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The Rise and Downfall of Cassandra: World War I and Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's Self-Perception¹

In his 1912 article "A Horoscope" Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky described the hypothetical circumstances for the outbreak of the next world war, which provisioned the eruption of the actual war in 1914. The success of that prognosis incepted the formation of Jabotinsky's self-image as a prophet, which he and his admirers maintained during his career. But his prophetic confidence often disrupted his ability to see the events around him outside of his political paradigm and created significant blind-spots in the scope of his political vision. The essay attempts to pinpoint the genealogy of the development of Jabotinsky's self-image as a prophet and to underscore the circumstances of World War I that enabled its emergence. I am interested in the dynamics of the relationship between personal mythology and history, and more particularly in the circular dependency between the understanding of one's past and patterns of self-perception and behaviour in the present.

1912 beschrieb Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky in seinem Aufsatz "Ein Horoskop" die hypothetischen Umstände des Ausbruchs des nächsten Weltkriegs, was sich als Vorhersage des realen Kriegs erweisen sollte. Der Erfolg dieser Prognose verstärkte die Herausbildung von Jabotinskys Selbstbild als Prophet, das er und seine Bewunderer pflegten. Doch sein prophetisches Selbstvertrauen hinderte ihn oftmals daran, die Ereignisse unabhängig von seinen politischen Paradigmen zu bewerten und führte im Kern seiner politischen Vision zu blinden Flecken. Der Essay will die Genealogie von Jabotinskys Selbstbild als Prophet im Kontext des Ersten Weltkriegs bestimmen, der sein Hervortreten ermöglichte. Es wird die Dynamik zwischen der persönlichen Mythologie und der Geschichte herausgearbeitet. Dabei wird insbesondere die Abhängigkeit zwischen dem Verständnis der persönlichen Vergangenheit und den Mustern der Selbstwahrnehmung und des Verhaltens in der Gegenwart betrachtet.

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In the winter of 1922, in the midst of the Zionist campaign for the formulation of the Mandate for Palestine in the spirit of the Balfour declaration, the future founder of Revisionist Zionism² Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky wrote to the president of the World Zionist Organization and his then friend Chaim Weizmann: "If you are depressed, I strongly advise you to trust my gut feeling. You know that I am close to Cassandra. Even now I worry for Jerusalem. But I believe in London [British government, S.N.] as in the rock mountain."³ Later in his career Jabotinsky used the reference to Cassandra again to highlight his own prophetic abilities as compared to the short-sightedness of his opponents and their refusal to recognize the truth when they heard it.⁴ He employed an image of the tragic heroine of the Greek mythology who was given the gift of prophecy by the god Apollo, but condemned by him not to be believed.⁵ Through the self-identification with the legendary Cassandra Jabotinsky positioned himself as a tragic prophet destined not to be trusted or understood by his contemporaries. This prophetic mode characterized many of Jabotinsky's analyses of political reality during his career as a leader of Revisionist Zionism. Ya'acov Shavit and Liat Shteir-Livny emphasized the tragic disparity that emerged in the 1930s between his confident prophetic rhetoric and his fatal failure to see the real dangers of the Nazi regime.⁶ One of the most representative instances of this disparity can be seen in his 1935 article "Nevios af Morgen" (Prophecies for tomorrow), where he claimed that prophecy-making is a dangerous occupation and immediately declared that according to his prophecy there would be "no European war in the future, no half-war and no quarter-war."⁷ Jabotinsky was not the only one who failed to foresee the outbreak of the World War II and its catastrophic consequences, but, as Shavit and Shteir-Livny convincingly argue, his case is especially intriguing against the backdrop of his overwhelming confidence in his ability to predict upcoming events and the ardent belief of his followers in his prophetic powers.⁸

Here, I would like to pinpoint the genealogy of the development of Jabotinsky's self-image as a prophet and to underscore the circumstances of World War I that enabled its emergence. I am interested in the dynamics of the relationship between personal mythology and history, and more particularly in the circular dependency between the understanding of one's past and patterns of self-perception and behaviour in the present.

² The Union of Zionists-Revisionists was founded in Paris in 1925. Jabotinsky was the animating power behind the inception of this movement and remained its undisputable leader until his death in 1940. Among the main tenets of this movement were the valorization of political and diplomatic mobilization over the economic *Gegenwartsarbeit*, preference of capitalist economy over the socialism, and national sentiments over the class consciousness. For more on Revisionist Zionism see: Kaplan, Eran: *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy*, Madison 2005; Shavit, Ya'acov: *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement, 1925-1948*, London 1988; Schechtman, Joseph / Benari, Yehuda: *History of the Revisionist Movement*, Tel Aviv 1970.

³ Jabotinsky, Vladimir to Chaim Weizmann, 25 February 1922, in: *Jabotinsky, Ze'ev: Igrot 1918-1922*, Jerusalem 1997, p. 292. Original in Russian.

⁴ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *About Cassandra*, in: *The Zionist. A Revisionist Fortnightly* (1), 17 September 1926, p. 57-59. The article, originally published in German, exists in Russian, French, Spanish, and Hebrew translations.

⁵ Cassandra, in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2015. online <http://academic.eb.com/EBchecked/topic/98088/Cassandra> (18.11.2015).

⁶ Shavit, Ya'acov / Shteir-Livny, Liat: *Mi kara ze'ev? Eikh hevin Ze'ev Jabotinsky et tiva shel Germania ha-Nazit ve et kavanoteiha?*, in: Bareli, Avi/Ginosar, Pinkhas (Eds.): *Ish Ba-sa'ar. Masot U-mekharim al Vladimir Jabotinsky*, Beer-Sheva 2004, p. 345-369. For French translation of the article see: Shavit, Ya'acov / Steir-Livny, Liat: "Qui Criait au loup? Comment Zeev Jabotinsky percut-il l'Allemagne nazie et son projet", *Revue d'histoire de la Shoah* 182 (2005), p. 67-93.

⁷ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *Nevios af Morgen*, in: *Der Moment*, 11 October 1935, p. 5. Original in Yiddish.

⁸ Shavit / Shteir-Livny, *Mi kara ze'ev?*, p. 347.

The starting point in the history of the formation of Jabotinsky's prophetic stance in the context of World War I goes back to January 1, 1912. On the first day of the New Year, he published an article in the local Odessa newspaper "Odesskie Novosti" entitled "A Horoscope," in which he dared to foretell upcoming events. As of the outset of the article he proclaimed:

"First of all, in the forefront of the events to pass in Europe is the great war. That war of which the world is so frightened, and which, at the same time, it is expecting with such morbid, painful curiosity. A war in the centre of Europe, between two or more first-rate civilized powers armed to the teeth with all the grandiose madness of present day technical equipment, with the involvement of ground-, sea-, undersea-, and aerial forces, with an incredible number of casualties, and such money losses, direct, indirect, and reflected, one gets the impression there will not be enough figures in arithmetic to count them all. This war will break out between England and Germany. [...] Usually, when a man predicts war, he is made fun of: easy, isn't it, to play politics sitting in a club, café or tavern and invent clever moves and combinations between British, French, and Germans. In this case, however, the situation is reversed: fun can be made only of somebody who does not see how perfectly obvious and inevitable this war is, which will make the whole surface of the Earth sigh and convulse."⁹

In his subsequent analysis Jabotinsky wrote about the reasons for the outbreak of war – the prime one, in his opinion, being the unprecedented might of British imperial power on the one hand, and the awakening of a unified Germany on the other, which "stretches her muscles, feels fresh, unused forces throbbing within, and wants to measure these forces against the Ruler of the oceans." This perception reverberated with modernist visions of latent primordial violence bubbling below the surface of European society, waiting to erupt and purify the corrupted material world. These visions, according to Modris Eksteins, not only anticipated the outbreak of the War, but were part of the cultural tendencies that facilitated its occurrence by preparing public opinion for its enthusiastic reception as a most viable solution for the political and spiritual conflicts of modernity.¹⁰

Jabotinsky's specific focus on the redistribution of colonial powers was probably influenced by Italian political discourse of that time. Ever since his three-year stay in Italy from 1898 to 1901, during which he studied at the University of Rome, Jabotinsky frequented circles of Italian non-conformist, syndicalist or syndicalist-oriented intellectuals such as political activist Arturo Labriola, philosopher Benedetto Croce, art critic Ricciotto Canudo, and economist Emanuele Sella. They were not necessarily affiliated to one coherent movement, but all of them shared similar modernist anti-rationalist sentiments including the valorisation of particularistic relativism, intuition,

⁹ Altalena [V. Jabotinsky]: Goroskop, in: Odesskie Novosti, 1 January 1912, p. 3. Original in Russian, English translation according to archival manuscript: Jabotinsky Archive at the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, T-1912/202/an.

¹⁰ Eksteins, Modris: Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age, London 1989, p. 33–73.

passions, and drives over universal, materialistic, and rational considerations and values.¹¹ Although their names were rarely mentioned in his writings, their ideas and terminology frequently appeared in his rhetoric and shaped it to some extent.¹²

Syndicalism originated in the 19th century in France and Italy as a sub-stream of the socialist movement. But by the end of the first decade of the 20th century some Italian syndicalists adopted nationalist ideas as an important mobilizing vehicle for the masses and saw colonialist interventionism as the optimal practical expression of these ideas.¹³ At about the same time that the Italian campaign for the colonization of Libya was launched, Jabotinsky as well, probably under the influence of his Italian friends, started to refer to the issue of colonial expansions. Echoing the arguments of Italian syndicalists, in his 1911 article "Pravo i Sila" (Right and Force) Jabotinsky stated that the liberal human rights rhetoric serves the existing status quo and prevents new participants from entering the world's theatre of power. He argued that since all conquests and all instances of power were and are enacted through mechanisms of forceful coercion, the only logical thing to do is to accumulate your own power and to fight for your own prey, instead of succumbing to a pacifist and defeatist rhetoric that only serves existing hegemonies, which were acquired through exactly the same aggressive and offensive measures their representatives were condemning now.¹⁴ Jabotinsky extended a similar line of argumentation in his analysis of the international political conjuncture on the eve of World War I in the abovementioned article "A Horoscope." This article also reflected Italian syndicalist debates ranging from technological discourse glorifying the introduction of new battlefield techniques to general rhetoric about the cathartic power of war. In terms of technology it is worth pointing out that the first military use of airplanes that Jabotinsky cited as a new military arena in future wars had only been introduced for the first time several months earlier by Italian forces during the Libyan campaign.¹⁵ Like Jabotinsky's stance in this article, even when some Italian syndicalists disapproved of the war as a political solution, they perceived it as "training in violence, heroism, and sacrifice," and "the school par excellence for those virtues which are necessary for greatness."¹⁶

This perception of war as a primeval force that is terrible but revitalizing for nations and individuals fashioned Jabotinsky's positions and judgments and prepared him for the actual outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. In Jabotinsky's autobiography the period before the war was defined as a lingering "on the crossroads."¹⁷ He wavered between his work as Russian writer and journalist, mainly in Odessa and St. Petersburg, and his Zionist activities, but neither of these preoccupations was truly satisfactory for him. He

¹¹ Sternhell, Zeev: *Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, trans. by Maisel, David, New Haven 2010, p. 315–371; Bellamy, Richard: *Croce, Gramsci, Bobbio and the Italian Political Tradition*, Colchester 2014, p. 18–20.

¹² On Jabotinsky's connections with Italian non-conformist circles see: Natkovich, Svetlana: *Bein Ananei Zohar. Yetsirato shel Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky Ba-heksher Ha-hevraty*, Jerusalem 2015, p. 26–34.

¹³ Roberts, David: *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism*, Chapel Hill 1979, p. 47–48; 120–121.

¹⁴ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *Pravo I Sila*, in: Felietony, St. Petersburg 1913, p. 125–138. Original in Russian.

¹⁵ Biddle, Tami Davis: *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare*, Princeton 2002, p. 19.

¹⁶ Sternhell, Zeev/ Sznajder, Mario/ Asheri, Maia: *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. by Maisel, David, Princeton 1994, p. 166.

¹⁷ Jabotinsky, Ze'ev: *Sipur Iamai*, in: Jabotinsky, Eri (ed.): *Ketavim. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, vol. Avtobiografia*, Jerusalem 1947, p. 82. Original in Hebrew. For English translation see: *Jabotinsky, Vladimir: The Story of My Life*, ed. by Horowitz, Brian/ Katsis, Leonid, Detroit 2016, p.101.

felt that the pettiness of the everyday life sucked him up and prevented him from fulfilling his potential. But in the summer of 1914, at the time of general turmoil and confusion, he found himself rediscovering his path in the reality he had predicted, and whose dynamic and laws he understood, or at least thought he did. As early as that September 1914 he joined the staff of Russia's leading newspaper "Russkie Vedomosti" as its war expert and correspondent, and embarked on a long journey into the hottest war zones. In the next 6 months he visited Finland, Sweden, Norway, England, Holland, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Gibraltar, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Italy. This journey provided him with a unique perspective on the constellation of world powers and the accumulated Zeitgeist in different corners of the world.¹⁸ His encounters with different facets of reality and world politics reinforced his confidence in his ability to analyse and predict historical processes. From this privileged position of an informed mobile observer he was able to identify the window of opportunity for the Zionist movement to promote its goals through its affiliation with British war interests. Parallel to his work as a war correspondent of "Russkie Vedomosti," whose home base, after his journey across Europe and the Middle East was mainly in London, Jabotinsky immersed himself into a promotion of the idea of Jewish legions.

It should be recalled that at the time of the Great War Jews fought on both sides of the conflict and the Zionist establishment jealously protected the neutral status of the movement. The activity of Jabotinsky and his associates – the likeminded non-conformist intellectuals such as Chaim Weizmann and Pinhas Rutenberg – to promote the organization of Jewish units in the framework of British military forces to fight for Palestine elicited a furious reaction from multiple factions inside and outside the Zionist movement. The members of an unofficial lobby for a Jewish legion were accused of short-sightedness, betrayal, collaboration with the secret police and international imperialism, as well as willingness to gamble with Jewish lives. But Jabotinsky remained firm in his adherence to the idea of the Jewish Legion, despite the personal price he had to pay. His confidence in his ability to read and interpret reality enabled him to function in these challenging conditions of total mistrust. Undoubtedly his past record as an expert who could foretell global processes and developments reinforced his determination to resist his political opponents.

And indeed, against all odds, Jabotinsky's and Weizmann's scenario for cooperation with the British government materialized in a way that exceeded all expectations. The Balfour Declaration promised the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine, Ottoman rule over the Holy Land was ended, and Jewish military units, created for the first time after hundreds years of Diaspora, participated in the conquest of Palestine. In 1917 Jabotinsky himself joined the British army and ended the war as an honorary Lieutenant in the battalion of Royal Fusiliers – a part of the Jewish legion. Only several short years earlier no one could have imagined that this dream would become a reality. Unsurprisingly there were few people so popular, authoritative, and admired in all the camps of the Zionist movement as Jabotinsky immediately after the war. It was probably the only time in his career that he was the recipient of a broad consensus.¹⁹ His

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 97–138.

¹⁹ Golomb, Eliyahu: Ze'ev Jabotinsky Ve-tnuat Ha-gdudim Ha-ivriim, in: Ma'arahot: Yarhon Le-she'elot Mediniyot, Kalkaliot Ve-tsvaivot (1941) Heshvan-Tevet, p. 6–12; 6–15.

persona was venerated and people hung on to his every word. Occasionally he expressed frustration when post-war reality did not unfold according to his expectations, but he saw this as a mere temporal hindrance on the path toward the inevitable realization of his vision for the future of the Middle East under British colonial rule.

In 1922, when he republished the collection of his feuilletons that had originally been printed in Russian in 1913, he included the article "A Horoscope" in the new edition as confirmation of his prophetic abilities to identify and decipher the *Zeitgeist*.²⁰ However this publication, which was later translated into Hebrew, German, and English, included only half of the original 1912 article. As a matter of fact, in the later publication Jabotinsky omitted half of the original text. That half included two other prognoses for the upcoming years. One referred to the future of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the other to the expected dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire. The latter prognosis was influenced by Jabotinsky's own experience as a Zionist emissary in the Ottoman Empire in 1909-1910, during which he formed a critical opinion of the prospects of the Young Turks' political enterprise, their political vision, and governing abilities. His negative stance toward the future of the Ottoman Empire was also influenced by the Italian experience in the fight against the Ottomans in the Libyan war, which he mentioned specifically in the text of "A Horoscope" in 1912.

It is noteworthy that later in the same year Jabotinsky returned to his prognosis of an upcoming war in the Balkans in different article that was completely devoted to an analysis of the national tensions in the peninsula, and the underlying interests of the great powers that influenced and manipulated them. Jabotinsky posited that theoretically the events in the Balkans could function as a trigger for a pan-European war, but he himself dismissed the likelihood of this scenario: "The pan-European fire is possible, but only if one of the great powers consciously desires it. In this case it is unlikely."²¹

Thus in 1912 Jabotinsky identified two possible bonfires that could lead to world war: first, in January, he predicted the war between England and Germany, and then, in September he foresaw a conflict between the Balkan nations fighting for independence and the Ottoman Empire. But he saw these as isolated processes, and did not think that they could converge into one conflict. This perception may have been an outcome of his unique positioning relative to political occurrences globally.

Dan Diner claimed that one's choice of observational stance on historical processes has a dramatic impact on their understanding. He suggested that the key vantage point for the comprehension of the entanglements of 20th century history is located on the eastern edge of Europe, between the Baltic, Black, and Aegean seas. This area was a part of what has been defined in the Western geopolitical thought at the beginning of the 20th century as a "pivot of history" – the bigger geographical region in which world's political, economic, and military interests intersected and converged.²² Diner situated his hypothetical ideal observer on the famous steps of Odessa. This was the representative vantage point, at once real and metaphorical, from which in one sweeping gaze the observer could have embraced the mythical, historic, economic, national, and geo-

²⁰ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *Goroskop*, in: *Felietony*, Berlin 1922, p. 262–267.

²¹ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *Voyna*, in: *Odesskie Novosti* 22 September 1912, p. 2. Original in Russian.

²² Mackinder, Halford: *The Geographical Pivot of History*, *The Geographical Journal*, 4 (1904), p. 421–437.

political perspectives of the area that concentrated both the legendary heritage of the West and its pragmatic commercial and political interests.²³

Historically, this was exactly the point of view of Jabotinsky, who was aware of the advantages of his observing position, and probably drew part of his confident prophetic rhetoric from this awareness.²⁴ But unlike the hypothetical ideal all-seeing observer, the historical Jabotinsky nevertheless developed a blind spot. When looking at international processes from the Odessa shores, he concentrated on naval powers and struggles for influence over existing or potential colonial territories. At the same time he considered the distribution of forces in mainland Europe as much more stable. The major bonfire he overlooked in his overview of potential conflict zones between England, Germany, and the Balkans was the situation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As the matter of fact Jabotinsky's major failure in his 1912 article "A Horoscope" was precisely his inability to grasp processes within the Austro-Hungary.

In the omitted part of the same article that Jabotinsky and his later biographers used as proof of his ability to foresee the future,²⁵ he claimed:

"Austria will not be dismantled. When we read about the endless arguments and quarrels between Czechs and Germans, Poles and Russians, Croats and Italians, we think, from a distance, that all these people dream about is how to throw off the shackles of their mutual neighbourhood, to shut the door and leave. But we forget that struggle is one of the forms of unity. The struggle for the same goal, especially a struggle for power, does not disassociate but rather unifies, connects, creates mutual dependencies, interweaves a myriad of common interests. In Austria everybody knows this perfectly well and no one believes in dismantlement, just as no one fears dismantlement. The people there repeat the favourite saying of one of the Habsburgs: Austria erit in ultima – Austria will be the last, Austria will outlive them all. In fact everyone in Austria, except maybe some Italians – loves Austria, treasures its existence, and does not want its collapse. In a country that does not acknowledge state nationalism, there is nevertheless strong and robust state patriotism. Austria will not be broken apart because it does not want to be broken apart."²⁶

In the following passages Jabotinsky acknowledged the dangers of Hungarian ultra-nationalism and separatism, but outlined the expected political and military moves that would neutralize and deactivate this threat to the future prosperity of the Habsburg Empire.

In 1912 his optimistic prognosis looked as plausible as the possibility of an Anglo-German war or a military conflict in the Balkans. It was influenced by Jabotinsky's stay in Vienna in 1908, when he delved into the study of national politics under different political regimes. He was particularly impressed by the policy promoted by the Austrian socialists

²³ Diner, Dan: *Cataclysms. A History of the Twentieth Century from the Europe's Edge*, trans. by Templer, William/ Golb, Joel, Madison 2007, p. 6.

²⁴ On Jabotinsky's perception of Odessa as a privileged vantage point for observing world history see: Natkovich, Svetlana: *Odessa as "Point de Capital": Economics, History, and Time in Odessa Fiction*, in: *Slavic Review*, forthcoming.

²⁵ Jabotinsky, Sipur Iamai, p. 93; Jabotinsky, *Story of My Life*, p. 107; Schechtman, Joseph: *The Jabotinsky Story. Rebel and Statesman*, New York 1956, p. 198; Katz, Samuel: *A Lone Wolf*, vol. 1, New York 1996, p. 136.

²⁶ Altalena [V. Jabotinsky]: *Goroskop*, in: *Odesskie Novosti*, 1 January 1912, p. 3.

to organize the Austrian political sphere according to the principle of supra-territorial national autonomies, and saw the idea of a multinational confederation under a liberal imperial rule as an optimal political model for the future.²⁷ Ironically, in "A Horoscope" from 1912 he pointed to the heir to throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his followers as supportive of this idea and gambled on their victory over the separatist tendencies in the Empire. Despite his obvious mistakes in his calculations of the future, even Jabotinsky's erroneous prognosis revealed his knowledge, perceptiveness, and striking ability to analyse political affairs.

I am less interested in the miscalculation itself than in Jabotinsky's decision to remove it from the representative corpus of writings consciously crafted by him later. He did not abandon the article in its entirety as he did with most of his journalistic oeuvre, but rather edited it and facilitated its translations and further abridged reprints²⁸ to promote and fortify the image he wanted to convey. In my opinion this was done sincerely, as part of Jabotinsky's attempt to present the reader with selections of his work that best applied to contemporary events in the 1920s. But his editorial decision revealed a blind spot in his self-comprehension. Instead of perceiving and presenting his figure as complex, multi-layered, both failing and succeeding, he chose the mythical image of the prophetic observer. In creating his authoritative persona he relied on his past, but redacted this very past to confirm certain facets of his heritage.

It is important to mention that in his self-characterizations Jabotinsky systematically eschewed direct self-identification as a prophet. On the contrary, he made the point that his interpretations originated solely from a cold, disengaged, and rational analysis of the events. However, even when he emphasized the rational nature of his prognoses, he wrapped them in a "prophetic" lexicon, contextualizing them as prophecies, horoscopes, or predictions of Cassandra. Even when he was using these terms ironically, implying that "one does not have to be a prophet in order to see and calculate..."²⁹ he constructed a semantic framework in which his life and writings should be understood and contextualized. This duality between his rational self representation on the declarative level and a fatalistic, semi-mythical subtext was especially apparent in his autobiographical writings. For example in his 1928 World War I memoir "The Story of the Jewish Legion," originally published in Russian, Jabotinsky employed two contradictory systems of rationalization to describe the epiphany he experienced when he first learned that Turkey had entered the war. First he presented this revelation as the sole outcome of logical analysis, then positioned it in the fatalistic and mythical context, and finally returned to a rationalistic mode:

"That morning in Bordeaux, after reading the damp poster on the wall, I drew the only logical conclusion possible – and to this day I don't understand why it took numbers of my friends so many years to reach such a simple conclusion. As I saw it, the matter was crystal clear: the fate of Jews in Russia, Poland, Galicia, very

²⁷Jabotinsky, Vladimir: Predislovie, in: Springer, Rudolf [Renner, Karl]: Gosudarstvo i Natsia, Odessa 1906, p. 3–7; Jabotinsky, Vladimir: Samoupravlenie Natsionalnogo Menshinstva, in: Vestnik Evropy 10–11 (1913) p. 117–138; 131–158. Originals in Russian.

²⁸Jabotinsky, Vladimir: Goroskop, in: Felietony, Berlin 1922, p. 262–267 (Russian); Zabolinsky, Zeev: Horoskop, in: Feuilletons, Maehr. Ostrau 1930, p. 74–79 (German); Jabotinsky, Zeev. Milhama Olamit, Hed Yerushalaim 55 (10) (1940), p. 3 (Hebrew, published posthumously).

²⁹Jabotinsky, Zeev: Ha-Milhama Ha-Ba'a, in: Ha-Mashkif, 14 April 1939, p. 3. Original in Yiddish.

important undoubtedly, was, if viewed in the historical perspective only, something temporary as compared to the revolution in Jewish national life which the dismemberment of Turkey would bring us.

I never doubted that once Turkey entered the war, she would be defeated and sliced to pieces: here again I am at a loss to understand how anyone could ever have had any doubts on this subject. It was no guesswork but a matter of cold statistical calculation. [...] Where is the man, whatever his faith, who can honestly point his finger at a certain date and say, "This is where I saw the light"? Everyone is born with the germ of his belief somewhere inside his brain, though it may not manifest itself until old age, or ever. I believe that it was always clear to me – from birth so to speak – that if ever a war should occur between England and Turkey, the right thing for the Jews would be to form a regiment of their own and participate in the conquest of Palestine – although before that day in Bordeaux I had never thought about it distinctly. As a matter of fact, this idea is very normal idea which would have occurred, under such circumstances, to any normal person; and I claim the title of a fully normal person. In Jewish colloquial parlance this title is sometimes translated by the expression *goyisher kop*; if it is true – so much the worse for us.³⁰

Here Jabotinsky leaped from his self-characterization as an ordinary commentator, obediently following the line of rational reasoning to someone who organically carries the "germ" of national idea and knows things "instinctively," before the consolidation of the historical circumstances that produce them. He simultaneously presented himself as "normal" and unexceptional, and as someone who is more in tune to his inner voice than his short-sighted colleagues. In a way he represented himself as being exceptional in his normality, while other people's refusal to accept his vision was characterized as denigrated, abnormal, and stereotypically Jewish.

Willingly or unwillingly Jabotinsky became trapped in the process of his own mythification, and was torn between his awareness of the historical dimensions of his life experience on the one hand and his mythical role as a national leader, carrying the "germ" of national destiny, on the other. Part of this mythification was a product of his popularity among the people, but part, undoubtedly, was a result of his own self-fashioning and self-presentation. During the 1920s, when this process of mythification was further accelerated after the founding of the Revisionist movement, Jabotinsky wrote to his wife:

"There is one unpleasant thing – I have felt it for quite a while and have now started being really frightened. Even with you I don't feel comfortable speaking about it seriously – they have started turning me into a myth: "this man that...."[unfinished sentence in the original, S.N.]. Of course the major role was played by the Legion and Acre [a reference to Jabotinsky's imprisonment because of his involvement in Jewish self-defense during the anti-Jewish riots in 1920 in Jerusalem, S.N.], but they attribute things to me that I didn't even do in an indirect way [...] Neither my fat body nor my bald head help here [...] Worst of all, this myth has begun to be transformed into a legend about a "Duce." Recently Weisel wrote me from Palestine, rebuking me, and asking why I am

³⁰ Jabotinsky, Vladimir: *The Story of the Jewish Legion*, trans. by Samuel Katz, New York 1945, p. 30–31.

disappointing my friends by refusing to be called the "leader." And I feel that this is happening more and more. It threatens to become a powerful tool for shifting public opinion, equal in its strength to the crisis in Palestine: both tools are cheap and demagogical. I am increasingly more concerned that this will be the factor that will bring us to "power" (az och un wei) – not a contemplation, not a program, but panic because of the failure in Palestine and a stupid legend about a new miracle-making Rabbi."³¹

However, despite his awareness of the demagogical aspects of his political mythology, Jabotinsky continued to fuel the Revisionist mythopoesis in general and his own image-building as a prophetic leader in particular. In a way his success in understanding and using the opportunities created by World War I and his refusal, or inability, to cope with the failures of his analysis, limited the scope of his political perspective. He continued to duplicate the same political paradigms that motivated his decision-making during World War I, inevitably creating broad areas of blind zones that led to his major failure to foresee the outbreak of World War II. As I mentioned earlier, following Shavit and Shteir-Livny, he was not the only one who miscalculated the dimensions of the dangers of the Nazi regime, but in his case the tension between his prophetic confidence and his problematic forecast widened the tragic and ironic gap between reality and ways to grasp it. The outbreak of World War II and the dynamics of its early development profoundly undermined Jabotinsky's beliefs on politics, war, but primarily the nature of European society and culture whose ethos was the cornerstone of his worldview. But even then, in a time of confusion and disorientation, the paradigms of World War I were Jabotinsky's only means of framing and comprehending European reality.

Several months before his death in 1940 he moved to the United States to promote the organization of Jewish military units, the only thing he could think of to oppose the looming catastrophe. From the United States he wrote to his wife in bombed-out London:

"If the war will continue there will be a [Jewish] Army, and if the war stops comme ça, then nothing matters. It was not worth it to be born and to have lived more than fifty nine years; everything has been pulled apart, the only good thing left is the family..."³²

In the 1940, facing the most destructive war experienced by humankind, Jabotinsky could no longer sustain his omnipotent image of a Cassandra. But together with the collapse of the Cassandra myth, all his perceptions of the self were shaken to their core. The family and the familiar World War I military paradigm were the only symbolic shelters where Jabotinsky could seek support for his post-Cassandra self, prior to his death from a heart attack in August 1940.

³¹ Jabotinsky, Vladimir to Jabotinsky, Joanna, 27 February 1927, in: Jabotinsky, Ze'ev: Igrot 1926–1926, Jerusalem 2000, p. 144. Original in Russian.

³² Jabotinsky, Vladimir to Jabotinsky, Joanna, 29 May 1940, in: Jabotinsky Archive at the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, A1–36/2/12. Original in Russian.

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