

A STUDY OF THE NATURE  
AND DEVELOPMENT OF ORTHODOX  
JUDAISM IN SOUTH AFRICA TO  
c.1935

by  
JOHN IAN SIMON  
B.A. (UNISA)

A dissertation in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in the  
Department of Jewish Studies,  
University of Cape Town.

January 1996

The University of Cape Town has been given  
the right to reproduce this thesis in whole  
or in part. Copyright is held by the author.

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: ORTHODOX JUDAISM IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES	1
CHAPTER TWO: EARLY BEGINNINGS AT THE CAPE - THE ANGLO-JEWISH ESTABLISHMENT	23
CHAPTER THREE: THE COMING OF THE JEWS OF EASTERN EUROPE	44
CHAPTER FOUR: BEYOND THE CAPE:	74
Johannesburg and Environs	74
Durban	105
Bloemfontein and the Orange Free State	112
Kimberley	117
Oudtshoorn	121
Port Elizabeth	126
CHAPTER FIVE: PROSELYTISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY	134
CHAPTER SIX: MAJOR INFLUENCES WHICH SHAPED SOUTH AFRICAN JUDAISM	150
CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	182
GLOSSARY	194
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the manner in which orthodox Judaism developed in South Africa from the foundation of the first congregation in 1841 up to about 1935, and considers what distinctive features, if any, characterised South African Judaism.

Locating the emergence of South African Judaism within the context of Western and European Judaism, the dissertation examines the interaction which developed between those Jews who derived from Anglo-Jewry and, to a lesser extent, from German-Jewish stock, on the one hand, and those who came from Eastern Europe, particularly after 1880, on the other hand. At all times, the impact of the wider South African context on the nature of South African Judaism is considered. The harsh realities of the need to make a living in what was at first an alien environment led to South African Jews having to abate, if not entirely abandon, the canons of strict religious observance.

The dissertation examines in greater detail the main centres where the Jewish communities established themselves. Particular attention is given to Cape Town and Johannesburg where the larger communities had set themselves up, but the opportunity is also taken to examine smaller communities such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein and Kimberley. There were also particular features of the so called "three digit communities", i.e. those having no more than a thousand souls, which constituted an important section of the South African Jewish

community, those who settled in the smaller country towns and whose religious life took on a certain character.

The dissertation then proceeds to examine the principal influences which determined how the South African Jewish community took shape. Amongst these influences were the authority of the Chief Rabbinate of the United Kingdom, which was particularly important whilst the community consisted primarily of Jews of Anglo-Jewish origin; and the way in which this influence gradually lessened as the community became more independent and as the Eastern European section began to predominate. The background and mindsets of the Jews from Eastern Europe played a very important part in the way the community shaped itself. Other influences which were brought to bear included the Zionist movement, the internal authority of the important religious figures and institutions such as the Ecclesiastical Courts, *Batei Din*, and the influence of particularly important charismatic and influential lay leaders. A fairly close examination is conducted of the most important religious leaders during the period under review.

A special chapter is devoted to the issue of proselytism and the way in which it presented itself and was perceived and encountered by the South African Jewish community.

The dissertation concludes with some general arguments contending for the homogeneity of the South African Jewish community; with some indication as to what identifiable characteristics it

assumed and how its future would have been viewed in 1935; the *terminus ad quem* of the dissertation; with some forward looking comments bringing the matter up to the modern day.

The dissertation has drawn on a number of bodies of primary material, including a previously unknown body of material located in the archives of the Chief Rabbinate in London, comprising an important body of correspondence which took place between the office of the Chief Rabbi and numerous religious and lay leaders in South Africa. This has been examined and is widely drawn upon. The minutes of the principal congregations have been examined and numerous other archives and sources of material which are referred to in the text. The *South African Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *SAJC*) which was the principal weekly Jewish journal in South Africa during the period under review, has been fully examined and is widely quoted.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a matter for deep regret that three mentors to whom I am much indebted for the impetus to embark on this study and for much else were not spared to see its completion. Rabbi Dr Israel Ben-Yosef and Associate Professor Bernard Steinberg actively encouraged me to set about a disciplinary study which was entirely new to me and furnished much practical guidance and assistance in its early stages. I remember with gratitude and affection my many discussions with them; and my long talks with Rabbi E J Duchinsky, from whom I learnt so much about Judaism and from which the final decision emerged as to the topic of this dissertation. It is with deep sincerity that I recite the traditional formula "May their memory be for a blessing".

One of the many new things which I have learnt in the course of this enterprise is the function of the supervisor of a dissertation or thesis. I was tremendously fortunate that the University appointed Milton Shain to this position. It is a measure of the slow pace at which I worked that his career can be partially charted by the titles which he has held during the period of this task. When I commenced he was Mr Shain; shortly thereafter he became Dr Shain; and recently, to the great satisfaction of all who have been associated with him in any way, he was appointed Associate Professor. Our friendship did not abate by one iota his insistence on the most rigorous academic standards; yet this in turn did nothing to detract from the great pleasure which I had from the work and the benefit I derived from working under his supervision. I owe him a profound

debt of gratitude for his assistance, guidance and constant encouragement.

The profession of librarianship and archivist seems to attract to it (or develop in those who follow it) remarkable qualities of cheerfulness and willingness to assist all enquirers. I have never come across anyone pursuing this calling who has not shown me kindness and assistance beyond measure. It is therefore a particular pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to Ms Leonie Twentyman-Jones and her colleagues at the Manuscripts and Archives Division at the University of Cape Town; Mrs Veronica Belling, Librarian of the Jewish Studies Library, Kaplan Centre, UCT; Mrs Yvonne Verblun, Librarian of the Jacob Gitlin Library and her colleagues; Mrs Sylvia Tuback, Librarian and Archivist of the S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg; the late Reverend J Sunshine, Archivist of the Chief Rabbinate, London, as well as Mr Shimon Cohen, at that time the executive director of the Chief Rabbinate and his staff; Mr Joseph Munk, the archivist of the Anglo-Jewish Archives, London; Mrs Trude Levi, the Librarian of the Mocatta Library; Mr Raphael Weiser and Mrs Rivka Plesser of the Manuscripts and Archives Department of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Givat Ram, Jerusalem; the Librarians and Archivists at Southampton University.

I am grateful to those individuals who have occupied the office of Dean of the Faculty of Arts at UCT during the period of my registration: Professor C Webb, Associate Professor J Cartwright, Professor P J Salazar and Associate Professor J

Atkinson. They have each in turn sympathetically entertained my requests for extensions of time within which to complete the work, understanding the inroads which the exigent calls of a demanding legal practice make upon the time available for research and writing. This prompts too, an expression of appreciation to my partners and the staff of my firm, especially my secretary Ms Anita Katcher for their constant loyalty.

I was fortunate to have assistance in translation from Yiddish from Mrs Lilian Dubb, and from Yiddish and Hebrew from Mrs Sheila Barkusky. My cordial thanks go to these two friends.

Within the ranks of Jewish communal life, I wish to acknowledge the cooperative assistance always received in such generous measure from Mr Ian Sacks, Executive Director of the S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Cape Town; Mr Izzy Wolman, Executive Director of the Western Province Zionist Council, Cape Town; Mr Mickey Glass, Executive Director of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues, Cape Council; and their respective Secretariats.

The South African Jewish Trust provided a generous grant towards the travelling expenses involved in my researches into the Archives of the Chief Rabbinate in London. The late Mr Solm Yach and the Mauerberger Foundation defrayed the cost of obtaining transcripts from Bar Ilan University of the Responsa discussed in chapter 5. I express my thanks to these benefactors.

I have benefitted very much from discussions with the following persons, and the advice and information which I received from them was invariably invaluable: Dr Edna Bradlow; Rabbi Dr Reuben P Bulka; Professor Allie Dubb; Chief Rabbi Cyril K Harris; Professor Jocelyn Hellig; Rabbi Dr D Isaacs; Judge Felix Landau; Professor Aubrey Newman; Professor Jonathan Sarna; Professor Gideon Shimoni; Rabbi Dr E J Steinhorn.

My debt of gratitude to my wife Shirley, for forty years of love, companionship and support, cannot be expressed in words or repaid in a lifetime.

## INTRODUCTION

Whether Jews comprise a race, a religious group, a nation, a civilisation; or whether they constitute an amalgam of any two or more of these categories, or some sort of collective entity not yet identified, let alone defined; and whether Judaism is a confession of faith, a religion, a way of life or a state of mind; all this has been the topic of much debate. The vexed question "What is a Jew?" was long preceded and, if ever resolved, will no doubt be survived by the wider question "Who, or what are the Jews?"

If ever the question is answered, or however many answers are proposed, it is at least certain that religion, the religious component of the definition, needs to be addressed. Judaism is a religion with several facets, nuances and characteristics. It is therefore worthy of some note that although the Jews of South Africa have existed as a cohesive and identifiable community for a century and a half, no study has been made of the characteristics which marked that brand of Judaism which they practised.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Reference should be made at this point to three small sample surveys. In 1977, Allie A Dubb conducted a sociological survey of the Johannesburg Jewish community and reported the results in A A Dubb, *Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Community*, Grahamstown, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1977. In 1991, the same writer conducted a wider survey of the five main cities of South Africa, and reported the results in A A Dubb *The Jewish Population of South Africa: The 1991 Sociodemographic Survey*. Jewish Publications - South Africa, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 1994. In 1974, Sheila M Aronstam conducted a survey of the Bloemfontein Jewish Community: S M Aronstam, *A Historical and Socio-cultural Survey of the Bloemfontein Jewish Community with special reference to the conception of Jewish welfare work*. Unpublished thesis for Doctorate of Social Science, University of the Orange Free State

It is true that there have appeared a number of studies of South African Jewry, and by now a somewhat uneven historiography has come into existence. At best these works only touch on the way in which South African Jews actually practised their religion. For example, in the first book to appear dealing with the history of the Jews of South Africa, Louis Herrman, although taking the year 1895 as his *terminus ad quem*, hardly touched on the patterns of religious life among Jews in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps he was more concerned to establish the community's credibility as part of the general population against a backdrop of rampant antisemitism<sup>3</sup> than to analyse the significance of its religious beliefs and practices. Hermann's work, without doubt, was essentially a narrative history with little if any attempt to deal with purely religious issues. Almost the first hundred pages dealt with a scholarly investigation into the Jewish

---

1974. All three of these surveys covered very small samples. In 1977, Dubb used a sample of 283 and in 1991, 1800. Sheila Aronstam used 167. Insofar as they dealt with religious matters (Dubb, 1977 pp 103-125, Dubb 1991, pp. 107-108 and Tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5; Aronstam, pp. 257-318) these observers concerned themselves with public manifestations of religious practice and standards of traditional religious observance, rather than with any particular characteristics of Judaism. These surveys will be referred to more fully in Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Herrman, *A History of the Jews in South Africa from the earliest times to 1895*, South African Edition, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Although the first edition of Herrman's book was published in 1930, and was intended to be a brief historical sketch of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the 1935 "South African edition" was published during a period of emergent grey-shirt antisemitism and an economic depression. For Antisemitism see Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

ancestry of some of the early Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers. The fact was that these early settlers no longer practised Judaism, and Herrman's further references to a few later arrivals from Britain and Germany who endeavoured to maintain their Jewish identity in isolation, tells us nothing to assist us in our study. The same applies to his *Centenary History of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation*, the Mother Congregation of South Africa<sup>4</sup> and to the later book, *Birth of a Community*,<sup>5</sup> by Israel Abrahams who served the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation as Rabbi from 1936 to 1967.

Two books of somewhat disparate length and quality which comprised chapters contributed by different authors were those edited respectively by Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz<sup>6</sup> and by Marcus Arkin.<sup>7</sup> The former, although wide-ranging and informative within its limits, is lacking in introspection and still less in any description or even awareness of the differing forces and strands which operated to determine the nature of the religious

---

<sup>4</sup> Louis Herrman. *The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1841-1941: A Centenary History*, Cape Town, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1941.

<sup>5</sup> Israel Abrahams. *The Birth of a Community: A History of Western Province Jewry from Earliest Times to the end of the South African War 1902* Cape Town, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1955.

<sup>6</sup> G Saron and L Hotz (eds.), *The Jews in South Africa: A History* Cape Town, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1955.

<sup>7</sup> M Arkin, (ed.) *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1984.

beliefs and practices which were to form the warp and weft of South African Judaism. It can be seen as falling within what Milton Shain describes as the "contribution" category of history influenced by and intended as a response to the tensions experienced by the community in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>8</sup> Arkin's book in accordance with its subtitle "A Contemporary Survey" does little more than record the statistical and organisational situation of the community; even in the chapter on religious expression contributed by Jocelyn Hellig we learn much more about the organisation of the various religious congregations and groups operating in South Africa at the time of the publication of the book, than about their ideologies or practices or the routes by which they reached their present situations.<sup>9</sup>

The books thus far examined form a certain pattern.<sup>10</sup> They tend to present, in South African terms, what Todd Endelman writing of Anglo-Jewish historians described as a "cosy sanitised view of Anglo-Jewish history, associated with Cecil Roth and the notables of the Jewish Historical Society of England...<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society: The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony*, p.xvi

<sup>9</sup> Jocelyn Hellig, "Religious Expression" in Arkin, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> For what is believed to be the first attempt at a survey of South African Jewish Historical writing in general, see my essay. "Towards an appraisal of South African Jewish Historiography", in P E Westra and B Warner, (eds.) *Festschrift in honour of Frank R Bradlow*, Cape Town, Friends of the South African Library, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Todd Endelman, "English Jewish History" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11 No. 1, February 1991 p.91. Endelman characterised the version of history written by Roth and his

Endelman went on to describe a new school of historical writing in Anglo-Jewry challenging cherished views and telling "a blacker and more sober story, a tale shot through with failure and discord to which there is not always a happy ending".<sup>12</sup> More recently, the works of Gideon Shimoni<sup>13</sup> and Milton Shain<sup>14</sup> have looked more closely at tensions between Jews and non-Jews, but neither professes to attempt to examine what made up the religious component of the consciousness and activities of the South African Jew.

A number of local histories of individual congregations and communities have been written, usually by devoted descendants of the early founders, but it is no disrespect to these works of *pietas* to note that they principally describe the milestones in the history of the particular community: the acquisition of the cemetery, the opening of the synagogue, the names of the various ministers and lay leaders and so on.<sup>15</sup> In short, there has been

---

colleagues as "whiggish, apologetic and triumphalist, emphasising the harmony between Jewishness and Englishness (for our purposes, read 'White South Africanism') while minimising the discordant aspects of the assimilation process".

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.92.

<sup>13</sup> G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910-1967)*. Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980.

<sup>14</sup> Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism*.

<sup>15</sup> Booklets, brochures or monographs concerning the following communities are to be found in the Library of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg or the Jacob Gitlin Library, Cape Town: Adath Jeshurun (Johannesburg), Berea, Bloemfontein, Cape Town Orthodox Hebrew Congregation Claremont, Cyrildene/Observatory, Durban, Edenvale, Fordsburg/Mayfair, Germiston, Glenhazel, Green and Sea Point, Griqualand West, Jeppestown and Eastern District, Kensington, Klerksdorp,

no study of the way in which the Jewish religion was practised in South Africa; how it originated; how it evolved; and what forces shaped it. The Jew at prayer - or refraining from it; the Jew performing, abandoning or compromising the *mitzvoth*; the synagogue Jew; has not been examined.

The South African Jewish community is one of the so-called "frontier communities"<sup>16</sup> and useful lessons can be drawn from how the community has reacted to the various competing forces struggling for the attention, loyalty and commitment of South African Jewry. At this time Orthodoxy worldwide is undergoing a considerable process of self-examination. Scholars across the socio-religious spectrum are speculating as to the functions of the various sects and groups on the outskirts of world Jewry and how they relate one to to the other.<sup>17</sup> Who will occupy the

---

Linksfield, North-Eastern Congregation, Northern Suburbs Oudtshoorn, Oxford, Paarl, Parkview, Greenside, Port Elizabeth, Poswohl, Pretoria, Somerset West, Springs, Stellenbosch, Sydenham/Highlands, Waverley, Worcester.

<sup>16</sup> For an examination of this phenomenon, and of communities fitting such a description, see Louis Hartz (ed.), *The Founding of New Societies*, New York, Harcourt Brace and World 1964; and Daniel J Elazar with Peter Medding, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies: Argentina, Australia and South Africa*, New York and London, Holmes & Meier, 1983.

<sup>17</sup> See for example: Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1870*, New York, Schocken Books, 1978; David Rudavsky, *Modern Jewish Religious Movements: A History of Emancipation and Adjustment*, New York, Behrman House, 1979; C Goldscheider and A S Zuckerman, *The Transformation of the Jews*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1984; Zvi Kurzweil, *The Modern Impulse of Traditional Judaism*, New Jersey, Ktav Publishing House, 1985; C S Liebman and S M Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experience*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990.

high ground after the struggles which are presently under way? What brand of religious observance is most likely to ensure survival, or even to resist the forces of assimilation? An examination of how Orthodoxy reacted to the particular challenges in South Africa would I suggest not be without merit. South African Jewry still repays examination even if it has been slow to examine itself.

A number of received opinions have become fashionable and have almost attained (or descended to) the status of the cliché. Examples are that the early immigrants from Eastern Europe were by and large models of piety and learning and that immigrants with an Eastern European background resented, rebelled against and wanted no part of the manners and mores of those who descended from Anglo-Jewry. A cordial welcome was accorded to the coining of the phrase "pouring *Litvak* spirit into Anglo-Jewish bottles."<sup>18</sup> It is submitted that the phrase is more colourful than appropriate and is memorable more for its homeliness than its meaning. Another phrase more pithy than helpful is "non-observant Orthodoxy."<sup>19</sup> It will be part of the aim of this study to examine the received wisdom incorporated in

---

<sup>18</sup> This phrase was first used by Gustav Saron in his essay "The Making of South African Jewry: An essay in Historical Interpretation" in (L Feldberg (ed.) *South African Jewry 1965 Edition*, Johannesburg, Fieldhill Publishing Co. 1965.

<sup>19</sup> This phrase appears to have been first used by Charles S Liebman in his article "A Sociological Analysis of Contemporary Orthodoxy" in *Judaism*, Vol. 13 No. 3 Summer 1964, p.285. It was applied to the South African situation by Jocelyn Hellig in various published work including "South African Judaism: An expression of Conservative Traditionalism", in *Judaism*, Vol. 35 No. 2, Spring 1986, p.233.

these and other conventional wisdoms and it will be submitted that much of this received opinion is unreliable if not downright inaccurate.

The fact that numerous studies of this nature exist in regard to the Jews of England, United States of America and elsewhere immediately presents us with one of the factors which will be repeatedly encountered in this work, namely, the comparatively small size of the South African Jewish community. It is convenient at this point to note that by 1841 when the first community was established in Cape Town there were but a handful of Jews in that city and by 1875, the number had grown to 119.<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the century there were some 38 000 Jews in South Africa and that number had increased approximately two and a half times by the end of the period covered by this thesis.<sup>21</sup>

It is now necessary to examine what is meant by the terms Orthodoxy and Orthodox Judaism for the purpose of this study. This dissertation will examine a body of learning which suggests that, historically considered, Orthodox Judaism is a comparatively modern religious ideology which arose in the early nineteenth century as one of the responses to the crisis in Jewish life engendered by the emancipation and the enlightenment.

---

<sup>20</sup> G42-1876 Results of Census, Colony of the Cape of Good Hope gives the following figures: Cape Town 119; Port Elizabeth 123; Graaff Reinet 36; Grahamstown 25; Victoria West 22; Kimberley had approximately 120 Jews at this time, but was not officially part of the Colony.

<sup>21</sup> Official Census figures: 1904 38101; 1936 90645

If, as proved to be the case, South African Orthodoxy contained most if not all of the elements of Orthodoxy, as observed in Eastern Europe, it was in its turn both in its name and in its practice to receive the accretion of anomalous elements which by no means represented an unbroken chain of dogma, ritual or practice.

It will be repeatedly necessary to note that whilst the immigrants to South Africa had left their homes in Europe recently in point of time, they had come to a land immeasurably different from what they had known. Culturally, socially, politically, religiously and by every other criterion, southern Africa was a strange region. How did this affect the way they practised their religion? To what extent if at all, for example, did they conform to the following paradigm?

In the modernisation of the Jews, their religion is transformed. As the old order changes, so do the institutions legitimating that order. These alterations relate directly to the process of modernisation, to new political and economic conditions, residential and educational patterns.<sup>22</sup>

Or again, did the South African experience support the following contention:

[Frontier communities] have tended to be self-consciously conservative in their early stages, as the pioneers of the new settlements tried to retain the only civilisation they know. Then, once rooted the settlements "take off" in new directions more appropriate to the new environment, directions that are possible precisely because the population has become more self-confident and at home. The

---

<sup>22</sup> Goldscheider and Zuckerman, *op. cit.*, p.6. One would certainly seek in vain for any indication that the Jews of South Africa at any time complied with the discipline and rules of conformity described in another section of this work, see p.21 ff, "The Interrelationship of Institutions".

Jewish settlements in the Southern Hemisphere followed this pattern. They began as fragments of various European Jewries, making every effort to maintain familiar ways during the period of settling in and only later beginning to move in the direction of the more relaxed development of indigenous patterns. The tendency of those Jewish immigrants who sought to remain Jews, but who were not themselves learned in Jewish matters, was to identify their previous Jewish experiences as the sum and substance of Jewishness, and to be most fearful of any changes. This tendency was reinforced by their minority status in the new countries.<sup>23</sup>

It will be shown that there were particular circumstances affecting the lives and ultimately the religious experiences of South African Jews which render it unreliable to compare their situation too closely with the Jews of Argentina and Australia, the other two frontier societies examined by Elazar and Medding in the work just quoted. Another intriguing question which, I hope it may be said without immodesty, will be examined in greater depth than heretofore, is the precise relationship between the Jews who came to South Africa from Eastern Europe, mainly after 1880 and those of English or German descent who came mainly earlier. At least two examples will be quoted which go against the traditional view that the so-called *grienes* formed their synagogues because they did not like the Anglo-Jewish atmosphere of the earlier established synagogues; other evidence will be adduced to indicate that at any rate the issue is more complex than has been suggested hitherto.

As a final example of some of the issues to be addressed in this work, mention may be made of the somewhat singular fact that during the century covered by this study, Orthodox Judaism was

---

<sup>23</sup> Elazar with Medding, *op. cit.* p. 8.

the only "brand" of Judaism practised in South Africa. (Whether that Orthodoxy can itself be said to have been homogeneous is a question of its own which merits and will receive attention. The Reform movement did not come to South Africa until the end of the period under review.<sup>24</sup> The Chassidic movement as an organised body did not come until long after the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> The Conservative movement has not come to this day.<sup>26</sup> What were the features of South African Orthodox Judaism which caused or contributed to these and other phenomena?

---

<sup>24</sup> In fact the first Reform Congregation was established by Rabbi Dr M C Weiler in 1933. See D Sherman, *Pioneering for Reform Judaism in South Africa*. Personal memoir, privately printed, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> But justice requires a reference to the "Hebrew Congregation Chabaad" which was founded in 1897 and worshipped at a synagogue called "The Hope of Jeshurun" or "Beth Hamedrash" at 23 Buitenkant Street until 1945. In that year the few remaining members petitioned the Supreme Court for leave to sell the property as "persons normally attending worship at the synagogue in question have moved their residences to other parts of the City of Cape Town, thereby rendering the functions of the said synagogue as a house of worship steadily less and less effective ... the present day position is that the Synagogue has ceased to fulfil a useful need ..." (The Court's sanction was needed because of the terms of the Trust Deed under which the property was held.) This congregation, although called Chassidic was never part of the Chassidic movement as such; the term referred more to the piety of its members than to any organisational affiliation. Ex parte Trustees of the Chabaad (*sic*) Hebrew Congregation. Case No. M247/1945 Supreme Court of South Africa, Cape Provincial Division. For an overview, see S A Rochlin, "Jubilee of Cape Town's Oldest Minyan: The Colourful Story of the Chabad Congregation", in *S A Jewish Times* 19 December, 1947.

<sup>26</sup> Two individual congregations in recent times have taken to calling themselves "Conservative"; but this would appear to derive rather from the personal predilections of the Ministers concerned than from any constitutional affiliation. Neither to my knowledge are part of the World Conservative movement.

The *terminus ad quem* of this study is 1935 and a number of considerations have led to this decision. The two most important religious leaders in the first century of the community's existence were Rabbi Dr J L Landau and Reverend A P Bender. Landau died in 1942; although he was still in office at the time of his death, the last few years of his life were clouded by illness. Bender retired in 1935 and died two years later. They would shortly be succeeded by powerful figures, Rabbi Louis I Rabinowitz in Johannesburg and Rabbi Israel Abrahams in Cape Town, each of whom would make his own mark on the religious life of the community and chart new courses. Another factor determining the selection of the date is that, as pointed out above, it was only in 1933 that Reform Judaism came to South Africa. Furthermore, during the later years of the 1930's German Jews from Hitler's Germany made their way to these shores.<sup>27</sup>

It was after the *terminus ad quem* which I have chosen, that there developed other phenomena in South African Jewry which would affect in one way or the other the manner in which Orthodox Judaism was practised. These included the decline of the country communities, the so-called 3-digit communities viz. those that had less than 1000 members. This study will take an opportunity of examining how religion worked in these small communities and the remarkable way in which Orthodoxy was continued, observed and maintained, despite all outer indications that it was doomed to extinction. Another element was the rise of the Jewish day

---

<sup>27</sup> See Edna Bradlow, *Immigration into the Union 1910-1948. Part 2*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, UCT 1978.

school movement which would step up, even if not to the extent desired by its proponents, the nature of Jewish knowledge amongst those who went through its curriculum. Later still came the emergence of right-wing Orthodoxy which would have its own effect on South African Orthodoxy and the story of which is yet to be written. Finally reference must be made to what will be referred to in the paper as the "Chief Rabbi Syndrome" which ultimately led to the appointment of a Chief Rabbi for the whole of South Africa. These developments all deserve examination, but to try and incorporate them all in one dissertation would be to spread the net far too wide.

All in all 1935 seems to mark a useful watershed year from which to look back and survey what South African Orthodoxy was, the context out of which it evolved, and how it developed in a short century in a frontier community.

## CHAPTER ONE

## ORTHODOX JUDAISM IN THE 19th AND 20th CENTURIES

To define a concept by reference to its opposite - indeed to another concept to which the proponents or adherents of the former are intractably antagonistic - is not unknown in Judaism. The powerful group of Lithuanian Jews led by the Vilna *Gaon*<sup>28</sup> who became known as the *Mitnagdim* owed their name solely to the fact that they were opposed to (*neged*) *Hassidim*. So it is with orthodoxy. It is a fallacy that orthodox Judaism as understood by modern Jews derived as to its name, tradition and practice in unbroken line from the ancient origins from the Jewish faith. It would follow from this belief that those who advance it are under the impression - or wish to contend - that orthodox Judaism as practised today is the same as it always was through the centuries of dispersion and even beyond that to ancient times. This is not so.<sup>29</sup>

Amongst all the other cataclysmic changes in the lives, practices

---

<sup>28</sup> Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720-1797. The outstanding spiritual and intellectual figure of World Jewry in the eighteenth century. The title "*Gaon*", originally held by the heads of the great academies of Sura and Pumpedita in Babylon, was in modern times reserved for outstanding scholars and teachers. The title of honour, *Vilna Gaon*, was derived from the town where he spent most of his life. He was violently opposed to *hassidism* mainly because of its introduction of new prayers and customs and because of his perception that its adherents devoted insufficient attention to study for its own sake. As a result of his influence, Lithuania and especially Vilna was the centre of *mitnagdism*, i.e. opposition to *hassidism*.

<sup>29</sup> See on this point the discussion by David Singer in "The New Orthodox Theology", in *Modern Judaism* Vol. 9 No. 1 February 1989.

and mindsets of the Jews brought about by the emancipation which commenced towards the end of the eighteenth century and the enlightenment which followed shortly thereafter,<sup>30</sup> there were included fundamental changes in the religious practices of the Jews. Traditional Judaism - to adopt a more explicit term than orthodoxy - is the expression best used to describe and define the belief that the Torah is the revealed word of God given to Moses at Mount Sinai.<sup>31</sup> This belief; and the divine sanction of the Laws contained therein which flow from it, required of the Jew observance of the Law as expressed in the *Torah* and interpreted in the authoritative sources of Judaism. It is this latter body of law which constitutes the oral *Torah*, in contradistinction to the written *Torah*, the Pentateuch, which pious Jews hold to be immutable under any circumstances.<sup>32</sup> It

---

<sup>30</sup> Care must be exercised in assigning too precise a chronological sequence to these developments. The Jews of Western Europe began to be granted civil emancipation and release from civil disabilities more or less in the wake of the French Revolution, but the process did not advance at the same pace or in the same manner in the different territories in which Jews lived. There were also setbacks in the process, as for example in the former Napoleonic Empire in the wave of reaction which followed Napoleon's defeat; and in Russia after the assassination of Alexander III. The European Age of Enlightenment similarly advanced at a varying pace, both as to time and geographical area; its commencement pre-dated that of the period of Jewish emancipation and it in part survived it.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus XX and XXIV: 12.

<sup>32</sup> The following pithy description of Orthodox Judaism cannot be improved upon for its comprehensiveness and clarity. "Orthodoxy ... requires acknowledgment of the divine origin of the Commandments and firm resolve to fulfil them; however, it also permits great latitude in the formulation of doctrines, the interpretation of biblical passages and the rationalisation of *Mitzvot* ... . The only heresy is the denial that God gave the written and oral Law to His people who are to fulfil its mandates and develop their birthright in accordance with its own built-in methodology and authentic exegesis." Emanuel Rackman, "A Challenge to Orthodoxy" in *Judaism* Vol. 18 No. 2 Spring 1969.

was the climate of rationalism which flourished in the wake of the French Revolution and the civil emancipation which the Jews earned in Western and Central Europe and even more so the age of the Jewish Enlightenment (the *Haskalah*) which followed on from both these developments, that brought to the practice of Judaism new perplexities and new problems. This was described by Moshe Samet as

a grave crisis brought on by the accelerated process of modernisation at work all around [the Jewish community], the end result of which was a deep cleavage between those who wanted to adapt the tradition to the demands of the time and those who wanted to preserve it intact for fear of its either being undermined in some way or of its virtual disappearance.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed the very idea of *Haskalah* - enlightenment - became a term of reprobation in the mouths of those concerned to defend the old ways. Resistance to enlightenment and to emancipation was regarded as proof of faithful stability. Eliezer Schweid notes that

every amendment or change proposed by the Enlightenment, was actively denied by protest to the contrary reaffirming the old as a uniform and as a guarded wall; in clothing, in manner and customs in language *in the style of the prayer in the synagogues*, etc. (author's emphasis)<sup>34</sup>

But they were defending, if not an entirely lost cause, at least

---

But note that one who falls short of these requirements does not cease thereby to be an Orthodox Jew: "By orthodoxy is meant the institutions normally described as orthodox and all Jews identified with such institutions, regardless of their private beliefs and practices." Charles S Liebman, "A Sociological Analysis of Contemporary Orthodoxy" in *Judaism*, Vol. 13 No. 3, Summer 1964.

<sup>33</sup> "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 8 No. 3, October 1988.

<sup>34</sup> "The Impact of Enlightenment on Religion" in *Judaism*. Vol. 38 No. 4, Fall 1989.

a citadel which could not remain unbreached. There were those who perceived the possibility of adapting the practice of traditional Judaism to a new climate and a new age. There were those, however, who had hoped originally to preserve the faith and religious practices of their fathers with a minimum of adaptation but found themselves being led inevitably into a new type of religious practice which became known as reformed Judaism (or Reform).<sup>35</sup>

Once again, therefore, a word was coined to describe something which was the opposite of something else. Orthodoxy was the name given to that type of Judaism which was not reformed and it was probably intended by the reformers in a pejorative sense as meaning "rigid" or "unbending".<sup>36</sup> A mid eighteenth century Jew anywhere in the world when asked if he was an "Orthodox" Jew would simply not have understood the question. From the nineteenth century onwards orthodoxy (*aliter* neo-orthodoxy or

---

<sup>35</sup> For a fuller discussion on how Judaism responded in various ways to the Emancipation/Enlightenment/Modernity dilemma see: David Singer, "Voices of Orthodoxy" in *Commentary*, Vol. 58 No. 1, July 1974; Charles S Liebman, "Orthodox Judaism Today" in *Midstream* August/September 1979; Samuel C Heilman, "The Many Faces of Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1982; Schubert Spero, "Towards a Philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 6 No. 1, February 1986; Moshe Samet *op. cit.*; David Singer, "The New Orthodox Theology" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 9 No. 1, February 1989; Robert Goldenberg, "Is there an Essence of Judaism After All?" in *Judaism*, Vol. 38 No. 1, Winter 1989.

<sup>36</sup> It is probable that the term was first used in 1795 in the German journal *Berlin Monatschrift* Vol. XXV, page 530. It was quoted in 1806 by the French Jewish leader, Abraham Furtado, President of the Assembly of Jewish Notables (1806-1807) convened by Napoleon. For a fuller discussion see H D Schmidt, "The Terms of the Emancipation 1781-1812" in *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, 1956, p.30.

modern orthodoxy) took its place as one of the responses which the Jewish world devised to the challenges - positive or negative - brought about by the era of Emancipation, the European Age of Enlightenment, followed in turn by the Hebrew Age of Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*.<sup>37</sup> As Jacob Katz explains:

the notion that orthodox Judaism is nothing more than the tradition is a fiction, it is part and parcel of modern Jewish experience, a practice of the late 18th century.<sup>38</sup>

Some support for the contention (if support were needed) that post-Enlightenment orthodoxy as understood in Europe was an innovative development can be found by comparing developments which took place amongst the Jews of Moslem lands. They had no emancipation, no *Haskalah* in the nineteenth century, no modernity to respond to. Therefore no divisions took place amongst them. No reform movement, no neo-orthodoxy emerged to challenge or reinforce their traditional beliefs. None of them needed to proclaim themselves orthodox; they continued to practice one brand of Judaism only.<sup>39</sup>

To return to Europe, Jews prior to the beginning of the eighteenth century were settled and well-esconced in a

---

<sup>37</sup> I repeat, in relation to these phenomena, the caution against rigid chronology contained in note 3.

<sup>38</sup> "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective" in Peter Medding (ed.), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* Vol. 2, Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1986.

<sup>39</sup> See Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984 and H M Sachar, *Farewell Espana: The World of the Sephardim Remembered*, New York, Knopf, 1994.

traditional position which was self-understood and uncontested; they were "tradition bound" because other than a total abandonment of Judaism there was no other option. In post-Enlightenment Europe, however, a Jew had choices. He could choose to be bound by tradition i.e. orthodox in the new sense. But this involved a conscious decision on his part, together with an awareness of the alternatives, unlike, as we have just observed, the Jew living under Moslem rule who had no alternatives.

I am not arguing that the orthodoxy which developed in the wake of the age of enlightenment as neo-orthodoxy or modern orthodoxy did not derive its authority, assumptions and rules from the traditional format of Judaism. It has been pointed out that even if it is correct to state that Judaism has no dogma, this does not mean that it has no doctrine. The orthodox Jew of the mid-nineteenth century and thereafter believed as fervently as his forebears in the divine origin and immutable nature of the *Torah* and in the duty to perform the commandments given by God to Moses at Sinai and outlined or interpreted in the authoritative sources of Judaism. But now it was not sufficient to cling to these practices and beliefs. There were those who claimed equally fervently to be Jews, but who saw things differently, who adapted and adopted, compromised and trimmed. These were seen by the traditionalists to be a threat to Jewish survival; and an awareness of, and judgmental reaction to other Jews' rejection of tradition, became an essential characteristic of all forms and variations of orthodoxy.

It was precisely those efforts to hold on to the past in an atmosphere that championed change that resulted in a fundamental transformation of orthodox Judaism. They had to encounter forced citizenship in France, compulsory Germanisation of names in Germany, compulsory secular schooling in Austria. These so-called compulsions were not intended by the secular rulers to be inimical to the Jews but were intended to bring Jews as citizens out of the ghettos into the mainstream of life in the modern nation state to enjoy the privileges of representative democracy in common with their fellow citizens. But the loosening of the ties, the breakdown of the ghetto walls carried not only the chance of the new freedom but what many perceived as the whiff of a new danger.

It was inevitable that diversity would occur even within the ranks of those who declined the other alternatives i.e. the orthodox. They were united in their belief in divine revelation, the immortality of the written and Oral Law and the binding nature of the *Mitzvoth*. But differences and new answers emerged and became perpetuated. It was perhaps inevitable that efforts "to hold on to the past in an atmosphere that championed change [would result] in fundamental transformations of orthodox Judaism".<sup>40</sup> It is instructive for example to compare and contrast the teachings of R. Moshe HaSofer (1753-1839) known as the *Hatam Sofer* after the name of his major published work and R. Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808-1889) on the one hand, with those of R. Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) and R. Joel Teitelbaum

---

<sup>40</sup> Heilman, *op. cit.*, p.23.

1888-1979) in the twentieth century on the other. Sofer in the eighteenth century and Teitelbaum in the twentieth century were firm for tradition, and sought protection of the integrity of Judaism in isolation from modernity. Hirsch in the eighteenth century and Kook in the twentieth century, on the other hand, sought a rapprochement between *Halachic* life on the one hand and an openness to selective aspects of modern experiences on the other.<sup>41</sup> There is a similar divergence in modern times in deciding precisely where orthodoxy is to be located in any conceivable religious spectrum. So, for example, Reuven Bulka defines as orthodox anyone to the right of conservatism.<sup>42</sup> It has even been pointed out that different types of orthodoxy include differences derived from various geographical areas.<sup>43</sup>

For Jews who seek authority from Anglo-Jewish tradition, the situation is no more clear. The term "Orthodoxy" is not to be found in the constitution of the United Synagogue of Great Britain, considered by all to be the epitome of modern orthodoxy

---

<sup>41</sup> For Sofer, see sources quoted in note 20 of M Samet, *op. cit.* and his reliance on the Talmudic dictum "*Chadash asur min a-Torah*" as meaning that any innovation to the *halacha* is *per se* forbidden; For Hirsch, see his *Nineteen Letters on Judaism* 1836 trans B Drachman, New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1899 revised 1960; his pamphlet *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt* (Religion Allied with Progress, 1854); For Kook, see S H Bergman, *Faith and Reason: Modern Jewish Thought*, New York. Schocken Books, 1963; B Z Bokser (ed. and trans.), *The Essential Writings of Abraham Isaac Kook*, New York, Amity House, 1988; for Teitelbaum, see entry in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 15 pp.908-10 and V Teitelbaum, and sources there quoted.

<sup>42</sup> *Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism*, New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1983.

<sup>43</sup> Samet, *op. cit.* p. 249.

in the United Kingdom. The constitution defines the religious position of that body as "progressive conservatism".<sup>44</sup>

Therefore the later part of the eighteenth century, and the whole of the nineteenth century, there emerged and developed in Europe a form of Judaism called orthodoxy which was in its essentials a remnant of what had been traditional rabbinic Judaism for at least two millennia but was assuming its own patina in its reaction to the new age; was assuming different complexions and degrees of intensity in certain areas under certain governments, under different leaders and which even assumed different guises in different countries.

It was from the comparatively enlightened Western Europe - mainly England and Germany - that the first Jewish immigrants to southern Africa would come.

---

<sup>44</sup> Louis Jacobs, *Helping with Inquiries*, London, Valentine Mitchell, 1989.

## CHAPTER TWO

## EARLY BEGINNINGS AT THE CAPE - THE ANGLO JEWISH ESTABLISHMENT

Efforts have been made, principally by Herrman,<sup>45</sup> to trace Jewish participation in the earliest attempts at opening up navigation of the coast of Africa as far as the Southern tip and to identify Jewish ancestry amongst some of the early Dutch settlers. These may be ignored for the purposes of any serious study of the South African Jewish community. The Dutch East India Company would only permit the employment of practising Protestants and any professing Jew would not have found a place in the early settlement. For all practical purposes therefore, one must look to the second British occupation (beginning in 1806) for any signs of the presence of practising and professing adherents of the Jewish faith in Southern Africa.

The privilege of having been the first practising Jew to live in the Cape (the other parts of South Africa had of course not yet been opened to white settlement) is usually accorded to Dr Siegfried Frankel, a medical practitioner, who came to the Cape from Germany. His attempt to maintain the observance of his ancestral religion must be respected but as was inevitable led to nothing in the way of lasting Jewish settlement as his children were baptised and lived as Christians.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> *History of the Jews*, Chaps I-IV.

<sup>46</sup> For further details of his career see Clara Friedman-Spitz. "The Jewish Involvement in the Establishment of the University of Cape Town" in *Jewish Affairs*, January 1980.

The fledgling colony, however, attracted settlers from England and a few more from Germany, some of whom came to seek economic advancement in the wake of the financial hardships prevailing in Europe following upon the end of the Napoleonic wars. The 1820 settlers<sup>47</sup> provided another growing trickle of Jews who brought with them to their new land that type of religious observance which they had known in England.<sup>48</sup> Thereafter a steady trickle of Jews from England and also a few from Germany entered the colony; most of the latter came as prosperous merchants representing commercial firms in Frankfurt and elsewhere following the lead of the Killian and Bergtheil families.<sup>49</sup>

Something should be said of the background from which these English Jews came. This is relevant to the present enquiry because it will shed some light upon their attitude towards Judaism and Jewish tradition; this will be contrasted in due course with the mindsets of those Jews who would come to South Africa a few decades later from Eastern Europe.

---

<sup>47</sup> This was the name given to some 4000 British settlers who were established on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Colony in 1820 by the British Government in an attempt to maintain a "belt of dense settlement to hold the frontier". See Monica Wilson "Cooperation and Conflict: The East Cape Frontier" in M Wilson and L Thompson (eds.) *The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol. 1 South Africa to 1870*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969.

<sup>48</sup> For an account of Jewish religious practice in England in the nineteenth century, see Stephen Sharot, "Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870 - 1914: The Synagogue Service" in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XV No. 1 June 1973 and Steven Singer, *Orthodox Judaism in Early Victorian London 1840-1858*, unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Yeshiva University 1981.

<sup>49</sup> Herrman, *History of the Jews*.

The atmosphere which prevailed in Great Britain and in which Jews there lived virtually from the resettlement in the seventeenth century but in particular after the Industrial Revolution, encouraged the social and economic advancement of the Jews but presented problems for their self-identification.<sup>50</sup>

Gradually all obstacles to the entry of Jews into virtually every profession, dignity and class were removed and complete civil emancipation was achieved. Similarly, British economic growth and expansion in the wake of the Industrial Revolution benefited the Jews who brought to the opportunities provided by the new age their own special qualities of hard work, respect for education and family, and community interdependence. There were many therefore who worked their way out of the poor areas of London, Manchester and the other provincial cities where Jews settled in their tens of thousands from the middle of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. But the British Jew always had a tendency to look over his shoulder, to be aware of social and commercial antisemitism and to deprecate any emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of Jewish identity, whilst yet steadfastly maintaining his identity as part of a voluntary community. Todd Endelman suggests that for British Jewry "the pressure to conform was so strong that it was difficult for Jews

---

<sup>50</sup> M C N Salbstein, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Britain: The Question of Admission of the Jews to Parliament, 1828-1860*. London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1982.

to feel secure about their Jewishness".<sup>51</sup> Tony Kushner makes a similar observation when he notes that while British society prided itself on its liberalism, it "failed to produce an environment for the healthy existence of a positive Jewish identity."<sup>52</sup> Anglo Jewry was by the middle of the nineteenth century a community which combined strong (albeit voluntary) religious loyalty with a determined sense of identity, but which at the same time was subject to a considerable degree of social assimilation.<sup>53</sup>

This preoccupation with identity in a voluntary community is to be contrasted with the process which at all times affected Jews of central and Eastern Europe. A Jew in the Greater Russian Empire confined to the Pale of Settlement, cocooned and constricted in his *shtetl*, never had the opportunity, even if he was sufficient of a maverick to wish to do so. Even a Jew of the more enlightened German Confederation (or Empire as it later became) was always conscious of his membership of the *Gemeinde*.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the Jew in Great Britain, living in a more open society, had perforce to cling to outward signs of

---

<sup>51</sup> Todd M Endelman, "English Jewish History" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 11 No. 1, February 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Tony Kushner, "The Impact of British Antisemitism 1918-1945" in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990.

<sup>53</sup> V D Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858*, Leicester and London, Leicester University Press, 1990.

<sup>54</sup> David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987.

religious observance to maintain his identity; to observe the Laws of *Shabbat* and *Kashrut*, to such greater or lesser degree as he chose; and to observe "rites of passage" so as to keep his contact with his roots and his fellow Jews. All these activities if observed in a sufficiently "English manner" (i.e. solemn decorum during services, the synagogue officials modelling their dress and deportment on the higher Anglican clergy and so on), enabled him to be a Jew without prejudice to his ambitions for himself and more importantly for his son, to be "an English gentleman". Social antisemitism indeed prevailed; many bastions were slow to fall to Jewish ambition and some remained entirely unbreached. But, as pointed out by Endelman, a relatively high level of religious observance was maintained; there was a marked paucity of support for what he described as "deracinated and universalist forms of Judaism" and conversion to Christianity was rare.<sup>55</sup> Later in this study it will be seen that precisely the same "push and pull" factors would be experienced by South African Jews of English origin.

The background from which the few Jews of German origin derived differed considerably from that of the English Jew. German Jewry had, since the French Revolution, experienced advances and setbacks in its march towards modernity. Whilst German territories were under Napoleonic subjugation, Jews were heirs to the new freedom bred by the Revolution. "To the Jew as an

---

<sup>55</sup> *op cit.* See also Endelman, "Communal Solidarity among the Jewish Elite of Victorian London" in *Victorian Studies*, Spring 1985.

individual, everything; to the Jew as a member of the Jewish community, nothing."<sup>56</sup> This was the revolutionary dictate perpetuated and enforced by Napoleon's writ. Jews had full civil rights, but few religious privileges, unless one counted it a privilege to be allowed quietly and unobtrusively to follow the faith of one's forefathers.

However, with the fall of Napoleon and the re-establishment of the principles of legitimacy, for good or for ill, the Jewish condition almost reverted to its pre-revolutionary state. Rights which had been granted by the discarded Regime were not only to be annulled; those who had acquired those rights were to that extent seen to have benefited from the overthrown Regime and had to be prevented from retaining any vestige of those benefits.

The position was by no means uniform throughout the German States and inasmuch as no Jewish issue was perceived to exist by the peacemakers in Vienna in 1815, it was left to each individual restored ruler to deal with his Jews as seemed good to him. As David Sorkin expressed it:

The Congress of Vienna made Jewish rights a domestic issue of the Sovereign states . . . . The issue confronting the states was what they now would do with the liberal ideas of 1789 - natural rights, popular sovereignty and Jewish emancipation - in the reverse situation of the Napoleonic era. Not only had all external pressure to adapt those ideas been removed, but the Holy Alliance increasingly exerted pressure in favour of the principle of legitimacy.

---

<sup>56</sup> These were sentiments expressed by the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre during the debate on the eligibility of Jews for citizenship in France at the time of the Revolution of 1789. See Paul R Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds.) *The Jew in the Modern World, A Documentary History*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p.104.

The way the German states chose to reconcile notions of increased liberty - including the liberty of the Jews - with the structure and state and society depended in the main on the balance of domestic political and social forces....<sup>57</sup>

All this produced different emphases in different parts of Germany. Those few Jews from Germany who settled in the Cape therefore had left behind them not the voluntary self-identification merging into Jewish ritual modelled on the Anglican Church, as along with religious freedom, as was the case of English Jews; not social and economic oppression which as we shall see later formed the background of Eastern European Jewry; but a religious life which was controlled or at least carefully watched by the secular authorities. Under the watchful gaze of these secular authorities was played out the triple thrust of Mendelsohnian reform, the neo-orthodoxy of Samson Rafael Hirsch, and the implacable opposition to change of those who ranked themselves behind such leaders as the *Chatam Sofer*. Some indication of the mindsets which these circumstances produced for them in Germany and at the Cape is to be found in the efforts which the fledgling Cape community made to obtain its first *Sefer Torah*. Application was made to the Frankfurt *Gemeinde*. With that combination of respect for authority and respect for religious observance which the German situation could have been expected to bring forth, Frankfurt replied that they would be happy to send the *Sefer Torah* - but only when the Chief Rabbi in London issued a licence permitting this.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> *op cit.* p.35.

<sup>58</sup> Herrman, *History of the Jews*, pp.117-8

Saron has suggested that although it was the English Jews (with a sprinkling of co-religionists from Germany and Holland) who established the first Hebrew congregations in Cape Town (1841), Grahamstown (1843), Port Elizabeth (1857) and Kimberley (1872), the community would have eventually succumbed to the problems brought about by paucity of numbers, intermarriage and the alien environment had it not been for the accretion of numbers as a result of immigration from Eastern Europe from the 1880's onwards.<sup>59</sup> It is certainly true with hindsight that there are at present no Jewish descendants of those who formed the first congregation in Cape Town in 1841; but the Anglo Jewish influence remained strong throughout the ensuing century and a half and patterns of Jewish worship remained by and large those prevailing in England rather than elsewhere.

The religion which the early Jewish settlers in the Cape practised was coloured by the close relationship which existed between the Cape Colony and the mother country. It would appear that isolated attempts were made in the Cape in the 1830's to get together 10 adult male Jews (a *minyan*) to form the quorum which Jewish law requires must be present before divine service can be held. At first there was no success.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> G Saron, "The Making of South African Jewry: An Essay in Historical Interpretation in *South African Jewry 1965*, Johannesburg, Fieldhill Publishing Co. 1965.

<sup>60</sup> The resolution passed on the 26 September 1841 resolving to convene *Yom Kippur* services referred to "previous several ineffectual attempts" [to form a congregation] Cape Town Hebrew Congregation (hereafter "CTHC"), Minute Book, No.1 p.1.

The fact that there were no facilities to provide meat which would comply with Jewish dietary laws and the further fact that economic necessity prevented Jews from observing the Sabbath made serious inroads into the ability of Jews to observe their religious precepts even though there was nothing whatever in the laws of the colony preventing them from doing so. Eventually largely due to the energy and initiative of Benjamin Norden a small group of colonists convened at his home for a formal service on the evening of Friday 26 September 1841. This was the service of the Eve of *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the evening service being called *Kol Nidrei* after the opening prayer. There was of course no minister or cantor, but the various parts of the service were led by members of the Congregation. A week later most of them, together with some others, gathered together at the home of another leading figure, Simeon Marcus, and resolved to constitute themselves into "The Society of the Jewish community of Cape Town Cape of Good Hope". The congregation assumed the Hebrew name *Tikvath Israel* (Hope of Israel). A treasurer, secretary and elders were appointed "to act for the whole body of Jews in all matters having in view to the establishment of the Jewish religion in this colony".<sup>61</sup>

In Cape Town a colonial atmosphere prevailed, heavily under the influence of England in social and political matters.<sup>62</sup> The small Jewish community was nurtured and flourished in this

---

<sup>61</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 1 p.2.

<sup>62</sup> T R H Davenport, "The Consolidation of a New Society" in M Wilson and L Thompson (eds.), *op. cit.*

colonial atmosphere which spread to religious matters also. From the beginning the community looked to the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom for the appointment of its ministers and direction in matters spiritual and ritual. Jews of the Cape in common with their fellow English-speaking citizens regarded England as home and sought guidance from London as to how they should order their synagogue affairs so as to approximate as close as possibly to that which prevailed in the synagogues under the control of the Chief Rabbi.<sup>63</sup> Both in the formal sense and in practical matters the Chief Rabbinate directed the community. No juridical step could be taken - a conversion, a divorce, the opening of a *mikvah*, the consecration of a burial ground, even the acquisition of a *Torah* scroll - without the specific authority of the Chief Rabbi.<sup>64</sup>

From the archives of the congregation, one can trace the various important milestones in the early history of the fledgling community.<sup>65</sup> The acquisition of the first burial ground in Albert Road, Woodstock (which was in use until 1887), the

---

<sup>63</sup> The influence which the British Chief Rabbinate exerted on the South African Jewish community is dealt with in Chapter 5.

<sup>64</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, *passim*. As to the acquisition of the first *Torah* scroll, see CTHC, Minute Book No.1 p.14, where it is recorded, on 10 July 1842, that a letter had been received from the Frankfurt community stating that no scroll of the Law would be sent to the Colony until they had permission from the "Raph (*sic*) in London". It would be another six years before Aaron de Pass brought one from London.

<sup>65</sup> The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation Minute Books are held at the University of Cape Town (hereafter "UCT") Manuscripts and Archives Division, BC.849.

ceremonies attendant upon the first burial, the celebration of the first birth<sup>66</sup> and the first marriage.<sup>67</sup> It is interesting to note that despite the generally accepted view that all the founders were of English descent, the English spelling throughout the early months is very poor; Hebrew months are always used as well as the English months and repeatedly words and phrases appear in Hebrew script. Every committee meeting ended with a prayer and amongst the early steps taken were the decision to read the Scroll of Esther on *Purim*<sup>68</sup> and the necessity to obtain the services of a *Mohel*.<sup>69</sup> The first circumcision performed was by a certain R J Joseph on his own son. Joseph appears to have had some rudimentary ecclesiastical qualifications because he had obtained authority to act as *Mohel* before he left England.<sup>70</sup> In 1854 he was appointed by the colonial authorities as marriage officer for the western district. It was 1850 before the first reference appears to taking steps to obtain kosher meat.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Charles Horn was born in 1845, a month or two after the death of his father Abraham, one of the seventeen original members and the first to be buried in the Albert Road Cemetery.

<sup>67</sup> On 19 June 1844 Amelia, daughter of Mr and Mrs Simeon Marcus was married to Michael Benjamin of Grahamstown.

<sup>68</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 1 page 35. Meeting on 28 January 1844.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p.59. Meeting on 6 September 1845.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p.85.

<sup>71</sup> CTHC, Minute Book No. 2 p.32. On the 2 April 1850 it was reported that arrangements had been made with Mr Morris Butcher, No. 6 Shambles, for the delivery of Cosher (*sic*) meat, and that notices to that effect had been issued by the Secretary. Some two months later, it was recorded that Mr Morris had reported "that the demand for Cosher meat was by no means as much as represented". (p.42)

As the numbers continued to grow, thought was given to the advisability of the appointment of a minister and the acquisition of a permanent place of worship. (Services were being held regularly on Sabbaths and festivals in the houses of members.) Despite the exhortation of Chief Rabbi N M Adler,<sup>72</sup> whose jurisdiction the Cape Colony recognised, there was no unanimity about these two important steps. Those who were opposed took the view that the congregation was too small and its financial resources too limited to justify the assumption of these additional burdens,<sup>73</sup> but the majority were determined to persevere in establishing a fully fledged congregation with a minister and a synagogue. They were assisted by the accession of several new members during the latter years of the 1840s and financial contributions were obtained, not only from members, but also from Jews who had not joined the society and even former Jews who had embraced Christianity.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Letter Chief Rabbi Adler to CTHC, 2 July 1846 referred to at a meeting on 14 November 1846. CTHC, Minute Book No. 2 p.87.

<sup>73</sup> One of the most important members, Simeon Marcus and his son-in-law, Moss, actually resigned on the issue, but later returned.

<sup>74</sup> They included two particularly interesting personalities: Isaac Manuel, who had been a soldier in the Napoleonic army, came to the Cape in 1808 and pioneered the export of hides from the Colony. He joined the Anglican Church and is buried in the churchyard of St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. Joseph Suasso da Lima came from Amsterdam, settled at the Cape in 1818 after having served in Batavia on a government mission. He wrote and published the first history of the Cape, *Geschiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop* and was the editor of *De Versamelaar* in which he published on 7 February 1843 an obituary of the recently deceased Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Solomon Hirschell. After joining the Dutch Reformed Church, he was appointed to teach catechism to slave children.

In 1849 a property was acquired and adapted to the use of a synagogue.<sup>75</sup> In August of that year the first minister arrived. He was the Reverend Isaac Pulver who had been selected by the Chief Rabbi. He was qualified as Minister, *Chazan* and *Shochet*. He immediately assumed his duties. For the first time kosher meat was available and steps were taken to import *matzah* for Passover. On the 15 September 1849 Mr Pulver conducted the ceremonies connected with the consecration of the synagogue, the first to be established in South Africa. Several members who had previously resigned returned to strengthen the congregation. An elaborate constitution comprising no less than 108 laws was drawn up, far more far-reaching and draconian than was justified by the size of the congregation and in due course they were abandoned and a more realistic code of 16 laws was drawn up.<sup>76</sup> But the laws did not suffice to ensure harmony and progress. It was not possible to maintain the ritual ceremonies and orthodox standards expected and required by someone of Pulver's pious background. Eventually after holding office for only two years he resigned in 1851 and actually held separate services for a small number of secessionists during the High Holy days of that year. He had pressed unsuccessfully for the establishment of a *mikvah* and attempts made to obtain authority for him from the

---

<sup>75</sup> The property consisted of two houses and a store at the corner of St John's Street and Bouquet Street. It was purchased for £800.

<sup>76</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 3. The Laws appear at the beginning of the Volume. These dealt with such matters as the procedures to be adopted when couples planned to be married; the laws regarding burials and payment of burial fees; the imposition of fines on members who declined to accept honours in synagogue, mourning rituals and the officials responsible for the administration of the congregation generally.

Chief Rabbinate of London to perform "every religious ceremony" (this presumably referred to conversions and divorces) failed.<sup>77</sup>

Pulver's letter of resignation set out his three reasons for giving up his position, namely: his inability to obtain kosher meat; his inability to bring up his children in a place "where so little regard was paid to the principles of our religion"; and the fact that after two years' trial, he could not make his income meet his expenses.<sup>78</sup>

One little insight into the struggles which Pulver had to maintain the decorum which he had expected as a minister from England is to be found in a decision of the committee of the 25th May 1851. It was decided to issue a formal request to members not to remove their *tallith* before the conclusion of the prayers.<sup>79</sup>

It seems clear that from the very earliest days of the existence of the congregation the small community had a real desire to maintain the dietary laws and uphold standard religious practices, despite the peccadilloes which are recorded. The fact that these pioneers being deprived of these basic requirements

---

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid, passim.*

<sup>78</sup> Letter Pulver to the Chief Rabbi 15 June 1851, transcribed in CTHC, Minute Book, No. 3 p.26.

<sup>79</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 3 p.15. Other complaints related to members refusing to bind themselves to take Kosher meat; the necessity to fine members for not attending services or declining honours; members failing to pay their dues, which on at least one occasion led to a threat of legal proceedings.

of orthodox Judaism nonetheless continued the struggle to maintain the integrity of their religious life must be counted to their credit. It is not too fanciful to see in these early struggles a harbinger of the attitude which would permeate South African Jewry throughout the next century and a half. Keep as much as you can; and do not let the inability to observe one *mitzvah* lead you to ignore all the others.<sup>80</sup>

Pulver's successor, also recommended and appointed by the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, was the Reverend Joel Rabinowitz who arrived in Cape Town in 1859 and was to serve the community as its minister for 23 vital years during which a new synagogue would be built and the congregation at last established on firm foundations. When Rabinowitz commenced his ministry, there were some sixty professing Jewish families in and around Cape Town and three other established congregations in the colony, namely at Grahamstown, Graaff-Reinet and Port Elizabeth.

Rabinowitz included in his duties the responsibility for all Jews within the Colony and was seen by them and by the community at large as the recognised head of "South African Jewry". The minutes of the congregation repeatedly reflect decisions authorising Rabinowitz to visit "the diamond fields" and other areas on "the frontier" in order to conduct circumcisions and other pastoral duties. The issue of circumcising the children born to Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers was a frequent

---

<sup>80</sup> In 1855, the CTHC resolved to obtain from England "a book referring to and descriptive of all Jewish customs". (Minute Book vol. 3 p.78). This was probably the *Shulchan Aruch*.

cause of controversy. It was usually permitted, but with reservations.<sup>81</sup>

An exchange of correspondence between Rabinowitz and a Jew living in what was then a remote outlying area of Port Elizabeth is worth quoting. It indicates the loyal adherence to Jewish tradition of a Jew clearly having little secular or religious education and also the warm response of Rabinowitz and the difficulties attendant on what is today regarded as a standard and routine family observance. Mr Isaacson's letters are quoted exactly as they were written with all the oddities of spelling, grammar and syntax.<sup>82</sup> It hardly necessary to say that this is done in no spirit of mockery, but to illustrate a typical communication from a frontier Jew grappling with the realities of life and the pulls of his religion.

19 October 1866

My wife having presented me with a son I wish to know whether you are soon coming this way as I want you to yitch him. he was born on the 14th. Mr. Abramson did my last at Alice when Mr. Jacobs's at Kingwilliamstown was done - I am a poor man but I will give twenty pounds but that must include all things. Please let me hear from you dear sir as soon as you can - being very anxious.

---

<sup>81</sup> CTHC, Minute Books, *passim*.

<sup>82</sup> Mr Isaacson's letters are in different handwritings, even to the signatures. He himself must have been illiterate in English, and so dictated his letters to others. This explains the fact that the spelling and syntax are much worse in the second letter than the first, and also the idiosyncratic transcription of the Hebrew words in the second letter. Filler must surely mean *T'ffilin*. Konfits presumably means a *Tallith* (Prayer Shawl) which according to religious law must bear four fringes (*arba Kanfoth*). I am confident that my explanations of these are correct, but I am entirely baffled by the word "yitch" in the first letter. It clearly means "circumcise"; but what could it's derivation possibly be? One suggestion offered is "to make him Yiddish" - but this is entirely unconvincing.

I only know Mr. Adler and Mr. Godfreys.

October 26 5627=1866

I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your letter from (*sic*) the 19th inst. and I beg to congratulate you most heartily upon the birth of your newly born son sincerely trusting that both mother and baby are doing well.

I need not tell you how delighted I was to see from your letter that although you are far away from my congregation here, you too are willing, nay anxious to adhere as much as it lays in your power to the sacred principles of Judaism and to bring up your children to the same. O! How I wish most earnestly that I had but wings so as to fly away to your place at once and circumcise your son. Nothing could have given greater pleasure, since I must confess that I fully admire and respect you seeing that you are longing to discharge your sacred duty as a Jewish father to your son and willing to make a great pecuniary sacrifice upon the shrine of our religion and spend twenty pounds to accomplish your sacred object. Considering that you are not a rich man, as you say in your letter, I must admit that it is a large amount.

I have therefore spoken to our worthy president, Mr W M Benjamin and both he and myself are very sorry to tell you that I could not be spared by my congregation for the next three months to come for several of them expect an increase in their family and they might want me here.

I therefore promise you, sir, that I shall endeavour to obtain permission from my congregation to come up to you as soon as I see that I can be reasonably spared in Cape Town, provided you send me the money for the travelling expenses.

I would take the liberty to advise you to become a member of our congegation by paying five pounds per annum to our congregation and if you wish to do so, please let me know so that I may have you proposed as a member at the next meeting of our congregation which will take place shortly.

November 2, 1866

Most Reverend and kind Sir,

I got your letter and shall become one yure members at 5£ a year. It is very kind of your dear Sir, to rite so quickly. It gived me and my poor wife so mutch pleasure but it looks like we shall have to bring the little feller without muthers milk as Mrs Isaacson is got sore brests I omitted to tell you this boy comed afore is time but he is

a strong feller - I think it will be all the better if he is done in two or three months I shall do all that you tell me dear Sir and much obleeged for your hints - and will do all you say.

When you do come please bring a filler and Konfits as I lost mine in moving about - please excuse the writing as I have got a vitlo on my finger and its very pane - so I must now leave of <sup>83</sup>

In May 1866 it was reported that a child born of a Jewish father and Christian mother who had died at the age of two months had not been circumcised; he was permitted to be interred in the Jewish burial ground in the part set aside for such cases. It was left to Rabinowitz's discretion as to the burial service "especially as the father had applied to Mr Rabinowitz before the child was eight days old and his first son born in Natal was circumcised by a Christian doctor in the absence of a *Mohel*."<sup>84</sup> This is another instructive example of how despite the difficulties brought about by intermarriage, lack of facilities and absence of appropriate officials, the members of the fledgling colony made touching efforts to observe whatever they could, even if only in a rudimentary manner of the religious rites of passage.

Shortly after Rabinowitz's arrival, it was decided that the time

---

<sup>83</sup> UCT, Manuscripts and Archives Division, BCS 428. These letters are bound in an Album of letters, press cuttings, and other memorabilia of Rabinowitz, deposited with the University by a descendant of his, Mr Gluckman of Port Elizabeth. They reflect with poignancy and vividness the career of this important figure in the story of South African Judaism. Many of the difficulties and troublesome issues which this dissertation endeavours to describe as having marked the development of Judaism in the Cape and throughout South African illustrates.

<sup>84</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 3 p.197.

had come to construct a proper synagogue for the community. (Services were still being held in the made-over premises acquired during Pulver's ministry.) A property was acquired in St John's Street and the foundation stone was laid in a solemn ceremony attended by the whole congregation on 8 September 1862. The new synagogue was consecrated in the completed building on 13 September 1863, the fourteenth anniversary of the establishment of the former synagogue in Bouquet Street. This would in due course become known as the "Old Shul" and would be used for overflow services and to house the Jewish Museum, the first such Jewish institution to be set up in 1958.

Until 1872 Rabinowitz was the only Jewish minister in South Africa. He led his congregation through financial and spiritual ups and downs, but always maintained a steady adherence to the norms of Anglo-Jewish orthodoxy as he understood it. As we have seen he sometimes had difficulty in reconciling the exigent requirements of the Chief Rabbi with his own sometimes unruly flock. When he retired in 1882 he received many testimonials, gifts, public addresses and expressions of esteem from Jews and non-Jews alike. After his retirement he returned to England for a short while, but soon returned to South Africa. In what must surely be a unique mid-life career change, he enrolled as a student of metallurgy at the South African College and in 1887 he received his certificate as an assayer, which profession he duly pursued in the gold-rich Witwatersrand. Wittily contrasting his former and new occupations, he quipped, "Hitherto I have tried to extract gold from people who have a heart of stone. Now

I am going to try the stone itself."<sup>85</sup>

He remained active in Jewish and congregational life both in Johannesburg and after his return to Cape Town, where he died in 1902 at the age of seventy-four.

Rabinowitz was succeeded as Minister of the Cape Town Congregation by the Reverend Abraham Frederick Ornstien, who arrived in June 1882 after a varied career as a Minister and teacher, including eleven years in Australia. He had been born and educated in England and like his predecessors, came highly recommended by the Chief Rabbi. The congregation, which was firmly established when he arrived, made further steps under his leadership and from a financial point of view the community benefitted from the rising tide of prosperity which the Cape generally was experiencing during the 1880's. Ornstien gave great satisfaction at first and was voted a bonus at the end of his first year of office and again at the end of the second.<sup>86</sup> It was found necessary to extend the synagogue and to add a school room, and the alterations designed by Charles Freeman, were completed in 1885. At the same time the first *mikvah* was constructed. This is essential to the strict practice of Orthodox Judaism and it is used as part of the ceremonies involved in accepting a convert to Judaism. The records show that at this time the question of proselytism was engaging the

---

<sup>85</sup> The anecdote is related, without authority by Israel Abrahams in his chapter "Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in G Saron and L Hotz (eds.) *op. cit.* The quip is said to have been made in a conversation with Sir Thomas Upington, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.

<sup>86</sup> CTHC, Minute Book, No. 3, pp.398-9.

attention of the Jewish community. As pointed out above, it was the financial contributions of three proselytes which enabled the mikvah to be constructed at this time.<sup>87</sup>

It was Ornstien who would face the first real challenge to the unity of the community from a new influx of Jews who came to the Cape with backgrounds, assumptions and practices very different from those which had prevailed hitherto in the colony. Even during Rabinowitz's ministry there had been, as we shall see, rumblings of discontent amongst the more recent arrivals and controversial challenges to the authority of the Chief Rabbi; they would increase in frequency and vehemence and engage more and more people as the Eastern European element increased in numbers during the 1880's and 1890's until, as described below, the first breakaway occurred. A new element had entered into South African Jewry, which would enlarge, transform and enrich the community; but at first, the newcomers troubled and perplexed the Anglophile Cape Town Jews and then English trained ministers Rabinowitz and Ornstien.

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p.367, Report of *Mikvah* Committee. p.384, Ornstien reports on a candidate for conversion and simultaneously that the construction of the *mikvah* is proceeding.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE COMING OF THE JEWS OF EASTERN EUROPE

## The Background

It is estimated that between 30 000 and 40 000 Jews came to South Africa from Greater Russia between 1880 and 1914, over 90% from Lithuania. By sheer force of numbers they therefore soon dominated the community. It is necessary to examine the background from which they came and the cultural and religious "baggage" which they brought with them in order to understand how they impacted on the community which they found and how they helped to shape South African Jewry.

For over three centuries the Jews of Eastern Europe had maintained an intensive religious life observing an intellectual and spiritual isolation which was not only imposed on them but self-imposed. The *Haskalah* Movement had permitted a certain infusion of secular learning and thought and had exposed Jews who did not reject it to wider cultural and intellectual horizons; but it did not bring with it any serious threat to the integrity of Jewish life, the ideals of Jewish tradition or the strict adherence to ritual observance.<sup>88</sup> Social assimilation was neither available to, or sought by, the Jews who had lived under the dominion of the Czar, (notwithstanding efforts by the latter

---

<sup>88</sup> On the *Haskalah* generally, see Jacob S Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement in Russia*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1913. Also *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 7 pp 1433 ff s.v. *Haskalah*.

and some of his officials).<sup>89</sup> In the words of Simon Dubnow, Russian civilisation was "not worth the having".<sup>90</sup> As was to be expected from a population of some 3 million Jews,<sup>90A</sup> there was of course wide divergence in standards of orthodoxy and depths of learning, not to mention methods of employment and lifestyles generally.

By and large the Jews who came to South Africa from Eastern Europe in the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries were not the most scholarly, well educated or ritually observant. Furthermore they were seeking economic advancement and social acceptance, not religious freedom which they had enjoyed to the full in their homeland. A pious scholar, Zvi Valk Widawer, reporting from San Francisco in the 1880s for his Hebrew journal published in Russia, could write:

The Jews who live in this land did not endure long journeys and untold hardships in order to slake their thirst for the word of God and to busy themselves in the Torah in a free and untroubled place. Jews came here only to achieve the purpose which occupied their entire attention in the land of their birth. That purpose was money.<sup>91</sup>

He would not have found reason to send a dissimilar report from

---

<sup>89</sup> S M Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, (trans. I Friedlaender), Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1918; S Ettinger, "The Struggle for Emancipation in Eastern Europe", in H H Ben-Sasson (ed), *A History of the Jewish People*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980.

<sup>90</sup> Dubnow, *op. cit.*

<sup>90A</sup> Evyatar Friesel, in his *Atlas of Modern Jewish History* gives the Jewish population of Europe as 2 730 000 at the beginning of the 19th Century.

<sup>91</sup> A Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter - A History*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1989.

South Africa. To visit far-off and remote farmsteads, to keep his shop open for fifteen hours a day seven days a week, to become accepted, was a more urgent need for the recent immigrant than the need to observe the Sabbath or keep Kosher.

Those who were not prepared to make these sacrifices stayed at home. Some of them found in changing circumstances in Greater Russia opportunities for new competition and confrontation with non-Jews. The large property owners, professionals and wealthier classes generally stayed.<sup>92</sup> Only five per cent of Jewish immigrants into the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century were over 45 years of age<sup>93</sup> and there is no reason to believe that the percentage in South Africa was significantly different. Indeed, in 1936, Dr H Sonnabend, a South African sociologist and demographer, found over seventy-five per cent of South African Jews under 30 years of age were South African born.<sup>94</sup> The religious elite stayed, having been

---

<sup>92</sup> C Goldscheider and A S Zuckerman, *The Transformation of the Jews*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910*, New York, Columbia University Studies in the Social Sciences No. 145, 1914. See also Lucy Dawidowicz. "A Century of Jewish History, 1881-1981: The View from America" in *American Jewish Year Book 82*: pp.3-98 where this writer states: "The impulse to emigrate was stimulated by the lack of opportunity and by persecution but it had its deeper source in the restless energy of young people discontented with their lot." (p.11.)

<sup>94</sup> H Sonnabend, "S A Jewry in Figures: Interesting Facts" about our Community", in *Jewish Affairs*, December 1941; "The Social Role of the Jew in South Africa", in *Jewish Affairs*, January, 1948.

warned by many of their Rabbinic leaders not to imperil the purity of their religious life by travelling to pagan lands. In 1893, for example, the most distinguished moralist amongst the Rabbis of Europe, R Israel Meir Ha-Kohen, who was also known as *Chofetz Haim* from the title of his most important work, warned against mass emigration to America. He realised that this emigration had become so powerful it could not be stopped but he pleaded with those who listened to him to choose persecution in Russia rather than economic success in America. As he put it:

A man must move away from any place which causes turning away from the way of the Lord even if he knows for certain he would have great economic success there.<sup>95</sup>

Most middle class Jews managed to find ways of re-establishing themselves in Russia.

It was, Hertzberg says, the "pedlars and tailors" who left<sup>96</sup> and the position in regard to immigration to South Africa was substantially the same. In fact we have interesting details of 1237 applicants for naturalization in 1904-1906. They included 428 "general dealers and merchants" and 133 "tailors and outfitters". Applicants for naturalization could of course be expected to "upgrade" the description of their occupation.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore it would only have been the hardy and adventurous

---

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Hertzberg, *op cit.*, p.157.

<sup>96</sup> *op. cit.*, p.153.

<sup>97</sup> Alexander Papers, University of Cape Town, *Register of Jewish Residents Seeking Naturalization in the Cape Colony 1904-1906*. This instructive body of material is analyzed in Louis Hotz, "Jews Who Arrived Here Sixty Years Ago", in *Jewish Affairs*, February, 1963.

spirits who would have ventured to a new and unknown land. Those who went to the United States had a great deal of information about the land they were choosing both for good and for ill. Although there had been some information coming through in increasing volume from South Africa<sup>98</sup> it was by and large unknown territory. This applied particularly in the diamond fields and the goldfields - the so-called pull factor - in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

But it would be doing an injustice to these immigrants not to recognise that the toughest and least cultured of them nonetheless came from a tradition of respect for learning and religious tradition. As a recent student of these Jews has observed: "Lithuanian Jews were well versed in traditional Jewish sources, rich in spirituality and sincerely respectful of knowledge in general and Jewish learning in particular".<sup>99</sup>

The fact that the overwhelming majority of Jews from Eastern

---

<sup>98</sup> Many articles and letters appeared in the Yiddish and Hebrew Press in Eastern Europe, particularly *Ha-melitz*, *Ha-maggid* and *Ha-tzfirah* in which recent immigrants to South Africa reported on their experiences and impressions in their new homes. They are extensively quoted in M P Grossman, *A Study of the Trends and Tendencies of Hebrew and Yiddish Writings in South Africa since their beginnings in the early nineties of the last century to 1930*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1973.

Two particularly vivid accounts by M D Hersch and N D Hoffmann respectively are quoted by Shimoni, *op. cit.* pp 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> M Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania*, Jerusalem, Gefen Publishing House, 1995.

Europe came from Lithuania has led many South African observers to reflect on the extent to which a particular *Litvak* flavour impregnated South African Jewry. They therefore sought to identify and describe specific *Litvak* characteristics in contrast to those of say Polish or Galician Jews. Saron has maintained that such a task is possible, but many of the qualities cited by him in support of this contention could with few changes equally apply to other Eastern European Jews.

They preserved their homogeneity ... they came from a land that was economically poor and culturally backward ... where boundaries and rulers changed frequently ... they created their own spiritual tradition ... produced a host of scholars.<sup>100</sup>

All these and other characteristics could it is submitted be applied to Polish Jews, Jews from the Ukraine, Jews from Rumania or Latvia.

The attribution by so many commentators of some special quality to South African Jewry because of its *Litvak* origin owes more to nostalgia and folklore than to accuracy of geography or sociology. What is or was a *Litvak*? There is no clear definition. Jews from Courland, part of Latvia, were considered *Litvaks*, at least culturally. Alexander Hertz<sup>101</sup> defines *Litvaks* as Jews from the Pale of Settlement, especially from the Vilna and Minsk *gubernias*, who settled in Congress Poland at the end of the nineteenth century, many of whom were under the

---

<sup>100</sup> *The Making of S A Jewry*, p.31.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, Evanston, Illinois, North Western University Press, 1987.

influence of Russian culture and language.<sup>102</sup> Other writers define *Litvak* as a Lithuanian Jew, but qualify this by stating that Jews from outside Lithuania may also be considered *Litvaks*... They identify a number of mundane characteristics contrasting *Litvaks* from other *Ashkenazi* Jews, these include differences in Yiddish dialect, culinary tastes and cooking methods, and certain religious practices such as reading the Friday night *Kiddush* in a sitting position and avoiding the extravagant body movements associated with *Chassidic* methods of prayer.<sup>103</sup>

Indeed the expression seems to have become conflated with *mitnagdism*, and to differentiate Jews of Lithuania and those who thought like them from the remaining increasingly *Chassidic* Jewish world of Eastern Europe.

Admittedly Lithuanian Jewry was greatly influenced by the authority and tradition of the Vilna *Gaon*. His combination of secular knowledge with the older traditions of learning and intellectuality earned for Vilna the title of 'the Jerusalem of

---

<sup>102</sup> After the third partition of Poland on 23 December 1791, the decree limiting Jewish habitation to White Russia (Belarus) and the Ukraine was extended to include the newly acquired territories along the Baltic Sea. Thus began the Pale of Settlement that stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Of the areas then inhabited by Lithuanian Jewry, ethnic Lithuania and Byelorussia became an integral part of Russia. The southern part, around Grodno and Suwalk, became part of the Duchy of Warsaw (Poland).

<sup>103</sup> S and N Schoenberg, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, New York and London, Garland Publishing Co. 1991.

Lithuania". The close adherents of the Vilna *Gaon* were *Torah* scholars, intellectuals, giants of learning - but for reasons already stated these were not the Lithuanian Jews who came to South Africa.

In short the motivating factors which brought Jews of Eastern Europe to South Africa are complex and it is very difficult to establish a reliable pattern as to their religious, intellectual and cultural mindsets. They certainly brought with them certain inherited and inherent beliefs regarding the value of education, a respect for learning, pride in their children's achievements and a passionate pride in their descent (*yichus*) if it could be shown to derive from distinguished Rabbinical antecedents. Whatever religious practices they had abandoned or compromised therefore, they always remained determined to uphold essential religious rituals, to observe at least the High Holy Days and the rites of passage, such as circumcision, *barmitzvah*, religious marriage and religious burial to maintain those elements of Jewish life which in their view would ensure continuity and prevent the assimilation of their children. It was through the synagogue that they operated and in the synagogue that they focused their aims and efforts to achieve these goals.

The new immigrant lost no time in assuming the outward trappings necessary to establish himself in his new home but equally lost little time in establishing the essential institutions - the synagogue, the cheder and the burial ground, which would enable him to preserve his roots.

The *Cape Times* in an editorial of July 1896 recognised these elements.

The Russian exile who scarcely would call his soul his own in Europe rejoices to draw in the free air of the British Colony ... . The man who stepped ashore in his long outlandish boots - which he slept in, perhaps close to the fo'c's'le coming over - and with a beard to his equally outlandish belt, suddenly one fine day emerges with the cut of a genteel Cape Colonist. He toils, he saves and as soon as he has saved a little, he calculates how many times that sum will enable him to send his son to college ... . When he has made his fortune he is as a rule as unashamed of his beginnings as he is proud to rank among his own people. <sup>104</sup>

With this background it is not surprising that the first arrivals in the Cape were dissatisfied with the standards of observance which they encountered amongst the Jews of English origin, perhaps not so much as to the intensity of observance which was maintained, but because of the distinctive English climate and atmosphere which prevailed. We have seen that the authority and jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbinate of the United Kingdom was recognised and deferred to. Jews from Eastern Europe knew nothing of such an authority; the concept of a Chief Rabbi was unknown where they came from.

By the end of the century the majority of the Cape Town Jews were of Eastern European origin. They were soon characterised by the cultural and religious luggage which they brought with them. Their mother tongue was Yiddish and only a small number had a smattering of English if that; this soon changed and even though they may never have lost their accents, they soon learnt to speak fluent and idiomatic English. They worked hard in trying to adapt to their circumstances learning and observing from whatever

---

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in the *London Jewish Chronicle*, 31 July 1896.

opportunity presented itself - most became pedlars, petty traders or artisans. But they did not like what they saw of the way in which the Jewish religion was practised and observed.

#### Interaction, confrontation, accommodation

Amongst the early issues which precipitated a clash between the dissident elements of the Cape Town community and the Chief Rabbinate were the questions of *Schechita* and cemetery control. In 1887 a controversy arose in the Cape Town congregation concerning the control of the cemetery. More than 40 years earlier a plot of ground within the municipal area had been acquired by the congregation and consecrated for use as a burial ground. In 1885, however, the municipal bye-laws were amended to provide that all cemeteries had to be located outside the municipal boundaries. A further tract of land was therefore acquired, but the authorities could at first not be prevailed upon to impose binding conditions in perpetuity ensuring that the control of the cemetery would always vest in the congregation and that only persons belonging to the Jewish faith could be buried there. The last requirement assumed no little importance because of the growing numbers of the community who were marrying women who were either not Jewish at all or who had been "converted" to Judaism other than in accordance with orthodox ritual.

This led to a split in the community because there were some who were prepared to accept the land on the terms offered and administer it themselves without the sanction of the majority and more importantly without the permission of the Chief Rabbi. They

became known as secessionists. A letter from Chief Rabbi N M Adler to the Cape Town Minister, Rev. Joel Rabinowitz, is instructive both as to the matters dealt with in it and the somewhat magisterial tone adopted by the Chief Rabbi:

I have received a letter from Mr Elsner, the President of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, in which he brings a serious indictment against you in that you have consecrated a portion of the Maitland Cemetery as a Jewish burial place for a congregation which I have not recognised and in conjunction with a *shochet* whom I have not permitted to act... . The Executive of the Congregation inform me that they refuse to accept an allotment in the general cemetery for the following reasons:

- (a) Because trustees refused to hand over the ground in perpetuity to the Jewish Community and would not give them absolute control over the ground;
- (b) Because there was no guarantee that persons not belonging to the Jewish faith would not be buried there;
- (c) Because there was no Jewish representative on the Board of Trustees for proper separation of the various denominations.

These grounds seemed to be reasonable and in accordance with our law ... I most earnestly beg you to give the reasons which induced you to act in the manner indicated ... I was thoroughly displeased with the publication of a pitiful squabble in the *Cape Times* ... <sup>105</sup>

By June the controversy was still raging and had extended to the issue of *Schechita*. In a letter to Rabinowitz, Adler wrote:

We, my father and I have given our full consideration to your letter of the 28th April ... . The Congregation were fully justified according to Jewish law in making these two demands ... . As it appears that the portion of the ground allotted to the secessionists was not granted to them for their absolute control in perpetuity, you were not

---

<sup>105</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook, No. 96. Letter 1359, 24 March 1887. For an explanation of the references to and citations of the records and correspondence of the Chief Rabbinate throughout this dissertation see my paper "New Archival Material Relating to the Early Development of South Africa's Jewish Community" in R Musiker and J Sherman (eds.) *Waters out of the Well*, Johannesburg, Library of the University of the Witwatersrand, 1988.

justified in accordance with Jewish law in consecrating it ... I am grateful of the opportunity of advising you earnestly to use the influence you possess in the restoration of peace and harmony among the Jewish residents in Cape Town ... I am pleased to learn from you that you have induced the secessionists to desist in partaking of the *Schechita* of Mr Salom and that they draw their meat supply from the butchery for whom Mr Mizrachi sent out by me, act.<sup>106</sup>

However irksome the involvement (those on the spot may well have regarded it as interference) of the Chief Rabbi may have been, the fact is that his laudable aim was achieved. A cemetery was consecrated in accordance with Jewish law for the sole use of the Jewish community; the unity of the community was restored and maintained and the integrity of the *Schechita* arrangements was defended. When Rabinowitz's successor, Reverend Ornstien, adopted the same attitude in regard to the *Schechita* at the Cape he earned the commendation of the Chief Rabbi.<sup>107</sup>

It was not only *kashrut* and cemeteries which fuelled the fires of dissention between Ornstien and the more conservative of his "establishment" congregants on the one hand, and the ever growing number of newcomers on the other. Ornstien was not a man to accommodate himself to the religious susceptibilities and social needs of the *grienes*.

---

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, Letter 2788, 30 June 1887.

<sup>107</sup> The authority of the Chief Rabbi in matters concerning ritual slaughter was an issue which frequently arose in places other than South Africa. The matter came before the English Courts in the case of *Scholtz vs Adler* in which a butcher sued the Chief Rabbi for damages for having declared the meat sold by him (the Plaintiff) unfit to be eaten by Jews. The judgment upheld the authority of the Chief Rabbi in matters of this nature.

The strife extended as far as Oudtshoorn, where Ornstien, seeking to uphold the authority of the Chief Rabbi, objected to the appointment of a marriage officer chosen by the local community, which was predominantly of Eastern European descent.<sup>108</sup> Ornstien's background, his rigid outlook and want of tact, led to his being never really at ease with those of his congregants who were of the newly arrived immigration, and who grew in number year by year. When his appointment terminated in 1894 it was not renewed, and he died the following year.

The appointment of the Reverend Alfred Philipp Bender who was inducted as minister of the congregation on 13 September 1895, was to lead the congregation into the new century on a crest of enthusiasm and prosperity which would see the construction of a splendid new synagogue and establish the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation firmly and permanently as the Mother congregation of the swiftly growing Jewish community of South Africa.

Alfred Philipp Bender was born in 1863, the son of an Anglo-Jewish minister in Dublin. He had a distinguished academic career at St John's College, Cambridge and entered the Ministry as a young man. He was a typical Anglo-Jewish cleric and a distinguished Hebrew scholar and contributor to the *Jewish Quarterly Review*. The level of his Rabbinic learning was not

---

<sup>108</sup> *Ha-amelitz* 23 February 1888. See also my note s.v. "Oudtshoorn Rabbiner", in L Feldman, *Oudtshoorn: Jerusalem of Africa* (J Sherman ed.) Johannesburg, Friends of the Library, University of the Witwatersrand, 1986.

high.<sup>109</sup> A study of his published sermons shows that his quotations and references were invariably from the classics or the great milestones of English and European literature;<sup>110</sup> he rarely had recourse to the classical Jewish sources other than the Bible itself. Whilst this was of little account to those of his congregants with an English background and who themselves had minimal Talmudic knowledge, it was irksome to the newer immigrants, many of whom had a profound knowledge of the Jewish sources.

What Bender lacked in traditional scholarship he certainly made up for in his great love for his fellow man, and his determined energy and zeal in works of charity and welfare. He was very active in the social work of the community and involved the women, the children and the adolescent youth in communal activities. He was much involved in Jewish education and responsible for the first Talmud Torah (religious school) and the first attempt to form a Jewish public school as well as a working man's club and a literary and debating society.

There is evidence that Bender, despite the success of these activities, was not happy in the early years of his ministry. There is a letter which Chief Rabbi N M Adler wrote to him in 1901 offering sympathy on the death of Bender's father, and in

---

<sup>109</sup> "He was not a talmudist by *Yeshivah* standards". Israel Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community*, p.86.

<sup>110</sup> A P Bender, *Sabbath Sermons and Sermons for Festivals and Special Sabbaths and Occasions*. 2 Vols. Privately printed and published, no date.

this letter the Chief Rabbi writes, "I am grieved by your writing that you are not sure that you will remain in the country; your retirement would be a great loss to Anglo-Jewry".<sup>111</sup> In a sermon in June 1903 he spoke in despondent terms of the falling off of attendance at services and other complaints which he had about the congregation. He said that "all these facts may soon combine to make him give up his post in order to make room for a man whose work may have more lasting influence and prove to be of greater benefit."<sup>112</sup> In 1907 he went to England and applied for a position as Minister at the New West End Congregation. He was not successful and in a rather cruel pun, a newspaper correspondent of the time wrote, "That as the New West End Congregation was not prepared to bestow upon Bender the mantle of Elijah he was returning to his own Cape".<sup>113</sup>

Bender's relationship with those Jews of the community who were of East European extraction was ambivalent. He was not at ease with them on personal grounds and they did not like his "English" manner, nor respect what they perceived as deficiencies in his piety and learning. He also knew nothing of and had no feelings for the Yiddish language, and did not support the representations made by other elements in the community, led by Morris Alexander, to have Yiddish recognised by the Government as a European

---

<sup>111</sup> Jewish Museum, Cape Town, File 199 B. V. 15.

<sup>112</sup> SAJC, 10 July 1903.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 9 August 1907.

language.<sup>114</sup> But on the other hand, he was indefatigable in his efforts to assist others in dealing with the administrative and bureaucratic difficulties often experienced by Jewish immigrants when they arrived at the Cape Town docks, and his affable manner and eminent reputation eased the way past many an obstructive immigration or customs official.<sup>115</sup>

The three focal points of Jewish religious life in Cape Town can now be plotted around the emergence of the first three congregations with their respective synagogues and between them they trace the movement of the community from one which was entirely dominated and controlled by Jews of English (to a smaller degree German) descent to those who in increasing measure sought to look back towards the customs and religious life which they had known in Eastern Europe, particularly in Lithuania from which as has been pointed out the vast majority emerged.

The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation as we have seen was established in 1841 and looked to the United Kingdom and specifically the Chief Rabbi for direction and guidance. In 1902, two new synagogues were built. The first was in Roeland Street, Cape Town, erected by the New Hebrew Congregation which had been founded in 1900 almost entirely by persons who had broken away from the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation. By and large they were less affluent than those of the mother congregation and they were

---

<sup>114</sup> For a full account of this issue, see Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society*, pp.57 f.f.

<sup>115</sup> Louis Mirvish, *op. cit.*

dissatisfied with the English manners and mores of the founder congregation. But there are aspects of this breakaway which repay study because they tend to dispel, or at least to call into question, certain myths which have emerged as to the motivations of the breakaway congregations which would be formed throughout South Africa.

Received opinion is that the breakaways by the so-called *grienes* were occasioned by a desire to follow a method of worship and type of congregational structure more in line with that which they had known in *der heim* (the old country) and to avoid the Anglo-Jewish atmosphere of the founder congregations. This was to be seen not only in Cape Town, but it would be seen also in Oudtshoorn, in Port Elizabeth and in Johannesburg. But an examination of what took place at the New Hebrew Congregation and its synagogue in Roeland Street does not fit in with this paradigm. We find, for example, that the fledgling congregation when it came to lay the foundation stone of its new synagogue, extended a warm invitation to Reverend Bender<sup>116</sup> to perform this function. We find too, that they did not, as one would have expected and as took place in other congregations, send messages back to Lithuania to engage the services of a *Rav* who could Minister to them according to the customs which they knew. Instead they wrote to the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom

---

<sup>116</sup> Letter Cape Town New Hebrew Congregation to Reverend A P Bender, 20 September 1901. Bender Papers. Jewish Museum, Cape Town File 199 B V. For further details concerning Bender, see below.

requesting that he send them a Minister trained at Jew's College.<sup>117</sup> As it happened nothing came of this request but one may speculate and reflect that if they had found someone from Jew's College introduced by the Chief Rabbi it would indeed have almost certainly been someone of the type associated with the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, that is to say, a minister as comfortable with English culture and learning as with the Jewish sources.

The fact that the sermons in the Great Synagogue had been delivered in English, clearly caused the members of the new Congregation no concern. Until they eventually obtained the services of a Minister they prevailed upon Adv. Morris Alexander to deliver the sermons and addresses in the synagogue on important occasions. Alexander, who was the acknowledged secular leader of Cape Town Jewry, had himself been educated in England, was a Cambridge graduate, a practising barrister and a fervent Anglophile.<sup>118</sup> He knew little or no Yiddish and he was by no means an observant Jew. His sermons were in English, indeed in polished Cambridge English, and he usually delivered them whilst wearing his academic robes.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Letter, New Hebrew Congregation to the Chief Rabbi, 12 November 1914. Chief Rabbi correspondence, File G. They asked for "an orthodox man holding a rabbinical diploma and having an English or American University degree, who should be able to preach in English and Yiddish".

<sup>118</sup> For details of Alexander's life and career, see Enid Alexander, *Morris Alexander*, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Juta and Co. Ltd., 1953.

<sup>119</sup> Milton Shain, "If I am for myself alone, what am I?" *Morris Alexander and South African Society*. Morris Alexander Memorial Lecture, July 1983, S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Cape

The services conducted in the Roeland Street synagogue differed, if at all, only in the most minute detail from those of the Great Synagogue. A member moving from one synagogue to the other would have retained his same prayer book and the order of service would have been unchanged. The fact that the minutes of the meetings of the main committee and the sub-committees of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation were in English, whereas for many years those of the New Congregation were in Yiddish, is an indication of the linguistic comfort of the leadership of the congregation and says nothing about the differing religious procedures.

However, the next congregation to be formed went one step further in catering for those who sought the more traditional customs. This was the *Beth Hamedrash* which was built in 1902 in Constitution Street. It has been pointed out by Dr Louis Mirvish, the son of the Rabbi who was appointed to this synagogue in 1908, that the area in which the *Beth Hamedrash* was situated had the semblance of a Lithuanian *shtetl*. In a touching memoir the Rabbi's son has described the atmosphere surrounding this congregation in the following colourful way:

The *Shul* was open the whole forenoon when services followed each other in rapid succession. In the evenings between *Minchah* and *Maariv*, the synagogue presented a scene of animated activity. The hard struggling Jew, the shopkeeper, pedlar, 'trier' or artisan would foregather at the conclusion of the day in the Beth Hamedrash and between services he would sit at one of the *Shiurim* or lectures delivered around long tables with benches all around. The immigrants even brought with them the cast system which used to exist in the *Shtetel* and this was reflected in the

---

Town. Although Shain quotes no authority for the reference to the academic gown and mortar-board, he is presumably relying on the reference to this practice by Louis Mirvish (see following note).

particular groups which attended the *Shiurim*. There was the learned class the ignorant, *lamdonim* and the '*amei-ha-aratzim*' (ignoramuses). The *lamdonim* sat round the *Rav Shiur*, the *Gemorah* and then in descending order of importance there would be *Mishnah*, *Ayin-yaakov*, then *Chumash* and later a *Tehillim* circle was formed. Scores of people all returning from a hard day's work would sit around and concentrate on the intricacies and legalistic complexities of Jewish lore and would discuss heatedly principles of religion and philosophy. This daily intellectual stimulus filled their lives with interest and excitement. On Saturday morning there were two *Minyanim*, an early one for the 'paradnikes' the people who had to daven quickly and go off to the Parade or market; then about 9 o'clock there was a second service for the more learned people, every one of whom was a *Shomer Shabbat*. Religion was fervent, in some respects they were fanatical. Everything which had to do with the English *shul* was considered *treife*. Zionism was not much in favour. A man's piety was measured by the length of time it took him before he finished praying the *Shmonah esrei*.<sup>120</sup>

While the *Beth Medrash* was continuing along these lines, the mother congregation was conducting itself according to its own fashion, under a succession of English trained ministers, appointed on the recommendation of the Chief Rabbi in London, to whom they each owed loyalty, and from whom they derived their sense of what was expected of a minister.

Despite the breakaways of the New Hebrew Congregation (to its synagogue in Roeland Street) and the *Beth Medrash*, the mother congregation continued to grow and flourish under Bender's leadership, and it became apparent that a larger house of worship was necessary, and one more suited to the growing dignity of the community. It was decided to build on the land immediately adjoining the existing synagogue. The foundation stone was laid

---

<sup>120</sup> Louis Mirvish. *Cultural Life of Cape Jewry in the years 1899-1914*, unpublished paper read at the Annual General Meeting of the Jewish Museum Cape Town, 29 November 1959. Jewish Museum File 100 A311(3).

on 2 June 1904 by the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, and the new edifice, which would be known as the Great Synagogue, or the Gardens *Shul*, was opened with great ceremony on 22 September 1905. One of the officiants was the first Jewish Mayor of Cape Town, Hyman Liberman, himself one of the wardens of the synagogue.<sup>121</sup>

Bender's ministry continued in ever-increasing dignity and esteem until he retired and was appointed Minister Emeritus in 1936. He died the following year.

Throughout the ministries of Pulver, Rabinowitz, Ornstien and Bender just described, the Anglo-Jewish atmosphere prevailed in the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation. One sees the influence of English customs, for example, in the installation of an organ in 1898<sup>122</sup> and a decision around the same time to determine seat rentals according to the position occupied by the seats in the synagogue, levying additional taxes on the more prominent seat holders.<sup>123</sup> Dissatisfaction was experienced regarding the lack of preparation of young men for their *Barmitzvah* ceremonies and what was perceived as attempts being made by persons who were not members of the congregation to use the facilities of the congregation for the purpose of rites of passage.<sup>124</sup> Thus in

---

<sup>121</sup> SAJC, 15 and 22 September 1905.

<sup>122</sup> CTHC, Minute Book 6. Special General Meeting 16 October 1898.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, Meeting, 21 May 1899.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*.

1915 we find new regulations imposed regarding *Barmitzvahs*, directing that only sons of members could be allowed to read *Maftir*, recite a prayer and be addressed by the Minister.<sup>125</sup> In 1903 a lively discussion ensued at the Annual General Meeting of the congregation regarding the appointment of its first *Chazan*. There were glowing reports from Berlin regarding the applicant, Cantor Steinfeldt, where he occupied the position of "*Musaph Chazan*" at the temporary synagogue on High Festivals. One speaker pointed out that it was necessary that he should "know in what order the prayer should be read."<sup>126</sup> A sufficient contrast between this congregation and the other two congregations to which reference has been made is to be found in the fact that such a discussion could never have taken place at a meeting of the more traditional communities.

We thus have a picture of three congregations, the one preserving the outward trappings of Jewish life, but in a manner which would be acceptable to those who sought to adjust themselves to life in an English colony and to prove themselves worthy of being accepted into the wider community. The second catered for those who, possibly in many cases for personal reasons, were uneasy in the mother synagogue, wished to be more relaxed and more at home in observing their religious life amongst those who shared the same tradition, educational background and upbringing while at the same time being aware of and eager for the advantages of assuming and absorbing the atmosphere of the Colony. The third

---

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 1 June 1915.

<sup>126</sup> *SAJC*, 20 March 1903.

made few concessions to the life around them and sought to maintain as far as possible exactly the sort of religious life they had known in Eastern Europe.

An interesting view on the overall situation brought about by the different trends which we have examined is to be found in an interview which Dr Solomon Schechter<sup>127</sup> gave to the *London Jewish Chronicle* following upon his visit to South Africa in 1910. This interview was reprinted in the *SAJC* of the 1st February 1911. Speaking of the youth of Cape Town, he said:

I don't think that the youth of Cape Town have a clear Jewish consciousness, any how they have not a sufficient acquaintance with Judaism they seemed to me to be wanting a lead. My special object in addressing them was to try and make them understand that at the present moment a real movement among the young men to come back to Judaism. I trust devoutly that I've succeeded with a few." Asked about his impressions of the Jews of Cape Town generally, he said, "The majority of the Jewish inhabitants appear to be Russians and Galicians. The Rev. A P Bender's synagogue is described as English, but a fair number of the members are immigrants from the continent of Europe. Then there is the Roeland Street synagogue which has no Rabbi, though it may one day ... . In addition there is a *Beth Hamedrash* with a Rabbi of its own. I found the Rev. Mr Bender an exceedingly affable man, a typical son of the university and a very good representative of the Jews among the gentiles with whom he is as popular as with members of his congregation. His sermons are celebrated for their apt quotations from the English classics. He holds a Sabbath Mincha service which is well attended and he undoubtedly does his best for Judaism in Cape Town as he sees it ... .

---

<sup>127</sup> (1847-1915) President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. One of the most distinguished Jewish scholars of his generation, principally famous for having been concerned with the recovery of the huge and important collection of documents from the Cairo Geniza, their deposit in Cambridge University, and the extensive body of scholarship which followed upon their examination. Although a traditional Jew in every respect, he has become known as a principal architect of Conservative Judaism, which its adherents see as standing between orthodoxy and reform - but the stratification must be treated with caution. It is interesting to note that the purpose of his visit to Cape Town was to attend the marriage of his daughter to Morris Alexander.

There is a Talmud Torah where the Hebrew through Hebrew method is employed and where excellent work is done ... Some however have scented Zionism the original sin in it and established a rival Talmud Torah in which Yiddish is taught.<sup>128</sup>

There are some interesting points in these remarks. Schechter specifically took occasion to mention that Bender held a Sabbath *Mincha* service - the other synagogues of course not only had a Sabbath *Mincha* service as a matter of course, (how could they not?) but indeed had *Mincha* services every day. The fear of a Zionist influence in the *Talmud Torah* was not well-founded because Bender himself was fervently anti-Zionist until after 1917 when the Balfour Declaration made this movement more acceptable to English Jews. I shall later have something to say about the importance of Zionism as an influence on South African Jewish religious life.

It is of course always difficult even by a contemporary to judge of the true standard of religious observance of congregants at any particular time, but much more so when viewed from a distance of a century or so. Certain aspects of religious life as it was in the Cape Colony are to be found in the transcripts of oral history interviews held with some older members of the community as part of the oral history project conducted by the Kaplan Centre of Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town in the early nineteen eighties. These of course must be viewed with care given the length of time which has elapsed since the events which the respondents are describing, and allowance must be made for the fact that many of the comments must surely

---

<sup>128</sup> SAJC, 1 February 1911.

represent either reconstruction or the telescoping of views which may have emerged during the years between. For example, differing views of Bender emerge. He is alleged to have told one of the congregants:

I want you to remember ... this is a thorough English shul, I want no foreign element in this shul ... when once you let the foreign element come to the shul the shul will go to the dogs ... <sup>129</sup>

Yet another correspondent describes Bender as having spoken about the dirty, filthy Russian Jews. This immediately arouses a certain scepticism until one notes that the correspondent goes on to quote from a diary which he had kept as a young man of 20 and in which he had entered this particular comment following upon an interview which he had with Bender.<sup>130</sup> On the other hand, Bender is known to have had a cordial and harmonious relationship with Rabbi Mirvish with whom he often co-operated in assisting him with efforts to deal with customs officials and immigration officials on behalf of Eastern European Jews seeking entry into the Colony.<sup>131</sup>

Other views of respondents in these interviews present a homely picture of Jewish religious life in the Colony.<sup>132</sup> It is clear that the standard of religious observance, except amongst those

---

<sup>129</sup> Kaplan Oral History Collection, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, UCT (hereafter "Oral History"). Interview with Mrs E.G.

<sup>130</sup> Oral History. Interview with A.M.

<sup>131</sup> Louis Mirvish, *op. cit.*

<sup>132</sup> Several of the Oral History interviews are summarised in B I Feldman, *Social Life of Cape Town Jewry 1904-1914 with special reference to the Eastern European Immigrant Community*, unpublished B.A. (Hons) Thesis, UCT 1984. Much of the material in this section has been extracted from this source.

whose lives were centred entirely around the synagogue as described by Mirvish, was not high. Sabbath could not be observed by those who were struggling to make a living and could not afford to keep their businesses closed on Saturdays or were forced to work for employers. The standard of *kashrut* was not high. Generally the high holy days were observed, even if only for the purpose of attending services and it was necessary for several overflow services to be held as the synagogues could not accommodate all who wished to attend, particularly on the specially important religious occasions such as *Kol Nidre* and those occasions on which *Yizkor* was recited. It seems that Friday nights were observed extremely widely, even amongst those who otherwise could not or would not keep the Sabbath. Candles were lit and *Kiddush* was recited with the other accompaniments of the Sabbath meal and special attempts would be made to have a better meal than on other nights during the week. This importance attached to Friday night observances is something which will be referred to later as it may represent one of the few specifically South African features of Orthodox Judaism.

Another indicator of how religious life was conducted was that the *Mikvah*, the ritual bath, was used by very few women of the community but there were nonetheless two *Mikvaot*, one in Long Street and the other in the Winter Gardens complex off Hanover Street.

It must be stressed, however, that indifferent though the standards of religious observance may have been, by and large

even those who observed the very lowest standard were concerned to make an effort to maintain some outer semblance of religious attachment. It is a matter for note and possibly some self-congratulation on the part of those concerned that despite the powerful forces in favour of assimilation and the difficulties attendant upon religious observance, a vibrant Jewish life nonetheless was maintained. Those who are concerned to show the advantages of the more traditional observance may point to the fact that there are no descendants of the original founders of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation who are still practising Jews in Cape Town, whereas many Jews can point to parents or grandparents who grew up religiously-speaking in that part of Cape Town where the influence of the two Eastern European congregations was most powerfully felt.

A feature of religious life and the practice of religion amongst those who were concerned with the upward mobility of the Jews was the fact that all the Ministers, especially Rabinowitz and Bender, performed an important public relations function and were not averse from using the synagogue itself as a public relations opportunity. Thus the various occasions connected with the building first of the Old synagogue and afterwards the Great Synagogue were accompanied by much pomp and circumstance and the presence of important civic dignitaries up to the Governor himself. Great satisfaction was felt when the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, John X Merriman, spoke at a bazaar held in April 1909 in aid of the Great Synagogue building fund. During the course of his address he praised the Jews for their orderly

character, for the fact that they made no claim on the rates and were prominent in contributions to education and charity.<sup>133</sup>

The SAJC on the 9 October 1903 reported the annual general meeting of the congregation at length. There was a reference to the harmonious state of affairs which existed between the congregations of the Gardens and of Roeland Street and there was also a reference to the South African College having planned its commemoration day ceremonies on *Yom Kippur* even though there were two Jewish Professors and one Jewish Minister on the Council, one of these professors was Reverend Bender and one wonders what part he played in trying to avoid this situation. Those who are concerned to accuse the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation of a certain snobbery might note that in the same newspaper there was a report on *Rosh Hashana* services aboard the *SS Saxon* within two degrees of the equator. The names of the principal participants were all mentioned, but it was said that the *Shofar* was blown by a "Third Class passenger" whose name was not mentioned.

Observance of the High Holy day services was always a touchstone of Jewish identity. Jews would bring their families from outlying districts (no easy journeys given the state of the roads and the incompatible carts and wagons which represented the only transport available) and the synagogues were full to overflowing - a phrase literally true, as "overflow" services were invariably held by the three main congregations 1903 was not atypical in this regard.

---

<sup>133</sup> SAJC, 15 April 1909.

Roeland Street had more than the Gardens on the second day of *Rosh Hashana*. At the Masonic Hotel there was a service for Orthodox Russian and Polish Jews. There had also been services at the Goedetrouw Temple, the Metropolitan Hall, the Sea Point Town Hall, the *Beth Hamedrash* in Constitution Street and in Buitenkant Street and in Woodstock, Observatory and in Wynberg. The following editorial in the *SAJC* gives useful insight into one attitude towards religious life then perceived in Cape Town.

The magnetic influence of the synagogue seems to extend only over those three days (*Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*) and over the first day of the festivals (i.e. the other festivals) should the same happen to fall on a public holiday when there is no race meeting. If we ask in virtue of what its influence extends just so far and no further, it is very difficult to find an answer. Religious feelings seem to be an element of very minor importance in the founding of modern synagogues, though in the synagogue every provision is made for the fostering of that feeling. The financial power of Judaism was in the past consulted for the interest of this feeling by building elegant structures to pray in, by providing accomplished Cantors and trained choirs to adorn the recital of the prayers with all the charms of a vocal display and by maintaining eloquent preachers to paint in vivid colours the ugliness of vice and the beauties of virtue and even (if the congregation is very generous) to set an example of religious observance which it is understood is not to be followed by their flock. It is a wonderful structure this modern Judaism with its foundations enveloped in mist and obscurity so that it is impossible to gauge its strength or power of endurance.<sup>134</sup>

As the years passed and the community grew, the congregations began to assume their own individual characteristics. A picture of the view which the New Hebrew Congregation had of itself in contra-distinction with the older congregation is to be found in the Chairman's comment at the Congregation's 1929 Annual General Meeting:

They of the New Hebrew Congregation had always aimed to

---

<sup>134</sup> *SAJC*, 9 October 1903.

maintain traditional Judaism in Cape Town and a spiritual home and the new arrivals from Eastern Europe would find that they were not tied by the conventionalities of modern synagogal ideas of other places. It was also their idea to devote more attention to the cultural side of their communal activities rather than on outside polish. They laid stress on the importance of the *Talmud Torahs* on Jewish education and on Jewish literature and learning. More perhaps than on the general etiquette observed elsewhere.<sup>135</sup>

There was also reference to the possibility of amalgamation with the Gardens. This reference to etiquette and outside polish points to one of the points of difference between the Gardens Shul on the one hand and the others. The officials of the mother synagogue laid stress on decorum and dignity in services, whereas those who had their grounding in the synagogues of Eastern Europe attached importance to the atmosphere of relaxation and easy-going lack of formality which existed in the *shul* as they understood it.

---

<sup>135</sup> SAJC, 8 November 1929.

CHAPTER FOUR  
BEYOND THE CAPE

Johannesburg and environs

The Johannesburg Jewish community is one of the few Jewish communities throughout the world whose members joined with others to become the founders of the city. Jews were present in Johannesburg at its birth and never looked at themselves as immigrants, having to overcome the obstacles of arriving in an established community. They were in fact part of a developing society.<sup>136</sup> Another distinguishing feature of the founder years is that the members were not as in the Cape, comfortable settlers in a colonial environment. They were part - and very much part - of a robust mining community, living a life with few cultural amenities and still less opportunity for gracious living. Like the Cape, the earliest settlers in Johannesburg were mainly of Anglo-Jewish descent, but it was within the first years of the establishment of the community that the immigration from Eastern Europe began to make its mark.

The first religious services were conducted for the High Holy days in 1886,<sup>137</sup> but no steps were taken to form a congregation. As so often happened in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, it was the death of a Jew with the concomitant necessity for a

---

<sup>136</sup> For the early years of the Johannesburg community, see generally M Kaplan and M Robertson (eds.) *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*. Cape Town, Vlaeberg Publications, 1991, *passim*.

<sup>137</sup> Kaplan and Robertson, *op. cit.*, p.63

consecrated burial ground and the proper performance of the funeral rites that stirred the early settlers to form themselves into a congregation. A touching, though unvouched, story describes how an unknown Jew, recently arrived in the Goldfields from Port Elizabeth, aware that he was dying in the veld, wrote a note addressed "to a Jew" which he handed to a black man requesting him to deliver it to any Jew that he found in the hope that arrangements would be made to bury him according to Jewish rites. This was duly done and the deceased, John Nathan, the second Jew to die in Johannesburg, was buried according to orthodox rites by none other than the Reverend Joel Rabinowitz who has already been described as having served the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation for twenty three years.

The fact that two Jews had now been buried in consecrated ground acted as a spur to the growth of the newly established congregation. The story has been well told of the meeting on Sunday evening, the 10 April 1887, in Barnet Wainstein's bar on the corner of Market and Harrison Streets some six weeks before Nathan's death, at which was established the Witwatersrand Goldfields Jewish Association. This would soon change its name to the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation and it set about the establishment and maintenance of Jewish congregational life in South Africa. It was not the first congregation in the Goldfields; this honour belonged to Barberton where the first Jewish cemetery of the Witwatersrand had been established in the nearby settlement of Pilgrim's Rest as early as 1878. But it was the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation which would become the

principal and largest Hebrew congregation in the Republic.<sup>138</sup>

As the number of Jews in the Witwatersrand soon far outstripped the Cape, far more separate organisations developed and within some ten years of the establishment of the Witwatersrand Hebrew congregation there was a *Chevra Kadisha*, a Zionist Association, a Benevolent Association, a Ladies' Society and a *Schechita* Board. The *Chevra Kadisha* was by far the most important and served as a central unifying force.

As the Jewish population grew numerically and became more widely dispersed geographically, there was a steady increase in the number of new congregations. Before long, congregations were established in Boksburg, Germiston, Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp, Potchefstroom and Pretoria. In Johannesburg difficulties soon arose; a breakaway occurred in 1892, similar to that which occurred in Cape Town when the New Hebrew Congregation was formed. A group of Eastern European Jews established the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation and in February 1893 instituted their own permanent place of worship in Fox Street (the *Beth Hamedrash*).

But this was not the first breakaway which had occurred and the story of what took place represents a replication of what happened in the Cape with one exception, that the breakaway group did not complain about the Anglo-Jewish atmosphere, as was the

---

<sup>138</sup> M Kaplan and M Robertson (eds.) *op. cit.* chapter One and *passim*.

complaint concerning the Great Synagogue in Cape Town. Whatever complaints had been levied against Bender's congregation had to do with manners and atmosphere; it was never contended that the Jews of the Great Synagogue did not observe orthodoxy in due form. In Johannesburg however, there were bitter complaints by many members of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation of what were perceived to be modernist and reform tendencies; these complaints were directed principally against the minister, the Reverend Mark L Harris, formerly of Kimberley, who had been appointed in 1889.<sup>139</sup>

It is difficult to assess precise details of the actual aspects of ritual and liturgy to which objections were made. Subsequent details of Harris's career suggest that he may well have endeavoured to introduce a fair amount of English into the services and to have permitted a mixed choir, but it is unlikely that any radical changes in the services took place.<sup>140</sup> Certainly no prayer books would have been available other than those traditionally used in *Ashkenazi* Orthodox Synagogues. No doubt the Anglo-Jewish/Eastern European confrontation was an element in the schism although it must be noted that elements of

---

<sup>139</sup> Landau wrote to Chief Rabbi Adler on 6 September 1905 as follows: "With regard to your question, re: Mr Harris, ... the general opinion here of him is not very favourable. *He was the cause of the first split in this community about 14 years ago* (emphasis added) was dismissed, and has since then never occupied any official position. At one time he tried, I hear to form a Reform Congregation, but did not succeed. [The Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation and the Johannesburg "New" Congregation] decided not to take part in the opening of his synagogue and wish to have nothing to do with it." Chief Rabbinate Records, File "D".

<sup>140</sup> The leaders of the breakaway congregation had, after all, been leaders of the "Old" Congregation: They included the first President Emanuel Mendelsohn, and the incumbent President, Hyman Morris.

both groups were to be found in the breakaway congregation, and both would remain in the founder congregation. Personalities must also have played a part because the confrontation extended well beyond religious and congregational matters and had an influence on the general character of Johannesburg communal life.<sup>141</sup>

The breakaway took place in 1891 and the secessionists established the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation and erected a synagogue in Park Street. A temporary truce of sorts took place between the groups while Johannesburg was occupied by the British Forces during the Anglo-Boer War but immediately after the war, rivalry flared up again.<sup>142</sup>

So the position was reached that the three principal congregations in this fledgling community were the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation who worshipped in the President Street *Shul*; The Johannesburg New Hebrew Congregation who worshipped in the Park Street *Shul* and the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation (*Beth Hamedrash*) who worshipped in the Fox Street *Shul*.

One searches in vain from the vantage point of the present time to identify any differences between the type of orthodoxy observed in these three congregations; such differences as arose

---

<sup>141</sup> G Saron, Unpublished notes for a projected book which was never completed: Housed in the Jewish Studies Library, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town, p.330.

<sup>142</sup> For further information on the early years of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation and its Park Synagogue see G Saron, "Early Days of Johannesburg Jewry: Tribulations of the Park Synagogue" in *Jewish Affairs*, November 1981.

had to do with the intensity of the observance of tradition and the personal piety of the members.<sup>143</sup> A member of any of these congregations could have attended a service in any synagogue in South Africa and had no difficulty in following and participating in the services. An indication that this is what the Jews wanted, is to be found in the subsequent history of Reverend Mark Harris. An anonymous writer in the *London Jewish Chronicle* wittily observed that the difference in the Jewish outlook of the three congregations was that the members of the "Old" Congregation were proud to call themselves Jewish, the members of the "New" Congregation "thought" Jewish, and the members of the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation "acted" Jewish.<sup>144</sup>

We have seen that it was Reverend Harris's reformist tendencies in the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation which was the main reason for the establishment of the Johannesburg New Hebrew Congregation by 1898. Even his own congregation were dissatisfied with his leadership. He was persuaded to resign in March 1898, having given a verbal undertaking in consideration of a monetary payment that he would not form a new congregation

---

<sup>143</sup> The early minute books of the "Old" and "New" Congregations can be seen in the Archives of the S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg. The earlier records of the third congregation have not been found, if indeed they still exist. In any event, they would almost certainly have been recorded in Yiddish. In the archives of the Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, there are notes by S A Rochlin concerning an exhibition about early Rand Jewry held sometime in the 1950s. Rabbi Kossowsky is said to have given a talk which dealt with the Minute Book of the First Orthodox Congregation, which was reported to have been on display. Diligent enquiry has failed to trace the Minute Book.

<sup>144</sup> S Rappaport, "Rand Jewry 1893" in *Jewish Affairs*, June 1950.

or accept a position in one.<sup>145</sup> Apparently in breach of this undertaking he was instrumental in the establishment of what came to be called the Rand Modern Hebrew Congregation which operated as he himself described as a "modern Hebrew Synagogue".<sup>146</sup>

The foundation meeting of the new congregation took place at the Hotel Victoria on the 5 June 1898.<sup>147</sup>

The preamble to the constitution of the congregation gives an indication of the wishes of its members.

This congregation is founded for the purpose of instituting services to meet a want long felt in Johannesburg:

1. Such services established, modernised and rendered attractive by the introduction of more English and music than heretofore, whilst retaining the Hebrew language in the most essential portions of the ritual.
2. The elimination of senseless customs introduced by latter day Rabbis and not commanded by Mosaic Law.
3. To raise the standard of Judaism and while revering ourselves make it respected by our fellow citizens.
4. In none of the services in this congregation was monetary matters to be mentioned.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation Minutes, 1 September 1897 *et seq.*

<sup>146</sup> SAJC, 17 June 1898.

<sup>147</sup> Standard and Diggers' News 6 June 1898.

<sup>148</sup> SAJC, 1 July 1898. It would appear that Harris felt impelled to write to the Chief Rabbi seeking to excuse his conduct; his letter elicited a very severe reproof, in which Adler wrote: "... your argument that you had no alternative but to accept any post that offered is futile ... the reforms that have been introduced by you must surely be ... a grave violation of the Holy Name and can only lead to promote further *Chillul Hashem* amongst the Jews in Johannesburg. The introduction of English will also serve to the gradual abolition of the sacred language .... I note likewise that one of the clauses of your constitution ... is to eliminate all the senseless customs

In order to decide whether these requirements did represent "a long felt want" it is sufficient to point out that the new congregation did not last for more than a few months. During its short existence, however, the Rand Modern Hebrew Congregation was included in a meeting which took place on the 13 July 1898 for an informal discussion in regard to the possibility of establishing a *Beth Din* principally to deal with the problem of proselytism. The other three congregations were represented, namely: The Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation, the Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation and the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation (only the firstmentioned objected to the participation of the Rand Modern Hebrew Congregation on the grounds that they were Reform). The failure of this shortlived "Reform" Congregation marked the end of any serious erosion into the practice of orthodox Judaism in South Africa until 1933. The fledgling community, with all its lack of personal religious observance was not ready for reform. Was this the beginning of South African "non-observant orthodox"?<sup>149</sup>

The Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation filled the gap left by the

---

introduced by latter-day Rabbis and not commanded by Mosaic law ... [this is] a total denial of traditional law and procedure... you have placed yourself outside the pale of my pastoral jurisdiction." Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 49, Letter 79, 22 July 1898.

<sup>149</sup> This phrase was first used in relation to South African Judaism by Jocelyn Hellig in various published works, including "South African Judaism: An expression of Conservatism Traditionalism", in *Judaism*, Vol. 35 No. 2 Spring 1986. It has been used in general application by Charles S Liebman in his article "A Sociological Analysis of Contemporary Orthodoxy", in *Judaism*, Vol. 13 No. 3, Summer 1964 and by Reuven P Bulka in his book *Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism*, New York, Ktav Publishing Co. 1983.

departure of Reverend Harris by the appointment in 1898 of one of the most outstanding ministers in the history of South African Jewry, Rabbi Dr Joseph Herman Hertz. The Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation was served in succession by Reverend Phillip Wolfers (formerly of Barberton) who served in 1892, Reverend Harris (formerly of Kimberley), who served from 1890 to 1898 and Reverend David Wassersug who served as "lecturer" until the appointment of another outstanding figure in the history of South African Jewry, Rabbi Dr Judah Leib Landau who took up as minister of his congregation in 1903.

From 1898 onwards until 1911 when Hertz left to take up a position in the United States, he and Rabbi Landau struggled in the interest of their communities as they saw it and sometimes also with each other. The development of the community and its religious observances was largely formed by their respective philosophies and approaches and it is necessary therefore to examine them separately and together.<sup>150</sup>

Joseph Herman Hertz, the son of Simon Hertz, a noted Hebraist and teacher, was born in Rebrin, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1872. He went to the United State with his father in 1894 and graduated with a BA at New York College in 1891, obtaining a Ph.D at Columbia University in 1894. While pursuing these secular studies, he also followed a course of Rabbinical

---

<sup>150</sup> For a fuller account of the work of these two figures in South Africa, particularly the Witwatersrand, and their interaction with each other, see my chapter, "Pulpit and Platform: Hertz-Landau" in, Kaplan and Robertson, *op. cit.*

studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary<sup>151</sup> in New York from which in 1894 he obtained the first Rabbinical Diploma awarded by that institution. Aged only 22, he was immediately appointed as Rabbi to a congregation in Syracuse in New York. In 1898 he received a call as Rabbi to the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation and he arrived in September of that year. As soon as he assumed his pastoral duties of his office, he acquainted himself with the situation facing the Jews as *Uitlanders*, i.e. foreigners of the South African Republic, who were therefore subject to the political, civil and educational disabilities imposed by the ruling Kruger regime.<sup>152</sup> He became actively involved in the struggle for civil liberties on behalf, not only of the Jews, but of the other so-called *Uitlanders*. He made common cause with the Catholic community and because he refused to retract controversial comments which he made at a public meeting calling for the removal of all religious disabilities attached to non-Protestants, he was required to leave the South African Republic. He had an adventurous time during the Anglo-Boer War, visiting Johannesburg, Lourenco Marques, Durban and Cape Town. In the latter city he conducted the services for the refugees "High Holy Days" in 1900 and 1901.

---

<sup>151</sup> This institution was founded in New York in 1887, intended to serve as a bastion of "traditionalism" i.e. orthodoxy against "radicalism", i.e. Reform. In 1902, eight years after Hertz received his rabbinical diploma, Solomon Schechter was appointed President, and the Seminary gradually changed its emphases until it became the educational and spiritual centre of Conservative Judaism.

<sup>152</sup> For a full and authoritative account of the situation in the South African Republic (Transvaal) which was to lead to the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, see G Saron, "Boers, Uitlanders, Jews" in Saron and Hotz, (eds.), *op. cit.*

After the war, Hertz returned to Johannesburg and resumed his duties. Apart from his duties as Rabbi to his own congregation, he played a prominent part in the affairs of the community generally and helped to bring about the establishment of the Jewish Orphanage and a smaller *Talmud Torah* and day school for secular instruction.

As one of the founders of the Jewish Board of Deputies for Transvaal and Natal and Vice President of the South African Zionist Federation, which was established in 1898, Hertz was touched by virtually every aspect of communal life. Hertz the scholar<sup>153</sup> was never far removed from Hertz the communal activist and when he was invited to read a paper at the first South African Zionist Congress, he produced an essay which was subsequently published under the title "The Jew in South Africa". This was later described as "the first attempt to present the story of the Jews in all the South African colonies" and must be regarded as the first contribution to South African Jewish historiography.<sup>154</sup>

Hertz's report to the Annual General Meeting of his congregation in 1904 indicated and summarised the scope of all busy Rabbis in those years. In congregational matters he reported the

---

<sup>153</sup> For a full list of his publications see *Dictionary of South African Biography* (hereafter "DSAB"), Vol. 1, p.364. His most important books found in almost all South African synagogues were *The Hertz Chumash* (his commentary on the Pentateuch (1936) and *The Hertz Siddur* (his edition of the Daily Prayer Book, with commentary) (1941).

<sup>154</sup> DSAB Vol. 1 p.365.

institution of the Friday evening sermon which he described as a new feature in South African synagogues. "On Friday evenings we may boast of the largest numbers of worshippers of any English congregation in the British Empire", he wrote.<sup>155</sup> Hertz also reported on the institution of children's services, Hebrew religious classes, adult education classes and a class in synagogue melodies. He also claimed proudly that he had done something to destroy the current conception of the clergymen which holds that in all financial matters he was a mere infant. (He had collected half of the building fund which stood at £7000.)

Dealing with extra-congregational work, he described visits to lay foundation stones of new synagogues in Jeppestown, Bloemfontein, Krugersdorp, Germiston, Klerksdorp and "Cape Town's New Synagogue" (*sic*).<sup>156</sup> As regards his involvement in wider communal affairs, he referred to his work at the *Talmud Torah*, the Jewish Lads' Brigade, the Orphanage and his share (from its inception) in the work of the Jewish Vigilance Committee and the framing of the Immorality Ordinance. He deprecated the community's inability to maintain a unified *Schechita Board* or *Beth Din* and he derived some satisfaction from his address at the inaugural meeting of the Jewish Board of Deputies for Transvaal and Natal on the 28 July 1903. It was this address which

---

<sup>155</sup> For further comment on this distinctive feature of South African Orthodoxy, see Chaps. 5 and 6.

<sup>156</sup> This is obviously a reference to the Roeland Street Synagogue of the Cape Town New Hebrew Congregation. The synagogue was consecrated by Hertz in 1902.

revealed Hertz in the role which perhaps he enjoyed most: that of defending "his Jews" from unwarranted attacks from outside. "By means of official figures" he wrote, "I once and for all gave the lie to the foul aspersions cast upon Johannesburg Jewry in connection with the illicit liquor evil and at the same time I exposed the fallacy of excluding the Russian Jew or his language from this country as unjust and contrary to the best imperial interests in South Africa."<sup>157</sup>

An American academic and former English Barrister, Sefton Temkin, contributed to the journal *Judaism* in 1975 what he described as "A sketch of Joseph Herman Hertz" under the title "Orthodoxy with Moderation".<sup>158</sup> Barely a page out of a paper running to 18 pages is devoted to his work and career in South Africa. Temkin does however devote some attention to the background of Hertz's training and how as a young Rabbi, he had denounced extremes of Orthodoxy and Reform in unequivocal terms. On the one hand he was opposed to any radical or reform movement in which:

the Rabbi's whim of the moment, the congregation's passing fancy are the only basis ... for the fashionable Judaics in our larger cities ... (and caused to be) crushed underfoot the tender blossoms of poetry and faith.

But he was equally discouraged by the more orthodox synagogues of all the recent immigrants from Eastern Europe which he described as follows:

with the noise, the disruptions, the lack of harmony and

---

<sup>157</sup> J H Hertz, *The Jews in South Africa*. Johannesburg, Central News Agency Limited, 1905. For an account of the alleged Jewish involvement in the illicit liquor trade at that time, see M Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, 1994.

<sup>158</sup> *Judaism*, Vol. 24 No. 3, Summer 1975.

dignity in their services they repel rather than attract ... ignorant of the past and blind to the future fanaticism knows not the blessing of peace and union. With the onslaughts of radicalism, it does nothing, nothing ...

This approach on the part of Hertz was consistently maintained throughout his career. When he had already attained the position of Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, he used such phrases as "the golden mean in Judaism", "Religious advance without loss of traditional values", "the task, nay, the duty of the religious adjustment", "the need of thinking anew and acting anew so as to make orthodoxy a synonym of progress without loss of essential values." The mindset of the young newly-ordained Rabbi in Syracuse and the mature Chief Rabbi of the British Empire therefore formed the mindset of the spiritual leader of the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation and played a vital part in the creation of Orthodox Jewry in South Africa.

It is essential to juxtapose the account of Hertz's career in South Africa with that of his eminent contemporary, colleague and, it has to be admitted in many ways, his *bete noire*, Landau. Judah Leib Landau was born in Zelosce near Brody in Galicia in 1866. He obtained a Ph.D in Vienna in 1898 and in the same year received his Rabbinical Diploma from the Rabbinical Seminary in Vienna.<sup>159</sup> From an early age he showed a remarkable literary talent which was to earn him an important role in the annals of

---

<sup>159</sup> The Israelitisch - Theologische Lehranstalt was founded in 1893 and became an important European centre for research into Jewish literature and history. It therefore embodied the principles and philosophy of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Landau therefore like Hertz came to his Ministry steeped in traditional Judaism and modern scholarship.

twentieth century Hebrew literature.<sup>160</sup> He was also an early ardent Zionist and in 1900 was sent to England to represent the Hebrew journal *Hamagid* at the fourth Zionist Congress. This was a turning point in his life because he stayed in England to assume office as Rabbi to the North Manchester Hebrew Congregation. When the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation was formed in the circumstances described above, the congregation extended a call to Landau to come to Johannesburg as its Rabbi. By this time the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation had indeed advanced to the stage where it was justified in securing the services of a fully trained and well qualified Rabbi. There are indications however, that their decision to do so may have been partly brought about by the dislike of Hertz, the Rabbi of the rival Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation. Much of the strife which took place between these two ministers may have been attributable to this attitude.

In terms of Jewish scholarship and intellectual stature, South African Jewry has never had spiritual or lay leaders of a higher quality than Hertz and Landau. It goes without saying that they were both deeply versed in Jewish sources and carried the complete intellectual equipment of the late nineteenth century Rabbis, steeped in tradition, honed by the enlightenment and shaped by the spirit of the time. Later in this work certain conclusions will be drawn concerning the state of South Africa's Judaism in the first decades of the twentieth century from two

---

<sup>160</sup> M Waxman, *History of Hebrew Literature*, Vol. 4, New York, Bloch Publishing Co. 1938-1960, pp.830 ff.

of Landau's published works: the Hebrew play, *Lefanim U-Leachor* (1921)<sup>161</sup> and his book entitled *Viduyim* (1929).<sup>162</sup>

Within a short while of Landau's arrival in Johannesburg, a bitter mutual antipathy developed between these two powerful personalities. Careful investigation of available sources and conversations with those likely to have some knowledge of the subject, have been unable to reveal any reason for this, other than it may have spilled over from inter-congregational rivalry and also that it may (though this is a somewhat hazardous speculation) have had to do with Landau pursuing a more rigorously Orthodox policy than did Hertz. Some of the details of this feud must be recounted because they bear directly on the way in which religious practice and observance developed during their respective ministries. The most direct reference to this feud which either Rabbi ever made in material intended for publication is to be found in certain "autobiographical notes" prepared by Landau shortly before his death.

Dealing with the arrival in Johannesburg, Landau states:

In Johannesburg, there were two Congregations, the older one, whose spiritual head was Rabbi J H Hertz, now the Chief Rabbi of the United Synagogue in England, and the Johannesburg Hebrew congregation with the guidance of whose destinies I was entrusted. The two were, unfortunately, rival Congregations, which constantly tried to provoke similar conflicts between their two Rabbis.

Dr Hertz who had spent a few years in Johannesburg before my arrival, was already well-known as a fluent speaker,

---

<sup>161</sup> Translated into English as *Conflicting Worlds*, New York, Bloch Publishing Co. 1933. Trans. D Mierowsky.

<sup>162</sup> Vienna, Menorah Publishing, 1929 (Hebrew).

able preacher and energetic young man. My position was, therefore, made very difficult, the more so as my English was at that time far from perfect, and I was often embarrassed at public meetings, a defect of which my opponents took advantage.<sup>163</sup>

From this quotation it will be seen that Landau ascribes the situation in the first instance to the rivalry between the two congregations which extended into the relationship between the two rabbis.

As early as 17 February 1904, Chief Rabbi Adler wrote to Landau in reply to a letter he had received from him and expressed his regret "that you find your position an onerous one".<sup>164</sup> He asked Landau to inform him about his "relations with the Dayan Friedman and Dr Hertz". Things seem to have gone from bad to worse because on 8 September 1904, Adler wrote again to Landau: "I regret to learn that there is a lack of brotherly feeling in Johannesburg ... you would be giving a splendid example if as the elder you would hold out the hand of friendship to Dr Hertz".<sup>165</sup> Landau's reply has not been preserved, but elicited a further letter on 8 November 1904 which deserves to be quoted in full:

I note statements you make in your letter with regard to your relations with Dr Hertz. I assure you that it grieves me greatly that harmony has not yet been established. When Dr Hertz was here I spoke to him earnestly on the subject and entreated him to co-operate in a friendly spirit with you. I can conceive no greater injury to the interests of religion than when members of a community find that their leaders wrangle instead of straining every nerve for the advancement of the Holy Faith and *Kiddush Hashem*. I

---

<sup>163</sup> J L Landau. Unpublished biographical notes in the author's personal possession.

<sup>164</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 98. Letter 191.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, Letter 212.

earnestly hope that you as the elder will show the right example in this matter.<sup>166</sup>

It appears that Landau's early years in Johannesburg, before he attained the general recognition and status which were to be his in full measure, were not happy. On two occasions in 1907 for example, first in May and again in September, Adler wrote to Landau advising him not to apply for a rabbinical position in Europe.<sup>167</sup> Clearly, Landau's mind was turning frequently to the possibility of leaving Johannesburg.

Mention has already been made of Landau's book *Viduyim* and there are several references in it which throw some light upon his experience and his attitude. So, for example, in letter 10 from "The Rabbi in the South to the Rabbi in the North", he opened his heart as follows:

I came here a few years ago full of strength and youth and with a soul full of ideals ready to dedicate my whole life to my work for the benefit of my brethren in this land. They told me that the skies were blue there and that their purity and innocence were reflected in the souls of the people like myself; that the earth was virgin and untilled without preconceptions and set ways and that the young people likewise had no prejudices or fixed ideas, like blank paper, and I hoped that I would be able to create in the communities a pure and innocent atmosphere free of the strange gods who were being worshipped in Europe and free of pagan altars. I set about my work with enthusiasm and much energy. I worked thus throughout the years without cease. My hands did not tire nor my concentration falter. I hoped that inevitably those who hated the truth and scorned Judaism would realise it was not me who they were fighting but their own sons and daughters. My white hair and signs of old age will show you today that my friends were false prophets, that my hopes were vain and that all my work was for nothing. It was not my fault but the fault of those who undermined my work, zealots and hypocrites who have only two ideals in their lives, shopkeeping and

---

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, Letter 217.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, Letters 292 and 300.

slander.<sup>168</sup>

In other places in his book Landau is even more direct in his allusions. Thus in Letter 4, also written from the southern rabbi to his colleague in the north, he characterises the leaders of the community:

All their Judaism is shrunk within the walls of the synagogue which is empty even on Sabbaths and Festivals from one Day of Atonement to the next. For them their synagogue is simply a monument that stands and testifies and proclaims through choirs of women that there abides the burial place of the honour owed to their religion.<sup>169</sup>

The reference to women's choirs is a direct thrust at Hertz, and Landau may unwittingly have been doing his colleague an injustice. It seems that far from being responsible for the presence of ladies in the choir of his synagogue, Hertz found the practice in force when he arrived and unsuccessfully tried to put an end to it.

At the very first meeting of the congregational committee which Hertz attended on 4 October 1898, the new minister "asked that the ladies' voices be removed from the choir". On being questioned as to whether Jewish law forbade ladies' singing in the choir, Hertz replied that there was no such positive law, "but prejudice and other considerations were against it..." After some discussion and no doubt partly in deference to the wishes of the new minister, it was resolved to discontinue the mixed choir and to present each of the lady members with a

---

<sup>168</sup> *op. cit* Letter "Vav" p.134.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, Letter "Daled" p.30.

souvenir.<sup>170</sup> Subsequently they each received a prayer book, but were apparently not mollified by this gift, because the minutes also reflect that only a short while later, in May 1899, 40 ladies of the congregation petitioned the committee for their reinstatement. The all male committee was apparently less willing to withstand the urging of the ladies than the doctrinal views of its minister. It was unanimously resolved that the ladies be reinstated in the choir and that "the Rev. Dr J H Hertz be politely informed of this resolution".<sup>171</sup> No doubt the issue still rankled because it was reported years later that Hertz had been obliged to issue a strong public reprimand regarding the behaviour of the female section of the choir - as a result of which most of them walked out in protest.<sup>172</sup>

It will be recalled that a major reason for the breakaway in 1891 to form the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation had been objections to the behaviour of the Reverend Mark Harris. But the "new" congregation apparently adopted a more orthodox attitude than the "old". The president of the "new" congregation remarked: "It was known that a large influx of Jews was anticipated from Russia and the Continent and it therefore behoved the Jewish community of Johannesburg to meet that influx in a proper manner".<sup>173</sup> Thus Landau had to adopt a more stringent approach to ritual

---

<sup>170</sup> Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation, Minutes 4 October 1898 (hereafter WOHC).

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 7 May 1899.

<sup>172</sup> SAJC 6 April 1906.

<sup>173</sup> Hyman Morris, quoted in Saron and Hotz, *op. cit.* p.154.

issues and his attitude towards mixed choirs was an example of this. The fact that Landau blamed Hertz for permitting mixed choirs emerged from a letter which he wrote to his great friend Dr Moses Gaster (1856-1939), *haham* (religious head of the English *Sephardi* Community) on 16 June 1915:

I have had a hard struggle against a movement set on foot by [Hertz's] old members to introduce a ladies' choir in my new Synagogue. The fact that such choirs existed in Synagogues of the U.S. under the late Dr Adler's jurisdiction greatly strengthens the hands of the agitator. Of course I shall never give my consent but can't you recollect some public statement ever made by D.A. against a mixed choir.<sup>174</sup>

The controversy died hard. In 1914, three years after Hertz's departure, Landau was invited to preach in the synagogue of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation on the festival of *Shavuoth*. He accepted with "gratification" but "on conscientious scruples (*sic*) desired that the service be conducted without the aid of the lady members of the choir".<sup>175</sup>

Hertz, for his part, took the opportunity when appropriate of making his own public digs at Landau. One of the issues which arose in the community from time to time in Johannesburg during this period was the attendance of Jewish children at Christian church schools. Hertz had made strenuous efforts for some time

---

<sup>174</sup> Gaster Papers, Mocatta Library, University College, London. "D.A." obviously means "Dr Adler". In fact, Adler seems to have expressed himself exactly to the contrary. In 1931, Sir Robert Waley Cohen, acting President of the United Synagogue of Great Britain, told a colleague that Hertz had shown him a Responsum of Adler's permitting the use of mixed choirs in synagogues; but, added Cohen, presumably at Hertz's request "that is a private document; it is not for publication". Bernard Homa, *Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry 1880-1940*, London, Jewish Historical Society of England, 1969.

<sup>175</sup> WOHC Minutes 20 May 1914.

to arrange for religious instruction under government auspices, but without success. Landau, perceiving that Jewish children at these schools were not receiving any Jewish instruction, arranged to give classes to the boys at Marist Brothers College. Hertz thereupon delivered a controversial sermon in which he directly criticised Landau for this. It not only exacerbated the relationship between the two rabbis, but also caused rivalry and ill-feeling between their respective congregations. In his "Autobiographical Notes", Landau described how he was "fiercely attacked for that daring step" and he ascribed the opposition as being not due to religious zeal but merely aimed at him personally.<sup>176</sup>

Another of Landau's struggles in the field of education concerned his efforts to establish a Jewish boarding school which he stated "met with determined and unpardonable opposition". He devoted several pages of his "Autobiographical Notes" to the failure of this project, which obviously caused much bitterness. He recounts that by 1934, before he went overseas, he had actually collected £10 000 in cash and pledges which was used to buy 13 acres of land in Lower Houghton for the purpose of building a Jewish boarding school. While he was in Europe, the communal leadership abandoned the scheme, returned the money to the donors and sold the land; it now forms part of the Houghton golf course! Landau himself attributes the decision to abandon the boarding school project to the "lack of self respect" and the "inferiority complex ... of the *"Nouveaux Riches"* whose "ambition

---

<sup>176</sup> *op. cit.* p.51.

[it is] ... to offer their children an opportunity of identifying themselves with their Gentile fellow-students, of imitating their manner and habits as they regard them as more 'refined' and more 'Genteel'".<sup>177</sup> It appears that the opposition which he encountered was similar to that found in later years when attempts were made to establish Jewish day schools in South Africa;<sup>178</sup> but Landau's efforts were never as successful as those of his successors in showing the hollowness of the opposition's arguments.<sup>179</sup>

As far as his rabbinical colleagues were concerned, it was not only with Hertz that Landau found himself in an uneasy association. At various times, in correspondence with Chief Rabbi Adler, he was critical of the Reverend A Levy of Durban, the Rev. M Rosenberg of Pretoria, and the much loved and respected Dayan Friedman ("Reb Moishel") of Johannesburg.<sup>180</sup>

An almost amusing light is thrown upon the rivalry between Hertz and Landau in their published reports to the 1904 Annual General Meetings of their respective congregations. Dealing with the subject of the Jewish Lads' Brigade, Hertz stated:

---

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, p.56.

<sup>178</sup> For an account of the Jewish day school movement and its development in South Africa, see M E Katz, *The History of Jewish Education in South Africa 1841-1980*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, UCT 1980.

<sup>179</sup> Landau, *Autobiographical Notes*, p.53.

<sup>180</sup> Chief Rabbinate Records File E. Landau to Adler 18 December 1905. See also Landau Archives, Hebrew University, Givat Ram. 4° 798.

It is a matter of regret that a communal institution like the Jewish Lads' Brigade, which I have helped to organise, and which has held special military services in our Synagogue, should be made to appear, unpremeditatedly I hope, as an annexure to one congregation.<sup>181</sup>

During the same month, in his report to his congregation, Landau stated:

As regards the Jewish Lads' Brigade, of which I have the honour to be the Hon. Chaplain, I am pleased to state that its numbers have very much increased of late, and it is making satisfactory progress ... the Jewish Lads' Brigade was present at our special *Chanukah* service.<sup>182</sup>

It is doubtful whether the membership of the Jewish Lads' Brigade, which each rabbi so earnestly claimed as his own, ever reached one hundred!

However, too unbalanced a view should not be given of the relationship between these two vigorous personalities. In many matters of common communal interest they worked together in public harmony. Examples are manifold and include the Board of Deputies, the Zionist Federation, the Orphanage, the Jewish Vigilance Committee, the Schechita Board, the *Talmud Torah* examinations, the *Chevra Kadisha*, the attempts to form an Aged Home and joint classes on Jewish history and religion for older girls and boys in the community. It is also pleasing to note that in March 1906, at the *Brith Milah* of Hertz's eldest son, Moses Samuel, Landau was accorded the honour of acting as *Sandek*.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> SAJC, 15 April 1904.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 29 April 1904.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 9 March 1906.

Landau, too, was willing to introduce progressive steps. It was he who instituted at the Park Synagogue what was known as the "*barmitzvah* for girls" also described as "confirmation" and the forerunner of the *Batmitzvah* ceremony which is so well-established a part of South African Jewish life to this day. Landau held that this ceremony did not derive from an ancient custom but was being established by him "due to the altered circumstances under which we exist at the present time". Taking the opportunity of making some self-revealing comments concerning the position of women, he said that he did not support the equality of the sexes because he believed that man reasoned with his intellect, while woman was guided entirely by her heart and was therefore more susceptible to outside influences. The confirmation service was fittingly associated with the celebration of *Purim*. He also endeavoured to introduce *Shabbat* afternoon services for children, but this he later abandoned because "things had degenerated into a ridiculous farce".<sup>184</sup>

On the subject of the *Barmitzvah* ceremony and the significance - or lack of it - which was accorded to it by some members of the community, Landau could be trenchant and outspoken. Not many rabbis of his time would have had the courage to deliver the following *Barmitzvah* homily to the unfortunate lad before him:

My dear boy, I've never seen you before and I'll probably never see you again. I don't know your name; I don't know your parents; I know nothing about you. May the Lord

---

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 16 March 1906.

ble<sup>s</sup>s you and keep you and may you have a successful life.<sup>185</sup>

No doubt the Rabbi considered that the right royal row which ensued was justified by the blow which he struck for a more dignified approach to the solemn occasion of *Barmitzvah*; but pity the poor boy who was the focus of the occasion!

Landau's modern thinking is also seen in his attitude towards the study of scripture. While occupying a position firmly based on traditional orthodoxy, he was willing to recognise and enter into discussion on the problems present in the study of Holy Writ in the light of reason as well as from the vantage point of faith. This was a position to which he did not come early and, in his later years, he was to write:

I now realise the painful position in which the true Jewish scholar is placed dealing with historical facts and Bible verses which must be explained not in a *Midrashic* Pilpulistic but honest scientific way ... the desperate effort to reconcile orthodoxy and free scientific research has so far failed. Abraham Ibn Ezra ... easily got over his difficulties in connection with some thought-provoking passage remarking '*Ve-zeh Sod*' (That is a secret). The modern student refuses to accept such evasive remarks. Even Salomon Joseph Rapoport, the orthodox Chief Rabbi of Prague, refused to believe that the whole Book of Isaiah was written by one and the same prophet.<sup>186</sup>

Landau was also unusually tolerant, according to the standard of orthodoxy of those days, in regard to the introduction of English into the service. He was approached by some young men of the congregation in this connection and acceded to their plea that they were seeking the introduction of English into the service

---

<sup>185</sup> G Saron, Unpublished transcript of interview with Judge Felix Landau, 21 April 1975. S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg.

<sup>186</sup> Landau, Autobiographical Notes, p.14.

not as a measure of reform, but to aid them in understanding and appreciating the service.

Hertz's attitude was somewhat similar and both of them were called to testify on this subject in a libel action, now rightly long forgotten but at the time a *cause célèbre* in the Johannesburg community. A Yiddish journal, edited and published by B S Hersch, had published certain articles attacking the *Talmud Torah* (Hebrew High School). The authorities were accused of following reform tendencies and it was mentioned, among other things, that prayers were read in English. The committee of the high school, through its secretary, M P Valentine, published a withering attack on Hersch in the *SAJC* of 23 June 1911. This led him to sue the proprietors of the *Chronicle* for libel. In the course of his evidence, Landau said the reading of prayers in English did not constitute reform, but was in consonance with orthodoxy, and English was used in orthodox services and at funerals. He did add, however, that he himself "preferred to read my prayers in Hebrew for national sentiment among other reasons".

Hertz gave evidence somewhat to the same effect, although he made an interesting point concerning orthodoxy. This, he said, was geographical; thus there was English orthodoxy, German orthodoxy, Russian orthodoxy and so on and, he added, the orthodoxy in his congregation was that in vogue "amongst English speaking orthodox Jews".<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> *SAJC*, 8 September 1911.

Both rabbis battled with the problem of proselytism and this will be dealt with more fully in chapter four. The issue of proselytism, however, provides an opportunity to comment on the incidence of intermarriage and assimilation among Jews in Johannesburg during the period with which we are concerned. Hertz regarded marriage to a convert as intermarriage. This is incorrect both sociologically and according to *Halacha*. Jewish Law provides that when a convert has been accepted into Judaism, after due orthodox ritual and procedure have been observed, such a person is regarded as a Jew in every respect, and a marriage contracted by such a person cannot be regarded as intermarriage.

What is significant however, is the religious authorities' concern regarding the prevalence of proselytism. It shows that the Jews of Johannesburg were anxious, if at all possible, to avoid the extreme act of leaving the community which would be result from marrying a person of another faith who retained that faith after marriage. Certainly in the early days of Johannesburg there was a shortage of Jewish girls of marriageable age and this brought with it the inevitable pressures. As has been discussed elsewhere, there were powerful push and pull forces militating against the assimilation of Johannesburg Jews. These forces presumably operated even more strongly on those who most markedly revealed their recent European background. It can be stated with a fair amount of confidence, therefore, that assimilation in the sense of Jews leaving Judaism entirely, and becoming part of a completely non-Jewish society, occurred to a very small degree in Johannesburg during this period.

Such problems as existed, whether in regard to proselytism or *Schechita* or the other necessities for a full religious life, might have been more easily handled had there been a properly functioning *Beth Din*. This however could not be achieved, apparently because Landau and Hertz and Dayan Friedman, who would have been the obvious constituents for a *Beth Din*, were unable to work together. As early as 1904, it was reported that Landau's efforts to form a *Beth Din* with Hertz and Friedman had proved unavailing: "that disunion if anything was greater than before and that the public had lost confidence in its ecclesiastical chiefs".<sup>188</sup>

At the same time, Hertz himself reported to his congregation that "local conditions are as yet unfavourable for the effective establishment of a *Beth Din*".<sup>189</sup> Two years later, Landau told his congregation that, despite his endeavours to co-operate with other congregations to form a *Beth Din*, this had proved impossible.<sup>190</sup> It was only late in 1915, when Hertz was no longer in Johannesburg, that Landau was able to report to his friend Dr M Gaster:

You will be glad to hear that I have established a *Beth Din* - the first in the history of South African Jewry - and that all congregations in the Transvaal already acknowledge its jurisdiction. Such a thing was impossible as long as H. was here. The foreign orthodox congregations opposed every attempt in favour of such an innovation.<sup>191</sup>

---

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 25 March 1904.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 15 April 1904.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 27 April 1906.

<sup>191</sup> Gaster Papers, Mocatta Library, University of London, Landau to Gaster, 16 June 1915.

It is not surprising to find Landau blaming Hertz for his inability to found a *Beth Din* earlier, but it is ironic that he, a foreign-born rabbi, who never lost his marked Germanic accent and whose orthodoxy was strong and unimpeachable, should also find himself ranged against "the foreign orthodox congregations". (There will be a further reference in chapter 6 to the part which the *Beth Din* as an institution played in the development of South African Judaism.)

In 1911 it was announced that Hertz had accepted a position as rabbi of the *Orach Chaim* Congregation in New York. A series of functions and presentations took place and he left Johannesburg for New York in November 1911. Landau did not attend the final function, a fact that was obliquely referred to by Hertz in his address. However Hertz's tenure in his new position was to be short-lived. Dr Herman Adler, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the British Empire died on 18 July 1911 and Anglo Jewry was placed in a turmoil regarding the election of his successor. This is not the place to examine the convulsions which attended the election of the new Chief Rabbi, but Hertz was eventually elected and was installed on 14 April 1913.

In the amalgamation of the Witwatersrand "Old" and the Johannesburg "New" Congregations in 1915 Landau's position was entrenched. The constitution of the united body recognised Landau's pre-eminence by providing that he would be "Ecclesiastical Head and Chief Rabbi of the Amalgamated Congregation for life". With hindsight, this can be seen as

inevitable and indeed it was foreseen by many, some even far afield.

This is not intended to be a history of the South African Jewish community and so it would be pointless to set out in detail dates and surrounding circumstances and leading figures of all the new synagogues and congregations as they were formed. Diligent search has failed to reveal any significant differences in the nature of the orthodoxy which was practised in these congregations. For the sake of obtaining an overview as to how independent congregational life grew, it is interesting to note the congregations who were invited to the induction of Dr Landau as Rabbi of the Johannesburg New Hebrew Congregation in 1903.

In the Transvaal there were the original Old Hebrew Congregation, the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, Jeppestown, Fordsburg, Boksburg, Germiston, Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp, Potschefstroom and Pretoria. In the Cape there were the three Cape Town congregations already mentioned, Kimberley, Oudtshoorn, Paarl, Port Elizabeth, Robertson and Worcester. There were also congregations at Bloemfontein, Volksrust and Bulawayo.

The extent to which small communities emerged can be gauged by the fact that when the Board of Deputies appointed a Country Community Rabbi in 1951, his responsibility included 68 rural communities having between 5 and 20 families. The effect of these scattered communities on the development of orthodox Judaism will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

Before moving on to examining some of the smaller communities, it is instructive to note certain comparisons and contrasts between the two major communities, i.e. Johannesburg and Cape Town. One notes that the schisms and divisions in Johannesburg played a greater part than in Cape Town because having the larger population with larger congregations and more ministers, there was less cohesion. Even after the formation of the breakaway orthodox congregations in Cape Town and the suburban congregations which arose away from the city centre, the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation was more dominant in Cape Town than any congregation in Johannesburg until the formation of the United Hebrew Congregation in that city in 1950. Most of the newly emerging communities in the Transvaal followed the lead of the main Johannesburg congregation and made common cause with its leadership as did the communities in Durban, Bloemfontein, Kimberley and elsewhere. More thrustful leadership therefore emerged in the Transvaal which will be examined more carefully in the discussions on lay leadership in the following chapter.

Moreover the domination of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation meant effectively that there was only one religious head in Cape Town whereas from 1903 as had been seen, Hertz and Landau were equally dominant in their respective spheres and Dayan Friedman (*Reb Moishel*) and later Rabbi I Kossowsky had the allegiance of a large segment of the orthodox community.

### **Durban**

A Jewish presence had been noted in Durban as early as 1825 and

from about 1850 the community began to grow in numbers; a *Brith Milah* was performed in 1875. As usual it was the need for a cemetery which spurred the formation of a structured community and the first cemetery was consecrated in 1880.<sup>192</sup> The first recorded organised synagogue services took place over Passover 1882 and the congregation was established in 1883 and acquired a synagogue in Grey Street (later renamed Broad Street) in 1884. In the South African context the period which elapsed between the first settlement and the formation of the congregation was unusually long because as we have seen, and will see later, Jewish settlers usually lost little time in establishing a congregation. It has been suggested that this may have been occasioned in part by the poor inducement which Durban in the early days offered to prospective settlers.<sup>193</sup> Indeed a local resident, J P L Goodman remarked in 1876: "Natal has been inhabited by white people for nearly 30 years and, it is strange few of our co-religionists have remained a sufficient time to enable a Jewish congregation to be formed, the prospect of the place not being the brightest."<sup>194</sup>

The first occasion when a public event took place of a formal religious nature was in December 1875 when a *minyán* was convened

---

<sup>192</sup> Much of the material concerning Durban is taken from: S G Cohen, "A History of the Jews of Durban 1825-1918", Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Natal, 1977. *Ibid*, "A History of the Jews of Durban 1919-1961. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal 1982. Where necessary these sources are hereafter referred to as "Cohen, 1977" and "Cohen 1982" respectively.

<sup>193</sup> Cohen 1977, p.133.

<sup>194</sup> *London Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 1876.

on the last day of *Chanukah* for the purpose of a *Brit Milah*. Remarkably, the father of the child was not a Durban resident, but came from Pretoria, where he lived, for the occasion. It has been suggested that the reason for this that there was no suitably qualified *Mohel* in the Transvaal and the nearest officiant was Reverend S Rappoport of Port Elizabeth who came to Durban for the occasion.

Reverend Rappoport visited the community again in 1880 to perform the funeral rites of a Jew and this was the occasion of the acquisition of the first cemetery. There was still no congregation established but in 1882 a service was held for *Pesach*, principally at the instigation of a newly arrived resident, Phillip Wartski.<sup>195</sup> The year following Wartski's arrival, steps were taken to establish a congregation and in September 1883 the congregation was established and held its first New Year services at the Masonic Hall, Smith Street. As we shall see occurred in Bloemfontein, Jewish businessmen publicly declared their intention to close their stores over the Jewish New Year.<sup>196</sup> At first services were held in a temporary room, but on 1 January, 1884 the former Wesleyan Chapel in Grey Street was consecrated as the first synagogue in Oudtshoorn. On the same afternoon the first Jewish marriage in Durban was solemnised, that of Mr J H Isaacs and Miss Jenny Grainger. The service was conducted by Reverend Weinstock who had been the

---

<sup>195</sup> Arthur Markowitz, *Philip Wartski, Hasholom Rosh Hashana Annual*, September 1959.

<sup>196</sup> *Natal Mercury*, 2 October 1883; 19 September 1884.

*Chazan, Schochet and Mohel* a few months earlier.<sup>197</sup>

A letter exists dating to this period reflecting the impression made by the early congregation on an interested though impartial observer. Dr I Gregory d'Arbella, physician to the Sultan of Zanzibar, visited Natal in 1884 and wrote to the *London Jewish Chronicle* noting that although the leadership of the congregation was in the hands of English Jews it was those of Eastern European origin, mostly artisans, who were most regular in their attendance at synagogue. Dr d'Arbella also reported that a large number of former German Jews living in Durban had abandoned Judaism altogether and intermarried, and that English as well as foreign Jews were to be found in trade.<sup>198</sup>

But the influence of the British Chief Rabbinate was strong in Durban and elsewhere and the appointment of Reverend Samuel Isaac Pincus as Minister of the congregation in 1891 was made "subject to the approval of Dr Adler." Reverend Pincus' father who arrived in 1881 was made the Jewish marriage officer for Natal. Reverend Pincus was the first minister to hold office for a substantial length of time as his predecessors served for a very short while. Lack of funds and the Natal climate had both been advanced as reasons for this. By 1897 additional land was acquired for the enlargement of the burial ground, the management of which was in the hands of the *Chevra Kadisha*.

---

<sup>197</sup> *London Jewish Chronicle*, 30 November 1883.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, 25 July 1884; *SAJC* 22 June 1884.

By 1903 the community numbered about 500, most of them by this time Jews of English descent who, sensing a need for an English trained and English speaking Minister, issued a call to Reverend Abraham Levy. Under his ministry the foundation stone of a new synagogue in St Andrews Street was laid in 1903 and the synagogue was consecrated in 1904.

By 1909 a rift appeared which was almost an exact replica to what had occurred in Cape Town and Johannesburg.<sup>199</sup> A large number of Jews had come to Durban from the Transvaal during the Anglo-Boer War and had decided to stay after the war. They were mainly Jews of Eastern European origin and they objected to what they saw as the anglicised character of the congregation. Amongst the complaints which were recorded were the introduction of a mixed choir at *Chanukah* services, inadequate provision for Jewish education and what they saw as too many secular inroads into the traditional ritual. 43 Members broke away and formed the Durban New Hebrew Congregation and appointed Reverend A Hoffenberg as their Minister.<sup>200</sup> They acquired a building in Grey Street to

---

<sup>199</sup> The schism which ensued seems to have been unexpected, at least in some quarters. The *London Jewish Chronicle* reported in 1904: "... there exists but one synagogue in Durban and there is no likelihood of a second being built ... there is no doubt that Durban Jews will afford to the world at large the pleasing spectacle of a united congregation." *London Jewish Chronicle*, 12 February 1904.

<sup>200</sup> Cohen notes that "the division along ethnic lines and synagogal affiliation was not absolute. Just as some Jews of East European descent retained their membership of the Durban Hebrew Congregation, so too some Jews of English origin, who identified with the more traditional outlook of their East European co-religionists, took out membership of the New Hebrew Congregation". Cohen, 1977, pp. 28-29. Here again, therefore, we have a warning, frequently repeated in this dissertation, against being too simplistic in ascribing reasons for the various

use as their synagogue and this new synagogue as so many throughout the country became known as the "*Griene Shul*". They would erect a new synagogue in Park Street in 1922 and continued to maintain a separate congregation.

Great controversy attended the ministry of Rabbi E M Levy who was appointed to the Durban Hebrew Congregation i.e. the original congregation, in 1924.<sup>201</sup> The controversy had to do with the validity or otherwise of his Rabbinic qualifications. He was strongly supported by his congregation and the Chief Rabbi (Hertz) under whose aegis he underwent a further course of instruction and pursued some studies at Jew's College. Eventually Hertz affirmed that he (Levy) was entitled to bear the title of Rabbi.

Levy never ceased to be grateful to Hertz and to proclaim his loyalty to him. He sent Hertz frequent and full reports of his activities, some of which furnish useful material for this study. He reported particularly fully in 1925. Here he stated that he preached frequently, conducted classes at the secular school every afternoon and in synagogue on Sabbath and lectured to the Zionist Society. He carried out his usual rounds of sick visits and official activities and had formed a Lodge of the Hebrew Order of David. He reported on the two congregations that existed in Durban between whom a friendly relationship existed. His own

---

breakaways which, in fact, took place in every major South African congregation. The English/East European axis was *usually* an important but *never* the sole reason.

<sup>201</sup> Chief Rabbinate records, File C.

congregation, the Durban Hebrew Congregation had 300 members and the other, the Park Street Congregation about 100. There were disputes about the way the Burial Board should carry out its affairs and be financed, he was at pains to stress how he enjoyed the respect and esteem of "other congregations". He reported with particular joy of an incident which had occurred at the conference of the local Board of Deputies. There were two candidates for President and the defeated candidate refused to accept appointment as Vice President. When he was eventually persuaded to accept the lesser office, he was at pains to announce that he had been influenced by Reverend Levy's inspiring prayer at the opening of the conference. He did not fail to advise Hertz whenever he had modelled a sermon on one of the latter's printed addresses.<sup>202</sup>

His repeated protestations of loyalty to Hertz seemed to have been inspired in part by some remnants of the Hertz-Landau feud to which reference has already been made. When Landau visited Durban, Levy explained in great detail how he had called upon the latter and "paid him the courtesy and respect due to a man of his learning ... . At the very outset however, I made it perfectly clear to him that much as I appreciated and respected him it was a purely personal matter and that I owe you the utmost loyalty and allegiance as my Chief so far as my official position is concerned." The letter continues "I can assure you that the only authority recognised by my congregation and myself is Chief Rabbi Dr Hertz." This outpouring of loyalty seems to have been

---

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, Letter E M Levy to Hertz, 4 August 1925.

brought about by the publication of some brochure or magazine in Durban which described Dr Landau as "Chief Rabbi". (He was of course by this time Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Transvaal.) "It seems to me", continued Levy, "that Dr Landau's 'Chief Rabbi' is simply a courtesy title that in practice is insignificant at least so far as Durban is concerned and the person responsible for the arrangement of the magazine, sent it to the printer in sublime innocence of the question of principle involved."<sup>203</sup>

#### Bloemfontein and the Orange Free State

Bloemfontein was another of those cities where there was a Jewish presence from earliest times.<sup>204</sup> A few prominent German-Jewish families helped to lay the foundations of the city from 1848 onwards and did much to foster the social and communal life of the Orange Free State as a whole. Until the arrival of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants, almost all the Bloemfontein Jews were of German-Jewish descent - there was hardly any Anglo-Jewish presence. Throughout the period covered by this study, the leadership of the community came from these early German-Jewish families, but Eastern European Jews took an increasingly important role in the development of the community as the years went by. As in the Cape, the first tentative steps towards establishing a community structure was the holding of services for *Yom Kippur*. The year was 1871 and the services were held in

---

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, Letter E M Levy to Hertz, 23 December 1926.

<sup>204</sup> Much of the material about Bloemfontein is obtained from Sheila M Aronstam, *op. cit.*

the home of a leading figure in the community, Isaac Baumann. Another characteristically early step in the formation of the community was the melancholy need to have a suitable burial place. Baumann's son, Louis David, died in 1874 and Baumann bought a plot of ground next to a Christian cemetery to serve as a burial place. This became the first Jewish cemetery in Bloemfontein. Fellow Jews had to be brought in from surrounding areas as there was no *minyan* to be obtained in Bloemfontein for the funeral rites.

A happier "first" took place in the same year when Baumann's daughter Bertha, married Henry Adler of Winburg. Reverend S Rappoport of Port Elizabeth came to officiate. Some indication of the esteem in which the tiny Jewish community and Baumann in particular were held by the Government, is to be found in the bureaucracy attendant upon the marriage. The Reverend Rappoport was already an official marriage officer for the Eastern province and the diamond fields area. There was no Jewish marriage officer in the Free State and no provision for anyone other than a Christian to be appointed to this position. The *Volksraad* (Legislative Assembly) set a precedent by authorising the executive to appoint Rappoport as an official marriage officer of the Free State. He subsequently performed several Jewish marriages and several circumcisions in Bloemfontein and elsewhere in the Free State. The official formation of a congregation, however, was slow in developing, probably because the Jewish community grew very slowly. In the 1880 census it appeared that out of 1688 Whites in Bloemfontein, there were 28 Jews. In the

whole of the Colony there were but 67 Jews, equivalent to .11% of the total.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, the small community must have been fairly prominent and observed all the High Holy days because in 1877, the *Friend* newspaper could report after *Rosh Hashana* "none of our tradesmen of the Jewish persuasion opened their stores and so caused the town to present a very dull and semi-holiday appearance."<sup>206</sup>

The 1890 Census revealed that the Jewish population of the Free State had risen to 127 Jews of whom 41 lived in Bloemfontein.<sup>207</sup> 1890 also saw the extension of the railway line from Cape Town to Bloemfontein and a further extension to Johannesburg soon afterwards. This accelerated the growth of the community because by 1893 the congregation was finally established and constituted and Reverend Urdang was appointed Minister. He served until 1896 when Reverend M L Cohen took office, who was to preside over a substantial growth and development of the religious life of the community.

The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) affected the fortunes of Bloemfontein Jewry in different ways. It prevented any further congregational development or expansion and in fact no permanent synagogues were established anywhere in the Free State until after the war; but there was a substantial growth in the

---

<sup>205</sup> *Census of the Orange River Colony*, Bloemfontein, Argus Printing and Publishing Co. 1904.

<sup>206</sup> *The Friend*, 20 September 1877.

<sup>207</sup> OFS Census, 31 March 1890.

population as well as many temporary visitors, principally Jewish soldiers from the Imperial forces who happened to be stationed in Bloemfontein at one time or another during the war. High Holy day services during this period brought some 150 Jewish Bloemfontein residents to the hall hired for the occasion and the numbers were swollen by the visiting soldiers who obtained leave to attend services. The Imperial connection was not lost - at services held in Bloemfontein to honour Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee it was the Order of Service prepared by Chief Rabbi Adler which was used for the occasion and addresses were delivered in English and German.<sup>208</sup> Towards the end of the war and immediately thereafter, there was an acceleration of congregational activity. Reverend Cohen soon gave attention to the question of *Kashrut* and kosher food was available from 1901. (He was officially appointed *Schochet* on the 24 June of that year.) Two years later he commenced Hebrew and religious instruction. A visit by Rabbi Hertz from Johannesburg in 1902 spurred the congregation to make efforts to establish a permanent synagogue and appoint a more highly qualified minister.<sup>209</sup>

A Special General Meeting was held at which a building committee was appointed, as well as a congregational committee, whose task was to find a minister, preacher, teacher and *Mohel*. The foundation stone of the synagogue was laid on the 7 May 1903 and the synagogue officially opened the following year.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup> *London Jewish Chronicle*, 23 July 1897.

<sup>209</sup> *SAJC*, 2 February 1902.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 1 April 1904.

The appointment of the Minister took rather longer, but when Reverend Z Lawrence arrived from Sunderland on the 24 November 1904, 300 members were at the station to meet him. The community now proceeded to grow apace and in 1905 a congregation was established at Kroonstad and the following year in Bethlehem. The city of Bloemfontein being centrally situated in South Africa often served as a meeting place and venue for national conferences where it was desired to avoid any aspect of partisanship involved in meeting in one or other of the two main centres. This applied in the Jewish community also. Mr Wolf Ehrlich was a very influential figure in the Bloemfontein community and served as President of the congregation from 1902 to 1924. He was one of the founders of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (hereafter Board of Deputies) and served as Chairman of the National Congregation which took place in Bloemfontein in 1912 when the Transvaal and Natal Board and the Cape Board resolved to amalgamate to establish the national body.

Nothing can be gauged of any individual characteristic of this community during the period covered by this study. Some speculation may be permitted from a small survey conducted by Sheila Aronstam, a social scientist, in 1971. In her thesis to which reference has been made, nearly half the respondents reported that they ignored the dietary laws completely and none claimed to observe the Sabbath laws entirely. But the overwhelming majority (over 90%) lit the Sabbath candles, observed New Year and the Day of Atonement by attending synagogue and not working, lit Sabbath candles and owned a *mezuzah*, a

Hebrew prayer book and a *Haggadah*. About a third observed dietary laws in part, more than three quarters recited *kiddush* on Friday night and nearly half maintained Friday night observance in a general sense. The *Pesach Seder*, either in an orthodox form or a modified form was observed by nearly all respondents and some 90% claimed to be able to follow the synagogue service in whole or in part.

Throughout the various categories surveyed, the standard of observance was higher, sometimes considerably higher, amongst the older members of the community than the younger. From this we can infer that during the period of this study the standard of observance would have been generally higher.

### Kimberley

The handful of Jews who were among those who flocked to the area which is now Kimberley in the wake of the discovery of diamonds in 1869, lost no time in establishing themselves into a community.<sup>211</sup> In the early seventies services and annual meetings were already being held in halls or stores hired for the purpose and already in 1876 the first synagogue had been completed. The congregation took form as the Griqualand-West Hebrew Congregation on the 27 July 1878. The first Minister was Reverend M Mendelssohn<sup>212</sup> and he was succeeded in 1884 by

---

<sup>211</sup> For a general description of the early days of the Kimberley Jewish community, see Eric Rosenthal, "On the Diamond Fields" in *Saron and Hotz*, eds. *op. cit.*

<sup>212</sup> The father of Sidney Mendelssohn, who was to establish the finest collection of Africana then known and compiled the first comprehensive bibliography of literature relating to

Reverend Abraham Ornstien, the nephew of the Minister in Cape Town. Unfortunately he died very young and he was succeeded by Reverend Harris Isaacs who served as Minister from 1890 to 1928, except for a short period of service in Johannesburg. The Jews of Kimberley appear to have been a fair mixture of those of Anglo-Jewish descent and Eastern European Jews, probably with the former predominating. They appear to have been serious in their desire to uphold ritual observance and to observe *kashrut*, while Kimberley was besieged during the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>213</sup> The new synagogue complex was completed in 1902. There was never any breakaway as took place in other centres, but Isaacs' position was apparently no sinecure. In reply to Hertz's letter of congratulations on completing 25 years service in the Ministry in South Africa he wrote: "None but those who have held office in South Africa can appreciate the difficulties under which Ministers here labour".<sup>214</sup>

There is a very early letter addressed by Chief Rabbi Adler to Reverend Mark L Harris, the Minister of Kimberley. The only copy of this letter which has been traced is a hand-written draft prepared in the Chief Rabbi's office and entered into his letterbook as a record of what was sent. It is worth quoting the letter in full, not only because it contains certain information

---

Africa.

<sup>213</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 98. Letter 98. Letter Adler to Isaacs, 26 March 1900. "It was indeed kind and thoughtful of the authorities to permit our brethren to be supplied with kosher food at the time when meat was so excessively scarce."

<sup>214</sup> Chief Rabbinate Records File G. Isaacs to Hertz, 1 July 1915.

about what was going on in Kimberley, but because it deals with so many of the issues which arose time and time again in the South African Jewish community. In the transcription which appears below, I have filled out abbreviations and secretarial shorthand and have transcribed into English letters words which appear in Hebrew script.

In answer to your letter of February 18th I authorised you together with Mr Mendelsohn and Mr Magid to admit Mrs David Adler as a *giyoret* provided that Mr David Adler is not a *Kohen* and that the lady has been properly instructed in the principles and duties of Judaism.

With regard to the case of Mrs Goetz, I have the fullest sympathy for the poor lady. But I am very greatly surprised that you propose giving *get* to her in the absence of her husband. You should surely know that a *get* can only be given in the place where the husband resides.

With respect to your request to constitute a regular *Beth Din* for South Africa to perform all Rabbinical function including *gittin ve-chalitzut*, such right can only be given to one who possesses *hora-ah* from a competent authority. As unfortunately none of the gentlemen whom you name possess such *semichah* I am unable to appoint at the present time a *Beth Din* for South Africa. I have already written to you on the subject of *gerut* and the re-examination of *Schochtim*. I forward you some copies of the code by concurrent mail. Reciprocating your kind wishes of *Simchat Regel*, I remain <sup>215</sup>

In June 1927 the Rev. Maurice Konviser, recently appointed to Kimberley under the aegis of Chief Rabbi Hertz, wrote to the latter reporting on the "very nice welcome" that he had received from the congregants to his arrival. The text of his letter reflects something of the way the community functioned and the duties required of its minister.

I have found that there was no systematic Hebrew and religious education and in fact it was sorely neglected for the last three years. I began to re-establish the classes and while commencing with about 15 children, I have now an

---

<sup>215</sup> Chief Rabbinate Records File G. Isaacs to Hertz, 1 July 1915.

attendance of over 50 every day. Personal canvassing and private talk to the parents can help the work considerably. I am pleased to say that my primary efforts have been very successful and hope that my subsequent work will be equally appreciated. I am told that my synagogue services are well-rendered and my activities as regards Jewish organisations, lectures and debates tend to foster a keener enthusiasm for Jewish matters in general.<sup>216</sup>

A few months later he again reported that he was starting confirmation classes for girls and asked for a syllabus; that he had established a Jewish children's library; that the congregation was very pleased with his efforts over the High Festivals and that parents were responding to his efforts and that he was contemplating commencing daily classes "for the older folk in *Shulchan Aruch* or *Ayn Yaakov*." His further successes involved the Sabbath childrens services in the synagogue and occasional visits to places around Kimberley where he had been successful in arranging for some of the children to come to town for lessons in religion.<sup>217</sup>

These examples, particularly from Durban and Kimberley, of Ministers writing personally to the Chief Rabbi give interesting insights into how the communities functioned. They are, I suggest, instructive because they are not edited reports intended for publication in a brochure or annual bulletin. In a sense they can be seen as a branch manager's confidential report to head office; he is obviously concerned to show himself in as good a light as possible, but he cannot stray too far from the facts because head office have other sources of information and

---

<sup>216</sup> Chief Rabbinate records File C. Konviser to Hertz, 23 June 1927.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, Konviser to Hertz, 20 October 1927.

any over-exuberant claim to success will inevitably be shown up by fall off in turnover or criticism from the shareholders. This commercial analogy is not disrespectful, and, it is submitted, not inappropriate. The records are replete with individual congregants writing direct to the Chief Rabbi, where they perceive they have cause for complaint.

### Oudtshoorn

There are a number of features of the Oudtshoorn Jewish community which replicates the situation which we have seen in larger centres but it has certain distinctive features of its own. For example, although there took place the same hiving off of the *grienes* as we have seen elsewhere, there was no question of the breakaway group representing a reaction against Jews of Anglo-Jewish descent; there were hardly any of the latter. The Jews who formed the first congregation in 1883 and built their synagogue in Queen Street five years later, were almost all of Eastern-European descent.<sup>218</sup> The community's prosperity was largely built on the boom in the Ostrich feather industry which brought dramatic wealth to the area in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. When the second synagogue was built in St John's Street in 1896 to house the new congregation formed by the *grienes* the distinction between the "established" and "breakaways" had nothing to do with their country of origin. In fact there is strong indication that the Queen Street synagogue had in any event become too small to house the congregation. By

---

<sup>218</sup> For fuller details, see George Aschman, "Oudtshoorn in the Early Days" in Saron and Hotz, (eds.) *op. cit.*

1904 the *London Jewish Chronicle* could report as follows:

The crowded attendances at the High Festivals have again raised the question of the necessity of enlarging the Queen Street Synagogue. Nothing more practical than a discussion has ever resulted owing to the financial outlook in the Colony; but it is hoped that the matter will soon be taken in hand." <sup>219</sup>

Although the Queen Street Synagogue was known as the English *Shul* and the St John's Street Synagogue as the *Griene Shul* this had nothing to do with the country of origin of the members. They all came from Eastern Europe and had all until comparatively recently been *grienes*. The distinction also does not derive from the training and background of the officiating ministers. The Queen Street Synagogue was served for more than 50 years by Reverend Myers Woolfson who arrived at Oudtshoorn in July 1888. He had come from London under the sponsorship of the Chief Rabbi, but he had not been the latter's first choice, nor does he appear to have been regarded with unqualified confidence. The Chief Rabbi wrote to Dr Stusser, the first President of the congregation as follows:

I support Woolfson as *Chazan* and *Schochet* but he has not trained as preacher and "teacher" so that it highly advisable that you should engage a student of Jews College to discharge those important functions." <sup>220</sup>

The following month, the Chief Rabbi wrote to Reverend Ornstien in Cape Town that he had authorised Reverend Woolfson to act as *Schochet* and *Chazan* but "not as Minister".<sup>221</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> 28 October 1904.

<sup>220</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 97. Letter 3214, 17 September 1888.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, Letter 3842, 30 October 1888.

Despite the Chief Rabbi's reservations, Reverend Woolfson served as the complete *Kolboinik* for fifty years.

Clearly he preserved English mannerisms and those together perhaps of the fact that the congregants of Queen Street by virtue of their long residence in Oudtshoorn had advanced further along the road of acculturation and had derived further benefits from the upward mobility which had been attained upon financial advancement.

One outstanding feature of the *Griene Shul* in St John's Street, was the fact that almost all its congregants came from the Lithuanian town of Kelm. (Kelme, Kelmy) (Most of the Queen Street congregants hailed from Shavel.) This was to lead to an interesting fact about the St John's Street Synagogue. At the insistence of one of its leading members, the *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark) was modelled on that of the member's synagogue at Kelm and, it is said was constructed according to sketches prepared by the Minister, either from memory or from photographs. A most imposing edifice, it was surmounted with a distinctive onion-shaped centrepiece. When the St John's Street Synagogue was closed down in 1973, and the building demolished, arrangements were made with the Municipality of Oudtshoorn to relocate the Ark in the established Jewish section of the C P Nel Museum, of Oudtshoorn, the floor of the building had to be lowered so as to accommodate the Ark.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> The author had the privilege of being present and officiating at the ceremonies attendant upon the opening of the Jewish section of the Museum.

With regard to the distinction, if any, between the Jews of Queen Street and those of St John's Street, one naturally inquires whether the latter sought a *Rebbe* from *der heim* to serve them. As in Roeland Street, Cape Town, and as in other centres which we examined, they did not. They appointed Reverend Emmanuel Lipkin, recommended by the Chief Rabbi, who had formerly served one of the Liverpool congregations; but when Reverend Lipkin's term of office came to an end, he was succeeded by a pious old world Minister known affectionately from the town of his birth and the birth of his congregants, as *Reb Borukh der Kelner*. But Reverend Lipkin had one very great recommendation which must have endeared him to his congregation in St John's Street. He was a grandson of Rabbi Israel Lipkin Salanter, one of the giants of the *Musar* Movement<sup>223</sup> and Kelm was well known to have been the centre of that movement. He himself was a talented artist and musician.

There is little if no evidence to suggest that there was any significant difference between the ritual and liturgy conducted in the two synagogues, but it has been suggested that services were held daily in St John's Street, but they were only held on Sabbaths and festivals in Queen Street. It has not been possible to verify if this is correct and it seems unlikely. Certainly if a mourner needed to recite *Kaddish* during the prescribed year of mourning or on *Yahrzeit* it is certain that a *minyán* would have

---

<sup>223</sup> This was a movement which stressed the need for strict ethical behaviour on the part of the individual, according to *halacha*. It arose in the 19th century amongst the *mitnagdim* of Lithuania and became an important element in the philosophy and practice of most (but not all) Lithuanian *Yeshivot*.

been gathered morning and evening to enable him to so do. By the time the congregations merged as a result of the depletion in the numbers of the community and the closing down of the St John's Street Synagogue, there was certainly no difficulty whatever in the former members of St John's Street finding their place in and participating in the Queen Street services.

The Oudtshoorn community prospered with the ostrich feather industry and the farming industry generally. The members grew and the intensity of Jewish life was remarkable and became famous throughout South Africa. Oudtshoorn earned the soubriquet "Jerusalem of South Africa".

Before leaving this brief account of a community which had characteristics both of the larger cities and the smaller dorps, it is also worthwhile to mention one interesting and perhaps unique fact. This is not the occasion to deal with the relationship between the Jews and other fellow South African citizens.<sup>224</sup> However good or bad these relations may have been in various times and at different places, there has hardly ever been any movement towards ecumenism or for Jew and Christian to participate in each other's religious practices. Oudtshoorn is unique in this respect. It can claim to be the only congregation which has at one time had a practising Christian as an Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. This was Mr Charles B Black who occupied this combined position, when the Jews of Oudtshoorn and

---

<sup>224</sup> The best authority on this issue is Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Witwatersrand University Press 1994.

the outlying districts called a meeting in December 1886 to establish a congregation and erect a synagogue. At the ceremony which marked the laying of the foundation stone of the synagogue on the 26 January 1888, Reverend Ornstien who had come from Cape Town for the occasion, in the course of his address had this to say:

I find that subscriptions [to the building fund of the synagogue] have been received from English, Scotch nay all have thrown aside any feeling of difference and have aided in the work; and above all I find the most valuable, nay incalculable assistance has been given by the Christian Honourary Secretary, Mr Charles B Black without whose indefatigable labours the committee could not have arrived at so happy a consummation ... I think the Jewish Committee here owes a debt of gratitude to that gentleman and on their behalf and my own I heartily thank him for his labours in the Jewish cause." <sup>225</sup>

#### Port Elizabeth

The distinguishing historical event in the Eastern Province insofar as the history of South Africa was concerned in the nineteenth century was of course the arrival of the 1820 Settlers from England. It is recorded that amongst the members of Willson's party were three Jewish families - the Slomans, the Nortons and the Simons. In addition there were six bachelors, five of whom were the redoubtable Norden brothers who, like the Slomans, made their way to Cape Town where they played an important part, as we have seen, in the establishment and early development of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.

These settlers did not stay in the Port Elizabeth area. They had many and tragic adventures and it was in Grahamstown that the

---

<sup>225</sup> *Oudtshoorn Courant*, 1 February 1888.

earliest Jewish presence began to be felt. The Grahamstown community has some claim to have been the first organised Jewish congregation in the country but as it never took root in those days this was a temporary priority.

In time Port Elizabeth would exceed any other Eastern Province community in the size and influence of its congregation. It would be 1855 however before the Jews of Port Elizabeth hired a room in Queens Street to use as a temporary house of worship. They formed themselves into a congregation in 1857 and were fortunate to have the leadership of one of those charismatic lay leaders whose drive, influence and enthusiasm played so important a part in the early years of the community. This was Mr A M Jackson who arrived in Port Elizabeth in 1859 and was appointed marriage officer shortly after his arrival. The Queens Street room was soon too small and in 1862 a building known as the Lutheran Church was acquired at the top of Whites Road Hill and became known as "the Synagogue on the Hill". By 1864 the congregation was firmly established. <sup>226</sup>

As would be expected it was almost entirely constituted by Jews of Anglo-Jewish descent. In 1869 it was resolved to appoint a permanent minister. Once again the Chief Rabbinate in London was consulted and after a long period of negotiation Reverend Samuel Rapaport, who had been serving as junior minister at the Portsmouth Hebrew Congregation, was appointed and he arrived in

---

<sup>226</sup> J J Redgrave, *Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days*, Wynberg, Cape, Rustica Press, 1947; A Addleson, "In the Eastern Province" in Saron and Hotz (eds.) *op. cit.*

September 1872. He was to hold office for nearly 25 years. His services as a marriage officer and *mohel* were widely used and he was frequently called to various parts of the Cape Colony, to Bloemfontein, to Natal and also to the Griqualand West congregation.

As we have seen in our discussion of Bloemfontein and Durban he officiated at the first Jewish wedding in Bloemfontein and conducted the first *Brith Milah* in Durban. As it happened he was also present in Johannesburg on the 10 July 1887 when the first public Jewish meeting was held.

In due time it was resolved to purchase a piece of ground on which to build a synagogue and in December 1874 the ground in Western Road was acquired. The foundation stone was laid towards the end of 1876 by A M Jackson and the Reverend Rapaport consecrated the new house of worship on the 2 September 1877.

Reverend Rapaport it would seem was not an entirely easy person and from time to time controversy arose. This flared up particularly in 1884 when he made a statement in which he claimed that his congregation in Port Elizabeth "had never required or received support or aid, spiritual or material, of any kind whatsoever at the hands of the would be parent" (this was a reference to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation). It may be that at this time there was some sort of power play between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. This issue elicited two letters in the *Cape Argus* which tell something of the kind of difficulties which

the early congregation would have encountered in the early days. Joseph Benjamin who had been the secretary of the Port Elizabeth congregation challenged Rapaport's allegation that the Port Elizabeth synagogue had not received assistance from Cape Town. He drew on his years of experience in that capacity to state with emphasis that Reverend Joel Rabinowitz had frequently visited Port Elizabeth during the course of his visits to the Eastern Province and during these visits he had preached sermons, conducted circumcisions and assisted in many other ways. Reverend Rabinowitz had also willingly responded to a request to come to Port Elizabeth specifically to consecrate their first synagogue and had collected cash contributions from his own congregants to send to Port Elizabeth to assist that community. Mr Benjamin concluded with a stinging rebuke to Reverend Rapaport for having in his ignorance and lack of experience, exhibited ingratitude to the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation "for their parental care as well as their material and spiritual aid".<sup>227</sup>

The same issue of the *Cape Argus* carried a letter from Reverend Joel Rabinowitz himself, who was then living in London, and had not yet returned to South Africa, to take up his position as metallurgical assayer. Rabinowitz was equally scathing about Rapaport's denial of any aid given in the early days by Cape Town to Port Elizabeth. He also referred to his visits and various functions in the service of the smaller community, including obtaining a piece of land from the Government for use as a Jewish

---

<sup>227</sup> This letter is to be found in the album of Rabinowitz memorabilia referred to in note 83.

burial ground in Aliwal North, and his many visits to his "Jewish friends on the frontier ... in their sorrow or joy ... [who] were grateful for my words of condolence, congratulation or exhortation." Practical expressions of assistance from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth had included the presentation of a shofar and seven sets of festival prayerbooks. But Rabinowitz went further and accused Rapaport of ingratitude for personal kindness, generosity and hospitality. This included receiving Rapaport and his two children into his (Rabinowitz's) own house when they first arrived in Table Bay in 1873 "where they received not only genuine kindness and hospitality and other 'little favours' but he also received my paternal advice for which he expressed himself grateful." The indictment of Rapaport concluded with mentioning that instead of thanking Rabinowitz for sending to Port Elizabeth money which he had collected for that community in Cape Town, he "reproached me because I had not collected more money."<sup>228</sup>

Some explanation of the sharpness of the exchanges between Rabinowitz and Rapaport is perhaps to be found in a private letter which the latter wrote to the former on the 5 July 1891. It seems that Rapaport's daughter had married a non-Jew and the fact of the bridegroom's religion only emerged later. Rapaport maintained that Rabinowitz had told Chief Rabbi Adler that he (Rapaport) had known the facts when he permitted his daughter to contract the marriage. In a somewhat sarcastic but bitter letter he demanded to know the grounds upon which Rabinowitz had made

---

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

this alleged statement. It is perhaps noteworthy that in the letter Rapaport does not specifically deny the allegation in terms.<sup>229</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the commencement of services in Queens Street in 1862 are movingly described by A M Jackson in a letter to the *London Jewish Chronicle*.<sup>230</sup> He gives the credit to a pious lady, Mrs Abrahamson, who was under the tragic necessity of having to find a place to bury her recently deceased daughter and pressed her fellow Jews to take the necessary steps. As so often therefore throughout South Africa it was the need for a burial place which spurred congregational activity.

The letter demonstrates that other religious needs inspired Mrs Abrahamson to urge her fellow Jews of Port Elizabeth to create a congregational structure. Mr Jackson describes how, in her distress at the death of her only daughter a few days before their arrival in Port Elizabeth, who had had to be taken to Grahamstown for burial, Mrs Abrahamson "contrived to stimulate the few Jews she found already here to petition the government for the grant of a suitable plot of land for the burial of the dead". The letter goes on to describe how Mrs Abrahamson had succeeded in obtaining matzos from Cape Town for the Passover of 1862 and later that year when the High Holy Days were approaching, she obtained religious necessities from her relatives in Germany to enable religious services to be held in

---

<sup>229</sup> This letter is to be found in the same album, at p.48.

<sup>230</sup> 1 August 1863.

due form, and even canvassed the community to ensure that the necessary *minyan* made up the service. As each festival approached, it was Mrs Abrahamson's efforts which ensured that the festival was observed in due form and that all necessary appurtenances were provided.

The Anglo Boer War found many "*uitlander*" refugees in Port Elizabeth. Services were held for them and many of them were absorbed into the economy. They were practically destitute and it was not easy to find jobs for artisans and small traders in the depressed economy then prevailing in the Eastern Province. The difficulties were compounded because most of the new immigrants were of Eastern European origin, whereas we have seen the Port Elizabeth community was largely derived from Anglo Jewry. Not for the first time those who needed help charged the others with lack of sympathy and were in turn themselves accused of ingratitude.

The pattern which we have seen so often in South Africa was repeated in Port Elizabeth as the number of Jews of Eastern European origin increased in the early years of the century. Once again there was dissatisfaction at the English ritual at the modernised Western Road synagogue which these *grienes* referred to as "the reform *shul*". They decided to form an orthodox congregation. They held services first in private homes or in shops and eventually acquired permanent premises in Hartman Road. By 1908 they felt they were strong enough to appoint their own minister. Once again they approached the Chief Rabbi in London

which is another example of the tendency of these Eastern European Jews to yet look to London for their ministers rather than to Yeshiva-trained Rabbis from "*der heim*". This is something which we have encountered time and time again and repays reflection.

It cannot have been only the English training of the ministers to which they responded. The upward mobility provided by the growth of the area and their own enterprise and success in commerce and later in professional life brought them even closer to the colonial atmosphere of the Eastern Province. As long as they could maintain the standards of observance which they set for themselves they were quite willing, indeed eager to shed the outward trappings of Eastern Europe.

Perhaps the Chief Rabbi in London was wise enough to choose for these newly established congregations ministers more likely to appeal to them. In this case he sent Reverend J L Hilkwitz who served the orthodox synagogue for some while before he moved to the Paarl Hebrew Congregation. In 1912 a new orthodox synagogue was consecrated.

In concluding this short account of what happened in Port Elizabeth it is only necessary to reiterate that there is no record of any significant or even noticeable differences between the prayers and liturgy conducted in the Western Road synagogue and that conducted in the Hartman Road synagogue.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## PROSELYTISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

As we have seen, the two largest communities, Cape Town and Johannesburg were compelled to grapple with the question of proselytism from their earliest years, and the issue arose not infrequently in smaller centres as well. (Proselytism for present purposes, of course, means conversion of a non-Jew to Judaism.)

From the earliest times proselytism has been known and practised in Jewish life. The pre-eminent biblical example frequently quoted is that of Ruth particular because she was the ancestor of King David. It is also pointed out that Ruth's conversion ("Whither thou goest I will go ... they people shall be my people and thy God my God." Ruth I, 16) was not for the purpose of marriage - she was already a widow - but out of conviction and commitment. This contrast will be frequently encountered in our examination.

The Talmud defines the conditions upon which proselytes may be accepted; basically an acknowledgment of the Torah in its entirety through religious conviction plus *Tevilah* (ritual immersion) plus circumcision for males (summed up by Maimonides in *Hilkoth Issurey Bi'ah*, Chapters 13 and 14.) It was also necessary that there should be acceptance by a duly constituted *Beth Din*.

The sources reflect many different attitudes towards proselytism. Thus in *B T Yevamoth* 109b we read "Evil after evil comes upon those who accept proselytes." In the same tractate at 47B is the famous comment of R Helbo that "Proselytes are as bad for Israel as a scab" and later we shall note an interpretation of this dictum by an eminent South African Rabbi. The arguments for an against are summed up by the great Tosaphist R Isaac in *Tosaphot Quiddushin* 70b during the course of which he advances a more liberal interpretation of R Helbo's comment.

Despite the changes in attitude which have been described there has hardly ever been an organised Jewish community of any size where the question of proselytism did not arise. By and large it seems that the Jewish attitude towards proselytism had always been inversely proportionate to prevailing feelings of comfort, security and self confidence. When the community felt itself under threat spiritually or physically it closed ranks and resisted the would be proselyte. A community sure of itself and its strength (even if mistakenly so) was more likely to be willing to receive new adherents. This phenomenon has been and continues to be precisely reproduced in microcosm in South Africa.

At first, in Cape Town, there was not such a marked imbalance between the numbers of young Jewish men and women as would later emerge some half century later in the early years of Johannesburg, and it was easier for marriageable young Jews to find partners within the community or if necessary to bring them

out from England or Germany. A less positive aspect was that Jews either left the religious fold entirely or married women who did not adopt the Jewish faith thus bringing about assimilation in the next and following generations. It is a fact that by a comparatively early date there were no descendants in Cape Town of the earliest founders of the congregation; by contrast with the situation in the Transvaal where there are many descendants of the early pioneers, a difference not to be attributed solely to the fact that one community is some 50 years younger than the other.

The early records of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation do show some instances of proselytes in the early years of the congregation, these having in all cases been controlled and directed from the Chief Rabbinate in London. A different situation emerged in Johannesburg and perhaps it is not without significance that the earliest references to the problem have to do with marriages across the colour line.

As early as March 1897 Chief Rabbi Adler had been in touch with the Kimberley community on this subject. On 15 March 1897 he wrote to the congregation as follows: "The fact that the lady's father is of coloured origins, I would not regard as an impediment. Jewish law not acknowledging definitions of race and of colour."<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> Letter, Chief Rabbi Adler to Kimberley Hebrew Congregation 15 March 1897. Chief Rabbi's Letter Book 96.

Two weeks later, Adler wrote to the Minister of the Congregation, dealing with the same application in greater detail:

With regard to this point I have to state that from the Jewish point of view we are not allowed to make any difference between white and coloured people. Both are regarded equally as a child of God and if a(?) convinced of the truth of Judaism and desires to be received into Judaism we dare not reject him on account of his colour (At the same time I am well aware what a strong antipathy is felt to intermarrying with people of colour both in South Africa and in the West Indies). The rule which I have adopted in all these cases is that before I can entertain any case of *Gerut* it must come to me recommended by the Minister of the Executive of the congregation. If they for valid reasons withhold such recommendation believing that cases of conversion will encourage mixed marriages, I shall not entertain the application however strongly it may be urged but in each case the Minister of the congregation should carefully weigh whether there is not reason to apprehend that refusal to entertain a case may lead to the party who is married being altogether lost to Judaism.<sup>232</sup>

The problem was not limited to Kimberley. On 17 November 1897 the Committee of the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation, taking a line very different from that of Chief Rabbi Adler, unanimously resolved "That no black proselytes be admitted to the synagogue and no man who had married one can be admitted as a member; also no black person be allowed to enter the synagogue during any service."<sup>233</sup>

This approach and that of Adler may be compared, not without interest, to that of the Jewish community of Charleston, South Carolina, whose constitution adopted in 1820 provided as follows:

The Congregation will not encourage nor interfere with

---

<sup>232</sup> Letter, Chief Rabbi Adler to Rev. E Jaffe 29 March 1897. Chief Rabbi's Letter Book 96.

<sup>233</sup> Minutes, WOHC, Archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg.

making proselytes under any presense whatsoever, nor shall any such be admitted under the jurisdiction of the Congregation, until he, or she, or they, produce legal and satisfactory credentials, from some other Congregation, where a regular Chief or Rabbi and Hebrew consistory is established, and provided he, or she, or they, are not people of colour. <sup>234</sup>

This is not the place to comment on the propensity of Jews to adopt the attitude of host communities in matters of race; and the more prominent the issue, the more notable the tendency of the Jews to make common cause with the establishment - at first. Fortunately Jews were also usually in the vanguard of those who sought to redress the problem presented by the issue.

Reference has already been made to the fact that before a proselyte can be accepted according to Jewish law the action of a *Beth Din* is required. It would be many years after the establishment of a settled community in Johannesburg before a *Beth Din* could be appointed. In the meanwhile, leaders of the early congregations were much vexed by the conduct of individual ministers not attached to any community who were prepared, no doubt for financial reward, to allow aspirant proselytes to go through the form of conversion. Eventually on 8 January 1898 a special meeting of the Committees of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation, the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation and the Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society took place, having been convened to consider how to deal with the problem of proselytes and their acceptance by

---

<sup>234</sup> Abraham Shusterman, "The Last Two Centuries" in D M Eichhorn (ed.), *Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis*, New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1965.

unauthorised persons. It is clear from the discussions as recorded that all the three congregations were against accepting proselytes in Johannesburg, an attitude which was to continue for nearly a quarter of a century. The following resolution was passed unanimously:

That proselytes made in South Africa by an ecclesiastical authority (or *Beth Din*) not recognised by the three Congregations at present existing in Johannesburg, viz. the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation and the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, be not admitted to any privileges appertaining to members of the Jewish faith and that none such be recognised as Jews in any way, and the Committees here at present assembled bind themselves to submit this resolution to the members of their respective congregations in order to get same adopted, and form part of the by-laws of such congregations.<sup>235</sup>

The *Chevra Kadisha* (Burial Society), represented at the meeting, was requested to ensure that no person who had been converted in contravention of the resolution could be buried in the Jewish cemetery other than in a specially allocated plot without participation of any official minister. The records show that from time to time applications were received from would-be proselytes that these were invariably referred to the Chief Rabbinate in London. However, an investigation as to the character of the applicant was always made and on occasions the congregations would pass amongst themselves information regarding applications which they had received to see whether anyone could throw light on the applicant.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Minutes, Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 8 January 1898.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, *passim*

A letter written by the Secretary of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation on 13 July 1903 to a non-Jew who sought admission to the faith, provides a typical example of the response which such applications evoked. If only for its elegant language and elevated sentiments, it deserves to be quoted in full:

Your letter of the 1st instant addressed to the Committee of the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation has been placed in my hands to answer. Your request therein 'to become a member of the Jewish religion on account of having married a Jewish lady' has the earnest consideration of my Committee.

As you are doubtless aware it has never been the desire or endeavour of people of the Jewish faith to make proselytes to their creed as they look upon their religion as bestowing the purity of race upon its members. If however, circumstances arise which make a non-Jew earnestly desirous of enhancing the faith of our forefathers, consent is only given provided the Jewish Authorities are fully satisfied that the would-be proselyte has thought the matter over and has firmly and sincerely resolved upon his wish to become a Jew to all intents and purposes for the rest of his life.

In taking this step it should be borne in mind that the Jew, besides being in the minority amongst the religious bodies of the world, has also to bear many disadvantages arising from the ancient nature of his faith, and the consequent intolerance of opposing religions. Jews however in this and other enlightened countries may not feel at any disadvantage but they do feel in their hearts a true sympathy for their brethren who suffer in other part. To a true Jew his own faith is very dear and he is loath to allow anyone to enter into the sacred covenant and bond of Abraham whose heart cannot beat in unison with his in upholding the faith.

Before we can thoroughly think out your application with a view to granting your request we would like you to give the matter your heartfelt thought and consideration and if you are fully prepared to become a Jew activated by motives of affection for the faith and with a determination to remain a Jew come what may betide you, I shall be glad to get your answer to that effect and will place it before my Committee.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>237</sup> Congregational Archives, S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg.

The unified approach in Johannesburg described above was however not maintained and in the first decade of the century much anxiety and controversy was occasioned by the fact that each congregation was going its own way. As early as 1905 the SAJC wrote in an editorial:

There are three recognised congregations who for all purposes of ecclesiastical control and conduct are entirely independent and autonomous. Each Rabbi can decide for himself who to admit as a convert subject only to the control of his own committee. Attempts are being made to form a unified central body on conversions just as the *Chevra Kadisha* serves the whole community.<sup>238</sup>

The attempts to form a central body did not succeed. In May 1906 the SAJC again called for a "unified approach to proselytism" and "one Beth Din for the Transvaal representing Jewish ideas and opinions for the whole colony."<sup>239</sup> A year later the SAJC published an editorial headed "The question of proselytism". It was based upon a report submitted to his congregation by Rabbi Landau who explained that under the present system "a would-be Jew or Jewess could hawk their [*sic*] proposed adhesion to Judaism from Rabbi to Rabbi." The SAJC again called for a united approach to the problem and claimed to know of "instances where anxiety to accept a large monetary donation in support of the finances of the synagogue have led them to accept the proselyte refused by another synagogue." In the same editorial the journal commented on the problem of proselytism with the "tendency to intermarriage [which is] more prevalent now than ever before in Transvaal Jewry."<sup>240</sup> This reference to

---

<sup>238</sup> 29 December 1905

<sup>239</sup> 4 May 1906

<sup>240</sup> 3 May 1907.

intermarriage with the suggestion that it is when the integrity of the community is perceived to be in danger that ranks are closed against the proselyte, supports the contention that there is an inverse relationship between proselytism and communal self-confidence. It will reappear in the South African context.

Hertz and Landau both made public statements from time to time on this issue, and the writings of both are replete with references to it. It is Landau who occasionally exhibits a somewhat more relaxed, but never indulgent, attitude. In his report to the 1906 Annual General Meeting of his congregation, he states: "Proselytism occasionally has to be resorted to in order to bring happiness into homes which may otherwise remain divided and since the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire sanctions it in London I would not refuse it in South Africa." He added, however, that in the year under review there had been only three cases of converts being received into Judaism under his auspices, one of whom had been a lad of 17 years.<sup>241</sup>

In a sermon preached some years later Landau, arguing that the overwhelming majority of applicants for conversion were actuated only by the desire to marry Jews, demonstrated the dilemma facing the rabbi in dealing with the two attitudes that had divided the community into two camps. The one demands the admission of those would-be proselytes through suspect of insincerity; the other demands absolute rejection, regardless of any extenuating

---

<sup>241</sup> Report of the Rabbi contained in the printed Annual Report of the Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation submitted to the Annual General Meeting 1906.

circumstances. Both sections are actuated by one and the same reason; the salvation of children. "Admit the stranger" pleads the one "in order to save my child." "Reject the stranger" insists the other "that this bad example may not affect my child. Which course should the Rabbi, which the community, adopt."<sup>242</sup>

Hertz in his 1906 report, adopted a more stringent tone: "Our Law prohibits all cases of conversion not due to absolutely disinterested motives ... in the formative period of this community when the tide of inter-marriage seriously threatened Jewish home life in this country, it was the vigorous carrying out of this Law which alone saved us ... every time we accept a proselyte because of a marriage contemplated or already entered into, we directly and invariably encourage new cases of inter-marriage."<sup>243</sup>

There were few illusions as to the reasons motivating most converts to Judaism, and this was the cause of much of the antagonism which the local Rabbinate displayed at this time (as contrasted with the later approach which we will examine). In 1910 Rabbi Landau devoted a sermon to the subject which was published in detail by the SAJC to whom he had obviously made his notes available. The Rabbi was at pains to point out that

---

<sup>242</sup> J L Landau, *Judaism Ancient and Modern*, London, Edward Goldston Ltd., 1936.

<sup>243</sup> Report of the Rabbi contained in the printed Annual Report of the WOHC submitted in the Annual General Meeting, 1906.

Judaism does not object to proselytism and that "those sayings which condemn the admission of strangers to our faith originate from a time when every proselyte brought disaster upon the Jewish community, when both decaying Rome and growing Christianity resented every effort to convert one of their people to the Jewish faith. Then was 'a proselyte to Israel as bad as a sore on the skin'" (a clear reference to and gloss on R Helbo's dictum quoted above). A proposed proselyte had to be "prompted by convincing reasons affecting his innermost beliefs, his moral happiness." Rabbi Landau made it quite clear that the desire for marriage was an unacceptable reason. <sup>244</sup>

But the opponents of conversion were fighting a losing battle and there was a continuous and growing stream of applicants for conversion, the preponderant majority of whom were young ladies who wished to become converted in order to marry Jews. Despite the strictures of the Rabbinate who continued to hold that such a motivation was insincere and insufficient to meet the criteria of orthodox Judaism, some comfort must surely have been found in the related facts that the ladies concerned were prepared to embrace the Jewish faith and abandon what must have been, at least in some cases, seriously held convictions; that the young men were willing, indeed insistent, to require such a step rather than abandon their adherence to their religion by contracting out of community entirely; and perhaps more importantly in the long run that the children of these marriages would continue to be Jews. These considerations together with the further

---

<sup>244</sup> SAJC, 4 February 1910

circumstance that the Jewish population was growing in numbers<sup>245</sup> and stature and confidence<sup>246</sup> (thus meeting the criterion to which reference has already been made) inevitably meant that there would be, as indeed there was, a certain softening of attitudes; indeed the position was eventually reached where today, as we shall see, an intended marriage to a Jew is almost seen as a positive factor, if not an absolute requirement, to the acceptance of a proselyte.

But the change came slowly. One harbinger of the new approach was to be found in the 1924 report of Landau, by then Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation, to his congregation. Reluctantly, if not resentfully, he noted that the efforts of the community not to receive converts "unless under exceptional circumstances" had often been neutralised by two circumstances: firstly, that wealthy people could afford to send intended converts overseas to achieve conversion, and secondly, that local unauthorised individuals were making proselytes who "claim and receive all communal privileges."<sup>247</sup> He reported that he had

---

<sup>245</sup> From some 10 000 in 1890 to over 70 000 in 1926. See Dubb, *Jewish South Africans*.

<sup>246</sup> By 1929 there were records of 208 Jewish communal organisations in South Africa - including the large national organisations such as the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the South African Zionist Federation, the synagogues and Hebrew Congregations, Zionist societies, cultural groups, youth movements, *landsmanschaften*, etc. See M de Saxe and I M Goodman (eds.) *The South African Jewish Year Book 1929*, Johannesburg, S.A. Jewish Historical Society.

<sup>247</sup> Report of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Transvaal, printed in the 9th Annual Report of the Congregation for the year ended 30 March 1924.

convened another meeting to discuss the problem and one of his ideas was to ask overseas communities not to make proselytes of South Africans without the consent of the South African Jewish authorities. Landau also referred to the weight to be attached to marriage, contemplated or already performed, in approaching applications for conversion. He said that in principle, Judaism was not opposed to accepting converts, but referred to the need for "absolute sincerity and unshaken faith", adding that a desired marriage was not sufficient reason.

Eventually it became borne on the religious authorities that the realities of the situation dictated that the vast majority of the applicants for conversion were those who wished to marry Jews. This was indeed virtually conceded in a report on proselytism issued by the United Hebrew Congregation, with Landau's support and approval, as late as 1925.

The following year the 10th annual report of the United Hebrew Congregation contained the following item:

Proselytes. The policy of the congregation and of the local Jewish community in general has been to discountenance proselytes and for years all applicants have been indiscriminately refused, but it has been forcibly brought home to your Council that it is not only impracticable and unjust but also contrary to the Jewish law to close the door entirely to all, including genuine and deserving applicants to the Jewish faith. The injustice and futility of declining to consider any application regardless of their [sic] merit is evident when it is found that the people who are refused consideration in South Africa, proceed to London and other European cities where they find very little difficulty in entering the Jewish fold. This in practice means that only the poor applicants who cannot afford to travel overseas are precluded by local obstinate refusal to consider cases of any description. The Council therefore recently converted three ladies after full investigation and the consent of

Chief Rabbi Landau with the approval of Rabbi M Freedman.<sup>248</sup>

In the following year (1926) the draft by-laws of the proposed Federation of Synagogues set out rules which would govern the acceptance of proselytes. These included requiring favourable reports from the advisory board appointed for the purpose; a two-thirds majority vote of the Executive in favour of the application; that applicants had to have "unimpeachable antecedents" (whatever that may mean) and that communal privileges would only be extended to people converted under the auspices of the Federation.<sup>249</sup>

On 27 July 1930 the S A Jewish Board of Deputies resolved "That a commission be appointed to investigate, take evidence and report upon the law relating to proselytism and its administration in South Africa and make recommendations in regard to the administration for submission to the Board."<sup>250</sup> A number of important communal leaders were appointed to the commission. Diligent search had not yet brought to light the final report of that commission or even whether one was presented but at the 9th National Congress of the Board held at Bloemfontein in January 1932 an interim report was tabled.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 10th Annual Report 1925.

<sup>249</sup> Draft Bye Laws. Federation of Synagogues, 1926, in the archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg.

<sup>250</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Minutes, 27 July 1930.

<sup>251</sup> Printed Report submitted to the 9th National Congress, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, January 1932.

This interim report contains virtually nothing which has not already been noted in this study; the need for a unified approach to prevent "pirate" conversions (which was associated with the call for a United Beth Din); the setting aside of the cemetery for people of mixed marriages which was intended to have some influence on deterring people from contracting such marriages and the question as to the extent if at all to which intended marriage should be a bar to conversion. In discussing the work of the commission, Rabbi Landau was now prepared to go on public record by saying "that the door should not be closed to converts" but was still opposed to accepting proselytes whose only object was marriage. One of the members of the commission, the President of the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation stated that he had been 40 years in South Africa "and had never seen a *Ger Tsedek* - a proselyte to Judaism because of religious conviction." It was decided that the commission would continue its work in other parts of South Africa.

Whatever report may have eventually been received by the Board of Deputies, it is clear that by this time the principle had been established that proselytes were being accepted by the South African religious authorities on merit and the desire for marriage would be no bar. From that time onwards there has been a gradual pragmatic adaptation to the need and wishes of the community, bearing in mind that here have been two organised strands in the religious composition of the community since the

establishment of the Reform movement in 1933.<sup>252</sup>

---

<sup>252</sup> It is interesting at this point to compare the situation prevailing in Australia at about the same period which we have hitherto been examining. Proselytism in that territory has been described as a "fundamental and seemingly insoluble issue dominating Jewish religious public life from 1851 to 1920". Here again we find a community, perceiving itself weak, threatened by intermarriage and therefore wishing to "discourage it by making conversion extremely difficult, drawn out and subject to rigorous tests of religious sincerity and estimations of the likelihood of ritual performance after conversion. See Elazer with Medding, *op. cit.*, p.265.

## CHAPTER SIX

SOME FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
SOUTH AFRICAN JUDAISM

Writing of the Dutch settlers at the Cape in the seventeenth century, Noel Mostert noted that after just two or three generations in South Africa, the settlers scarcely retained a shadow of their European heritage. More than in any other colonial settlement the South African colonists "thoroughly and irrevocably [severed] themselves from the culture and civilization, the habits of thought and expression, the ritual institutional obedience and industry of their forefathers". There was no room in the imaginations of African colonials for what this author called "inherited nostalgia".<sup>253</sup>

This description differs so vastly from the experience of Jewish immigrants to South Africa that any historian of the community must concentrate on trying to identify all the influences and characteristics leading to the community maintaining its "inherited nostalgia" and its "institutional obedience" while at the same time establishing itself as an integral and growing part of the new society.

It was in his synagogue that the new South African Jew would be

---

<sup>253</sup> Noel Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1992, p.163.

expected to feel closest to his Jewish roots.<sup>254</sup> The liturgy followed in all South African synagogues was taken over almost entirely from the English *Minhag*. It must be remembered that all over the world there was little variation in orthodox liturgy and so even Jews from Eastern Europe would have little difficulty in adjusting themselves to the services conducted by ministers trained in or appointed from London. Almost invariably the Singer prayer book<sup>255</sup> was used. Except for those who might have brought festival prayer books with them from Europe, it was the so-called "*Routledge Machzor*"<sup>256</sup> which was usually purchased and

---

<sup>254</sup> The phrase "in his synagogue" is by no means synonymous with "whilst praying". No observer of South African Jewry will fail to recognise the comments of one recent writer: "One of the enduring sociological puzzles about the modern Orthodox synagogue has been the remarkable capacity of its users to engage in a variety of non-prayer-oriented involvements during the course of the prayer service, without ever calling into question the basic definition of their situation as being one of prayer ... They may, for example, pray fervently at one moment, become engaged in a heated discussion about real estate at the next, find themselves caught up in the unravelling of a biblical text at another moment, lost in reverie later, singing in chorus, joking gossiping, or collecting charity pledges at other times, and so on." Samuel C Heilman, "Prayer in the Orthodox Synagogue: An Analysis of Ritual Display", in *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 6 No. 1 Spring/Summer 1982.

<sup>255</sup> The first edition of this famous prayer book was issued in London in 1890, *sub. nom.* *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregation of the British Commonwealth of Nations*. It was prepared under the authority of Chief Rabbi Dr N M Adler, who died before its publication. The English translation by Rev. Simeon Singer, hence the cognomen *The Singer Siddur* by which it has been known to generations of worshippers in the English speaking world. It has gone through scores of re-issues, re-printings and new editions.

<sup>256</sup> The first edition of this work appeared in 1904 under the authority of Chief Rabbi Dr Herman Adler. Like the *Singer Siddur* it was widely, indeed almost exclusively, used by "Anglicised" congregations. It takes the name by which it was generally known from the publishers George Routledge and Sons Ltd. A feature of this publication was the translation into poetic English (often in rhyme) of many of the *piyutim* (Liturgical poems). Ironically, one of the features of the

used by South African Jews. For more than a century South African *Barmitzvah* boys recited the *Barmitzvah* prayer composed by Adler. Before Herman Adler became delegate Chief Rabbi, he was for many years Minister of the Bayswater Synagogue. Whenever possible he urged the South African congregations to follow the customs and style of that congregation.<sup>257</sup>

As in the Cape, so in the Eastern Province, centred mainly in Grahamstown and later Port Elizabeth as also in Kimberley, one finds the English influence in liturgy and mores. This influence throughout the Cape was to be affected and the early settlers were to be perplexed, perturbed and ultimately displaced by an entirely different type of Jew who began to settle in South Africa in the later decades of the 19th century.

It can hardly be denied that the influence of religious life and religious practice was predominant in ensuring that the Jews maintained their identity and their links with their forefathers both in time and space. The manner in which this religious influence was brought to bear and the various strands which led

---

services in most synagogues where "English" customs prevailed was to omit these *piyutim* from the liturgy.

<sup>257</sup> See for example the advice of Chief Rabbi H Adler to the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation that they should "model their congregational affairs and mode of worship on the Bayswater Synagogue which is conducted on Orthodox lines and crowded every Sabbath with a congregation of intellectual men and highly cultured women". Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 96. Letter 3842, 24 November 1885. Similarly, when Chief Rabbi Hertz was asked by the Oudtshoorn Hebrew Congregation to send them a supply of "Valentine" *siddurim* (which had no English translation) he recommended and directed that they should rather adopt the "Singer" *Siddur* (see note No. 249 above). See Hertz Papers, Anglo-Jewish Archives, 112/20, (Southampton University).

to its make-up repay study.

It is not surprising therefore that when the Cape Town community assumed an organisational framework in 1841, the fledgling congregation looked to the Chief Rabbinate in London for guidance and direction in liturgical and spiritual matters. Both in the formal sense and in practical matters the Chief Rabbinate directed the community. It would not be long, however, before the new infant began to assume some of the semblance of an *enfant terrible*.

A brief comparison of the salient dates is useful to illustrate how the development of the position of the Chief Rabbi in England over the last one and a half centuries related to the development of the South African community. The term of office of Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschell (1802 - 1842) came to an end just after the establishment of the first congregation in Cape Town. He therefore had little, if any, impact on the infant community but the community of barely twenty families nonetheless made offerings to charity when the news of his death reached Cape Town in 1843.<sup>258</sup>

The term of office of Nathan Marcus Adler commenced in 1843. By 1879 his failing health necessitated the appointment of his son, Herman Adler, as "delegate Chief Rabbi". Herman Adler's own term of office as Chief Rabbi commenced in 1891 and terminated with his death in 1911. During the time that Nathan Adler was in

---

<sup>258</sup> CTHC, Minute Book 1. p.23. Minute dated 5 February 1843.

active control, the South African community consisted of no more than the Cape Town congregation and a scattering of small communities in isolated country areas. It was whilst Herman Adler held the reins of office, first as delegate Chief Rabbi from 1879 and then as Chief Rabbi in his own right from 1891, that the community grew, developed and expanded, in particular in Kimberley following the discovery of diamonds in 1869 and in Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand generally following the discovery of gold in the 1880's. In addition, as is well known, substantial numbers of Jewish immigrants came to South Africa from Eastern Europe in the wake of the increase of anti-semitism and pogroms in Russia following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881. It was during the Herman Adler years that the influence of the Chief Rabbinate grew and reached its apogee.

The impact of the office of Chief Rabbi waxed and waned partly because there was never any constitutional or formal component in the relationship and also because of the demographic changes which took place in the community. The Chief Rabbi exercised a moral authority but only over those who were voluntarily willing to submit themselves to such authority. So it was that from the very beginning the Cape Town Hebrew congregation, the mother congregation of South Africa, submitted itself to the authority of the Chief Rabbi, appointed ministers proposed and recommended by him, deferred to his decisions and sought his direction but it was not long before tensions arose in the tiny congregation and these related precisely to issues upon which the malcontents would not accept the authority of the Chief Rabbi.

Given that the Chief Rabbinate was, as we have seen, a typical English institution which presided over an ecclesiastical dispensation largely fashioned on the Anglican Church and which was therefore shot through and through with English customs and practices, one can understand how it was that the Jews of the Cape Colony adjusted without difficulty to this control from London. Yet we find that even in the robust and less polished atmosphere of the Transvaal the measured tones of Imperialism even if expressed in the Jewish idiom, held sway. In fact the Chief Rabbi's letterbooks and correspondence files reveal that by 1894 correspondence with Johannesburg had become much more frequent than with Cape Town. The size of the growing Jewish community on the Witwatersrand in turn meant that new problems would be encountered with increasing frequency about such matters as divorce, conversion, funeral customs and the like. All this meant an increasing need for guidance from London; guidance which was needed just as much in the Transvaal Republic as in the Cape Colony.

This "little imperialism" attained perhaps its apogee when after the proclamation of the South African Republic by the Boers under President Paul Kruger, Adler asked the following question of a Minister in the Transvaal; Reverend Wolfers as follows:

Please inform me for whom you pray in the *Hanotein T-Shuah* the Transvaal not forming part of the British Empire? <sup>259</sup>

---

<sup>259</sup> Chief Rabbinate records, File G. Letter to Rev. P Wolfers, 31 October 1889. The *Ha-notein t'Shuah* (the words appear in Hebrew script in the original, and would of course have been pronounced by Adler and Wolfers in *Ashkenazi* pronunciation *Hanosein t'Shu-oh*) is, as is well known, the traditional prayer for the Head of State printed in all prayerbooks, not only those

The Chief Rabbis' influence in South Africa might have been stronger and lasted longer had they had a more sympathetic understanding of the ever increasing numbers of South African Jews of Eastern European background and their particular requirements and inclinations. In 1888 there was a schism in Johannesburg not unlike that which was seen in Cape Town. Chief Rabbi Adler wrote to one of the lay leaders discussing the proposed formation of another congregation which "would have benefited those Hebrew residents who are less cultured and unhappily less strict in their commercial dealings".<sup>260</sup> Examples of similar slighting references to Jews of Eastern European background are legion.<sup>261</sup>

Chief Rabbi Adler was clearly aware of the problems occasioned by the differing backgrounds of the two elements. He left a letter which he directed to be opened after his death and in which he made recommendations as to the sort of personality who should be chosen to succeed him. Such a successor, wrote the Chief Rabbi, should amongst his other qualities be one who would be "equally acceptable in the east and the west ... preserve a good and cordial understanding between the east and the west, the native and the immigrant." The Chief Rabbi sadly noted "the great difficulty of meeting with such a person."<sup>262</sup>

---

used by English speakers.

<sup>260</sup> Chief Rabbinate Records File C.

<sup>261</sup> See for example *SAJC*, 27 November 1903, 25 March 1904; 11 November 1921 and *passim*.

<sup>262</sup> *SAJC*, 18 August 1911.

at the way in which this brochure dared to proclaim Landau as Chief Rabbi without limiting him to his own bailiwick. Hertz in his reply was sympathetic towards those who were protesting.<sup>265</sup> When the book finally appeared Landau was described as "Chief Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues of the Witwatersrand".

But the issue was not laid to rest, the anti Landau faction stressing the limitation of his authority and the Rabbi's supporters doing everything possible to add to his dignity. In fairness to Landau he never laid claim to a dignity or authority which he did not possess.

One should note that in years to come we would find Rabbi L I Rabinowitz as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation of the Transvaal and Rabbi I Abrahams as Chief Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations of the Western Cape and South West Africa. In due course there would also be various senior Rabbis and senior ministers appointed by the Reform Congregation. South African Jewry never exceeded 120 000 souls!

There was one circumstance pertaining to the role of Anglo Jewry which in a strange way created a reverse reaction in South Africa. In an article on the status of the Anglo Jewish Rabbinate, Michael Goulston examined the inferior status enjoyed by Jewish Ministers as a combined effect of the autocracy exercised by the Chief Rabbinate and the ignorance and imprudent

---

<sup>265</sup> A M Jackson to Hertz 15 June 1928 and 22 June 1928. Hertz to Jackson 10 July 1928. Chief Rabbinate Records File "C".

conduct of the lay leadership.<sup>266</sup> There was to emerge in reaction to this "opposition" a new generation of Ministers, often the sons of those who had suffered under the previous regime, who were determined no longer to endure the slights and inferior treatment not to mention inadequate remuneration meted out to their forebears. L I Rabinowitz in the Transvaal and Israel Abrahams in the Cape were exemplars of this new generation. Indeed some of their congregants considered that these incumbents had permitted the pendulum to swing too far the other way and that they and their communities might have benefited had they shown a little more of the human touch, but there can be no doubt that they were inspiring preachers, teachers and administrators, powerful personalities who wielded a strong influence on their communities in religious and social matters, an influence which was mainly to the good and helped to maintain a vibrant and homogenous community.

One of the important spheres in which Rabinowitz and Abrahams respectively exercised an influence on the South African community was in the important part that Zionism played in the community.<sup>267</sup> Zionism as an intellectual exercise, a programme of action and an organisational activity, was taken up very early

---

<sup>266</sup> Michael Goulston, "The Status of the Anglo-Jewish Rabbinate", in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 10 No. 1 June 1968.

<sup>267</sup> See in this regard G Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910 - 1967*, Cape Town, Oxford University Press 1980.

in South Africa.<sup>268</sup> Indeed there may be some argument to be advanced that the comparatively late arrival in South Africa of the Reform Movement had something to do with the Zionist enthusiasm prevailing in South Africa and the fact that in the early years Zionism was largely absent from and in some cases totally opposed by the Reform programme.<sup>269</sup> In the opinion of Gideon Shimoni:

It is doubtful whether even Rabbi M. C. Weiler, [distinguished founder of Reform in South Africa] would have succeeded in establishing a viable Reform Judaism in South Africa, were it not for his unimpeachable Zionist credentials.<sup>270</sup>

It was at one time thought that the two sections of the community, those of English origin and those of Eastern European origin were on opposite sides of the Zionist platform, that the entire English section was "anti Zionist". This is fallacious. In fact many prominent members of the Zionist movement were of English background and because of their administrative and organisational skills were highly valued by their colleagues whose organisational ability did not perhaps match their Zionist

---

<sup>268</sup> For the early development of the Zionist movement in South Africa, see Marcia Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism*, Johannesburg, Menorah Book Club, 1950.

<sup>269</sup> Two letters from David Dainow, editor of the *South African Zionist Record* to Miss Lilian Montague dated 2 May 1930 and 4 June 1930 deprecate the "anti-Zionist attitude of Rabbi Mattuck [which] has incensed South African Jewry against the [Reform] movement; and urge the World Union for Progressive Judaism to send as an emissary "Rev. Perlsweig ... a Jewish nationalist (*sic*). The letters are in the Archives of the World Union.

<sup>270</sup> Shimoni, *op. cit.*, p.50.

fervour.<sup>271</sup>

To quote Shimoni once again:

Upon examining the [South African Zionist] Movements seminal years it becomes evident that it is owed a great deal to a number of prominent personalities who were either English-born or Anglicised Jews of German origin and who appear to have been Zionists from the outset."<sup>272</sup>

It must be said however, that it was only after the Balfour Declaration of 1917 made Zionism respectable in English eyes that many elements of the community became enthusiastic Zionists. Bender was a good example of this.<sup>273</sup> A convinced Anglophile, he believed that true emancipation and equality were assured under British rule and regarded Zionism as a misleading illusion. After the Balfour Declaration however, he enthusiastically embraced the cause until he became known as "a veritable pillar of strength" and allowed his congregation to affiliate to the South African Zionist Federation.<sup>274</sup>

The fact of the matter is that Zionism was part of the warp and weft of Jewish communal life in South Africa. The Rabbinate

<sup>271</sup> Jocelyn Hellig has suggested that South African Jews of Lithuanian descent were inclined to express their identity through Zionism rather than through conventional religious forms. See for example, her unpublished paper, "South African Jewish Orthodoxy: A Model for Survival?" delivered at a Conference of the Council of the World's Religions, Hertenstein, Switzerland, August 1985.

<sup>272</sup> Shimoni *op. cit.* p.19.

<sup>273</sup> In 1903 he urged the acceptance of the Uganda offer "If only", he said "the Russian leaders would give up the vain struggle for the impossible" (*SAJC* 10 July 1903). A few months later he warned that bloodshed would follow in Palestine "if the Zionists appear on the scene". (*Ibid*, 11 September 1903)

<sup>274</sup> *S A Zionist Record*, 17 September 1926.

preached the Zionist message on all appropriate occasions and the *Kolboiniks* in their halls and *cheder* rooms always paid great attention to those festivals having a national theme. Posters illustrating the work of the Jewish National Fund, for example, and many other Zionist institutions and celebrations were the standard decorations of Jewish communal halls throughout South Africa.

Not the least factor which has influenced the way in which the South African Jewish community developed was its far removal from the mainstream of Jewish life and the long distances within the country itself. Europe, America and Palestine were far away and it is only in recent decades that modern technology made it easier to communicate across the continents. There were long distances within the territory itself and the community developed no local *Yeshivot* or other centres of Jewish learning. There was never a recognised central authority. Fully one quarter of South African Jews lived outside the two main cities. It was inevitable therefore that certain particular nuances or emphases would develop and some of these have been recognised in *Responsa* which were issued to questions addressed by South African Ministers to their overseas colleagues.<sup>275</sup>

On more than one occasion it was found possible to give lenient rulings for the stated reason that the local circumstances

---

<sup>275</sup> A collection of such *Responsa* taken from the *Responsa* computer project of Bar-Ilan University are described, summarised and analyzed in my article "Responsa and Rulings Reflecting some South African Issues", in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 36 No. 1 June 1994.

justified this. It is clear from at least one *Responsum* that South African Jews were generally considered to be lax in their observance of religious precepts.

In 1922 the eminent scholar of Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (1863-1940) was asked whether the fact that the witnesses to a *get* (one of whom was a shopkeeper and the other a tavernkeeper) publicly desecrated the Sabbath by keeping their respective establishments open on Saturdays, would invalidate the *get*. His ruling was that the *get* was valid and he gave the following explanation:

Since desecration of the Sabbath is so common in that place and virtually no one sees any prohibition in opening a business on the Sabbath, the witness is not disqualified since he is not aware that he has done an act which disqualifies him.<sup>276</sup>

Another *Responsum* which has regard to the circumstances of the place is from Rabbi Waldenberg who permitted boys under the age of thirteen who were being prepared for their barmitzvah to be taught on the sabbath how to lay *t'fillin*. He commented in 1964:

the teacher from Johannesburg may teach these youngsters who have no other opportunity to learn how to put on tephillin even on a Sabbath ... . This ruling is made taking into consideration the special circumstances of the children in the diaspora who are forced by law to spend their week studying the curriculum of the public schools.<sup>277</sup>

Other rulings which have been affected by South African circumstances relate to permission being granted to deliver a *get* to a woman living far away in South West Africa by registered post because of the near impossibility of finding messengers to

---

<sup>276</sup> *Ahiezer* Part 3 Chapter 25.

<sup>277</sup> *Tzitz Eliezer* Vol. 1 Chapter 5.

deliver it by hand;<sup>278</sup> and a fascinating case referred to in 1897 by Chief Rabbi Adler but also referred to as a contemporary issue by Rabbi Mirvish of permission being given to a happily married couple to become divorced. The husband was on his deathbed, they had no children and because he had brothers living in America and Russia from whom the widow would find it virtually impossible to obtain *chalitza*, and she would therefore be compelled to live as an *agunah*.

In a lenient Responsum Rav Kook stated that the preferred course was for the wife to be given a *get* so there would be no risk of her becoming an *agunah* but he added that if the husband were to recover then he and his wife would have to be prudent and discreet about their future life together.<sup>279</sup>

There is no evidence whatever to be found of any disparity of any substantial nature between the way in which services were conducted in any South African synagogue in the period under review. The *Minhag* (custom) was that observed for at least two centuries in the Ashkenazi communities<sup>280</sup> of Central and Eastern Europe and taken over in Great Britain and the Commonwealth as also in the United States of America. Such minor variations might include: whether the *Chazan* intoned the "*Hineni*" prayer

---

<sup>278</sup> M C Mirvish, *D'roshei ve-Shut ha-Ramach*, Cape Town, 1935 (Hebrew).

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>280</sup> Clause 1 of the Constitution of the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation specifically provides: "The ritual during the religious services shall be the *Minhag Ashkenaz*".

before commencing the *Musaf* services on the High Holy days; the extent to which references to the *Korbanot* (rituals connected with sacrifice in Temple times) were incorporated into the liturgy; whether or not *Ma'aravot* (scriptural quotations) were incorporated into the services of the High Holy days and festivals and the amount of English which was incorporated into the services. In the nature of things, it is impossible to trace written records to support these assertions. Congregations would not preserve in their committee minutes or elsewhere records of these minor variations in the services, particularly where the practice in one congregation might vary from season to season or year to year, according to the current inclination (or whim?) of the incumbent Rabbi or Cantor. This writer has for years made it a practice to seek information on these matters from Rabbis and senior congregants of many communities and I am satisfied that this is the correct reflection of the position.<sup>281</sup>

It was not only in the synagogue liturgy itself where matters of ritual arose. Other occasions in life presented themselves where accommodation had to be allowed. The whole question of custom and ritual relating to death, burial and mourning was one which often presented problems. Jewish tradition eschews wreaths and floral tributes and funerals; but how was a Rabbi to deal with a situation where non-Jewish friends of an eminent deceased Jew wished to show their respect in the manner customary to them, i.e. by the delivery of wreaths to a funeral? Not infrequently

---

<sup>281</sup> I would mention with particular appreciation useful discussions which I have had on these matters with Rabbi Dr D Isaacs of Johannesburg.

the report of large funerals would include a reference to the presence of wreaths. Again the manner in which expressions of comfort and sympathy were to be extended to the mourners sometimes occasioned comment. The custom in Eastern Europe was that friends attending the *shivah* house<sup>282</sup> would merely take their seats in silence perhaps murmuring appropriate scriptural passage or *talmudic* comment. Rabbi L Kossowsky strongly disapproved of the custom of friends clustering round the mourners with embraces and kisses and uttering the conventional expression "I wish you long life". He was eventually persuaded to withdraw any prohibition against this widespread custom, but he said that did so under protest in order to avoid embarrassment to the mourners.<sup>283</sup>

From time to time minor controversies would arise as to the need for updating (the word "Reform" aroused heated emotions and most correspondents preferred to avoid it). An editorial in the *SAJC* of the 10 November 1905 referring to the consecration of the Doornfontein Synagogue which was about to take place was instructive. The writer pointed out that the traditional *Machzor* and *Siddur* continued to be used in the new synagogue which was perceived as being for more traditionally inclined congregants. "Anyone who wished to follow the service will find all that he requires in the old fashioned *Siddur* and *Machzor* with or without English translation ... the principle is curtailed ... because

---

<sup>282</sup> The term applied to the house where mourners are observing the seven day period of mourning for a close relative enjoined by Jewish religious law.

<sup>283</sup> Information from Rabbi Dr D Isaacs.

the only efforts so to speak in its excrescences and has not been attacked in any vital part. In other words, there has been no talk in Johannesburg to omitting reference to sacrifice which was the first step taken by Reform Congregations in Germany, England and America." The writer went on to compare the four "modern" congregations of Johannesburg, specifically the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation, the Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation, Jeppestown and Doornfontein with what had taken place in the United Synagogue in London and to point out that they maintained some degree of orthodoxy. The editorial went on to trace the importance of the English sermon as an important factor in maintaining orthodoxy in both Johannesburg and the United Synagogue.

A large number of able men, including most preachers in England and all up to now in South Africa have adopted a policy of compromise and reconciliation which so far has been successful. Without insisting so strongly on orthodoxy as to alienate the younger generation, they yet stay clear of Reform and avoided any reference in the services that might be taken as compromising the foundations of traditional Judaism.<sup>284</sup>

From Port Elizabeth in 1908 there came a call for more radical revision. The President of the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation contributed to the journal an article entitled "Does our synagogue services need revision". He refers to obsolete prayers, refers to sacrifices which are out of date, *piyutim* which are inappropriate and generally called for modernisation of the services.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>284</sup> SAJC, 10 November 1905.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, 19 April 1908.

The uniformity which was to be found in the services in almost all synagogues is the more interesting in that there was seldom lacking in the Jewish press and in the community generally those who argued for updating and revision of services. This makes it all the more significant that those who were responsible for the synagogue administration and the way in which the services were conducted, the Rabbis, the Cantors and the lay leaders by and large remained firm against any substantial change.<sup>286</sup>

Having considered the form of services, another matter which repays examination, is the question of attendances at services. On this subject there were fairly substantial variations from time to time and from place to place and from congregation to congregation. The SAJC on the 27 October 1905 pointed out with satisfaction that on the minor festival *Hoshana Raba* not less than 60 worshippers had attended the Park Synagogue having between them having some 14 *Lulavim* and that "these were not new immigrants fresh from Russia, but for the most part old established residents of this city". The writer went on to point out that even on occasions such as *Purim* and *Tisha B'av*, one finds "quite a respectable nucleus" in the synagogue. By and

---

<sup>286</sup> The Anglo Jewish world generally was experiencing at this time pressures and counter-pressures regarding changes in the synagogue service. For an overall examination, although focused mainly in London, see Stephen Sharot, "Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: The Synagogue service", in *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 15 No. 1, June 1973. For an examination and comment on the South African situation, see a series of articles by "Morenu Rav" in the SAJC (June; July 1907.) For arguments for and against the "reform" of services in South Africa, which are typical of the debate, see article and correspondence in SAJC, 22 November 1929, 29 November 1929; 6 December 1929.

large, failure of most Jews to attend religious services other than on certain occasions is a recurring theme.

Those occasions upon which the synagogue was invariably crowded and a large congregation required overflow services were *Yom Kippur*, particularly *Kol Nidre* and *Yiskor* and *Neilah*; the first day of *Rosh Hashana* and to a lesser extent the first night of the so-called Pilgrim festivals. *Chanukah* was popular as having a military significance and in particular young people's groups, Jewish Boy Scout Groups and similar movements would have parades and special services on *Chanukah*. *Pesach* which celebrates the birth of Jewish nationhood became more and more popular as the Zionist movement grew and Jewish nationalism came to the fore.

The *SAJC* (on the 6 March 1908) had an editorial entitled "*Olov-Hasholem* Judaism". I am inclined to doubt that this is a first recorded use of this neat phrase. "*Olov Hasholem*" (literally "peace be upon him") is a phrase used by pious Jews when mentioning names of departed relatives, particularly parents. "*Olov Hasholem* Judaism" therefore means that type of religious observance that only involves acts of piety towards parents, including attendance at synagogues on those occasions when memorial prayers are recited and on the *Yartzeit*, the Hebrew anniversary of the death of the relative.

A plaintively worded plea is to be found in an article in the *SAJC* on the 7 June 1907 "the burden of the Rabbi's song is always the same - 'why do you not come to synagogue?' We have such

beautiful choirs, such magnificent readers, such eloquent preachers, in fact everything you could wish for ... we give services Friday night to enable you to do your work on Saturday and we carefully pay attention to the wealthy members of our community to lessen the burden on the poorer members and yet you stay away."<sup>287</sup>

This comment stands in certain contrast with the point made in an earlier editorial in the same journal. Commenting on the situation as perceived then in Johannesburg the editor noted that the great majority of congregants were thoroughly dissatisfied with the form of service. They did not understand Hebrew and derived no spiritual edification from the service. Some appreciated "the architectural embellishments and the choral attractions", but others found these a hindrance to prayer, and considered the sermons which the former found stimulating to be "dull and wearisome". The so-called "unorthodox" section (this is clearly intended to refer to the more affluent and "Anglicised" group) were said to provide the financial assistance to enable the "Hebraic people" to afford to conduct their services while at the same time these "unorthodox" sought by means of this financial assistance to "impress the imagination and win the respect of the non-Jewish world". The writer concluded by maintaining that "intense friction" arose from the yoking together of elements so essentially different."<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>287</sup> SAJC, 7 June 1907.

<sup>288</sup> SAJC, 9 February 1906.

These two editorials contain within them a host of references to what South African Jews considered important in their religious lives. The choirs, the cantors, the preachers, the Friday night services: were these indeed everything that the congregants could wish for? If superficially this would appear to trivialise religion it must yet be recalled that these Jews were in a sense extending into their religious lives the success which they were gradually coming to attain in material terms. The modest success which often advanced to affluence and sometimes to very great wealth presented an opportunity to the whole community not only to enjoy the good life in secular terms, but to experience within the synagogue more comfort and a more congenial service. The stirring sermon, the musical skills of the cantor, the grandeur of the surroundings, all these extended into synagogue life, the outer trappings of success. It is not surprising that there were many who were not attracted to the synagogue to enjoy this aspect of having "made it". On the contrary, it is noteworthy that by and large most Jews *did* carry with them into their religious lives the benefits and advantages which they had earned in the secular world. What is more, leadership in synagogue affairs was not confined to those who sought in such leadership a status and authority which they could not find elsewhere. Almost all the outstanding lay figures mentioned in this chapter also achieved success in public life.

A reference in the 1907 article warrants examination, namely, the distinction drawn between rich and poor. There was never a class division within the South African Jewish community apart from the

temporary and soon to be bridged gulf between the learned and the unlearned mentioned by Louis Mirvish and referred to in chapter two. The titled Albu's, Phillips' and Oppenheimers soon disappeared from the communal scene. Certainly in the synagogue, democracy prevailed. There may have been - there certainly was in the larger synagogues - a higher seat rental paid by those who wanted and could afford seats nearer the front. But nobody ever lacked a seat in *Shul* or access to all the religious facilities of the community for want of funds. No South African Jew could ever have been heard to utter anything like the following lament, made by a Londoner:

I am a regular attendant at one of our large synagogues. That is, I am what is styled by some of the petty officials a "squatter". I occupy, nearly all the year round, the seat of a gentleman who seldom has occasion to pray ... I pray for him - my first prayer on entering the synagogue being that he might not come there that day. For, he once had *Jahrzeit* on a Festival, and I was terribly put out when he ejected me ... . At the time of *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, of course, I cannot occupy a seat ... I am too poor to rent a seat ... . Why, then should I be shut out entirely from publicly joining in the worship of God at the most solemn time of the year merely because I have the double misfortune to be poor and religious. <sup>289</sup>

The centripetal affect of the synagogue which has been described ensured that South African Jews would on the whole be punctilious in the traditional observance of the rites of passage; do what they could to provide a modicum of Jewish education for their children; and maintain their religious institutions with dignity and their officiants with respect. But this did not make them rigorous or even particularly attentive in matters of religious observance. The clashes described in the editorial of February of 1906 quoted above would disappear within a generation; but

---

<sup>289</sup> Stephen Sharot, *op. cit.*

it was the observant who became less observant, not the other way around.<sup>290</sup>

The foregoing consideration of important elements in the way in which Judaism was practised in South Africa served to introduce another important influence on the community. Almost all these requirements, the architecture of the synagogue, the organisation of the choir, the levying of membership fees, the engagement of ministers and cantors, all fell within the responsibility of the lay leadership. The lay leaders rarely, if ever, had anything to do with the liturgy or the ritual observance. However, in the smaller communities particularly, with less forceful ministers, an enthusiastic president with some knowledge could make his views known and sometimes enforce them. But it was the laity who approved the framework within which religion was conducted.

Every congregation was established and formed by lay leaders and its principle characteristics were determined by their background and assumptions. In this regard the position in South Africa was little different to that described by one writer as having prevailed amongst early immigrants in the United States.

The Jews who cared established institutions which seemed to be exact copies of those that they had left behind in Europe. They had no other models. They therefore created synagogues in which the ritual was orthodox, along with cemeteries, facilities for the slaughter of animals for food according to the kosher ritual and *mikvaot* (ritual baths). The lay leaders of the earliest colonial synagogues behaved like their peers in Europe; they tried to enforce obedience to the ancient ways by all their members, but they failed, for unlike the authorities of the Jewish communities in the European ghettos, the Americans

---

<sup>290</sup> Dubb, *Jewish South Africans*.

had not the power to coerce.<sup>291</sup>

The lay leaders therefore played a very important part in the development of South African Judaism. Individual figures such as Mendelsohn in Johannesburg, Norden in Cape Town, Wartski in Durban, Baumann in Bloemfontein, Jackson in Port Elizabeth, all played their part in placing their stamp on their respective communities. But neither they, nor their colleagues were versed in the *Halacha* or the sources; so they may have played a part in determining what sort of architect would be engaged to design the synagogue or how to set about engaging a minister and determine his remuneration, but they had nothing to do with what prayers were recited or how to respond to the queries which led to the *responsa* mentioned earlier in this chapter. Admittedly in the smaller communities the lay leaders would conduct a more direct administration of the affairs of the congregation. They had more to do and more to say because the minister would perhaps be less assertive and there were fewer congregational officials to look after the day to day conduct of the affairs of the community.<sup>292</sup> In some of these country communities, lay leaders

---

<sup>291</sup> Hertzberg, *op. cit.* p.48.

<sup>292</sup> As to be expected, there was not unanimity of opinion about the quality of the Ministers in the smaller communities, and this must be borne in mind in considering the case of the *Kolboiniks* referred to earlier. "In the smaller congregations... the state of affairs is deplorable. There, Jews have not an atom of respect for the Minister and so as a religious force he is simply laughable", wrote Samuel Goldreich, President of the South African Zionist Federation in 1907. (*London Jewish Chronicle*, 1 March 1907). But shortly afterwards another correspondent challenged this, and maintained that these Ministers "are quite fit and efficient for their work and give entire satisfaction to their respective congregations". (*Ibid*, 10 May 1907). And another minister, serving at about the same time was described as "an... inspiring teacher [and] the cementing influence in an atmosphere which favoured disintegration and assimilation".

became all powerful, and some of them began to think that they had entrenched rights to control every aspect of the congregation. But on the whole the manner in which the responsibilities were divided between clergy and lay leadership meant that the latter provided the framework within which religion was conducted, but it was the former and mainly the few strong personalities amongst them who shaped synagogue Judaism. Because there were so few of these powerful and influential religious leaders this tended to make for uniformity, if not unity throughout the country.

In considering the position of lay leaders, something should be said about the position of women in this regard. The part that women played in Judaism comprises a separate subject of debate and is beyond the scope of this work. It should be noted however, that it was only at the end of the period covered by this dissertation that recognition was given to the status of women in the policy making area of the congregation. Within a week of each other, the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation, the two largest congregations in the Cape Province, resolved at their respective Annual General Meetings in September 1932, "by a large majority" to permit women to serve on the synagogue committee. This privilege, if privilege it was, does not appear to have been

---

(Judge Joseph Herbstein, on Rev. Wiskin of Graaff-Reinet, quoted by A Addleson in Saron and Hertz (eds.) *op. cit.*, Chapter sixteen.) The fact is that the small communities, like the larger, did not, by and large, disintegrate or assimilate: so it seems that Goldreich's minority view is not the correct one, in general.

widely exercised. Only five ladies have served on the committee of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the last of them in the 1970's. In the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation it seems that there have only been two lady committee members. Ladies, of course, have always played an important part in such congregational activities as ladies' guilds, catering, fund raising and the like, but it is a matter for comment that they tend to have avoided serving on the main policy making bodies of congregations.<sup>293</sup>

One example of an important function of the lay leadership is to be found in the part which they played in the establishment of *batei din*. A *beth din* is essential to a community which wishes to conduct its own religious administration. Divorces, conversions, *chalitzah* all require a *beth din* which must be constituted by three qualified rabbis. These are not the only functions of a *beth din*. It is also required to control *schechita*, ensuring that the ritual is properly observed and where necessary issuing certificates as to the ritual purity not only of meat products, but of all foods whose *kashrut* requires to be attested. Hertz,<sup>294</sup> Landau,<sup>295</sup> and Mirvish<sup>296</sup> had each

---

<sup>293</sup> For a fuller account of this matter, see my article "Where are our Modern Prophetesses?" in the 1994 *Rosh Hashana* Bulletin of the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation. Several of the interviews forming part of the Oral History Project in the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town refer to the involvement of women where it extended beyond the home at all, being confined to catering and fund-raising activities.

<sup>294</sup> Saron, *Unpublished notes*, p.54.

<sup>295</sup> SAJC, 25 March 1904.

in his time attempted to establish a *beth din*, but had failed because of lack of support from colleagues. It was only when the lay leadership took charge that *batei din* were properly established and remained in operation. This happened in 1915 in Johannesburg when the two principal congregations amalgamated. However, as late as 1928 Landau could report of difficulties in this connection.<sup>297</sup> In Cape Town it was only after most of the congregations united to form the United Council of Hebrew Congregations in 1932 that the position was stabilised.<sup>298</sup>

The fact that a *beth din* requires three members meant that in the comparatively small communities it was difficult to maintain permanence. Mirvish and Kosovsky were examples of religious leaders who wielded more influence because they served more traditional communities who showed more deference towards the rabbis but on the whole, it was the lay leadership which formed the matrix within which religious life was conducted.

What was the relationship between the ministry and the lay leadership? Inevitably clashes were bound to occur. Some of the

---

<sup>296</sup> See *SAJC*, 30 October 1931 for a discussion of an unsuccessful attempt to establish a *Beth Din* comprising Mirvish, Bender and four other lesser known Reverends.

<sup>297</sup> See his report to the 1928 Annual General Meeting of the United Council. It was believed that there would never be general support for the *Beth Din* until it was strengthened by "an influential *Rav* from overseas" and it was hoped that this role would be filled by Rabbi I Kossowsky who arrived in from Poland 1928 and assumed appointment as *Rosh Beth Din*.

<sup>298</sup> Even in 1932 it was reported that because the Council (i.e. the lay body) was "still in its infancy, a *Beth Din* had yet to be established". *SAJC*, 1 April 1932. The Cape Town *Beth Din* was eventually inaugurated on 10 February 1933.

ministers indeed expressed themselves on occasion with some bitterness. In 1924, for example, a schism appears to have taken place in Pretoria where Minister Rabbi W Hirsch reported to Chief Rabbi Hertz that the section which broke away from the synagogue for no better reason than because one man was elected president and one was not has remained obdurate ... the community suffers from years of neglect and the situation aggravated by the split fills me with despair.<sup>299</sup>

Reporting later in the year that the split had been healed, Rabbi Hirsch waxed somewhat poetical:

What we lack in Pretoria is lay leaders. If we only had a capable respect-command (*sic*) layman to stand at the head of the community the outlook would be very good.

South African Jewry has all the symptoms of youth. It is energetic at times, but is capricious and wayward and has secured the blessing of being like the sand on the seashore at least in one respect in that it cannot stick together ... . Nearly half the number of synagogues in South Africa were built not to satisfy the needs of religion but to provide a chair for some ambitious office seeker.<sup>300</sup>

Earlier the same year, Reverend Bender had also written to Chief Rabbi Hertz describing the lay leaders in poetically uncomplicated terms.

... The Baronets and the Knights, the Peers and the Peerless who sit enthroned in the warden's box with a golden aura around their caesarean heads ...<sup>301</sup>

Another quotation further demonstrates this point. Rabbi Landau published a book in Hebrew called *Viduyim* (Confessions). It

---

<sup>299</sup> Hirsch to Hertz 22 August 1924. Chief Rabbinate records File D.

<sup>300</sup> Hirsch to Hertz, 1 December 1924. *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> Bender to Hertz, 2 March 1924. *Ibid.*

purports to consist of a series of letters between a Rabbi in the south and his friend in the north. The former clearly represents Landau himself and he takes the opportunity of expressing many things about the community in which he was working. In one letter dealing with the lay leadership he complains:

All their Judaism is shrunk within the walls of the synagogue which is empty even on Sabbaths and festivals from one Day of Atonement to the next. For them their synagogue is simply a monument that stands and testifies and proclaims through choirs of women that there abides the burial place of the honour owed on their religion." <sup>302</sup>

Reference has already been made to the practical difficulties which faced pious South African Jews, particularly in the early days in observing the Sabbath. A writer in 1911, mentioned:

in South Africa it is the minutest minority - so small as to be almost imperceptible - that accepts the Sabbath day in its spirit.

(that is with honours bestowed as on a bride, as was the case in Russia).<sup>303</sup> This particular writer blamed the "Zionists" in its dereliction, but there was no shortage of other explanations.

In 1905 a writer wittily observed:

we might divide the Jews in Johannesburg into three classes: the older generation which goes to synagogue and does not go to the racecourse; the younger generation, mostly Russian newcomers who go both to the synagogue and to the racecourse; and the sons of the older generation, English trained and mostly British born, who go to the racecourse and do not go to the synagogue, except for special reasons.<sup>304</sup>

The desirability for holding children's services including satisfaction with those ministers who succeeded and dissatisfaction with those ministers who failed, is a recurring

---

<sup>302</sup> Landau, *Viduyim*, Letter "Daled".

<sup>303</sup> Quoted in M P Grossman, *op. cit.* Vol. 1.

<sup>304</sup> SAJC, 17 October 1905.

theme.<sup>305</sup>

Frequently remarked, but not exclusively connected to children's services was the lack of decorum during services. There appears never to be a time in South Africa when this was not an issue.

It would be tedious to repeat every reference that came up in the Jewish press, the synagogues, the annual congregation reports, Rabbis' sermons etc. They range from the trivial (one correspondent complained that it was indecorous that at the end of the evening service after the closing hymn, that of *Yigdal*, the *Chazan* instead of some other official announced the time of services for the following day.) to those who were seriously concerned that lack of dignity and decorum were keeping people away from synagogue and were threatening the well-being of the community. One seeks in vain for any argument that lack of decorum in the synagogue has any real religious or theological implications, the main thrust of the argument is the inconvenience of other worshippers and the disturbance of the solemnity of the occasion. A host of minor issues arise in Jewish life having to do with matters of ritual and observance.

---

<sup>305</sup> SAJC, 6 March 1908 - a reference to the Children's Services which had been held in the WOHC for the last ten years thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Hertz, Rev. Mr Woolf and the band of enthusiastic ladies; SAJC, 16 April 1906 reported on services for the confirmation of girls held by Rabbi Landau; SAJC, 4 October 1918 reported that 350 - 400 children attend Rev. Bender's Sabbath afternoon services, "whereas despite the amalgamation of the two major Johannesburg congregations, there are no children's services in Johannesburg". This last may have served as a challenge because Children's Services recommenced at the United Hebrew Congregation in Johannesburg a few months later - SAJC, 21 March 1919.

How to bury a suicide;<sup>306</sup> kosher food for prisons;<sup>307</sup> the right of a *Cohen* to *duchen* if he is not a Sabbath observer;<sup>308</sup> the maintenance of war graves,<sup>309</sup> are only a few examples of issues which have at various times enjoyed the attention of South African Jews.

In an overall assessment of the development of Judaism in South Africa one constantly finds that invariably a lenient view prevailed and that attempts at rigidity or non-compromise failed. It is stressed that this comment must be read against the time frame of this particular study. Different considerations would prevail at a later stage. So we find that the combined forces of history, geography and demography have all combined to give South African Judaism a particular complexion.

As far back as 1903, the *SAJC* in an editorial, referring to a sermon delivered by Chief Rabbi Adler in which he criticised any attempt to reform the liturgy, made an extremely perceptive comment, which remains valid today:

Even in South Africa there is a strong tendency to fit, or attempt to do so, our religion to the so-called exigencies of the time.<sup>310</sup>

---

<sup>306</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 99. Letter 302. Adler to S Levin of Kimberley 8 October 1907.

<sup>307</sup> CTHC Minute Book 3, p.18. Special General Meeting 20 March 1903.

<sup>308</sup> Chief Rabbi's Letterbook 96. Letter Adler to J H Isaacs of Durban 24 October 1895.

<sup>309</sup> Chief Rabbinate Records File F.

<sup>310</sup> *SAJC*, 16 January 1903.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Several objective factors including demography, space and economics have operated in different ways to determine how South African Jews maintained and practised their religion.

The size of the community is the first factor which merits examination. There were never more than 120 000 South African Jews at any one time and during the period covered by this study the figure probably did not exceed 80 000. This had positive and negative consequences. There never existed a sufficiently substantial critical mass to permit the emergence of a body of Jewish learning or a distinctive brand of south African Jewish scholarship. In the United States, for example, between the years 1965 and 1989, 1830 books appeared dealing with American-Jewish history. In South Africa during the same period less than one-half of one per cent of such books were published; the imbalance is far more than could be explained by the relative size of the communities. It was just not possible, even if it had been desired, to establish centres of higher learning and so whatever study of Jewish sources and Jewish texts were carried on, was to be found in the small *shiurim* held in and around the synagogues throughout the country. No lasting scholarship remained to be studied and built upon by succeeding generations.

But this insufficient critical mass also had other consequences. The community was not large enough to permit of schisms or the

emergence of different trends of observance or religious practice. This comment is not as inconsistent as it may seem with the several accounts contained in the foregoing pages of breakaway congregations and temporary secessions. The whole point is that even though these breakaways took place and separate congregations were formed, with a stronger or weaker Eastern European element, or more or less rigorous standards of ritual observance, it was the same Judaism which was being practised, the same liturgy which was being recited, the same customs which were being observed.

Jewish demography also impacted on another aspect of the South African scene. The general socio-cultural climate in South Africa very much accentuated the importance of group identity. One had to belong somewhere. Given the race structure of the sub-continent, Jews who wished to abandon their communal identity had to seek acceptance within the English or Afrikaans minorities. By and large they were not welcome in either camp. There were of course those Jews who settled amongst Afrikaners usually in the small country towns and in farming communities. They became known as "Boere Jode" and were often highly valued and regarded in the communities amongst which they lived. But their identity was never in issue nor could their origins be hidden; the platteland Jew who farmed, traded, joked and played with his Afrikaans neighbour, never attempted to pray with him. Similarly those who sought acceptance in the English establishment were hard put to obtain an unreserved reception even if they had sought it. In short, there was really nowhere

outside his community for a South African Jew to go and this was an important factor in the extremely low level of assimilation which occurred in South African Jewry, especially during the years covered by the period of this study. But as important as these social and cultural factors may have been, the synagogue was an equally important element in retaining the identity of the South African Jew. Even though his own standard of religious observance fell far short of what strict piety required; even though he looked to the minister to be his surrogate in attendances at synagogue and performance of his religious duties, nonetheless in matters concerning the observance of the rites of passage, the basic elements of his daily and seasonal life and, most importantly, the education and social alignment of his children, the South African Jew in his own way cleaved to the synagogue and maintained the practices of his forefathers as devotedly as his counterpart anywhere in the world.

The situation and size of the homeland which the first generation Jew had adopted and his descendants served was another contributory factor determining what it meant to be Jewish in South Africa. The sub-continent as we have observed was far from the main stream of Jewish life, particularly before technology slashed distance. However important therefore was the guidance obtained from London or Vilna, short-term decisions were frequently made and adapted to South African use. Equally important were the distances within South Africa itself. The distance from London to Warsaw (worlds and aeons apart in Jewish terms) was less than the distance from Cape Town to Johannesburg.

We have seen in this study how accommodation had to be made for these factors of distance. It is not only important that such accommodations were made; that the *get* was sent to South-West Africa by registered post; that the *Barmitzvah* Boy was allowed to be taught how to lay *t'fillin* on the Sabbath. The important thing to note in this context is that the practice was not abandoned but active efforts were made to apply the religious requirements even by adaptation. The unspoken slogan was: keep as much as you can; if you cannot observe the *mitzvah* to the letter rather observe it partially than abandon it altogether.

When the Jews in the small country towns having amassed their modest (sometimes large) fortunes, moved to the larger centres, this was done usually in the interests of the education of their children both secular and religious. The man who had been a *ganser macher* (big shot) in the small country community, invariably joined a large congregation in the city. Sometimes if he was so inclined, he would become a *ganser macher* there too, but he always ensured that the full synagogue facilities were available to his family and were used. This movement from the small towns to the larger centres was taking place about the same time as the city populations were growing, and the Jews were moving out from the central city areas to the outlying suburbs where they formed their suburban congregations. The increase in prosperity which brought the centre city Jew to the suburb, or the country Jew to the city, was invariably not accompanied by a fall-off in observance. If anything, there was greater stress on the conduct of religious activities, national festivals and

family celebrations, even though this was not usually associated with a more intense standard of religious observance.

Another factor where consideration of distance impacted on religious observance was the existence of a large number of commercial travellers and the like who travelled long distances on their commercial activities and were frequently away for weeks at a time in the period before high-powered cars and well surfaced roads. The traveller who found himself in Oudtshoorn, or Springbok in Namaqualand in the North-West Cape, or Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal, on the Sabbath or on a day where he wished to observe the religious anniversary of *Yahrzeit*, would never have any difficulty in finding a *minyán* where he would be made to feel at home both with the provision of an orthodox service exactly akin to that which he knew in his own synagogue, as well as warm hospitality. The emergence of these country communities can almost be traced along the expansion of the railway system to the North-West and to the East so that travellers by train too could have these facilities.

The period under review contains ebbs and flow as far as the economic conditions in South Africa were concerned. On the whole, however, the situation of white South Africans showed increased prosperity. South Africa opened up, developed and expanded in various departments, e.g. business and commerce, both wholesale and retail, light industry, including engineering and construction, property development, insurance, entertainment and the professions; the Jews were there to share in the benefits

of this expansion. A fairly prosperous community therefore emerged or at least a community which had a sufficiency of committed members who were able and willing to help finance the erection and maintenance of synagogues and engaging of ministers and other officiants. Their contributions too enabled the community to subsidise poorer members, thus ensuring that nobody was denied access to full religious services for lack of funds. Even the smaller communities maintained themselves and their members generally showed a willingness to sacrifice at all levels to maintain community institutions. This was not confined to South Africa; the records show that South Africa was a favourite port of call for emissaries from overseas, religious and charitable institutions, not to mention the Zionist movement.

What effect did this increase in prosperity have on the religious observance of the community? It would be unrealistic to suggest that the community became more observant as the years passed. But it is significant that on the whole standards of observance did not fall off. The wealthier congregations could afford more effective rabbis and more celebrated cantors and this certainly drew the members to the synagogue. It seems that as far as outward semblance was concerned (and who can judge the heart?), the wealthier communities maintained a full and even accentuated religious life and the individuals not only took advantage of the services which were on offer but insisted that they were of the highest standard. Some observers have maintained that they are aware of instances where Jews who were unable to observe the sabbath whilst earning their living, commenced to do so after

retirement. If such instances exist they were too few to have been noted to any large extent.

Another view of the impact of urbanisation, affluence and education is that after the second generation sons of the immigrants had established themselves, their children, the grandchildren of the immigrants, tended to revert to the grandparents' values and standards of observance and to maintain religious practices which their parents had neglected but not entirely abandoned. There is considerable evidence of this but as it emerged principally after 1935 and indeed in post-war circumstances, it does not come within the scope of this study. The reason for mentioning it however is as follows: the second generation, that is, the children of the immigrants (whether they were born in Europe and came with their parents as infants or whether they were born in South Africa) were called by many religious authorities "the lost generation" because the need to make a living and establish themselves had led to a fall off in religious observance and a neglect of education. However, this so-called "lost generation" nonetheless retained a sufficient matrix of commitment and identity to pass this on to their children.

In order to enable them to do so they made use of and adapted the tools which were to hand. They engaged the most effective ministers whom they could offer and the cantors with the widest range of traditional melodies. They were punctilious about observing the rites of passage in due form. They used the

synagogue wherever possible and developed their own sense of what was important.

This prompts a reference to the particular significance which Friday nights developed in the South African Jewish community. The observance of this has been noted as far back as the early years of Hertz's ministry. Even in the South African winter, daylight lasts long enough to enable the Friday night service which inaugurates the sabbath, to be held before dinner. Nobody lived very far from the synagogue - when they moved out to outlying suburbs they established synagogues there. Most owned motorcars, and did not hesitate to drive on the Sabbath although this was contrary to the strict laws of Sabbath observance. It was therefore not difficult for the family to attend service on Friday nights and if the cantor and choir were in good voice and the rabbi could be counted on for a stirring sermon - and the presence of friends also made for a social occasion - then why not go to *Shul* on Friday night and obtain a little glow of sanctity and tradition in pleasant surroundings and congenial company? In the nature of things it is impossible to provide figures but there can be little doubt that the proportion of South African Jews who (during the period under consideration) attended synagogue on Friday nights (and they continue to do so) is significantly higher than the attendance of most other religious denominations at their respective places of worship with the possible exception of the attendance of Moslems at mosque on a Friday. Even those who did not go to synagogue made something special of Friday night - a family dinner, an

unwillingness to go out, the observance of the ritual of candle-lighting, *kiddush* and a family meal. The oral history interviews in the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies are replete with references by those who record these early years to the importance which their families attached to the Friday night observance.

Earlier in this study we examined the principal influences which shaped South African Jewry. In the main these influences all operated as unifying forces. Those sections of the community which acknowledged the jurisdiction and valued guidance of the Chief Rabbinate in London, recognised that authority as a cohesive force. The fluctuations which arose as a result of the interaction between "English" Jews and "Russian" Jews never proved catastrophically divisive. The factors which the two sections had in common, i.e. the striving for upward mobility, the desire for economic and social acceptance, the determination to be part of a larger developing community, were more powerful, significant and long-lasting than the temporary differences in dress, accent and daily habit. Even such negative forces as existed - the comparatively mild measure of anti-semitism, the inevitable position of occupying an ambivalent position in the "Boer/Brit/Black Axis", served to drive the community inward rather than outward. There was virtually no class distinction in the community - such superficial differences as existed between the lifestyles of the rich and the poor never went very deep. Within a generation differences of background and origin virtually disappeared and a South African Jewish community

emerged which reaped the benefits and experienced and suffered the disadvantages of South Africa's socio-economic circumstances.

All the evidence shows that there existed the general respect for tradition, desire for education and that and that aversion to experiment and what they would have called "meddling with new fangled ideas" which was generally typical of white South Africans. This respect for tradition inevitably operated to strengthen rather than weaken their ties to a religion which is inherently tradition bound. Whether it involved observance of national festivals (the rise of Zionism was an important feature here), the observance of family occasions, whether of mourning or celebration, the maintenance of a loyal outward show of commitment to the community, all these features remained constant in the community. They benefited in various measures from the different accretions of new elements whether those from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1914 and those from Germany after 1933 or looking ahead those from Rhodesia and the Congo (to use contemporary terminology) post-war.

I am not concerned to paint too roseate a picture. The frustrations and the backsliding described by Rabbi Landau in *Viduyim* were very real, true piety was rare. Jewish scholarship was almost non-existent. What was alive was bedrock commitment and identity based on a firm foundation and shaped by the circumstances of time and place.

There were many for whom the synagogue and religious life

generally was not the preferred method of living out their Jewishness. They preferred to devote their time and talents to one or other of the many other communal activities: either the two major national institutions, namely the Zionist Federation and the Board of Deputies; or one or other of the cultural, educational and welfare institutions. But however secular these non-Synagogues organisations may have been, they always were scrupulous not to contravene the religious laws. A function would never be held on a Sabbath or festival and non-kosher food would not be served at an official meal. The standard of observance of communal bodies was different from and superior to the individuals who directed them.

What was the future which would have confronted the observer in 1935, the end of our period of examination? The Reform Movement was in its infancy but was making some impact in the larger centres. The unity of the community would be compromised in certain quarters by this development because there were elements of the orthodox establishment which reacted vehemently and truculently to the new movement. Reform Jews would never exceed eighteen per cent of the total Jewish population but it would make an impact on the community, both in its own right and as a challenge to orthodoxy to re-examine some of its practices. That this in turn would ultimately lead to a strong rightwing orthodox movement was not then apparent. There was still no sign of the emergence in South Africa of a Conservative movement. Conservatism never had the "Empire building mission" of reform and was perhaps never strong enough to emerge in any effective

way outside the United States.

There were rumblings from Germany and the early development of Nazism. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 was not fully appreciated for the dangers which it represented in the peace of the world in general and the Jewish people in particular involving as it did the destruction of European Jewry and the reservoir of learning which that involved.

Important methods of Jewish education and the emergence of more highly qualified teachers would shortly increase the standard of knowledge amongst South African Jews, but it would be some while before the benefits of this began to emerge.

In 1935 there existed in South Africa a Jewish community assured in its own mind of its continued existence as part of the Jewish world; observing the faith and practices of its ancestry to the extent which the circumstances of time and place permitted. They did not keep the whole law; but they did not abandon the whole law. They permitted themselves considerable latitude in the way they interpreted what it meant to practice the Jewish religion, but that latitude was not without limits. The SAJC of 16 January 1903 got it right in pointing out that in South Africa there is a strong tendency to fit, or attempt to do so, our religion to the so-called exigencies of the time.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Agunah</i>	A woman who is prevented from remarrying because she is unable to obtain a religious divorce.
<i>Amei-ha-aratzim</i>	Ignoramuses
<i>Arba Karfoth</i>	Literally "four corners". The fringes at the four corners of the Tallith.
<i>Aron Hakodesh</i>	Ark of the Law: the section of the synagogue where the Scrolls of the Law are kept.
<i>Ashkenazi</i>	A Jew descended from Central or Eastern European forebears in contradiction with one descended from Spanish or North African forebears (a Sephardi).
<i>Ayin-yaakov</i>	A book of rabbinical commentary.
<i>Barmitzvah</i>	The confirmation ceremony observed by a Jewish male at the age of 13 years signifying his attainment of religious majority.
<i>Batmitzvah</i>	A type of "confirmation" ceremony for girls based on the Barmitzvah.
<i>Beth Din</i>	Ecclesiastical Court
<i>Beth Hamedrash</i>	House of study
<i>Brith Milah</i>	Ceremony of circumcision
<i>Chalitzut</i>	The ceremony by which a childless widow is released from her obligation to marry her deceased husband's brother, according to the laws of the Levirate marriage.
<i>Chanukah</i>	The Festival of Lights
<i>Chazan</i>	Cantor
<i>Cheder</i>	Hebrew School
<i>Chevra Kadisha</i>	The Burial Society
<i>Chumash</i>	The Pentateuch
<i>der heim</i>	"the old country"

<i>Duchen</i>	The platform from which the Kohanim blessed the people in Temple times; hence the action of the Priestly blessing.
<i>Gemeinde</i>	Community
<i>Gemorah]</i> <i>Mishnah]</i>	Together comprise the Talmud, the compendium of the Oral Law.
<i>Ger Tsedek</i>	Righteous convert
<i>Gerut</i>	Proselytism
<i>Get</i>	A religious Bill of Divorce
<i>Giyoret</i>	A woman candidate for conversion to Judaism.
<i>Griene</i>	A newcomer, a "greenhorn"
<i>Gubernia</i> (pl. <i>Gubernias</i> )	A territorial unit of local government in the Russian Empire.
<i>Haggadah</i>	The book containing the service of the Pesach Seder.
<i>Halacha</i>	Jewish religious law
<i>Hamagid</i>	A Hebrew journal published in Russia in the 19th Century.
<i>Haskalah</i>	Enlightenment
<i>Hassid</i> (pl. <i>Hassidim</i> )	A follower of Hassidism
<i>Hassidism</i>	A pietist movement founded by R Israel Ba'al Shem Tov in Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth Century.
<i>Hineni</i>	The Cantor's prayer before reading the Additional Service on the High Holy Days.
<i>Hoshana Raba</i>	The seventh day of the Festival of Succoth.
<i>Kaddish</i>	Mourner's Prayer
<i>Kashrut</i>	Ritual purity as applied to food according to the dietary laws.
<i>Kiddush</i>	The prayer of sanctification over wine.
<i>Kiddush Hashem</i>	Sanctification of the Holy Name.
<i>Kohen, Cohen</i>	One of the priestly caste; a descendant of Aaron.

<i>Kol Nidrei</i>	The service for the eve of Yom Kippur.
<i>Korbanot</i>	Sacrifices
<i>Lamdan</i> (pl. <i>Lamdonim</i> )	One learned in Jewish lore.
<i>Lefanim U-Leachor</i>	"Forwards and Backwards", a play by J L Landau.
<i>Litvak</i> <i>Lulav</i> (pl. <i>Lulavim</i> )	A Jew from Lithuania, but see pages 49-50. The palm branch, containing four species of herb used on Succoth.
<i>Ma'aravot</i>	Special scriptural passages inserted in the Daily services on Festivals.
<i>Maariv</i>	Evening service
<i>Machzor</i> (pl. <i>Machzorim</i> )	Festival prayer book
<i>Maftir</i>	The portion of the Pentateuch read in association with the prophetic reading assigned for the day.
<i>Matzah</i>	Unleavened bread eaten on Passover
<i>Menorah</i>	Candelabra
<i>Mezuza</i>	A small roll of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch affixed to the door of a private dwelling as directed in Deut. VI:9 and XI:20.
<i>Mikvah</i> (pl. <i>Mikvaot</i> )	Ritual bath
<i>Minchah</i>	Afternoon service
<i>Minhag</i>	Custom
<i>Minhag Askanaaz</i>	Custom of prayer observed by Ashkanazim.
<i>Minyan</i> (pl. <i>Minyanim</i> )	The quorum of ten adult males required for public worship.
<i>Mitnaged</i> (pl. <i>mitnagdim</i> )	An opponent of Hassidim
<i>Mitzvah</i> (pl. <i>Mitzvoth</i> )	Commandment

<i>Mohel</i>	One qualified to perform rite of circumcision.
<i>Musaph</i>	Additional Service
<i>Musaph Chazan</i>	The Chazan who intones the Additional Service (Musaph).
<i>Neged</i>	Against, opposed to
<i>Neilah</i>	The concluding service of Yom Kippur.
<i>Pesach Seder</i>	The service at home recited on the Evening of Passover.
<i>Piyutim</i>	Liturgical poems
<i>Purim</i>	The Feast of Lots, commemorating the story of Esther, Mordechai and Haman.
<i>Rav</i>	Rabbi
<i>Rav Shiur</i>	The Rabbi who conducts the shiur.
<i>Reb</i>	Reverend
<i>Rebbe</i>	Affectionate term for Rabbi or Reverend.
<i>Rosh Beth Din</i>	Head of the Beth Din.
<i>Rosh Hashana</i>	Jewish New Year
<i>Sandek</i>	One who holds the baby at a Brith Milah.
<i>Schechita</i>	Slaughter of animals according to religious law.
<i>Schochet</i>	One qualified to perform Schechita.
<i>Sefer Torah</i>	Scroll of the Law, containing the Pentateuch written on parchment.
<i>Semichah</i>	Rabbinical ordination
<i>Shabbat</i>	Sabbath
<i>Shiur</i> (pl. <i>Shiurim</i> )	Discourse on religious lore.
<i>Shivah</i>	Literally, seven. The seven days of mourning for a close relative.
<i>Shmonah esrei</i>	The eighteen benedictions forming portion of the Daily Service.
<i>Shofar</i>	Ram's horn

<i>Shomer Shabbat</i>	One who observes the laws of the Sabbath.
<i>Shtetl</i>	Little town, "dorp"
<i>Shul</i>	Synagogue
<i>Shulchan Aruch</i>	Code of Jewish Law, compiled by R Joseph Caro, published in 1555.
<i>Siddur</i> (pl. <i>Siddurim</i> )	Daily prayerbook
<i>Simchat Regel</i>	Compliments of the season.
<i>Succah</i>	Booth or tabernacle
<i>Tallith</i>	Prayer shawl
<i>Talmud Torah</i>	Hebrew School
<i>Tehillim</i>	Psalms
<i>Tevilah</i>	Ritual immersion in a Mikvah.
<i>T'fillin</i>	Phylacteries
<i>Tisha B'av</i>	The 7th day of the month of Av, on which occurred according to tradition, several tragic events in Jewish history, including the destruction of the Second Temple.
<i>Torah</i>	Religious law in the widest sense.
<i>Treife</i>	Ritually impure according to the dietary laws - not Kosher.
<i>Trier</i>	One who tries or struggles.
<i>Ve-zeh Sod</i>	"That is a secret" - something hidden or arcane.
<i>Viduyim</i>	Confessions
<i>Yahrzeit</i>	Anniversary of a death .
<i>Yeshivah</i> (pl. <i>Yeshivot</i> )	Seminary for religious studies.
<i>Yigdal</i>	The concluding hymn of the Evening Service of Sabbath and Festivals.
<i>Yiskor</i>	Memorial service for the Dead.
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	Day of Atonement

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## A. MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

- Alexander Papers  
Manuscript Division, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town. BC 160.
- Album of letters, press cuttings, etc. relating to Reverend Joel Rabinowitz  
Manuscript Division, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town. BCS 428.
- Bender File  
Jewish Museum, Cape Town. File 199 BV 15.
- Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, Minutes  
Manuscripts Archives Division, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, B.C.849.
- Chief Rabbinate Letterbooks and Correspondence Files  
Office of the Chief Rabbinate, Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London. (Copies at Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town.)
- Gaster Moses/Landau correspondence  
Mocatta Library, University College, London.
- Hertz, J H correspondence  
Anglo Jewish Archives, University of Southampton. (Copies at Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town.)
- Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation, Minutes  
Rochlin Archives, S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg.
- Landau, J L  
Papers - Archives Department, Hebrew University, Givat Ram, Jerusalem.
- Unpublished autobiographical notes  
In the possession of the author, by courtesy of his son, Judge Felix Asher Landau.
- Mirvish, Louis  
*Cultural Life of Cape Jewry in the years 1899-1914.*  
Unpublished paper read at the Annual General Meeting of the Jewish Museum Cape Town, 29 November 1959. Jewish Museum File 100 A311(3).
- Saron, G  
Unpublished notes on South Africa, Jewish History  
Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town.

Unpublished transcript of interview with Judge Felix Landau, 21 April 1975. *S A Jewish Board of Deputies*, Johannesburg.

Oral History Project, Transcript of interviews  
Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town.

United Hebrew Congregation of the Transvaal, Minutes  
Rochlin Archives, *S A Jewish Board of Deputies*,  
Johannesburg.

Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation, Minutes  
Rochlin Archives, *S A Jewish Board of Deputies*,  
Johannesburg.

#### B. PRINTED PRIMARY SOURCES

G 42 - 1876 Results of Census, Colony of the Cape of Good Hope.

Annual Reports of the Witwatersrand "Old" Hebrew Congregation,  
Johannesburg "New" Hebrew Congregation, and United Hebrew  
Congregation of the Transvaal (*S A Jewish Board of Deputies*  
Archives).

*South African Jewish Chronicle*

*London Jewish Chronicle*

*Zionist Record*

#### C. SECONDARY SOURCES

Abrahams, Israel

"Western Province Jewry 1870-1902" in G Saron and L Hotz  
(eds.) *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Cape Town  
London New York, Oxford University Press, 1955.

*The Birth of a Community: A History of Western Province  
Jewry from Earliest Times to the end of the South African  
War 1902* Cape Town, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1955.

Addleson, Abraham

"In the Eastern Province" in Saron and Hotz (eds.) *op. cit.*

Alexander, Enid

*Morris Alexander*, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Juta and Co.  
Ltd. 1953.

Arkin, M (ed.)

*South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey* Cape Town,  
Oxford University Press, 1984.

- Aschman, George  
 "Oudtshoorn in the Early Days" in Saron and Hotz, (eds.)  
*op. cit.*
- Bender, A P  
*Sabbath Sermons and Sermons for Festivals and Special Sabbaths and Occasions.* 2 Vols. Privately printed and published, no date.
- Bergman, S H  
*Faith and Reason: Modern Jewish Thought,* New York. Schocken Books, 1963;
- Bokser, B Z (ed. and trans.)  
*The Essential Writings of Abraham Isaac Kook,* New York, Amity House, 1988;
- Bulka, R P  
*Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism,* New York, Ktav Publishing House, 1983.  
  
*Dimensions of Orthodox Judaism,* New York. Ktav Publishing Co. 1983.
- Davenport, T R H  
 "The Consolidation of a New Society" in M Wilson and L Thompson (eds.) *The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol. 1 South Africa to 1870.* Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Dawidowicz, Lucy  
 "A Century of Jewish History, 1881-1981: The View from America" in *American Jewish Yearbook 82: 3-98*
- De Saxe, M and Goodman, I M (eds.)  
*The South African Jewish Year Book 1929,* Johannesburg, S.A. Jewish Historical Society.
- Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol. 1*
- Dubb, A A  
*Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Community* Grahamstown, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1977.  
  
*The Jewish Population of South Africa: The 1991 Sociodemographic Survey.* Jewish Publications - South Africa, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town 1994.
- Dubnow, S M  
*History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (trans. I Friedlaender) Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society 1918. S Ettinger, "The Struggle for Emancipation in Eastern Europe" in H H

Ben-Sasson (ed) *A History of the Jewish People*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1980.

Elazar, Daniel J with Medding, Peter  
*Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies: Argentina, Australia and South Africa*, New York and London, Holmes & Meier, 1983.

Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 7

Endelman, Todd  
English Jewish History in Modern Judaism, Vol. 11 No. 1, February 1991 p.91.

"Communal Solidarity among the Jewish Elite of Victorian London" in *Victorian Studies*, Spring 1985.

Friedman-Spitz, Clara  
"The Jewish Involvement in the Establishment of the University of Cape Town" in *Jewish Affairs*, January 1980.

Friesel Evyatar, *Atlas of Modern Jewish History*, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

Gitlin, Marcia  
*The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism*. Johannesburg Menorah Book Club. 1950.

Goldenberg, Robert  
"Is there an Essence of Judaism After All?" in *Judaism*, Issue No. 149, Vol. 38 No. 1, Winter 1989.

Goldscheider, C and Zuckerman, A S  
*The Transformation of the Jews*, Chicago and London. University of Chicago Press 1984.

Goulston, Michael  
"The Status of the Anglo-Jewish Rabbinate" in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 10 No. 1 June 1968.

Greenbaum, M  
*The Jews of Lithuania*, Jerusalem, Gefen Publishing House, 1995.

Hartz, Louis (ed)  
*The Founding of New Societies*, New York, Harcourt Brace and World 1964.

Heilman, Samuel C  
"The Many Faces of Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1982

"Prayer in the Orthodox Synagogue: An Analysis of Ritual Display" in *Contemporary Jewry* Vol. 6 No. 1 Spring/Summer 1982.

Hellig, Jocelyn

"Religious Expression" in Arkin, (ed.) *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey* Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1984.

"South African Judaism: An expression of Conservatism Traditionalism", *Judaism* Vol. 35 No. 2 Spring 1986.

"South African Jewish Orthodoxy: A Model for Survival?" delivered at a Conference of the Council of the world's Religions, Hertenstein, Switzerland, August 1985.

"South African Judaism: An expression of Conservative Traditionalism" *Judaism* Vol. 35 No. 2 Spring 1986

Herrman, Louis

*A History of the Jews in South Africa from the earliest times to 1895.* South African Edition, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1935.

*The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation 1841-1941: A Centenary History* Cape Town, Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1941.

Hertz, J H

*The Jews in South Africa.* Johannesburg, Central News Agency Limited, 1905.

Hertzberg, A

*The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter. A History.* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1989.

*The Jews in Polish Culture,* Evanston, Illinois. North Western University Press, 1987.

Hirsch, S R

*Nineteen Letters on Judaism* 1836 trans. B Drachman revised 1960; his pamphlet *Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt* (Religion Allied with Progress, 1854)

Homa, Bernard

*Orthodoxy in Anglo-Jewry 1880-1940.* London. Jewish Historical Society of England 1969.

Hotz, Louis

"Jews Who Arrived Here Sixty Years Ago", in *Jewish Affairs*, February 1963.

Jacobs, Louis

*Helping with Inquiries,* London, Valentine Mitchell, 1989.

Joseph, Samuel

*Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910.* New York, Columbia University Studies in the Social Sciences No. 145, 1914.

- Kaplan, M and Robertson M (eds.)  
*Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915.* Cape Town, Vlaeberg Publications, 1991
- Katz, Jacob  
*Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation 1770-1870,* New York. Schocken Books 1978.
- "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective" in Peter Medding (ed.) *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* Vol. 2, Bloomington, Indiana University Press 1986.
- Kurzweil, Zvi  
*The Modern Impulse of Traditional Judaism,* New Jersey Ktav Publishing House 1985.
- Kushner, Tony  
 "The Impact of British Antisemitism 1918-1945" in David Cesarani (ed.) *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1990.
- Landau, J L  
*Viduyim,* Vienna, Menorah Publishing, 1929 (Hebrew).
- Judaism Ancient and Modern,* London, Edward Goldston Ltd. 1936.
- Lewis, Bernard  
*Jews of Islam,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Liebman, C S and Cohen, S M  
*Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experience.* New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1990.
- Liebman, Charles S  
 "A Sociological Analysis of Contemporary Orthodoxy". *Judaism,* Vol. 13 No. 3, Summer 1964
- "Orthodox Judaism Today" in *Midstream* August/September 1979
- Lipman, V D  
*A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858,* Leicester and London; Leicester University Press, 1990.
- Markowitz, Arthur  
*Philip Wartski Hasholom Rosh Hashana Annual,* September 1959.
- Mendes-Flohr, Paul R and Reinharz Jehuda (eds.)  
*The Jew in the Madeira World, A Documentary History,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1980,
- Mirvish, M C  
*D'roshei ve-Shut ha-Ramach,* Cape Town 1935 (Hebrew).

- Mostert, Noel  
*Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* London, Jonathan Cape, 1992
- Pakenham, Thomas  
*The Boer War*, London. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979.
- Rackman, Emanuel  
 "A Challenge to Orthodoxy" in *Judaism* Vol. 18 No. 2 Spring 1969.
- Raisin, Jacob S  
*The Haskalah Movement in Russia*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1913.
- Rappaport, S  
 Rand Jewry 1893 in *Jewish Affairs* June 1950.
- Redgrave, J J  
*Port Elizabeth in Bygone Days*, Wynberg, Cape, Rustica Press, 1947.
- Rochlin, S A  
 "Jubilee of Cape Town's Oldest Minyan: The Colourful Story of the Chabad Congregation" in *S A Jewish Times* 19 December 1947.
- Rosenthal, Eric  
 "On the Diamond Fields" in *Saron and Hotz*, (eds.) *op. cit.*
- Rudavsky, David  
*Modern Jewish Religious Movements: A History of Emancipation and Adjustment*, New York Behrman House, 1979.
- Sachar, H M  
*Farewell Espana: The World of the Sephardim Remembered*, New York, Knopf, 1994.
- Salbstein, M C N  
*The Emancipation of the Jews in Britain: The Question of Admission of the Jews to Parliament, 1828-1860*. London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1982.
- Samet, Moshe  
 "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 8 No. 3, October 1988.
- Saron, Gustav  
 "The Making of South African Jewry: An essay in Historical Interpretation" in (L Feldberg (ed.) *South African Jewry 1965 Edition*, Johannesburg. Fieldhill Publishing Co.  
 "Boers, Uitlanders, Jews" in *Saron and Hotz* (eds.) *op. cit.*

Saron, G and Hotz, L (eds.)

*The Jews in South Africa: A History* Cape Town, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1955.

"Early Days of Johannesburg Jewry: Tribulations of the Park Synagogue" in *Jewish Affairs* November 1981.

Schmidt, H D

"The Terms of the Emancipation 1781-1812" in *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, 1956

Schoenberg, S and N

*Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, New York and London, Garland Publishing Co. 1991.

Schweid, Eliezer

"The Impact of Enlightenment on Religion" in *Judaism*. Issue No. 152, Vol. 38 No. 4, Fall 1989.

Shain, Milton

*The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1994.

*Jewry and Cape Society: The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony*, Cape Town Historical Publication Society, 1983

"If I am for myself alone, what am I?" *Morris Alexander and South African Society*. Morris Alexander Memorial Lecture, July 1983. S A Jewish Board of Deputies, Cape Town.

Sharot, Stephen

"Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: The Synagogue service" in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 15 No. 1, June 1973.

Sherman, David

*Pioneering for Reform Judaism - South Africa*. Privately printed n.d.

Shimoni, G

*Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910-1967)*. Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1980.

Shusterman, Abraham

"The Last Two Centuries" in D M Eichhorn (ed.) *Conversion to Judaism: A History and Analysis*. Ktav Publishing House, 1965.

Simon, J I

"Towards an appraisal of South African Jewish Historiography" in P E Westra and B Warner, (eds.) *Festschrift in honour of Frank R Bradlow*, Cape Town, Friends of the South African Library, 1993.

"New Archival Material Relating to the Early Development of South Africa's Jewish Community" in R Musiker and J Sherman (eds.) *Waters out of the Well*, Johannesburg, Library of the University of the Witwatersrand, 1988.

"Pulpit and Platform: Hertz-Landau" in M Kaplan and M Robertson, *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*. Cape Town, Vlaeberg Publications, 1991

"Responsa and Rulings Reflecting some South African Issues" in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* Vol. 36 No. 1 June 1994.

"Where are our Modern Prophetesses?", in the 1994 *Rosh Hashana* Bulletin of the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation.

Singer, David

"The New Orthodox Theology", in *Modern Judaism* Vol. 9 No. 1 February 1989.

"Voices of Orthodoxy" in *Commentary*, Vol. 58 No. 1, July 1974

Sonnabend, H

"S A Jewry in Figures: Interesting Facts" about our Community", *Jewish Affairs*, December 1941; "The Social Role of the Jew in South Africa", *Jewish Affairs* January 1948.

Sorkin, David

*The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Spero Schubert

"Towards a Philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 6 No. 1, February 1986;

Teitelbaum, S V

*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 15 pp. 908/10

Temkin, Sefton

"Orthodoxy with Moderation" in *Judaism*, Vol. 24 No. 3, Summer 1975.

Waxman, M

*History of Hebrew Literature*, New York, Bloch Publishing Co. 1938-1960.

Wilson, Monica

"Cooperation and Conflict: The East Cape Frontier" in M Wilson and L Thompson (eds.) *The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol. 1 South Africa to 1870*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969.

## UNPUBLISHED THESES

Aronstam, S M

*A Historical and Socio-cultural Survey of the Bloemfontein Jewish Community with special reference to the conception of Jewish welfare work.* Unpublished thesis for Doctorate of Social Science. University of the Orange Free State 1974.

Bradlow, Edna

*Immigration into the Union 1910-1948. Part 2.* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, UCT 1978.

Cohen, S G

*A History of the Jews of Durban 1825-1918.* Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Natal, 1977.

*A History of the Jews of Durban 1919-1961.* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Natal 1982.

Feldman, B I

*Social Life of Cape Town Jewry 1904-1914 with special reference to the Eastern European Immigrant Community.* Unpublished B.A. (Hons) Thesis, UCT 1984.

Grossman, M P

*A Study of the Trends and Tendencies of Hebrew and Yiddish Writings in South Africa since their beginnings in the early nineties of the last century to 1930.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand 1973.

Katz, M E

*The History of Jewish Education in South Africa 1841-1980.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, UCT 1980.

Krut, R M

*Building a Home and a Community: Jewish Johannesburg 1886-1914.* Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1985.

Singer, Steven

*Orthodox Judaism in Early Victorian London 1840-1858.* Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Yeshiva University 1981.