

המכון הבינלאומי לגנאלוגיה יהודית ומרכז פאול יעקבי, ירושלים



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH GENEALOGY AND PAUL JACOBI CENTER

AT THE JEWISH NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, JERUSALEM

Joint Symposium - St. Petersburg

Neville Lamdan - Opening Remarks

10.9.2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

We are about to embark on a pioneering voyage of genealogical discovery.

For the first time, as far as we know, a group of international scholars is convening to explore scientifically the Genealogy and Family History of the Jews of Russia - more specifically, to focus on Jews who lived under Russian jurisdiction, in Russia proper - that is, *outside* the official Pale of Settlement, as defined by Katerina the Great at the end of the 18th century.

This ground-breaking initiative was originally proposed by my colleague and co-chairman, Dr. Igor Sakharov - and we, in the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem, were delighted to accept it, in the knowledge that over the last two decades much serious work has been done on the genealogy of Jews living *inside* the Pale, but far less study, in any systematic way, has been pursued into Jews "beyond the Pale".

Our joint enterprise is both pertinent and timely. It is not always appreciated that about half of the Jews in the world today lived in Imperial Russia after the Partitions of Poland late in the 18th century. A certain percentage of these - and perhaps a larger percentage than previously thought - resided inside Russia proper.

For reasons I do not understand, over the last several months there has been a demonstrable surge of interest in these Jews. Those of us who follow Jewish genealogical sites have witnessed an increase of questions around the topic - for example, regarding the 1897 All Russia Census, or records kept by official rabbis (Kazzonyi Ravin) or primary sources in general from the late Imperial Period. Sometimes the queries are as naive as "was Katerina ever used as a Jewish name". But there is clearly increased interest and involvement out there among the general Jewish genealogical community.

In response to these queries, people who perhaps should know better have been giving strange replies. A Vice President of JewishGen, the leading Jewish genealogical site in the United States, recently explained to an inquirer that the organization's databases were organized by Eastern and Western European nations, "but not Russia" - as if Russia was on another planet! Why so, she asked rhetorically: "two reasons ... First, because there were few Jews who lived in what is now Russia; ... and, second, because there are so few Jewish records available for current-day Russia."

This second claim is simply not correct. In the last few months, there has been a veritable explosion of databases, mostly in the Russian language, posted on the Internet, dealing with Jews in Russia and under Russian jurisdiction. Indeed, a catalogue has been compiled of about 1,000 relevant datasets in Russian and the list keeps growing.

Many of the sites deal with Jews in the Russian military. To mention but a few examples: There are lists of senior Jewish officers in various branches of the Red Army, lists of Russian Jews who fell in the 2nd World War generally and who died in the defence of Leningrad in particular. A database of Russian Jews who fought in the Russo-Japanese War is also available.

There is of course a wider focus as well, far beyond military related topics. For instance: Communal and Synagogal records for Moscow have been posted; the names of Chassidic leaders arrested in Moscow under Stalin and their fates are now available.

Much of this information gathering and its diffusion appears to be spontaneous and unorganized. We at our Symposium will attempt a systematic and scientific look at a broad range of sources and resources accessible for the genealogy of Jews in Russia in archives, libraries and elsewhere, both in Russia proper and beyond.

From an academic point of view, much of the material already posted on the Net and still more of that that will be mentioned here, will be in the nature of raw material, primarily for scholars, family historians and social scientists in general to examine, analyze and contextualize within various frameworks and from different perspectives. We will also listen to papers which are practical applications of genealogical research, case studies of what we hope are representative families and social groups.

We have great expectations for the outcome of our deliberations. It is our intention to quickly print up the papers as delivered in the original languages, and then to publish the Proceedings of our Symposium as a properly edited volume in English - "to get the word out" to a much wider audience.

I should like to thank all those responsible for putting the Symposium together and for supporting it.

First and foremost, we must express our deep appreciation to the Director of the Russian Institute for Genealogical Research, Dr. Igor Sakharov, and his staff for doing all the hard work at this end. Then, our thanks go out to the Director-General of the National Library here in St. Petersburg, Dr. Anton Likhomanov, who so readily gave his backing to the suggestion of holding the Symposium when it was first proposed.

Likewise, I should like to thank the Government of St. Petersburg on the one hand and the Consulate-General of Israel in St. Petersburg on the other hand for their full support - and for having both sent distinguished representatives to be with us this evening in the personages of the honourable Mr. Alexander Makarov, Chairman of the relevant Historical and Cultural Committee in the City Government; And my friend and former colleague from the Israel Foreign Ministry, the Israel Consul-General, Mr. Edward Shapiro.

In sum, we are about to set out on two fascinating days of deliberations, devoted to the advancement of knowledge about our shared past and common roots.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to wish us all:

"Udachi" – "Bon Succès" - "behatslacha l'kulanu".

Thank you very much.