Jews in Habsburg Galicia: Challenges of Modernity

Vladyslava Moskalets

The 19th century was a period of crucial transformations for Polish Jews. During this century, these communities entered an era of secularization, encountered economic modernization, and appropriated modern ideologies, such as nationalism and socialism. At the end of the 18th century, the Jews of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were divided between the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, following of the partitions of Poland, with the majority living in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire. In 1772, following the first partition, the Habsburg Monarchy established a new province on its north-eastern border and named it the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, alluding to the medieval Ruthenian state which had previously existed on those territories. Three main ethnic groupings dominated the population of Galicia: Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews, who also constituted the three main religious groups, namely, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, and those adherents of the Judaism. The territory also included various smaller minority communities, such as Germans, Armenians, Hungarians, and Romani. According to some estimates the Jewish population in 1772 was between 150.000 and 200.000, constituting 6–7% of the general population. Despite representing the smallest of the main groups, the number of Jews residing in this area of the Habsburg Monarchy was already unprecedented, and continued to grow during the next century. In 1849, the Jewish population of Galicia had more than doubled, rising to approximately 328.000, or 6.7 per cent of the populace. Later in the century, this had reached 11.7 per cent. In both empires, Jews mainly lived in the cities, though there were attempts to promote Jewish agricultural settlements, while smaller Jewish communities continued to perform some essential intermediary functions in the villages.

Differences between these two empires made Jewish experiences in each unique. Political participation, opportunities for integration, censorship, and exposure to state and localized violence manifested in different ways. Eco-

nomically, however, Jews on both sides of the border lived very similar sorts of lives. Despite the differences, there were a lot of cross-border interaction between both empires, such as the *Hasidism* or *Haskalah* movements. Moreover, the emancipation of the Jews in the Habsburg lands was the outcome of a series of different legal reforms, only being finalized in 1867 when Emperor Franz Joseph II granted them full equal rights.

This chapter will provide an overview of the most important processes that took place within the Jewish communities of Galicia, in the context of their living within a multinational environment. The shifting political, economic, and religious contexts of the 19th century are therefore crucial for understanding Ukrainian-Jewish relations.

Economic Life and Opportunities

Galicia was one of the poorest provinces of what came to be known as the Austro-Hungarian Empire after 1867, with much of its economy revolving around agriculture. Besides a few exceptions, there were no major modern industry, and even big cities like Lviv (Lemberg/Lwów), were mostly centres of trade and services. The economic decline of the smaller towns made Jews migrate to a few big cities, or emigrate abroad, with the number living in Lviv rising from a third to the majority of the city's population. Jews in Galicia were engaged primarily in trade with 51 per cent of those actively working as merchants or retailers being Jewish. In general, the occupational structure of Jews in Galicia differed from the western provinces of Austria-Hungary with a higher percentage engaged in industry than in more industrialized areas like Bohemia. Moreover, a high rate of Jews in Galicia were not professionally active.

Since the presence of the Polish nobility continued to dominate the territory's politics and administration, they continued to hire Jewish managers to work on rural estates as intermediaries between the ruling elites and the largely Ukrainian peasantry. A group of wealthy Jewish landowners were also present, living mainly in the area around the city of Ternopil, and were similar to their Polish counterparts.

Despite its largely agrarian character, industries did exist in a few places. The county of Boryslav in eastern Galicia and Krosno in the west, for instance, developed into centres for the Austro-Hungarian oil industry, which employed a lot of Jews as entrepreneurs, workers, or overseers and played a crucial role in the growth of the Jewish industrial proletariat. Similarly, the city of Kolomyia

was home to the "Big Tales" prayer shawl factory, which mainly employed Jews. The presence of Jewish workers was significant for philanthropists and international observers since working in manufacturing or extraction industries was considered more "productive" and ethically more appropriate than trading.

At the other end of the social spectrum, a new generation of acculturated Jewish elites were more integrated into the so-called free professions, becoming doctors or lawyers. This transition was especially prevalent among banking and trader families who could provide their children with a university education in Lviv or Vienna.

The area around the city of Stanislav (today's Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast), also included a number of villages with a relatively significant Jewish population, some of whom continued to serve as local middlemen as well as shop-keepers, millers, or wandering traders. The mid-19th century had also seen an influx of Jews into villages after they had obtained the rights to land holdings. However, many also engaged in agriculture and lived similarly to non-Jewish peasants. Being more isolated from their mostly urban-based religious institutions, these rural Jews tended to interact more often with the Christian Ukrainian peasants rather than with their coreligionists.

During this period, both the Polish and Ukrainian national movements were increasingly preoccupied with local economic problems and differences in Galicia's occupational structure. Since Jews were overrepresented in commerce and trade, Ukrainian and Polish intellectuals often blamed them for exploiting the peasantry. The end of the 19th century also saw a rise in cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian national cooperative networks, which pushed and increasing number of Jewish traders out of the villages and into the urban centres. In response to this, Jewish activists, tried to encourage Jewish youths to pursue more vocational forms of education and qualify as craftsmen. During the interwar period appeared, this would manifest in the form of a Jewish cooperative movement, which traded kosher meat and milk.

Mass Migration

Although the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms that took place in the Russian Empire from 1881 to 1882 served as one of the key triggers for much of the migration of the 19th century, this process was as much the outcome of a range of long-term socio-economic changes. The decay of the *shtetls* (towns, where Jews

had previously constituted most of the population) meant that numerous artisans, merchants, and peddlers did not have the means for survival. Moreover, urbanization was unable to solve the problem since the major cities lay outside the Pale of Settlement were the majority of Russian Jews were forced to live.

Migration rates intensified more towards the end of the 19th century, when Jews had already established effective international support networks and the accepting countries, such as Canada, the United States, and Argentina, required a larger workforce for their burgeoning textile industries. Large number of Ukrainians and Poles also migrated during this period, however, their movement patterns differed to those of their Jewish counterparts. Ukrainian migrants, in particular, were mainly peasants who sought out seasonal agricultural work in the USA, Canada, and Brazil. Additionally, unlike these Ukrainian peasants, who often returned from overseas once their contracts came to an end, Jewish migrants usually took their families with them settled abroad permanently. Those Jewish who emigrated from Russia usually travelled illegally via the border crossing in Brody on the Austro-Hungarian border. One of the most famous Yiddish writers, Sholem-Aleichem, described an illegal border crossing by a Jewish family in his novel *Motl, the Cantor's Son*. Differences between Jews from the Russian Empire and those from Habsburg Galicia became especially apparent among the emerging diaspora communities in the USA, where the latter received the somewhat derogatory name of *Galitzianers* and were stereotypically portrayed as backward and orthodox.

Another major problem was the slave trade, notably the coercion of women into prostitution. Those who often operated networks of slave traders were Jewish, which influenced the prevalence of antisemitic discourses in the press, even though Jewish women were as likely to fall victim as their Polish or Ukrainian counterparts. Pauperization, lack of education, and prostitution caused concern among international philanthropic networks, such as the Baron Hirsch Foundation, the French Alliance of Israelites (*Alliance Israelite Universelle*), and those operated by the Rothschild family in the United Kingdom. These Jewish charitable organizations often tried to help integrate Jews into more productive occupations or provide them with vocational training which would allow the latter to find stable employment. The Austrian-Jewish social activist Berta Pappenheim (1859–1936), in particular, was noted for her investigations into the trafficking of Jewish girls in Galicia and attempting to fight against prostitution.

The Social Transformation of Judaism in Galicia

During the 18th and 19th centuries, European Jewish communities underwent major internal transformations, among which the most significant were Hasidism and Haskalah. The former was a charismatic religious movement inspired by the Jewish mystic Baal-Shem Tov (1698–1760), which emerged in Galicia's eastern Podolia region. One of the key tenants of Hasidism was the possibility of connecting with God transcendentally through emotional experiences rather than just through learning the *Talmud*. The popularity of the Hasidism movement transformed the traditional *kahal* system and undermined the established Jewish authorities, being organized around charismatic leaders known as *tzaddiks*, who lived in the small cities and held courts where their adherents could visit them. Among the most famous of these was the Chornobyl court established by Mordekhai Twersky.

Although Habsburg and Russian officials tended to regard the movement with suspicion, the former tended to be less repressive, prompting some of the tzaddiks from Russia to emigrate. A famous example was tsaddik Yisroel Friedman from Ruzhin, who fled to the then Austrian Empire after being accused of murder and persecuted by the Russian authorities. He subsequently established his court in Sadagora, near Chernivtsi in eastern Galicia, which attracted numerous adherents from both sides of the border. The Hasidic lifestyle itself, encompassed different elements borrowed from both Polish and Ukrainian culture. Tsaddiks usually organized their courts in a manner similar to the Polish nobilities' country estates, while the movement's songs and melodics often took inspiration from Ukrainian peasant folk traditions.

Besides the state authorities, Hasidism's popularity also drew suspicion from the adherents of the Jewish Enlightenment movement, the Haskalah. This movement appeared at the end of the 18th century among Jewish intellectuals in Berlin who wished to promote moderate Jewish integration within their respective societies. The incorporation of Galicia into the Habsburg Empire led to many new changes and cultural influences brought German-speaking acculturated Jews from Moravia and the German lands brought recent changes, including the Haskalah. Brody – the main border city between the Habsburg and Romanov empires- became one of the movement's centres and a n conduit for spreading its ideas to Russia. In Galicia itself, however, the movement's priorities quickly shifted away from social integration and towards criticizing of Hasidim. It's leading activists, the *Maskilim*, argued that the tzaddiks deliberately fooled the uneducated and impoverished Jewish masses in order to

financially exploit them. Some famous maskils, such as Yosef Perl (1773–1889) from Ternopil, even employed more novel methods, such as parody, in order to undermine Hasidism's influence.

Prior to the mid-19th century, however, the Haskalah's influence was somewhat restricted to a small circle of elites. However, it would subsequently come to influence more popular movements, such as Reformed Judaism. In the 1840s, a Reformed synagogue, *Tempel*, and a Hasidic counterpart, *Jakub Glanzer Shul*, were built almost simultaneously in Lviv's Kraków suburb. Supporters of Reformism financed the former's construction and invited a prominent pro-Reform rabbi from Moravia, Abraham Kohn, to Lviv in order to promote the movement. Kohn's stay in the city was brief and prompted resistance from part of the community, who objected to his appointment as Chief Rabbi of Lviv. In 1848, an Orthodox Jew poisoned him in retaliation, with the community because by the new of one of its first ideologically motivated murders. Nevertheless, the Reformed community in Lviv continued to grow in size and influence, that saw Kohn being elevated to status of a spiritual founder with a Jewish school being named in his honour.

Jews in the Galician Political Context

During the 19th century, the Jews of Galicia increasingly found themselves at the crossroads of a major cultural shift. While the older generation had tended to embrace the German cultural milieu, publishing their writings in German, the latter half of the 19th century witnessed a growing trend towards Polish acculturation. Marsha Rosenblit describes Jews in the Habsburg Monarchy as holding as sense of triple identity: political loyal to the empire, cultural loyalty towards a Polish or German-speaking milieu, and an inherent ethno-religious loyalty towards Judaism itself. The political climate of the Austro-Hungarian Empire also contributed to the creation of various organizations that were a place of socialization and a way of influencing politics. Moreover, the increasing diversity of these organizations after 1850 came to reflect the growing cultural and political divisions within the Jewish community.

The *Shomer Israel* organization represented the most notable expression of German-Jewish acculturation, having been founded in 1868 and publishing its own German-language newspaper *Der Israelite*. In 1876, at the initiative of Shomer Israel, the Lviv Kahal adopted a new charter that favoured community members who had received a secular education. In response, the rival Ortho-

dox organization *Mahzikei HaDat* was formed in order to counter the perceived effort to forcibly secularize he community, publishing its own newspaper of the same name. By 1883, *Mahzikei HaDat* boasted around 40.000 members.

In the political context of late-19th century Galicia, Jewish leaders and organizations also had to interact with newly emerging Polish and Ukrainian political forces. Following the 1867 Constitution, in particular, Polish politicians had come to dominate the Galician provincial government. Indeed, the Monarchy's Orthodox subjects even attempted to maintain a degree of influence over imperial politics by siding with the powerful Polish bloc that emerged in the Austrian parliament. Between 1882 and 1892, a pro-Polish political organization, *Agudas Achim*, also proved highly influential, using its own printed publication, *Ojczyzna*, as a mouthpiece for promoting the interests of Poles.

Galicia's other groupings subsequently attempted to cooperate in response such as during the 1873 elections that saw the emergence of a Ukrainian-Jewish political alliances when the pro-Ukrainian Ruthenian Council and Shomer Israel agreed to work together in order to limit Polish domination in Galicia. As part of their strategy, the Council sent letters to the Central Election Committee of the Jews of Galicia (*Central-Wahl-comité der Juden in Galizien*), which Shomer Israel supported with a proposal for backing Jewish candidates in the cities on the condition that Jewish voters living in the villages supported Ukrainian ones. Although the alliance worked mostly in the Ukrainians' favour, the Jewish press spoke positively about the political mobilization of Jews and the overcoming of mutual Ukrainian-Jewish prejudices in the villages.

By the end of the 19th century, however, Zionism had emerged as a stronger ideological alternative. Early Zionism in Galicia took the form of a so-called "diaspora nationalism" as it did not presume that the region's Jews would immediately emigrate to Palestine. While this remained an important symbol for the movement, Zionist leaders continued to imagine remaining in Galicia as their more likely future, becoming increasingly focused on the local political climate as a result. Consequently, Ukrainian and Jewish nationalism developed simultaneously and faced similar challenges within the Habsburg Monarchy. Jews were not even considered to be one of the Monarchy's constituent nations; a nation was broadly defined as being based on a distinct language, of which Yiddish was not recognized. The first proposal for granting national recognition to the Habsburg Jews was not put forward until 1905, when the Ukrainian politician Iulian Romanchuk suggested it to the Austrian parliament. This support was itself the result of decades of cooperation between Ukrainian and Jewish national movements, which achieved its climax during the 1907 parliamentary

elections, the first to permit universal male suffrage. The idea behind this cooperation was to encourage Ukrainian peasants to vote for Jewish candidates while urban Jews backed Ukrainians in order to counter the threat of Polish domination. Numerous political rallies during the electoral campaign demonstrated the popularity of this decision as well as reflecting the general politicization of the Galician populace. As a result, four candidates from the Jewish party and 27 Ukrainian deputies were elected to Parliament, demonstrating the strategy's success.

The Development of Modern Jewish Culture

Of the developments that came to represent the rise of modern Jewish culture in Galicia, Yiddish theatre was one of the modern notable, growing out of the *Purim-shpiel* plays dedicated to the Jewish holiday of *Purim*. Some of the first performances staged in Galicia were organized by the Broder singers, independent performers originally from Brody who sang and entertained the public in taverns and restaurants. Their performances were inspired by traditional *badkhonim* (wedding entertainers) and cantorial music. A more permanent Yiddish theatre in Lviv appeared in 1889, moving from place to place. Its founder, Yaakov Ber Gimpel, had been a former singer in the Polish theatre, with its most popular performances being operettas written and directed by the famous playwright Abraham Goldfaden. Yiddish theatre was also a very egalitarian form of entertainment that brought together people from different social spheres.

A number of influential Jewish artists were also born in Galicia, including Maurycy Gottlieb (1856–1879) who hailed from the western city of Drohobych and later received an artistic education in Kraków at the workshop of the famous Polish artists Jan Mateiko. Gottlieb's own works were remarkable for his usage of personages and stories from Jewish and world history and literature, such as *Shylock and Jessica* (1876), based on William Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Another Drohobych-born artist, Ephraim Moshe Lilien (1874–1925), became famous for his woodcuts dedicated to the Zionist movement, especially a portrait of the modern movement's founder Theodore Herzl.

Modern Jewish literature had started to develop with the rise of the Haskalah movement. As Galicia was one of its main centres, a few prominent authors also resided there, developing their own literary approaches through constant dialogue with the movement's Vienna and Berlin branches. A re-

markable feature of modern Jewish literature was its multilingualism with authors employing a mix of Hebrew, German, and Yiddish. The first of these writers were *maskils*, usually from wealthy families, who had been fortunate to receive private education and wrote in their free time being mostly based in Lviv, Brody, Zhovkva, and Ternopil. Yitshak Erter (1791–1851), for example, was famous for his satirical fiction, which was highly critical of Hasidim. The most famous work of this kind was *The Revealer of Secrets* (1819) by Yosef Perl. The book consisted of letters allegedly written by Hasidim revealing terrible things about the religion. Paradoxically, the text became popular among Hasidim, who's adherents often failed to recognize the satirical form.

Menahem Mendel Levin (1749–1826) also wrote satirical works condemning Hasidic ideas, notably the novel *Moral Accounting* (1808). The most famous of these authors, however, was the philosopher Nahman Krochmal of Zhovkva (1785–1840), for whom Haskalah was viewed as a possibility to discuss religious problems within a modern philosophical context. His student, Meir Letters (1800?–1871), later became pioneer of Hebrew romantic poetry, though he also wrote in German.

The other significant development of Jewish literature was the appearance of Yiddish neoromanticism at the turn of the 20th century. Among the most famous poets were Shmuel Yankev Imber, Melech Ravitch, Dovid Kenigsberg, and Uri Tsvi Grinberg. Their decision to write in Yiddish, was itself a consciously artistic choice. The Yiddish literature movement in Galicia was itself precipitated by the opening of the newspaper *Lemberger Togblat* in Lviv in 1904 by Gershom Bader (1868–1953), which gave young authors an opportunity to publish their prose and poetry. The period preceding the First World War subsequently witnessed a flourishing of Yiddish literature in Lviv, however, most of this movement's leading figures subsequently moved to Vienna after 1914.

The End of Galicia

Jewish Galicia would ironically, outlive the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeira, which ceased to exist with the dissolution of Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War. As some of the Habsburg's most loyal subjects, the fall of the Dual Monarchy represented a major identity crisis for the territory's Jewish inhabitants. Many were subjected to antisemitic violence during and after the war, such as the Lviv Pogrom of 1918. During the interwar period, Gali-

cian Jews were obliged to integrate into the post-war Second Polish Republic, where they also faced new problems such as political radicalism and social insecurity, as well as new opportunities including the possibility of emigrating to Palestine. The Galician past was also as problematic by some Jewish intellectuals, who considered the experience of life under the Monarchy as one of cultural Germanization. During the 20th century, however, Galicia would become mythologized within literature, such as the writings of the Galician-born author Joseph Roth as well as numerous memoirs.

Selected Bibliography

Bartal, Israel. *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Gąsowski Tomasz. *Między gettem a światem. Dylematy ideowe Żydów galicyjskich na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Rozprawa habilitacyjna* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1996).

Liptzin, Solomon. *A History of Yiddish Literature* (New York: Jonathan David Publ., 1988).

Manekin Rachel. "Galicia" https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/galicia#idoara.

Manekin, Rachel. "Galitsianer" https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Galitsianer.

Manekin, Rachel. "Politics, Religion, and National Identity: The Galician Jewish Vote in the 1873 Parliamentary Elections," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 12 (1999): 100–119.

Mendelsohn, Ezra. *Painting a People: Maurycy Gottlieb and Jewish Art* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002).

Shanes, Joshua. *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

Sholom Aleichem. *The Adventures of Mottel, the Cantor's Son*, trans. Tamara Kahana (Sholom Aleichem Family, 1999).

Sikorska, Oksana. "Gimpel's Theatre in Lviv: Its Role in The Jewish Community's Life and Its Place In The City's Cultural Space" https://lia.lvivcenter.org/en/themes/?ci_themeid=86.

Tenenbaum Józef. *Żydowskie problemy gospodarcze w Galicyi* (Wieden, 1918).

Wolff, Larry. *The Idea of Galicia History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012).