

A CASE STUDY OF RADICAL ASSIMILATION IN POLAND. THE MARKUSFELD FAMILY

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the phenomenon of radical assimilation in the late 19th century. The author focuses on the Markusfeld family, who had lived in Kraków since at least the mid-18th century. The study is an attempt to show the history of family against the background of the history of Galicia, in the second half of the 19th century, when the idea of integration was finally abandoned, and integration ceased to be seen as solution of “the Jewish question.” The paper is based on Bauman’s analysis of the general sociological mechanisms of modern assimilatory processes, and refers to the category of radical assimilation (T. Endelman). It seeks to answer the question of why most family members chose to convert at the end of the 19th century. The author shows that the choice of “default” religion, was not tantamount to their affirmation – but it was a way to look for happiness and fulfillment, which was (unlike in France), according to some Jews not accessible while staying Jewish. Baptism was also a form of protection – the Second World War would prove it effective.

It is as if the government ridicules emancipation, it closes its door to the Jew and makes his social advance very difficult. On neither a state nor a municipal level can we find a single Jew.

– [Sz. Wr.]¹

[...] this equality is not desired by Galician society. People don’t perceive a Jew as someone who has an equal right to live [...] to develop his physical and intellectual skills in any profession, equal chance to gain wealth, position and dignity as the non-Jewish citizens – but rather they see him as an intruder [...].

– Zygmunt Markusfeld²

¹ Sz. Wr., “Nasza pozycja,” *Ojczyzna* 1892, no. 1, 1.

² Markusfeld 1880, 6-7.

The expression “radical assimilation,” as used in the title of this article, is an umbrella term referring to various routes by which Judaism and the past was erased, lost or – as Todd Endelman puts it – “buried.”³ It includes conversion, secession (an act of formal withdrawal from the community), mixed marriages and other forms of losing contact with Jewish descent, which was seen as a burden.

At the end of the 19th century, radical assimilation became an answer⁴ to the *unfinished project of Enlightenment*, to the ambivalent – as I repeatedly argue – offer of inclusion via „civilizing” and adjusting oneself – the offer, which failed, as became apparent at the end of the century.⁵ In this short article I will try to reconstruct its mechanism using the complicated example of the Markusfeld family.

The offer of integration

The changes in 18th-century European thought, societies and states led to the dismantlement of the previous order and, among other things, radically altered the status of the Jewish population. The French Revolution “had placed the question of Jewish civil equality on the European political agenda and had made real new possibilities for inclusion and integration.”⁶ Emancipation offered a way out of the ghetto (for those who waited for it) and at least formal access to the Western world. At a different pace (in Western and East Central Europe), this project of the Enlightenment had raised hopes and aspirations, offering a chance for development that was supposed to be equal in the spirit of the age of unlimited possibilities.

The ideals of the Enlightenment (“the legislative reason of philosophers”) harmonized well with the practical policies of the states. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it:

There was a genuine affinity between the legislating ambitions of critical philosophy and the designing intentions of the rising modern state; as there was a genuine symmetry between the tangle of traditional parochialisms the modern state had to uproot to establish its own supreme and uncontested sovereignty, and the cacophony of “dogmatic schools” that had to be silenced so that the voice of universal and eternal [...] reason could be heard and its “apodeictic certitude” could be appreciated. Modern rulers and modern philosophers were first and foremost legislators; they found chaos, and set out to tame it and replace it with order.⁷

Modernity, with its obsession with order, had brought an end to the pre-modern, small-scale communities, “which for most of their members were the universes in which the whole of the life-world was inscribed.”⁸ The modern state undercut the roots of tradition and forms of life of communities and groups of people. In this way, the reproduction of forms of life based in communities became impossible.⁹ Its absolute superiority

³ Endelman 2015, 16.

⁴ Along with searching for a remedy in the ideology of Zionism, socialism and, later, communism.

⁵ An excellent example is the history of Galician integrationists; see Jasnowski 2015, 2016.

⁶ Endelman 2015, 66.

⁷ Bauman 1992, 119. See also Bauman 1991 (Polish edition: Bauman 1995).

⁸ Bauman 1991, 61; 1995, 91. See also: Bauman 1989b, 2009.

⁹ Bauman 1995, 146.

had undermined any rival institutions of social control that might limit its monopoly on power – this is why the autonomy of the Jewish community was no longer accepted.

In Kraków, like in other places, this institution was stripped of influence (after 1817 it was known as the Jewish Committee of the Kazimierz District) and was made fully subordinate to the government.¹⁰ The educated elite, as Bauman suggests, “used its own mode of life, or the mode of life of that part of the world over which it presided [...] as the benchmark against which to measure and classify other forms of life – past or present – as retarded, underdeveloped, immature, incomplete or deformed, maimed, distorted and otherwise inferior stages or version of itself.”¹¹ This urge to make everything homogeneous was also noticed by Todd Endelman, who wrote that its final goal was to achieve order, reason and homogeneity.¹² Bauman writes of “disciplining, training, educating, healing, punishing and reforming aimed at categories other than itself.”¹³ In Krakow, the Statute organizing the lives of Jews in Kraków and its surroundings (*Statut urządzający starozakonnych w Wolnem mieście Krakowie i Jego Okręgu*) (1817)¹⁴ was written in that spirit; it had divided subjects into categories of usefulness, right and wrong forms of life (the “wrong” forms were those that did not fit the model of development that was understood as “normal”). No wonder we can read of things like usefulness, “adoption of common lifestyle,” “a necessity to dress oneself like a Christian” in order to have the right to live in Kraków or its suburbs.¹⁵ The goal was to adjust to the aesthetic canon, cognitive and behavioral patterns that were seen as “indispensable for the identity of most advanced age.”¹⁶ The Statute promised civil rights, but not unconditionally. Those who wanted to be part of the community would have to “train” and be fully devoted to prove that they no longer had “visible signs that make them different from other citizens” (§ 23).¹⁷ The minority had to perceive the official values as universal and, as a result, it had to reject its own cultural tradition as inferior and uncivilized (so that it had to be civilized).¹⁸

As Marcin Wodziński has accurately noted, the term “civilization” involved “an important concept of progress and hierarchy of various civilizations,” so that it also in-

¹⁰ Cf. Jakimyszyn 2008, 2015.

¹¹ Bauman 1989, 111; 1998, 144.

¹² Endelman 2015, 51.

¹³ Bauman 1989, 111.

¹⁴ Quoted in Jakimyszyn 2008, 262-274.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁶ Bauman 1989, 111.

¹⁷ Jakimyszyn 2008, 271.

¹⁸ As Bauman has accurately noticed, the state “expected to admit the inferiority of their present form of life.” The offer of assimilation was the offer “of escaping the stigmatizing classification through acceptance of a non-stigmatized form of life.” Assimilation was an invitation to individual members of the stigmatized groups to disavow loyalty to the group of origin, to question the right of these communities to establish separate norms of behavior (Bauman 1995, 148-149). Thus, the program of assimilation was among other things an “important weapon in the effort [...] to further sap the coherence and the power of resistance of those competitive institutions of social control which potentially limited [...] ambition of absolute sovereignty”: Bauman 1990, 158; 1991, 106; 1995, 148-149. At the same time, we must remember that Jews, inspired by the heritage of the Enlightenment, also fought for “progress” and against backwardness without being forced to do so. In Kraków the first organization of progressive Jews was established in the 1840s, with such leaders as Abraham Gumplowicz, Jonatan Warszauer, Józef Oettinger, Maurycy Krzepicki, Jozue Fink and Szachna Markusfeld: Jakimyszyn 2012, 19-20.

volved a value judgement. To “make oneself civilized” meant to rise from the state of degradation, barbarity and cultural primitivism.¹⁹

The path to emancipation was winding; it was quite different from the French model. In Kraków, the high hopes of the Revolutions of 1848 were soon crushed by the neoabsolutism of Alexander von Bach (1852-1859) (who destroyed some of the achievements of this period; suffice it to say that the Imperial Patent of October 1853 confirmed the old restrictions and reinforced the prohibition against Jews settling outside the ghetto).²⁰ The year 1859 marked the beginning of reforms. When it came to Jewish issues they met with opposition from conservative circles. Equal rights, introduced in the Constitution of 1867, were not received with enthusiasm – a significant number of Christians voted against them.²¹ Their intention was to minimize Jewish participation in the local government (or to ban it completely). However, as Łukasz T. Sroka puts it, “despite all the lies and slanders, many Poles reacted with empathy, reason and sense of justice.” For instance, Franciszek Smolka called for a revival of the heritage of the Great Sejm, and Count Stanisław Tarnowski described the lack of religious tolerance as “underprivileged, and therefore a persecution.”²²

In other words, emancipation in Galicia was something that was imposed from above and was not adjusted to the opinions of citizens and politicians. It became a fact of law, but, despite its significance, it did not change the common sentiments and views and did not affect the distance between Jews and the rest of society.²³ As Endelman puts it, “the improvement of legal status does not necessarily mean the improvement of social status.”²⁴

The end of integration. Towards radicalization

The progressives, supporters of integration, as elsewhere, tried to adjust their own tradition to “civilization of all mankind,”²⁵ to reconcile it with “universal human nature, natural law and reason.”²⁶ Particularism was to be substituted with “universal” values. Like in the Western world (though not to the same extent), the tradition was profoundly changed. The focus was on those elements of tradition that could be, as Gershom

¹⁹ Wodziński 2004a, 26. Zygmunt Bauman argues that it was in line with the “idea of [...] the model of cultural evolution,” a belief that a way of life can be made universal. It was believed that the differences between nations and peoples are temporary and that the highest achievements of culture would become universal eventually. From this point of view – if people had a separate culture it was only because they were lower on the ladder of evolutionary hierarchy; they could, however, climb the ladder through assimilation. It is clear that “loyalty towards discredited values and lifestyles meant that one is still at the lower stage of cultural hierarchy.” This hierarchism was to be radically questioned in the second half of the 20th century (public lecture: Z. Bauman, *Kultura jako praxis*, Warsaw, November 27, 2012).

²⁰ Purchla 2011, 201.

²¹ Sroka 2015, 70-71.

²² *Ibid.*, 73.

²³ Endelman 2015, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bauman 1991, 128; 1995, 177.

²⁶ Bauman 1995, 154-155.

Scholem suggests, regarded as fitting the rationalistic standards of modernity.²⁷ Others were rejected as non-essential and strange. The Galician *Ojczyzna* would write about “age-old influences,” “local customs” and “additions” that were “a product of the needs of the moment” and still existed “despite their severity and absurdity.”²⁸ Integrationists thought that these elements “should give way to tendencies of modern era, modern culture.”²⁹ “We are living,” they wrote, “at the end of the 19th century. Not in Egypt or Palestine but in Central Europe!”³⁰ Even though in Kraków and Galicia the reinterpretation of Judaism was conservative, sticking to orthodoxy was criticized:

Let us show respect to the good part of our heritage [...] but for God’s sake! Let us not overrate tradition that keeps us away from here and now and leads us back to the past where dust and rust of ages kills us.³¹

The ideologists of integration considered themselves to be Polish; ethnic bonds were of lesser importance. In the article “Our Dreamers,” published in *Ojczyzna*, they wrote:

The sum of bonds that link any branch of Jewish tribe to the home country and society, that they are part of – real and strong bonds – is much more important than the spiritual unity of common descent and common past.³²

Identity was often harshly criticized: the folk and common forms of names that were used even in birth certificates were “silly and ugly,” “unpleasant” and “gross” and “barbaric,” “deformed beyond all measure.”³³ Jargon was “a barbaric product of barbaric times,”³⁴ “despicable and humiliating.”³⁵ Cheders were called “harmful nests,”³⁶ “Augean stables,”³⁷ “deathly schools,”³⁸ in which students are infected with “physical degeneration, mental distortion and social separation.”³⁹ The rhetoric of *Ojczyzna* is a sign of persistence in a fight for “progress,” but also much more: this circle of people was very sensitive to the non-Jewish opinions. It seems that this was the mechanism described by Todd Endelman when he wrote about David Friedländer:

The more resistance he met from Prussian authorities, the further he moved from the conservative reformism of his master Mendelssohn and the more he insisted that the integration of the Jews required their radical transformation.⁴⁰

²⁷ Scholem 1971, 306-309, quoted after Bauman 1995, 177.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ojczyzna* 1886, no. 8, 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ojczyzna* 1886, no. 8, 30.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ N. J. Grünberg, “Słowo o imionach żydowskich,” *Ojczyzna* 1892, no. 2, 9-10.

³⁴ *Ojczyzna* 1890, no. 19, 151.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ojczyzna* 1883, no. 3, 11.

³⁷ *Ojczyzna* 1885, no. 1, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ojczyzna* 1890, no. 7, 51.

⁴⁰ Endelman 2015, 65.

Although this attitude came from a different time (1786-1793) and place (Prussia),⁴¹ the resemblance is uncanny, and the results the same. Friedländer, now disillusioned, did not take part in the campaign of Prussian Jews. He began to doubt that full equality is possible.⁴² This sentiment is described by Endelman:

Friedländer's "despair" is central to understanding the spread of conversion in well-to-do German Jewish families at this time and later as well. Conversions at this level of society were nourished by an acute awareness of a gap between their low civil status and standing in the popular imagination, on the one hand, and their wealth and cultural accomplishments, on the other. This awareness, in turn, created feelings of bitterness, frustration, humiliation, and disappointment and eventually drove highly acculturated Jews to the baptismal font – in much the same way that hopelessness and poverty drove the very poorest.⁴³

In Galicia too, effort, loyalty and determination met with resistance – “vote of no confidence,”⁴⁴ hostility and “unreformable prejudice.”⁴⁵ It resulted in apathy and discouragement. The ideology of integration was weakened, and the circle of activists disintegrated.⁴⁶

We are condemned by those who stick to the outdated ideals [...] for we are not only Jews but we divide our loyalty and love between Jewish people and the nation we feel part of. We are condemned by citizens who have locked themselves in shallow and unproductive dogmatism [...] and accuse as of being Jewish separatists because [...] we do not abandon our Jewish faith.⁴⁷

While aspiring to being Poles of Jewish faith, they were not accepted by either side. Perceived as strangers by Poles, they were treated so even more by “their own.”⁴⁸ As Bauman pointed out (quoting Kurt Lewin) referring to this profound alienation, which led to radical gestures:

it is characteristic of individuals crossing the margin between social groups that they are not only uncertain about their belonging to the group they are ready to enter, but also about their belonging to the group they are leaving... It is not the belonging to many groups that is the cause of the difficulty, but the uncertainty of the belonging.⁴⁹

In the last decades of the 19th century, the ideological heirs of Haskalah⁵⁰ entered a profound crisis. The rise of the ideology coincided with the time when many Jews hoped that they could be accepted as citizens and the distance between them and the rest of society would be shortened. The crisis, however, coincided “with a time when anti-

⁴¹ The goal of the struggle was also different: Prussian Jews fought for emancipation, while Galician Jews, a century later, were already emancipated, at least theoretically, but faced rising hostility and discrimination.

⁴² Endelman 2015, 65.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Both in Galicia and in the Kingdom of Poland: Wodziński 2003, 17.

⁴⁷ F., “Nasza pozycja,” *Ojczyzna* 1891, no. 11, 82.

⁴⁸ At least by the majority that stuck to the traditional way of life.

⁴⁹ Levin 1948, 148, 179, quoted in Bauman 1991, 118 (see also Bauman 1995, 164).

⁵⁰ I use this term following M. Wodziński, so that they can be separated from the traditional maskilim, adherents of the Hebrew Haskalah. Integrationists were inspired by the ideas of Haskalah, but reinterpreted them and made them more radical.

Semitism was a fixture of politics in illiberal states.⁵¹ Wodziński argues that the crisis of this formation was linked to “the general ideological and cultural shifts in Europe at the end of the 19th century”; to the rise of modern nationalism (Zionism), anti-Semitism and “politicization of Jewish streets,” to which the late descendants of Haskalah found no answer.⁵² As Wodziński writes:

The very foundation of the Haskalah ideology and their heirs was a belief in objective, “scientific” value of progress in knowledge, technology and the development of civilization that has to lead to the general progress of mankind in all fields.⁵³

The faith in this progress of civilization and “humans as such” was now put under question; as is often stressed, elites have quit universalism for nationalism, rediscovering “the common heritage” of the fate of the nation.⁵⁴ The ideals that used to bring hope were now empty platitudes “that were once held with great conviction.”⁵⁵ Importantly, the very possibility of integration was now being doubted: “It is as if the government ridicules emancipation, it closes its door to the Jew and makes his social advance very difficult. On neither a state nor a municipal level can we find a single Jew.”⁵⁶ Was there a right intuition in these words, written in 1891? It seems so. Bauman says that this kind of emancipation was homogenization rather than pluralization, elimination of differences that did not grant equal rights, a turn towards homogeneity, not multiculturalism.⁵⁷

To sum up, *the unfinished project of emancipation*,⁵⁸ while letting Jews out of one ghetto (cultural and territorial), had put them in another – that of social incoherence and cultural ambivalence.⁵⁹ Ancient segregation was now changed into a different form of alienation – separation was no longer territorial, but social.⁶⁰ Although emancipation, at least formally, made the pragmatic conversions unnecessary, in practice, as it turned out, it failed to undermine their deep-seated reasons. For many families the gap between self-identification and the way they were perceived by society, between their legal and social status, between ambitions and the chance to fulfill them – was something unbearable. Therefore they would decide to free themselves from the stigma of descent and would get rid of it completely. This painful path was chosen by the Markusfeld family.

The Markusfeld family

Henryk (Chaim) Markusfeld was born in Kraków on December 12, 1819. He was the son of a well-known Jewish activist, Szachna Markusfeld (born around 1785-1787)

⁵¹ Endelman 2015, 99.

⁵² For further details on the failure of the integration of Jews, cf. Wodziński 2003, 235 and note; 2005.

⁵³ Wodziński 2003, 237.

⁵⁴ Bauman 1995, 186.

⁵⁵ *Ojczyzna* 1888, no. 15, 113.

⁵⁶ Sz. Wr, “Nasza pozycja,” *Ojczyzna* 1892, no. 1, 1.

⁵⁷ Bauman 1991, 127-128; 1995, 176.

⁵⁸ The project was rejected by both sides: Polish and Jewish. Both Polish and Jewish people favored nationalism or indifference.

⁵⁹ Bauman 1991, 120.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and Scheindla Ebersman (born 1787⁶¹). His father was active in the Jewish community. In the 1807 elections Szachna became one of the *Spitalverwalters*.⁶² (When, under occupation, the old system of kahal was abolished, the municipal government took many of its prerogatives: in particular, the president, chosen by the governor, who assisted in the election of *Vorstebers*, former seniors, and later on also 12 *Ausschussmänner*, 12 *Spitalverwalters* and 15 members of the audit committee). This suggests that he was a significant person in the community, but also that he was a wealthy man, for only rich Jews were elected. Importantly, Szachna was a member of the circle of progressives that, in 1840, established the Association for Religion and Civilization (Religion- und Zivilisationsverein). Along with Markusfeld the members of the elite were: Abraham Gumpłowicz, Jonatan Warszauer, Józef Oettinger, Maurycy Krzepicki and Jozue Fink.⁶³ For a long time Szachna was a member of the Jewish Committee of Kazimierz District, and after his death his wife, Scheindla, would receive 300 zł as an “honorary wage.”⁶⁴

The Markusfelds were among the few Jews who lived outside the ghetto. We should remember that, from the 15th century onwards, Jews were not allowed to settle in Kraków, a territory encircled by the present-day Planty park (once the location of the city walls and moat). Jews lived in Kazimierz, a Jewish town with its own walls that separated it from the Christian part of Kazimierz. From the end of the 18th century (and for the following decades) this state of affairs was a matter of argument. In the period of the Free City, the Statute would limit the possibility of settlement outside these walls to those Jews who were doctors or professors of the Academy, artists, inventors, craftsmen, factory owners and tradesmen, who adopted European dress, spoke Polish or German and sent their children to public schools. After the period of liberalization and the failure of the 1848 Revolutions, the old limitations were reestablished. Nonetheless, in 1850, as public records show, there were a significant number of rich tradesmen and members of intelligentsia living in Stradom. For instance, tenement number 1 was inhabited by the Blumenfeld, Drobner, Rappaport, Wachtel and Cypres families⁶⁵ – almost 30 people altogether, not taking into account the Feintuch family,⁶⁶ which converted before the survey.⁶⁷ In this neighborhood (community number 6) lived Scheindla Markusfeld with her family (in the next survey she was registered as an inhabitant of the 7th district (Stradom⁶⁸)).

⁶¹ Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016), Kraków; correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

⁶² Bałaban 1936, 566-567, 589-591.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 663.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 736-737.

⁶⁵ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1850, sig. 7 (microfilm: J 11704); sig. 28-29 (microfilm: J 11725, J 11726).

⁶⁶ For further details on the Feintuch family, cf. Purchla 2011.

⁶⁷ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1850, # 7 (microfilm: J 11704).

⁶⁸ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1857, # 20 (microfilm: J 7521).

Henryk Markusfeld

Henryk (Hirszt) was one of Szachna and Scheindla's younger children. In 1804 Salomon was born, then Miriam, Samuel (Stanisław), Feigel, Pinkas, Józef, Rózla and Sara. Miriam, the second oldest Markusfeld child, was 16 when she married Leibel Mendelsburg, and three years later gave birth to Abram (Albert) Mendelsburg (who was a member of Kraków's 19th-century elite). Henryk graduated from St. Anne's secondary school in 1836, and therefore "he could not be unattached to Polish culture" and was a step "to cross the Ghetto walls."⁶⁹ Szachna's son became a secretary of the Association of Jewish Tradesmen. Bolesław Łopuszczański writes that he was active in lobbying for Jews to be allowed to trade outside Kazimierz.⁷⁰ Raised in a patriotic spirit, he took part in the uprising of 1848 and was one of the commanders of the National Guard led by Piotr Moszyński.⁷¹ In the first elections to the City Council, which took place in September 1848, he was elected as a representative of the progressive Jews of Kraków, receiving 428 votes. He was a member of the City Council until 1853, when it was disbanded. In his five-year activity he would defend Jewish interest, lobbying for abolishment of the city tax paid by Jews; in 1850 this led to the establishment of the Polish-Jewish committee, which that was to reform the tax system in a fairer manner.⁷²

Henryk was also active in the struggle for equal rights. On February 12, 1861 the Committee of Jews represented by Markusfeld, Cypres and Löbenheim called for freedom of settlement for Jews deciding to move from Jewish Kazimierz to the Christian part of the neighborhood, Stradom and the Old Town of Kraków (they referred to the act issued by the Emperor on February 18, 1860). Since the local government did not answer the petition, in 1864 the Committee began another campaign. Despite their efforts, the restriction was in place until 1867.⁷³ In 1863, during the January Uprising, Henryk was active in the Uprising Committee as a member of a police organization. At the end of the 1870s he became a chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Kraków, and "supported the Polish tendencies against the Germans."⁷⁴ From 1877 Markusfeld was responsible for the Jewish Registry Office (as a plenipotentiary of the town hall). He was elected for this position – which he would take for the rest of his life⁷⁵ – by city mayor Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz.⁷⁶ His cooperation with Rabbi Schreiber (and his successors) did not go particularly well, because, in practice, it was the rabbi who was responsible for marriage certificates (this was a result of Schreiber's efforts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna). The problem was that, according to the law, only the certificates that were signed by a plenipotentiary were valid; therefore the rabbi had to send certificates

⁶⁹ *Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski* 1938, no. 10, 20.

⁷⁰ Łopuszczański 1975, 54-55.

⁷¹ *Biuletyn Okręgu Krakowsko-Śląskiego Związku Żydów Uczestników Walk o Niepodległość Polski* 1938, no. 10, 20.

⁷² See also *Fremden-Blatt*, 1851, no. 38.

⁷³ Bałaban 1936, 707.

⁷⁴ *Nowa Reforma* 1890, no. 104.

⁷⁵ AŻIH, Gmina Wyznaniowa Żydowska w Krakowie, # 107/428.

⁷⁶ Żbikowski 1995, 180.

to Markusfeld, which he very often failed to do (according to Żbikowski⁷⁷). In March 1877 Markusfeld sent an official complaint, and the city hall tried to force the rabbi to act according to law, but the result of this intervention was not permanent.⁷⁸

Markusfeld was also active in the Aid Association for Poor Jewish Boys (*Stowarzyszenie Wsparcia Biednych Chłopców Starozakonnych*), which was a significant charitable institution of a progressive character,⁷⁹ mainly because of its program, which, according to Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, “was thought to be crucial for the general wellbeing of society; not only in temporary terms, but also as a kind of investment in future development.”⁸⁰ From the mid-1870s onwards at least half of the board of the Society was occupied by progressives like Markusfeld and Arnold Rappaport. Markusfeld became a deputy chairman of the Society in 1877.⁸¹

In 1847, the 26-year-old Markusfeld married Pesia (Apolonia), the daughter of Jakób and Golda Szancer from Pińczów.⁸² According to the survey of 1869, Henryk, Apolonia and their children (Zygmunt, Artur, Bronisława, Regina, Florentyna, Maksymilian and Zofia) lived in the city center, in tenement number 350.⁸³ According to the next survey (1880), they lived in Stradom, at house number 49. Their children Bronisława, Flora, Zofia and Artur (who was a bookkeeper) still lived with them. Zygmunt had moved to Bielsko, while Maksymilian was in Warsaw (his wife, Klara, lived with his parents).⁸⁴

Henryk died in 1890. The reason for his death was “heart injury and nephritis.” The next day, the daily newspaper *Czas* would write:

After 70 years of life, Henryk Markusfeld died today [5 May] in Kraków. In 1848 he was one of five commanders of the National Guard [...]. Markusfeld never ceased to be a faithful son of this land, and for this reason he was respected by people who were active in social work; let us name for example the late Mikołaj Zyblikiewicz. In 1848 he was elected for the position of councilman in the first Council of Kraków, and he would work there until it was disbanded [...]. For 13 years he was the chairman of the Jewish Community, and he always represented Polish tendencies. For the whole of his life he was faithful to his principles. He was related to the most noble of Kraków’s Jewish families and was genuinely respected.⁸⁵

Markusfeld’s funeral took place on Wednesday, May 8 and attracted a large crowd. Former city mayor Ferdynand Weigel delivered a speech in which he praised Markusfeld as a councilman and a former member of the executive committee of the council, former member of the National Guard and, finally, a good citizen. The next person to deliver a speech was Professor Rosenblatt, who “showed a true patriotism of the deceased, love for his motherland and positive work among his folk.” M. Schlesinger praised Markusfeld’s achievements as “one of the co-founders of the progressive house of prayer who

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Maślak-Maciejewska 2015a, 44; 2015b, 255.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Maślak-Maciejewska 2015b, 255-256.

⁸² Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016), Kraków; correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

⁸³ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1870, # 4.

⁸⁴ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1880, # 17; # 27.

⁸⁵ *Czas* 1890, no. 2.

bravely fought against zealotry.” Ernest Deiches, an academic, said that Markusfeld was a role model for the youth.⁸⁶

After Henryk’s death, Apolonia lived with her family at 42 Grodzka Street,⁸⁷ on the second floor in a three-room apartment with kitchen, study and lobby. Some of her children left Kraków and moved to Bielsko. Zygmunt had already settled there, and his siblings Maksymilian, Bronisława and Zofia would live there from time to time.⁸⁸ Two daughters stayed in Kraków with their mother: Flora, who helped her mother with the household, and Regina with her husband Max Dessauer, a Protestant tradesman.⁸⁹ Importantly, according to the survey Regina’s children – Irma, Ilona and Stefan – were of the same faith as their mother. The matter of Irma’s conversion is unknown, but in 1891 Regina converted along with Ilona and Stefan.⁹⁰

At the end of the century the Markusfelds moved to Stradom. According to the survey of 1900 Apolonia lived with her children Bronisława, Florentyna, Zofia and Artur and also her grandchildren – Ilona and Stefan Dessauer, Zdzisław Marski (who, at the time, attended the Sobieski secondary school).⁹¹ In 1910, after the death of Apolonia (1906) and Artur (1904), only three sisters stayed in Stradom: Bronisława, Flora, Zofia, as well as Jerzy Marski.⁹² Maksymilian was baptized in Bielsko in 1889 (at the age 32) and changed his name to Marski. Regina, Ilona and Stefan converted in 1891.

Against the “Christian idea of nation” – Zygmunt

Zygmunt, Henryk’s and Apolonia’s first son was born on April 24, 1847. Like the majority of children of the intelligentsia he was sent to St. Anne’s⁹³ secondary school, where he had his final exams on June 24, 1867 and, again, on September 25.⁹⁴ He enrolled at the Faculty of Law at the Jagiellonian University, where he studied until 1870/71, when he received a certificate of completion of studies (July 31, 1871). In October he took the state exam of law (his field was political science) and on February 12, 1873 received a doctor’s degree.⁹⁵ In secondary school he experienced hostility. As he later recalled, the physics teacher would claim that “the Jews know how to write in newspapers, know literature and poetry, but they are useless when it comes to physics.”⁹⁶ a few years later

⁸⁶ *Nowa Reforma* 1890, no. 107, 3.

⁸⁷ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1890, # 2; # 44-45.

⁸⁸ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1890, # 2.

⁸⁹ Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016), Kraków; correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

⁹⁰ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1890, # 2.

⁹¹ ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1900, # 26.

⁹² ANK, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa z r. 1910, # 26.

⁹³ ANK, Gimnazjum i Liceum im. Bartłomieja Nowodworskiego w Krakowie 1801-1957, # GLN 125; GLN 185; GLN 207.

⁹⁴ Stopka 2011, 178.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Markusfeld 1880, 4. Despite this fact, he took part in a school reunion in 1892: ANK, Gimnazjum i Liceum im. Bartłomieja Nowodworskiego w Krakowie 1801-1957, # GLN 219; *Gazeta Lwowska* 1892, no. 136, 3-4.

he moved to Bielsko, where he started working as a clerk. First, he was a secretary for the Industrial Society (later on he would be a member of many boards in industry). In 1879, responding to the activity of Teofil Merunowicz, a member of parliament, and remarks published by *Czas*, he published a pamphlet with his reaction to insinuations spread by the “feudal-clerical camp.”⁹⁷ His angry response begins with the passage from *Czas*: “The nationalist idea is specifically Christian and Catholic, but it does not reject anyone who feels part of it.”⁹⁸ In his view, the exact opposite was true: the Jew was, according to these circles, not a citizen, a Pole, but a stranger who is expected to “deny his own identity.”⁹⁹ This was why, he claimed, Jews who have a choice between this “specifically Christian and Catholic nationalist idea” that “cannot be separated from its religious component” and the so called “Viennese secularism” often chose the latter. Zygmunt was angry not so much with the stereotype of the “Catholic-Pole”¹⁰⁰ but with the usurpation to speak in the name of the whole nation (which was something that *Czas* did), as if Jews were not citizens.¹⁰¹ According to the reactionary camp, it was a great misfortune that peasants’ land was bought by Jews: “they would prefer if the land was bought by Germans, as long as they are Christian, rather than Jews who are Polish, but are not Christian.”¹⁰² The author responded to the accusation of “unproductivity” of Jewish occupations (usury, trade) by arguing that until 1867 Jews were not allowed to work in any “decent” field (in bureaucracy, industry, agriculture) and had no choice: “we were usurers, publicans, tradesmen, because we were not allowed to do anything else” and “Jewish usurers are just a product of the society that surrounds them.”¹⁰³

In Markusfeld’s view, it was the “Christian-Catholic nationalist idea” (Catholicism as a *sine qua non* condition for being Polish) that led to the difficult position of Jews that was to be changed by the constitution. Unfortunately, he wrote, opposition to the land ownership (which had nothing to do agricultural issues but was religiously motivated) would go against emancipation and the spirit of Viennese liberalism. The idea of equality (which came from above) and the “Catholic nationalist idea” were contradictory, and did not allow for the change of the Jewish social status. If emancipation was to be real, it should not be limited to the law, but should become part of public awareness. “The sense of equality has to be in the blood of society” (Todd Endelman also stressed this condition). As soon as 1879, Markusfeld expected legal measures to be insufficient:

This equality [...] is not wanted by *Czas* and – let us be clear about it – this equality is not wanted by the Christian population of Galicia. People don’t perceive a Jew as someone who has the equal right to live [...] to develop his physical and intellectual skills in any profession,

⁹⁷ Merunowicz 1879.

⁹⁸ Markusfeld 1880, 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Pole-Catholic myth – a historical stereotype that was formed in the 17th century, associated with the idea of Poland as a bulwark of Christianity. In the era of the partitions it gained political significance, resulting in the Catholicism of the majority of Polish society; belonging to the Polish nationality became dependent on professing the Catholic faith, which became considered as the character trait of the Polish nation. As Roman Dmowski put it, “Catholicism is not a supplement to the Polish national character, but is inherent in its very essence”; cf.: <http://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Polak-katolik;3959264.html> (July 21, 2016).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

equal chance to gain wealth, position and dignity as non-Jewish citizens – but rather they see him as an intruder [...].¹⁰⁴

This is why, unlike *Ojczyzna* a few years later, Markusfeld called for a change in the way of thinking of the majority:

Get rid of your religious prejudice and do not try to prove your good attitude towards us by showing this or another Jewish citizen who made a career through “extreme effort or through denial of his Jewish identity,” while you can easily achieve the same without it [...].¹⁰⁵

He responded to a claim that Jews were attracted by Vienna by showing that Jewish members of parliament voted in exactly the same way as the members’ feudal-clerical camp (despite their opposite interests). He asked: “Why do they do that? Because they want to prove to you that they are with you and achieve their ultimate goal: the brotherhood of citizens of all faiths.”¹⁰⁶

The fact was that Zygmunt did not believe in this brotherhood any more. A few years earlier he had baptized his daughter Kornelia in Bielsko,¹⁰⁷ in 1878, Alfred, and in 1881, Łucja.¹⁰⁸ He himself did not leave the community, and remained there until his death, just like many other families in Europe at that time – he chose to baptize his children before it meant anything to them.¹⁰⁹ Endelman says that, “In some instances, parents converted their children but did not themselves become Christians until much later, often waiting until the death of their own parents.” Zygmunt acted in a different manner. He was active in the community and B’nei B’rith¹¹⁰ association (and was buried at a Jewish cemetery in Bielsko¹¹¹). When he decided to convert his children he must have thought, like the relatives of the Mendelsohns before him, that it would be “barbaric” to sentence children to constant martyrdom.¹¹² Those who decided to act in the same way often explained it as something they did for their children to protect them from exclusion and hostility.¹¹³

The Marski family

Markusfeld’s reaction was not uncommon. From the end of the 1870s, as Endelman argues:

Ideological anti-Semitism, occupational discrimination, and social exclusion and stigmatization combined to create an atmosphere in which increasing numbers of Jews [...] experienced their Jewishness as an unbearable burden.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁷ Correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Endelman 2015, 83.

¹¹⁰ Proszyk 2002, 229.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Endelman 2015, 64.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

As a result, “with illiberalism in the ascendant, unprecedented numbers of Jews looked for radical strategies – revolutionary socialism, Zionism, and conversion to Christianity – for salvation.”¹¹⁵ In Kraków, among the elite, conversion was chosen by people like Maurycy Baruch, Ludwik Gumpłowicz, Antoni Rosner, Leon Blumenstock (Halban) and Albert Mendelsburg. The Feintuch family did it even earlier.

Without any doubt, the brother (Zygmunt) influenced his siblings. Suffice to say, Maksymilian converted in Bielsko in October 1889.¹¹⁶ He was 10 years younger than his brother and was probably religiously indifferent, a member of the community through his family rather than religion or ethnicity. Like many after him, when he had to choose between acceptance and career on the one hand and a religion that he barely knew on the other, he chose personal happiness. Religiously indifferent Jews decided to convert because of outside factors, while being aware of their descent, which they perceived as a burden (in the West many simply “did not care,” so there were fewer conversions). The generational change is also important. What was acceptable for the generation that came out of the ghetto (Henryk) was not acceptable for those who were born outside it (Zygmunt, Maksymilian, Zofia, Regina).

Max chose the career of a financier; as soon as the 1880s he would make business in Warsaw, with Stefan Krzywoszewski, who would become a godfather of Zdzisław, the first son of Klara Łucja and Maksymilian.¹¹⁷ Soon Henryka (1890), Jerzy (1897) and Janina (1901) were born. In the mid-1890s Marski became the manager of a bank in Vienna and its foreign branches.¹¹⁸ Klara moved there after her husband with the children (except Zdzisław, who continued his education in Kraków). They lived, among other places, in Istanbul and Belgrade, where Marski was the manager of a branch of Viennese Länderbank. Despite all the travels, the members of the family would see each other; for instance, in July 1900 Klara went with the children and Flora, the sister of Max, to Zakopane, which was a popular resort (the Szarskis and Henryk Sienkiewicz with his family were staying there at the same time¹¹⁹). Janina was born and baptized in Belgrade. Soon, after his final exams, Zdzisław joined his family and began studying at the Academy of Trade in Vienna. After Maksymilian’s death (1915), Viennese newspapers wrote of his knowledge, skills and trustworthiness.¹²⁰ Both he and Klara (who died in 1925) were buried at a Christian cemetery.

Maksymilian was to change his name in Vienna due to the rise of anti-Semitism.¹²¹ His decision marks the end of the history of the Markusfelds¹²² (which enters a sphere of taboo) and the beginning of the history of Marski family. “When my father was alive,”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹⁶ Correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016); also Max’s sister, Zofia was baptised at the beginning of the 20th century. Unlike Artur, Bronisława and Flora she was buried in the family tomb at the Rakowicki cemetery.

¹¹⁷ Krzywoszewski 1947, 182.

¹¹⁸ *Welt Blatt* 1915, no. 157, 13; *Fremden-Blatt* 1915, no. 190, 10.

¹¹⁹ Ośrodek Dokumentacji Tatrzańskiej TPN, # TT-P/146 (*Zakopane. Lista gości w Zakopanem 1892-1903*).

¹²⁰ *Welt Blatt* 1915, no. 157, 13; *Fremden-Blatt* 1915, no. 190, 10. See also *Neue Freie Presse* 1915, no. 18276, 18.

¹²¹ Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016), Kraków; correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

¹²² At least that part of the family.

says Piotr Marski, referring to Zdzisław, son of Max, the topic of the Markusfelds was a taboo; we did not speak about it. It was when I was a grown man and started to search for my roots that I learned about my roots; but unfortunately not many members of my family were still alive.”¹²³

In many intelligentsia homes, descent was a stigma that was to be removed, a kind of biographical stain.¹²⁴ One was put under constant pressure to be someone other than one really was and to feel guilty for not being who one was supposed to be.¹²⁵ For instance Nicolas – Mikołaj Słonimski – recalled that, “there were two spheres of taboo at home: Jewishness and sexuality.”¹²⁶ One of the taboo-forming factors was also fear. Janina, sister of Zdzisław, lived in such fear that she would never go to the cemetery on Miodowa Street, and tried to convince her nephew that he should not either.¹²⁷ Janina married her close cousin Karol Markusfeld; her son Henryk (born 1924) was baptized with her¹²⁸ at St. Stephen’s church in Kraków (1938). They changed their surname from Markusfeld to Kwiatkowski.¹²⁹

To sum up, it seems that for the Marski family conversion meant a removal of the last sign of strangeness, a change of social position, an escape from stigma and the ghetto of alienation. The Marski family, like many Jews, would become Evangelical Protestants (Janina and her son are exceptions). Endelman explain this phenomenon by the attractiveness of this religion, which was less hegemonic and less tied with oppression. Moreover – as he stresses – in general Protestant clergymen would demand less from the converted than Orthodox or Catholic priests.¹³⁰

Epilogue

In an essay on assimilation, Emmanuel Levinas writes that:

We have to think whether indifference to religion really changed the Christian character of society that we live in [...]. The stage for this non-religiousness of Christians is a state that – no matter how secular – still preserves forms of religious life in its substance.¹³¹

Endelman accurately noticed that “organic or essentialist notions of Germanness that celebrated national difference, biologist descent, and tradition, Christianity – its symbols, myths and traditions, not just its ethics – became an integral part of German nationalism.”¹³² There was a similar combination of Polishness and religion in Poland. In 1911 Antoni Lange, a poet and literary critic, would write, “To be a Pole is tied so closely

¹²³ Correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

¹²⁴ Bauman 1995, 104-105.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Endelman 2015, 127.

¹²⁷ Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016)

¹²⁸ Primarily (1901) she was baptized in the Evangelical church, correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

¹²⁹ Correspondence with Piotr Marski (June-July 2016).

¹³⁰ Endelman 2015, 145.

¹³¹ Levinas 1991.

¹³² Endelman 2015, 67.

to Catholicism that the two things seem to be inseparable. If you are not Catholic, you are not a Pole.”¹³³ As a result, for many, conversions were “a sign of Jewish identification with the laws of the state and the manners of society.”¹³⁴

* * *

The conversion of the Marski family was very modern. Endelman defined modern conversion as “not the result of persecution, exclusion and immiseration” like in the pre-modern era, but rather a result of prior but incomplete and ambiguous acceptance.¹³⁵ The conversion of the Marski family was bureaucratic rather than religious.¹³⁶ Their faith (in the new church) was very superficial;¹³⁷ the conversion itself was a price to be paid for social inclusion. The choice of “default” religion, did not mean affirmation – it was a way to look for happiness and fulfillment, which was (unlike in France) not accessible if one remained Jewish. Baptism was also a form of protection – the Second World War would prove it to be effective.¹³⁸

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Welt Blatt

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁶ Cf. Endelman 2015, 118.

¹³⁷ Conversation with Zdzisław Marski (June 2016).

¹³⁸ None of the family members died during the Holocaust. The only threat concerned Janina’s son, Henryk (1924-2001). Janina brought him to Zakopane to her brother, Zdzisław, who lived there with his wife Aniela and their son. Unfortunately, a local denounced him and Henryk was arrested. Zdzisław then interceded on his behalf, “even though he had distinctly Semitic features,” and managed to release him from arrest. Henryk also succeeded in avoiding deportation in Kraków.

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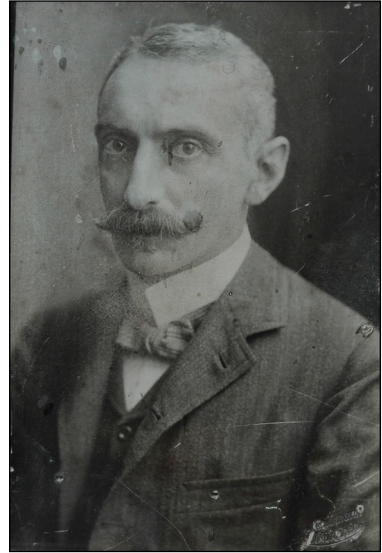
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1. Medal of Henryk Markusfeld
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



2. Max Marski (1855-1915)
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



3. Klara Łucja Marska (1867-1925), Max's wife
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



4. Klara-Łucja i Jerzyk
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



5. Zygmunt Markusfeld (1847-1903)
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



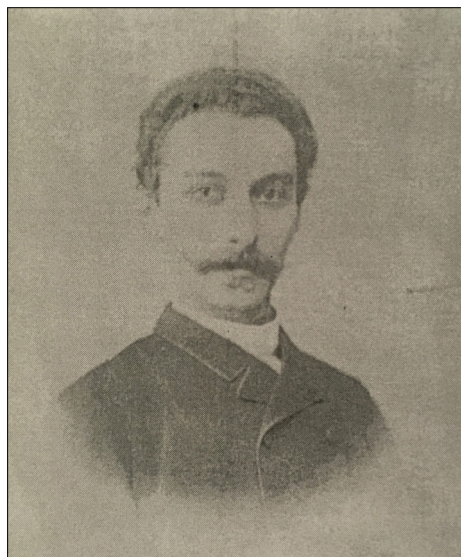
6. Zdzisław Marski (1889-1961), son of
Max and Klara
Source: Private archive of Marski's
family



7. Zdzisław Marski (1889-1961)
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



8. Max Marski (1855-1915)
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



9. Max Marski (1855-1915)
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10. Klara Łucja Marska
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



11. Jerzy Marski, son of Max and Klara
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



12. Zofia Marska
Source: Private archive of Marski's family



13. Portrait of Sz. Heyman, Klara's father
Source: Private archive of Marski's family