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## Preface

It is with great pleasure that the editor and the members of the editorial board present this volume of studies on the history of the Jews in old Poland to Professor Jacob Goldberg of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Professor Goldberg has been the leading scholar in this field for the last generation and has to a great extent laid down the academic agenda which is being followed to this day. One measure of his pre-eminence and the scope of his influence is provided by the contributors to the volume, comprising his colleagues, students and friends not only from Poland and Israel, but also from Western Europe and North America.

The title, “Studies in the History of the Jews in Old Poland,” is particularly fitting for a volume dedicated to Professor Goldberg, who has done so much to explore hitherto uncharted aspects of the history of the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The studies here collected almost all employ the integrative approach so characteristic of his work, and succeed in opening new fields of research and examining better known topics in a new light. Of particular importance, perhaps, are those papers dealing with relations between the Catholic Church and the Jews, including the issue of Jewish communal debts. These are questions of crucial importance, as yet barely surveyed. It is to be hoped that the studies here will act to stimulate further research and discussion.

Also of importance, and touching on one of Professor Goldberg’s main topics of study, are those papers dealing with Polish-Jewish relations, whether in social, economic, or even cultural terms. They too open up new vistas for research, ranging from the conceptual-methodological to political history and the history of antisemitism, and promise much for the future. The basic questions of Jewish settlement and demography are also dealt with in a number of studies, which succeed in broadening our understanding of the most fundamental processes of Jewish history in Poland-Lithuania.

The important field of comparative research, also emphasized by Professor Goldberg, is represented here, as is the history of Hasidism — that movement of Jewish spiritual revival so characteristic of Eastern Europe in general and Poland in particular. Post-modern historiographical methodology is also discussed in one paper, and if in strict terms these papers exceed the bounds

of the volume, they are included because these topics have always formed an important part of Professor Goldberg's thought.

Finally, though some kind of summary and appreciation of Professor Goldberg's work in his field would normally be included here, on this occasion it seems appropriate to allow him to speak for himself, by publishing an abridged and edited version of the speech he gave on the occasion of his receiving a doctorate *honoris causa* from Warsaw University. The publication of the speech seems doubly merited as the historic and very emotional nature of the occasion is also worth being remembered in a volume such as this.

Though it might have seemed more logical to issue the studies in Hebrew or in Polish, the decision was made to publish them in English, because it is the editor's conviction that research in this field plays a role that goes beyond the academic. The encouragement of dialogue in the broadest context should contribute to breaking down the barriers which still exist between the Polish and Jewish peoples. The publication of this volume as a forum for the exchange of ideas and different points of view will, it is to be hoped, go some way to expediting this process.

The first barrier to be broken is that of language. Some of the papers here were translated from the Polish by Luba Gilron and they, together with others, were edited by Matthew Teller, to both of whom the editor wishes to express his thanks. Thanks are also due to those anonymous donors whose contributions have helped to bring this project to fruition, as well as to the Center for Research on the History and Culture of Polish Jews at the Hebrew University, the Faculty of Humanities at the Hebrew University, and the Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada (Montreal), for their funding. Finally, the editor would like to thank Dan Benovici and the staff of the Magnes Press in Jerusalem for their help in the publication of the volume.

The editor and the editorial board wish Professor Goldberg many more years of good health and fruitful research. *Ad mea ve'esrim!*

Adam Teller  
Jerusalem, 1998

## Professor Jacob Goldberg On the Study of Polish-Jewish History

A Speech Delivered on the Occasion of  
his Being Awarded the Title of

*DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA*

by The University of Warsaw, January 1993

I should like to thank his Magnificence the Rector, the Senate, the Dean, and the Board of the History Faculty at Warsaw University for bestowing upon me the title of *Doctor honoris causa* — the greatest honor and highest distinction in the academic world. I am proud of the fact that it has been awarded by Warsaw University, with its school of outstanding historians, as well as by other eminent representatives of Polish historiography. This fact confirms my conviction as to the significance of the title.

I consider the honorary doctorate a source of special satisfaction, since it not only acknowledges my personal research undertakings, but also emphasizes the great importance of the field pursued both by myself and a slowly growing group of Israeli and Polish historians. I shall also treat it as acceptance of the premises of my research which strives towards an integral interpretation of the history of Polish Jews and the history of Poland. It serves to underline what I have always held: There is no history of Poland without the history of the Jews, and no history of the Jews without the history of Poland.

I should like to begin by stressing that more than twenty years of an ever growing interest in the culture and history of the Jews in Poland have paved the way for my belief that all efforts towards a full understanding of the basic problems of Polish culture and history will remain fruitless unless accompanied by the development of research in this field. This is especially true when one understands that almost every Polish historian encounters in his work the issue of Polish Jews at all stages of Poland's development. It is also the reason why at present the subject of developing integral research on the history of the Jews in Poland has become a question of special concern

to outstanding Polish historians. The history of Polish Jews constitutes part of Polish history, and the path towards an appropriate and more precise acquaintance signifies a close connection between the history of the two nations. This, in turn, entails the need to utilize both Polish and Jewish sources.

The history of Polish Jews is that of the most numerous and principal Jewish community in the diaspora, which existed in the old Commonwealth and played a prominent role in the economic and social life of Poland. At present, a group of historians of my generation is embarking upon an attempt to fill the gaps in this story caused by a long period of neglect. The main burden of pursuing this trend is soon to be borne by young Israeli and Polish historians, and a small affiliated group of scholars in other countries. Their expertise, interest, and determination are already a source of optimism.

The history of Polish Jews embraces eight centuries of a co-existence of two communities, Polish and Jewish, as well as the co-dependence and intermingling of two cultures, both molded on Polish soil. Polish-Jewish relations, as they developed over the course of centuries, comprise common ground for both nations; for this reason I have devoted to them most of my attention. It seems to me that the former Jewish community should be included in the category of an “ethnic-legal group” — a usage proposed by Antoni Mączak, who thus eliminated the need for terms such as “national” or “religious minorities,” which are of little use to describe the situation in past centuries. I am able to declare today that the configuration of relations between the host nation and various “ethnic-legal groups” constitutes a factor determining the entire situation of the population belonging to such groups. Accordingly, I believe that Polish-Jewish relations were crucial in shaping a number of domains of Jewish life in the Commonwealth, and in determining the social structure of the Jewish community as a whole. The Jews’ economic activity and many aspects of their social life followed a course laid down by the developing relations between Poles and Jews. Only a few individual fields of religious and cultural life developed independently, though even they were to some extent determined by Polish-Jewish relations. This important conclusion should be pursued with great care and precision, since the history of these relations transcends the range of dichotomous stances, both negative and positive, which became apparent on both sides. One cannot rest satisfied with a presentation of the hostile or friendly attitudes towards the Jews expressed by representatives of the various estates of Polish society, but must search for other characteristic stands maintained by groups and individuals.

This question involves the general problem of the Jews' attitude towards the nations among which they lived throughout the diaspora, and its study is also understandably dominated by an interest in anti-Jewish orientations and antisemitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The real issue, though, is the discovery of the factors which caused negative phenomena and led to their dissemination. This is particularly important in the case of Poland, the homeland of over 80 percent of the Ashkenazim. However, alongside negative attitudes towards the Jews, which were widespread in the Commonwealth, but which, according to Janusz Tazbir, did not assume such acute forms as towards Protestants, widely diversified positive attitudes were also encountered among the various estates. It would be superfluous to explain the importance for both academic study and contemporary relations of closer study of the reasons for the adoption of such stances.

Instead of dealing solely with the causes of hostility, then, the historian should also take the opportunity to examine cases of mutual sympathy and rapprochement. The latter assumed various forms. In the sixteenth century Stanisław Sarnicki, a Calvinist minister renowned for his irrepressible imagination, declared that the Poles were descended from Jews. In the following century, Wojciech Dembołęcki, an even greater fantast, opposed this view, claiming that "this venerable and serious historian ... was led astray ... in trying to seek the origin of the Sarmatians among the Jews." Members of the nobility frequently justified the need for providing patrimonial care for Jews settled on their estates by referring to moral imperatives and more general arguments. Jan Korzbok Łącki did this in a way typical for his period by trying to put himself in the position of a Jew and stressing in the privilege he granted in 1714 to the Jewish community of his private town of Szamotuły in Great Poland: "The Jewish nation is hated by everyone, and were it not to enjoy protection, its fortune and existence would suffer." Analogous sentiments and formulations can be found in other eighteenth century sources.

Frequent descriptions of extreme cases and mentions of widespread attitudes assumed by various groups and individuals often suggest to the historian various generalized assessments. However, in reality, neither the condemnation of the Jews nor their praise constituted the dominant or representative stance of old Polish society. More typical was an attitude which stemmed from changing circumstances and the frequent contacts between the two communities caused by the Jews' multifaceted economic role and their great numbers. Consequently, a number of motives, often difficult to recapture, shaped the attitude of the Polish community towards its Jewish counterpart, despite universal stereotypes and accusations. Depending on

the situation at the time, various parts of Polish society harbored sometimes positive sometimes negative feelings towards the Jews, some of whom were criticized while others were treated with sympathy.

This is not to say that many people expressed more or less favorable opinions about Jews. However, when they did so, it was predominantly done in practice. It is worth citing a few of the typical attitudes of Polish society. One might start with Hetman Jan Tarnowski, who in his speech to the Sejm of 1522, sharply criticized the persecution of Hungarian Jews in Buda. He also supported the efforts of Piotr Kmita, *wojewoda* of Kraków, at the royal court. Kmita sought to free the imprisoned elders of the Kraków and Poznań communities, and to halt the suspicion that the Jews were murdering abducted children and converts. On the other hand, this very same Kmita issued an order forbidding the Jews to settle in the marketplace of his hereditary town of Tarnopol. In the mid-18th century, Stefan Garczyński, *wojewoda* of Poznań, vehemently criticized the Jews in his book, *Anatomia Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (The Anatomy of the Polish Commonwealth), but when he tried cases concerning Jews he always decided in their favor. Even if it is assumed that he received some reward for doing so — a suggestion which cannot be proven — this is clear testimony that he was not their implacable enemy.

The example of Stanisław Poniatowski, the father of King Stanisław August, is even clearer. Although he attacked the Jews in his writings, he offered 10,000 *złoty* for the Jewish poor in his township of Jazłowiec in Podolia. Andrzej Młodziejowski, Grand Crown Chancellor and Bishop of Poznań, protected the Jews of Lublin against restrictions proposed by Christian merchants, and in 1774 wrote to the *starosta* of Lublin: “The trading fraternity knows well that I do not support Jews and will not permit them to settle in the town — but they cannot be prosecuted with impunity.” On another level, Roch Sikorski, a burgher from Bielsko Podlaskie, wrote in his diary at the turn of the eighteenth century: “I have avoided them [i.e., the Jews] like fire because since childhood I have been prejudiced against them. But I got to like a certain Hersz, a grocer in Bielsko, and even entrusted him with a small fund for my children, certain that he will not betray me.” Similarly differentiated attitudes can be encountered not only among the magnates, the gentry, the clergy, and the burghers, but even among the peasants. On those occasions when Polish peasants dared to banish the Jewish tavernkeeper from their village, other inhabitants of the same village would generally come to his support and offer him refuge. A number of analogous cases testifies that direct contacts could overcome prejudice and distrust.

One and the same person could therefore reveal both positive and negative feelings — a phenomenon typical for communities which co-existed so closely, and quite normal for inter-personal relations. At that time, the conditions offered to the Jews by the Commonwealth, described by contemporaries as *paradisus Judaeorum*, were conducive to this kind of tolerance and excellent for the development of Jewish life.

One factor, however, disturbed this co-existence — the cultural isolation of the Jewish community, which became unbreachable despite the constant contacts between the two nations. I have discussed the reasons for this phenomenon elsewhere; here I should just like to emphasize that as a result of this isolation, the two communities living alongside one another knew little about each other, and, as a rule, remained unfamiliar with their neighbors' customs and culture. Such co-existence, accompanied by restricted mutual acquaintanceship, is extremely difficult and leads to misunderstandings and false interpretations of observed customs, habits, and behavioral patterns. Today, too, insufficient knowledge about the joint Polish-Jewish past is conducive to antisemitism, which is rearing its head, as well as to anti-polonism, which is also spreading.

Therefore, progress in integral research on the history of Polish Jews should not only play a prominent role in historiography, but also become a factor in the propagation of that knowledge which assists the destruction of stereotypes and images conducive to xenophobia. It is for this reason that care should be paid to maintaining the proportion in research into the history of Polish Jews: Intensive studies should not be limited to the brief and most tragic fragment of their history, but should cover the whole of their eight-hundred year past on Polish soil. This task is closely related to my opening statement in which I said that I also regard the title of *Doctor honoris causa* as recognition of the great importance of integral research on the history of Polish Jews over the centuries.<sup>1</sup>

1 This is a slightly abridged and edited version of the English translation of the speech which first appeared in: *Dialectics and Humanism* 4/1994, pp. 178–183. The editors would like to thank Prof. J. Kuczyński of the University of Warsaw for his permission to publish this text.