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‘Jewish Regions in the Early Modern Central and Eastern Europe’. Conference held at the German Historical Institute and Warsaw University, Warsaw, 6–7 November 2018

On 6 and 7 November 2018, a conference entitled ‘Jewish Regions in the Early Modern Central and Eastern Europe’ was held at the German Historical Institute and at the University of Warsaw. The session was organised by the cooperating German Historical Institute, the Mordechaj Anielewicz Centre for the Study and Teaching of the History and Culture of Jews in Poland affiliated to the University of Warsaw’s Institute of History, and the Institute of Judaic Studies, Jagiellonian University, Cracow. Nineteen scholars and researchers from Poland, Israel, the United States, Russia, and Germany attended the Conference.

The Conference dealt with East Central European regions analysed from the standpoint of Jewish studies. The organisers sought to demonstrate that the category of ‘region’ can be applied in the research into the history and culture of Jews in early modern period. The ‘Jewish region’ has been defined as an area of activity created by Jews and filled by their activities. It was assumed that these entities were, to an extent, independent of the existing political and geographic borders; moreover, and importantly in the Jewish context, they would have been independent of the traditional categorisation into Ashkenazic and Sephardic culture. The adoption of such a broad definition has enabled to present the notion from multiple research perspectives.

The keynote lecture, entitled ‘Region, Region: Let Me Count the Ways’, was delivered by Moshe Rosman of the Bar-Ilan University in Israel. His presentation started with a historiographic analysis showing the state of research on regions in modern period. Rosman emphasised that a number of contradicting definitions of the notion ‘region’ have hitherto appeared in scientific studies. For instance, some authors consider uniqueness the characteristic of a region, while others argue that a region must be representative of a certain larger whole. Rosman interestingly showed that the beginnings of Jewish regional studies are connected with a change in the paradigms in Jewish historiography and with a gradual appreciation of spatial categories by Jewish historians.

A total of seventeen papers were presented in five thematic sections portraying regions from various research perspectives. The first panel, headed ‘Jewish Regional Self-Governments’, analysed ‘region’ in terms of the development of Jewish autonomy bodies. In her analysis of Jewish sources, Anna Michałowska-Mycielska of the University of Warsaw showed that the territory

within which the jurisdiction of the Lithuanian Wa'ad was in force was perceived as a separate area within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Adam Kaźmierczyk and Przemysław Zarubin of the Jagiellonian University focused their attention on Jewish autonomy bodies in the Polish Crown's landed administrative units (called *ziemstvos*). Kaźmierczyk discussed the influences of magnates on Jewish local policies; Zarubin described the *ziemstvos'* financial condition at the end the eighteenth century.

The leading problem in the 'Regions and Economy' section was the influences of economy on the shaping of Jewish regions. In the introductory paper, Shaul Stampfer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem discussed the determining role of economic development in Jewish migrations and in the shaping of Jewish regions in Poland-Lithuania. The papers presented by Maria Cieśla and Ruth Leiserowitz, both of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, showed economic regions from the standpoint of business contact networks developed by Jewish merchants. Cieśla discussed the case study of the Ickowicz brothers who were active in the middle of the eighteenth century in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania; Leiserowitz discussed the contacts of Jewish merchants in Samogitia after the Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The section on 'Jewish Geography' featured papers showing the functioning of regions seen from an external, Jewish point of view. It was shown, in an interesting way, that geographical divisions perceived from the perspective of Jews considerably differ from their perception known from Christian descriptions. Four papers were delivered as part of the section. Vladimir Levin of Jerusalem's Hebrew University of Jerusalem discussed East European Jewish mental maps, with a special focus on notions such as 'Lite', 'Zamet', or 'Raisyn'. An interesting analysis of the significance of regional names in Jacob Frank's self-identification was proposed by Paweł Maciejko of the Johns Hopkins University. Marek Tuszewicki of the Jagiellonian University discussed the regional divisions seen from the standpoint of research into folk medicine. The panel was concluded with the paper by Jagiellonian University's Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, which analysed contact networks of progressive synagogue rabbis in Galicia and in the Kingdom of Poland.

The leading question of the session headed 'Jewish Region – Christian Region' was the actual impact of the divisions imposed by Christians (supreme authorities) on the formation of Jewish regions. The issue was considered from the legal and forensic perspective, from the demographic standpoint, and in terms of activities of exponents of the economic elite. Andrej Špirt of the Lomonosov State University in Moscow analysed the Jewish-Christian relations typical of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's eastern territories and influencing the formation of the local Jewish region. Anat Vaturi of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, presented her research on everyday functioning of Jews in Poland-Lithuania's judicial system. Mikołaj Szołtysek of the

University of Warsaw and Radosław Poniak of the University of Białystok proposed a demographic analysis of the structure of the Jewish family in the eighteenth-century Commonwealth, taking note on the similarities between the Jews and the Christians inhabiting the same regions. Tomasz Wiślicz of the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History, Polish Academy of Sciences described the biography of Zalman Wolfowicz, the leaseholder of the Starost Office of Drohobycz in mid-eighteenth century, against a broad regional background.

The Conference's last section, entitled 'Region and Religion', dealt with religious issues. The lecturers tried to determine the extent to which religious categories might be of use in describing Jewish regions. Lucia Raspe of the University of Frankfurt and Oren Roman from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev focused on prayers and liturgies. In her analysis of the *slichot* prayers, Raspe argued that within the Ashkenazi Europe, they differed regionally in form and content; Roman showed the dissemination in Europe of the so-called Minhag Frankfurt – local, Frankfurt-originated prayers and customs. In the closing paper, Sarit Cofman-Simhon from the Kibbutzim College analysed the proliferation in the Ashkenazi Europe of the so-called *Purimshpil* – performances staged during the Purim festival.

The papers so diverse in the topics covered, put together and mutually juxtaposed at the Conference, altogether demonstrated that 'region', as an analytical category, may provide a useful tool in the research on the history of Jews in early modern period – including in undermining several worn-out historiographic patterns and routines.

trans. Tristan Korecki

Maria Cieśla