

Nicholas I and the Jewish Cantonist Soldiers in Finland

A chapter in the psychohistory of intolerance

During the reign of Alexander I encounters between Jews and Christians in Finland were rare and sporadic. Jews were prohibited from settling permanently in Finland, and the few Jews who came to Finland quickly converted to Christianity and assimilated into the surrounding society. The enlightened Finnish establishment generally displayed a benevolent attitude towards the Jews, but there seemed to be no way of circumventing the anti-Jewish legislation. The cultural and intellectual milieu in Åbo and a few other important towns helped the converted Jews to integrate. The situation changed, however, when a new monarch ascended the throne in Russia. Finnish autonomy within the Russian empire was an ambiguous concept, and the policies of the ruler naturally had an enormous impact on the Grand Duchy of Finland. Nicholas I ascended to the throne in 1825 and his reign had serious consequences for the Jews in Finland and elsewhere in his vast empire. Czar Nicholas I did not share the enlightened opinions and values of his predecessor and the spirit of the Enlightenment was swept aside. In Finnish-Jewish collective memory, as well as in the collective memory of Eastern European Jewry in general, Nicholas I is remembered for his ruthless conscription of Jewish men into military service in cantonist units. For an individual cantonist¹, the period

1 The term is derived from the German word *Kanton*, an enlistment district. See Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 90. Originally the cantonist units had

of military service was as long as 25 years, a period of time which in many cases was long enough to uproot the poor youngster from his family, his community and his religion. In traditional Jewish history Nicholas I is portrayed as an evil emperor and a persecutor of the Jews, but the deeper psychological reasons behind his cruelty have not been the object of serious study. I will study the psychological causes of Nicholas' policies with regard to the Jews in order to grasp the psychohistorical ramifications of his troubled mind for the Jews in Finland.

The dilemma of the Finnish Jews was just a microscopic component of the czar's general policy in respect of the Jews in his empire. The reign of Nicholas I had tumultuous consequences for the traditional Jewish communities in the Russian empire. The Czar wanted to reform and modernize the lives of his Jewish subjects through education and military training. All these initiatives came through imperial decrees and legislation dictated from above. The thinking of Nicholas I was characterized by autocratic faith in military solutions for any conceivable problem in society. He wanted to standardize his entire empire according to military concepts, and thus foreign observers found that the usual urban order had been transformed into camp discipline and everyday life in Russian society started to resemble a state of siege.² For the Jews of Russia this process of standardization meant that they were no longer exempted from military service. Jews had traditionally not served in the Russian army. During the reign of Alexander I the

been established as military orphans' detachments. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, the foremost expert on the Jews in the Russian army, writes that "once they arrived, the ... children acquired new 'parents': the army was their mother and the emperor their father". Cantonist units were found all over the Russian empire from Irkutsk to St. Petersburg. In the drafts of 1827, 1828 and 1829, some 1862 Jewish cantonists joined the ranks. Of these young boys, 125, or almost 7 percent, converted to Christianity. See Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 90-93.

2 Stanislawski 1983, 14-15.

czar and the military establishment had made it clear that the Jews were still exempted. This judgment was not based on benevolent or humanitarian considerations but rather on prejudice. The Jews were seen as physically inferior cowards or religious fanatics, whose loyalty was questionable.³ Even though Nicholas I shared these prejudices he nevertheless chose a different approach. He wanted to reform the Jews through military training, stern discipline, and standardization. The decree calling for the conscription of Jews was published on August 26 1827. Each local Jewish community was supposed to deliver a certain number of recruits. This was the responsibility of the *kahal*, the executive organ of the community. It was up to the kahal to choose who was to be drafted. When the number of recruits transpired to be smaller than expected Nicholas I ordered that the local Jewish recruiting officials should be sent to disciplinary battalions if they failed to fill their quota. When this measure proved to be ineffective the czar stipulated that the local communities should be given the right to arrest any Jew who was caught without a passport. These unfortunate Jews were then sent to the army instead of those the community protected and wanted to shelter from conscription.⁴

In other European countries the inclusion of the Jews in the draft was an emancipatory concern. In France, Prussia and Austria Jews were no longer excluded from society. They had the opportunity of becoming equal citizens by completing their military service. In Russia, the situation was totally different as Nicholas I was not concerned with the rights of his subjects. Instead, he stressed their duties towards the state. The Jews did not obtain any rights as a reward for serving 25 years in the czar's army. The duration of military service was the same for all ethnic groups within the Russian empire. A majority of the czar's subjects were apathetic and did not protest, but for the Jews the introduction of the draft was a part of a larger drama. In the collective

3 Stanislawski 1983, 14.

4 Stanislawski 1983, 184.

memory of Eastern European Jewry, calamity upon calamity haunted the Jewish people. Among these calamities, the cantonist draft is prominent as one of the most terrible, rivaled only by the pogroms. Historical accounts in Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish, portray the cantonists as counterparts of the biblical Joseph, who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. The traditional Jewish communities were portrayed as the cruel brothers of Joseph and the parents of the cantonists represented Jacob and Rachel mourning their son, who had been lost forever. This narrative tradition nurtured also stories about so-called *khappers*, people who earned their living by kidnapping and delivering young Jewish recruits to the Russian army. These recruits came from the lowest strata of the Jewish communities and they had minimal chances to defend their rights. This tradition was gradually complemented by another type of narrative where the Jewish soldiers were able to defend their identity and maintain their Jewish culture and religion. This was also in line with the biblical story of Joseph, who was able not only to survive but also to achieve success through his extraordinary talents while in exile. In the case of the cantonists, the Egyptian desert was replaced by the Siberian snow.⁵ These narrative traditions were also integrated in the academic study of Jewish history. Exile (*galut* in Hebrew and *golus* in Yiddish) became the major theme in the history of Jews in Russia. According to Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, the Jewish collective memory has displayed a tendency to see current experiences as manifestations of biblical narratives. The actors change but the scenarios remain fundamentally the same.⁶

With regard to Finnish Jewish identity, the cantonists have played a central role. The cantonist system was abolished in 1856, and two years later, in 1858, the discharged former soldiers were given the right to settle down permanently in Finland together with their families, and these former cantonists established the core of the nascent Jewish

5 Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 2–3.

6 Yerushalmi 1982, 37; Erl 2011, 54.

community in Finland. During the following century, the vast majority of Jews in Finland traced their ancestry to these former cantonists, and the story of the cantonists was a part of the community's identity.⁷ The cantonists had maintained their faith in exile, and their descendants could take pride in the achievement of their forefathers. The poor young Jewish boys, forcefully conscripted and torn away from their families, had finally overcome the system and found a safe haven in Finland. Hard work and perseverance had earned them a secure position, both spiritually and economically. Community life was characterized by relative wealth and stability. In the final decade of the twentieth century, groups of newly arrived Jewish immigrants started to challenge the hegemony of the cantonists' descendants. Newly arrived Russian and Israeli Jews had no personal connection to the cantonists and their story and therefore did not feel included in the narrative of the community. Initially, there were few attempts at bridging the gap between the core population (i.e. the cantonists' descendants) and the newly arrived immigrants. One significant step in this direction is represented by Rony Smolar's article in the community magazine *Hakehila* (3/2012). Smolar writes about the history of the cantonists in Hebrew under the heading *The Cantonists – Our Picture*.⁸ Thus the Israeli members of the community were able to obtain glimpses of a narrative, which they did not share, but which was important for the community. Addressing the Israelis in Hebrew was an inclusive gesture, but did it make them feel like being part of "*Our Picture*"? In order to penetrate behind "*Our Picture*" of the cantonist soldiers, we have to study the man and the mind, which produced the system.

7 See, e.g., Jacobsson 1951; Seela 2005; Smolar 2012.

8 Smolar 2012.

Nicholas I – a psychological portrait

The cantonist system was the product of an autocratic czar's will. The system reflected the militaristic outlook of Nicholas I, and it was deeply connected with his personality. In order to understand the rise of the cantonist system, we have therefore to probe the factors that shaped the personality of the czar. In this task, I rely mainly on the biographies written by Bruce Lincoln (1989) and Nicholas Riasanovsky (1969). These two biographies are the standard works on Nicholas I. The most recent research by e.g. Richard S. Wortman (1995) follows in their path, even though it does not deal exhaustively with Nicholas' personality and biographical details.

Nicholas was born on June 25 1796. As an infant Nicholas was removed from the care of his mother and he was brought up by nannies. He was allowed to see his mother only for a few minutes each day.⁹ On these occasions his mother insisted that he should behave according to court etiquette. She was a strict and demanding mother and Nicholas did not receive any tender care from her. According to the psychological research of Margaret Mahler, a sound relationship between mother and child is beneficial for the development of the child's personality. Mahler's findings indicate that there should be a symbiotic phase from which the child would gradually evolve towards separation-individuation. Disturbances in the relationship between mother and child might leave the child unable to leave the symbiotic phase. Such disturbances include a "hard mother" who does not accept the child or pushes the child away, as well as the "soft mother" who keeps the child in her grip and does not allow the child to leave her stifling embrace.¹⁰ Nicholas' mother was one of the hard kind. Strict discipline was also exercised by the nannies. Besides the demanding Miss Jane de Lyon there were also two noblewomen of Baltic

9 Lincoln 1989, 50.

10 Theweleit 1993, 207.

German military stock. Bruce Lincoln emphasizes the military background of these women. In his biography, Lincoln underscores the importance of these women for the atmosphere in which Nicholas was raised. Later the importance of raw military discipline was accentuated, when Count General M. I. Lamsdorf became Nicholas' teacher.¹¹ His pedagogical qualifications were dubious but he succeeded in instilling a sense of discipline in the obstinate young Nicholas. Lamsdorf was a rigid and cruel person whose aim was to break the will of his pupil, thus his methods of instruction included corporal punishment.¹² The childhood of Nicholas was full of phobias. He was afraid of officers, fireworks, thunder, and cannons. Later this list was augmented by phobias connected with the fire in the Winter Palace in 1837. After the fire Nicholas was terrified by flames and smoke. In addition, he suffered from a fear of great heights. In his biography Nicholas Riasanovsky also mentions the fear of blood.¹³ How did Nicholas manage to live with all these phobias that haunted him? On the surface, he maintained a majestic and perfect calm exterior, but this was only a façade behind which he could hide feelings of rage, depression, sorrow, and anxiety. He managed to curtail the feelings of anxiety and depression by maintaining punctuality, order, and perfect regularity in his routines. Under the supervision of Lamsdorf, he grew up with the mentality of a drill instructor with military exercise as his foremost interest.¹⁴ Under these circumstances Nicholas embarked on a psychological voyage where external rigor, first initiated by teachers and later internalized and self-imposed, started to give his personality its physical contour in the form of a mental armor.¹⁵

11 Lincoln 1989, 52–54.

12 Riasanovsky 1969, 24.

13 Riasanovsky 1969, 6.

14 Riasanovsky 1969, 6–8.

15 Cf. Theweleit 1993, 412, 418.

As a child Nicholas preferred his toy soldiers to all his other toys. As soon as he woke he started to play with his lead and porcelain soldiers and organized battles and maneuvers with them. He loved uniforms; at the age of five he owned sixteen uniforms of the Izmailov cavalier-guard regiment as well as several St. Andrew Silver stars. As a young boy Nicholas drew every day and he was quite skilled at drawing soldiers, uniforms, military maps, and fortresses. The empress tried to curtail Nicholas' military mania, but she did not succeed. When Nicholas was given the assignment of writing an essay arguing "the military is not the only service justifying the nobleman; there are other no less useful and honorable occupations", he sat and pondered the heading for one and a half hours and finally decided to write nothing.¹⁶ Lamsdorf's way of educating Nicholas led to an external emphasis on military attribute such as uniforms, detailed maps, and plans of fortresses etc. whereas real combat skills and strategic thought were neglected. In the realm of Nicholas' professionally shallow but deeply internalized militarism there was one thing, namely uniforms, which rose above everything else. According to Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Nicholas' love of uniforms knew no bounds. In his twenties, he portrayed his wife clumsily dressed in a cavalier-guard's uniform.¹⁷ The uniform also had implications on a personal level. The main issue being about keeping one's personality together. The function of the uniform was apparently the same for Nicholas as it was for the German Freikorps soldiers and early fascists described by Klaus Theweleit.¹⁸ According to Theweleit, the soldier carries with himself a boundary in the shape of the uniform, and the belt and cross belt in particular. They give the soldier a feeling of something holding him together. Discipline, pain, and the uniform

16 Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 30.

17 Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 30. On Nicholas I and military parades, see Wortman 1995, 308–321.

18 Theweleit 1989, 223.

bind him together and repel the threat of fragmentation. According to the Marquis de Custine, Nicholas I girded himself so tightly that his stomach was pushed up into his chest and his ribs were thrust forward. His entire person was thus set in suspense. After undressing the emperor's bowels were relieved and he was cast in a state of fatigue.¹⁹ If we compare Klaus Theweleit's analysis of the German Freikorps' soldiers with the personality of Nicholas I, we can discern a common variable: Prussian militarism. Nicholas' adoration of Prussian militarism was rewarded when he married Charlotte, a Prussian princess. The marriage took place in 1817 and the bride changed her name to Alexandra. According to Bruce Lincoln, she found consolation for her homesickness when she spent a few summer weeks together with Nicholas in Krasnoye Selo watching military exercises. The military environment, which was permeated by Prussian discipline, made the princess feel at home.²⁰ Military surroundings enabled Nicholas himself to experience rare moments of happiness. Parades could make him feel ecstatic, and inspections of enormous parades lead sometimes to religious and even close to orgasmic moods.²¹

The original function of discipline and militarism for Nicholas was to keep together his fragile and undeveloped personality, but this was later extended to keeping together the entire Russian empire. Empire and personality were integrated in the mental picture of a besieged fortress (it is to be kept in mind that Nicholas had a special passion for the engineer troops). Duty, severe discipline, and military virtues became ends in themselves.

19 De Custine 2002, 142.

20 Lincoln 1989, 66–67. Lincoln quotes Alexandra's own words: "I could not restrain a small cry of pleasure because they [the Semenovskii, Izmailovskii and Preobrazhenskii Regiments] reminded me of my beloved Guards of the Berlin Regiment." Alexandra stated further that "these three weeks passed far too quickly for me, so pleasing did I find this military life".

21 Riasanovsky 1969, 9.

The cantonists and Finland

Finland was a peripheral and autonomous part of the Russian empire. Gradually Jewish cantonist soldiers arrived in the Russian garrisons in Finland. They were stationed mainly in Sveaborg, Tavastehus, and Åbo. After the decree on Jewish military service was promulgated at the end of August 1827, it took very little before the czar told the provincial governors in Finland that they should be careful when granting passports to Jews who wanted to travel from Finland to Russia. In principle, Jews did not have the right to reside in Finland, and consequently the czar's order pertained mainly to Jews who were travelling through Finland to other destinations. In the background, there might have been an assumption of a minuscule permanent Jewish settlement in Finland. The legislation of the Russian empire was a conglomerate of complicated and sometimes conflicting paragraphs, and legal theory could often be replaced by daily circumventing of laws and decrees in a country where Gogol's *Dead Souls* had their real-life counterparts in a thoroughly corrupted reality.²² The czar was afraid that Jews might use Finland as a gateway to the capital cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, and consequently he reminded the governors that Jews only had the right to reside in a limited part of the empire.²³ The Jewish Pale of Settlement comprised the western governments of the empire, but Finland was not part of the Pale.

The Pale of Settlement had already been defined before Nicholas I ascended the throne in 1825. However, the czar's fear of Jews trying to violate the boundaries of the Pale seemed to conceal other fears and psychological agendas. Nicholas was adamant about defending a conservative order, but the question arises as to whether there was anything rational about forcing the Jews to live within a limited territory, not to mention the almost paranoid attitude of the czar when

22 See e.g. Stanislawski 1983, 160–161.

23 Samling af Kejsleriga Bref 1836, 221–222.

he thought of all possible ways in which the Jews might try to circumvent his orders. The psychohistorian Avner Falk has written about borders and the crossing of borders. According to Falk, there is an enormous psychological significance attached to a border. Falk writes that strictly drawn and guarded national borders are connected to obsessive and compulsive behavior and a fear of loss of self and one's own boundaries.²⁴ Those who dream of living on the other side of a border in a foreign country might actually be harboring an oedipal longing for union and symbiosis with an accepting mother in a state of incestuous and overflowing bliss.²⁵ I would argue that in the case

- 24 Falk 1989b, 157. "From a psychohistorical viewpoint, the diffuse borders of ancient empires compare strikingly with the generally well-defined and strictly defined borders of present-day nation states. It is possible that, with the advance of civilizations, human beings have on the whole become more obsessive and compulsive, so that a rigid system of compartmentalization (drawing precise maps with national borders) has been imposed on geography, politics, diplomacy, travel, and any other field of human behavior which has to do with borders. Behind such rigidity lies the fear of loss of boundaries, that is the fear of loss of the self and non-being. Disputes over borders arise in different parts of the world and lead to armed conflicts or even war. It is clear that the emotional meaning of one's country's borders, unconsciously, is fused with that of one's own boundaries. To give up territory, however occupied by military force, is to some a great narcissistic loss and injury ... Borders are not only needed for military security: they are unconsciously needed for the feeling of being there, to overcome the panic of the symbiotic loss of ego boundaries."
- 25 Falk 1989a, 144-145. Falk connects his reasoning to the research of William G. Niederland and Paul Friedman: "They suggest that the two countries on the two sides of a border unconsciously symbolize early parental figures. Thus, crossing an international border for a man may mean crossing the incest barrier into the mother. It may also mean a search for a bounteous early mother who will unconditionally accept and embrace the child. Migrants in search of a new place and a new job, immigrants in search of a new country, sky-jackers heading for the hospitable land which will grant them asylum have fantasies which are very similar to the early infantile wishes concerning the mother."

of Nicholas I the maintaining of strictly guarded borders was probably connected with psychological problems resulting from the early childhood experiences of the emperor. His fear of the Jews crossing the border of the Pale was apparently connected to his fear of the loss of the boundaries of his own weak self, which would lead to the dissolution of the self. Empire and ego were intertwined in the absolutist outlook of Nicholas. He seems to have been especially afraid of Jews appearing in the capital cities St. Petersburg and Moscow. These cities were symbols of the czar himself. As the emperor and empire were symbolically equated, the thought of a Jewish presence in the capitals was probably unbearable for the ruler, and the borders of the Pale of Settlement were thus as much a psychological concept as they were a geographical one. The emperor guarded both psychological and geographical borders with an iron fist. Majestic and dressed in uniform, but nevertheless panicking at the same time, the czar ordered that the borders should be guarded against Jewish intrusion. The fear of ego dissolution seems to have loomed ominously in the background.

It is hard to determine the volume of Jewish transit traffic via Finland to the Russian heartland. However, there is information about a gradually established Jewish presence in Vyborg, where many of the Jews eventually converted to Christianity. Even in the Vyborg case, the conclusion of the Russian authorities seemed to have been that the final goal of these Jews was to gain right of residence in St. Petersburg. A new era of Jewish-Christian relations was inaugurated in the Grand Duchy of Finland when the conversions were brought to the attention of the authorities. During these years, the German Lutheran parish of Vyborg had welcomed a so far unsurpassed number of Jewish converts to Christianity who had been baptized as Lutherans.²⁶ The converts

26 The converts were Marcus Salomo, baptized on November 11th 1827, renamed Johann Carl Reneau; Mayer Wulff, baptized on January 22nd 1828 and renamed Alexander Martin Wulff; Marcus David Arnhold, baptized on August 15th 1828 while retaining his name; Hermann Salomon

were baptized by parish rector August Gottfried Wahl (1746–1830). Wahl was born in Germany and he had received his doctorate in Theology from Åbo. Why was Wahl ready to baptize the Jews even though he probably suspected that they might have other than purely spiritual reasons to convert? He might have been influenced by similar enlightened ideas to the clergy in Åbo, where pastors around the turn of the century welcomed Jews in bourgeois society after having baptized them. The consequences of Wahl's willingness to baptize the Jews soon materialized. The diocesan chapters of Finland were notified in November 1830 that they should be aware of the fact that Jews were converting to Christianity in order to gain economical and social advantages.²⁷ Previous research has accused Nicholas I of trying to forcibly convert Jews to Christianity. The warning issued to the diocesan chapters portrays the czar in a totally different light. Jews were supposed to remain Jews, and they were not supposed to be included in the Christian community. Instead, they should remain a distinct ethnic and religious group. On the other hand, the czar wanted to modernize the Jews through education and military service, but the Jews should nevertheless retain their separate status. As a separate group, they should be standardized as much as possible and be integrated among the various ethnic groups within the empire, but this form of inclusion entailed merely an increase in the duties imposed on the Jews and not any corresponding increase in their rights. There

Fürst, baptized on November 4th 1828 and renamed Hermann Simon Fürst; Dawid Samuel Kohn, baptized in December 1828 and renamed David Gottlieb Kohn; Mur Garfunkel, baptized on December 10th 1829 and renamed Moritz; Ezechiel Nathan Luric, baptized on March 11th 1830 and renamed Eduard; Slegon Löwenstimm, baptized on July 18th 1830 and renamed Wilhelm Johann Slegon; Schai Markuk and Julius Kuic, both baptized on August 13th 1830 and renamed Andreas Johann and Julius Andreas, respectively. See church archives of Vyborg German parish.

27 Samling af Kejslerliga Bref 1837, 300.

were possibilities to convert to Christianity, but the czar was afraid that the Jews were trying to exploit these possibilities in order to gain social and economical advantages.

Even though Finland had an autonomous position in the Russian empire, the Finnish authorities were reminded that they should follow Russian legislation. The Finnish provincial governors were informed about a ukase of the Governing Senate²⁸ regarding the admission of Jews into certain guilds. Jews should not be admitted to guilds, which were open for non-Jews only.²⁹ The ukase is an expression of the sovereign's will and shows clearly that Nicholas I had an extremely suspicious attitude towards the Jews: he assumed that they were constantly trying to gain their way into domains that were inaccessible for them, and an increase in restrictions imposed on the Jews meant an increase in the potential points, where the law could be breached.

The czar as "Little Father"

In Russia, people commonly referred to the czar as "little father" (czar batiushka).³⁰ Autocratic Russian rulers from Peter the Great to Joseph Stalin enjoyed and exploited this paternalistic expression.³¹ Nicholas I was no exception on this point, and people spoke of him as "little father". Who were the children of this "little father"? Naturally

28 The Governing Senate was the executive body of the czar founded by Peter the great, and it should not be confused with the Finnish Senate.

29 Samling af Kejserliga Bref 1837, 400-401.

30 Rancour-Laferriere 1995, 152.

31 According to Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, "the Russian czars, for example, had since the seventeenth century been affectionately referred to by the naively monarchistic peasantry as "little father" ("Batiushka"). Peter the Great was "Father of the Fatherland" ("Otets Otechestva"). Iosif Stalin, who far outstripped the tsars in the degree to which he enslaved Russia (and the rest of the Soviet Union), was called "Father", "Father of the Peoples", "Wise Father", "Beloved Father", and so forth". Rancour-Laferriere 1995, 153.

all the ethnic Russians, but did the same apply to Nicholas' subjects from other ethnic backgrounds such as Poles, Finns or Jews? "Little father" was a father who ruled his empire with an iron fist, and some of his subjects were certainly in the position of stepchildren. They were forced to live in insecurity – did "little father" regard them as his real children, could they gain some favor from him or even obtain love and acceptance from him, or were they left at the mercies of his whims and subjected to cruel legislation and draconian ukases? For Nicholas I and his Russian subjects there was a clear model of a strict father and his beloved children, but with regard to the czar's subjects of other nationality the situation was more ambiguous. Many Finns regarded Nicholas as a fatherly figure whom they feared, but at the same time they wanted to please him and appease him without questioning his authority.³² In Finland people often repeated an apocryphal quotation, according to which Nicholas was supposed to have said that Finland was the only province in his empire that had not caused him any worries. This quotation mainly reflects the Finns' aspiration to remain good and loyal subjects and their wish that "little father" would regard them as his real children. How was it then with the Jews? Was Nicholas their "little father" as well? In a psychohistorical interpretation of "little father" and his children the Russian and Finnish Jews can definitely be seen as stepchildren in comparison with the czar's "real" Russian children.³³ The laws and ukases, which limited

32 Siltala 1999, 154.

33 Among his "real children" Nicholas favored the young officers in the Cadet Corps. When the director of the Novgorod Corps fell ill, he gave the following speech to the cadets: "My beloved children! My feelings for you and my love make it hard to part from you ... Forgive me children that I am in no condition to come to you, to thank you, to talk with you ... I will pray for you, my friends, my darlings ... always be as good, as honorable, as dedicated as you were to me ... always be useful to yourselves and the fatherland ... and both with truth and dignity." Friedman 2012, 220. This

the rights of the Jews, restricted them to the Pale of Settlement and constrained their possibilities of converting to Christianity, can clearly be seen as “little father’s” intention of keeping his stepchildren at a distance. Finns could advance to prominent positions in the empire and they were offered opportunities to prove their qualifications and deserve their status as “little father’s” real children, but this was not the case for the Jews. On a psychological level the czar was their stepfather, but he wanted the Jews to be constantly be aware of their subordinate position in the family. They had a given place in the house of the czar, being mentally banished somewhere close to the outer door in a cold draft, far from the warmth of the inner chambers. They were supposed to respect their father and obey him, but he did not want to have them too close to himself. Of course “little father” did not treat his “real” children (i.e. the ethnic Russians) very well, either. They were also supposed to obey his stern will and they were at the mercies of his capricious ukases, but this did not affect the experience of the stepchildren (i.e. the Jews). Daniel Rancour-Laferriere writes about the identity of the Russians as a suffering people. The Russians submitted to the will of their “little father”, and suffering became something ennobling in their mind, a masochistic form of pleasure.³⁴ For the Jews, however, suffering was something different. In the face of various oppressors – for example the Romans, the Spanish Inquisition, or the Russian czar – the Jews did not remain passive and they did not try to find ennoblement or pleasure in their suffering. Yohanan

was a display of the benevolent and loving side of the czar’s paternalistic jargon.

- 34 Rancour-Laferriere quotes the Russian philosopher Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev. According to Chaadaev, “Russians come to expect, even welcome punishment from the paternal figure of the tsar, traditionally referred to as “little father tsar” (“tsar’ batiushka”) by Russians. The rule of law is utterly alien to Russians: “For us it is not the law which punishes a citizen who has done wrong, but a father who punishes a disobedient child.” Rancour-Laferriere 1995, 47.

Petrovsky-Shtern writes that even though suffering was seen by many Jews as a divine punishment for disobedience and the great sins of the Jewish people, there was always a ray of hope – maybe God would annul his severe decrees through the repentance of the people and the intercession and prayers of righteous men, and finally alleviate the sufferings of his people.³⁵ In addition to this, there was always a way for ordinary Jews to actively improve their own situation through ingenuity and hard work.

The expulsion of Jews from Sveaborg

One example of Jews actively trying to improve their conditions was the struggle of Finnish Jews for the right to live on the fortress island of Sveaborg. In the 1830's, at least 42 Jewish soldiers were undergoing their military service in Sveaborg. This figure can be compared to the total strength of the garrison, which was 4000-5000 soldiers during that period.³⁶ The Jewish soldiers in Sveaborg were all adults (in contrast to Jewish minors in the cantonist battalions), and they were in a better situation than the younger Jewish recruits. It is not known for certain what kind of sufferings the Jewish soldiers of Sveaborg had gone through before arriving on the island. Apparently they were satisfied with living on the island. The garrison was for a long period a more important population center than the actual capital, Helsinki, which is situated on the mainland. The Jewish soldiers and craftsmen, who were attached to the military units, had their families living together with them on the island, and they did not want to move away, despite Nicholas I's personal order that they should move away from Sveaborg and find accommodation on the mainland, from where they should daily commute by rowing boat to the island.³⁷

35 Petrovsky-Shtern 2009, 43-44.

36 Halén 2000, 29-31.

37 National Archives of Finland, Venäläiset sotilasasiakirjat, Sotilasinsinööri-

The forced moving of Jewish families from Sveaborg to Sandhamn in 1848 can be seen against the background of the anxiety displayed by Nicholas I in the face of the revolutions of 1848 in Western Europe. The original order, which forbade Jewish families from living within the walls of various fortresses in the Russian empire, was issued in 1845, but the disturbances in Europe in 1848 apparently gave added urgency to the implementation of the order. Finland was a peripheral part of the empire, but the chain of command reached even this remote location. On 2 July 1848, the commandant of Sveaborg, Artillery General Altfater, wrote to the commander of the Sveaborg Engineering company, Lieutenant Colonel Engel, and reminded him that His Majesty the Emperor had on 3 January 1845 “kindly expressed his highest will: in no case to allow Jewish families to stay inside fortresses”. General Altfater had been informed that “in this fortress lives the wife of the private of the 3rd military working squadron Meyer Blah, Belka Hatskaleva”. Altfater wanted to know on what grounds “the Jewess Hatskaleva has been allowed to live in the fortress and has not been moved”.³⁸ A few days later, on 5 July, Lieutenant Colonel Engel wrote to the commander of the 3rd squadron, Captain Isaev, and demanded an explanation. Isaev’s predecessor had been told that two Jewish families had been sent to Sandhamn in order to be employed at the brick factory and that they had been placed under “strict surveillance so that they should not engage in illegal trading activity typical for Jews, especially keeping a tavern”. Apparently the families had after a while moved back to Sveaborg. The correspondence between Altfater and Engel went on, and Altfater expressed in highly courteous words his astonishment over the fact that the czar’s

hallinnon arkisto, 14647 Santahaminan siirrettävät juutalaiset perheet 1848.

38 National Archives of Finland, Venäläiset sotilasasiakirjat, Sotilasinsinöörihallinnon arkisto, 14647 Santahaminan siirrettävät juutalaiset perheet 1848.

orders had been disobeyed. Engel replied that he had made a list of the Jews who lived in the fortress and that four out of five people on the list were craftsmen who were necessary and that the fifth man was a fortification worker but also a shoemaker at the same time, therefore, the squadron needed him, too. All the Jews were under strict surveillance and Engel promised to punish them severely if they engaged in any prohibited activities. The list was compiled by Isaev and dated July 16 1848. The Jews on the list were private 1st class Meier Blah (bricklayer), private 1st class Leiba Pribshstein (bricklayer and squadron tailor), private 2nd class Girsh Meerovich (carpenter and glass cutter), private 2nd class Benjamin Baranovich (blacksmith apprentice) and private 2nd class Leiba Zuperman (fortification worker and shoemaker).³⁹

On 16 July 1848, the matter was forwarded to the regional commander of the engineer troops, Major General Brandt, who ordered the Jewish families to be removed from Sveaborg. Letters were exchanged between lower ranking military bureaucrats, who investigated the possibility of finding accommodation for the families on Sandhamn. The result was that there was room for seven Jewish families and that they could be allowed a rowing boat with six oars for their daily transport to Sveaborg. Despite a frenetic correspondence it was still unclear in August 1848 why the Jewish families still were allowed to stay on Sveaborg. Captain Isaev reported finally on 20 August 1848, that the last Jewish family had been transferred from Sveaborg to Sandhamn. The four other Jewish families who had initially moved to the mainland in Helsinki had not been able to afford the rent in Helsinki, so they too had been transferred to Sandhamn.⁴⁰

39 National Archives of Finland, Venäläiset sotilasiakirjat, Sotilasinsinöörihallinnon arkisto, 14647 Santahaminan siirrettävät juutalaiset perheet 1848.

40 National Archives of Finland, Venäläiset sotilasiakirjat, Sotilasinsinöörihallinnon arkisto, 14647 Santahaminan siirrettävät juutalaiset perheet 1848.

The Jewish presence in Sveaborg was nevertheless a story with many twists. The commandant of Sveaborg returned to the matter fifteen years later. He wanted to remove the families of all non-commissioned officers and private soldiers from the fortress. This massive operation affected roughly 400 families (both Jews and non-Jews). Commandant Alexeyev gave the order on 1 June 1863 and the list of the families moved included some Jews: Schlem Fajelovich's daughter Hajka, Iohit Kolomatskiy's 17-year-old wife Schifra and Lejzer Knak's wife Hova (Haja). Three years later the new commandant Lieutenant General Alopaeus deported all Jews from Sveaborg. Harry Halén writes about Jews in nineteenth century Finnish garrisons but he mentions only the orders of 1863 and 1866. The process of removing the Jews from Sveaborg was rather lengthy, according to Halén.⁴¹ If we take into account the order of 1848, which has not received scholarly attention before, we have to conclude that the process was much longer than Halén assumes. It seems that the Jews were able to maintain a presence in Sveaborg despite the various commandants' strenuous efforts. Many Jewish soldiers managed to have their families with them on the fortress island. Deportations were implemented from time to time, but the Jewish families returned as soon as they could.

The fortress as a symbol

Why was Nicholas so deeply concerned with the Jewish presence within the walls of his fortresses? In the case of Sveaborg, the matter was about a few private soldiers with families, people who could hardly pose any great threat as spies, conspirators, or revolutionaries. The Czar's fear of Jewish subversive activity was basically irrational and lacked any real foundation. A potential explanation of this fear could be offered from a psychoanalytical perspective. According

41 Halén 2000, 31.

to Freud, the fortress is a powerful and loaded psychological symbol. Freud sees castles and fortresses as symbols for woman.⁴² My choice of using Freudian symbolism as a tool of interpretation is supported by similar modes of analysis, which are used in the field of psychohistory. One prominent example is offered by Klaus Theweleit, who discusses the castle as a symbol for woman. Theweleit writes that “in dreams, thoughts or perceived images of “castles” often refer to or are associated with the womb. “Castle” carries the connotations “mother”, “noble woman”, “pure, high-born woman”.⁴³ Critics might want to dismiss Freud as outdated and discard his theories as unscientific, but in the field of psychohistory, Freud’s theories cannot be ignored. Even as his theories have been challenged, developed, and modified, they still constitute a point of departure with a high degree of relevance. As Klaus Theweleit puts it: “As a rule, the mode of conceptualization here must be critical of Freud, while still remaining Freudian.”⁴⁴ The entire psychological study of the causes of Anti-Semitism relies heavily on a foundation built by Freud.⁴⁵ Thus the use of Freud’s theories in the context of Nicholas I and the Jews in Sveaborg can be regarded as justified. A Freudian interpretation is naturally subject to serious scholarly challenge, and the interpretation I offer is just one possibility of explaining Nicholas’ special relationship with fortresses. Nevertheless, I would argue that the psychoanalytical approach offers a plausible explanation of Nicholas’ seemingly irrational behavior.

A fortress is something to be conquered and owned. From another point of view, the fortress (i.e. the woman) is a symbol of safety and

42 Freud 1964, 140. Freud adds that these symbols are not limited to the realm of dreams. They are also found in various other contexts, such as myths, popular legends, everyday speech, and poems. See Freud 1964, 142.

43 Theweleit 1993, 86. For Theweleit, the use of psychoanalytic symbols grounded in the writings of Freud is a methodologically solid way of writing psychohistory. See Theweleit 1993, 192–194.

44 Theweleit 1993, 56–57.

45 Falk 2008, 67–79.

one can find shelter behind its walls. The importance of womanly or maternal care and safety is a starting point for an examination of Nicholas I's special attitude as regards fortresses. Nicholas had been separated from the care of his mother at a tender age. The separation-individuation phase in the development of Nicholas' personality had been disrupted in such a way that he seems to have been left with a deep craving for symbiosis with his mother. This craving manifested itself in an accentuated need for safety and security. As an emperor Nicholas was able to cultivate his unusually high enthusiasm for fortresses and the engineer corps in a highly concrete manner. Regarding military administration he would devote close attention to fortresses and the engineer corps, although his interest in fortresses had deeper roots. As a child Nicholas built small playhouses for himself and his nannies. He used chairs, earth, and toys as building materials, and he never failed to fortify his buildings. The fortifications included cannons, which would offer protection for the inhabitants.⁴⁶ The need to build fortresses was deeply seated in the personality of Nicholas I, and I would argue that this need was not about rational military or political calculations, but apparently had to do with a deeper psychological need for safety, a need which was nearly impossible to satisfy.

Nicholas' relationship with fortresses could manifest itself in absurd ways, expelling the Jews from Sveaborg being just one example. Other examples are offered by the Marquis de Custine, who visited Russia in 1839. The Marquis de Custine had been given permission by the Minister of War (i.e. ultimately the Czar himself) to visit Shlisselburg, the old Swedish fortress at the head of the Neva River on Lake Ladoga. According to de Custine, visiting a Russian fortress was a highly complicated matter. Despite all permits and recommendations de Custine was met with suspicion, pretexts, and strange glances when he was received by local dignitaries. Finally, de Custine was allowed to visit the fortress, which gave him an uneasy and prisonlike

46 Riasanovsky 1969, 10.

feeling. De Custine's experiences from other European fortresses were markedly different. In other countries, he had been received in a courteous and pleasant manner despite all imaginable strategic and political consideration. In Shlisselburg, however, de Custine's visit became a bizarre spectacle in which he felt he could at any time have become a prisoner in the fortress, which he had entered as a noble and privileged tourist with the express permission of the Emperor.⁴⁷ The entire host of local dignitaries had been affected by the paranoid spirit that permeated the bureaucratic apparatus of Nicholas I. The restrictions and secrets surrounding the fortresses were manifestations of this paranoid spirit, but at the same time I would argue that the paranoia and the fortresses themselves were manifestations of the Czar's psychological needs rooted in his unhappy early childhood years, the unanswered cry of the baby and the absence of motherly love and care.

The ordeals of Itshok and Schleimo

The history of the Jews in Sveaborg is particularly interesting. The story of the cantonists is absolutely essential for Finnish Jewish identity. Discharged former cantonist soldier were the people who founded the Jewish community in Finland. The cantonists displayed determination and courage clinging to the religion of their fathers and they have received due admiration for this. The picture is slightly altered, however, if we take into account the fact that many of the Jewish soldiers had wives and children with them. All Jewish soldiers in Finland were not lost young boys isolated from their Jewish family and community life. The accommodation of Jewish families close to the barracks was a factor that was certainly helpful for the foundation of Jewish community life in Finland. I have previously mentioned the narrative traditions that dealt with the experience of the cantonists. Stories about the ordeals of the cantonists were passed on orally. One

47 De Custine 2002, 351–368.

such story was written down by Santeri Jacobsson, author of the first major account of Finnish Jewish history. In Jacobsson's book we find the story of two individual cantonists. According to Jacobsson the story dates back to the 1870s but it was written down in the early 1950s when Jacobsson published his work about the Finnish Jews' struggle for rights. Jacobsson had heard the story from his father, who had personally met the two cantonists. The story is thus part of an oral tradition, and it is hard to determine the relationship between legend and actual facts. The important thing is what the story tells us about the nature of the Finnish Jewish identity. The protagonists had been drafted as young children and they had been forcibly baptized. Despite this the two men had secretly kept Jewish religious customs, which they had learnt at home and in the *cheder* (i.e. Jewish elementary school). When they grew up they told their commanding officers that they did not accept the Christian creed and that they wanted to be Jews. They were incarcerated because of this, and an Orthodox priest came to their cell in order to persuade them to return to Christianity. The zeal of the priest just made them furious, and they threw him out of the cell. After this, the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg was told about the situation, and the men were transferred to Sveaborg. There they were locked in a casemate, a bombproof dungeon. They were forced to wait four years before they got any decision about their fate. Jewish women from Helsinki, especially Mrs Chava Knopp, brought them food regularly and candles for Shabbat. She also mended their clothes and alleviated their hardships in other ways, too. Even the heart of the commandant was moved, when he saw the two Jewish soldiers' spiritual perseverance. Finally, metropolitan Antonius came from St. Petersburg to see the prisoners. Shabbat was about to begin, and the prisoners were allowed to wear new and clean clothes so that they could be presentable before the metropolitan. They set the table with Shabbat courses, lit candles, and put on their talitot (prayer shawls) and started to read the evening prayers. Then the door was opened and the mighty Russian patriarch entered the room accompanied by

guards. The prisoners did not react. They just continued to pray. The metropolitan ordered the guards to leave the room, and he closed the door. Then he sat down on a chair in a corner of the room and waited for the prisoners to finish their prayers. When the prisoners were ready, he addressed them in a meek tone, telling them that the Holy Synod had authorized him to pay them a visit. He wanted them to answer a simple question: Were they prepared to repent and to return to the pure doctrine? The prisoners replied: "Why do you ask, do you not see the burning Shabbat candles on the table? Have we not been tormented enough? Are our sufferings not enough for you? We were forcibly baptized as children. We do not accept your creed, we stick to the doctrine of our forefathers. Our faith will not be shaken by torture. God is our witness and our protection. Leave us alone!" The Shabbat candles flickered gently on the table and spread their faint light in the cell. Shadows flickered on the stone walls, and there was a moment of silence. Finally, the metropolitan rose and tried to hold back his tears. Then he spoke with a trembling voice: "I shall leave now and I will not disturb your Sabbath evening anymore. I will recommend that the Holy Synod shall release you immediately. I pray to the Almighty that He shall give me the same kind of place in the kingdom of heaven as you have earned yourselves through your unwavering faith. God bless you!"

Soon after this the prisoners were released. They were called Itshok and Schleimo among their fellow Jews. When they had been baptized they received new Christian names, but they did not want to use those names anymore. After their release they went to Vyborg, where they met Santeri Jacobsson's father. One of them did not travel further since he was fatally injured in an accident. He fell under the train at the Sorvali stop in Vyborg. The other moved to America, where he had relatives.⁴⁸

48 Jacobsson 1951, 97–99.

Conclusions

The story told by Santeri Jacobsson conveys a clear message: the early years of Jewish settlement in Finland were characterized by intolerance and insecurity. This impression, which has put an indelible mark on Finnish Jewish identity, can naturally be nuanced by, for example, the scholarly work of Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern. He emphasizes the fact that Nicholas I was an intolerant ruler on all levels and that the Jews were not the only victims of the Czar's intolerance. I have demonstrated the ways in which Nicholas I's psychological background affected his personal intolerance, which in turn marked the early developments of Jewish history in Finland. Alexander II, the successor of Nicholas I on the Russian throne, finally gave the order, which enabled discharged Jewish soldiers to legally settle in Finland, thus establishing a permanent Jewish population in the country. Nicholas I had, however, already contributed to the legislation regarding the status of Jews in Finland, and his personality and attitudes had affected the bureaucracy in Russia and Finland in such a way that deeply rooted suspicion and discrimination were part of the bureaucratic mindset.

With regard to the psychohistory of tolerance in the Grand Duchy of Finland, I have presented the following new findings with a connection to the personality of Nicholas I: geographical borders and their relationship with Nicholas' fear of the dissolution of the boundaries of his self; the uniform as Nicholas' mental boundary, the fortress as a symbol for woman/mother and Nicholas' longing for an unattainable mother; the Czar as "little father" with a complicated relationship with his stepchildren, that is to say the Jews. A person with a hard and austere childhood like Nicholas would most probably not have evolved into a great champion of tolerance. The reign of Nicholas I was a reign of almost constant intolerance, which was synonymous with his absolutism and paranoia. Jews and their position in the remote Grand Duchy of Finland were not the primary concerns of Nicholas, but

they received their share of ukases and imperial orders, which laid the foundation for the coming decades of discrimination and intolerance as well as a lasting impression of the cantonists' ordeals in the narrative tradition of Finnish Jews.

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