



VI
2007

Schwerpunkt / Special Issue:
Early Modern Culture
and Haskalah

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

François Guesnet

The Turkish Cavalry in Swarzędz, or:
Jewish Political Culture at the Borderlines of Modern History

It seems inappropriate to start an investigation about the relationship between changes in the political and military developments at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Jewish political culture with an anecdote about the encounter between a rather small-sized Jewish community in the province of Greater Poland, Swarzędz (Schwersenz would be the German name of that small town), and the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte in the year 1806. However, taking into account the many books, articles, memoirs, letters and legends that have been devoted to the complex relationship between Napoleon and the Jews, a forgotten but meaningful anecdote might serve as the ideal vantage point to reflect upon the shifts Jewish communities underwent after the end of the French monarchy, the Polish Commonwealth, and the Holy Roman Empire.

The task of the following is to explore how the bases of Jewish political agency changed in the course of the so-called *Sattelzeit*, roughly speaking the period between the 1780s and the 1830s, in the Jewish communities of France, Germany, and Poland. It will be argued that the advent of Napoleon introduced an urgent need to revise fundamental elements of Jewish political agency. One expression for this ubiquitous search for new strategies and forms of agency is the attempt of the Jewish notables of Swarzędz to symbolically integrate their community into the political project of the French emperor through a highly original ritual to greet the monarch. The encounter of the Jews of Swarzędz with Napoleon Bonaparte will be compared to similar innovative strategies of Jewish communities to define their place in a new political setting, beginning with the Jews in revolutionary Paris in 1789. It will be argued that this search for new role models led to a re-evaluation of more or less remote examples of Jewish political agency, which Jewish intellectuals discovered in non-Jewish contexts. Such a perspective takes into account processes of interaction between Jewish communities and their social and political environment.

The following anecdote took place in Greater Poland, in a small community not too far from the regional capital, Poznań. It seems of significance, as it can serve as an example for an interrelatedness that has long been overlooked, or at least underestimated, between Napoleon's early military suc-

cesses in Central Europe and the self-perception of Jewish communities in Europe.¹ Swarzędz, a relatively young town, which is located approximately 14 kilometers from Poznań, was founded by an aristocrat, Zygmunt Grudno Grudziński, in 1621. The founding privileges were exceptionally beneficial for the Jews as for the Protestants who were called upon to settle in the new location. The Jews who settled in Swarzędz originated from Poznań, and the new community depended on the regional capital. As the legend still in circulation in the nineteenth century narrated, these Jewish pioneers cleared the forests with their own hands in order to build the new town, and erected a synagogue in its center.² At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Swarzędz counted around four thousand inhabitants, with a clear majority of Jews. Napoleon came to the region in the aftermath of the downfall of the Holy Roman Empire, weeks after the Imperial Diet had been forced to agree to the dissolution of the Empire on August 6, 1806. The encounter of the Jews of Swarzędz with the French emperor has been described by a Polish aristocrat, August Wilkoński (1805–1852), and first been published in *Biblioteka Warszawska*, a Polish learned periodical, in 1841:

“It was in the fall of 1806 that the mayor of Swarzędz called upon the Jewish elders to explain what was the reason for the unusual commotion among the Jews that had been noticed by many. During the market, the rumour spread among the Christians that the Jews had rented the total amount of 120 horses from the nearby villages. They trooped up these horses close to their cemetery and adorned them with decorative harnesses. The curious villagers were pondering the Jews’ intentions, but the news that Napoleon, the French emperor, would personally inspect his troops stationed in the areas surrounding Swarzędz made the people forget about the so-called Jewish secret, and many people left for Zielieniec, the location of a water-mill on the route to Poznań, where the emperor was expected to pass by [...] Next to the stables of an inn, near a lake, an innumerable crowd of Jewish observers had assembled, and their gabbling, brawling and shouting was loud enough to compete with the noise of a distant artillery. [...] It was obvious by

- 1 Most of the academic studies devoted specifically to the relationship of Napoleon to the Jews and to his significance for the history of the Jewish communities in Europe refer to the convocation of the so-called Sanhedrin in 1806 and matters of emancipation, and none deals with the event discussed in the following: Robert Anchel, *Napoléon et les Juifs*, Paris 1928; Bernard Blumenkranz, *Le Grand Sanhédrin de Napoléon*, Toulouse 1979; Joseph Lémann, *Napoléon et les Juifs*, Paris 1989; Albert Lemoine, *Napoléon Ier et les Juifs*, Paris 1900; M. Liber, *Napoléon et les Juifs*, in: *Revue des Études Juives*, 71–72 (1920), 127–147; Lilly Marcou, *Napoléon face aux Juifs*, Paris 2006; Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin*, London 1979; see also the topical bibliography by Leigh Ann Whaley, *The Impact of Napoleon, 1800–1815*. An annotated bibliography, Lanham 1997. For more references, see below.
- 2 Adolf Warschauer, *Die Entstehung einer jüdischen Gemeinde*, in: *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 2 (1890), 170–181, here 173. In Warschauer’s interpretation, the privileges for the Jewish settlers were even more advantageous than for the Protestants, as they were completely free in choosing their leaders, whereas the Protestants had to have their list of candidates confirmed by the owner of the town.

that the Jewish secret was to give a nice surprise to Napoleon. At one o’clock in the afternoon, some rascal shouted from atop a roof: ‘Er kymt, er kymt!’ and on horseback of a splendid arab, the small caporal appeared. He was just inquiring of one of the generals in his entourage about the strategic location of Swarzędz, when a huge Turkish cavalry lunged out from behind the stable and obstructed the emperor’s passage. Huge turbans, enormous beards, red, yellow and green overcoats and coats (in Polish: *kurty, czamary, płaszcz*), the horses covered with blankets in many colours, cords and feathers, swords, some spears and standards gave this cavalry a particularly military and Asiatic outlook. Napoleon stopped his horse and asked his entourage about the meaning of this incident, but nobody had an explanation. At that moment, the head of the Turkish cavalry closed in on the emperor, and bringing his horse to a halt just a few steps from Napoleon, he took off his turban and explained: ‘Fürchten Sie nichts Kajserliche Majestät! wir sind keine Türken, wir sind Szwerzencer Juden!’ [Fear nothing, Your Imperial Highness! We are not Turks, we are Jews from Schwersenz!] Napoleon laughed out loud, and the brave Turks shouted three times: ‘Vivat, mighty emperor Napoleon, vivat!’, and disappeared.”³

How close is this anecdote to the actual events in the fall of 1806? At this point in our investigation, we do not have any independent confirmation of Wilkoński’s description. A shorter version was published by the popular historian Ezriel Natan Frenk in 1912. In this version, the young Jews of Swarzędz dressed themselves up in many colours, formed a cavalry regiment carrying flags, and thus succeeded to surprise the Emperor and his entourage. Among the local notables receiving the emperor were some older Jews, and one of them, who could speak a little bit of French, turned to Napoleon and said: “Don’t be afraid, great emperor, these are not soldiers but just Jews – unlucky like all Jews from Swarzędz.”⁴ Frenk emphasizes that it is not known if the story is true, whereas Wilkoński gives his anecdote a title that emphasizes the account’s supposed veracity: “Napoleon and the Little Jews of Swarzędz. A true story.” Wilkoński depicts the “żydki,” the “small” or “miserable” Jews with all the contempt that an average Polish noble of his time would feel for them – thus being true to his social rank. However, both sources quite clearly point to an episode that includes a huge number of local Jews disguising themselves as military unit in order to present themselves to Napoleon Bonaparte.

- 3 August Wilkoński, *Napoleon i żydki ze Swarzędza. Zdarzenie prawdziwe* [Napoleon and the Little Jews of Swarzędz. A true story], in: *Biblioteka Warszawska* 2 (1841), 526–528. It was edited and reprinted in the author’s collected writings as *Napoleon i Żydki Swarzędzkie* [Napoleon and the Swarzędz Jews], in: *Ramoty i ramotki Augusta Wilkońskiego* [Branches and Sprigs, by August Wilkoński], vol. 1, Poznań 1862, 57–59. Wilkoński, in his time a quite popular writer, renders the short address of the head of the “Turkish cavalry” to Napoleon in German in both versions. – Translation of the quotation by F.G.
- 4 Ezriel Natan Frenk, *Yehudei Polin bi-Ymei Milhamot Napolion. Le-Toledot ha-Yehudim be-Polin* [The Jews of Poland During the Napoleonic Wars. A Chapter of the History of the Jews in Poland], Varshe 1912, 3f.

On the level of ceremonial traditions, such a procedure was an absolute novelty. It represented not only a deviation, but a clear and very strong transgression against the traditional ritual. To greet a new ruler in military attire was something unheard of for a Jewish community. Moreover, it was not without risk, and one element in understanding the masquerade is the attempt to emphasize the non-threatening character of those on horseback. While making a statement of allegiance, it kept a door open to claim a purely carnivalesque intention. Such a claim could easily have been substantiated by pointing to the tradition of the Purim holiday. Nonetheless, the Jewish notables of Swarzędz urgently wanted to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the emperor, to make a statement in reference to this powerful monarch. Thus, they acted in order to distance the community from tradition, though not totally, and they tried to distinguish their community, though not unequivocally.

Not surprisingly, the community's protocol does not refer to the events in any way.⁵ In the unlikely case that a scribe would have noted the event, it almost certainly would have been erased after the final defeat of Napoleon for evident reasons. As condescending as Wilkoński is toward the Jews of Swarzędz, as unlikely it seems that his intention was to denigrate these or other Jews by reporting the event that struck his mind just as what it was indeed: more than one hundred Jews on horseback imitating a Turkish cavalry in order to greet the most powerful man of Europe. The other references to the incident are not as detailed as the account by Wilkoński or by Frenk.⁶ In the correspondence of Napoleon himself, we find several notes concerning the general enthusiasm with which he was greeted in Greater Poland in 1806, but no specific references to his passage through Swarzędz. Thus, he writes to the Maréchal Ney: "Mes troupes sont entrées en Pologne; elles ont été reçues à Posen avec un enthousiasme difficile à peindre," and the bulletin of the troops notes that in the provincial capital of Greater Poland, "les fenêtres [étaient] parées comme en un jour de fête" and that "les Polonais sont animés de la meilleure volonté. Ils forment des compagnies à pied et à cheval

5 Anna Michalowska, *Charity and the Charity Society (Khebra kadisha) in the Jewish Community of Swarzędz in the Eighteenth Century*, in: *Acta Polonica Historica* 87 (2003), 77–88, does not mention the event; neither does idem, *Pinkas kahał swarzędzkiego (1734–1830) [The Protocols of the Swarzędz Community Board, 1734–1830]*, Warszawa 2005.

6 Samuel Zanel Pipe, *Napoleon in Jewish Folklore*, in: *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences* 1 (1946), 294–304, here 296, reduces the encounter to five lines with Poseń taking the place of Swarzędz, whereas in the war diary by the Polish-Catholic priest Ksawery Zimiecki, *Dni nadziei i grozy. Fragment dziennika [Days of Hope and Threat. Fragments of a Diary]*, accessed through http://www.sierpc.com.pl/czytelnia/ziemiecki/dni_nadziei.html (official internet site of the community of Sierpc in the vicinity of Swarzędz, December 2006), the event is noted on February 2, 1945, and refers the anecdote to the fact of a personal encounter between Napoleon and the Jews of Swarzędz.

avec une grande activité."⁷ When the French troops entered Poznań on November 12, 1806, one of the commanders wrote to Napoleon: "Les Polonais nous reçoivent comme des libérateurs, il n'existe point d'armée ennemie pour comprimer leur sentiments. Aussi ils s'y livrent avec enthousiasme." This popular mood in favour of the entering French troops, thought to be the harbingers of a resurrected Polish Rzeczpospolita, may well have been one of the inspirations for the Jews of Swarzędz: "La révolution [against the Prussian administration] se répandait de ces centres avec une vitesse extraordinaire et elle embrassait les petites villes et les domaines des grands propriétaires."⁸ At least some of the Jews of Greater Poland shared the enthusiasm for Napoleon with their Polish neighbors, as well as with many Jews all over the continent, and in the United States of America, specifically during the period of the convocation of the Sanhedrin in Paris in 1806.

This period was marked by military triumphs in Central Europe, the introduction of the Code Civil that ensued, and the prospect of emancipation for the Jews in the territories of the former Holy Roman Empire under French control. The suspension of the Jewish emancipation in the eastern provinces of France by Napoleon in 1808, the so-called "décret infâme," was still to come.⁹ Moreover, the project to establish a state for the Jewish nation in Palestine, probably not much more than a strategic measure of propaganda during the campaign in Egypt and Palestine in 1799, fueled the minds of Jews all over the continent.¹⁰ The general mood in territories formerly belonging to the Polish commonwealth was tense after the victories over the partitioning powers Prussia and

7 Correspondence de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l'empereur Napoléon III, Paris 1854f., citations vol. 13, 499, 501, and 580.

8 Marcell Handelman, *Napoléon et la Pologne 1806–1807. D'après les documents des Archives Nationales et des Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, Paris 1909, 34–44, both citations 37.

9 Franz Kobler, *Napoleon and the Jews*, New York 1975, 17–22, stresses how for a certain period of time, Napoleon appeared as the "liberator of the Ghetto." Joseph J. Shulim, *Napoleon I. as the Jewish Messiah. Some Contemporary Conceptions in Virginia*, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 7 (1945), 275–280, has collected some evidence for Jewish perceptions of Napoleon as Messiah.

10 Pierre Dominique Constantini, *Bonaparte en Palestine, au Mont Carmel, siège d'Acre, la question d'Israël, l'Europe unie*, Paris 1967; Nathan Michael Gelber, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Zionismus. Judenstaatsprojekte in den Jahren 1695–1845*, Wien 1927, ch. 5; Philipp Guedalla, *Napoleon and Palestine*, London 1925, passim; Kobler, *Napoleon and the Jews*, 23–106; Aryeh Newman, *Napoleon and the Jews*, in: *European Judaism* 2 (1967), 25–32, especially 31, who is obviously wrong about the content of legends about Napoleon emanating from Eastern Europe; Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin*, 227; A.S. Yahuda, *Conception d'un État Juif par Napoléon*, in: *Évidences* 3 (1951), no. 19, 3–8; concerning the ramified reception of Napoleon's would-be project to recreate a Jewish state in Palestine, and the wide dissemination of it, see especially Henry Laurens, *Le projet d'état juif attribué à Bonaparte*, in: *Revue d'études palestiniennes* 33 (1989), 69–83.

Austria, as has been shown. The fact that Polish troops under Dąbrowski had participated in the campaign of Egypt doubtless strengthened the hopes of the Poles to see the French leader making significant decisions in favor of their nation.¹¹ It is this very specific combination of factors that inspired the Jews of Swarzędz to choose their attire: the campaign against the Ottoman Empire, the popular hopes placed in Napoleon to restore Poland,¹² more specifically the close connection between the French leader and the project of the Jew's emancipation, as well as the vision of a restoration of a Jewish state.¹³ It should be stressed that there is a difference between symbol and reality, between an innovative symbolic statement of allegiance and factual participation in military actions. Nevertheless, the greeting of Napoleon by the Jews of Swarzędz as Turkish cavalry is a perfect illustration for the hopes to acquire a new standing in the framework of the political project that constituted Napoleon's Europe. Within this framework, the masquerade expressed the willingness to go far beyond the traditional place of Jewish communities, it contained a promise to participate actively on behalf of this project. However, it should also be emphasized that the intention to create a direct contact to the highest authority available and to forge a significant bond represented the continuation of well-established patterns of Jewish political tradition under the conditions of exile, the "royal alliance."¹⁴

The Epistemic Significance of the Jews of Swarzędz as Turkish Cavalry

As a point of departure to understand the further epistemic significance of this anecdote, one has to recall both the symbolic and instrumental value of any ceremonial enactment of allegiance or loyalty between a sovereign and his or her subjects. As recent studies in the semiotics of ceremonies of political or any

- 11 Szymon Askenazy, *Napoleon a Polska*, Warszawa et al. 1918, 2 vols., here vol. 2, 210, 227; see also Frenk, *Yehudei Polin bi-Ymei Milhamot Napolion*, 6.
- 12 A panegyric published in Warsaw in 1807 expresses the hopes for the resurrection of Poland, referred to as *Sarmatia*: *Shirei Hod li-Khvod 'Adonenu ha-Kesar ha-'Adir we-ha-Hasid* [Song of Praise in Honor of Our Lord Righteous and Pious Emperor], Varshoj 1807, 5.
- 13 Iconographic references to the campaign in Egypt and Palestine are numerous, e.g., in contemporary caricatures favorable to or against Napoleon, documenting the popularity of this imagery, see e.g., Gisela Vetter-Liebenow, *Napoleon – Genie und Despot. Ideal und Kritik in der Kunst um 1800*, Hannover 2006, 25 and 75. Rostom Raza ("Roustan"), Napoleon's mameluk bodyguard from 1798 on, represented one more continuous iconographic reference to the campaign in Egypt, *ibid.*, 93, 113, 123.
- 14 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Diener von Königen und nicht Diener von Dienern. Einige Aspekte der politischen Geschichte der Juden*, Munich 1995, *passim*.

other meaning have shown, these dimensions are interconnected and of great significance. Thus, the ceremonies of inauguration of the Prussian kings reflect shifting functions for the various participating groups over the nineteenth century, with a growing role of the general public on the one hand, and the media on the other.¹⁵ For Jewish communities, to demonstrate its members' loyalty toward the monarch was of crucial importance, as he or she was the highest political and symbolic authority. Any transition from one sovereign to his successor would, in the framework of the *ancien régime*, necessitate the confirmation of existing privileges and guarantees, a procedure that would be preceded by a declaration of loyalty. Furthermore, and as a routine procedure, royal birthdays, weddings etc. would entail prayers for the well-being of the sovereign and the commonwealth. Prayers for the well-being of the monarch would eventually be complemented by panegyric creations originating from local intellectuals or religious professionals, for birthdays by illuminating the houses in the Jewish quarter.¹⁶ The difference between these forms of routine symbolic reference to the absent Gentile monarch and one visiting a town with a Jewish community would be the carefulness with which the community's leaders would have to prepare their physical appearance and consider linguistic and ceremonial requirements. A Gentile monarch could be greeted by a small group of elders and religious leaders, be it at the limits of the town or village or in front of the synagogue. We know of many cases of Jews taking advantage of a sovereign passing through a given town or place in order to intervene in some specific matter.¹⁷ A quite remarkable public performance was the parade of representatives of the Prague community celebrating the heir apparent in 1741, Joseph, Archduke of Austria and the later emperor Joseph II.¹⁸ Few situations were charged with political and existential threat for Jewish communities as

- 15 Jan Andres/Andreas Schwengelbeck, *Das Zeremoniell als politischer Kommunikationsraum. Inthronisationsfeiern in Preußen im "langen" 19. Jahrhundert*, in: Ute Frevert/Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), *Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, 27–81, here 34–50.
- 16 For some sermons and prayers in favor of Napoleon Bonaparte, see *Collection des Actes de l'Assemblée des Israélites de France*, publiée par Diogène Tama, Paris 1807, 138 f., and René Gutman, *Les décisions doctrinales du Grand Sanhédrin 1806–1807*, Strasbourg 2000, 108, 119, 133.
- 17 Shmuel Lejb Tsitron, *Shtadlonim. Interessante idisher tipn fun noentn avar* [Intercessors. Interesting Jewish Figures From a Recent Past], Varshe s.d. [1923 or 1926], *passim*, gives a host of examples of the tsar passing through small *shtetlekh*, or small towns, thus offering opportunity for intervention, e.g., 81, 140–156, 320. In the case of the expulsion from Prague, representatives of the Jewish Community would wait for Maria Theresia on a presumed itinerary of the queen in order to plead their case, François Guesnet, *Textures of Intercession. Rescue Efforts for the Jews of Prague, 1744/48*, in: *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 4* (2005), 355–375, here 366.
- 18 Andreas Nachama/Gereon Sievernich (eds.), *Jüdische Lebenswelten (Ausstellungskatalog)*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, 99.

was the transition of a given region from one ruler to another in the context of war and conquest. In some cases, a new ruler would not be able to secure his or her hold over conquered territory, and a too early demonstration of loyalty to the temporary ruler could be interpreted as treachery – as was the case in Prague in 1744.¹⁹ Napoleon – the leader of the nation that had introduced legal emancipation for the Jews, under whose name the vision of the Jews restoring their state in Palestine was publicized all over Europe, who was greeted as the presumed saviour of Poland by the Poles, and who, in 1806, already had subdued two of the partitioning powers – must have put the stakes very high as to how to greet this exceptional personality. And indeed, what the leaders of the modest community in Swarzędz in Greater Poland devised as a surprise for Napoleon, was without doubt *à la hauteur*, as its leaders in many respects deviated from patterns practised over many generations.

Firstly, they chose a military attire to solemnly greet the emperor: symbolically, they pledged allegiance as soldiers. They departed from the tradition to engage in military affairs only under duress, and declared their willingness to join the forces of the new ruler. Secondly, they performed some sort of *levée en masse*, with a huge group of community members participating in the greeting, engaging not only the representatives or elders, but a large number of male community members. Even the huge parade in Prague in 1741 cited above showed only about half of the number of horses involved in the welcome extended to Napoleon by the Jews of Swarzędz – at least following the account of Wilkoński. Third, they would surprise the new ruler with an unprecedented form of greeting for him, engaging their community as well as Napoleon in some kind of new bond of allegiance, necessitated by the exceptional circumstances. Any deviation from ceremony is significant, as sticking to traditional procedures has its meaning. And indeed, despite their military, massive, and surprising greeting of the French emperor, the Turkish cavalry of Swarzędz followed traditional forms to pledge loyalty in one important dimension. The local Jews addressed the monarch as “Szwercencer Juden,” thus emphasizing their self-perception as collective body. It appears as a bold way to affirm the community’s existence and presence, striving to establish a new formula for the traditional “royal alliance.”²⁰ This interpretation is further corroborated by the fact that the Jews of Swarzędz just one year earlier had won the status as independent community. After decades of communal disobedience that had led to a severance of tax payments by the Jews of Swarzędz after the dissolution of the Council of Four Lands in 1764, and brought

19 Guesnet, *Textures of Intercession*, 356f.

20 For an overview concerning the political tradition of the ‘royal alliance,’ see Yerushalmi, *Diener von Königen und nicht Diener von Dienern. Einige Aspekte der politischen Geschichte der Juden*, passim.

about seven trials and several bans (*herem*) against Swarzędz for insubordination, the regional government had convinced the quarreling parties to agree to a settlement. It provided for the emergence of Swarzędz as an independent community, this for a lump sum of 2000 Taler payable in installments to the Poznań community through 1820.²¹ Thus, the Jews on horseback in Turkish attire greeted the French emperor in 1806 as proud leaders and members of a new Jewish Community that had just won the last battle in a long war against a patronizing central Community, and was obviously not afraid of new challenges.

The Shaping of Hasidic Legends

At this point in time, too little is known about the fate of this small community after the demise of Napoleon. However, it is not very likely that consequences were serious. Clearly, the Jews of Swarzędz bet on the wrong horse. As had been said before, periods of war and turmoil held specific threats and dangers for Jewish communities, and there were few periods in European history when the stakes were as high and the potential developments as unpredictable as during the Napoleonic Wars. The astonishing choice of the Jews from Swarzędz to symbolically greet the emperor as potential allies certainly constituted an innovative ritual and has to be seen as an “act of daring” and a bold statement of a “sense of participation.”²² Whereas the leaders of this Greater Polish community made a clear choice, others were more reluctant. None, however, could ignore the military and political turmoil of these years. Especially legends about the lives of the Zaddikim, the leaders of the various Hasidic communities, relate how the wars affected the fate of their communities. We find a substantial number of allusions to Napoleon Bonaparte’s military and political fate.²³ It is not surprising that the

21 Warschauer, *Die Entstehung einer jüdischen Gemeinde*, 181.

22 David Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key. Anglo-Jewish Construction of Modern Jewish Thought*, Princeton/Oxford 2000, 141, thus characterizes the audacious political writing *A Discourse Addressed to the Minority* (London 1770), with which Abraham ben Naphtali Tang (d. 1792) entered the heated debate concerning the relegation of Robert Wilkes from the English parliament. I shall return to this example of intense participation in non-Jewish political affairs later.

23 Hillel Levine, “Should Napoleon be victorious . . .,” *Politics and Spirituality in Early Modern Jewish Messianism*, in: Rachel Elijor (ed.), *The Sabbatian Movement and Its Aftermath. Messianism, Sabbatianism and Frankism*, 2 vols., Jerusalem 2001, vol. 2, 65–84; Pipe, *Napoleon in Jewish Folklore*, passim; Eziel Natan Frenk, *Me-Hayyei ha-Hasidim be-Polin. Sipur [From the Lives of the Hasidim in Poland. A Story]*, Varshe 1896, 135–142. See also the account by Simon Dubnow, *Geschichte des Chassidismus*, 2 vols., Berlin 1931, vol. 2, 263f.

legends depict all but one of the Zaddikim as skeptical of the French emperor, as these tales were disseminated after his final defeat. The only Zaddik who is presented in a number of legends as a fervent supporter of Napoleon was Rav Mendele Rymanover, said to have prayed for the defeat of the Russian troops after Napoleon attacked Russia.²⁴ Napoleon's most prominent opponents were Shneur Zalman of Ljady and the Maggid of Koziennice, to whom is attributed the prophetic formula taken from the book of Ester *napol tipol* ("you shall fall").²⁵ The legend about the encounter of the Maggid of Koziennice and Napoleon is especially telling, as it puts the Hasidic leader and the French emperor at eye level, with the Maggid prophesying Bonaparte's defeat. Threatened with capital punishment by the latter, the Hasidic leader was vindicated by the further events. What emerges from this and other legends is in fact a new, eschatological vision of the contemporary world. For many Jews, the rise of Napoleon had messianic dimensions. In the entourage of the Seer of Lublin, the final defeat of Napoleon was closely connected to the sudden death of their leader, and both were seen as announcing the end of the world.²⁶ Millenarian expectations also emerged in other parts of Europe. A provincial functionary in revolutionary France reported to a high-ranking police administrator in Paris, Merlin de Douai, about a conversation he had had in February 1799 during a coach travel with an Ashkenazic Jew from Germany, which he rendered as follows:²⁷

"– Are you still waiting for the Messiah?

– No, he has arrived.

– I have not read the news in any gazette.

– You did not see then that Bonaparte has seized the Holy Land?

– Yes, I know that, but what does our general, who eats bacon and sausages, have in common with the Messiah? Did not Godefroi de Bouillon also seize Palestine without the Temple of Jerusalem rising from its ruins?

– Well, this time it will rise. There are 1,500,000 Jews in Europe who, if they must, will sacrifice their fortunes and their lives for such a glorious enterprise."

24 Nifla'ot ha-Hoze [Wonders of the Seer], Warsaw 1910/11, 59. I am grateful to Susanne Talabardon, Potsdam University, to have shared her insights concerning Hasidic tales and legends with me; see also Levine, "Should Napoleon be victorious . . .," 74, and Dubnow, *Geschichte des Chassidismus*, vol. 2, 234 f.

25 Levine, "Should Napoleon be victorious . . .," 82; Pipe, *Napoleon in Jewish Folklore*, 301; Frenk, *Me-Hayyei ha-Hasidim be-Polin*, 142.

26 Nifla'ot ha-Hoze, 18–20.

27 Letter from the commissioner of the North to Merlin de Douai from February 28, 1799, in: *La Révolution française à travers les archives*, Paris 1988, 426–429; see also Shulim, *Napoleon as Messiah*, cf. above, n. 9. The addressee of the letter, Merlin de Douai (1754–1858), was an ambitious functionary and politician, serving for a short period of time as member of the *directoire*. He distinguished himself as an advocate of a strong centralized police. – Translation of the quotation by F.G.

taken with the necessary degree of reserve concerning the actual wording of the conversation, the young Jew obviously welcomed the supposed seizure of Jerusalem by Napoleon as event of messianic dimension, leading to the reestablishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. As long as his military successes lasted, Napoleon was greeted by many Jews as a liberator and helper,²⁸ carrying a message of renewal and salvation, or even "being close to the Messiah," as a song of praise printed in Warsaw in 1807 hailed the emperor.²⁹ In 1812, things obviously looked differently to religious and community leaders in Galicia and in regions under Russian control. The outcome of the military campaigns was indeed unpredictable. To show too much support for the French emperor entailed a significant risk for the Jews in case of a reversal of fate. Thus, the two most influential religious leaders in Lithuania and White Russia, the head of the Yeshiva in Wolozhyn and Shneur Zalman, the leader of Habad Hassidim, opted against Napoleon. The strong anti-Napoleonic stance taken by the latter was reinforced by personal considerations. Already in May 1798, his activities around collecting the *haluka-gelt* (Yidd., apportioned payments), donations for the Jewish communities in Palestine, doubtless provided a basis for denunciations levelled against him by Jewish adversaries from Vilnius, accusing him of "assisting the French Revolution" by sending money to the Sultan as well as to Napoleon in Palestine.³⁰ His temporary incarceration on denunciations to conspire against the authorities in 1800 made his position all the more vulnerable. Thus, his ostentatious and active support for the Tsarist administration in the context of the Russian war effort against the French intruder does not come as a surprise.³¹ Obviously, Hasidic tradition had in some way to deal with these events, it had to incorporate the almost elementary force with which the French emperor defeated empires and upset dynasties, and integrate it to

28 Frenk, *Yehudei Polin bi-Ymei Milhamot Napolion*, 9.

29 *Shirei Hod li-Khvod 'Adonenu ha-Kesar*, 3.

30 Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics. Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia*, New York/Oxford 1989, 43 f.; Levine, "Should Napoleon be victorious . . .," 78; Dubnow, *Geschichte des Chassidismus*, vol. 2, 157.

31 Dubnow, *Geschichte des Chassidismus*, vol. 2, 148, 265–270; Levine, "Should Napoleon be victorious . . .," 82. It should be noted in passing that Levine's presentation of Shneur Zalman's political options is not convincing. He contrasts the potentials of Jewish existence in "the interstices of tsarist autocracy with greater opportunities for civic society and associational life" to the precarity of "feudal society" where "the collective lives and the plausibility of their faiths" of the Jews were "depending on charters here or concessions there" on the one hand and "Napoleonic totalitarian mass society" on the other. Levine distorts all three societal frameworks, underestimating the binding forces of contractual solutions in the *ancien régime*, postulating a civic society where there were no citizens, and re-projecting twentieth-century categories on the turn of the nineteenth century.

some extent in its own worldview in order to stay credible, a substantial task considering the offers presumably made by Napoleon to the Jews. The option chosen by some Hasidic communities was to present their leaders as functioning as interlocutors of Napoleon and cautioning him not to invade Russia. This was the case in the legends about the Rav of Miedzyrzecz and the Rav of Kozienice, whereas the Seer of Lublin, and the Zaddikim from Kock and Ropczyce are presented as hostile toward Napoleon's plans.³² As an example, one may cite the legend – in Ezriel Natan Frenk's popular transcript – about the encounter of the Rav of Kozienice with the French emperor, with the Zaddik admonishing Napoleon: "You maniac, you egoist, what are you striving for? You think this world has lost its balance and you can conquer it? You believe you can fling nations around and destroy religions? God is in heaven, you are on earth!"³³ A Hasidic leader yelling at the most powerful sovereign in Europe is a strong image, to say the least. Most of the Hasidic legends referring to the Zaddikim's encounters with Napoleon come up with a comparable dramatic effect. These tales remind their readers that substantial changes in the order of the world will only happen with the religious virtuosos' consent and cooperation. Nothing could be more remote from this attitude than the decision of the Swarzędz elders to dress up as a Turkish cavalry and symbolically suggest that Jews could or should become involved in Gentile military affairs. Thus, the legend's message fitted the political and mental situation of Jews (and non-Jews) in the period of post-Vienna reaction. It was, however, a message that obscured the profound changes that had occurred in Jewish political culture by re-defining Jewish agency, thus opening the "road to modern Jewish politics." These changes will be analyzed in the following section.

Political Developments and Epistemological Changes as Determinating Factors of Modern Jewish Political Culture

The French revolution and the partitions of Poland as the revolutionary and the reactionary guise of the collapsing *ancien régime*, the ever expanding control of modern state administration that did not tolerate intermediate political powers, institutions and associations (including the Jewish community), and the massive military threat posed by Napoleon to the consuetudinary

32 Pipe, *Napoleon in Jewish Folklore*, 297.

33 Ezriel Natan Frenk, *Aggadot Hasidim. Le-Bnei ha-Ne'urim we-le'Am [Legends of the Hasidim. For the Youth and the Nation]*, Varshe 1923, 142. In Frenk, *Yehudei Polin bi-Ymei Milhamot Napoleon*, 50f., the author adds that on the order of Prince Czartoryski, the Maggid prayed for the success of the emperor.

distribution of political power over wide areas of the European continent challenged the sources of political power themselves. This was true for empires and nations as it was true for the Jewish communities in Europe. The emergence of Hasidism as the main challenge to the traditional Jewish community in Eastern Europe very clearly illustrates the parallelisms in the developments in the Jewish and Gentile political culture. In the course of merely a few decades, this movement was able to establish charismatic religious leadership with a strong tendency to heredity, to create new communities with a membership that was founded not on the principle of locality, but of voluntary adherence, to take over community boards and rabbinate throughout substantial stretches of Eastern Europe, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, to establish cultural hegemony in these regions. All this was only achievable through a quite radical reassessment of what created political authority within a community, a reassessment that occurred throughout European Jewish communities of the period. In German-speaking areas and Western Europe, the main thrust of this challenge to older concepts of communal authority came from acculturating segments of Jewish society that from the seventeenth century on developed new concepts and models of Jewish-gentile cohabitation. Here, the political challenge within the communities was defined by the objective to establish new and wide areas of a Jewish-gentile hyper-culture, for which the state's administration and its institutions were perceived to be preeminent symbols.

Thus, the remarkable statement by the community of Swarzędz dressing up as Turkish cavalry as a matter of fact puts this small community at the intersection of two substantially differing models of modernization of Jewish agency. On the one hand, there is a strong expression of an 'Eastern European model,' as it were, to mobilize the local Jewish community as a political entity, and to strive for an inclusion into a political vision of breathtaking dimensions. On the other, the very fact of (symbolically) integrating this community into the greater political scheme of a Gentile leader proves that these Greater Polish community leaders understood what modernization is about toward the West.

Indeed, we come across earlier examples of similar political strategies in revolutionary Paris. As Jews were in principle not allowed to settle permanently in the French capital before the emancipation, no formally constituted community existed, and the number of Jews living in Paris did not exceed one thousand.³⁴ They were comprised of a small group of Sephardic Jews from the well-to-do communities in the South, Jews originating from Alsatian and Lotharingian communities, of which the city of Metz was the most

34 Frances Malino, *A Jew in the French Revolution. The Life of Zalkind Hurwitz*, Oxford 1996, 7–9.

important, and a small number of Jews from outside France: German territories, Poland, England, and others. One of them was Zalkind Hourwitz, a Jew from Poland, self-taught, who had come to Paris in 1774 or earlier.³⁵ Known for his *Apologie des Juifs*, an essay pleading for the emancipation of the Jews that had won the prize of the Académie of Metz (along with two other essays), he was one of the unrelenting supporters of unconditional emancipation of the Jews when the issue was put on the agenda of the *Assemblée Nationale*.³⁶ When, in mid-July 1789, the National Guard was created in order to prevent a military coup and to maintain order in the face of famine, an estimated one hundred Jews, among them Hourwitz, joined the ranks of the militia.³⁷ In the period of deliberations of the *Assemblée Nationale*, the cause of the Jews of France was defended, among others, by Hourwitz and Jacques Godard, an advocate, member of the national assembly and of the assembly of the Paris representatives, the *Commune de Paris*. In a moment of intense discussions about the project of a comprehensive emancipation of all Jews of France, and not just those from the South, Hourwitz and other Jewish members of the National Guard would escort Godard to the *Commune de Paris* on January 28, 1790, where the latter would address the representatives in order to win their crucial support.³⁸ Here, Godard praised the Jews clothed in the National Guard's uniform for their "patriotic zeal that distinguished them from the outset of the revolution on, that had motivated them to take up the arms and had turned them into courageous and unfailing fighters."³⁹

The message of the Jews in uniform was a multi-layered one. First and foremost, it declared the readiness of the Jews of Paris to defend, together with the other guardsmen, the *acquis* of the revolution, and thus to adhere to the project of social and political change. They also documented their resolve to give up part of their collective distinctiveness in merging in a larger collective, that of Parisian guardsmen. Consequently, they conveyed one more message, crucial in the eyes of Zalkind Hourwitz, the instigator of

35 Ibid., 5.

36 Ibid., 29–59.

37 Ibid., 202. Interestingly enough, Hourwitz had stated in his essay that Jews were "absolument incapables du service militaire et des emplois publiques" – rabbinical strictness, nevertheless, "n'empêche point de les employer dans la milice pour la garde intérieure du royaume," see Zalkind Hourwitz, *Juif Polonois. Apologie des Juifs en réponse à la question. Est-il moyens de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France? Ouvrage couronné par la Société Royale des Arts et des Sciences de Metz, Paris 1789* (reprint Paris 1968), 35, 39.

38 Ibid., 91–96.

39 Ibid., 77, 92. The number of fifty Jewish guardsmen is presented by Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, 11 vols., Leipzig 1998, vol. 11, 199, citing the *Moniteur universel* 1 (1790), 184f.

the Jewish escort: As the political and social framework change, Jews also will change. They would not cease to be Jews, as some have argued against Hourwitz,⁴⁰ who clearly rejected all expectations that Jews would give up their religion once emancipated.⁴¹ But they would indeed change, becoming "plus heureux et plus utiles." One cannot stress enough the similarity in political strategy delineated by this Polish Jew in his *Apologie*, and the symbolic act of emphasizing the need for emancipation by joining the National Guard. Like in the later case of the ceremonial intuition of the Jews of Swarzędz, at the core of Hourwitz' strategy lay a new perception of Jewish agency. In the case of Hourwitz, this new orientation was without doubt inspired by the writings of Moses Mendelssohn, much admired by Hourwitz, and who had defined a new attitude for a *shtadlan* (Hebr., intercessor), for a Jew speaking up for his people: not to plead with the authorities, but to submit a claim to the public for reflection.⁴² "I had to defend my people in front of the public," writes Hourwitz in his *Apologie*, defining his task of being one of an advocate and a witness, feeling "the absolute necessity that some Jew answered" the question on how to make the Jews "more happy and more useful." To give this answer was not only to "intervene," but to "take up a struggle."⁴³ A few pages later Hourwitz took up that idea once more, emphasizing his notion of Jewish agency: "écoutons les Juifs eux-mêmes plaider leur cause" (let us listen to the Jews themselves pleading their cause) in order to gauge the question whether or not to grant the status of equal citizenship.⁴⁴

It is a marker of the so-called *Sattelzeit* that Jewish thinkers and writers in a simultaneous yet unsynchronized search for political orientation turned to earlier examples of Jews acting on behalf of their community. The need to change or adjust the status of the Jews within the various non-Jewish commonwealths they were living in was evident, as evident as was the necessity to revise the tools to achieve this objective. In the same spirit that

40 Malino, *A Jew in the French Revolution*, 206.

41 Hourwitz, *Juif Polonois. Apologie des Juifs en réponse à la question*, 29 (especially note 2).

42 François Guesnet, *Moses Mendelssohns Tätigkeit als Fürsprecher im Kontext jüdischer politischer Kultur der frühen Neuzeit*, in: Menora. Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte 16 (2005/2006); Julius H. Schoeps et al. (eds.), *Moses Mendelssohn, die Aufklärung und die Anfänge des deutsch-jüdischen Bürgeriums*, Hamburg 2006, 115–137, here 132–137. There are numerous parallels in the argument of both authors in matters of the emancipation of the Jews, like the corollary of Jewish betterment through emancipation, the limited perspectives of agrarian productivization, the value of commercial activity, a strong stance against rabbinical jurisdiction, and advocating early burial.

43 Hourwitz, *Juif Polonois. Apologie des Juifs en réponse à la question*, Préface, 8–11. The French terms is "entrer en lice," which connotes competition as well as fight.

44 Hourwitz, *Juif Polonois. Apologie des Juifs en réponse à la question*, 8. Among the examples to follow for France, Hourwitz mentions the Netherlands, England, Poland, Sweden, Austria, and the status of the Jews in Bordeaux and Bayonne, *ibid.*, 35.

led Zalkind Hourwitz to “take up a struggle” and to “defend [his] people in front of the public,” these predecessors in Jewish agency selflessly put personal interest aside in favor of the needs of their community. They shared the common feature to represent an example of Jewish agency as expressed through concrete, political intercession. Most prominent among these earlier examples that were now re-assessed were the biblical figure of Esther, Philo, the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, and Menasseh ben Israel, the Sephardic rabbi from Amsterdam, the self-proclaimed savior of the Sephardic Jews living as neo-Christians in Spain, France and Portugal. All three were “re-introduced” during this period by Jewish authors by dint of a previous reception by non-Jewish authors. This potential to disregard traditional borders between religious and political discourses was an infrequent but ubiquitous phenomenon in enlightened Europe, as David Ruderman has shown in his study on the English-Jewish Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century. There, he portrays David Levi (1742–1801) as probably the “first major public Jewish intellectual” in Europe, continuously and aggressively attacking English protestant Hebraists for their philological shortcomings, and the astonishing figure of Abraham ben Naphtali Tang (d. 1792), “jumping into the commotion of a national debate” of the Wilkes affair.⁴⁵ Thus, one characteristic of the borderline of modern Jewish history is deliberate, conscious, public and non-apologetic transgression of borders between Jewish and non-Jewish discourses with a clear intention to act politically – whether the political objective was the fate of the Jewish community or of non-Jewish society.

Thus, the context of Moses Mendelssohn’s cooperation with Christian Wilhelm Dohm in publishing *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* in 1781 is a reference to Menasseh ben Israel. Mendelssohn added his translation of the *Vindiciae Judaearum* by Menasseh, first published in 1655, under the title *Rettung der Juden*. Menasseh, rabbi in Amsterdam, as a writer was perceived as the “official exponent of Judaism to the Gentiles.”⁴⁶ He undertook it in this essay dedicated to the Supreme Court of the Parliament to demonstrate the necessity of a Jewish re-settlement in England.⁴⁷ After a surprisingly intense and positive reception of his earlier essay *Hope of Israel* (1650) in England, encouragement by members of a British mission to Amsterdam visiting a synagogue in 1651, and the fact that the Parliament officially recommended examining the proposal of Menasseh ben Israel to re-

45 Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key*, 108–144, here 141.

46 Cecil Roth, *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel. Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat*, Philadelphia 1934, 90.

47 François Guesnet, *Die Politik der Fürsprache – Vormoderne jüdische Interessensvertretung*, in: Dan Diner (ed.), *Synchrone Welten. Zeitenräume jüdischer Geschichte*, Hamburg 2005, 67–92, here 78–82.

settle the Jews in England had led to his famous expedition, of which the “unexpected dividend of failure” was the informal re-admission of the Jews by Oliver Cromwell.⁴⁸ As Mendelssohn points out in his introduction to his translation, he learned of Menasseh’s writings through an earlier publication in *The Phenix* [sic!], or *Revival of scarce and valuable Pieces*, published in London in 1708. Though taking a certain distance from the rabbi from Amsterdam by qualifying this “man of great rabbinical wisdom and other sciences” as of “burning zeal for the well-being of his brethren” he conceded that Menasseh “presented the cause of his nation to the English parliament [...] and supported it in front of the Lord-Protector” and “finally achieved the re-admission of the Jews.”⁴⁹ There can be little doubt that Mendelssohn himself, in motivating Dohm to publish the *Bürgerliche Verbesserung* and adding his translation of the *Vindiciae Judaearum* to this tractate, referred to his own inspiration of how to present and support “the cause of his people:” by presenting it to the general public, and not to a restricted forum like a royal court in the context of an audience, or in a letter to some influential noble person.⁵⁰ *Veritas non auctoritas facit legem* – Truth, and not power was to define what law could and should be, a concept closely bound to the optimism of the Enlightenment and the core idea behind the new Mendelssohnian approach to Jewish intercession: “A political consciousness developed in the public sphere of civil society which, in opposition to absolute sovereignty, articulated the concept of and demand for general and abstract laws and which ultimately came to assert itself (i.e., public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law. In the course of the eighteenth century, public opinion claimed the legislative competence for those norms whose polemical-rationalist conception it had provided to begin with.”⁵¹ At the core of Mendelssohn’s concept about a re-defined Jewish agency, we find the idea that he lived in a time where it did not count to how powerful an addressee one directed a petition or a project. Rather, reason as governing principle will allow anyone, including a Jew, to present a reasonable argument to the public and to prevail.

48 David S. Katz, *Menasseh ben Israel’s Mission to Queen Christina of Sweden, 1651–1655*, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 45 (1983), 57–72, here 69.

49 Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum. Vorrede zu Manasseh ben Israels “Rettung der Juden,”* ed. by David Martyn, Bielefeld 2001, 10.

50 Guesnet, *Moses Mendelssohns Tätigkeit als Fürsprecher im Kontext jüdischer politischer Kultur der frühen Neuzeit*, 135.

51 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. by Thomas Burger, Cambridge, Mass. 1989 (101999), 54.

History as Guide for the Perplexed

In contrast to this overly optimistic Mendelssohnian re-conceptualization of Jewish political agency as solely requiring an accessible and reasonable public and good arguments, the choice of past examples of Jewish agency by other authors demonstrates less confidence in pure reason as the decisive factor. Thus, in 1836 Mordechai Aaron Günzburg⁵² published a translation of *Legatio ad Gaium* by Philo of Alexandria, describing the mission of a group of Jews from this Mediterranean metropolis under the leadership of the philosopher.⁵³ What fascinated Günzburg in Philo was the figure of the intellectual “standing up to the kings” and becoming the saviour of his people.⁵⁴ Günzburg contrasts the significance of Philo’s writings as one of the oldest existing Hebrew texts to the fact that most Jews ignored this example of devotion to the Jewish people, and even did not have the text in Hebrew at their disposal. He further emphasized that not only Philo, but most of the Jewish leaders of the period of the Babylonian exile were examples of faithfulness to their God, of virtue and dignity.⁵⁵ Günzburg links the achievements of Philo in defending the Jews of Alexandria against these first attempts of blood libel to developments in his own times. He suggested that the courage of Philo in defending his fellow Jews may serve as a direct example to his contemporaries – and it seems a significant fact that he published this appeal years before the Damascus Affair.⁵⁶ This first Hebrew version of Philo’s text, who himself had written in Greek, was a translation from a German version published in 1783 by Johann Friedrich Eckhard.⁵⁷ There

52 On Günzburg, see Israel Bartal, Mordechai Aaron Günzburg. A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity, in: Frances Malino/David Sorkin (eds.), *From East and West. Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750–1870*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990, 126–147.

53 I follow the second edition: Sh. B. Shvartsberg (ed.), *Ha-Mal’akhut ‘al Kaius Kaligula ha-Kesar ha-Shlishi le-Romim Me’et Yedidiah ha-’Aleksandri hu Filon ha-Yehudi, Ne’etak le-Lashon ha-Kodesh ‘al yedei Mordekhai Ahron Gintsburg [The Delegation to Gaius Caligula, Third Emperor of the Romans, by the Alexandrian Scholar Philo the Jew, Translated to the Holy Language by Mordechai Aaron Günzburg]*, Varshe 1894, here 5. About the earlier reception of Philo see Joanna Weinberg, *The Quest for Philo in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Historiography*, in: Ada Rapoport-Albert/Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Jewish History. Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky*, London 1988, 163–187, *passim*.

54 Shvartsberg, *Ha-Mal’akhut ‘al Kaius Kaligula*, Introduction, and the account given by Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, 107.

55 Shvartsberg, *Ha-Mal’akhut ‘al Kaius Kaligula*, 6.

56 *Ibid.*, 4.

57 *Die Gesandtschaft an den Cajus. Aus dem Griechischen des Philo übersetzt von Johann Friedrich Eckhard*. Leipzig, im Verlage der Dykischen Buchhandlung, 1783. This translation was itself the result of the pan-European philhellenian movement leading to a systematic translation of Greek texts, see Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus. Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970*, Princeton 2003, 24, emphasizing

the two noteworthy differences between Günzburg’s translation and its German template. The first concerns the episode in the *Legatio* of how the temple in Jerusalem was finally saved from being desecrated due to a letter sent by King Agrippa, the friend and confidant of Gaius, to the emperor. This letter finally motivates Gaius to give up on his project to have a gigantic sculpture of himself erected in the Jerusalem Temple, and thus represents the core of the account about how the desecration was prevented.⁵⁸ Günzburg singled out the pages containing the letter by a title that does not occur in the Greek original, nor in the German translation: “Letter by Agrippa the king to Gaius the emperor.”⁵⁹ Obviously, for Günzburg the words of the Jewish king Agrippa that finally altered the course of events represented the core message of Philo’s work, because he cut short his translation at this point, omitting the final parts of the original text. Obviously, his intention was to acquaint readers with this example of Jewish intercession, and to emphasize the significance of this letter as a pattern of political procedure.⁶⁰ Significantly, Günzburg’s translation was reprinted in 1894 at a time when Jewish political self-organization reached the stage of mass movements.⁶¹ While it is not surprising that a Jewish author looked for political orientation by turning to this kind of historical example, it remains a noteworthy fact that he extended his search to the non-Jewish reception of a Jewish text from the Greek ancient world.

Similarly, only a few years later, Me’ir Halevi Letteris published a dramatic version of a highly paradigmatic example of Jewish political agency, the biblical legend of Esther. He published his *Shalom Ester* in 1843.⁶² However, this book was not an adaptation of the biblical text, but a translation of

ing the significance of the “philosophically unadventurous university philologists” dominating at this point in time the reception of classical Greek texts.

58 Philo: *The Embassy to Gaius*, Transl. by F.H. Colson (The Loeb Classical Library vol. 379), London/Cambridge, Mass. 1968, 139–165.

59 Shvartsberg, *Ha-Mal’akhut ‘al Kaius Kaligula*, 56–76.

60 A study pertaining to Jewish intercession (*shtadlanut*) with a reflection by the present author on the significance of Philo’s mission to Gaius Caligula is forthcoming.

61 Sh. B. Shvartsberg gives as a reason in its preface for reprinting Günzburg’s translation not only its political relevance, but also the scarcity of the book, due to the poor quality of the first edition (*Ha-Mal’akhut, Rosh Davar Me’et ha-Motse la-’Or*, s.p.).

62 *Shalom ‘Ester*. Shir ‘al Ma’aseh Mordekhai we-’Ester be-Shloshah Halakim, Ne’etak mi-Lashon Tsarfat le-Lashon ha-Kodesh Me’et Me’ir Halevi Letteris [Poem About the Story of Mordehai and Esther in Three Parts, Translated from the French Language to the Holy Language by Me’ir Halevi Letteris], Prag 1843. The title was given equally in French: *Ester, Tragédie tirée de l’Écriture sainte. Imitation après celle de Mr. Jean Racine par Mr. M. Letteris*, etc. On this and other translations of Racine’s tragedy to Hebrew, see Bettina Knapp, *Jean Racine’s Esther and Two Hebrew Translations of this Drama*, in: Saul Lieberman/Arthur Hyman (eds.), *Salo Wittmayer Baron Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, 3 vols., New York/London 1974, vol. 2, 591–621, erroneously giving 1847 as date of publication of Letteris’ translation (620).

the tragedy *Esther* by the most classical of all French classics, Jean Racine, published in 1689. Racine's version of the biblical legend emphasized the religious dimension of Esther's readiness to sacrifice herself and the unconditional obedience to divine inspiration.⁶³ The new emphasis on divine intervention in the face of imminent danger and the confidence in divine justice contributed to the edifying character of Racine's adaptation of the biblical legend of Esther. The translation itself was finished a short period before the dramatic events of the Damascus Affair, as Letteris wrote the introduction in the spring of 1839. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the author refers less to the politico-national content of the biblical legend, and more to aesthetic aspects, expanding about the challenge to translate the Alexandrine of the French original, mentioning the surprising decision to translate the twelve syllables of the French Alexandrine line with eleven syllables in the Hebrew translation.⁶⁴ In the context of this reflection about the Jewish political culture at the borderlines of the modern age, it is all the more relevant that Letteris chose to re-introduce the *Megillat Ester* in a new form, a text that cannot but raise the question about the responsibilities of each individual Jew toward his or her community. The author explicitly refers to an earlier example of such a translation, citing the Ladino adaptation *Ester* by Salomon Usque, published in Venice in 1619.⁶⁵ In the case of *Shalom Ester*, the text is re-appropriated from a non-Jewish adaptation, and it is an open question whether this re-appropriation constitutes a reclaiming for the Jewish community, or if the fact that it had gone through an adaptation by Racine, one of the most appraised authors of all times, added to the authority of this text.

Conclusion

At the end of the period under consideration here, the search for new "guides for the perplexed," for new perspectives of Jewish political agency, had above all yielded a choice of options, taken from the wealth of Jewish history, offering a considerable range of political options. Without doubt, in the context of the Damascus Affair, to reassess Jewish political agency was becoming an even more urgent task. In the beginning, we find Mendelsohn's reappraisal of the course of action taken by Menasseh ben Israel. Though Mendelsohn pays tribute to the sense of political responsibility of Menasseh, he chose a different strategy by turning to the unfolding public sphere

63 Jean Racine, *Théâtre complet*, 2 vols, Paris 1965, vol. 2, 253–255

64 Shalom 'Ester, *Shalom le-Rahok u-le-Karov* [Introduction], 7.

65 *Ibid.*, 11.

and reclaiming the end of discriminatory legislation toward the Jews. In contrast, the overwhelming force of history in its making that marked the Napoleonic era created an opportunity for religious leaders within the emerging Hasidic movement to claim political leadership. The same events, however, inspired the leaders of Swarzędz, a small but ambitious Jewish community in Greater Poland, to demonstrate their eagerness to insert themselves in what they probably conceived as part of the emperor's project: to bring emancipation to the Jews and to define their community's constitutional status, and, possibly, to conquer Palestine and recreate a Jewish state. The course of history was different, but nevertheless, the intuitive and innovative strategy of the Swarzędz-elders constitutes a significant illustration for the obvious need for Jewish communities to develop new models of political agency. The resurgence of the blood libel in the context of the Damascus Affair reinforced a tendency to consider all options for political strategies. What stands at the end of the period under consideration, is a broad array of potential strategies. This emerges most clearly from the wide range of politically active figures of the Jewish past and present who entered the Jewish public discourse. This can be illustrated by the strong emphasis on Jewish political agency in an early Jewish periodical, the *Revue orientale*, edited by the highly original rabbi of Bruxelles, Elijah Carmoly.⁶⁶ From the start of the learned journal, the editor published articles about the *shtadlanim* of the early modern period like Josel of Rosheim, Menasseh ben Israel and Jom Tov Lipman Heller,⁶⁷ and wrote and published the first modern historiographical study on Philo of Alexandria. Furthermore, he emphasized the political achievements of Jews from the eighteenth century active on behalf of their respective communities like Isaac Pinto, Jacob Pereire and Abraham Furtado in France. Long biographical articles presented the life and deeds of political activists of the turn of the century and in the course of the Napoleonic period like Michel Berr, secretary of the Great Sanhedrin, David Sintzheim, president of the Consistoire des Israélites de France, and Jonas David Meyer, president of the Consistoire supérieur hollando-allemand, among others. Much attention was devoted to the events surrounding the Damascus Affair.⁶⁸ The wide range of periods, characters, contexts, and strategies notwithstanding, one common feature is shared by the objects of

66 *Revue orientale. Recueil périodique d'histoire, de géographie et de littérature* 1 (1841)–3 (1843/44). Carmoly, editor of this periodical and author of numerous studies, scorned by later Jewish historians like Heinrich Graetz, certainly deserves more academic attention than he has received to date.

67 Carmoly's articles were among the first publications of source material especially concerning Josel von Rosheim.

68 A fascinating article, or rather list, by Carmoly is devoted to "Diplomates juifs modernes," cf. *Revue orientale*, 3 (1843/44), 353–355.

Carmoly's curiosity: the political involvement of deserving individual Jews who influenced the course of history and the fate of their communities. This emphasis on Jewish political agency clearly has to be understood as the heritage of the Jewish interpretation of the European Enlightenment, as illustrated by Jewish public intellectuals like Abraham Tang, Moses Mendelssohn or Zalkind Hourwitz, and the profound impact that politics itself, i.e., the events surrounding the French Revolution, the partitions of Poland and the Napoleonic Wars, had on European Jewish communities. This heritage was marked by an attempt to draw from ancient sources of Jewish political agency, even if these sources had to be re-discovered in the context of non-Jewish discourses.