

DAMIAN KASPRZYK



HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-3588-3486

DAMIAN.KASPRZYK@UNI.LODZ.PL

University of Łódź  
Faculty of Philosophy and History  
Practical Anthropology Unit

## Regionalism, regions, and regionalists of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland A historical and ethnological sketch

Regionalizm, regiony i regionaliści  
żydowskiej diaspory w Polsce  
Szkic historyczno-etnologiczny

**Summary:** The paper attempts to answer the question about the conditions for the implementation of regionalist ideas within the Jewish community across Polish territories, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The author identifies internal variations within this community, delineating diverse stances towards local character and varied circumstances surrounding the practice of regionalist endeavours. The text presents statements (declarations) made by Diaspora representatives, testifying to their attachment to the land (place) of their birth, as well as activities that can be regarded as an emanation of such a relationship. Furthermore, the profiles of several enthusiasts with Jewish roots, pursuing their regional interests in various places in the Republic of Poland and at different moments in its history, are presented. The categories of nostalgia, sentiment, establishing roots, and the concept of a “little homeland” are also highlighted.

**Keywords:** regionalism, history of the Polish Jews, ethnography, intercultural relationships, biography

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie o warunki realizacji idei regionalistycznych w środowisku Żydów zamieszkujących ziemię polskie, szczególnie w XIX i XX w. Autor wskazuje na wewnętrzne zróżnicowanie tego środowiska określające rozmaity stosunek do lokalności i niejednorodne warunki uprawiania kojarzonych z regionalizmem aktywności. W tekście zaprezentowano wypowiedzi



(deklaracje) przedstawicieli diaspory świadczące o przywiązaniu do ziemi (miejsc) urodzenia, a także ukazano działania, które można uznać za emanację tak nakreślonego związku. Przedstawiono sylwetki kilku pasjonatów o żydowskich korzeniach, realizujących swoje zainteresowania regionalistyczne w różnych miejscach Rzeczypospolitej i w różnych momentach jej historii. Wyeksponowano też kategorie nostalgii, sentymentu, zadomowienia oraz figurę małej ojczyzny.

Słowa klucze: regionalizm, historia Żydów polskich, etnografia, relacje międzykulturowe, biografistyka

## Introduction

In the novel *Samson* by Kazimierz Brandys, its Jewish protagonist, Jakub Gold, learns in high school from his Polish friend that anti-Semites are not concerned with individuals, but rather with their desire to expel Jews from the country: “Jakubek [...] you know that it is all the same to me who is a Jew and who is a Turk. But you have forsaken your land, so will it be wrong if you return there?” The hero, upon hearing these words, “gazed out of the open window and saw the green branches of the chestnut trees and the grey smoke rising high behind them [...]. Was this not his land? After all, he had no other land but the house on Łąkowa Street, the school named after Kościuszko, and the forest by the river.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us use this literary passage not to visualise the plight of a national or ethnic minority facing nationalism, as understood in Gellnerian terms.<sup>2</sup> Nor should it serve to ignite discussions on anti-Semitism through yet another text grappling with the past. While the scene from Brandys’s novel contains the trap of simplification, particularly regarding collective identities, it offers valuable insights for a different purpose. Specifically, it presents an opportunity to explore the socio-cultural conditions influencing the emergence of regionalist sentiments among members of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland and to answer the question about the participation of representatives of this national-ethnic group in the broadly understood regionalist movement, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Regionalism emerges when an individual or a collective regards a specific region as their own, identifying with it and treating it subjectively across a spectrum of activities ranging from purely cognitive to pro-developmental. Such activities and declarations,

---

1 K. Brandys, *Samson*, Warsaw 1960, p. 13. As cited in: B. Keff, *Strażnicy fatum. Literatura dekad powojennych o Zagładzie, Polakach, Żydach. Dyskurs publiczny wobec antysemityzmu*, Warsaw 2020, pp. 15–16.

2 “Nationalism is first and foremost a political doctrine that states that political entities should coincide with national entities.” E. Gellner, *Narody i nacjonalizm*, Warsaw 1991, p. 9.

particularly when originating from grassroots communities, are presumed to stem from a regionalist disposition characterised by curiosity and a willingness to act, influenced by an emotional, sentimental, and nostalgic component – a form of attachment to a place, be it of one’s birth, residence, or both, often referred to as a “little homeland.”

Let us regard Gold’s contemplation as he gazes out of the window of his school as the central motif in the previously quoted passage from Brandys’s work. This allegorical motif allows us to establish that both Poles and Jews often had private homelands embedded within a shared spatial and, in a sense, socio-cultural framework.

### Assimilation and traditionalist context

Arguably, the “inscrutability” of Jewish religion and tradition, and the associated mystery, compounded by the near-total disappearance of this ethnic group from Central and Eastern Europe due to the Holocaust, may lead us to view Jewish culture through the lens of Kelal Israel – the community of all Jews. In recent decades, numerous publications have explored the long-standing presence of Jewish communities in specific places, but these are usually the “same Jews”, distinguished by their religion and customs from their Polish neighbours. The predominant portrayal in the literature is that of the Jewish community as a monolithic entity, which may foster stereotypes and lead to erroneous conclusions, showing a state of affairs inconsistent with reality. It is important to recognise that the Jewish population in Polish territories was internally diverse.<sup>3</sup> This diversity was multidimensional, multi-factorial, and multi-source, and paralleled broader pan-European social, cultural, political, and economic transformations. The multifaceted nature of this diversity had various effects on the possibility of phenomena associated with regionalism emerging among representatives of the Jewish diaspora.

Within the Jewish community in Central and Eastern Europe, or *Ashkenazim*, distinct “types” emerged, as outlined by Ezra Mendelsohn, distinguished by their approach to tradition and degree of self-isolationism. The first “type” was characterised by limited acculturation and assimilation into the external environment, religious orthodoxy, and the use of Yiddish in daily communication. Conversely, the second “type” exhibited a higher level of acculturation and openness to assimilation, a departure from Yiddish and orthodoxy, sometimes replaced by some form of Reform or Liberal Judaism.<sup>4</sup> Although this is not the only intra-environmental division,

3 R. Wapiński, *Polska i małe ojczyzny Polaków. Z dziejów kształtowania się świadomości narodowej w XIX i XX wieku po wybuch II wojny światowej*, Wrocław-Warsaw-Kraków 1994, p. 152.

4 E. Mendelsohn, *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, Warsaw 1992, pp. 27–28.

itself burdened by oversimplification, let us trace the conditions conducive to the development of regionalism within both “types”.

It is often claimed in the literature that Polish Jews, not only being the most populous among the Diaspora, were also among the most fervently religious and superstitious communities among the chosen people.<sup>5</sup> If we ignore the fact that such opinions typically align only with the Hasidic world, it is worth asking whether this boundless spirituality exhibited by Eastern European allowed for the emergence of regionalism. It is, in fact, a question of whether, within Jewish communities, the concept of *regios*<sup>6</sup> played a role in reinforcing the group’s distinctiveness and cohesion alongside religious and ethnic factors. Arguably, the orthodox and traditionalist Jewish community was not conducive to the development of a deeper regional reflection. Minds were preoccupied with the study of Torah secrets, and efforts were concentrated on preserving religiously dictated traditions. Under such circumstances, the emergence of regionalist interests, as conceived by theorists viewing regionalism as a socio-cultural movement, was unlikely. However, this traditionalism cultivated an attachment to place, and this is already close to conceiving regionalism in terms of a sentiment – an extended emotional connection to land and people. It was linked to loyalty to state authorities and respect for the local order.<sup>7</sup> For centuries, religious leaders within Jewish communities fundamentally assumed that life in dispersion necessitated complete detachment from secular affairs and adherence to traditional – religiously prescribed – patterns of behaviour.<sup>8</sup> The state of the Diaspora, however, was a God-given state, and only He was capable of altering it. Hence, a lack of interest in the non-Jewish external world did not necessarily sever the ties linking individuals to a place; it was a matter of accepting the “divine plan.”

This referred primarily to Poland as a place of refuge. “The uniqueness of Poland from the Jewish perspective lay, among other factors, in the opportunity it afforded for the full expression of their otherness.”<sup>9</sup> Even the Ashkenazi messianic imagery depicted Poland as a safe haven. Jan Doktor, in his analysis of the issue, noted: “Historians have long observed the remarkable absence among Polish Jews in the First Polish Republic of a sense of exile, a feeling that they resided not in their homeland

---

5 Cf. A. Potocki, *Słownik biograficzny Żydów z Podkarpackiego*, Rzeszów 2010, p. 7.

6 J. Damrosz, *Ojczyzna i jej regiony (region, regionalizm, edukacja lokalno-regionalna i etniczna)*, Płock-Warsaw 2007, p. 250.

7 M. Fuks, Z. Hoffman, M. Horn, J. Tomaszewski, *Żydzi polscy. Dzieje i kultura*, Warsaw 1982, p. 36.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

9 J. Doktor, “Miejsce schronienia czy zbawienia: Polska w mesjańskich wyobrażeniach Żydów I Rzeczypospolitej,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2014, no. 1, p. 56.

but in the diaspora.”<sup>10</sup> During this period, the vast majority of European Jews (almost exclusively *Ashkenazim*) lived in Poland. Consequently, “Polish Jews cease to perceive themselves as Jews in a general sense; instead, they become Polish Jews, with their own customs and even distinct legal norms.”<sup>11</sup> Doktor calls this “Jewish regional tradition” (in the sense of Poland as a region of Europe).<sup>12</sup> Only here could Jewishness (*yiddishkayt*) be developed and realised in anticipation of the arrival of the Messiah. Therefore, there was no clear religious reason for attachment to *moledet* (the place of birth) to be perceived as a departure from traditional Jewish principles; rather, belonging to a cultural community, which is at the centre of Jewish life, had a clear and highly significant communal dimension. It then referred to a micro-community comprising a particular group of Jews in a particular place.<sup>13</sup> This, in turn, resonates with the idea of localism, as defined by K.Z. Sowa: “the relative autonomy and empowerment of specific local communities in economic, social, and cultural terms within a broader socio-spatial and political system. It entails the concentration of social and economic life within local communities, as well as their primacy and domination over that broader socio-spatial system, which is, as it were, produced by these communities, and therefore secondary to them.”<sup>14</sup> If we consider localism as the foundation of regionalism (also in the sense of an earlier, but also necessary for regionalism, circle of affiliation), it is solid for Jewish communities, also, or perhaps especially, in the case of traditionalist and even orthodox communities.

On the other hand, what was the climate for regionalism fostered by the liberal diaspora, which embraced assimilation and acculturation?<sup>15</sup> Its emergence is a complex phenomenon. For lack of space for a broader discussion, let us only briefly touch upon the *Haskalah*. It was a movement in Jewish culture and philosophy that developed from the 1780s onwards, embracing Enlightenment and rationalist principles. Its representatives (Moses Mendelssohn is considered to be its founder) proclaimed the need to enter into dialogue with modern European culture, modernise Diaspora life, reject superstitions, reform the traditional models of the *cheder* and the *yeshiva*, change customs (rejecting traditional dress), allow participation in professions

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A. Unterman, *Żydzi. Wiara i życie*, Łódź 1989, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> K.Z. Sowa, “Zmierzch i odrodzenie się lokalizmu w XX stuleciu. Uwagi o politycznych uwarunkowaniach procesów społeczno-gospodarczych,” [in:] *Spoleczności lokalne. Teraźniejszość i przyszłość*, eds. B. Jałowiecki, K.Z. Sowa, P. Dudkiewicz, Warsaw 1989, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> A. Posern-Zieliński, “Akulturacja,” [in:] *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, ed. Z. Staszczak, Warsaw–Poznań 1987, pp. 16–19.

hitherto rarely performed by Jews (such as agriculture), open up to secular education, and abandon Yiddish in favour of Biblical Hebrew and languages prevalent in non-Jewish environments. The *Haskalah* in the West resulted in mass assimilation and was therefore rejected by traditionalist circles. Critics of the *Haskalah* emphasised the danger of annihilating historically formed Judaism as the basis of Jewish distinctiveness.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, additional circumstances become relevant. The *Haskalah* facilitated the engagement of members of the Diaspora in secular disciplines, including those closely related to the regionalism of history and ethnography. It clearly influenced the development of Jewish literature (a multitude of genres) and art (historicism). It spurred social activism and the establishment of various institutions (including the proliferation of the press). Despite facing opposition from contrasting ideologies, the *Haskalah* had an impact on the further development of the socio-political life of Eastern European Jews.<sup>17</sup>

A consequence of the *Haskalah* and other emancipation movements was the great emphasis on worldview positions, leading to significant clashes on fundamental issues. A case of particular interest in this context seems to be the Zionist idea. It advocated for the abandonment of the Diaspora in favour of establishing a new homeland in the land of Israel "The principle of the Zionist movement in its early stages was to completely break with the traditions brought from places of origin and to create new communities that would develop based on new norms, often created on the basis of the negation of traditional ones."<sup>18</sup> In theory, adherence to Zionist ideology appeared incompatible with the awakening and cultivation of a regionalist mindset within the Diaspora. It even seems to have fostered a contrary attitude, potentially manifesting as oikophobia.<sup>19</sup> However, it is easy to point to circumstances indicating that Zionists sometimes with great affection regarded and took an interest in their places of birth and upbringing. Many proponents of Zionist ideas residing in Poland, including active representatives of the movement, expressed a profound connection to their places of origin. This aspect will be further explored later in the text.

Within other orientations, there are echoes of demands that can be associated with regionalist ideals. The Bund<sup>20</sup> advocated for national and cultural autonomy

16 R. Żebrowski, "Haskala," [in:] *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje, kultura, religia, ludzie*, vol. 1, eds. Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, Warsaw 2003, pp. 562–563.

17 Ibid.

18 O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "Stara ojczyzna – w nowej ojczyźnie. Pojęcie ojczystego miejsca w tradycji polskich Żydów," *Lud* 1998, vol. 82, p. 78.

19 H. Haumann, *Historia Żydów w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej*, Warsaw 2000, p. 133.

20 A left-wing, anti-Zionist Jewish party active between 1897 and 1948.

within autonomous territories, although this proposition quickly proved to be utopian. One of the most eminent experts on nationality issues in the Polish lands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Leon Wasilewski, argued that even extraterritorial cultural autonomy faced limitations due to “the dependence of Jewish life on the conditions of a given territory and the lives of the majority of its inhabitants.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Wasilewski drew attention to the regionalisation of socio-cultural life in general, on the assumption that the functioning of Jewish communities also depended to a greater or lesser extent on local peculiarities regardless of their degree of self-isolation.

The folklorists (folkists) shared the belief that the future of the Jews, as indigenous people, was linked to the Diaspora. Consequently, Jewish popular parties supported the principle of *do-iket* (“localness”),<sup>22</sup> which entailed, among other things, respect for the land akin to that of Polish agrarians.

In conclusion, the traditionalist stance among members of the Jewish Diaspora did not hinder the cultivation of the localism essential for the emergence of a regionalist mindset and disposition, while progressive-assimilationist currents facilitated the development of regionalism as an intellectual and scholarly orientation. They also helped bring Jews closer to Polish organisations and institutions organised and operated in a spirit of regionalism.

### Regions in diaspora conditions

The theorist of regionalism states: “There is no doubt that regionalism was born in the context of the existence of specific regions, distinguished by a set of particular characteristics, and remains in a permanent relation to them, i.e., it is always associated with a specific area.”<sup>23</sup> The identification of this area usually remains an open question. Undoubtedly, the regionalist movement, along with its institutionalisation, usually requires precise determination of the boundaries of the region, as does regionalism understood as a research direction and procedure (precise delimitation is often an aim in itself for this kind of activity). In such cases, we usually deal with objectivist concepts of the region.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, regionalism conceived in terms of

21 L. Wasilewski, *Kwestya żydowska na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Lviv 1913, p. 6. As cited in: R. Wapiński, op. cit., p. 175.

22 H. Haumann, op. cit., p. 230.

23 H. Skorowski, “Współczesne ujęcie regionalizmu,” [in:] *Regionalizm. Idea – tradycje – perspektywy rozwoju w muzealnictwie*, ed. Z. Chlewiński, Płock 2007, p. 11.

24 S. Węglarz, *Tutejsi i inni. O etnograficznym zróżnicowaniu kultury ludowej*, series *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne*, vol. XXXVI, Łódź 1997, p. 39.

affection, attachment, attitude, or local patriotism forms the foundation of a subjectivist concept of the region. Regardless of these findings, it is worth considering the nature of the regions inhabited by Jews living in the Diaspora.<sup>25</sup>

One of the oldest divisions is related to the distinction between Sephardic culture – Jews living in Islamic states – and Ashkenazi culture – Jews living in Christian countries. However, irrespective of this most general division, which can be given a macro-regional character (it is a proposal indicating the existence of something like cultural circles), differentiation emerged throughout history as a result of the inhabitation of territories belonging to specific state-political structures which, over time, in the realities of Europe, took on specific ethnic faces. Hence, “dialects of prayer” and differences in pronunciation, as well as stereotypes about the characteristics of Jews living in each country. “In these numerous Jewish subgroups there are different liturgies and customs, as well as diverse attitudes towards non-Jewish culture, Kabbalah, and folk superstitions.”<sup>26</sup>

Much has been written about the specificity of the Jewish community living in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was believed to result from the conditions encountered by the Jews arriving in the area, the evolving legislation, and the cultural character of the dominant ethnos. In this context, the area of pre-partition Poland can be regarded as a region within the European Diaspora that was fundamentally different from others. Heiko Haumann, author of *A History of East European Jews*, outlines the specifics of the conditions that prevailed on the Vistula: “From the moment the first privileges were granted, the Jews had the right to regulate internal disputes according to their own rules, as well as to form their own self-government, which by the sixteenth century had developed to such an extent that it was in vain to try to find a similar one in all Europe.”<sup>27</sup> The rapid development of settlements led to the expansion of Jewish self-government, reaching a form unprecedented in other countries. The communities were governed by collegial bodies, or *qahals*. They were responsible for organising education, supervising the cemetery, the bathhouse, and the ritual slaughtering of meat; they also performed charitable functions and administered a hospital. The *qahal* determined the amount of communal tax per household. Among other measures to streamline the tax system, King Sigismund II Augustus ordered the establishment of four Jewish districts, which were to elect the elders of the

25 Interesting in this context is the article by O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, “Zróżnicowanie regionalne Żydów polskich,” [in:] *Kultury regionalne i pogranicza kulturowe a świadomość etniczna*, ed. I. Bukowska-Floreńska, series *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, vol. 2, Katowice 1999, pp. 353–361. The author’s ideas tend towards objectivist concepts of the region.

26 A. Unterman, op. cit., p. 257.

27 H. Haumann, op. cit., p. 33.



land, tax assessors, and tax collectors at conventions. In 1581, at a convention in Lublin, a central representation of the Jews of the Crown and Lithuania called the Council of Four Lands (*Va'ad Arba' Aratzot*) was constituted, responsible for the efficient collection of poll tax for the Jewish population.<sup>28</sup> In time, a separate Sejm of Lithuanian Jews was established.<sup>29</sup>

Interpreting this unprecedented phenomenon, it is worth paying attention to the mechanism of regionalisation in the functioning of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland. The *Va'ad* covered four lands (provinces): Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, Red Ruthenia, and Volhynia. From the perspective of royal power, the *Va'ad* improved the fiscal mechanism. However, for the Jewish community, it served an important additional function. In its forum, problems of trade cooperation between towns were discussed and decided upon above all. Taras Wozniak compares the *Va'ad* to the Hanseatic League. Its subjects were the *qahals*, analogous to the local communities, which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. They had their own laws and institutions of judicial, religious, educational, and social power. The only common ground between them was activity within the Jewish tradition.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it was a kind of a federation, though perhaps the comparison proposed by the aforementioned author is somewhat exaggerated. The autonomous unit was, apart from a few large urban centres of the time, primarily a *shtetl*.

The upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century left a clear mark on the identity and culture of the Jews in this part of Europe. The *Va'ad* gradually lost its importance. However, it was not until the partition of the Commonwealth that barriers were erected between the various *qahals*. "Over time, different political cultures are formed on different sides of the new borders, giving rise to new Jewish communities with distinct cultural traditions."<sup>31</sup> This process was accompanied by varying policies of the Enlightenment absolute monarchies, each seeking forced secularisation and assimilation, albeit in its own manner. Thus, it can be said that the world of Eastern European Jewry (despite its obvious isolation from the local cultures of the ethnically distinct population) was internally regionalised, and this regionalisation was linked to the historical, political, and cultural processes affecting all inhabitants of the respective states. In Poland, this regionalisation was further stimulated by certain formal and legal solutions (a kind of federation of communities within the *Va'ad*), and after the loss of independence, regional differences were exacerbated by the borders of the partitions.

28 Ibid., p. 34.

29 M. Fuks, Z. Hoffman, M. Horn, J. Tomaszewski, op. cit., p. 15.

30 T. Wozniak, "Historyczny fenomen żydowskiego sztetlu," *Kurier Galicyjski* 2017, no. 8, p. 18.

31 Ibid., p. 19.

But let us delve deeper into considering the regionalisation of diaspora life. Such a perspective will allow to take into account the individual experiences. Despite the high mobility characterising the Jews, particularly in comparison with the numerically dominant peasants, the functioning of the diasporic community was subject to the mechanisms of region formation, especially in pre-industrial conditions. According to classical approaches, the centre of gravity played a decisive role in this case as a point of trade, information exchange, and cultural diffusion. As Jerzy Damrosz emphasises, “regional borders are basically a secondary phenomenon,” while the formation of regions “is not a phenomenon directly resulting from some collective will and desires of the local population.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, we have a centre of gravity, which could be any *shtetl*/town. Due to its market, administrative, and religious features, it performed region-forming functions, somewhat independently of the will of the inhabitants, according to Damrosz’s concept cited above. The so-called sociogravitational processes are decisive here. This mechanism is succinctly described by a researcher of the Jewish presence in Sieradz before the Second World War. Although one may have doubts about recognising Sieradz as a classic *shtetl*, it is worth quoting this passage: “Rural Jews from the surrounding villages, itinerant Jewish traders, and Sieradz Jews all met in the market square during fairs, markets, and visits to the town to run their daily errands. The Sieradz market was a centre for the exchange of goods, but also for the exchange of experiences and opinions, enabling contact between Jewish communities from the town and from the countryside.”<sup>33</sup> These circumstances allow to consider the *shtetl*, with its commercial functions and *qahal* institutions, as the centre of the Jewish micro-region. Consequently: “Jews are united by a number of closely related religious practices and customs of daily life, a common historical heritage, and a deeply ingrained sense of collective identity and solidarity. Nevertheless, Jewish communities are pluralistic conglomerates, not only displaying distinctiveness in relation to other communities but also divided internally into divergent subgroups.”<sup>34</sup>

In Jewish neighbourhoods and towns, the centre of socio-religious life was the synagogue, which served not only as a place of prayer but also as a hall for *qahal* meetings. Typically, in the vicinity of the synagogue, there were facilities such as a school, a hospital, a bathhouse, and a *mikvah*.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Polish Jews, we can speak of the “spirit of the bell tower”. Although this metaphor originated in the

32 J. Damrosz, *Region i regionalizm (studium interdyscyplinarne)*, Warsaw 1987, p. 45.

33 M. Haraszkiewicz-Niewczas, “Przestrzeń i miejsca obecności Żydów w Sieradzu w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2007, vol. XII, p. 28.

34 A. Unterman, op. cit., p. 255.

35 M. Fuks, Z. Hoffman, M. Horn, J. Tomaszewski, op. cit., p. 29.

Christian Western culture (*l'esprit du clocher*) and may seem initially mismatched with Jewish cultural realities, it can be aptly replaced by the term "spirit of the synagogue" or "spirit of the *shtetl*", representing a specific emanation of a little homeland within the Jewish community.<sup>36</sup>

Another distinct "type" of the Jewish region was the area of traditional economic activity. The role of intermediaries between the village and the town, or more precisely between the nobility, the peasantry, and the bourgeoisie, marked not only the socio-economic existence of the Jewish population but also the geographical space, forming a functional region of its own. It could be said to have been delineated by a cluster of villages, a few manors, and the local urban centre.<sup>37</sup> This applied to both the wealthier Jews – leaseholders, administrators, lenders remaining in close symbiosis with the gentry – and to small pedlars attempting to fill the smallest gaps in the local market. The literary figure of the Jew Szymzel depicted by Maria Dąbrowska in her novel *Nights and Days* may serve as a good example. His paths did not lead into the unknown. He regularly returned to the same places, so he wandered, traversing familiar roads. The notes of a Jewish peasant/*lichernik* ("*licherniks*" being the term for Jews in the Vilnius Region who bought second-hand goods in the surrounding villages) demonstrate that during three days in February 1936, he visited fifteen villages and hamlets in two districts.<sup>38</sup> For the other most numerous representatives of small crafts – tailors, shoemakers, glassblowers, tinsmiths, hatmakers as well as messengers and porters – such a microcosm was the *shtetl*.

In these two configurations, a symbolic triangle delineated by the points of the village, the (landed) manor, and the town, and within the space of the *shtetl*, the Jewish region and regionalism can be found. If regionalism implies (as it can be interpreted) pride in one's place in the world, then Central European Jews, while consciously acknowledging their Judaism, also felt a deep affinity for the places they inhabited despite the accumulating adversities, and nowhere was this sentiment more apparent than within the realm of the *shtetl*. "Even if they were poor, as economic development brought diminishing returns from the exchange between town and countryside, even when they lived in overcrowded, cramped quarters, with little to wear and often suffering from hunger, they still took pride in their Jewish identity (...). It was no coincidence that particularly esteemed communities were bestowed with honorary titles, such as 'Jerusalem of Volhynia' – Berdyczów or 'Jerusalem of Galicia' – Rzeszów."<sup>39</sup>

---

36 Cf. A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warsaw 1996, pp. 57–58.

37 H. Haumann, op. cit., p. 41.

38 E. Polińska-Mackiewicz, "Żydzi a polska wieś," *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2002, vol. V, p. 148.

39 H. Haumann, op. cit., p. 70.

Vilnius itself was referred to as “Lithuanian Jerusalem.”<sup>40</sup> Pride and attachment to a place equally to, or more strongly than, a sense of powerlessness and lack of alternatives urged people to persevere in small communities akin to the fictional Kasrylevka portrayed in the novel *Tevye the Milkman* by Sholem Aleichem (the film *Anatevka*).

Evidence of awareness of regional distinctiveness, on the other hand, can be observed in internal prejudices. This was experienced, among others, by the *Litvaks*, that is, Jews undergoing Russification or those already Russified. They arrived fleeing pogroms on Russian territory and as a result of forced resettlements stemming from Tsarist laws between 1882 and 1891, which restricted the territory of Jewish settlement. This led to a further significant increase in the Jewish population in the lands of the former Commonwealth. The Jews who had lived in these areas for centuries regarded the *Litvaks* with disdain. This was because they usually spoke Russian (they often did not know Polish at all) and were well-versed in trade relations in the east, which gave them a distinct advantage in business dealings. The previously assimilated Jews from Congress Poland also viewed the *Litvaks* as conducive to Russification and compliant with the partitioning powers.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, the Jews of Galicia, with the emergence of the *Litvaks*, began to distance themselves from the Jews of Congress Poland in general. Given these circumstances, we can identify grounds to discuss interregional prejudices and the functioning of regions in intersubjectivist terms (a sense of distinctiveness in group consciousness).<sup>42</sup>

The 1978 Nobel Prize winner for literature, Isaac Bashevis Singer, who spent his youth in Biłgoraj, revisited the atmosphere of the Hasidic communities of eastern Poland in his later works. Particularly, an analysis of the Nobel laureate’s “geography of short stories”, often set in numerous *shtetls* of the Lublin region, allows for the delineation of a compact area with defined borders: to the east by Tyszowce, to the west by Kraśnik, to the north by Lublin, and to the south by Tarnogród. By portraying certain characteristics of the towns, including the topography of the area, Bashevis shows the world of the Jewish Diaspora firmly rooted in the region and co-creating it. The narrators of Bashevis’s stories depict the regional world of Jews in the Lublin region, distinctly separate from the *Litvak* world of the Jews from Lithuania and Belarus.<sup>43</sup>

The regionalisation of the Hasidic world presents a distinct consideration. Hasidism, one of the most significant and largest religious movements within Judaism, has evolved into “a cultural formation with an extremely wide impact, shaping

---

40 E. Polińska-Mackiewicz, op. cit., p. 147.

41 R. Wapiński, op. cit., p. 158.

42 J. Damrosz, *Ojczyzna...*, p. 243.

43 S.L. Wolitz, J. Sherman, “Isaac Bashevis Singer jako lubelski regionalista,” *Akcent* 2003, no. 3, pp. 26–27.

the system of values, ideas, beliefs, social practices, and interpersonal relations.”<sup>44</sup> This amalgamation of cultural elements exhibited regional characteristics owing to the influence of Hasidic dynasties and the courts of the *tzadikim*. As noted by Marcin Wodziński: “an analysis of the territories dominated by the various dynasties clearly shows that, despite border disputes, almost every dynasty also had an area of authority uncontested by competition, and the boundaries of these areas were quite clearly defined.”<sup>45</sup>

## Regionalists

Many representatives of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland have, over the centuries, demonstrated an activity that can be described, either implicitly or explicitly, as regionalist. There is also ample evidence of the strong attachment of Jews to their places of birth and residence. One can come across it in memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, literary works, and other forms of artistic expression. In this brief and selective approach, as in the case of the previously discussed issues, let us review the characters who, through their actions or attitudes, deserve to be called regionalists. This selection is intended solely to provide an idea of the main areas of their activity.

Jewish regionalists originated from diverse backgrounds, encompassing rabbinical and Zionist affiliations, indicating an openness within these circles to the issues at hand. However, they were mainly representatives of partially or largely assimilated and so-called progressive families. They pursued their passions primarily in the field of scientific research, notably in historical and ethnographic fields, as well as in fiction and broadly defined socio-cultural and organisational activities.

The Jewish community in the Polish lands was highly urbanised.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, Jewish regionalists/historians primarily documented the history of Jewish communities in specific urban centres. At the same time, they did not shy away from strictly regional approaches. A notable exemplar is the figure and the work of Majer Bałaban (1877–1942/3), a historian specialising in the history of Jews of Lviv, Kraków, and Lublin, historian of Jewish art in Galicia, professor of the University of Warsaw, and

44 M. Wodziński, *Chasydyzm. Atlas historyczny*, graphic design by W. Spallek, Kraków–Budapest–Syracus 2019, p. 9.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 75. The influence of the Hasidic courts can be determined by analysing the *kvitels* (pages with requests addressed to the *tzadikim*, which contained information about where the pilgrims came from) and the topography of the *shtiebel*s (Hasidic houses of prayer belonging to individual dynasties).

46 I. Nowakowska, “Fenomen żydowskiej mniejszości narodowej w okresie międzywojennym na przykładzie Polski w latach 1918–1939,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1989, no. 2, p. 49.

co-founder of the Institute of Jewish Studies (1928).<sup>47</sup> Bałaban was first and foremost a Lvivianist: he wrote about the Jewish quarter in this city, Jewish institutions operating in it, and the Jews who were of merit for its history. The designation of M. Bałaban as a regionalist gains further validation through the sentimental element accompanying his work, a sentiment he openly acknowledged. Reflecting on his father, a diarist with a profound passion for history, Bałaban remarked, “thanks to him I fell in love with my hometown, every street, every house, and every stone.”<sup>48</sup>

The endeavours of the Łódź-born editor and industrialist, Abram Tenenbaum (1883–1970), serve as an illustration that Zionist activity need not preclude a regionalist perspective towards one’s place of origin. Prior to his emigration to Palestine in 1923, Tenenbaum published works devoted to Łódź and Łódź Jews, and established a textile factory on land he had purchased in Jaffa (now the centre of Tel Aviv), which he called “Lodzija.”<sup>49</sup> It would be difficult to find clearer proof of the bond of a follower of the Zionist idea with his little homeland left in the heart of Europe. In contrast, Moses Schorr (1874–1941), who came from a family deeply rooted in religious traditions, was a rabbi. This researcher/regionalist published, among others, the award-winning work *Żydzi w Przemysłu do końca XVIII wieku*, the first edition of which came out in 1903.<sup>50</sup>

The Jews were a nation of books. The ability to read – essential for religious life – was possessed by almost all men. Until the late eighteenth century, Hebrew writing predominantly comprised Talmudic literature. Secular concerns found expression in the currents associated with the *Haskalah*. This is where regional themes emerge. Writers, sometimes through a distorting lens, depicted the realities of *shtetls*, particularly those in Galicia. These motifs are present, for example, in the works of Yitzhak Erter (1794–1851), Nathan Samuely (1846–1921), and the Hebrew novella precursor, Mordechai Dawid Brandstädter (1844–1928). This literature thus fulfilled the criteria of being regional, both in terms of the authors’ places of creation and its setting in the realities of the region. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the era of Yiddish (Jewish) literature began. In this wave, works with pronounced regional themes developed even more intensively. They are present in the creations of distinguished

47 H. Węgrzynek, “Bałaban Majer,” [in:] *Żydzi polscy. Historie niezwykle*, ed. M. Prokopowicz, Warsaw 2010, pp. 20–22.

48 M. Bałaban, “Praca mojego życia,” [in:] *Księga jubileuszowa dla uczczenia sześćdziesięciolecie profesora Majera Bałabana. (Cz. I Akademia)*, Warsaw 1938, p. 37. As cited in: M. Horn, “Majer Bałaban – wybitny historyk Żydów polskich i pedagog 1877–1942. (W czterdziestolecie śmierci),” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1982, no. 3–4, p. 4.

49 M. Szukalak, *Słownik biograficzny Żydów łódzkich oraz z Łodzią związanych*, series II, vol. 3, Łódź 2012, pp. 110–111.

50 H. Węgrzynek, “Schorr Mojżesz,” [in:] *Żydzi polscy. Historie niezwykle*, ed. M. Prokopowicz, Warsaw 2010, pp. 291–293.

artists such as Icchok Leib Peretz (1851–1915) and Szalomo Asza (1880–1957). The former became known as an author exceptionally attached to the areas from which he originated (Zamość region). He drew inspiration from Jewish and Polish legends and local customs, and left works in which fantasy mixed with realism, giving them a neo-romantic character. Conversely, Ash's modern and original works were influenced, to some extent, by Stanisław Witkiewicz, Stefan Żeromski, and Władysław Orkan, who were closely associated with Polish regionalism.<sup>51</sup>

If folklore studies are considered the pathway to regionalism, it is noteworthy that collectors and documenters of Jewish folklore were not lacking in this domain. It is impossible to omit the figure of Regina Lilientalowa (1877–1924), who, under the influence of Ludwik Krzywicki, took an interest in Polish and then Jewish folklore. Engaging in research within the realm of Jewish ethnography, she focused on rituals and beliefs, publishing in *Wisła* and *Lud*. Lilientalowa's most important works include the five-volume synthesis *Święta żydowskie w przeszłości i terażniejszości* (Jewish Festivals in the Past and Present), three parts of which were published as part of the treatises of the Academy of Learning.<sup>52</sup>

Among the early scholars delving into the ethnography of Polish Jews was Benjamin Wolf Segel (1866–1931), raised in a traditional family with a primary focus on religious education.<sup>53</sup> His work "Materiały do etnografii Żydów wschodniogalicyskich" (Materials for the Ethnography of the Jews of Eastern Galicia), published in *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej*, attests to the fact that scholars in the ethnography of the Jewish people originating from this background approached the issues district-wise, based on regionalisation within the national dimension, and on the assumption that it had an effect on the differentiation also within Jewish culture.

An important institution initiating folklore and folk studies was the Jewish Scientific Institute in Vilnius (JIWO/YIVO). Numerous amateur ethnographers and collectors of local curiosities collaborated with it, documenting cultural differences between the various centres of the diaspora.<sup>54</sup>

Jakub Hoffman (1896–1964), a figure whose activities and experiences could fill several biographies, is acknowledged in the literature as a regionalist. In the Second

51 M. Fuks, Z. Hoffman, M. Horn, J. Tomaszewski, op. cit., p. 53.

52 H. Bar-Itzhak, *Pioneers of Jewish ethnography and folkloristics in Eastern Europe*, Ljubljana 2010, pp. 158–160.

53 O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "Benjamin (Binjamin) Wolf Segel," [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 1, eds. E. Fryś-Pietraszkowa, A. Kowalska-Lewicka, A. Spiss, Kraków 2002, p. 265.

54 M. Tuszewicki, "Badania nad etnografią Żydów aszkenazyjskich i ich znaczenie dla historiografii," [in:] *Żydzi polscy w oczach historyków. Tom dedykowany pamięci Profesora Józefa A. Gierowskiego*, eds. A. Kaźmierczyk, A. Maślak-Maciejewska, Cracow 2018, pp. 87–88.

Polish Republic, Hoffman, a veteran of the Legions during the First World War, became known as an energetic teacher, researcher, and cultural manager associated with Volhynia. He devoted himself to this region as an amateur ethnographer and collector, without, however, concentrating on Jewish folklore. He had an impressive collection of embroideries and Easter eggs from this area, which testifies to his subjective treatment of regional culture in its multi-ethnic aspect. He passionately devoted himself to popularisation and journalistic work as the initiator and editor of *Rocznik Wołyński*, published by the Volhynia Board of the Regional Union of Polish Teachers of Elementary Schools, then the Polish Teachers' Union. In this capacity, he also published the outcomes of his studies. Hoffman often provided commentary on the organisation, tasks, and functions of regional museology.<sup>55</sup>

Maximilian (Mordechai) Goldstein (1880–1942) can be considered a Galician regionalist. This prominent collector and bibliophile addressed a meeting of the Jewish community of Lviv in 1910 with a proposal to create a collection of Galician Judaica. Despite encountering a lack of understanding for his initiative, Goldstein embarked on an extensive campaign to promote the collection of artefacts, with the ultimate goal of establishing a Jewish museum in Lviv. His appeals targeted not only Galician historians but also the Jewish youth. He willingly made his own collections available in his flat and lent them to various exhibitions.<sup>56</sup>

Abraham Samuel Herszberg [Abram Szmul] (1856–1943), associated with Białystok, was a journalist and amateur historian who published in Hebrew and Yiddish, described as a journalist/regional expert. He authored articles on the history of Białystok, including the history of the city's industry, and a chronicle of the local Jews published in the United States after the Second World War as *Pinkos Białystok*.<sup>57</sup>

Dora Kacnelson (1921–2003), born in Białystok, repeatedly learned the bitterness of the Polish-Jewish fate. She was a literary scholar, Slavist, and outstanding researcher focusing on the reception of Mickiewicz's works, who "made being a Polish-Jewish woman an existential axiom."<sup>58</sup> After the Second World War, fate led her to various places. She lived and worked as a researcher in the Soviet Union, delving

---

55 A. Milewska-Młynik, *Jakub Hoffman*, [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 4, eds. A. Spiss, J. Świąch, Wrocław 2014, pp. 53–57.

56 O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "Maksymilian (Mordechai) Goldstein," [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 3, eds. A. Spiss, Z. Szromba-Rysowa, Wrocław – Kraków 2010, pp. 97–100.

57 Z. Romaniuk, "Abraham Samuel Herszberg [Abram Szmul]," [in:] *Słownik biograficzny białostocko-tomżyński*, vol. 1, ed. A. Dobroński, Białystok 2002, p. 60.

58 J. Ławski, "Dora Kacnelson. Ta, która 'zgađa przyszłe wieki,'" [in:] *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski. Seria II. W blasku i cieniu historii*, eds. J. Ławski, B. Olech, series *Colloquia Orientalia Białostocensia. Literatura/Historia*, vol. VII, Białystok 2014, p. 66.



into the archives of Vilnius, Polotsk, Lviv, and Drohobych. Her region was the Borderlands, which she loved both as her little homeland and as the cradle of Romanticism. Towards the end of her busy life, despite having lived in various places – from the remote Chita in Siberia to Berlin (where she died) – she expressed a desire to reside in Białystok, with which she was closely associated.<sup>59</sup>

The above is just a sketch for a collective portrait of regionalists with Jewish roots. The primary objective of the author was to underscore the diversity of passions and pursuits within this group. It should be once again emphasised that its representatives came from varied backgrounds. Biographers of Jewish scholars who can be described as regionalists accentuate their often traditional upbringing and origins. Many held rabbinical degrees, such as Bałaban, while some joined the ranks of Zionists, such as the esteemed historian/Varsavianist Emanuel Ringelblum.<sup>60</sup>

### Hometown associations and *pinkasim*

The fodder for regionalism is certainly memory and nostalgia. These, coupled with curiosity and the need for affiliation, are the main sources of regionalist attitude and commitment. It is fitting, therefore, to correlate certain activities of Jewish communities situated distant from their “old homeland” – both those in Israel and in many other countries – with regionalism.

From the late nineteenth century to the 1970s–80s, in places where Jews emigrated from Poland, hometown associations known as *landsmanschafts* in Yiddish served as unifying entities for individuals originating from a common locality and gained considerable popularity. The emergence of such organisations suggests a robust development of local identities among members of the Jewish Diaspora in Poland, and in many individual cases they even superseded the sense of belonging to a broader ethnic community. According to Wojciech Konończuk, the primary objective of these hometown associations was not only mutual assistance but also the preservation of identity in new environments.<sup>61</sup> One may ask about the nature of this identity. As a rule, there were clusters, often very numerous, of Jews in areas witnessing

---

59 Idem, “Żydzi Wschodniej Polski: w blasku i cieniu historii,” [in:] *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski...*, op. cit., p. 16.

60 P. Fijałkowski, “Emanuel Ringelblum jako badacz historii warszawskich Żydów,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2015, nr 4, pp. 599–611; Idem, “Polsko-żydowska topografia Warszawy. Z pism varsavianistycznych Ringelbluma,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2015, no. 4, pp. 659–660.

61 W. Konończuk, “Ziomkostwa Żydów polskich w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Studium przypadku landsmanschaftów Bielska Podlaskiego i Orli (1888-1993),” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2019, no. 1, p. 169.

influxes of settlers from Poland. Usually, there was no deliberate or organised effort to erode Jewish identity among the newcomers. Consequently, it can be inferred that the *raison d'être* of these hometown associations was the cultivation of local (regional) identity. The question of assistance, viewed as a matter of a technical and organisational nature, could have been addressed in a different way, without attaching a specific locality's signature from the abandoned country. It can be argued, moreover, that the principles of self-help and charity as such also bore a regional characteristic, for they were perfectly implemented in the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe and even became defining features of these communities.<sup>62</sup>

*Landsmannschaften* provided significant assistance to the compatriots who remained in Europe after the First World War, notably in combating poverty and fortifying Jewish education. However, a notable shift in the objectives and activities of hometown associations occurred after 1945. The support for European communities dwindled, given that a considerable majority of these communities had ceased to exist. Consequently, the focus of these organisations redirected towards two main avenues: providing support to those opting to emigrate to Israel and intensifying the publication of memorial books.<sup>63</sup>

Memory, an integral element of the regionalist attitude, has held a distinctive position in Jewish culture throughout history. The Second World War, specifically the Holocaust, unveiled an additional and distinct dimension of memory. Beyond recalling the Holy Land, the Holy Scriptures, and the history of the chosen people before and after the exile from Israel, the memory of the little and larger homelands of Eastern European Jews assumed particular significance. Therefore, although the context of the Holocaust is fundamental and must not be diminished, the memory and the activities associated with it acquired a regional significance. This manifested notably through the proliferation of memory books, known as *pinkasim*. "The modern memory book, *Pinkas zikaron* in Hebrew, *yizker-bukh* in Yiddish, aims to document the world before the Holocaust, extending the existence of the Jewish towns in Eastern Europe, the so-called *shtetls*, and to immortalise those who lived there.<sup>64</sup> *Pinkasim* refer to a specific place, typically a town, with its name featured prominently in the publication's title. One can speak of a defined model of a memory book. The contents of such a publication consist mainly of: a historical overview of the Jewish community, tracing its history from its establishment; a series of commemorative articles covering the inter-war period; materials detailing

62 Ibid., p. 172.

63 Ibid., p. 187.

64 O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, "Księga pamięci ('memorbuecher') a mit żydowskiego miasteczka," *Etnografia Polska* 1991, vol. XXXV, p. 187.

Jewish institutions and organisations of various kinds; and an account of the Holocaust during the Second World War.<sup>65</sup>

*Pinkasim*, however, do not conform to the criteria of a town monograph, as they are seldom produced by professional historians. According to Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, *pinkasim* should primarily engage cultural anthropologists, as they reveal two interrelated phenomena: the process of mythologising the past and the inadvertent creation of the myth of the Jewish town.<sup>66</sup> Several factors contributed to these mechanisms. The first was the nostalgic approach to the reality described. The memoirs were authored by individuals who had survived the hecatomb of the Holocaust, which made it difficult to view the past in a critical way. In line with the anthropological concept of a little homeland, these authors saw not so much the town and the community as themselves in that place and time. The community was safe, the families were complete, and the order that prevailed at the time was assessed from the perspective of the chaos that followed. In this context, the authors presented their personal world as then happy and fulfilled, and the social system as ideal. The second factor contributing to mythologisation as a phenomenon characteristic of memorial books was the ideological stance of the regional communities publishing them. Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz makes a detailed analysis of the content of these books from this angle. The Zionists, who publish the books mainly in Israel, emphasise the superiority of their theories (which, in a sense, proved right in the face of the Holocaust). Conversely, the *pinkasim* published by Bund circles in the Diaspora highlight the cultural and educational activities of their organisations. The Hasidic world, which shows no particular interest in the past or the life of the Diaspora communities, “does not have its own ambassador among the publishers of the memory books.”<sup>67</sup> Finally, there is a tendency to accentuate in the memory books the merits of the families financially supporting these publications. All these circumstances inevitably lead to the distorted proportions in issue coverage in the *pinkasim*, with certain themes being underrepresented or omitted. However, this does not change the fact that the memory books were created for nostalgic and chronicling reasons, and therefore connected to the sense of local identity of the survivors, both their authors and former Jewish inhabitants of the communities/towns. The sentimental value that the memory books hold for them has a regionalistic dimension, although this context may become somewhat obscured when viewed against the backdrop of the overarching theme – the Holocaust and the related tragedies rooted in individual and collective memory.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 190–191.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

## Conclusions

The socio-cultural contexts presented herein, influencing the formation of regionalist attitudes and activities within this milieu, constitute a mere cross-section of the myriad circumstances potentially impacting such phenomena. This is where the area opens up for more thorough research into the conditions shaped by Jewish religion, the extent of assimilation into Polish culture and society, intellectual trends, and various other unmentioned factors contributing to regionalist awareness and activity. Comprehensive studies are needed into the establishment of regionalist institutions by Jewish local communities, with a primary focus on the press and entities dedicated to historical and ethnographic research, the nature of relations with Polish activists and regionalist institutions such as museums and associations, and the presence of terms such as “region” and “regionalism” (synonymous or derivative) in Yiddish and Hebrew, along with regional themes in Jewish art. These are the basic issues worth elaborating on, while at the same time acknowledging the intricate nature of the research problem. *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* (The Jewish History Quarterly) has had a section entitled “From Regional History” for years. This means that the regionalist discourse is embedded in the study of the history of the Jewish Diaspora. This suggests the likelihood of discovering new regionalist figures, initiatives, and much compelling evidence that Jews have had their little homelands here for centuries.

Let the message of the reflections proposed here be one such piece of evidence. It is a description by Bruno Schulz, who defined his little homeland of Drohobych in a way that surpasses the endeavours of many theoreticians: “Where the map of the country takes on a distinctly southern hue, fawn from the sun, darkened and weathered by summer’s elements like a ripe pear, there it stretches like a cat basking in the sun, this chosen land, this peculiar province, this one and only town in the world. It is in vain to tell the profane about it! It is in vain to explain that this long undulating tongue of land, with which this country is breathing in the heat of summer, this scorching hot cape facing South, this branch slipped solitarily between the swarthy Hungarian vineyards, detaches this backwater from the collective landscape, which then goes alone down an untried path in an attempt to be a world in itself. This town and land have locked themselves into a self-sufficient microcosm, installed at their own risk at the very brink of eternity.”<sup>68</sup>

---

68 B. Schulz, *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, Wrocław 1989, p. 325.

## Bibliography

### Literature

- Bałaban M., "Praca mojego życia," [in:] *Księga jubileuszowa dla uczczenia sześćdziesięciolecia profesora Majera Bałabana. (Cz. I Akademia)*, Warsaw 1938.
- Bar-Itzhak H., *Pioneers of Jewish ethnography and folkloristics in Eastern Europe*, Ljubljana 2010.
- Brandys K., *Samson*, Warsaw 1960.
- Damrosz J., *Ojczyzna i jej regiony (region, regionalizm, edukacja lokalno-regionalna i etniczna)*, Płock–Warsaw 2007.
- Damrosz J., *Region i regionalizm (studium interdyscyplinarne)*, Warsaw 1987.
- Doktór J., "Miejsce schronienia czy zbawienia: Polska w mesjańskich wyobrażeniach Żydów I Rzeczypospolitej," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2014, no. 1.
- Fijałkowski P., "Emanuel Ringelblum jako badacz historii warszawskich Żydów," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2015, no. 4.
- Fijałkowski P., "Polsko-żydowska topografia Warszawy. Z pism varsavianistycznych Ringelbluma," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2015, no. 4.
- Fuks M., Hoffman Z., Horn M., Tomaszewski J., *Żydzi polscy. Dzieje i kultura*, Warsaw 1982.
- Gellner E., *Narody i nacjonalizm*, Warsaw 1991.
- Goldberg-Mulkiewicz O., "Benjamin (Binjamin) Wolf Segel," [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 1, eds. E. Fryś-Pietraszkowa, A. Kowalska-Lewicka, A. Spiss, Kraków 2002.
- Goldberg-Mulkiewicz O., "Księga pamięci ('memorbuecher') a mit żydowskiego miasteczka," *Etnografia Polska* 1991, vol. XXXV.
- Goldberg-Mulkiewicz O., "Maksymilian (Mordechaj) Goldstein," [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 3, eds. A. Spiss, Z. Szromba-Rysowa, Wrocław–Kraków 2010.
- Goldberg-Mulkiewicz O., "Stara ojczyzna – w nowej ojczyźnie. Pojęcie ojczystego miejsca w tradycji polskich Żydów," *Lud* 1998, vol. 82.
- Goldberg-Mulkiewicz O., "Zróżnicowanie regionalne Żydów polskich," [in:] *Kultury regionalne i pogranicza kulturowe a świadomość etniczna*, ed. I. Bukowska-Floreńska, series *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, vol. 2, Katowice 1999.
- Haraszkiewicz-Niewczas M., "Przestrzeń i miejsca obecności Żydów w Sieradzu w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej," *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2007, vol. XII.
- Haumann H., *Historia Żydów w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej*, Warsaw 2000.
- Horn M., "Majer Bałaban – wybitny historyk Żydów polskich i pedagog 1877-1942. (W czterdziestolecie śmierci)," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1982, no. 3–4.
- Keff B., *Strażnicy fatum. Literatura dekad powojennych o Zagładzie, Polakach, Żydach. Dyskurs publiczny wobec antysemityzmu*, Warsaw 2020.

- Kłoskowska A., *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warsaw 1996.
- Konończuk W., "Ziomkostwa Żydów polskich w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Studium przypadku landsmanszaftów Bielska Podlaskiego i Orli (1888-1993)," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2019, no. 1.
- Ławski J., "Dora Kacnelson. Ta, która 'zgađła przyszłe wieki,'" [in:] *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski. Seria II. W blasku i cieniu historii*, eds. J. Ławski, B. Olech, series *Colloquia Orientalia Białostocensia. Literatura/Historia*, vol. VII, Białystok 2014.
- Ławski J., "Żydzi Wschodniej Polski: w blasku i cieniu historii," [in:] *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski. Seria II. W blasku i cieniu historii*, eds. J. Ławski, B. Olech, series *Colloquia Orientalia Białostocensia. Literatura/Historia*, vol. VII, Białystok 2014.
- Mendelsohn E., *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, Warsaw 1992.
- Milewska-Młynik A., "Jakub Hoffman," [in:] *Etnografowie i ludoznawcy polscy. Sylwetki, szkice biograficzne*, vol. 4, eds. A. Spiss, J. Święch, Wrocław 2014.
- Nowakowska I., "Fenomen żydowskiej mniejszości narodowej w okresie międzywojennym na przykładzie Polski w latach 1918-1939," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* 1989, no. 2.
- Polińska-Mackiewicz E., "Żydzi a polska wieś," *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2002, vol. V.
- Posern-Zieliński A., "Akulturacja," [in:] *Słownik etnologiczny. Terminy ogólne*, ed. Z. Staszczak, Warsaw-Poznań 1987.
- Potocki A., *Słownik biograficzny Żydów z Podkarpackiego*, Rzeszów 2010.
- Romaniuk Z., "Abraham Samuel Herszberg [Abram Szmul]," [in:] *Słownik biograficzny białostocko-łomżyński*, vol. 1, ed. A. Dobroński, Białystok 2002.
- Schulz B., *Opowiadania. Wybór esejów i listów*, Wrocław 1989.
- Skorowski H., "Współczesne ujęcie regionalizmu," [in:] *Regionalizm. Idea - tradycje - perspektywy rozwoju w muzealnictwie*, ed. Z. Chlewiński, Płock 2007.
- Sowa K.Z., "Zmierzch i odrodzenie się lokalizmu w XX stuleciu. Uwagi o politycznych uwarunkowaniach procesów społeczno-gospodarczych," [in:] *Społeczności lokalne. Teraźniejszość i przyszłość*, eds. B. Jałowiecki, K. Z. Sowa, P. Dudkiewicz, Warsaw 1989.
- Szukałak M., *Słownik biograficzny Żydów łódzkich oraz z Łodzią związanych*, series II, vol. 3, Łódź 2012.
- Tuszewicki M., "Badania nad etnografią Żydów aszkenazyjskich i ich znaczenie dla historiografii," [in:] *Żydzi polscy w oczach historyków. Tom dedykowany pamięci Profesora Józefa A. Gierowskiego*, eds. A. Kaźmierczyk, A. Maślak-Maciejewska, Kraków 2018.
- Unterman A., *Żydzi. Wiara i życie*, Łódź 1989.
- Wapiński R., *Polska i małe ojczyzny Polaków. Z dziejów kształtowania się świadomości narodowej w XIX i XX wieku po wybuch II wojny światowej*, Wrocław-Warsaw-Kraków 1994.
- Wasilewski L., *Kwestya żydowska na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Lviv 1913.
- Węglarz S., *Tutejsi i inni. O etnograficznym zróżnicowaniu kultury ludowej*, series *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne*, vol. XXXVI, Łódź 1997.

- Węgrzynek H., "Bałaban Majer," [in:] *Żydzi polscy. Historie niezwykle*, ed. M. Prokopowicz, Warsaw 2010.
- Węgrzynek H., "Schorr Mojżesz," [in:] *Żydzi polscy. Historie niezwykle*, ed. M. Prokopowicz, Warsaw 2010.
- Wodziński M., *Chasydyzm. Atlas historyczny*, graphic design by W. Spallek, Kraków–Budapest–Syracus 2019.
- Wolitz S.L., Sherman J., "Isaac Bashevis Singer jako lubelski regionalista," *Akcent* 2003, no. 3.
- Wozniak T., "Historyczny fenomen żydowskiego sztetlu," *Kurier Galicyjski* 2017, no. 8.
- Żebrowski R., "Haskala," [in:] *Polski słownik judaistyczny. Dzieje, kultura, religia, ludzie*, vol. 1, eds. Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, Warsaw 2003.