

# Salvaging Lives, Saving Culture: An-sky's Literary Ethnography in the First World War

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Shloyme Zanvyl Rappoport (1863–1920), who published under the pseudonym S. An-sky, was one of the foremost Yiddish writers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But in 1909, in a letter to his friend and frequent correspondent Chaim Zhitlowsky, he announced that he was turning his attention away from writing: »...I have decided to devote the rest of my life to the Jewish task, which I consider colossally important for the creation of a Jewish culture. This is the creation of Jewish ethnography, the collection of objects of Jewish folklore, etc.«<sup>1</sup>. An-sky had long harbored an interest in folklore, but early in his career this interest had been primarily in Russian rather than Jewish subjects – in fact, he had written extensively in Russian. By the end of the nineteenth century, his interest had come to include Jewish folklore, and he started writing more in Yiddish, but his 1909 announcement to Zhitlowsky of his turn to Jewish ethnography presumably entailed leaving behind his engagement with Russian folklore as well as his belletristic activities, whether Jewish or Russian in focus. An-sky's decision intimates a triage between literature and ethnography, which, in the eleven years preceding his death, he would ultimately refuse to implement in his own most important works, his seminal play *The Dybbuk* and his war memoir *Khurbn Galitsiye*, the latter of which forms the subject of this essay. These two works, his two most significant produced after his turn to Jewish ethnography, illustrate in two divergent but complementary ways the possibilities for a non-scholarly, ethnographically informed and engaged literature in Yiddish.

1 An-sky, qtd. in Benjamin Lukin: »An Academy Where Folklore Will be Studied: An-sky and the Jewish Museum.« *The Worlds of S. An-sky: a Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*. Ed. Gabriella Safran & Steven J. Zipperstein. Stanford, California 2006, pp. 281–306, p. 287.

The Dybbuk was his masterpiece and a key work of modernist theater. It incorporates mystical and supernatural elements with a strong primitivist character, drawn from the folk tales and customs that he collected on the Baron Guenzburg Jewish Ethnographic Expedition through Volhynia and Podolia from 1912 through 1914. This was a literary work based on ethnographic sources, but not subject to them, manipulating them for its own dramatic ends, even as it showcased their richness and viability as art – an achievement that certainly fell in line with the goal he stated to Zhitlowsky of creating a Jewish culture based on ethnographic work. There is much more to say, of course, on *The Dybbuk*, but it has already been the subject of a quantity of scholarship that is, within the small discipline of Yiddish studies, extensive. I choose instead to focus here on An-sky's lesser known work, *Khurbn Galitsiye*<sup>2</sup>, both because it has not been subject to extensive analysis, and, more importantly, because with this work he accomplished something remarkable. *The Dybbuk* is a literary work that made use of ethnographic materials, but *Khurbn Galitsiye* is a book that takes as its equal subjects literature and ethnography, placing them within the context of an engagement with Jewish culture that privileged, by necessity, the concerns of the present, rather than a scholarly past or an ideological future. That present was the First World War, and its primary concern for An-sky, unifying the ethnographic and the literary, was salvage – salvage of folklore and salvage of people. *Khurbn Galitsiye* is a document sprung from this goal and is also a record of the pursuit of this goal. The resulting text is more ambivalent about its relationship to ethnography but also more dependent on it than *The Dybbuk*.

The question of how to contextualize a project so explicitly focused on salvage by one of the masters of Yiddish literature (or, put bluntly, how to account for the exploitation for literary purposes of a society to which the author ostensibly belonged as a member and advocate) is complicated by the perspective that scholarship on Yiddish literature has generally taken. The standard position on literature describing the *shtetl*

- 2 »The Dybbuk« and »Khurbn Galitsiye« both have complicated publication histories, but the former was rapidly published in multiple languages, and has long been available in numerous editions. The latter was never published in its own right, appearing only in An-sky's collected works. It made its first and only appearance as a stand-alone book in the abridged English translation by Joachim Neugroschel, on which I draw in this paper for citations in English.

has been developed and articulated most clearly by the eminent Yiddishist and Hebraist Dan Miron in his book *The Image of the Shtetl* (2000). In an essay in that volume under the same title, Miron cites a comment by the Yiddish literary critic David Frishman from a 1910 essay on Mendele Moykher Sforim. Frishman writes,

If, let us assume, a deluge comes, inundating and washing away from the face of the earth the Jewish ghetto and the Jewish life it contains, not leaving behind so much as a residue, a sign, except by sheer chance, Mendele's four major works... as well as two or three shorter works—then, I doubt not, with these spared, the future scholar would be able to reconstruct the entire map of Jewish shtetl life in Russia of the first half of the nineteenth century in such a manner that not even one iota would be left out.<sup>3</sup>

Miron swiftly takes Frishman to task for making »such an extravagant and blatantly wrong statement«. He claims that Frishman has »attributed total historical reality to fictional shtetlekh that had clearly been formed along generic lines« and that these places and Mendele's portrayal of them form »not an essentially realistic-mimetic approach to reality but rather a satirical-moralistic one«<sup>4</sup>. The focus of Miron's emphasis on genre here is not as important as the question of where Miron lays the blame, as it were, for Frishman's »blatantly wrong statement«. He acknowledges that there must be something more than »sheer cognitive failure« at play, both on the part of the author and of his readers, attributing to them two primary desires, which formed the basis of their presumed acceptance of Frishman's reading of Mendele. The readers of 1910, says Miron,

needed to think that their literary masters had »immortalized« that premodern, preurbanized Jewish way of life that they, as members of the modernized Jewish intelligentsia, had abandoned. They wanted the works of the masters not only to »preserve« the world they had lost, but also to justify their »betrayal«; hence, these works not only had to be critical of traditional Jewish society, but also had to assuage

3 Frishman, qtd. in Dan Miron: *The image of the shtetl and other studies of modern Jewish literary imagination*. Syracuse 2000, p. 7.

4 *Ibid.*

a sense of guilt as well as an unclear but growing awareness of the problematic status of Jewish modernity...<sup>5</sup>

This pop-psychological account of the »needs« of the Yiddish speaking intelligentsia of 1910, stemming as it does from a broad-stroke reading of trends in the social history of the latter half of the nineteenth century is an unproblematized, facile viewpoint. Miron finds these needs extending even beyond both world wars, citing a reviewer of Zborowski and Herzog's pseudo-anthropological 1954 book on the shtetl, *Life is with People*, who maintained that the book was preempted and superseded by the works of Mendele. Miron has as little patience for that reviewer as he does for Frishman, writing: »The silliness of this argument is once again too blatant to be explained as sheer intellectual deficiency«<sup>6</sup>. He chalks it up, once again, to psychological and emotional needs, which, he says, underlie our contemporary and correct understanding that Mendele's works are, in fact, just literature, though this »realization is painful and involves a sense of loss«, a loss precipitated by the Holocaust. Miron's reaction to what he calls the »socio-historical« reading of shtetl literature is as impassioned as the viewpoint he criticizes; he simply iterates the flip-side of the coin, unwilling to take a step back and attempt to account in a substantive fashion for what is actually going on with Frishman's reading of Mendele. Indeed, if, as Miron claims, we contemporary readers temper our sophisticated reading of Mendele with a dose of Frishman as a palliative to the »sense of loss« the correct reading engenders, what possible reason for producing this kind of reading could Frishman himself have had, decades before the Holocaust?

In fact, while I agree with Miron that there is more going on here than intellectual deficiency, I also maintain that it is more than vague emotional needs. I will articulate my understanding of Frishman, as of all like-minded approaches to literature of the shtetl, presently, through a close reading of An-sky's memoir. But in order to finish setting the stage for my reading, I will extract the beginnings of my approach by putting a small amount of pressure on the very review of *Life is with People* that Miron dismissively cites. The reviewer, as quoted by Miron, says of Mendele: »He created in his books a gallery of historical-sociological types

5 Ibid., p. 8.

6 Ibid., p. 10.

and constructs that rivals Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* and with the same conscious purpose of recording an epoch<sup>7</sup>. The reviewer was unlikely to have felt a sense of loss for both Balzac's world and for Mendele's world; moreover, Balzac's world encompassed the provinces as well as Paris, and included all social strata, while Mendele generally restricted himself to the provincial and impoverished milieu of the shtetl. Placing Mendele and Balzac on equal footing is a clear indication that something broader than the needs and concerns of the Yiddish intelligentsia is at play in producing a reading of literature intent on preservation and reconstruction. I do not mean to suggest that Frishman's approach is or is not a viable reading of the Yiddish classics: as Miron demonstrates in his essay on Mendele, there are compelling alternatives to Frishman. I do want to suggest that the reasons for Frishman's reading of Mendele are of importance and interest and are more than a »tragic farce«. Slightly earlier, Miron first suggests and then quickly moves on from a fundamental point: »Literature was nominated as the official custodian of the national collective memory, guaranteeing the accessibility of the recent past to those who had drifted away from it«<sup>8</sup>. These very phrases: »national collective memory«, »accessibility of the past«, »official custodian« resemble closely the keywords of much recent scholarship on the history of museums, in particular ethnographic museums, in the period leading up to Frishman.<sup>9</sup>

7 Ibid., p. 10.

8 Ibid., p. 8.

9 For accounts of ethnography, anthropology and museums in Central Europe, especially Germany, see Andrew Evans: *Anthropology at war: World War I and the science of race in Germany*. 2002, n. pag.; Andre Gingrich: *The German-Speaking Countries. One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*. Chicago 2005, pp. 61–93; Anja Laukötter: *Von der »Kultur« zur »Rasse« – vom Objekt zum Körper? Völkerkundemuseen und ihre Wissenschaften zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Bielefeld 2007; H. Glenn Penny: *Traditions in the German Language. A New History of Anthropology*. Ed. Henrika Kuklick. Malden, MA 2008, pp. 79–95; H. Glenn Penny, Matti Bunzl (eds.): *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*. Ann Arbor 2003; Andrew Zimmerman: *Anthropology and antihumanism in Imperial Germany*. Chicago 2001. For a more general historical view, see Tony Bennett: *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics*. Routledge 1995; Bettina M. Carbonell: *Museum studies: an anthology of contexts*. Wiley-Blackwell 2004; Donald Preziosi, Claire J. and Farago: *Grasping the world: the idea of the museum*. Ashgate Pub. 2004.

The key element linking the ethnographic tasks of literature and museums is that identified by Frishman – how to respond to the possibility of cultural annihilation. The solution for ethnographers at that time was to collect – artifacts, folklore, and so on – as much as possible, in order to create the basis for subsequent analysis, once it was no longer possible to study the natives in situ or at all.<sup>10</sup> By Frishman's period, this practice, called salvage ethnography, was one of the governing principles of the discipline, despite the fact that it is, essentially, a paradox. Jean Baudrillard expressed the tension at work at the heart of this discipline most succinctly: »In order for ethnology to live, its object must die; by dying, the object takes its revenge for being »discovered« and with its death defies the science that wants to grasp it«<sup>11</sup>. Just as an ethnographic museum must destroy that which it seeks to enshrine, so too a literary repository of culture, like the works of Mendele, requires the elimination of its subjects, or at least the perception of their elimination, in order to make those works viable. Literature focused on salvage is, like the ethnographic museum, perched on the edge of the oblivion of memory, and so becomes an engine for the ethnographic project in its consumption and production of material. In the Jewish context of Central and Eastern Europe this was especially so. The conditions causing the rapid changes in Jewish society were very different from those wiping out traditional ways of life in the South Seas or the Wild West, but the dynamic of elimination and preservation was the same. Frishman's reading of Mendele was not an interpretive error, it was an imperative. His choice of Mendele is a reflection of the common reading – so infuriating to Miron – of Mendele's works as filled with ethnographic verities; Mendele is also synecdochical for Yiddish literature in the broadest sense – he was (and is) commonly considered the »grandfather« of Yiddish literature. And the job of that literature, according to Frishman, was salvage.

As I have indicated, Frishman was not the only one who felt this way. In fact, one of the »fathers« of Yiddish literature, Y.L. Peretz, conceived of the job of Yiddish writers as the collection and preservation of folkloric material, which was one of his primary interests. In 1911 Peretz

10 For a treatment of the origins of salvage as a fundamental component of anthropology see Jacob W. Gruber: *Ethnographic Salvage and the Shaping of Anthropology*. *American Anthropologist* 72(6), 1970, pp. 1289–1299.

11 Jean Baudrillard: *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press 1994, p. 7.

wrote the following instructions for writers, »Collect, transcribe and inscribe. Come together and learn to read, sing together, recite, enjoy, create the atmosphere for the artistic... Later, genius will come and create«<sup>12</sup>. Clear from this quotation is Peretz' romantic, Herder-inflected conception of the purpose of folklore: contained within folklore is the raw material out of which true Yiddish art, i.e. art that is reflective of the essence of the Jewish people, can be produced. But here is also a loud echo of Frishman – the task of Yiddish writers in collecting and preserving is preparatory, not an end in itself. For Peretz the ultimate end is literary, and I understand Frishman in the same way: if Mendele's works contain the Yiddish world down to its smallest detail, what other venue than that of Mendele could possibly be appropriate for a recreation of his world?

And so the Jews became subjects of ethnography: in danger of disappearance, with literature their best hope of salvage. In this essay I hope to show, by means of a series of close readings of An-sky's *Khurbn Galitsiye*, how Yiddish modernist literature took part in the discourse of ethnographic salvage, providing Europeans with their first significant opportunity to be at once the collectors and the collected, to turn the ethnographic gaze on themselves. Forced by the First World War to stop the ethnographic expeditions he had organized as part of the mission he described in the letter to Zhitlowky, An-sky began extensive travels among Jewish towns along the Eastern Front during the First World War, keeping a detailed diary that eventually became *Der yidisher khurbn fun Poyln, Galitsiye, un Bukovino, fun tog-bukh 1914–1917* (the destruction of Jewish Poland, Galicia, and Bukovina, from diaries 1914–1917), generally called simply *Khurbn Galitsiye* (the Destruction of Galicia). *Khurbn*, a Yiddish word derived from Hebrew, does not simply mean destruction—it is the Hebrew word used in the formulaic phrase for the destruction of the temple, and thus metonymically for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. It has therefore also since been used as the Yiddish word for the Holocaust. A *khurbn* is more than destruction, it is cataclysmic, utter destruction. In the sense that the original *khurbn* caused the Exile, it is thus also the precondition for the exist-

12 Peretz, qtd. in Mark W. Kiel: *Vox Populi, Vox Dei: The Centrality of Peretz in Jewish Folkloristics*. In: Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies 7, 1992, pp. 88–120, p. 103.

ence of Jewish culture in Galicia. In calling his record of the destruction visited upon the Jews of Galicia, Bukovina, and Poland a *Khurbn*, he is positing a number of conclusions: that the death and devastation that the Jews suffered was not only collateral damage of the war, but was a result of purposeful persecution and pogroms; and that the scope of the suffering could only be fathomed in reference to the greatest calamity in Jewish history, namely the destruction of the temple. In fact, this very connection to an iconic, yet remote precedent emphasizes how utterly unprecedented the destruction actually was.

During the War, An-sky set aside ethnography as his primary concern and turned to humanitarian work in the war zone, acting as an aid-worker at-large, roving around the Eastern Front and coordinating the efforts of different aid organizations, the Russian occupying army, and Jewish communities. He also set for himself the task of investigating and recording the state of the Jews along the front and the extent of their devastation and persecution. *Khurbn Galitsye* records his experiences in pursuit of both objectives – documentary and humanitarian. Aside from their simultaneity, these two objectives shared an underlying impetus, one that referred back to An-sky's lengthy career, but especially to his most recent pre-War ethnographic work. If salvage, from an ethnographic perspective, consists of collecting and preserving elements – folklore, songs, artifacts, and the like – of a culture that is under threat of disappearance, then the literary recording of the destruction of Jewish culture along the Eastern front, especially since it was coincided with the attempt to save Jewish lives, is a process that can be characterized as salvage.

Before the War, An-sky had led the first major Jewish ethnographic expedition on a collecting tour of Jewish towns and villages in Russia. He focused on two main objects of anthropological interest in the period, particularly as it related to Jews: folklore and material culture. His efforts were among the most systematic and far-reaching ethnographic projects ever attempted for Jews. In addition to the expedition, he also founded a museum; both these efforts were important precursors for the founding of YIVO (Institute for Jewish Research) in the 1920s. His social welfare activities during the War were, for the discipline of anthropology in that period, unusual. Compare, for example, the activities of German physical anthropologists in exploiting prisoners of war as

subjects for study.<sup>13</sup> An-sky, however, was not a typical anthropologist. In fact, his combination of anthropologically inspired and sourced literary works, field expeditions, and social welfare projects make him an overlooked predecessor of many contemporary anthropologists.

His working model during the War was consistent: in just about every town he came to for aid work, An-sky made sure to visit the synagogue, and if there was one, the court of the local Hasidic Rebbe. In Ger, the town that was home to the court of Poland's largest Hasidic group, the Gerer Hasidim, an old man lead An-sky through the deserted court of the Rebbe, and then to the synagogue which was

a groys, a likhtike, ober a farlozene, lang nisht oyfgeroynte. Aher in shul iz dos arayngfloygn der shrapnel, beshas do hobn zikh bahalten etlikhe toyzender yidn. Der shrapnel hot durkhgebrokhn in balkn a groys lokh, velkhes men hot itst farmoyert. Ober khuts dem zenen nishto in vant, nisht in der podloge keyn shum shpurn, vu der shrapnel iz aroys oder farblibn. Der shames hot mir oykh dertseylt di mayse, vi in shul hot der shrapnel keynem nisht gshedikt, nor, az men iz aroysgelofn oyf der gas, zenen dray'un'tsvantsik mentshn geharget gevorn. Az ikh hob im gefregt, vu iz ahingekumen der shrapnel, vos iz arayngfloygn in shul, hot er geentfert mit a geheymen, retzelhaftn ton: »-a -a! Ot dos iz dokh di mayse... keyner veyst nisht, vu er iz ahingekumen!« A milkhome-moyfes. Ver veyst, mit velkhe legendes der shrapnel iz shoyn arumgevaksn!<sup>14</sup>

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...a large, bright, but desolate building, which hadn't been cleaned in ages. The shrapnel had entered the synagogue when several thousand Jews had taken refuge there. The shrapnel had torn a large hole in the ceiling, which was now patched up. Otherwise, neither walls nor floor showed any traces of where the shrapnel had exited or remained. The synagogue attendant also told me the story of how the shrapnel injured nobody in the synagogue, but when people had run out into the street, twenty three were killed.

When I asked him what had become of the shrapnel that had flown into the synagogue, he replied in a secretive and enigmatic voice: »Ah, ah! That's the point – no one can tell what's become of

13 See Evans (see note 9).

14 S. An-sky: *Gezamelte Shriften*. In *Fuftsehn Bender* 4, p. 83.

it.« A wartime miracle. Who knows what legends have sprung up around the shrapnel!<sup>15</sup>

Here An-sky collects a folkloric artifact that was not in danger because of the war, but had been generated by the war, namely the story about the synagogue. Encapsulated in this oral artifact is the salvage of the synagogue itself; the story is thus both about salvage and is itself an act of salvage. The collection of ephemeral, newly generated folkloric material substitutes for the impossible task of collecting an entire building.

Throughout *Khurbn Galitsye*, An-sky makes note of several other wartime legends he encountered. Early in the book he discusses the phenomenon of the legends:

Di ershiterte yidishe bafelkerung, nisht hobendik di meyglikhkeyt tsu kemfn, nisht gegen di akhzoriyesdike farfolgungen un retsikhes, nisht gegen di shedlikhste bilbulim, hot, vi in di alte tsaytn, fun di eygene ziftsen un trern gevebt legendes, in velkhe zi hot geshept mut un treyst. In eyn ort hot men zikh gesoydet, az »der rebe shraybt vegn der milkhome a megile, velkhe vet ibershtaygn alts, vos iz biz itst geshribn geven, un az er vet endikn, vet kumen di geule oyf yidn.« In andere erter hot men fil geret vegn »kets«. Gezukht im in alte sform un gerekhent, az dos zenen ongeshtanen di emese meshiekhs tsaytn. Nor mer fun alts zenen geshafn gevorn legendes vegn di shpiyonazh-bilbulim. Derbay hot di folks-fantaziye gearbet in derzelber rikhtung, vi bay aliles-dam. Bay aliles-dam hot dos folk gezen in yedn bilbul nisht an'oysgetrakhte mayse, nor a farbrekhn, vos andere zenen bagangen, kedey aroyftsuarfn es oyf yidn. Derbay, farshteyt zikh, zenen di legendes, vi ale folks-legendes, durkhgedrungen mit a tifn optimizm. Mit dem gloybn, az sof kol sof muz zikh der emes aroysvayzn.

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The Jews, frightened and cowed, had no way of fighting – neither the cruel, murderous persecutions nor the harmful lies. And so they wove their sighs and tears into legends, as they had done in the past, from which they drew comfort and courage. In one place it was ru-

15 S. An-sky: *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey Through the Jewish Pale of Settlement During World War I*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York 2003, p. 42. The translations are taken from Joachim Neugroschel's abridged edition of the text, »The Enemy at his Pleasure«, which I have added to and altered in places to make the selections conform more closely to the Yiddish original.

mored that the local Rebbe was writing a long saga about the war, »which would surpass anything ever written. When he finishes, the redemption will come.« Jews talked about the Messiah in many places; they consulted ancient texts and believed that the Messianic age was finally dawning. But more than anything, Jews told stories about the false espionage charges. The peoples' imagination operated in the same ways as with blood libels: as they saw it, blood libels were not outright lies but were sparked by crimes other people committed in order to turn the blame on the Jews. Of course, these legends, like all folktales, were filled with deep optimism, with the faith that in the end truth will out.<sup>16</sup>

The rumor of the literary Rebbe is ironically self-referential given An-sky's own lengthy saga about the war, but also implicates An-sky's subjects in the mechanism of folkloric production and collection. Although, like the Rebbe, An-sky was writing a book on the War, he can hardly be suspected of having harbored thoughts of divine redemption. In fact, the orientation of a salvage ethnographer is based on the assumption that things will not work out – that redemption will not come. Nevertheless, his persistence in his relief work and in producing a literary record of that work betrays a hopefulness that he also found in the wartime folktales he collected.

In part An-sky remained hopeful because the war had become an active, dynamic mechanism for the production of folklore. Yet war was also, of course, a sinkhole of culture, exemplifying the paradoxical tension that salvage requires – in order to salvage something, it must be at risk of disappearance. Visiting the old synagogue in Brody, An-sky was shown

fil alte, zilberne antiken, kesers, menyores, laykhter fun 16-17ten yorhundert, vi oykh tayere poroykhesn.

Ven ikh hob oyfgevizn di gaboim, az bay itstiker tsayt iz geferelekh tsu haltn do in shul azelkhe tayere khfeytsim, hobn zey mir geentfert mit a shmeykhl:

--Zorgt nisht! Mir bahaltn di khfeytsim in aza ort, vu keyner vet zey nisht gefinen.

16 An-sky (see note 13), pp. 38–39; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 21.

Hot zikh ayngengeb'n tsu bahaltn di ale zeltene antiken fun yidishn altertum beys di tseyndliker pogromen, vos zenen forgekumen in Brod biz der letster tsayt? Dos iz mir umbavust.

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many ancient silver rarities: menorahs, crowns for Torah scrolls, candelabras from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as lavish curtains for the Holy Ark. When I pointed out that this was a dangerous time for keeping these precious articles in the synagogue, the beadles answered with a smile: »Don't worry! We hid them in a place where no one could ever find them.«

Did they manage to hide these ancient treasures during the many pogroms that took place in Brody after my visit? I don't know.<sup>17</sup>

In another situation, An-sky was able to save the valuable artifacts. Arriving in Lutsk, he was given a trunk of artifacts from the synagogue:

a keser fun 18ten yorhundert, tsvey zeltene zilberne laykhter geklappte, mit figuren fun ende 16ten oder onfang 17ten yorhundert, a zilberne leviim-kendl, a hodes, a yad, a blekh, alts zilber un alt kinshterishe arbet, tsvey poroykhesn, a tishtekh, alte geshmikte mit gold. Der vert fun dem iz geven anerekh fun tsvantsik biz draysik toyzent rub.

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an ornamental Torah crown from the eighteenth century and two rare hammered silver candelabra with sculpted figures – dating back to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. There were several other silver objects in an old artistic style: a Levite pitcher, a spice box, a pointer for Torah reading, and a plate. And there were also two ancient gold-embroidered items: a tablecloth and a curtain for the ark. The overall value of these treasures added up to some twenty or thirty thousand rubles.<sup>18</sup>

With the selective fastidiousness of a professional collector, An-sky lists everything of interest in the horde; he does not, however, provide the details of how he managed to spirit them away to St. Petersburg. The danger to these objects did not end there, though. An-sky describes how, »in yor 1918, az di sovyetishe makht hot gevolt opnemen dem yidishn

17 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 140; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 73.

18 S. An-sky: *Gezamelte Shriften*. In *Fuftsehn Bender* 5, p. 122; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 166.

muzey, hob ikh dem tshemodan tsuzamen mit fir kastns mit andere zeltene khfeytsim fun muzey opgegebn oyf tsu bahalten inem muzey fun Aleksander dem III unter a kvitung. Dos bafint zikh dort biz itst«in 1918, when the Soviet authorities were about to dismantle the Jewish Museum, I took the trunk together with four crates of other rare articles from the Jewish Museum to the Alexander III Museum for safekeeping; I was given a receipt for the lot, which is still in storage there.<sup>19</sup> Given the precarious security of these objects, a receipt seems a weak surety, but for An-sky that particular story was over – the objects were salvaged.

The Soviet threat to these objects, in addition to the receipt he received from the Alexander III Museum and his rough estimate of the ruble value of the items makes very clear that here, as in all ethnographic collections, more was at stake than culture. As soon as the objects left their original ritual homes, they became primarily commodities, and secondarily scholarly resources (commodities themselves). Less than a page before the description of the Lutsk synagogue artifacts, An-sky describes the aftermath of a pogrom in the nearby town of Poretsk, as he heard it from a firsthand witness. His description of the theft of Jewish property during the pogrom obliquely and uneasily forces a comparison with the acquisition of goods as part of a friendly ethnographic salvage effort.

After discussing the situation with local officials and victims, An-sky turned over 700 rubles for the survivors of the Poretsk pogrom, although the value of the property stolen from the Jews by the pogromists was probably much higher. An-sky contrasts the futility of relief operations in such a violent and unstable war-zone with the clear and quick success of a cultural rescue operation. And yet at least the Jews of Poretsk received 700 rubles compensation; the Jews of Lutsk got only a receipt.

An-sky's calibration of anthropology in service of his primary mission to distribute aid did not, however, preclude his espousal of prevailing anthropological prejudices. Yet these too could be turned to use by An-sky, if more abstractly: a group of anecdotes about the so-called ›Wild Division‹ of Caucasian soldiers in the Russian Army exposes, in almost parodic fashion, the prejudices of Western anthropology and their presence in the midst of the war. In an extended passage, An-sky writes:

19 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 122; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 167.

Di »vilde diviziye« hot geshpilt a gants vikhtike rol in der itstiker milkhome. Zey zenen geven formirt fun kavkazer aynvoynner, gruziner, tshentshentses un andere. Di halb vilde soldatn hobn nisht onerkent keyn shum distsiplin. Zey zenen geven shtark ibergegebn zeyer hoypt-komandir un hobn zikh oysgetseykhent mit an'emes wilden heldentum. Tsuzamen mit dem hobn zey zikh oysgetseykhent oykh mit zeyer vilder akhzoriyes, say benegeye tsum faynd, say benegeye tsu der fridlikher bafelkerung, iberhoypt tsu yidn. Mir iz oysgekumen tsu hern fil ertseylungen vegn zeyer oyfirung oyf der milkhome. In onfang hobn zey nisht farshtanen tsulib vos men lozt lebn di fridlikhe bafelkerung...

Eyn ofitsir hot dertseylt, az er iz eynmol gegangen oyf a »razvyedke« mit tsvantsik gruziner fun der divizye. Zey hobn zikh shtil derklirn tsu di pozitsiyes fun soyne un antdekt, az dort gefinen zikh tsvey oder dray polkn. Der ofitsir hot gegeben shtil a bafel umbamerkt umtsukern zikh tsurik. Nor di soldatn hobn gefodert, men zol onfaln oyfn soyne.

--Mit tsvantsik mentshn oyf tsvey polkn onfaln?-- Iz geven ershtoynt der ofitsir un kimat mit gvald genoyt zey umtsukeren zikh tsurik.

Zey zenen geven shtark oyfgeregt oyfn ofitsir far zayn pakhdones un gefodert, men zol im tsunemen fun zey.

A tsveyter ofitsir hot dertseylt, az in zayn rote zenen geven a foter mit tsvey zin, tshentshentses. Eynmol hot men gebrakht eynem fun di zin a toytn. Oyf morgn hot zikh der tsveyter zun gezegnt mitn foter un avekgegangen nekome nemen farn bruder. In a por teg arum hot men im oykh gebrakht a toytn, a tsehaktn oyf shtiker. Der foter hot nisht eyn trer farloyrn, nisht eyn vort gezogt vegn toyt fun zayne kinder. Er iz nor a gantsn tog geshtanen oyf di kni oyf zayn kavyor un mispalel geven. Oyfn tsveytn tog inderfri hot der genumen dem kinzhal in di tseyun un in di hent tsvey revolvorn. Er iz aroysgekrokhen fun grobn un ruik avekgegangen ibern feld tsum grobn fun soyne. Derzeendik dos, zenen ale geven ershtoynt. Ven men hot fun di estraykhishe grobns derzen dem alten gruziner, velkher iz ruik gegangen tsu zey ibern ofenem feld, iz men dort oykh, aponim, geven shtark iberrasht. Nokh dem hot men genumen shishn inem altn. Nor di koyln hobn im nisht getrofn un er iz zikh gegangen ruik, vi frier, biz er hot dergreykht di grobns fun soyne un iz arayngeshprungen ahin. Vos er hot dort geton un tsi er hot tsayt

gehat nemen a velkhe es iz nekome far dem toyt fun zayne kinder, iz shver tsu zogn. Nor baynakht hobn di estraykher aroysgetrogn un avekgeleygt oyfn frayen feld zayn tsehaktn guf un derbay avekgeleygt nebn im zayn kinzhal. Dermit hobn zey oysgedrikt zeyer koved tsum heldnmut funm altn kemfer.

In zeyer oyffirung zenen geven riterishe shtrikhn fun di vilde tsaytn. Eynmol hot zeyers an'opteylung zikh arayngerisn in di grobns fun soyne. Di estraykher hobn gevorn dos gever un oyfgehoybn di hend tsum tseykhn, az zey giben zikh unter. Ober di »vilde« hobn dos nisht farshtanen un nisht ongenumen.

--Tsulib vos varfn dos gever? Tsulib vos untergebn zikh? A shande!-- hobn zey oysgeshrien. Zey hobn derlangt di soldaten tsurik zeyer gever un genoyt zey shlogn zikh. Es farshteyt zikh, az bazigt hobn di »vilde« un oysgeshtokhn di fayndlekhe soldatn biz tsum letstn, ober in kamf zenen oykh etlekhe fun zey gefaln.

Baym farnemen a shtot, rekhenen di »vilde«, az alts, vos es gefint zikh in shtot, gehert zey. Un zey baroyben di shtot biz dem letstn fodem.

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The Wild Division was important in the war. It consisted of Caucasians: Georgians, Chechens, and others... These half-wild troops accepted no form of discipline. They were devoted to their commander in chief and they stood out for their truly savage heroism. But they also excelled in barbaric cruelty toward the enemy and toward civilians, especially Jews. I heard many stories about their conduct in the war. Initially, they couldn't understand why civilians should be allowed to live...

One officer told me he had gone on reconnaissance with twenty Georgians from the Division. After sneaking over to enemy lines, they discovered two or three companies stationed there. The officer quietly ordered the soldiers to return undetected, but they insisted on attacking.

»Twenty men against two companies?« The officer was shocked and had to force them – practically with violence – to head back.

They were furious at his timidity and demanded that he be replaced.

Another officer told me that in his company there was a Chechen father with two sons. One day one son's corpse was brought back. The next day the second son said good-bye to his father and went off

to avenge his brother's death. Several days later they brought back his corpse too, hacked to pieces. The father didn't shed a single tear or utter a word about the death of his children. He simply knelt on his rug all day, praying. Early the next morning he put his dagger between his teeth and grabbed a revolver in each hand. Climbing out of the trench, he walked calmly across the open field toward the enemy trenches. The Russians were flabbergasted. And when the Austrians saw the old Georgian, calmly walking toward them over the open field, they were, it seems, greatly surprised. They started shooting but the man dodged the bullets, walking calmly as before, until he reached the enemy trenches and leaped in. It's hard to say what he did there and whether he had time to take his revenge for the death of his children. But late that night, the Austrians placed his mangled body in the field, with his dagger at his side, expressing their admiration for the old warrior's heroism.

In their conduct they followed a knightly code from a more savage time. Once a detachment tore into enemy trenches. The Austrians threw down their rifles and put up their hands in surrender, but the wild troops didn't understand and wouldn't accept this. »Why are you throwing down your weapons? Why are you surrendering? It's shameful!« they yelled. They handed the Austrians their rifles and forced the soldiers to fight. It goes without saying that the wild troops won, killing the enemy troops down to the last man, but they also lost a few of their men in the fight.<sup>20</sup>

Present in the phrase »a knightly code from a more savage time« is a typical Western admiration tempered with disdain for exotic peoples. Unlike the Russian troops, who were merely brutal, the Caucasian soldiers had a supposed ethics behind their brutality. Their behavior is still, in An-sky's presentation, to be contrasted sharply with that of Jews; and difference, as with the Russians, is constructed not only ethically, but ethnically. If the Russians are Europeans, then the Jews are Semitic, and better for it; if the Russians are barbaric Easterners, then the Jews are Europeans, and better for it. An-sky notes the Caucasian origins of the Wild Soldiers – they are wild, exotic, from the east, but they are essentially white, as they must be, since they are allied with the Russians, and so opposed to the Jews. The Jews, therefore, must be civilized, from

20 An-sky (see note 13), pp. 220–221; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, pp. 108–109.

Europe, but essentially dark. This topsy-turvy calibration of ethnic and geographic identity attempts to maximize the reader's sympathy for the Jews and disdain for those who abused them by eschewing ethnography's presumed scientific rigor while maintaining its idiom.

An-sky was not only interested in stories produced by the war – he also collected standard folkloric fare, as he had before the War. In regions of the Hasidic heartland like Bukovina, this material consisted largely of Hasidic stories. I would like to treat in detail here what I read as the centerpiece of An-sky's book – the narration of a series of episodes in which the intertwining of literary and ethnographic tropes reaches its most complex level. In the town of Khorostkov, An-sky describes how an old woman burst in to a meeting he was holding with town officials, and announced her prestigious lineage: »Ikh bin R' Zusye Anipolyers an'eynikl un R' Leyvik Yitskhok Berditshevers an'ureynikl, fun der muters tsad shtam ikh fun Bal-Shem. In undzer mishpokhe zenen tsunoyfgeknipt zibetsn gute yidn un mit dem groysn Brodsken bin ikh a shlishe berevie!« (»I'm a granddaughter of Rabbi Zusye of Anipolye and a great-granddaughter of Rabbi Leyvi Yitskhik of Berditshev, and on my mother's side I'm a descendant of the Baal-Shem-Tov. Our family includes seventeen Rebbes, and I'm third cousins with the great rabbi of Brody!«)<sup>21</sup> She succeeded in producing the opposite effect of the one she desired – An-sky cynically writes: »Staytsh, vos vil zi! Az m'shtamt fun azoy fil gedoylim hot men, farshteyt zikh, rekht oyf a gor bazundere shtitse. Az ikh hob ir geentfert, az far undz zenen nishto keyn meyukhosim, hot zi a vayle gekukt oyf mir farvundert, nokhdem a kvetsh geton mit di pleytses mitn hekhstn protest un iz aroysgegangen« (»Well, what did she want? If you're descended from so many notables, naturally you deserve special support. When I replied that we didn't go by illustrious ancestry, she glared at me for a while, then shrugged in supreme protest and walked out«)<sup>22</sup>. Perhaps with reason, An-sky was not prepared to adopt the respect for lineage of the local Hasidic Jews. And though he seems not to have liked Hasidim, he certainly had a distinct liking for Hasidic stories. A few lines after deriding the elderly woman of noble lineage, An-sky describes how the town's cantor later approached him, and was immediately given aid, be-

21 S. An-sky: *Gezamelte Shriften*. In *Fuftsehn Bender* 6, p. 55; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 246.

22 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 56. Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 246.

cause »Di shtitse, vos er hot gebetn, iz geven aza kleyne un aza rekhtfar-tike« (the support he asked for was so minuscule and so justified)<sup>23</sup>. The gift did not, however, come without stipulation: An-sky the aid worker was working in concert with An-sky the ethnographer, immediately asking whether the cantor knew any Hasidic tales. To An-sky's delight, he did: »Un vi er hot dertseyt! Mit a hislayves, mit vunderlekhe detalen, vi an'ekhter dikhter. Yede mayse, vos er hot dertseyt, iz geven poshet a kinstler-verk« (And what a storyteller he was! Filled with rapture, teeming with marvelous details like a true poet. Each tale he recounted was a work of art!). Haunting this exchange as in all of An-sky's other ethnographic endeavors, is the fear of loss: »Ikh hob gefilt an'emes'n tsar, vos ikh hob zey nisht gekont bukhshetlekh farshraybn« (I felt true pain that I couldn't write them down word for word' he says of the stories). The joy of discovery is tempered by »true pain« caused by the ephemeral nature of the oral artifact and its impending loss—indeed, An-sky writes that he was only able to remember one of the cantor's stories. This story, however, confirmed his earlier assertion about the messianic nature of Jewish folktales during the War, as An-sky writes that all the cantor's stories were about the Messiah. In fact, »Ikh hob zikh shpeter ibertsaygt, az der gedank vegn meshiekhn hot shtark interesirt di eltere yidn in gants Galitsye.« (Later on, I concluded that elderly Jews throughout Galicia were deeply interested in the Messiah).<sup>24</sup>

An-sky's evening seems to have been something of a sthetyl pastiche, à la Fiddler on the Roof: after the excessively proud offspring of Rebbes and the storytelling cantor, an additional figure enters the scene:

Beshas er iz gezesn un dertseyt, hot zikh hinter mir mit amol derhert a shtiler vaynender shpil fun a fidl. Geshpilt an'alten tif troyerikn nign. Ikh hob zikh umgekukt un derzen baym tir an'arumgerisenem, oysgehungertn un farbitertn yid fun a yor fuftsik, er hot geshpilt oyf an'alten oremen fidele. Un beyde hobn geveynt. Baym klezmer hobn zikh gegosn fun di oygn shtile trern un fun dem fidele hot zikh gegosn a shtiler, hartsraysnder geveynt.

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While the cantor was sitting and telling his story, I suddenly heard a quiet, doleful violin emitting an ancient and deeply plaintive mel-

23 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 55; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 246.

24 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 56; Neugroschel, *ibid.*

ody. I looked around and saw in the doorway a famished, tattered, embittered Jew in his fifties, playing an old, poor, violin. And both were weeping. Tears poured from the musicians eyes, and a quiet, heartrending cry poured from the fiddle.<sup>25</sup>

This sequence, true or not, is a ridiculous revue of sentimental figures, that were then, even though they may still actually have existed in some form or another, both nostalgic and archetypal. An-sky has cast these living people as tropes – a conceit enabled by the merging of the literary and ethnographic features in his writing. And for An-sky these figures were ethnographic sources in addition to being literary tropes. In describing the violinist, he transitions seamlessly from one mode to the other:

Es iz geven zeyer rirend tsu hern un tsu zen, vi di fidl hot geveynt un vi bay dem hungerikn mentshn hobn zikh gegosn trenn.

Az ikh hob geforsht di verk fun folks-shafung, hob ikh zikh opgeshtelt oyf dem, vos in di folks lider un folks-mayses vert azoy oft geredt vegn klog un geveyn. »Hot men ongehoyn tsu veynen un tsu klogn«, »a yomer un a klog« u.a.v.

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It was very touching to hear his violin weeping and to see the hungry man's tears.

When I was engaged in ethnographic research, I had noticed that so many folk songs and folktales are full of grief and lament: »So they began to weep and wail,« »Woe and sorrow,« and so on.<sup>26</sup>

Although this passage is unambiguous in its depiction of An-sky's relationship to potential ethnographic subjects and sources, it is not as heartless as it may seem. An-sky continues, on the subject of the sorrowful folk-songs, that he »ho[t] shtendik gerekhent, az dos iz nor a poetisher oysdruk. Itst, in Galitsye , hob ikh zikh ibertsaygt, az dos iz a realer shtrikh. Ikh hob gezen vi mentshn bagisn zikh mit trenn« »had always seen this as merely a rhetorical figure. But now, in Galicia, I realized that it is true to life. I saw people »shedding torrents of tears«<sup>27</sup>. It is not his experience as an ethnographer that has enabled him to be more compassionate in his aid work, but the opposite: his experience as an aid worker

25 An-sky, *ibid.*, pp. 56–57; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 247.

26 An-sky, *ibid.*; Neugroschel, *ibid.*

27 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 57; Neugroschel, *ibid.*

has provided him with the opportunity to elucidate a problem from his field work.

The intertwining of literary, humanitarian, and ethnographic concerns becomes deeply complicated in an episode quickly following the one just described. Still in the same town, Khorostkov, An-sky met the two owners of a Jewish antiquarian bookshop, Lipo Shvager and Rabbi Frenkel. An-sky describes their store as Galicia's largest for old and rare books and manuscripts. It was destroyed in the pogrom, and the owners had saved very little. What they did salvage An-sky says he took back to St. Petersburg. He then relates a story that Shvager told him: Shvager encountered the Rebbe of Kopetshinyets in a spa in Hamburg at the beginning of the War. Once the Russians had invaded Galicia, the Rebbe asked Shvager to go to Kopetshinyets to save a handwritten letter and an autograph by the Baal Shem Tov. These were obviously very rare, and were valued so highly that they warranted a trip into the war zone. An-sky writes that the Rebbe said to Shvager,

...for teykef umiyad in Kopetshinyets un rateve di briv. Oyb du vest nisht zayn bikhoyles umtsukern zikh, bahalt zey in a zikhern ort. Zolst visn, az in veg shteyen dir for fil sakones, du konst geharget vern fun a koyl, m'kon dikh umbrenge iber a bilbl, rakhmone litslan, ober di sakone tor dikh nisht meakev zayn oystsufirn di heylike shlikhes un rateven di briv.

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...please go to Kopetshinyets immediately and save these letters. If you're not able to come back here, store them in a safe place. You ought to know that your trip will be very perilous. You could be shot, or someone might kill you because of a rumor... but these dangers should not keep you from performing your sacred mission and saving those letters.<sup>28</sup>

Shvager asked the Rebbe about his property and other valuables, worth millions. The Rebbe responded, »Dos alts meg zikh farfaln geyn... nor dem Bal-Shems briv muzn geratevet zayn« (>All that stuff is expendable... but the Baal-Shem-Tov's letters must be saved<).<sup>29</sup> Shvager made it to the town, but wasn't able to escape with the manuscripts, so he buried them deep in the basement of the Rebbe's house. Months later, after an

28 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 59; Neugroschl, *ibid.*, 249.

29 An-sky, *ibid.*, pp. 59–60; Neugroschel, *ibid.*

initial failure to retrieve the letters, Shvager finally found them, and saw that the writing had disappeared from the letter that the Baal-Shem-Tov wrote (although the autograph was still intact). After relating this story, An-sky writes:

Dem emes zogndik, hob ikh nisht gor gegloybt der mayse. Ikh hob gerekhent, az dos iz eyne fun di geveynlekhe legendes, velkhe vern gring geshafen in aza mehume-tsayt. Derum hob ikh gebeten Shvagern, er zol mir vayzn di briv. Di briv hobn zikh gefunen in Kopetshinyets, bahalten in khadre-khadorim un Shvager hot nisht gevolt zey vayzn. Nor az mit a por vokhn shpeter hob ikh zikh mit im getrofn in Kopetshinyets un bin shtark tsugeshtanen tsu im, hot er, afile zeyer nisht gern, ayngeshtimt. Er hot gebrakht di briv in shul, zey zenen geven ayngeviklt in etlekhe papirn. Shvager hot mit a groysn erenfurkht, nisht onrirendik zey mitn hant, funandergeviklt. Ikh hob derzen tsvey zeyer alte, tsunoyfgeleygte boygelekh papir. Eyns iz geven bashribn fun ale zayten mit a dinem gedikhntn ksav... [iz] geven koym tsu bamerkn di untershrift mit sharfe lange eyntsike oysiyes: »Yisroel Bal-shem«. Der tsveyter, a halb farfoylter, (beyde briv zenen geshribn in yor 5513 [1753]), mit shvakhe flekn fun naskeyt oder ttern, iz geven reyn, on a shpur fun oysiyes. Shvager hot gekukt oyf di briv mit a fartrakhtn mistishn blik un shtil aroysgeredt:

--M'zogt, az di oysiyes zenen farshvundn fun naskeyt un mit khemische mitlen kon men zey oyfshtelen... ober mir, khsidim, mir rekhenen andersh... gor andersh...

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Frankly, I didn't put much stock in Shvager's tale. It was one of the usual legends that emerge during such tumultuous times. So I asked to see the letters. He said they were at the inner sanctum in Kopetshinyets and refused to show them to me. But when I met him there a few weeks later, I urged and prodded him, and he yielded, though very reluctantly. He brought the letters to the synagogue. They were wrapped in several sheets of paper. With great reverence he unfolded the letters without touching them directly. I saw two small sheets of ancient paper, both of them dated 5513 [1753]. One was covered on both sides with a dense and tiny handwriting... [with] a barely perceptible signature in long, sharp, single letters: »Yisroel Baal-Shem«. The second sheet, half decayed and with faint spots left by moisture or tears, was completely blank, with no trace of writing.

Shvager, gazing at both letters with dreamy, mystical eyes, said: »I was told that the script vanished because of the dampness and that it can be chemically restored.... But we Hasidim have a different view....A very different view.«<sup>30</sup>

An-sky proceeds to provide his own interpretation of this story, but I will first pause here to parse what has already transpired. The Rebbe of Kopetshinyets sends Shvager on a mission, giving him the brief of an intrepid salvage ethnographer: »go... and save these letters... you ought to know that your trip will be very perilous... but these dangers should not keep you from performing your sacred mission and saving those letters.« It is the cultural value of the letters, not their monetary value that is of concern to the Rebbe – he tells Shvager not to try to save any of his property: »All that stuff is expendable... But the Baal Shem Tov's letters must be saved«<sup>31</sup>. Jewish law prohibits unnecessarily endangering of one's own life, and does not necessarily compel it in order to save a life. Accordingly, the Rebbe here has ascribed to these artifacts a value equal to, or perhaps greater than, that of a human life. Shvager's sacred mission' of salvage is worth his life. However it is neither the war nor the journey that proves to be of the greatest danger for Shvager. Instead, when Shvager goes to retrieve the letters and cannot find them, An-sky writes that »er iz shir nisht geshtorbn fun tsar« (»he almost died of shock«)<sup>32</sup>. Although a hyperbole, it is the loss of the artifacts that is depicted as coming closest to killing him – salvage, even more than war, is a matter of life and death.

But the collector's work is not done – this was only An-sky's rendition of Shvager's story about his own salvage expedition, as it were. Now An-sky turns the story itself into an artifact, reasserting himself as the primary collector, writing: »Frankly, I didn't put much stock in Shvager's tale. It was one of the usual legends that emerge during such tumultuous times.« Like the earlier stories that An-sky collected, he categorized this as a newly minted folktale, with the difference that this folktale has something to say about the act of collecting itself. Moving from an external analysis back into a participatory mode, An-sky asked Shvager to see the letters. Shvager, now the native informant, his role

30 An-sky, *ibid.*, pp. 60–61; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, pp. 248–249.

31 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 249.

32 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 60; Neugroschel, *ibid.*

as collector having been taken up by An-sky, resists, protecting the religious mysteries that the ethnographer seeks, claiming they are in the »inner sanctum« of the Rebbe's court in Kopetshinyets. Shvager finally relents and displays the letters with, as Ansky writes, the »opgefloygene oysiyes« (>flown-away letters<)<sup>33</sup>, alluding to a story from the Talmud Bavli (Avodah Zarah 18a). This story is of great symbolic significance, and is reiterated in a martyrological elegy at the center of both the Tisha b'Av and Yom Kippur liturgies. It tells of Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion, whom the Romans wrapped in a Torah scroll as they burned him at the stake as punishment for teaching Torah. His students asked him what he saw in the midst of the flames, and he responded »The parchments are burning, but the letters are flying away.« The Baal-Shem's letters in turn reminded An-sky of a different scene, loaded with its own allusive weight: »...hob ikh mikh dermont on dem shtik aropgebrokhene lukhes, vos ikh hob gefunen in der khorever un gelesterter shul in Dembits. Oyf im zenen farblibn nor di verter: »tirtsakh«... »tinaf« (>I recalled the shard of the Ten Commandments that I had found at the profaned and shattered synagogue in Dembits. All that was left on the fragment were the words *kill* and *commit adultery*<)<sup>34</sup>. This image, of course, recalls the shattered tablets of Moses. It is these two images—the broken tablets and the flying letters – that, writes An-sky, »summed up the life of the Galician Jews«<sup>35</sup>. These two iconic Jewish scenes are instances of major crisis in the transmission of the Torah, and, metonymically, in the survival of the Jewish people. They speak, therefore, to the same fundamental concern at play in An-sky's ethnographic and humanitarian aid journeys – survival and salvage. An-sky arrives at these two symbols by way of two stories of failed ethnographic salvage: a destroyed synagogue and a damaged letter. Elaborating on his reading of these two episodes, and reorienting them slightly, An-sky uses them to describe what was really at stake in the war; to track, in other words, the progression from ethnographic catastrophe to human catastrophe.

Earlier in the war,

di tragedye [iz] geven nokh an'oyslerlekhe... es zenen untergeshnitn gevorn hunderter un toyzenter lebens, ruinirt gevorn farmegens,

33 An-sky, *ibid.*, p. 61; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 250.

34 An-sky, *ibid.*, Neugroschel, *ibid.*

35 Neugroschel, *ibid.*

khorev gevorn groyse kulturele shatsn, ober der shturem hot nokh nisht ongerirt di tifenishn fun di neshome, nisht farnikhtet di mentshlekhe zelvstvirdikeyt... itst... di ale lebndike meysim zenen aroysgetrogn far mir shoy'n nisht in geshtalt fun »tsebrokhene lukhes«, nor vi lukhes, fun velkhe es zenen »opgefloygen di oysiyes«; opgeton zikh dos hekhste heyliktum fun zelvstvirdikeyt...

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the tragedy had still been purely external... hundreds and thousands of lives were cut short, fortunes destroyed, great cultural treasures wiped out. But the storm had not yet reached the depths of the soul, had not destroyed human self-worth... Now... all these living corpses trudged past me not as »shattered tablets« but as tablets from which the letters had flown away. These people had lost the supreme sanctity of human dignity.<sup>36</sup>

By means of these two instances of unsuccessful salvage and their refraction through their allusive origins back to their contemporary context, ethnography is finally turned to the service of humanity. Whereas the earlier suffering that An-sky had encountered offered him the opportunity to elucidate ethnographic problems or the means to produce folkloric material for collection, now the vector has been reversed – An-sky draws lessons about humanity from his work as a collector. It is precisely here, in the conjoining of a literary conceit and an ethnographic topos – of biblical allusion and the compulsion to salvage – that An-sky finds the clearest expression of his ethnographically inflected literary voice.

36 An-sky, *ibid.*, pp. 62–63; Neugroschel, *ibid.*, p. 251.

Samuel Spinner, Reisen zu den Juden: Literatur  
und die Suche nach Kultur zwischen den Weltkriegen

Als die Schriftsteller Arnold Zweig und Sammy Gronemann im Ersten Weltkrieg an die Ostfront kamen, erlebten sie zum ersten Mal Ostjuden in ihrem natürlichen Habitat. Die Werke, die aus diesen Erfahrungen entstanden, beinhalteten eine harsche Kritik am jüdischen Leben in Westeuropa, während sie das osteuropäische Judentum als besonders authentisch priesen.

Obwohl die Kritik am westeuropäischen Judentum längst Gegenstand wissenschaftlicher Betrachtung geworden ist, wurde der Diskurs der Authentizität nie mit einem anthropologischen Kontext in Verbindung gebracht, zum Beispiel mit Traditionen wie ethnographischen Reiseberichten, Museumsausstellungen und Völkerschauen.

Der anthropologische Zusammenhang kann jedoch erklären, warum zur gleichen Zeit in der jiddischsprachigen Welt ein Authentizitätsdiskurs entstand, der eindeutig nicht mit einer Kritik des Westjudentums korrelierte. Dies wird am Beispiel von S. An-sky deutlich, ein russischer Jude, dessen Reisen während des Ersten Weltkrieges wie bei Zweig und Gronemann zu einem literarischen Produkt führten: einem umfangreichen Bericht seiner Reisen zu jüdischen Gemeinden entlang der Ostfront, in dem er versucht Material von ethnographischem Interesse zu sichern.

Die ethnographische Orientierung, die diese Zwischenkriegstexte von deutschen und osteuropäischen Juden gemeinsam haben, ist der Anlass meines Vortrags, in dem ich die ethnographischen Tropen (z.B. Authentizität, Sammlung und »salvage«) beschreibe, die – mithilfe des literarischen Kunstgriffs der Reise – einen so wichtigen Teil der deutschen und jiddischen Literatur dieser Zeit ausmachen.

