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*Political Culture of Polish Jewry:
A Tour d'Horizon*

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Until it was divided by its neighbours Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772, 1793 and 1795, Poland was host to the largest Jewish community of its kind in Europe, roughly three-quarters of a million strong, living in towns and villages all over the country. Moreover, Polish Jewry had possessed a political structure which transcended local or regional frameworks. The Council of Four Lands (*va'ad arba aratsot*), a semi-annual convention of community and regional representatives, was an institution ensuring supra-communal and regional autonomy.¹ The Council's formal task was to administer the Commonwealth's taxes on the Jewish communities. But the representatives, who convened during large fairs, dealt with numerous other matters besides. This political authority was unique in European Jewish history for its important official status, its quasi-legislative function and its long existence – community representatives first met in the late sixteenth century and the Council was abolished only on the introduction of a per-capita tax in

¹ The first pioneering study of the Council was Mojżesz Schorr, 'Organizacja Żydów w Polsce od najdawniejszych czasów aż do r. 1772 (głównie na podstawie źródeł archiwalnych)' [The Organization of the Jews in Poland from the Oldest Times Until 1772], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 13 (1899) H. 1, 482–520; H. 2, 734–75 and Louis Lewin, 'Neue Materialien zur Geschichte der Vierländersynode', *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* 3 (1905), 4 (1906), 9 (1916). Concerning the dissolution of the Council see Jakob Goldberg, 'Żydowski Sejm Czterech Ziem w społecznym i politycznym ustroju dawnej Rzeczypospolitej' [The Council of Four Lands in the Social and Political Structure of the Former Polish Commonwealth], in Andrzej Link-Lenczowski (ed.) *Żydzi w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław 1991) 44–58, and Jakob Goldberg, 'Der Vierländer-Rat der polnischen Juden und seine Beziehungen zu den jüdischen Gemeinden und Juden in Deutschland im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', in Karl Erich Grözinger (ed.) *Die wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Beziehungen zwischen den jüdischen Gemeinden in Polen und Deutschland vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 1992) 39–52. See also Wolf Feilchenfeld, 'Die innere Verfassung der jüdischen Gemeinde zu Posen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Zs. der Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* 11 (1896) 122–37, especially 125. An important source for Schorr was Philipp Bloch, 'Die Generalprivilegien der polnischen Judenschaft', *Zs. der Gesellschaft für die Provinz Posen* 6 (1891) 139–74, 387–416.

1764.² The following discussion of the political culture of Polish Jewry has a wider relevance due to demographic developments and migrations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result of these, the historical origins of approximately four-fifths of Jews alive today are East European. Few phenomena in the political and cultural world of Ashkenazi Jewry during the past 200 years can be understood without considering the impact of eastern European and thus Polish Jewry.³

The term 'political culture' here refers to 'the fundamental principles of a given social group concerning the political world and the operational and instrumental ideas connected herewith' (Karl Rohe).⁴ The concept is obviously of special value in analysing political collectives below the state level.⁵ To understand what constituted the 'political world' of Polish Jewry, one has to consider its distinctiveness in terms of religion and language. These Jews spoke Yiddish in a Slav environment, while using Hebrew for religious and administrative matters. Jewish communities were set apart politically by their dependency, comparable to that in Central Europe, on privileges granted from the thirteenth century onwards by regional aristocrats and later by Polish kings. Economic cooperation gave rise to interdependence between princes and kings on the one hand, and Jews on the other. The fact that these relations had a clear legal basis does not mean that Jews were safe or their lives stable – conflicts arose especially with Christian burghers of Polish towns and with the clergy supporting them. The numerous agreements

² The Council's constitution and influence have been repeatedly studied. Its protocols were first published in 1945 by Israel Halperin in Jerusalem and again with comments and an overview of research by Israel Bartal, *Pinkas va'ad arba aratsot* [Protocols of the Council of Four Lands], preface Shmuel Etinger (Jerusalem 1990). A recent analysis is Gershon Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century. A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley 2004) 211–31.

³ The term 'Polish Jewry' is here applied to communities in the Polish Commonwealth prior to the first partition in 1772. This definition is justified by the fact that the following analysis refers to the pre-partition Commonwealth. For a thought-provoking reflexion on the use of this term between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Scott Ury, 'Who, What, When, Where and Why is Polish Jewry? Envisioning, Constructing, and Possessing Polish Jewry', *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (2000) 3, 205–28.

⁴ Cited by Andreas Dörner, 'Politische Kulturforschung und Cultural Studies', in Othmar Nikola *et al.* (eds) *Politische Deutungskulturen. Festschrift für Karl Rohe* (Baden-Baden 1999) 93–110 (citation p. 95). This definition is based on the concept of civic culture proposed by Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton 1963).

⁵ Klaus von Beyme, *Die politischen Theorien der Gegenwart* (Wiesbaden 2000, 8th ed.) 222–34, especially 226.

(*ugody*) between the municipal Christian elites and the Jewish leadership are a dramatically under-researched topic in this connection.⁶

Nevertheless, this kind of 'alliance with the central power'⁷ made it possible to claim political and legal protection in the frequent conflicts which arose. While Jewish communities in German-speaking areas were banned from urban centres after the persecutions of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and experienced a dramatic demographic decline, Polish Jewry formed part of urban agglomerations. In addition, the privileges granted by Zygmunt III in 1551 gave Jewish communities in Poland independence in electing community administrations and hence jurisdictional autonomy. Such autonomy was a prerequisite for Polish Jewry's self-perception as a politically independent entity within the Polish Commonwealth, a perception whose significance is illustrated by the following example.

Stanisław August Poniatowski, the last Polish king, encouraged a wide range of modernizing efforts.⁸ The Polish Commonwealth had lost ground by comparison with its neighbours – Prussia, Austria and Russia – in the realm of state administration and the ability to conduct coherent political and military action. Moreover, the aristocracy, which controlled the councils – diets – of the nobility, could easily hamper fiscal initiatives. These diets, in which each member held a veto, could not function as modernizing agents. State modernization began with fiscal reform in 1764, followed – after the first partition of Poland in 1772 – by the introduction of a Commission of National Enlightenment (*Komisja Edukacji Narodowej*) in 1773, charged with reforming educational institutions. In 1788, under the threat of further territorial loss, all social orders – estates – were invited to Warsaw to discuss state reform and defence against external threats. This diet, the Four Years' Sejm

⁶ For an example of such an agreement see the *ugoda* of the small town Kamionka in the Lviv region, signed in 1589 and renewed in 1766, *Confirmatio iurium et privilegiorum Iudaeis oppidi Kamionacensis in terra Leopoliensi siti servientium*. See Jacob Goldberg, *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth* (Jerusalem 1985) 1117 f.

⁷ This term was used by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main 1979) 184. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, 'Diener von Königen und nicht Diener von Dienern'. *Einige Aspekte der politischen Geschichte der Juden* (München 1995) deals with the historic dimension of the political option he calls the 'royal alliance'.

⁸ Gottfried Schramm, 'Reformen unter Polens letztem König. Die Wandlungsfähigkeit eines Ständestaates im europäischen Vergleich', *Berliner Jahrbuch für osteuropäische Geschichte* 1 (1996) 203–16.

(*Sejm Czteroletni*), led to the first constitution on the European continent, that of 3 May 1791.⁹ The best that can be said of this is that it opened the way to constitutional changes which would guarantee religious tolerance for all faiths, while reserving a privileged place for the Catholic Church.¹⁰ It preserved the privileges of the nobility and the aristocracy, so did not ensure legal equality for all. Nor did it address the injustices of serfdom or the inferior position of the town burghers. Yet it preserved the strong position of the estates against the king, thus refusing to follow most European nations on the path to absolutism.

The status of the Jews was intensely debated during deliberations on this constitutional project, much as before the French Revolution.¹¹ On one side, burghers and clerics claimed that Jews had gained too much wealth and influence, and that a constitutional and legislative response was called for. Several proposals for the legal emancipation and/or social and religious reform of Polish Jewry were published, some influenced by legislation on the subject in revolutionary France that led to Jewish emancipation.¹² Most were formulated by Gentiles or by *maskilim*, Jewish supporters of Enlightenment. On the other side, Jewish communities sent large numbers of delegates to Warsaw to intervene with the king or with members of the Diet, either personally or by taking advantage of direct access to the press and printers in the capital, publishing comments and counter-proposals by return.¹³ The clashes of opinion are well illustrated by the dispute between a Gentile reformer, Mateusz Butrymowicz, who proposed legal changes to de-autonomize

⁹ Jerzy Kowceki (ed.) *Konstytucja 3 Maja 1791. Statut Zgromadzenia Przyjaciół Konstytucji* (Warszawa 1991). See also Samuel Fiszman (ed.) *Constitution and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Poland. The Constitution of May 3, 1791* (Bloomington 1997).

¹⁰ *Konstytucja 3 Maja 1791*, 42.

¹¹ Cf. François Guesnet, 'Strukturwandel im Gebrauch der Öffentlichkeit. Zu einem Aspekt jüdischer politischer Praxis zwischen 1744 und 1881', in Martin Schulze Wessel and Jörg Requate (eds) *Europäische Öffentlichkeit. Transnationale Kommunikation seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main 2002) 43–62.

¹² These are documented in *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego* [Materials Pertaining to the History of the Four Years' Sejm] (Wrocław 1955–68, 6 vols); vol. 2 (edited by Janusz Woliński, Jerzy Michalski et al.) records petitions of the municipalities, including numerous anti-Jewish proposals; vol. 6 (edited by Artur Eisenbach et al.) is devoted to the deliberations concerning the status and reform of Polish Jewry.

¹³ This activity has been first analysed by Jakub Goldberg, 'Pierwszy ruch polityczny wśród Żydów polskich. Plenipotenci żydowscy w dobie Sejmu Czteroletniego' [The first political movement among Polish Jews. The Jewish plenipotentiaries in the Period of the Sejm], Jerzy Michalski (ed.) *Lud żydowski w narodzie polskim* [The Jewish People Amidst the Polish People], (Warszawa 1994) 45–63.

and de-Judaize the Jews, and Herszel Jozefowicz, the Jewish author of a riposte to these proposals.¹⁴

Butrymowicz, a noble member of the Sejm, argued in his pamphlet, *Sposób uformowania Żydów polskich w pożytecznych krajowi obywatelów*, that Polish Jews should acculturate to Polish society by giving up central features of their religious practice and cultural traditions.¹⁵ He described negative Jewish characteristics and qualities, in line with the enlightened discourse of his time, not as essentially Jewish but as a result of their living conditions, and therefore as capable of 'embetterment'. In order to become 'useful citizens' he considered it essential for Jews to be acculturated to the surrounding Polish society.¹⁶ Likewise the *kahal* – the Jewish community and its administration – must cease to be a state within a state with its own municipal jurisdiction and administration. In accordance with the Enlightenment concept that religion falls within the private sphere, Butrymowicz conceded the case for Jewish judges in religious matters, but not in civil affairs.¹⁷ He emphasized the link between a given *res publica* and the rule of one law.¹⁸

Herszel Jozefowicz, who wrote the riposte to Butrymowicz's proposals, was a rabbi in the provincial capital of Chełm, and one of the previously mentioned Jewish plenipotentiaries sent as lobbyists to Warsaw during the deliberations of the Four Years' Sejm.¹⁹ Between 1788 and 1792 a total of 120 of these so called *shtadlanim* (intercessors)

¹⁴ In the following analysis I employ the Polish spelling of names in the sources used.

¹⁵ *Materiały* vol. 6 (see note 12), no. 7, 78–93. This proposal, entitled 'Method for turning the Jews into inhabitants useful for the country', served as a blueprint for a shorter legal proposal, presented by Butrymowicz in the autumn of 1789, published under the title of *Reforma Żydów*, see *ibid.* no. 12, 118–128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 79.

¹⁷ This is close to the arguments of Christian Konrad Wilhelm von Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (1786: Nachdruck Hildesheim 1973), or of de Clermont-Tonnerre, member of the revolutionary Assemblée Nationale in France, who denied Jewish communities the right to maintain judges, see 'Opinion de M. Le Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre, député de Paris. Le 23 décembre 1789', in *La Révolution Française et l'émancipation des Juifs*, Bd.7: 'L'Assemblée Nationale Constituante. Motions, Discours et Rapports' (Paris 1968), (no pagination).

¹⁸ Cf. Artur Eisenbach, 'Postulat Asymilacji Żydów i jego implikacje w dobie stanisławowskiej' [The Postulate of Jewish Assimilation and its Significance during the Reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski], *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* (Warszawa 1984) H. 3–4, 3–30 (especially pp. 21–3).

¹⁹ 'Myśli stosowne do sposobu oformowania Żydów polskich w pożytecznych krajowi obywatelów', *Materiały* (see n. 12) no. 9, 98–105.

passed through Warsaw.²⁰ Surprisingly perhaps, Jozefowicz did not deny most of Butrymowicz's claims concerning the cultural and political status of Polish Jewry – that Jews were too different in religion, language, habit and other aspects of everyday life, that Jewish judges had too wide a scope of jurisdiction, and that the communities' administration, the *kahal*, had too much power over Jewish inhabitants of towns located, after all, in Poland. But he rejected the corollaries. He declared that Butrymowicz as a noble undoubtedly had many important tasks to care for – perhaps too many to enable him to understand the conditions of Jewish existence in Poland. Hence he exaggerated unworthy conduct by Jews, and did not realize to what extent Jews in Poland were 'good, benevolent and thankful towards the country'.²¹ Their economic activity, far from being harmful, was highly beneficial, not least to the Polish nobility who often had Jewish business associates.²² Nowhere were Jews more productive than in Poland, knowing and practising handicrafts and even building Catholic churches.²³ Jozefowicz rejected all proposals to reform religious customs, as the Jews 'would not be able to live in conformity with the Bible and would no longer deserve the name of Israelites of the old covenant'.²⁴ As for Butrymowicz's proposal that Jews dress like Gentiles: 'It is true that we do not have a divine law prescribing our clothes, but why change it? If we are so unworthy of trust and deserve a bad reputation, then it should be best that we dress differently from Christians in order to be easily recognizable.'²⁵ Finally, as regards Jewish legal autonomy, Jozefowicz denied that its abolition would make Jews more law-abiding. Rather, it deserved to be broadened. He employed a military metaphor: 'If one wishes to lead a large number of soldiers, one should begin with the officers ... therefore in each *województwo* two assessors should be selected from among the rabbis and community elders, who shall supervise the proper execution of all decrees of the Republic'. In other words, not only should existing Jewish legal autonomy be perpetuated;

²⁰ Goldberg (see n. 13) 46–50.

²¹ Myśli stosowne (see n. 19) 100.

²² Jerzy Michalski, 'The Jewish Question in Polish Public Opinion', in Adam Teller (ed.) *Studies in the History of the Jews in Old Poland. In Honor of Jacob Goldberg, Scripta Hierosolymitana*, vol. XXXVIII (Jerusalem 1998) 123–46, 134.

²³ Myśli stosowne (see n. 19) 102.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

it should be complemented by a new form of legal supervision at a higher administrative level, such as existed until then only on the level of individual communities.²⁶ Jozefowicz stoutly defended the way the status of Jews distinguished the Polish Commonwealth from other nations: 'God showed special generosity towards this *Rzeczpospolita* [Commonwealth] making it so vast and settling such a great number of us [the Jews] within its frontiers'.²⁷

Despite their different conclusions, these authors provide a fairly homogenous picture of the political and legal status of the Jews in the Polish Commonwealth. Both describe the breadth of Jewish autonomy based on privileges granted through the highest political authorities – the king and the aristocracy. Both consider the independence of Jewish judges and the rule of Jewish law within Jewish communities to be core features of this autonomy. Agreeing that Polish Jewry was legally and culturally distinct, they diverge on whether this situation should be changed or preserved. In any event, given the number of Jews living in the Commonwealth and the scope of their economic activity, their status is of central significance for the political future of the Polish Commonwealth.

One is struck first by the confidence with which the rabbi from Chelm defends the *de facto* political autonomy of Jews, and secondly by the way both authors consider the status of Jews in a reformed *Rzeczpospolita* to be an issue which cannot be resolved by the Diet or the king alone, but which has to derive from mutual understanding. Butrymowicz states: 'I think there is no other way to achieve this [reform] than to call a Sejm commission and to ask the Jews that they choose from among the elders constituting their government in religious matters [*zwierchność*] who should be responsible for establishing the preconditions for concluding a lasting and eternal agreement [*concordatum*] between the two hitherto struggling nations [*narody*]'.²⁸ This is strikingly close to Herszel Jozefowicz's recognition that in order to find 'a regulation which should last for centuries, the assembled estates should convene a commission [*deputacya* in Polish] to gain knowledge and to decide on all difficulties and circumstances, and which, after hearings and discussions, should report to the estates for a decision'.²⁹ In short, it is necessary to conclude not a *contrat social* among individuals with

²⁶ *Ibid.* 104.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Sposób (see p. 65 above and n. 15) 85.

²⁹ Myśli stosowne (see n. 19) 104.

equal rights and duties, as in the enlightened and absolutist nation-states of western Europe, but a *contrat de sociétés* between two distinct political entities.

Butrymowicz and Jozefowicz were ambivalent about the relationship between these entities. Both saw the need for eventual agreement between the Diet representing the Gentile side and Jewish delegates their own communities. But the legal basis for these negotiations remained unclear. Did the two sides together form the *Rzeczpospolita*? Did the Gentile side consider the Jews as strangers, however privileged? Both authors envisaged the agreement as a lasting one, tacitly accepting Jews and Gentiles as separate political entities, bound by a contract that confirmed their separateness. But for Butrymowicz this coexistence should give way to the forced acculturation of the Jews. Both authors viewed the Diet as the main political agent: the body choosing the *komisya* or *deputacya* (almost synonymous terms) that would discuss the results of negotiations and decide about an eventual agreement. Most of the *shtadlanim* sent to Warsaw by local communities or regional assemblies of communities during the Four Years' Sejm represented traditional Jewish hierarchies. These tended to immunize Polish Jewry against outside influences, such as demands for integration and/or de-Judaization, or the marginal voices of Polish-Jewish *maskilim*. Their main aim was to preserve the status quo and to defend the legal, political and hence religious and cultural autonomy of their communities.

Jewish political culture on the eve of the partitions of Poland therefore relied on the institution of the autonomous community and the political prerogatives linked to this community's privileges in matters of jurisdiction. Jewish representatives like Herszel Jozefowicz viewed Polish Jewry as a distinct political and cultural entity within the *Rzeczpospolita*, not as part of the Commonwealth, but, through God's will, linked to it. The desire to preserve the status quo was far from politically passive, since the traditional Jewish elites, seeing their own position to be politically dependent on the good will of those in power, were capable of a high degree of activity.³⁰

Nonetheless, the main factors leading to change stemmed as much from the Jewish community as from the Gentile world. The abolition of

³⁰ François Guesnet, 'Politik der Vormoderne – Shtadlanut am Vorabend der polnischen Teilungen', *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts/Simon-Dubnow-Institute Yearbook 1* (2002) 235–55, here 249–51.

the Council of Four Lands in 1764, mentioned at the outset, showed that the *Rzeczpospolita* realized the need to modify certain features of pre-absolutist state administration, thereby preparing for an end to royal or aristocratic prerogatives as the basis for political separateness of Jewish communities. Petitions to the Four Years' Sejm from Jews in Wilno and other towns pleaded for an end to the prerogatives of the *kahal* and for equality of all citizens regardless of religion. A typical argument was that 'as we pay our taxes to the public treasury as individuals, each and every one has the right to be protected by the government' – especially against the power of the Jewish hierarchy.³¹ An unnamed author stated in the official publication of the Diet (the *Journal Hebdomadaire de la Diète de Varsovie*) of May 1790 that 'chacun de nous est aussi un individu, et par conséquent, il semble qu'il aye des droits à ce qu'accorde la loi naturelle'³² – a position thoroughly remote from the efforts of Herszel Jozefowicz and other representatives of the traditional hierarchy to preserve the community's autonomy, based on the will of God and royal privileges rather than on concepts like natural law.

More influential than the direct use of Enlightenment ideas was their indirect effect through changes in the general political framework, especially the partition of Poland and the annexation of large numbers of Jews by the absolutist states of Austria, Prussia and Russia.³³ The three powers reacted differently to their new Jewish population and its political culture. Austria and Prussia went to great lengths to gain control of the reluctant Jewish communities, rewarding integrationist efforts by individuals and fighting corporate autonomy.³⁴ In Galicia the process took a rather tortuous course. Maria Theresia issued a *Judenordnung* for the new province in 1776 designed to replace the autonomous communities

³¹ 'Odpowiedź ze strony Żydów wileńskich na zaskarżenie dekretu Komisji Skarbu Lit. Od kahału wileńskiego Stanom Sejmującym podane' [Reply from the Vilna Jews to the charges by the Lithuanian Fiscal Commission, given by the Community Board to the Estates in Session] (first months of 1789), *Materialy* (see n. 12) 6:105–13, citation 112. Hundert (see n. 2) 112–18, doubts the social substance of this long-lasting conflict in the Jewish community of Wilno.

³² 'Les Juifs aux représentants des villes de la Pologne' (30 May 1790), *Materialy* (see n. 12) 6:188–190, citation 189.

³³ For the partitions of Poland cf. Michael M. Müller, *Die Teilungen Polens 1772–1793–1795* (München 1984).

³⁴ Peter Baumgart, 'Die Stellung der jüdischen Minorität im Staat des aufgeklärten Absolutismus', *Kairos. Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft und Theologie*, NS 22 (1980) 226–45.

by a High Council (*Oberster Rat*) with wide executive powers over all Galician communities. It was a failure and was abolished in 1786. Joseph II chose a more balanced approach with his *Toleranzpatent* for Galicia from 1789. Local communities would hold significant administrative prerogatives, their funds secured by new taxes. These administrative bodies, designed along Enlightenment lines, were supposed to execute state policies on the local level. They therefore did not express Jewish political culture, but rather the state's need for a local body to enforce its policies towards the Jews. These policies reflected a conservative though enlightened ideal of allowing Jews their religious practices, while forcing them to adopt German family names, to use German as an administrative language and to avoid distinctive clothing. The *Toleranzpatent* offered partial civil rights, especially 'municipal citizenship and access to the local public service in towns to the groups of the Jewish population which had the necessary property qualifications'.³⁵

In Prussian Polish territories the new administration in 1797 ended all rabbinical jurisdiction beyond the purely religious sphere (although this is hard to define), forbade communal intercession with the provincial administration and proscribed the election of community elders. However, the new rulers also abandoned the principle that members of a given community were collectively liable for community debts – an issue originating mostly in the seventeenth century, and which in Russia continued to haunt Jewish communities until the Great War.³⁶

So-called enlightened rule in former Polish territories of Prussia therefore went straight to the core of the political culture of Polish Jewry in significantly reducing its autonomy. Unlike the progressive form of incorporation demonstrated by revolutionary France, Jews were not offered the status of emancipated *citoyens* to compensate for this loss. In 1812 Prussia offered citizen's rights to Jews who demonstrated the will to become loyal and acculturated Prussians and who disposed of some wealth, echoing Josephinian legislation. After long deliberations, the *Toleranzedikt* of 1812 was in 1833 extended to the former Polish province of Greater Poland that had not been under Prussian rule in 1812. At its core was an offer of naturalization as Prussian citizens for Jews of a certain wealth in exchange for demonstrated loyalty to Prussian rule and

³⁵ Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780–1870* (Oxford 1991) 56.

³⁶ Andrzej Wojtkowski, *Polityka rządu pruskiego wobec żydów polskich od r. 1793 do 1806* (Poznań 1923) 23f. This policy was later reversed.

German as language of everyday use. Although regional and central authorities had not considered Greater Polish Jews desirable new citizens, the patriotic insurrection in the neighbouring Kingdom of Poland in 1830 had demonstrated the need to win over as many constituencies as possible, including the Jews.

Sophia Kemlein has shown that this conditional emancipation of Jews in Greater Poland was decisive in motivating former Polish Jews to identify with German culture and the Prussian state – a development which, although not completed, was almost irreversible by the end of the 1840s.³⁷ An important transforming factor in the political culture of Jews in Greater Poland was the demographic decline caused by migration towards the provincial capital, Poznań (Posen), the emerging metropolis Berlin and the United States. Important communities shrank within a few decades to a few dozen families or less, unable to guarantee basic features of a Jewish community.³⁸ For the first decades of Russian rule in Congress Poland – an administrative entity that had been formed in 1815 by the decisions of the Congress of Vienna in the central Polish provinces around Warsaw (hence its name) – and in the Pale of Settlement in the western part of the Russian Empire (corresponding roughly to contemporary Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine), communal institutions remained untouched. In Congress Poland the so-called 'synagogue supervision' (*dozór bożniczy*), introduced late in 1821, officially replaced the *kahal*, outlawed early in 1822. Equally unsettling for the traditional community structure was the proscription of Jewish confraternities, the *hevrot*. Members of the *dozor* were elected by higher tax-paying community members and considered as executing purely administrative functions rather than as representing their respective communities. In most communities the notables who had previously held office in the *kahal* and the *hevrot* accepted the non-prestigious function of synagogue supervisor, although they based their authority on their informal position. No administrative measure was able to dismantle the traditional *hevrot*, and they continued their activity throughout the nineteenth century. Membership in the burial societies especially constituted a major source of communal authority.³⁹

³⁷ This irreversibility was especially clear during the Polish uprising in the Posen province in 1848, see Sophia Kemlein, *Die Posener Juden 1815–1848. Entwicklungsprozesse einer polnischen Judenheit unter preussischer Herrschaft* (Hamburg 1997), e.g. 318 f.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 185–8.

³⁹ Izaak Levitats, *The Jewish Community in Russia, 1772–1844* (New York 1943) *passim*; Guesnet (see n. 20) 333–412.

This shift in authority from the *kahal*, or leadership of the corporate community, to the illegal confraternities is illustrated by a decision of the elders of the burial society of Zamość, proclaimed shortly after the abolition of its *kahal*. 'Regarding the humiliation of the dignity of the *kahal*, in that they are now called synagogue supervisors, which is the reason why some of its members now fear that they have lost their power and authority, we declare that the members of the synagogue supervision hold the same power as the former *kahal*.'⁴⁰ What constitutes from one standpoint an acknowledgement of state legislation – the synagogue supervisors being in charge of communal affairs – confirms at the same time that communal authority rests with those able to decree who is in charge of the authorized institutions.

In Russia the *kahal* was not abolished until 1844, when many of its functions were taken over by the municipal administration. Moreover, whereas in Prussia and Austria the politics of according piecemeal citizenship rights to the upper echelons of Jewish society led to growing identification of these elites with the state's policies, this barely occurred in Congress Poland or in the Russian Empire.⁴¹ Jewish elites on the local level generally remained true to the notion of communal autonomy, which was possible only because of the coexistence of state-sponsored administrative bodies with an informally approved local leadership.⁴² This coexistence is probably the most significant feature distinguishing the development of the political culture during the nineteenth century in Russia and the Kingdom of Poland from that in Prussia and Austria. Two factors played a crucial role in the emergence of this differentiated leadership in the eastern provinces of the former Polish commonwealth. The first is the great authority of the 'holy community' (*kehilah kedoshah*) based on autonomous legislation and preserved by a shared

⁴⁰ Ephraim Kupfer, 'Pinkas Bractwa Pogrzebowego i dobroczynnego w Zamościu', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 2:8 (1951) 47–80, citation 69; see also François Guesnet, *Polnische Juden im 19. Jahrhundert. Lebensbedingungen, Rechtsnormen und Organisation im Wandel* (Köln, Wien 1998) 398.

⁴¹ Eli Lederhendler discusses the dialectics of identification with and distance from government policies among traditional and enlightened Jewish elites in 'Modernity Without Emancipation or Assimilation? The Case of Russian Jewry', in Jonathan Frankel *et al.* (eds) *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge 1992) 324–43; cf. Guesnet (see n. 40) 223–9.

⁴² Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics. Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York, Oxford 1989) 46–83.

respect for Jewish law and religious observance. Using a variety of strategies and instruments, gentile authorities – in most cases supported by a small segment of enlightened Jews – sought to complement traditional communal functions and institutions by state-controlled equivalents: the 'consistoires' in France, regional boards in Galicia, the synagogue supervision in the Kingdom of Poland and the ill-famed crown rabbis in the Kingdom and in Russia. A multiplicity of leadership, based on Jewish and non-Jewish sources of authority, duly unfolded.

The second factor was the challenge of Hasidism. This consisted not only in religious and spiritual competition to Rabbinism. During the first half of the nineteenth century the movement gradually gained a foothold in many Polish and Russian communities, and Hasidic leaders claimed their share in political leadership as well.⁴³ In those regions where the Hasidic movement acquired substantial communal backing, unexpected alliances could emerge as the result of the ever more complex communal structures. For instance, assimilationists and Hasidim in Warsaw successfully joined forces in 1870 in order to remove Jakob Gesundheit, the local chief rabbi and inveterate enemy of both movements, from his functions.⁴⁴

To summarize (and necessarily generalize): the political culture of Polish Jewry gradually faded in the Prussian part of the former *Rzeczpospolita*, due to the diminishing size of Jewish communities and strong positive incentives to identify with the partitioning power. In the provinces annexed to the Russian Empire (the 'Pale of Settlement'), the formal abolition of the *kahal* in 1844 was reinforced in its transformative consequences by the de-legitimization of informal communal authorities through compliance with government policies, especially with the legislation on military service of 1827.⁴⁵ The clearest continuity

⁴³ Important new studies now complement the classical interpretation of the rise of Hasidism by Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment. Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia 1985); cf. Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society* (Oxford, New York 2006), and Marcin Wodzinski, *Oświecenie żydowskie w Królestwie Polskim wobec chasydyzmu* (Warszawa 2003), Moshe Rosman, 'Hasidism as a Modern Phenomenon – The Paradox of Modernization Without Secularization', *Simon-Dubnow-Institute Yearbook* VI (2007) 215–26.

⁴⁴ 'Ya'acov Gesundheit', *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (New Haven, London 2008) 1:591.

⁴⁵ Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicolas I and the Jews. The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia 1983) 13–35, 123–55, and Iokhanan Petrovskii-Shtern, *Ebrei v russkoi armii, 1827–1914* (Moskva 2003) 31–70.

of the communal and corporate ethos within Jewish communities was thus located in the Kingdom of Poland not least because of the intensity of religious and spiritual competition between Hasidism and traditional rabbinic elites. Here, state-sponsored institutions of communal representation were not held in high esteem. In many instances, however, they offered Jewish partisans of acculturation and reform some leverage in Jewish matters, an influence otherwise hard to exert due to their numerical weakness. Thus, in these central regions of eastern European Jewish settlement, political competition revolved more around communal hegemony and small-scale intervention on behalf of these communities, and much less around larger projects, e.g. legal emancipation. In the case of the Kingdom of Poland, a partial emancipation was indeed enacted in 1861. However, this resulted less from Jewish lobbying than from the political assessment of the Russian administration that such legislation might secure Jewish loyalty to the Tsarist regime in a period of unrest.⁴⁶

Jewish political culture in eastern Europe thus unfolded in different arenas and had other foci than in western parts of the Continent. It was more self-absorbed and less influenced by the prospects of acculturation or emancipation. An example will illustrate the contrast. As part of an ongoing struggle for hegemony in Warsaw in the early 1850s, a small group of wealthy Jews, following the Prussian model of acculturation, proposed new rules for electing the synagogue supervision. These envisaged that only board members of four philanthropic and educational institutions in Warsaw would be eligible for the position of synagogue supervisor, institutions that had been founded and were still controlled by the proponents of these new rules. The rules would therefore have given power over the largest Polish-Jewish community to a small minority. A group of observant notables thereupon intervened with the central government and called for preservation of the existing election procedures. 'The free choice of its representatives by the community should be preserved; these representatives should be respected and trusted individuals of moral dignity... Although the promotion of education and philanthropy is important, the community expects from the government that it should above all not damage the dignity and the religious freedom that our people has enjoyed for 3167 years, and that

⁴⁶ Eisenbach (see n. 37) 479–84.

the government should respect the supreme laws protecting this freedom.⁴⁷ The political culture of those signing this letter is clear not only from its thoroughly unsubservient tone, but from the way it calls on the government to respect the community's inherited practices, linked to the founding events of the people of Israel, the Exodus from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai. This argument is consistent with the concept of the 'contract of societies', according to which the Jews of Poland (like all other Jews) are subject to non-Jewish legislation only on condition that Jews themselves agree on the respective spheres of influence. Whereas the Jewish political culture of central or western Europe was characterized by adherence to the concept of nation state, that of Polish Jews clung to the idea of an autonomous entity entitled to be master of its own fate.

The contrast continued into the early twentieth century. Western Jewries had fought relentlessly for emancipation and integration throughout the nineteenth century and gradually acquired legal guarantees. The anti-Semitic movement that gathered impetus from the 1870s onwards and culminated in the Dreyfus Affair (1894 onwards) challenged the very foundations of this civil existence. Paradoxically the only common ground remaining at that time among 'Western' Jews concerning their shared political culture was the view that there was no such thing as Jewish politics. This made the fight against the existential threat of anti-Semitism – and all other spheres of political agency – still more difficult.

In eastern Europe, by contrast, Jewish politics unfolded with an impressive intensity between the 1870s and the Great War, leading to the establishment of a rich and varied – and perhaps even over-factionalized – political landscape. Besides the notables who followed traditional lines of political action, such as intervention with influential Gentiles or relying on the 'royal alliance' with the state's elites, a new Jewish intelligentsia emerged with access to the (Jewish and non-Jewish) public. The new political leadership derived its political legitimacy not from communal consensus, but mainly from two modern currents of thought. One was the national movements of 'small nations' (Miroslav Hroch) and their claims for autonomy and self-determination. The other was the concept of democratization in

⁴⁷ Guesnet (see n. 20) 403–10, quote 407 f.

general. What democratization meant for the Jews of eastern Europe was open to debate. Did it imply social revolution within the Jewish community or as part of the general struggle for a homeland in Palestine; or was it a matter of personal cultural autonomy? In any case, the debate was a heated one and took place widely within the evolving Jewish public sphere, based on the press and on a rapidly growing system of parties and associations.⁴⁸

The development of the political culture of eastern European Jewries in the later nineteenth century was enhanced by the fact that there had been no process of national realignment of political loyalty so characteristic of western European Jewish communities with respect to their home countries. The political framework of a specific nation state was one aspect of Jewish political agency, but not an objective in itself. A good example of this Jewish political culture in action was the *Comité des Délégations Juives* and its interventions during the Paris peace conference in 1919, which produced significant results concerning the cultural autonomy of Jewish minorities in Poland, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹ These did not produce, as Jewish negotiators had wished, substantial autonomy for the respective Jewish communities. But Jewish political life in these countries burgeoned, displaying a wide range of parties and tendencies and a wealth of differentiation unknown in regions lacking the same political culture and traditions.

⁴⁸ These general trends have been analysed and presented by Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge 1981) by Lederhendler (see n. 45) and Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York, Oxford 1993).

⁴⁹ Cf. Erwin Viehhaus, *Die Minderheitenfrage und die Entstehung der Minderheitenschutzverträge auf der Pariser Friedenskonferenz 1919* (Würzburg 1960) 74-99.