The nature of Jewish identity in Croatian Lands during the long nineteenth century

This paper gives an internal Jewish perspective on the Jewish communities in Croatian lands. It focuses on the multitude of Jewish identities in the Habsburg Monarchy, later Austria-Hungary. The structure of this multinational empire enabled the Jews to maintain their Jewish identities. The Jews in Croatia were not a homogenous group. After 1867, the majority of Croatian Jews lived in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy and were Ashkenazim who usually belonged to some form of Reform/liberal Judaism, while Sephardic Jews lived in the Austrian part of the Monarchy. The paper analyzes the processes of integration and status mobility, language shifting, changing of family names, the issues of assimilation and responses to it, taking into consideration both the Neologist and the Orthodox communities, where Ashkenazim are concerned.

INTRODUCTION

When we are discussing the problem of the Jewish identity in the region of the Croatian lands in the long 19th Century (from the late 18th century until 1914), it is only possible to do so in the context of the history of the Jewish communities within the Habsburg Monarchy and Austria-Hungary.

With the Edict of Tolerance of Joseph II (1781 and 1783) the Jews throughout the territory of the Habsburg Monarchy were allowed to practice their religion, which brought about tolerance though not necessarily equality. The Edict of Tolerance allowed the Jews to settle permanently in Croatia and Slavonia for the first time after the expulsion of 1526. Most of these Jews came from Hungary. In 1787, the Jews had been compelled to adopt German surnames. Every Jewish community was required to keep their records in German.

A few years after the Edict of Tolerance, the first Jewish community in Croatia and Slavonia was founded in Varaždin. After that, the communities in Čakovec (1780), Zagreb (1806), and Požega
(1820) were founded. Until 1848, Jewish communities were founded in Karlovac, Osijek and Rijeka.

Until 1848 the activities of the Jewish communities were not legally regulated (except for the obligatory registration with the local authority) and they arose spontaneously, in order to enable the organization of worship, to help the poor, widows and orphans, to support religious schools and to secure a kosher butcher (shochet – šoḥet). During the Emperor Franz Joseph I, the Law of associations/organizations was introduced (1852), therefore these communities also had to have their rules approved.

In 1840 the Jews were allowed to practice a craft. Due to the great resistance of Christian craftsmen, the Jews were allowed to teach only Jewish apprentices, which helped further Jewish settlement. In the mid-19th century the dynasties of the rich Jewish merchants emerged, as was the case with the Serbs and Croats as well. The Jews with capital took part in profitable businesses; some owned factories, the others went into construction as the building of modern roads began. By the end of 1850 the exploitation of the forests was also a profit-making activity of the Jewish merchants and entrepreneurs. Even before 1848 Jewish doctors enjoyed a great reputation. Besides the richer stratum of the Jews, there were also numerous smaller retailers, craftsmen and innkeepers, as well as money-lenders who were lending money mostly to peasants. The Imperial patent of 1860 allowed the Jews to own property, and by the decision of the Croatian Parliament, the Jews became citizens with equal rights to others. The emancipation in terms of confession was introduced in Austria in 1890 and in Hungary by 1895.

1 Gradually they eliminated various provisions that were limiting family and economic life (regional approval of marriage, limited ability of testimony in court, the exclusion from certain trades, no settlement in the mining towns, and special provisions for certain kingdoms of the Empire). Mirjana Gross, Jews in the Habsburg Empire in the 19th century, in 200 years of Jews in Zagreb, Zagreb, 1988., Pp. 39. Otherwise, the civil equality in Austria and Hungary was proclaimed in 1867. (Austria December 21, Hungary December 28): since worship belonged to the area of Croatian autonomy, due to various reasons the proclamation of the law on equality only came about in 1873.
The Jewish population immigrated to the Croatian lands mostly from Hungary, with the exception of Dalmatia. In fact, Venetian Dalmatia, after the fall of the Venetian Republic and following the short period of French government, entered the Austrian part of the Empire. Unlike Croatia and Slavonia, there were very small Sephardic communities in Dalmatia and in the territory of the Republic of Dubrovnik throughout the early modern period. They were made up of refugees fleeing from the Iberian Peninsula after the 1492 expulsion. After the fall of the Venetian Republic and the Republic of Dubrovnik at the end of the 18th century, the wealthier families started leaving, mainly for Trieste, while mostly poorer Sephardic families from the territory of the Ottoman Empire and later from the occupied and annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina started arriving to the coastal cities. This movement also continued through the beginning of the 19th Century.

THE JEWISH ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE DISPUTE BETWEEN REFORM AND ORTHODOX JEWS

The emancipation of Jews in Central Europe, together with the debate regarding the Jewish question, was a lengthy process which lasted throughout the century. The modernization in Croatian lands began in the mid-19th century and the process of industrialization spread to the entire territory of the Monarchy only after the emancipation. This is an important detail which facilitated the considerable progress of Jewish communities throughout the monarchy, including the northern Croatian lands.

The Haskalah, or the Jewish Enlightenment, arrived to the Habsburg monarchy from the German confederation. In 1810 it had reached Galicia and during the 1830s it spread to Hungary. After Haskalah came Reform Judaism. With reforms, the tension between the reformists and the traditionalists within the Monarchy became inevitable (both the haredim and the Neo-orthodox).

The conflicts in the Monarchy worsened after 1848. At the general congress of the Hungarian Jews (1868/9) the central issue was the conflict between the Reformed and the Orthodox. Since
no agreement was possible, the Orthodox petitioned the Hungarian Parliament and were allowed to form special Orthodox communities. There were also communities which chose not to pick either of the two sides, and kept the status they had before the Congress.² The eventual split in the Hungarian Jewish communities influenced the Zagreb community and other Croatian and Slavonian communities.

After the immigration of Jews in Croatia and Slavonia, the Reformed or neologist group grew ever more numerous and stronger. The number of Orthodox Jews was reduced to only very small percentage of the total Jewish population.³ The exception was a number of immigrant Jews in Zagreb that came from the Eastern Europe (Galicia, Russia, Romania); in time they would function in the context of a separate Orthodox Jewish community.⁴

The first conflict within the Jewish community occurred in the context of the proliferation of the reform movement in Croatia and Slavonia. In 1840, a new rabbi was appointed in Zagreb and the reform of the liturgy started. The Orthodox Jews, settled on the territory of Kaptol, revolted and in the end the independent Orthodox community was founded. The position held by the Hungarian governor and the Croatian Government was that both the Jews in the area of

² According to the existing legislation in the German states, all the Jews had to be members of one Jewish community in a particular area (system Gemeinde). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the founder of modern neo-orthodoxy was initially opposed to the establishment of special communities, but changed his mind after the reform Synod in Brunswick (1844) and the attitudes which were expressed there by the radical reformers. Hirsch, in fact, saw the reformists as secessionist from Judaism. The Orthodox group wanted the community and the funds to be managed by the Rabbis, while the reformists wanted the secular organization of communities and schools. Although the Hungarian, and German Jews were divided into two hostile camps, the differences among Austrian Jews didn’t develop to such extent.

³ Even before the Law on Equality the Neologists outnumbered the orthodox group.

⁴ The Hungarian reform stream was called neologists and, following this concept, the orthodox Jews in Croatia and Slavonia were called starovjerci (old believers). Otherwise, except for the neologist and orthodox Jews, there was a small Hasidic enclave in Eastern Slavonia and the Srijem - the Satmar and Gur hasidim.
Kaptol and those in the free royal municipality\(^5\) were one indivisible body and that the community as a whole should be controlled by the Zagreb neologist rabbi, while the two groups had the right to exercise their own form of worship.

The government and parts of the Christian elite interfered in these conflicts. In an effort to maintain the economic unity of the Jewish community, the Supreme prefect of the Zagreb County imposed on the Orthodox a unique š\(\text{hita}\), thus interfering in purely religious matters. At the same time, both the Hungarian government and certain capitalist circles took the side of the Neologists as they were perceived as useful elements of modernization. The Catholic hierarchy took the side of the Orthodox group.

In 1906 the Croatian Parliament passed the *Law on the Organization of the Israelite religious municipalities in the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia*. This law required each Jew to be a formal member of one community and stated that there can only be one community in each city. Since there were differences in the ritual and in the liturgy among the members of the Zagreb Jewish community, the *Society of Old Believers - members of the Israelite religious community* was founded in Zagreb that same year.

**BETWEEN ASSIMILATION AND ZIONISM**

Jewish nationality was not recognized in the Habsburg Empire or the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Jews found themselves in the gap between the ruling Magyars and many other national minorities in Hungary. At the time of the Jewish settlement in Croatia, the Jews generally spoke German or Hungarian, languages of the dominant nations in the Monarchy.\(^6\)

---

\(^5\) Kaptol and Gradec merged in 1850 and became the city of Zagreb.

\(^6\) The founders of the community probably spoke their Yiddish dialect in the beginning, but it wasn't recognized as a language, but as a dialect in all parts of the Habsburg Monarchy (because Jews were not recognized as a nationality group). That is why we do not have the precise language statistics for the said period.
At the time when the Jews became full citizens of the Habsburg Empire, the national struggle of the individual peoples of the Monarchy was in full swing and each domestic national movement expected from the Jews to take the right side. During the revolutionary years of 1848 and 1849 the Croatian Jews mostly took the side of Ban Josip Jelačić, who supported the idea of civil rights for the Jews.  

An illustrative case of a Croatian Jew that not only got involved in a national movement but was one of its leader, is a story of Vid Haj Morpurgo in the 1860s the Austrian Dalmatia.  

Vid Haj Morpurgo, the Jew from Split, was a prominent representative of the National Party (Narodna stranka), one of the founders of the newspaper Narodni list, and the owner of the bookstore which served as a meeting place for the members of the Split People’s Party. In 1870 he was chosen to be the candidate of the National Party for the Dalmatian Parliament. He significantly contributed to the victory of the National Party in the 1882 local elections in Split. After the victory he was appointed municipal president and became the president of the Trade and Industrial Chamber.

Linguistic assimilation amongst the Jews began in the mid-19th Century. Until then the Jews usually spoke the languages of the areas from which they came (mostly German, and in the second half of the 19th century, more and more Hungarian). Linguistically, Jews assimilated relatively fast thanks to the fact that most children attended public schools. Croatian as a

---

7 Ivo Goldstein, *The Jews of Zagreb*, pp. 15. A large number of Jews in the revolution is recorded on the Austrian and on the Hungarian side. This shows the degree of assimilation, acculturation, or at least, the identification of the Jews with the general political trends.

8 He was a prominent merchant, publisher, banker and industrialist: founder of the First People’s Dalmatian Bank (1869), the industry of alcoholic beverages, Split cement and other branches of industry as well as the first lending Library in Split.

9 *Il Nazionale – Narodni list (National Gazette)* was newspaper of the National Party, which was published in Zadar starting with 1862.
language of teaching was introduced in the Zagreb Jewish school in 1865. In 1880, 55.6 percent of Croatian Jews listed German as their mother tongue, 30.3 percent listed Croatian and 11.7 percent listed Hungarian; at the turn of the century, 42 percent of Jews listed German as their mother tongue, 35 percent listed Croatian and 21 percent listed Hungarian. The assimilation was significantly faster in the city of Zagreb (in 1900 54.1 percent of Jews in Zagreb listed Croatian as their mother tongue).

A similar process happened with the name changes. At first, the Jews mainly had traditional Jewish-Hebrew, or traditional German names. Already in the middle of the 19th century they often gave their children Croatian names.

The Jewish elite lived in larger cities (Zagreb, Varaždin, Rijeka and Osijek). They were regarded as the wealthier and more productive citizens who contributed the large number of intelligentsia, while the majority of the Jewish population who lived in small towns belonged to the lower middle class, and even some form of the proletariat. Since the 1880s, the number of Jews in liberal professions constantly grew.

In 1846 the Jewish humanitarian society (Israelitischer Humanitätsverein) was founded in Zagreb and it was the first humanitarian organization in Zagreb. The founders were the members of the Epstein family, who wanted to build bridges to other peoples and religions. In time, this society evolved into the association of Jews and Christians – Zagrebačko družtvo čověčnosti, (Zagreb Humanitarian Society), which included many respectable citizens and was dismantled only in 1946.

---

10 In addition, almost half of all the Jewish children in Croatia and Slavonia usually finished at least 4 classes of a secondary school and the percentage of literate Jews in Varaždin reached 90.3 percent. (Mirjana Gross, Jews in the Habsburg in the 19th century, in 200 years of Jews in Zagreb, pp. 41.)

11 Ivo Goldstein, The Jews of Zagreb, p.17

12 Ivo Goldstein, The Jews of Zagreb, p.17

At the same time, beginning in the 1860s and especially during the 1870s with the appearance of Antisemitism, national Judaism also appeared in various forms, from Territorialism to Zionism. Zionism evolved as a delayed national movement in Central and Eastern Europe, but also as a reaction to the failures of emancipation and the rise of anti-Semitism, among whose results were the pogrom in the Russian Empire in 1881, and the Dreyfuss affair in France.

In Croatia and Slavonia, Zionism found its supporters in the mostly limited circles of the university youth, intellectuals, and the minority of Orthodox Jews. In 1898, the Jewish student society Literarni sastanci židovske omladine, cionističke orijentacije, (Literary meetings of the Jewish Youth of Zionist orientation) was founded, and in 1904 the first Zionist conference of college and university students of the southern Slavic nations took place in Brod na Savi (Slavonski Brod). In 1906 the local organization of the Jewish National Fund, Keren Kajemem Le Israel was founded in Osijek, and three years later, in 1909, the National Association of the Zionists of the southern Slavic countries of Austria-Hungary was founded, also in Osijek. In 1906, the Jews of the Zionist orientation started the first Jewish newspaper in the Croatian language, Židovska smotra which was published until 1914.

---

14 In Austria-Hungary, in the period between 1867 and 1914 there were 12 processes for ritual murders (Mirjana Gross, Jews in the Habsburg in the 19th Century in 200 years of Jews in Zagreb, p. 50)

15 In Austria-Hungary we also come across it in the form of religion, the ideology of social-Catholic parties, and in the pangermanic (and other) nationalisms. Jews in dual monarchy react differently to this trend: in some places associations were founded to combat anti-Semitism, others called for a complete integration (assimilation) in the majority nation, while some see the rise of anti-Semitism as a reaction to the great wave of immigration of uncultured Eastern Jews.

16 Jewish review; In 1917 it was replaced by Židov (The Jew), also of Zionist orientation.
SEPHARDIC JEWS FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The period of Austrian administration in Dalmatia began with the development of steam navigation, the clustering of transport, trade and industry in large urban centers and with the institution of companies with large capital. Austria supported the development of Trieste as its main port; Hungary had the same policy toward Rijeka. Split and Dubrovnik became isolated and slowly fell into disrepair. As the most prosperous families of the Dalmatian Jews moved mainly to Trieste, the poorer families of Bosnian Sephardic Jews took their place; they were mostly small artisans and traders.\(^{17}\)

With the Austro-Hungarian occupation and the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ashkenazi Jews started to settle there. In addition to Dalmatia, the Sephardic Jews especially settled in Zagreb. The occupation and the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina brought new organization, administration, new trading rules, and a new official language, in addition to other cultural changes. All of this prompted Bosnian Jews to turn toward the Western countries and to educate their children in Austrian and Hungarian cities.

CONCLUSION

The Edict of Tolerance of Joseph II was guided by the idea of the necessity of the *improvement* of the Jews, or of turning the Jews into useful citizens; in addition to social and economic reforms it banished traditional Jewish self-government. The *Maskilim* functioned on a similar premise, the need for Jewish *self-improvement*, in order to become useful and acceptable members of society. Finally, Haskalah occurred in the areas where there had been no Jewish emancipation. Haskalah was followed by the Reform movement and the orthodox reaction to it. In Croatia and Slavonia reform/neologists prevailed, while Dalmatian communities were too small and in a distinct cultural context and did not experience these processes.

---

\(^{17}\) Besides them, the Ashkenazi Jews, mainly from Galicia, also moved to the coastal cities of Split and Dubrovnik.
In this very complex period the permanent settlement of Jews in Croatia and Slavonia began in earnest. Creation of a modern Jewish identity throughout the Monarchy, was complicated by the nationality conflicts.\textsuperscript{18} The Jews that settled Croatia and Slavonia at the time of settlement and throughout the 19th Century spoke German and Hungarian, which were perceived as the languages of the dominant nations in the Monarchy in that period.

However, after the settlement, the integration-assimilation concept prevailed. There were even Jewish members of Croatian national movement; the role model, but not the only example for this conception is Vid Haj Morpurgo from Austrian Dalmatia.

At the same time Jewish national movements appeared in the Monarchy and by end of 19th and especially in the 20th century, the Zionist ideology engaged mainly the middle class, the students and the intelligentsia, while the poorest classes remained apolitical in the beginning. Later, a large number of the lower classes became involved with the left-wing political movements, especially in the inter-war period.

\textsuperscript{18} This is the period of the national awakening in the Monarchy and to the east of Europe.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Židovi na tlu Jugoslavije, katalog izložbe, Zagreb 1988
Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, Novi Liber, Zagreb 2005
Melita Švob, Židovi u Hrvatskoj. *Migracije i promjene u židovskoj populaciji*, K. D.
200 godina Židova u Zagrebu, Zagreb 1988
Duško Kečkemet, Židovi u povijesti Splita, Židovska općina, Split 1971
Bernard Stulli, *Židovi u Dubrovniku*, Zagreb 1989