

REVIEW

Anna Jakimyszyn, *Żydzi krakowscy w dobie Rzeczypospolitej Krakowskiej. Status prawny – przeobrażenia gminy – system edukacyjny* [*The Jews of Kraków in the Times of the Republic of Kraków*], Austeria Publishing House, Kraków–Budapest 2008, pp. 368; ISBN 978-83-89129-67-3

The studies devoted to the history and culture of Kraków's Jews have a long tradition marked by the names of many prominent historiographers such as Majer Bałaban (1877–1942?), Natan M. Gelber (1891–1966), Ignacy Schiper (1884–1943), Janina Bieniarzówna (1916–1997), as well as contemporary ones: Tomasz Gąsowski, Mariusz Kulczykowski, Hanna Kozińska-Witt, Jan M. Małecki i Andrzej Żbikowski¹. However, despite the effort they put into the research, many relevant issues have not yet become monographs.² The history of Kraków's Jews between 1815 and 1846, the time of existence of the Republic of Kraków, or the Free City of Kraków, had been such an issue until the publication of this book.

The rump state that came into being as a result of the agreements made during the Congress of Vienna met the expectations of none of the interested parties. Each of the invaders (especially Russia and Austria) wanted Kraków to become part of their territory. The difficult compromise reached in Vienna postponed the plans for annexing Kraków to one of the countries. The citizens of Kraków were conscious of the fact that the promised freedom would be illusory, as the Free City was entrusted to the “custody” of the founding superpowers. The Jews among them were the most disappointed. The *Statute Organizing the Followers of the Law of the Old Testament in the Free City of Kraków and its Environs* (*Statut urządzający starozakonnych w Wolnym Mieście Krakowie i Jego Okręgu*, Kraków 1817), contrary to anticipation, did not improve their legal and economic situation. Nonetheless, we are dealing with a crucial period for both the history of Kraków and Jews. Freedom of trade allowed the citizens of Kraków to develop professional careers. This, in turn, resulted in the revival of social and political life in the city. Self-government and private patronage for cultural and educational initiatives became intensified.

¹ See R. Żebrowski, *Wokół genezy historiografii żydowskiej w Polsce* [*On the Origins of Jewish Historiography in Poland*], in: K. Pilarczyk, S. Gąsiorowski (eds.), *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach polskich* [*Jews and Judaism in Contemporary Polish Studies*], vol. II: *Conference materials*, Kraków 24–26.11.1998, Kraków 2000, p. 189–203; N. Aleksion, *Żydowska szkoła krakowska? Historycy żydowscy wobec dylematów tożsamości* [*Jewish School of Kraków? Jewish Historians on the Identity Dilemma*], in: G. Borkowska, M. Rudkowska (eds.), *Kwestia żydowska w XIX wieku. Spory o tożsamość Polaków* [*The Jewish Question in the 19th Century. The Dispute on the Identity of Poles*], Warszawa 2004, p. 169–180.

² I discuss the problem in the context of the 19th c., cf. *Stan badań nad historią Żydów krakowskich w XIX wieku* [*The Present State of Studies on the History of Kraków Jews in the 19th c.*], in: J. Rajman (ed.), *Kraków. Studia z dziejów miasta. W 750. rocznicę lokacji* [*Kraków. Studies on the History of the City on the 750th Anniversary of its City Charter*], Kraków 2007, p. 156–168.

These key issues are touched upon in Anna Jakimyszyn's book. The author has proven not only her erudition and good knowledge of the subject, but also her passion for research. Individual problems are analysed thoroughly on the basis of a vast array of competently collected reference materials. Jakimyszyn searched for the materials used in her study in the State Archive in Kraków, the archives of the Jagiellonian University and the Jewish Historical Institute. The reference books are published in Polish, English, German, Hebrew and Yiddish. The author's professional translations from foreign languages constitute evidence of her skill, since she is a teacher and interpreter of the Yiddish language.³

The reviewed work presents the problems from the perspective signalled in the title, which must be assessed positively. Excepting the extensive *Introduction* (pp. 11–21), an introductory character can also be assigned to the first chapter, entitled *Jews of Kraków between 1795 and 1846* (pp. 23–67). This chapter describes the origins of the Free City of Kraków, and its social, religious and economic relationships. Legal and political aspects are also assessed. A separate section is devoted to the *Statute Organizing the Followers of the Law of the Old Testament in the Free City of Kraków and its Environs* (*Statut urządzający starozakonnych w Wolnym Mieście Krakowie i Jego Okręgu*) (pp. 63–67). Taking into consideration the importance of this document, putting it into a separate section is completely well-grounded.

In the second chapter the author focuses on *Rights and Duties of the Kraków Jews* (pp. 69–107). They were granted a considerable amount of freedom as far as religious matters were concerned. The author notices that: "As the followers of a tolerated confession, Kraków's Jews possessed the right to maintain synagogues, cemeteries and socio-religious institutions important for them. Moreover, they had complete freedom of religious practices (p. 73)".

The third chapter focuses on *The Transformations of the Community* (pp. 109–184). In the following sections the author discusses such issues as: the administrative authorities in the Community, *Confraternities*, *Socio-religious Institutions*, and, in a particularly interesting manner, *The Rabbinate*. Thanks to its outstanding rabbis, the Free City of Kraków, despite many political limitations, had never stopped being the centre of Jewish life in Polish territory. The achievements of Dow Ber Meisels and Horsz Dawid Lewi were exceptional. We must therefore hope that the lives of both rabbis, great Polish patriots, will be presented in separate monographs soon.

The fourth chapter is devoted to education. This part of the text is especially significant because, as the author puts it: "building foundations of the changes which were to take place in the second part of the 19th century" (p. 260) fell in the years 1815–1846. Among those changes the most important were those concerning equality of rights for Jews (based on the *Dezemberverfassung*, or *December Constitution*) and, as a consequence, the mobilization of Jews in the fields of science and politics. It was the era of the Republic of Kraków when the educational paths of famous scholars of Jewish origins began, Józef Oettinger⁴ and Jonatan Warschauer among them. At the turn of the

³ Among others, Jakimyszyn translated, compiled and provided introduction for *Statut krakowskiej gminy żydowskiej z roku 1595 i jego uzupełnienia* [*The 1595 Statute of the Jewish Community of Kraków and its Supplements*], Kraków 2005.

⁴ In 1873 Józef Oettinger became the first Jewish professor of the Jagiellonian University.

19th and 20th centuries the number of students and scholars of Jewish origins at the Jagiellonian University increased markedly. During the interwar period (1918–1939) Jewish students played a crucial role in certain academic fields (law, medicine). If we take into consideration the fact that between 1815 and 1827 there were only two Jews from Kraków among the students of the Jagiellonian University, it should be concluded that this was a real revolution!⁵

At the end of the work an appendix includes source texts (both published and unpublished). They are intended for readers who want to broaden their knowledge in relation to particular issues, and can be utilised during classes with students of Jewish studies, history and archive studies.

The construction of individual chapters and the cause-effect relations formulated there are beyond reproach. All fundamental theses have been associated with proper source texts or studies.

It is also worth mentioning that Anna Jakimyszyn is the first researcher who, while preparing a monograph on Jews in the Republic of Kraków, treated the *Statute Organizing the Followers of the Law of the Old Testament in the Free City of Kraków and its Environs* as the starting point for her studies, gathering further related material at the same time.

Another advantage of the book are its detailed indexes of illustrations, maps, tables and graphs appended at the end of the work as well as the index of names and geographical names.

Thanks to “Austeria”, the book and its graphic layout show evidence of thorough editing. Notable too are the attractive illustration on the hard cover and the high quality of paper and print.

The reader may be unsatisfied with the superficial treatment of the relationship between Christians and Jews, which had an influence on the rights and duties of Jews discussed in the second chapter. Furthermore, reading the book would be much easier if the sentences were simpler and shorter. Some of them are seven (p. 35) or even nine (p. 14) lines long.

These critical remarks reflect their author’s viewpoint, but they absolutely do not influence the overall positive evaluation of the work in question. Without a doubt, it fulfils a gap in Polish historiography in an exceptionally competent way.

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⁵ Cf. A. Jakimyszyn, *Jews of Kraków...*, p. 250. See M. Kulczykowski, *Żydzi – studenci Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w dobie autonomicznej Galicji (1867–1918)* [*Jews – Students of the Jagiellonian University in the Times of the Autonomous Galicia*], Kraków 1995; *idem*, *Żydzi – studenci Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918–1939)* [*Jews – Students of the Jagiellonian University in the Second Polish Republic*], Kraków 2004.