CAUGHT IN THE THICKET

CHAPTERS OF CRISIS AND DISCONTENT IN THE HISTORY OF HASIDISM

The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History
Jerusalem
CONTENTS

Preface 11

Introduction: On History, Embarrassment, and Discontent
I. Methodology and Content 15
II. ‘Lies My Teacher Told Me’: Hasidic History as a Battlefield 19
III. Orthodoxy’s Strategies of Memory and Repressed Memory in the Face of Crisis and Embarrassment 25
IV. ‘I Am also Not Objective’: History as it Should Have Happened 48

Chapter One: Apostate or Saint? In the Footsteps of Moshe, the Son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady
I. ‘Would that My Parents Were Cruel’: Sons of Zaddikim and Rabbis who Left the Fold 51
II. ‘I Will Make the Sign of the Cross Just to Upset You’: Conversion and the Parent – Child Relationship 55
III. Polemic Memory and Apologetic Memory 60
IV. ‘Our Well Known Brother’: Moshe Before His Conversion 62
V. Leon Yulievitz or Piotr Aleksandrovitz? The Archival Testimony 70
VI. ‘He Was of Sound Mind’: Traditions of Memory Among the Maskilim 76
VII. ‘The Man Was Completely Sane’: Testimony of the Converts 87
VIII. In the Historian’s Workshop 94
IX. ‘The Time Has Come for Moshe’s Story to be Revealed’: Traditions of Hasidic Memory 108
X. ‘He First Went Insane and Only Then Converted’ 125
XI. ‘It Never Happened’? The Continuing Struggle Over the Memory 128

Appendices
1. Moshe’s Statement About His Desire to Convert 131
2. Moshe’s Certificate of Baptism 132
3. A Letter From Moshe’s Brothers Dov Ber (The Middle Rebbe) and Hayyim Abraham About the Conversion 133
4. The Burial Listings of Moshe’s Daughters in Jerusalem 136
Chapter Two: ‘The Mitnagdim Laughed that He Was Drunk’:
The Fall of the Seer of Lublin

I. ‘A Flame Hovers Over His Head’: The Seer of Lublin in the Eyes of His Hasidim
II. The Fall of the Seer of Lublin in the Hasidic Tradition of Memory
III. ‘Silly and Stupid’: The Seer of Lublin in the Eyes of His Opponents
IV. Ma’asei Ha-Rav (The Rabbi’s Deeds) or Sefer Nekiyut U-Frishut (The Book of Cleanliness and Abstinence)? On the Textual History and the Author’s Identity
V. Sefer Nekiyut U-Frishut: Content and Structure
VI. ‘I Fell Down Drunk’: Echoes of the Fall in Maskilic Literature
VII. Did The Seer of Lublin Commit Suicide?

Appendix: Sefer Nekiyut U-Frishut

Chapter Three: ‘Happy Are the Persecuted’: The Struggle Against Bratslav Hasidism

I. Three Waves of Persecution
II. ‘A Fearful and Upsetting Scene’: Testimony of the Maskilim
III. The Struggle of Talne Hasidim Against Bratslav
IV. The Rzhishchev Affair and the Decree Against Travel by Zaddikim
V. ‘The Bratslav Hasidim Eat Treyf’: The Scandal in Teplik
VI. ‘They Are Not Beholden to Any of the Leaders of Our Time’: The Obligation to Obey and Motives for Struggle
VII. ‘The Lord Seeks the Persecuted’: Impressions of the Persecutions in Bratslav Historiography
VIII. Continuity of the Persecutions
IX. ‘Legacy of a Mistake’: An Epilogue?

Appendix: ‘The Outrage that Was Perpetrated in Our Town of Teplik’

Chapter Four: ‘Heretic, Who Believes Not in the Great Leaders of the Time’: The Struggle Over the Honor of the Book Or Ha-Hayyim

I. Hasidic Attitudes Toward Rabbi Hayyim Ben Attar
II. ‘A Melamed Insulted the Honor of Or Ha-Hayyim’: Responsa of Rabbi Hayyim Halberstam of Zanz
III. ‘An Ignorant and Illiterate Person’: More Responses
IV. ‘I Will Cry from My Bitter Soul’: The Letter of the Melamed from Siven 242
V. Between ‘The Holy Spirit’ and ‘Yeshivah and Toil’:
    Social and Ideological Motives 247
VI. Reverberations: The Honor of the Book Mishnah Berurah 251
VII. From Emunat Hakhamim (The Faith in the Torah Sages) to Da’at Torah (The Torah’s Opinion) 252

Chapter Five: ‘Excitement of the Soul’: The World of Rabbi Akiva Shalom Chajes of Tulchin
I. From Enemy to Friend 255
II. His Literary Legacy 256
III. ‘Out of My House, Impure One!’: Rabbi Akiva Chajes in Light of the Memoir Literature 259
IV. Rabbi Akiva Chajes’s Conversion of the Heart 269
V. The Nomination of Akiva Chajes as Rabbi of Dubova and ‘The Ka-Davar Controversy’ 276
VI. Entanglement of Memory 281

Chapter Six: ‘How Much Times Have Changed’: The World of Rabbi Menachem Nahum Friedman of Itcani
I. Hasidism and Philosophy 283
II. On the History of Rabbi Menachem Nahum Friedman 285
III. His Literary Legacy 289
IV. ‘Religious Zeal Is a Plague Recounted in the Torah’:
    Between Innovation and Conservatism 302
V. Disregard or Polemic? The Book Ha-Tov Ve-Ha-Takhlit (The Good and the Purpose) 306
VI. ‘How Much Times Have Changed!’: A Humanist Among Hasidim? 310
VII. ‘What Befell the Rebbe’s Grandchildren Who Left the Fold’? 311
VIII. ‘It Is Forbidden to Have This Book’ 314

Chapter Seven: ‘Confession of My Tortured Soul’: The World of Rabbi Yitzhak Nahum Twersky of Shpikov
I. Shpikov Hasidism 317
II. On the History of Rabbi Yitzhak Nahum Twersky 319
III. ‘Praise for Your Bravery’: The Twersky Sisters 322
V. ‘A Sacrifice on My Mother’s Altar’: The Value of the Confession 326
V. ‘Caught Up in the Current of That Generation’: The Historical Context 330
VI. ‘My Tiny and Ugly World’: Full Text of the Confession 332

Bibliography 349

Indices 359