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Polly Zavadvker

Reconstructing a Lost Archive:
Simon Dubnow and “The Black Book”
of Imperial Russian Jewry.
Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915

“We must direct all of our attention to one goal: to undertake pragmatic action at the moment when the fate of nations will be decided.”

Simon Dubnow, 5 April 1916¹

Like other Russian Jewish intellectuals during World War I, the historian Simon Dubnow understood the act of compiling and documenting Jewish wartime experiences as a mission both on behalf and in defense of a beleaguered Jewish nation.² In carrying out this mission, Dubnow sought to address the present as well as the future needs of the Jewish people. With an eye to the future, he compiled a documentary account of a catastrophic war as it unfolded in real time, intending that these documents serve as a foundation for the future writing of Jewish histories of the period. Dubnow also recorded the experiences of Jews in order to fulfill a practical and immediate function – to raise funds for and provide information about Jewish war victims, and to procure documents that could be used in the struggle for Jewish rights in Russia and Eastern Europe during and after the war.

Although scholars have increasingly addressed the previously neglected social, political and cultural dimensions of Russian Jewry’s experiences during World War I, the subject of how Dubnow and his contemporaries reacted to and chronicled the war is largely unknown.³ It has been assumed that

- 1 Semion Markovich Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni. Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia. Materialy dlia istorii moego vremeni* [The Book of Life. Recollections and Reflections. Materials for the History of my Times], ed. by Viktor Kel’ner, St. Petersburg 1998, 362 (diary entry of 5 April 2013).
- 2 The concept of wartime writing of history as both a defensive tradition and a national mission is indebted to David Engel, *Writing History as a National Mission. The Jews of Poland and their Historiographic Traditions*, in: Israel Gutman (ed.), Emanuel Ringelblum. *The Man and the Historian*, Jerusalem 2010, 117–140.
- 3 See Salo Wittmayer Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, New York 1964, 187–200; Mordechai Altshuler, *Russia and Her Jews. The Impact of the 1914 War*, in: *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 30–31 (1973–1974), 12–16; Steven J. Zipperstein, *The Politics of Relief. The Transformation of Russian Jewish Communal Life during the First*

because written communication in Hebrew and Yiddish was heavily censored in Russia during the war, efforts among Russian Jewry to comprehensively document the war failed.⁴ In fact, Dubnow and other Russian Jewish activists collected and wrote vast amounts of material, not primarily in Hebrew or Yiddish, but in Russian. Although the major part of the archive they assembled was later lost or scattered in various places, a number of significant texts were published in Russia and abroad during and in the years immediately following the war.

Among the most important of these writings was an anthology called *From "The Black Book" of Imperial Russian Jewry. Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915* (hereafter referred to as *The Black Book*), which will be discussed in this essay in detail for the first time.⁵ Dubnow edited this one-hundred page document, and published it in 1918 in the groundbreaking journal *Evreiskaia starina* (Jewish Antiquity), where he served as editor at the time. *The Black Book* combined narrative summaries and reproductions of official documents, including many Russian military decrees concerning Jewish soldiers and civilians. Apart from Dubnow, among other contributors

World War, in: Jonathan Frankel (ed.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 26 vols., New York/Oxford 1984–2012, here vol. 4: *The Jews and the European Crisis, 1914–1921*, Oxford 1988, 22–40; Samuel Kassow, *Jewish Communal Politics in Transition. The Vilna Kehile, 1919–1920*, in: *YIVO Annual* 20 (1991), 61–91; Heinz-Dietrich Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews. Reform, Reaction, and Anti-Semitism in Imperial Russia, 1772–1917*, Chur 1993, 323–406; Eric Lohr, *The Russian Army and the Jews. Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I*, in: *Russian Review* 60 (2001), 404–419; Viktor Kel'ner, *The Jewish Question and Russian Social Life during World War I*, in: *Russian Studies in History* 43 (2004), no. 1, 11–40; Semion Gol'din, *Russian Jewry under Tsarist Military Rule during World War I* (PhD thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005) (Russ.); Oleg V. Budnitskii et al. (eds.), *Mirovoi krizis 1914–1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropetskogo evreistva* [The World Crisis of 1914–1920 and the Fate of East European Jewry], Moscow 2005; Konrad Zieliński, *The Shtetl in Poland, 1914–1918*, in: Steven T. Katz (ed.), *The Shtetl. New Evaluations*, New York 2009, 102–120; Andrew Noble Koss, *World War I and the Remaking of Jewish Vilna, 1914–1918* (PhD thesis, Stanford University, Calif., 2010).

- 4 David Roskies has argued that Russian Jewry's efforts to record Jewish history "largely failed" during World War I because "the tsarist government closed down the entire Jewish-language press, imposed strict censorship on all news from the war front, and banned the use of the Hebrew alphabet in the mails." Idem, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past*, Bloomington, Ind., 1999, 19. Similarly, Laura Jockusch wrote that because of Hebrew and Yiddish censorship in First World War Russia, "efforts to make a comprehensive documentation failed." Idem, *Chroniclers of Catastrophe. History Writing as a Jewish Response to Persecution before and after the Holocaust*, in: David Bankier/Dan Michman (eds.), *Holocaust Historiography in Context. Emergence, Challenges, Polemics, and Achievements*, Jerusalem 2008, 135–166, here 146.
- 5 Simon Dubnow (ed.), *Iz "chernoi knigi" rossiiskago evreistva. Materialy dlia istorii voiny 1914–1915 gg.* [From "The Black Book" of Russian Jewry. Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915], in: *Evreiskaia starina* 10 (1918), 195–296 (henceforth IChK).

identified within the text of *The Black Book* were the liberal lawyer Maksim M. Vinaver (1862 or 1863–1926), and the Bundist activists David I. Zaslavskii (1880–1965) and Genrikh Erlikh (1882–1942). *The Black Book* sheds light on four major aspects of the Russian military's anti-Jewish perspectives and policies during the war: 1) fear of Jewish espionage, 2) expulsions of Jewish communities, 3) military pogroms, and 4) the taking of hostages (*zalozhniki*) in order to prevent treasonous actions among local communities.⁶

The subtitle of *The Black Book – Materials for a History of the War, 1914–1915* – expressed Dubnow's intention that the work should be used as a source for just that: the future study and writing of Jewish history during (what became) World War I. Indeed, several historians have used it to that very end.⁷ However, the story behind the creation of this important historiographic source remains a mystery.⁸

As is well known, Dubnow was not only a scholar, but also a man of action who regarded the writing of history to be an integral aspect of Jewish national identity-building and political mobilization. This essay argues that *The Black Book* represents Dubnow's attempt to create a Jewish national wartime narrative during a period of unfolding crisis, but also potential promise. On 27 July 1914, immediately before the war started, he expressed hope in his diary that the war would bring about the emancipation of Jews in Russia, or, as he put it, that its relations with the Allied powers might force the Russian government to “cleanse the country of its political inquisition.”⁹ It was also widely expected that the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, home to millions of Jews, would be granted national independence. Propaganda distributed by the Russian and German governments in hopes of winning the loyalty of the Polish population helped to reinforce these assump-

6 Although Dubnow's name is not listed anywhere as editor of *The Black Book* in the volume of *Evreiskaia starina* where the work was published, he did identify himself as such in a bibliographic citation. See Simon Dubnow, *Noveishaia istoriia Evreiskago naroda* [Recent History of the Jewish People], 3 vols., Riga 1938, here vol. 3, 468.

7 IChK is cited as a reference in Löwe, *The Tsars and the Jews*, 323–406; Lohr, *The Russian Army and the Jews*; idem., *Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I*, Cambridge, Mass., 2003, 137–150; Gol'din, *Russian Jewry under Tsarist Military Rule during World War I*; John Klier, *Kazaki i pogromy. Chem otlichalis' "voennye" pogromy? [Cossacks and Pogroms. How Were “Military” Pogroms Different?]*, in: Budnitskii et al. (eds.), *Mirovoi krizis 1914–1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropetskogo evreistva*, 45–70; idem, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917–1920*, trans. by Timothy J. Portice, Philadelphia, Penn., 2012, 225–240.

8 Dubnow's efforts during World War I are briefly recounted in Viktor E. Kel'ner, *Missioner istorii. Zhizn' i trudy Semena Markovicha Dubnova [A Missionary for History. The Life and Work of Semen Markovich Dubnov]*, St. Petersburg 2008, 457–460, and 501 f. (Germ.: Simon Dubnow. Eine Biografie, Göttingen/Oakville, Conn., 2010).

9 Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 337.

tions.¹⁰ As we shall see, Dubnow and fellow Jewish activists understood that in order to demand national rights and recognition for Jews, whether from the Duma or an international congress after the war, they would need to produce evidence of the Jewish nation's wartime suffering. Thus, Dubnow and other contributors hoped that *The Black Book* would serve an instrumental purpose at an opportune moment in the struggle for Jewish civil rights.

The first goal of this essay is to situate *The Black Book* in the political and cultural context in which it was produced. The origins of the archive that Dubnow helped to assemble during the war, which contained the sources that were used to write it, will then be explored. Finally, the essay engages in a critical interpretation of the types of documents that Dubnow used in the book, and explains the strategies he used to create a Jewish national wartime narrative. As will be seen, Dubnow's choice of materials for *The Black Book* reflected important and widely held assumptions about factuality and evidence during World War I. He and his contemporaries also faced formidable challenges in representing the catastrophic history of Jews throughout Russia: How could they explain events of such unprecedented character, and summarize phenomena that affected hundreds of thousands of people in different locations in different ways? These problems of representation were not particular to Dubnow's efforts during World War I; indeed, in drastically different circumstances during World War II, Soviet Jewish writers Il'ia Erenburg and Vasilii Grossman edited what would become a second, two thousand-page Russian-language *Black Book* (*Chernaia kniga*), that chronicled the suffering of Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Soviet territory.¹¹ This essay then represents in part the beginning of the hitherto unexplored study of ways that Dubnow's *Black Book* may have preceded the attempts of Soviet Jewry to document the catastrophic history of Jews during and in the wake of the Holocaust.

10 Commander in Chief Nikolai Nikolaevich made statements at the start of the war suggesting that the Russian state might recognize an autonomous, reunited Poland in the event of a Russian victory. See Proclamation of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [Grand Duke Nicholas], 14 August 1914, in: Frank Alfred Golder (ed.), *Documents of Russian History, 1914–1917*, New York 1927, 37 f. Fritz Fischer has pointed out that in attempts to win the loyalties of minority groups, German propaganda promised to extend rights in the event of victory, in: idem, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, New York 1967, 237 f. Ezra Mendelsohn makes a similar point about the impact of German propaganda on Jewish national identity, in: idem, *Zionism in Poland. The Formative Years, 1915–1926*, New Haven, Conn., 1982, 39–45.

11 See Vasilii Grossman/Il'ia Erenburg (eds.), *Chernaia kniga. O zlodeiskom povsemestnom ubiistve evreev nemetsko-fashistskimi zakhvatchikami vo vremenko-okkupirovannykh raionakh Sovetskogo Soiuza i v lageriakh unichtozheniia Pol'shi vo vremia voiny 1941–1945 gg.* [Black Book. On the Ruthless Murder of Jews by German-Fascist Invaders throughout the Temporarily-Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and in the Death Camps in Poland during the War 1941–1945], Vilnius 1993.

“An Unreliable Element:”
Jews in Russia, 1914–1915

The experiences of Jews in Russia during the first year of the World War reinforced a sense of their separateness as a national minority in the Russian Empire, and motivated efforts to defend and promote the interests of Jews as a distinct people. Nearly all of European Russia, including the territory of the Pale of Settlement, where five million Jews lived by legal decree, came under Russian martial law at the end of July 1914.¹² Russia’s Jewish subjects became victims of violence committed by the very armed forces that were defending their own country, and in which some 300,000 or more Jewish troops were sacrificing their lives.¹³ Two of the Russian military’s measures in particular – the expulsion of Jews from war zones, and censorship – fostered an unintended outcome by promoting and, in some cases, radicalizing Russian Jews’ sense of national identity. Russian Jews responded in two ways: first, they mobilized a vast network of civil society initiatives, most of which had been established in the prewar period, in order to address the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Jews, and the destruction of dozens of communities within the war zone. Second, they documented Jewish wartime experience, both so that the collective suffering endured as a result of the war would not be forgotten, and that it might further political struggles on behalf of the Jewish people.

From the first days of the war, military elites spread rumors of Jewish espionage which gained currency among the population and rank-and-file troops, in part due to the similarity between the Yiddish and German languages. The widespread belief in and fear of Jewish spies in the war zone, coupled with the series of military disasters that the Russian army suffered between the winter and summer of 1915, became a pretext for a number of policies that collectively aimed to remove or, as Peter Holquist put it, to “extract” populations of Jews deemed to be an unreliable “element” from zones of military action.¹⁴

12 For a discussion of the legal history of the Pale of Settlement, see John Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews. The Origins of the “Jewish Question” in Russia, 1772–1825*, DeKalb, Ill., 1986, chap. 1.

13 The estimate of troops is cited from Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, s. v. “Military Service in Russia,” in: *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Military_Service_in_Russia> (27 June 2013). Altshuler estimates that 500,000 Jewish troops served in the Russian Army during World War I. See *idem*, *Russia and Her Jews*, 13.

14 Peter Holquist, *To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate. Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia*, in: Ronald Grigor Suny/Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations. Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford 2001, 111–144, here 115.

The first phase of war, from the end of July 1914 until January 1915, was characterized by sporadic deportations and expulsions of Jews near front zones in Poland and Galicia. In April 1915, a German offensive forced the Russian army to retreat across hundreds of miles of Lithuanian and Polish territory on its northwestern front. Consequently, some 3,3 million people, including Poles, Germans, and Jews, were displaced by the end of 1915.¹⁵ Jews were deported en masse from along a front that extended a thousand miles and traversed the territory of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belorussia and Ukraine. It was during this retreat that one local Russian military authority near Dvinsk received orders on 24 May 1915 to systematically expel Jews from given locales in order to supposedly “cleanse this region of an unreliable element” (*ochistit' etot raion ot nenadezhnogo elementa*).¹⁶ Estimates of Jews driven from Lithuanian territory alone in 1915 range from 500,000 to one million.¹⁷

As the Tsar's Ministers, local populations, and fellow Russian Jews looked on in horror, homeless Jews on foot, in wagons, and in trains poured past the borders of the Pale of Settlement into the Russian interior in the spring and summer of 1915.¹⁸ Their numbers included both refugees (*bez-hentsy*) who had fled voluntarily, as well as expellees (*vyselentsy*), or those deported by military decree. The variations in policies issued by military headquarters allowed for enormous variation, as well as abuses in their implementation at the local level. Not infrequently, superior officers denounced Jewish civilians as enemy aliens in front of their troops, who would then loot and desecrate synagogues, burn Jewish neighborhoods, and sometimes kill Jews without fear of punishment. These atrocities – what Eric Lohr referred to as “military pogroms” – were unprecedented in the history of the Russian Empire, insofar as they were enabled and justified by what he calls a “legitimized framework for anti-Jewish violence.”¹⁹

15 Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking. Refugees in Russia during World War I*, Bloomington, Ind., 1999, 3.

16 “Telegramma komendanta Kovenskoj kreposti generala V. N. Grigorieva glavnomu nachalniku Dvinskogo voennogo okruga inzhener-generalu kn. N. E. Tumanovu, 24 maia 1915 g.,” as cited in Eric Lohr, *Novye dokumenty o Rossiiskoi armii i evreiakh vremena Pervoi mirovoi voiny* [New Documents on the Russian Army and Jews during the First World War], in: *Vestnik Evreiskogo Universiteta* 8 (2003) no. 26, 245–268, here 262.

17 Lohr, *The Russian Army and the Jews*, 404, fn. 1. Figures from spring and summer deportations of 1915 include more than 40,000 Jews from Courland; 120,000 from Kovno; and 30,000 from Grodno province. See Zipperstein, *The Politics of Relief*, 24.

18 The Ministry worried primarily about the disastrous effects of mass deportations on Russia's war effort and image abroad. See Michael Cherniavsky, *Prologue to Revolution. Notes of A. N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers 1915*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1967, 39, 56–72, and 85 f.

19 Lohr, *The Russian Army and the Jews*, 406 f.

Censorship in wartime Russia was another important condition that kept Jewish activists vigilant about the way their history would be told. A decree of 20 July 1914 granted the military censor control over the press, mail and telegraph systems, as well as public speeches.²⁰ The censors monitored written communication in Yiddish and Hebrew with a heavy hand, though they did not ban it completely. Letters written in Yiddish by Jewish soldiers were intercepted by censors, for example.²¹ But the Warsaw Yiddish paper *Haynt* (Today) continued to be published in weekly installments during the war, although, like the Russian-language Jewish press, it mostly reproduced translations of official military communiqués or previously published material from other Russian papers.²²

For Jewish activists, however, wartime censorship posed particular challenges to the struggle for Jewish emancipation and legal rights because the subjects of the military's anti-Jewish violence and the contribution of Jews to the Russian war effort were both removed from the published record. Pogroms and other atrocities were generally not reported, and Jewish-sounding names of soldiers (all except for the first letter) were not included in published lists of combatants who received St. George's Crosses.²³ The Jewish press reacted to this censorship by featuring photographs and short biographies of Jewish soldiers who had earned awards for acts of bravery. Indeed, entire papers were established to publicize the topic of Jewish heroism. The short-lived paper *Voina i evrei* (*The War and the Jews*) devoted itself to "gathering in one place as much factual, thoroughly verified material as possible about the efforts of Jewish combatants."²⁴ Its editors spoke of the attempt to dispel "like smoke, the new support for anti-Semitism," fueled by the assumption that Jews were shirking their obligations to their country's war effort.²⁵ However, copies of *Voina i evrei* could not be sold after 26 May 1915,²⁶ but documents conveying information about Jewish troops, as shall be seen, ultimately became a crucial source of material for *The Black Book*. In May 1917, Dubnow wrote that in the years 1914/15 he had read many letters by Jewish soldiers, and that other documents that "could not be pub-

20 D. A. El'iashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii 1797–1917. Ocherki istorii tsenzury* [Government Policy and the Jewish Press in Russia 1797–1917. Studies of a History of Censorship], St. Petersburg/Jerusalem 1999, 488.

21 Soldiers' letters in Yiddish captured by the military censor are cited in Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827–1917. Drafted into Modernity*, New York 2009, 259 f.

22 Chaim Finkelstein, *Haynt. A tsaytung bay yidn, 1908–1939* [Haynt. A Jewish Newspaper, 1908–1939], Tel Aviv 1978, 61 f.

23 Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 219.

24 *Voina i evrei* 1 (1914), 1.

25 *Ibid.*

26 El'iashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii 1797–1917*, 492 f.

lished at the time passed through my hands.” He still planned, as of then, for those documents, “at some point, [to] comprise a ‘black book’ – a terrible chronicle of Jewry during these black years.”²⁷

“The Color Black” and the Writing of Jewish Wartime History

Jews in Russia recognized that the way they publicized their nation’s wartime history would have important political significance in the postwar period. As a national minority in Europe, they were not alone with such considerations: Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs, and other national groups were aware that the borders of the Russian and Habsburg Empires where they lived would likely change after the war, and looked forward to postwar concessions or national independence that might follow from the collapse of those empires.²⁸ For this reason, the documentation and publicizing of atrocities that different peoples suffered at the hands of warring powers became important features of Central and East European national politics during World War I.

Ukrainian intellectuals, for example, published a volume in 1915 about the Talerhof concentration camp in the Austrian Alps, where at the start of the war, Austrian and Hungarian authorities interned 30,000 Galicians of Slavic descent, as well as those suspected or known to have Russian sympathies. Prisoners, among them elderly people and children, were detained without formal charges, and thousands died from starvation and diseases that broke out by the winter of 1914/15.²⁹ Elsewhere in Europe, “atrocities commissions” were established in France, Britain, Austria, Serbia, and Bulgaria during the first weeks of war to document (and in some instances, to fabricate) stories of massacres, mutilations, starvation, rape, and physical torture of both civilians and soldiers.³⁰

27 Simon Dubnow, *Istoriia Evreiskago soldata 1915 goda. Ispoved’ odnogo iz mnogikh* [The History of a Jewish Soldier in 1915. One Confession among Many], in: *Evreiskaia nedelia* [Jewish Week], 21 May 1917, 65.

28 On the development of Ukrainian national aspirations during this period, see Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine. Birth of a Modern Nation*, Oxford 2007, 61–66.

29 Ivan Petrovych (Ivan Krypiakevych), *Halychuna pidchas rosiis’koi okupatsii. Serpen’ 1914–cherven’ 1915* [Galicia under Russian Occupation. August 1914–June 1915], *L’vov 1915*. For a list of Ukrainian, Polish and Russian national war histories, see Paul Robert Magosci, *Galicia. A Historical Survey and Bibliographic Guide*, Toronto 1983, 167–173.

30 James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914–1919*, New Haven, Conn., 1941, 3, and 285.

Descriptions of enemy atrocities were commonly compiled in books with colors in their titles. Thus, Belgian intellectuals compiled a “grey book” documenting atrocities against Belgian civilians under German occupation, while the Germans sought to refute these claims with a “white book.”³¹ In his introduction to *From “The Black Book” of Imperial Russian Jewry*, Dubnow explained the choice of the color black for the title of a book about anti-Jewish atrocities:

“In international affairs it is customary to report on the most important political events in ‘blue,’ ‘white,’ ‘yellow’ and other books of various colors of the rainbow. Apparently the color black has yet to be used: it has been left for the fate of the Jewish people, who are more an object than a subject of diplomacy.”³²

For Dubnow, the color black symbolized not only the tragic experiences of Jews during the war, but also their standing as a people who lacked political rights, visibility and recognition as a nation among the European nations. It was, in his view, “the fate of the Jewish people” to languish at the hands of other powers. Yet by publishing a book meant to stand alongside accounts of the wartime suffering of other nations, Dubnow expressed the paradoxical nature of chronicling Jewish wartime history: documenting and publicizing their status as victims of the Russian army might overcome this “fate,” and therefore constituted an overtly political act. Descriptions of anti-Jewish violence, extensively catalogued in the pages of *The Black Book*, demonstrated that Jews had become victims because the Russian military regarded them as “beyond the law” (*vne zakona*), and therefore violence against Jews could go unpunished.³³ By writing their own wartime history and creating a national narrative, Jews sought to define themselves as subjects and arbiters of their political future, and not only as victims of violence, or, as Dubnow put it, an object of diplomacy alone. Yet in order to become subjects of their own future, and acquire recourse to legal protection and rights, Jews needed to gather and present evidence of their victimization in the past.

At the time they compiled the book in 1914 and 1915, contributors to *The Black Book* planned for the anthology to be used as a weapon in the struggle for the civic emancipation of Jews in Russia. However, due to wartime censorship, the book could not be published until 1918, by which time the Pale of Settlement had been abolished and Jews had been formally emancipated. In the aftermath of revolution, the book served a different political purpose, namely to influence the postwar proceedings at Versailles. Dubnow wrote in

31 See John Horne/Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914. A History of Denial*, New Haven, Conn., 2001, 229–249.

32 Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 195.

33 *Ibid.*, 269, and 295.

1918 that *The Black Book* could “reveal the truth that, due to the oppressive wartime censor, has not yet been exposed to all belligerent nations,” and provide documentary material to “assist those political activists who will have to put the Jewish problem before the opinion of the nations at the forthcoming world congress.”³⁴ As will become clear below, the political context surrounding the publication of the work determined the way the people’s history would be presented on the pages of *The Black Book*.

A Lost Archive

The effort to document and archive the experiences of Russia’s Jews during the war, which culminated in the publication of *The Black Book*, was initiated by a so-called Collegium of Jewish Communal Activists (Kollegiia evreiskikh obshchestvennykh deiatelei).³⁵ Among its members, the Collegium was known as the Political Bureau (Politicheskoe biuro, or Politbiuro).³⁶ According to Dubnow, the Politbiuro had an executive committee of fifteen people, and approximately eighty members in total.³⁷ It had been established after the 1905 Revolution as a forum for communication between Jewish deputies elected to the First State Duma, and leaders of four major Jewish political parties (including liberals and Zionists, though not socialists) that went above-ground following the revolutionary political reforms.³⁸

34 Ibid. According to Dubnow (Kniga zhizni, 370), *Evreiskaia starina* could not be published in 1916 or 1917 due to paper shortages.

35 The name Kollegiia evreiskikh obshchestvennykh deiatelei is used to identify the group in an introduction to a compilation of military decrees that was published by Russian-Jewish émigrés in Berlin in 1928. See Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev [Documents on the Persecution of Jews], in: Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii XIX, The Hague/Paris 1970 (first publ. 1928), 246.

36 In his memoirs, Iakov Frumkin uses the name Politbiuro in reference to the same group, as do Semion An-sky and Dubnow in their diaries. See Iakov G. Frumkin, *Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva. Vospominaniia, materialy, dokumenty* [From the History of Russian Jewry. Recollections, Materials, Documents], in: *Kniga o Russkom Evreistve ot 1860-kh gg. do revoliutsii 1917 g.* [Book on Russian Jewry from the 1860s to the 1917 Revolution], New York 1960, 50–107, esp. 81–84; S. An-sky’s diary for 6 January 1915 is at Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva [Russian State Archive of Literature and Art], F. 2583, O. 1, D. 5, l. 3; Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 337–355, passim. Dubnow also identifies the Politbiuro as the organizer of the archive for *The Black Book*. Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 196.

37 See the diary entry cited from 1 August 1914, in: idem, *Kniga zhizni*, 337.

38 For the history of the four parties that took part in the Politbiuro, see Christoph Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900–1914. The Modernization of Russian Jewry*, New York 1995, 45–71.

During World War I, the Jewish deputies to the Fourth Duma included Naftali M. Fridman (1863–1921), Meier Kh. Bomash (1861–1947), and Ezekiel B. Gurevich, all of them *Kadets* (*kadety*), or members of the mainstream liberal Constitutional Democratic Party. Despite their different opinions concerning religion and language, members of the four different groups that constituted the Politbiuro all regarded Jewish national and civil rights as their primary cause: Dubnow represented the Folkspartei, which championed his principle of extra-territorial Jewish national and cultural autonomy. Vinaver founded and led the Jewish People's Group (*Evreiskaia narodnaia grupp*a) which fought for Jewish civil equality and full rights as a national minority, and the prominent ethnographer Lev Shternberg (1861–1927) was one of its chief ideologues. The Jewish Democratic Group represented those to the left of the *Kadets* within the Politbiuro, and included the lawyer Iakov G. Frumkin, Leontii M. Bramson (1869–1941), Genrikh B. Sliozberg (1863–1937), and the high-ranking official at the St. Petersburg Public Library, Aleksandr I. Braudo (1864–1924). Finally, the Zionist faction was led by Israel A. Rozov (1869–1947).³⁹

In addition to the presence of scholars like Dubnow and Shternberg in its ranks, the Politbiuro was prepared for the work of documenting the military's anti-Jewish campaign because it was primarily composed of lawyers. These lawyers had nearly two decades of experience assembling evidence against claims, such as blood libel accusations, that often served as pretexts for anti-Jewish persecution. In this regard, the wartime documentary effort demonstrated an important continuity with the prewar struggle for civic emancipation – the Politbiuro had been founded by lawyers with the explicit goal of replacing the figure of the intercessor (*shtadlan*), a role often played by wealthy Jewish elites, who had been intervening behind the closed doors of private offices and homes with Russian authorities on behalf of Jews since the mid-nineteenth century. In the attempt to defend Jews and establish precedents in courts of law, these lawyers had become pioneers in the effort to achieve Jewish civil rights through the use of the Russian legal system.⁴⁰

It is important to recognize that the Politbiuro's wartime documentary effort originated in part from Jewish lawyers' attempts to use and reform the judicial system rather than to rely exclusively on channels of personal influence as part of the effort to defend Jewish victims of violence. Indeed, the documentation of anti-Jewish violence and the judicial reform movement

39 The names of members in the Politbiuro executive are mentioned in Frumkin, *Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva*, 82.

40 On the history of judicial reform and Jewish citizenship in late Imperial Russia, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley, Calif., 2002, 311–366.

had been inextricably entwined for decades. After a pogrom in Odessa in May 1871, the Jewish lawyer and self-taught historian Il'ia Orshanskii (1846–1875) responded with four other Jewish lawyers by attempting to reconstruct the origins of the violence. Their goal, as Benjamin Nathans wrote, was to make a case against Odessa city authorities, who were widely perceived to have been complicit in the outbreak of public violence against Jews, and to demand compensation for the violence, estimated at some ten million rubles.⁴¹ Orshanskii and fellow lawyers interviewed victims, perpetrators and bystanders, and compiled a report based on their testimonies that harshly criticized the weak response of city authorities to the violence. When they brought their report to the recently reformed courts, it was subsequently ignored and barred from publication.

In 1900, a group of Jewish lawyers sought to institutionalize the tradition of documenting anti-Jewish violence by forming a clandestine Defense Bureau. Although its attempt to reform anti-Jewish legislation proved unsuccessful, the Defense Bureau achieved recognition among the Jewish masses for its efforts to defend Jewish victims in courts of law during pogroms that broke out between 1903 and 1906, the worst of them in Białystok, Kishinev, Gomel, and Odessa.⁴² In 1905, several lawyers in the Defense Bureau, including Vinaver, Sliozberg, and Frumkin, became part of the Politbiuro. They were still serving on its executive committee when the war broke out in 1914. In June of 1915, Vinaver linked the Politbiuro's work of publicizing anti-Jewish atrocities to the struggle for civil rights, referring to it as a "protest against the attempts of reactionary forces to sever [Russian Jewry's] ties to the army and society on the basis of the Jewish Question."⁴³

Aside from their experience as political activists and judicial reformers, many Politbiuro members were also influenced by, and important contributors to the Jewish national-historicist institutions that Dubnow himself had helped to establish twenty-five years before the war. In a famous essay about the study of history of Russian Jewry published in 1891, Dubnow called for the practice of collecting (in Yiddish, *zamlung*) documents and materials, which he argued were essential for the contemporary and future study of Jewish history.⁴⁴ And in St. Petersburg in 1908, Dubnow participated in

41 Orshanskii's efforts following the 1871 Odessa pogrom are discussed *ibid.*, 320–322. On responses of Jewish intellectuals to prewar pogroms, see Brian Horowitz, *Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia*, Seattle, Wash., 2009, chap. 5.

42 The Defense Bureau is discussed in Gassenschmidt, *Jewish Liberal Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1900–1914*, 8–18.

43 Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 226.

44 *Idem*, *Ob izuchenii istorii russkikh evreev i ob uchrezhdenii istoricheskogo obshchestva* [On the Study of the History of Russian Jews and on the Establishment of a Historical Society], St. Petersburg 1891. For a survey of the development of historiographical tradi-

founding a Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society (*Evreiskoe istoriko-etnograficheskoe obshchestvo*, henceforth EIEO) to oversee the collection, classification, and preservation of material for the study of Jewish history and culture.

Dubnow's call to the Jewish public to collect sources for the writing of Jewish history inspired a veritable cultural movement among East European Jews, and eventually came to play an important role during the World War. By 1914, the EIEO and its network of scholars and institutions had established an infrastructure for the study of Jewish history in St. Petersburg and throughout the Pale of Settlement.⁴⁵ In 1915, it declared its status as an important institution for Jewish historical documentation by asking the public to send valuable materials to its offices for safe-keeping, "in view of the present-day circumstances of war, when many manuscripts and antique objects are found in private hands, and are thus in great danger of disappearing."⁴⁶

Prior to as well as during the war, Politbiuro members also comprised the leadership of every major Jewish philanthropic and cultural institution in St. Petersburg. Vinaver served as chairman of the EIEO and contributed his own scholarship to its major historical publications. Sliozberg directed the Jewish Committee for the Relief of War Victims (known by its Russian acronym as EKOPO; *Evreiskii komitet pomoshchi zhertvam voiny*). Many others actively contributed to organizations for Jewish education, health, and labor, and had helped to establish libraries, scholarship funds, and credit associations to support the advancement of Jewish cultural and economic life throughout the empire.⁴⁷ Thus, the lawyers' efforts to document anti-Jewish violence, and the larger historicist goal of creating archives for the

tions among Russian Jews, see Benjamin Nathans, *On Russian-Jewish Historiography*, in: Thomas Sanders (ed.), *Historiography of Imperial Russia. The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State*, New York 1999, 397–432.

45 On the emergence of public institutions for the study of Jewish history in the period from 1905–1917, see Jeffrey Veidlinger, *Jewish Public Culture in Late Imperial Russia*, Bloomington, Ind., 2009, 229–291.

46 *Arkhiv i muzei Evreiskago istoriko-etnograficheskago obshchestva* [Archive and Museum of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society], in: *Evreiskaia starina* 8 (1915), 428.

47 Bramson, Vinaver, and Sliozberg were all active with the Society for the Spread of Enlightenment among Jews (*Obshchestvo dlia rasprostraneniia prosveshcheniia mezhdv evreiami v Rossii*; OPE), founded in 1863, the Society for the Improvement of the Hygienic and Health Condition of the Jewish Population in Russia (*Obshchestvo okhraneniia zdorovia evreiskago naseleniia*; OZE), founded in 1912, and the Society for Artisan and Agricultural Labor (*Obshchestvo dlia remeslennago i zemledelcheskago truda*, ORT), founded in 1880. The finances and management of these organizations all came under the auspices of EKOPO during the war.

study of Jewish history, dovetailed during the war through the efforts of the Politbiuro.

The members of the Politbiuro assembled the archive of material from which *The Black Book* was later produced, though as Dubnow wrote in the introduction to that work, the documentary materials presented in it comprised only a small part of the vast number of sources that the Politbiuro collected from the start of the war until the 1917 revolution.⁴⁸ The history of the Politbiuro's archival effort can be pieced together from diaries and memoirs composed by those associated with it, including Dubnow and Frumkin, as well as Solomon Pozner (1876–1946) and David Movshovich (1887–1957).⁴⁹

Movshovich played a particularly important role in the collection of documents, though he largely operated behind the scenes. He had been affiliated with the Politbiuro prior to emigrating to England shortly before the war. In London, he became Foreign Secretary for Lucien Wolf, who was then head of Britain's Jewish political lobby, the Conjoint Foreign Committee.⁵⁰ Movshovich returned to Russia in 1914 to report on the Eastern Front. As a native speaker of Russian and Yiddish, a self-taught historian with a strong interest in Jewish national rights, and a talented translator (in 1936 he translated Dubnow's two-volume survey of world Jewish history from Russian into English), Movshovich was a logical choice to serve as Wolf's liaison with the Politbiuro during the war.⁵¹ Wolf, a close observer of Jewish life in Russia, had maintained good relations with the Politbiuro since 1906.⁵² He used the information gathered by Movshovich in Russia as a basis for conducting diplomatic discussions with the British Foreign Office. And at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, this information served Wolf again in his efforts to secure rights of national self-determination for minorities in East European countries that gained their independence after the war.⁵³

48 Dubnow (ed.), IChK, 196.

49 Frumkin, *Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva*, 81–84; David Movshovich, *A bletl yidishe nay-geshikhte (1915–17)* [A Page of Recent Jewish History (1915–17)], in: *YIVO Historishe shriftn* 2 (1937), 549–560.

50 Mark Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe. The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914–1919*, Oxford 1992, 182 f.

51 Movshovich translated Dubnow's *Uchebnik Evreiskoi istorii* [Textbook of Jewish History], see idem, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, London 1936.

52 Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 67. In his journal *Darkest Russia*, Wolf had monitored and publicized the conditions of Russian and Polish Jewish life for two decades before the war. He was forced to cease publication when Britain became allies with Russia.

53 The Conjoint Foreign Committee had waged a public campaign to defend Jewish rights abroad and in the Russian Empire specifically since 1881, as much in efforts to stem the tide of emigration of East European Jewry to Britain as to export a liberal world order to places where Jews had not yet been emancipated, thus helping align British foreign inter-

Wolf's diplomatic work in London and Paris required the collection, translation, and distillation of vast quantities of intelligence that could not be gleaned from the censored Russian press, nor from the biased perspectives of British diplomats and correspondents who reported from the Eastern Front (perhaps most notably, the British attaché to the Russian high command, Alfred Knox, whose claims that Jews ran a German spy system in Poland were easily accepted by the British Foreign Office).⁵⁴ Movshovich gave Wolf direct access to the nerve center of the Russian-Jewish documentary and political efforts. Although he is virtually unknown to history except as Wolf's secretary, Movshovich later became an important figure in the Politbiuro's attempts to publicize the fate of Jews in the war. Indeed, it is possible that the largest collection that remains from the Politbiuro's war archive are those documents that Movshovich personally collected and later donated to YIVO.⁵⁵

On 31 July 1914, Dubnow, along with Shternberg, Vinaver, Sliozberg, and others attended the first meeting of the Politbiuro executive to take place following the outbreak of war.⁵⁶ The group met at least once a week, often on Tuesday nights at Deputy Fridman's home.⁵⁷ Meetings sometimes concluded shortly before dawn, and Dubnow, for one, having listened to the "evils of the day,"⁵⁸ often left them feeling shaken and full of anxiety, only to start his workday a few hours later.

Managed as it was by those quintessential purveyors of documents – historians and lawyers – the Politbiuro executive created a special division (also apparently housed in Fridman's apartment) in order to handle the collection of documents related to the war. This so-called Information Bureau maintained its own permanent staff; its tasks included the verification, editing, briefing and circulation (typically through unofficial means) of materials

ests with those of British Jewry. See *ibid.*, 2–19. On diplomatic efforts to restrict the emigration of East European Jews to Britain, see Todd Endelman, *Native Jews and Foreign Jews in London, 1870–1914*, in: David Berger (ed.), *The Legacy of Jewish Migration, 1881 and its Impact*, New York 1983, 109–130.

54 See Levene, *War, Jews, and the New Europe*, 54. For examples of Knox's claims see his memoirs, *With the Russian Army, 1914–1917*, 2 vols., New York 1971, esp. vol. 1, 120, and 145 f.

55 YIVO is the acronym for Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut, or Institute for Jewish Research, founded in 1925 in Vilna, and relocated to New York after World War II. The David Mowshowitch Papers can be found in the Lucien Wolf Collection at YIVO RG (Record Group) 348. For materials on Jews in the Eastern Front of World War I, see folders 57–59, 67, 107, 108a–c, 109a–b, 129a–b, and 130.

56 Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 337. For Shternberg's role in particular, see Sergei Kan, *Lev Shternberg. Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist*, Lincoln, Neb., 2009, 224–228.

57 Pozner recalled these details in a memoir, *cit. in Kel'ner, Missioner istorii*, 457 f, n. 161.

58 Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 355.

concerning anti-Jewish persecution, especially among Duma officials and the Tsar's Council of Ministers. Frumkin claimed that government authorities "knew, of course," about the existence of the Politbiuro and its Information Bureau: "permission for them was never granted and never requested," he recalled, "but these bureaus did not encounter any obstacles to their work. One could say they led a semi-legal existence."⁵⁹

Despite its semi-underground status, the Information Bureau made an important impact on Duma officials in publicizing the military's abuse of powers in the war zone. The Bureau circulated two hundred to three hundred copies of selected documents among government officials and political activists. The historian Elias Cherkover (1881–1943) later described the Information Bureau's manner of gathering materials as "confidential" and "dangerous," given the intensity of police surveillance at the time.⁶⁰ A native of the Russian Empire, Cherkover spent the war in New York closely monitoring the situation of Jews under both Russian and German occupation.⁶¹ After returning to Russia in 1917 he continued the Politbiuro's war-related efforts by compiling a massive archive of documents and testimonies about widespread atrocities against Jews in Ukraine and Belorussia during the Russian Civil War.

How did the Politbiuro and its Information Bureau carry out their "dangerous" and "confidential" work under conditions of military censorship and surveillance? The Bureau received news of the front and exchanged material through several sources. Perhaps the most widely circulated documents (and ones that would be extensively reproduced in *The Black Book*) were thousands of military orders, protocols and transcripts of judicial proceedings.⁶² It is not entirely clear how the Politbiuro acquired copies of these documents, but they provided evidence that the Russian military had legitimized the mass persecution of Jewish subjects – information that obviously could not be published in the press during the war.

The Information Bureau also collected testimonies, correspondence and other eyewitness accounts. The differences between the picture of Jewish presented in official documents versus that which could be gleaned from those so-called human documents are striking. Military documents repre-

59 Frumkin, *Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva* [From the History of Russian Jewry], 84.

60 Elias Cherkover, *Tsu D. Movshoviches artikl* [Addition to D. Movshovich's Article], in: *YIVO Historishe shriftn* no. 2 (1937), 561.

61 Cherkover reported on Jewish life under German military occupation for the Russian-language Jewish paper *Evreiskaia nedelia*. His articles relied heavily on reports by the war correspondent Herman Bernstein that appeared in the New York Yiddish daily *Der tog* (The Day). See Cherkover's articles in *Evreiskaia nedelia*, 17 January 1916, 19–25, and 24 January 1916, 11–13.

62 Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 196.

sented the Jews as a nation of victims, a people whom the military, as we saw earlier, defined as an “unreliable element,” alien enemy group, and a population to be extracted and removed from militarily sensitive regions. In contrast, selected personal documents represented Jews in a more nuanced and far less tragic light; indeed, some expressed a sense of individual agency and resilience on the part of the victims.

Testimonies and letters, for example, showed a range of Jewish war victims’ responses to the traumas of war. Letters of petition sent to Jewish political leaders in Petrograd constituted one kind of source that reflected individual and subjective experiences. Employing the practice of intercession (*shtadlanut*), Jews from across the empire sent requests to Deputy Fridman asking for help with compensating their personal losses. Yankel Vilner had been arrested for selling bread to occupying German soldiers in his native town in eastern Poland (an act, he claimed, in which Jews and Christians had participated in equal measure). Vilner sought Fridman’s help to retrieve a promissory note he had received prior to his arrest for the amount of 3,350 rubles, and promised to donate some of the recovered funds to the local Jewish relief committee in the shtetl of Bakhmut.⁶³

Depositions comprised another category of personal documents that became part of the Politbiuro archive. Some of these were taken from Jewish soldiers who had returned to Russia from the front. Jacob Hershhorn spoke about the year he spent in a German POW camp between May 1915 and May 1916. His testimony revealed a remarkable picture of Jewish POWs who created a veritable civil society in captivity. The prisoners organized a relief association in the camp, held regular prayer services, staged concerts on Chanukah and Purim, and ran a school that taught Russian and Yiddish to illiterate soldiers.⁶⁴ Hershhorn even knew of fellow Jewish prisoners who after returning to Russia had sent money back to support the “Association” in the POW camp! As with other depositions (now in Movshovich’s papers in the YIVO archives), it is not clear where, under what circumstances, or with which interlocutor Hershhorn recorded his statement.⁶⁵

Information also reached the Russian interior not only in the form of documents but also from actual people. First, there was the presence of thousands of wounded Jewish soldiers and civilians who flooded the cities in the first year of the war. As Peter Gatrell wrote, the war changed the status of all

63 The letter of 9 August 1915 was written in Russian by a law student, Semion Abramovich Tsukublin, on behalf of Iankel Elias Vilner. Natsional’naia Biblioteka Ukrainy imeni Vernadskogo [Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine], F. 321, O. 2, D. 367, ll. 1–2.

64 YIVO RG 348, F108/MK13077–13088, Deposition of Jacob Hershhorn (n. d.).

65 It is likely that the statements reached London after having been originally transcribed in Yiddish or Russian, and translated into English.

of Russia's ethnic minorities; as Poles, Germans, Muslims, Jews and others fled or were expelled from the empire's scorched borderlands and reconstituted themselves in the Russian interior, they became "immediately visible," and their "hastily created communities provided an opportunity to draw attention to the losses they had incurred."⁶⁶

Journalists, including the famous playwright, ethnographer and traveling relief worker Semion An-sky (1863–1920) frequently wrote about Jewish soldiers and refugees after meeting them in hospitals and shelters.⁶⁷ Soldiers could be readily located because the Russian-language Jewish press regularly published the names of wounded Jewish soldiers receiving care in hospitals in Moscow or Petrograd.⁶⁸ Similarly, on 7 August 1915, following the mass expulsions of Jews from Polish and Lithuanian territory, Dubnow visited refugees from the shtetl Malkin in a shelter near the EIEO archives in Petrograd. The refugees told him that a Cossack regiment had set fire to their town a few hours after issuing an expulsion order, and that residents who had been unable to escape in time perished in the flames. Dubnow relayed the story the following day at a Politbiuro meeting.⁶⁹

The Politbiuro's collection efforts yielded a massive quantity of material. According to one eyewitness, by the end of the war the group had collected enough to fill five published volumes.⁷⁰ As Frumkin later recalled, several contingencies prevented those volumes from seeing the light of day. A number of the Politbiuro's members left Russia following the October Revolution, and many documents became scattered and lost in their possession. Copies sent to the British Museum, Paris National Library, and to Palestine failed to reach their destinations; another copy deposited at the St. Petersburg Public Library under the care of Aleksandr Braudo could not be located after his death in 1924.⁷¹

66 Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 5.

67 Semion An-sky, *V evreiskom lazarete* [In the Jewish Hospital], in: *Den'* [The Day], 28 November 1914, 324.

68 For one list of Jewish soldiers in Moscow hospitals, see *Novyi voskhod*, 25 September 1914, 18.

69 Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 353.

70 Noted in the preface to *Dokumenty o presledovanii evreev* [Documents on the Persecution of Jews], 245 f. The author of this preface was likely Iosif Vladimirovich Gessen, editor of the Kadet paper *Rech'* (Speech) during the war, and formerly a Duma deputy, as well as executive committee member of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Society. After the revolution, Gessen left Russia for Berlin, where he edited the twenty-two volume series *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii* [Archive of the Russian Revolution]. In volume 19 of that series, Gessen published the war documents. In his memoir (*Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva*, 108), Frumkin recalls that he personally gave a copy of the documents to Gessen in Berlin.

71 Frumkin, *Iz istorii Russkogo Evreistva*, 108.

A “Tragic Book”

Materials in *The Black Book* chronologically cover the first fifteen months of war, between July 1914 and October 1915, and focus geographically on Polish and Lithuanian provinces. The work is divided topically in four sections: 1) reports by Dubnow and Vinaver on general conditions of Jews in the first year of war, including memos they had circulated among Duma officials and the Council of Ministers, with military decrees appended as supporting evidence;⁷² 2) an account of the expulsions of Jews from the north-eastern front, focusing on the Kovno and Kurland provinces of Lithuania, authored by David Zaslavskii, and also appended with official documents;⁷³ 3) descriptions of hostage-taking among Russian Jews, along with official documents (no author was named for this section);⁷⁴ 4) descriptions of pogroms in Galicia, Poland, and Lithuania during the retreat of the Russian army between the spring and summer of 1915, authored by Genrikh Erlikh.⁷⁵

Thus, the contributors to “The Black Book” included the liberal Vinaver, the autonomist Dubnow, and the Bundists Zaslavskii and Erlikh. As Bundists, Erlikh and Zaslavskii would not have taken part in the predominantly liberal Politbiuro; however, from Dubnow’s diary we know that Erlikh (who also happened to be Dubnow’s son-in-law) attended the groups’ meetings, and was also well-informed about the condition of Jews as a reporter for the Kadet paper *Rech’* (Speech).⁷⁶

Dubnow stated in his preface to *The Black Book* that the work would present a “broad range of factual material that will serve the future historian as a basis for representing the fate of a nation [...] absorbed by the events of the World War.”⁷⁷ It is not immediately self-evident, however, what Dubnow meant by the term “factual material.” A close look at its contents suggests that the types of documents included in *The Black Book* reflected important assumptions about what constituted facts and evidence during World War I.

72 Maksim Moiseevich Vinaver, *Polozhenie Evreev v pervyi god voiny (iul 1914–iun’ 1915)* [The Condition of Jews during the First Year of the War (July 1914–June 1915)], in: Dubnow (ed.), *ICHK*, 197–231.

73 David Iosifovich Zaslavskii, *Vyseleniia Evreev* [Expulsions of Jews], in: *ibid.*, 231–254.

74 *Zalozhniki – Russkie Evrei* [Hostages – Russian Jews], in: *ibid.*, 254–267. The author for this section is not named.

75 Genrikh M. Erlikh, *Razgrom Evreiskago naselenia Litvy i smezhnikh gubernii letom i osen’iu 1915 g.* [The Destruction of the Jewish Population in Lithuania and Neighboring Provinces in the Summer and Autumn of 1915], in: *ibid.*, 267–296.

76 For Erlikh’s attendance at Politbiuro meetings, see Dubnow, *Kniga zhizni*, 340.

77 *Idem*, *ICHK*, 195, and 197.

It was a widely held view during the war that claims about wartime atrocities were not regarded as factual unless they could be corroborated by multiple sources; otherwise, they had to be “laid to rest with other products of folklore and imagination.”⁷⁸ The contents chosen for inclusion in *The Black Book* expressed this view. Eyewitness testimony, for example, constituted a problematic source because it was difficult to corroborate with multiple accounts or official documents. To produce a Jewish national narrative of the war, Dubnow aspired to use a “broad range of factual material,” as he put it, to create an objective and credible record whose claims could not be disputed. This explains why, for example, official documents were appended to each section of the *The Black Book*, whereas personal documents – considered the least verifiable and therefore least credible sources of material – were not reproduced.

Other published texts that documented Jewish wartime experience used similar principles: the paper *Voina i evrei* requested that the public send in materials referring to acts of heroism among Jewish soldiers, but only “materials that have been thoroughly verified, so that no one may accuse us of distorting facts.”⁷⁹ Such ideas also appeared in a ninety-seven page EKOPO report about Jewish expellees that was sent to the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in October 1915.⁸⁰ This report then became the basis for part of an important narrative and documentary compilation that the AJC published in the United States in 1916, known as *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone*, and translated into Yiddish as *Der shvartser bukh* (The Black Book). The authors of the original EKOPO report listed the nine types of sources they had used as evidence for their findings, ranked by “order of credibility.” It is telling that official government documents and decrees were ranked first, whereas “private correspondence and [...] personal narratives” were ranked ninth.⁸¹

Yet although documents were thought to rank first in terms of credibility, Dubnow indicated that *The Black Book* presented not only the documents

78 Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914–1919*, 49.

79 *Voina i evrei* 1 (1914), 1.

80 *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone*, New York 1916; in Yiddish: *Der shvartser bukh*, trans. by William Poyznik, New York 1916. No reason is given as to why the Yiddish translation was entitled *The Black Book*. The Yiddish text was not related to Dubnow’s Russian text of the same title. The American Jewish Committee published these two pamphlets to help raise funds from various constituencies of the American Jewish public. See Albert Lucas, *American Jewish Relief in the World War*, in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (September 1918), 221–228.

81 The original report is located at the Archives of the American Jewish Committee, New York, General Correspondence 1906–1932, box 26, folder 1, *Condition of the Jews in Belligerent Countries. A Preliminary Survey with Special Reference to the Jews in Russia*, 10 October 1915, 1–97, here 10.

themselves, but also summaries (*svodki*).⁸² The combination of documents and narrative summary revealed another of Dubnow's strategies in compiling the book: official documents were necessary to include as "factual materials," but they did not constitute a Jewish national narrative. What purpose did these *svodki*, or summaries, serve? For one, they sought to make sense of a complicated historical reality in which Jews had been victims of pogroms, expulsions, and rape in dozens if not hundreds of cities and shtetls throughout the war zone, with inestimable variations in individual experience. Summary and simplification were thus important elements in the creation of a coherent narrative of national experience. These summaries also described peoples' experiences of the war from a seemingly objective perspective. The hand of the individual writer (whether Dubnow, Erlikh, or others) was hardly evident, and left no traces of an authorial "I" or of the narrator's personal relationship to the events that were described. The anonymity of the authors contributed to the sense that *The Black Book* was a Jewish national narrative, rather than simply a catalogue of various individuals' tragic accounts. Yet the records left by individuals, as we know from the range of materials that became part of the Politbiuro archive, were quite varied, and did not all conform with the narrative of Jewish historical experience that Dubnow sought to create. What was this narrative?

The narrative framework throughout *The Black Book* represented one aspect of Jewish wartime history in particular: it emphasized the relationship between the Russian government's victimization of Jewish civilians and the sacrifices of Jewish soldiers for the Russian war effort. As Dubnow stated in his introduction:

"The majority of material for this tragic book comes from the fate of Russian Jewry, with whom the Tsarist government and Judeophobic society waged a war of destruction, at the very moment when Jewish blood was being spilled at the front in defense of Russia."⁸³

Throughout *The Black Book*, the phrase the "fate of Russian Jewry" was used to evoke the Russian military's victimization of people whose sons, fathers and brothers were dying for Russia. Among the elderly people, women, and children in the war zone, one could hardly find a family that was "not related to a soldier."⁸⁴ Within this narrative framework, the stories of individual figures functioned as symbols of the national experience as a whole. Thus, the Jewish soldier who died at the front while his family was being expelled from their home symbolized the futility of the Jewish contri-

82 Dubnow (ed.), IChK, 196.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., 240.

bution to the Russian war effort, and by extension, the realization that civil rights for Jews could never be won from a regime that practiced such policies; the rape of a Jewish woman symbolized the violation of the family, and in a broader sense, the destruction of the most basic unit that enabled national continuity. Put differently, one could say that in this narrative framework, the figures of soldiers and women functioned as synecdoches: their particular experiences stood for the history of millions of Jews, or the imagined nation, as it were. The use of synecdoche is a crucial method by which Dubnow created a coherent national narrative in *The Black Book* using a vast number of documents that reflected a broad range of experiences.

It is possible that by conflating individual experience with that of the nation as a whole, Dubnow and the writers of *The Black Book* sought to avoid the problems associated with using individual testimonies – sources that, as we have seen, skeptical critics could potentially dismiss as “products of folklore and imagination.” At the same time, because *The Black Book* generalized the experiences of tens of thousands of Jews within a single narrative, the editor’s own claim to historical accuracy and evidence could be called into question. *The Black Book* is thus characterized by an unresolved tension between Dubnow’s aspirations to produce a document filled with incontrovertible evidence, and his evocative characterization of the work as a “tragic book” about “the fate of Russian Jewry.”

The conflict between documentary method and the creation of national narrative through the use of synecdoche is particularly notable in descriptions of rape victims in *The Black Book*. The closing pages of the book are filled with a veritable catalogue of horrifying stories of girls and women who were raped in different locations, a tragedy that as Erlikh, the author of the section put it, “deserves its own place in a wartime martyrology of Russian Jewry.”⁸⁵ In all of the cited accounts, violators were invariably identified as Cossacks, figures long associated in the Jewish popular imagination with brutality and anti-Jewish violence.⁸⁶ In all of the cited cases, the victims’ husbands, fathers and sons had either died while trying to defend them, were away fighting at the front, or had been previously arrested by Russian military authorities. In the shtetl Onikshty, a father and son were killed for trying to defend mother and daughter, while a man in Piskurno was killed trying to defend his daughter, who was then raped.⁸⁷ Several stories referred to women who had sought to escape their attackers. Some tried to drown themselves or throw themselves from windows, but were dragged from the water or picked up from the ground, and raped. No one was spared: eleven- and twelve-year-

85 Ibid., 292. For crimes against women, see 292–295.

86 On this subject, see Klier, Kazaki i pogromy, 47 f.

87 Dubnow (ed.), IChK, 292.

olds, women more than seventy years old, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and the wives of soldiers all became victims.⁸⁸ It is difficult, if not impossible in some cases to verify the accuracy of these accounts, which may have also served an apologetic purpose. They ought therefore to be interpreted twice: as “factual material” and as part of the tragic national narrative that Dubnow sought to construct in *The Black Book*.

In her study of atrocities against women committed during World War I by Ottoman Turks in Palestine and Armenia, Billie Melman has suggested that in memoirs of the war years, stories of victimized women were often conflated with the history of the nation as a whole.⁸⁹ The inability of men to defend their women, and the violation of masses of women (mothers, wives and daughters) destroyed families; the broken family, in turn, symbolized the degradation, or catastrophe of the Jewish nation, and threatened the nation’s future in a most fundamental way. Melman’s argument is deeply relevant to the narrative of atrocities against Russian Jewry presented in *The Black Book*. Stories of womens’ suffering epitomized Dubnow’s goal that *The Black Book* function as a document about the victimization of the Jewish people as a whole, and his belief that such a document could serve a pragmatic purpose by helping to address and overcome what he regarded to be the underlying cause of victimization – lack of civil rights for the Jewish people.

Conclusion

According to Dubnow, *The Black Book* included only a “small part” of the vast amount of material that had been gathered by the Politbiuro between 1914 and 1917; additional documents would be published in future editions of *Evreiskaia starina*, including eyewitness testimonies about the conduct of the wartime civil administration towards Jews, the experiences of Jews in the Town and Zemstvo Unions, and the destruction of Galicia.⁹⁰ Although volumes of *Evreiskaia starina* would be published until 1930, none of these plans came to fruition. As noted earlier, some of the contents of the Politbiuro archive went into exile following the Bolshevik Revolution, along with those who had helped to compile it. But perhaps most importantly, the much

88 Ibid., 293.

89 Billie Melman, Re-Generation. Nation and the Construction of Gender in Peace and War, Palestine Jews 1900–1918, in: idem (ed.), Borderlines. Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870–1930, New York 1998, 121–140, esp. 133 f.

90 Dubnow (ed.), IChK, 197.

bloodier scale of anti-Jewish violence during the Russian Civil War that began just one year after the end of the World War overshadowed the events that had come before. Indeed, several of the individuals who had chronicled World War I, including Dubnow, Cherkover, and Vinaver, turned their attention to documenting pogroms from 1918 to 1920. Their efforts produced another archive in which they amassed thousands of additional documents about the experiences of Jews during wartime.