

Jewish Cultural Renaissance in Imperial Russia, 1880-1922

Extremely Rare Publications from and about Russian Jewry



- Rare literary texts of well-known writers
- Many works were published in small print runs in provincial cities
- Originals can hardly be found outside Russia



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In 1917, there were more Jews living in the Russian Empire than anywhere else in the world. The Jewish population in Russia had grown from 1.6 million in 1820 to 5.6 million in 1910. Starting in the second half of the 19th century, the Jews in the Russian Empire were caught up in a major cultural and social transformation that constituted modernity for the Ashkenazi Jewries. This collection provides insights into such questions as: What did it mean to be Jewish and Russian, Jewish and modern? Should Jews acculturate, and if so, into which regional or European culture? Which language should Jews speak and teach their children? And what was the relationship between the elite and the popular, the Jewish and the Slavic, the literary and the historical research? The rare publications in this collection represent an extremely valuable historical and general cultural source for both specialists and researchers, and a broader circle of readers.

First Steps

During the second half of the 19th century, as a result of political and social reforms, the Jewish population of Russia began to participate in the general Russian cultural and political arena, and the Russian language gradually became the Jews' second native language. A strictly Jewish literature written in Russian began to develop, and literature was translated from Hebrew and Yiddish into Russian.

A distinct Jewish literature in Russian originated in 1803 with the publication in St. Petersburg of a separate edition of a poem by L. Nevakhovich entitled "The Wailing of a Daughter of Judah."

It was only in the 1860s that the Jewish population of the country, riding on the wave of general Russian social change, gradually began to read its national literature in the Russian language. For rather a long time, such literature was published not so much for Jewish but for Russian readers. It was used to explain to Russian society the essence of Jewish religious life, to communicate the spiritual and social needs of the Jewish people, and to appeal for tolerance and human sympathy toward them.

On the Wave of Change

But things did not stand still and, together with Russian life, the Jewish world changed. Thousands of young Jews left the villages and towns in the Pale of Settlement in Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine and headed for the large industrial and cultural centers, where they hoped to receive an education at Russian gymnasia and universities in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa, Khar'kov, and Kiev. This would broaden their horizons and provide them with an opportunity to become integrated into



the local social, communal, and cultural life of the country. This led, slowly but surely, to a situation in which Russian, instead of being a language of "business-like" exchange, became the third or even the second "native" language of Russia's Jews (after Yiddish and Hebrew). According to the 1897 census, for example, over 3000 residents of Odessa, 2000 residents of Ekaterinoslav, and 3500 residents of Kiev used Russian as their native language. By this time, the sizable Jewish population of St. Petersburg had become almost entirely Russian speaking.

By the beginning of the 20th century, a Russian-Jewish intelligentsia had emerged. Acknowledging themselves as Russian Jews, their representatives – doctors, journalists, lawyers, writers, engineers, scientists, and men of culture – now addressed their own people in the Russian language. A distinct culture of Russian Jewry – scholars, authors, publishing houses, newspapers, and journals – gradually arose in the country.

The development of Russo-Jewish Judaica (the study of the history of the Jews, which was undertaken by Jews themselves) and the publication of this research were innovations launched by the Russo-Jewish press in the pre-reform period.

New People, New Language

On the brink of the 20th century, a rich literature in the Russian language was created in Russia by and for the Jews. It became possible for a Jew to address another Jew in Russian and to know not only that he would be understood, but that he would find in the addressee a grateful reader. While in the 1870s there were only two popular authors writing in Russian (namely G. Bogrov and L. Levand), by the beginning of the 20th century the Jews of Russia were reading, along with the works of Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and Maksim Gorky, works written by their own authors in the Russian language: S. Uishkevich, Ben-Ami, Sh. An-sky, N. Osipovich, and S. Frug. The works of the classics of Jewish literature began to be translated into Russian, for both Jewish and Russian readers; for example, Mendele Moikher-Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, and Haim Bialik were translated.

Participating in this process were not only Jewish authors and translators, but also well-known writers of the period, such as V. Bruisov, V. Khodasevich, V. Ivanov, and F. Sologub. Numerous literary miscellanies reproduced translations of the best examples of ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish poetry produced by such past masters as A. Maikov, A. Pleshcheev, P. Kozlov, and P. Weinberg. Many of the Jewish libraries in Russian towns created special "Russian" sections for Russian-Jewish literature.

New Jewish Studies

In 1863, an initiative by Ezvel Gunzburg and A. Brodsky (the leader of the Odessa community) led to the establishment of the St. Petersburg-based Society for the Spread of Education among Jews of Russia (OPE). The objective of the OPE was to create a new system of Jewish education that would combine secular European knowledge with traditional Jewish scholarship. In St. Petersburg, Baron D. Guenzburg laid the foundations of a Higher School of Jewish Studies. Leading Jewish organizations – such as the Jewish Historical-Ethnographical Society and the Society for the Emancipation of Jews – decided to create a non-religious, civic Jewish community.

These organizations published periodicals and anthologies with the aim of amassing material on Jewish history and the cultural history of Russian Jews. These publications had more than just academic significance: Jewish scholars of the ancient, medieval, and contemporary history of the Jewish people contributed to the revival of national consciousness, refuted numerous myths and falsifications in the literature on Jews, and generally provided food for thought on the past and future of the Russian Jewry.

Time, Place, Content

One of the manifestations of national Jewish cultural life of the period was the publication of numerous literary-publicistic anthologies. In 1871, Adolf Efimovich Landau began publishing historical-literary anthologies of the “Jewish Library” in St. Petersburg.

General information

Scope	48 titles
Number of fiche	678
Size of fiche	105 x 48 mm.
Film Type	Positive Silver Halide
Reduction ratio	Varies Depending on the original
Internal finding aids	Eye-legible headers on every fiche indicating the author, abbreviated title, place and date of printing of each item
External finding aids	Bibliographic records for all titles ordered are supplied in MARC21 format with the microfiches

These contained articles and publicistic works written by prominent representatives of the Jewish enlightenment, that is, Lev Levand, Lev (Judah Leib) Gordon, and others. The “Jewish Library” became the largest Jewish publishing project and was very popular among educated Jews not only in the capital but throughout Russia. Because the majority of the Jewish population lived in the Pale of Settlement, many anthologies were published not only in St. Petersburg, but also in such provincial cities as Kiev, Minsk, Odessa, Gomel’, Kremenchuk, and Kharkov. The traditions of the time dictated the content of such publications, which, as a rule, included both literary and purely publicistic works. Often such anthologies became joint projects: Both Jews and Russian authors contributed to them. Similar almanacs were either organized thematically or had a general cultural character.

Lost Works

The overwhelming majority of these publications – which were issued in small editions, and often in provincial cities – have been irretrievably lost. This is regrettable, as their content has enormous significance. The publications provide unique information about the general cultural and social life of the Jewish population of that period, and its relations with the wider society.

The uniqueness of these publications is also evinced by the fact that their pages contained works by many writers who later became well-known authors, poets, translators, commentators, or political activists. Moreover, a number of these

works were never published in any other place. Thus, many “Jewish” works by such writers as M. Gershenzon, S. Marshak, Ai. Shternberg, A. Sobol, and N. Minskii – writers who are now recognized only as practitioners of Russian literature – have been lost. During the 1920s and 1930s, this tradition, which was gradually dying out in the USSR, was continued in the United States within the milieu of Jewish emigrants from Russia and other European countries.

Collection

This collection contains materials that reflect the atmosphere of the period, as well as works that were not subsequently republished and are **preserved in single copies in only a few libraries**. The collection was created at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg – essentially the only library in Russia that, for several centuries, had the legal right to receive a copy of every publication that appeared anywhere in the country’s territory.

National Library of Russia

www.nlr.ru

The National Library of Russia (NLR) is one of the world’s largest libraries. Because of the wealth and variety of its collections, it ranks among such eminent libraries as the Library of Congress and the British Library. The NLR occupies a special place in the history of Russian culture. It was founded by the enlightened monarch Empress Catherine II to serve a dual purpose, namely to house “a complete collection of Russian books” and for “general public usage.” Today, the NLR has more than 32.8 million items, 6 million of which are in a foreign language.

Еврейскіе осенніе праздники. (Рошъ-Ташона, Јомъ-Кипуръ, Сукосъ, Симхасъ-Тора).

Литературно-художественный сборникъ для
еврейской семьи и школы.
Под редакціей У. И. ДАВЫДЪ.



С.-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ.
Царская Стреловая М. И. Гутцадъ Шталера, 55.
1913.

Slavic Judaica from IDC Publishers

General	History	Culture
Jewish Studies	Anti-Soviet newspapers (1918-1922)	Jewish Cultural Renaissance in Imperial Russia (1880-1922)
History of the Jews in Imperial Russia and the USSR	Bund Archive (1894-1921)	Jewish Theater under Stalinism (1916-1950)
Slavic Judaica in the YIVO Library (19th and 20th centuries: all of them before 1940 and most before 1917)	Poalei Zion Archive (1917-1928)	
	Birobidzhan (late 1920s -late 1940s)	
	Anti-Semitism and Nationalism at the End of the Soviet Era	



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