere. The letter is translated here at length:

On your Lordship's question concerning Rabbi Abraham Levison who wants to accept the Christian faith of the Greek Orthodox confession (*Grekorossiiskogo ispovedanie*)—who is he and is he sincere in his desire—in my opinion of his moral quality, I respond accordingly:

I have been acquainted with Rabbi Levison for about two years. The purpose of my acquaintance with him was to more closely familiarize myself with the teachings of the Talmud and other Jewish religious books, and from the beginning of this acquaintanceship he revealed to me many absurd Talmudic prescriptions and the impossibility of fulfilling them, and then also revealed to me, that as a Jewish teacher, he teaches things that are against his own convictions—and that he certainly resolved to become a Christian. His reading of Christian theological books and listening to the Jewish lectures of Christian professors in Germany have prepared him in advance for this decision. Now, this begs the question: Why did he not turn to the Lutheran faith? Although he studied Christianity through Lutheran theology books and because of this his conversion to Lutheranism ought to be expected: but he's viewed the multitude of parties in the Lutheran Church—their coldness to confessors and the lack of positions for scholars even for those of the Lutheran creed—and so he backed away from her even though his original intention was to join. Reading the *Pisem o Bogosluzhenii Pravoslavnoi Grekorossiiskoi Tserkvi* of Murav'ev and the short catechism for junior deacons

of the Orthodox Church in German positioned him to turn to our church and maybe his appeal to me as much as anything contributed to the fact: In all the time of my acquaintance with him, the idea of becoming Christian and to be useful is his life, and because of this, I feel that his desire for conversion is sincere. With regard to his moral quality, he is in my observation an intelligent man, constant, sober, and as far as I know, honest. There is just one thing I will note: Since he studied Christianity mostly through the Lutheran theological books, it is not surprising that some of the rationalist ideas came into his head, so I advise he be mentored in the future as regards the Orthodox doctrine of Christianity, to pay attention to this weakness.¹⁰⁵

Of note here are several important elements that speak to the nature of the conversion process and the ways in which personal conviction was measured. Within the seeking of permission to convert and thus enter into Russian society, one needed to stake a personal claim as to why conversion was desired, but in cases where added benefit might be contributed to state programs those potential contributions needed to be systematically laid out as well. In the years around 1840, as suggested above, the aim of the state-led Jewish education reform program of Uvarov and Lilienthal was committed to making Jews useful for state service. In the archpriest's letter, his appeal to the superiority of the Eastern Church to the Protestant confessions would not have fallen on deaf ears. As well, the archpriest's warning that even one so well prepared for conversion as Levison, was still in need of continued supervision and mentoring to assure that any erroneous Protestant theology was replaced with "correct belief" is telling of the desire to protect the Russian church from western theological teaching. For a Jew to become Protestant was acceptable for entrance into Russia society, but even more advantageous for those seeking career advancement would be full conversion to Orthodoxy. Underlying this

¹⁰⁵ RGIA f. 797, op. 9, d. 25232, ll. 16-17. Delo Kantseliarii Ober-Prokurora Sviateishago Pravitel'stviushchago Sinoda, "O zhelanii evreev Levisona primet' pravoslavnuui veru."

effort was a belief that traditional Jewish religious rituals and practice were impractical in a modern nation-state and that Russia would only gradually dismantle the insularity of these communities.

The archpriest's letter of 17 July 1839 confirmed what Levison had written just a few days prior. In his own letter to Ober-prokurator Protasov, Levison laid out in no uncertain terms his potential contributions to the Russian Empire. Levison's letter possessed a scholarly tone, characteristic of his writing in which he laid out his reasoning behind the decision. "I intend to devote my life to the spread of the church among the Jews," he began. He then suggested four areas where his particular skills and talents might help accomplish this goal of converting Russia's Jews to the Eastern rite. Above all, he argued, who could deny the importance and direct lineage of the church from the "apostles and fathers of the Church" as the main source for church doctrine and practice. In claiming this, Levison established his desire to teach Jews this principle. Second, among those who historically helped attract the outsider or non-Orthodox (*inovertsy*) to the church was a trait "of tolerance, though not indifference." A third component used to show his possible contributions was his desire to see, "state education...go hand in hand with the church." And his fourth point, which is as blatant a statement of his intentions argued for his specific ability to interact with and influence Russia's large Jewish population.

The main purpose of my life is that among the Jews living in the Russian Empire, who are more immersed in their Talmud, Mysticism, and Pharisaic delusions, to help position them for the adoption of Christianity.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ RGIA f. 797, op. 9, d. 25232, l. 9.

Levison staked out a position that would have made him particularly useful to the reform program—but went further to show how he was unique and further outlined how he planned to accomplish his work. His intention was not to preach to those who do “not have any knowledge of Judaism” or only “belittles what the Jews think.” His program was different and he showed as much by appealing to the notion of “expert Jews” and his desire to not work with the lowest class of Jews, instead he would focus on the “the rabbis and Jewish scholars” and through scholarly means show that Judaism proved the “truthfulness of Christianity.” Levison also appealed to historical precedence—in the form of Moses Mendelssohn and the German case—to show that much good would come from those enlightened individuals who wanted to improve Jews. “Mendelssohn did so much in favor of Christianity...now thousands of Jews in Germany are turning to Christianity...so much more can be done by the pure teachings of Christ about God.”¹⁰⁷ The Levison model highlights the particular concerns about the German scholar entering into Russian society. It should be remembered that Levison was both petitioning for membership in the Russian Orthodox community through conversion, and also for access to the capital city as a semi-permanent resident with a passport and legal rights equal to those of other subjects.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, these were highly learned men who ambitiously sought a post in the university. Thus, Levison petitioned as a rabbi, but also as a “Doctor of Theology in Hebrew Law,” thereby showing his credentials as well as his

¹⁰⁷ RGIA, f. 797, op. 9, d. 25232, ll. 11-12.

¹⁰⁸ In both the Khvol'son and Levison documents there is reference to that secondary (though perhaps not less significant) condition that they also be permitted to live in St. Petersburg without further undergoing registration processes and applications other than would normally be required.

understanding not just of the books, but also the culture. His delineation between the common Jewish folk and the rabbis and scholars suggests that his perception was, like that of the imperial bureaucracy, largely focused on changing the elite members of society as a means of gradually reforming the whole of it. This was a particularly German Haskalah approach to Jewish reform that understood the importance of education that could then be disseminated to the lower classes.

Interpreting Khvol'son's Conversion

Most scholars have understood Khvol'son's abandonment of Judaism as a move toward economic and professional prosperity. In part, this interpretation stems from the probably apocryphal statement about his want of an academic job in St. Petersburg. In nearly every secondary work that mentions Khvol'son, the following story is employed as evidence that his decision to convert was economically motivated. To the question, "Tell us, Professor Khvol'son, were you baptized because of belief (*po ubezhdeniiu*) or because of coercion (*po prinuzhdeniiu*)?" he replied, "Yes, I was convinced it was better to be a professor in St. Petersburg than a *melamed* in Eyshishok (a small village near Vilna).¹⁰⁹ From this statement, scholars have concluded that Khvol'son abandoned

¹⁰⁹ Semen Reznik, "Krovavyi navet v rossii istoriko-dokumental'nye ocherki," *Vestnik*, vol. 24 (23 Nov. 1999), 1. Available online at <http://www.vestnik.com/issues/1999/1026/koi/resnik.htm> (accessed Feb. 10, 2013). Most of the summaries of Khvol'son's statement leave out the original question, Reznik provides the original question and provides a slightly different answer. He suggests that Khvol'son replied "Of course, out of belief. He was convinced that it was better to get the salary of a professor in St. Petersburg than starve in the Pale of Settlement." These words are quoted in many summaries of Khvol'son. While they are attributed to him, it remains unclear when or where he uttered the phrase. The most common version of the quote (the one included here) is from Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996; orig. New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1967), 335.

Judaism because he found opportunity to better his economic or social situation and obtain the longed for professorship. Such a reading of Khvol's son's conversion is shortsighted and does not fully account for, or recognize, his concerted efforts to protect Jews afterwards. However, when his conversion is seen within the broad context of his intellectual contributions to biblical scholarship and knowledge about Jews and Christians in interaction (as the subsequent chapters here aim to do), such a view is far too simplistic.

Conversion in modern Europe meant different things to various people; for some it was a process of spiritualization or embracing a personal understanding of God, while for others, the choice to change one's religious affiliation marked a conscious effort to improve economic or social status. Others felt compelled to convert due to social pressure or because of a belief that emancipation projects had failed to provide Jews with the rights of citizenship. In Russia, conversion provided one of the few viable avenues by which Jews improved their legal and economic situation. Many chose conversion to enable them to access economic opportunities and legal privileges that were often tied to the idea of Russianness (in the sense of *narodnost*)—an identity inextricably bound to Russian Orthodox confessionality. To be fair, there were opportunities for unconverted Jews to enter into the state's service through special exemptions for the sale of alcohol, and a small group of individuals became “fabulously wealthy” as a result of their involvement in the program.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Brian J. Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy*, 18-20. As Horowitz shows, for a small percentage of Jews who became the government's middlemen in the production and sale of alcohol, opportunities to become part of the state bureaucracy and live in St. Petersburg were tickets into Russian society and access to wealth, even without conversion. For others from the

In his examination of Russian-Jewish history under Nicholas I, Michael Stanislawski developed a typology of these “Jewish apostates”: true believers, poor and criminals, and those individuals who sought social, political or financial advancement.¹¹¹ The most prevalent among these three categories, according to Stanislawski, were those who chose apostasy in order to meet pressing financial concerns or desires. The smallest group was comprised of Jews who converted to Christianity out of a sincere desire and belief in the Christian message. Khvol’son left very few statements that aid the historian in interpreting his decision, but his expansive body of writing provides many clues about his religious worldview. By contextualizing the religious and humanitarian motivations that rested behind many of Khvol’son’s academic pursuits, alongside his refutation of the blood libel, one can see elements of the “true believer” more clearly than the the strands of exploitative conversion for which Khvol’son has become so well recognized by Jews and Russians.

At the same time, Khvol’son’s humanitarian contributions might also be viewed as constructing, or at least envisioning a radically innovative understanding of relations among the three major Abrahamic traditions. In order to do so, this project takes as its beginning point the idea that during the nineteenth-century religious belief and religious

lower classes with few economic resources the surest path to breaking the restrictions placed on Jews was conversion.

¹¹¹ Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I*, 143. See also, Stanislawski, “Jewish Apostasy in Russia: A Tentative Typology” in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed., Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 193-94.

affiliation were becoming less hereditary and more a matter of personal preference.¹¹² This line of thinking, a common value among nineteenth-century Haskalic writers and thinkers (perhaps due to the German origins of the movement), focused on the superiority of human reason, thought, and decisions in determining identities. Individual identities were no longer fixed by tradition, but rather became malleable and one possessed the ability to adjust as needed in society. For many Jews during the nineteenth century, identity was a blend of German and Jewish, French and Jewish, or Russian and Jewish. The creative blending of these various communities and value systems was one of the most important transformations of the nineteenth century.

Historians have misinterpreted Khvol'son's conversion in part because it is viewed alongside the familiar *knappers* (grabbers) stories that permeate the earlier historiography on Russian-Jewish relations and the forced conversion of young Jewish boys through military conscription.¹¹³ Such stories are compelling; they perpetuate the

¹¹² One of the best scholarly works examining this significant transformation of religious affiliation and opportunities for creating new religious identities is Laurie Manchester, *Holy Fathers: Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia*, Harriman Institute Series (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008). Manchester examines the *popovichi* (clergy sons) who were no longer tied to the clerical class and thus able to participate in a rapidly secularizing society. She argues against the idea that they were decidedly secular and in doing so, provides a useful framework for understanding late imperial Russia's process of secularization as one part of, and not opposed to, religious identities. A number of other works examine the broad spectrum of religious affiliation and belief, see for examples: Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Chris J. Chulos, *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861-1917* (DeKalb, IL.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

¹¹³ The "knappers" were Jews who assisted the local Jewish leaders and Russian military leaders in rounding up the young boys selected for service in the army.

story told by many Jewish families of forced conversions and the need to flee persecution based on anti-Jewish policies and pogroms in the 1880s. Traditional historical accounts have overemphasized the “lachrymose” interpretation of Jewish – Christian relations in the Pale.¹¹⁴ Earlier histories, bent on proving the hostility of Russians to Jews, failed to highlight the close proximity of Jews to Christians in the Pale. This proximity brought not only occasional antagonism, but also provided frequent contexts for friendships and relationships between Jews and Christians. In the nineteenth century, the tsarist effort to reorder the place of Jews in the empire often failed to restrict the great fluidity between the two communities in their everyday experience. In the markets and in the streets, Jews and Christians lived and experienced life together rather than in opposition to one another.¹¹⁵ Recent work overturns many of these older versions of the story, favoring instead a more balanced understanding of the real impact of Russian policy and

¹¹⁴ The “Lachrymose School of history” which Salo Baron labeled those who focus on the persecutions endured by Jews in the Russian Empire. The article where Baron originally wrote about this “school” is “Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?” *Menorah Journal* 14 (June 1928): 515-26.

¹¹⁵ I thank Dovid Katz and the Lithuanian Jewish community members who shared their experiences with me during a fruitful research trip to Vilnius, Lithuania during the summer 2009. Their memories of their childhoods before the Second World War helped me think about the interactions between Jews and Christians in the villages and towns of their youth. While there were profound differences between the Pale in 1840 and 1920, the region needs to be understood as an ethnic and religious shatter zone where identities frequently blended cultural and religious components in fluid ways that do not always reflect traditional scholarly interpretation. Ger Duijzings’s work on the Balkans provides a context for my thinking of this region as a territory of mixed populations that fostered mobility and freedom in the construction of identity. See, Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1-32. Also see David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994) for a description of “modernity” and popular religion in Germany. Blackbourn’s challenge to the idea of modernity as synonymous with progress and technological advancement (p. 374) helps show how state policy and lived religious experience did not easily align in cohesive and cooperative ways during the nineteenth century.

conscription into the military on Jewish conversions.¹¹⁶ More recent efforts by scholars have altered the story of Jewish conscripts by showing that the numbers of forced conversions were most likely fewer than previously believed. Khvol'son's story supports, rather than undermines, the general theses of Petrovsky-Shtern and Litvak. Historians have struggled to understand conversion in the Russian Empire because access to specific resources (e.g., education and occupations) was so tightly connected to one's religious identity. Thus, the Russian experience with conversions seems to stand in stark opposition to the emphasis placed on individualism and personal experience in European and American Protestantism in the nineteenth century. Ellie Shinker suggested that historians have traditionally understood European religious conversion through the Protestant experience. Thus, decisions to convert are viewed "as a private commitment,

¹¹⁶ Olga Litvak, *Conscription and the Search for Modern Russian Jewry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Petrovsky-Shtern, *Evrei i russkoi armii, 1827-1914* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003). Litvak attempts to examine the "normative" Jewish history of conversion in the empire (perpetuated by a large body of Jewish literature in the nineteenth century), with the "official" Russian version of that same history. In doing so, Litvak suggests that there was a new category for "Russian Jewry" that was neither completely loyal to their Jewish heritage nor accepted as fully Russian. Litvak argues that the practice of mandating Jewish boys enlist in the army for twenty-five years did not fully achieve the original aim. Through her analysis of novels and short stories Litvak shows that the practice created ambivalent subjects rather than fully committed, practicing Orthodox believers. Likewise, Petrovsky-Shtern suggests that the historical record emphasizes a more liberal environment within the army where Jews were, surprisingly, able to mix both worlds. Jewish conscripts in many of the cases highlighted by Petrovsky-Shtern, were able to hold onto their Jewish dietary, customary, and religious rights even as they were, in nearly every other respect, like their Russian counterparts. Michael Stanislawski argues that, according to the most complete records, up to 30,000 Jews converted to Christianity during the reign of Nicholas I (1825-55). Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, 141. Stanislawski bases his evidence on the figures collected by Shaul Ginzburg from Synodal archives. The figures are collected in Ginzburg's materials collected in the Rivkind Archive, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, file 6, no. 6. While this figure of 30,000 includes forced conversions of Jewish cantonists, at least 5,000 converts chose to convert, according to Stanislawski, 213. Eugene Avrutin estimates that approximately 20,000 cantonists were converted during the nineteenth century. See Avrutin, "Returning to Judaism after the 1905 Law on Religious Freedom in Tsarist Russia" *Slavic Review* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 95.

an affair of the heart.”¹¹⁷ Conversion in Russia was a problem in the nineteenth century because it took place within a unique political and confessional environment centered on Russian Orthodoxy.

The transition from Jew to Russian Orthodox was never an easy one because those who converted often found artificial boundaries between the two communities. Khvol’son’s conversion remains, as it was in the nineteenth century, difficult to interpret because, as an oft-mentioned trope suggests, he was not “kosher” and yet he was one of, if not the most, strident Christian defender of Jews in the Russian Empire. Khvol’son’s story, even today, is considered an explicit model of the Jewish apostate who, out of nothing other than conviction for a better life, abandoned his Judaism. In this sense, Khvol’son’s conversion is archetypal. Countless versions of the story exist, but at its most basic level, the story begins when someone asked the *Netziv*, Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (1817-1893) who strongly opposed teaching secular subjects in his yeshiva (in Volozhin):

‘How are we to relate to such a person, who did so much good for the Jewish people, and yet was guilty of the ultimate treason? Do we see anything positive in him?’

To this he replied with a story of a pious Jew who was commanded to eat pork to cure his otherwise incurable illness. After a short period of refusing to follow this prescription, the local rabbi encouraged the sick Jew to do as was told by the doctor. Before doing so, the

¹¹⁷ Shinker, “Imperial Hybrids,” 10. Conversion within the Russian empire was problematic because it simply does not fit the western model of Jewish conversion that often denoted a full-fledged abandonment of one’s previous religious community. Shinker highlights the ongoing, persistent nature of Jewish apostates’ relations with their family members, Jewish communities, and their activities in missionization (in the absence of any concerted state or church effort) to their former co-religionists.

patient requested that the pig be properly slaughtered and that every procedure be followed as instructed for other animals. When, during the slaughtering, a lesion was found on the lung of the pig, some serious intellectual and legal work needed to be done to ensure that the pork was safe. When the local rabbi had made up his mind, he declared:

‘If the lungs had come from a cow, I could find an argument to call it kosher. But how do you expect me to pronounce the word ‘kosher’ on a pig?’
After relating such a story, the Netziv, replied with a question of his own: ‘How then do you expect me to use the word kosher in regard to Chwolson.’¹¹⁸

And so the question that begs further, serious reflection, to which I return at the end of this project, is how can we understand such a person? While this project is less about the “rehabilitation” of Khvol’son and more concerned with interpreting his scholarly work and his defense of Jews within their proper context, they can only be understood in light of his personal identity. In doing so, this analysis of Khvol’son and his work is an answer to Shalomit Magnus’s approach to Jewish conversion. Magnus articulated a category of Jewish apostates, which she refers to as “good bad Jews.”¹¹⁹ This class of Jews was unique because they chose conversion out of economic, legal, or social need, but

¹¹⁸ I have quoted directly from the most recent version of this somewhat humorous anecdote: Yitzchok Adlerstein, “The Israeli Health Administration and the Rehabilitation of Daniil Chwolson,” *Cross-Currents* (8 May 2009), available at: <http://www.cross-currents.com/archives/2009/05/08/the-israeli-health-ministry-and-the-rehabilitation-of-daniel-chwolson/#ixzz2URpoXjn0> (accessed 12 January 2013). The story supposedly originated when a group of Jews wanted to provide some kind of award or recognition to Khvol’son for his efforts on behalf of Jews. The countless versions appear in many different locations and the details change but the story generally stays the same.

¹¹⁹ Shalomit S. Magnus, “Good Bad Jews: Converts, Conversion, and Boundary Redrawing in Modern Russian Jewry, Notes Toward a New Category,” in Susan A. Glenn and Naomi B. Sokoloff, *Boundaries of Jewish Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 132-160.

defended and worked for the betterment of Jews after they abandoned Judaism. In her study of Jewish apostasy, Magnus focused on Khvol'son, among others, but did so from the perspective of how other Jews thought about Khvol'son and his activities. From the outset, Magnus called for research into the “motivations, voices, and experience” of these converts, and this study provides an effort in that direction.¹²⁰

The almost unanimous conclusion about his conversion was that he did so for strictly professional purposes to secure a lucrative post at St. Petersburg University. Such a view, I argue, is too shallow and does not cast the net wide enough to account for the nuanced understanding that Khvol'son held of Judaism and Christianity, as well as his own identity. For Khvol'son, an aspiring scholar without an official professorial post between 1850 and 1854, conversion surely promised a more stable economic future for himself and his family.¹²¹ This study of Khvol'son—placed in the context of his work and the intellectual and public circles that he worked in—seeks to broaden current understanding of converts and their liminal position between religious communities. Shinker has used the term “imperial hybrids” to describe Jewish converts who adopted a new identity that was neither fully Jewish nor entirely Russian.¹²² Rather than conversion being a process by which boundaries between Jew and Christian were drawn, it served as a means for blurring lines of community and identity. In this regard, Khvol'son was

¹²⁰ Ibid., 133.

¹²¹ A number of individuals in Russia today have argued that it was his need for economic security and his desire to provide opportunities for his children that pushed Khvol'son toward conversion. It is a compelling argument but lacks some of the required depth to fully explain his decision.

¹²² Shinker, “Imperial Hybrids.”

among the most prominent. While not discounting the state's attempts to convert Jews, the larger context of conversion will explore the varieties of experience by those who left Judaism and Jewish communal life for Russian Orthodoxy.¹²³ Through the examination of Khvol'son, as a convert and defender of Jews, the nebulous space between communities is opened to reveal that religious conversion in nineteenth-century Russia was a contested process that attracted the attention of ruling elites, religious leaders, and society more generally.

Khvol'son benefited from the fact that he came of age and achieved much of his scholarly acumen during a period when the Russian government took seriously efforts toward reform and modernization, only to stringently reject similar efforts in the 1880s and 1890s. Khvol'son adapted himself into, and in turn was aided by well-positioned officials, the model Jewish subject who successfully assimilated into Russian society and contributed to the aims of the empire. As the next chapter shows, within two years of his arrival in St. Petersburg, Khvol'son found himself in the midst of a tense situation between Jews and Christians that forever changed the path of his life. Unlike so many other converts, Khvol'son chose to defend his former co-religionists rather than turn away or even persecute them in the face of ritual murder charges.

¹²³ This study employs the methodological approach of Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Orsi offers a unique approach to the study of religious experience by suggesting that religion must be studied within its larger contextual, social, and political milieu while not discounting the relevance of personal lived experience.



Figure 1. Young Daniil Khvol'son (ca. 1855). SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 58, no. 11.



Figure 2. Feofania Iakovlevna (Cohn) Khvol'son - Oil painting (date unknown). SPFA
RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 60.



Figure 3. Orest Daniilovich Khvol'son and family with D. A Khvol'son (date unknown).
SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 59, no. 3.



Figure 4. Anatolii Daniilovich Khvol'son, jurist (date unknown). SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 59, no. 2.

CHAPTER 2

"BUT IN THIS MATTER THEY REMAIN IN THEIR JEWISH CONVICTIONS": THE SARATOV AFFAIR, 1852-1860

On 3 December 1852, Feofan Sherstobitov, a ten-year-old boy from Saratov, did not arrive home from school. Young Sherstobitov lived in the city with his parents. His father, Efim Grigor'ev Sherstobitov, was a local shopkeeper. His parents, desperate to find their son, began searching the neighborhood and placed announcements in prominent locations around the city. His mother described her son as having blond hair, grayish eyes, and a fair complexion. On the day he disappeared, Sherstobitov was dressed in a large lambskin coat, a Crimean winter hat, nankeen trousers, and winter boots.¹ It was not until 8 December that Efim Sherstobitov filed a report with the local police and insisted that they assist in finding her young son. According to city police reports, the city was searched from one end of the city to the other.² There was no sight of the young boy and there was very little, if any available evidence as to his whereabouts. Although the informal search by family and friends surely lasted for several weeks or more, the initial police investigation only lasted for several days while they searched the perimeter of the city.

¹ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 1.

² RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 1.

For whatever reasons the initial investigation into Sherstobitov's disappearance may have ceased—lack of police interest, inadequate evidence—the search would begin anew at the end of January. It was then that the city of Saratov and its surrounding villages heard of another child, a peasant boy close in age to Sherstobitov, who also disappeared in broad daylight in Saratov. On 27 January 1853, Mikhail Maslov disappeared after playing in the street with his close friend, Stepan Kanin. According to Kanin's story, the two boys were playing and running in the streets when they were approached by a dark-complected, bearded man with dark hair. The man asked the boys if they wanted to earn some money by helping him carry some slate slabs (*aspidnyia doski*) to the banks of the Volga River. Excited by the possibility of earning money, the two boys readily agreed to help the man and followed him away. After a short while, Stepan Kanin, fearing that he might get into trouble if his parents found out, headed home to warm himself from the winter cold. Maslov, however, continued on with the man in hopes of earning his promised wages.

Maslov, whose family hailed from Kerenskaia, in neighboring Penza province, never returned home and his parents, worried that he was late, immediately began searching around town for their boy. Their inquiries to neighbors and others on the street yielded little, if any, reliable information about his whereabouts. Unlike Sherstobitov's disappearance, however, Maslov's parents initiated the investigation immediately. The police were notified and local officers were told to exercise vigilance in their search for the boy. Perhaps the disappearance of a second boy heightened the local population's concern over the matter, but the search carried on at length for several weeks and

included communication with provincial officials about the matter. Gradually, the local police began thinking about possible connections between Maslov and Shertobitov's disappearance.

On 29 January, police were notified by people from the village Liubavtsova (located about 50 versts from Saratov) that one of their villagers, Ivan Nikolaev Moskvín, traveled to Saratov on or about 10 December 1852 and remained there until about the 20th of December. Moskvín was also in the city on 26 January 1853, "to collect money from some individual" in the city.³ According to neighbors' reports, Moskvín matched the description given to police by Kanin. Moskvín was rounded up by police and Stepan Kanin was asked to look at Moskvín to see if he recognized the man in front of him. Kanin reported to police that Moskvín was not the man that approached him in the streets. According to Kanin's initial report, the boys separated before lunch, near the tavern "Moscow," while the church bells were ringing. Authorities determined that Moskvín was not involved in the case because he did not arrive in Saratov until sometime after six o'clock that evening, and subsequently released him to return home.

In a letter from the Saratov Provincial Vice-Governor to the local authorities, the governor insisted on searching "with all thoroughness in finding the young boy, and who this reported kidnapper was that led the two young boys (Maslov and Kanin) away from their homes."⁴ At the request of the Governor's office in Saratov, the chief of police

³ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 3.

⁴ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 3. This memorandum is dated 29 January 1853.

Vestman submitted a report on 3 February 1853 about the progress of the investigation. By that point, the missing boys became part of the same investigation, and the detailed report listed the clues that police had collected up to the point. Although police had the initial descriptions of the boys' appearance as well as the information provided to them by Kanin, a report dated 4 March 1843 (written by Vestman) to provincial authorities indicated that the investigation had reached a standstill. In the report he argued that the investigation had worn out his police force and they were unable to make any substantial progress during the past month.⁵ They had investigated all possible leads in the case, each one leading to another dead end.

Almost immediately after Vestman submitted his report calling off the search for the missing boy, the case shifted from kidnapping to murder. Around mid-day on 4 March, Volokhov, a Saratov police officer, reported that the body of a young boy was spotted under the stern side of a boat on the river. The body, it was discovered, was that of Mikhail Maslov. The body was discovered face up, with the head pointed downstream. The boy's head and arms, exposed to the harsh winter cold were covered in blood. The head of the boy was partially severed on the right side, his mouth was opened, both ears were filled with snow and ice, and eyes closed.⁶ The boy was covered with a blanket and dressed in a very old coat with a fine lining inside and with torn sleeves. Maslov was still

⁵ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 3.

⁶ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, ot. 1, ch. 1, l. 6. Report of Private Vand'ishev, the local officer who first saw and reported on the condition of the body.

wearing the boots he was wearing when he left home. The clothes he was last seen wearing were nowhere to be found.

The police requested the local medical inspector immediately begin a complete anatomical autopsy, though, at the doctor's request, this could not happen until 7 March due to the fact that the body was frozen and would take several days for the tissues to defrost enough to be dissected. The doctor's report is both horrific and finely focused in detail and method. The exactitude of the doctor's evaluation reveals the importance of science and medicine in understanding the case. The doctor outlined the results of his examination and showed how there were two major factors that contributed to Maslov's death: strangulation and a sharp, crushing blow to the head.⁷ The young boy's temporal bones (located on the lower sides of the skull near the ears) were cracked, and his occipital protuberance (back of the skull) was shattered. According to the doctor, the blow that struck the back of the skull did so with such force that the boy sustained serious injury to the brain and could not have survived more than a few minutes after the strike. At some point after his skull was crushed, but while he was still alive, the boy was strangled using a sash that was found on the ice with his body. Additionally, the examiner noted that he was circumcised in a crude and inexact manner.

If the news of two boys disappearing from the area failed to spark public interest and concern, the discovery of one of their mangled bodies most assuredly drew the attention of the local population toward the unfolding events. Local police received a number of letters from members of the community indicating their concern over the

⁷ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 8-11.

boys' disappearances and the startling discovery of Maslov's body.⁸ That local police failed to quickly apprehend a guilty party or individual only exacerbated those concerns. Death of young children and grisly murder more so, can be paralyzing to parents who hesitate to send children out of the home, to school, or even to join friends in the streets. At the same time, fear and concern often turn away from the search for safety of children, if allowed to persist over even narrow spans of time, only to morph into critique of government officials and police. Parental concerns are evident in the escalation and broadening of government officials' involvement in the investigation. Shortly after the investigation began anew, regional government officials pressured local police authorities to send relevant information to their superiors, especially when new leads arose. Even before provincial authorities pushed investigators to press forward unceasingly, and not rest until the whereabouts of the boys was determined, the local community was on high alert for details about the case. After finding the body of one boy, the search for the second shifted from rescue to recovery. Local governments that failed to protect their young, even in distant provinces away from the traditional politico-cultural centers of St. Petersburg and Moscow faced the potential loss of that consistently tenuous relationship in Russia between local populations and imperial authorities. Thus, the brutality of Maslov's murder evaporated hope that Sherstobitov might be found unharmed—the government had to respond in a way that would reassert its role as a protector of peace, people, and order.

⁸ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 31.

The search for Maslov's perpetrators continued through March and into April. As the questioning broadened to include a wide array of potential suspects, nearly a month and a half after the discovery of Maslov's body police stumbled upon yet another gruesome scene—the body of Feofan Sherstobitov who disappeared from Saratov on 3 December 1852. On April 12, the body was discovered behind a factory near the river. The body showed evidence of severe dehydration. Much of the tissue had deteriorated and the corpse lay blackened by the elements.

Soon after the boys were discovered, the local population began hearing and passing along rumors that the murders were the sinister acts of local Jews who, as legend had it, needed to murder Christian children for ritual purposes. As soon as the focus turned to Jews the investigative team pushed all of their efforts in that direction. When young Maslov's crude circumcision was discovered, investigators assumed this was connected to some Jewish ordinance. Local police began to consider the possibility that Jews were somehow tied into these events. Rumors that Jews murdered these boys in order to fulfill secret religious ordinances gained widespread attention. In order to prove that Jews were responsible, local authorities brought together a Jewish boy and a Tatar boy from the local population, to evaluate the various methods of performing the operation, and identifying the methods specific to each procedure. The final Senate report reveals that the examination of a Tatar boy was not necessarily out of concern that local Tatars may have committed the crimes, but rather to reinforce Jewish guilt by ruling out all other parties. The local medical doctors who performed the circumcision for each boy were brought in to ask about the procedure. Following this examination, the parents of

Mikhail Maslov were asked whether the peasant boy had undergone circumcision to fulfill some kind of religious rite. He had not.

The corpses revealed that the boys' bodies were inflicted with numerous wounds, but not until after they were circumcised in a very crude manner. Local police and medical experts were immediately assigned to the investigation. Shortly after the discovery of the bodies, the case attracted the attention of the tsarist government in St. Petersburg. Almost immediately, both local and state officials began circulating information that indicated the cases were being investigated as sadistic, cult-like ritual murders and Jews were the primary suspects. At the time of the murders, there were several dozen Jews in the city.⁹ In familiar fashion to earlier ritual murder cases, the collective body of Jews became the scapegoat for answering the atrocities. Most Saratov Jews were enlistees in the army who were stationed there, but a handful of them were permanent residents in the region. The ensuing investigations into the murders led to what later became known as the Saratov Affair (1852-1860).

The issue of ritual murder became in the nineteenth-century context, a battlefield over which national interests were debated, identities forged, and loyalties challenged. This chapter examines one such incident, the Saratov Affair, where a small group of Jews were linked to a mysterious set of murders, accused not only of committing the murders, but also of sadistically carrying out the act for ritual purposes. Although the immediate

⁹ Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, from the earliest times until the present day*, vol. 3, trans. Israel Friedlaender (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916), 150-53. Stationed in Saratov in December and January were roughly forty soldiers of Jewish descent, as well several Jewish artisans and merchants.

events examined here occurred in or near Saratov, a small city located on the Volga River, they soon garnered the attention of government officials, intellectuals, and citizens in St. Petersburg and Moscow, particularly those within the Ministry of Affairs.

The Saratov Affair, as it was known from the earliest days of the investigation, receives scant coverage among scholars today. Due to strict censorship of the Russian press and the distance of the city from the capital the case did not appear in the newspapers, even those in Saratov provided only limited mention. The surviving documentary evidence for a study of the case is, for the most part, contained in the Ministry of Internal Affairs collection of statements, witness testimonies, and reports written by experts on both sides of the issue. Contained within the Ministry of Internal Affairs documents are over 1200 pages of reports, reports on reports, summaries of letters, and official bureaucratic communication from Saratov to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Though the case later attracted the attention of the prolific historian of Russia's Jews, Iulii Gessen among others, it has remained largely understudied. Based on the coverage afforded the case in Russian-Jewish historiography, it serves only as a marginal event that occurred on the Volga frontier, a great distance from the capital, with little impact on the empire generally. However, viewed from within the historiography of Russian exposure to the ritual murder accusation, it must be seen as a major turning point.

The first suspect in the case was a local peasant named Lokotkov, who was arrested on 10 March 1853. Lokotkov remained a key suspect through the 1850s. The first arrest of a Jew in Saratov in connection with the murder was a military private,

Mikhel Shlifferman. Even before the body of the young Sherstobitov was discovered, the investigation moved forward at a steady, though often wandering pace. On 31 March 1853 Saratov police arrested Shlifferman and continued a long series of questioning about the young boy and his death. Weeks earlier, on 10 March, Shlifferman's home was searched by local investigators, but found nothing that could incriminate him in the murder. A number of articles of clothing were looked over and six letters written "*na evreiskom iazyke*" (in Yiddish) were discovered, although a translation of the letters yielded no useful evidence. Shlifferman was a barber in the army and also occasionally performed the circumcisions of young Jewish boys when asked to do so. During an interrogation on March 11, he claimed that he did not know anything about the boys, including their whereabouts, and that he did not perform the circumcision on the young Maslov. When asked for details about the process of circumcision, including the possibility of performing it on older boys (ten or eleven years old), he simply claimed that it could be done but would be much more difficult and painful. Shlifferman further explained that because he was a barber in the army, he had responsibilities that usually kept him in close contact with his superiors. When the young boy Stepan Kanin was asked if Shlifferman was the one who had "enticed" him, he said that the man looked similar, but that his voice was different; Shlifferman had a slight lisp and his Russian was not as clean as the perpetrator's speech.¹⁰

Other arrests of Jews and Christians soon followed Shlifferman's apprehension. In May of the same year, Private Anton Bogdanov (Roman Catholic) was arrested and

¹⁰ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 12.

interrogated in connection with the case, as were Private Fedor Iurlov (Orthodox), Private Itzka Berlinskii (Jewish), Private Ezdra Zaidman (Jewish), city resident Iankel Iushkevicher (Jewish), and Mar'ia Ivanovna (state peasant). One more arrest (a peasant named Akirlina) occurred in September 1853. All told, thirteen major arrests were made in connection with the Saratov case over a three-year period. The timeline of the arrests helps explain as well the shift from one isolated individual to the Jewish community, or at least, a group of Jews believed to have connections to the case. By mid-May, local authorities made the connection between the two boys, the crude circumcisions performed on them, and the legacy of Jewish ritual murder charges. The evidence against the Jews arrested came from Private Bogdanov, who was disreputable and immediately began pointing the investigation toward Saratov Jews.

After Shlifferman's arrest, police built a circle of suspects who might have assisted in the circumcision of the young boys and, ultimately, in their deaths. On 13 May, Iankel Iushkevicher, a Jewish resident in the city for more than twenty-five years, was arrested after Bogdanov presented a story that brought him directly into the affair. Iushkevicher, a local furrier and father of the one the city's most prominent corset makers who serviced many of the wealthy elite in the region, was accused of coordinating the entire process, from kidnapping, to religious ceremonies, and ultimately it was he who local police believed killed the young boys. The day before, on 12 May, Iushkevicher's son, Fedor Iurlov was arrested and interrogated. Iurlov, formerly Iushkevicher, changed his name when he converted to Russian Orthodoxy, but maintained close relations with his father's family. Iurlov was a private in the Saratov battalion, and therefore was

frequently able to visit his father's home. According to another soldier, Ivan Ushakov, Bogdanov and he were acquaintances of Iurlov and in December 1852 he visited the Iushkevicher home. In his testimony, Ushakov noted that the family spoke Yiddish and therefore he did not understand anything they said to each other.

Iushkevicher was fifty-four years old at the time of his arrest and appears to have been a familiar face to many Saratov residents. His daughter, Minareizy Guglinoi, offered frequent testimonies in her father's defense and each one suggested that her father never housed any young boys at their home and that he most certainly did not perform any circumcisions in their home.¹¹ Bogdanov and other witness claimed that Saratov Jews planned to sell (or simply send) the blood of the Christian child to Jews in other provinces of the empire, and most often the cited Mogilev province as the intended destination. This story gained prominence because Bogdanov and others claimed that Iankel Iushkevicher was from the Mogiliev region, one of the most heavily Jewish provinces in the western borderlands, and had family ties there. Iankel's father, Faibish Leib Iushkevicher, died in 1819 and never lived in the interior provinces. Those who supported Iushkevicher's denial of the association with Jews seeking Christian blood in Mogilev went so far as to have officials in Mogilev submit an affidavit indicating that his father had died in 1819 and that there were no additional relations in the region to Iushkevicher.¹²

¹¹ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 1, l. 58-58; 78; 155; ch. 2, l. 339; 346; ch. 3, l. 667.

¹² RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, od. 1, ch. 4, l. 822-823. This report was requested by Giers, the Ministry of Internal Affairs official who replaced Durnovo on the case.

In the first weeks of the investigation after the discovery of the bodies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs sent one of its own, N. S. Durnovo, to carry out the investigation. Durnovo dutifully carried out the investigation, eliciting from locals all manner of outlandish accusations and testimonies about the case and more generally about Jews and their penchant for Christian blood. Durnovo's administration of the investigation led him to conclude that Jews were the perpetrators and that they acted out of religious conviction.

1844 Report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

An earlier 1844 Ministry of Internal Affairs investigation into Jewish ritual murder heavily influenced Durnovo's perspective on the killings.¹³ The 1844 report, possibly written in large part by the well-respected conservative scholar Vladimir Dal' (1801-1872), was published internally for the Ministry and circulated only to a small group of individuals. The report remains today a contentious subset of blood libel historiography for a number of reasons, including the question of authorship and the prolonged dependence upon it by later officials who considered it an authoritative text.

¹³ RGIA, f. 1282, op. 2 delo 2138 ch. 1 (4 March – 9 September 1844), *Kantselia ministra vnutrennykh del* "delo ob obvinenii evreev v ritual'nykh ubiistvakh"; f. 1282, op. 2, delo, 2139, ch. 2 (4 March – 9 September 1844) "delo ob obvinenii evreev v ritual'nykh ubiistvakh". These contain reports for the MVD statement on the Jewish ritual murder from 1844. The files in this collection reveal a single report with many emendations – these are clearly the work of someone other than the author. Aleksandr Panchenko has done extensive work on this *delo* from RGIA. For more see his recent article, "Vladimir Dal' i krovavyi navet," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 111 (June 2011): 288-315. Panchenko shows how direct these lines of communication were between leading Ministry officials and their subordinates responsible for collecting and reporting on information about ritual murder, kidnapping, and other Jewish crimes. A second set of archival documents related to the Velizh case and the 1844 report are in RGIA, f. 821, op. 8, d. 296.

One of the reasons that the 1844 report became an “instant bibliographical rarity” was because it was limited in publication and was hardly systematic or comprehensive, tending more toward a “scissors and paste job” than anything else.¹⁴ The work is truly a collection of curiosities rather than any kind of coherent report. Within the Ministry of Internal Affairs files in the report are a collection of letters between Ministry officials and others, and summaries of pages from a book *Obriady zhidovskie* (Ordinances of the Jews), reportedly published in St. Petersburg in 1787, with details of Jews and their need for Christian blood.¹⁵ Included as well are two striking images. The first is a woodcut of a young Christian boy being crucified on a cross by three Jews. The first Jew is tying the boy’s outstretched arms to the cross, while a second puts nails through the palms, and a third is working on the boy’s feet. The second image depicts a deceased boy on a table (possibly in a coffin) with stab marks all over his body – thus hinting at the possibility of bloodletting.¹⁶ Also tacked onto the end of the report is a handwritten selection of verses from Numbers 23 and a ruling attributed to the Polish King Casimer III about Jews and their use of blood in 1264 and 1334.¹⁷ Furthermore, the 1844 report provided a major

¹⁴ John D. Klier, *Imperial Russia’s Jewish Question, 1855-1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 416.

¹⁵ RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, ch. 2, ll. 1 ob., 2. The writer of the summaries included five reasons why Jews needed Christian blood, including the Purim celebration, and also rabbinical blessings at weddings and funerals.

¹⁶ RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, ch. 2, ll. 47-48.

¹⁷ For the reference to the biblical book Numbers, see RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, ch. 2, l. 163. The Casimer III reference is interesting because it is a two column, single page notation that has the Latin verse on one side with a Russian translation in the second column. Here the opinion is made quite clear that *all* Jews are required to use Christian blood because it is decreed

contribution to Russian anti-Semitic literature and was used at two critical moments in later Russian history in connection with ritual murder charges.

The authorship of the 1844 report on Jewish ritual murder needs to be considered in light of other such reports produced during the same year and within the same ministerial context. Between 1841 and 1852, the Ministry of Interior Affairs was under the direction of Lev Alekseevich Perovskii, who was a technocrat with deep connections to Russian scholars in the capital. Perovskii understood and placed faith in scientific inquiry and analysis, and sought out leading scholars and other professional opinions to assist him in his work within the MVD.

In 1844, Perovskii sought out scholars and bureaucratic *chinovniki* who might assist him in better understanding the heretical movements within the empire, including Jews, but also breakaway Orthodox groups including the *skoptsy* (the self-castrated). Laura Engelstein's historical reconstruction of *skoptsy* culture and religious worldview sheds light on the 1844 report related to Jewish ritual murder.¹⁸ As Engelstein shows, 1844 and 1845 were critical years for the MVD in systematizing available knowledge on the various religious sects within its jurisdiction. Under Perovskii's supervision a number of "secret commissions" were created to catalog the known information about aberrant religious sects. The commission created to investigate the *skoptsy* (among other heretical

in their law (*upotrebliaut' chelovecheskuiu krov', potomu chto vse zhidy, po predpisanno (ikh') zakona...*), see RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, ch. 2, l. 162.

¹⁸ Laura Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom: A Russian Folktale* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 56-59. I rely on Engelstein's thorough analysis of the 1844 report on the *skoptsy*.

groups) published a short, limited-print run, report intended for the “instruction of administrative colleagues.”¹⁹ Although the *skoptsy* report was later published with attribution to another MVD bureaucrat, Nikolai Nadezhdin (1804-1856), the major intellectual force behind the 1844 version was Vladimir Dal’.²⁰ A noted folklorist and lexicographer, Dal’ retains iconic status among Russian scholars for his magisterial *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivago velikorusskogo iazyka*, a four-volume Russian dictionary still widely sold and used in Russia today.²¹ Engelstein suggests that although he was more than qualified to author the internal report in 1844, Nicholas I could not accept the work because of Dal’'s Lutheranism, and therefore his work was attributed to Nadezhdin with minor additions and commentary.²² As the Dal’ work on the *skoptsy* community shows, within the ministerial system, one’s religious identification mattered to the ministers, and above all, to the emperor himself. Within Nicholas I’s Russia, when non-Orthodox individuals reached certain levels within the bureaucracy, their religious “otherness” prevented full incorporation into the system. Thus, regardless of one’s intellectual

¹⁹ Ibid., 56.

²⁰ For more on Nadezhdin and his involvement in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (he edited the Ministry’s journal), and his connection to Dal’ and others, see Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 110-115.

²¹ Vladimir Dal’, *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivago velikorusskogo iazyka* (Moscow: 1863-1866).

²² Engelstein, *Castration and the Heavenly Kingdom*, 57-58. Dal’ was a lifelong Lutheran, though he finally converted to Orthodoxy just before his death. Engelstein suggests that Dal’ was able to reconcile his Lutheran faith with Russian Orthodoxy as a pillar of the empire and often proclaimed the benefits of Orthodoxy.

prowess, non-conformity or failure to adopt Russian Orthodoxy prevented full incorporation into the Russian bureaucracy.

The archival record leading up to the official report identifies the motivations and sources for creating such a report. Between 4 March and 31 May 1844, Minister Perovskii persistently sought out sources and evidence of Jewish murder, kidnapped children, and other devious acts that corroborated his sense of Jews' criminal acts. It is somewhat unclear how Perovskii received his mandate for such a study, but he claimed it was the result of meeting with other government ministers. In a series of letters to other ministers and police officials, Perovskii asked repeatedly for case files from police reports regarding specific events involving criminal acts by Jews. On 4 March, Perovskii sent (through his secretary Golovin) a request to Matvei Mikhailovich Karniolin-Pinskii, then Procurator of the Fifth Department of the State Senate, to supply copies of Senate reports. He specifically asked for those related to "charges against Jews with regard to the murder of Christian children for their blood," as well as those related to the Velizh Jews (compiled in 1832).²³ Karniolin-Pinskii responded by including two reports, the first related to a Jew accused of killing a twelve-year-old girl, the second was in connection with the Velizh case from the 1820s and 1830s.²⁴ Perovskii sent similar requests to St. Petersburg Governor-General of the Military, A. A. Kavelin (19 March 1844), in which

²³ RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 50, "Kopiiia otnosheniia 5 departamenta Senata M. M. Karniolinu-Pinskomu ot 4 marta 1844 g."

²⁴ RGIA, f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 51, "Otnoshenie ober-prokurora 1-ogo otdeleniia 5-ogo departamenta Senata M. M. Karniolina-Pinskogo ministru vnutrennykh del L. A. Perovskomu ot 8 marta 1844 g." The response by Karniolin-Pinskii also requested that the reports be returned when no longer needed so they could be stored in the Senate archive.

he made specific mention of events between 1819 and 1824 involving a kidnapping from the *Sennoi* square (haymarket) near the Jewish synagogue and the disappearance of a young Christian child from a local bathhouse.²⁵ In his letter to Kavelin, Perovskii stressed the urgency of obtaining the records of these two cases, and asked Kavelin to “find them as soon as possible” and forward them onto Perovskii.²⁶ In another letter (17 April) to the Deputy Procurator fist division of the Fifth department of the Senate, Vasilii Mikhailovich Bychkov, Perovskii requested records pertaining to Jews accused of cutting

²⁵ This point is critical for reasons explained below (see “Perovskii Report 1853”) in connection with the Saratov Affair and Perovskii after he finished his term of service in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1852. Perovskii also wrote to the Moscow City (Civil) Governor Ivan Grigor’evich Seniavin regarding another (or possibly the same event) in Moscow in which he noted “It came to my attention, that in about 1826 there was kidnapping of a Christian child by Jews...and the Jews were caught and punished.” See RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 54, “Otpusk pis’ma ministra vnutrennikh del L. A. Perovskogo moskovskomu grazhdanskomu gubernatoru I. G. Seniavinu ot 20 apreliia 1844. Other letters in the same file indicate this continued preoccupation with these particular cases of child abduction from public bathhouses—even when those in correspondence with him denied that such cases existed or were unable to provide any evidence other than hearsay. Seniavin was happy to report that he had accomplished the task, but unfortunately only scant documentation from the investigations existed; see RGIA, f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 61, “Pis’mo Moskovskogo grazhdanskogo gubernatora I. G. Seniavina ministru vnutrennikh del L. A. Perovskomu ot 7 maia 1844 g.” A number of the files in this *delo* were declared confidential (*sekretno*), which may also suggest either that there were individuals within the ministry and other government agencies that were fully behind the hunt for past cases, or that such hunting was itself open to question.

²⁶ This urgency is stressed in RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 52, “Kopiiia ontosheniia ministra vnutrennykh del L. A. Perovskogo sankt-petersburgskomy voennomu general-gubernatoru A. A. Kavelinu ot 19 marta 1844 g.”; and RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 58 “Kopiiia otnosheniia ministra vnutrennikh del L. A. Perovskogo sankt-peterburgskomu voennomu general-gubernatoru A. A. Kavelinu ot 15 maia 1844 g.” Perovskii urged Kavelin, “*Po nastoiatel’noi nadobnosti v svedeniakh ob etikh proisshestviiakh, ia vnov’ imeiu chest’ pokorneishe prosit’ Vas, milostivyi gosudar’, prikazat’ uskorit’ otyskanie oznachennykh del i zatem preprovodit’ ikh ko mne.*”

the tongue out of a peasant (1837) in Kazan.²⁷ It is clear that the issue of Jewish ritual murder was at the forefront of Perovskii's professional and personal agenda in 1844. Convinced that records existed in the government's files, Perovskii's search cast a wide net within police, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Senate records. He may well have received directives from his superiors (possibly even Nicholas I), but the records indicate that he was invested in a deeply personal way in carrying out his investigation.

The 1844 report on Jews and ritual murder followed a similar path, at first it circulated internally and only for a very small number of ministry officials. Most likely, the report was the result of several individuals who compiled available information and opinions about blood libel, even though a single individual likely completed the final compilation. The anonymity of the report's author in 1844 meant that later publication of it for public consumption could place responsibility on various individuals. The first, and most likely candidate was Dal', which makes the most sense given the nature of his work on many of the Ministry of Internal Affairs reports during this period and the later attribution of him as author of the *Rosyskanie ob ubienii evreiami khristianskikh mladentsev i upotreblenii krovi ikh* published in 1913.²⁸ Further corroborating his

²⁷ RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 53, "Kopiiia otnosheniia ministra vnutrennikh del L. A. Perovskogo zamestiteliu ober-prokurora 1 otdeleniia 5 department Senata V. M. Bykovu ot 17 apreliia 1844 g."

²⁸ Vladimir Dal', *Rozyskanie ob ubienii evreiami khristianskikh mladentsev i upotreblenii krovi ikh* (St. Petersburg: Suvorin, 1913). Some of the earliest supporters of the Dal' authorship theory included Ivan O. Kuz'min who strongly suggested that Dal' must be the author of such a text. See Kuz'min, *Materialy k voprosu ob obvineniakh evreev v ritual'nykh prestupleniakh* (St. Petersburg, 1913). For a current evaluation, see for example, Stephen K. Batalden, "Nineteenth-century Russian Old Testament Translation and the Jewish question" in *Kirchen im Kontext unterschiedlicher Kulturen: Auf dem Weg ins dritte Jahrtausend*, eds. Karl Christian Felmy, Georg Kretschmar, Fairy von Lilienfeld, Trutz Rendtorff and Claus-Jürgen Roepke (Göttingen:

involvement with the Perovskii investigation are letters written by him in connection with many of those discussed above. On 30 May 1844, Dal' sent a letter to the archpriest Ioakim Semenovich Kochetov requesting further information about the *Sennaia* Haymarket abduction of children and Perovskii's earlier request for information. Dal' made clear that Perovskii brought him into the investigation and requested a full report on the progress of the research.²⁹ Several months later, the archpriest responded with the following summary of the story of the St. Petersburg kidnapping near the synagogue:

It was said to have occurred in St. Petersburg in the *Sennoi* (Haymarket) near the Jewish synagogue and for this the Jews were blamed. The Minister wishes for some reason more information about the incidents, and although no such records were found in the local police archives...but as a result of the order of the His Excellency, I am required to tell you, for the report to the Minister, everything I know about it. Regarding this matter I have the honor to inform your Excellency that I don't know many details of the events spoken of, but only that I remember around 1820, near my place of residence at the Haymarket, which was once a bathhouse, I heard talk among the people there that there was a large commotion in the women's bath, a woman kidnapped a baby...she having been asked to watch the child who was set on the bench while the mother bathed herself...when

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 582, ff. 10. While there is clear evidence that Dal' was involved in the publication of this document, some scholars suspect that the published document was the result of collaboration between several authors active within the ministry. As evidence that the debate over the authorship of the *Rozyskanie* was a matter of scholarly interest within imperial Russia, it should be noted that Iulii Gessen published his *Zapiska o ritual'nykh ubiistvakh (pripisyvaimia V. I. Dal'iu) i eia istochniki* (St. Petersburg, 1914) along with co-authors M. Vishnitser and A. Karlin immediately after the publication of Kuz'min's text. Further, it is no coincidence that these texts appeared at the same time as the Beilis trial was concluding and ritual murder once again occupied public interest. See also the article by Aleksandr Panchenko, "Vladimir Dal' i krovavii navet." Panchenko argues that the available archival material does not provide conclusive evidence that Dal' was the sole author, though he was clearly heavily involved in the process. Panchenko's article is a response to his colleague Semen E. Reznik who argues that Dal' was not the author of the text. See Semen E. Reznik, "Zachem zhe snova piatnat' V. I. Dalia? *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 107 (2011): 435-441; and also Semen E. Reznik, *Vmeste ili vroz'?* *Sud'ba evreev v Rossii*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2005), 60-71.

²⁹ RGIA, f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 62, "Kopiiia pis'ma V. I. Dalia prot.[oieriiia] I. S. Kochetovu ot 30 maia 1844 goda."

the she [the mother] came out of the bath, she could not find her child, and when she asked around, she was told that two Jewish women left the bathhouse with him. The mother dressed quickly and ran out onto the street but did not see any Jewish women or the child.³⁰

Kochetov continued that he was unsure if this was a new story or an old recycled one that he heard while walking out of the bath one day (a woman behind him was telling the story). As this letter makes clear, Dal' assumed a leading role in procuring material and following up on previous requests by the Minister and his secretary. Given his literary ability, Dal' may well be responsible for the compilation of the various evidence and reports supplied to the ministry during this investigation.

Later, in 1878, when the report was published for wider public consumption in the St. Petersburg newspaper *Grazhdanin* (The Citizen), the author named on the title page was Valerii Valerievich Skripitsyn, who was the director of the Department of Religious Affairs for Foreign Confessions within the MVD.³¹ In the *Grazhdanin* article, Skripitsyn used the 1844 report with very few changes to further promote the charge of ritual murder in the final years of Alexander II's reign.³² The report appeared once again in connection with the Beilis Trial in 1913, when it was republished with Dal' listed as the author. Although the 1844 text was read by only a handful of ministers, through later

³⁰ RGIA, f. f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 161, "Pis'mo protoieria I. S. Kochetova V. I. Dal'iu ot 8 September 1844 g."

³¹ *Grazhdanin* was a conservative literary newspaper that was published and read widely in Russia during this period.

³² These later renditions and Khvol'son's review of the Skripitsyn article are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 below. *Grazhdanin* 23-28 (1878).

renditions it became a major contributor to the periodic revival of the ritual murder charge against Jews.

Durnovo was heavily influenced by this 1844 report and seems to have assumed on the basis of his training within the MVD, that the ritual murder accusations were true, as proven by the patchwork report circulated internally within the ministry. Durnovo, as the lead investigator in Saratov in 1853, presupposed the possibility of ritual murder as motivation for the killing of the two Saratov boys. Durnovo involved local police to conduct a thorough surveillance of all Jews in the area, including Jews who had at some point converted to Christianity. Gradually, more and more Jews were imprisoned. Local Jews were slandered by a broad array of witnesses, most of them criminals or individuals of dubious character themselves. One such example of these testimonies against local Jews included a military private, known as Bogdanov, who maintained a reputation as a thief and drunkard. Needless to say, Bogdanov had, on more than one occasion, familiarized himself with local officials, and usually not on his own terms. Bogdanov testified that he had dumped one of the bodies after Yankel Yushkevicher, a local furrier, had retrieved the required blood. Although Bogdanov's testimony eventually led to his own, the atmosphere in Saratov fostered by Durnovo and others led to widespread speculation about Jewish ritual murder.

Perovskii Report 1853

A second report on the events in Saratov aggressively lays out the ritual murder charges against Jews with specific reference to the 1853 evidence and investigation. The report, included in the Perovskii files, is dated 1853 and initially looks like a continuation

of the more widely disseminated 1844 report on ritual murder in imperial Russia. The 1853 report, similar to the report from a decade earlier, does not reveal the author or the exact date of writing.³³ The intended audience is unclear and there is no evidence that the report ever reached publication for a wide audience. However, regardless of the author, the report evidences some of the intellectual maneuvering of those who fueled similar tales of Jewish ritual murder in the nineteenth century. In the report from 1853, the writer details the events in Saratov and uses the occasion to make the case for Jewish involvement in the murders and, by implication, the collective guilt of Jews. The report claims to use the evidence found at the scene along with available knowledge floating around Saratov among townspeople and peasants. The author of the report was privy to names and dates, along with the reports by investigators, medical examiners, and others with first hand knowledge of the case. Thus, while authorship is once again problematic, it was likely either the work of Perovskii himself – he had just completed his tenure as head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1852 – or another individual within the ministry. Most likely, Perovskii continued to have relations with others in the ministry who could provide accounts of the documents generated in relation to the case. As the

³³ RGIA, f. 1021, op., 1, d, 52. Perovskii, Lev Alekseevich, “Zapiska neustanovlennogo litsa ob ubiistve evreiami dvukh mal’chikov v Saratove dlia soversheniia religiozniv obriiazov.” This report is a handwritten report totaling twenty-four pages. No author is listed on the report, and the date is 1853. Unlike the 1844 report, the 1853 report seems to be a private piece of writing intended for Perovskii (unless, of course, it was authored by Perovskii himself). It does not bear the notations common among other Ministry of Internal Affairs reports and letters. I have labeled this the “Perovskii Report” simply because it is in his file in RGIA. As best as one can tell, this report does not appear in any of the secondary literature. Although the evidence remains inconclusive at this point, there is remarkable similarity between the author’s script in this report and one letter included in the 1844 report, from Perovskii to Seniavin. These similarities suggest that Perovskii may well have authored this 1853 report. For more on the communication between Seniavin and Perovskii, see RGIA f. 1282, op. 2, d. 2139, l. 54.

documentary evidence from the 1844 report confirms, Perovskii possessed a desire to search out any and all evidence or rumors of Jewish ritual murder. He was not above promoting rumors and claiming them to be true, even when those who submitted reports to him claimed that these were unfounded hearsay.

The manuscript “Perovskii Report” examines in sharp detail the alleged crimes committed by Saratov Jews, the conspiracies with soldiers, and then expands the discussion to a wide-ranging diatribe against Jews generally. While fascinating as an account of the accusations and the story behind them, the Perovskii report reflects well the culture of anti-Semitic Russian officials and bureaucrats. The story of how the Jews carried out the murders is given in detail (according to the author’s perspective), which suggests that Perovskii likely had access to many details included in the investigative reports of 1853, and from these drew his allegations against Jews. It is also quite possible that the author of the report was Durnovo, the official from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. While this report was not written as a letter to Perovskii, and thus, its authorship is disputable, it might well have served as an update on the events by Durnovo for his former boss.³⁴

It is important to remember that this report is dated from a fairly early point in the investigation and therefore, if the dating listed on the report is accurate, the author did not have access to the full Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Internal Affairs investigation from 1860. The conclusions of that investigation were still unknown, thereby allowing

³⁴ Durnovo is not mentioned by name in the report, thus making his role as author more plausible.

the Perovskii report of 1853 to employ rhetorical devices to suggest proximity to (or knowledge of) the details of the case, without having to declare what sources were used. With this air of authority, the report could fully employ the “mysteries” of kidnappings and disappearances to link the two murders to a few specific Jews and then implicate the wider Jewish population and more importantly, Judaism, in the boys’ deaths. In the early months of the investigation, the possibility existed for Durnovo and others to leverage imaginative, damaging claims against local Jews. Once the initial claims were levied against Saratov Jews, the rumors of Jewish ritual murder quickly spread throughout the city and forced local authorities to look more closely at the entire Jewish community rather than one or two potential suspects.

The report is important as a source for understanding why individuals like Khvol’son chose to write the types of responses that they did, and why Khvol’son took up the cause of Jews accused of ritual murder for the duration of his life. In his refutation, Khvol’son took up the very charges that the Perovskii report raised and systematically dismantled them. Most likely, Khvol’son knew nothing of this particular report, as he surely would have mentioned such claims in his 1880 text. He was, however, familiar with the charges against Jews and understood the damaging potential of these accusations. As is explained in greater detail Chapters 3 and 4, there is a stark difference in the degree of openness between Khvol’son’s 1861 text and his work in of 1880. Khvol’son was vague in his description of the events leading to his work in 1861, such was not the case in 1879 and 1880. The Perovskii report builds on claims of Russian identity and fears of Jewish efforts to undermine that identity through assimilation and

conversion. The report suggests that Jews found ways to enter into the greater Russian milieu by becoming pseudo-Russians, who were so uncommitted to their own religious heritage that they could simply choose conversion as a way of escaping Russian residency restrictions and other juridical means intended to limit Jewish influence within the interior provinces of the empire.³⁵ Saratov in 1853 was a multi-cultural city that brought together a wide range of minority groups. As a province that increasingly commanded the attention of imperial officials in St. Petersburg and Moscow, Saratov was also a place where the confessional nature of the empire was tested, examined, and negotiated.

The Perovskii report built on these fears of Jewish exploitation and highlighted individuals (Christians) who were corrupted by Jews in Saratov. According to the 1853 report, the town of Saratov became a haven for Jews who sought to live closer to the interior of the empire and gain access to the economic benefits available there. The author of the report felt compelled to explain that the Jews who came to Saratov often converted out of “malicious intent.”³⁶ The author argued:

“It was generally noted that Jews only baptize for the sole purpose of being able to live freely in the Greater Russian provinces, but in this matter they remain in their Jewish convictions, and secretly perform the rituals of their fathers, as evident in Saratov province, where a very many baptized Jews—more or less all of them, knew about the Saratov child-murderers.”³⁷

³⁵ RGIA f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 7.

³⁶ RGIA f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 7.

³⁷ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 5.

Here the blame for the two boys' murders is placed squarely upon the dangerous Jewish convert, who, out of greedy desire to obtain greater wealth, prominence, or business, sought conversion as a way to escape the Pale of Settlement. The shift in emphasis from Jews as Jews to Jews as ambitious assimilationist Christians highlights one of the major fears of "Great Russian" chauvinists. According to some estimates, the Russian population in Saratov reached as high as 76 percent.³⁸ This was not merely a matter of classification of peoples, but rather served as a microcosm of the larger processes of identity politics at work in the empire. Jews who professed adherence to Judaism could be dealt with differently than Jews who forged new identities as Christians through conversion. Furthermore, many of the actors in this Saratov case were Jews who either lived in the city for decades (Iankel Iushkevicher and his family) or they were converts (or, in the case of Kriuger, children of converts) allegedly with an uncertain identity—and therefore questionable allegiances to the state and Orthodoxy.

Jews who remained Jews belonged in various ways to the world of Judaism and its religious norms, and were held in check by a number of structural and religious limitations superimposed on them by the government in the form of the Pale of Settlement and other sumptuary laws. In this way, the government could enforce a certain level of control over them. However, when individuals who otherwise were regulated by these structures, appeared outside of this bounded existence, they both challenged and reinforced cultural stereotypes. As the Saratov case shows, the city's multicultural

³⁸ Rex A. Wade and Scott J. Seregny, *Politics and Society in Provincial Russia: Saratov, 1590-1917* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), 1-2.

composition as a frontier town on the Volga, populated by many different religious, social, and economic groups presented specific problems for local and imperial officials.

Russian perceptions of encroachment by Jews and other non-Slavic populations on this “Great Russian” (*Velikorossiiskii*) province and its inhabitants contributed to growing fears for Russian identity. The 1850s and 1860s proved to be a critical period in the reformulation of tsarist competency to rule over the people. It was during this period—characterized by Russian subjects’ frustration with the tsarist government—when Alexander II eventually responded to cries for modernization and revamping the social structure of Russian society through reform. At the same time, the still small enclaves of Jews and other minority population outside of the Pale of Settlement, found themselves drawn into the debates about the future of Russia.

The author of the Perovskii report brought together the details of the Saratov murders and the individuals involved. However, in order for the report to function effectively as a diatribe against Jews, the author extended the accusations to Jews outside of the city to other locales in the Russian Empire thus leading the reader to assume some Jewish conspiracy involving economic networks that Jews operated. Thus, Saratov Jews were connected in various ways to Jews in Mogilev province and to other regions in the empire through their interactions and visits. This also was connected to the blood that Saratov Jews aimed to acquire from young Christian boys. In addition to a broad pattern of Jewish conspiracy, the author of the report sought to show that Jews had successfully infiltrated the ranks of Christians of every denomination and by doing so, were linking their crimes to Christian converts as well. Among the men who allegedly participated in

the ritual circumcision of the Christian boys in the Jewish synagogue were some of the Jewish members of the battalion, Schlifferman, Fogel'feld, Berman, and Zaimon. Within the circle of participants were Christians as well, including Iankel Iushkevicher's son, Private Iurlov (Russian Orthodox) and Private Bogdanov (Roman Catholic). Furthermore, the author aimed to exploit the figure of Kriuger, the retired Provincial Secretary (*Gubernskii Sekretar*), to further damage the public image of Jews by showing how Jews tied him to the local crime ring. Kriuger's involvement in the circle is particularly interesting as it revealed the author's belief that Jews actively sought recruits, and did so by exploiting (or enticing) them through economic means. In a footnote to the report, the author included the following:

Regional Secretary Kriuger, the son of a Jewish convert, was educated as a young man—he studied at Kazan University. He was in good standing in the service and was engaged...but eventually fell into poverty and despair. The Jews took advantage of this and persuaded him to return to the Judaism (*zhidovstvo*) for 500 rubles. Kruger, fearing the circumcision operation [as the son of a convert he was uncircumcised], first wanted to see the operation on a grown boy and because of this he was present at the circumcision [of Sherstobitov].³⁹

The author of the report was persistent in the connection between Jewish rituals and the Saratov case. In every instance, the author set forth specifics of the murders and then tied the details back to the religious requirements. Thus, in the description of Maslov's circumcision and murder, included among the details was the amount of blood removed from the boy at the time of circumcision (three large cups obtained from small cuts to the arms and legs), as well as the comparative amount of screaming and crying between

³⁹ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 11. He was also allegedly present at the circumcision of Maslov later.

Sherstobitov and Maslov. As each action was described during the circumcision process, the author included phrases about how it was done according to the Jewish law or the traditions of the fathers.

Further, the spatial relations between the Jews and the locations of the murders were outlined in the Perovskii report. On 3 December 1852, Sherstobitov was taken in the middle of the day straight to the Iushkevicher home where he remained until the 13 of December when he was taken to the synagogue and the circumcision performed. According to the Perovskii report, Sherstobitov's circumcision was incomplete (*ne polnoe*) because while Iushkevicher held the boy from running away, Shlifferman was supposed to complete the cut but was scared and left the operation unfinished. After forcing Shlifferman to hold the boy down, Iushkevicher took the knife and attempted to finish the procedure. According to the Perovskii report, on 26 January, Maslov was taken to the home of Iankel Iushkevicher, at about noon, where he remained until mid-February. During his time at the Iushkevicher home, Maslov "was fed gourmet food, cared for, and given money."⁴⁰ On 16 February, Maslov was taken to the synagogue where he was placed in the charge of the caretaker, Berman. On 18 February, Maslov was stretched out on a table in the synagogue and circumcised according to Jewish practices, in the same manner as Sherstobitov. Already in the early reports, there was evidence that local authorities were attempting to find earlier precedent for the Jewish need for Christian blood. For example, included in the summary of the Maslov circumcision is mention of the Jewish holiday Purim. On this Jewish festival Jews commemorate the

⁴⁰ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 12.

events in the biblical book of Esther, when the children of Israel were saved from the genocidal plottings of Haman.⁴¹ Purim served as a point of contention between Jews and Christians since at least the medieval period, when Christians mistakenly feared that Jews burned an effigy of Christ rather than Haman. Kruiger reported that during the ceremony, Iushkevicher read prayers from a “secret book” (the Talmud) and carefully followed instructions contained in the book as well.⁴² Three days following the circumcision and blood letting of Maslov, the young boy was returned to the home of Iankel Iushkevicher, where, according to the Perovskii report, Iushkevicher killed him. Further in the report, the author noted that the boy had been tortured—according to the testimony of his parents—as evinced by the wounds to his back and chest and the scrapes on his hands and face.) Iushkevicher apparently needed to kill the young boy because he tried to run away from the apartment.⁴³ On 4 March, Private Bogdanov took the body and placed it along the Volga. In the days that followed, Bogdanov reported that he had confessed (*soznalsia na ispovedi*) to a Roman Catholic priest his involvement in the crime, to which the cleric advised him to immediately report the crime.⁴⁴ Bogdanov, tormented by his conscience (*vpal v terzaniia sovesti*), turned himself in voluntarily.

⁴¹ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 14. The relevance of Purim is discussed further in the next chapter as it was a major element of Khvol’son’s analysis in 1861.

⁴² RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 11. “*Iankel’ chital po kakim to osobym sekretnym knigam’ molitvy.*”

⁴³ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 14.

⁴⁴ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 16.

The author of the report appealed to the emotional side of his potential readers as well, noting that Maslov's mother could not talk about the events for over a half a year without crying.⁴⁵ The report placed the boys in a position of ongoing torture and abuse—and situated the blame squarely on the shoulders of religious fanatics from Jewish sects.

The author also attempted to tie the biblical Abraham to the religious and historical foundations of the ritual murder charges:

A look at the history of infanticide among the Jews, from Abraham to the present time, gives one the right, with the appearance of such atrocities, immediately to draw the attention to the Jews, for we do not know of any other faith in which there would be dogmas like infanticide, and although only some Jews preserve the concept of human sacrifice during our times, across the centuries these people were often found guilty of such crimes generated by their religious beliefs.⁴⁶

The Perovskii report placed the specific events (or at least a version of them) in the context of the long history of ritual murder and appealed to notions of irrefutable evidence and logic to convict Jews. The author referred specifically to the story from the St. Petersburg bathhouse featured in the 1844 investigation. This focus on an event for which there was little evidence available places the authorship of the 1853 report

⁴⁵ This is one of the internal references that helps place the dating of this report sometime in the final months of 1853, or even after, if the date was applied by a second hand. See RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 3.

⁴⁶ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 16. Of interest to the declaration about the other religions associated with human sacrifice is Robert Geraci's examination of the Multan case (1892-1896) among Votiaks (later known as Udmurts). As Geraci suggests, the Votiak population did not resemble the Jews in any way, but when similar charges were placed against them, the result was a debate about Russianness and identity. Geraci's work confirms that the ritual murder charge, regardless of which population was its target, served as an ideological model for defining and reshaping Russian identity. See Robert Geraci, "Ethnic Minorities, Anthropology, and Russian National Identity on Trial: The Multan Case, 1892-1896," *Russian Review*, vol. 59, no. 4 (Oct. 2000): 530-554. An earlier version of Geraci's article is published in his book, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

squarely in the hands of Perovskii himself or one who was familiar to a fault with the earlier Ministry of Internal Affairs work on the subject.⁴⁷ In the final paragraph of the report, the author noted: “Common sense makes it clear and evident that the Saratov infanticide was produced by Jews and those now suspected, as concluded by the local authorities.”⁴⁸

1854 – 1860 The Case Moves From Local Authorities to the Tsar

Unable to find sufficient evidence against the imprisoned Jews, and with no clear suspects, Durnovo was finally asked to end his investigation and leave Saratov. In his reports to the Ministry, Durnovo expressed exasperation at the overwhelming responsibility placed on his shoulders, which likely led to his removal from the case. Although the preliminary investigation concluded in late fall 1853, it nevertheless carried on more informally through the winter and spring of 1854, while the Jews in Saratov were still imprisoned. In mid-summer 1854, Nicholas I allowed a *sudebnaia komissiia* (judicial commission) to carry out a formal investigation of the findings of Durnovo and other information that surfaced in the preceding months. At the head of the commission was a high ranking Ministry of Internal Affairs official, Aleksandr Karlovich Giers. During the two years (1854 – 1856) that Giers’s commission worked on the case, more arrests were made, some of the Jews were released, and a great deal more testimony was

⁴⁷ As was noted earlier, the 1844 report was distributed internally with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, although the search for earlier occurrences of Jewish infanticide and ritual use of blood seems to have been the result of Perovskii’s personal interest in the myth.

⁴⁸ RGIA, f. 1021, op. 1, d. 52, l. 24.

collected. The judicial commission was charged with three specific tasks related to the Saratov case: a) summarize the available evidence and facts related to the murder of the two young boys in Saratov, b) examine the existence of any evidence that might link Private Bogdanov and local authorities to the killings, and c) conduct a thorough investigation into Jewish texts to determine if they contained evidence of rituals that could explain the use of Christian blood by Jews.⁴⁹ While the first two areas are rather straightforward and uncontroversial, the third area, namely the investigation about Jewish ritual use of Christian blood, became one of the defining debates for Jews and Christians in the last decades of the Russian Empire. Giers chose to convene a special internal commission (*osobaia komissia*) to investigate the third component of the judicial commission's charge.⁵⁰ The special commission brought together three particularly impressive Hebraic scholars, who marked three distinct generations of prolific scholarship. Joining Giers were Gerasim Petrovich Pavskii, Fedor Fedorovich Sidonskii, Vasili Andreevich Levison, and Khvol'son. The four scholars on the committee represented a quite remarkable effort on the part Giers to bring together the very best minds of the age who could with competence and erudition comment on the case and the particular question about Jewish texts.

⁴⁹ See D. A. Khvol'son, *Upotrebliaut-li evrei khristianskuiu krov'?: Raszuzhdeniie* (St. Petersburg: M. A. Khana, 1879), 1.

⁵⁰ This special commission convened under the guidance of the MVD's *department dukhovnykh del inostrannykh ispovedanii* (Department of Spiritual Affairs and Foreign Confessions).

Gerasim Pavskii occupied many prominent positions in his lifetime, and was, among the three the most important for the Russian Orthodox community in Russia. Pavskii taught at St. Petersburg Theological Academy in the 1820s and translated the Old Testament from the Masoretic text, which eventually got him into trouble with what came to be called the Pavskii Affair, one of “the most extraordinary Russian church interrogations.”⁵¹ Pavskii was also the tutor and confessor to the Grand Duke Alexander Nikolaevich (Alexander II), and also archbishop at the impressive Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg. The work of Pavskii on the special commission is circumscribed somewhat by later recollections of his contributions. Khvol’son noted that Pavskii was already quite old in 1855 and therefore contributed a short, though sympathetic response that rejected notions of Jewish ritual murder.⁵² A year later, when the second edition of his 1861 text emerged, he noted that Pavskii’s report was positive toward Jews although it was not “unconditional” (*predstavil po etomu povodu kratkii otzyv, v blagopriiatnov dlia evreev smysle, khotia i ne vpolne bezuslovno*).⁵³ Khvol’son tempered his second statement in

⁵¹ Stephen K. Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translation and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 96. Batalden examines Pavskii’s life in great detail, including a brief note about his work on the Saratov special commission; see particularly pp. 96-112 and 178. The Pavskii Affair took place in the early 1840s, when Pavskii was accused of mistranslating (or improperly annotating his translation of) the biblical text. His translations, originally part of his teaching material, were gradually disseminated into the wider public which caused major problems for church hierarchs. Also see S. Protopopov, “Protoierei Gerasim Petrovich Pavskii, materialy dlia ego biografii, chast’ III” *Strannik*, vol. 17, no. 2, (February 1876): 101-37. The archival material related to the Pavskii Affair is RGIA f. 797, op. 12, d. 29882, ll. 1-206, “O nepravil’nom perevod’ nekotorykh knig vetkhogo zaveta.”

⁵² Khvol’son, *Upotrebliaut’-li evrei khristianskuiu krov’?* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. A. Khana, 1879), 7.

⁵³ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev: istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Tsederauma i Gol’denbliuma, 1880),

response to a short article by N. Barsov who cited two of Pavskii's handwritten notes about the commission in which he expressed some degree of doubt about the statements that *no* Jews ever committed ritual murder.⁵⁴ Most important, however, is the fact that Pavskii submitted his more favorable report and only later began to change his mind about the matter. Thus, the report that was submitted in the end bore a highly favorable tone toward Jews. The slight change in Khvol'son's note regarding Pavskii's hesitancy suggested that even one of the greatest Hebrew teachers of his time maintained a degree of uncertainty on the issue.

Feodor Sidonskii was the odd contributor to the commission because he was not well grounded in biblical and post-biblical literature. Sidonskii studied at Tver University before beginning his studies under Pavskii at the Theological Academy in St. Petersburg. Sidonskii, though he was an ordained priest and for a time taught English at the Academy, wrote more of his work in the area of philosophy.⁵⁵ Sidonskii did not offer much in the way of meaningful contributions to the investigation because he was limited by the language barrier and offered his opinions but little else. Sidonskii later took up a

vii-viii. As needed, both texts will be referenced throughout this work. The editions have different pagination and so I have adapted the following reference system to suggest which text is referenced: I refer to the author, the short title, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, the year, followed by the relevant page or pages. Pavskii submitted a number of short summaries of the work of the commission to the Ministry of Internal Affairs according to the report in the MVD file. However, the content of those summaries are only vaguely noted in the file. He, along with Giers, is the only one listed in the MVD files.

⁵⁴ N. Barsov, "Mnenie protoiieria G. P. Pavskogo po voprosu ob upotreblenii evreiami khristianskoi krovi dlia religioznykh tselei," *Tserkovnyi vestnik*, no. 20, chast' neofitsial'naia (19 May 1879), 15-16.

⁵⁵ Vasilii Vasil'evich Zen'kovskii, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2003), 306-307.

post at the University in St. Petersburg after he was dismissed from the Academy. For his part, the convert Levison became Khvol'son's mentor and partner in this endeavor. Levison became a model scholar for Khvol'son during this particularly important moment in his life when he transitioned toward the university post and converted to Orthodoxy. Khvol'son's recollections about Levison are generally positive and they worked well together, both exceptional Hebraic scholars who contributed in major ways to the field in Russia but also in Europe.⁵⁶

Following a lengthy investigation into the three areas dictated by the judicial commission, the individual members of the internal special commission readied and submitted reports that were to be forwarded to the state senate in Moscow (sixth department). The individual reports uniformly confirmed that there was no evidence within Hebrew texts that could lend any credibility to the charge of ritual murder. The Moscow council approved Giers's (and the commission's) recommendation that there was no conclusive evidence against Saratov Jews and they recommended that the Jews who remained imprisoned (Iankel Iushkevicher, Fedor Iurlov, and Mikhel Shlifferman) be set free.⁵⁷ The three other suspects, Kriuger, Avksentii Lokotkov, and Anton Bogdanov, they argued, were guilty of murdering the two boys. The Moscow Senate submitted their recommendation to the State Council in St. Petersburg, where it

⁵⁶ Although Khvol'son was complimentary of Levison and his contributions to the Ministry of Internal Affairs committee and his scholarship, he later held reservations about Levison's translations of the Old Testament.

⁵⁷ RGIA, f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, ot. 4, ll. 948-1032, "Rezoliutsiia Pravitel'stvuiushchago Senata po 1-mu Otdeleniiu 6-go Departamenta po delu ob' diistve v gorode Saratove dvukh mal'chikov'."

underwent yet another review, this time with tsar Alexander II included in the small audience. A full eight years after Sherstobitov and Maslov disappeared, the jury, so to speak, was still undecided about who killed the boys and what motivation rested behind the dastardly deed. To resolve this, the matter was passed to the State Council.

The State Council's report, included in full in the Ministry of Internal Affairs documents preserved in the archive, shows a systematic reexamination of the various individuals, their stories, and the relations between them.⁵⁸ The three ministers assigned to the case reviewed the files submitted to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and divided the two sets of suspects and attempted to place their roles in the murders alongside each other and in connection to the blood libel charge. Curiously, in the opening pages of the summary, the claim is made that the accusations about Jews carried with them centuries of history. In order to understand the many twists and frequent appearances of such accusations, a full examination of theology and dogmas was required. Without such a study, the Council argued, "the question is still clearly unresolved, which is why it cannot be taken into consideration when determining the judgment."⁵⁹ Such a statement is fairly shocking when the work of the Ministry of Internal Affairs special commission and judicial commission are considered. How is it that the emperor's closest advisors did not understand the report that Pavskii, Levison, Sidonskii, and Khvol'son—perhaps the greatest nineteenth-century Russian Hebraists—generated? It was unthinkable to those

⁵⁸ RGIA f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, ot. 5, ll. 1-18.

⁵⁹ RGIA f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, ot. 5, l. 1.

who knew of the special commission and their work that the issue of ritual murder was so easily dismissed as unsolvable.

The focus of the State Council shifted to the question of murder and the perpetrators. However, rather than dismissing the possibility of ritual murder, the basis of the arguments focused on the suspected Jews who co-opted their non-Jewish co-suspects into carrying out the crime along with them. Bogdanov, the “drunkard” and criminal, who was “so easily put up to doing the crimes” (*legko mog byt' podgovoren k prestupleniiu*), was the victim of Jewish exploitation. Further, because he spent so much time around Jews, (or converted Jews), he became like a Jew (*kak zhid*).⁶⁰ By following this line of thinking, it is fairly clear that notions of Jewish infiltration into the greater Russian interior, were based on fears that Russian morality was deteriorating as a result. Kriuger, as the 1853 report suggested, was enticed back to Judaism and through that process, was turned from a former position of prominence in the province to collaborating in two vicious murders carried out because of Jewish convictions. In the end, the State Council rejected the Moscow Senate’s recommendation and the charge of ritual murder remained a viable explanation for the deaths of Sherstobitov and Maslov. The Minister of Justice Zamiatin defended the Jews before this council and urged the ministers to free them. In the end, however, even Alexander II joined in and added his own “i ia” to the Council’s resolution, and voted overwhelmingly against Jews. Thus the diligent work by the scholars and members of the judicial commission and their conclusions were invalidated

⁶⁰ RGIA f. 1151, op. 5-1860, d. 49, ot. 5, l. 2.

by vote (including the vote of Tsar Alexander II) in 1860.⁶¹ While the few Jews being held for further investigation were eventually released, the Council's conclusions left open the possibility of a ritual aspect to the murders and the suspicion that a certain sect of Jews could quite reasonably be responsible.

Upon the revelation of the Council's decision, Khvol'son as one of the contributors to the special commission, became desperately concerned that their report had not been taken seriously, and, like many scholars, grew disheartened because his work was overlooked and undervalued. Given the pressing nature of the investigation and reports, it was more than just Khvol'son's scholarly pride that caused him angst. Upon further investigation, what Khvol'son discovered from his friend A. S. Norov was that the file reviewed by the State Council did not contain the full reports of the commission or the individual reports of Pavskii, Levison, and Khvol'son.⁶² For Khvol'son this was the final straw. Incensed at so grievous an oversight, he set out to publish his report to help set the record straight. Regarding the missing reports, Khvol'son wrote:

I do not know what happened to these reviews, but as far as I know the facts, the Saratov case files (including our reviews) were submitted for final approval to the State Council. A. S. Norov, a former member of the Council, indicated that the reports were missing. Why it was carried out in this manner—I do not know, among just and dutiful Christians, such an act is prohibited. [...] The opinion of the State Council on the accusations may have been, indeed would have been entirely different, if only the members had read my analysis of the Saratov case. It is unrealistic to expect that members of the State Council, who are unfamiliar with the religious beliefs, customs, and literature of the Jews, could, not even if they wanted to, of course, detect the lies against them [the Jews]—and yet it is

⁶¹ Iulii Gessen, "Saratovskoe delo po obvineniiu evreev v prestupleniakh s ritual'noi tsel'iu," in *Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*, vol. 14 (St. Petersburg, 1914), 7.

⁶² Khvol'son, *Upotrebliaiut-li evrei khristianskuiu krov'?* (1879), 6.

absolutely impossible that they could fail to acquit the Jews given the facts contained in the witnesses' (experts) testimonies.⁶³

Khvol'son clearly did not expect the government ministers to be aware of the long history of ritual murder accusations, hence the need for the special commission and a panel of experts. While Khvol'son might have been sympathetic to the Council's distance from the events and intricacies, he could not excuse their willingness to overlook the affair altogether, perpetuating as it were, the Christian fear that Jews were demonic, violent, and willingly killed Christian children.

That Khvol'son chose to take up the medieval charges against Jews, particularly the accusation that Jews ritually murdered their Christian neighbor's children for religious purposes, is not altogether surprising. The introduction (or, reintroduction) of such claims into Russian culture seems to have generally coordinated with those moments when Jews were most heavily under attack for upsetting the status quo or challenging Russian ideas of "nation" and culture. In an insightful article, Hillel Kieval suggests "the modern, or "revived" ritual murder trial presents a compelling, if troubling, case for the convergence of myth, irrationality, traditional wisdom and rational discourse in the production of knowledge—as well as excellent material for the analysis of competing systems of knowledge and power in modern society."⁶⁴ The ritual murder charge was a secondary, though powerful way of cloaking the deeper concerns

⁶³ Ibid., 7-8.

⁶⁴ Hillel J. Kieval, "Representation and Knowledge in Medieval and Modern Accounts of Jewish Ritual Murder" *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, vol. 1, no. 1 (Autumn, 1994), 54. Kieval refers to those cases occurring during the post-emancipation period "modern" and he assumes that the trials occurring in the 1880s onward are all subsumed within this category.

developing in Russian society. It became a site of contestation over authority, identity, and religion.

Khvol'son faced frustration as he attempted to procure a publisher for the volume based on his findings from the commission's work. As was quite popular at the time, authors often turned to the numerous literary journals to publish books in serial form. A number of publishers in St. Petersburg offered to publish the work as a set of articles on behalf of Jews. Khvol'son noted that editors' desire to do so was part of a popular practice at the time that was viewed kindly by their peers. "Finding a journal to submit my inquiries was, at the time, quite difficult. Yes, editors, readily accepted articles for the public benefit of Jews; at this time it was considered an act of honor—*tempora mutantur et redactores mutantur in illis*."⁶⁵ Despite the willingness of the editors to publish the text, their requirements simply did not accord with the professor's ambitions for the text. Although a good number of those editors he submitted the text to offered to print the text, most wanted to divide the text into as many as twelve parts. For Khvol'son, this was impractical because it spread the work out to the point that it might lose some of its impact. In the end, the journal editor of *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* offered to publish the book in four successive parts.⁶⁶ The original publication in the journals was met with

⁶⁵ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), ix. Khvol'son inclusion of the Latin here is striking, for it may well be his acknowledgement, that there may be mutual benefits for Jews and editors through the publication of articles that promoted the eradication of anti-Semitism. If editors are willing and able to change over time, was there also hope for the Russian populace more generally? This question is explored further in Chapter 4.

⁶⁶ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (St. Petersburg, 1861). Published serially first, the Khvol'son text became the most complete refutation of the

some degree of fanfare by Khvol'son's acquaintances and he distributed the copies to friends and others interested in obtaining copies of the work. In his 1880 edition he noted that he provided as many copies as he could to friends, colleagues in educational institutions, the Ministries of Internal Affairs and National Enlightenment, and also to interested individuals throughout Russia and Europe.⁶⁷

In recent years, scholarship on the blood libel, and ritual murder as a subset claim, developed in two significant ways. Whereas earlier scholarship focused on the charges laid against Jews, and either attempted to destroy the myth by highlighting the logical fallacies of arguments and the imagined nature of the Jewish rituals that led to such beliefs, several scholars have now pushed the matter toward understanding how the language, and structure of texts about ritual murder (witness accounts, court documents, anti-Semitic pamphlets, and the like), function as sites of cultural and religious conflict. The first of these approaches, gaining full steam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, originated in efforts to repudiate the myth of Jewish ritual murder. It was in this context that Khvol'son became involved, and like few others around him, attempted to eradicate Christian beliefs that Jews sought to kill Christians because of religious texts or traditions. This was the motivation for historians who gathered around moments of heated contention between Jews and their Christian neighbors. Historians have allowed much of this work to remain fallow in recent decades, preferring to accept such efforts as

ritual murder charge in modern Russia. The text was originally published in *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, 1861, vol. 164 (March), 1-56; (April), 1-48; and vol. 165 (May), 1-60.

⁶⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), ix-x.

void of significance or consequence. While scholars acknowledge that such work was carried out and served important functions at the time of writing, little work has attempted to understand how these texts developed and where their authors chose their battles and why. Khvol'son's work on ritual murder was significant because it provided an encyclopedic catalog of the many occurrences of such accusations and, even more importantly, set an agenda that remains at the forefront for scholars who seek to improve relations between Jews and Christians today.

CHAPTER 3

"TO DOUBT THE PROGRESS OF HUMANITY AND COMMON SENSE": THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF KHVOL'SON'S 1861 TEXT

One of the lacunae that first motivated this study of Khvol'son was the absence of any significant analysis or even general study of his refutation of the blood libel. The prevalence of ritual murder accusations in the Russian Empire between 1850 and the First World War would suggest more than passing reference to the work; yet, Khvol'son remains a background figure in most modern histories of Russian and Jewish society. His prolonged participation and dominant position as a central figure in the rebuttal of ritual murder and his approach to that problem deserves greater examination. Although the text received broad coverage in the literary journals of the day, it occupies a dusty, seldom referenced corner in the historiography among current scholars.¹ The republication of the text in Russian in 2010 suggests that there may be a revival of interest in the text, although even there the editor's introduction to the work is largely hagiographic and repeats what earlier scholars wrote regarding Khvol'son without new insight into his life or the place of the text today.²

¹ One of the most complete of these reviews is the one published in *Sion: organ russkikh evreev* (27 October 1861 and 2 November 1861). The content of this review is discussed below.

² Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev: istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam*, ed. Yuri Tabak (Tekst: Moscow, 2010).

Khvol'son's sought to reshape the relations between Jews and Christians by correcting theological ideas that were founded on mistaken perceptions of the biblical text and the perpetuation of hostile Christian views of Jews and Judaism throughout history. Many scholars view the Catholic effort to redefine the relationship of Judaism and Catholicism after Auschwitz (i.e., Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*) as a beginning point for challenging traditional Christian teaching regarding the life of Jesus and the early church in relation to first-century Judaism. In this regard, Khvol'son's application of thought and effort to the Russian ritual murder charges and his rebuttal is quite remarkable because of the overlap of his choice of subjects with those of proponents of a post-Holocaust theology today. Since the mid-1960s a large body of scholarship has sought to rewrite the history of Jews, Christians, and Muslims with greater sensitivity as branches of a single Abrahamic tradition.

Khvol'son's efforts are so closely connected thematically with current efforts among interfaith groups and ecumenically minded scholars that his work deserves to be seen as a predecessor of this movement. One recent example of this work by a scholar who remains deeply committed to this effort of understanding the early centuries of Christianity within the Jewish religious and intellectual milieu is Amy Jill-Levine, a New Testament scholar who is also Jewish. Levine traces the long history of the problem that Khvol'son presented his readers. What is striking is that both the nineteenth-century scholar and his twenty-first century collaborator employ the same scriptural passages to stake out their claims and do so in almost identical fashion. Levine's work to place the Christian story, as accounted in the New Testament books, back into the Jewish world

carries on a long tradition of similar efforts—as close comparison with Khvol’son’s text suggests.³

While Levine’s concern lies in sorting out the complicated history by correcting, instructing, and rewriting theological training and public perception of the Jewish roots of Christianity generally, others have gone even further. For example, Daniel Boyarin, a scholar of rabbinic Judaism claimed, “I wish us to see, that Christ too—the divine Messiah—is a Jew. Christology, or the early ideas about Christ, is also a Jewish discourse and not—until much later—an anti-Jewish discourse at all.”⁴ This argument is the product of centuries of scholarship that gradually built up an awareness, and then recognition, that Jesus was not a complete radical in his usage of ideas, terms, or his understanding of human-divine relation—but rather fit within certain strands of Jewish tradition. Although Khvol’son did not go as far as Boyarin is now attempting, he did find

³ My analysis of Amy-Jill Levine is based on her recent book, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006). I also use Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Annotated New Testament New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The choice to discuss Levine as opposed to others who participate in this effort is based largely on the closeness of her arguments throughout the works listed here to Khvol’son’s own work. In many cases the same verses are cited and used in nearly identical ways to refute traditional Christian thinking about early Christianity and its relation to Jews and Judaism. Levine is one of the more public figures in this subfield who frequently participates in public lectures and other presentations in which she makes the very same arguments to clergy and lay Christians. Levine’s other works include Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*. 1st ed, (New York: HarperOne, 2011); Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity (Lewiston, N.Y., USA: E. Mellen Press, 1988); Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, and John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus in Context*, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marianne Blickenstaff, *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles*, Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings (London ; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).

⁴ Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012), 5-6.

Jesus firmly within the Pharisaic tradition and therefore one among many who refined, rather than rejected, first-century Jewish religious thinking and practice.

The purpose of the present chapter is to conduct a full analysis of the 1861 text and place it in the context of events that gave rise to it. I see the text as an important contribution to the study of Jewish – Christian relations during a time when too few individuals concerned themselves with such matters. At the same time, I argue that the publication of Khvol'son's rebuttal of the blood libel myth should be read as a beginning point for much of his other work, including his extensive research on the Passover and death of Jesus and his translation of the Bible. By viewing his contribution as a beginning point, his personal biography illuminates his reasons for writing the book and his subsequent research related to Abrahamic religious traditions. Through his work on the ritual murder accusations, Khvol'son conceived of a transformed version of religious relations between Jews and Christians that served as a corrective to the medieval standardization of Christian theology, based as he saw it, on skewed understandings of the Jesus movement and teachings contained in the Gospels and Pauline Christianity.

Qualified for the task: Personal experience and formal training

Khvol'son's 1861 text, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev: istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam (Some Medieval Accusations against Jews: A Historical Study according to the Sources)* is remarkable for many reasons. As a historical source it is rich in content and employs a broad range of evidence to prove his point. First and foremost, the text serves as an impressive bibliographic compendium to

the history of ritual murder accusations. At the same time, it also sheds light on the depth of knowledge and familiarity of leading Russian Hebraic scholars in the 1850s with a large body of earlier texts. Taken as a whole, Khvol'son's investigation into the blood libel myth highlights his faith in the historico-critical textual practices of nineteenth-century biblical scholars and portrays a firm sense of distance between the barbarity of the Middle Ages and the more refined modern period, couched in the nineteenth-century notion of "progress." The interplay between medieval barbarity and modern progress is evident throughout the text – and the author frequently employed pleas to his contemporaries for finally abandoning the last vestiges of that earlier age. Khvol'son viewed his age as one of social, political, and economic progress that was the fruit of the Enlightenment. At the same time, he remained upset about the treatment of Jews in Russia because it seemed to go against the Enlightenment's core values of toleration, law, reason, and justice.

To see Khvol'son as a historian and scholar is to view him in the way that he saw himself. In the case of the blood libel accusations, it was his upbringing within Judaism, alongside his intellectual expertise, that qualified him for the task of refuting them. He diligently reminded his readers of this fact at a number of places within the text. "Until I was twenty years old, I lived with one of the well-known rabbis," he argued, "and Jews of every class were there in my home daily."⁵ The appeal to his instinctive understanding of Jewish culture and religion takes on three distinct forms that function to introduce him as an authority to judge on such matters. First, he was a convert from Judaism to Russian

⁵ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvinieniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), xv.

Orthodoxy and as such could be trusted to remain loyal to the Christian cause. Second, he obtained a position of authority as part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs special commission and therefore had the backing of the government to conduct a thorough investigation. Finally, Khvol'son grew up among Jews and possessed a real knowledge of their culture. This alone was not enough; he also appealed to the intellectual and scholarly audience as one of their equals who proudly possessed a doctorate degree from a German university. In other words, his knowledge of Jews was derived from two sources – experience and formal training. As a result of his “lifelong work in Jewish literature and history,” he claimed that he knew “the life of Jews” including the inner workings of the community and the “form of their thought” or philosophy and theology.⁶ At the heart of this short personal biography, Khvol'son invited his audience to pay attention to his work for the reasons listed above. This was an important step, especially later in his life when he struggled against those who claimed similar knowledge but possessed little if any actual awareness of Jewish life. Khvol'son claimed that his approach was different than his detractors because he actually understood what Jews do at home and in the synagogue (personal knowledge); but he also carried authority on the matter because he possessed a scholarly degree and was responsible for the education of Russian Orthodox clergy and university students.

To refute the blood libel myth and its foundations required historical investigation rather than theological explication. Khvol'son was very much a man representative of his time and the scholarly projects of his contemporaries in biblical studies—most notably

⁶ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 97.

philology and history. These two great intellectual pillars among nineteenth-century university professors were part of the turn toward Hebraic studies and the search for the Jewish roots of Christianity. In his view, it was his responsibility to analyze, disassemble the myth, and disseminate truth about Jews in opposition to the bigotry that led to his involvement with the Ministry of Internal Affairs investigation in Saratov. Khvol'son, according to his reckoning, was best suited for this task because:

There must be taken into consideration the fact that the case is not only a theological issue, but also an historical one, and both ability and experience are needed for a critical historical analysis capable of restoring their [Jews] credibility. For this, theological knowledge alone is insufficient. The best Christian theologian cannot solve the problem using Christian theological scholarship. Christian theology has no application here, to address this issue needs a most accurate and in-depth knowledge of all branches of Jewish literature and all accumulated sources, familiarity with the history of the Jewish religion, as well as the exact knowledge of all periods of Jewish history.⁷

In this single passage, Khvol'son declared his approach to the issue at hand. The text he produced amounted to a full attack of Christian interpretations of history, of theological arguments, and of the history of polemicist accusations against Jews. Thus, it was not a simple description, or encyclopedia of every medieval case, instead, it was a rewriting of that history in light of the best (and worst) scholarship available to him.

As a convert from Judaism to the Russian Orthodox Church, Khvol'son's position in the academy was never quite set in stone as he remained (both in his eyes and in the eyes of his colleagues) in a nebulous position between two worlds, one Jewish and one Christian. He was, after all, a Christian and identified himself with the surrounding

⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvinieniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 153-54.

Christian society and institutions.⁸ In his own lifetime, his peers regarded him as a true believer within Christianity.⁹ Ivan Troitskii, a student of Khvol'son's and constant friend, cited a St. Petersburg cleric who, in a spontaneous gathering with former students, professors, and members of the clergy the day after the old professor's burial, suggested in memoriam that Khvol'son was above all "a scientist and Christian believer."¹⁰ And yet, like many other converts in the Russian Empire, his Jewishness could be muted but not erased. For Khvol'son, the refutation of Jewish ritual murder myths was not simply a matter of scholarly attraction, but also served as a way for him to carve a rare form of intellectual and political activism in the Russian Empire on behalf of Jews.

Structure and Scope of the Text

The 1861 edition of *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev* launches into a rich history of Jews and Christians in interaction with the words:

The history of religion presents before us remarkable moments, namely: at various times, when a comparatively small number of people confess a religion that distinguishes them from the majority, — this minority, subjected to all

⁸ Khvol'son, *Vosemnadtsat evreiskikh nagrobnikh nadpisei iz Krimea* (St. Petersburg: M. Ettinger, 1866), 1-2. The *Institut vostochnykh rukopisei* archive in St. Petersburg contains Khvol'son's self-edited manuscript for this work, and a separate draft of an introduction. See fond 55, opis 1, delo 2. This is a manuscript for the introduction to the Russian edition of Khvol'son's short work on the Jewish burial inscriptions found in Crimea. The work was first published in German in 1865.

⁹ Zalman Shazar, "Baron Gunzberg and His Academy," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 57, (1967), 3. Shazar was a student at Ginzberg's academy. He suggested that although Ginzburg would very much have liked to employ Khvol'son at the academy as he was one of the two best Hebraic scholars in the early twentieth century, Ginzburg was unable to do so because of Khvol'son's conversion.

¹⁰ Ivan Troitskii, "Pamiati professora Daniila Abramovicha Khvol'sona 23 Marta 1911," *Tserkovnyi Vestnik*, no. 14-15, (April 1911), 433.

manner of libels, heaped together in different, often absurd and ridiculous accusations. Those of the majority are not content to challenge the theology and dogmas of the minority, but try to ascribe to them every possible appalling evil. There are many examples in history to back up what is stated here.¹¹

Indeed, the history of Jews and Christians living in close proximity was a subject that was particularly relevant in nineteenth-century Russia. By placing the question about Jewish use of Christian blood in the context of “majority” and “minority” religious relations, Khvol’son spoke in terms that his contemporary Russian readers would understand as relevant for their own situation—even when discussing “some medieval accusations.” However, Khvol’son does not make explicit what events or ideas motivated his writing of the text in 1861. Although he provided a brief introduction, there is almost no direct mention of the events in Saratov and the judicial commission in the 1861 edition.

For the historian, the lack of a clear introduction (or even mention) of the events that prompted the writing and publication of this text is a question worthy of a reasoned answer. Did Khvol’son feel that his potential reader did not need a brief account of the Saratov Affair because of familiarity and awareness of the events? Were there political ramifications that prevented his referencing directly the case and his involvement with it? The tsar had, after all, supported the Supreme Council’s decision at the end of the Saratov investigation by adding his own “and I” to the margins of the final report. Khvol’son was well aware of this fact and understood the potential danger that this realization presented to him. Another possibility is that Khvol’son exercised professional caution to protect against being too forward in his judgment for fear of institutional backlash from

¹¹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 1.

university officials or the censor.¹² He was, after all, only in his first years at the university and despite his early contributions to scholarship, he felt some hesitancy for taking too strong a stance against those in positions of power. As any young professor could understand, drawing unnecessary attention to oneself may have adverse affects in relations with others, particularly superiors. At the same time, he may well have tried to avoid undue political attention from government officials or other interested parties. Likely there were elements behind each of these questions that prevented a fully transparent declaration of Khvol'son's anger over the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Council's handling of the Saratov case.

The very act of publishing books about Jews was replete with political consequences in 1861. Khvol'son understood these issues first hand as his first four years (11 June 1851 – 14 September 1855) in St. Petersburg were spent working within the Ministry of Education on Jewish affairs.¹³ In his work within the bureaucracy on Jewish affairs he must have encountered firsthand some of the issues related to publication. In a recent article, Andrei Dmitriev explores the censor's rejection of works on both sides of

¹² Khvol'son's text as published in 1861 was approved by the state censor in St. Petersburg, F. F. Veselago on 21 June 1861. For more on F. F. Veselago and the Russian Censorship Committee, see Vassilii Egorovich Rudakov, "Poslednie dni tsenzury v Ministerstve narodnogo prosveshcheniia" *Isstoricheskii vestnik*, (1911), no. 8: 517-518, and no. 9: 982-987. For a discussion of censorial reforms in the middle of the nineteenth century in Russia, see Natal'ia Genrikhovna Patrusheva, "Tsenzurniia reform serediny XIX veka i ee vliianiena strukturu tsenzurnykh uchrezhdenii sostav tsenzorskogo korpusa" *Gramota*, vol. 11 no. 5, (2011): 134-138.

¹³ Troitskii, "Pamiati professora Daniila Abramovicha Khvol'sona 23 Marta 1911", 430-431.

the political spectrum during this period.¹⁴ In 1861, two books were submitted to the censor and rejected because of their Jewish content – one looked favorably upon Jews, while the other was a summary and partial translation of an anti-Semitic work by the German theologian Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761-1851).¹⁵ When *Evreiskii Vopros v russkoi zhurnalistike* (The Jewish Question in Russian Journalism) was written, its author, Arnol'd (Aron) Borisovich Dumashevskii (1837-1887) was a Jewish student of literature at St. Petersburg University.¹⁶ After he examined a large sample of Russian journal publications from 1857-1858, Dumashevskii concluded that the majority of Russian society looked favorably upon the Jews and would support emancipation efforts. It is easy to see why a work such as Dumashevskii's would be problematic for the censor in the years leading up to full discussions concerned with the serf emancipation efforts in the Russian Empire. The connection between Jews and serfs was not all that difficult to make. Jews were, after all, much like the Russian serf, restricted in occupation, location, and economic opportunity. If calls for Jewish emancipation were allowed to fester within liberal circles and joined with the serf emancipation efforts, the government would have

¹⁴ Andrei Petrovich Dmitiev, "Tsenzura i evreiskii vopros v god osvobozhdeniia krest'ian (Zapreshchennye knigi N. P. Giliarova-Platonova i A. B. Dumashevskogo po arkhivnym materialam Glavnogo Upravleniia Tsenzury)" in M. A. Banina, M. B. Konashev, N. G. Patrusheva (eds.), *Tsenzura v Rossii: istoriia i sovremennost'*, *sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, number 5 (St. Petersburg: National Library of Russia, Institute for the History of Natural Sciences and Engineering RAN Saint-Petersburg Branch, 2011), 125-143.

¹⁵ The original German text that inspired Giliarov-Platonov was Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus, *Die jüdische Nationalabsonderung nach Ursprung, Folgen, und Besserungsmitteln, oder über Pflichten, Rechte und Verordnungen zur Verbesserung der jüdischen Schutzburgerschaft in Deutschland* (Heidelberg, 1831).

¹⁶ Dmitriev, "Tsenzura i Evreiskii vopros," 125.

trouble separating the two movements. Thus, the censorial decision to prevent Dumashevskii's text from reaching the public made sense.

The other work that came up against the censor's careful eye, written by the Orthodox theologian N. P. Giliarov-Platonov, was a strong critique of the Jewish emancipation project. Giliarov-Platonov was sent on an official mission to the western European countries in the mid-1850s to examine the Jewish Question there and government educational policies throughout Europe.¹⁷ Upon his return from this expedition, Giliarov-Platonov decided that there was not an applicable model for Jewish emancipation that would work in Russia and therefore concluded that any attempt to follow a western model should be abandoned.¹⁸ Giliarov-Platonov later became heavily involved in the blood libel and authored a number of articles focused on turning public opinion in support of the accusations.¹⁹ According to Dmitriev's interpretation, the Dumashevskii and Giliarov-Platonov works were rejected not necessarily for what they contained, but rather for their potential to start a public debate about the Jewish Question and emancipation. In 1861, "emancipation" was a buzzword loaded with political and social meaning. Even more so, after the 1863 Polish rebellion, Jews in the northwestern territories experienced greater restrictions as a result of proximity to the Polish challenge

¹⁷ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 368-369.

¹⁸ Dmitriev, "Tsenzura i Evreiskii vopros," 133-135.

¹⁹ See for example the commentary in *Sovremennye izvestiia*, vol. 141, no. 25, v., (1869). John Klier highlighted Giliarov-Platonov's "fascination" with the blood libel and his efforts to legitimize the claims and credits him with ushering in greater public awareness of the charges in the 1860s and 1870s; John Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, 421-422.

to Russian authority and culture.²⁰ That the censor thought it wise to limit the potential for public outburst about Jewish rights at the time of serf emancipation efforts is telling of the connection between relative freedoms for one group and limitations for another.²¹ The censor's policy, at least in this instance, suggests a cautious program inspired by fear of public awareness of issues and not just in support of one or the other's specific argument. The significance of the censor's reluctance to publish both of these books is relevant to the question of Khvol'son because it highlights the very fine line between acceptable texts and unacceptable ones. In his 1861 text, Khvol'son also took up the cause of Jewish emancipation, though in a carefully masked manner. The question is buried deep in the middle of the text and he does so by looking west and then reflecting on the Russian situation indirectly. As shown below, it simply did not add up that Jews living in a modern society could not participate freely in it as a result of restrictions placed upon them by an enlightened government.

Khvol'son was aided by the extreme paucity of available sources in Russian that could be included and cited in his own work. He looked west because that is where he found evidence for the origins of ritual murder accusations and therefore, the lack of instances related to blood libel in Russia before the nineteenth century might be read as a

²⁰ John D. Klier, "The Polish Revolt of 1863 and the Birth of Russification: Bad for the Jews?" *Polin*, no. 1 (1986): 91-106.

²¹ There were events where this question of emancipation took on similar complexity in western European countries. See for example, Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History, and National Identity, 1778-1829* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); and for the impact of Catholic Emancipation on the Jewish Question, see Abigail Greene, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85-93.

subtle defense of Russian exceptionalism. Khvol'son argued that he traced the migration of the myth from Western Europe to Russia, and given the recent appearance of the myth he hoped to eradicate it before it could successfully take root within Russian culture. Further, when Khvol'son published the text, the question of Jewish religious tradition, authority, and legal decrees was not a benign subject for Russians nor Jews in the Russian Empire. Although he converted, Khvol'son remained deeply concerned by the negative portrayal of Jewish rabbinical thinking and literature among Russians. The general portrayal of rabbinic thought suggested that old, bearded men sat around pondering, discussing, arguing over minutia in the Talmud. The origins of this portrayal did not develop in Russia, though the internal Jewish debate about the future of Judaism in Russia contributed fuel to anti-Jewish polemicists.²² That is not to say that Jews were responsible for this stereotype, only that the internal debates within East European Jewish communities provided a set of ideological differences (discussed in chapter one) that were exploited when convenient by those who sought to disparage Judaism and Jews in modern Russia.

Although the task of educating the public—for Khvol'son this meant those not in the academy or state bureaucracy—would eventually find its way to Khvol'son's writing desk, the 1861 text was likely written for those whom he considered colleagues and intellectual equals. Again, the question of the lack of contemporary context stated explicitly at the beginning of his work suggests that he was sure that his intended audience would perceive the immediate relevance of the text. The first pages of the text

²² Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, 39-41.

lay out various accusations that occurred against Jews, including the poisoning of water wells, cursing Christ and Christians daily, usury, and several others. However, from the beginning he claimed that he would not address all of these in depth, in part because “enlightenment and time have done away with the larger part of these accusations.”²³ The accusation of greatest importance to Khvol’son, and the one most closely examined in the 1861 text “states that Jews steal Christian children, murder them, and then use their blood.”²⁴ Here it may seem that Khvol’son was overly specific, having placed emphasis on the particular rather than a broad set of accusations (as the title of the book suggests), but he pushed his aim further. Since enlightenment and the passage of time reduced the number of remaining “acceptable” accusations against Jews, the task then was to speed this process aimed at the elimination of other forms of anti-Jewish sentiment. As a central actor in this process, and one uniquely positioned to do so, the “enlightened” Jewish convert developed into a type of *shtadlan* who could meld scientific evidence, moral obligation, with liberal values of civil society into a national project aimed at improving the Russian state and improving the lot of Jews.²⁵ Undergirding all of Khvol’son’s effort was the idea that if Russia was to become a fully modern state it could not ignore the

²³ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 5.

²⁴ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 5.

²⁵ The *shtadlan* (pl. *shtadlonim*), were individuals who, because of wealth, talent, or intellect gained the ear of ministry officials and other bureaucrats within the Russian state and were able to use that opportunity to advocate, or defend, Jews. See Scott Ury, “Noble Advocate or Unbridled Opportunist? The Shtadlan of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,” *Polin* 15 (2002): 267-99; Vladimir Levin, “Preventing Pogroms: Patterns in Jewish Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Russia,” in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European*

plight of Jews, much less continue to persecute them. Thus, Khvol'son willingly took on the role of intercessor between Russia's Jews and the government, but at the same time formulated a systematic approach to Russian anti-Semitism that could break apart the cycle of myths that periodically appeared in European society and reignited waves of anti-Jewish policies and actions.

As a participant in the Ministry of Internal Affairs Saratov special commission, Khvol'son became one among a handful of individuals within the state bureaucracy that could comment with authority on the issue of ritual murder. However, the commission was limited in its reach because the intended audience for any report that might be issued was a small group of bureaucrats within the ministry. This narrowness of audience meant that whatever conclusions the individual members came to as a result of their investigation would likely never find their way into the broader social circles that gave rise to the issues under investigation. At best, the report would be examined, commented on and considered, and then hidden away into a ministry file.

After realizing the limited reach of the Ministry of Internal Affairs commission report along with its ineffectiveness in creating real change, Khvol'son restructured his approach for the published version of his work on the commission. He established a schematic structure for evaluating the underlying issues, the history, and his rebuttal of the myth characteristic of a "scientific" approach. Thus, he developed a classification system to group the various manifestations of the myth over time and then gave each consideration in the subsequent chapters. His list was divided into two sections: a) those

History, Essays in Honor of John Klier, edited by Jonathan Dekel-Chen, et. al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 95-110.

pertaining to need based on Jewish religious ritual; b) those related to witchcraft or sorcery (*koldobstvo*), medical treatments, or “for any other superstitious (*suevernyi*) aim.”²⁶ The accusations that continued to be recycled belonged to the first category. As an enlightened scholar who valued scientific inquiry and placed confidence in the ability of scholarship to address all areas of life, Khvol’son trusted “reason” to prove that there was no justifiable medical reason for Jews to use Christian blood. As well, the more superstitious interpretations of the myth disappeared along with the witch-hunts in early modern Europe. Despite his confidence in the ability of science to overcome these types of prejudice, the religious question proved that a concerted effort was required because religion, even in the nineteenth century, remained the predominant worldview of Russians. People still valued religion as the primary tool for understanding the physical world—and despite the efforts of some scholars to highlight the rise of secularism, Khvol’son himself depended upon a religiously influenced interpretation; and he expected that his readers would do the same.

The collection of possible interpretations of Jewish use of blood is listed at length in his text, and is translated here:²⁷

1. Jews use Christian blood to prepare unleavened bread and it is mixed with the wine, which they drink during the first two nights of Passover.²⁸

²⁶ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 6.

²⁷ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 6-7. This list is found on pages 6-8 in the 1880 volume with minor alterations.

²⁸ This reference is to the *Seder* meal (or meals) on the first two nights of the Passover celebration. Passover begins on the fourteenth day of Nissan (Leviticus 23: 5). Traditionally, after *Kaddish* is said, a glass of wine is drunk, and a second glass is poured and later consumed after the asking of the four questions help retell the story of the Exodus. Four cups of wine are

2. The blood of a Christian is used at the wedding: when the bride and groom stand under the canopy, and accept the blessing, the Rabbi offers them a small amount of Christian blood mixed with eggs.²⁹
3. In the synagogue, the Jewish religious leaders rub the blood on them and offer a blessing upon the people, in accordance with Numbers 6:24.³⁰
4. During the celebration of Haman (Purim) the priest offers members of his congregation a dish prepared from Christian blood.³¹
5. Jews hope that sacrifices of Christian blood are pleasing to God, or: Jews believe that Christian sacrifice is pleasing to God and although after the destruction of the Temple they are unable to offer other sacrifices the responsibility and charge to carry them out did not go away.³²
6. The sacrifice of a Christian child replaces the sacrificial lamb of Passover (*paskhal'nago agntsa*).

consumed during the Seder. See Exodus 1-15 for the biblical story. For more on the dating of the Passover and Khvol'son's interest in it, see chapter six below.

²⁹ Traditionally, the bride and groom stand under the *Chuppah*, where they recite blessings and the marriage contract, and exchange rings. The canopy is symbolic of the couple's first home together and a reminder of Abraham and Sarah's hospitality to the three visitors mentioned in Genesis 18. This passage is the basis for Andrei Rublev's icon commonly referred to as "the Trinity." Though not the subject of this dissertation, it is precisely this ability of Christians and Jews to find symbolic reference in the same biblical text that was of concern to Khvol'son. He remained convinced that given the proper understanding of the text, both Jews and Christians would find more commonality than difference.

³⁰ The reference to Numbers is significant because it is this chapter of the book that Moses is instructed how to teach Aaron and others the method for blessing Israel. In the verses that precede verses 24-27, there is mention of animal sacrifice, but at no point is blood mentioned. The specific instructions given were "[22] The Lord spoke to Moses: [23] Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them: [24] The Lord bless you and protect you! [25] The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you! [26] The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace! [27] Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them." Numbers 6:22-27 (JPS).

³¹ Purim, the celebration that commemorates the events of Esther and the Persian rule of Haman as recorded in Esther 3-7. The specifics are discussed anon in relation to Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 118-119. In the 1861 edition, Khvol'son uses "*Gaman*" whereas for the 1880 edition he employed "*Aman*."

³² It is in this thread that Khvol'son is beginning to make the connections between his references to earlier poets and writers and the continuation of the discussions that they wrote about in their texts.

7. During Passover, Jews smear Christian blood on the doorpost in memory of the smeared blood of Paschal lamb from the exodus from Egypt.³³
8. When a Jew dies, his fellow tribesmen smear his face with blood or soak a handkerchief and put it on the deceased person's face, and seem to saying in the ear of the deceased: 'If the Messiah in whom Christians believe and on which they rely is the true, promised Messiah, then God help you and with this innocent blood of a murdered Christian purchase eternal life.'
9. Some claim that the Jews do not use the blood of abducted infants, but they crucify them on Good Friday, in order to annually portray the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and finally—
10. Jews murdered Christian children just out of hatred for Christians (*prosto iz nenavisti k kristianam*).

The second class includes the following testimonies of prosecutors of Jews:

11. Jews use Christian blood for unknown (secret) medical remedies.
12. Jews use this Christian blood against the peculiar inherent smell attributed to them.
13. Jews mix different drugs from the blood of Christians as love potions. (*prigotovliaiut iz krovi khristian raznyia snadob'ia, vzbuzhdaiushchiia liubov*).
14. Jews use blood to stop bleeding when they circumcise their children.
15. Jews use Christian blood to facilitate delivery and speed up their recovery after childbirth, and finally—³⁴
16. Jews use Christian blood to treat the diseases and illnesses to which only Jews are susceptible.

By summarizing the various aspects of the accusation that Jews killed Christian children in this way, Khvol'son projected onto the task a scientific approach that clearly defined the variables he intended to dismantle. The task at hand, simply put, was "to analyze these accusations from a scientific point of view and share the research."³⁵ In order to

³³ Along with the command regarding the Passover offering in Exodus, God instructed Moses to place some of the blood of the sacrificial animal on the two doorposts of the home as a marker so that the plague wrought by God would not destroy them. See Exodus 12:7-9; 12-13.

³⁴ Khvol'son removed this point from the 1880 text without comment as to why it did not remain.

³⁵ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 7.

accomplish his goal Khvol'son separated the book into six chapters that highlight not just the history and occurrences of the accusations, but also the textual sources used by accusers. In the first chapter Khvol'son attempted to show how mistaken Christian perceptions about early Christianity contributed to the blood libel accusation. Second, the book was intended to show the fictional basis of the charges—made clear by the proofs presented in the first chapter. Third, Khvol'son took his argument further to show that there is no legal or historical precedence for such accusations. In this chapter he also outlined the transition into the critical period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Fourth, he sought to identify in history where baptized Jews defended other Jews, a task that had real import for his personal circumstances. In the fifth chapter, he focused on the efforts of Christian governments, popes, and educated individuals to protect Jews from these accusations. The final chapter then turns to the possibility of an aberrant Jewish sect that encouraged or participated in these crimes. By the end of the text, it is quite clear that Khvol'son used a circular literary device whereby he challenged the earliest history of Jews and Christians together, debunked the foundations of the myth, asserted historical evidence that the myths had repeatedly been proven false, then shifted his emphasis to the question of converts and religious sects. In doing so, he set the history in its proper context and then returned back to the very same issues (converts, communal identities, and heresy) but in the medieval and modern contexts. The organization of *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev* reveals not just the scientist at work but also a clear thinking about the history of the blood libel and the appearance of the myth in Khvol'son's own time.

Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

In order to understand Khvol'son's argument about the earliest interactions of Jews and Christians, the terms and movements need to be described in greater detail. From the earliest pronouncements of the ritual murder accusation, the most frequently cited text by Christians was the Talmud, a product of the rabbinic period. Rabbinic Judaism, properly understood, was the result of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. Traditionally, the rabbinic period is divided into several stages or periods, the first from about 70 CE to c. 200 - 220 CE.³⁶ The second stage, the post-Mishnaic period, lasted until the end of the fifth century CE. During this period, the sages not only carried on the tradition of repeating the traditions, but also initiated a broad program of interpreting and responding to Mishnah. Rabbis were intellectuals with profound learning of Torah respected for their interpretive skills. Whereas earlier Jewish culture focused on the Temple rituals, the rabbinic period is recognized as one of intellectual creativity – the result of which was the compilation of Talmud. Other aspects of the rabbinic period included the localization of Jewish communities around the synagogue, which further decentralized Jewish culture away from Jerusalem. The Talmud, or perhaps more correctly, Talmuds, came into being during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries CE.³⁷ This is generally how Khvol'son understood the rabbinic period,

³⁶ This early period is also referred to as the period of the *Tannaim*, with reference to the sages who lived during this period. It was during this period that Judah ha-Nasi brought together the Mishnah.

³⁷ The Jerusalem Talmud (or Palestinian) was compiled by the early sixth century. Around 650 CE the Babylonian Talmud, generally considered to be the more complex and developed of the two, was completed.

though he was also willing to identify earlier predecessors (in the century or so before the destruction of the temple) as part of that tradition as well.

Khvol'son was adamant that the early rabbinical texts (Tannaitic) contained little, if any real commentary on Jesus and Christianity. Such a view is supported by much of modern scholarship on the rabbinic period. Of greater concern were the issues of Roman control and the end of the Temple as a center of Jerusalem Jewish life. After the fourth century transformation of the Roman Empire into a Christian one, the texts changed in tone and discussion of Christianity as its adoption impinged upon Jewish life in a more direct way. The majority of anti-Christian commentary is located in the Babylonian Talmud, a fact Peter Schäfer argues was the result of the restricted freedom of rabbinic writers to comment directly on the Roman Christians after 312 CE.³⁸ Khvol'son argued that the rabbis knew almost nothing of "Christianity" and Christians in the sense that his contemporaries thought of them, which made any direct commentaries on the emerging religion a near impossibility.

Attacking the Talmud as a source of ritual murder seemed a safe bet for Christians because it was one of the texts that Jews held sacred that Christians did not. In the medieval period, very few Christians were even able to read the Talmud without significant help from learned and sympathetic Jews. Accusers of Jews could not directly attack the Bible as the source from which Jews found the command to murder Christian

³⁸ Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). The majority of the texts that concern Christians and Christianity make brief, passing references to, e.g., Jesus, his apostles, and his death (*Sanhedrin* 43a) and little else of concrete historical significance. See Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 18-19.

children. Obviously, this was the foundation of the Christian Old Testament—and doing so would undermine their religious tradition.

Khvol'son might well have started with Talmudic references, but chose instead to begin his analysis with the first moments when “Jews” and “Christians” coexisted. In order to root out the origins of these hostile relations, Khvol'son started at the beginning and worked forward to his own day. The professor sought to dispel beliefs about the early centuries that were, according to his calculations and those of some of his former colleagues in Germany, incorrect and damaging in their portrayal of first-century Judaism. The first critical step in this process required the reader to understand the “origins, development and the spirit of Rabbinism.”³⁹ At this point, the German education received at the hands of Geiger and others is quite evident. The center of rabbinic life, like that of the earliest Jewish traditions, revolved not around stagnation and rigid religious law, as many detractors portrayed. Rather, it was the product of ongoing “revelation” and creativity. In the 1861 text, this argument is a significant portion of the first chapter, but the full force of his claim is put together in the 1880 text where an additional forty pages were added to explicate this point.⁴⁰ Over the course of twenty years, Khvol'son developed as a scholar and acquired new knowledge and understanding of his material. This is a critical point because we see his desire to take on the myth that

³⁹ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 8.

⁴⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 12-51. The addition of this section shows a more refined and cohesive commentary on the rabbinical period, its purpose, accomplishments, and consequences. The text picks up again where it left off, so that page 14 in the 1860 text appears on page 51 of the 1880 edition.

proved so damaging to Jews in Russia, but at the same time it also reveals an active mind that continued to push for greater clarity and understanding of the real issues. In 1880, he had completed articles on topics including the “Last Supper and the day of Jesus’s death” (1873 and 1875) and also his history of the Old Testament (1874).⁴¹ This is a connection that Khvol’son pointed out for his readers in the second edition of the 1861 text, and whether he recognized it in the 1860s or not, the blood libel refutation became the hallmark cause of his public life.⁴² For Khvol’son, as for many humanists beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in western Europe, Jewish ritual and Jewish Passover were more than just passing interests—they held the keys to understanding Christianity’s own religious celebrations. In this chapter, I argue that the methods, sources, and overarching themes of *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev* centered not just on the ritual murder charges, though these are addressed at length, but also attempted a systematic undoing of Christian prejudices based on a false interpretation of early Christianity. In this way, the project in 1861 as conceived by the author was a multifaceted attack on centuries of misunderstanding at the very heart of the Christian tradition.

⁴¹ Daniil Avraamovich Khvol’son, “Posledniaia paskhal’naia vecher Iisusa Khrista i den’ ego smerti” *Khristianskoe Chtenie*, vol. 9-10 (Sept. - Oct., 1875), 430-488; “Posledniaia paskhal’naia vecher Iisusa Khrista i den’ ego smerti,” *Khristianskoe Chtenie*, vol. 5-6 (May - June, 1877), 821-876. This long essay was later published in German (1892 in St. Petersburg and in 1908 in Leipzig) under the title “Das Letzte Passamahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes.” Also, Khvol’son, “Istoriia vetkhozavetnago teksta i ocherk drevneishikh ego perevodov po ikh otnosheniiu k podlinniku i mezhdru soboiu,” *Khristianskoe Chtenie* (January 1874): 519-74 and (February 1874): 3-74.

⁴² Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 13.

The connection becomes even clearer if viewed through some of the sources used in his text. As one might expect, he worked from the classic writers in antiquity, to the Renaissance humanists, and then brought the full weight of German scholarship from the nineteenth century to shed light on his argument. He looked to the early Christian theologian Origen (184-253 CE) who wrote *Contra Celsus* (*Against Celsus*), and suggested the Jews deserved consideration among the great peoples of civilization and that among the cultural milieu of early Christianity were large numbers of people who also participated in and actively observed Jewish religious teachings.⁴³ Khvol'son is selective in his use of sources; for example, he shied away from Origen's other works that tended with great frequency to be more hostile toward Jews. He also cited Eusebius (ca. 263-339 CE), who in his *Ecclesiastical History* donated significant space to examine his predecessor Origen. Perhaps the most interesting of Khvol'son's footnotes, in the first chapter are his use of Cesare Baronio (1538-1607) and Isaac Casaubon (1559-1614).

Baronio, a Catholic Cardinal and author of the massive, twelve-volume church history

⁴³ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 13. Khvol'son cites Origen, *Contra Celsus*, book 1, chapter 35. For more on Origen, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 181. See also, Nicholas De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications vol. 25 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 76; James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians in Antiquity*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 251 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 189-197. Celsus, a Greek writer, wrote from the perspective of a Jew who was highly critical of Christianity. Origen, in his reply to Celsus, wrote favorably about Jews and their history. However, it should also be noted that Origen, like many early Church Fathers, held mixed views about Jews.

maintained a strange relationship between the history of the Church and Judaism.⁴⁴ While he encouraged a view of church ritual as consistent with the early Church, Baronio also fostered a desire to see in the origins of Christianity a heavy Judaic influence. Khvol'son was well aware of the work of renaissance and early modern scholars and theologians and used them to help defend his position. The Calvinist Isaac Causabon, the subject of a recent collaborative effort by Joanna Weinberg and Anthony Grafton, is traditionally remembered as a brilliant Greek scholar. However, as Weinberg and Grafton show, he was also a dedicated Hebraic scholar who studied alongside Jews. Causabon is a fairly remarkable source given that many scholars were unaware of his command of Hebrew literature and his combining of Jewish and Christian knowledge. Among Renaissance humanists knowledge of Hebrew language and texts was not unheard of in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, though it rarely equated to increased toleration of Jews and their religion.⁴⁵ That Khvol'son was aware of Causabon as a Hebraic scholar suggests, at least to some extent, his broad knowledge and ability to draw upon a set of textual evidence that others may have missed. This is characteristic of Khvol'son, who spared little effort in his intellectual pursuits. Although he too frequently assumed his reader could keep up

⁴⁴ Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, 12 vol. (Rome: Oratory, 1593-1607). I use Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg's interpretation of Baronio and Casaubon, see Grafton and Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter of Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

⁴⁵ Heiko A. Oberman, "Discovery of Hebrew and Discrimination against the Jews: The *Veritas Hebraica* as Double-Edged Sword in Renaissance and Reformation," in *Germania Illustrata: Essays on Modern History Presented to Gerald Strauss*, ed. Andrew C. Fix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 19-34.

with his passing references to people and texts, he offered broad and convincing evidence for his claims.

Within the very first pages of the text, Khvol'son also introduced the likes of Josephus, Pliny, Tacitus, Petronius, and Plutarch. In doing so, he presented the framework for understanding the accusations. The texts that he chose to begin the story were those that his colleagues, trained in the classics, were sure to have read and with which they were familiar.⁴⁶ Josephus's *Contra Apionem* (likely written around the end of the first century CE), a Greek work written as a polemical effort in defense of Jews and their religious traditions, is the first text introduced in the book. Khvol'son turns immediately to the point in the story where Apion introduces the Greek variant of Jewish ritual murder.⁴⁷ According to Josephus, Apion the grammarian, spread lies about Jews and the Temple. In one of Apion's stories, Antiochus Epiphanes (the eighth Seleucid ruler, 175-164 BCE) discovered in the process of taking over the Temple at Jerusalem a Greek male resting on a bed surrounded by all kinds of food, and in asking about the situation, he learns the story of Jewish ritual murder.⁴⁸ According to this story as related

⁴⁶ There is a large body of literature about how these authors served as a corpus for those who would study the ancient world in the Renaissance period. Anthony Grafton, for example, shows how *Satyricon* was a text that was both widely read and commented upon by Renaissance scholars in his article "Petronius and Neo-Latin Satire: The Reception of the *Cena Trimalchionis*" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 53 (1990), 237-249.

⁴⁷ Josephus Flavius, *Against Apion*, Book II, 7 and 8. For more on Josephus and his treatment of Jewish history and Jews, see Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile*, 177-197; J. Carleton Paget, "Jewish Christianity," in William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy, *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 769-771.

⁴⁸ Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-163 BCE) was the Seleucid ruler who in 169 or 168 BCE recaptured Jerusalem and profaned the Temple. Following the plundering of the temple, they altered or restricted temple practices and worship. These events led to the Maccabean revolt,

by Josephus, Jews captured a Greek male and fattened him until he could be slaughtered and consumed. In the dialogue, Josephus defended Jews by showing how this story simply did not happen and the basis of it rested in Apion's imagination. Khvol'son's use of Josephus served two purposes. First, he needed to establish a very early text that described the predecessor to the blood libel of the Middle Ages. Second, in doing so, the added benefit was a reference to the refutation of the story about Jewish ritual slaughter of humans and cannibalism.

Khvol'son was never satisfied with just one source to defend his position. In nearly every chapter, he presented a particular case study (often two or three) as a model and then showed how later generations perpetuated that same evidence and defense of Jews against the charges outlined in his opening pages. For Khvol'son, more agreement among a variety of sources signaled truth and correctness, while an aberrant source often signaled a questionable claim and therefore dismissal by Khvol'son. So, in his analysis of Josephus, Khvol'son connected his story to Petronius's *Satyricon*, along with Plutarch's *Symposiacs*, to show the early debates about Jews and animal worship, ritual slaughter, and ultimately, about the Jewish God.⁴⁹ One element in these early sources that

led by Hasmoneans and Judas Maccabeus. Judas Maccabeus regained control of the Temple from the Seleucids in 164 BCE. The Jewish celebration of Hanukkah celebrates the triumph of the revolt and the rededication of the Temple at Jerusalem. See Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of Los Angeles, 1990), 212-213.

⁴⁹ Here again, Khvol'son cites Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book II. 7, and he specifically mentions the instance in Josephus when the head of an ass was supposedly discovered in the temple. *Satyricon* is traditionally attributed to Gaius Petronius, a first century Roman. *Satyricon* was likely written in the mid 60s CE. Plutarch, *Symposiacs*, Book IV, question 5, responses 2 and 3. Book IV of Plutarch is a back and forth discussion about morals and Roman life, and they cover a broad range of topics with some rather remarkable discussions. In Plutarch, Callistratus asks the question: "Sirs, what do you think of that which was spoken against the Jews, that they

Khvol'son picked up on was whether Jews abstain from eating pork because they esteem swine as deity or because of a disdain for the perceived filthiness of the animal. By comparing this to the similarly held belief that Jews worshipped the image of an ass in the Temple shows how these symbols circulated between the many texts and how one story led to another, and eventually these kinds of stories become normative for those who employ them against Jews in the abstract.⁵⁰ The connection here is important because these early writers considered (or responded to "discussions" about) the Jerusalem Temple with the sacrifice of animals and the occasion of remembering the exodus from Egypt. The worship in the temple, according to these early accounts, suggested that Jews found great meaning in their law and used these symbolic acts to instruct and remind the people of their relation to God.

At first glance, this appears as an oddly complex way to refute the Jewish ritual murder charges that developed in Saratov. However, what Khvol'son sought to do was to show that the latest rendition of anti-Jewish rhetoric was not original; rather, it was based

abstain from the most lawful flesh?" In his own response to the question, Callistratus argued that the swine is held in veneration among Jews (and therefore not eaten) because it reminded them of the cultivating of the land in Egypt. He argues that the use of the snout to till up the land taught Jews lessons in agriculture. In response, the sparing partner Lamprias argues, "But the Jews do hate swine's flesh, because all the barbarians are naturally fearful of a scab and leprosy, which they presume comes by eating such kind of flesh. For we may observe that all pigs under the belly are overspread with a leprosy and scab; which may be supposed to proceed from an ill disposition of body and corruption within, which breaks out through the skin. Besides, swine's feeding is commonly so nasty and filthy, that it must of necessity cause corruptions and vicious humors; for, setting aside those creatures that are bred from and live upon dung, there is no other creature that takes so much delight to wallow in the mire, and in other unclean and stinking places." Quotations taken from Plutarch, *Plutarch's Morals: Translated from the Greek by Several Hands*, corrected and edited by William W. Goodwin, with an introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston: Brown and Little, 1871), 307-310.

⁵⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 2.

on a long history of false claims and accusations. Although the book did much more, at its most basic element it was a catalog of individuals and events related to the blood libel charge from the first century CE to the nineteenth century. Arguably, if the Khvol'son project failed to eradicate the myth, then it bore the potential to contribute and reinforce, rather than eliminate the accusations. It provided a primer in the historical appearances of the ritual murder charges and if read incorrectly, showed that this was a persistent element of history. In his mind however, his project was as complete as possible in its scope and thorough in its use of the available sources—and therefore it needed to succeed. By not discussing Maslov and Sherstobitov (the young men murdered in Saratov), Khvol'son focused on the history of the charges and sought to show where they were erroneous and unfounded in truth. At the sametime, he wanted to show how the promoters of the myth were recycling old stories that had never been proven and therefore erase the perceived connections between Jews and the myths that were then appearing in the Russian Empire.

The period of intense creativity of the rabbis and the commentaries, interpretations, and proscriptive texts they produced needs to be seen in the context of a formative period in two religious traditions; Rabbinic Judaism and the creation of a Christian community. For Khvol'son, the convert to Orthodoxy, these are two unbounded strands of the same rope connected to his personal identity and more importantly, the identity of both religious communities. The line between Judaism and Christianity was blurry in the beginning, a point that Khvol'son sought to prove in his 1861 text and in others that he produced later in life. Within this first century milieu the most important

debates were those that sought to differentiate between two types of believers. First-century Christianity was rich with sectarian branches and “particularly strong were the disputes between two movements, the Christians from the Jews, and the Christians from the Gentiles.”⁵¹ Khvol’son leaned on the New Testament books, particularly Acts and Paul’s letters, to show that the debate was about who was a Christian and who was not, and which practices were normative.

At every stage of his examination, the underlying concern that emerged in his choice of sources and examples was the relation between identity and religious community—manifest in the liminal figure of the convert. With the fifteenth chapter of Acts as a beginning point for a discussion about gentile observance of the Law of Moses, Khvol’son showed that the debates were not structured in a way to make direct comment on Jews, but rather focused on the place of the Gentile Christians in a changing religious setting. In Acts 15: 28-29:

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.⁵²

Khvol’son found evidence that from the very beginning the question was not about the validity of Jews and Jewish law. Rather, the question focused on non-Jews who became a

⁵¹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 14. Khvol’son uses *iazichnik* and the adjectival *iazicheskii* throughout both the 1861 and 1880 texts. The alternative *neevrei* (adj. *neevreiskii*) is rarely used. The confusion often emerges out of the debate between pagan and “Gentile,” but Khvol’son did not care to differentiate between these terms. For more on this subject, see Matthew V. Novenson, “The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 128, no. 2 (2009): 257-373.

⁵² Acts 15: 28-29 (NRSV).

part of the Jesus movement. For Khvol'son and for scholars today, this is clear evidence that at least in the early first and second centuries CE a set of standards existed for Gentiles that differed in many respects from Jewish legal observance. Although he rarely provided background to his inclusion of certain biblical passages in the 1861 text, in the later 1880 edition there were a number of highly instructive clarifications and expansions of his thinking on certain subjects. In the case of his use of Acts 15, he launched into the discussion without fully explaining why these verses were particularly relevant to his argument. The reader is not informed that this is a section of the New Testament about a concerted effort among the apostles to send clarification (in the form of letter or epistle, or, as in the case of believers in Antioch, messengers) on what was required of Gentiles. The use of Acts (particularly chapter 15) is important for the argument for a couple of reasons. First, most scholars today attribute Acts to the author of the third Gospel, and most agree that it was likely a late first century composition, which places it certainly after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. If this dating is correct, then the question of Gentile-Jewish relations was a pressing matter for both formative Christianity and Judaism after 70 CE. The book is divided largely between stories about two central figures in Christian tradition; Peter and Paul.⁵³ Both figures represent a position of authority and their individual stories tell something of the issues discussed in the New Testament text regarding observance of the Law. Peter, (Simon bar Jonah) was heralded

⁵³ The book of Acts is divided roughly between the ministrations of Peter (chapters 1-13) and then takes up the Pauline story.

as “the rock” upon which the church was built. Matthew’s gospel notes the following discussion between Jesus and Peter:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” And he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.⁵⁴

Peter (alongside John) became the head of the Jerusalem arm of the church, preaching in large part to Jews who believed the Messiah had come.⁵⁵ Paul, perhaps the most famous of the apostles of Jesus, represented another branch of early Christianity—the mission to the Gentiles in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Paul was a Jew who tended toward the Pharisaic school of thought (characterized by a belief in resurrection and the oral law) and envisioned his own religious transformation as consistent with his Judaism.

Khvol’son spent significant time describing these early developments within Christianity because he wanted to show that at the time, two distinct communities did not exist, but rather a range of possible and legitimate versions characterized by blurred, rather than stringently defined boundaries between them.

⁵⁴ Matthew 16: 13-19 (NSRV).

⁵⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 63.

His launch point for his impressive, complex analysis of the “Gentile question,” is Acts 15: 24: “Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds.”⁵⁶ The KJV translation highlights the terms of the question more directly, making mention of the demand for Gentiles to be circumcised and to “keep the law.”⁵⁷ Although he did not attempt a line-by-line commentary on the New Testament texts, in 1880 he addressed the issues at hand for Jews and Christians in a more developed way that shows his awareness of the nuances in the text. He wrote:

Even at the time of the Apostles the question was raised: Do Christians have to perform Mosaic laws? On this occasion, appeared three different directions (*napravleniia*). One, to which mainly belonged Pharisaic believers of Christ, was of the opinion that even pagans should be circumcised and required to comply with all Mosaic laws if they desired to be adopted into Christian society. They likely come from the views that these pagans should be considered real Jewish proselytes, according to the technical expression of rabbis — the *ger-tzedek*, and therefore have to be circumcised and observe all the Mosaic regulations.⁵⁸ Others, which included James, the brother of the Lord, and almost all of the apostles were of the opinion that those pagans must observe only certain laws, calculated in Acts 15: 29. Apparently they thought that the pagans should not be recognized as real Jewish proselytes, the *ger-tzedek* or proselytes within the gates, but rather as *ger-toshab*, which according to the rabbis are only obliged to comply with some of the laws as described in that place in Acts, known as the Noahide laws that are binding on all the descendants of Noah. According to this view, it did not by itself grant that the natural Jews who accepted the teaching of Christ were exempt from compliance with all the laws of Moses. The third area, mainly representative of

⁵⁶ Acts 15:24 (NRSV). The Gentile (or pagan) question here refers to the obligation of Gentile-Christians to observe Jewish religious requirements.

⁵⁷ Acts 15: 24 (KJV). “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment.”

⁵⁸ Although there are varied definitions for the *ger-tzedek*, this usually refers to the “true convert” to Judaism.

the Apostle Paul, advised that after the appearance of Christ, the Mosaic law ceased even for natural Jews. After long debate, the apostles decided that pagans who accepted Christianity should perform only certain laws, but that they are not required to undergo circumcision or compliance with other laws.⁵⁹

The systematic analysis of these three “directions” or opinions reveals his deeper understanding gained over twenty years in his various positions in the academy. Here Khvol’son finds a sliding scale of religious observance. On the one end, full obligation to the Mosaic Law, at the center (James and other apostles) a blending of requisite observance and non-observance, while at the other end (Paul) complete abolishment of the law. Khvol’son referred to Acts throughout the first chapter of his book because it was there that the foundational questions about Jews and Christians were discussed and it was from these texts that a great number of the later polemicists found material for supersessionist arguments. Historically the root problem of supersessionist views was that they erased the Jewish world around Jesus by negating the validity of their religious principles. To correct this development, Khvol’son reminded his reader that “Our Savior knew rabbinical teaching and struggled more with the arrogant representatives of it, than he did with the rabbinic teachings themselves.”⁶⁰ Within this chapter Khvol’son unmistakably positioned himself alongside the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school of thought and the Geiger effort. The historicizing of early Christianity and rabbinic Judaism held profound implications for both religious communities in the nineteenth century. As in other places, the object of his study was to show how nineteenth-century

⁵⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 52-53. This section is inserted in between two paragraphs that appeared in the 1861 text.

⁶⁰ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 9.

views on Jews and Judaism were often based on mistaken understandings of first- and second-century relations.

Jewish Christianity – The Space Between

At the heart of the argument here was the imprecise definitions of “Jewish Christianity.” Jewish Christians are difficult to define for many reasons. Some scholars argue for an ethnic understanding of the term (Jews who became Christians), while others employ a praxis-based definition.⁶¹ Most Gentiles who exercised any relation to Judaism, did so as “one who fears God” and were allowed to live among Jews without being tied to the full extent of religious obligations under the Mosaic Law. These individuals did not need circumcision and were allowed to eat foods that were prohibited for the Israelites.⁶² They were, however, required to adhere to the seven Noahide laws.⁶³ Although classical rabbis found evidence in Torah for the Noahide laws, David Novak argued that the “historical starting point can only be established following the social, demographic, and

⁶¹ Pagent, “Jewish Christianity,” 731-735. Pagent’s article in the Cambridge series is one of the most concise historiographical essays dealing with Jewish Christianity. He points out that the term did not come into use until the 1830s, when Ferdinand Christian Baur popularized the German “*Judenchristentum*” to explain the mixture of Jewish and Christian beliefs in first and second century CE. Khvol’son frequently employed the Russian “*evreo-khristiani*,” see, for example: Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 15.

⁶² “You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to the foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.” Deuteronomy 14:21 (JPS).

⁶³ Novak and Lagrone, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*. The Noahide Laws were those laws that, if followed, Jews would consider anyone a righteous individual. They include: 1) Do not deny God, 2) Do not blaspheme God, 3) Do not commit murder, 4) Do not engage in adulterous, incestuous or homosexual behavior, 5) Do not steal, 6) Do not eat meat torn from a living animal, 7) Use of a system of courts to enforce the previous six laws.

religious dislocations of the Second Temples' destruction in 70 CE.”⁶⁴ Novak's argument about the dating of the Noahide Laws lends further credence to Khvol'son's argument about the deep concern among both Jews and Christians about the fluid nature of Jewish and Christian identities in the first centuries.

In this same vein the writings of Paul inspired a broad range of scholarly interpretation and writing in recent years. The question is at the forefront of many New Testament scholars' writings since Vatican II and the Catholic response to the post-Holocaust world.⁶⁵ These scholars embraced efforts by theologians and others to rethink the relationship between Jew and Christian and began a process of reinterpretation of troubling biblical passages while remaining true to what the text said. Above all, this movement sought to understand the historical context rather than the layers of tradition that misrepresented Jesus and Paul among Jews. Daniel Boyarin finds in Paul a “radical Jew” and seeks to “reclaim Pauline studies as an important, even an integral part of the

⁶⁴ Novak and Lagrone, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism*, 1. This quote is from Lagrone's summary of Novak's argument in the first chapter of Novak's work; see chapter one in Novak's book, pp. 11-35. Novak suggests that the first “explicit presentation” of this legal code is from the Tosefta, traditionally dated as a late second century work.

⁶⁵ The most complete review of the diverse scholarly views on Paul is John Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also, Brenden Byrne, “Interpreting Romans Theologically in a Post-“New Perspective” Perspective,” *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 94, no. 3 (July 2001), 227-241; Sidney G. Hall, *Christian Anti-Semitism and Paul's Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1977); E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983 [Reprint London: SCM Press, 1985]); E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978); Krister Stendall, *Final Account: Paul's Letters to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Krister Stendall, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

study of Judaism in the Roman period and late antiquity.”⁶⁶ The ambiguity of the Pauline letters provided a broad range of possible interpretations and commentaries on the text. For example, Paul argued that Jews were unique in their relationship to God. “I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.”⁶⁷ Later Christians attempted to understand this passage in light of others attributed to Paul. The ambiguity of the Pauline message is evident in a later passage in the same chapter, “And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins. As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”⁶⁸ Khvol’son viewed the major issue of the first centuries of Christianity as a debate “between Christians from the Hebrews and Christians from the Pagans” (*mezhdru khristianami iz evreev i khristianami iz iazychnikov*).⁶⁹ With the focus on the different paths of the early Christians and their diverse origins, Khvol’son wanted to reshape the image of the relationship between Jews and Christians by returning attention to the centrality of these debates—and in doing so, move away from the oppositional relation to one of greater fluidity.

⁶⁶ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1.

⁶⁷ Romans 11:1-2 (NSRV).

⁶⁸ Romans 11: 27-29 (NSRV).

⁶⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 14.

Central to the 1861 text was Khvol'son's full-fledged attempt to restructure Russian intellectuals' thinking about the idea that Jews were from the beginning opposed to Jesus and the church founded in his name. The question posed by the author sought to provoke his readers to place themselves within the world of Jesus. If they were there, "how would we act toward this man whom we all know?"⁷⁰ After all, according to Christian theologians, Jesus opposed everything about the Jewish world around him. Khvol'son had an answer for this theological problem between Christianity and Judaism. Jesus came and lived among Jews who believed that "only God could forgive sins, and they believed, as is well known to everyone, in an abstract monotheism."⁷¹ Against this, Jesus forgave sinners and declared his divine parentage when he claimed that he had "descended from heaven and that he and his father were one."⁷² It is in these opening pages of the text that we see the scholar's intellectual structuring of the problem. The problem, therefore, was not in the proclamations of Jesus but in the gradual distancing of his message from the Jewish context. Centuries of church theological teaching erased Jesus's Jewishness, perpetuating instead a Christian message that was diametrically opposed to Jews and Judaism.

Like Boyarin and Levine, Khvol'son found in rabbinical explanations of the biblical text a portrait of humanity and universal concern for people—not just Jews. In every instance, the reader is reminded (or taught, perhaps) that although rabbinical

⁷⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 10.

⁷¹ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 10.

⁷² Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 10.

commentary was directly relevant to Jews, it also reflected an awareness of the “non-Jew” as part of the human race. Khvol’son highlights the fact that Rabbi Akiba saw in Holy Scripture a message for Jews to love others as themselves (*i vozliubishi blizhniago svoego iako sam sebe*).⁷³ In citing R. Akiba and the Levitical command to “Love thy neighbor,” Khvol’son blended for his Christian audience—without saying as much—the “legalistic” book of Leviticus with the “revolutionary” Jesus who sought to overthrow the outdated and outmoded religious practices.⁷⁴ Thus, by citing a phrase that any nominally aware Christian would know and understand, Khvol’son emphasized the continuity between Jewish law and religious instruction and Jesus, his followers, and the New Testament text. In the 1880 text, Khvol’son went further and cited at length the passage in Mark 12: 28-34 wherein Jesus and the interlocutor (a scribe) discussed the “first great commandment.”⁷⁵ In his analysis, Khvol’son aimed to show that there remained a continuum of this command from Leviticus, to Jesus, to Akiba, and beyond. The structure of the argument provided weight to the implication: if Jesus cited and emphasized the need for his followers to “love one another” then he most certainly did not intend to

⁷³ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 50. Rabbi Akiba, or often Akiva, (ca. 50 - ca. 135 CE). Akiba was one of the most important rabbinical figures martyred at the time of the Bar Kochba rebellion. Akiba recognized the messianic leader of the second century revolt, Simon bar Kosiba (Bar Kochba) as the Messiah. Akiba reportedly stated “Love your neighbor as yourself—this is the major principle of Torah.” See Jerusalem Talmud *Nedarim* 9:4. Khvol’son easily could have cited Hillel’s commentary on Leviticus 19:18 wherein he argued “What is hateful unto thee, do not do unto thy neighbor.”

⁷⁴ Leviticus 19: 18 (JPS), “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.”

⁷⁵ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 23-24. Khvol’son rarely cited whole passages of scripture in his work, which lends some degree of importance to the passage, as it seems Khvol’son wanted to employ it to fully make his point.

overthrow Jewish theology and law. He was, for the most part, consistent with Jewish thinking that surrounded him. As Amy-Jill Levine argued: “this historical anchoring need not and should not, in Christian teaching, preclude or overshadow Jesus’s role in the divine plan. He must, in the Christian tradition, be more than just a really fine Jewish teacher. But he must be that Jewish teacher as well.”⁷⁶ In other words, “Jesus does not need to be unique in all cases in order to be profound.”⁷⁷ Here again, Khvol’son’s intellectual structuring of the problem and his attempts at resolution, are revealed in his follow up to the discussion about the command to love others. It was not just an ancient command, he argues, but rather, a timeless wisdom as relevant for contemporary Russia and its relations as it was for ancient Israel.⁷⁸

Khvol’son’s Timing of the Parting of Ways

Khvol’son sought to show how in the tenth and eleventh century, there was not an ecumenical synod or council, as existed in the Christian church, to create and maintain a normative form of Judaism.⁷⁹ The result of this lack of central authority was that Judaism, although founded on the same central principles, looked differently in its praxis and in the cultural manifestations surrounding it because of the broad geographic diversity of the communities. Khvol’son presented this idea to his audience not to disparage Judaism, though it is possible to read it in such a way, but rather to defend his position that there

⁷⁶ Levine, *Misunderstood Jew*, 20.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁸ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 52.

⁷⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 58; 82.

was not a single normative text or authority figure that could define for Jews their religious practice in every location. Certainly, as his text shows, there was unanimity on the broadest theological questions, but beyond those core ideas, one could find any number of possible avenues and interpretations. What this meant for the blood libel issue was that Judaism lacked the cohesive nature of dogmatic principles.⁸⁰ Without a broad system to weed out heresy, opponents were able to claim that accusations applied to at least some Jews without the burden of proving that they belonged to normative Judaism.

Because “enemies of Jews” occasionally claimed evidence in the Pentateuch and other biblical books in support of their accusations about Jewish ritual, Khvol’son also wanted to show how the Bible, a sacred text to both communities was a poor choice to raise such claims. The New Testament, as noted above, was an obvious choice to disparage Jews, but polemicists could use even the Pentateuch as evidence. Khvol’son went directly to Abraham, the “patriarch” of the three Abrahamic traditions to show how ridiculous it was to use the biblical text as evidence of Jewish ritual murder. The obvious story is the sacrifice of Isaac by his father at the request of God. Abraham was “tested” by God when told to “take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”⁸¹ In his obedience to God, Abraham took Isaac with him, along

⁸⁰ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 59.

⁸¹ Genesis 22:2 (JPS). According to some versions of the Abraham/Isaac story, God “tempted” Abraham as opposed to testing him. Although the difference may be slight, such comparisons have been examined at length in Edward Kessler, *Bound By the Bible: Jews, Christians, and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The land of Moriah is also referred to in 2 Chronicles 3:1. “Then Solomon began to build the House of the

with the ass and two servants. After he placed his son Isaac upon an altar that he built, Abraham prepared to “slay his son.”⁸² It was after Abraham had completed the necessary preparations, and according to the Genesis account, was ready to fulfill the divine command that angelic intercession occurred and prevented Isaac from being slain. Abraham, after succeeding in showing his “fear of God” received an animal to sacrifice in place of his own son.⁸³ Khvol’son uses this familiar passage to highlight the dangers of using scripture haphazardly and out of context to levy claims against Jews. He summarized the discrepancies that existed among various interpreters as follows:

True, some philosophers would conclude from chapter 22 of Genesis, which tells of Abraham’s intention to sacrifice his son Isaac that human sacrifice once existed among the Jews. But as we know, such a conclusion belongs to the rationalists, who disbelieving that the Pentateuch is a book written by Moses, believe that the story of the Jewish patriarchs was created by later understandings (*po pozdneshim poniatiiam*). In contrast, all faithful Christians, as well as all Jews, take the words of the Holy Scriptures as they are, and understand this narrative as the test of Abraham by Jehovah; learned Jews talked in detail about this subject and consistently see the test here in conjunction with the teaching of the omniscience of God.⁸⁴

Here Khvol’son has followed a familiar rhetorical device in his writing by finding a familiar source that was revered by both Jews and Christians as sacred, highlighting the

Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where [the Lord] had appeared to his father David, at the place which David had designated, at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.” According to the commentary associated with Genesis 22:2 in the JPS Tanakh translation, this reference to Moriah (the Mount) was “perhaps on the understanding that the ‘Akedah is the foundation for the service of God that took place there” (p. 45-46).

⁸² Genesis 22:9-10 (JPS).

⁸³ Genesis 22:12-13 (JPS).

⁸⁴ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 86.

possibility of various readings, and then showing where Jews and Christians can find common hermeneutical ground.⁸⁵

Khvol'son understood the importance and centrality of the Akedah for both Jews and Christians and used it as a way to examine how Christian thinking drew upon the Jewish hermeneutical tradition while also incorporating it into a reading that prefaced the New Testament and the story of Jesus. Christians interpreted the providing of the ram as reference to the command given to Moses and Aaron in Egypt to provide a paschal lamb in Exodus 12:1-28. There, Moses is commanded to provide a lamb that is “without blemish, a yearling male” and watch over it until the fourteenth night of the month and then slaughter it at twilight.⁸⁶ Christians drew upon the institution of the Passover reference to other passages that they reinterpreted with Jesus in mind. Christians have not limited their reading of the paschal lamb to the New Testament alone, but also find the messianic tone in Isaiah to be a reference to Christ as the lamb.

[5] But he was wounded because of our sins, Crushed because of our iniquities. He bore the chastisement that made us whole and by his bruises we were healed. [6] We all went astray like sheep, Each going his own way; And the Lord visited upon him the guilt of all of us. [7] He was maltreated, yet he was submissive, He did not open his mouth; Like a sheep being led to slaughter, Like a ewe, dumb before those who shear her, He did not open his mouth.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For a very good encyclopedic summary of the story of Abraham within the Orthodox Church, see A. P. Lopukhin, ed., *Pravoslavnaia bogoslovskaiia entsiklopediia*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: A. P. Lopukhin, 1900), 164-183.

⁸⁶ Exodus 12:5-6 (JPS). This passage would be of importance later to Khvol'son in his discussion of the dating of the Last Supper debate. Nisan was referred to later in Esther 3:7 “In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, *pur* – which means “the lot” – was cast before Haman...” See also, Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obviniiaakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 88.

⁸⁷ Isaiah 53:5-7 (JPS).

The book of Isaiah is frequently read by Christians as prophetic—with frequent reference to the coming messiah—as evidenced by popular Christian motifs such as those referenced in George Frederick Handel’s *Messiah* (1741) and others.⁸⁸ In similar fashion, Peter also connected Christ with the sacrificial lamb in his first epistle: “but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.”⁸⁹ Here Khvol’son’s methodology is quite clear. He wanted to show the progression of the medieval idea that Jews demanded the blood of a Christian child through a story that was centrally connected to the Christian understanding of Jesus’s death. In the misguided reading of Abraham’s test (those that found evidence of human sacrifice), some Christians undermined their reverence for the biblical text by placing within it a malicious Jewish desire to reenact the crucifixion of Jesus. While it is somewhat difficult to measure biblical literacy among nineteenth-century Russian subjects, this line of thinking surely caused Khvol’son’s colleagues and intellectuals to pause. His audience was all too aware that this connection was central to their Orthodox faith and his mentioning of the story shows his awareness not only of a shared textual tradition but also an understanding of the liturgical practices of his Christian community. The story of Abraham and Isaac, traditionally read in conjunction with other Old Testament passages at Vespers on the Great and Holy Saturday (the morning before the Orthodox Easter) –

⁸⁸ Passages from Isaiah that are included in Handel’s work include, but are not limited to: Isaiah 53:4-5 (above); 7:14; 35:5; and 40:11.

⁸⁹ 1 Peter 1:19 (NRSV).

serves as a connection between this imagery of the lamb and the celebration of Easter.⁹⁰

The passages read on the Great and Holy Saturday draw together the themes discussed above while also highlighting the crucifixion story and the divine sacrifice. In a society where many Christians were fairly uneducated, the liturgy and artistic portrayals of biblical stories were the medium through which many could understand this same connection.⁹¹

Europe Transformed: The Origins of the Myth

Within the relationship between Jews and Christians problems existed since the period of the Gospels. This much Khvol'son could admit. But they were not so problematic that both communities were not able to thrive. The weight of the problems gained their polemical nature once theologians and scholars, along with rulers, rewrote the history and initiated a period of unprecedented violence and hostility. For Khvol'son, the hostilities developed slowly sometime after the fifth century and became fully manifest in European society around the eleventh and twelfth centuries when, as Khvol'son suggested, these communities became diametrically opposed to one another in a much more cataclysmic way. Between the first half of the book and the second half,

⁹⁰ Genesis 22:1-18 is the tenth Old Testament reading during the Great and Holy Saturday celebration. The other readings are 1) Genesis 1:1-13; 2) Isaiah 60:1-16; 3) Exodus 12:1-11; 4) Jonah 1:1-16, 2:1-11, 3:1-10, 4:1-11; 5) Joshua 5:10-15; 6) Exodus 13:20-15:19; 7) Zephaniah 3:8-15; 8) 1 Kings 17:8-24; 9) Isaiah 61:10-11, 62: 1-5; 10) Genesis 22:1-18; 11) Isaiah 61:1-9; 12) 2 Kings 4:8-37; 13) Isaiah 63:11-19, 64:1-5; 14) Jeremiah 31:31-34; 15) Daniel 3:1-51. I thank Nadieszda Kizenko for directing me to this reference within the liturgy.

⁹¹ As is discussed elsewhere, this was also during the period when the Russian Bible was still in translation, which indicates that even those who could read may not have fully understood the biblical text if they tried to read it.

Khvol'son took great care to ensure that his reader understood that although the problems were depicted as "eternal," or at least immemorial, this was a false depiction of the past that skewed the relations. "Christians" and "Jews," as the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century individual encountered them, had not always existed. The stark differences between the two communities were the result of historical, tangible developments, and not based on first-century reality. To claim this was problematic, of course, because it challenged everything that much of Christian tradition taught about Judaism. Khvol'son did not deny that differences existed; instead, he argued that the medieval period ushered in a much deeper stratification because of the historical context of medieval Europe.

After the challenge to the foundations of Christian origins in the first chapter, Khvol'son continued his charge through the sources and remained consistent in his approach and analysis of that history. In a number of the rebuttals of the specific elements, or variations of the blood libel charge, Khvol'son followed a systematic approach that proceeded from biblical text, rabbinical source, then medieval or early modern commentator, and, when appropriate, he added in modern writers. "What we want to show," he argued, is that "ideas that Jews would need the blood of Christians for religious purposes, goes against basic logic and sound thinking."⁹² As a result of his methodical approach, Khvol'son followed his schematic that he presented in the opening pages and addressed each and every instance mentioned. Ultimately, the result was a searching evaluation of available sources and opinions on the ideas. He was selective in his sources and chose those that helped set the issue in the clearest light possible.

⁹² Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 75.

Khvol'son laid open these accusations to passages from Torah that not only did not support, but even suggested the very opposite about Jews and the killing of human beings. He takes on the ninth chapter of Genesis, where God's covenant with Noah was declared as well as the prohibition against killing human beings.⁹³ Among others, Khvol'son employed the passage from Exodus 21:12 "He who fatally strikes a man shall be put to death"⁹⁴ He followed this up with greater description of the prohibition against consuming blood and highlighted the commands given to Moses and Aaron on how to properly select and prepare sacrifices in Leviticus chapters 3, 7, 17, and 19. Thus, in piling source upon source, Khvol'son hoped to show the absurdity of the charge in the face of passages that both communities held to be sacred. At the same time, he remained aware that Christians had used many of these very passages to show that rabbis had somehow twisted their meaning, or interpreted them in some way to suggest that Jews ought to kill Christians. He recognized that regardless of the similarity and agreement between passages, this was not enough to overturn the ritual murder charges. He needed to go further in his efforts and in the remaining chapters would attempt to do just that in as complete a way as possible.

To truncate his analysis with Torah, or even with the New Testament would ultimately do nothing more for the Jewish cause. The story he hoped to tell was much

⁹³ Genesis 9:6 (JPS). "Whosoever sheds the blood of man, By man shall his blood be shed; For in his image Did God make man."[□] This chapter included the Noahide laws (mentioned earlier) that included the prohibition of bloodshed of another human being.

⁹⁴ Exodus 21: 12 (JPS). He also cites the similar passage in Leviticus 24: 17, 21 and the much more specific passage in Number 35: 16-21.

more than just a theological or even hermeneutical problem with the scriptures.⁹⁵ It was historical, and so, to make his point, he trusted only a full examination of the sources across centuries of texts and individuals would accomplish that task. At the same time, he remained committed to the idea of “logic” and suggested that “we now ask, if it is possible, that an individual who has even a spark of logic and sound thinking” could actually believe that Jews were capable of hiding such a murderous command from Christians (let alone other Jews) for so many centuries.⁹⁶

Khvol’son identified a critical disconnect between “sound thinking” and accusations against Jews—and found the origins in the Middle Ages. Khvol’son argued:

If in the Middle Ages, when the knowledge of Hebrew was so rare among Christians, when the Bible was considered a banned book, and when every non-Catholic was viewed as a moral monster,—the Jews were accused of using Christian blood for the unleavened bread of Passover, then you are probably not surprised by this; but if now that Christian scholars have introduced their co-religionists to the laws and customs of the Jews, such charges can have more space and find believers even in government, then automatically we start to doubt the progress of humanity and common sense.⁹⁷

While he could show the damaging effects of medieval accusations on Jews in Italy, Germany, and France, to trace those same accusations in the modern period was more troubling. He repeatedly juxtaposed notions of “enlightenment” or “logic” with the foolish, corrupted minds of the accusers, and in so doing sought to appeal to the

⁹⁵ He made mention of Maimonides and the rabbinical interpretations, but only in a vague, passing reference. See Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 78.

⁹⁶ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 76.

⁹⁷ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 78.

sensibilities of intellectuals, politicians, and the general reading public who, at least in his mind, could see past the false accusations and eradicate belief in the myth.

Inmestar and Purim – The Challenges

Khvol'son did not shy away from difficult issues. Two connected issues that he addressed were Purim and the Inmestar incident.⁹⁸ One incident that Khvol'son knew he had to address because of its divisive nature was the Inmestar incident that occurred about 415 CE in Syria. The pretext for the events at Inmestar was that in 408 Theodosius II (401-450 CE) prohibited Jews from setting up or burning an effigy of Haman or a cross, as these were understood as acts of violence against Christians. In 451 in Inmestar, Jews were accused of tying a Christian boy to a cross (in place of Haman) and torturing him until he died.⁹⁹ The only account that we have, and one that Khvol'son cited, was from Socrates, a fifth century historian who mentioned the incident in his ecclesiastical history. Socrates points out that the Jews, drunken from the Purim festivities, murdered the young boy.¹⁰⁰ Khvol'son did not deny that such an event had occurred nor did he deny that Jews had actually killed the young boy.¹⁰¹ Given the paucity of the sources, he

⁹⁸ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 82-83 and 117-120, respectively.

⁹⁹ Gavin Langmuir, "Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder" in *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in anti-Semitic Folktales*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 10.

¹⁰⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 118. He notes that the story comes from Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, vol. VII, 16.

¹⁰¹ Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 227. Horowitz suggests that the famous Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnov (1879-1941) did attempt to soften the impact of the Inmestar incident when he suggested that the Jews did build a gallows (in the shape of the cross) for Haman, but did

would likely not have found sufficient information to even attempt a refutation of this incident. He was more content to point out that the Jews involved had acted while entirely drunk and not out of some normative adherence to the protocols of the festival. He was more interested in the connection between the Inmestar incident and the twelfth- and thirteenth-century appearance of the blood libel myth. Medieval protagonists equated and exploited the shift from an effigy of Haman to a Christian boy (representative of Christ on the cross) to accusations that Jews conducted this ritual every year. In order to do so they needed to kidnap children.¹⁰² This was a story that became, especially in the nineteenth century, a common element of the “history” of the blood libel.¹⁰³

The Jewish festival of Purim (named for the casting of the “*pur*” or lot) celebrates the Jewish victory over the Persian king Ahasuerus’s advisor, Haman. According to the Book of Esther, Haman was appointed by Ahasuerus to a position of high power in the kingdom. Esther, a Jewish woman who became the new queen (after Queen Vashti refused to obey her husband) discovered Haman’s plot to kill her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai failed to bow to Haman and therefore was viewed as not honoring and obeying

not murder a Christian boy. See Simon Dubnov, *History of the Jews: From the Roman Empire to the Early Medieval Period*, vol. 2, translated by M. Spiegel from the Russian 4th ed. (South Brunswick, N. J., 1968), 191.

¹⁰² Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 118.

¹⁰³ Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 218-226. The connection between Purim and the blood libel was used in anti-Semitic stories related to the Damascus Affair and even the later Dreyfus case in France.

the king of the land.¹⁰⁴ Through a fairly bizarre turn of events, Haman was killed upon the stake that he had constructed to impale the Jew Mordecai upon. The Jews then defeated an army of 75,000 soldiers and on the fourteenth day of Adar (the twelfth month, usually in March), they celebrated by making “it a day of feasting and merrymaking” and for sending gifts to each other.¹⁰⁵ In post-rabbinic Judaism, the feast of Esther precedes the Purim festival. During the festival the story of Esther (*megillah*) is read to the congregation.¹⁰⁶ Whenever the name of Haman is read, the children and adults make loud noises by stomping feet and by the use of noisemakers. They also frequently have the traditional three-cornered pastries (*Hamantaschen*) said to be representative of Haman’s hat. In some instances, an effigy of Haman was burned publicly—which led to many of the anti-Semitic claims about Jews’ loyalty to Christian rulers and their intention to reenact the crucifixion of Christ.

In the sixteenth century Ernst Ferdinand Hess, a Jewish convert to Christianity, attempted to slander the Jews in nearly every way possible. Khvol’son argued that even Hess, who made fun of the guidelines for preparing the Passover matzo bread, and whose book was “generally impregnated with poisonous bile” against Jews, did not support the

¹⁰⁴ In later anti-Semitic attacks of the Jewish holiday, opponents of Jews accused them of not wanting (or unable) to be a part of the medieval kingdoms and opposing non-Jewish rulers. Modern anti-Semites also employed this rhetoric of Jewish disloyalty to the modern nation-state.

¹⁰⁵ Esther 9:17-19 (JPS).

¹⁰⁶ The term *megillah* (lit. scroll) can denote any of the following books; Esther, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Song of Songs. However, it is often used to refer only to Esther.

claim that they used Christian blood.¹⁰⁷ In the nineteenth century as these connections were being forged, certain groups of Jews, sensing the efforts by anti-Semites to make these connections sought to get rid of Purim, or at least not celebrate it because it is the only biblical festival not mentioned in Torah.¹⁰⁸ The fact that some well-educated Jews (e.g., Claude Montefiore was a graduate of Balliol College, Oxford and student of Solomon Schechter) wanted to help Purim celebrations disappear, suggests something of the weight that anti-Jewish claims about the festivals had in nineteenth-century Europe.

Khvol'son addressed the *prazdnik Gaman* (Purim) and dismissed charges of anti-Christian motivations in the celebration as misguided and erroneous because the festival began nearly five centuries before the birth of Jesus and therefore could not possibly refer to Christians.¹⁰⁹ Khvol'son could not ignore the charges associated with Purim because it

¹⁰⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obviniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 81. "...khotia upomianutaia ego kniga voobshche propitana iadom'i zhelch'iu protiv evreev." Hess's book, *Neue Judengeissel*, was published first in 1589, with a number of republished versions in the early seventeenth century.

¹⁰⁸ Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 28-29. Among those who attempted to lessen the impact of the celebration was Claude Montefiore who went so far as to write an article titled "Purim Difficulties" in the *Jewish Chronicle* (March 2, 1888), 8. For more on the Montefiore's nineteenth-century effort to reevaluate the book of Esther and the Purim celebration, see Jonathan Magonet, "The Liberal and the Lady: Esther Revisited," *Judaism*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 167-76; Edward Kessler, *An English Jew: The Life and Writings of Claude Montefiore*, 2nd ed. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002); Elsie R. Stern, "Esther and the Politics of Diaspora" *Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 100, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 25-53.

¹⁰⁹ Khvol'son referred to Purim as the "celebration of Haman" while the earliest reference outside of the book of Esther, found in 2 Maccabees 15:36, emphasizes Mordecai the victor; "And they all decreed by public vote never to let this day go unobserved but to celebrate the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – which is called Adar in the Aramaic language – the day before Mordecai's day." (NSRV with Apocrypha).

was often tied into the charges against Jews and their need to kill Christian children.¹¹⁰ With its close proximity to Passover, the Jewish holiday was noted specifically in the press that covered the Damascus Affair (1840) where Jews were accused of murdering Father Thomas, a local Catholic priest. Elliot Horowitz, in his provocative work on the history and use of Purim and Jewish violence suggested that because Purim is traditionally such a popular point of intersection among defenders of Jews and anti-Semites we can often see “their true colors” in the way that they describe, attack, or defend the commemoration of the events in Esther.¹¹¹ Khvol’son likewise knew that he needed to at least address the issue, even if only to dismiss the charges as completely false. By highlighting the story of Purim and Inmestar, Khvol’son provided for his reader a possible source from which medieval enemies of Jews found fodder for their tales.

Stealing the Host and Stealing the Child – The Medieval Charge

Khvol’son continued as well with the familiar charge that Jewish involvement in the crucifixion provided a point of origin for the medieval host accusations and eventually the blood libel. Consistent with his view of the Middle Ages, Khvol’son understood the context behind the charge as reflective of Christian matters of faith and doctrine and not based in any tangible reality. Critical to this period in Christian history were church councils that clarified transubstantiation as official doctrine. In between the thirteenth century and the debates between Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth

¹¹⁰ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 82-83.

¹¹¹ Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, 9-10.

century, the Eucharist became the major battle ground among Christians, and in the process Jews were accused of stealing the wafer, stabbing it to draw out the blood of Christ, and otherwise destroying one of medieval Christianity's most sacred objects.¹¹² As Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, the imagery and focus of the body of Christ and his blood became central to Christian doctrine.¹¹³ At the same time, a sharper line between Jewish ritual slaughter of animals and Christian belief in the "New Covenant" took shape with dangerous implications for Jewish-Christian relations in Europe.

According to the host desecration myth, Jews obtained (often through bribery) the host wafer and boiled, poked, and stabbed it, as a means of drawing out the blood of Christ. Khvol'son, in his analysis of the host accusation, attempted to show his reader how truly bizarre such a charge looked from the modern perspective. If Jews, he joked:

'knew and believed, that the host was truly the body of Christ and crucified the host, they were convinced that they were once again crucifying Jesus Christ himself.' Excellent! After all, this is a new discovery; Jews, therefore believe in transubstantiation, and because of this, crucified the host, believing that they were actually crucifying Christ.¹¹⁴

Khvol'son suggested that the timing of some of the early cases coincided so closely with the thirteenth-century Fourth Lateran Council that it was unmistakably connected to the doctrine of transubstantiation becoming central to the faith. He identified the 1290 case in

¹¹² Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege After the Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2-3.

¹¹³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 149.

Paris where a Jewish woman purchased the host from a Christian and with other Jews at her side, boiled the host in water and then poked it with a sharp object. According to the tale, out of the host (still miraculously intact after the boiling and prodding) flowed blood, and then the host began to float above the table and Christians were able to view the miraculous event.¹¹⁵ In a similar event near Frankfurt am Main in 1296, a young boy stole (*pokhitil*) the host from a church and gave it to the Jews. Once in possession of the host, the Jews of Rotil poked at the host until there was no blood left. When a local butcher saw the Jews doing this, he rounded up a number of locals who then incited a bloody battle against Jews with the result of over ten thousand Jewish casualties.¹¹⁶ Although instances of suspected host desecration gradually subsided in Europe, the myth fostered the spread of the closely related blood libel.

The two instances seem to have joined forces in the Simon of Trent case (1475) in northern Italy.¹¹⁷ The Trent story began with the discovery of the body of young Simon a two-year-old boy floating in a small ditch. Although Jews initially found the body, they

¹¹⁵ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 149. Khvol'son depended upon Baronio's *Annales Ecclesiastici* for this story.

¹¹⁶ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 149-150.

¹¹⁷ The case has received broad coverage in recent years and is the subject of a number of books. Ronald Po-chia Hsia pioneered the study of the subject with his *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Additionally, a major contribution to the study of the Trent case and the blood libel myth more generally is the recently published collection of translated documents from the case and its coverage; Stephen Bowd and J. Donald Cullington, eds. *"On Everyone's Lips": Humanists, Jews and the Tale of Simon of Trent*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 418 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012). See also; Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Alleged Ritual Murder of Simon of Trent (1475) and its Literary Repercussions: A Bibliographical Study" *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. 59 (1993): 103-135.

were quickly accused of killing the young Christian for ritualistic purposes. In the trial, Pope Sixtus IV sent official delegates to oversee the matter and gradually some Jews confessed to the crime as the result of prolonged torture. The Jews were burned at the stake, or beheaded and then burned. Simon gained great attention when a cult of Simon emerged in Trent – a development that led to increased hostility toward the local Jewish population. The Simon of Trent murder was portrayed in a wide range of artistic depictions, which most often showed a young boy (Simon) being held with his arms stretched out in the position of the cross, meant to signify his likeness to crucifixion of Christ. While one Jew circumcised the young boy, others poked his arms and legs to draw out blood that was then caught in basins or cups.¹¹⁸ Artistic portrayals of events like this were essential because they allowed the Christian viewer to better understand the difference between Christian and Jewish communities at a time when Catholic Europe sought an emboldened Christian identity and solidarity against the Jewish other. Dana Katz argued that in the Renaissance period, “Christians defined themselves and their faith through the production of images that sought to vilify Jews” and in doing so hoped to “create a unified Christian social body.”¹¹⁹ Although the available choices for medieval blood libel trials were numerous, Khvol’son focused closely on the Simon of Trent case

¹¹⁸ A number of these images are available in the secondary literature. See “The Torture of Simon by the Jews of Trent, Woodcut in Giovanni Mattia Tiberino, *Die Geschichte und legend von dem seylichen kind und marterer genannt Symon von den Iuden zu Trientt gemarteret und getoettet* (Augsburg, c. 1475) which is used on the cover of Bowd and Cullington, “*On Everyone’s Lips.*” Other depictions of the murder are available in the same volume, see pp. 11, 12.

¹¹⁹ For more on this, see, Dana E. Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 7.

as this was one of the hallmark occasions and because it revealed the combative nature between Jews and Christians in fifteenth-century Europe.

Khvol'son argued that the question leading to the accusations was not a theological one, but rather, a historical one—and therefore required a thorough investigation of the sources and the material available.¹²⁰ The position of this statement in the text was significant because he had already made the case that the accusations against Jews were not the result of either the New Testament or the Talmud, but rather were the result of medieval machinations. The specific circumstances in Italy, France, Germany and elsewhere in Renaissance and early modern Europe encouraged an active process of separation of Jew and Christian that was most easily accomplished through a theological interpretation that depended upon a supercessionist view of Jewish depravity and reluctance to accept the Messiah that had, according to Christian accounts, already come.

Medieval and Modern Converts

One of the central attacks levied in the book was against Jews who converted to Christianity and then used their apostasy to formulate or endorse false accusations against their former coreligionists. It was the relationship of converts and Jews that was of critical importance for his evaluation of the problem. He approached the convert in the same way as other subjects broached in his study; as historical actors who behaved in certain ways for specific reasons within concrete settings. The shift from a theological refutation into the realm of history, buoyed by nineteenth-century historical methods,

¹²⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 153-154.

allowed Khvol'son to show where the ritual murder myth developed and how it functioned in European society at a moment when religious, economic, and social makeup experienced dramatic change. During the thirteenth century, antagonism ran high between Jews and Christians. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council placed limits upon Jews and their occupations, and also attempted to deal with the question of Jewish converts who returned to Judaism. It was, after all, this ecumenical council that declared, "There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved."¹²¹ The hostility toward Jews espoused in the council of 1215 was the result of a broad attack on heresy and non-Christian religions.¹²² Specifically, this council addressed issues central to Catholic relations with Jews including, Jewish usury, and decrees regarding Jewish clothing that was distinctive from their neighbors. In light of thirteenth-century papal actions towards Jews and Judaism, it became clear that the position of Jews in relation to Christians was a contested one both in Jewish and Christian circles—similar to the first- and second-century debates discussed above. Unlike the early scenarios contained in the Gospels and New Testament books, the medieval debates occurred in a very different political, social, and economic environment that contributed to the heightened animosity between these groups and one that focused on the physical differentiation between Jews and Christians.

¹²¹ As quoted in Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230.

¹²² Norman P. Tanner, *Church in Council: Conciliar Movements, Religious Practice, and the Papacy from Nicea to Vatican II* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), 188.

Within this context, it is easy to see why the Jewish apostate would be a highly contested issue and why those who converted would want to align themselves as far away from their former coreligionists as possible. The first among these “converts” discussed in the Khvol’son’s text were Nicholas de Lyra (1270-1349), a French exegete who was widely read among Christians for his study of Jewish texts, and bishop Paola de-Santa-Maria (1351-1435). Although modern scholars have largely disproven the idea that Nicholas de Lyra was born a Jew, Khvol’son was convinced that it was indeed his work that helped turn rabbinic texts into objects of “scientific” study by Christian exegetes.¹²³ Nicholas de Lyra, who grew up on France, witnessed the expulsion of Jews from parts of France in 1306 as well as papal and royal prohibition against the possession of the Talmud. In 1240-1242, Pope Gregory IX, placed the Talmud on trial along with other Jewish texts.¹²⁴ In 1242, the Talmud and other books were burned and similar trials and/or burnings occurred in 1248, 1257, and the 1280s. As one who grew up in an age of increased anti-Jewish hostility, Nicholas drew upon official church and royal sentiment to understand Jewish rejection of Christ and their continued role in the world—this was a theological approach. Nicholas de-Lyra, remained convinced that Jewish sources, including Talmud, should be read to better understand the Christian story and the divinity

¹²³ Deana Klepper, *Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Texts in the Later Middle Ages*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 8.

¹²⁴ Gregory IX’s charges against the Talmud included the idea that it expressed hostility to non-Jews. See Robert Chazan, “Trial, Condemnation, and Censorship: The Talmud in Medieval Europe” in John Friedman, Jean Connell Hoff, trans., *The Trial of the Talmud: Paris, 1240*, Mediaeval Sources in Translation Series (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012), 1-92.

of Jesus.¹²⁵ There is some disagreement, due in part to rumors that circulated in the fifteenth century about Nicholas' place as a convert to Christianity from Judaism. Nicholas employed Hebrew extensively in his work, but it was fairly obvious to later readers that he did not possess a profound knowledge of the language, and therefore was likely not raised in a Jewish home.¹²⁶ Khvol'son understood him to be a Jewish convert, and therefore a central figure in the transformation of relations between Jews, Christians, and their use of textual sources. Khvol'son, however, argued that even a scholar who produced highly anti-Judaic tracts could not justify (i.e., find evidence) for belief in Jewish blood rituals that involved Christian children.¹²⁷ Regarding Nicholas, Khvol'son argued: "He came from Normandy where in Judaism he acquired full knowledge of the rabbinic literature. By adopting Christianity, he became a Franciscan monk and one of the greatest theologians of his time."¹²⁸ Khvol'son was critical of Nicholas for taking up the pen against Jews but praised him, as he did others, for not supporting the blood libel. "This man, who had done such an important service to Christianity, and who knew well a

¹²⁵ For more on Nicholas de Lyra's use of Jewish texts and his legacy among other Hebraists, see Klepper, chapter 5, 109-133.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 8. Klepper suggests "Rumors dating from the fifteenth century that Nicholas was born a Jew have been universally discounted by modern historians—as his fifteenth-century critic, Bishop Paul of Burgos (a converted Jew himself) noted, Nicholas's knowledge of Hebrew and Rabbinic interpretation was too limited to reflect a Jewish upbringing."

¹²⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 166.

¹²⁸ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 166. The Franciscans, along with Dominicans, were products of the thirteenth century and were part of the structural support for anti-Jewish claims. For a concise description of this period in Jewish history, see John Efron, Steven Weitzman, Matthias Lehmann, and Joshua Holo, *The Jews: A History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2009), 147-172.

good many Jews and their literature, and who even wrote several works against them, decidedly rebelled against these accusations.”¹²⁹ Khvol’son remained committed to the idea of “authority” in his appeal to his readers—as his dependence on prominent Jewish converts suggests.

In much the same way that Nicholas de Lyra figured as a central case study in his chapter on converts, so to did Paul of Burgos, a fifteenth century Catholic bishop. Born Solomon ha-Levi, he was the rabbi of Burgos who later converted (ca. 1390) to Christianity and lived in Paris. After a brief period of study in theology (the university in Paris was renowned for its theological studies) he became the bishop of his former home city, Burgos. Paul of Burgos, who read and commented on the work of his predecessor, Nicholas de Lyra, was taken by later scholars as one who could be trusted on all matters Jewish; even when he was wrong on some issues.¹³⁰ Like his appreciation of Nicholas, Khvol’son praised the rabbi turned bishop for his rejection of the blood libel, even when he slandered Jews in other areas.¹³¹

Khvol’son found others who likewise challenged the accusations that Jews used Christian blood. For example, he explained at length the debate in 1510 between Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) and Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469-1523).¹³² Reuchlin, a

¹²⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 166.

¹³⁰ Grafton and Weinberg, *Casaubon*, 217-220.

¹³¹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 166, 172.

¹³² Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 170-172.

German jurist and humanist, was deeply interested in the study of language (as any good Renaissance humanist would be) and was drawn into conflict with the Jewish convert Pfefferkorn who revived calls for the destruction of the Talmud and other Jewish texts because they restricted Jewish acceptance of Christianity. Reuchlin took up the cause of Jews and sought to overturn demands to once again destroy Jewish books and pin Jews as obstinate and anti-Christian. Although Reuchlin was not entirely free from anti-Jewish ideas, in this case he emerged as the champion of Jews.¹³³

According to Khvol'son's interpretation of the battle, the "enlightened people" (*prosveshchennye liudi*) aligned with Reuchlin while the "uneducated and fanatical" (*nevezhdny i izuvery*) people were on the side of Pfefferkorn.¹³⁴ In his description, Khvol'son favored those with education over those without, and, held himself as one who continued the tradition of humanistic interest in languages, an emphasis of going "to the sources" (*ad fontes*), coupled with his desire to improve life for contemporary Russian Jews. This was not just his opinion, but also one that gained popularity among friends and students later in his life as reflected in numerous telegrams, letters, and nekrologies. During the jubilee celebrations of Khvol'son's scholarship in 1896, colleagues from Ekaterinoslav sent a telegram in honor of Khvol'son to David Gintsburg that employed a highly instructive comparison to the Reuchlin—Pfefferkorn case:

¹³³ Sophie Kessler Mesguich, "Early Christian Hebraists" in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Mange Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht GmbH & Co., 2008), 256-264.

¹³⁴ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 170.

To the highly respected Baron David Goratsievich, as a worthy disciple of the famous teacher Professor Daniel Abramovich Khvol'son, we are writing to you from Ekaterinoslav with the humble request that you pass along to that highly esteemed man our words of heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of the fifty year anniversary of his erudite literary activity and our boundless gratitude for everything he did for his tribesmen (*edinoplemennikov*) during that period of time and to express the feelings of respect and gratitude of the Jewish people to this Christian in the best sense—in human language even these sublime words are not strong enough. We can only say that if the world had more Christians like Lessing, Reuchlin, and Khvol'son, then humanity would not know either the Inquisition or Roman oppression or unfounded accusations of anti-Semitism or any aimless wild misanthropy.¹³⁵

Even in the loose comparison to Reuchlin, no less than to Gottfried Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), we sense something of Khvol'son's understanding of his role as scholar and defender of Jews. More importantly, we sense something of his perceived legacy not just in the blood libel matter, but also for his scholarship taken as a whole. That his students and contemporaries thought of Lessing and Reuchlin when thinking of Khvol'son is symbolic. Lessing, of course, was the author of the play "Nathan der Weise" (1779) in which Nathan represented and embodied Enlightenment values that transcended the differences between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Khvol'son was the Reuchlin of his generation, albeit in a specific geographic and political context that faced some of the very challenges that Pfefferkorn promoted and Reuchlin rejected in sixteenth-century Germany. Khvol'son developed a space for his public and scholarly activity that took the form of the familiar *shtadlanut*, an intercessor between government and community. The traditional relations between the government and the Jewish community were

¹³⁵ SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 23, l. 3. This is a telegram sent from a large group of his younger colleagues. Similar telegrams were submitted from Kazan, Kiev, and scholars and friends in many other locations.

compromised in the nineteenth century as the Russian government sought new figures that were loyal to the causes of the state. Khvol'son found in the blood libel issue an opportunity to develop a different relationship with the state that was not entirely tied into the bureaucracy and yet, carried weight with some its individual members.

As in other places in the 1861 text, Khvol'son sought to be as broad and inclusive as possible. In his search for sources, he found evidence in thirteenth-century France and Spain, fifteenth-century Germany, and Victorian Britain. When he traveled to Britain in the 1866, he encountered the “missionary” Alexander M'Caul who published his *Reasons for Believing that the Charge Lately Revived against the Jewish People Is a Baseless Falsehood* to address the ritual murder charge mounted against Jews in Damascus.¹³⁶ M'Caul's text contained the testimonies of dozens of Jewish apostates who declared that the blood libel was entirely false.¹³⁷ Reverend M'Caul's work is very similar to Khvol'son's, though it lacks the depth and critical scholarship of the 1861 text. M'Caul cataloged the many instances of blood libel cases and argued that in each and every one the evidence simply did not back up the claim. Both Khvol'son and M'Caul used the seventeenth-century historian and philologist Johann Christoph Wagenseil (1633-1705) as the premier example of a highly contentious individual who criticized nearly every

¹³⁶ Alexander M'Caul, *Reasons for Believing the Charge Lately Revived Against the Jewish People is a Baseless Falsehood* (London: Alexander Macintosh, 1840). Reverend M'Caul dedicated his work to Queen Victoria and argued that the Protestant Reformation had gone a long way in erasing the medieval charges, but there remained remnants that continued to recycle through modern society. M'Caul, like many of those cited by Khvol'son, could be fairly hostile toward Jews in his missionary efforts, which makes him fit the model of Khvol'son's discussion because like others, he rejected the blood libel.

¹³⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 169.

aspect of Judaism and Jewish culture, but found no reason to believe that Jews had any reason to kill Christian children.¹³⁸ Further, both authors mentioned at length the work of another anti-Jewish writer, Johann Andreas Eisenmenger (1654-1704) who had studied Hebrew in Amsterdam and feigned a desire for conversion to Judaism.¹³⁹ Eisenmenger attempted to reveal Judaism's secrets and show that Jews did in fact despise Christians. In his search for Jewish converts and sources, Eisenmenger could only find one who would support the claim that Jews murdered Christian children. Both authors used Eisenmenger as one of the most prolific and critical examples of anti-Jewish sentiment, but even he could not claim belief in the ritual murder.¹⁴⁰ M'Caul included in his rebuttal a declaration by converted Jews that stated:

We the undersigned, by nation Jews, and having lived to the years of maturity in the faith and practice of modern Judaism, but now by the grace of God members of the Church of Christ, do solemnly protest that we have never directly nor indirectly heard of, much less known amongst the Jews, of the practice of killing Christians or using Christian blood, and that we believe this charge, so often brought against them formerly, and now lately revived, to be a foul and Satanic falsehood.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ M'Caul, *Reasons for Believing*, 25; Khvol'son (1861), 102-103, 148-149 ff. Wagenseil attempted to gather and republish as many works as possible by Jewish authors that criticized Christianity. Wagenseil is often remembered as the author of *Tela Ignea Satanae. Hoc est: arcani, et horribiles Judaeorum adversus Christum Deum, et Christianam religionem libri 'anekdotoi'* (Altdorf: Johannes Henricus Schönnerstaedt, 1681). [*The Fiery Darts of Satan, or the Secret and Terrible Books of the Jews against Christ our Lord and the Christian Religion.*]

¹³⁹ For more on the transmission of Eisenmenger's work into the Russian context, see Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews*, 176-177. Eisenmenger "feigned" an interest in conversion so as to gain access to the Jewish community and individuals who might reveal details and information of interest to him in this regard.

¹⁴⁰ M'Caul, 26-28; Khvol'son (1861), 105 ff.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 45. When the book went to press in 1840, thirty-five Jewish converts signed their name to the declaration. Before the book was actually published, another twenty-two submitted their names. It should be noted that M'Caul was closely related with the London

Khvol'son understood that he was not the first to take on the challenge of refuting these accusations against Jews. And yet he understood the gravity of his work within the Russian Empire and recognized the import of it for millions of Jews. Additionally, by making use of M'Caul's 1840 response to the Damascus case, Khvol'son brought his analysis up to the most recent case that European Jews and European governments decried.

All of this work to show where defenders of Jews were found among Jewish converts to Christianity prefaced Khvol'son's inclusion of the Pole Gaudenty Pikulski. Khvol'son viewed Pikulski as the link between the early instances of ritual murder or blood libel accusations and the Russian nineteenth-century version of the tale. Pikulski was a Catholic priest who issued his work as an attempt to strengthen or revitalize Christian (Catholic) faith at a time when Polish nationalism had yet to fully take shape.¹⁴² Gershon David Hundert examined Pikulski's text as part of this process of creating "a mono-ethnic Polish national consciousness."¹⁴³ As Hundert shows, the eighteenth century

Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. In 1844, he traveled as a representative of the society to Krakow and various parts of Russia and recorded some of his impressions, including "Poland still continues the same rich and boundless field of labor that it ever was. The labor of the Society for so many years have produced a most happy change in the tone and feeling of the Jews towards Christianity." See Thomas D. Halstead, *Our Missions: Being a History of the Principal Missionary Transactions of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, from its foundation in 1809 to the present year* (London: W. Macintosh, 1866), 118.

¹⁴² Gaudenty Pikulski, *Złość Żydoska przeciwko Bogu i bliźniemu, prawdzie i sumnieniu, na objaśnienie przeklętych Talmutystów, na dowód ich zaślepienia i religii dalekiej od prawa boskiego przez Mojżesza danego na dwie części opisana* (Lwow, 1758).

¹⁴³ Gershon David Hundert, "Identity Formation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth," in Karin Friedrich and Barbara M. Pendzich, eds., *Citizenship and Identity in a*

was one of “disentangling” Polish (Catholic) and Jewish activities and culture to lay the foundation for a strong future Polish identity. Pikulski supported the Frankists, an eighteenth-century religious movement among Jews led by Jacob Frank (1726-1791). Frank encouraged Jewish acceptance of the New Testament and a gradual move away from Judaism to Catholicism.¹⁴⁴ The real targets of Pikulski’s text were the “Talmudists” who opposed Frank and his followers.¹⁴⁵ Pikulski used straightforward attacks against Jews who he purported intentionally misconstrued their biblical text and misinterpreted the book to hide evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. Pikulski’s book is massive, well over 800 pages larded with footnotes and references to other texts. Pikulski was interested in showing where and how Catholics were superior to their Jewish counterparts. He spent the second part of the book supporting accusations against Jews—in particular the claim that Jews secretly despised Christians. Pikulski’s book was based upon a manuscript attributed to a certain Serafinovich, heralded as a rabbi and scholar in

Multinational Commonwealth: Poland-Lithuania in Context, 1550-1772 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 131-148.

¹⁴⁴ Frank and hundreds of his followers converted in 1759. For more on the Frankists, see Simon M. Dubnov, *Istoriia evreev v evrope: novoe vremia (XVII-XVIII vek) Perekhodnaia epokha do frantsyzkoi revoliutsii 1789 g.* (Moscow: Mosty Kul’ tury, 2003), 332-336; Todd M. Endelman, “Jewish Converts in Nineteenth-Century Warsaw: A Quantitative Analysis,” *Jewish Social Studies* 4, no. 1 (1997): 28-59; Pawet Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁵ The “Talmudists” were counter posed to the “Frankists” and Pikulski sought to assert the classical imagery of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*. In this juxtaposition of Christianity and Judaism, one represented the “new” while the other, the outdated, less refined, “old.” Christianity had “superseded” the parent religion. This was a familiar way of thinking about Judaism in Early Modern Europe, when a number of philosophers considered Judaism a “fossil” religion, void of vibrancy and creativity.

Talmudic literature.¹⁴⁶ Pikulski's claims took the form of a catalog of anti-Jewish literature in support of his rant against the Orthodox Jewish community.¹⁴⁷ Khvol'son dismissed Pikulski in short fashion by noting that "we can show that he was not only not a rabbi, but that he was also extremely uneducated, he was unable to understand anything in Jewish literature and understood nothing about Jews."¹⁴⁸ Pikulski's diatribe against Jews was not just another instance of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the history of European civilization, but more importantly, served as a conveyor of misinformation about Jews. The process by which Russians became aware of anti-Semitic ideas is represented in Khvol'son's work as an eastward migration that can easily be traced alongside and in cooperation with, the blood libel myth. From 1144 in Norwich to 1475 in Trento, to 1852 in Saratov, Khvol'son followed a chain of similar incidents that drew upon a common discourse of anti-Jewish sentiment. Although the times and the places changed, the common ideas shared by the accusers served a similar function in each and every case. Khvol'son believed that the Russian cases need not continue the trend – but the requirement of correct knowledge depended upon a learned Hebraist who understood the texts and perhaps more importantly, both communities in interaction. He outlined his

¹⁴⁶ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 161-162.

¹⁴⁷ Zakrzewski highlights how Pikulski's work took the form of the Enlightenment period encyclopedia. Khvol'son calls it a catalog, Khvol'son, (1861), 163. See Andrzej J. Zakrzewski, "Jewish Spite: *Złość Żydoska*...of Gaudenty Pikulski — an Eighteenth Century Encyclopedia of Antisemitism in Poland" in *The Jews of Częstochowa: Coexistence, Holocaust, Memory*, ed. Jerzy Mizgalski (2005) [online], available at http://www.aapjstudies.org/jewish_spite_zlosczydowska (accessed 2 January 2013).

¹⁴⁸ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 161.

understanding of his position within this discourse of ritual murder in the following passage:

It is strange indeed. If it were a question, for example, about some difficult and complex issue of Roman history, you probably would not have called upon somebody who can barely read a few lines in some sort of Latin book, and would instead charge it to one who is quite dedicated to Roman literature, who possess deep knowledge of Roman history and knows the inner and the outer life and who donated a significant part of his life to the subject of Roman history. But it is something else entirely when the indictment is said on the whole about millions of people! If there is a man who knows the Hebrew alphabet, and when needed – using a dictionary – is able to recall even a few lines in Hebrew, even though this man possessed only the most vague and misunderstood information on literature, and on the history of the foreign and domestic life of Jews, he is already considered a quite competent judge in this matter!¹⁴⁹

Khvol'son was the exception to the rule. In his own mind, and by the account of those who commented later on his achievement in crippling the blood libel charge, Khvol'son could address both the Christian and Jewish sources, and understood as well the historical context of the accusations.

Jewish Sects and the Blood Libel

Khvol'son brought together the various strands of his argument in the final chapter of the 1861 text when he argued for a refined understanding of the historical development of Judaism and the ongoing debates about what constituted normative Judaism from the first century CE to his own day. As shown earlier, Khvol'son grounded his argument in the diversity of Jewish and Christian communities in the century or two between the birth of Jesus and the fifth or sixth century when these communities solidified their differences theologically and when rulers adopted Christianity as the

¹⁴⁹ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 153.

religion of state. Within Christianity the divisive issues of “doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the nature of Christ, communion, holy icons” found various sects or groups who espoused separate views on these matters.¹⁵⁰ In the same way, Judaism was also a conglomerate of various religious sects; during the Second Temple period the two most important were the Pharisees and Sadducees. Gradually as the rabbinic tradition and texts gained greater authority (during the third century and after), Judaism gained a normative form, though it was never centralized in the way that Catholicism and papal influence became so closely related with rulers and governance in the Middle Ages.¹⁵¹ Within both religions a process of gradual sorting and defining of the various elements of ritual and dogma separated the two religions in preparation for the hostilities and clashes witnessed during the second millennium CE. Khvol’son used the Christian equivalent of this process of centralization to show that Jews had also undergone internal battles about who should be considered observant, noting specifically the Karaite movement of the eighth century CE and the messianic movement that followed Shabbtai Zvi (1646-1724) in the seventeenth century.¹⁵² As each new age dawned, the various communities persisted in redefining for their own age the physical manifestations of normative Judaism. The logic of the argument posed in the final chapter of Khvol’son’s work needs to be understood within the similar argument made about first century Judaism – namely, that Judaism has

¹⁵⁰ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 198.

¹⁵¹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 198.

¹⁵² The eighth century date provided by Khvol’son is generally accepted among historians of Judaism today. The Karaite movement gained popularity in Israel during the early tenth century and later in Byzantine Empire. It should also be remembered that there was a flourishing Karaite community in Crimea when Khvol’son wrote his work.

never been stagnant, but rather the result of ongoing revelation and innovation to meet the needs of the day. Here, as elsewhere, Khvol'son's dependence upon Geiger's structuring of the problem and its interpretation is evident.

The Karaites developed outside of the rabbinic tradition, and even in opposition to it. Early Karaites espoused an understanding of the legal norms that were based in the biblical text rather than in rabbinic writings and interpretations. Khvol'son was eager to show that Judaism took shape over centuries and the process was neither smooth nor had it fully reached a point of stability. This approach, although it seemed to suggest that Judaism was splintered throughout its relationship with Christianity, actually served his purpose quite well. As he had done with Judaism, Khvol'son also showed how Christianity, from its very early reception among Jews and Gentiles (discussed above) was a religion in constant flux. From the early debates about who or what qualified as Christian, to the later schisms and Protestant Reformation, Christianity was no more unified than were the Jewish communities in Europe. And while Christian accusers of Jewish ritual murder claimed that the murders were the result of some errant sect, Khvol'son sought to show how that was a difficult claim to support – and in his usual way, levied evidence against such an interpretation.

Khvol'son did not dismiss the idea that certain Jews may have at some point in time committed murder against Christians. It was highly possible that this was the case, as was the reverse possibility that Christians had on occasion killed Jews. To argue otherwise would be highly contentious and false. There were, after all, “fanatical people” in every religion, but their actions need to be understood outside of their religious

community, even when they claim allegiance to it.¹⁵³ This is a familiar claim today among believers and scholars and so we ought not to think it strange that Khvol'son employed a similar argument against such accusations. Despite the fact that individual Jews likely killed individual Christians at some point, there was no evidence that any of the Jewish sects had committed ritual murder, with the intention of using or consuming Christian blood as part of the rituals prescribed to them in their sacred texts. Even in the most recent cases, Khvol'son argued that there was no evidence in any religious text for Jewish killing of Christian children. In his own time, it was the Hasidic community most often associated with the charges against Jews. The Hasidic movement, a product of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Galician Jewry, valued certain religious texts, most notably the *Zohar*. The *Zohar*, a central source for mysticism, was often attributed to the highly regarded second-century sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai.¹⁵⁴ The narrative of the *Zohar* centered on discussions held by Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai and his traveling companions that focused on the hidden (inner) meaning of scripture.¹⁵⁵ Scholars, however, attribute the work to Moses de Leon (1240-1305), a Spanish Kabbalist. The *Zohar* describes a complex set of symbols or *sefirot* that can help the follower understand the unknowable, mysterious God. As the product of medieval Spain, the *Zohar* represented a unique cultural space where Christians, Jews,

¹⁵³ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 200-201.

¹⁵⁴ Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 4-5.

¹⁵⁵ Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, "Jewish Myticism," in Judith R. Baskin and Kenneth Seeskin, eds., *The Cambridge Guide to Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 409.

and Muslims coexisted in creative ways within the region during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁵⁶

Opponents and accusers of Jews often cited Talmud and these mystical books as the sources from which Jews gained their religious instruction. To combat this accusation against the Hasidim of his day, Khvol'son reminded (or taught) his audience that although *Zohar* and the like were cherished in Kabbalah, they were also canonical for the Jewish community generally.¹⁵⁷ Thus, if the text was canonical among Jews broadly, then any accusation of the book as a source for Jewish ritual murder, must by definition also accuse "all Jews" of the crime. It was this linkage that Khvol'son challenged as false because there was, as his research proved, no evidence in any Jewish book that Jews were instructed to carry out these murders. To further his cause, he also argued that even within the hotly debated issues among the *Mitnagdim* and *Hasidim*, the matter was more about authority than about altering religious practice. The differences between the two communities were significant but did not sever ties between them – on the contrary, when cooperation benefited Jewish communities as a whole, they tended to work together.

To further argue against the possibility that the charge of ritual murder had any legitimacy in medieval and early modern Europe, Khvol'son cited specifically the advent of the ghetto in Italy and elsewhere. The formal ghetto developed in Venice around 1516 when local authorities restricted Jews to certain parts of the city. In the Jewish ghetto, he

¹⁵⁶ It was this same culture that fostered many of the greatest figures in Jewish philosophy, including Maimonides, the most famous medieval Jewish philosopher.

¹⁵⁷ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 205.

argued, “the streets were so narrow that everyone could observe their own neighbors on both sides of the street” and therefore knew the everyday occurrences around them.¹⁵⁸ It was impossible, he argued, that given the close-knit nature of Jewish communities in Italy and Germany in early Modern Europe that a small group of Jews could have carried out such horrendous crimes against Christians without somebody taking notice and alerting authorities. Likewise, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Jews had significant communal control over their population and communal leaders worked closely with local elites to ensure that Jews were protected.¹⁵⁹ Given the complex relations between Jews and Christians, Khvol’son placed full blame for the accusations on Christians who sought to alleviate their own concerns about Christian practices by placing false accusations upon Jews.

In every instance, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev* shows that “the foundational principles, spirit, and direction of the religion and of Jewish legal resolutions” speak against the accusations and that there is no evidence anywhere in Jewish literature that would incriminate Jews in the face of such claims.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, Khvol’son challenged Christians to eradicate the source of the accusations within their own society. “Nothing could be more outrageously absurd,” he argued, “as complaints of Jewish hatred against Christians.” After all, for “fifteen centuries Christian

¹⁵⁸ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 207.

¹⁵⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 206-207.

¹⁶⁰ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 109.

people systematically persecuted, tortured, oppressed the Jews and mocked their religion, customs and nationality.”¹⁶¹ Further, he implored Christians to tell him where the evidence for such claims and prejudice existed? “Christians have written entire libraries against Jews and Judaism, and yet, within all of Jewish literature” only a small number of unpleasant references against Christians were found.¹⁶²

To conclude his lengthy refutation of Jewish ritual murder charges, Khvol’son alluded to Saratov without specifically mentioning the events of 1852-1860. As argued above, there were reasons for cloaking his analysis and slight critique of the Saratov Affair. Despite his reluctance to openly criticize Russian society and the government, he was noticeably frustrated in the final pages of his text by the events in Saratov. He called upon Christians everywhere to battle against these heinous charges:

There are people who said that the government should take steps to eradicate this crime among the Jews, but such thoughts are only bitter fruit of inveterate prejudices (*zakorenelykh predrassudkov*) and ignorance of Jews: for that which is not and never has been; cannot be destroyed, but rather you need to take the most effective measures to eradicate these prejudices within the environment that caused them and provided the false witnesses that confirm the prejudices of these blood myths. We are commanded to take such actions by our duty as people, as citizens and as Christians!¹⁶³

Here we see Khvol’son the convert, working from a “Russian” position, employing the Russian voice. He is no longer the Jew, but speaks of Jews as the “other” and does so in order to reach his fellow Russians. It should also be noted that he was walking a very

¹⁶¹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 96.

¹⁶² Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 96.

¹⁶³ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 207.

precise line between accusing the government of inaction, or of promoting such charges, and turning the argument instead upon Russians in general.

At the heart of Khvol'son's argument here is the idea that the root problems are the prejudices and ignorance regarding Jews that were so prevalent in Russian society. In order to solve the problem and eradicate the myth, Russians needed to become more aware and knowledgeable about their Jewish neighbors. To illustrate the dangers of this complete ignorance of Jewish culture and history among Christians, Khvol'son cited a specific instance within the Saratov commission's investigation. During the investigation, Levison and Khvol'son came across a book that contained a picture (with a caption written in Hebrew letters but obviously Spanish words) that was distributed among Christians in the city after the discovery of the two young boys. The image, according to some who claimed to have seen it, contained a picture of a man with a crown on his head (depicted as a Jew) with red boils all over his body. This infected man is shown sitting inside a bathtub and surrounded by men who took young children away from weeping women.¹⁶⁴ Above the tub, these men pierced the young children so that their blood drained into the basin. This image became representative of the Jewish need for Christian blood and was circulated by some during the Saratov Affair.

However, Khvol'son noted that once they (Levison and Khvol'son) looked at it, it became quite obvious where this image originated. The image was based on *Shemot Rabbah*, the Midrash of Exodus that mentions the story of Pharaoh and the Israelites in

¹⁶⁴ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 212-214.

Egypt (Exodus 1-14). Although no mention is made of the story in Exodus, the Midrash suggested that Pharaoh had contracted leprosy and his doctors told him to slay hundreds of young Jewish children.¹⁶⁵ There is some discrepancy in the stories about what happened next. According to the Midrash, the Jews were spared this atrocity on account of their forefathers' diligence. Ephraim Shoham-Steiner has argued that this story was familiar in the medieval period, but some authors (including Rashi) changed the ending somewhat to suggest that young Israelite children were actually slain and not saved by divine intervention.¹⁶⁶ Khvol'son was bewildered at the ignorance of Christians who assumed that the image actually depicted Jewish ritual murder when its origins were quite the opposite. However, as David Malkiel suggested in an article discussing the story of pharaoh in relation to Passover iconography, the story of the pharaoh's use of infant blood "ran parallel to" stories about Jewish use of Christian blood after a 1462 case in Endingen in which several Jews were accused of killing a Christian family.¹⁶⁷ Malkiel pointed out the complexity of the Passover Haggadah and the ritual murder accusations in his epilogue to his article:

The legend of the slaughter of the Jewish infants and the ritual murder accusations glided silently past each other at the Passover table. The Seder ritual was structured by the drinking of four cups of wine at specified points in the evening's proceedings. Only red wine was permitted, and Isaac ben Moses, a thirteenth-

¹⁶⁵ Khvol'son suggested that Pharaoh was told to kill 300 youth and bath in their blood.

¹⁶⁶ Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, "Pharaoh's bloodbath: Medieval European Jewish Thoughts about Leprosy, Disease, and Blood Therapy" in *Jewish Blood: Reality and metaphor in history, religion, and culture*, ed. Mitchell B. Hart (New York: Routledge, 2009), 99-115.

¹⁶⁷ David J. Malkiel, "Infanticide in Passover Iconography" *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 56 (1993): 85-99.

century Viennese Talmudist, suggested that the colour restriction was intended to evoke the memory of the infants' blood which Pharaoh had shed. Four centuries later, David ben Solomon Halevi noted that red wine was currently avoided in the Ukraine, because of the prevalent danger of false accusations-an allusion to the blood libel.¹⁶⁸

What Khvol'son uncovered in the anti-Semitic book was the colliding of these two stories in the Saratov Affair. Thus, he understood the urgency of his work on blood libel as one that might correct both the prolonged hostility between Jews and Christians, but also find new avenues of cooperation and greater awareness of the other's religious traditions and rituals. Khvol'son's inclusion of this short example suggests that it was precisely this type of erroneous attribution of images and myths for which he wanted to provide the context so that Christians could not unknowingly perpetuate these anti-Semitic accusations.

To look back at the summary and discussion of the 1861 text from this vantage point is to understand the heart of the Khvol'sonian project. The sense that there existed a popular sentiment about these accusations drove Khvol'son to take on the broad attack on erroneous Christian perceptions of Jews and Judaism. By presenting himself as a "Russian" and "Christian," the text gained a stronger appearance of authority and yet, could also be sympathetic to the broader Russian social and cultural context. As a product of the Haskalah and its educational ambitions, Khvol'son believed wholeheartedly in progress and the idea of overcoming barbarity and prejudice through the dissemination of correct principles and knowledge. If the modern age was to achieve its rightful place as the most advanced and refined period in the history of mankind, the remnants of

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 99.

medieval hostility needed to disappear from Christian society. He noted that “no pen nor gracefulness is able to convey the unspeakable evil that pours out of our Christian society toward our unfortunate fellow Jewish citizens and the prejudice against them,” and yet he maintained a hope that with greater awareness would come respect for Jewish contributions to society and increased tolerance of non-Christian religions.¹⁶⁹

The concluding statement of the review of the 1861 text in the Russian-Jewish journal *Sion* suggested that juridical attempts to curtail or even prevent the cycle of ritual murder charges failed. Instead of “protection of Jews” and “justice,” modern Russia experienced “bigotry, ignorance, and prejudice.”¹⁷⁰ The author continued:

No laws can bring the benefit of Khvol’son’s work that lies before us. It is impossible to read it and not feel the love of truth, the spirit of tolerance and humanity, which breathe on his every word. Thanks to God that it has found more readers, and it was warranted that it was published in one of the most popular Russian journals, and that it was written to be very easily understood, smooth, almost popular language, which is not always the case with scientific research and we may boldly say, that after this book—if still possible to levy such accusations against Jews—then their conviction is absolutely impossible.¹⁷¹

If the reviewers of his text believed that Khvol’son had, once and for all, depleted the foundations of the ritual murder myth, and were convinced that its eradication from Russian soil was accomplished, their thinking was in line with that of the author.

Khvol’son fully believed that his thorough investigation explicated every corner of the

¹⁶⁹ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861), 207.

¹⁷⁰ “O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev: Istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam,” *Sion*, (3 November 1861), 283.

¹⁷¹ “O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev: Istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam,” *Sion*, (3 November 1861), 283.

myth, untangled the web of lies, and left the perpetrators with little legitimacy in their efforts. *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev* was a complete scholarly attempt to rid the world of not just the myth of Jewish ritual killing of Christian children, but also a falsified understanding of the development of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It was a bold and daring project, particularly for a young Jewish convert making his way in Russian society. Indeed, as the next chapter shows, it was possible for anti-Semites to once again bring these accusations against Jews that Khvol'son had supposedly vaporized. As is shown below, the charges reappeared and they gained in strength and intensity, and culminated with the Beilis Affair just before the First World War.

CHAPTER 4

PROFESSORS, PLAGIARIZERS, AND POGROMS: FROM SARATOV TO BEILIS

In the same week that Khvol'son died in 1911, the most important and consequential case of blood libel developed in Kiev. On Sunday, 20 March 1911, the body of young Andrei Iushchinskii was discovered and identified in a cave near Kiev. Like so many of the earlier cases involving young boys and girls found murdered in woods, canals, or caves, Iushchinskii's body was partially naked, punctured with small stab wounds and bloodied. The boy's clothes were blood soaked and his body riddled with punctures and wounds. Iushchinskii had been missing since Saturday, March 12, 1911. The investigators discovered that Iushchinskii decided to skip school that day and go visit a schoolmate, Zhenia Cheberiak. Several witnesses corroborated this point by indicating that they remembered seeing the two boys walking together on the streets of Kiev. It remained unclear whether Iushchinskii ever reached the Cheberiak home, and if he did, how long he spent there is unclear. The discovery of the young boy's body sparked widespread interest among the city's occupants, not least because of a growing desire in early twentieth-century Russia to protect children within society.¹ The brutalized condition of the body and the obvious attempt to conceal the corpse added to the intrigue. Additionally, the lack of an immediate suspect or motive in Iushchinskii's murder cast a

¹ Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 58. Kelly argues that between about 1891 and 1917, there was an ongoing process of social development within Russia that placed greater emphasis on the protection and welfare of children.

suspicious shadow over the city. Despite this apparent lack of material evidence, it would not be long before all eyes would focus on one man.

The Beilis Affair ranks among the three most ‘popular’ ritual murder cases from European history.² In company with the William of Norwich case (1144), and the Simon of Trent (1475) case, the Kiev trial is the subject of thousands of pages analyzing its purpose, background, rhetoric and place in Russian history.³ To look back at the event a hundred years later, the question about how it can be understood and analyzed remains at the forefront of Beilis scholarship. After all, when a key expert witness and prominent scientist stood before a packed courtroom in Kiev and declared with full conviction that “on one night a year, all Jews lose their minds,” what can one do?⁴ Yet, as this chapter shows, we still seek to evaluate this case and others like it—and not simply because it is an intriguing story—but because the basis of the narrative has not disappeared from popular culture.

² See some of the most recent literature on the Beilis case in: Igor O. Glazenap, *Ubienie Andreia Kievskogo: Delo Beilisa-"Smotr Sil": Stenograficheskii Otchet Kievskogo Sudebnogo Protsessa* (Moskva: Russkaia idea, 2006); Genri Markovich Reznik, R. Sh. Ganelin, Viktor Efimovich Kelner, I. V. Lukoianov, kongress Rossiiskii evreiskii, and Federatsii Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi, *Delo Mendelia Beilisa: Materialy chrezvychainoi sledstvennoi komissii vremennogo pravitel'stva o sudebnom protsesse 1913 g. po obvineniiu v ritual'nom ubiistve* (St. Peterburg: DB, 1999).

³ The latest book on the Beilis case is Robert Weinberg, *Blood Libel in Late Imperial Russia: The Ritual Murder Trial of Mendel Beilis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). Weinberg's book details some of the specific details of the Beilis trial, and focuses on the cultural context surrounding the events. Additionally, Weinberg offers a selection of documentary pieces, some original and others republished from similar volumes. The case is also the subject of a forthcoming (February 2014) volume by Edward Levin, *A Child of Christian Blood: Murder and Conspiracy in Tsarist Russia: The Beilis Blood Libel* (New York: Schocken, 2014).

⁴ *Delo Beilisa. Stenograficheskii otchet*, 3 vol. (Kiev, 1913), vol. 3: 150. [*evrei skhodiats' s uma*]. This is from Dr. Sikorskii's testimony against Beilis.

Since the tense days of 1913 and the conclusion of the Beilis trial, the story of a Jewish man accused of murdering a young Christian child—usually a boy, but on occasion the script changes to include a young girl—remains a compelling story. The Beilis Affair inspired the work of Bernard Malamud’s *The Fixer* for which he received the 1967 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Although accusations of plagiarism continue to embattle the story, other authors find the basic plot a useful, if entirely unoriginal, beginning point. Likewise, Sholem Aleichem’s attention was heavily focused on Beilis in 1913 (he followed the trial closely from several European cities), and it made a functional appearance in the plot of *The Bloody Hoax*.⁵ Similarly, Allan Levine, author of the “Sam Klein Mysteries Series” chose the provocative title, *The Blood Libel*, for his book that links Odessa’s Jews in the 1890s to Manitoba’s Jewish immigrants in the 1910s. These works, which change names, places, and when very ambitious, the chronology of the events, bring little innovation to the overall trajectory of the narrative.

Although the offshoots of the Beilis case created a working plot for any number of fictionalized stories, the twenty- and twenty first-century fascination with such tales pale in comparison to the explosion of a public discourse about ritual murder in late-imperial Russia. Politicians, journalists, theologians, literary figures, and scholars actively joined into the debates about whether Jews actually killed Christian children and used their blood. In doing so, they participated in a discourse formulated around this

⁵ Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Congruity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 360. The Yiddish version of Aleichem’s text is Sholem Aleichem, *Der Blutiger Shpas* (Warsaw: Kultur-lige, 1923). It is also available in Russian and also a recent English edition, Sholom Aleichem, *The Bloody Hoax*, trans., Eliza Shevrin (Bloomington: Bloomington University Press, 1991).

question of Jewish depravity and through that question addressed pressing issues about Russia's future, Russian nationality, and the growing fear of Jewish internationalism. In this way, the question of blood libel represented not only a continued manifestation of anti-Jewish rhetoric but also provided an outlet to express their deep-seated fears about the path of Russia before the First World War and in between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

In order to understand how this public debate that gripped Russian society developed, the starting point needs to be with Khvol'son and his work in connection with the Saratov case—and more importantly, the afterlife of his 1861 text. After Khvol'son, writers on every side of the argument either responded to or used Khvol'son's text as evidence to build their case.⁶ This chapter examines the story of Khvol'son and his detractors who despite the 1861 text continued to promote the idea that Jews were obligated by religious law to kill Christian children. When the 1861 text was published, Khvol'son and some of his reviewers felt that there could never be a relapse into the kind of thinking that resulted in another case like Saratov. And yet, not only did the

⁶ This aspect, like many others of Khvol'son's life, is understudied although it makes appearances in a few works related to the "Jewish Question" in late imperial Russia. For an example of this history, see Nikolai Vladimirov, "Prizraki proshlago," *Zhizn i sud* (22 September 1913), 11. This volume addressed the ongoing Kiev Beilis trial and was dedicated to Khvol'son and the question of blood libel published shortly after his death, with a brief article about Khvol'son's work and the history of the accusation in European history. This aspect of Khvol'son's life is most recently studied by Stephen Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translation and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 174-182, which is based on his earlier "Nineteenth-century Russian Old Testament Translation and the Jewish question" in *Kirchen im Kontext unterschiedlicher Kulturen: Auf dem Weg ins dritte Jahrtausend*, ed. Karl Christian Felmy, Georg Kretschmar, Fairy von Lilienfeld, Trutz Rendtorff and Claus-Jürgen Roepke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 577-587; John D. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1855-1881*, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 417-449.

accusations continue, the general debate took on a more hostile and aggressive tone toward Jews. If Khvol'son expected his single text to quell any discussion of the matter—and there is sufficient evidence in his writing to suggest that he did—then his project ultimately failed in the grandest of ways. In order to understand how such a monumental work such as Khvol'son's could seemingly fail to hit its mark, more must be said of the nature of Russian anti-Semitism and the myth. In doing so, this chapter traces Khvol'son's continued interaction with those who actively wrote about the blood libel charge between 1870 and 1913 when the Beilis trial reached its apex and then conclusion. In the end, Khvol'son's students were prepared under his tutelage to refute the claim once more in connection with the Kiev trial, and in doing so, redeem the project and solidify his legacy.

John Klier argued that the hostile breaking point in the relationship between Russians and Jews occurred quite late in the nineteenth century. For Klier, there was a difference between the anti-Jewish rhetoric before the 1870s and the “Judeophobia” that emerged during that decade. He argued that in the early period, Russian objections to Jews and Judaism were “largely based on objective realities.”⁷ According to this account, Jews posed tangible threats to Russian livelihood and Russian culture—and the negative responses by Russians to those threats were malicious but perhaps somehow understandable. There is evidence that this kind of thinking existed among some non-Jews in the Russian Empire, particularly in the western regions before the 1860s where some Jews did quite well as participants in the government's economic programs. At the

⁷ Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question*, 417.

same time, those Jews who did quite well were brought into the system by the government, either through special exemptions and contracts, or, in the case of soldiers, through the military conscriptions programs. Thus, if anyone was to blame, it seemed that it might be government policy makers. And yet, as the long history of accusations of Jewish economic exploitation prove, it was far more convenient to place fault on Jews.

By Klier's account, the Saratov Affair (and its earlier predecessor in Velizh) was the result of Russian perceptions of a tangible Jewish threat. In this study of Khvol'son and the afterlife of his 1861 text, Klier's thesis is helpful in explaining the dramatic popularization of the blood libel myth in the Russian Empire after 1861, but fails to account for the very events in Saratov that were similar to other ritual murder cases in both rhetoric and tone. It is true that Saratov was the first such case outside of the Pale of Settlement, and therefore the local community might well have felt an "invasion" of Jews from the west. However, given the very small number of Jews in Saratov at the time, this interpretation seems overly simplistic. Klier's argument does lend some assistance in thinking about the veritable explosion of texts in the Russian Empire on ritual murder after 1861, including the continuation of Khvol'son's own work on the topic. The very accusations that Khvol'son challenged—the Talmudic command to murder, the anti-Christian sentiment within Jewish texts, and the mysticism of various Jewish sects—were combined under the banner of Jewish internationalism and conspiracy to perpetuate the myth through the end of the empire. As the analysis of the Beilis case at the end of this chapter shows, it was the combination of Jewish internationalism, economic exploitation, mixed with the medieval charges of religious mysticism that made late-imperial Russian

anti-Semitism so charged. After 1861, and with the reappearance of the ritual murder charge, Khvol'son gradually understood that in the face of the anti-Semitic rhetoric, rational thought and systematic rebuttals could do little in the face of such accusations.

The Myth Goes Public

Despite the failure of his earlier text to eradicate the charges, Khvol'son remained committed to the cause he joined as a young professor when he participated on the special commission. Events in the empire continued to draw him into the service of Jews and their defense. In the mid-1870s the Jewish community in Kutaisi (modern Georgia) faced the same charges that plagued Saratov's Jews two decades earlier. In March of 1879, nine Jews in Kutaisi were arrested and tried in connection with the murder of a young girl, Sarra Modebadze, whose body was found in the woods near the city. In the months leading up to the trial, Khvol'son received requests from Jewish leaders in Kutaisi to come to their aid by once again writing a refutation to the myth.⁸ Khvol'son accepted the challenge and set about once again publishing his work. From that request, two separate texts were produced, one a short essay, the other an expanded volume of the earlier rebuttal.⁹ However, the initial result was radically different from the original text

⁸ SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 50, l. 1. On 27 April 1879, members of the Kutaisi Jewish community sent Khvol'son a letter regarding the accusations and his work on the case. The letter was written by M. Tsotsiashvili and M. Khundiashvili and signed by a number of other community members.

⁹ Khvol'son, *Upotrebliaut'-li evrei khristianscuiu krov'?* (St. Petersburg: M. A. Khana, 1879). This text was 35 pages long when published, though it was also republished later in Kiev in 1912. Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv Evreev: Istoricheskoe izsledovanie po istochnikam* (St. Petersburg: Tsederbaum i Gol'denblum, 1880). The longer edition was published under the same title as the 1861 text and is cited here consistent with the

published in connection with Saratov. In the first half of 1879, Khvol'son published a "brochure" on the subject that summarized for the reader a popular account void of many of the more theological and textual arguments in favor of a more direct refutation.¹⁰ The major difference between 1861 and 1879/1880 was the the formation of active enemies of Khvol'son and outspoken promoters of the blood libel. Whereas the early text focused on past writers and their thoughts on the accusations, in the 1870s and 1880s, Khvol'son faced colleagues and contemporaries who took up sides against him—most notably Kostomarov, Skripitsyn, Golitsyn, and Liutostanskii. Between 1876 and 1883, a series of articles and books responded to Khvol'son's earlier work or attempted to revitalize the blood libel charges for another generation. Liutostanskii's work in 1876 was the first step in that direction and the Kutaisi affair in 1879 sparked further interest from others.

The 1880 edition was an important volume for a number of reasons, first and foremost because it bore the potential to extend Khvol'son's influence further than the first volume. For whatever purpose the text bore for Khvol'son, it remains as well a vital link to understanding his intense preoccupation with the book's subject and allows a rare look into the scholar's insecurities of his achievements. Despite the many impressive reviews and praises paid to the 1861 text, its author remained insecure about the success

form used in Chapter 3—Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880).

¹⁰ Khvol'son, *Upotrebliaut'-li evrei khristianscuiu krov'?*. One of Khvol'son detractors during this period classified the 1879 text as a "broshiuurka," which is more or less accurate. See Ippolit Liutostanskii, *Ob' upotreblenii evreiami (Talmudistskimi sektatorami) khristianskoi krovii dlia religioznykh tselei, v sviazi s voprosom ob otnosheniakh evreistva r khristianstvu voobshche*, 2 vol., 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestva Obshchestvennaia Pol'za, 1880), II: ix.

of the book. To be sure, this was a man who understood his own abilities—confident in his intellect and scholarship—and yet discouraged by the fear that colleagues and others simply missed the full import of the book. It is important to remember that part of the impetus to write the earlier volume came after having his work on the commission ignored. It is in the later volume that we learn about the “misplaced” report that incensed the young member of the commission to the point that he felt he needed to make public his efforts. He left out the critical details of the commission and its work in the earlier volume, for reasons discussed in Chapter 3. However, the later volume provided the historical context not just of the ritual murder charges but also the immediate context of his work within the Russian Empire.

Liutostanskii

Ippolit Liutostanskii (1835-1915), a defrocked Catholic priest who converted to Orthodox Christianity, wrote a damaging attack on Jews that perpetuated the ritual murder myth.¹¹ Like so many before him, Liutostanskii attempted to overwhelm his reader with case after case of Jews and their rituals that required Christian blood. In order to do so, he claimed authority because he too (or so he suggested), was a former rabbi. Many of the charges against Jews that Liutostanskii made were recycled stories with little

¹¹ Ippolit Liutostanskii, *Vopros ob upotreblenii evreiami-sektatorami khristianskoi krovi dlia religioznykh tselei, v sviazi s voprosom ob otnosheniakh evreistva k khristianstvu voobshche* (Moscow, 1876). Liutostanskii was born in Lithuania, of Polish parentage, and was in constant disagreement with Khvol'son and others who pointed out his weaknesses (lack of Hebrew, etc.). See for example, Zalkind Minor, *Rabbi Ippolit Liutostanskii i ego sochineniie "Talmud i evrei"* (Moscow, 1879). Liutostanskii also published a second work (the one to which Minor responded that attempted to depict the Talmud as an evil and misguided book. Liutostanskii's *Talmud i evrei* was published in 1879.

innovation to them. He did, however, attempt to take the history of the charges up to the Saratov affair, and dwelt extensively with the 1823 Velizh and 1850s Saratov history. Although others joined in, the most developed and lengthy contributions to the debate came from Liutostanskii and Khvol'son. After reading Liutostanskii's 1876 report, Khvol'son ignored it for as long as possible, but when the Kutaisi troubles brought him back to the issue, any reluctance to revisit the old charges seemed to disappear. Khvol'son responded to Liutostanskii specifically in his 1880 text. Khvol'son added about 170 new pages to the 1861 text to further clarify his arguments and more importantly, to take on his challengers. Throughout the 1880 text, Khvol'son peppered in a large number of references to the arguments of his enemies and then refuted each and every point by showing how he had earlier dispelled the very myths they promoted or how their evidence falsely applied Talmudic readings and other sources. The feud between Liutostanskii and Khvol'son would continue as Liutostanskii responded to Khvol'son's additional 170 pages with a two-volume (783 pages) work on "Talmudist sects" and the sources of ritual murder.¹² In his two-volume work, Liutostanskii also directly challenged Khvol'son to seriously reconsider his claims.¹³ Liutostanskii argued that the serious (though in his mind quite innocent) attempts to answer the question "Do the Jews use Christian blood?" were protested and halted by those interested in protecting and obscuring secrets of the Jews, particularly the content of the Talmud and mystical elements of Judaism.

¹² Liutostanskii, *Ob upotreblenii evreiami*, (1880).

¹³ *Ibid.*, viii-xvii.

During the 1879/1880 period, Khvol'son's public activism on behalf of Kutaisi Jews and the need to deal at length with *Liutostanskii* highlights the shift in his thinking about the ritual murder issue and its root causes. Popular anti-Semitism was directed and given substance by intellectuals and pseudo-scientists. Therein lay the reason for two texts. Not satisfied with merely producing a scholarly monograph about accusations against Jews, Khvol'son also readied a "reader's digest" version for a wider audience. This shortened version was first printed in 1879 as *Upotrebliaut'-li evrei Khristianskuii Krov'?*, and was distributed by several publishing houses in St. Petersburg during that year.¹⁴ Regarding Khvol'son's decision to publish a shortened, accessible version for the general reader, *Liutostanskii* offered the following criticism:

The scientific booklet by the professor of Talmudic languages, Khvol'son, which is entitled, *Upotrebliaut'-li evrei Khristianskuii Krov'?* (*Do Jews use Christian Blood*), gave birth to many imitative writers on the subject. The book became an encyclopedic collection of allegedly authoritative materials for all kinds of borrowing. Khvol'son's booklet gets its authority precisely because of the "boastful" and "long" title of the author as "full professor of Jewish, Chaldean and Syriac" languages at St. Petersburg University, full professor at St. Petersburg Theological Academy, member-correspondent of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and others. Indeed, such a long list of titles and languages, even without the addition of "and others," is at first sight, enough to confuse anyone.¹⁵

Within this selection, one gets the sense that there were deep-seeded frustrations, perhaps even jealousy, on the part of *Liutostanskii* at Khvol'son's many titles and positions, if not his consistent publication record and frequent attempts to publicly prove him wrong.

¹⁴ Khvol'son, *Upotrebliaut'-li evrei Khristianskuii Krov'?*. One publisher of Khvol'son's abbreviated refutation is M. A. Khana, and another is Tsederbaum i Gol'denblium. The latter also published Khvol'son's expanded 1880 edition of his larger, scholarly text.

¹⁵ *Liutostanskii, Ob upotreblenii evreiami (talmudistskimi sektorami) khristianskuii krovi*, (1880), ix-x.

While Khvol'son's longer text, particularly the 1880 edition, was of interest to his colleagues, it was likely far too expensive and detailed to receive broad general readership. The lack of potential readership was problematic for Khvol'son because he firmly believed in his potential to alter people's perceptions and opinions, particularly as they concerned religion and relations between Jews and Christians. As is made clear from Khvol'son's writings on unrelated subjects, he was concerned not only that his writings reached his colleagues in the universities and academies of Europe, but that they also found their way into circulation in the bookshops and community reading rooms. Khvol'son revealed the "public" nature of his work and expressed concern that his scholarship was more or less limited in its readership and scope if it did not have much appeal to a much larger non-academic audience outside of the academy. He argued that the role of the historian is to find ways to apply his erudition to a lay public, in his words the "*chitaiushchei publik*" that can, with the help of the scholar, gain knowledge and change their perceptions of the past, thereby also influencing their future.¹⁶ Khvol'son particularly recommended that Christians learn something about Jews, as a way of understanding their own religious roots and the long history of Jews and Christians. Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, one can sense the urgency of Khvol'son's scholarship on the blood libel. While Khvol'son clearly believed that the kind of deeply researched, complex scholarship produced by European historians in the nineteenth

¹⁶ IVR RAN f. 55, op. 1, d. 2. This is a manuscript for the introduction to the Russian edition of Khvol'son's short work on the Jewish burial grounds found in Crimea. The work was first published in German in 1865. The Russian edition was published as *Vosemnadtsat' evreiskikh nagrobnikh nadpisei iz Krima* (St. Petersburg: M. Ettinger, 1866), 1-2.

century served an important function intellectually, it could do far more. For Khvol'son, scholarship must also serve a role outside of the academy. Although the MVD commission's overlooking of the reports submitted by Girs and his experts became the occasion for Khvol'son to publish his work, the republication of his larger text and pamphlet versions (both in expanded form) revealed an increasing urgency and awareness that anti-Semitism had taken on a more serious form during this period.

Skripitsyn

Among those who followed the Kutaisi Affair quite closely was Dostoevsky, who a year later published his *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (The Brothers Karamazov) that included a memorable discussion between the book's hero, Alyosha, and Liza about the Jewish killing of Christian children each year at Passover.¹⁷ Maxim Shrayer claims that Dostoevsky was aware of Khvol'son's 1861 and 1879 texts, as well as Liutostanskii's text and the 1844 MVD report republished in the newspaper *Grazhdanin* in 1878.¹⁸ The 1878 republication of the report was attributed to Valerii Valerievich Skripitsyn, who

¹⁷ A number of literary scholars understand the Kutaisi Affair as influential in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* published in late 1880. See Elena M. Katz, *Neither With Them, Nor Without Them: The Russian Writer and the Jew in the Age of Reform* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 188-190; D. V. Grishin, "Byl li Dostoevskii antisemiton?" *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, vol. 114 (1974): 73-88; Maxim D. Shrayer, "The Jewish Question and the Brothers Karamazov," in Robert Louis Jackson, ed., *A New Word on the Brother's Karamazov* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2004), 210-233 (Shrayer's essay was originally published as "Dostoevskii, the Jewish Question, and the Brothers Karamazov," *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 273-291. The original text related to the blood libel is in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, 30 vols. (Leningrad, 1972-1990), XV: 24. See also Aleksandr A. Panchenko, "K issledovaniuu "Evreiskoi Temy" v istorii russkoi slovesnosti: suizhet o ritual'nom ubiistve," *Novoe Literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 104, (2010), 79-80.

¹⁸ Shrayer, "The Jewish Question and the Brothers Karamazov," 219.

served as the director of the Department of Religious Affairs for Foreign Confessions (*Departament dukhovnykh del inostrannykh ispovedanii*) in 1844.¹⁹ Skripitsyn spent a long career in the state's service and was recognized for his vigilance in protecting Orthodoxy. Skripitsyn, like Dal' was closely connected to Perovskii during his time at the head of the MVD. Skripitsyn was a divisive figure, evidenced by the fact that during his lifetime and after his death friends and enemies wrote articles about his effectiveness as a bureaucrat. In 1875, O. A. Przhetslavskii published an article that was highly critical of Skripitsyn and his policies toward non-Orthodox minorities in the empire.²⁰ The staunchly conservative nationalist, D. N. Tolstoi, replied with an article of his own where he defended Skripitsyn against some of the charges.²¹ Skripitsyn, Tolstoi argued, needed to be understood within the administrative complexity of the ministerial system, which was "kaleidoscopic" and burdened by overlapping jurisdictions and confusing policy mandates from the emperor and his closest advisors.²² Further, Skripitsyn had

¹⁹ The history of the 1844 text and its republished versions is discussed in Chapter 2. The various possible authors and the published versions of the report make it difficult to refer to it as a single report. In order to avoid confusion I refer to each edition by the listed author to make clear which edition I am referring to in the discussion here. Khvol'son believed that the Skripitsyn was fully involved in the 1844 text and likely influenced Iulii Gessen's later reflection on the authorship of the report. For Gessen's analysis, view I. Gessen, M. Vinnitsera, A. Karlina, *Zapiska o ritual'nykh ubiistvakh'' pripisyviaemsia V. I. Dalii i eia istochniki* (St. Petersburg: Tipographiia L. Ia. Ganzburga, 1914), 9-31. Gessen argued that during the Beilis trial in Kiev, the Dal' attribution was far more significant than the Skripitsyn name, given the monumental position of Dal' among scholars and the public generally.

²⁰ O. A. Przhetslavskii, "Vospominaniiami," *Russkoi Stariny* (December 1875).

²¹ D. N. Tol'stoi, "V pamiat V. V. Skripitsyn," *Russkii arkhiv* 14, no. 3 (1876): 384-392. For more on Tolstoi, see Thomas S. Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis: Autocracy and Local Self-Government, 1861-1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166-167.

²² Tolstoi, "V pamiat V. V. Skripitsyn," 384.

accomplished, above all else, the major objective of his job as director of the department—to protect Russian Orthodoxy. While critics claimed that Skripitsyn failed to understand the theology and praxis of Roman Catholicism and other religious groups in his jurisdiction, Tolstoi claimed that Skripitsyn’s responsibility was to follow the directives from the top of the bureaucratic structure. Tolstoi was willing to admit that Skripitsyn “did not possess any special learning” to prepare him for the post, but made up for it in loyalty to the Russian people and the Perovskii ministry.²³

The 1878 article with Skripitsyn’s name attached was published four years after his death.²⁴ The article itself appeared in successive volumes of the newspaper with later additions made to bring it up to date through the 1870s.²⁵ The article is above all else, a

²³ Ibid., 384, 390.

²⁴ Skripitsyn died in Paris in 1874 and his body was sent to Moscow where he was buried in the Dormatov cemetery.

²⁵ “K istorii evreev,” *Grazhdanin*, no. 23-25 (10 October 1878): 485-295 [the page numbers in no. 23-25 are confusing as the article begins on page 485 but after 489, the numbering changes to 290 through 295]; no. 26 (26 October 1878): 513-522; no. 27-28 (10 November 1878): 538-543; no. 38-40 (31 December 1878): 649. The addition in no. 38-40 is a bit of an oddity because the article ended in volume 27-28, and the later one page summary of Saratov, Tiflis, and other cases in the 1870s was not attributed to the author, but clearly was part of the same article, under the same title. It is possible that the later addition was simply an effort to bring the article up to date, as the earlier one left off with the Velizh case in the 1820s. The author noted that there were striking similarities between Velizh and Saratov, with the noted exception that in Saratov, the process of justice had successfully proven that Jews were involved in the case and had prosecuted them as such. Another point of interest with *Grazhdanin* and the volumes listed above was the inclusion of a multi-part article by N. N. Golitsyn titled “O neobkhidomosti i vozmozhnosti evreiskoi reformy v rossii.” In the article Golitsyn argued that the immediacy of the “Jewish question” and Jewish reform programs needed to be handled as soon as possible, to the benefit of both Jews and Russians. The problem however, according to Golitsyn was that successful action on this front was so delayed during the nineteenth century that it was unlikely any effort would bring immediate change. This echoed the above-mentioned sentiment of the Skripitsyn report and the failure of Alexander I’s ukase of 1817. The article ran in the following volumes of *Grazhdanin*; no. 27-28: 538-543; no. 29-31 (24 November 1878): 565-569; no. 32-34

listing of 148 different ritual murder cases from the time of Constantine to the 1870s. For each entry, a short description of the individuals or details of the case are included. In this respect it was similar to many other attempts to connect a broad series of events through the common theme of ritual murder. More important, however, is the inclusion of a sharp critique of Russian imperial policy regarding the Jewish question and the attempt to prevent legal action against Jews accused of ritual murder. One of the major themes throughout the commentary on ritual murder was the failure of the 1817 prohibition against the use of ritual charges against Jews. The author argued that Jews used bribery to convince educated people that the accusation was a “vile slander” and further criticized “the humanity of our criminal laws, that not only saved the Jews, but further... managed to obtain the Supreme Order of 1817 that forbid the accusation of Jews in this crime.”²⁶ The final straw, in the author’s opinion was the 28 February 1817 ukaze (formally announced 6 March 1817) that declared the claims against Jews a prejudice and an unlawful accusation, thereby preventing such charges from being legitimized or encouraged. The aim of the article was to show how the 1817 declaration by Alexander I prevented the truth from being known and had perpetuated Jewish ability to carry out the charges without fear of prosecution.

In his introduction to the article, the long-time editor of the paper, Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii (1839-1914), argued:

(9 December 1878): 597-604; no. 35-37 (19 December 1878): 625-633; no. 38-40 (31 December 1878); no. 1 (8 January 1879): 9-18; no. 2-3 (26 January 1879): 29-36; no. 4 (6 February 1879): 71-76.

²⁶ *Grazhdanin*, no. 23-25, October 10, 1878), 486.

Printed below are the documented facts from an 1844 investigation by a highly respected person regarding the murder of Christian children by Jews for the purpose of securing blood. More is said below concerning the importance of this study and its author. Now, however, we note only that in the book "The question of the use of Christian blood by Jewish sectarians for religious purposes" published in 1876 by Ipp. Liutostanskii (former rabbi and Orthodox priest), set out many of the facts presented in this report, but did so in an incomplete and even entangled form – and without specifying their origins—so we believe that our readers will be very interested to read the detailed and truthful story of such striking cases of Jewish bigotry. We also present new sources and further facts that occurred between 1844 and last year (1877).²⁷

The editor also added at the conclusion of the article a brief history of the source upon which it was based. It should be noted that within Mershcherskii's summary, he wrongly attributed the positions of rabbi and priest to his subject, Liutostanskii. Mershcherskii highlighted the fact that "the real title of the article" was "The murder of Christians by Jews for the purpose of obtaining blood." Further, the material was compiled by "Privy Councilor Skripitsyn (Director of the Department of Foreign Confessions), by order of the Minister of the Interior, Count Perovskii for submission to the Emperor Nicholas I, the heir Tsarevich, Grand Duke and members of the Council of State."²⁸ Of interest here is the slight challenge to Liutostanskii's first book on ritual murder and his poor organization of the material. Although Liutostanskii and the Skripitsyn article levied the

²⁷ Ibid., 485. Meshcherskii, who was related to the historian N. Karamzin, was closely connected to the Alexander III and Nicholas II and represented the strong anti-reform sentiment among the highly conservative factions in government and society. The *New York Times* called him "the brains of the late Czar Alexander III" in the article written shortly after Meshcherskii's death in 1914; see "Czar's Adviser, Mestchesky, dies," *New York Times* (24 July 1914). The newspaper *Grazhdanin* was also the recipient of subsidies from the government. The close connection between Meshcherskii's paper and the government also reflected the turn away from reform by Alexander II in the last years of his life before his assassination in 1881.

²⁸ Ibid., no. 39-31, 556.

same charges against Jews, there was an effort to claim the right to authorship.²⁹ The *Grazhdanin* article was published, as the editor claimed, as a corrective to the Liutostanskii text. What this internal debate between two highly conservative and Judeophobe authors revealed was the ongoing need for authority in such matters. Liutostanskii claimed (falsely) rabbinic training and priestly occupation, while Meshcherskii stressed the role of the “highly respected” investigator who had the backing of the imperial government and even Nicholas I.

Khvol’son picked up on this debate when he responded at length to both of these works in the second edition (1880) of the 1861 text. The Skripitsyn text, Khvol’son argued, was based largely on Pikulskii’s *Złość Żydoska* (1758) – evident by the large extractions that were almost verbatim. Khvol’son believed as well that Pikulskii’s text depended upon the Eisenmenger text – and claiming such allowed a systematic genealogy of the ritual murder charges and their revival in the modern period. More important still, was the fact that the later writers applied what they found in earlier texts and made critical mistakes in their use of them.

Khvol’son pointed out that Liutostanskii incorrectly identified the sixteenth-century text *Centuriae Magdeburgenses* as an eighteenth-century text written by

²⁹ The attribution of Skripitsyn to the article in 1878, if he was not the author of the 1844 report, was useful simply because he could not refute it from the grave. This provided an opportunity to remove immediate issues that might draw opponents of the ritual murder accusations to attack those associated with the paper. And yet, the question of authorship was once again raised in 1913 when the *Rozyskanie* was published at the time of Beilis. The attachment of Dal’ to the record likely heightened this sense of authority as he was one of the great pillars of nineteenth-century intellectual life in the Russian Empire.

Raimond Martin. *Centuriae Magdeburgenses* was the work of Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-1575) a reformer with interest in religious history and eventually a scholar at Jena.³⁰ Skripitsyn included in his report a list of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works related to the blood libel. Within that list, Raimond Martin was listed above *Centuriae Magdeburgenses*, and Liutostanskii assumed that Martin was the author. Since Khvol'son discussed Martin at length in his 1861 text he had little patience for Liutostanskii's fallacious historical argument. Khvol'son also pointed out that both Skripitsyn and Liutostanskii connected Socrates with a German text, *Kirchengeschichte*, which suggested to the unwitting reader that Socrates Scholasticus (Scholastikos) wrote in German, when in fact the text referred to his fifth-century Greek history of the church.³¹ Further, the list of books in the Skripitsyn report suggested that they all addressed the blood libel or similar charges, which Khvol'son argued was not the case, thus further repudiating his opponents' weaknesses as scholars who assumed that their Russian readers would take their word as proof, since the common reader "had not seen any of these books."³² Khvol'son further added a biting insult to Liutostanskii when he claimed:

It may well be that some readers will ask why I did not go into a detailed refutation of Skripitsyn and his *plagiarist*. To which I, in turn, provide the

³⁰ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 120.

³¹ *Grazhdanin*, no. 23-25: 487.

³² Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 116-118.

question: is it worth refuting such nonsense? ... I can only say of Skripitsyn's "note" and Liutostanskii's book that I would simply throw them into the fire.³³

Here Khvol'son not only dismissed the logic of their arguments, but further accused Liutostanskii of plagiarizing and doing so in sloppy manner that undermined the "authority" of the text. Throughout his rebuttal, Khvol'son appealed to rational thought and authority, just as he had done in 1861. In the preface to his 1880 edition, Khvol'son set the bar for those who want to participate in the public debates about Jews and ritual murder. He argued that first and foremost, they must understand "the origin and development of Christian doctrine and its relationship to the teachings of Judaism." Further, participants need the ability to "assimilate the scientific methods and techniques required for the critical analysis of historical sources, especially medieval ones." The final requirement was that they also understand the philosophy of history and the division of historical time, as well as ethnography and religious phenomena. By placing this standard upon the field, Khvol'son still appealed to his position as a scholar, even when his opponents did not value his "scientific methods."³⁴

The effect of Khvol'son's persistence is difficult to measure, in part because the charge of ritual murder became a significant part of late imperial Russia after the Saratov Affair, but also because the publication of anti-Semitic tracts and works continued. In the second edition of his own text, Liutostanskii highlighted one way of measuring

³³ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), 121. (emphasis mine).

³⁴ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), xv.

Khvol'son's prominence on the question of ritual murder, while he also tried to disparage his efforts. Following Liutostanskii and Khvol'son, a long list of similarly titled essays and books were produced, joining either side of the debate. The problem for Liutostanskii was that the reader could be fooled by the text thinking that it was one of the others, published by Khvol'son or himself (the two leading authorities in his mind). For example, S. V. Protopopov published an article in response to Liutostanskii in 1877 in the journal *Strannik*.³⁵ He titled his article *Ob upotreblenii evreiami khristianskoi krovi dlia religioznykh tselei*, which almost verbatim copied both Liutostanskii's title (minus the nod to Jewish sects), encouraged Russian Orthodox believers to be more Christ-like in their treatment of Jews. Protopopov outlined the major contributions of Khvol'son and also the arguments set forth by Liutostanskii.³⁶ As an Orthodox priest, Protopopov challenged Liutostanskii by quoting some of the harshest diatribes against Jews and the Talmud. By painting Liutostanskii in this light, and setting that image against Khvol'son,

³⁵ S. V. Protopopov, "Ob upotreblenii evreiami khristianskoi krovi dlia religioznykh tselei (Vopros ob upotreblenii evreiami – sektatorami khristianskoi krovi dlia religioznykh tselei, k sviazi s voprosom ob otnosheniiakh evreistva r khristianstvu voobshe. Ier. Ippolita Liutostanskogo, Moskva, 1876)," *Strannik*, vol. 2, year 18, no. 2 (February 1877), 259-285. In 1886, another book, with the exact title as Khvol'son's 1879 essay was published by another Jewish apostate, Aleksandr Alekseev. Alekseev also participated in the Saratov case and was in Saratov for some time during the investigation. Alekseev also provides a fair summary of Investigator Durnovo's activities and the influence of the 1844 text on his understanding and opinion in the Saratov Affair. See Alekseev, *Upotreblaiut-li evrei khristianskuiu krov' s religioznoiui tsel'iu?* (Novgorod, 1886), 1-12. Prince Nikolai Nikolaievich Golitsyn also published *Upotreblaiut-li evrei khristianskuiu krov'?: Zamechaniia po povodu spora N. I. Kostomarov s prof. D. A. Khvol'sonam* (Warsaw: Gub. Pravleniia, 1879). Khvol'son addressed Golitsyn's work in the preface to his 1880 and declared after reading the first sections, "I do not have the sufficient patience to read all of it... though I am prepared to answer to all of his objections, if the current volume does not contain the answer" (xiv). See, Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniiakh protiv evreev*, (1880), x-xv.

³⁶ Protopopov, "Ob upotreblenii evreiami," 262-264.

whom he found compelling, Protopopov aimed to turn Orthodox opinion to be more tolerant of Jews (although he was critical at times of them). After Khvol'son leveled his strongly worded accusation of plagiarism by Liutostanskii, the latter could hardly mount such a charge against the professor. However, he found ways to get at the question more circuitously. His thinking seemed to be: if you can't beat them, take down their followers. In doing so, Liutostanskii seemed to offer Khvol'son a place of authority on the subject:

Protopopov titled his works exactly as our book: "On the use of Christian blood by Jews." Of course, they both did it in order to mislead the public, trusting them to check out a book based on advertising. In his argument about the Jews' use of Christian blood, Protopopov is not only a blind and slavish imitator of Khvol'son, but expressed it almost entirely in his [Khvol'son's] words. He, Protopopov, conducts such a detailed investigation of Jewish literature and Talmud, such knowledge of which may be appropriate only to Khvol'son, but not an Orthodox priest.³⁷

Liutostanskii returned the charge of plagiarism and accused those who published their work with similar titles to his own of misleading the consumer. By challenging those on the side of Khvol'son, Liutostanskii paid great respect to the work of Khvol'son who exhibited a deep intellectual well of knowledge about the sources he used. The power of Khvol'son's argument and rebuttal of Liutostanskii had a temporary effect on the priest's attitude toward Jews and his earlier work. In 1882, Liutostanskii issued a second work in which he suggested that some of his earlier works were flawed by the fact that he was misinformed.³⁸ Although Liutostanskii attempted to withdraw some of his earlier claims, the sincerity of this recanting was dubious at best. When Liutostanskii's 1876 work was

³⁷ Liutostanskii, *Ob upotreblenii evreiami*, vol. 2 (1880), xi.

³⁸ Liutostanskii published his *Sovremennyi vzgliad na evreiskii vopros*, (1882), and attempted to discount his earlier writings as ill-informed.

republished in 1897, he used the occasion to insert a new preface in which he reflected on the earlier debates about ritual murder. In that preface, Liutostanskii noted that immediately following his earlier publications he received numerous threats on his life that caused him great fear. In 1897, the aging Liutostanskii noted that, “As I near the end of my earthly pilgrimage, death is not as scary (*strashna*) now. Even the Savior died at the hands of the Jews, and he was holier than all his disciples, and even thousands of Christian ascetics suffered martyrdom at the hands of barbarian Jews.”³⁹ Despite his one time recanting of his earlier works, this passage suggests that Liutostanskii remained convinced of Jewish willingness to murder Jesus, and, by extension, he believed that the potential for Jewish ritual murder needed to be taken seriously.

Kostomarov

The historian Nikolai Ivanovich Kostomarov, who participated in the Ministry of Internal Affairs investigation into the Saratov case, noted Khvol'son's more pedestrian tone in his review of the text in the St. Petersburg paper *Novoe Vremia*.⁴⁰ Kostomarov noted that Khvol'son seemed determined to change “public” opinion in his short pamphlet. Kostomarov remained convinced that Jews used Christian blood for their religious ordinances. To counter the short brochure, Kostomarov attempted his own

³⁹ Liutostanskii, *Ob upotreblenii evreiami (talmudistskimi sektorami) khristianskuiu krovii dlia religioznykh tselei* (St. Petersburg, 1897), i-ii.

⁴⁰ N. I. Kostomarov, “Upotrebliaut li evrei khristianskoi krov?” *Novoe Vremia* (June 29, 1879): 2. Kostomarov was a close associate of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko and ardent defender of the Ukrainian language and budding nationalism.

reshaping of public opinion by attacking Khvol'son's motivations and pro-Jewish allegiances.⁴¹

The extent of Kostomarov's belief in the charge of Jewish ritual murder is made explicit in his "Zhidotrepnie v nachale XVIII v.," published just four years after his exchange with Khvol'son.⁴² Kostomarov's story, which examined a pogrom in the eighteenth century with origins in ritual murder charges, brought the Jewish question fully into the discussions between empire and its peripheries. Kostomarov combined anti-Jewish rhetoric, the nineteenth-century historian's belief in empathy (one's ability to *know* a subject deeply enough to place dialogue between historical actors), and justification for the Kmel'nitskii (Chmielnicki) brutality among Jews. The setting for his tale about Jews is 1703 Kiev (near *Pecherskaia lavra*), at the home of a local Jew who happened to receive a visit from a *tzaddik* from L'vov (L'viv). Kostomarov built the story with an eye looking back at the Kmel'nitskii raids because they represented a heroic, if bloodied, moment for the Cossack heritage so proudly developed within nineteenth-century Ukrainian nationalist thought. In 1648, Khmel'nitskii led a charge against Polish landowners and nobility. The underlying issues that brought about the raids were fears of Polish eastward expansion (Polish feudalism).⁴³ Jews, as agents of the Polish nobility,

⁴¹ Khvol'son's response to this challenge was published as part of his 1912 edition of the short brochure that was published posthumously (discussed below).

⁴² N. I. Kostomarov, "Zhidotrepnie v nachale XVIII v.," *Kievskaiia starina*, v. 5, no. 1 (January 1883), 1-26.

⁴³ John D. Klier, "The pogrom paradigm in Russian history," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13-14.

were secondary targets and victims to the Khmel’ nitskii raids. In different ways, the events of 1648 remained fixed in the minds of nineteenth-century Ukrainian nationalists and nineteenth-century Jews in Eastern Europe. Romantic notions of national cultures inspired many of the nineteenth-century ‘inventions’ of nations—largely through the rewriting or narrating history through folk culture.⁴⁴

Kostomarov built on this heritage by positioning a Jew and a Christian in dialogue that reflected this tension within collective memories. The Christian in the story accused the rabbi of secretly hiding material about the abuse of gentiles—particularly Christians. In a particularly tense section of the story, Sokhno, the Christian claims:

You are a damned *zhid* (derogatory form of Jew), you don’t believe in our books and do not believe in anything they claim...if only you were to trust and believe in them, you would find proof that our Lord Jesus Christ was the true Messiah...it is even in your books, though secretly hidden.

The *tzaddik*, (rabbi Solomon Zakhar’evich Grekovichor) responded accordingly to these charges:

In our books!?! Our books are published and anyone who can read them can understand them. You will not find anything along those lines.

Sokhno countered:

Yes, this we know! We’ve heard this! Everything in your Talmud is printed. However, many more are preserved in your letters, kept under great secrets, and

⁴⁴ Gabriella Safran, *Rewriting the Jew: Assimilation Narratives in the Russian Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18. Benedict Anderson’s idea of the imaginative process of nation building in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is useful to understand how Kostomarov employed a crucial “folk” culture (Cossack) to reiterate to his readers the importance of vigilance against those who he believed sought to undermine that particular identity. By placing the “Jew” and the “Pole” in opposition to true Slavic identities, he built up a straw man that could be torn down in terms that his reader could easily identify with and understand. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 45, 164. Anderson examined the role that print culture and language standardization played in the nation-making project but also showed where the impetus for doing so needed to counterbalance the “creation” element with the “organic” elements of the culture that persisted from a distant past.

even such a thing as the shedding of Christian blood, and still you are afraid to reveal these letters. And yet, you decided not to carry out any of the dirty tricks toward Christians (*postanovliaetsia ne vskiakaia pakosti chinit' khristianam*) mentioned in your Talmud ...⁴⁵

As a historian, Kostomarov was active in the literary world and a promoter of empire building (though in a particularly Ukrainian sense). In his understanding of the world, Jews occupied an uneasy and exploitative position. According to his interpretation, the Russian Empire needed to alter its course in history, and a first step in that direction was to discourage Jews from assimilating deeper into the social structure of the empire. Kostomarov further encouraged hostility toward Jews in his story when he highlighted the *tzaddik*'s apparent ability to discern heavenly omens indicating further troubles for Jews because of their hostility to Christ and their efforts to take advantage of Christians.⁴⁶

The exchange with an anti-Semitic opponent like Kostomarov forced Khvol'son to reassert his position and earlier work on the matter. More importantly, however, it was in his response to the very personal attacks that a new emotional connection to the case became evident. As a final plea to his Russian audience, he stated outright his hopes for the second printing: "May God grant that this updated treatment of my book turn upon itself greater attention than the first volume, and so that I might destroy in Russia that which is long extinct in Western Europe, that dangerous prejudice—which resulted in the

⁴⁵ Kostomarov, "Zhidotrenie v nachale XVIII v.," 21.

⁴⁶ According to Kostomarov, after a star appeared for three nights in the sky, the *tzaddik* regretted to inform his fellow Jews that more dark times lay ahead.

sacrifice of so many innocent people.”⁴⁷ That he saw his role in this project in this light is telling—he envisioned himself as someone with the intellectual capacity, religious understanding, and temporal means—to assume a public role in this Enlightenment project. The project itself was indeed ambitious, overturning powerful superstitions and prejudices against Jews in the Russian Empire. The completion of his broad refutation in 1861 marked an end, albeit a temporary one, in Khvol’son’s scholarship on the matter. Yet, as the next two decades proved, the persistent myth of ritual murder was not eradicated from Khvol’son’s world. Time and time again, rumors of blood libel in the empire and polemical writers bent on reminding Russians of the Jewish threat. With each subsequent threat, whether great or small, Khvol’son found himself once again placed in a position of authority on the matter.

When accused of overtly favoring and defending Jews and Judaism by Kostomarov, Khvol’son argued that his desire was to seek truth and justice for his fellow Jews, and that he firmly believed his role as a scholar allowed, and his Christian faith required, him to do so. In the concluding paragraph of his shortened version of his 1912 text, Khvol’son suggested again why, as a leading academic, he took up the cause of Jews maliciously accused of killing Christian children.

Mr. Kostomarov refers to my “tribal patriotism” (*plemennoi patriotism*) and talks about my “favoritism toward Jews.” Yes, I admit that I foster empathy for Jews, as I know not only their dark side, but their bright side as well. In my opinion it is much more honest to defend those of my tribesmen (*edinoplemmenikov*) and my former religion from false accusations, than to slander them with various untruths and false representations of the most innocent facts. Surely, a defender of Jews cannot count on the approval of the majority who invariably join with those slanderers of Judaism. But why should an honest man need this sort of approval? I

⁴⁷ Khvol’son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1880), xvi.

remain true to my conscience in struggling for justice and for truth (*za pravo i istinu*). Whether I am praised or condemned for this, I do not care.⁴⁸

Khvol'son's response to Kostomarov highlights one of the persistent fears among Russians during this period about the suitability of Jews as loyal subjects of the Russian state. Fear of Jewish assimilation and success, at the expense of Russians, undergirded this concern.⁴⁹ That Khvol'son, among the select Jews who arguably were the most assimilated into the interior of Russian society, could be questioned on his loyalty suggests something of the ongoing effort to weed out the Jewish threat to Russian identity. His decision to apply his understanding of Judaism's universal application to morals and "truth" centered on his belief that knowledge could produce a more tolerant and enlightened society. What exactly did Khvol'son have in mind in his struggle for "justice and truth?" In his *Semitic Nations* (published in Russian and German in 1872 and English in 1875), Khvol'son uses ancient Israel to answer this question:

When, therefore, we read the writings of the Israelites, a phenomenon becomes salient, which is unique in its kind. What did this people desire, and for what did it hope? It desired and hoped for the time to come in which all nations of the earth should seek the truth and find it; a time in the which all nations of the earth should reforge their swords and spears into sickles and pruning hooks, that no nation should lift the sword against another, when men should not exercise in the

⁴⁸ Khvol'son, "Prilozhenie III: Otvét na zamechanie N. I. Kostomárova," in *Upotreblaiut-li evrei khristianskuiu krov'*? (Kiev: 1912), 77. This edition of the Khvol'son condensed text wrongly attributes the text to A. D. Khvol'son, rather than D. A. Khvol'son. It was published posthumously in connection with the Beilis trial. The original version of this reply was published in *Novoe Vremia*, no. 1172, 5 June 1879.

⁴⁹ One need look no further than the notorious editorial in *Novoe Vremia* (23 March 1880), titled "The Yid is coming" to find evidence that among a certain sector of society, anti-Jewish fears were built upon the fear that too many Jews who successfully incorporated in the Russian society would have broad negative effects upon the empire.

practice of war, when universal peace should prevail, and knowledge and insight should fill the whole earth.⁵⁰

This passage highlights Khvol'son's undying commitment to the Haskalah belief in the universalism of Judaism and its ability to improve Russian society generally by broad application of its foundational principles devoid of Jewish notions of cultural and social particularity.⁵¹ And yet, in the face of this combined modern and medieval anti-Semitism, Khvol'son's project, characterized by logic and rationality of thought, could do little to combat irrational fears of Jewish exploitation. Kostomarov's story about the *tzaddik* and Christian illuminates how the "real concerns" (before the 1870s) that Klier mentioned later combined with Russian ideas of the occult (so clearly prevalent in Silver Age Russian literature) to form more violent and dramatic anti-Semitism that led to pogroms

⁵⁰ Khvol'son, *The Semitic Nations* (Cincinnati: Bloch and Co., 1874), 54. Regarding his own position as a Christian and Jew, Khvol'son argued that "I have here, although myself a Semite, not ignored the faults of the Semites, but pointed out also their good qualities. But in spite of this bright side of the Semitic character, yet was the culture of the Semite a one sided one, for reasons which we have mentioned; and our civilization too would have been a one-sided one if the Semites alone were our teachers and leaders. Happily, our culture consists of a union of the products of both Semitic and Aryan culture; for our modern culture dates principally from the sixteenth century, when the Bible and classical literature were, so to say, discovered anew in western Europe. From the ancient Israelites, who in a spiritual respect occupy the highest rank among the Semites, we have received through the intervention of Christianity, our daily bread, i.e., *pure conceptions of God, and the doctrines of humanity and morality*: from the Greeks, on the other hand, who occupied equally the highest rank among the Aryans, we have received all that belongs to the improvement and beautifying of human life, i.e., *art*, in the widest sense of the word, and *science*. We have already almost reached the intellectual height of the Greeks; nay, in many ways we have even overreached it; the above described idealism of the ancient Israelitic nation, let us hope that our grandchildren's children will reach." This text is analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

⁵¹ Michael Meyer, "Modernity as a Crisis for the Jews" *Modern Judaism*, vol. 9, no. 2 (May 1989): 154.

and forced many Jews to fully abandon the integrationist model altogether and begin thinking about their world differently—with dramatic effects on their future.

The explosion of essays, journalistic accounts, and books on the blood libel charge between 1876 and the mid-1880s must be understood in the wider context of the Russian Empire and Jewish life during that period. As the long history of ritual murder and blood libel charges makes clear, moments of crisis usually fostered the recycling of those charges. Among Jonathan Frankel's many contributions to current understandings of modern Jewish history was his thesis that crisis was the wheel that drove Jewish history.⁵² For Frankel the choice of 1840 and 1881-1882 as the major moments of crisis for European Jews helps connect occurrences of ritual murder accusations with two major shifts in Jewish political thinking.

The second period, 1881-1882, marked a clear break from the Enlightenment driven *maskilim* who placed great faith in the assimilation project, a project sponsored in part by the Russian government to gradually bring select Jews into the service of the Empire while also modernizing Jewish communities throughout the Pale of Settlement. By 1880, this failure of the Uvarov education program, the conscription efforts, and the collapsing economic structure in the Pale of Settlement proved the bankruptcy of such an effort. As John Klier suggested: "Russian Jewry had been a target, for just over one hundred years, of a convoluted process of social engineering directed by the Russian

⁵² Jonathan Frankel, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian*, 15-31; also his *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews*.

state.”⁵³ By 1881, Jews experienced a mixed bag of improvements that led not to integration but to further discrimination. The public debate about Jews and ritual murder was an attempt to navigate the complexity of Russian policy toward Jews, the failed emancipation project in Russia, and the growing dissatisfaction of Russians with the ebb and flow of Russian legal developments. The assassination of Alexander II on 1 March 1881 further exacerbated the conservative backlash against Jews (there was a minor effort to place the brunt of the blame on Jewish terrorists. However, Alexander III moved quickly to address the Jewish Question in 1881 and those efforts provided the watershed moment that turned into mass emigration from the Pale of Settlement, shattering confidence in the reform project altogether.

In May of 1882, Tsar Alexander III enacted the “May Laws” that, above all else, sought to move Jews further out of rural communities in the Pale of Settlement. Jews throughout the Pale were attacked, their homes destroyed, and property confiscated. All told, 20,000 lost their homes and nearly 100,000 Jews lost property.⁵⁴ As the string of pogroms shattered hope for a peaceful future in Russia, a new political component to Jewish life emerged that would alter the path of Russian Jewish life through the First World War and beyond. It was during these crucial years that the United States, western Europe, and Palestine became destination points for the Jewish exodus out of Russia. Jonathan Frankel argued that this idea of exodus, or “a going-out from the land of

⁵³ John D. Klier, “Russian Jewry on the eve of the pogroms,” in Klier and Shlomo, *Pogroms*, 3.

⁵⁴ Alexander Orbach, “The Development of the Jewish Community, 1881-1893,” in Klier and Shlomo, *Pogroms*, 143.

bondage to a promised land, came to dominate, however momentarily, every aspect of Jewish public life in Russia.”⁵⁵ Some developed the groundwork for Zionist movements, others sought the creation of new political and social identities in the form of political parties and worker movements (the Bund), while still others receded further into traditional Jewish religious and communal cultures. For his part, Khvol’son remained committed, perhaps to a fault, to the hope of emancipation and political equality for Jews. As the final years of Khvol’son’s life show, the earlier hoped for emancipation via conversion seemingly worked for Khvol’son, but not without tremendous cost to his own reputation. Many others of his generation became entirely disillusioned by the failed assimilation program. The splintering of Russian Jewish life after 1881 separated the various strands to the point that it became impossible to speak of a cohesive “Russian Jewish culture” in anyway but the most abstract terms. The events in Kiev in 1911-1913, however, brought together Jews from every stripe to combat the most recent round of ritual murder charges against Mendel Beilis.

Beilis Affair

The scene in Kiev in 1911 was grim after the discovery of the Iuschinskii. Iuschinskii’s body was found in a small cave outside of Kiev, on the property of a wealthy Jewish business owner, located in relatively close proximity to the Cheberiak home. The original suspects in the investigation included a small band of known

⁵⁵ Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.

criminals in Kiev and the mother of Iushchinskii's friend Zhenia, Vera Cheberiak.⁵⁶ Vera Cheberiak was recognized in Kiev because her apartment was a known storehouse for stolen goods, frequented by a familiar group of local thugs. As the investigation continued into Iushchinskii's murder, eyes turned toward Cheberiak and her small band of thieves. There was reason to believe that Iushchinskii, who skipped school on the day of the murder to visit the Cheberiak home, knew too much about the crime ring originating in the home and therefore was killed by one or more members of this criminal group. The earliest reports by the investigating authorities, suggested that the criminals responsible for the murder might have inflicted the corpse with the numerous wounds—thereby giving the impression of a ritual slaying—after the boy had died.

At the same time that the government investigators began to piece together evidence against Cheberiak, other theories circulated among both government officials and the wider public within Kiev. Given that the timing of Iushchinskii's death coincided with the days leading up to the Jewish Passover, claims about Jewish ritual murder emerged sparsely at first, but rapidly gained more widespread coverage and currency. The cave where the body was found was located on the Zaitsev property, owned by a wealthy Jewish businessman. Mendel Beilis, a father of five children, was an employee of Zaitsev and was frequently seen in the area around the factory. With special

⁵⁶ The criminals included: Boris Rudzinskii, Ivan Latishev, and Piotr Singayevskii. Following the Beilis trial, an incredible body of literature was produced in the form of memoirs, commentaries, and even picture books. See for example, *Delo Beilisa: Polnyi Sudebnyi Otchet' (Vozniknovenie dela, obvinitel'nyi akt', sudebnoe sledstvie, ekspertiza, rechi storon', vsekh' uchastnikov' protsessy)* (Kiev: Tipografia Noria, 1913); also the work of O. O. Gruzenberg, *Ocherki i rechi* (New York: Grenich Printing Corp., 1944), 177-192; for an example of one who published work in favor of the blood libel charge, see Ivan O. Kuz'min, *Materialy k voprosu ob obvineniakh evreev v ritual'nykh prestupleniakh* (St. Petersburg, 1913).

permission from the government to live outside of the Pale of Settlement boundaries, Beilis (1874-1934), made his home near the brick factory where he worked. Due to proximity, ethnicity, and religion, Beilis almost immediately became a possible subject in the public's eyes. Despite the paucity of evidence against Mendel Beilis, insiders within the local police department helped manufacture enough evidence to eventually bring Beilis under scrutiny. It took nearly four months, until July, for police to develop a strong enough case to arrest. After his arrest, Beilis was left in jail pending formal charges and awaiting the prosecution's case. Finally, in late summer and early fall 1913, the case was put forward by the prosecution and went to trial. The proceedings that followed eventually came to be known as the "anti-Semitic trial that shook the world."⁵⁷

After the arrest of Beilis, the case attracted international attention because of the sensational charge of ritual murder by Jews of a Christian child. When Kiev city coroner Karpinsky examined the body, he determined that the body was stabbed at least forty seven times. The body was half-naked and bound, with the boy's mouth stuffed with fabric. On the day the body was discovered a Russian neighbor visited Beilis' home to report that rumors of Jewish ritual murder were spreading rapidly around Kiev.⁵⁸ Within a matter of days, pamphlets accusing Kiev's Jews of ritual murder began appearing throughout the city. During the funeral of Andrei Iushchinskii, pamphlets were

⁵⁷ Ezekiel Leiken, *The Beilis Transcripts: The Anti-Semitic Trial that Shook the World* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Mendel Beilis, *The Story of My Suffering*, trans. Harrison Goldberg (New York: Mendel Beilis Publishing Company, 1926), 26-27. After Mendel Beilis' was acquitted in 1913, his family left for Palestine in 1914, where he lived for several years before eventually immigrating to New York, where his memoirs were finished and published.

distributed to those participating in the procession and nearby pedestrians that read:

“Russian people! If you love your children, beat the Jews! Beat them till not a single one is left in Russia! Have pity on your children! Avenge the suffering innocent!”⁵⁹ With the stark memory of pogroms in 1903, and 1904-1906, in the forefront of Jewish memory, concern among Jewish circles escalated.

For a few weeks during the trial in September and October 1913, frequent reports appeared in major national and international newspapers.⁶⁰ In London, the “Protest” to the Beilis Affair in 1912 was signed by a “Who’s Who” among British politicians, writers, and scholars. Among the 238 individuals who attached their names to the “Protest” document were Cardinal Francis Bourne (Archbishop of Westminster), S. R. Driver (Regius Professor of Hebrew, Oxford), Charles Harding Firth (Regius Professor of Modern History, Oxford), Henry Scott Holland (Regius Professor of Divinity, Oxford), James A. H. Murray (Editor of the “New English Dictionary”), J. G. Frazer (Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and author of *The Golden Bough*), Arthur Conan Doyle, G.

⁵⁹ R. Ganelin, V.E. Kel’ner and I.V. Lukianov, *Delo Mendelia Beilisa: materialy Chrezvychainoi sledstvennoi komissii Vremennogo pravitel’sтва o sudebnom protsesse 1913 g. po obvineniiu v ritual’nom ubiistve* (St. Petersburg: 1999), 6.

⁶⁰ The range of papers that covered the trial included major daily papers in New York, London, Berlin and elsewhere, but also smaller papers as well. The Niagara Falls Gazette, for example, provided a lengthy synopsis of the trial and expert witnesses (both Russian and British) who refuted the claim of ritual murder. “British Experts Demolish “Ritual Murder” Theory,” *Niagara Falls Gazette* (4 October 1913), 9.

Bernard Shaw, G. M. Trevelyan, and H. G. Wells.⁶¹ The authors of the document

argued:

The question is one of humanity, civilisation, and truth. The “Blood Accusation” is a relic of the days of Witchcraft and Black Magic, a cruel and utterly baseless libel on Judaism, an insult to Western culture and a dishonour to the Churches in whose name it has been falsely formulated by ignorant fanatics. Religious minorities other than the Jews, such as the Early Christians, the Quakers, and Christian Missionaries in China, have been victimised by it. It has been denounced by the best men of all ages and creeds. The Popes, the Founders of the Reformation, the Khalif of Islam, Statesmen of every country, together with all the great seats of learning in Europe, have publicly repudiated it.⁶²

The document served the important purpose of opposing the Russian government’s allowance of the case to go to trial, though it did not oppose the judicial process, only the attachment of the blood and ritual elements. The appeal was for due process, not ignoring the case all together. As well, within the very short text, a sense of British superiority is quite clearly voiced. The “ignorant and inflammable populace of Eastern Europe” allowed the myth to frequently occur and as a result, many Jewish lives were at stake.⁶³ That the major capitals of the world sought to protest the pending trial is not remarkable, in the sense that these kinds of events occurred frequently during the nineteenth century. Additionally, leading intellectuals on both sides became interested in the trial’s outcome.

⁶¹ The group of 238 signees argued “We desire to associate ourselves with the protests signed in Russia, France and Germany by leading Christian Theologians, Men of Letters, Scientists, Politicians and others against the attempt made in the city of Kieff to revive the hideous charge of Ritual Murder—known as the “Blood Accusation”—against Judaism and the Jewish people.”

⁶² *Palestine, Zionism, and the Levant, 1912-1946*, Seeds of Conflict Series, vol. 1 (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1974), 1-4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1.

Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), the prolific Jewish historian in the Russian Empire felt compelled to postpone his work on the history of Jews in Russia to compile a series of essays on the history of accusations of Jewish ritual murder in Poland and Russia.⁶⁴ Other Russian intellectuals and writers, such as Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko (1853-1921), a prominent Russian writer and liberal activist, joined forces with Dubnow and others to denounce pogroms as well as the prosecution of Beilis.

It comes as no surprise that during a trial where a Jew was accused of ritually murdering a Christian child, strong anti-Semitic arguments would be used. However, during the Beilis trial, the nature of the anti-Semitism merits greater attention than historians have been willing to allow. My aim here is to revisit the Beilis case in an attempt to understand how religious and secular forms of anti-Semitism coalesced into a powerful and totalizing form of hatred of Jews. Additionally, how is it that in twentieth-century Kiev, by all appearances a modern city, scholars from academies of science, medicine, and religion turned a murder trial into an international ritual murder spectacle? It should also be noted that Kiev was an important economic and industrial center for Russia as well as one of the key cities where Jews interacted in close proximity with their non-Jewish neighbors. Kiev served as a microcosm for studying Jewish-Orthodox relations at the state and more local, public level in early twentieth-century Russia. Natan Meir described Kiev as “an ideal place to view the encounter between the average urban

⁶⁴ Simon M. Dubnov, *Kniga Zhizni* (St. Petersburg: 1998), 322. Dubnov suggested that he felt it was his responsibility to respond to the Beilis Affair to refute the long history of the “ritual legend” about Jewish need for Christian blood. The articles were published in 1912 in *Evreiskaia Starina*.

Jew and the Christian townspeople. In a city where ethnic segregation was the norm, the extent of interaction and cooperation... was truly remarkable.”⁶⁵ Kiev’s importance as the center of regional government as well as a key Jewish center makes this analysis of the Beilis trial relevant and in many ways a legitimate test case for relations among the Orthodox center and the non-Orthodox other.

Anti-Semitism and the Beilis Trial

With this in mind, why revisit the Beilis trial? There are at least two reasons for doing so. First, in connection with Khvol’son and his legacy of Jewish defense against malicious charges, the trial ironically marked the conclusion of a life spent in the service of his former coreligionists. Khvol’son’s death in 1911 provided a convenient moment for Russians, Jews, and colleagues throughout Europe to remember the important work he accomplished related to the ritual accusations against Jews. At no point in his career did the failure of his project seem more palpable than it did during the tense imprisonment and then very public trial of Mendel Beilis. And yet, the confounding testimonies by his former students and dear friends proved an intellectual genealogy that connected the dots between Saratov, Kutaisi, and Kiev. Further, as a brief foray into the published essays and books during and immediately following the trial proves, Khvol’son still figured centrally within their efforts and his work was a beginning (and often an ending as well) of these works.

⁶⁵ Natan M. Meir, “Jews, Ukrainians and Russians in Kiev: Intergroup Relations in Late Imperial Associational Life” *Slavic Review* vol. 65 no. 3 (Fall 2006), 479. Meir’s analysis of social spheres where Jews and Christians interacted portrayed Kiev as a cosmopolitan hub of civic activity where individuals from various ethnic groups joined together in pursuit of common social goals.

Second, the Beilis case offered an occasion when the various forms of anti-Semitism merged together into a form that appealed to both the enlightened notions of reason and science (often considered racial anti-Semitism) but also relied heavily upon religious claims and emotionality. Hans Rogger, suggested in 1966 that Aleksandr Tager's monumental work on the Beilis trial answered the tangible questions of how, when and what, but left open the question of why.⁶⁶ The "why" question that is most perplexing here is: why was the case so successful, convincing many experts and large segments of the public that Jews were guilty of ritual murder when a number of earlier cases seemed to suggest that obtaining a conviction in these sensational trials was nearly impossible?

In order to answer these questions, we need to see how the Beilis trial exhibited a culmination of both religious and secular anti-Semitism that denies supremacy of interpretation to either variant. Careful examination of the Beilis trial transcripts moves us closer to understanding what Walter Laqueur suggests is a blending of characteristically medieval religious Judeophobia, or even more distant *adversus Judaeos* of the church fathers or "religious" anti-Semitism, and a modern form of "secular" anti-Semitism that originated during the middle of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ As the examples

⁶⁶ Hans Rogger, "The Beilis Case: Anti-Semitism and Politics in the Reign of Nicholas II" *Slavic Review* 25, No. 4 (1966), 615-629. This work was later republished in a collected work, see; Herbert A. Strauss, ed. *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Antisemitism 1870-1933/39, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Russia* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), 1257-1273.

⁶⁷ Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4-5. For more on the shift from the church fathers rhetoric to the reformation, see Alice L. Eckhardt, "The Reformation and the Jews" in

below show, the divide between these two variants is significantly blurred in the trial records of the Beilis case.

Science, Boils, and the Professors

On September 25, 1913 the Beilis trial began in Kiev. The fate of Beilis, after two years spent in prison, now rested with the decision of the jury. The case was presided over by a panel of three judges led by Fyodor A. Boldyrev, who was appointed to be the head of the Kiev district court (*okruzhnii sud*) only one year before the trial began. Boldyrev's appointment was a strategic move in 1912 by the local government with the Beilis case in mind as Boldyrev was known for his "sympathetic and benevolent attitude to the tasks of the government."⁶⁸ Witnesses in the trial ranged from known criminals to university professors, doctors, religious leaders, friends and family of Beilis, as well as members of the Cheberiak and Iushchinskii families.⁶⁹ At Beilis' side in the courtroom was an elite panel of defense attorneys. Leading the Beilis defense team was Oscar

Eugene J. Fisher, *Interwoven Destinies: Jews and Christians Through the Ages* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 111-133.

⁶⁸ Aleksandr Tager, *The Decay of Czarism: the Beiliss Trial, a Contribution to the History of the Political Reaction during the Last Years of Russian Czarism. Based on Unpublished Materials in the Russian Archives* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1935) [Orig. *Tsarskaia Rossiia i delo Beilisa* (Moscow, 1934)], 170. Tager indicates that after the revolution it became known that Boldyrev was promised the appointment of Chief Justice of the Kiev Supreme Appellate Court.

⁶⁹ Medical experts included Kiev City Coroner Karpinskii, a Professor of Forensic Medicine, Kosortov (defense), and Sikorskii, a professor emeritus of psychology at Kiev University (prosecution). The religious experts included: Father Justin Pranaitis (prosecution), Professor Glagolev (defense), Professor Troitskii (defense), Professor Kokovtsov (defense), and Rabbi Jacob Mazeh (defense). Additionally, one of the heads of the Double-Headed Eagle organization, Priest Feodor Sinkevich, was called to give communion to the son of Vera Cheberiak, who mysteriously fell terminally ill during the trial.

Gruzenberg, a famous defender of revolutionary, leftist political criminals in Russia at the time. His other clients included Maxim Gorky, Vladimir Korolenko and Leon Trotsky. Gruzenberg's previous involvement in a similar case in Vilno in 1900 led the Kiev's Jewish population to petition him to represent Beilis in the 1913 trial.⁷⁰ Before Gruzenberg accepted the request by the Kiev Jewish community to take on the case, he believed that "no one in the Ministry believed that Beilis was guilty, but it had been decided to turn him over to the Union of the Russian People, the Union of the Archangel Michael and the Union of the Double-Headed Eagle to torment."⁷¹

The prosecution was led by State Prosecutor O. Vipper. Vipper's arguments posited during the trial by the prosecution are, by themselves, very good examples of the combination of the religious and secular variants of anti-Semitism. Before launching into a diatribe against Judaism more generally, Prosecutor Vipper sought to show that Beilis was the only one on trial, and though guilty, was not representative of Jews. However, this is soon lost in his accusations of Jewish international conspiracy. In his closing arguments, Vipper, began with Beilis and rapidly expanded his vision of the significance of the case. He argued:

In this matter all over the world, not only Christians, but everyone around the world who believes in God, should shudder (*sodrognut'sia*), in this trial, on this point, this case deserves to be characterized as a "world event." But the world is preoccupied by other issues... as far as the world is concerned, Andrei does not matter and will soon be forgotten. The world is much more concerned with Beilis, and it is the interest in Beilis which makes this a "world trial." Soon after Beilis, a

⁷⁰ O.O. Gruzenberg, *Yesterday: Memoirs of a Russian-Jewish Lawyer*, edited and translated, Don C. Rawson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 109.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Jew, was implicated in this case, the whole world was aware and a torrent of criticism and abuse was released against Russia's authorities. "How dare they indict a Jew in so heinous a crime?" Judaism, however, is not on trial; we are dealing here with only one Jew, who out of fanaticism or religious aberration, sought to murder. Jews are afraid that if the Jew Beilis is convicted, it may initiate pogroms and cast suspicion upon the Jewish nation. We know that pogroms usually afflict the poor and the disadvantaged Jews, while the leaders, who are responsible for this worldwide agitation, and who very often affront us with their manipulations—these people are often free from pogroms.⁷²

Despite his attempt to maintain focus on Beilis and his refusal to admit that Judaism was on trial, it is interesting that Vipper places full blame for pogroms on Jewish leaders.

Vipper clearly falls into the trap of what Maurice Samuel has called the "hallucinatory anti-Semitism" based on theories of Jewish international conspiracy.⁷³ This type of anti-Semitism is often considered to be the more modern variant as it exploits the economic conditions and racial difference of Jews in Europe.

The deep hostility present in Vipper's diatribe is stated ever more precisely further in his testimony. Continuing his indictment of Jewish leaders, Vipper exclaimed:

"I feel that I am under the authority of Jews, that I am burdened by the power of Jewish thought, by the domination of the Jewish press...the Russian press is only partially Russian; in fact, nearly all news outlets are in Jewish hands."⁷⁴

He continues "in their hands mainly, is the capital, and although they have very few rights, in fact they rule over our world, and in this case, Biblical prophecy is almost

⁷² *Delo Beilisa. Stenograficheskii otchet* 3 vol. (Kiev, 1913), III: 4. The entirety of Vipper's closing remarks on October 23, 1913 can be found in the transcripts volume 3, pages 3-57.

⁷³ Maurice Samuel, *Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), 167.

⁷⁴ *Delo Beilis*, III: 18.

fulfilled, in spite of their bad conditions, we feel under their yoke.”⁷⁵ Unfortunately, Vipper does not tell us which prophecy he had in mind.⁷⁶ Vipper’s argument targeted two important notions related to the idea of the yoke (Russian, *igo* or *iarmo*): first, the frequent connection between the “yoke of Christ” and the New Testament “yoke” of the law (suggestive of Jewish legal restrictions), and second, familiar economic accusations about Jewish usury and exploitation in the Pale of Settlement. Vipper seemed convinced that his fear of Jewish exploitation was both real and pressing.

Given the appearance of the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* booklet at the turn of the century in Russia, the rhetoric was readily available and resonated within small circles of the population.⁷⁷ The *Protocols* perpetuated in a modern vein, the anti-Semitic charge that Jewish authorities masterminded an international conspiracy to

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The use of the word yoke is interesting here, as if perhaps to imply that the Jewish yoke, which is apparently burdensome, is more degrading than the yoke of Christ. (Matt. 11:29)

⁷⁷ The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* continues to attract the attention of scholars, journalists, and others because of its deeply anti-Semitic tone and because it continues to appear in small bookshops in some parts of the world and is now readily available on the Internet. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has been translated, republished, and altered over the past century since it first appeared in 1903 in Russian. Between 1903 and 1912 (during the Beilis Trial) the Russian text was published in no less than twenty editions. For more on the history of the text and its publications in Russian and later elsewhere in Europe, see Cesare G. De Michelis, *The Non-Existent Manuscript: A Study of the Protocols of the Sages of Zion*, trans. Richard Newhouse (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press [for The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (SICSA) and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem], 2004). The text is viewed by the overwhelming majority of scholars today as a forgery based on a “French archetype” from around 1897. The first Russian translation appeared around 1901 but it was first published in 1903 and 1905 in Russian. Many writers are still concerned with the text and its refutation, and in this vein seems to have a similar life to that of the nineteenth-century blood libel against Jews. For one of the most recent and thoughtful refutations, see the work by the Israeli jurist, Hadassa Ben-Itto, *The Lie that Wouldn’t Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005).

control the world through economic networks. The modern fear of Jewish exploitation was coupled with biblical references to ‘prove’ to Christians that Jews were their eternal enemies. The employment of the visual image of the “yoke” by Vipper invoked an older parallel from the New Testament. By juxtaposing the image of Christ’s yoke with the “Jewish yoke,” Vipper provided the jury a familiar reference. The following passage from the book of Matthew could have provided a frame of reference opposite Vipper’s “Jewish yoke”:

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”⁷⁸

In addition to the Matthew reference above, Russians with a vague awareness of the book of Acts would also notice the disparaging view of the yoke in Acts 15:10, “Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?”⁷⁹ This idea also took root within the Russian legal discourse and the journals of the day debating the Jewish question. Iulii Gessen, in his essay on N. P. Ignat’ev (head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) under Alexander III, noted that the tightening of Jewish residency restrictions within the Pale of Settlement in the 1880s was an effort to provide economic protection to their neighbors (i.e., peasants) from “the Jews’s yoke.”⁸⁰ Religious ideas and rhetoric transferred easily

⁷⁸ Matthew 11:28-30 (NSRV).

⁷⁹ Acts 15:10 (NSRV).

⁸⁰ Iulii Gessen, "Graf N. P. Ignat'ev i 'Vremennye pravila' o evreiakh 3 maia 1882 goda," *Pravo*, nos. 30-31 (1908), 1632.

into the “secular” realms of early twentieth-century Russia and loaded the charges against Jews with vitriolic fervor that brought together the emotionality of religious belief and identity with the “real” socio-economic threats posed by an expanding Jewish population. The transference of these ideas and rhetoric proved sustainable across both time and space. Similar invectives (discussed by Khvol’son in his 1861 text) were found throughout Europe in the medieval and early modern periods. To provide just one example; in 1543, the reformer Martin Luther argued in his tract “Against the Jews and Their Lies”:

They let us work with the sweat of our brow...while they stuff themselves, guzzle and live in luxury from our hard-earned goods. With their accursed usury they hold us and our property captive...They are our masters and we are their servants...We are at fault in not avenging all this innocent blood of our Lord and Churches and ...the blood of the children which they have shed since then, and which still shines forth from their Jewish eyes and skin. We are at fault in not slaying them.⁸¹

Without drawing a direct line between Luther’s thinking in the German lands to Kiev in 1913, and recognizing that these types of statements must be viewed within their specific historical context, it remains difficult to dismiss the similarities in arguments. Miriam Bodian suggests that one of the positive side affects of the Reformation was the lessening in number of charges of well poisoning, host desecration, mysticism and of course, blood libel across Europe.⁸² If this was the case—though elements of the assertion might be

⁸¹ As quoted in Rose, *German Question*, 7. For the full context, see Luther’s Works, vol. 47 “The Christian in Society, IV”, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁸² Miriam Bodian, “Christianity and Judaism” in R. Po-Chia Hsia, ed., *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 6 “Reform and Expansion, 1500-1660 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 486.

challenged—the Reformation did very little to lessen the rhetoric of those charges. The Beilis case serves as a clear testament to this fact. The idea of Jewish economic control over Christians was clearly not new and there must have been some notion of Luther’s sentiment when Vipper proclaimed his fear of Jewish domination.

After his criticism of Jewish internationalism, Vipper aimed to touch a more emotional chord with the jury, one that employed religious themes and terms dear to the Orthodox soul. It should be noted here that the jury was, by design, composed primarily of peasants and workers and entirely void of university-trained intellectuals who may have voiced a strong anti-religious concern in the trial proceedings.⁸³ To the jury panel, Vipper suggested:

Now, before your decision regarding Beilis, I trust that the memory of the image of the martyred boy, Iushchinskii, will not be erased from your memory. Let Beilis be deemed innocent by the Jewish people, even the whole world; the name Beilis, for Russians, not only will never be holy, but with your conviction, the Russian people may soon be able to forget the awful affair associated with his name. But the name of Beilis should never be allowed to overshadow the name of Andrei Iushchinskii. Two years ago he was unknown, now this name is on everyone’s lips, his name is the name of a martyr, the name is dear to the Russian people and to the grave of this martyr, I do not fear to say, the Russian people will flow, and will pray over his sufferings, his inexpressible suffering.⁸⁴

By evoking the image of a martyr, Vipper attempted to strike a chord with the Russian Orthodox community. Iushchinskii, an Orthodox Christian, represented one of them. In this sense, the courtroom became the arena for an “us/them” debate that pitted Jews against Orthodox Russians. The association of Iushchinskii with the image of the martyr

⁸³ Tager, *Decay of Czarism*, 177, 215.

⁸⁴ *Delo Beilis*, 3: 57-58.

remains even today. Recent concerns voiced in various online (Jewish) newspapers from Israel and England express deep-seeded fear over Ukrainian nationalist anti-Semitism. Using the 98th anniversary of the death of Andrei Iushchinskii as his beginning point, journalist Anshel Pfeffer warned in March 2009 that “hundreds of Ukrainian nationalists will make their annual pilgrimage” to the grave of the 1911 murder victim.⁸⁵ There, these people will venerate “Andrei of Kiev” as a martyr. The cultural implications of Vipper’s arguments continue to bear relevance today.

The closing arguments of defense attorney Vasili Aleksseevich Maklakov began on October 25, 1913.⁸⁶ Maklakov’s reasoning suggests that the defense team was very confident in their case.⁸⁷ Maklakov, believing that they had fully defended Beilis’ innocence, attempted to move the discussion away from the international conspiracy presented by Vipper two days earlier. Maklakov was concerned that:

The question that stirs the world is not focused on Iushchinskii, nor on Beilis, but on a more ancient problem, particularly, is it true that Jewish books, Jewish teachings – both ancient and modern – encourage the use of human blood. What is it, a blood covenant that the Jews kept secret for centuries, or simply a fairy tale?⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Anshel Pfeffer, “Grave near Kiev is reminder of 20th century’s only blood libel,” *Haaretz*, September 2, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/952355.html> (accessed March 19, 2009). Anshel Pfeffer, “Ukraine: why we should worry,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, December 18, 2008, <http://www.thejc.com/articles/ukraine-why-we-should-worry> (accessed March 15, 2009).

⁸⁶ Samuel, 93. V.A. Maklakov’s brother, N.A. Maklakov was a “careerist devoid of principle who found his highest happiness in meeting the wishes of the czar. V.A. Maklakov was a moderate liberal, and perhaps the most brilliant attorney for the defense.

⁸⁷ The defense’s belief that their case was by far the most convincing is supported by Gruzenberg’s own memoirs. See the English translation of Gruzenberg’s memoirs; O.O. Gruzenberg, *Yesterday*, 109-111.

⁸⁸ *Delo Beilis*, 3: 123.

Maklakov pleaded with the jury: “May God give you the wisdom to resolve to decide the Iushchinskii murder without attempting to decide ancient myths, about which you know almost nothing.”⁸⁹ Clearly, Maklakov hoped to defend Beilis’ innocence and by doing so, believed that the accusations of Jewish guilt would therefore be understood as baseless and thereby dismissed. Given the long history of blood libel trials in Russia during the nineteenth century, we have to ask why they thought that this would happen, as in nearly every other case, despite an acquittal, the possibility of Jewish ritual murder remained unquestioned.

In an attempt to disprove the prosecution’s own witnesses, Maklakov argues that Vipper and others drew heavily upon medieval, irrational evidence that supported a religious derivation of Jewish eternal guilt as the “killers of Christ” that did not focus on Beilis at all. To refute them, he addressed one of the prosecution’s medical testimonies (that of Ivan Alekseevich Sikorskii [1853-1919]) who suggested that European Jews are plagued by sores on their buttocks, and that African Jews were plagued with boils. In addition to other outlandish generalizations, Sikorskii suggested that “one night a year, all Jews lose their minds” (*evrei skhodiāt’ s uma*).⁹⁰ Maklakov’s appeal to reason and common sense attempted to show that there was clearly no evidence to support these outrageous claims. In an earlier report, filed in May 1911 after his examination of the body, Sikorskii laid out a scientific argument about how the evidence suggested that the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 150.

murder was much more than a racial vendetta, but was provoked by religious fanaticism. As his evidence, he used the careful infliction of small wounds from which to drain the blood from the body.⁹¹ Despite his attempts to show how scientific the murder was, Sikorskii's fate was sealed by his own belief in such claims. Ultimately, Sikorskii was questioned in relation to the trial by the Special Commission (1917) and was censured for his involvement in both the investigation and his testimony.⁹² Additionally, scholars from all over Europe, including the well-known opponent of anti-Semitism, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu (1842-1912) rebuked him for his slanderous words in his 1911 report on the condition of the body.⁹³ Another scholar intimated that Sikorskii "compromised Russian science and brought down shame on his own head."⁹⁴ Although Sikorskii was a very prominent figure in Russian science, his irrational use of medieval myths to support his claims at the expense of his previous professional success remains a seemingly unanswerable question.

As noted above, the religious and medical experts called to testify in the case were important participants in the trial for both sides as they helped to solidify the arguments in at least some degree of authority. Ultimately, some of the prosecution's key experts made serious blunders in their testimonies that caused a loss of respectability

⁹¹ Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 367-370.

⁹² Tager, *Decay of Czarism*, 50.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

outside of the courtroom in their professional lives. As a key witness against Beilis, and more importantly, against Kiev's Jews, the prosecution called upon a Catholic priest from Tashkent with dubious qualifications to testify about Jewish rituals and Judaism. In his testimony about Jewish ritual murder, Father Justin Pranaitis attempted to employ his understanding of Talmud, Zohar, and other works to show that the Beilis trial was only the last in a long series of such murders prescribed through Jewish law and mysticism. Known before the trial for his 1893 essay *The Christians in the Jewish Talmud, or The Secrets of the Teachings of the Rabbis about Christians*, Pranaitis continued in the courtroom his vitriolic campaign against Judaism.⁹⁵ With very little mention of Beilis or the accusations against him, the priest insisted upon Talmudic evidence for blood libel.

Pranaitis suggested that there were three goals in the Jewish practice of killing Christian children. According to his testimony, Jews kill Christians because “of their great hatred that they bear toward Christians and their belief that they are offering a sacrifice to God through such a murder.”⁹⁶ The second reason Jews commit these crimes, he argued, is for the magical use of the blood obtained from such a ‘sacrifice.’⁹⁷ In his discussion about Jewish fascination with the blood of ritual murder victims, Pranaitis cites the very troublesome passage from Matthew 27:25 (English Standard Version) “And all the people answered, His blood be on us and our children.” His use of Gospel passages while not original, no doubt served to make a connection between Jews and

⁹⁵ Samuel, *Blood Accusation*, 87.

⁹⁶ *Delo Beilis*, 2: 304.

⁹⁷ *Delo Beilis*, 2: 304-305.

their willingness to shed blood, a notion that Vipper aimed to impact jurors' perceptions of Judaism. The third reason according to Pranaitis, for Jewish ritual murder, was that the Rabbis were confused by the prophecies of the reality of Christ.⁹⁸ They believed, he argued, that by sprinkling a small amount of the blood of the murdered Christian on them during Passover they would be saved.⁹⁹ The use of these three accusations against Jews by Pranaitis reasserted very old notions of Jewish destitution and moral inferiority.

The expert witnesses for the Beilis defense team, like Gruzenberg himself, were called in not only for opinions about Judaism and Jewish religious practice, but also for their familiarity with blood libel court proceedings. As noted earlier, Gruzenberg played an important role in the Blondes case in Vilnius. Likewise, the testimony of the distinguished Hebraist from St. Petersburg Theological Academy, Ivan Gavriilovich Troitskii (b. 1858), proved critical to the defense's argument in court. Troitskii's experience came largely through his association with Khvol'son's earlier work in the Saratov case. When a St. Petersburg newspaper correspondent interviewed Troitskii just after arrival in Kiev in September 1913 to serve as a witness in the trial, he claimed, "I don't know if I was called on behalf of the prosecution or the defendant, but I heard from others that I was there for the defense."¹⁰⁰ In 1912, Troitskii submitted a report in

⁹⁸ Pranaitis cites numerous scriptural passages, most importantly; Ezekiel 33 and Ezekiel 35, both contain frequent references to blood and blood shed.

⁹⁹ *Delo Beilis*, 2: 305-307.

¹⁰⁰ "Prof. Troitskii o dele Beilisa [Beseda]," (22 September 1913), 4. It is unclear which paper this article appeared in, as the only copy that I can find was cut out of the paper and placed in the Khvol'son file in in SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 53, l. 1. The article does not mention Khvol'son, which makes its inclusion in the fond all the more interesting, perhaps suggesting the

response to a number of questions about Jews and ritual murder. The usual questions were asked along the very same lines as those posed to the Saratov commission that Khvol'son served on. Troitskii summarized the questions as having dealt with the existence of Jewish books that contained mystical prescriptions for the use of blood and whether there was any validity to the accusations historically. Troitskii's efforts in the Beilis trial served as a similar response to the sharply anti-Semitic comments of Pranaitis. In tandem with Rabbi Jacob Mazeh, Troitskii's step-by-step rebuttal of the Catholic priest's claims, the defense embarrassed Pranaitis and the prosecution. In the expert testimonies, the defense sought to show the limited knowledge of Pranaitis and those who colluded with him to validate the charges against Beilis. Like Khvol'son before him Troitskii argued regardless of whether it was against a Jew or Christian religious and civil law prohibited murder. Many of the questions asked of these witnesses were so bizarre and leading that the presiding judge often reminded the prosecutors (as he did with Pranaitis) to stick to the facts and avoid speculation. The rich heritage of Hebraist scholars who testified against claims of Jewish ritual murder is only one small, but

Khvol'son family or someone close to them recognized the close relationship between Khvol'son and his student Troitskii and the relevance of the article to Khvol'son's work on the subject. The history of the Khvol'son collection is interesting because at least some of the materials were provided to archive by Anatolii Daniilovich Khvol'son in 1912 and 1913. For more on the donation of parts of the Khvol'son library to the Oriental Institute and the Academy of Sciences archives, see IVR RAN, f. 55, op. 1, d. 7/822, l. 1-2; "Para piska s Harrassovitz po voprosy o priobretenii Akademii Nauk biblioteki?" (29 April 1909); SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 55, l. 1; letter from Sergei Ol'denburg thanking A. D. Khvol'son for the submission of books and personal papers from the Khvol'son office (4 January 1912).

significant, contribution by Christian and Jewish intellectuals to defeat these outrageous claims against Jews in Russia.

Troitskii was not the only of Khvol'son's former students to assist the defense. Pavel Konstantinovich Kokovstov (1861-1942) also testified in the case and was crucial expert witness. Kokovstov succeeded Khvol'son at the university (later Leningrad State University), taking up the post in Syriac, Aramaic, and Hebrew in 1894. Kokovstov was born in Pavlovsk and was trained extensively by Khvol'son himself. One of Khvol'son's other students even placed Kokovstov's efforts in the Beilis trial as more valuable and consequential than Khvol'son's work in earlier cases. Solomon Zeitlin, in a review of a 1968 accounting of the Beilis Affair, included this curious side note on the Kokovstov – Khvol'son comparison:

Kokovtsov studied under Chwolson (who had also been my teacher while I was in St. Petersburg). Kokovtsov was of the Russian nobility. Chwolson was a convert to Christianity, and this made it possible for him to become a professor in the University of St. Petersburg. There is similarity and difference between these two men. Chwolson wrote books demonstrating the absurdity and fallacy of the blood accusation against the Jews. Kokovtsov, a Russian aristocrat, shattered the accusation of the prosecutor against Beiliss that the Jews used blood for ritual purposes. Chwolson was selfish. He wrote in defense of the Jews in many instances for self benefit. Kokovtsov was spirited, magnanimous.¹⁰¹

For whatever misgivings Zeitlin possessed toward Khvol'son and his work, the lineage from Khvol'son to Troitskii and Kokovtsov, provided these two expert witnesses with the necessary training and academic credentials, as well as personal desire to continue their mentor's legacy. Theirs was a relationship that went well beyond professor and student,

¹⁰¹ Solomon Zeitlin, "Review of Maurice Samuel, *Blood Accusation: The Strange History of the Beiliss Case*," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 59, no. 1 (July 1968), 80.

so much so that they both attended, and took active roles in Khvol'son's funeral services. Kokovtsov was one of the pallbearers who escorted Khvol'son's body and casket from his apartment on the Twelfth line (*liniia*) on Vasil'evskii Ostrov to the university cathedral and then on to Smolenskoe cemetery.¹⁰² Troitskii was the first speaker at the funeral on 26 March 1911. Troitskii talked at length about the old professor's many contributions to the theological academy and its students, as well as the contributions to science. Following Troitskii, V. N. Speranskii also spoke and concluded with the following tribute:

He walked life's thorny path firmly and steadfastly. He believed in people, in humanity, and in knowledge. Yes, even in the last minute of consciousness, Daniil Avraamovich remained interested in scientific issues.¹⁰³

The timely occasion of Khvol'son's passing foreshadowed the events of the next two years when the major trajectory of his professional and personal life were once again placed before the Russian public. His works were cited or alluded to by friends and foes in their writings about the Beilis Affair.¹⁰⁴ Even after his death, the central thesis of his

¹⁰² "Pokhorony D. A. Khvol'sona," *Rech'*, (27 March 1911), 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ A short list of articles that poured forth during the heady days of 1913 include: N. S. Taganstev, "Taina Krovi' i evreev: Ekspertiza Kuratora – Ksendza I. E. Pranaitisa po delu ob ubiistve Andriushi Iushchinskago," *Missionerskoe obozrenie*, vol. 12 (1913): 559-597; "Kronika: Ritual'nyi ubiistva," *Evreiskii mir*, no. 16 (24 April 1911): 18-19; no. 17 (30 April 1911): 27-29; "Kto zhe ubiitsa Andriushi Iushchinskago," *Peterburgskaia Gazeta: politicheskaiia i literaturnaia*, no. 329 (30 November 1911), 4; Iulii Gessen, "Na arene krovavogo naveta v Rossii," *Evreiskaia letopis*, no. 1 (1923); Felikh Meier, *Professor V. F. Zaleskii, kak storonnikh krovavago naveta* (Vilna: Tipografiia Artel' Pechati Dela, 1913); *The American Jewish Yearbook*, 5675 (1914-1915), ed. Herman Bernstein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914), esp. 51-52; S. I. Brazul'-Brushkovskii, *Pravda ob ubiistve Iushchinskago i dele Beilisa, s 12 risunkami na otdel'nykh listakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. A. Bezsonova, 1913), 84-86;

1861 text still resonated with the jury and same arguments held up against individuals determined to prove once and for all that Jews used Christian blood for religious purposes.

At the conclusion of the trial, as the jury was asked to deliberate and reach a final verdict, two questions were asked of them. The first, focused on the boy, Andrei Iushchinskii and his murder. It asked about the condition of the body and asked whether Iushchinskii's death was the result of murder. The understanding suggested here was that the murder was committed in a very specific way, noting the exact amount of blood drained from Iushchinskii, and the location of wounds on the body. The jury answered affirmatively that indeed they were convinced of this evidence about the murder.

The second question posed to the jury is the most significant, however, because it was here that Beilis' fate, and in a way the fate of Russia's Jews, was finalized. The question asked—"Did thirty-nine year old Mendel Beilis, knowingly and in cooperation with others, driven by religious fanaticism murder Andrei Iushchinskii?" Assumed within that question was the implied assertion that the Beilis case was not simply concerned with murder, but the existence of a premeditated and religious incentive to kill. The jury, in response to this question, commented that there was not sufficient evidence against Beilis, though they did not disqualify Jewish ritual murder as a motive in Iushchinskii's death.

Ivan G. Troitskii, "Professor D. A. Khvol'son," *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia*, vol. 34, (1911), no. 8, otd. 4: 90-99.

Jews around the world were obviously thrilled for the acquittal, though they feared that the myth of Jewish ritual murder had not been sufficiently debunked.¹⁰⁵ One Jew in Germany mourned the outcome of the trial because “Beilis was set free, the Jewish people was condemned,” while the Yiddish poet/writer Abraham Reizen, wrote: “A half of a victory, a half of rejoicing.”¹⁰⁶ In this sense, the prosecution won because the Jewish scapegoat remained available to be blamed for the collapse of imperial government, revolution, economic struggles and many other social ills in Russia. The combination of virulent religious rhetoric with modern scientific anti-Semitism in the Beilis case is evidence that there continued to be a very strong religious tone to modern anti-Semitism in early twentieth-century Kiev. Despite constant reminders that only Beilis was on trial, the testimonies of Vipper, Sikorskii, and Pranaitis all focused on Jewish collectivity, Hebrew scripture, Talmud, and Kabbalah.¹⁰⁷ They insisted upon Beilis’ religious life and whether fanatic or not, his Jewishness alone made him culpable.

There are at least three possible interpretations of the causes behind the Beilis Affair. First, it is possible to view Kiev society as a battleground between revolutionary ideas and reactionary politics (Tager). Second, within the surrounding population and particularly among intellectuals, there existed a potentially dangerous, yet acceptable

¹⁰⁵ Szajkowski, Zosa. "The Impact of the Beilis Case on Central and Western Europe." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31, (1963): 197-218.

¹⁰⁶ Szajkowski, 216. Szajkowski indicates the following materials were found in various archives: YIVO archive, (Wolf to Dr. Nathan); AJA (Dr. Nathan to Shciff, Nov. 12, 1913); YIVO (Wolf’s letter); *Juedische Rundschau*, XVIII-46 (1913), 491, A. Rejzen, in *Der Najer Journal* (Paris), Nov. 14, 1913.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel, *Blood Accusation*, 230.

form of anti-Semitism available to them through elitist literature (Katsis). The third option is that 1913 Kiev witnessed the perfect storm of rampant racial anti-Semitism mixed with Christian notions of Judaism's inferiority (Smith). Were the ritual-murder accusations in 1913 against Beilis the result of a period of heightened social or political concern? It seems likely that public agitation may well have contributed to the charges and trial against Beilis. In the days following the 1905 revolution and the pending First World War, Kievan society faced challenges from all sides. In one of the earliest studies of the Beilis trial, Tager suggested that the government officials sought to use the Iushchinskii's murder to finally prove Jewish guilt in aiding if not fostering the anti-tsarist, revolutionary movement in Russia.¹⁰⁸ While Tager's arguments are sound and his work remains foundational, his conclusions only help us understand the bringing of charges against Mendel Beilis, a relatively unknown Jew in Kiev. The decision by well-educated intellectuals to accuse Beilis and his fellow Jews of carrying out yet another ritual murder forces us to look deeper into Kiev society.

Leonid Katsis sought to understand what convinced men like Sikorskii and Vipper of the validity of the blood libel myth. In his work on the trial, Katsis suggested that there existed in Silver Age Russia a rich literary and culturally accepted form of Judeophobia and a prevalent anti-Semitic social element in Russian society.¹⁰⁹ If Katsis' theory holds true, then it helps explain how and why the Beilis case became so popular

¹⁰⁸ Tager, *Decay of Czarism*.

¹⁰⁹ Leonid F. Katsis, "Delo Beilisa v kontekste 'serebrianoogo vek'a" in *Russkaia eskatologia i russkaia literatura*, (Moscow: OGI, 2000), 34-61; Leonid F. Katsis, *Krovavii navet i russkaia mysl'* (Moscow: Mostii kulturii, 2006).

and attracted an international audience. As a predominantly Orthodox Christian community, Kiev's rich history contributed greatly to elite Russian identity. One very important theory about the reason for the ritual-murder accusation developed out of Helmut Walser Smith's investigation into a similar trial in 1900 Konitz. Smith argued that an intricate process of Christian projection occurred because "there was something disturbing about a ritual in which the body and blood of Christ was consumed as food and sacrificed to God."¹¹⁰ This argument, based on an understanding of psychological defense mechanisms, suggests that Christians alleviated their own discomfort and confusion over their own religious ritual by accusing Jews of ritual murder. By extension, and as the prosecution in the Beilis trial displayed, the jump from ritual murder to "Christ killers" was not easily hindered by nineteen hundred years. While this theory, particularly as it relates to the witnesses in the Beilis trial, is difficult to quantify today, it helps to explain the religious anti-Semitism used throughout the trial.

How then can we understand the motivations for anti-Semitism that emerged during the 1913 trial of Beilis? While care must be taken to avoid pinning all Russians into an anti-Semitic mold and thereby essentializing the Russian citizen, there was some element of popular anti-Semitism in Kiev that allowed the claims to operate as plausible charges to some of the population. The willingness of certain individuals, previously held in high regard by their associates in the scientific academies and public sphere, to embrace the claims against one Jew and then extend those accusations to all Jews is

¹¹⁰ Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 97. In his investigation of the Konitz murder, Smith looks at the long history of ritual-murder accusations in Europe. His study serves as an important comparative work to the later Beilis trial.

remarkable and sensational. And yet, not all Russian citizens espoused these attitudes. As the late John Yoder compellingly suggested, even in Nazi Germany, “At least some Christians in Germany were ready to say that there did not have to be Auschwitz.”¹¹¹ Likewise, within the Beilis trial, there were many non-Jews who believed that the trial breached elements of human rights and civility and who rose to the occasion to show solidarity with Beilis and Russia’s Jews.

The triumph of anti-Semitism veiled in religious garb allowed the modern, secular forms of the phenomena in the Beilis case to escalate to fully developed, rampant hatred of Jews and Judaism. The Beilis transcripts continue to serve as a reminder of how deeply troubled Jewish-Orthodox relations were in pre-revolutionary Russia. Perhaps this also helps to explain the relative reluctance of many, though certainly not all, Russian Orthodox theologians to address these issues.¹¹² Recent attempts to use the Iushchinskii martyr’s image to reassert anti-Semitic claims is troubling and suggests that indeed the Beilis case remains, for some, unresolved even today.¹¹³ Although the overwhelming majority of people in the world today disregard the ritual murder charge as completely false and nonsensical, the occasional charge is still leveled against Jews (or others). As the Beilis trial showed, even the most extensive and aggressive efforts failed to eradicate

¹¹¹ John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 44.

¹¹² One shining example of this attempt to address the issues of anti-Semitism in Eastern Orthodoxy is the statement “To Recognize Christ in His People: The final declaration by the Christian Round Table of Eastern Orthodox priests and cultural representatives from Greece, Georgia, Italy, Russia, and Ukraine visiting Jerusalem”, April 20-24, 2007.

¹¹³ Andris Grutups, *Beilisada: delo ob ovnenenii Mendelia Beilisa v ritual’nom ubiistve* (Moscow: 2007), 456.

the spurious accusations. Perhaps “eradication” was simply too much to hope for in this case. The cyclical and illogical nature of anti-Semitic moments or “events” suggests that the repetitive defense and broad rejection of such events might be the best alternative. Khvol’son surely hoped for more, but the history of the twentieth century forces even the most optimistic within society to now accept a more cautious, though no less vigilant course.



Figure 5. Khvol'son at the Tiflis Conference, 1881. SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 58, no. 8.

Mission Accomplished?

When Khvol'son republished his *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev* in 1880, he turned a reflective mind toward the larger implications of his efforts. While the earlier version of the text addressed the history of blood libel accusations in response to events in Saratov and the MVD investigation, the author's introduction to the later volume suggested that the refutation of the blood libel became a matter so dear that he measured his success through the book's influence on Russia. He concluded the preface with: "May God grant that the current new treatment of my book drew the attention more than the first edition and that I was able to destroy in Russia that long ago disappeared in Western Europe, old and dangerous prejudice victim became so innocent. If it is so, then I can declare: "I have not lived in vain."¹¹⁴ For Khvol'son, the matter of defending Jews moved from an immediate cause to one that spanned his lifetime, and drew him into public conflict with others who supported, promoted, or acted indifferently to the blood libel charge. Since the mid-1850s, involvement in the blood libel—initially at the behest of government officials—became a life-long cause for the professor in St. Petersburg. Looking back at the content and context of his life, his preoccupation with the subject reveals much about his *weltbild* and values.

If the Khvol'son project failed to produce the results he desired, then it was through no lack of effort on his part. He received accolades and the praise of many in society, particularly among Jews.¹¹⁵ In 1881 he traveled to Tiflis for an academic

¹¹⁴ Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh* (1880), xvi.

¹¹⁵ N. Vladimirov', "Prizraki proshlago," *Zhizn' i Sud' 2* (1913), 11.

archeological conference, and on his journey back to St. Petersburg he was invited to stop in Kutaisi—the site of the late ritual murder case that prompted his short pamphlet on the issue. During that stop, he received a hero's welcome from the Jewish community. As David Gintsburg noted:

He learned from the judges [in Kutaisi] that their belief in the innocence of the accused derived from his ardent defense of the Jewish people. He was conducted into the synagogue by the head of the congregation, attended by a Jewish escort all the way. The synagogue was brightly lit up. The Holy Ark was opened and the congregation blessed him. The venerable rabbi, a magnificent figure with biblical bearing, delivered an emotional sermon in Hebrew. Another rabbi spoke in Georgian, and the congregation's president translated and then gave Chwolson an address of thanks.¹¹⁶

The changing face of anti-Semitism to include religious hostilities, economic and social fears, and political discrimination might have required a much larger and perhaps quite different approach than the one taken by Khvol'son. Although the ambition to drive anti-Semitism out of Russia was noble and just, the question about how to accomplish such a task was never resolved in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, as the sad history of Europe and the Second World War proved. Khvol'son's involvement in the ritual murder polemics of the late nineteenth century was driven by a sense of immediate concern for his former co-religionists, but also by a religious worldview that was also deeply fixed on the role of human intervention in securing the idealized world to come. In order to achieve the hoped for future, individuals needed to take action to change the course of history. Khvol'son firmly believed that his actions were contributing to the betterment of

¹¹⁶ As quoted in Ginzburg, "Daniel Chwolson: A Christian Jew," in Dawidowicz, *A Golden Tradition*, 338. The same story is told in the short biography by E. A. Khvol'son, "D. A. Khvol'son, (Orientalist) 1819-1911, Zhiynennii put samouchni-potchetnogo chleni Akademii nauk," SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 54.

society generally and the condition of Russian Jews specifically.¹¹⁷ Khvol'son's writings on ritual murder, as well as other, seemingly unrelated subjects, reveal a common thread for Khvol'son. He understood his unique position as a Jewish convert, as a Hebraic scholar, and Orthodox Christian as a position of authority from which to assert his polemic against Liutostanskii and the ritual murder myth. The final sentence of his "Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov" best summarizes his philosophy and understanding of his role in relation to humanity:

And may those whom God entrusted with this holy duty of protecting us, care for our protection and safety in accordance with requirements of the common good [*soglasno s obstoiatel'stv' i k obshchemu blagu*]; but we, educated men, whom God has granted mercy so that we can devote our entire lives to the searching out [*issledovaniiu*] of Truth and dissemination of a higher culture, we, men of peace and science, ours is a sacred duty to labor in word and writing, to prepare for that time when man will make a sickle from his sword; so the kingdom of eternal peace [*tsarstvo vechnago mira*] will reign and all humanity will be filled with knowledge and understanding.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ The idea of "*chelevechestvo*" (humanity) and related topics such as the *slava cheloveka* (honor of man) are ever present in Khvol'son's writing and a rare archival find in his own handwriting suggests that this was a major intellectual concern for him, as his work on the blood libel proves. A small *tetrad'* (notebook) listed only as *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh, i "Vypiski iz Talmuda"* shows Khvol'son thinking through the value of humanity. SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 9. This notebook contains one and a half pages of Khvol'son's notes on the 1861 text. Khvol'son's notes were most likely written at some point prior to the publication of the second edition, perhaps as a set of notes to expand for the 1880 publication. The notes are quite abbreviated, but he noted adjustments for the Sadducees – a topic that he greatly expanded for the second edition (see my discussion of the additional pages added regarding Pharisees and Sadducees in the previous chapter). Additionally, he made a note about the section in *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev*, (1861) [see page 62 of Khvol'son's work] related to Talmudic comments about Christians and Christianity. In the second section of the notebook (beginning at the back of the notebook), Khvol'son added mixed German and Russian notes about the Talmud and the idea of humanity. This section is 20 pages of handwritten notes.

¹¹⁸ Khvol'son, "Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov," *Russkii Vestnik* 97 (1872): 475.

CHAPTER 5

“IN SCIENCE, WE ARE ALL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN”

It comes as little surprise that Khvol'son was drawn to the subjects that occupied the pinnacle position of prominence in the German academy when he arrived in Breslau. During the nineteenth century, German universities promoted highly competent philologists and historians, particularly those they referred to as “Orientalists.” It was within this field of study, focused on Islamic, Jewish, and Christian antiquity in the Near East, that Christian and Jewish scholars found greater reciprocity than their counterparts in other academic disciplines. A growing number of scholarly works today help elucidate this rare moment of cooperation—though one that also provided opportunities for deep chasms of opinion.¹ Edward Said, in his monumental critique of orientalism as a tool of colonial ambition, placed emphasis on the French and British scholars who contributed to the ideological underpinnings of Christian imperialism.

Since Germany and Russia lacked overseas empires comparable to France and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Saidian reading of orientalism does not fit as well for Central and Eastern European orientalists. However, within the German

¹ The most complete of these studies is Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Marchand's broad work encapsulates not just the academic development of oriental studies, but also the cultural manifestations of the underlying theories and beliefs broadly accepted among writers and intellectuals. See also Todd Kortje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Ursula Wokoeck, *German Orientalism and the Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). Wokoeck's study is more narrowly focused on the university setting that gave rise to German orientalism.

school, an important movement developed that greatly influenced Khvol'son and his later studies. Khvol'son's later works shared a common emphasis on placing historical actors, texts, and languages in their proper place within the long chronology of humanity. This was not simply a matter of academic interest, but rather part of Khvol'son's desire to correct misperceptions about relations between the many "peoples" or nations that were competing for dominance in the world around him. The broad linguistic skills he possessed allowed him to participate in dating texts that his contemporaries knew little about, but also made him a lucrative participant in one of the most important textual developments in nineteenth century Russia—the translation of the Bible into Russian. Along the way, his enormous productivity in many fields brought with it challenges from colleagues, enemies, and friends—the subject that is explored in this chapter. Some of these battles waged in the name of scholarship were truly academic in nature, participated in by those who sought to push the limits of human knowledge about the past—not unheard of among scholars today. Others took a more personal tone, and attacked Khvol'son the person and, as was often the case, the convert. Although Khvol'son took on all challengers when it came to his scholarship, and at times did so with great fervor, his students remembered a brilliant mind and generous man.

Sparring Orientalists – Joseph Ernest Renan and Khvol'son

Khvol'son's early work on the Sabians and the literary evidence of them attracted not only the attention of those professors near him who supervised his work, but also colleagues in other locations throughout Europe. Among those who were impressed by his dissertation and a subsequent essay (1858) and responded to it was Ernest Renan, one

of the leading French orientalist. Renan was an important figure for nineteenth-century theologians and biblical scholars across Europe following the publication of his 1863 *Vie de Jésus* in which he attempted to present a scholarly history of Jesus, minus reference or interpretation through miraculous supernatural events and stories.² Owing to Renan's efforts to further develop biblical criticism and scholarship on the Bible, his *Life of Jesus* challenged conservative figures within the Russian Orthodox Church because it undermined the supposed inerrancy of the Biblical text. This internal struggle branched out into numerous arenas within the church, religious academies, and universities. The seriousness of Renan's argument forced Russian scholars and clergy to reconsider their own traditions and teaching about the central figure within their religious worldview. Renan's challenge to Russian biblical scholarship and clerical teaching has been well documented. Arthur Repp has shown how Renan presented challenges to traditional exegesis that first encouraged scholars and churchmen to develop a viable field of biblical scholarship in Russia. While it is true, as Repp has argued, that Renan's work was at the center of the battles over biblical interpretation among Russian clergy and scholars, it is equally true that the Frenchman was impressed by, as well as deeply concerned with, many of Khvol'son's works. The two men carried out conversations (often fairly tense in nature) in the scholarly journals and through letters.³ In an essay

² Joseph Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus* (Paris, 1863).

³ Arthur Repp's dissertation considered Khvol'son in other arenas, but made no mention of the Khvol'son – Renan debate. Renan's work was the "catalyst" that forced Russian Orthodox theologians to "defend the Christian faith as they understood it." See Arthur Christian Repp, "In Search of an Orthodox Way: The Development of Biblical Studies in Late Imperial Russia," PhD diss. (University of Illinois at Chicago, 1999), 93-112. Repp examines in detail the responses of

published in 1860 (and later translated and published in England), Renan noted that Khvol'son should be considered an "originator" in their field and that any criticisms to his work must, of necessity, be culled from the devices and methods that Khvol'son himself provided.⁴ Renan argued:

Dr. Chwol'son, in turning the attention of critics to facts and texts too much disregarded before, fully merits to be called their originator; and it would be unjust to forget, that if his opinions are combatted, it is with weapons which he himself has furnished, and on ground which he himself has prepared.⁵

Khvol'son's work attained such a high status as a model for oriental scholarship that in order to challenge it, the review could not do so without at least recognizing the important role that Khvol'son played in bringing the subject and the numerous texts to

Archimadrite Mikhail (Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy), who viewed the work as a "popularization" of western scholarship; and Ivan T. Osinin, who argued that Renan's was a sincere, though misled, effort at historicizing the New Testament text. Renan's work continued to be of interest to Khvol'son, as well as his fellow colleagues in St. Petersburg, and reviews of his works appeared in the various journals in Russia. In addition to Khvol'son responses to Renan, see for example the review of *L'Antechrist* (Paris, 1873) by N. P. Rozhdestvenskii in *Khristianskoe chtenie* 1 (January 1874): 72-119.

⁴ Ernest Renan, *An essay on the age and antiquity of the Book of Nabathæan agriculture, To which is added an inaugural lecture on the position of the Shemitic nations in the history of civilization* (London, Trübner & Co., 1862) [orig. *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, et Belles-Lettres*, Tome XXIV, 1860.] Khvol'son's essay, to which Renan responded directly is Khvol'son, "Ueber die Ueberreste der Altbabylonsischen Literatur in Arabischen Uebersetzungen," *Memoires des Savants strangers*, vol. VIII (St. Petersburg, 1859). Khvol'son's essay was also highlighted at the Proceedings of the American Oriental Society in 1860 by Professor James Hadley. For Hadley's summary and critique, see "Proceedings of the American Oriental Society, New Haven, October 17th and 18th, 1860," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 7 (1860-1863), vi-vii. Hadley, a Professor of Greek at Middlebury College and later Yale, praised Khvol'son's ambitious project and examined the work's resemblance to Movers's work (Khvol'son's teacher in Breslau) on the Phoenicians. For more on Hadley and his work, see the *Obituary Record of Graduates of Yale College: Deceased during the academical year ending in June 1873, including the record of a few who died a short time previous, hitherto unreported*, presented at the Meeting of the Alumni, June 25, 1873, p. 99, [online], available at http://mssa.library.yale.edu/obituary_record/1859_1924/1872-73.pdf; accessed 24 January 2013.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

light. Renan's challenge to Khvol'son was based on what he viewed as an excessive dating of the "The Book of Nabathæan Agriculture."⁶ On the one hand, Khvol'son argued that the book should be seen as part of a much earlier period, perhaps as early as nine hundred to one thousand years before the birth of Jesus. He was convinced that the text suggested a highly developed Babylonian civilization that mastered architecture, literature, and government. On the other hand, Renan and others favored a much later, probably first-century BCE authorship. In his dating of the text, Khvol'son followed another Frenchman, M. Quartremère, who argued the book contained important insights into the literary life of Babylon and was possibly written during the reign of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II, thus in the sixth century BCE.⁷ Khvol'son, by Renan's account, provided "the most perfect copy" of the known manuscripts of the book and had access to all of them at some point in his preparation of his dissertation and the later essay.⁸ Here Khvol'son's friend and supporter, Norov seems to have aided him.

⁶ The book mentioned here was translated into Arabic in 904 CE. The book was but one of the many documents that Khvol'son used in his study. It contained information about agricultural practices, but also cultural, philosophical, and religious ideas. Khvol'son promised that the translation and edited texts that he was working on and hoped to make available to his colleagues would amount to about four quarto volumes of six hundred pages each. Khvol'son argued that the book was of Chaldean origin.

⁷ Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and then destroyed the Temple in 586 BCE (see 2 Kings 24: 11-20). It was this same Nebuchadnezzar described in Daniel 2 in connection with his dream and Daniel's interpretation of it. Though space does not allow for further exploration of the idea, the dating of the book to the period discussed in Daniel is interesting because the image of Daniel is quite different between later Jewish interpretations and commentaries and Christian ones. Daniel, for Christians represents a prophetic book whereas rabbinical commentators tended to be cautious in their interpretations, given the major crisis of the destruction of the temple and the removal of its wealth and fine adornments by Nebuchadnezzar.

⁸ Renan, *An Essay on the Age and Antiquity*, 15.

Renan noted that the Paris Manuscript, which one would expect him to have easy access to given his career in the library, was unavailable because it “had been sent to the Russian minister for Dr. Chwolson’s use.”⁹ Renan indicated that since Khvol’son had promised to bring forth a full translation of the text (the Paris Manuscript only contained one third of the book) it was of little use to seek out the original source until it could be read in its entirety. For Renan, the issue of dating seems to have amounted to placing credit upon a fully functional, and intellectually advanced civilization, when as he understood the text, these were the contributions of those living just before the birth of Jesus during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. While Khvol’son argued for a much earlier contribution to the world of letters and ideas, Renan suggested manifestations of literary greatness were most likely to be found in and around the century or two before and after the birth of Christianity.

The Khvol’son – Renan debate carried over into other texts and lasted well into the 1870s. In 1855, Renan published his *Histoire generale et system comparé des langues sémitiques*, in which he examined Semitic and Indo-European languages through a history of the people and their origins. What this amounted to was a quite popular text that attempted, as the title suggested, comparative philology and ultimately, an examination of the major contributions of the two language families to the world. Renan’s intellectual battles (and friendships) in connection with his ideas of race and

⁹ Ibid., 59, footnote 1.

nations were most recently examined by Joan Leopold.¹⁰ In her examination of Renan and racial ideology, Leopold suggested that the man was greatly influenced by the revolutions of 1848 and the development of science during his lifetime. During the 1840-1860 period, there were debates between scholars who promoted “innatists,” psychological understandings of human development and language progression on the one hand, and the “sensationalists” on the other.¹¹ Within this debate, Leopold argued, Renan viewed himself as a moderate, situated between those who attributed “quasi-theological” causes (therefore innate) and those who believed that individual language development occurred because of surrounding elements and circumstances. The important point here, in relation to Khvol’son and that Leopold points out, was that after 1848 Renan turned to a more stringent racialist worldview in his personal life and scholarship.¹²

Renan and Khvol’son carried on a private conversation that opened up to the public between 1860 and the early 1870s. Renan mentioned in a footnote that Khvol’son sent him a letter in which he clarified and responded to some the critiques waged against

¹⁰ Joan Leopold, “Ernest Renan (1823-1892): From Linguistics and Psychology to Racial Ideology (1840s to 1860s),” *Historiographia Linguistica* 37, no. 1-2 (2010): 31-61.

¹¹ Another way of thinking about this debate is in terms of “nature” and “nurture” interpretations of human development.

¹² *Ibid.*, 52. See also the short dissertation by Jane Victoria Dagon, “Ernest Renan and the Question of Race,” PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1999. Dagon’s work examines the treatment of Renan by Edward Said, Tzvetan Todorov, and Laura B. O’Connor. Dagon’s work is an effort to rehabilitate Renan from the critics mentioned above (along with others) who sought to label him an out-and-out racist. See Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Laura B. O’Connor, “The Return of the Repressed Celt,” PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997. Todorov’s interpretation most closely matches Khvol’son’s own interpretation of Renan’s work.

him by the former in 1860. While Renan took up the issue of dating in response to Khvol'son's *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus* and his 1858 essay, Khvol'son returned the favor in 1872 when he published in Russian, German, and English his essay on the Semitic nations.¹³ In his essay, Khvol'son acknowledged Renan's position and importance within European Oriental studies. He also challenged Renan in a direct way, attempting to dismantle the scholar's approach and interpretation of the Semitic people and their history. That Khvol'son elected to publish in Russian, German, and eventually have his response published in English is telling of his motivations. Whereas his 1856 two-volume work and his subsequent 1858 essay were only published in German (albeit in St. Petersburg), the broadening of audience in the 1872 essay was deliberate. The two earlier books were intended as major contributions to European orientalism and were only intended for his colleagues in the major universities and intellectual centers. A decade or more later, however, Khvol'son better understood his role as public intellectual and the responsibility of that position. The desire to expose a widening readership to his ideas (and warn against the implications of Renan's) mirrored in many ways, or indeed may have preceded the similar development in his response to the blood libel discussed earlier. This gradual move from highly specific writing for a scholarly audience to a broad general readership became representative of his literary life.

Khvol'son was particularly upset over Renan's accusing the Semitic nations of lacking significant contributions to world history. Renan's work was a comparison, based

¹³ Khvol'son, "Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov," *Russkii Vestnik* 97 (1872): 423-475; *Die Semitischen Völker* (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1872); *The Semitic Nations*, trans. Ephraim M. Epstein (Cincinnati: Bloch, 1874).

on an analysis of language development that examined “Aryan” and “Semitic” nations. Although he occasionally praised Semitic communities for individual achievements, Renan concluded that the Semitic groups contributed very little, if anything to religious ideas, science, and culture. According to Khvol’son, such an interpretation was factually wrong and more importantly, misled the wider reading public toward dangerous ideological patterns. The publication of his “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov” was a continuation of his work on the Nabathæan texts that he published much earlier. Thus, it should be read as a work in which the author traced the very long history of Semitic peoples from centuries before Nebuchadnezzar up to his own time. Yes, the work on the Nabathæan language and the Semitic nations book were very different in audience and methodology, but they represent a major contribution to the world of oriental scholarship and then an effort to apply that research to a very different time and solve contemporary problems and the racialization of anti-Semitism faced by European Jews in the 1860s and 1870s.

The Semitic nations, according to Khvol’son, were divided into four subgroups: 1) the “southern or Arabian group” and the “middle or north Arabian group” (Abyssinians); 2) middle-Semitic (Canaanitic) including Hebrews and Phoenicians; 3) northern or Aramaic (Syria, northern Mesopotamia and parts of Asia Minor; and 4) Eastern-Semitic (Assyro-Babylonian).¹⁴ In many instances throughout his essay, however, Khvol’son’s use of “Semites” should be read as “Hebrews” or “Jews.” He tended to promote the use of Semites as an overarching familial bond, but in many cases

¹⁴ Khvol’son, “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov,” 437-428.

the substitution of the more specific “*evrei*” seems more appropriate.¹⁵ The Aryan group was much more diverse—including groups from India and Persia, southern Eurasia and the Caucasus, Europe, Iceland, and the Americas. The groups were subdivided into Indian, Iranian, Minor-Asiatic, Grecian, Romantic, Germanic, Slavic and Celtic.¹⁶ Although other groups contributed in small ways to the world that Renan and Khvol’son lived in and the civilizations they studied, the two major contributors were the Aryans and Semites because “the actions of those two races are operating on us vitally to this day, and their activity has not come to a close yet.”¹⁷ The question under debate between Renan and Khvol’son at its most basic components was about the superiority of the Aryan race over the Semitic race.

Studies of Russian concepts of race still have not developed in equal proportion to similar studies elsewhere. Part of this has to do with the history and demographic shape of the Russian Empire, but also with the complex Soviet policies toward nationality and race. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, intellectuals, scholars, and politicians were more divided than ever on the question of whether Russia could, or even should, attempt to develop a “single nation” (*edinyi narod*). The complicated history of Russian interaction with, and rule over, Tatars, Georgians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, and others

¹⁵ Near the end of his essay, Khvol’son asserted this pattern of thinking and more frequently suggested, for example, “Among the Semites, and particularly so the Hebrews...” or “it was the Semitic nation, and particularly the ancient Jewish nation, that taught humanity the principle of morality...” After specifying that he really meant Jews in his use of Semites, Khvol’son then staked out his claims and evidence. See, in particular part four (pp. 465-475).

¹⁶ Khvol’son, “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov,” 436.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

raised questions about the ultimate goals of the empire. As was suggested in the first chapter of this work, Russian policy, even when clearly stated in government directives and law, was rarely carried out in uniform fashion across the empire, and often policies that worked in one area failed terribly in others. All of this raised questions about the path forward, though many believed that a future state, nation-state based on common historical experience and cultural commonalities was not out of reach.¹⁸ In the 1860s and 1870s when Khvol'son and Renan took up the issue of nation and race, European science was only beginning to think in terms of race and its connections with nation-states, empires, and religion. The study of ethnicity and nationality in both the imperial and Soviet periods is a ripe field of inquiry—although race as a category of evaluation within these studies is rarely if ever a part of that conversation. Eric Weitz sparked a fairly intense dialogue about race and Soviet policy that helps clarify the terms used by Russians to discuss race and the concepts of nations.¹⁹ Modern scholars today define “race,” “nationality,” and “ethnicity,” as unnatural constructions of human society—tools of categorization and boundary making. Benedict Anderson, argued that nationalism and the idea of nations were the result of a discrete historical forces, that when merged and

¹⁸ Vera Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation* (London: 2001), 155-190.

¹⁹ Eric D. Weitz, “Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 1-29. For responses to Weitz’s article, see: Francine Hirsch, “Race Without the Practice of Racial Politics,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 30-43; Amir Weiner, “Nothing but Certainty,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 44-53; Alaina Lemon, “Without a ‘Concept’? Race as Discursive Practice,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 54-61. Weitz responded to his critics in the same volume. See “On Certainties and Ambivalences: Reply to My Critics,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 62-65.

given legitimacy became “modular, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness...to merge and be merged with a corresponding side variety of political and ideological constellations.”²⁰ For Khvol’son and for Renan, national characteristics were neither “imagined” nor created—but rather existed naturally (therefore historically) in the world.

Khvol’son’s concept of race did not differ in significant ways from Renan’s understanding of the term. For both men, race was an immutable and persistent idea that time could not change. Further, the inherency of race was locked not in skin color or physical features necessarily, but in a nation’s intellectual, linguistic, and cultural manifestations. In Khvol’son’s single use of the term *rasa*, it was employed within the context of a “cultural race.” Driven by the question of what makes one nation distinct from another, Khvol’son argued against those who believed religion, climate, geography, laws and state institutions, or even education formed the individual.²¹ Nations, he argued, are nothing more than a “large collective individuality.” Like individuals then, nations possess immutable and irreversible characteristics evident in their cultural projects, their “thoughtfulness,” and “intellectual endowments.” The most important cultural nations come from good stock. He further argued, “Even Alfred the Great or Peter the Great could not have created such historical people from a nation of Hottentots. The best artist does not produce anything elegant from bad clay, just as the best wheat seeds will not

²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4.

²¹ Khvol’son, “Kharakteristika Semiticheskikh narodov,” 424-431 ff.

grow in sandy soil.”²² He rejected the Lockean notion of *tabula rasa*—that all knowledge is the result of experience and education—substituting instead a theory that placed above all else, the innate characteristics provided by one’s national characteristics.²³ Education, he allowed, could reform or alter behavior, but it would never overcome the stronger national characteristics. No sooner could a “lion change itself into a horse,” argued Khvol’son, than can man truly be a master of himself, erasing evidence of his previous self for another national identity.²⁴ Khvol’son praised Jews and Muslims for their emphasis of primary education for all males, even when he believed that education’s potential for reforming the human spirit was quite limited. Instead, he argued, it helped train the mind to better understand how best to use those characteristics innate to them, thereby altering behavior.²⁵ This understanding of human potential reflected Khvol’son’s self-understanding of his own Jewish heritage and culture which was improved upon by his selective use of Christian and Russian culture.

If the totality of intellectual contributions to civilization were the measure of a nation’s accomplishment and importance, then the Semitic family was far superior, Khvol’son argued, to Aryan groups. After all, the Bible (both the Old and New

²² Ibid., 432. Khvol’son’s derogatory usage of “Hottentot” is consistent with its nineteenth-century meaning. The Hottentots, or Khoekhoe people, were viewed by the Dutch and others as barbaric and uncultured people, and hence the name became representative of a particularly non-European civilization.

²³ Khvol’son, “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov,” 430.

²⁴ Ibid., 431.

²⁵ Ibid., 472-473.

Testaments) was its most significant individual piece of intellectual production, and therefore it should be seen for its value to humanity—offering “refreshment, instruction, comfort, and the lifting of souls.” Khvol’son noted that time had proven this to generation upon generation and because the Qur’an gained its structure and precepts from the Bible (a Semitic book) there was no comparable force in the history of humanity. How then, did Renan argue that the Semitic race was the *race inferieure*? According to Khvol’son, for a learned man such as Renan to claim that Jews were inferior was simply “*nevozmozhno!*” (impossible).²⁶ The Aryans, Khvol’son claimed, could possess very few, if any, truths as their own invention because they were so dependent upon the Semitic family for their foundations. According to Renan’s summation, religious intolerance was exclusive to the Semites (and more particularly Jews). Renan had noted that the strict monotheism and idea of Jewish chosenness, as iterated in the Bible and in subsequent Jewish texts, prevented Semites from understanding or permitting the perspective of other religions, most notably Christianity.²⁷ This intolerance was the result of Semitic peoples inability (because of intellectual inferiority) to see the world from a perspective of multiplicity. Khvol’son countered Renan’s argument (as he viewed it), seeing it as a mistaken interpretation of Jewish communal identity. One fundamental difference between Jews, Muslims, and Christians was, by Khvol’son’s estimation, related to community building. Unlike Christians, Jews were not after converts, and Islam concerned itself with the heathen, rather than transformation of Jews or Christians. Jews

²⁶ Ibid., 443-444.

²⁷ Ibid., 444.

and Christians, he suggested, were viewed as supplanted by the Muhammadan message, but they were allowed to continue on as *dhimmi* within Muslims societies. It was the Christian effort to force conversion that reflected the perversion of the Christian ideal within medieval European communities. For Khvol'son, the challenge of understanding the relationship among world religions was the great challenge of the nineteenth century. Khvol'son argued that the simple mind (even that of a child) saw things in multiplicity—but the educated mind (*tol'ko bolee razvityi um staraetsia otyskat' dlia nikh obshchee osnovanii*) attempted to find “fundamental unity” in multiplicity.²⁸ Khvol'son, the father of one of Russia's most respected and recognized physicists, turned to science for a modern-day example to help his reader understand what he meant by “fundamental unity.”²⁹ He argued that “light, heat, electricity, and magnetism” are considered by non-scientists to be four very different things, and yet, the scientific mind understands all four as manifestations of the same fundamental principle.³⁰ Nations, like light and heat, if subjected to scientific inquiry, would yield their secrets and the core foundations of their existence.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Perhaps the world recognizes more of Khvol'son through the work of his son, Orest Daniilovich Khvol'son, the noted physicist and astronomer. The younger Khvol'son's contribution to the Russian physics community was immense, from his publication of the five-volume *Kurs fiziki*, 5 vols. (St. Petersburg: K. L. Rikera, 1904-1916) used in many university physics courses, to his assumed contribution to the development of the “Einstein Ring.” Perhaps some readers will recognize the moon crater named for Khvol'son. The success of his son Orest as a scholar and renowned scientist was, in part, due to his father's charting of that same course one generation earlier.

³⁰ Khvol'son, “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov,” 444.

It is through his study of the idea of nations that Khvol'son most explicitly made claims about the historical profession and his approach to it. Khvol'son argued that the study of history was comparable to the work of "natural historians" who through their study of the natural world drew conclusions in the form of "laws" that helped explain phenomena.³¹ Nations were no exception and a thorough study of them would inevitably lead to a classification of them according to their achievements. The fundamental problem at stake in the Renan-Khvol'son debates was which conclusions were valid and which were not. Renan, heavily influenced (unknowingly Khvol'son admitted) by his own Catholic upbringing and education, could not see where Judaism and Islam offered much to the civilized world. Khvol'son, who claimed an early desire to become Protestant instead of Orthodox or Catholic, revealed his thinking on the subject in this essay and used historical reasoning to explain it. The great questions of human history—how to explain the creation of the world and how to reconcile human free will and divine wisdom—were clear evidence that Semites did in fact possess a philosophy, though one that centered on fundamental questions rather than wildly speculative issues of secondary importance.³² Further, Khvol'son explained that Jews never developed the type of state or republic that others did, not because they were incapable, but because their conception of the state was based on protection of the individual rather than the promotion of the state and "aristocracy by birth." Because the individual was at the heart of Semitic

³¹ Ibid., 423.

³² Ibid., 448-450.

understandings of communal life, the Jewish perception of state authority was more in tune to the modern version, based on egalitarianism, natural rights, and toleration.³³

As a result of their emphasis on individualism and personal relation to God, Semites simply “could not be subjected to an infallible Pope...as nearly one hundred million Aryans have done.”³⁴ Here Khvol’son elucidates an important point for helping the historian better understand his position on Christianity and its various denominations. Among the various Aryan subsets, Khvol’son identified the Germanic tribes most closely with Jews (and most Muslims).³⁵ It was among the Germanic people that the strongest critique of papal authority developed and altered the idea of religious authority for many in Europe. The Protestant Reformation, the movement where this critique became institutionalized in opposition to Catholicism, was the result of greater individualism among the Germanic tribes.³⁶ Khvol’son was highly anti-clerical, critical of dogmatic formulations meant to restrict human relations (e.g., no Jew would think of “denying oneself of the happiness of family life,” or choosing monasticism and asceticism), which Catholics revered in the form of clerical celibacy.³⁷ Thus, it is quite apparent by the end of Khvol’son’s essay that he too easily looked past some of the more difficult critiques by

³³ Ibid., 456-457.

³⁴ Ibid., 458.

³⁵ According to Khvol’son, the *Imam* in Islam, held by some to be infallible, represented an apparent weakness among even some Semites in their dependence upon a spiritual authority to govern their lives in much the same way as the Pope did for Catholicism.

³⁶ Khvol’son, “Kharakteristika semiticheskikh narodov,” 459-460.

³⁷ Ibid., 453-464.

Renan, or too quickly dismissed them as erroneous, but on each and every point he asserted the opposite proposal to refute him. Khvol'son stated each of Renan's proposals, and then went on at length to show how Renan had misinterpreted his data and jumped to conclusions that were not founded in historical fact. Both authors dealt with the same characteristics, but the meanings of those traits were interpreted very differently.

Khvol'son admitted that he acknowledged weakness among Semitic people (though this may be too generous praise of his effort to do so), but in each and every case, the problem seemed to originate in the excess of the good principles upon which their nation was built. Thus, the over-extension of their most positive characteristics could lead Semitic groups into undermining their contributions. Thus, Jews were "egotistic" and also given to wit and satire (a positive characteristic for Khvol'son, but one that could go too far). Khvol'son claimed his own Semitic heritage in this essay, but also argued that his was a more balanced and fair judgment of the two great cultural groups to whom the modern world owed its reverence and appreciation for the contributions that originated in Judaism, and then were further promoted by Christianity and later Islam. The three Abrahamic, or monotheistic relations and the people attached to them would do well, he argued, to better understand the relations between them and their commonalities. In other words, to carry out a full rhizotomy and erase the spiritual roots of modern Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would unhinge Europe from the very anchors that allowed it to develop to its place of prominence in the nineteenth-century. In this regard, Khvol'son viewed history teleologically, headed towards an aim of universal peace that focused not

on power and authority, but protection of individuals and their rights as participants in the human family.

For all his generosity toward Semites, and to a lesser degree Aryans, Khvol'son's declaration about the immutability of race and national characteristics was no less absolute in its definition than those promoted by pseudo-scientists from the mid-nineteenth-century onwards that reached their ultimate veracity in the Nazi camps during the Second World War. Herein rests the danger or at least the possibility of dangerous ideological claims about different peoples and their characteristics. Khvol'son did not claim racial, phrenological understandings of different peoples, but the biological (i.e. inherited from birth) interpretation—and therefore its irreducibility and permanence—carried with it the similar propensity to characterize or stereotype individuals based on a hierarchy of “mental gifts.” At its most “fundamental” point, Khvol'son's approach to race (or nation) was remarkably close to the perspectives that led Christians to think of Jews as criminals and murders, and also that led Nazi ideologues in their pursuit of the pure race. Thus, in Khvol'son's view, within the Aryan family, Germans were more advanced in their best characteristics than Romanic language groups. Essentially, Khvol'son wanted to categorize and define people based on a set of innate values and ideas that one could not overcome. Thus, in his decision to convert, for example, Khvol'son may have given up his adherence to Judaism, but he could not eliminate the positive and negative traits that he possessed because he was a Semite.

Biblical Translation (Synodal, BFBS, OPE)

In 1858, Khvol'son was invited to begin teaching at St. Petersburg Theological Academy in conjunction with his already busy schedule at the university.³⁸ At the academy he taught Hebrew and other languages to would-be clergy and helped train them for the office. His arrival at the academy marked not just an important personal achievement for the professor, but also the beginnings of another important scholarly project that occupied the better part of his professional career. In 1858, the Holy Synod asked Kazan Theological Academy and its counterpart in St. Petersburg to begin translating the text of the New Testament into Russian.³⁹ The initial plan was for both

³⁸ Khvol'son also joined the faculty at the Catholic Theological Academy in St. Petersburg, where he taught courses until 1884. He maintained his post at the Theological Academy (Orthodox) until 1883. Khvol'son had joined the faculty in early 1858, some time around March 21, as by that date the Synod indicated in a letter from Andrei Predmechenskii (assistant secretary) that it had determined his salary. See SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 45 "Predmechenskii A. pismo k Khvol'sonu, D. A. ob opredelenii ego prepodavatelem evreiskogo iazyka v Peterburgskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii," 1858 mart 21. Khvol'son was also elected as a "Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences in 1858," suggestive of his remarkable success in the first three years as a professor of Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldean literature at St. Petersburg University.

³⁹ The decision to translate the Bible, first the New Testament and then the Old Testament into Russian was not an undisputed decision. Questions were raised about the validity of such a translation, the sources from which the text should be translated, and who possessed the authority to do so. This subject is central to the recent work of Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars*; Repp, "In Search of an Orthodox Way," 55-109; and Georges Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogoslovia*, 3rd edition (Paris: YMCA Press, 1983); for a nineteenth-century description of this process as it was ongoing, see I. Chastovich, *Istoriia perevoda Biblii na russkom iazyke* (St. Petersburg, 1873). Further questions arose when the Metropolitan Filaret [Amfiteatrov] (1779-1885) of Kiev argued that if one were to translate the Bible into nineteenth-century Russian, why not go further and include non-literary languages such as Ukrainian and Belorussian. The Kiev Metropolitan challenged A. P. Tolstoi (oberprokurator of the Holy Synod) by suggesting that to move away from the Slavonic text (the product attributed to Saints Cyril and Methodius), which he viewed as as close to the original text as they could get (along with the Vulgate and Septuagint), would undermine the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox church. This debate further pressed the issue of the language of the church and the move away from teaching Slavonic as a religious language.

academies to work separately on translations of the Gospel of Matthew while the academies in Moscow and Kiev were assigned to do the same with Mark's Gospel. This plan was soon abandoned and each of the gospels were translated just once, a process completed by the middle of 1860. Remarkably, the full Synodal New Testament text was published in 1863.⁴⁰

With the translation of the New Testament well underway, the Holy Synod turned to the question of translating the Old Testament. Although the archival record is somewhat vague on Khvol'son's invitation to join the faculty at the Theological Academy, it seems quite obvious that his linguistic skills and his early success as a scholar made him indispensable to the project and therefore he was brought on to assist in this work. Khvol'son served on a committee of professors from the Theological Academy formed in 1860, which the Holy Synod charged with the task of translating the Old Testament books. The other members on the committee were Evgraf Ivanovich Loviagin (1822-1909), a professor of Greek, and Moisei Aleksandrovich Golubev (1824-1869), a professor of Scripture.⁴¹ The committee worked between 1860 and 1869 to complete the task. Rather than publish the text for the first time when all of the books were completed, the committee published their work in the various theological journals attached to the academies in Kazan, Kiev, and Moscow as well as other journals—thereby providing an

⁴⁰ Repp, "In Search of an Orthodox Way," 77-78.

⁴¹ Batalden indicates that before the 1868 published edition of the Pentateuch, Pavel Ivanovich Savvaitov had joined this committee, see *Russian Bible Wars*, 143-144, 246, entry no. 91. Savvaitov was a graduate of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and one time professor of philosophy in Vologda, his hometown. When he joined the academy in 1842, Savvaitov began teaching hermeneutics and patristics.

opportunity for other scholars to critique their work.⁴² The first edition of the committee's work (the Pentateuch) was published in 1868, followed by the historical (Joshua – Esther) and poetic books (Job – Ecclesiasticus) in 1869 and 1872, respectively. The prophetic books (Isaiah – 3 Esdras) were published in 1875.⁴³ The translation of the full text was finally published in 1875, and the following year it was combined with the New Testament translation to create a full Synodal Bible edition.

For his part Khvol'son was to participate with the division charged with completing the translation of the Synodal Old Testament translations from Hebrew and, following the death of Moisei Golubov in 1869, lead this division. One of the problems, perhaps the most challenging issue, was how to adequately employ the Hebrew text and the Septuagint (the basis for the Slavonic text in use at the time). The matter was not just textological, but also political. The Greek tradition and heritage within the Russian church, and those fundamental adherents to it, feared that the divine nature of the text could be lost if the Hebrew sources became the primary basis for the translation.⁴⁴ Khvol'son's role on the committee, and more importantly, his own translations (for which he depended upon Gerasim Pavskii's early lectures and translations), amounted to nearly two-thirds of the final translation. Khvol'son's work on the Synodal translation of

⁴² The translations appeared at different times in *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie*, *Trudy Kievskoi dukhovnoi akademii* and also *Khristianskoe chtenie*. Khvol'son's translations appeared in *Khristianskoe chtenie* between 1861 and 1869.

⁴³ All four parts were published by the Synodal Press (St. Petersburg) under a single title, *Sviashchennia Knigi Vetkhago Zaveta v russkom perevode*.

⁴⁴ Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars*, 143-145.

the Old Testament included the Torah, the historical books (Joshua-Second Kings), Song of Songs, Job 42, First and Second Chronicles, and Psalms. By any account, Khvol'son's contribution to Russian Old Testament scholarship was unsurpassed.⁴⁵ Khvol'son provided a useful summary of his work on the Old Testament translation in *Khristianskoe chtenie* in 1874 as the project neared completion.⁴⁶

Ever the enterprising scholar, Khvol'son also negotiated his way into a second translation project headed by the British and Foreign Bible Society office in St. Petersburg. In the 1860s, the Bible Society turned to Khvol'son's colleague, Vasilii Levison, to produce a translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew, at the same time that translators were working on the Synodal version. The competing translations caused a stir among the leadership both within the BFBS and also within the Synod.⁴⁷ Vasilii Levison passed away in 1869, marking (as Golubev's death in the same year) the death of the key translator and a need to change course both for the Synodal and BFBS translations of the text. Khvol'son capitalized on both organizations' need for a new coordinator and translator. In a lengthy meeting with William Nicolson, Khvol'son reportedly argued that there were deep problems with the Synodal translation—marked

⁴⁵ A special edition of *Khristianskii Pobornik: russkii organ metodistskoi episkopskoi tserkvi* 2, no. 8 (August 1911), focused on the history of the Bible in Russia and included along with a summary of Khvol'son's work, a picture of him on the front cover. These types of tributes to Khvol'son and his work on the Bible translations were common, and, as the publication noted here suggests, such admiration crossed confessional boundaries as well.

⁴⁶ Khvol'son, "Istoriia vetkhozavetnogo teksta i ocherk ego drevneishikh perevodov," *Khristianskoe chtenie* (1874), chast' 1: 519-74 and chast' 2: 3-74.

⁴⁷ Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars*, 152.

by an undisciplined use of textual sources from Greek and Hebrew. Without standardized requirements about which primary language text to base the new translation, the Synodal translation became a “hodge-podge” of these sources.⁴⁸ As Batalden pointed out, the BFBS had long been tied to efforts to translate the biblical books into Russian, and had sponsored a number of efforts toward that aim in the nineteenth century. It is not surprising therefore, that the BFBS was able to bring together a team of able translators and publish a new edition of the Russian Old Testament based on the Masoretic text—comprised of a combination of Khvol’son and Levison translations—by 1875.

A third biblical translation project came to Khvol’son through his relations with Jews in St. Petersburg. In mid-December 1863, a small group of wealthy Jews gathered together as the “Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia” (*Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdru evreiami v Rossii*, hereafter OPE).⁴⁹ The OPE was a philanthropic organization developed by wealthy Jewish merchants in St. Petersburg who served, like Khvol’son, as part of the “useful” class of Jews that the tsarist officials hoped would help accomplish the goal of modernization of Russian Jewry. Led by the Gintsburg family, the OPE organized Jews of different stripes into a potentially cohesive and influential organ of Russian Jewry in the capital city.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴⁹ Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy*, 34-41. Horowitz’s work is the best work on the OPE to date and helps place the organization’s efforts within the broader cultural and political transformations of both Russia generally and Jewry specifically. See also, Iliia Trotskii, “Samodeiatel’nost’ i samopomoshch’ evreev v Rossii (OPE, ORT, EKO, OZE, EKOPO),” *Kniga o russkom evreistve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917g.: Sbornik statei* (New York: Soiuz Russkikh Evreev, 1960), 475-501.

Khvol'son joined the OPE in the weeks that followed its initial meeting, as the organizers sought to bring in scholars and professionals to aid its work and to increase the prestige of the organization. Khvol'son, like Harkavy and others, used their German to promote their work abroad, and the heavy influence of German in St. Petersburg was reflected in the publications of these scholars who elected to use German as the language of scholarship in the 1850s and 1860s. Much of the work (and money) was directed toward education and the foundation of schools. In similar fashion to the 1840s agreement between Uvarov and Lilienthal, Jews in St. Petersburg and increasingly in Odessa, viewed education as the path forward to help integrate Jews in the wider society. Less state driven than before, the OPE effort to improve education for Jewish children was the result of an internal Jewish movement.

For those Jews who were permitted to live outside the Pale and who benefitted most from the opportunity to work or attend university, knowledge of the Russian language was a major part of their new communal identity.⁵⁰ The OPE, in part as a result of its diverse composition of highly enlightened Jews, felt that a translation of the Masoretic text into Russian should be one of the first scholarly projects endorsed and supported by the organization. Horowitz has documented the broad impact that Moses Mendelssohn's German translation of the Bible had on this group and like their German predecessors, some members of the OPE longed to see the Bible appear in Russian as a

⁵⁰ Although Russian was the most useful languages for Jews to know if they were to integrate into Russian society, the decision to use it as a primary language in the OPE schools was not a foregone conclusion. See Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy*, 37-38.

way of encouraging broader use of the language among Jews.⁵¹ Once the project was agreed upon by OPE leadership, despite the battles that persisted from the Russian Orthodox community, Khvol'son took the lead.⁵² However, nearly a decade later, when the OPE published a translation, it was Lev Mandelshtam's translation that had earlier been prohibited by the Holy Synod. Khvol'son and his fellow scholars within the OPE did work to complete a selection of translations and commentaries on the Bible, but generally the project met with little excitement. Khvol'son's involvement on this committee to compile these materials is generally disregarded, in part because of his Christian conversion that, as is noted elsewhere here, caused many Jews to question his motivations. It should also be noted that even among reform-minded individuals, the sacred religious texts were often left as they were, while other elements of religious practice were altered or abandoned.

Khvol'son's involvement within the OPE from its early years was also significant because it provided an outlet for him to continue working with Jews in the city who were active in negotiating a space for Jews to thrive in the empire as part of, and not in opposition to, the government. While Khvol'son was somewhat of an outsider because of his conversion, he remained a useful associate of the OPE because of his growing prominence in the academic world. His relationship was enduring, though he occasionally ran into conflict with some of its members, particularly another scholar, Abraham Harkavy (1835-1919). Harkavy, who trained under Khvol'son in Oriental

⁵¹ Ibid., 42-46.

⁵² Trotskii, "Samodeiatel'nost' i samopomoshch'," 473.

languages at St. Petersburg University between 1863 and 1868, eventually headed the Oriental division at the Imperial Public Library.

In July 1866, Khvol'son visited London and Paris while conducting research on a large set of Arabic manuscripts housed in the libraries there, particularly the British Museum.⁵³ One such manuscript, *Kitab al-A'lak al-nafisa* (The book of Precious Gems) by Ibn Rusta, is a tenth-century account of Bulgars and Slavs. This book, which Khvol'son translated and discussed in his book on early Arabic works related to the Slavic people as part of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the university, exposed a difference of opinion between Harkavy and Khvol'son.⁵⁴ Khvol'son believed the date of composition was 903 CE, while Harkavy placed it two decades later. Harkavy's view was based on the point that one of Ibn Rusta's sources returned from a journey (921 CE) that brought him into contact with Bulgars, upon which the author gained insight into the people.⁵⁵ Since Ibn Rusta was dependent upon this source, Harkavy argued, the book

⁵³ SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 52, "Pisma Khvol'sona, D. A., zhena Feofaniia Iakovlevna, na nem. iaz."

⁵⁴ Khvol'son, *Izvestia khozarakh', burtasakh', bolgarakh', mad'iarakh', slavianakh', russakh'*: *Abu-Ali Akhmeda ben Omar' Ibn-Dasta, neizvestnago dosele arabskago pisatel'ia nachala X veka, po rukopisi Britanskago muzeia v pervyi raz' izdal', perevil', i obiasnil'*— *Napechatano po sluchaiu piatidesiatiletniago iubileia S. Peterburgskago universiteta* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk', 1869), 15-40. Khvol'son incorrectly attributed the book to Ibn Dasta, the author was Ibn Rusta. Some of Khvol'son's notes related to this work are in SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 6, l. 6-82, "Biografii Aaron-Adia, Aaron Abraam, Adonish-ben Tamin i drug. podgotov lennye dlia entsiklopedicheskogo slovaria I. N. Berezina: Rukopis' na nem.: Chernovye zametki ob arabskom pisatele nachala Khvol'son v Abi-Aii Akhmede ben Ol'are Ibn Dasta," (date unknown).

⁵⁵ For more on the Khvol'son – Harkavy debate, see Janet Martin, *Treasure of the Land of Darkness: The Fur Trade and its Significance for Medieval Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 173-174.

could not have been produced before the mid-1920s. While this is a minor change, it seemed to have distanced Harkavy from his former teacher later in his career. Khvol'son read Harkavy's *Skazanie musul'manskikh pisatelei o drevnikh slavia* with great attention and made extensive notes based on his reading of the work.⁵⁶ The two continued to debate the sources and the dating of them throughout the rest of Khvol'son's most active years—evidence that both men were trying to stake their claim as the leading Russian scholar of Arabic texts.⁵⁷ Both men published in Russian and German, and Harkavy also in Hebrew—reflective of the competing knowledge bases in the west and in Russia—and the need to define one's scholarship to each of the variant audiences. Both Khvol'son and Harkavy hoped to bring greater awareness to the expansion of Russian scholarship by publishing at home and abroad.

Another factor that complicated these two great scholars' relationship may well have been Khvol'son's conversion to Russian Orthodoxy, as Harkavy remained committed to a more conservative strand of Judaism. Late in Khvol'son's life, Baron David Gintsburg, son of the founder of the OPE, sought permission from the government to create a Jewish university for the training of Jews in traditional fields but also in secular subjects. After a lengthy struggle with government officials, Gintsburg was able

⁵⁶ SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 10, "Otyz o rabote A. Ia. Garkavi "Skazanie musul'manskikh pisatelei o drevnikh slavia."

⁵⁷ See for example the debate about the dating of a ninth-century manuscript in Khvol'son, *Corpus Inscriptionum Hebraicarum: Enthaltend Grabschriften aus der Krim und andere Grab und inschriften in Alter Hebräischen Quadratschrift sowie auch Schriftproben aus Handschriften vom IX – XV Jahrhundert* (St. Petersburg: 1882), 184-197. See also Khvol'son, *Syrisch-Nestorianische Grabschriften aus Semirjetschie* (St. Petersburg: Akademii Nauk, 1897).

to create the *Vysshie kursy vostokovedeniia* (Higher courses in Eastern Studies).⁵⁸ Formed in 1906, the “university” existed until just after Gintsburg’s untimely death in 1910. Gintsburg, a former student of Khvol’son and Harkavy and lifelong supporter of both, gathered professors and graduates from the university to teach in the new institution. According to Zalman Shazar, Gintsburg likely wanted to have the aging professor on the faculty, but could not extend the invitation due to Khvol’son’s conversion.⁵⁹ Harkavy, one of the most well-respected scholars of the age, was too Orthodox to join the faculty, due in part to a promise made earlier that he would never take up such a post at a reform inspired school.⁶⁰

Gintsburg attracted highly specialized and competent instructors for his students (Dubnov and Gintsburg are of note), though noticeably Khvol’son and Harkavy were not listed as faculty. The well-known editor of *Evreiskaya entsiklopedia*, Lev Katznelson, was also part of the faculty.⁶¹ Despite being in the final years of life and not formally being listed on as a member of the faculty, on occasion Khvol’son led some informal lessons in Hebrew philology for Gintsburg’s students. One such student, Zalman Shazar

⁵⁸ The name of the school is significant because Gintsburg was only able to establish it once he named it in a religiously neutral way.

⁵⁹ There can be little doubt of Gintsburg’s deep respect for Khvol’son, even if he could not appoint him to teach in his new school. See the glowing biographies produced by Gintsburg; “Tubilei prof. D. A. Khvol’sona,” *Voskhod* 51 (21 November 1899): 1604-1607.

⁶⁰ Zalman Shazar, “Baron David Günzburg and His Academy,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 (1967): 1-17.

⁶¹ Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 66-67.

reflected on these lessons in Khvol'son's home, mentioning specifically the old professor's weakened state:

Though the attitude of even famous rabbis towards him [Khvol'son] was rather lenient, the Baron [David Gintsburg] could never forgive any convert. For all that, he was later to arrange to have students go to Chwolson's home for lectures on Hebrew Grammar. It was the last winter of Chwolson's life—he was more than ninety years old and had to be carried into the room in a rocking chair. Wrapped in woolen blankets, he never moved out of the chair, and the voice that spoke to us with a strong Jewish accent in its Russian, was the voice of a dying man.⁶²

Shazar's observations about Gintsburg and Khvol'son and the issue of conversion reflected a familiar line within the nineteenth-century reform movement, keeping tradition with Geiger's opinions about converts. In 1887, one of Geiger's short essays (in the form of a letter) was republished in the journal *Voskhod*, decrying the Jewish convert who abandoned religion and community out of greed and economic ambition.⁶³ For Geiger, conversion from Judaism should only be carried out if one truly believed in the Christian message or government restrictions prevented one from obtaining work in the desired field. At the heart of Geiger's arguments, and likely espoused by Gintsburg, was the question of whether Khvol'son could have achieved his ambitious scholarly goals as a Jew without conversion. From his comments in 1854 and 1855, it seems fairly clear that Khvol'son felt he could not obtain the position he desired in the university and needed to convert. Harkavy attempted to achieve the same status in the scholarly world but do so while he remained committed to his traditional Jewish roots, while Gintsburg and his family seemed to gain incredible wealth and influence in the capital by remaining Jewish,

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶³ Abraham Geiger, "Ob otpadenii ot evreistva," *Voskhod* 5 (1887): 33-35. This essay was republished from his *Nachgelassene Werke* (Berlin, 1875).

albeit secularized in many respects. Although Khvol'son achieved incredible success as a scholar and aided in many Jewish reform (enlightenment) projects, his conversion remained problematic even in the final years of his life despite his many accomplishments. By 1910, his conversion was far less dangerous and damaging to Russian and Jewish communal identities, given the dramatically relaxed legal restrictions on conversion and his advanced age. And yet, for those in the Jewish communal leadership, Khvol'son's apostasy from his own people still provoked mixed reactions and caused some to hesitate to consider him one of their own.

Joining the Age Old Debate – Khvol'son and the Dating of Jesus's Death

In the 1870s, Khvol'son found himself in yet another public debate with his extended essay on the dating of the final week in the life of Jesus. Since at least the Renaissance period, scholars and theologians sought to correctly interpret the chronology of the Gospel texts. The central event that perplexed Christian scholars was the Last Supper and Death of Jesus, recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 26-27, Mark 14-15, Luke 22-23) and John 13 and 18-19. At the heart of the debate was the question of whether Jesus and his disciples participated in a Passover meal or whether it was, as one of Khvol'son's students suggested, just “an ordinary meal.”⁶⁴ Khvol'son's article, “Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista i den' ego smerti,” was published in

⁶⁴ Solomon Zeitlin, “The Last Supper as an Ordinary Meal in the Fourth Gospel,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42, no. 3 (Jan. 1952): 260.

Kristianskoe Chtenie in 1875.⁶⁵ Khvol'son, as a professor at the Theological Academy, had already published a significant number of his Old Testament translations in the academy's journal and the Synodal translation project was finally nearing publication. The 1875 essay should be seen as a continuation of that work.

Why did the dating of the Last Supper matter? To what end were the centuries of debates formulated? While the debate about the Last Supper may have seemed appropriate within medieval communities that were deeply divided over theological issues, it seems odd that such an issue provoked such sharp reaction in the Russian Empire. Khvol'son set out his reasoning for reviving the issue in the introduction to his 1875 article:

The question about what day Jesus Christ participated in the last Passover supper and on what day he was crucified, has been the subject of great and famous studies contending to answer it⁶⁶... It is no surprise that the literature of the subject grew to the point that it is now an entire library. Therefore, some may think it bold of me to attempt to resolve the issue. But after discussing how closely related the New Testament is with the Old, the extent to which you need precise knowledge of Jewish spiritual life in a continuation of the first centuries before and after Jesus Christ is evident.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Khvol'son, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista i den' ego smerti," *Khristianskoe chtenie* 9-10 (September – October 1875): 430-88; nos. 5-6 (May – June 1877), 821-76; nos. 11-12 (1877), 57-610; nos. 3-4 (1878), 352-419. A minor bibliographical note, Repp and Batalden did not list the third part of the essay from November-December 1877 (part two of Khvol'son's response to Arkhimandrite Vitalii).

⁶⁶ Khvol'son mentions specifically which studies he has in mind, including the work of Causabon and Scaliger. See Anthony Grafton's impressive work on Scaliger in the two-volume biography of the classical scholar, Grafton, *Joseph Scaliger: A Study in the History of Classical Scholarship*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983; 1993).

⁶⁷ Khvol'son, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista i den' ego smerti," *Khristianskoe chtenie* 9-10 (September – October 1875): 430-431.

In seeking a resolution to the question raised by so many scholars before him, Khvol'son formulated his "opinion" and used it as an opportunity to address many of the same questions broached in his 1861 refutation of the blood libel.⁶⁸ He addressed at length the question of Jesus and Judaism, and the variations of Judaism in the first century, as well as the place of Sadducees and Pharisees and their inner conflicts at the time.

Khvol'son's article introduced into Russian biblical scholarship much of the western approaches to the Gospel texts and was an effort to engage Russian biblical studies with the more developed German body of literature. As with all of Khvol'son's projects, the language of publication is instructive in that it shows which audience he hoped to influence. Khvol'son was constantly mindful of the need to publish his research in German—as it was the leading research language for most of Europe during the nineteenth century. Yet, in this work Khvol'son published first in Russian, and only after a decade or more did he publish this article in German. As his scholarship built upon Geiger and others in Germany, many of his colleagues in Germany and France were already aware of the line of historiography that he outlined for them.⁶⁹ His conclusions were novel in some respects, but the general debate about the last of week of Jesus's life was familiar to them. His Russian colleagues however, were at a turning point in the study of the Bible and their adoption or rejection of western models of historical criticism

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁶⁹ Khvol'son pointed out as much at many points in his response to his critic, Arkhimandrite Vitalii, see for example, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista," (1878); 367.

was still an unsettled matter.⁷⁰ Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of reviewers praised Khvol'son's accomplishment in the article, one critic challenged Khvol'son's scholarship and, more importantly, his objectivity and motivations.⁷¹ Arkhimandrite Vitalii (Grechulevich) leveled the negative review of Khvol'son's article in his own journal *Strannik*.⁷² Unlike other journals where Khvol'son's work on the last week of Jesus's life first appeared, *Strannik* was independent and therefore not connected to any of the institutional moorings of the Russian Orthodox academies or seminaries. An examination of Khvol'son's argument and his response to Archimandrite Vitalii's critique reveal that in the last third of the nineteenth century Russian religious scholarship was a contentious field that involved both the clergy and scholars.

The final week of the life of Jesus fascinated scholars and clergyman for hundreds of years, in part because it was believed that if one could speak with accuracy about the events of that week, then it might be possible to better understand the relationship

⁷⁰ Repp, "In Search of an Orthodox Way," 145-146.

⁷¹ Khvol'son's article was reviewed favorably in *Pravoslavnyi sobesednik* 11-12 (1875): 515-517 (the journal published by the theological academy in Kazan) and later in the journal connected to the Kiev seminary, *Rukhovodstvo dlia Sel'skikh Pastyrei* 25 (1876): 232-35.

⁷² A. V. [Arkhimandrite Vitalii], "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista i den' ego smerti," *Strannik* 11 (1876): 97-126. The second half of the article was published in *Strannik* 12 (1876): 185-289. The first part of the article listed "A. V." as the author, while the second volume included the full "Arkhimandrite Vitalii." While not including the full name of the author might be construed as an effort at anonymity, it was also common practice in many of the journals to simply include the initials of the author, particularly when they were frequent contributors. Vitalii's name is evident throughout the journal and so this should not be seen as an effort to hide the name of the author. Vitalii's years are 1822-1885. As noted in Chapter 3, the journal *Strannik* published (in 1877) Protopopov's review of Liutostanskii's work on the blood libel, and, although more generous to Jews, still carried some of the negative sentiment toward them.

between Jesus, his accusers, Pharisees, Sadducees, Romans, and the context of his death. It should be noted that “better understanding” could be used either to promote a reconciliation of Jews and Christians (as Khvol’son sought to show) or also from the entrenched view of Jews as killers of Jesus. The conclusions, therefore, were not value neutral. Christian interest in the Last Supper is understandable, given its prominence in the development of the Eucharist, but also because the Passover *seder* was a distinctly Jewish practice, and one that gained very negative connotations within the blood libel charge.⁷³ Some Christians claim that the events described in Matthew 26: 17-31 marked the last legitimate Jewish Passover meal because after the events of that weekend, Jesus overcame the necessity for the Law of Moses and sacrifice. This double meaning of the Last Supper as a Passover meal is significant for later generations of Christians because the Eucharist, instituted by Jesus at this event, became the way that they remembered his death and sacrifice. This event, as recorded in Matthew, is a profound component of Christian theology:

[27] While they were eating Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” [28] Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. [29] I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”⁷⁴

⁷³ The *Seder*, as practiced today, is largely the product of the rabbinic period. The Haggadah, the special foods and preparation of them, though precedence existed before, were formulated in new ways in the years after the destruction of the Second Temple. *Seder* means literally ‘order,’ suggestive of the ordered and ritualized manner in which the meal progresses and the recounting of the exodus story.

⁷⁴ Matthew 26: 27-29 (NRSV).

From a Christian perspective, Jesus became the Paschal (Passover) lamb, being sacrificed for the sins of the people. Jews used the Passover in one of, if not the most important, of their festivals to remember the bonds that bound them and the promises of God in protecting ancient Israel. One can see why this subject might bear a high degree of interest and tension between Jews and Christians. And, in the case of Khvol'son and Vitalii, what started out as an internal Christian debate was turned into an anti-Semitic attack on Khvol'son. Vitalii's attack against Khvol'son's writings is not altogether surprising when considered within the nineteenth-century context of philosemitism's negative connotation.

The debate was how, if at all, the Johanine account could be reconciled to the Synoptic Gospels, given the obvious disparity between the accounts. The first three follow similar patterns and contain largely the same material and events. In a number of places, John's account suggested that the meal was a Passover meal. Of note are comments that Jesus and his disciples reclined while they ate (John 13:23), suggestive of the idea that the Last Supper was not a regular meal but one connected to a festival.⁷⁵ Further, the meal was in Jerusalem, indicating that the group may have been required to stay in the city limits because of Passover.⁷⁶ Khvol'son's efforts to reconcile the

⁷⁵ Barry D. Smith, "The Chronology of the Last Supper," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53, no. 1 (1991), 31-32.

⁷⁶ Other indications include the cleansing of the feet, which indicative of one who had previously accomplished the full ritual cleansing prior to eating the Passover meal on the seventh day, see Numbers 19:19, "The clean person shall sprinkle it upon the unclean person on the third day and on the seventh day, thus cleansing him by the seventh day. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe in water, and at nightfall he shall be clean." This passage refers to the process of

discrepancies between the Johanne account and the Synoptic gospels required that he apply his hypothesis to the text and then let others respond to it. He admitted in a number of places in the original article but also in his later response to Vitalii that his was nothing more than an educated theory (*gipoteza*).⁷⁷ Khvol'son promoted his view, that the discrepancy was the result of a translation error from Aramaic in Matthew that resulted in two variations of the same story. Matthew 26:17 as it is translated today reads: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?'"⁷⁸ Khvol'son, in attempting to reconcile the story, argued that one plausible explanation was that the original wording suggested that the day of Unleavened Bread "approached" rather than already being in process. While his effort was conjectural, its implications were profound. If the original Matthew account had been mistranslated at a very early date, then the Last Supper would have occurred on the 13th day of Nisan, rather than on the 14th day, as suggested in Exodus.⁷⁹

cleansing one contaminated by contact with a corpse. See also P. J. Heawood, "The Time of the Last Supper," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42 (Jan. 1952): 37-44.

⁷⁷ Khvol'son, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista," *Khristianskoe chtenie* 3-4 (1878), 353; 362.

⁷⁸ Compare Mark 14:12 (NRSV), "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?'" and Luke 22:7-8, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.'" See Khvol'son, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria Iisusa Khrista," *Khristianskoe chtenie* 3-4 (1878), 356.

⁷⁹ Exodus 12:18, "In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening." This marks the seven-day festival marked by the removal of any leavening agents from the home. Holy days begin and end in the evening, and so this one began on at the end of the 14th day until the evening ending on the 21st day.

With his suggestion of possible mistranslation, Khvol'son had to go even further to explain how it was that Passover could possibly be celebrated on a different day. There was, in Khvol'son's day, precedent for moving the date of the feast of Passover to the day before when the 14th day of Nisan occurred on Friday (which was the case in the year that Jesus died). This change would allow for the sacrifice of the Passover lamb to be accomplished without compromising the prohibition of such acts on the Sabbath. This maneuvering of the text and suggesting alternate translations and possible compromises within Jewish tradition allowed Khvol'son to show how the text of John could have originally corresponded to the Matthew text.⁸⁰

Vitalii's attack on Khvol'son had little to do with the subject matter of the 1875 article; rather, it was a defense of Holy Scripture and the Christian tradition. Khvol'son, as a convert from Judaism, threatened the sanctity of the tradition if he wanted to begin declaring that biblical passages were wrongly translated and there were human caused mistakes in the text. Vitalii was not just an everyday cleric but had published his own work on the New Testament, including harmonies of the Gospel texts.⁸¹ In his commentary on Khvol'son's work, Vitalii made clear his distrust of Khvol'son as an authority on matters related to the faith—both as an academic and as a convert. Vitalii claimed:

He [Khvol'son] is very well aware that, with such a frank statement of his method to reconcile the Gospels stories which are apparently opposed to each other, or, in

⁸⁰ The Gospel of John is believed to be the latest of the Gospels in terms of its composition, possibly around 90 CE.

⁸¹ Repp, "In Search of an Orthodox Way," 148.

his own words, to apply "our (i.e., his) experience" to resolve this contradiction," he immediately undermined the credibility of his scholarly authority, so much extolled by him, and maybe even the scholarly reputation of the academic journal bearing the highly venerable name *Christian Reader*, would not dare put on its pages this strange, to say nothing of its absurd and scandalous fabrication of *Christian* beliefs. Fully conscious of this, he developed his thoughts into a complete argument. I must say, it was done so skillfully that he managed *to lead astray even the elect (prel'stit' dazhe izbrannykh)*.⁸²

Vitalii's choice of accusations is telling. In the final sentence here he chose the words "*prel'stit' dazhe izbrannykh*" from Mark's gospel to reveal his true feelings of what Khvol'son was doing and its damaging effects upon Christian belief. In the thirteenth chapter of Mark, sometimes called the Markan Apocalypse, Jesus warned and prophesied about the last days. Vitalii specifically focused on verse 22, where the phrase "to lead astray even the elect" comes from, to show that Khvol'son was not just a curious scholar, but might also be compared false prophets seeking to lead away Christians. Mark recorded "For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."⁸³ For Vitalii, the efforts by Khvol'son and others to employ scholarly criticism to pull apart the sacred texts of the church and add various "reasonings" to the interpretation of scripture amounted to full-fledged attack on the tradition and clerical responsibility. In the end, Khvol'son's four articles on the subject (the first was the initial article while the subsequent three were lengthy systematic responses to each and every of Vitalii's critiques) simply overwhelmed his intellectual challenger. Further, the nature of their responses to each other highlight the distance between the world of churchmen and scholars on the

⁸² A. Vitalii, "Posledniaia paskhal'naia vecheria," 100-101, italics in original.

⁸³ Mark 13:22 (NRSV).

divergent discourses that circled around the question of the death of Jesus. Even when they were talking about the same verses, the different approaches to the text were quite obvious, one based on critical analysis of the structure and content, while the other attempted to defend the text against the “rationalists” who wanted to prove the fallibility of the text. While the suggestion that the Bible was infallible found little resonance with many nineteenth-century scholars, we should be careful to assume that all scholars wanted to disprove the Bible, rather, they sought to apply reason and critical approaches to better understand the text and show the history of the human side of its production and formation.

Although the exchange between Vitalii and Khvol’son circled around a traditionally important question about the last week of Jesus’s life, within the Russian context in the 1870s, it spoke to the larger question of authority and the future of Russian religious life.⁸⁴ Khvol’son, given his important positions at the university and Orthodox and Catholic theological academies, alongside his biblical translations, occupied an influential position within Russian religious culture—and Vitalii exhibited a far right wing position among religious conservatives. Vitalii’s personal attack revealed an underlying concern among some that Khvol’son’s success as a scholar did not equate to

⁸⁴ This question of authority to speak for the church is addressed at length in Batalden’s *Russian Bible Wars*, and shows that this was a constant concern among churchmen, government officials, and scholars. Batalden’s thesis, which employed Charles Taylor’s important work on “a secular age,” suggests that the “Bible wars” were one of the arenas where the issue of secularization was most hotly and fully debated during the nineteenth century. Further, it clarifies to some degree the Khvol’son – Vitalii conflict as a continuation of this long power struggle. See Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars*, 7-9 and 206-207; Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and the edited volume that served as a response to Taylor’s thesis, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

his right to speak on behalf of the church. Moreover, his close affinity to Jews and Judaism (particularly the Talmud) raised further questions about the success of conversion as a tool for reform of Jews. While Vitalii's view of Khvol'son was a very limited one and seems to be the minority position, it does not eliminate a persistent question of Khvol'son's motives in his work. While Khvol'son found many admirers and supporters among Christians and Jews, there remained a small sector of society that never forgot his Jewish origins (partly because he did not let them) and continued to use this as a critique of his ability to comment fairly on matters central to the faith.

In the final months of his life, Khvol'son once again returned to this issue of early Christianity, Judaism, and the Last Supper when he began receiving further criticisms from readers of his German edition of the Last Supper essay, published as *Das Letzte Passamahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes*. Although previously available in a St. Petersburg German edition from 1892, the 1908 Leipzig edition sparked criticism from abroad. In all fairness, Khvol'son was perhaps too tied to the theory that Jesus was a Pharisee and because of this he should not be seen in any way opposing their views—which led some to question his ability to comment on the Gospel texts. As many of his works pointed out, Jesus was part of Judaism, and if the split between Jews and Christians was much later than previously assumed (perhaps with the rise of Christian Gnosticism in the second century, as Khvol'son claimed), then Judaism and “true Christianity” as taught by Jesus were entirely compatible.⁸⁵ It was only the later

⁸⁵ David R. Catchpole, *The Trial of Jesus: A Study in the Gospels and Jewish Historiography from 1770 to the Present Day*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 52-53.

reconfigurations and interpretations of Jesus and his teachings that derailed everything. In separate journals, Khvol'son published two very similar essays that restated and clarified his earlier arguments. The first was published in *Khristianskoe Chtenie* and outlined in very clear terms what Khvol'son's position was on the issue and why he had attempted to offer his opinion on the subject in 1875.⁸⁶ Khvol'son commented on the uncharacteristic brevity of his article, and his reluctance to take on the article:

I personally did not want to take part in this, as it seemed to me a quite useless debate, as I am already ninety-one; two years ago I went blind and cannot read a single line. Therefore, it is very difficult to ask others to find evidence in the books and notes, and sometimes just not possible, so I cannot describe exactly the desired place, so in most cases I rely solely on my memory. I had help in the preparation of this article from my daughter-in-law, O. G. Khvol'son to whom I offer my sincere thanks.⁸⁷

After outlining his understanding of the synoptic Gospels and their relationship to the Gospel of John, Khvol'son moved to weightier matters—what was the purpose of all of this wrangling over dates, translations, and exegesis? A careful reading of Khvol'son's short response to the challenge by a certain Professor Drews who sought to verify if Jesus Christ really ever existed, proves the centrality of “humanity” and betterment of the world in Khvol'son's writings—even in his final months. He noted that the great Maimonides wrote, “Jesus Christ spread the great teachings of Moses and the prophets regarding the unity and holiness of God, about humanity and morality among the peoples

⁸⁶ Khvol'son, “Vosrazhenie protiv lozhnago mneniia, budto Iisus Khristos v deistvitel'nosti ne zhil',” *Khristianskoe Chtenie* 1 (January 1911): 3-22.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

of the universe.”⁸⁸ This positive commentary on Jesus and his teachings were, according to Khvol’son, “deleted and scratched out of the manuscripts” by fanatical papal censors in the fifteenth century.⁸⁹ Khvol’son expressed concern at this late stage in life about the incessant hunt for the “historical Jesus,” which he too had participated in during his lifetime. If taken too far, it could undermine the very purpose of religion altogether, by emphasizing the details and not the larger message of humanity and improving understanding in the world. He concluded by quoting Rabbi Jacob Emden: “The benefit would be to both them and us, if only they lived in accordance with the requirements of their religion set forth in the Gospel! They would deserve the greatest praise, if only they had acted according to the requirements of his Gospel.”⁹⁰ Ultimately, it was the rabbis of old who “expressed much more sensible” understandings of the life of Jesus and his message, and not the biblical scholars of his own day.

The second article published in the *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshcheniia* in February 1911 addressed a familiar topic within much of Khvol’son’s writing, namely, relations between Sadducees and Pharisees in first-century Palestine.⁹¹ In perhaps his final tribute to his beloved mentor in Breslau, Khvol’son extolled the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Khvol’son claimed to have evidence from very old manuscripts (pre-fifteenth century) of these commentaries and their deletion by censors. Maimonides, as Khvol’son pointed out, believed that Jesus and the Christians, along with Muhammad and Islam, prepared the way for the return of the “true Jewish Messiah.”

⁹⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁹¹ Khvol’son, “Saddukei i Farisei,” *Zhurnal’ minsterstva narodnago prosveshcheniia*, chast’ 31, no. 2, otd. 2 (Feb. 1911), 277-283.

contribution of Geiger to the study of these two Jewish groups.⁹² In speaking of how Josephus Flavius had provided a useful, though biased account of the Sadducees and Pharisees, Khvol'son added:

The [modern] reader is not privy to the science of theology, in fact, they have no clue who was a Sadducee or Pharisee, and even the learned theologians have only a vague understanding about them. [Josephus] talked about the essence of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees in different places in one of his works, but these cannot be considered accurate, because he liked to write with embellishment. He tried to portray the people of Israel in the best light before the Romans. So he did not talk about ritual differences of these two trends in Judaism, that the Romans would have no interest, but as if they were two different philosophical paths. So his description was misleading and confusing to historians and theologians almost to the middle of the XIX century.⁹³

Among Khvol'son's closest associates, it was Geiger who ultimately shifted the discourse from one of vagueness and inaccuracy to a more critical, scientific approach to first-century Judaism and Christianity. Khvol'son appears to have found the message of the messiah, as the one who ultimately will usher in peace and unity in the world, and identified the Jewish strand of that thinking with the Pharisees. Here we see Khvol'son's hope for the future, from the Jewish Pharisees preceded Jesus Christ—a Jewish figure, who at some future date would usher in a day of peace and humanity in the world once again. Khvol'son understood his role as a continuation of that effort, and in doing so, sought further to encourage people to think about the common historical bonds among

⁹² SPFA RAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 32 “Pis'mo Khvol'sony, D. A. Luidvig Geiger, Berlin” (January 3 and 24, 1910). Ludwig Geiger asked Khvol'son to submit a short recollection of his father that was to be included in a volume marking the 100th birthday of his father.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 277-278.

the Abrahamic traditions. Doing so would bring about a better world that he hoped for and worked to develop during his long life.

“An Eternal Teacher” – Khvol’son Behind the University Lectern

Reviews of Khvol’son’s scholarly contributions laud his broad knowledge and linguistic talents, but to gain a stronger perspective of Khvol’son the person, there is no better record than those who interacted with him in the classroom. His inexhaustible work as a teacher was already mentioned above, not many continue to teach in their ninetieth year. Khvol’son took leave from his formal university responsibilities and the Theological Academy in 1883, shortly after the death of his wife.⁹⁴ The following year, he retired from the Catholic Academy as well. Many of his students recalled meeting informally for tutoring in languages and grammar well after his retirement.⁹⁵ Others noted that he was a common sight in the university, where he continued to meet students and faculty and also offered occasional lectures. He also continued to publish many of his articles in the late 1890s and 1900s. His grandson, Evgenii, commented in his memoir that occasionally his mother would sit with the aged Khvol’son and read to him, as he was completely blind in his last years.

⁹⁴ Troitskii, “Pamiati professor Daniila Abramovicha Khvol’sona 23 Marta 1911,” 431.

⁹⁵ “Iz vospominanii slushatel’ia o D. A. Khvol’sone,” *Rossiiia i Aziiia* (Saturday 25 December 1899): 3-4.



Figure 6. Khvol'son at his desk. SPFA RAN, f. 959, op. 1, d. 58, no. 14.

Khvol'son's reach as a scholar went beyond teaching languages and literature to interested students. There were those who came to Khvol'son not through his Hebraic scholarship in its technical sense, but through the yearly public lectures he gave at the Catholic Academy (and elsewhere) on the blood libel and Jewish-Christian relations. One university student reflected on his first hearing Khvol'son lecture to the public:

The other day that professor turned ninety years old. I don't know what he looks like now, but twenty years ago when I was young student, despite his being seventy years old, it was easy for him to climb the stairs at the university. None of us were interested in the Faculty of Oriental Studies (except for a few future consuls and ambassadors), but it was a generally expected duty that freshmen visit all of the lecture classes. I remember the gray hair, a broad forehead, large intelligent eyes, a typical Jewish nose.

'What is he reading?'—I asked a comrade.

The comrade replied,—‘Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldean literature.’
‘I’ve had enough.’

My interest soon evaporated (*isparilsia*) and I soon forgot about the existence of the old professor who delves into such boring matters as Chaldean literature. Many years later I was again in one of Khvol’son’s lectures. This was not a typical university lecture, but a report before the scientific community. The report was extremely interesting to me. It was about Christ and about the attitude of the Jewish people to Him. In the professor’s statements, everything was new to me: according to him, the old idea that nobody knows the path that strengthened the notion of deep hostility of the Jewish people to the Savior, is completely false. He used a number of quotes and texts to argue that in the course of the first century friendly relations existed between the followers of the teachings of Christ and the Pharisees.

‘Is he a Christian?’ I asked my friend, a lecturer, who came to the session.
‘Yes, although he was born as a Jew. He is generally a very interesting person. He is self-taught, from the *heder* to the academy. Indeed, he has long been a worldwide celebrity.’⁹⁶

Khvol’son’s ability to instill one of the central messages that developed in his scholarship, but carried with it the weight of his larger social message is recorded in many accounts. Usov, the author of the passage cited above, continued his story with the admonition of his lecturer friend that everyone must read his refutation of the blood libel. Usov closed his homage to the professor with this, “May God grant to the old professor still many more years to work for the benefit of the motherland and for all of humanity.”⁹⁷ There are numerous other accounts that attest to similar sentiments before and after Khvol’son’s death.

Khvol’son’s eightieth birthday served as a reason to bring together many of his students, friends, and associates to celebrate the man’s life and work. Baron David

⁹⁶ M. Usov, “D. A. Khvol’son (k 90-letniiu so dnia ego rozhdeniia,” *Vsemirnaia Panorama* 31 (November 20, 1909), 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Gintsburg coordinated the events and thanks to his family's influence the event was widely publicized in many of St. Petersburg's papers.⁹⁸ Gintsburg also compiled a *Festschrift* in honor of Khvol'son that included papers in English, German, and French.⁹⁹ Ginzburg added his own paper and a short introduction explaining why Khvol'son mattered to the Jewish and scholarly worlds.

Among those who celebrated the eightieth birthday in the journals, was A. N. Gren, a former student of Khvol'son's and editor of *Rossia i Azia*. In a special edition of the journal published in Kiev, Gren compiled a student recollection about his mentor, a set of lecture notes from 1881-1882, and a short biographical sketch. In addition, Gren dedicated a poem to his former professor that is striking for many reasons, but also helps shows the symbolic role that Khvol'son maintained even late in life. The poem read:

“Suum Cuique”
Прошло уж много лет, как с Вами
Сидел я вместе tête à tête
Когда Восточный факультет
Я посещал с двумя друзьями.
Сэр Ольденбургъ из них, о грусть,
Считает Веды слаще рая,
Другой познал ужь наизусть
Гиероглифы все Китаяю
А я остался позади,
Остался скромным публицистом,
Востоковедов резервистом.
Моя задача впереди!

⁹⁸ A short list of the articles about the event include: Gintsburg, “80-letie D. A. Khvol'son” *Novosti* (Sunday 21 November – 3 December 1899); “D. A. Khvol'son,” *Peterburgskaia Zhizn'* (November 1899): 3045; Gintsburg, “Iubilei prof. D. A. Khvol'sona,” *Voskhod* 51 (21 November 1899), 1604-1607; and the majority of *Rossia i Azia* 3, no. 4 (25 December 1899).

⁹⁹ *Leem Amudot Le-Daniel ish Amudot – Recueil Des Travaux Rédigés en Mémoire du Jubilé Scientifique de Daniel Chwolson*. Berlin: S. Calvary & Co., 1899.

Избави Бог и думать мне
Попасть в Олимп богов барона:
Его торжественного трона
Клянусь, не смею потреясти.
Но Вам пропеть мой гимн печальный
Осмелюсь я и впереди
Вам пожелать лишь жизни славной,
Славный, чем та, что позади
Осталась. Вы дорогой торной
Не без борьбы ее прошли,
Не раз и к Вам восточник вздорный
Интригу вел, теперь ушли
Невзгоды, горе чередую,
Теперь единую толпою
Мы к Вам с приветом подошли.
Примите-же наш клик приветный:
Вам много лета! Признаюсь,
Идут одной ватагой бледной
Все кроме Вас у нас. Боюсь
Я оскорбить своих собратом,
Скажу: типун мне на язык,
Но, как увижу наших хватов,
Один, с улыбкой блаженной
Завет студентов на миньон,
Другой-Кавказец оглашенный
Перстом колеблет Зевса трон,
А третий с дочерью-красоткой
И днем и ночью, иззафет,
Бормочет он с улыбкой тонкой,
Завет кавказца на ответ.
Вы далеки от них. Науки
Вы вечно лишь стезю шли,
В науке мы все Ваши внуки
И с верой в Вас вперед пошли.
Вы указали путь нам верный
И мы по той стезе идем.
Идем не скоро, путь наш мерный,
На все-же к цели мы придем.
—А. Грен¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ A. N. Gren, "Suum Cuique"—Posviashchaetsiia D. A. Khvol'son" *Rossiiia i Aziiia: Ezhenedel'naiia literaturno-politicheskaiia i nauchno-populiarnaia gazeta*, vol. 3, no. 4 (25 December, 1899), 1.

Here we see a different perspective on the meaning of Khvol'son for his students that did not appear in other memoirs and recollections on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. The concluding lines of the poem that engages “the gods of Olympus” and a “private clique” of Orientalists, reveals the “spiritual” father role some held of Khvol'son at the end of his life. While these views were limited to a very small group of people, Gren felt an affinity for his old professor that is beyond the normal accounts of Khvol'son's impact. Within this poem, a similar sentiment emerged reminiscent of the heartfelt thanks that Khvol'son felt earlier for his mentors, Geiger and Fleischer.

On March 26, 1911, professors and administrators from St. Petersburg University, the Spiritual Academy, and former students gathered at building 7 on the 12th line on Vasilievskii Island. Former students gathered around the body of their professor, a few brief comments and stories were shared, and then the party carried the casket out onto the street. The pall bearers were former students: P. K. Kokovtsev, N. Ia. Marr¹⁰¹, professors B. A. Tyraev, F. A. Braun, I. V. Bartol'd and I. Iu. Markon. There, on the street, a larger crowd gathered to see the casket placed upon the waiting hearse. At nine in the morning, the procession left the home and slowly headed to the church located at the university.

The cathedral was overflowing with friends, family, and those who came to pay their last

¹⁰¹ Marr (1867-1934) is credited with the development of the Japhetic theory in linguistics that became central to Soviet understandings of historical development of language. Marr, born to a Scottish father and Georgian mother, eventually became dean of the Oriental faculty at St. Petersburg University. The Japhetic theory (from Japeth, the third son of the biblical figure Noah), was based on the understanding that all languages had common elements and that eventually the world would migrate from a plurilingualism to monolingualism—an idea that Stalin briefly entertained. For more on Marr, see Marina Yaguello, *Lunatic Lovers of Language: Imaginary Languages and their Inventors* (London: Athlone Press, 1991).

respects. At noon, the procession exited the church and headed toward Smolenskoe Cemetery to lay the body to rest. A large procession followed the casket and when they arrived at the freshly prepared gravesite, two speakers addressed the audience—Troitskii and Mikhail Nestorovich Speranskii.¹⁰²

Although their remarks are discussed briefly in Chapter 4, they are returned to here in greater detail. Troitskii's remarks focused on Khvol'son as a professor extraordinaire with a profound influence on the Russian academy. "Under the influence of Daniil Abramovich," suggested Troitskii, "generations of scientists, bishops, archpriests, and priests developed."¹⁰³ He then praised the professor for his contribution to "the academy, theological sciences, and the Russian church."¹⁰⁴ One has to wonder as well, how poignantly he felt the influence of Khvol'son and his work in 1912 and 1913 when he became a central figure and expert witness in the internationally recognized trial of Mendel Beilis. At a moment of crisis, Khvol'son's lifelong effort to provide a scholarly—as well as popular refutation—of the ritual murder charge surely provided a model for addressing the Kiev case.¹⁰⁵ What that model looked like in 1913, how

¹⁰² For more on Speranskii, see Andy Byford, *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007).

¹⁰³ "Pokhorony D. A. Khvol'sona," *Rech'*, Sunday, 27 March 1911, 5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ In the Khvol'son fond (f. 959) of the PO ARAN there is an article from one of the St. Petersburg newspapers that recounts an interview with Troitskii just before his departure from the capital to appear before in the courtroom in Kiev in 1913. In part, the inclusion of the article into the Khvol'son file is surprising because he does not mention the professor in the conversation. While it can be difficult to judge why an archivist chose to include this in the file, it does suggest some awareness of Khvol'son's ongoing efforts on the subject. PO ARAN f. 959, op. 1, d. 53, l. 1.

Troitskii chose to use it, and its success potentially serves as an important barometer of his mentor's impact on the ritual murder myth.

Speranskii, the second speaker at the graveside, commented that “a great and exemplary *starets*” departed from the world when the professor died.¹⁰⁶ The choice to use *starets* is telling of the respect that Speranskii held for Khvol'son. The *starets*, was a common appellation for a wise, religious leader who taught not only about the world, but also inspired his hearers or students to seek the divine. His word choice was significant and reflected the position that many of his students held in light of his work in the academy. Speranskii continued: “He believed in man, in humanity, in knowledge. Even to his last minutes of consciousness, Daniil Abramovich was interested in learned questions. This wise teacher possessed an immortal, inexhaustible, godlike spirit (*bessmertnym, neistoshchnym, bogopodobnym dukhom*)...In life he was an eternal teacher and an accommodating spirit. Daniil Abramovich will serve as a testament for future generations.”¹⁰⁷ This generosity of spirit suggested something of Khvol'son's understanding of the university lectern he occupied for so many years. Rather than a bully pulpit, the university post that he so desperately sought in his younger years, allowed him to share his hard won knowledge.

¹⁰⁶ “Pokhorony D. A. Khvol'sona,” *Rech'*, Sunday, 27 March 1911, 5.

¹⁰⁷ “Pokhorony D. A. Khvol'sona,” *Rech'*, Sunday, 27 March 1911. 5.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the scholarly community has witnessed a reemergence of interest in Daniil Avraamovich Khvol'son. Cambridge University Press has published his two-volume dissertation on the Sabians and his 1880 refutation of the blood libel was published in Russian for a wider audience.¹ Further, Khvol'son's translation work is highlighted in Stephen Batalden's book on the process behind the production of a full Russian edition of the Bible.² This development of Khvol'son studies is a reminder of the monumental and controversial figure that Khvol'son was in the nineteenth century. Through his life we can see the expansion of the Russian academy and sciences, the embattled space of Russian theology, and the politics of conversion within a confessional empire. Within these arenas, the "Jewish Question" was one of the most protracted and heated debates that emerged during the long nineteenth century in Russia. Between the partitioning of Poland and the First World War, Jews and other minority groups competed for space, economic opportunities, positions in universities, and legal rights. A select number of Jews took advantage of limited opportunities to enter into the mainstream of economic and cultural life of the Russian Empire. From the beginning, minority groups competed with local Russians for those few positions that promised a brighter future and greater economic security. Daniil Khvol'son benefited from concerted

¹ Daniil Avraamovich Chwolson, *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Khvol'son, *O nekotorykh srednevekovykh obvineniakh protiv evreev: istoricheskoe issledovanie po istochnikam*, ed. by Iurii Tabak, (Moscow: Tekst/ Knizhniki, 2010).

² Stephen K. Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translations and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

imperial projects that sought to bring Jews into the empire, either through conversion, military service, or education. Education provided Khvol'son the opportunity to live in St. Petersburg, albeit temporarily, and with this relocation, chance meetings with leading ministers and scholars who further aided his rise to prominence in Russian academic circles. His subsequent conversion to Christianity enabled Khvol'son to take up a post as professor of Semitic languages and further secure his future in the city.

What are we to learn from this case study of Khvol'son? As argued earlier, the Khvol'son story shows the degree to which some Jews who proved their usefulness to the empire were able to navigate the often-restrictive legal barriers to Jewish assimilation into Russian culture. That is to say, there was room for Jews to become leading members of society despite periodic efforts to frustrate their ambitions. Further, this project showed the degree to which Jewish and Russian relations were founded on mythical, yet highly contentious, rumors about Jews and their "eternal" opposition to Jesus Christ and the whole of Christianity. Uniquely situated (due to conversion) between Christian and Jew, Khvol'son attempted to correct erroneous Christian beliefs about Jews and argued for a more articulate and tolerant relationship between the adherents of both religions. In doing so, Khvol'son on occasion alienated himself from both sides and his message seemingly fell on deaf ears when viewed over the long course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As was the case in other European empires, Jewish assimilation into the dominant socio-political environment proved the most unobtrusive pathway to improving Jewish life in Russia. Doors remained open for Jews to work and live in St. Petersburg and other

cities outside the Pale of Settlement. The result of this selective integration, as Nathans calls it, was a remarkable degree of hybridity among Jews who chose to combine elements of their Jewish identity with components they observed in the wider Russian society. For some, the transition into life outside the Pale of Settlement was fairly smooth; many had acquired Russian and German earlier in their desire to gain a secular education, and a seemingly large number of those who transitioned out of the Pale of Settlement legally did so as a result of their upbringing. The maskilim were groups of advocates for religious moderation and reformed education for their children, and driven by a desire to blend their Jewish traditions and religion in ways that lessened differences between Jew and Gentile. They took their cues from German forerunners, but many also developed specifically Russian approaches that could address the particularities of the Russian context.

As scholars have shown, the Russian government facilitated this small group of Jewish individuals who wanted to help Jews attain greater legal rights in the empire. Russian policy toward its Jewish subjects was a mixed bag of approaches, policies, and practices. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the motivation came from the need to better control the newly acquired populations in the western borderlands. If Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, and others acquired in the late eighteenth century could be incorporated (and this usually meant recorded or counted), then they could be taxed. Taxation brought much needed support for the regime, particularly during a series of costly wars in the early decades. In order for such a massive population to be effectively counted and taxed, the regime needed bureaucrats willing to plan effective avenues

toward that end. More important however, were an elite group of Jews who were willing to cooperate with the government to help improve life for Jews at the same time.

Khvol'son was a product of this age and should be considered among the most successful of these Jews who believed in the state's capabilities to improve the lives of Jews. Unlike others of his generation, Khvol'son elected to convert to Russian Orthodoxy. His decision to do so rewarded him greatly, but it also ostracized him from some members of the Jewish community. He was regarded as a Christian—and a good one at that—but always with his Jewish provenance carefully noted. Khvol'son declared on many occasions that he was a Christian, but he rarely, if ever, tried to hide or deny his Jewish origins or his consistent affinity for Jews.

When scholars look only at Khvol'son's conversion and little else from his life and his scholarship, it is easy to assume that his conversion carried little emotional or devotional meaning for him. However, when his conversion becomes part of his ambitious vision for Jews and Christians, his intentions are brought into greater focus. Even today Jews have struggled with Khvol'son because he apostasized, and yet worked diligently to improve the lives of Jews—specifically from false accusations of ritual murder. Russians too have problems identifying with the man. During his life his opponents argued that he only took up the blood libel because it brought him wealth and fame. Khvol'son's aim was different. It is evident from the protracted career and his chosen topics that were so central to both the Christian and Jewish understandings of their respective religions that he trusted his efforts to revise and reeducate Christians could lead to enlightenment for both communities.

Although this study of a nineteenth-century professor focused tightly on the man and his circles of friends and foes, it also shows how there were alternative lives and identities available to Jews in the Russian Empire that did not negate the legitimacy of Judaism nor the place of Christianity in the world. In the figure of Khvol'son, it is possible to see a man who truly believed that he was "between worlds," functional in both Christian and Jewish circles.³ Khvol'son envisioned a future where Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims, would better understand the universal claims that each tradition made and in the process find new paths toward cooperation and a stronger sense of humanity. His message remained constant and committed. Each religion needed to better understand their origins and the stories of their development, and in the process, they would find common roots that could strengthen their claims without obliterating those of the other two religions.

Khvol'son too easily saw past divisive exegetical issues and his scholarly responses were likely far too complex for average Russians to handle. Even when his efforts to fix the problems by explicating in relatively generic terms for a common reading public, he wrote past many of his readers. His impact on the specific cases he took on, in Saratov and Kutaisi for example, was profound and contributed to the immediate overturning of the specific charges. However, when viewed in the long-term, his contributions are far from self-evident. It is true that he indirectly led a younger generation of scholars to hold similar beliefs, but the persistent reappearances of the

³ I have borrowed the term "between worlds" from the title of Hava Tirosh-Rothschild's *Between Worlds: The Life and Thought of Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

blood libel issue prove the futility of a one-man project aimed at obliterating long-held beliefs about Jews and their religious rituals.

Khvol'son promoted a highly nuanced form of Jewish-Christianity that was neither fully Jewish nor devoutly Christian. Rather than see these two religious traditions as separate, Khvol'son argued for a mending of ways—a return to the time when the line between Jew and Christian was blurry at best. He willingly overlooked the past 1700 years or so not because he was naïve, but because he firmly believed that both religions offered powerful messages to the world and they ought to be used in tandem rather than in opposition to each other. It is easy to see why such a view put off many of his opponents from both Jewish and Christian camps. Few Russians in the nineteenth century would believe that contemporary Jews had much to offer the world. In an age when the biblical text was becoming more accessible to literate Russians, those who had read the Old Testament did so through the lens of a New Testament vantage point. Thus, the political, social, and economic negation of the nineteenth-century Jew was seemingly supported by the main religious text of Christian worship. Khvol'son's daring reinterpretation of the biblical text and his emphasis on early Christian-Jewish relations ostracized him from both communities, even while they sought to claim him as their own. When he died, this bifurcated understanding of Khvol'son's contributions to Jewish and Russian learning was largely hidden from public view. Jews have struggled to comprehend Khvol'son's conversion while praising him for his efforts to eradicate blood libel myths from the modern world. Similarly, Russians have largely placed him on a

dusty pedestal for his contributions to philology and history while overlooking his frontal attack on Russian Orthodox theologies of Jews and Judaism.

For Khvol'son, the path to finding a permanent resolution to the religious debates that had divided Jews and Christians for centuries was not a complete secularization of society. In a truly confessional state or empire, religion was central to, not separate from official understandings of their role in the state. Rather, he argued that it was a rereading of the key texts and the histories, in search of truth and commonality that would unite rather than divide these groups further. In order to do so, however, Khvol'son depended upon the tools and perspectives provided by his secular education, specifically, biblical criticism, deep linguistic and textual analysis, and the dispassionate eye of the nineteenth-century scholar. In the figure of Khvol'son we see the blending of the secular and religious in creative ways, and as this project set out to do from the beginning, the totality of the secular paradigm is questioned during an age when identities were still formed around a core of religion and confessionality. Even among those Jews who remained tied to religious institutions and traditional orthodoxy, this blending was more common than much of current literature would lead students to believe. Although Khvol'son expressed an extreme position (highly tolerant of diversity) when it came to religious identity, he was part of a much bigger crowd that experimented within the boundaries of acceptable identities to formulate new alternatives by blending these two cultures. Much of Khvol'son's scholarship recognized the existing problems between Jews and Christians, but rather than accepting them as eternal, he believed that they could be tempered and recast in more tolerant ways.

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