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BETWEEN THE BANK AND THE THEATRE:  
RETRIEVING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF TWO LANDMARKS  
OF PRE-WORLD WAR I JEWISH LEMBERG

Visiting today's Lviv in search of the traces of Jewish past, one is confronted with scenes of desolation, void and emptiness, where a vibrant Jewish culture was once thriving. Although the urban landscape of the city is remarkably preserved, one searches in vain for information about the buildings and monuments reminiscent of the rich past of the Jewish community that numbered 100,000 souls before World War II. Only occasionally can one spot the former slot left by a mezuzah on a doorpost in the old Jewish quarter, or glimpse at waning Yiddish letters that surface under layers of paint fading away.

All synagogues were destroyed and burned by the Nazis, but two: the former Jakob Glanzer-shul (on St. Theodor Square) which was transformed into a Jewish community centre in 1989, and the Tsori Gilod Synagogue on Br. Mikhnovskikh Street, which was returned to service a few years ago under the name Beit Aron ve-Israel. The sites of the Goldene Royz and the Great City Synagogue are almost entirely razed to the ground. Devastation is even more dramatic in the former suburbs of Krakowskie and Ziółkiewskie Przedmieście: the Reform Tempel Synagogue (inaugurated in 1846 on the old market place) and the Great Suburb Synagogue on Siańska Street (formerly Bożnicza) no longer exist and they were replaced by public squares with a few trees and benches. Opposite, the sites of the Bet Hamidrash of the suburb (5 Siańska St.) and the Synagogue of the Beth Lehem Society (8 Siańska St.) were transformed into playgrounds for children. The Hassidim Shul (Beit Hassidim), built in 1791 at the corner of Łazienna and Bożnicza streets (4 Siańska St.) vanished, and the synagogue Or Szemesz at 3 Miodowa St. was replaced by a Soviet building. The old Jewish cemetery was covered by the Krakivski Rynok and the site of the small Jewish streets of the "ghetto" by the shopping market Dobrobyt<sup>1</sup>. Dozens of other smaller structures have disappeared without a trace, while others are left decaying and unmarked,

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed account of the state of Jewish heritage sites in Lviv, see *Lemberg/Lviv/ L'viv: Jüdische Erinnerungsorte in Lemberg: Eine Bestandaufnahme / Jewish Sites of Memory*, in: *Lviv: A Survey/Yevreis'ki mistysya pam'yati u L'vovi – Inventarnyy perelik*, Berlin, Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin / Zentrum für Stadtgeschichte Ostmitteleuropas, 2007. Omer Bartov dwells on the disappearance of the last traces of Jewish past in Western Ukraine in: *Erased: vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007.

leaving the phantom of Jewish Lviv as a place of sorrow, deprived of the memory of a large part of its former inhabitants assassinated by the Nazis, and left without any form of musealisation and commemoration<sup>2</sup>.

However, the overall urban structure of Lviv has been amazingly left untouched by the war and many formerly Jewish structures that served a variety of purposes could be identified and related to their history. It would be feasible to think of a multimedia project that could help illuminate Jewish cultural and social life in mapping the places and linking them with iconographic sources (old photographs, postcards, architectural plans, artistic representations in painting or drawing) and written sources or documents of oral history (printed texts, memoirs, recorded videos and narrative of survivors). Such a collective project, aimed at linking the research of many historians and students, would enable us to tell something about each building, its history, its function, and possibly about the people who dwelled, worked, crossed each other's way daily in these places. The flexibility of the internet support opens the way for a dynamic presentation, including how one building was lost, abandoned, changed hands and (re) appropriated at different times of history. This could be done for the synagogues and learning houses, but also for primary and secondary schools, dormitories and canteens, institutions of higher learning, libraries, workplaces such as stores and shops, craftsmen's workshops, Jewish enterprises and businesses, banks, places of social interaction such as offices of trade unions and political parties, cultural institutions, theatres, movies theatres, libraries, editorial offices of newspapers and publishing houses, cafés and restaurants, and so on.

My article will exemplify this undertaking with two landmarks of Jewish Lemberg, a Jewish bank and a Jewish theatre. The Bank Sokal and Lilien was a reputable financial institution, founded and managed by an assimilated family of the Jewish bourgeoisie, and serving Poles, Jews and Ukrainians alike. The Lemberg Yiddish theatre founded by Jakob Ber Gimpel rather catered to the needs of the Yiddish speaking circles. While these two institutions, the reputable Jewish bank and the popular Yiddish theatre, are associated with quite different segments of Lemberg pre-War Jewish society, a close investigation actually could tell us much about the real social interactions and the links that existed between spheres often considered poles apart, such as economy and culture, banking and theatre, and "high" and "low" culture.

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<sup>2</sup> About the silence surrounding Jewish history in Lviv, see D. Bechtel, *Von Lemberg nach L'viv: Gedächtniskonflikte in einer Stadt an der Grenze*, in: *Osteuropa*, vol. 58, no. 6 (June 2008), pp. 211–227, as well as in *Lemberg, Lwów, Lvov, Lviv: de la 'petite Vienne' au centre du nationalisme ukrainien*, in: *Les Villes multiculturelles en Europe centrale*, dir. D. Bechtel et X. Galmiche, Paris, Belin, 2008.

MEYLEKH RAWICZ AND THE JEWISH BANK SOKAL AND LILIE:  
RETRIEVING THE HISTORY OF A GROUP PICTURE



Let us start with a picture: the group photograph of the buildings, the owners and the employees of the Jewish Bank Sokal and Lilien, which is preserved in the archives of the Lviv historian Faina Petriakivska on Mendelieieva St.<sup>3</sup> The group portrait was presented on an unknown date to Adolf Lilien (in the centre of the picture), the head of the bank, with the caption “Kochanemu szefowi w dniu otwarcia nowego lokalu urzednicy” (“To our dear boss, on the day of the opening of our new premises”). Left and right of him, one can see two senior staff members of the bank, Sokal (left, no first name) and “Ignacy” Lilien (sic, right). The captions with the names of the staff members were apparently inserted later, by handwriting, and they will be discussed below. At the bottom the pictures of both the old and the new buildings of the bank appear. Although the date is not marked, the aesthetics of the ornamentation in the picture is definitely that of *Jugendstil* or Secession, turn-of-the-century art, and thus the picture probably was taken shortly after 1900. The new building of the bank also has its own fame: it was designed by the rising architect Michał Ulam and erected as the first four-storey building in Lemberg in 1903 or 1904, right in the

<sup>3</sup> I discovered this picture in 2007, thanks to a visit in the archives with Meylekh Sheykhet.

main street, Wały Hetmańskie, not far from the Teatr Wielki, at the corner of Kiliński St. The young architect, who had just established himself in Lemberg in 1903, attracted sensation with this construction. The journal *Przegląd* wrote in 1904: “In technical circles in the place of Lemberg, Mr. Michał Ulam is the hero of the day. A young architect whose name will for long remain engraved in the annals of the city of Lemberg, as he is the first one to construct a four-storey building in Lemberg”<sup>4</sup>. The bank who commanded its building was obviously prosperous.



This collective portrait of the bank staff depicts men and their place of work, the entire hierarchy including the partners and the employees of a Jewish financial institution well established on the main *corso* of the city, old and young, in fine attire, assembled around their leaders. This mute picture, the faces of the uptight employees staring today into the void blank of history leave us with many unanswered questions: Who were these people? What was it like to work in a Jewish bank at the turn of the century? How did they think, live, interact? Were

<sup>4</sup> About the completion of the new building on Hetmańska around 1904 by the architect Michał Ulam, see *Die Bauunternehmung Michal Ulam in Lemberg*, in: *Moderne Illustrierte Zeitung: Reise und Sport, Sondernummer Galizien, seine kulturelle und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung*, Vienna: Buchdruckerei Industrie, 1913, pp. 172–173, and therein the quote from *Przegląd*, no. 124, 2 July 1904. Therefore, other publications which set the construction time later, around 1909–1910, are mistaken. Michał Ulam was a leading member of the Jewish Kahal and a Zionist. He died in 1938 in Monte Carlo. His nephew, Stanisław Ulam, became a mathematician and contributed to the invention of the hydrogen bomb in the USA.

they traditionally minded or assimilated? How did they talk, in which language did they speak? What kind of cultural activities would they favour in their leisure time? How were they dressed, or even what perfume would they wear? Most times, it is impossible to recreate the “Lebenswelt” of a Jewish family bank from 100 years ago... But while most of the documentation disappeared in flames, sometimes there are good surprises and here, we were struck by good luck.

In this case, there is a perfect match between the picture I found in the archives of Faina Petriakivska and the memoirs of the Yiddish writer known as Melekh Rawicz (Meylekh Ravitsh<sup>5</sup>, pseudonym of Zakharye-Khone or Sigmund Bergner, 1893–1976), *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn* (*The Tale Book of My Life*).



In 1910, young Sigmund just turned 17 years old and graduated from the business high school in Stanisławów. His father, as was done in these days, arranged through relations of him to get him the first job in the Bank Sokal und Lilien and accompanied him to the capital of the province for his first job

<sup>5</sup> Meylekh Rawicz, born in Radymno in Eastern Galicia, later became a major proponent of the Yiddish avant-garde. He was close to the Lemberg group of poets in 1910–12 while working at the bank, then left to Vienna where he participated in Moyshe Zilburg’s journal *Kritik*, and moved to Warsaw in 1921. His first collection of poems, *Oyf der shvel*, was published in Lemberg in 1912. He was a major actor of Yiddish literary life, emigrated to Canada and published significant memoirs and canonical works. See *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur*, 4 vol., Wilno, Kletskin, 1927–1929; *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 7, New York, Alveltlekher Yidisher Kultur-Kongres, 1956–1968.

interview. The son got the job, but he worked in the bank for no longer than two years, as he departed for Vienna in 1912. However, he left extensive recollections about his days at the bank.

The Bank Sokal und Lilien had been established as a family business about 40 years earlier, it was part of the establishment<sup>6</sup>. Rawicz recalls it vividly and writes: “Sokal and Lilien was the most solid Jewish bank in Lemberg. Something like the spirit of the Berlin-based Oppenheimer and Mendelssohn banks was hovering over it”<sup>7</sup>. Rawicz expands on how the bank was stiff and formal: its entrance was kept by uniformed janitors and it had a staff of thirty to forty people. It was led in a very conservative way. As for language usage, Yiddish was not permitted; only German and Polish were spoken there. Business correspondence was written on plain, white paper by four clerks, each one sitting at a separate table, entirely by handwriting, and not even letterhead paper and stamps were used for this task, which was already deemed old fashioned for the time. Everything was proceeding according to a long-established and adamantly maintained tradition of banking: “It was not a bank, it was a temple of money!” concludes Rawicz.

Similar impressions are recalled also by non-Jewish families, such as the one of Hanna Franko-Klyutchko, the daughter of Ivan Franko (1856–1916), the famous Ukrainian writer. Olha Khoruzhynska-Franko, the mother of Hanna and the wife of Ivan Franko, had inherited some fortune from her own grandfather, a millionaire from Odessa: “my mother received a huge sum for that time, ten thousand roubles, invested in shares; besides this, family silvery for 24 persons, house linen, dresses, furs, furniture, and with all this she came to Lviv, with the full belief and hope to build a family life [...]. She secured her savings in the Bank Sokal and Lilien on Hetmańska Street, and I would often go with her to retrieve the monthly interests. This money (several roubles per month) was a huge help not only for the household, but also because father had to go to Vienna, where he was preparing a doctorate at the philosophical faculty”<sup>8</sup>. From her testimony, the bank was playing a major role in securing the assets of a Ukrainian upper class and intellectual family. Adolf Lilien, the head of the bank, who is depicted in the centre of the group picture, is also mentioned by Ivan Franko himself, as Adolf tried to help out the Ukrainian Kryloshanski Bank, founded in 1868 to help the rural economy, with a loan, which alas did not prevent it from going into bankruptcy in 1884. This gives us interesting information about the relationship between Jewish and Ukrainian banks: they were not necessarily harsh competitors, as often portrayed, but could also sustain each other. Surely, the Bank Sokal and Lilien had such a firm reputation among clients because of its implication in the overall economic welfare of Galicians of all creeds and backgrounds.

<sup>6</sup> “Seit mehr als 40 Jahren bestand auf dem Platze in Lemberg die ehrwürdige und erbgessene Bankfirma Sokal & Lilien, die durch Tüchtigkeit, Fleiss und Verlässlichkeit der jeweiligen Firmeninhaber sich eine grosse Klientel und weitreichende Bedeutung zu erwerben verstanden hat”. *Filiale Lemberg der Unionbank*, in: *Moderne Illustrierte Zeitung*, op.cit., 1 February 1913, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> M. Ravitsh, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn*, Buenos Aires, Tsentral-komitet fun poylishe yidn in Argentine, 1964, p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> H. Franko-Klyutchko, *Ivan Franko i yoho rodyna*, Toronto, 1956, quoted by R. Horak, *Ivan Franko ta bankir*, in: *Halyts'ka Brama*, no. 4 (76), April 2001. I am grateful to Serhiy Tereshchenko for this reference.

Adolf Lilien (1863–1911) was a major figure of the Polonized Jewish bourgeoisie of Lviv, active in the assimilationist “Ojczyzna” circle. He was a liberal, opposed to Zionism, and was highly esteemed for his involvement both in economical and philanthropic activities. He already inherited the bank from his own father and was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Crafts (Gewerbe- und Handelskammer). He also contributed to various charities, among others to an association involved in supporting summer camps for Jewish children. His wife Erna, born Nierenstein, was active in the women’s association “Ochrona kobiet.”

His brother Eduard Lilien, a lawyer and a member of the city council during three legislative periods, had a more liberal-progressive leaning and was engaged in democratic circles, in close collaboration with Polish socialist leaders. The historian Roman Horak, director of the Ivan-Franko-Museum, retraced how Eduard Lilien defended Ivan Franko and the Galician socialists when they were under trial in Cracow in 1880 and helped the writer to publish in the *Kurjer Lwowski*. Eduard Lilien also founded the short-lived Polish language journal *Ruch* (1887–1889), where Franko also collaborated<sup>9</sup>. These details also shed a new light on the relationships between Ukrainians, Poles and Jews in Lemberg: here is a Jewish lawyer active in Polish socialist circles and defending a Ukrainian writer in court! Eduard Lilien also was concerned with Polish cultural life in Lviv: he is named among the members of the Committee for Supervising the Building of the City Theatre in 1899, as well as a member of its Artistic Committee<sup>10</sup>. The worlds of law, politics, democratic progress, Polish cultural life and Ukrainian fight for recognition meet in this one person. However, in 1911, he must have mismanaged his affairs: he had to move abroad because of his accumulated debts (possibly 300,000 crowns!), which could have endangered his brother’s activities as well as the family bank<sup>11</sup>. It may have been the sign of the family’s decline: in this very same year, Adolf Lilien, whose health had deteriorated, passed away and the bank was taken over by a bigger financial institution based in Vienna, the Union-Bank.

Meylekh Rawicz wrote that when he started working in the bank in 1910, one of the owners, Sokal, had already passed away, and only Lilien was continuing in this capacity. According to Rawicz, it was a certain “Emil” Lilien, but there is no trace of this “Emil” in other sources, so it must have still been Adolf. In the picture, on the other hand, Adolf Lilien is represented along with a certain “Ignacy” Lilien, according to the handwritten caption, which might also be an erroneous first name, because it is not attested in other sources. Memories sometimes are blurred with time... Besides Eduard, Adolf had two other brothers, Norbert and Ernest, who could have possibly played a role in the bank, and a son,

<sup>9</sup> R. Horak, *Ivan Franko ta bankir*.

<sup>10</sup> K. Bulzacki, “Zawsze mój Lwów”. *Tekst Aktu pamiątkowego spisane przy otwarciu teatru miejskiego*, <http://www.lwow.com.pl/teatrwielki.html> (consulted 16 July 2015).

<sup>11</sup> About Adolf and Eduard Lilien, see *Gazeta Narodowa* 27.6.1911, p. 2; *ibid.* 3.8.1911, p. 2. Also about their official functions, *Hof- und Staats-Handbuch der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Monarchie*, Vienna, Druck und Verlag der K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, annual, various years. I am indebted to Harald Binder for these references.

<sup>12</sup> Rawicz’s memoirs were written well after World War II, so he may have erased the first name Adolf, which had such a negative connotation after Hitler, from his memory.

Artur, whom Rawicz also mentions and who was supposed to take over the direction of the bank. In late June 1911, that is one year later, Adolf Lilien died and the bank plunged, possibly because of Eduard's debts. Vienna-based Union-Bank bought the Lviv Lilien Bank and turned it into one of its branches<sup>13</sup>, so that the Lilien dynasty had to give up its family enterprise.

Rawicz gives a very detailed portrait of the person he remembers as "Emil" Lilien, but who actually may rather have been called Adolf: "He was a profoundly, for generations already assimilated Jew. Almost converted." ("er iz geven a tif- un doyres-lang asimilirter yid. Kimat geshmadt"). He used to talk very little, and rarely would come to his bank, and if at all, only to give a couple of brief, short orders that were to be seen literally as a law not to encroach<sup>14</sup>. Rawicz says more about Lilien's wife and their son, which allows us to identify them as Erna and Artur Lilien, and to conclude now without doubt that he was speaking of Adolf and his family: "The wife of director Lilien, who had the face and the looks of a Polish aristocratic lady, was active in the then modern Toynbee-Halle movement, which she planned to adapt to the poor Jewish society." This indicates that she was engaged in charitable work, establishing community centres for the poor Jews. According to Rawicz, the Liliens had one son, "who was behaving like a prince: he was handsome, authoritarian like a monarch, and used to write poetry in Polish, his name was Artur Lilien"<sup>15</sup>. Thanks to Rawicz, we are now able to reconstruct the history of the Lilien family enterprise: three generations of the Lilien dynasty, sketched in brisk and colourful words, now vividly appear before our eyes.

Aside from the Lilien family members, Rawicz draws the portraits of two senior banking executives, Menkes and Chameides, who are first in charge of testing his abilities in bookkeeping and then of supervising his work at the bank. The former, Menkes, was between 50 and 60 years old, elegantly dressed, clean-shaven, "his face looked neither gentile nor Jewish, but he had a long nose and he was wearing lorgnettes," and had "a very dignified and serious voice, somewhat similar to the creaking of an antique heavy oak chest." When he initially saw the young Bergner accompanied by his father for the job interview, he first sent him straight back to have a hair cut, and disappeared on the spot, exhaling a precious smell of roses, his favourite perfume<sup>16</sup>. The latter, Chameides, was exactly the opposite: he smelled like mothballs "as if he had just been retrieved from a big cupboard where he had been kept enclosed for half a year." "He is old, surely already 70 years old, of medium height, his beard shaved, and is wearing a big, long moustache that makes him look a bit like Friedrich Nietzsche. And he really bears a resemblance to the mad philosopher: he has an angry look, a high forehead; he sticks his glasses up his head and looks up from underneath like a bull ready to attack"<sup>17</sup>. In the picture from 1904 only Chameides is represented, but one can see his moustache à la Nietzsche and his

<sup>13</sup> M. Ravitsh, *Dos mayse-bukh...*, p. 162. About the Union-Bank, see I. Kotlobulatova, *L'vivs'ki skarbnytsi*, Lviv: Piramida, 2002, pp. 48–49, where it is mentioned that the Bank Sokal and Lilien continued to maintain a separate counter in the Union-Bank even after the merger took place.

<sup>14</sup> M. Ravitsh, *Dos mayse-bukh...*, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.



outdated looks. As Rawicz notes, Menkes and Chameides were competitors and even fierce enemies: “Chameides was considering Menkes an anti-Semite and an apostate (in Yiddish: *meshumed*), and Menkes held Chameides for an old-fashioned Jewish bigot (in Yiddish: *an alt-frenkishn yidishn khnyok*)”<sup>18</sup>. Again, in a few words, Rawicz sketches the opposition between both competitors, capturing two lifestyles, modern assimilationism and old-fashioned bigotry. Both men were working at the same Jewish bank, and their paths both crossed the one of young Rawicz, who at the same time was trying himself at his first verses in Yiddish.

Finally, there is still one character of importance that Rawicz does not mention, but who figures in the group picture, at the top left of the frame: it is Maksymilian Goldstein (1880–1942), who later became a famous numismatist, art collector and founder of the first Jewish museum in Lwów. In the picture, he appears to be the youngest of the bank employees, in his early twenties, and probably he was only recently hired around 1903. Indeed, his biography mentions that he was working with the banking house of the known philanthropist “Jakob Stroh, Sokal and Lilien,” but he later moved on to work with the Austrian Creditanstalt<sup>19</sup>. However, he had probably left it when Bergner arrived there in 1910. In fact, 1910 is exactly the year when Goldstein, then 30 years old, first came up with the idea of founding a Jewish museum with the Lemberg Jewish community<sup>20</sup>. Goldstein assembled an extraordinary collection of Jewish artefacts and objects of religious and daily life, which he then exhibited in the community building on 12 Bernstein St. (today Sholem-Aleykhem St.). The collection is now dormant in the cellars of the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lviv<sup>21</sup>. Thus, here is another link between the world of banking and that of Jewish culture, and between Rawicz and Goldstein: these two dedicated cultural actors of Lemberg Jewish life worked in the same assimilated milieu of Jewish finance and banking, alongside with their other activities devoted to the preservation of Jewish culture through theatre, writing, or museology. While they both worked in the same bank to sustain themselves, and while their footsteps crossed the threshold of the same house daily for a period of their lives, they may well never have met each other.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> J. Schall, *Zbieracz i jego zbiory: Zabiegi o utworzenie muzeów żydowskich w Polsce*, in: M. Goldstein and K. Dresdner, *Kultura i sztuka ludu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich*, Lwów, Nakładem Maksymiljana Goldsteina, 1935, p. 144. This book explains Goldstein’s interest in Jewish folk culture and arts.

<sup>20</sup> S.H. Hoshen, *Research and Collection of Judaica in Lvov: 1874–1942*, in: *Treasures of Jewish Galicia Judaica from the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lvov, Ukraine*. Several museums in Lviv had already started collecting Jewish artefacts, see F.S. Petriakowa, *Jewrejskoje muzejnoje dielo, individualnoje kollekcionirowanie na ukrainской etnicznojskiej territorii. Koniec XIX – naczalo XXI st.: obratnyj otsiet k buduszczemu*, in: *Zaporożskije jewrejskije czenenija*, 2001, no. 5, p. 273, as well as I. Horbań, *Ośrodky przechowujące dziedzictwo kulturowe narodu żydowskiego we Lwowie: historia i stan obecny*, in: *Żydzi w Lublinie – Żydzi we Lwowie*, eds. J. Zętar, E. Żurek, S.J. Żurek, Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> See N. Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, *The Blind Spot: Looted Art, Restitution, and the ‘Eastern Jews’*, in: *Osteuropa*, no. 1, 2009. In 1996, in cooperation with Beth Hatefutsoth in Tel Aviv, the collection of Maksymilian Goldstein from the Museum of Ethnography and Crafts in Lviv was studied and exhibited. But the collection again lies dormant in its cellars.

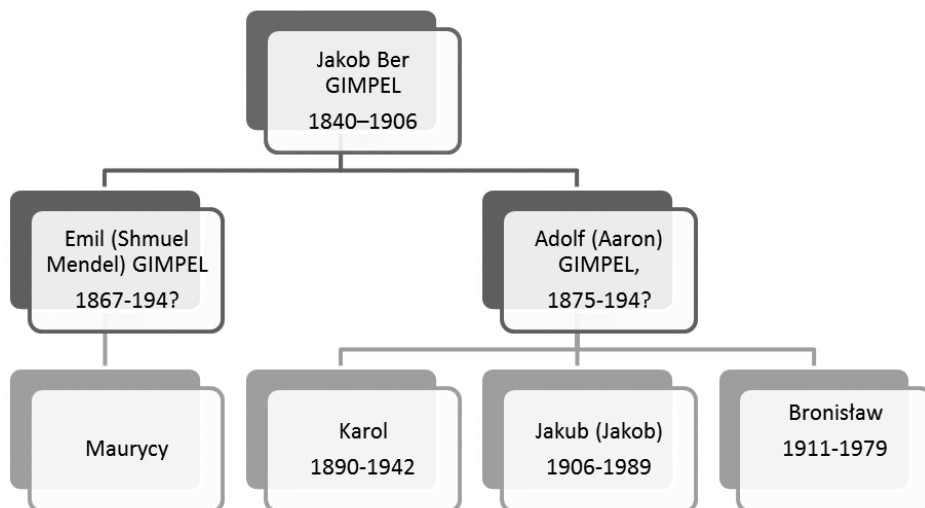
VOICES FROM THE PAST: RETRIEVING THE SOUND  
FROM THE LEMBERG YIDDISH THEATRE

More even than others, there is one arena which provides an interesting possibility to confront various supports to recreate a multimedia cultural history of Jewish Lemberg, and this is the history of the Yiddish theatre. While the corpus of theatre plays produced and even written in Lemberg is today forgotten history, many former Galicians have attested in their memoirs, mostly written in Yiddish, about the fascinating history of Yiddish theatre in the city<sup>22</sup>. However, the Lemberg Yiddish theatre has been little researched<sup>23</sup>, although there are academic and research departments interested in Jewish theatre and music that do hold collections of musical scores and photographs of the staged representations. These sources could be linked with the landmarks of Jewish theatrical history in Lemberg: the former Gimpel theatre on Hnatiuka St. (formerly 11 Jagiellońska St.) and the former theatre Colosseum, which was located on Kulisha St. (formerly Słoneczna St.) in the passage built for the Brothers Hermann at the turn of the century.

First of all, it is necessary to correct a number of common places often spread about Yiddish theatre seen as a minor genre with little influence. A glimpse into the biographies and achievements of some leading figures on the Lemberg stage will help create a totally different image. In 1889, Jakob Ber (Yankev Ber) Gimpel left the Polish Skarbek Theatre, where he was a chorister, to establish the Lemberger deutsch-jüdisches Theater, the first permanent Yiddish theatre in Lemberg, which constituted a pillar of Yiddish cultural life there until 1939. As for the banks, in the theatre there are dynasties too. Yankev Ber had two sons: the first one, Emil (Shmuel Mendel, 1867–194?), took over the direction of the Yiddish theatre, while the second one, Adolf (Aaron, 1875–194?), who played the clarinet in the symphonic orchestra, was also a musical director of the Yiddish theatre and head of the choir at the Reform Tempel. His career stretched thus from classical music to Jewish cantorial chant and liturgy, not omitting theatrical entertainment and Yiddish operetta: such a remarkable versatility is rarely seen, but in Jewish cultural life in a multicultural city like Lemberg.

<sup>22</sup> See the *Yizkor-bikher* quoted below, but one can also remind of the autobiography of A. Granach, *There Goes an Actor*, Doubleday, Garden City, Dorian and Co., 1945; republished as *From the Shtetl to the Stage: The Odyssey of a Wandering Actor*, Transaction Publ., 2010.

<sup>23</sup> The multi-volume encyclopaedia on Yiddish theatre by Z. Zylbercweig, *Leksikon fun Yidishn Teater*, published between 1931 and 1969 only has a scarce article on Yankev Ber Gimpel, and no article on the history of the Gimpel theatre, frowned upon as “Shund.” Zalmen Zylbercweig (1894–1972) was born in Chortkov, Galicia, and started as an actor before turning to writing and directing plays, he emigrated to the US in 1937. N. Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theatre*, New York, Limelight, barely alludes to Yiddish theatre in Galicia. A Ukrainian researcher who did not read Yiddish published a book based on articles collected from the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and other Jewish reference works, as well as sources in DALO: T. Stepanchykova, *Istoriya yevreiskoho teatru u L'vovi*, L'viv: Liha-pres, 2005. Another recent publication is D. Karner, *Lachen unter Tränen. Jüdisches Theater in Ostgalizien und der Bukowina*, Vienna: Steinbauer, 2005.



One generation later, Adolf Gimpel had three sons, all became famous musicians: Karol (1890–1942) and Jakob (Jakob, 1906–1989), both pianists, and Bronisław (1911–1979), a violinist. Jakob had already been playing the piano at his grandfather’s Yiddish theatre when he was eight years old. Along with his younger brother Bronisław, he graduated from the Lviv Music High School and in 1922, at the age of 16 and 11 respectively, they moved on to study in Vienna. Loaded with prizes, they left Poland in 1937–38 to continue their career in the United States and achieve world fame<sup>24</sup>. From the point of view of prosopography, these are fascinating examples because they force us to consider the three generations of the Gimpel family as go-betweens and mediators between “high” and “low” culture, between the Polish, Jewish, Austrian and then American worlds, between manifold religious, social, theatrical and musical identities and traditions.

This genesis of the famous Yiddish theatre is speaking in itself. When Yankev-Ber Gimpel obtained a concession to open a “German-Jewish” theatre in 1889, the contract specified that the language spoken on the stage would be German and that the music would be played by an Austrian military band! Out of this unlikely conjunction, a theatre was born that produced plays by a gamut of early Yiddish playwrights such as Goldfaden, Lateiner, Hurwitz, Shaykevitch, which the actors attempted to “translate” or better said to transpose orally into ...*some kind* of German. Playing on the linguistic proximity between both languages, they were mostly just distorting the pronunciation of certain vowels and avoiding all too obvious Hebraisms. The actor Bentsion Polepade, who had come from Russia, once attempted a small revolution: he switched to Yiddish on stage, first totally off-the-cuff. The public applauded with such enthusiasm to this innovation that it remained the rule<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> See the Jakob and Bronisław Gimpel Archive, established by Jakob’s son Peter Gimpel, <http://www.gimpelmusicarchives.com>.

<sup>25</sup> S. Prizament, *Yidish Teater in Lemberg*, in: *Yidish Teater in Eyrope*, vol. 1, *Poyln*, New York, Congress for Jewish Culture, 1968, pp. 287–288.

The theatre grew, attracted new actors, and extended its repertoire from operetta to art theatre and European classics. Due to its growing notoriety, the troupe engaged in numerous tours through Central Europe, including the cities where German was more in use than Yiddish, so that the actors would adapt their way of speaking to the language proficiency of their public. Similarly, during WWI, as many Austrian recruits were stationed in the city, the actors took back to playing in *daytshmerish*, a sort of Germanized Yiddish more easily understandable by German speakers<sup>26</sup>. The language theatre was thus flexible and adaptable depending on the ever changing public, so that the theatre was attracting both Jews and non-Jews, depending on the circumstances. The Gimpel theatre became the most popular Yiddish theatre in Europe before WWI, and its attraction extended well over the ocean. The premises themselves were quite particular: the building, erected in a back yard, could seat only 600 people, but in the summer, benches elevated on wooden scaffoldings would be put up in the courtyard to accommodate well over 2,000 spectators, with seats at different price levels (with a back to lean on, without a leaning, then 12 to 15 stacked levels of cheap benches, plus, of course, standing tickets and loges). The reason for this affluence was that during the summer, major stars and actors of the American Yiddish stage such as Boris Tomashefsky or Paul Baratoff would come on tour. Impresarios from Second Avenue and Broadway would send recruiters to tempt away the best actors and entice them to come and engage in a career in New York<sup>27</sup>. Some of them continued their way to Berlin, Vienna, New York and even Hollywood, such as the famous actors Rudolf Schildkraut or Paul Muni.

It is also interesting to have a look at who were the artists of the Yiddish stage and at their repertoire before WWI. The first generation of actors, who were playing even before the theatre had a permanent location, were Regina Prager, Joseph Weinstock, Frieda Gespass, Selig Schur, Bertha Kalisch, Kalman Juweller, Samuel Tabatchnikov, Berl Weinstein, and the director was Louis Zwiebel, whose wife later became a famous singer. They were joined by the actors Z. Karlik, Lina (Liebe) Karlik and Joseph Rozenberg. All these actors started by playing in so-called "German"<sup>28</sup>. Then came the second generation: with actors such as Julius Guttmann (also the artistic director of the theatre), his wife Salcia Guttmann, Rosa Schilling, Bentsion Polepade, and the singers Sam Schilling, Leon Kalisch and Adolf Meltzer. In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Z. Zuckerberg, Regina Zuckerberg, and Ludwig Satz also joined the company<sup>29</sup>.

At the same time, literally thousands of records were produced at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, featuring famous artists in the genres of cantorial and synagogue choral chant, Yiddish theatre and song, Klezmer and instrumental music, as well as spoken words, stand up comedy, theatre etc. Among them, the

<sup>26</sup> S. Prizament, *Yidish Teater in Lemberg*, p. 289; see D. Bechtel, *Yiddish Theatre and its Impact on the German and Austrian Stage*, in: *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, eds. J. Malkin, F. Rokem, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Y. Mestel, *Fun mayne yugnt-yorn in Galitsye*, in: *Gedenkbukh Galitsye*, ed. N. Tsuker, Buenos Aires: Tsukunft, 1964, p. 163.

<sup>28</sup> S. Prizament, *Yidish teater in Lemberg*, p. 287.

<sup>29</sup> This list is important as it records the names of the actors and singers who also recorded most of the repertoire of the Lemberg Jewish theatre. See also J. Gelson, *Błądzące gwiazdy na lwowskim firmamencie: Z notatek o teatrze żydowskim*, in: *Pamiętnik teatralny: Teatr Żydowski w Polsce do 1939*, XLI no. 1–4, 1992, pp. 345–352.

share of the above mentioned artists originating from Lemberg in the category of Yiddish theatre songs is overriding, amounting to 354 out of 560 titles counted in a preliminary study by the musicologist Michael Aylward in 2003, and many more should be added to this count. As Aylward writes, “I can think of no parallel in the history of the early record industry where an artist or group of artists was the subject of such intense activity. The pioneering recording engineers of this era documented a complete sound panorama of one of the most important Yiddish theatres ever to operate in Europe and, what is more, captured it on disc during the period when it was at the very peak of its powers”<sup>30</sup>. The repertoire is also characterised by a great diversity: there are pieces taken from operettas by Goldfaden and others, but also folk songs, comic songs and couplets, vaudeville, accompanied by piano, violin or even a full orchestra and choir, or even comic sketches.

The multimedia project ideally would be to link the biographies of these extraordinary actors and singers with photographic documentation about the Yiddish theatre, sheet music from the holdings of music libraries, librettos of the operettas and plays, and finally the original record tracks, taken from various Jewish sound archives, some being even already on the internet. These audio archives provide for a unique opportunity to analyse the musical style and even the language of these artists. The “Gesellschaft für historische Tonträger,” based in Vienna, Austria, for example, has already put online a number of old recordings from the Lemberg theatre<sup>31</sup>. From this easy-to-access collection, it is possible to assess both the variety of musical styles interpreted by these artists and the kind of Yiddish they spoke. Simple folk songs are part of the repertoire, for example Salcia Guttmann’s *Hot a yid a vaybele*<sup>32</sup>.

The song follows a typically Jewish melodic pattern, which derives from the morning prayers (D minor: resting points on 1<sup>st</sup> degree, 3<sup>rd</sup> degree, 4<sup>th</sup> degree, then tonic, i.e.: D-F-G-G). Interesting in the Guttmann example is the use of the *Freygish* mode in the B section (A B $\flat$  C $\sharp$  D E F G A). Her rendering of the song, with a simple piano background, is not really folksy, but rather combined with an artistic musical aesthetic and the singer obviously has a much wider range of vocal possibilities. The pronunciation is very clear and the one standard for Yiddish theatre. Helene Gespass offers a slightly different style of interpreting folk tunes, more in the vaudeville genre, also for example in *Berke kum tsu dayn Serke*, with a typical violin and piano accompaniment<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> M. Aylward, *Early Recordings of Jewish Music in Poland*, in: *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 16, 2003, table 2. The author’s article is based on a preliminary study of 1,753 records issued between 1906 and 1909, to which he is planning to add 3,500 more. He expects that more than 500 records stem from the Gimpel theatre alone, and more from “Broder singers,” such as Pepi Littmann or Szulim Podzamcze, who were involved more or less loosely in the Lemberg theatre.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.phonomuseum.at>, section «Jewish songs».

<sup>32</sup> Favourite records 1-26093 (2566-f-), Frau Guttmann, jüd. Theater Lemberg, *Hat a yid a vabele, Volkslied*. The site offers other interpretations of the same song. Sheet music with lyrics to this song is available in: J. Kammen, *The Kammen Folio of Famous Jewish Theatre Songs*, vol. 1, New York: Kammen Music, 1949. The lyrics and music were written by Morris Goldstein. Salcia Guttmann (1882–194?) entered the Yiddish theatre in 1897.

<sup>33</sup> Favorite 1-27103 (2908-o-), Helene Gespass, Lemberg m. Violinbegl., *Berke kim zu dein Serke*. Helene Gespass (ca. 1886–1909) was born in Lemberg as the younger sister of Frida Zwiebel-Goldstein.



Salcia Guttmann's husband, Julius (Yidl) Guttmann, interprets the religious classic *Yismechi*, which is originally part of the Mussaf service concluding the Shabbat morning prayers and has become a well-known Shabbat song, sung in many Hassidic communities over Galicia and Bucovina. There are several recorded versions of this song, which use another mode (the *Freygish* mode). But this one uses the *Mogen Ovos* mode with a *Yishtabach* cadence, and moves to the *Adonoy Molokh* mode in the B section, while the orchestra ends with a statement of a *Freygish* phrase, and it is offered here in a bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish version<sup>34</sup>. The interpreter, Julius Guttmann, also an artistic director of the theatre, was in fact a learned Jew, his brother was the Rabbi-in-chief (Oberrabbiner) of the Reform Tempel, certainly attended by families of the bourgeoisie such as the Liliens. This is another example of the many links between "high" and "low" culture, the Tempel and the Yiddish stage. His rendering of this piece shows how well he is acquainted with religious tradition, but also how he is able to divert it from its original settings, purpose and language to offer a wonderful bilingual divertimento with a mystic touch to it.

As the Yiddish writer and critic Isroel Ashendorf remembers with a touch of humour:

the Rabbi did not feel it as an offense to have a brother who was an actor, even if he himself had a permanent beard and the latter only would glue one to himself from times to times, when the role would demand it. It would often happen that on one and the same Shabbat, the Oberrabbiner Dr. Guttmann was delivering a sermon in front of the 'God fearing assembly' while his brother was standing in the Gimpel theatre and playing in an operetta by Goldfaden or a drama by Gordin. Of course, one couldn't compare the building of the Yiddish theatre with the one of the Tempel.

<sup>34</sup> Scala Record Nr. 16246, Julius Guttmann, Regisseur des jüdischen Theaters in Lemberg, *Jismechi*, recorded ca. 1910. *Yismechu Bemalchutcha*, "they will rejoice in your kingdom," is an often recorded classic. I am indebted to Joshua Horowitz for his musicologist's insights.

[...] However, the actor Yidl Guttman had an audience that was more grateful than the one of his brother the Oberrabiner Dr. Guttman<sup>35</sup>.

This witty anecdote establishes a parallel that has often been made between the Yiddish theatre and a temple or place of worship, insinuating that the cult of Yiddish secular culture that was beginning with the Gimpel enterprise would soon replace the antiquated religion. Displacing religious songs from the Bimah to the Yiddish stage was already the first step in secularization of Yiddish culture, but also in conserving the legacy of cantorial tradition in a performance that was going to continue to be accessible to modern Jews.

The most popular genre was the operetta, for example the duo from the famous *Bar Kokhba* by Frieda Zwiebel and Schapira<sup>36</sup>. In parts, the genre resembles Verdi, in others, plain operetta. The refrain in chorus is followed by a more recitative part where they sing in turns, and the language is Yiddish. The rhythm is underlined by a rather monotonous piano base. Frida Zwiebel-Goldstein (1877–?) was one of the leading prima donnas of the Lemberg Yiddish theatre.

Perhaps one of the most interesting recordings available on the Austrian site is the title *Droshegeshank* performed by Leon Kalisch<sup>37</sup>.



A *droshe-geshank* (sermon-present) is normally the part of the wedding where the groom gives a scholarly interpretation of the Torah or Talmud, followed by

<sup>35</sup> I. Ashendorf, *S.M. Gimpel Teater in Lemberg. A: Aktyorn*, in: *Gedenkbukh Galitsye*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>36</sup> Favorite 1-29062 (2529-f-), Frau Zwiebel und Herr Schapira, jüd. Theater Lemberg, *Gekommen ist die Zeit*, aus *Barkochba* (Duett), recorded 23.3.1906. *Bar Kokhba* was composed between 1883 and 1885, after the rise of pogroms in the Czarist Empire and recalled the Jewish hero Simon Bar Kokhba who led the last revolt against the Roman Empire.

<sup>37</sup> Victor 63832-B (6080 I), Leon Kalisch m. Chor des jüd. Theaters, *Droshegeshank auf einer jüd. Hochzeit*, recorded in December 1907. Leon Kalisch was born in 1882 in Lemberg and survived the war in the Red Army.

the time when the *badkhn*, the marriage entertainer, would stand on a chair or table, invite the guests to present their wedding gifts, then comment on the groom, the presents and the people in the community while improvising rhyming couplets called *gramen* in Yiddish. The traditional *badkhn*'s delivery was often studded with Biblical quotes. Here it is reduced to the speech announcing the gifts that family members and guests are bestowing upon the newlyweds. It is a recitative in the manner of the art of the *badkhn*, proclaiming in a humoristic mode the list of the presents offered from both the fiancé's and fiancée's side, poking fun at each and followed each time by a merry refrain sung in choir. This rare recording offers a fascinating sample of the intonations of the savoury kind of Yiddish spoken in Lemberg.

In the framework of this article, it was only possible to deal with two examples of landmarks of Jewish Lemberg, the bank and the theatre. They represent two major *lieux de mémoire* of the Jewish presence in Lemberg. Many more places and institutions could be tackled in a similar manner. The preliminary findings already indicate that many widespread stereotypical and simplistic views can already be deconstructed: from what we see, Jews, Poles and Ukrainians did not live in hermetically separate worlds, and as for Jewish culture itself, often too strictly defined boundaries between assimilated circles and Yiddish culture leave many areas and spaces for individuals to meet. What we have found, both for the traditional Jewish bank and for the Lemberg Yiddish theatre, indicates the many ways in which linguistic, cultural, social and national limits were crossed in daily reality. The synagogue, the bank and the theatre have all been addressed in various quotes as "temples," sacred places to which people refer with admiration and respect, a fact that suggests the diversity of Jewish identities and references in Lemberg.

As for the methodological approach suggested here, this article attempted to give leads of what researchers could do with the modern technical means at their disposal. Lemberg's Jewish history is still largely unknown and unresearched even in countries where Jewish studies are institutionalised at university level, all the more in today's Lviv. Linking places in the city with their history as preserved in the memoirs written by their former inhabitants and illustrated by the iconographic material at our disposal would be the first step. Much still has to be done to retrieve the history of Jewish culture, literature, press, intellectual and cultural life of Jewish Lemberg, searching in books, anthologies, periodicals, lexicons, memorial books (*Yizker-bikher*) and testimonies. Adding sound archives would enhance the possibilities to create an extensive multimedia database where texts, pictures and audio tracks could combine to offer a comprehensive overview of Jewish life and culture in Lemberg. It would be a very promising enterprise if the printed and vocal sources could be linked together and if linguists, historians of culture and literature as well as theatre specialists and musicologists would join and work together on the rich materials about the city's cultural life. At any rate, the two examples taken out of many give an idea of what could be done to illustrate in a multimedia interactive mode the fascinating and complex multicultural history of Lemberg.



MIĘDZY BANKIEM A TEATREM: ODTWARZANIE HISTORII SPOŁECZNEJ  
I KULTURALNEJ DWÓCH WAŻNYCH OBIEKTÓW ŻYDOWSKIEGO LWOWA  
SPRZED PIERWSZEJ WOJNY ŚWIATOWEJ

*Streszczenie*

Artykuł ma na celu analizę nowych perspektyw badania historii żydowskiego miasta Lemberg/Lwowa sprzed pierwszej wojny światowej na przykładzie dwóch ważnych obiektów i instytucji kulturalnych: żydowskiego banku Sokal i Lilien i teatru jidysz Jakuba Gimpla. Dzięki kolekcjom świadectw, wspomnień, archiwów, artykułów prasowych, starych fotografii i źródeł ikonograficznych, nut, a nawet wczesnych nagrań w języku jidysz, polskim i ukraińskim, możliwe jest szczegółowe odtworzenie multimedialnej historii kultury żydowskiej w mieście. Oprócz historii budynków można poznać historię osób, które w nich mieszkały i pracowały, dzięki ich zdjęciom, słowom, wspomnieniom, a nawet taśmom zawierającym nagrania ich mowy, śpiewu i rozrywek.

Badania te prowadzą do interesujących wniosków wskazujących na znacznie większą różnorodność kulturową, niż dokumentują to współczesne źródła. Można było zauważyć wielorakie kontakty między różnymi wspólnotami etnicznymi i religijnymi we Lwowie, między kulturą wysoką i niską; widoczne było również wzajemne przenikanie się obszarów językowych, narodowych, religijnych, społecznych, kulturalnych i artystycznych. Transpokoleniowa historia żydowskich rodzin jest świadectwem także ogromnej przemiany tożsamości ludzi z pokolenia na pokolenie. Zbieranie multimedialnych śladów przeszłości miasta oraz odtwarzanie dźwięków z przeszłości może przyczynić się do powstania wspólnego internetowego projektu na ten temat.

Tłum. Izabela Ślusarek