

*Lecture series on the History of the Jews in Poland
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Re-emergence of Poland as a sovereign state

The vibrancy of Jewish life in turbulent times

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I. VIEW SHORT FILM: A DAY IN WARSAW (POLAND/USA, 1939; PROD. YITSHAK GOSKIND)

- Zooming in: Jews as distinct part of modern, metropolitan Warsaw
- Central role of the kehile: education, welfare
- Street vendors and peddlers document Jewish poverty
- Traditional Jewish way of life is a visible characteristic (dress, Sabbath rest)
- Jewish press documents the complexity of political identifications

II. THE POST-NAPOLEONIC ORDER COMES TO A VIOLENT END:

- World War I
- Movements for national independence: Polish, Czech, Slovak, Lithuanian, Ukrainian...
- Two Russian revolutions: February and October revolutions 1917
- End of the empires: 2nd German Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Russian Empire

A difficult imperial legacy:

- Jews as 'threatening other' in most of the nationalist movements in eastern Europe
- In Greater Poland: allies of the Germanization, going all the way back to 1848
- In Galicia and other parts of the Habsburg Empire: Jews as Habsburg patriots, especially in Bukovina, Slovakia, Galicia
- In the former Kingdom of Poland: defectors from the cause of Polish independence, central significance of the notion of *Żydokomuna*: identifying Jews and the social democratic movement since the revolution of 1905

III. ANTISEMITISM

Antisemitism becomes a dominant factor in postwar Polish political culture. Anti-Jewish violence is perpetrated by Polish troops already in November 1918 after defeating Ukrainian armed units and after the local Jewish population had declared itself neutral.

In the context of the re-emergence of an independent Polish state, president Wilson's commitment to minority rights lead to the *National Minority Treatise* (28 June 1919), perceived by wide sections of the Polish public as an undermining of national sovereignty, even though the protection of minority rights was modest.

Russian-Polish War: miracle on the Vistula river 1920: threat of Bolshevik invasion

Iconic event: the election of Gabriel Narutowicz (1865-1922) to presidency of the Republic, and his assassination on 16 December 1922, after five days in office, after a radicalized campaign between liberal and left-wing parties, conservative and peasants' parties, and the nationalist right (National Democracy)

1922 elections mainly in the terms of ideological rivalry of Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski political camps. In fact, electoral campaign was characterized by the central presence of anti-Semitism and so called 'Jewish question'.

After the death of the unifying republican father figure Pilsudski in 1935, the radicalization accelerates, riots occur in the countryside. Political culture: right wing. Example of Adam Doboszynski's "March on Myslenice", March 1936, a riot copying Mussolini's march on Rome (well, almost).

Antisemitic policies in the 1930s:

- Ghetto benches at Polish universities: required seating on the back benches, or outright banning of Jewish students
- Legislation against ritual slaughter, in favor of Sunday as sole day of weekly rest
- Reoccurring of small scale anti-Jewish rioting and violence (e.g. Przytyk 1936)

IV. THREE VERY DYNAMIC THREADS OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION (JEWISH OR WITH 'VISIBLE JEWS')

Social Democracy

- Jewish version: Bund (founded in Vilne in 1897)
- Polish version: PPS (Józef Piłsudski [1867-1935]: "take the tramway of social democracy and get out at the Independence Station")
- Internationalist version: SDKPiL (Róża Luksemburg [1871-1919], Leo Jogiches [1867-1919])

Zionism / Nationalism

- Strong in Galicia and Tsarist Russia

Orthodoxy

- Founding of Agudat Israel in Kattowitz 1912, with affiliate organizations in Hungary, Galicia, the Kingdom of Poland, becomes the hegemonic in post-World War One Poland (the Second Republic)

V. A TRAJECTORY: JANUSZ KORCZAK (22 JULY 1878/79 - 5/6 AUGUST 1942)

Family background: secularized, polonized, strong commitment to communal work; medical studies at Warsaw University; sympathises with Polish struggle for independence

Drafted to military service as physician: 1904/05, during revolution of 1905, World War I, Russian revolution 1917 (reflections of war in his childrens' book *King Matt the First*)

1912-1942: director of *Berson Bauman* Jewish childrens' hospital (Warsaw)

1919: Childrens' Rearing House *Nasz Dom* (Our House): Concept of children as deserving respect and autonomy: introduction of institutions like parliament, court, newspaper, duties.

Popular speaker and lecturer.

Public outreach through radio programme *Stary Doktor* (Old Doctor) and childrens' paper *Mały Przegląd* (Small Review).

In a letter in 1925, he wonders about the Zionist movement: "... a return, or an escape?" and in his diary from 1928: "For me, the 'human question' has precedence over the 'Jewish question'"; however: visits to Palestine in 1934 (three weeks) and 1936 (seven weeks). In 1939, aborted attempt to travel for a third time.

This attitude shifts after 1933 (Hitler coming to power) and in the later 1930s due to rise in Polish nationalism and antisemitism.

In 1940, his orphanage is moved to the ghetto, where he remains with the children in his custody

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