

## JEWISH HISTORY AND CULTURE IN A DESTROYED SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA

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In approximately 1927–28, the Leningrad division of the OGIZ (Organization of State Publishing Houses of the RSFSR) began work on the publication of a four-volume Soviet encyclopedic dictionary (henceforth referred to as the *Dictionary*). The memoirs of Prof. Nikolai P. Poletika<sup>1</sup> tell how this publication was destroyed. The author of the memoirs reports that from 1928 to 1930 he was working on the *Dictionary* in its modern history and contemporary international politics division, and contributed several major articles to the first volume. He notes:

The first volume of the *Dictionary*, scheduled to appear at the beginning of 1932, included 639 pages of closely-written text. Work was also coming to a close on the remaining three volumes, each of which was being prepared in an edition of 100,000 copies. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of rubles had already been spent on paper, typesetting, workers' salaries and typographical work. But the entire printed edition of the first volume and the typeset manuscripts of the following volumes were sent to be reprocessed into pulp, the type set was eliminated,<sup>2</sup> and only the basic staffs of the *Dictionary* received

1. N. N. Poletika, *Vidennoe i perezhitoe (Iz vospominanii)* [Seen and experienced (from [my] memoirs)] (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 304–307.
2. This is the only case known to us of the destruction "at the root" of an encyclopedic publication in the USSR, although other encyclopedias were also subject to repressions. Thus, readers were told to cut out certain pages and to replace them with new ones sent to them by the authorities. For example, after the arrest of V. F. Zelenin, his article about L. P. Beria was removed from the 16th volume (1952) of the *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia*, 2nd ed. (henceforth *BSE-2*), which was ready for the press, and was replaced by an article about a new species, "Green Frog." The first six volumes of the second edition of the *Malaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia* (henceforth *MSE*), published in 1933–1937, were reissued in 1937–1939 in a new edition with basic corrections and additions (to replace the former edition in libraries and institutions). Only two (1932, 1933) out of the planned 12 volumes of the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia* were published since the editor-in-chief, R. P. Eideman, and the entire editorial board were shot. The publication of the *Literary Encyclopedia* was not completed (vols. 1–9, 11, 1929–1939), since the already prepared tenth volume was not permitted to be published (a copy of the prepared version of the tenth volume is preserved in the State Literary Museum in Moscow) and the fate of the twelfth volume is unknown. The publication of several encyclopedias about various localities, such as the *Siberian Soviet Encyclopedia* (vols. 1–3, 1929–32), the *Ural Soviet Encyclopedia* (vol. 1, 1933), and the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Central Chernozemnyi [black earth] Region* (vol. 1, 1934), was halted. The reason for this was probably the mass arrests of 1929–31 and the breaking up of the movement for the study of local regions (cf. the collection *Protiv vreditel'stva v kraevedcheskoi literature* (Against sabotage in literature relating to the study of local regions), OGIZ, 1931).

an author's copy 'as a memento' of their work.<sup>3</sup>

Poletika links the destruction of the Leningrad *Dictionary* to its rivalling the productions of the Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia Publishing House, which was established in Moscow in 1930. Based on a reading of a letter by Stalin to the editorial board of the journal *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia* (No. 6, 1931), "Certain Questions about the History of Bolshevism,"<sup>4</sup> Poletika believed that the chief reason for the "liquidation" of the entire edition was the failure of its articles on the history of Russia and that of the Bolshevik Party to reflect the line which was then becoming obligatory: Stalin's role as leader of the party and Soviet state. Because the Moscow group considered the Leningrad *Dictionary* to be a "literary-scientific enterprise of the Zinov'ev clique," they decided to destroy it.

The first volume of the *Dictionary*, "A-Zh," was to have included 7,273 articles (one can thus assume that the four volumes would probably have contained about 30,000 articles). Editorial work was completed on July 15, 1931, typesetting commenced on May 26, 1931, and 15,000 out of the planned edition of 100,000 copies were actually produced.

The managing editor of the *Dictionary* was Miron B. Vol'fson<sup>5</sup> (simultaneously he was a member of the editorial board and assistant to the chief editor of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia [*BSE*] and also deputy editor-in-chief of the Small Soviet Encyclopedia [*MSE*]). In addition to being in charge of the general editorial work of the *Dictionary*, Vol'fson was designated as a co-editor of the economics and history divisions. A. M. Fainshtein was the editor in charge of checking completed work, and V. V. Belenko, Vladimir I. Nevskii, and Vladimir M. Turok were editors of branch divisions. Only two members of the editorial board were not involved in practical work on the *Dictionary*: Otto Iu. Shmidt, member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and editor-in-chief of the *BSE*, and Nikolai L. Meshcheriakov, editor-in-chief of the *MSE*.

After the appearance of the letter of Stalin, in which Slutskii and other authors were accused of writing on Party history in the spirit of "an anti-party attitude and semi-Trotskyism," of "slander and falsification," of "fraudulent

3. Poletika, p. 305. The authors thank Professor N. P. Poletika for putting at their disposal his remaining copy of the first volume of the *Dictionary*. The authors also discovered one of the few extant copies of this edition in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.
4. I. Stalin, *Sochineniia* (Works), vol. 13 (Moscow, 1952), pp. 84–102.
5. M. B. Vol'fson (1880–1932) participated in the social-democratic movement, apparently, in the Bund (General Jewish Workers' Union). From 1906 he was a Menshevik and only in 1920 joined the Rossiskaia Kommunisticheskaia Partiiia (Bolshevik) [Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)] (hereafter RCP/B). He was known as one of the organizers of publishing matters in the USSR and a popularizer of Marxism. Vol'fson was the author of the article "The Jewish Question" in the 24th volume of the *BSE-1*. Thirty-seven years after its publication, Iu. Ivanov in his book *Ostorozhno: Sionizm* (Caution: Zionism) (Moscow: Politizdat, 1968), which became a standard of anti-Zionist propaganda in the 1970s–1980s, included Vol'fson among the "agents of the Zionist cause," because he spoke out against assimilation as the only way to solve the Jewish question.



chicanery," "wretchedness and falsehood," and the editorial board of *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* was accused of "rotten liberalism," (after which the journal was suspended throughout 1932), the editorial board of the *Dictionary* decided to delay publishing the volume while seeking a way out of the situation.

At the end of May, 1932, Vol'fson died. However, despite the unfavorable circumstances, the Leningrad OGIZ decided to go ahead with the first volume, though in 15,000 instead of 100,000 copies. In an attempt to avert the impending danger, the editors of the *Dictionary* included an "Introduction" and appeal "From the Publishers," in which they confessed to shortcomings, explained the reasons for them, and apologized to the readers. They noted:

As a result of events which occurred during this time in our fast-moving life, some positions—whether correct, or at any rate, permissible at the time when the articles of the first volume of the *Dictionary* were written and edited—at present are incorrect and outmoded.

Referring to the changing international situation and the alignment of forces in the world arena, the aggravation of the class struggle and, chiefly, to the appearance after the completion of editorial work of "Stalin's letter, which possessed enormous significance in principle," to the editorial board of *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, the Leningrad OGIZ confessed to "mistakes, inaccuracies, [and] anachronisms," admitting in advance that the list of them was incomplete. After each confession a long list appeared of "erroneous" articles in various branches of knowledge—from physics and philosophy to "housing" and "abortion." The main targets of the self-accusations, however, were articles on literature and art in which, as the publishers wrote, "a purely formalistic approach to the explanation of various phenomena and to the characterization of various writers, artists and musicians was harbored."

The publishing house acknowledged that a reworking of the *Dictionary* was "a difficult and lengthy business, all the more so since the editor-in-chief M. B. Vol'fson has passed away,"<sup>6</sup> and promised that a new editorial staff would introduce a number of essential changes in the edition's positions upon reviewing the volume.

Nevertheless, it decided to publish the volume because "our country shows an enormous and persistent demand for reference works such as encyclopedias and dictionaries." OGIZ thus felt it was inexpedient to delay the prepared part of the edition of the first volume or "to throw away an already printed and, in general, useful reference work," despite "a series of mistakes, gaps, [and] unsuccessful formulations." The publishers expressed the hope that all the errors would be corrected "both in additional printings of the first volume and in the following volumes of the *Dictionary*."

The editorial board's "Introduction" repeated the ideas and tone of "From

the Publisher," stressing chiefly that "the letter of Comrade Stalin" which "with particular force poses the issue of an implacable struggle against distortions of Marxism-Leninism," appeared when, "regrettably, almost all sheets of the first volume of the *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary* had already been printed." The editorial board acknowledged that "despite the repeated adjustments and reworkings of all articles in the *Dictionary*, it is not free of mistakes, which will be taken into consideration" in the future. The editorial board also reported that it "plans to assure" the publication of the remaining three volumes toward the end of 1932 or the beginning of 1933.

The list of articles which the editorial board acknowledged as incorrect did not include any dealing with the history of Bolshevism or the workers' movement in Russia. Presumably what was included was meant to act as a lightning rod to protect the articles which might be considered criminal from the point of view of Stalin's Party-ideological formulations.

On December 29, 1932, *Pravda* published an article by M. Rovinskii, "Innocent Victims of a Fast-moving Life . . .,"<sup>7</sup> which reported that the first volume of the *Dictionary* had been published in November-December 1932. Following either the publisher or his own initiative, M. Rovinskii limited his devastating criticism to only those articles which the editorial board itself had labeled as incorrect. Rovinskii's article abounded in irony, rhetorical questions and stigmatization, for example: "the author, hiding under the pseudonym . . ."; "whose 'Party spirit' dictated the articles on Gorkii and Bibik?"; "the imprint of Menshevik philistinism lies on many, very many pages of the *Dictionary*" and so forth. The article ended with the pointed question: "In our Soviet state, isn't such an attitude toward the reader a criminal one?"

In putting the blame for the mistakes in the *Dictionary* on "fast-moving life," according to Rovinskii, the authors of the two introductions wanted to "heap blame on . . . the Soviet system and on the pace of socialist construction, which appeared in the work of OGIZ under the euphemism 'fast-moving life.'"

Such particularly harsh political accusations, coming from the pages of *Pravda*, sealed the fate of the first volume and of the entire edition. According to Poletika, "the destruction of the *Soviet Encyclopedic Dictionary* . . . was one of the first 'burnings' of the works of Soviet authors, and it gave publishers, editorial boards and authors guidelines to follow in the future."

A comparison of the treatment of Jewish history and culture in this destroyed work with their treatment in works which were published allows the tracing of Soviet ideological development in these areas. The comparison undertaken here deals with Jewish subject matter in the first volume of the *Dictionary* and the first editions of the *BSE* and of the *MSE* (published previ-

6. This is the only time that Vol'fson is named as the editor-in-chief. In publishing data he figures twice as managing editor. This can be seen as an attempt by the publishing house and editorial board to transfer responsibility to the deceased manager of the publication.

7. Poletika incorrectly titled this article "Comrade Stalin's Letter to the Workers' Movement."



ously or simultaneously with the *Dictionary*,<sup>8</sup> in the postwar *Encyclopedic Dictionary*,<sup>9</sup> and in other encyclopedias, in those cases when, in regard to fundamental issues, the position of the *Dictionary* differed from those of other contemporary works.

### The Article "Jews"—Questions of Ethnography and Demography

When the volume of the *Dictionary* which contained the major article "Jews" and related material (Jewish language, literature, etc.) was published, all the articles on these topics had already been published in the ten-volume *MSE*, while the 24th volume of the 66-volume *BSE*, which included material on the same topics, was in the process of being edited. In other words, the basic encyclopedic material which served as a model and standard was being prepared almost simultaneously with the *Dictionary*. Although editorial work on the *Dictionary* preceded editing of the 24th volume of the *BSE* by 11 months, it is reasonable to assume that the authors and editorial board of the *Dictionary* were familiar with the material of the *BSE*. As was already noted, the editor-in-chief of the *Dictionary*, M. Vol'fson, was simultaneously a member of the editorial board and assistant to the chief editor of the *BSE*. Therefore the unique position of the editorial board of the *Dictionary* in relation to a number of Jewish topics can hardly be explained by unfamiliarity with the *BSE* material, but rather as a reaction to them.

The article "Jews" was authored by the editorial board and was over three-quarters of the size of the article in the ten-volume *MSE*. It was approximately 22 times longer than the article on this topic in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary*.

The "lack of proportion" is apparent when one compares the article "Jews" with material on other peoples of the USSR (e.g., Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Belorussians, and Georgians); there is much more material on the former. This can be partially explained by the fact that information on history, which is included in the article "Jews," appears—in the case of other peoples—in articles about the regions which they inhabit. Nevertheless, it turns out that the exposition of the ethno-demography and history of the Jews occupies more than one and a half times the space of similar material on the Georgians; twice as much as about the Armenians, and almost three and a half times more space than material about the Azerbaijanis. The ethno-demography and history of the Belorussians takes up approximately four-fifths of the space given to similar information about the Jews.

The proportions are entirely different in the *ES-1* (*Encyclopedic Dictionary*) published in 1953. The ethno-demography and history of each of the four peoples noted above there occupies from 4,500 to 5,000 p.m., which is approximately six times greater than the material on the Jews (768 p.m.).

8. *BSE-1* (here and henceforth, the number indicates the edition), vols. 1–25, 1926–1932; *MSE-1*, vols. 1–3, 1928–1929.

9. *ES-1*, vols. 1–3, 1953–1955.

The *Dictionary* article about the Jews also stands out with regard to content, particularly in the ethno-demographic section. In terms of accuracy of definition and informativeness, it is superior not only to material about the ethno-demography and anthropology of other peoples in this edition, but also to the corresponding section of articles about the Jews in all editions of the *MSE* and *BSE*. The article discusses aspects of the Jews' ethnogenesis, their languages, anthropology, ethnic composition and demography.

The *Dictionary* article is the first Soviet or Russian encyclopedia to begin with a precise ethnic definition of the Jews. They are defined as "a nationality of mixed origin, speaking various languages which they mastered in the process of the Jews' settlement among other nationalities."<sup>10</sup> It is noted that "only historical circumstances of the lives of the Jews, who for centuries preserved a common religion and language . . . determined the Jews' preservation of a certain ethnic and domestic communality." However, the entire following exposition makes clear to the reader that the Jews—both ancient and modern—are a single ethnic community, a single people.

In contrast, the authors of the first published Soviet encyclopedic articles about the Jews—in both the *MSE-1* and *BSE-1*—eschewed an ethnic definition and began their expositions of the history of the Jews with vague ethnographic (*MSE*) or anthropological (*BSE*) sketches.

The *Dictionary* provides data about the anthropology, ethnic composition and languages of the Jews which, in their completeness and accuracy, are superior to parallel material in all other Soviet encyclopedias. "The Jews are divided into two basic groups and several minor ones: the Ashkenazis (90% of the entire people), the European-American group; . . . the Sephardi or Shpan'oli—North African (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) and Balkan (Salonika) group." Among the smaller groups, "physically related partly to the Ashkenazis, partly to the Sephardi," are listed the

Yemenite Jews (Arabian) speaking a dialect of Arabic; Caucasus and Crimean Jews—several varieties (Mountain Jews—in Azerbaidzhan and Dagestan, Georgian and Crimean Jews) speaking in the Crimea and in Azerbaijani dialects of the Tatar language, in Dagestan a dialect of the Tat language, in Georgia Georgian; Central Asiatic Jews (Bukharan, Persian and Afghani) speaking dialects of the Persian and Tadjik languages; Chinese Jews—arrivals from Persia and Turkestan, almost assimilated with the local population, differing from them only in religion.<sup>11</sup>

10. The concept "nationality" (*narodnost'*) is used in the given case as a synonym of the concept "ethnic community," and not in the sense of ethnic subdivision: tribe, nationality, nation, as is accepted in postwar Soviet encyclopedias.

11. The Falashas are not listed among the ethnic groups. However, the article "Abyssinia" does have a cross-reference to a separate article about them which, had it been published, would have been the only one in all of the Soviet encyclopedias.



... Karaites are also mentioned here. Further on, data is given on the settlement of Jews around the world and the population of Jewish ethno-linguistic groups living in the USSR.<sup>12</sup>

The *MSE-1* sketch only gives data on the settlement of Jews by countries and reports that about 80% of them speak Yiddish. The detailed information of the *Dictionary* is not paralleled in the large article about the Jews in the *BSE-1*, nor in any of the postwar editions of encyclopedic dictionaries. Thus the informativeness of the *Dictionary* with regard to questions of ethnic definition surpasses not only prewar but also postwar Soviet encyclopedic editions.

## The History and Political Life of the Jews

### History of the Jews

Although the presentation of history in the article "Jews" was not free of vulgar sociology and followed the framework of the Marxist theory of a class struggle, it nevertheless provided rather extensive information about the Jews in the ancient world which, judging by "see also" references,<sup>13</sup> was to be expanded upon in other articles.

The history of the Jews is presented from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E., that is from the time of their appearance in Canaan (Palestine) where, "having partly annihilated, partly subjugated, the original population,"<sup>14</sup> they spread throughout the country. In the tenth century B.C.E., according to the *Dictionary*, the Jewish tribes united under the authority of David, while during the reign of his son Solomon,

Palestine entered the period of its greatest economic prosperity. However, . . . the broad masses continued to be in a very difficult situation. . . . Torn by internal strife, the Jewish state . . . split into two kingdoms—Israel (with the capital of Samaria) and Judea (with the capital of Jerusalem).

The article further reported that "weakened by a class struggle . . . the Jews did not have the strength to preserve their state's independence." Both kingdoms fell, "the entire nobility and a significant segment of the middle

12. The demographic data on the Jews given in the article is supplemented by population figures on Jews in articles about various countries and cities. Thus, it is indicated that Jews comprise 27% of the population of Warsaw, 13% of Bukovina, 10%-12% in the Vilna region. In the articles "Baghdad," "Bulgaria," "Hungary," and "Volyn," the Jews are listed among the other national minorities living there.
13. "Prophets," "Maccabees," "Sadducees," "Pharisees," "Essenes," "Zealots," "Messiah." In addition to the cross-references noted in italics, the volume contains articles with additional related information ("Antiochus," "David," "Babylonian captivity," "Bar-Kochba"), although for some reason there are no cross-references to them in the article.
14. Curiously, only this sentence was repeated almost in its entirety in the *BSE-2* (vol. 15, 1952) article "Jews," in which the entire section of Jewish history is covered in 46 lines of brevier type (2484 p.m.).

classes were taken into captivity by the victors." In Palestine, states the *Dictionary*, a theocratic rule emerged, which was developed in the period of the Seleucids. The information about the war and subsequent rule of the Maccabees states that they

were able, relying on the popular masses, to stir up a revolt against the foreign dominion and to gain the independence of Palestine. However, the new Jewish state, headed by the dynasty of the priestly rulers, the Maccabees, was unable to avoid either further Hellenization or the further growth of class contradictions.

In this period three basic "religious-social movements were formed among the Jews: the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes."<sup>15</sup> Each grouping is given a class characteristic, but none is termed, as is done in the *MSE-1* and the *BSE-1*, a "party".

In presenting the history of the Roman conquest, the *Dictionary* accents the "attempts of the Jews to regain their independence." The war of 67-70 C.E. is reported as an "enormous uprising, which was cruelly suppressed by the Romans, who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem." The resulting Bar Kochba revolt, "which was of a messianic nature," writes the *Dictionary*, also "was drowned in streams of blood." "Only the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to the Jews' hopes for a restoration of national independence and finally transferred the center of gravity of Jewish life to the diaspora."<sup>16</sup> The impression is created that the exposition of this period of history (which takes up about 40% of the entire text of the article) is intended to convince the reader that the Jews did not simply or submissively leave their country, but fiercely defended their right to an independent existence in it, to their own state and national independence.

A brief exposition (about 10% of the text) of the history of Russian Jewry begins with the partitions of Poland, "after which, a significant number of Jews first became subjects of Russia, which since the time of the Muscovite kingdom had forbidden the immigration of Jews." In discussing the position

15. In separate articles about the Essenes in both the *Dictionary* and the *MSE-1*, they are characterized as an ancient Hebrew religious sect in Palestine, which arose in the second century B.C.E. In the *BSE-1* they are called a "Judaic sect of the first century of the Christian Era." The *Dictionary* reported that the sect was "organized along communist principles of common property, living quarters and dining" and that "the first Christians borrowed much from the Essenes"; the Essenes' social demands were presented positively (they expressed in "passive form the protest of the working masses against exploitation"; they condemned "social inequality, in particular slavery"). The *ES-1* (vol. 1, 1953) indicated only the location of the sect "in Judea," but was silent about their nationality.
16. In the separate article "The Diaspora" is defined as the "dispersion of the Jews outside of Palestine after the destruction of the Jewish states by the Assyrians (8th century B.C.E.), by the Babylonians (6th century B.C.E.), and by Rome (first century B.C.E.)." An article on the same topic in the *MSE-1* contains only the information that "the Diaspora is the dispersion of the Jewish people outside of Palestine." This concept is not defined at all in the *ES-1*. In this section of the article the *Dictionary* also refers to the articles "Crusades," "Ghetto," "Antisemitism" and "Shabbtai Tzvi."



of Jews in Russian economic and cultural life, the *Dictionary* emphasized class stratification, which assumed acute forms. After dealing with the role of Jews in the revolutionary movement, pogroms and Jewish emigration, and mentioning Zionism in this context, the *Dictionary* arrived at the topic of Jews in the USSR. In a single sentence it stated that "the October Revolution guaranteed complete equality to Jewish workers and opened . . . opportunities for agricultural settlement."

#### *Jewish Political Parties and Figures*

The exposition of the history of Russian Jewry in the article "Jews" focuses not on pogroms and antisemitism, as is the case in the parallel article in the first edition of the *MSE*, but on the role of the Jews in "the all-Russian revolutionary-socialist movement," in which "the Jewish democratic intelligentsia began to play an outstanding role from the second half of the 19th century" and the Jewish workers formed "one of the most advanced ranks of the revolutionary proletariat of the country."<sup>17</sup> According to the *Dictionary*, the composition and situation of the Jewish proletariat in Russia was determined by "a certain success among Jewish workers of petty-bourgeois national-socialism in various forms." References followed to articles on parties representing this ideology: Poalei Zion, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, and the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party. It was stressed that "even in the social-democratic Bund, nationalist tendencies played a very noticeable role." In a separate article on the Bund, the *Dictionary* is the only one among all Soviet encyclopedias<sup>18</sup> to define it as "an organization of the Jewish proletariat [our emphasis], which played a major role in the development of the Jewish worker movement."

These "nationalist" tendencies, according to the *Dictionary*, found their expression in the resolutions of the fourth congress of the Bund (April 1901), which called for the reformation of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) into a federation of national social-democratic organizations. Implementing this request, noted the *Dictionary*, would have introduced organizational splintering of a single centralized party and therefore the second congress of the RSDWP in 1903 rejected the Bund's demand, as a result of

17. In other instances, too, the *Dictionary* notes the role of the Jews in the revolutionary movement. For example, the article about the "American Communist Party" states that "it consists largely of foreign workers," among whom Jews are named. This position sharply distinguishes the *Dictionary* from postwar encyclopedias, which are totally silent about the Jews' role as a national group in the revolutionary and communist movements.

18. This definition differs not only from the definition of the Bund in the first edition of the *BSE*, but also in all successive Soviet encyclopedias. For example, in the second edition of the *BSE*, the Bund is defined as "a petty bourgeois opportunistic party, which is an agent of the bourgeoisie among the working class," and Bundist immigrants reportedly "support the Anglo-American imperialists and preach the ideas of bourgeois cosmopolitanism" (vol. 6, 1951). The third edition of the *BSE* defines the Bund as a "petty bourgeois nationalist organization, uniting chiefly Jewish artisans of the western regions of Russia" (vol. 4, 1971).

which the Bund withdrew from the RSDWP and "returned to it only after the Unity Congress."

#### *Attitude towards Zionism*

The *Dictionary's* approach to Zionism was also different from that in the volumes of the *BSE* and *MSE* which appeared at the same time. Zionism was defined in the article "Jews" as a bourgeois nationalist movement (with a reference to a separate article), which arose at the end of the 1890s. Its adherents were found, according to the article, "among the bourgeois intelligentsia and the Jewish petty bourgeoisie, driven to despair by the Jews' lack of political and economic rights and among the poor artisans of backward agrarian countries." In this the *Dictionary* is in accord with the *BSE-1*, particularly in its assertion that "Great Britain, supported by the upper Jewish bourgeoisie of England, France, and the U.S., used Zionism for its imperialist goals." But none of the material printed in the *Dictionary* was as negative in its evaluation of Zionism as that given in the *BSE-1* by Geilikman, who wrote, "Zionism is deeply reactionary. Social-democracy saw in it its worst enemy,"<sup>19</sup> or the qualification of Zionism by M. Ger as "Jewish fascism."<sup>20</sup>

The reader could find additional information about Zionism in the *Dictionary's* articles about figures in this movement. The article about Moses Hess described him as "one of the precursors of Zionism," and noted *Rome and Jerusalem* as one of his basic works. The article about him in the *MSE-1* did not include such information. The *Dictionary* defined Theodor Herzl as an "extreme nationalist, founder of the Zionist organization, who published the book *The Jewish State* in 1896." The *MSE-1* provided the same information with additional evaluations ("founder of the Jewish bourgeois Zionist party" and so forth). The *Dictionary's* rather extensive article (800 p.m.) on V. Jabotinsky characterized him as a "political figure and publicist, one of the leaders of militant Zionism." In addition, the article noted his activity in organizing the Jewish Legion and reported on his arrest and ten-year prison sentence handed down by the English authorities. Jabotinsky, according to the article, headed the extremist group in the Zionist movement, the "Revisionists," who

demand the forced sale of all Arab lands to the Jews, the inclusion of Transjordan in Palestine, intensification of Jewish settlement and an aggressive policy toward the Arabs.

He provoked a split in the Zionist organization and became "the ideologue and leader of its most chauvinistic part." The *MSE-1* did not include an article on Jabotinsky.

19. T. Geilikman, "Evrei v Rossii" (Jews in Russia), section of "Evrei," *BSE-1*, vol. 24, 1932.

20. M. Ger, "Literatura na drevneevreiskom iazyke" (Ancient Hebrew literature), section of the article "Evreiskaia literatura," *BSE-1*, vol. 24, 1932.



It is worth noting that the short article about Arthur J. Balfour in the *Dictionary* was the only one in the encyclopedias to mention that he was the author of the Balfour Declaration, the British government declaration of November 2, 1917 favoring the establishment in Palestine of a "Jewish national home."<sup>21</sup> It is also noteworthy that in the article about the black activist Marcus Garvey, his work *Africa for Africans* was said to espouse "a kind of Negro Zionism."

### The Topic of Antisemitism in the Dictionary

A rather extensive separate signed article by Nuorteva in the *Dictionary* dealt with the subject of antisemitism. This topic was also discussed in the published volume in the articles "Jews," "Beilis Case," "Dreyfus Case," and "Ghetto." In addition, judging by cross-references, the edition was to have included the articles "Pogroms," "Blood Libel Trials," and "Pale of Settlement."

About half the material deals with antisemitism in Russia and the USSR. The survey of antisemitism in Europe ends with the period of bourgeois revolutions of the 19th century. At the same time, it was stressed that around the beginning of the 20th century, "only Russia and Rumania openly acknowledged antisemitism as a state principle." The author devoted only one sentence to contemporary antisemitism outside of Russia, noting that

antisemitism up to the present time is a favorite weapon of reactionary policy in all countries as a means of distracting attention away from the class struggle, especially among the fascists.

The article in the *Dictionary*, like the one in the *MSE-1*, was prepared during the first (and only) Soviet campaign against antisemitism (1927-1931). This circumstance probably explains the fact that the corresponding sections are not limited to mere declarations about the destruction in the USSR of the "social and economic basis of anti-Semitism," but also indicate those social groups which are infected with it. "As a vestige of the past," wrote Nuorteva, "antisemitism remains among the backward strata of the workers, nurtured by the counter-revolutionary antisemitic propaganda of kulak-Nepmen elements." The definition part of the article basically repeats the formulation of the first editions of the *BSE* and *MSE*, etymologically defining antisemitism as "enmity to the Semites." Actually, elucidates the author, this term signifies "a hostile attitude only toward Jews." The article proceeds to discuss manifestations of antisemitism or Judeophobia: in politics—"restriction of Jews' civil and economic rights, an effort to expel them from a given country and even attempts at their physical annihilation;" and in daily life—"the effort to insult their national feeling and personal human dignity." At the

21. Neither the *MSE-1* nor the *BSE-1* does this. Moreover, the extensive *BSE* article about Balfour notes the "insignificance of his activity as Foreign Minister."

same time, antisemitism is presented as being engendered by socio-economic conditions which arose as a result of the dispersal of the Jews throughout the Roman empire and cities of Western Europe where they "became rivals of the local commercial and money-lending bourgeoisie." Although medieval antisemitism was motivated by "primitive religious considerations (accusations of "betraying Christ" and alleged blood rituals), accusations that the Jews possessed "allegedly socially dangerous racial qualities," related the *Dictionary*, always concealed "motives of economic struggle."

The article deals primarily with antisemitism in Russia and the USSR.

In Russia, anti-Semitism developed into a complex system of oppression. The government forced the Jews to live in the Pale of Settlement, limited their choice of trade and profession, their right to study . . . [and] supported public accusations that the Jews exploited the Russian population. The government instigated blood libel trials and organized and inspired pogroms against Jews.

The author stressed the exceptionally savage nature of antisemitism during the Civil War in the Ukraine. In dealing with antisemitism in the USSR, the author noted measures that were being taken to overcome it, and assured readers that "the Great All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and Soviet regime are conducting a resolute struggle against antisemitism."

Despite its ideological nature and concentration on a class-economic approach, the article in the *Dictionary* is rather informative. This distinguishes it not only from the articles on the same topic in the *ES22* but also from the article in the *BSE-223* and all following encyclopedic editions.

Antisemitism was apparently considered such a significant problem that the editors of the *Dictionary* included it in many entries. For example, in a characterization of Eugen Dühring, Friedrich Engels' adversary in Germany in the latter half of the 19th century, it was noted that Dühring "combined enmity to social-democracy with antisemitism."<sup>24</sup>

22. *ES-1*, vol. 1, 1953.

23. *BSE-2*, vol. 2, 1950. Published in the years of organized public campaigns against Jews, this article, which expresses indignation at the "antisemitic cannibalistic policy of Hitlerism," and "systems of racial discrimination in the U.S. and Great Britain," is already patently a camouflage. This is also a feature of all postwar Soviet encyclopedias. The very mention of a phenomenon such as antisemitism in the USSR can be found only in the title of a book by Iu. Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR* (Jews and antisemitism in the USSR), (Moscow-Leningrad, 1929), included in a list of literature under the article "Antisemitism" in the third edition of the *BSE*.

24. The antisemitism of Dühring was noted also in the first editions of the *MSE* (vol. 3, 1929) and *BSE* (vol. 23, 1931). However, by the second edition of the *BSE* (vol. 15, 1952) mention was made of the "preaching of savage racial hatred" in general without defining its object.



## Jewish Culture

The *Dictionary* displayed a unique attitude not only with regard to the history and ethnic definition of the Jews, but also in regard to Jewish culture. It was the only Soviet encyclopedia which provided an article on Judaic studies (*Gebraistika*), including a precise definition of this field of knowledge:

*Gebraistika* (from the German *Hebraism* — Jews [sic]) — Jewish philology and the system of scientific disciplines studying the culture of the Jewish people as it is reflected in literary, religious, legal and other monuments.

The ten-volume edition of the *MSE-1* does not mention this topic. The *MSE-1* contains the term "Hebraism" ("figure of speech, characteristic of the ancient Hebrew language or borrowed from it in the translation of the Bible and other works.")<sup>25</sup> The *BSE-1* contains only an explanation of the term "Hebraist" ("scholarly specialist on the ancient Hebrew language and literature").<sup>26</sup> The term "*Gebraistika*" does not appear either in the article "Semitics" or in the article "Semitic Languages." This is not an accidental omission but the clear expression of a trend toward intentional omission which has been in operation throughout Soviet history.

The *BSE-2* does not contain articles on Judaic studies and the term "*Gebraistika*" appears, without definition, only in the article "Semitic Languages." Furthermore, there is the significant qualification: "Unlike in Western Europe, in Russia the leading discipline in Semitic studies is Arabic rather than Judaic studies." The *BSE-3* also lacks a separate article, but in the article "Semitics" it includes Judaic studies among the disciplines which study the "literature, culture and history of the Semitic-speaking peoples." A definition is given in the description of Russian Semitic studies during the 19th century.<sup>27</sup>

The *Dictionary* also displayed a unique attitude in its treatment of Jewish literature and language. In the third volume of the *MSE-1*, published before the *Dictionary* (1929), the author of the article "Jewish literature," I. Nusinov, without qualification defined as Jewish only "literature in the Yiddish or Jewish language" and related the origin of this literature to 15th-century Germany. In the *Dictionary*, the origin of Jewish literature is associated with the writing of the Bible. The *Dictionary* presented all Jewish literature written in various languages as a single whole and its development as an integral process in which succeeding stages follow from and are determined by the preceding ones. Languages are regarded in the same way: not only Yiddish but also "ancient Hebrew" is defined as a Jewish language. "From the second century before the Common Era, the language of Jewish literacy became, in addition to Hebrew [our emphasis], also Aramaic and Greek." It was noted that

until the end of the 18th century, the dominant language in Jewish literature was Hebrew, whereas the modern period is characterized by a turn toward "the colloquial language," i.e., Yiddish.

The article is very concise, but for its length it provides the maximum possible information. While avoiding evaluations, the authors of the *Dictionary* in fact contrasted their conception of culture with the version which was being intensively propagated at that time by the members of the *Evseksia* (Jewish section of the Communist Party). The latter version, according to which everything that is non-Yiddish is non-Jewish, was repeated in the above-mentioned article in the *MSE-1*.

The article in the *Dictionary* on "Jewish languages" postulated the existence of three Jewish languages: Yiddish, ancient Hebrew and Ladino. The first one defined is the "Jewish colloquial language (Yiddish, jargon) — the contemporary everyday language of a significant segment of the Jews: it developed in the German ghettos no earlier than the 14th century." Its structure, lexicon and script are then described. Approximately three times more space is given to the ancient Hebrew language,

a Judaic language, language of the Bible, belongs to the Semitic languages. It was the spoken language of the Jewish people . . . from the 4th to 2nd centuries before the Common Era.

In the context of the persecution of Hebrew in the USSR, it is of particular interest that the article reported that "the Zionist movement produced an attempt at the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language."

## Jewish Religion

The *Dictionary* article "Jewish Religion" (only the *BSE-1* also contained an article with that title) included a reference to the article "Judaic-Israelite Religion," which was planned for the second volume. The first volume contains an article on "The Bible," which in size, approach, and informativeness significantly surpasses articles on the same topic published earlier in the *MSE-1*,<sup>28</sup> and in accuracy of definition is superior to the extensive article in the *BSE-1*.<sup>29</sup>

The article begins with the definition: "The Bible" (Greek — 'books') is a collection of books which form the basis of the Jewish and later (with the inclusion of the so-called New Testament) of the Christian religion." In characterizing the Hebrew Bible (The Old Testament) the *Dictionary* (with an element of vulgar sociology) directly relates it to the life of the Jews:

The Torah is a literary monument, describing the life of semi-nomadic cattle-breeders at the time preceding their transition to settled agri-

25. *MSE-2*, vol. 3, 1936.

26. *BSE-1*, vol. 14, 1929; vol. 50, 1944.

27. *BSE-2*, vol. 38, 1955; I. M. D'iakonov, "Semitologia" (Semitic studies), *BSE-3*, vol. 23, 1976.

28. *MSE-1*, vol. 1, 1928.

29. *BSE-1*, vol. 6, 1927.



culture. The books of the prophets reflect the socio-political movements which arose in Judea in the second century before the Common Era.

The *MSE-1* reports on the Jews' attitude toward the Bible and their relation to it only as follows: ". . . of pre-Christian origin, it is a 'sacred scripture' also [our emphasis] of the Jews." The Bible is defined there as a "collection of 'sacred' books of the Christian church, divided by it into the Old and New Testaments."<sup>30</sup>

Although, like all atheistic literature, the *Dictionary* rejected the idea of the Bible being inspired by God, at the same time, it was far from the simplified evaluation of the *MSE-1*, which wrote that

The Bible is an example of a work full of crude errors, distortions of historical facts, patent fictions, irreconcilable contradictions, borrowings from 'pagan,' particularly from Assyro-Babylonian and Persian mythology, absurd teachings, tales, which often repel us by their immorality and obscenity.

In presenting its criticism, the *Dictionary* refers to "scientific-critical research which began with the French 18th-century scholar Astruc (in the 19th century this work was continued by the Bauer brothers, Wellhausen, Frazer, and others)." Following the "documentary hypothesis, it accepts the presence in the Pentateuch of texts of the Elohist and Yahwist authors and on this basis presents its conclusion concerning the "destruction of the legend" that the Bible was written by "holy men according to the inspiration of the holy spirit." Unlike the *MSE-1*, in its article the *Dictionary* provides data on translations of the Bible into various languages, supplemented by an article on the "Vulgate," which was lacking in both the *MSE-1* and the *ES*.

The same academic, if positivistic rather than accusatory-atheistic, tone evidenced in the article "The Bible" can also be found in other thematically related material in the *Dictionary*.

The influence of Judaism on a Russian heretical movement of the 15th century is noted in the article "Judaizers." In characterizing the latter's views as a combination of various rationalist and mystical trends and ideas of the Western European Reformation, the author of the article noted that "the Jewish scholar Zehariah is considered one of the leaders of the Judaizers." An article on Matvei Bashkin, a 16th-century heretic, indicated that his teachings were formed "under the influence of Protestantism and the teachings of the Judaizers." The article in the *MSE-1* on the "Judaizers" did not mention Zehariah and stated categorically about the sect itself that "the traces of Judaic beliefs in their teachings, however, is unnoticeable." The *MSE-1* does not include an article on M. Bashkin. The *BSE-1* reported the following on the connection between the Jews and the sect: "The church . . . gave them the

name 'Judaizers' in an effort to defame them and 'based' only on the fact that the 'heretics' extensively used the Old Testament part of the Bible and maintained ties with Jewish scholars." The article about Matvei Bashkin mentioned only the influence of Lutheranism on his views. The article on "Judaizers" in the *ES-1* not only avoided discussing the sect's connection with Judaism; it did not even explain its name at all. The *Dictionary* was thus the only prewar encyclopedia which specified the influence of Judaism on Russian heresies, and it did so without any negative connotations.

A comparison of material in the *Dictionary* on the Jewish religion and, in particular, on the Bible with material on the same subjects in the *MSE-1* shows that although both editions were prepared during a period of aggressive atheistic campaigns in the USSR, the *Dictionary* maintained a predominantly informative, encyclopedic style, whereas the *MSE-1* clearly descended to the level of propagandistic-atheistic literature.

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A systematic survey of material in the *Dictionary* dealing with Jewish subject matter leads to the conclusion that on almost all issues it adopted a position which was different not only from postwar, but even from prewar (late 1920s and early 1930s) encyclopedias published in the most favorable period for Soviet Jews.

In our opinion, the uniqueness of this position can be explained in the majority of cases by the editorial board's efforts to be informative and to maintain as objective an approach as possible within the framework of Marxist ideology. Perhaps this also reflected the preservation of the cultural tradition of the Petersburg academic school among the Leningrad intelligentsia of the 1920s and early 1930s. It is also possible, however, that with regard to certain issues, there existed a conceptual-ideological outlook which was different from the prevailing one. Thus, the abundant factual information on questions of Jewish culture could by itself, without obvious ideological intent, implicitly stand in contrast to the views of the *Evseksia*. Quite probably, however, this factual material was actually intended to affirm or substantiate an interpretation of Jewish culture that was opposed to the version that the *Evseksia* was promoting at that time.

While leaving unresolved this question of the text's basic ideological intent, one can state that in several cases the multifaceted and abundant factography was clearly in opposition to the then accepted view.

In other articles, the *Dictionary's* conceptual and ideological differences with other encyclopedias arose not only from its factography, but also was manifest in the very formulation of definitions. This was particularly true of the ethnic definition of the Jews as one people and the definition of the Bund as a proletarian party. Both of these definitions, which went beyond the framework of strictly Jewish matters, were related to such topical issues of the time as the concept of a nation and the question of defining a party as prole-

30. *MSE-1*, vol. 2, 1929.



tarian if it maintained a demand for cultural-national autonomy in its program. These issues were the subject of constant contemporary political and propagandistic manipulations, in the context of which any disagreements or deviations were considered political acts.

Nevertheless, neither these nor differences on other issues of principle were included in the *mea culpas* published by the *Dictionary's* editorial board, nor did they figure in the philippics of *Pravda*. It is unclear whether they were taken into consideration in the behind-the-scenes trial where the fate of the *Dictionary* was decided. An element which suggests that Jewish issues were *not* part of the accusation is the fact that, despite the destruction of the edition, none of the publishers or editors were subject to personal repressions. It is unknown, however, how events would have developed if the editor-in-chief, M. B. Vol'fson, had not died at that time.

Despite a certain vagueness with regard to direct causes, the fact remains that an entire encyclopedic edition was destroyed. It was a work which was superior to other Soviet encyclopedias in its informativeness and efforts to preserve objectivity and relatively independent judgments and opinions, certainly in regard to Jewish history and culture.