

### **Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish Studies: (Dis) Similarities**

**Veranstalter:** Kateřina Čapková, Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences; Marcin Wodziński, Department of Jewish Studies, University of Wrocław

**Datum, Ort:** 29.10.2014–30.10.2014, Prague

**Bericht von:** Dorothea Warneck, Historisches Institut, Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg

The workshop on „Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish Studies: (Dis) Similarities“, organized by Kateřina Čapková of the Institute of Contemporary History at the Czech Academy of Sciences and Marcin Wodziński of the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław pursued an innovative and challenging approach. Specialists in the field of Polish-Jewish and Czech-Jewish history came together in Prague for the first time. The aim was to start a discussion on the current state of research, shared questions, and differences and similarities in these two fields of Jewish Studies. The main challenge of the workshop was to openly discuss Polish-Jewish and Czech-Jewish historiography from a comparative perspective.

The basic idea of the five panels – The Early Modern Period, Demography and Migration, Gender and Family, Concepts of Modernity and Identity, and The Postwar Period –, organized around major aspects of Jewish experiences – was for scholars to compare their research and also general trends in both historiographical fields. Two general papers, giving an overview of the current state of historiography and major research trends, were followed by presentations of recent research projects. Nevertheless, the absence of a panel on the historiography on the inter-war period, as well as the Second World War and the Shoah, was critically mentioned, as was the fact that no project was presented comparing Polish-Jewish and Czech-Jewish history.

The keynote ‘Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish History: Possibilities for a New Paradigm’ was by HILLEL KIEVAL (St. Louis, Missouri). Using the example of the life stories of Polish and Czech rabbis from the 16th century onward, Kieval discussed

the extent to which Polish-Lithuanian and Bohemian Jewish culture went hand in hand or, alternatively, developed independently of each other during the past few centuries. As Kieval mentioned, border-crossing of rabbis like Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller or Solomon Judah Rapoport, who were educated in Yeshivot in the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth and later regularly moved between Polish and Bohemian Jewish communities, was common practice until the mid-18th century. In the years from the mid-18th to the mid-19th centuries alone, several intra-Jewish institutional and cultural shifts led to an increasing difference between the two Jewish communities.

The Early Modern Period panel opened with papers by ADAM KAŹMIERCZYK (Cracow) on concepts of modernity in Polish-Lithuanian Jewish historiography and RACHEL GREENBLATT (Boston, MA) about the current state of research on early modern Jewish history in Bohemia. While Kaźmierczyk mentioned the major impact of an integrated Polish-Lithuanian Jewish history, an approach followed by American historians like Moshe Rosman and Gershon Hundert, Greenblatt emphasized major problems facing the field of Bohemian-Jewish historiography in the Early Modern period, difficulties that actually exist for most periods in the history of the Jews of Bohemia. Greenblatt pointed out the lack of research on Jewish communities in other Bohemian towns and at the periphery, even though several highly differentiated and well-researched local case-studies have been made – mostly about Prague Jewish history. That is why she expressed a desire to see more basic studies on 16th and 17th centuries as a time of deep shifts, as during the re-entry of Jews into Eastern Europe and the beginning of a stable community in Prague. Kaźmierczyk highlighted the necessity to make history an integral part of several historical events in Poland.

Presenting her project „Jewish Appearances and their Perceptions in Early Modern Poland“, CORNELIA AUST (Mainz) discussed how regulations about dress, formulated by the State as well as by the Jewish community, led to a highly complex system of symbols of belonging and distance,

gender relations, and identity. But while deep insight into the system of regulations and its theoretical functionality can be provided, it is far more complicated to get an idea of their implementation and everyday practices. And, as Aust mentioned, the relative absence of depictions of the poorer part of Jewish society in visual sources, not to mention the various difficulties in using such sources for the early modern period in terms of stereotyping, later representation, and so on, makes this project highly ambitious. In his talk 'Networking of Ashkenazi Rabbis, c.1560–c.1620: Italy, the Bohemian Lands, and Poland', PAVEL SLÁDEK (Prague) outlined the impact that transnational rabbinical networks had on rabbinical literature, as well as the impact of Italian Jewish culture, visible in images and narratives in many publications of Bohemian Jewish scholars of that period.

In the Demography and Migration panel, SHAUL STAMPFER (Jerusalem) reflected on the role of demography for the Polish-Lithuanian case. Describing demography as being of minor interest in Jewish Studies and seen mostly as a service or auxiliary field of scholarship, Stampfer asked what was specific about Jewish demography and to what extent Jewish demography provided answers to demography in general as a modern methodology trying to make sense of a pre-modern society. He also pointed out how hard it is to 'translate the language' of statistics and to draw sound conclusions from numbers. In her project on the Jews of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the second half of the 18th century, JURGITA VERBICKIENĖ (Vilnius) was confronted with these issues and the question of the definition and criteria that where applied in determining whether one was to be considered Jewish, and also how to deal with the variety of criteria, external ascriptions, and self-attributions, which influenced statistical data in many ways.

MICHAEL L. MILLER (Budapest) emphasized four historical events important to the history of the Jews of the Bohemian Lands and phenomena important in Bohemian-Jewish demography and migration-history: the migration of east European Jews to the Bohemian Lands in early modern period, the Austrian legislation known as the *Fa-*

*miliantengesetze*, and the western migration of Galician Jewish refugees during and after the First World War. As examples of current research gaps, Miller mentioned the argument that the Thirty Years' War had a significantly smaller impact on the Jewish population in Bohemia, unanswered questions of the actual impact of the *Familiantengesetze* on Jewish demography, and the impact of migration on the countryside.

MICHAL FRANKL (Prague), in his inspiring paper, raised questions about migration and the matter of the loyalty of Jewish refugees to the new State. Though such matters have already been debated among Jewish organizations, Frankl, in his presentation 'Refugees, Loyalty, and a Nation-state under Construction: Jewish Refugees in the Bohemian Lands during and after the First World War', considered such debates among Jewish refugees and the impact of State support for refugees.

On the Gender and Family panel, MOSHE ROSMAN (Bar Ilan) gave a presentation on the question of Jewish gender boundaries in early modern Poland, focusing mainly on the role of education and actual and assumed educational differences between men and women. MARTINA NIEDHAMMER (Munich) focused on aspects of gender and family within different social strata and regions of the Bohemian Lands, and also considered the room for maneuver in the female and the male worlds which was available in the religious and the secular environments of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Using the example of Temerel, a female character in a famous Hasidic tale who crossed and stretched traditional Hasidic gender distinctions, TSIPPI KAUFFMANN (Bar Ilan) described lines of communication and modes of action between the genders as well as gender images that were used in the Hasidic discourse and also to communicate to future generations by means of such tales. A project discussing the options and limits of the permeability of boundaries was presented by VERENA KASPER-MARIENBERG (Graz). Using the example of the Kauder family, who settled on the Schwarzenberg estate of Hluboká nad Vltavou, south Bohemia, Kasper-Marienberg presented specific

and location-dependent circumstances of the business activity and living conditions of Jewish merchant families in rural regions of the Bohemian Lands in the 17th and 18th centuries, and she thus demonstrated how mutual dependence and benefits between Jewish merchants and their landlords helped to loosen boundaries that were believed to be rigid.

The second day of the conference started with a discussion on modernity and identity, introduced by MARCIN WODZIŃSKI (Wrocław) with a presentation on 19th-century Jewish encounters with modernity in Poland, which have been researched thoroughly in the last decade. Though the project has long been studied essentially as a process, as considered by Simon Dubnow, in the last few years in Poland a shift has taken place, from it being seen as a process to it being the subject of research projects on Jewish modernity and identity, as carried out by Shmuel Feiner, Helena Datner, and others. INES KOELTZSCH (Prague/Vienna) predicted similar changes in research on Jewish modernity and on the processes of enlightenment and acculturation of Bohemian Jews as well. Three main areas of interest were pointed out: multiple modernities and the interplay of tradition and reform; multi-ethnic society and the question of language and multiculturalism as a feature of Jewishness; and social and cultural practices and the lack of institutional organizations in Bohemian Lands for modern Jewish history.

RACHEL MANEKIN (College Park, MD) discussed the Habsburg project of legal structures for religious institutions in Galicia, the centre of Talmudic tradition, and the rabbinical position within it. In her presentation, LOUISE HECHT (Olomouc) explained how Christian printing houses had been used by Jews to promote Haskalah literature, since they could not run their own printing houses. Though both projects focused on the impact of modernity on the Jewish communities or within them, members of the audience emphasized the role of Jews as modernizers in Polish and in Czech society.

Considering Poland, MICHAEL MENG (Clemson) focused on four major fields of research on the post-war period, which be-

came relevant mainly after 1989: institutional and religious Jewish life shortly after the war; anti-Jewish violence in the post-war years; the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968; and the subsequent cultural dynamics and the phenomenon of the post-1989 revival of Jewish life in Poland. In contrast, KATEŘINA ČAPKOVÁ (Prague) emphasized the discrepancies between historiography about the Jews of the post-war period written by Poles and that written by Czechs. This, she argued, could be explained not only by the absence in Bohemia of an institution like the ŻIH (Jewish Historical Institute) in Poland. Whereas the ŻIH since 1950 had published widely on the history of the Jews during the Second World War and a renaissance of interest in Jewish culture had arisen in Poland already in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Czech historians had only limited opportunity to study Jewish history. The only place of Jewish history research was the Jewish Museum in Prague with its focus on the pre-modern period. Čapková called for a broadening of the geographic scope, in order to take new historical trends and methods into account, with transnational and comparative approaches such as the question of what influence the migration and the forced migration of the German population had on Jewish refugees after 1945 both in Poland and in Czechoslovakia.

In her paper '„Our People's Motherland": The Jewish Social and Cultural Society (TSKŻ) in Postwar Poland from a Local Perspective', AGNIESZKA W. WIERZCHOLSKA (Berlin) discussed the conflict among TSKŻ leaders about the TSKŻ as a Jewish project in Communist Poland, promoting the goals of the Communist party among Jews or as a Jewish project, while Jews became more and more separated from political and social life. SARAH CRAMSEY (Berkeley) sought to explain why Náchod, a Czech town at the Polish border, had become so important as a transit point for Polish Jewish refugees in 1946.

This conference was important as an overdue beginning of a dialogue on Jewish Studies in East Central Europe, underlining the need to fundamentally reconsider approaches, methods, questions, and the territorial and time framework. The division between Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish histo-

riography, restricted in its own fields, was obvious also during the conference. The lack of comparative and transnational projects seems to be symptomatic of the boundary between the two historiographies. The identification of main research gaps, such as failed links between pre-war and post-war Jewish history, projects on 19th-century history as well as the interwar period, and a lack of projects on Slovak-Jewish history and Jewish history at the peripheries, are some of the important results of the conference. Whereas Jewish historiography in Poland can already rightly be seen as an international topic, the historiography of the Jews of the Bohemian Lands has been only a local research field most of the time. It is important to start a fundamental debate on the self-conception and self-positioning of Czech and Polish Jewish Studies. Jewish history should be seen much more as a part of the histories of the majority nations and be much more integrated into the broader European context.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Keynote:*

Hillel Kieval (St. Louis, Missouri), *Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish History: Possibilities for a New Paradigm*

##### *Panel I: Early Modern Period*

Chair: Moshe Rosman (Bar Ilan)

##### *Two introductory lectures:*

Adam Kaźmierczyk (Cracow), Poland-Lithuania

Rachel Greenblatt (Boston, MA), The Bohemian Lands

##### *Two project presentations:*

Cornelia Aust (Mainz), *Jewish Appearances and their Perceptions in Early Modern Poland*

Pavel Sládek (Prague), *The Networking of Ashkenazi Rabbis, c. 1560 – c. 1620: Italy, the Bohemian Lands, and Poland*

##### *Panel II: Demography and Migration*

Chair: Hillel Kieval (St. Louis, Missouri)

##### *Two introductory lectures:*

Shaul Stampfer (Jerusalem), Poland-Lithuania

Michael L. Miller (Budapest), *The Bohemian Lands*

##### *Two project presentations:*

Jurgita Verbickienė (Vilnius), *Where Did the Jews of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Live in the Second Half of the 18th Century? The Development of a Network of Communities*

Michal Frankl (Prague), *Refugees, Loyalty, and a Nation-state under Construction. Jewish Refugees in the Bohemian Lands during and after the First World War*

##### *Panel III: Gender and Family*

Chair: Shaul Stampfer (Jerusalem)

##### *Two introductory lectures:*

Moshe Rosman (Bar Ilan), *Poland-Lithuania*

Martina Niedhammer (Munich), *The Bohemian Lands*

##### *Two project presentations:*

Tsippi Kauffmann (Bar Ilan), *An Aberration of Nature: Temerel, a Woman Hasid*

Verena Kasper-Marienberg (Graz), *Socio-Economic Profiles of Jewish Families in Rural Bohemia: The Kauder Family in Hluboká nad Vltavou (Frauenberg) in the 17th and 18th Century*

##### *Panel IV: Concepts of Modernity and Identity*

Chair: Anne-Christin Saß (Berlin)

##### *Two introductory lectures:*

Marcin Wodziński (Wrocław), Poland

Ines Koeltzsch (Prague/Vienna), *The Bohemian Lands*

##### *Two project presentations:*

Rachel Manekin (College Park, MD), *Resisting the Bohemian Model. The Galician Jewish Struggle against a Uniform Modernization Path*

Louise Hecht (Olomouc), *Christian Printers as Agents of Jewish Modernization? Jewish/Hebrew Printing Houses in Prague, Brno, and Vienna, 1780-1820*

##### *PANEL V: Postwar Period*

Chair: Gertrud Pickhan (Berlin)

*Two introductory lectures:*

Michael Meng (Clemson), Poland

Kateřina Čapková (Prague), The Bohemian Lands

*Two project presentations:*

Agnieszka W. Wiercholska (Berlin), „Our People’s Motherland”: The Jewish Social and Cultural Society (TSKŻ) in Postwar Poland from a Local Perspective

Sarah Cramsey (Berkeley), „The Most Significant Spot in Europe”. How 130,000 Jews and the Ethnic Revolution came to Náchod, Czechoslovakia, in 1946

*Concluding discussion*

Tagungsbericht *Czech-Jewish and Polish-Jewish Studies: (Dis) Similarities*. 29.10.2014–30.10.2014, Prague, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.04.2015.