

Hasidism in Tsarist Russia: Historical and Social Aspects

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Abstract It is difficult to ascribe to Hasidism sets of distinctive regional characteristics, because Hasidism transcended both communal and national boundaries. Aware of this problem, the authors of this article seek to characterize Hasidism in Russia, while eschewing the essentialist assumption that Hasidism in Russia had a Russian character.

The article describes Hasidism in Tsarist Russia from several perspectives. From an internal Jewish perspective, it discusses features of dynasties of hasidic leaders and the courts they lived in. This is followed by a discussion of relations between hasidic centers (the courts) and hasidic peripheries (the local communities). Relations between Hasidism and the Russian administration are also analyzed, as are the various ways in which *hasidim* in Russia adapted to the challenges of modernity, while hasidic leaders in Galicia and Hungary were usually more hostile towards modernization. Finally, the article describes the consequences of the upheavals of the First World War, Bolshevik Revolution, and the Civil Wars that followed. During these dramatic events and in their aftermath, the majority of the hasidic leaders in Russia moved to other places in Europe, America, and Palestine, and only some of them remained under the Soviet regime.

Keywords Hasidism · Eastern Europe · Tsarist Russia · Nineteenth century · Political history · Dynasties

Anyone attempting to place Hasidism within a single political entity, marked by clearly defined chronological and geographical boundaries, is bound to encounter problems. Some pioneering scholars of Hasidism discovered long ago that it was difficult if not impossible to describe any type of Hasidism as belonging to a particular geographical region, or to ascribe to it a particular set of distinctive local characteristics.¹ Hasidism, after all, was a religious revival movement that transcended both communal and national boundaries. While geographic proximity and ease of access generally facilitated adherence to a particular hasidic court and its own style of Hasidism, some *hasidim* lived a great distance away from their leaders and even needed to cross political frontiers to reach their courts. Likewise, some *tsadikim* acted on behalf of hasidic communities or individuals situated beyond the borders of their

¹See Aaron Zeev Aescoly, *Hahasidut bepolin*, ed. David Assaf (Jerusalem, 2000), 12–3, 34–6.

regions, even if they were not their own particular devotees. Hasidic books could be found throughout the Jewish diaspora of Eastern Europe, and the involvement of the *tsadikim* in the collection of funds for the hasidic communities in the Holy Land crossed regional border lines despite the clear regional character of the fundraising system itself (the *kolelim*).

This fluidity of geographic determinants is most apparent in the proclivity of the *tsadikim* to travel from one region to another and even across political frontiers, whether in response to government pressure or to contract cross-border dynastic marriages.

Despite these reservations, it is possible to point, if only preliminarily, to a number of defining characteristics, which were unique to Hasidism in Imperial Russia and distinguished it from the Hasidism that developed in other regions. For the purpose of the following discussion, this will be limited to those territories that were part of the Russian Pale of Settlement, to the exclusion of Congress Poland.

It should be emphasized that we do not attribute an inherent Russian essence to the type of Hasidism that developed in Imperial Russia, and therefore we refer to it as “Hasidism in Russia” rather than “Russian Hasidism.”² In addition, it should not be assumed that our references to the Russian context are intended to suggest that Hasidism in Russia was influenced solely by the Russian cultural and political environment.³ The distinctive portrait of Hasidism in Russia, to the extent that it can be drawn at all, is the product of complex linkages between uniquely Russian characteristics, interactions between diverse hasidic communities, certain developments that took place within the wider Jewish community, some features of the hasidic movement that transcend political boundaries, and a dynamism that can be found in religious revival movements in general.

Hasidic Demography

The dearth of systematic statistical and demographic data makes it difficult to define any hasidic group in simple quantitative terms such as large, or small. “Large” in this context may mean that the group in question has attracted a

²For a similar approach with regard to Hasidism in Poland see David Assaf, “‘Hasidut polin’ o ‘hahasidut bepolin’? Live‘ayat hageografyah hahasidit,” *Gal-Ed* 14 (1995), 197–206. On hasidic geography see also Marcin Wodziński and Uriel Gellman, “Toward a New Geography of Hasidism,” in the present volume.

³For an attempt to link specific geographical boundaries and political changes to the expansion of Hasidism in the Polish territories, see Adam Teller, “Hasidism and the Challenge of Geography: The Polish Background of the Spread of the Hasidic Movement,” *AJS Review* 30, no. 1 (2006), 1–29.

large number of adherents, that it has established a certain, if unquantifiable, presence in numerous communities, or that its ruling dynasty has branched out, generating numerous subsidiary courts with which many *tsadikim* are associated.

The Tsarist regime generally related to the Jews as a single, undifferentiated entity. When conflicts between *hasidim* and *mitnagedim* were brought to the authorities' attention, they did not always know, or care to know, how to distinguish between the rival groups. Nor did the official census reports and correspondence of state officials usually distinguish the various hasidic groups from one another. Moreover, even hasidic self-identity was not always clear-cut and obvious. In many communities there were individuals who sympathized with Hasidism and even prayed in hasidic prayer houses, but who did not necessarily identify themselves as the devotees of a particular *tsadik*. At the same time there were others who kept up simultaneous ties with more than one hasidic leader and his court.

In the absence of satisfactory external data, we must rely on internal Jewish sources, of which only a small proportion are contemporary (communal records, including the records of local fraternal societies [*hevrot*], letters, newspaper reports), while the majority are later recollections of the past (hasidic hagiographical tales, memoir literature, memorial [*yizkor*] books, and belles lettres). It is impossible to arrive at any firm conclusions on the basis of such sources, which were written long after, and in locations other than those in which the events they describe are said to have taken place. They also tend to be impressionistic, and are liable to betray either a polemical anti-hasidic bias or an apologetic hasidic slant. It is therefore often difficult to tell whether there was an actual hasidic presence in any particular community, to determine the balance between *hasidim* and non-*hasidim* in the population, or to discern the division among the *hasidim* themselves between the followers of one dynastic leader and another. Consequently, while the overall size (not to mention a detailed breakdown) of the hasidic population in Tsarist Russia cannot be determined precisely, it may be estimated in very broad terms.⁴

⁴The numbers that have come down to us are greatly exaggerated. In 1899 it was reported that "in our country there are about two and a half million *hasidim*" (*Hamelits*, 6 April 1899, 2), and this out of 4,900,000 Jews counted in the Pale in 1897. On hasidic demography and its methodological difficulties see Marcin Wodziński, "How Many Hasidim Were There in Congress Poland? On the Demographics of the Hasidic Movement in Poland during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Gal-Ed* 19 (2004), 13–49; Glenn Dynner, "How Many Hasidim Were There Really in Congress Poland? A Response to Marcin Wodziński," *Gal-Ed* 20 (2006), 91–104; Marcin Wodziński, "How Should We Count Hasidim in Congress Poland? A Reply to Glenn Dynner," *Gal-Ed* 20 (2006), 105–20.

A sensitive analysis of the sources at our disposal does enable us at least to note the presence of *hasidim* and of hasidic leaders in particular locations, and, based on this, to distinguish between large and small hasidic groups in terms of the scope of their geographic distribution.

In these terms, a small hasidic group would be one whose leader resided in close proximity to most of his adherents. Examples of this include, in the Polesia region (i.e. the province [*guberniya*] of Grodna and the western parts of the Minsk [Mińsk] province), Karlin Hasidism and its offshoots: Kobrin [Kobryń], Koydanov [Kajdanów], and Slonim [Słonim]; in the Podolia province: Apta [Opatów] and Savran [Sawran]; in the Kiev province: Linitz [Ilińce] and Bratslav [Braclaw]; in the Bessarabia province: Bendery and Rashkov [Raszków]⁵; and in the Volhynia [Wołyń] province: the small groups that branched off from the hasidic community originally led by the Maggid Yehiel Mikhl of Zlochev [Złoczów].

By contrast, large hasidic groups would be those whose leaders and followers were spread over a number of provinces, even beyond the borders of Russia. In this category, Habad, Chernobyl [Czarnobyl], Ruzhin [Rużyn] and their branches were without a doubt the largest hasidic groups in Russia, and their success may be attributed as much to the charismatic appeal of their leaders as to the sophistication of their organizational systems, and in the case of Ruzhin and Chernobyl, to the adoption of a multi-branched pattern of dynastic succession to the leadership, which facilitated expansion over widespread areas. With the relocation, at the beginning of the 1840s, of the Ruzhin court to Austrian Sadigura, Chernobyl remained the single largest hasidic dynasty in Ukraine. This was due mostly to its proliferation by means of establishing numerous sub-dynasties, and the frequent visits of their *tsadikim* to all their widespread communities. At the same time, many adherents of Ruzhin Hasidism in Russia remained loyal to the Ruzhin courts across the Austrian border.

It is noteworthy that for the most part, the hasidic leaders were concentrated in the oldest provinces of the Russian Pale of Settlement. Bessarabia, which was not annexed to Russia until 1812, may have claimed a modest hasidic presence already in the eighteenth century, and this persisted and grew during the Tsarist period.⁶ There was also a small hasidic presence in the provinces of New Russia, beyond the Pale of Settlement, although indigenous dynasties did not emerge in these areas,⁷ and perhaps for this reason,

⁵In fact the town Rashkov was located in Podolia province, on the eastern bank of the Dniester, but its Hasidic dynasty (Zuckerman) was identified mainly with Bessarabia.

⁶Eliyahu Feldman, "Toledot hayehudim bebesarabyah," in *Yahadut besarabyah*, vol. 11 of *Entsiklopedyah shel galuyot* (Jerusalem, 1971), 24–5.

⁷There are isolated examples of *tsadikim* who settled beyond the Pale, among them Yitshak Yoel Rabinovitch of the Linitz dynasty, who was deported there against his will (see below,

their hasidic populations remained small. The Jewish presence in New Russia was largely the product of internal migration, which increased from the 1860s, mostly from the northern provinces of the Pale. Hasidic adherents of many dynasties took part in this migration, most prominently Habad,⁸ whose influence was felt most in towns such as Kherson, Kremenchug, and Poltava, and in the Jewish agricultural colonies established in the Kherson province during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I. In any event, the provinces annexed to Russia after the partitions of Poland (Bessarabia and New Russia), as well as the Russian hinterland, remained on the sidelines of the main developments in Hasidism, while the influence of *tsadikim* from the more established provinces of Russia, as well as from Galicia and Poland, was always felt and widely acknowledged.

Dynasty, Court, and the Regal Way

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the *tsadikim* exerted a great deal of influence. Their authority derived as much from their reputation for piety, simple spirituality, supernatural powers, and sensitivity to the plight of ordinary people as it did from their sermons that expounded the doctrines of Hasidism. They considered themselves as belonging to the traditional talmudic-kabalistic elite, and displayed charismatic authority and spiritual creativity. However, they did not generally function as formal heads of hasidic courts, and because only a few of them were succeeded in office by their heirs, there were very few dynasties in the eighteenth century.

Dynastic succession emerged as early as the 1780s with Zlochev and Am-dur Hasidism but eventually became the norm throughout the hasidic world.⁹ By the third decade of the nineteenth century, it had become so ingrained that the few hasidic groups diverging from this pattern suffered persecution, like Bratslav Hasidism, or else disappeared altogether, as was the case with the Hasidism of Bershad.

Where dynastic succession occurred, it followed one of three basic models: (a) hereditary-linear, where authority is conferred upon a single descendant of the former *tsadik*, who becomes the unchallenged heir to the office;

at n. 54), and Mordechai Zusia Twersky (d. 1936) of the Chernobyl dynasty, who lived for several years (1891–1905) in Hotzila (Kherson province, New Russia).

⁸See Avraham Greenbaum, “Hitpashtut hahasidut bame’ah ha-19: mabat sotsyo-geografi rishoni,” *Hakongres ha’olami lemada’ei hayahadut* 10:B,1 (1990), 240.

⁹See Wolf Zeev Rabinowitsch, *Lithuanian Hasidism from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (London, 1970), 140; Gadi Sagiv, “Yehi’el Mikhl of Zlotshev,” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven, 2008), 2047.

(b) hereditary-decentralized, where a number of the *tsadik*'s descendants assume the leadership, each heading his own offshoot court; (c) linear succession by a disciple who is not a blood relative of the *tsadik*. These models do not necessarily capture the full reality of the situation in every case, as succession procedures were never formal or clear-cut, but they are useful in differentiating the dynasties from one another, and to some extent also one region from another, in broad terms.

Where the first model was followed, it was generally the *tsadik*'s eldest son who succeeded him. In the absence of sons, or in cases of controversy, a younger son, a son-in-law or grandson would succeed instead (sometimes only after rivalry between several such candidates has been resolved). Habad and Karlin-Stolin are clear examples of this model.

Where the second model was followed, with several or even most of the *tsadik*'s offspring assuming positions of leadership, a pluralistic approach prevailed, favoring the fragmentation of dynastic control. However, in most cases, only one of the heirs, generally the eldest son, would inherit the dynasty's "brand" name and remain in the same location as his father, while the others would relocate to neighboring towns, where each would establish his own sub-dynasty. The Ruzhin-Sadigura and Chernobyl dynasties are clear examples of this model, as the internal split was not only agreed upon but planned for and encouraged during the lifetime of the founder.¹⁰ The split was so unproblematic that in some cases the heirs continued to live in the same town or even in the same court compound, each functioning as an independent *tsadik* with his own community of adherents.¹¹ Yet in other cases, an internal split would result from a quarrel among several dynastic heirs. The emergence of rival Habad courts that followed the death of the dynasty's third leader, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn (the Tsemah Tsedek, 1789–1866), grandson of Shneur Zalman of Liady (Rashaz) and brother-in-law of Dov Ber, is representative of this phenomenon.¹² Dynastic fragmentation reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century with many towns in Ukraine boasting their own hasidic court and a *tsadik* living among them.

¹⁰See David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin*, trans. David Louvish (Stanford, 2002), 171–2; Gadi Sagiv, "Hasidut chernobil: toledoteiha vetoroteiha mereshitah ve'ad erev milhemet ha'olam harishonah" (PhD diss., Tel-Aviv University, 2009), 96–103.

¹¹See Sagiv, "Hasidut chernobil," 106–20; David Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidim: Crisis and Discontent in the History of Hasidism*, trans. Dena Ordan (Waltham, 2010), 210.

¹²The Tsemah Tsedek's younger son, Shmuel (1834–82), succeeded his father in Lubavitch, while Shmuel's older brothers established separate courts in Kopys [Kopuś], Liady [Lady] and Niezin [Nieżyn]. On this split and the claims that the will of the Tsemah Tsedek had been forged, see Ilia Lurie, *Edah umedinah: hasidut habad ba'imperyah harusit 1828–1882* (Jerusalem, 2006), 94–110.

These two hereditary models prevailed in Russia and inhibited the emergence of hasidic leaders who were not descended from former *tsadikim*. Indeed, it is difficult to point to any new hasidic dynasties in nineteenth-century Russia that were not connected by family ties to Hasidism's founding fathers of the late eighteenth century.¹³

The third model, where a disciple rather than a son succeeded to the leadership, was for the most part characteristic of Hasidism in Congress Poland, where it persisted up to the second half of the nineteenth century, although there is some evidence of it in nineteenth-century Russia as well. The disciple's ascent to leadership would sometimes follow a conflict with one (or more) of the *tsadik's* heirs. Thus, for example, in Habad, after the death of Rashaz in 1812, a conflict erupted between his son Dov Ber (1773–1827) and his disciple Aharon Halevi Horowitz (1766–1828), which ended in division: some of the *hasidim* accepted the son's leadership in Lubavitch [Lubawicze], while others followed the disciple Aharon, who established his own court in Staroselye (Mohilev province).¹⁴

Another disciple who succeeded his master and usurped dynastic control of an heir was Abraham of Slonim (1804–83) who, following the death of Moshe Poliyer of Kobrin (1783–1858), was adopted by the *hasidim* as their leader in place of their former *tsadik's* grandson, Noah Naftali (d. 1889). This eventually led to the creation of the Slonim dynasty, which eclipsed the Hasidism of Kobrin, from which it had originated.¹⁵

¹³In this context it is worth noting the efforts of the established *tsadikim* to suppress all attempts by outsiders to interfere with this dynastic order. A good example is the affair of the Lad (Heb. *bahur*) of Mikolayev, on which see Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 185–7. The case of the Maid of Ludmir, whose career as a *tsadik* was apparently curtailed by the Chernobyl dynasty, is more complicated because the objection to her activities was prompted not only by her lack of hasidic pedigree but also by her gender-anomalous conduct, which included the adoption of virginal celibacy and the posture of a male *tsadik*. See on her, Ada Rapoport-Albert, "On Women in Hasidism: S. A. Horodecky and the Maid of Ludmir Tradition," in *Jewish History. Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Steven J. Zipperstein (London, 1988), 495–525; ead., "The Emergence of a Female Constituency in Twentieth-Century Habad Hasidism," in *Yashan mipenei hadash: mehkarim be-toledot yehudei mizrah eiropah uve-tarbutam. shai le'imanu'el etkes*, ed. David Assaf and Ada Rapoport-Albert (Jerusalem, 2009), 1:7*–14*; Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Maiden of Ludmir: A Jewish Holy Woman and Her World* (Berkeley, 2003).

¹⁴On the split between Rashaz's successors, see Rachel Elior, "Hamahloket al moreshet habad," *Tarbiz* 49 (1979–80), 166–86; Naftali Loewenthal, *Communicating the Infinite: The Emergence of the Habad School* (Chicago, 1990), 100–38; Immanuel Etkes, *Ba'al hatanya* (Jerusalem 2011), 414–56.

¹⁵See Rabinowitsch, *Lithuanian Hasidism*, 188–9; David Assaf, *A Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik*, trans. Margaret Birstein (Detroit, 2002), 295–7.

However, in some cases, a disciple would assume leadership during his master's lifetime and with his blessing. Such a disciple, may have possessed the requisite charisma, gained recognition, and established a court that might have been more easily accessible to the local *hasidim* than his master's court. Nevertheless he would always consider himself subordinate to his master, who would be generally viewed as the senior *tsadik*. Among these subordinate, secondary *tsadikim* were Abraham Dov of Ovruch [Owruć] (d. 1840) and the Maggid Israel Dov of Velednik [Wieledniki] (d. 1850), both deferring to the senior *tsadikim* of the Chernobyl dynasty,¹⁶ as well as Yitshak Halevi Epstein of Homel (d. 1857) and Hillel of Parich [Parycze] (d. 1864), who both deferred to the leaders of Habad.¹⁷ It is likely that Mordecai (the Second) of Lachovitch [Lachowicze] also saw himself in this light in relation to Aharon (the Second) of Karlin (1802–72), as did Moshe of Kobrin, who was unrelated to a dynastic line of *tsadikim*, but who conducted himself as a *tsadik* while remaining subordinate to his master, Noah of Lachovitch (1774–1832), during the latter's lifetime.¹⁸

The hierarchical system that enabled "secondary" *tsadikim* to co-exist harmoniously with their senior and more established dynastic masters was advantageous to all the parties concerned. The senior *tsadikim* benefited from having official and loyal representatives in the towns where their subordinate *tsadikim* resided, and the local *hasidim* enjoyed direct contact with *tsadikim* living in their midst. It was not only the geographic dispersal of the *hasidim* during the period of the movement's expansion that facilitated the emergence of this type of secondary local leadership, but also the frequent power struggles within the various hasidic groups, which made the establishment of a secondary leadership an attractive alternative inasmuch as the subordinate leaders were not likely to challenge the authority of the primary *tsadikim*.

Hereditary succession, a prominent phenomenon in Hasidism throughout the nineteenth century, did not necessarily ensure a dynasty's long-term survival, which to a large extent was dependent upon random circumstances. Amdur Hasidism ceased to exist after only two generations, either as a result of anti-hasidic persecution or because the first heir, Shmuel of Amdur (d. after 1798), simply failed to attract a sufficient number of adherents, and Bendery Hasidism disappeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the designated heir refused to accept the reins of leadership.¹⁹ Baruch of Mezhibozh [Międzybóž] (d. 1811), a *tsadik* distinguished by his heightened

¹⁶See David Assaf, "Mivolin litsefat: deyokano shel r. avraham dov me'ovrutsh kemanhig hasidi bamahatsit harishonah shel hame'ah hatesha-esreh," *Shalem* 6 (1992), 224–30.

¹⁷See Lurie, *Edah umedinah*, 56–60.

¹⁸See Rabinowitsch, *Lithuanian Hasidism*, 160, 172.

¹⁹See *ibid.*, 140; Sagiv, "Savran-Bendery Hasidic Dynasty," in *YIVO Encyclopedia*, 1668–9.

dynastic consciousness, considering himself heir to his illustrious grandfather, the Besht, produced no sons to succeed him, and nor did his grandsons assume office to preserve the dynastic line of the Besht.²⁰ Nevertheless, the preference for dynastic succession by one or several family members gave rise to the phenomenon of succession by a *yenuka* (an infant), which was more common in Russia than elsewhere. In the absence of an adult offspring, the *hasidim* would refrain from adopting a disciple, however capable, as their leader, preferring instead to appoint a direct descendant as a child-heir, and to wait for him to reach maturity.²¹

While dynastic succession was common but not unique to Hasidism in Russia, the “regal way”—an ostentatious lifestyle adopted by the *tsadik* and marked by the accumulation of material assets and a resolute leadership style—was a distinctive characteristic initially found only in Russia.²² Regal-way leadership was evident in the institution of the court. This was the housing compound—impressive in its size and opulence, and generally situated on the outskirts of town—where the *tsadik*, his family, and their close associates resided and carried out their activities. They oversaw the complex logistical operation of hosting the hundreds of short and long term visitors to the court, as well as maintaining some permanent guests known as residents (*yoshvim*).²³ Regal-way courts emerged not only among the larger hasidic dynasties and their offshoots, such as Ruzhin and Chernobyl in Ukraine, but also among some of the smaller ones, such as Karlin in Polesia. With the transfer of the Ruzhin dynasty to Austria, and especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, this lifestyle was established also in the courts of Bukovina, Galicia, and Romania.

The regal way was generally perceived by *maskilim* and scholars alike to be an ideological and organizational framework that functioned as an equilateral triangle, whose vertexes were the court, dynastic succession, and royal manner. All three elements came together only in the cases of a few notable personalities, such as Israel of Ruzhin (1796–1850), David of Talne (1808–82) of Chernobyl Hasidism, and Aharon (the Second) of Karlin, but even there, this could not be maintained for long, and in most cases, not all three elements were present. Thus, for example, Habad meticulously followed the tradition of dynastic succession, and developed a highly institutionalized

²⁰See Sagiv, “Barukh Ben Yehi’el of Mezhbizh,” in *YIVO Encyclopedia*, 129.

²¹See Nehemia Polen, “Rebbetzins, Wonder-Children and the Emergence of the Dynastic Principle in Hasidism,” in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York, 2007), 53–84; Gadi Sagiv, “*Yenuka*: On Child Leaders in Hasidism,” *Zion* 76 (2011), 139–78.

²²See Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 212–43.

²³See *ibid.*, 267–309.

court, but did not adopt the regal way until the middle of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Mordecai of Chernobyl (1770–1837) certainly conducted himself in an ostentatious royal manner, and founded a large dynasty, but he does not seem to have resided in a formal court compound, at least not according to the extant sources. His son, Yohanan of Rachmistrivke [Rotmistrzówka] (1816–95), did preside over a formal court, but did not adopt the ostentatious lifestyle of his father, while Baruch of Mezhibozh conducted himself in a royal manner and apparently resided in a court, but he was not able to establish a dynasty.²⁴

It appears, therefore, that the nexus of all three elements in the regal way was not an absolute necessity but sprang from the hostile maskilic portrayal of the hasidic leadership in the Ukraine as a resolute, corrupt, oligarchic class that cynically exploited the naïveté of the rank and file *hasidim*, draining their financial resources while being totally divorced from their daily concerns and needs.

Center and Periphery

A visit to the rebbe was both a religious and a social highpoint in the life of the *hasid*, who associated the *tsadik*'s court with the images and symbols attributed to holy places. The journey there, especially from a great distance, constituted a pilgrimage—a profound character-forming or transforming experience.²⁵ However, for most of the *hasidim*, travel to the court was a major disruption of daily life and entailed a significant financial outlay. For this reason, very few could afford frequent visits. In practice, most of their routine hasidic activities took place in their own places of residence and were spread out over the entire year. It is therefore worth noting the frameworks that mediated between the hasidic court at the center and its wider hasidic community on the periphery. These frameworks included the separate hasidic prayer groups (*minyanim*); the court emissaries who visited the peripheral communities; the local fraternal societies; and the written contractual agreements between the *tsadikim* and the communities in which their followers were concentrated.

The most common means by which the *hasidim* expressed their adherence to a particular *tsadik* was participation in prayers and other religious and social activities linked to him in their own places of residence. These activities

²⁴On Habad, see Lurie, *Edah umedinah*, 40; on Chernobyl see Sagiv, "Hasidut chernobil," 58–60, 189–93.

²⁵See Aaron Wertheim, *Law and Custom in Hasidism*, trans. Shmuel Himelstein (Hoboken, 1992), 236–41; Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 310–5.

would take place in the separate hasidic prayer house, known as the *minyán*, *shtibl*, or *kloyz*, and named after the hasidic court to which the members belonged. The *hasidim* would follow a lifestyle conforming to the religious teachings and ethos of their particular brand of Hasidism; they would obey the directives of their rebbe and see themselves as representing him and his court's interests in their own locality. Such peripheral congregations maintained a dynamic link to the centers to which they belonged.

In addition, the *tsadikim* would visit their communities from time to time, and these occasions served to strengthen the spiritual bond between the rebbe and his followers, helping to implement the religious and social goals of his court, which included alms and charity projects, fundraising for the court or for the *hasidim* living in the Holy Land. Some *tsadikim*, among them Israel of Ruzhin and David of Talne, visited their peripheral communities frequently, while others, such as Rashaz and Nahman of Bratslav, traveled much less and even strove to limit their direct contact with the *hasidim* visiting the court.²⁶ Many *tsadikim* preferred to send out emissaries rather than travel to the *hasidim* on the periphery of their territory. The emissaries would deliver their communications, both written and oral, gather information about the state of the *hasidim*, and raise funds on behalf of the court for a variety of purposes. In Habad, where familiarity with the *tsadik's* sermons carried considerable weight, special emissaries were commissioned to repeat them word-for-word to the *hasidim* on the periphery, who were not able to visit the court and hear them from the *tsadik* himself.²⁷ The emissaries thus spared the *tsadik* the burden of travel and face-to-face dealings with his *hasidim*, without detracting from the efficacy of the court's fundraising operations, while at the same time providing the *hasidim* on the periphery with the opportunity to taste the authentic flavor of the distant court.

The erosion of Jewish communal autonomy in the course of the nineteenth century was accompanied by a rise in the power and influence of local organizations—fraternal societies made up of local craftsmen and artisans, or various Torah study and charitable associations. The relations that developed between the hasidic courts and these local organizations seem to have empowered both, as they took charge of collective religious and social functions

²⁶Rashaz's attempts to limit the number of visits by his *hasidim* to his court are reflected in his Liozna Regulations. See Immanuel Etkeš, *Ba'al hatanya*, 42–98. Nahman of Bratslav, too, tried to limit the visits of his *hasidim* to three times a year (see *Hayei moharan* [Jerusalem, 1976], *Sihot hashayakhot lehatarot*, §6; *Mekom leidato viyshivato*, §23).

²⁷On the channels of communication between the Habad court and its peripheral communities, see Lurie, *Edah umedinah*, 43–7; on the emissaries, see Etkeš, *Ba'al hatanya*, 99–110; on the repeaters (*hozrim*), see Yehoshua Mondshine, "Motivim habadiyim behanidah leshay agnon," *Bikoret ufarshanut* 16 (1981), 137–9; Yosef Yitshak Schneersohn, *Kuntres divrei yemei ha-hozrim* (Brooklyn, 2006).

previously performed by the autonomous communal institutions.²⁸ In some places the fraternal societies took on a distinctly hasidic character, at times so gradually that the process went unnoticed. This hasidization was most prevalent in Torah study and burial societies, which had at their core the mystical notion of spiritual rectification (*tikun*), deriving from the tradition of hasidic-kabbalistic thought. Some *tsadikim* gained direct influence and even control over these societies, generally through the mediation of members who had become their devotees. A fraternal society which had turned hasidic would seek the *tsadik*'s official approval of its ordinances, and grant him, or members of his family, honorary appointments in their town. The *tsadik* would thus strengthen his hold on the community, while the local society would gain prestige from its association with him. From time to time, such fraternal societies would use the *tsadik*'s authority to enhance their own fundraising activities for local projects, and they may, at times, have been aided by funds coming directly from the court.²⁹

Some communities, especially in Ukraine, would bind themselves to a particular *tsadik* by an official contract called *ketav magidut* (lit., preaching appointment) or *ketav rabanut* (lit., rabbinic appointment). This had little to do with the traditional posts of communal preacher or rabbi. Rather, the contract formalized the community's agreement to cede control of its internal affairs to the *tsadik*, who was given the power to appoint all the ritual specialists employed by the community, such as rabbis and halakhic judges, cantors, beadles, slaughterers, and bathhouse attendants. In addition, the signatories to the contract would promise on behalf of the hasidic community to pay a poll tax (*ma'amad*) to the court. This contractual arrangement, which secured the *tsadik*'s control over whole communities, gave rise to a rigid territorial conception of hasidic leadership, which may account for the frequent and long-drawn disputes between neighboring hasidic groups and their *tsadikim*, who accused each other of trespass.³⁰

²⁸See Isaac Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia* (Jerusalem, 1981), 69–84; Israel Halpern, *Yehudim veyahdut bemizrah eiropah: mehkarim betoledoteihem* (Jerusalem, 1968), 313–32.

²⁹On the relationship between the *tsadikim* and the fraternal societies, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Hasidism, Havurot and the Jewish Street," *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004), 20–54. On the membership of Rashaz's family in the Liozna Burial Society, see Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidism*, 35. On the involvement of the *tsadikim* of Apta [Opatów] in the affairs of local fraternal societies, see *Igerot ha'ohav yisra'el* (Jerusalem, 2000), 40, 56–7, 137–8, 160–4. On the involvement of the *tsadikim* of Karlin, see *Beit aharon veyisra'el*, 1, no. 3–4 (1986), 91.

³⁰See Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 303–7; id., *Untold Tales of the Hasidim*, 135–6; Sagiv, "Hasidut chernobil," 140–6.

Hasidic Literary and Oral Creativity

There is a considerable quantitative disparity between the literary production originating from Bratslav and Habad Hasidism on the one hand and all the other hasidic groups in Russia on the other.

In Bratslav, the production of original writings reached its peak in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the extensive literary enterprise of Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov, who preserved his master's legacy while adding to it much of his own. After his death in 1844, Bratslav's original literary output dwindled and was largely confined to imitations of the genres created by Nathan, alongside a vast corpus of abridgements and commentaries based on his own and on Nahman's writings. In Habad, on the other hand, the hasidic teachings of each of the leaders were continually being published, and the literary output of two of them, Rashaz and the Tsemah Tsedek, included halakhic works as well. No other hasidic group in Russia, or, for that matter, anywhere else in the hasidic world, could match this remarkable productivity.³¹

With the exception of these two cases, and even in comparison with the literary output of the hasidic leaders active at the time in Galicia or Congress Poland, hardly any original works were produced by the *tsadikim* belonging to other dynasties active in Russia during the nineteenth century. In most of their hasidic groups, a single book—either authored by, or based on the teachings of, one of their early founding fathers—would enjoy canonic status (although some groups did not possess even one such volume). The book *Me'or einayim*, for example, containing the collected teachings of Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl (1730–1797), founder of the Twersky dynasty, achieved this status in Chernobyl Hasidism, as did the books *Ohev yisra'el* in Apta, *Beit aharon* in Karlin, and *Yesod ha'avodah* in Slonim. Ruzhin-Sadigura Hasidism, on the other hand, could not boast even a single original work of comparable standing. Generally, this meager literary output testified to the relative reluctance of the *tsadikim* in Russia to deliver regular (or, in some cases, any) sermons on the Sabbath and holidays. This tendency was at odds with what was perceived as common hasidic practice, and the *tsadikim* and their adherents were forced to justify it in a variety of ways, especially since the *maskilim* were prone to pour scorn on this lack of literary creativity, suggesting that it resulted from sheer intellectual and spiritual inferiority. One should bear in mind, however, that the traditional homiletic

³¹See David Assaf, *Bratslav: bibliyografyah mu'eret* (Jerusalem, 2000); A. M. Haberman, "Torat harav," *Sefer haken* (Jerusalem, 1969), 133–71; Yehoshua Mondshine, *Likutei amarim, hu sefer hatanya: mahadurotav, targumav uve'urav* (Kfar Habad, 1981); id., *Sifrei hahalakah shel admor hazaken. . . bibliyografyah* (Kfar Habad, 1984).

discourse was never the only expression of charismatic leadership in Hasidism. Nor was the printed book necessarily viewed as a reflection of any hasidic leader's spiritual project. Moreover, even those among the founding fathers of Hasidism who became known for their scholarly inclination, such as the rebbes of Pshiskhe [Przysucha] and Kotsk [Kock] in Poland, had left behind no homiletic literature of any consequence, although they did provide explanations for this apparent shortcoming. Succinct homiletic insights, parables and stories, improvised aphorisms, and even mundane conversations peppered with moral lessons had characterized the hasidic leaders' mode of public address since the time of the Besht, and this legacy—oral and inherently unsystematic—was collected only much later (if at all) in the writings of their disciples.³²

Hasidism and the State

The numerous Jewish communities annexed to Russia as a result of the first partition of Poland in 1772 included important hasidic centers, especially in the provinces of Minsk and Vitebsk [Witebsk]. The Russian authorities generally adopted a policy of relative tolerance toward the *hasidim*, above all in the context of the struggles between the *hasidim* and their opponents (*mit-nagedim*). The opposition to Hasidism is generally portrayed as a series of events that unfolded in three distinct phases: 1772–80, 1780–4, and 1796–1801.³³ Even though each phase had its own motivations and outcomes, all three formed a single systematic campaign against Hasidism, which was actively supported and orchestrated by the Gaon of Vilna. The campaign may have begun in communities such as Shklov [Szklów] or Vilna [Wilno] prior to their annexation to Russia, but it continued unabated during the change of regime that followed the partitions of Poland—a political upheaval that did not seem to curb the intensity or ferocity of the campaign. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between the supra-communal measures taken against Hasidism by their opponents, who viewed the movement as a dangerous heresy threatening the integrity of Judaism, and such power struggles or disputes as occurred at the local level between individuals involved with one or the other of the rival camps.³⁴ Moreover, during the first two phases

³²See Zeev Gries, *Sefer, sofer vesipur bereshit hahasidut* (Tel-Aviv, 1992), 64–5; Aviezer Cohen, “Hitmodedut im ketivat sifrei drush beveit peshikhah,” *Dimuy* 28 (2006), 4–18, 86.

³³This periodization was first suggested by Simon Dubnow in his *Toledot hahasidut* (Tel-Aviv, 1930), 107–69, 242–89, and became the consensus among all scholars in the field.

³⁴Typical examples are appointments to, and dismissals from, the rabbinate of Pińsk during the change from the Polish to the Russian regime. See Mordechai Nadav, *The Jews of Pinsk, 1506–1880*, ed. and trans. Moshe Rosman and Faigie Tropper (Stanford, 2008), 294–308.

of the controversy, the involvement of the Russian authorities was barely noticeable, but by the third phase it had become quite evident, mostly because the two parties had begun to denounce each other to the authorities and to solicit their assistance.

The appeal to the authorities led, among other things, to the interrogation and imprisonment of *hasidim* and some of their leaders. Among the most well known of these was Rashaz, the leader of Habad, who was first arrested in September 1798 on charges of subversion leveled against him by an apparently fictitious informant named Hirsch Davidovitch of Vilna. Other *tsadikim* were arrested along with Rashaz, among them (according to hasidic sources) Shmuel of Amdur and Mordechai of Lachovitch (1742–1810).³⁵ Those arrested were released shortly thereafter, with the exception of Rashaz, who remained in custody and was sent for interrogation to St. Petersburg. His detailed responses to the interrogator's questions, in which he explained the doctrines of Hasidism and its historical roots, cleared him of all charges and led to his release from prison in November 1798. The Russian authorities then published a proclamation exonerating all the "Karlíners" (a term synonymous at that time with *hasidim*) from suspicion of subversive activity.³⁶

One would have expected the power struggles between *hasidim* and *mitnagedim* to subside at this point, but they did not. Local scuffles continued and even intensified, apparently because the *hasidim* now felt more secure in their relationship with the authorities. Thus, for example, at the beginning of 1799, the *hasidim* in Vilna reported to the authorities about corrupt behavior among the members of the local Community Council (Kahal). This resulted in the appointment of a new Kahal, whose members were more to the *hasidim's* liking. Evidently, even Vilna—the Gaon's own town and the bastion of resistance to Hasidism—had, for a time, come under the sway of the *hasidim*.³⁷

At around the same time, the Russian authorities began to formulate a policy towards the Jews who had become Russian subjects as a result of annexation. A significant landmark in this protracted process was the statute of 1804, which sought, among other things, to weaken the communal institutions of Jewish self-government (i.e. the Kahals). The limitations that this

³⁵See *Kerem habad*, 4, no. 1 (1992), 18–20.

³⁶See Dubnow, *Toledot hahasidut*, 259–63; Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim umitnagedim* (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:213–5; *Kerem habad* 4, no. 1 (1992), 21–3, 29–76. Two years later, at the end of 1800, Rashaz was arrested again. For the documents concerned with this imprisonment and interrogation, see Wilensky, *Hasidim umitnagedim*, 230–95; *Kerem habad* 4, no. 1 (1992), 79–100. On the term *karliners*, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism After 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, (London and Portland, 1996), 69–70.

³⁷See Israel Klausner, *Vilna, yerushalayim delita: dorot rishonim, 1495–1881* (Tel Aviv, 1988), 119–24.

imposed on the autonomy of the traditional communal authorities benefited the *hasidim* and hampered the endeavors of the *mitnagedim* to coerce them, as it recognized the de facto right of any Jews to split from the community on religious grounds, to establish their own prayer houses, and to choose their own spiritual leaders.³⁸

On the other hand, some clauses of the statute undermined the Jewish lease-holding economy and attempted to deny Jews the right of residence in villages situated along the new frontiers, where many had lived for generations. These clauses were perceived as “evil decrees” by all Jews, including the *hasidim*, who strove to have them rescinded at all costs. The hasidic leaders generally collaborated with other representatives of traditional Jewish society in a concerted effort to repeal or to modify these new regulations. However, their responses to the situation may be distinguished from those of other communal leaders by their resorting to two strategies, which may be considered specifically hasidic: traditional intercession marked by a move towards modern political activity, and magical or mystical practices. Examples of the former are the fundraising campaign for the Jews who had been expelled from the villages, which was led by Rashaz, the most prominent leader of the *hasidim* in White Russia, or the assembly of several prominent *tsadikim* in Berdichev, which was apparently convened in response to the same decree of expulsion,³⁹ while the resort to magical and mystical practices may be illustrated by Nahman of Bratslav’s dancing and hand clapping in an attempt to avert the 1804 decree.⁴⁰

Another factor that contributed to the authorities’ tolerant attitude towards the *hasidim* was the Napoleonic wars. In 1812, as the French troops were advancing into Russia, Rashaz joined the retreating Russian army in its flight eastward and called upon his followers to support the Tsar. Rashaz’s open distaste for Napoleonic France, his fear of the hidden dangers of emancipation for the future of Judaism, and the willingness of the Russian authorities to protect him and his family, led to a tradition of publicly affirmed loyalty to the Russian government in Habad Hasidism.⁴¹

The relative liberality of the Russian authorities came to an end during the reign of Tsar Nicholas I. Hasidism’s rapid spread, and the high-profile

³⁸See Shemuel Etinger, *Bein polin lerusyah*, ed. Israel Bartal and Jonathan Frankel (Jerusalem, 1994), 240–1, 256, §53.

³⁹On Rashaz’s fundraising journey, see *Igerot kodesh me’et admor hazaken, admor ha’emtsa’i, admor hatsemah tsedek* ed. Shalom Dober Levin (Brooklyn, 1987), 141–2; Yehoshua Mondshine, *Masa berdichov* ([Jerusalem], 2010). On the assembly of the *tsadikim*, see Halpern, *Yehudim veyahadut bemizrah eiropah*, 343–7; Rapoport-Albert, “Hasidism After 1772,” 120–1.

⁴⁰See *Hayei moharan, Sihot hashayakhot lehatorot*, §6; *Mekom leidato viyshivato*, §13.

⁴¹See Yehoshua Mondshine, *Hamasa Ha’aharon* (Jerusalem, 2012).

public activity of several *tsadikim*, had turned the movement's leaders into permanent targets for surveillance and delation. Indeed, in 1825, the leader of Habad at the time, Dov Ber, son of Rashaz, was arrested and interrogated on the basis of delation, charging that the *tsadikim* were contravening the 1804 statute. They were accused of amassing vast sums of money to satisfy their greed, exploiting the naïveté of the young, and taking control of entire communities. Following a lengthy investigation lasting more than a year and a half, Dov Ber was finally acquitted of all charges.⁴²

Such incidents notwithstanding, until the end of the 1830s, the *hasidim* were not viewed as being any more subversive, or singled out for closer supervision, than the rest of the Jewish population. On the contrary, they may have been valued as a useful resource that could be harnessed to the government's increasing efforts to break down the traditional framework of Jewish communal leadership, efforts that culminated in the abolition of the Kahal in 1844. Prince Dmitri Nikolaievich Bludov, the Russian Minister of the Interior, seems to have reflected the government's neutrality on the internal division within the Jewish community when he wrote in 1834 that from a religious perspective, there was no fundamental difference between the *hasidim* and their opponents. In his view, the Jewish religion in general, and especially its talmudic expression, was the cause of much social and economic strife, inasmuch as it encouraged hatred of others and prevented the integration of the Jews into Russian society. The efforts to reform the Jews, therefore, had to address the general Jewish populace, and it was consequently advisable to refrain from adopting a hostile attitude towards one group of Jews lest the other group was to deduce from this that it had gained government approval.⁴³

The change in the government's attitude toward the *hasidim* may be discerned from the 1830s on. Their involvement in the murder of two Jewish informants in the Podolian town of Novo-Ushits [Uszyca] in 1836 undoubtedly contributed to this shift. In the course of the investigation, the *tsadik* Israel Friedman of Ruzhin was accused by a Russian military court of having given his consent to the murders. He was arrested and interrogated for a period of three and a half years, during which time the authorities focused on the great influence of the *tsadikim* and its social and economic ramifications. Israel of Ruzhin was eventually acquitted of all charges, but restrictions were placed on his activities, and he was placed under close police surveillance. This, and the threat of being banished beyond the Pale of Settlement, induced him to leave Russia. In 1841, following a period of extensive travel, he finally settled and reconstituted his court in Sadigura, in Austrian Bukovina. Repeated

⁴²Shalom Dober Levin, *Ma'asar uge'ulat admor ha'emtsa'i* (New York, 1997).

⁴³See Shaul Ginsburg, *Ketavim historiyim mehayey hayehudim berusyah bememshelet hat-sarim*, trans. Y. L. Baruch (Tel-Aviv, 1944), 43, 166.

requests by the Russian government for the fugitive *tsadik*'s extradition were rejected by the Austrian authorities.⁴⁴

This seems to have been the first investigation of a hasidic leader to be conducted at the initiative of the Russian authorities rather than in response to delation by fellow-Jews. From this point on, the *tsadikim* were increasingly suspected of involvement with unlawful activities. Restrictions were placed on their movements, and they were constantly subjected to interrogation and surveillance. The Novo-Ushits affair prompted an ambivalent reaction in government circles: on the one hand it strengthened the case for the abolition of the Kahals, which had come to be viewed as semi-clandestine organizations invested with much too much power. On the other hand, it lent support to the view that the *tsadikim* were powerful extra-communal agents who exerted more influence on the Jewish populace than the traditional communal governing bodies. The outward expression of admiration and support for the rebbe during his imprisonment caused the authorities from then on to hesitate before applying such governmental force against the *tsadikim*.⁴⁵

The change in the attitude of the authorities toward Hasidism, from tolerance to hostility, was tied to the government's efforts to acculturate the Jews, and to the active maskilic involvement in these efforts. A three-way relationship between *hasidim*, *maskilim*, and the authorities was forged at this time not only in Russia but also in Galicia and Congress Poland. In their desire to "rectify" the Jews, the authorities invariably allied themselves with the *maskilim*, whose influence in Jewish society greatly increased during the first half of the nineteenth century. Most of the spokespersons for Haskalah viewed Hasidism as heir to the anti-rationalist kabbalistic tradition in Judaism, and as such, a negative force that obstructed the realization of their own vision for the future of Jewish society and religion. Maskilic criticism of Hasidism focused not only on the movement's mystical teachings but also on its social dimension, and above all on the *tsadikim*, who were represented as boorish, deceitful, and power hungry. For their part, the *hasidim* considered the *maskilim* and their spiritual world to be a threat to tradition that justified the use of both defensive and aggressive measures. The battles between them were waged in the educational and literary arenas, as well as on the communal and public fronts.⁴⁶

⁴⁴See Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 105–27, 136–43.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁶For examples of the "three-way relationship" in Russia, see Ilia Lurie and Arkadii Zeltser, "Moses Berlin and the Lubavich Hasidim: A Landmark in the Conflict between Haskalah and Hasidism," *Shvut*, n.s. 5 [= o.s. 21] (1997), 50–7. For Galicia and Congress Poland, see Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Eugene Orenstein, Aaron Klein,

In Russia, these attempts peaked at the beginning of the 1840s, with what the Jewish sources refer to as “government-sponsored Enlightenment” (*Haskalah mita’am*). In 1843, a commission was set up in order to draw up a plan for the establishment of modern Jewish schools. The third Habad rebbe, Menahem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch (the Tsemah Tsedek), was chosen by the authorities to represent the hasidic community, a choice which confirmed his stature as a public figure. Two years earlier, in 1841, he had been placed under police surveillance, and the Third Department, the powerful, semi-secret police established in 1826, continued to collect information about his movements until 1847, although it found no evidence of subversive activity.⁴⁷ During the commission’s deliberations, the representatives of the traditional camp, *hasidim* and non-*hasidim* alike, united in an attempt to dismiss or at least to modify the government’s proposals. The Tsemah Tsedek maintained throughout a pragmatic position advocating cooperation. Realizing that the authorities were resolute, he had come to the conclusion that it was pointless to resist them, arguing that it was preferable to make the best of a bad situation.⁴⁸

The Russian authorities succeeded in gradually weakening the old autonomous institutions, and finally abolished the Kahal in 1844. The power vacuum that this created was quickly filled by alternative frameworks. The hasidic groups, each with its *tsadik* at the helm, took it upon themselves to champion social, religious, and political causes that were no longer being addressed by anyone else.⁴⁹ Given the organizational power of the hasidic court, and the spontaneous volunteerism that characterized the relationship between the *hasidim* and their leaders, the hasidic assumption of responsibility for general communal affairs proved to be effective and, against all odds, strengthened Hasidism in a region in which external conditions appeared to be ripe for its decline.

and Jenny Machlowitz Klein (Philadelphia, 1985), 121–48; Marcin Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict*, trans. Sarah Cozens (Oxford, 2005), 86–94.

⁴⁷See Ginsburg, *Ketavim historyim*, 59–65; Shalom Dober Levin, “Hakhanot live’idat peterburg—1843,” *Pardes Habad* 4 (1998), 59–74; Zuzanna Solakiewicz, “The Tsemah Tsedek and the Russian State Power,” *Pinkas*, 1 (2006), 57–75.

⁴⁸See Immanuel Etkes, “Parashat hahaskalah mita’am vehatemurah bema’amad tenu’at hahaskalah berusyah,” in *Hadat vehahayim: tenu’at hahaskalah hayehudit bemizrah eiropah* (Jerusalem, 1993), 167–216; Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia, 1983), 148–54. On the rabbinic commission, see Etkes, “Parashat hahaskalah,” 200–2; Lurie, *Edah umedinah*, 65–78. On the hasidic viewpoint, see Heilman, *Beit Rabbi*, part 3, 9–20; Joseph Isaac Schneersohn, *The “Tzemaḥ Tzedek” and the Haskala Movement*, trans. Zalman I. Posner (New York, 1969).

⁴⁹See Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia, 2005), 50–1.

The same pragmatism that marked the approach of the hasidic leaders in Russia to the government's endeavors to change the Jewish educational system was evident also in their response to its attempts to reform traditional Jewish dress. The 1845 edict, to which the Jews referred as the Dress-code Decree, was supposed to come into effect in 1850, first in Russia and then in Congress Poland. Although the *hasidim* would have been the sector of the population most affected by this edict, their leaders in Russia were inclined to submit to the new law, in contrast to some of the hasidic leaders in Poland, who called on their followers to resist it to the point of "sanctifying the divine name" in martyrdom. The extra-territorial character of Hasidism was highlighted by its involvement in the intercession activities aimed at repealing the decree. These were tied to Moses Montefiore's visit to Russia in 1845 and his projected meeting with the Tsar. A new variety of hasidic-Orthodox politics took shape in the course of this endeavor, in which important *tsadikim* from Congress Poland and Austria took part, among them Israel of Ruzhin, who had already settled in Sadigura by that time, and Yitshak of Warka (1779–1848). This was no longer the traditional type of Jewish intercession (*shetadlanut*), but a modern type of activism that crossed political borders, with *tsadikim* from several countries joining forces to bring together Jewish groups representing opposing views, and to turn for help to international Jewish bodies in Western Europe.⁵⁰

The death of Tsar Nicholas I (1855), and the accession to the throne of Alexander II, did not fulfill the hopes for reprieve from all these government reforming initiatives. The *maskilim*, whose influence in the corridors of power was on the rise, saw the new Tsar's liberal declarations as an opportunity to advance their cause, and continued to portray the *hasidim* as a reactionary force that was obstructing the Jewish integration into Russian society. However, a number of government officials, mostly at the local level, who recognized the *hasidim*'s fundamental loyalty to the state and the financial clout of their leaders, preferred to maintain the *status quo* and refrained from interfering in the daily life of the *hasidim*.

Nevertheless, during 1850s and 1860s, relations between the *hasidim* and the authorities worsened. This, it seems, was due to fears of the unchecked power of the *tsadikim*, fired by the growing influence of the *maskilim*. Regulations issued on the authority of the Tsar in 1854 ordered the Governors

⁵⁰See David Assaf and Israel Bartal, "Shetadlanut ve'ortodoksyah: tsadikim polin bamifgash im hazemanim hahadashim," in *Tsadikim ve'anshei ma'aseh: mehkarim bahasidut polin*, ed. Rachel Elijor, Israel Bartal, and Chone Shmeruk (Jerusalem, 1994), 65–90; Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland, 1815–64* (Oxford, 2013), 178–98. See also Anram Blau, "Gedolei hahasidut ugezerat hamalbushim," *Heikhal habesht* 12 (2006), 96–124.

General of the provinces in the Pale of Settlement to increase supervision over the *tsadikim* and to stop the *hasidim* from holding religious gatherings without government approval.⁵¹ These regulations, which constitute the first official anti-hasidic legislation on record, continued to be enforced at least through the 1880s.

As part of this new policy, police surveillance of the *tsadikim*'s activities increased, as did the number of recommendations to expel them from the Pale, although these were never acted upon.⁵² Limitations were placed on the hasidic leaders in the southern provinces of the Pale, where the Chernobyl *tsadikim* were active, and where their regal way was displayed in public and often accompanied by violence directed at other *hasidim*. The most prominent among these *tsadikim* was David of Talne, who frequently traveled to neighboring Jewish communities, mainly for fundraising purposes. His visits, which also aimed to "conquer" new communities, stirred tensions among both his supporters and his detractors. Reports of violent outbreaks involving his *hasidim* prompted the authorities to conclude that not only his freedom of movement should be restricted but also that of all other *tsadikim*. In June 1865, following one of his fundraising journeys, which was accompanied by especially violent outbursts, the Governor General of the southwest provinces published an order forbidding the *tsadikim* to travel out of their own towns without the provincial government's permit, and the *tsadikim* were required to demonstrate their compliance by signing this order. Known in the contemporary sources as the "decree against the *tsadikim*" [*gezerat hatsadikim*], the order wreaked havoc on the hasidic leadership's activities. From the government's standpoint, however, it was a good substitute for harsher measures, such as incarceration, legal proceedings or expulsion from the Pale.⁵³ Expulsion decrees against hasidic leaders were, however, issued from time to time. In 1867, for example, an expulsion decree was issued against Gedalia Aharon Rabinovitch of Sokolivka-Linitz [Sokołówka-Ilińce] (1814–78), who refused to sign it, fleeing to Romania before it reached him. His son, Yitshak Yoel (1840–85), however, was not so fortunate, and in 1869 he was arrested and exiled, first to Siberia and then to Kherson province.⁵⁴ His grandson, Yehoshua Heschel (1860–1938), told how, at the end of the 1880s, he himself

⁵¹ See Lurie and Seltzer, "Moses Berlin," 51.

⁵² Thus, for example, in 1854, Ignatiev, Governor General of the provinces of Smolensk, Vitebsk and Mohilev, suggested that the Tsemah Tsedek be expelled to Siberia, though his recommendation was never carried out (*ibid.*, 44–5). Suggestions by *maskilim* that David of Talne be exiled were also rejected. See Paul I. Radensky, "Hasidism in the Age of Reform: A Biography of Rabbi Duvid Ben Mordkhe Twersky of Tal'noye" (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, New York, 2001), 123–4.

⁵³ See Assaf, *Untold Tales of the Hasidim*, 128–37.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 172–3, 293–4.

was forbidden to travel when he transferred his residence from Kantakuzovka [Kantakuzenka] in Kherson province to Monastyrishche [Monasterzyska] in Kiev province.⁵⁵

Despite this order, travel was still possible: there were ways of getting around the order, and travel permits could be obtained from time to time, either through bribery or for ostensibly medical reasons.⁵⁶ As a result, the activities of the *tsadikim* were not thwarted completely; the authorities understood that they could not stop them, and in any case, extreme measures, which were difficult to implement, clashed with the government's own interest in maintaining order and stability, and in encouraging the economic activity of the hasidic courts, which was beneficial to the development of the regional economy. The "decree against the *tsadikim*," which was renewed in 1885, was without doubt an inhibiting factor in the development of Hasidism during the last third of the nineteenth century, and it remained in effect for thirty years before being abrogated in 1896.⁵⁷

Hasidism and Modernity

Tsar Alexander II's reforms of the 1860s and 1870s had far-reaching consequences for Eastern European Jewry, hastening the disintegration of traditional society. This was evident in the collapse of long-established modes of economic activity, and the accelerated processes of industrialization, urbanization, and acculturation. As a result, social values were changing, and traditional communal frameworks were breaking down. The pogroms that erupted in southern Russia in 1881–2 gave symbolic expression to the sense that the old order was now approaching its end. This precarious encounter with modernity, marked by ongoing tension between conservatives and reformers, was affecting all sectors of Jewish society, including Hasidism. What appeared to be Hasidism's disintegration or abandonment was, in fact,

⁵⁵See Yehoshua Heschel Rabinovitch, "Hayei yehoshu'a," in *Sefer hayovel, kolel toledot ... yehoshu'a heschel rabinovitch*, ed. Shemaryahu Leib Horowitz (New York, 1930), 56–7.

⁵⁶For reference to a travel permit granted to a *tsadik*, ostensibly in order "to consult with physicians" but in fact in order to collect funds, see *Kitevei mikhah yosef ben-gurion [berdy-czewski]—sipurim* (Tel-Aviv, 1951), 155. According to Yehudah Leib Gordon, in order to circumvent the decree, some *tsadikim* pretended to be rabbis or preachers. See *Hamelits*, 29 June 1880, 228, reproduced in *Kitevei yehudah leib gordon—prozah* (Tel-Aviv, 1960), 188. On the bribes given in 1885 by the Skvira *hasidim* in order to enable Menahem Nahum Twersky to travel to Shpikov [Szpików], where he intended to establish a new hasidic court, see Mordechai Globman, *Ketavim* (Jerusalem, 2005), 116–7.

⁵⁷See "Rishayon latsadikim," *Hatsefirah*, 15 October 1896, 1046; "Gadol hashalom," *Hamelits*, November 1896, 2.

merely a reflection of the changes that were taking place throughout the Jewish community. If in the past Hasidism was attacked, first by the *mitnagedim* and later by the *maskilim*, now it had to confront secularization—an increasingly widespread phenomenon that drew on Jewish nationalism, especially the Zionist movement, and Jewish socialism, especially the radical workers' movements.

The hasidic movement responded to this threat with a major educational innovation: the establishment of its own large-scale yeshivot. Small yeshivot, at the local level, could always be found throughout Eastern Europe, but the nineteenth-century, modern institution of the large yeshivah, drawing its students and financial support from many faraway communities, had up until then been identified mainly with the *mitnagedim* or the Musar movement in Lithuania. The hasidic leaders had been skeptical about the value of these major yeshivot, encouraging instead independent learning in the local study houses, which existed in every Jewish community.⁵⁸ Their adoption of their historic opponents' large yeshivah model was not only an expression of their desire to return to the conservative values of talmudic study, but also an acknowledgement that yeshivah learning might provide an effective answer to the challenge of secularization. Hasidic supra-communal yeshivot were established at the beginning of the 1880s in Galicia and Congress Poland, but reached Russia relatively late,⁵⁹ although local yeshivot were established by some hasidic groups already in the 1880s. The most prominent and longest-lasting hasidic yeshivah was Habad's Tomekhei Temimim, which was founded in Lubavitch in 1897.⁶⁰

The hasidic leaders must have rejected the secularist revolutionary and socialist trends, viewing them as a rebellion against tradition and a blasphemous heresy, but there are no records of any public action they may have

⁵⁸See Meir Wunder, "Hayeshivot begalitsyah," *Moriah* 18:207–8 (1992), 95–100; Michael K. Silber, "'Yeshivot ein matsui bimedinatenu mikamah te'amim nekhnim': bein hasidim umitnagedim behungaryah," in *Bema'agelei hasidim: kovets mehkarim lezikhro shel profesor mordekhai vilenski*, ed. Immanuel Etkes et al. (Jerusalem, 2000), 93–7; Shaul Stampfer, "Hasidic Yeshivot in Inter-War Poland," *Polin* 11 (1998), 5–7; reprinted in *Families, Rabbis and Education: Traditional Jewish Society in Nineteenth-Century Eastern Europe* (Oxford and Portland, 2010), 254–6.

⁵⁹See Stampfer, "Hasidic Yeshivot," 7–11 (256–60).

⁶⁰On a "yeshivah" founded in 1888 by the Talne *hasidim* in Uman [Humań], "exactly like in one of the Lithuanian towns," see *Hamelits*, 25 July 1888, 1615. On the Habad Yeshiva, see Naftali Brawer, "Yisudah shel yeshivat 'tomekhei temimim' vehashpa'atah al tenu'at habad," in *Yeshivot uvatei midrashot*, ed. Immanuel Etkes (Jerusalem, 2006), 357–68; Ilia Lurie, "Hinukh ve'ide'ologyah: reshit darkah shel hayeshivah hahabadit," in *Yashan mipenei hadash*, ed. Assaf and Rapoport-Albert, 1:185–221.

taken against these trends.⁶¹ The Zionist movement, which manipulated traditional religious values, flaunting them to advance its own secular aims, and attracting many recruits from within the religious sector, was deemed to be the real enemy. Its activists were judged in religious terms to be transgressors with whom all ties must be severed.⁶² The fifth Habad rebbe, Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn of Lubavitch (1860–1920), repeatedly and vociferously expressed this view, basing it not only on the traditional religious objection to messianic activism, which is how he viewed Zionism, but also on the firm conviction that the movement's secularist political ideals were unlikely ever to be realized.⁶³ Other hasidic leaders in White Russia (such as the rebbes of Karlin and Lachovitch) also objected to Zionism, but some *tsadikim* in the southern regions of the Pale and in Romania (Chernobyl, Ruzhin, Bendery and their offshoots), were more receptive to nationalist ideas. A number even openly identified with Zionism, donating funds to *Hibat Zion* associations and to the Zionist Organization.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, from the beginning of the twentieth century on, not a single hasidic leader of note publicly supported Zionism.⁶⁵ The struggle against it solidified the Orthodox camp; former enemies—*tsadikim* alongside prominent Lithuanian rabbis—banded together to avert what they perceived to be a common danger. However, until 1912, when *Agudat Israel* was founded as a modern political organization representing the interests of ultra-Orthodox Jewry, including Hasidism, no initiatives of consequence were taken by the Orthodox leadership in Tsarist Russia.

Despite the vehement opposition of hasidic leaders everywhere to all progressive and secular trends, the *tsadikim* in Russia were usually more pragmatic than their colleagues in Poland, Galicia and Hungary. The *tsadikim* in

⁶¹ See David E. Fishman, "'The Kingdom on Earth is Like the Kingdom in Heaven': Orthodox Responses to the Rise of Jewish Radicalism in Russia," in *Yashan mipenei hadash*, ed. Assaf and Rapoport-Albert, 2:227*–59*.

⁶² On the *tsadikim*'s attitude to Zionism, see Itzhak Alfasi, *Hahasidut veshivat tsiyon* (Tel-Aviv, 1986); Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet: Religion and Nationalism in the Early Zionist Movement (1882–1904)* (Philadelphia, 1988), 114–6, 223–5; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago, 1996), 13–9.

⁶³ Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism: First Encounters* (Jerusalem, 2002), 324–30, 346–59; Shalom Ratzabi, "Anti-tsiyonut umetah meshihi behaguto shel rav shalom dober," *Hatsiyonut* 20 (1996), 77–101.

⁶⁴ On the *tsadikim* who supported Zionism, see A. Y. Slucki, *Shivat tsiyon: kovets ma'amerei ge'onei hador beshevah yishuv erets yisra'el*, ed. Yosef Salmon (Jerusalem 1998); Alfasi, *Hahasidut veshivat tsiyon*, 132–41. For examples of the sympathetic attitude of some of the Ruzhin and Chernobyl *tsadikim* towards *Hibat Zion* see *Hamelits*, 3 March 1896, 3; 3 April 1896, 1–2; 1 January 1897, 5.

⁶⁵ Yosef Salmon, *Im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru: ortodoksyah bemetsarei hale'umiyut* (Jerusalem 2006), 196.

Russia, especially of the Chernobyl and Habad dynasties, were more attuned to, and tolerant of, manifestations of modernity, which they did not necessarily perceive as a threat to the Jewish tradition and hasidic way of life. They displayed this attitude in their measured responses to a variety of issues, such as the government's efforts to enforce the dress-code law, or to reform the traditional Jewish educational system, as well as in their positive attitude towards the Jewish press.

This moderate response to modernity stemmed not only from the sense that it was difficult if not impossible to resist the aggressive modernizing agenda of the Russian regime, but also from the posture of accommodation, acclimatization, and relative openness towards the non-hasidic sectors of Jewish society. This attitude stands in sharp contrast to that of the main hasidic groups in the Habsburg Empire, who promoted segregation and Orthodox radicalization, perhaps because they confronted a more tolerant regime, which presented the danger of seductive cooptation.

The accommodation to modernity that was ascribed to the offshoots of Ruzhin Hasidism in Galicia and Bukovina from the middle of the nineteenth century was perceived to be the product of their original Russian character, which distinguished them from all the indigenous Galician hasidic groups. Anecdotes abound about the different customs and lifestyles that divided the families of the *tsadikim* originating in Russia from those who were native to Galicia, but the most blatant expression of this divide was the dispute that broke out in 1869 between the Galician hasidic Sanz group and the Russian Sadigura. This dispute, which peaked in the 1870s, was perceived not least as a clash between two Hasidic postures towards all manifestations of modernity.⁶⁶

One other characteristic of Hasidism in Russia, which appears to be at odds with its generally accommodating attitude towards modernity, was the leaders' reluctance to become involved in political activity, whether in the internal Jewish arena or on the larger stage, as representatives of Jewish interests to the state (with the exception of Habad).⁶⁷ This contrasted with

⁶⁶See David Assaf, *Hetsits venifga: Anatomyah shel mahloket hasidit* (Haifa, 2012).

⁶⁷On the failed attempt, in 1902, of Shalom Dov Ber Schneersohn (along with the *tsadik* Shmuel Weinberg of Slonim) to establish an association of *Mahazikei hadat* in Russia, see Avraham Hanokh Glitsenstein, *Sefer hatoladot... admor moharshab* (Brooklyn 1976), 259–60, 304–5; Shalom Dober Levin, *Igerot kodesh me'et admor moharshab* (New York, 1982), 1:268–82; Salmon, *Im ta'iru ve'im te'oreru*, 210–1. On the active participation of Shalom Dov Ber and his relative, the *tsadik* Shemaryahu Noah Schneersohn of Bobruisk (1847–1923), in the sixth (and last) rabbinical assembly that the Russian authorities gathered in 1910, see Shimshon Dov Yerushalmi, “Va'adot uve'idot harabanim berusyah,” *He'avar* 3 (1955), 86–94; ChaeRan Y. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover, 2002), 251–6. On Habad activities in the political arena see: Ilia Lurie, “Lubavitch vemilhamoteiha:

the active political involvement of the *tsadikim* in the Habsburg Empire and Congress Poland. But the political inaction of the *tsadikim* in Russia need not be construed as an indication that their power or prestige had diminished. Rather, it resulted from the different conditions that prevailed within the Pale, where the Russian authorities quashed all nationalist or partisan political activities. Moreover, the local character of the hasidic courts in Russia, where the major dynasties—especially in the second half of the nineteenth century—had split into numerous offshoots, prevented the emergence from within their ranks of any united, supra-communal, powerful political organization.

Emigration, Revolutions, War, and Pogroms

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, the changes that had begun in the 1860s and 1870s culminated in massive emigration to the big cities both within Russia and in countries beyond its borders. The depleted and much-impoverished Jewish population of the countryside was now less able to make the regular financial contributions that maintained the hasidic leaders and their courts in the manner to which they had been accustomed. The appeal of the courts was clearly on the decline, and towards the end of the century, many were experiencing loss of financial clout, and even financial ruin. By the turn of the century, few *tsadikim* in Russia were still enjoying either the salutary economic conditions of the past or the prestige they had once commanded well beyond their immediate circles of followers. Most of them were eking out a meager existence, making do with the loyalty of hasidic adherents within their own places of residence, and perhaps in a few other neighboring localities, for whom alone they now served as spiritual masters. This contrasted sharply with the position of the *tsadikim* in Galicia and Congress Poland, where there were still many wealthy and prestigious hasidic leaders, whose influence extended well beyond their immediate environment.

This process reached its peak during the First World War, and brought about the transplantation of entire small-town hasidic courts to larger towns or major cities. Not only the pressing reality of the war forced the courts to abandon the countryside and integrate themselves in their new urban setting, where hundreds of thousands of Jews resided, but also financial necessity, as in their former shtetl mold, many of them hovered on the brink of bankruptcy.⁶⁸

hasidut habad bema'avak al demutah shel hahevrach hayehudit berusyah hatsarit" (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009), 165–302.

⁶⁸See Assaf, *The Regal Way*, 308–9; Sagiv, "Hasidut chernobil," 189–97.

For the most part, the nineteenth-century hasidic leaders did not release any public statements on the issue of emigration. Their opposition to Zionism prevented them from openly encouraging mass emigration to the Holy Land, while America, the main destination for many Russian émigrés, was considered an unknown territory, where it was doubtful that keeping up Jewish tradition and the hasidic lifestyle would be possible at all. However, by the twentieth century, and especially during the 1920s, a number of *tsadikim* had emigrated to the United States and elsewhere, including Palestine.⁶⁹

The political events that occurred between the pogroms of 1881 and the 1905 revolution, which frequently entailed violence against Jews, did not leave much of an impression on the *tsadikim* in Russia. However, the events of the second decade of the twentieth century—the First World War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the civil war in Ukraine—sent shockwaves through the hasidic courts in Ukraine, completely disrupting their normal routines. According to eye-witness accounts, during World War I, some hasidic courts were turned into shelters for fleeing Jews, while others, suspected of identifying with one or another of the combatant sides, were raided and plundered, as even small-town courts were believed to have amassed great wealth. These raids placed the *tsadikim* in mortal danger, and some indeed lost their lives. As a result, a number of courts were dissolved abruptly, with the *tsadik's* family abandoning its possessions and fleeing. If one considers the Holocaust as the final liquidation of east European Hasidism, the second decade of the twentieth century marks the end of Hasidism in Ukraine.

After 1917 and the demise of the Russian Empire, what had been Hasidism in Russia throughout the nineteenth century was once again divided by the old-new political frontiers that now separated the Soviet Union from Romania and Poland. Although there is a significant body of research on Hasidism in the old empires, the study of Hasidism between the two World Wars is still in its infancy.

Conclusion

Is it possible to identify any distinctive Russian characteristics that united all the hasidic dynasties operating in Russia? We have described the social and organizational features that distinguished some of these hasidic groups, but we could not find even a single trait that was common to them all. At the same

⁶⁹See Arthur Hertzberg, “*Treifene Medina*: Learned Opposition to Emigration to the United States,” *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 6 (1984), 1–30; Ira Robinson, “*Anshei Sfard*: The Creation of the First Hasidic Congregations in North America,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 57, nos. 1–2 (2005), 53–66.

time, not a single characteristic that was unique to some of the hasidic groups in Russia was completely absent from the hasidic groups operating elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Even if we were to broaden the discussion to include a comparative analysis of their religious and spiritual doctrines (which have been excluded from the present paper), we would not arrive at a radically different conclusion.

Our conclusion is corroborated by the fact that in the writings attributed to both the *tsadikim* and the *hasidim* in Russia, there is no evidence of any self-awareness that their particular brand of Hasidism was uniquely Russian. We are therefore able to reiterate with greater conviction our preliminary doubts about the validity of the essentialist assumptions as regards the Russianness of the hasidic groups in Russia. It appears that the transnational characteristics of Hasidism defied geographical and political borders.

An example of this is the famous Habad distinction between Russian and Polish Hasidism, with Russian meaning Habad and Polish meaning groups in Volhyn. But this distinction was accurate only until the second partition of Poland in 1793. After that year, and even more so after the third partition of 1795, most of the Polish hasidic groups also found themselves dwelling in Russia, and the distinction between Polish and Russian ceased to have anything to do with geopolitical borders.

It seems that Russian characteristics surfaced only in the context of relations between the hasidic movement and the Russian state. Russian characteristics were applicable to different hasidic groups at different times, but at no time did they apply to all the hasidic groups that belonged to the Russian Empire. "Hasidism in Tsarist Russia" does not, therefore, refer to any specific conglomeration of hasidic groups but rather to the nature of the relations between the Russian state and any hasidic group that came in contact with it.

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In his short story "The Rabbi," set in the era of the civil wars that followed the Bolshevik revolution, the Russian-Jewish writer Isaac Babel described a symbolic encounter with an old *hasid*:

"All is mortal. Only the mother is destined to immortality. And when the mother is no longer among the living, she leaves a memory which none yet has dared to sully. The memory of the mother nourishes in us a compassion that is like the ocean, and the measureless ocean feeds the rivers that dissect the universe."

Such were Gedali's words. He uttered them with great solemnity. The dying evening surrounded him with the rose tinted haze of its sadness.

The old man said: "The passionate edifice of Hasidism has had its doors and windows burst open, but it is as immortal as the

soul of the mother. With oozing orbits Hasidism still stands at the crossroads of the turbulent winds of history.”

Thus spoke Gedali. And having come to the end of his prayers in the synagogue he took me to Rabbi Motale, the last of the Chernobyl dynasty.⁷⁰

The spiritual world of Hasidism in Russia, its social stability, and its capacity for survival were rooted in the religious values and life-style of Russian Jews in general. In their world, religious, and cultural trends scrambled with a range of powerful social and political movements. Hasidism was one such trend, and it developed as a movement in constant mutual contact with all the others.⁷¹

To some extent, Hasidism may be said to have functioned for its followers as a “shock absorber”—a stable shelter providing warmth, joy, and simple religious and moral guidance, on which to lean in an age of dramatic upheavals. Despite the conservative nature of Hasidism, the *tsadikim* in Russia usually accommodated change rather than rejecting it unequivocally. This enabled the movement to endure while many others have disappeared from the arena of history.

⁷⁰Isaac Babel, *Collected Stories*, trans. and ed. Walter Morison with an introduction by Lionel Trilling (Middlesex, 1974), 68. On the possible identification of this rabbi, who certainly was not the “last,” see David Assaf, *Ne’ehaz basevakh: pirkei mashber umevukhah betoledot hahasidut* (Jerusalem, 2006), 331 n. 54.

⁷¹See Ben Zion Dinur, *Dorot ureshumot* (Jerusalem, 1978), 220.