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Thank you for the warm welcome, the numerous questions, a lively discussion and the many stories you shared with me before, during and after my talks. And many thanks again to Rachel Harris for having arranged this series of lectures!

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**Lecture series on the History of the Jews in Poland at the Shomre Ha-Dat Congregation, London Hampstead**

## **Lecture series on the History of the Jews in Poland at the Shomre Ha-Dat Congregation, London Hampstead**

Lecture 3, 13 January 2013:

### **Jews in Eastern Europe and the Challenges of Modernity: Napoleon, Emancipation and Nationalism, 19th-20th Centuries.**

#### **I. The Episode of the Encounter of the Jews of Swarzedz/Greater Poland, with Napoleon Bonaparte, in 1806**

It was in the fall of 1806, that the mayor of Swarzedz called upon the Jewish elders to explain what was the reason for the unusual commotion among the Jews that had been noticed by many. During the market, the rumour spread among the Christians that the Jews had hired the total amount of 120 horses from the nearby villages. They trooped up these horses close to their cemetery and adorned them with decorative harnesses. The curious villagers were pondering about the Jews' intentions, but the news that Napoleon, the French emperor, would personally inspect his troupes stationed in the areas surrounding Swarzedz made the people forget about the so-called Jewish secret, and many people left for Zieleniec, the emplacement of a water-mill on the route to Poznan, where the emperor was said to pass by (...) Next to the stables of an inn, near a lake, an innumerable crowd of Jewish observers had assembled, and their gabbling, brawling and shouting was loud enough to compete with the noise of a distant artillery (...) It was obvious by then that the Jewish secret was to give a nice surprise to Napoleon. At one o'clock in the afternoon, some rascal shouted from atop a roof: „Er kynt, er kynt!“, and on horseback of a splendid arab, the small caporal appeared. He was just inquiring with one of the generals in his entourage about the strategic location of Swarzedz, when a huge Turkish cavalry lunged out from behind the stable and obstructed the emperor's passage.

Huge turbans, enormous beards, red, yellow and green overcoats and coats (in Polish: kurty, czamary, plaszcz), the horses covered with blankets in many colours, cords and feathers, swords, some spears and standards gave this cavalry a particularly military and asiatic outlook. Napoleon stopped his horse and asked his entourage about the meaning of this incident, but nobody had an explanation. At that moment, the head of the Turkish cavalry closed in on the emperor, and bringing his horse to a halt just a few steps from Napoleon, he takes off his turban and explains: ‚Fürchten Sie nichts Kajserliche Majestät! wir sind kejne Türken, wir sind Szwerzencer Juden!’ [Fear nothing, Your Imperial Highness! We are not Turks, we are Jews from Schwersenz!] Napoleon laughed out loud, and the brave Turks shouted three times: ‚Vivat, mighty emperor Napoleon, vivat!’, and disappeared.“

See François Guesnet, "The Turkish Cavalry in Swarzedz, or: Jewish Political Culture at the Borderlines of Modern History," in: Simon-Dubnow-Institute Yearbook 6 (2007), 227-248, for a full discussion!

Why important?

- Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and Palestine
- Napoleon's call upon the Jews of Europe to join the fight in order to "resurrect Jerusalem" (Moniteur Universel 1799)
- Napoleon at the height of his power
- He represents revolutionary France, the first nation to have emancipated the Jews (1789)
- Swarzedz a proud community which had just been recognized as an independent kahal

The greeting represents a creative combination of a traditional approach to Jewish-sovereign relations: establishing a direct personal relationship, speaking on behalf of the community alone (and not all the Jews or other communities) when greeting the sovereign, but also:

- *levée en masse*, instead of a small number of representatives
- military symbolism
- in a situation of an unstable political setting, the Jews of S. wholeheartedly embrace the promises Napoleon holds for them: emancipation and integration.

I would suggest to read this episode, which has been remembered in various forms, although with less detail, well into the 20th century, as an illustration for the attempt of a community to formulate a proactive strategy in the context of a highly volatile situation. It is correct to state that this particular community bet on the wrong horse, so to speak. I would like to emphasise, on the other hand, that the episode of the Turkish cavalry reminds us that Polish Jewry did not sit idle when history was being made, but attempted to **shape their own future**.

## II. The post-napoleonic political order

What *would be* the near future of Polish Jewry?

The political landscape after the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815 can be defined as a reconfirmation of the partitions of Poland, which remained a *fait accompli* until 1918.

Jews now lived in **four different administrative entities**, in three Empires:

**Greater Poland** - irreversible process of identification with German culture: ca mid 19th century. Capital Poznan. Continuing decrease in Jewish population through emigration.

**Galicia** (part of Austro-Hungary) - mass emigration to Hungarian and Romanian territories already in the mid-19th century, but also to Vienna. Economic periphery, with Kraków and Lwów as centers.

**Kingdom of Poland**, constitutionally part of Tsarist Russia, but autonomous. Due to economic dynamic destination of immigration from western Russian territories (Litvaks). No significant process of acculturation, growing hegemony of Hasidism. Centers of Warsaw (largest Jewish community in the world in 2nd half of 19th cent.), Lodz, Lublin.

**Tsarist Russia** (western territories of). Substantial differences in development in former Lithuania and 'New Russia', the destination of inner-Russian Jewish migration, e.g. to Odessa. Pale of Settlement: emerges in a series of administrative measures, defined in 1804. Beyond the Pale: who could move to Moscow, St Peterburg? Numerous very large communities: Vilnius, Kovno, Grodno, Minsk, Mohilev, Zhitomir, Chernigov, Poltava, Kishinev (Bessarabia) Bialystok, Berditshev, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav. The locations of the most dramatic outbursts of anti-Jewish violence lie all in 'New Russia': Odessa (1871) Ekaterinoslav (1881f), Kishinev (1903).

Shared patterns of the realities of Jewish life in all the partitions:

- continued loss of relevance of the local community and its leadership, both due to increasing limitations to Jewish autonomy, and centrifugal forces from within the community; abolition of the kahal 1815, 1822, 1844
- end of the alliance between nobility and the Jews: Jews are squeezed out of the independent production and distribution of alcohol
- Jews and non-Jews are confronted with the emergence of new forms of artisanal and industrial production, however only a very small number of Jews are able to take advantage of industrialization
- growing urbanization, emergence of the large Jewish metropolises: Warsaw, Lodz, Odessa, Budapest, Vienna, all of them destinations of a growing flow of emigration (about emigration later)
- centrifugal processes of integration in to the various imperial cultures, through a host of mechanisms:
  - 'selective integration': the upper echelons of Jews are adopted to the imperial elite (privileges in Tsarist Russia)
  - pressure to acculturate: 'carrot and the stick' in Prussia: 1812, 1833
  - no accepting social stratum, in contrast to parts of the middle classes in central Europe (semi-permeable society)
  - new political constellation through the emergence of the Polish patriotic movement, staging uprisings in 1830, 1846, 1848, 1863, 1905 - what is the possible attitude of the Jewish population?
    - support for uprisings: extremely dangerous for a minority
    - support for suppression of uprisings: risk of alienation of local population, and little reward
    - neutrality! fatal outcome e.g. Lvov Nov 1918.

Dov Ber Meisels (1798-1870), rabbi in Kraków and later av bet din of/in Warsaw, member of the first Austrian Imperial Diet in 1848: "I sit with the Left because the Jews have no rights"

Most Jews remained indifferent, probably (no polls!)

### III. Nationalism

As in economic contexts, Jews are 'orphaned' as community through the growing exclusionary dynamic of modern nationalism. This rejection is one factor in the emergence of Jewish nationalism, as is the adaptation of a political model which is growing more and more pervasive in eastern central Europe.

important factor: disillusioned intellectual and political elites among the Jews (refer to Miroslav Hroch: Nationalism of Small Nations)

two regions of particularly dynamic development: Galicia and Russia.

**Galicia:** Jews follow the Polish, Bohemian, and Ukrainian example, rather than reacting to outright rejection. E.g.: early Zionists in Galicia celebrate Maccabean evenings in Polish or Ukrainian houses

**Russia:** significant radicalization of the Jewish youth through a number of factors:

- less communal cohesion (late repercussion of the rekrutshina)
- intense russification through the rekrutshina
- mutual radicalization of the Russian and Jewish youth in educational institutions, especially universities, in a period of cultural hegemony of social radicalism and generalised rejection of autocracy.

#### IV. Emigration

The mass emigration of Jews from territories of former Poland-Lithuania to western Europe and the Americas (ca 2,5 million people 1870s - 1924) is motivated

- 1) by the economic cul-de-sac, as Jews do not find their place in the industrial production, 'classlessness': cite Poznanski
- 2) by the continued refusal of emancipation in Russia (though: emancipation in Congress Poland 1862, Austria 1867, German Empire 1871)
- 3) by the growing rejection by the non-Jewish population, as demonstrated in outbreaks of violence (pogroms)
- 4) by technological progress, making traveling much less onerous
- 5) by the promises of the 'goldene medine'

Only Italians and the Irish emigrate in comparable numbers. From the outset of mass emigration, Jewish emigration was marked by a significant degree of family migration.

#### V. Recommendations for further readings:

Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society*. Oxford, New York 2006

Artur Eisenbach: *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870*. Oxford 1988.

François Guesnet, "The Turkish Cavalry in Swarzedz, or: Jewish Political Culture at the Borderlines of Modern History," in: *Simon-Dubnow-Institute Yearbook 6* (2007), 227-248.

John D. Klier: *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*. Cambridge 2010.

Eli Lederhendler, "Classless: on the social status of Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the Late Nineteenth Century," in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 (2008) 2, 509-534.

Raphael Mahler, *A History of Modern Jewry, 1780-1815*, New York 1971.

---, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment. Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1985)

Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale. The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002.

Magdalena Opalski, *Israel Bartal: Poles and Jews. A Failed Brotherhood*. Hanover/NH 1992.

Antony Polonsky: *The Jews in Poland and Russia*. vol. 1: 1350-1881 (Oxford, Portland 2009), vol. 2: 1881-1914 (Oxford, Portland 2010), vol. 3: 1914-1988 (Oxford, Portland 2012).

Marcin Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland. A History of Conflict*, Oxford, Portland/OR, 2005.

Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. New Haven, London 2008, also fully accessible online: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/>