

Vladislava Moskalets

The Jewish Communities of Boryslav and Drohobych in the late 19th Century as Examples for the Rise of a Jewish Middle Class

The history of the transformation of Jewish communities, which began at the end of the 19th century, is an important part of East European history and is closely connected to the general process of modernization in this region. The story of the Jewish communities of Boryslav and Drohobych challenges traditional views, which portray Galician Jewry as socially backward and deeply traditional, and illustrates how the industrialization of Galician cities transformed the lives of the elite and led to the rise of a Jewish middle class.

The discovery of local oil resources in Galicia in the middle of the 19th century attracted investments of capital, and the rapid growth of the oil industry, in turn, stimulated the economic development of Drohobych and Boryslav, previously small Jewish shtetls. Jewish entrepreneurs got involved in the oil business in its early stages, and the most successful of them formed a Jewish economic elite, linked by business ties and family relationships. The families which formed the Jewish economic elite of Drohobych and Boryslav (the Gartenbergs, Schreiern, Liebermans, Lauterbachs and Backenroths) will constitute the object of this research project. The aim of the project is to examine how the involvement in oil manufacture and sales changed the lifestyle, views and orientation of the economic elite. This transformation also had an impact on the life of entire Jewish community, which in this period ceases to be a homogenous society.

Private Jewish entrepreneurs became some of the most active participants in the Galician oil industry during its first phase of development in the 1860s. Following the mechanization of the oil industry and the involvement of large international companies in the trade, small owners of oil businesses were forced out of the industry. However, groups of middle-sized and large entrepreneurs had already formed, and these successfully integrated themselves into the larger businesses. These groups constituted some of the most influential forces in the Jewish communities, in the economic as well as the political and social life of the cities. Aside from their business activities, some of these industrialists - like Ascher Selig Lauterbach - devoted time to composing religious texts, did charity work and agitated for changes in Jewish education.

Due to their unique status as the only industrial centers in Galicia, Drohobych and Boryslav became an object of interest for socialists (Ivan Franko and Ignacy Dashynski) and later Zionists (Saul Rafael Landau, Abraham Saltz and Theodore Herzl), who found in the industrial life of the region, and especially in the relations between mine owners and workers, effective illustrations for their own ideologies. Socialists regarded Jewish entrepreneurs as the classic example of exploiting capitalists who ruined the lives of local workers and peasants. Local Polish newspapers, such as the "*Gazeta Naddniestrzanska*," the "*Kurjer Drohobycki*" or "*Strażnica*" published incriminating articles on the business scams of the Jewish entrepreneurs and on the ties of kinship within their groups. Vivid (negative) portraits of Jewish oil-businessmen appear in the works of fiction of Ivan Franko ("Boryslav is laughing", "Boa Constrictor") and Jozef Rogosz ("In the Galician hell"), and in the short stories of Stefan Kovaliv.

Texts left by representatives of the Jewish elite, however, present a completely different portrait of the Jewish entrepreneur: a person educated in Judaic as well as general studies, a smart businessman and a benefactor. A comparison of the external and internal views on the local Jewish elite provides us with a vivid picture of the values, interests and fears of the Jewish and Gentile worlds.

The chronological framework of this research covers the period from the 1840s, the initial period of formation of the entrepreneurial elite, until the beginning of the First World War, at which point most of the entrepreneurs emigrated from the city. In geographical terms, the research is limited to the territories of oil extraction and trade, the Galician "oil belt" (Drohobych, Boryslav etc.). As this project includes also the following generations of oil magnates, it will be widened to Lviv and Krakov, which were principal centers of education for this elite. One of the most important cities in this story is Vienna, which became a place of settlement for many of the descendants of these Jewish entrepreneurs.

The aim of this research project is to examine the process of change which the Jewish economical elite of Drohobych and Boryslav underwent and to understand the transformation and modernization of this group throughout three generations. This will be done by analyzing the connections within the Jewish community and those of this community with Gentiles, its strategies of behavior and its intellectual orientations, in order to outline the formation of a strong middle-class and its following transformation.

One of the most important characteristics of the intellectual life of Boryslav and Drohobych was the competition between Polish and German models of acculturation. The cultural orientation of the Jews connected with the oil trade demonstrates the difficulties involved in choosing one model or the other, and it is important to analyze it in order to understand this process.

This study enables a close look at the impact of industrialization on the members of a Jewish economic elite. No such research exists on the Galician examples; however, this region is important and can provide valuable data. Previous studies on the elites of various regions of Eastern Europe pay little attention to the analysis of the processes that took place within a few generations in the Jewish middle class and are rather descriptive in nature. Galicia is important and unique as an example of industrialization, because its economic elite remained religious and concerned with Judaism.

The uniqueness of Drohobych and Boryslav as the only examples of industrialization in Galicia allow us to view the modernization of Jewish elites in a context different from that of Lviv or Brody. A future comparison of the Galician case with the industrial cities of other regions could help us understand the wider connections between economic and cultural processes. This research project is thus important not only in the local context of Galicia, but also as it concerns the wider issue of the modernization of Jewish elites in Eastern Europe in general.