# Rejoinder

François Guesnet

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# Rejoinder

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As coeditor of the volume on Jewish self-government in the Polish lands, I am grateful to the four colleagues who have engaged in such a thoughtful and encouraging way with *Sources on Jewish Self-Government in the Polish Lands*, a collection of translated primary sources. Editors and authors consider the practices and institutions around communal organization a key feature of the millennium of a significant Jewish presence in the Polish lands, allowing this religious minority to develop and maintain a considerable degree of self-governance. The reader offers translations of these sources (Latin, Middle High German, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, Russian being the most important) into English, thus making them accessible to a wider readership, whether it is interested in Jewish history, in the history of East Central Europe and its political, legal, cultural, and political dimenions, or in interreligious and ethnic cohabitation more generally.

Our initial assumption was that "the emergence of Jewish self-government in the Polish and Lithuanian lands is the result of a dynamic entanglement of Jewish and non-Jewish legal and political traditions, and an object par excellence for *histoire croisée* (entangled history)" (xii). Another assumption was that there was a considerable degree of continuity in the aspirations of members of these Jewish communities to establish institutions and practices of self-governance, that is, a space of social practices grounded in the implementation of Jewish law and intended to maintain a framework of securing the continuity of these institutions. We count Natan Hanover's idealizing description of Jewish life in Poland in *Yaven metsulah* among the loftiest expressions of such aspirations. Describing the six pillars on which the world rests, Hanover refers to Poland's ubiquitous rabbinical adjudication as the "pillar of justice."[1]

These endeavors could not and did not happen in a legal or constitutional vacuum; to the contrary, they were dependent on a framework defined by non-Jewish law and in constant negotiation with local magistrates, the nobility, the clergy, and the crown. Neither editors nor authors adhere to the romanticizing notion of full Jewish autonomy in the Dubnowian understanding, a position which would be difficult to defend in light of the historical records adduced in the ten chapters. To the contrary, these chapters illustrate the complexity of this entanglement, its significant

permutations over time, but also the conflicts within Jewish communities resulting from its sharp hierarchies. If there is one theme which runs through the ten chapters, it is not the beauty of Jews governing themselves, but the *mahloykes* (conflict) resulting from divergent interpretations about how a community should or should not be run, as well as from the jealousies involved in partaking in managing Jewish communal life. Magda Teter proposes to identify these features of communal self-rule as "delegated" or "derivative governance," as they were limited by the framework of non-Jewish sovereign power and legislation. As explained above, the editors share some of her concerns about the assumptions of comprehensive Jewish autonomy (a term carefully avoided throughout the volume under consideration) in the Polish lands and beyond. Accordingly, they see the *Sources on Jewish Self-Government* less in a Dubnowian tradition, and more in one emphasizing the generative and dynamic character of Jewish self-governance in these lands, as pioneered by scholars such as Mojżesz Schorr, Majer Bałaban, or Izaak Levitats, all of whom considered the individual Jewish community as its core arena.[2] Reducing it to an act of delegation is disregarding constitutive elements in establishing and maintaining these communities, such as the appreciation of and expertise in Jewish law, and its intimate connection to religious traditions and practices reiterated in manifold ways by a great variety of historical actors.

Each author was invited to identify those sources they considered most relevant to reflect the legal, political, cultural, and social implications of establishing, organizing, running, defending, and strengthening a Jewish community for the period and/or region for which they have expert knowledge. The intention was not to prove the existence of a fully autonomous Jewish polity, but to explore and document the obvious and continued efforts which went into striving for a degree of what throughout the volume is described as Jewish self-governance. Thus, the collection includes some well-known and centrally important sources such as the Statute of Kalish (1264, 19–23), the establishment of noble jurisdiction over Jews in private towns (1539, 90), or the establishment of the Pale of Settlement (1804, 206–8), but it also allows a reader to follow how core features of Jewish self-governance functioned over one millennium on the local and supracommunal level, using seemingly much less important sources. They illustrate shifts in administrative structures such as the *kahal* (but not limited to it), an institution like the Council of Four Lands or the Lithuanian Council, the rabbinate and rabbinical adjudication, subsidiary structures such as charitable confraternities, educational institutions, and negotiating a functioning relationship with neighbors, authorities, princes, the church, and the throne. As Scott Ury rightly points out, the editors indeed agree with Dubnow about the centrality of communal institutions. They do not, however, construe the practices around self-governance as full autonomy.

An important editorial feature is the overall chronological arch: Browsing this collection of sources, the reader moves from the medieval and the early modern period to the period of partitions, with the nineteenth century offering a synchronous presentation of sources for each partition, followed by the chapter on the First World War and the interwar period and the postwar period. The reader thus can follow the historicity of institutions and practices surrounding Jewish self-government, including the ever-growing desire of non-Jewish state-actors in gaining knowledge and control over these (xxix–xxx). I am grateful to Katarzyna Person for her review of the chapter by Marcin Urynowicz. At the very beginning of the work for this project, Jakub Goldberg argued that an inclusion of this darkest period in Jewish history in the chronological sequence of chapters would mean denying the dimensions of the genocide. As Person explains, one could argue that those who were forced to join the *Judenräte* were often experienced members of their respective community, and some even volunteered for this role. The very objective of subjugation and finally extermination of the Jews pursued by the German occupier however also defined the role of those who at times hoped to be a force of good, implicating them in a process of sequestration, dispossession, and murder. Despite the continued relevance of certain features and areas of Jewish self-governance, this constellation stood in too stark and dark a contrast to the preceding centuries of Jewish life in the Polish lands.

Hanna Węgrzynek deplores the lack of sources on the privileges *de non tolerandis Judaeis* prohibiting the settlement in a considerable number of towns. It would have indeed been an important aspect to cover, and I agree this is in fact a shortcoming, even though the volume does include the case of abolishing this privilege in the Prussian partition (chapter 3, item 15). She also suggests that among the several items referring to the Council of Four Lands, none reflects its international interventions. Again, this is a helpful observation. One could, however, point the reader to Moshe Rosman's cautious assessment of the Council's reach: "Jews the world over might have heard of the Va'ad and admired it. . . . They were not, however, prepared to give up their own authority in favour of the Va'ad's."[3] The Council is thus a perfect illustration of the tension between aspiration for self-rule and the de facto limitations of even internal Jewish political reach.

Scott Ury stresses how the sources presented in the reader reflect the continuities in the struggles of Jewish communities to maintain their room to maneuver even after the partitions, and the severe curtailing of Jewish self-governance, which is a most welcome observation. I have to agree with him that the overall topic is unfortunately not conducive to reflect the experience of Jewish women. While editors and authors have endeavored to include sources that offer insights about the gendered nature of self-governance, the organized Jewish community was (and often remains)

an institution of male dominance (as were its local non-Jewish counterparts, for example, municipal councils).

Magda Teter offers a comprehensive history of the historiography of Jewish self-governance and the ideal of Jewish autonomy and pleads for restraint in defining practices of self-governance as Jewish self-government or, even worse, Jewish autonomy. As pointed out earlier, the editors and authors of the source reader are in full agreement in their reluctance to claim a fully independent Jewish polity, which would have emerged in the early modern period. Where there seems to be a difference in conceptualizing practices of Jewish self-governance between us and this esteemed expert on the early modern period, it is the stronger focus on what the editors assume to be a strong, ongoing control over communal resources and institutions. This control necessarily involved a sustained communication between representatives from both sides. It seems farfetched to stipulate, as Teter proposes, a joint form of governance, arguing that "Jewish leaders formally participated in the negotiations during the sessions of the Sejm." Indeed, individual Jewish communities, but more importantly, the Council of Four Lands and the Lithuanian Council would send delegates to both regional noble assemblies (*sejmiki*) and the assembly of nobles of the Crown, or Sejm. As Anna Michałowska-Mycielska has recently demonstrated, these spokesmen or *shtadlanim* often made prior contact with relevant participants to prepare their intervention during the proceedings of both the sejmiki and the Sejm, and interceded mostly on matters of taxation, economic activities, privilege renewals, and relations between Jews and Christians. As delegates, they were present during these assemblies, or at least observed those proceedings, but they obviously did not have a say in them, let alone a vote. Their only means to influence decision-making was by persuasion or gifts, resulting in very significant expenses.[4]

These forms of interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish political actors became highly routinized in the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth—perhaps only comparable to medieval Spain or the Ottoman Empire. At the core of these practices was—and this is one of the leading assumptions of the source reader—the belief among leaders of the individual Jewish community that they were stewards (Danny Trom) of an entity grounded in Jewish law, a *kehillah k'doshah*.[5] The practices and routines derived from this assumption reflect a deep entanglement between Jewish adjudication and governance on the one hand, and non-Jewish political structures and actors. The reality of "doing Jewish politics" over the centuries in the Polish lands derive to a considerable degree from this sacred aspiration. It becomes more visible when it is taken away—such as the attempt in 1791 of communal leaders in the Prussian partition to continue to identify Jewish plenipotentiaries to address the Greater Polish Sejm (chapter 3, item 4), Dov Bolechow's claim that the partitions of Poland were the punishment of the Poles for having abolished the Council of Four

Lands (chapter 2, item 37), or the petition against the curtailing of Jewish communal prerogatives, such as installing an *eruv* or sabbath enclosure, drafted in Greater Poland in 1835 (chapter 4, item 8).

The obvious resistance against the introduction of a new administrative structure for Jewish communal governance and increased state oversight in the Kingdom of Poland in the wake of the abolition of the *kahal* in 1822 reflects the ongoing perception among Jewish communal leaders that the state interfered with growing insistence on what they perceived as their prerogative to be "masters of their own offerings" (or *maîtres de leurs propres offrandes* in the original).[6] The regret over this perceived loss of control and independent stewardship may have diminished in the course of the nineteenth century. However, the ongoing relevance of the local Jewish community as a major arena of intra-Jewish political engagements (xvi–xxi), well documented in the source reader also for the interwar period, the period of the German occupation and the Holocaust, and the postwar period, points to a lasting hope to claim a space defined by Jews on the basis of—increasingly variegated—traditions, values, and aspirations.

## NOTES

1. Hanover, *Abyss of Despair*, 119–20.
2. See (in chronological order) Schorr, *Organizacja*, Bałaban, *Dzieje*, and Levitats, *Jewish Community*. About the former two see recently Aleksiun, *Conscious History*, 63–108.
3. Rosman, "The Authority of the Council of Four Lands," 227.
4. Michałowska-Mycielska, "Jewish Delegates at the Noble Sejm," 163–80.
5. Danny Trom proposed the concept of stewardship to frame the ethos of Jewish communal leadership in Jewish diasporic history. Its advantage is to center *le fait juif* (which could be tentatively translated as the "Jewish given") without defining its religious, political, or cultural content any further, see Trom, *Persévérance du fait juif*.
6. Guesnet, "'Masters of their own offerings no more,'" 245–60.

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## CONTRIBUTOR


François Guesnet is the coeditor of *Sources on Jewish Self-Government in the Polish Lands from Its Inception to the Present.*