

Judaism in Medieval Novgorod: The Development of the Russian Orthodox Church Doctrine on the Jews

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In the late 15th century, a small group of revolutionary Jews sought to take over Russia. This became known as the "Judaizer Heresy." This movement approach Russia from the Northwest, from Novgorod, since this city was an oligarchy, seeking to move away from Moscow and part of the Hanseatic league. These Jews would use some of these as levers against Russia as a whole. The result was the rejection of the Jewish infiltrators through the swift action of Sts. Joseph, the Abbot of Volokolamsk and the Archbishop Gennadius of Novgorod. What surprised many was how easy it was to penetrate this Orthodox city so quickly. The revolutionary Jew was born at this time.

Medieval Novgorod was an oligarchic republic. It was a large, fabulously wealthy part of the Hanseatic League. Moscow sought to tie that republic closer to itself and a vision of a unified Russian Orthodox empire. Oligarchy rejects all ideas of the common good or self-sacrifice inherently, so it saw the rise of Moscow as a threat. Novgorod's elite sought an ally in Lithuania. Martha Boretsky, a slaveowner and the most powerful woman in eastern Europe at the time, led the anti-Moscow party and sought entry into a loose confederation of Poland and parts of Orthodox Lithuania. Upon failures of negotiation, the leader of the Judaizer party, Shariya Zhidovinov, likely a Karaite and Kabbalaist.

The spread of Jewish influence in the world and the domination of the Jewish community is a fact repeatedly noted in history. From the Persian king Artaxerxes influenced by the Jews through Esther or later, their influence upon the Caliphate of Cordoba, Jewish power is a fact of global politics and an essential part of Russian history. The emergence of this Jewish preacher was facilitated by several factors. During the Reconquista, Spaniards ousted the Arabs from the Pyrenees to end Jewish influence in Spain. Romans expelled the Jews and forced them to adopt Catholicism. The center of religious and political life of the Jews moved to the Polish-Lithuania. Poland was the center of Judaism. Casmir III conquered Galicia and part of Volyn and tried to colonize these lands, bringing them the benefits of Jewish merchants. Diluting the Russian population with alien elements, they were thus to be more strongly bound to Poland.

The appearance Shariya in Novgorod in 1471 preceded the final phase of the Reconquest in Spain and the mass exodus of the Jews from the Pyrenees as well as the publication of anti-Jewish laws in Lithuania. It is possible that these factors forced the Jewish community to seek a new base. He came with the entourage of Prince Michael Olelkovich of Kiev who also sought the wealth of Novgorod for himself.

Shariya was not alone. His band included Moses Hanusch and Joseph Shmoylov Skorova. Jewish propaganda was successful among some factions of the high elite. Usually, historians in this field, terrified of being labeled "anti-Semitic" say little more than that they were

“opposed to church corruption.”

These Jewish infiltrators organized cell structures of five men each, seeking the elite of the church first of all. There was no attempt to convert the lower classes at all. The first and the most influential followers of Shariya were two priests, Denis and Alexei. Alexei received the name Abraham, and his wife became Sarah.

St. Gennady was the Metropolitan of Novgorod and received word of an organized attempt by European Jews to take Russia. He called a synod in 1488 which condemned this movement and Joseph of Volokolamsk wrote his Illuminator partly in response to this new development. These ideological strands, including Zionism, were condemned by a synod in Novgorod in 1490.

Charles VIII expelled the Jews in 1493. The Chief Rabbi of Arles, Shamora, saw this policy developing several years earlier. Unrest grew in urban France against the Jews and he asked his brethren in Constantinople for advice in a letter of January 13 1489. The Chief Rabbi in Constantinople was Yusef, who replied to Shamora in November of that year.

His reply reads in part:

Beloved brothers Moses! We received your complaint outlining the misery and suffering that torment you. They cause us as much grief as yourself. If the king is urging you to be baptized, then do so, keeping the sacred law of Moses in your hearts.¹ If they threaten to take away our property, remember that our merchants will soon take away all that belongs to the Christians. Do they threaten your life? Soon, our cooks, pharmacists and doctors will take theirs. They destroy your synagogues? Soon, we will own their churches and we will destroy the temples of the goyim. We will do this by ensuring our entry into the professions such as medicine, law and public service and soon will dominate our present persecutors. We will be avenged. Be patient, this method will take us to the summit of power (Translated from the Russian, Letter of Yusuf, November 21 1489).²

Phony conversions will permit Jews to enter all the professions and from there, dominate the goyim (or “cattle”). It is strong evidence of a secret society within Christendom dedicated to destroying it. The Jewish revolutionary from here on would be obsessed with disguising their identity. They would change their names, appearance and even religion for the sake of penetrating the host society. Only in the 20th century have Jews been confident enough to rule openly.

Technology and “science” were part of their agenda for the creation of a “new man.” Astrology and Gnostic alchemy combined scientific theory with social revolution. This approach convinced the priests above to see themselves as the vanguard of a “New Russia” that they will rule. All revolutionary movements in modern times have been of this character.

They were outwardly quite humble and affable. They were quite pious for public show and impressed many. Alexei now had access to credit, money and an ideology that quickly placed him in good stead with many close to Ivan III. It spread in Novgorod because it justified slavery, the division of the world into the elite and the “cattle,” and promised tremendous power

1 This is not a reference to the Pentateuch, but the Talmud as its authoritative interpretation. It is true that Shariya was a Karaite, but this was only to make penetration that much easier. The dominant elements of Polish Jewry were solidly Talmudic.

2 A copy of this letter was first found in the Salamanca monastic libraries and is now in the archives of Toledo as part of its Spanish State Antiquities Section. Another copy was found in Provence.

through credit, money and technology.

Fedor Kuritsyn was a major government official who spoke German, Polish, Hungarian and Greek. He became the undisputed leader of the Russian Judaizers. By roughly 1500, it had just over 1,000 adherents in several Russian cities. Ivan III saw Shariya as a way to infiltrate Lithuania. His daughter, Elena, supported the Jews and her son, Dmitri, was proclaimed heir.

The alluring and mysterious power that the Judaizers promised was irresistible. The Kabbalah was attractive since it not only provided an avenue to money and power, but also a justification for it later. The Kabbalists gradually convince students that complete initiation into this secret science is possible only if they renounce Christ.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the west were marked by a special enthusiasm for this “science” that ultimately, came down to alchemy. Aristotle's “secret books” were peddled by the Judaizers to give their agenda a suitable respectable and “gentile” feel. Even in the ancient world, the “Neoplatonists” had nothing to do with Plato, but used his name for the sake of justifying their magical arts. Plato had no use for this ideology and the actual texts of Neoplatonism (especially that of Plotinus, their best known writer) knew of no such agenda.

Dionysus, one of their first “converts,” was told that he could remain a Christian and still practice these arts. Their conscience (as well as their social standing) needed to be reassured. This first generation of converts were zealous to appear as Christian as possible and so, there developed an association between this heresy and “Christian piety.”

The Talmud was a direct reaction to Christ. It denied and replaced the Old Testament and declared the prophets to be in Hell due to their condemnation of Israel. Race replaced piety. All nations other than the Jews were declared unclean animals. The rabbis, not any scripture, was the authority. Needless to say, this was not uttered to the Russian sinners who saw the justification for their lifestyle in the Jewish idea. It would be revealed slowly but surely in time. Thankfully, the church and crown, working together, destroyed this heresy.

Talmudists and Karaites alike were taken with the Gnostic mythos and convinced many that by “learning the secrets of nature” that unlimited power could be theirs. Monarchs throughout Europe kept sorcery and astrologers on hand. The famed historian Karamzin writes:

The Jewish science of the Kabbalah was captivating for the ignorant and curious minds in the fifteenth century, a time when many of the most learned men were looking anew at all the major mysteries of the human mind. Kabbalists boasted ancient legends came down to them from Moses, many even claimed to have the book received by Adam from God. This was the main source of Solomon's wisdom. With it, they can know all the secrets of nature, can interpret dreams, predict the future, command spirits and, soon, rule the world. They reduced the saying of the Old Testament to clever allegories. . . No wonder that these suggestions produced a dramatic effect in the minds of the weak and cunning Jews, and once having mastered them, assured them that the Messiah has not yet appeared in the world.

In Poland and Lithuania, where the papal fanatics furiously persecuted the Orthodox, Jews were privileged caste. They were regarded as free men, subject only to the Polish king and Grand Duke of Lithuania, they were exempt from military service, did not obey the local laws, and were judged only by their Kahal organization. Among the privileges of the Jews were the

right to impose levies on Orthodox churches. The Polish oligarchs, in order to keep the monarch weak, took away the ability of the crown to tax prosperous merchants in the cities. By bringing in Jews dependent on their goodwill, the monarch was shut out of this source of revenue.

The context is the great cause of the Moscow princes, the collecting of all Russian lands into a single state. The weak point of this all-Russian unity was still Novgorod, known for his rebellious elite. The oligarchs saw Moscow as a threat to their ambitions. To a great extent, this experiment into the Kabbalah was another attempt to justify secession from Moscow and to carve out a separate identity. Of course, this was solely an oligarchic experiment.

Even more, the Judaizer movement utilized the lowest forms of lust to entice people to their cause. All contemporary sources connect this movement to sodomy (which can mean fornication, adultery and homosexuality), which strongly suggests their adherents might have been homosexuals that now had an excuse for their perversion and pathology. This is hinted at in the condemnation of the fallen Metropolitan Zosima of Novgorod at the synod of 1490.

The ideological weapon of this elite was provided by Shariya. St. Gennadius complained of the ignorance of many Russian clergy, and these were easy targets. The typical analysis of this movement says that the Jews were simply another manifestation of 'western rationalism' that rejected the liturgy, sacraments and the spiritual world. In other words, they were nominalists and materialists, though there was no real language to communicate such views at the time.

In addition, the typical view is that they substituted the Old Testament for the New. This is false. They took aspects of the Old Testament and mixed them with books of magic and alchemy. The entire point of St. Gennadius' bible was to use the most authoritative sources to show what is actual scripture and what is manipulated. The Orthodox Bible is difficult; it promises little but pain in earthly life. The text of the revolutionaries promises power. The latter requires manipulation and appeals to the sub-rational. The former must be guarded strictly because its message is often difficult to absorb and accept.

In the universal church, one of the anathemas read aloud during the services of the Sunday of Orthodoxy reads:

Priest Alexander and Dionysus, Ivan "the Wolf" Kuritsyn, Feognost, monk Joseph Kunkin and all followers of the Judaizer movement, as well as all their sympathizers and teachers, all you that despised the church through this heresy, all who have driven, through the abominable and damned Jews, many from the faith and from the safety of the church, anathema.

Their modern-day followers in the church say that this was only a local council, so it "doesn't count" for us. Since the anathema refers to those sympathizing with this movement are also anathema, this is yet another proof that most of the modernist Orthodox are out of the church. Most of the anathemas read on that Sunday are from local councils, so this excuse is proven as weak as they are. This would also include most of the Patriarchs of the 20th century (in Russia and elsewhere) that have sought to curry favor with the Jews. In 2005, the fallen patriarch Alexei II awarded Rabbi Schneier the Order of St. Daniel of Moscow. Since, according to the Talmud, this medal would be a cursed object, it must have been immediately destroyed by the Rabbi.

The Strigolniki and Judaizers were similar organizations and close to the Bogomils. They took power by seducing the upper classes and using sex and the promises of power to bring them to heel. The ascetic labors could be removed and their appetites indulged. Any power they have

can be justified in its own right and there is no oppressive Father God to report to. The real attraction, apart from these, was that they could pose as “progressive” versus their “ignorant” conationals. It was an effective combination of forces that typified all revolutionary groups to this very day.

The Judaizers in Old Russia shows that there was a serious attempt to take Russia for the Jewish and Kabbalistic idea in the early modern era. This was considered by the Russian monarch an invasion and a severe subversion of the Russian idea. They were able to use the carnal sins of the clergy to gain a foothold in western Russia. In addition, there was a clear connection between this heresy and the merchant republics of the Hanseatic league. It is also connected with “sodomy,” both in the sense of homosexuality and the sense of usury (that is, the infertile being considered fertile).

The reaction against this movement defined Russian church politics for centuries to come and might even give a glimpse into the revolutionary mind throughout European history. All revolutionary and radical movements were Jewish in Europe from this point on, so it behooves the historian to take this blatantly Judaic movement seriously. Politically, it gave Moscow a clear notion that Novgorod needed to be firmly bound to Moscow or it will become a source of invasion in the future. Finally, it showed that the capitalists of the west that Russia was its main enemy. The more things change. . . .

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