

Teofilia Mahler, *Walka między ortodoksją a postępowcami w Krakowie w latach 1843–1868. (Komitet Starozakonných a Wydział dla Spraw Żydowskich)* [The Struggle between Orthodox and Progressive Jews in Cracow between 1843 and 1868], Austeria, Kraków and Budapeszt, 2017, 208 pp.; series: *Studia i materiały z dziejów judaizmu w Polsce*, 3

Teofilia Mahler's master's thesis, *Walka między ortodoksją a postępowcami w Krakowie w latach 1843–1868* (further referred to as *The Struggle*) was defended in 1934 and written under the supervision of Majer Bałaban, a renowned historian and founder of modern Jewish historiography in Poland. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, an Association of Majer Bałaban's Students announced a list of works to be published in a second volume of a Jubilee Book marking the anniversary of Bałaban's professional activity. The book was not published however due to the outbreak of the war. As a result, *The Struggle* appeared only recently as a third volume of the series *Studia i materiały z dziejów judaizmu w Polsce* [Studies and source materials from the history of Judaism in Poland]. It is deserving of publication for a number of reasons; first and foremost because the pre-war dissertation by Mahler is partly based on sources that did not survive the war, yielding access to their lost content. Secondly, it is one of the most comprehensive studies on Progressive Jews in Cracow, and on the Polish lands in general.

Mahler's work is comprised of four chapters in which she (a Cracow native who graduated from the University of Warsaw Faculty of History) attempts to reconstruct the dispute between Orthodox and Progressive Jews in Cracow from 1843 up until 1868; or to be more precise, between the institutions of both parties, namely the Jewish Committee (Pol.: *Komitet Starozakonných*) and the Israelite Department (Pol.: *Wydział ds Izraelickich*), the latter of which was established in 1866 by the Cracow City Council.

In the first chapter [‘The establishment of the Jewish Committee’] the author describes the history of the Committee, which was established in 1817 in place of the fully autonomous *kahal*. Deprived of many of its former prerogatives, it became a sort of advisory council and a representative body of the Jewish community, first under the supervision of the Senate, then under the Administrative Council, Commission of the Governorate, and finally – the Magistrate.

In the second chapter [‘The beginning of struggle between Orthodoxy and the Progressives’], Mahler presents the origins of Cracow's Progressive circle. Its leaders founded the Association of Religion and Civilization (Pol.: *Stowarzyszenie Religijno-Cywilizacyjne*), “in need of strong support against its greatest enemy” (i.e. Orthodoxy, p. 78). According to Mahler the basic goal of the Association was the moral and economic elevation of Jews, with the aim

of gaining freedom from – as she puts it – the yoke of Orthodoxy, and above all the Association aimed at the proper education of children, including in secondary schools. Though she describes the Association as “drawing examples from the civilized Jews abroad” she does not specify which countries she was referring to. We may assume that she had in mind the biggest centres of the Habsburg monarchy – Vienna and Prague – especially given that later in her dissertation she finds an affinity between Cracow’s Progressives and Adolf Jelinek, the preacher of a Progressive synagogue in Vienna and one of the most notable religious leaders in the Monarchy and a supporter of the so-called moderate reform of Judaism. While investigating the origins of the conflict, she claims that according to the Orthodox Jews the new community would only “bring about the annihilation of Jewry” (p. 71). Later, she discusses the first signs of the conflict – a quarrel between rabbi Dow Ber Meisels and Jozue Fink, a member of the Progressive movement (pp. 83–89).

In the third chapter [‘The Israelite Department and its fight against the Committee’] Mahler discusses the establishment of the City Council Department for Jewish Affairs and its conflict with the Jewish Committee. Its establishment was linked to the fact that in 1866 a *Temporary Communal Statute for the city of Cracow* was issued, guaranteeing autonomy to the city. According to the Statute the city was to be represented by the City Council, which also included Jews. It was then that the Department was first established, as an auxiliary institution that dealt with the particular problems of Jews. Since the Department was considered to be the only official representative body of the Jewish population, the Jewish Committee (with its Orthodox majority) was deprived of its prerogatives and the conflict became inevitable. The final chapter of Mahler’s work focuses on this conflict.

According to Mahler the conflict reached its peak in 1868 with the dispute between rabbi Szymon Schreiber and Szymon Dankowicz, the preacher of the progressive Tempel synagogue built a few years earlier. Mahler reconstructs this dispute in the fourth chapter, which for a long time (along with the entry on Dankowicz written by Bałaban in the *Polish Biographical Dictionary* and his short study on Jews of Cracow) was the only source of information on Dankowicz – the first Jewish preacher in Cracow who preached in Polish. Mahler investigates not only the dispute in which he took part but also his pro-Polish activities, but unfortunately stops prematurely in 1868 and admits she did not manage to establish what happened later with respect to the dispute nor Dankowicz’s subsequent role in Cracow. These issues were only recently dealt with by Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska – 80 years after Mahler’s dissertation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, ‘Działalność Szymona Dankowicza w Krakowie (1867–1875)’, in Michał Galas (ed.), *Synagoga Tempel i środowisko krakowskich Żydów postępowych* (Studia i materiały z dziejów judaizmu w Polsce, 1; Kraków and Budapest, 2012); *eadem*, ‘Rabin Szymon Dankowicz (1834–1910) – życie i działalność’ (Studia

Despite many deficiencies in Mahler's work, the decision to publish it today must be met with approval. I agree with the argument that the text can have a dual significance for the reader, as a "a useful study of a certain historical problem and at the same time ... an important source when it comes to history of Jewish historiography itself" (p. 25). As already mentioned, Mahler's work is partly based on sources that did not survive the war, as well as on sources that did survive it, but have not been used since the war due to changed call numbers. The author of this critical edition – *Studia i materiały z dziejów judaizmu w Polsce*, 3 managed to rediscover these latter works.

The edition follows the editorial principles for twentieth-century sources, including in part the *Projekt instrukcji wydawniczej dla źródeł historycznych XIX i początku XX w.* [Project of editorial instructions for nineteenth and twentieth-century sources] by Ireneusz Ilnatowicz, as well as newer presented instructions by Janusz Tandecki and Krzysztof Kopiński, and finally the practical solutions used by Paweł Fijałkowski in his edition of a dissertation written by another of Bałaban's disciples, Dwojra Raskin. Due to the numerous challenges inherent in Mahler's text (two kinds of annotations, wrong references, factual mistakes) and other circumstances (reorganization of archives, changes of call numbers, and the location of documents) the work of Maślak-Maciejewska can only be described as an impressive complement to Mahler's work. She has added the page numbers of cited studies, amended wrong references and factual mistakes, established the location of the majority of sources (and added present-day signatures), and sorted out the spelling of names and orthography. When evaluating Mahler's monograph one has to take into account that the author could not base her work on any previous publications and therefore had to rely only on archival sources. Bałaban's work on the progressive movement (mainly in Lwów's Tempel) was published a few years later.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, *The Struggle* is pioneering work, even if it was written under Bałaban's supervision.

Nevertheless, one has to mention some deficiencies. First of all, Mahler focuses on the formal aspects of the dispute, as if it was only a matter of the prerogatives of both institutions. Mahler creates a 'narrative of conflict' (to use a term proposed by Maślak-Maciejewska) and applies it to the institutional level. The ideological, religious, social (and class) aspects are almost untouched. Her work therefore produces a picture that is not nuanced enough –

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i materiały z dziejów judaizmu w Polsce, 2; Kraków and Budapest, 2013); *eadem*, 'The Activity of Szymon Dankowicz, the Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria (1889–1891), in the Light of the Sources Produced within the Circles of the Alliance Israelite Universelle', *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, xi (2013), 97–106; *eadem*, 'Progressive Preacher Szymon Dankowicz (1834–1910). A study in the History of Progressive Judaism in Partitioned Polish Lands', *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, xiv (2016), 69–84.

<sup>2</sup> Majer Bałaban, *Historia lwowskiej Synagogi Postępowej* (Lwów, 1937).

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we do not learn about the various and complicated tensions inside the Jewish community. The author pictures both groups in a very essentialist manner, so that they look rather schematic.

The works of Mahler, and especially Bałaban, for a very long time shaped the way historians thought of the mutual relations between the Orthodox and the Progressives. Today's research requires a new approach and new terms ('social class' for instance). New perspectives could produce a new and more nuanced interpretation of these relations, as well as the very genesis and development of the Progressive movement. The question we need to ask today is how and to what degree these institutions (for instance, The Association of Religion and Civilization) interacted with social hierarchies based on class and the possession of cultural capital?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See also Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* (Oxford and Portland, OR, 2007).