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**THE HASIDIC “CELL”.
THE ORGANIZATION OF HASIDIC GROUPS AT THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNITY***

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Abstract: This article analyses the social structure and composition of Hasidic groups at the level of the community, i.e. the elementary social unit of the Hasidic movement. As it demonstrates, the emergence of such groups usually followed the pattern of several stages, beginning with splintering individuals escaping from the control of the *kahal*, followed by the establishment of a Hasidic prayer hall, known as a *shtibl*, by far the most important institution of Hasidism outside of the Hasidic court. The two most typical compositions of the Hasidic group centered around the *shtibl* were peer groups, usually dominated by young men, and interest groups. Most importantly, women were consistently excluded from any participation in the Hasidic group and its activities.

For the social history of Hasidism one of the most important issues has always been the social composition and the structural development of the Hasidic movement. Unfortunately, despite the impressive development of research on Hasidism, it seems that a proper grasp of this essential question still remains outside the reach of contemporary historiography. This is mainly because of the limitations of the available sources, but also, partly, because of the insufficiency of our definitions of and scholarly approaches to the subject matter. The most important of these conceptual frameworks that prevented historians from proper evaluation of the social composition and structural development of Hasidism with its rank-and-file followers was the dominant paradigm of viewing Hasidism through the prism of its leaders, the *tsadikim*. Attracted by the importance of the concept of the *tsadik* and the social role played in the Hasidic world by its leaders, as well as by the picturesque and fascinating lives of the *tsadikim*, historians have all too often tended to forget about the vast majority of Hasidim, who lived outside of the Hasidic courts in countless townlets of Eastern and East-Central Europe.

What I will offer in the ensuing pages is my modest contribution that I hope might shed some light on one aspect of those neglected areas of the history of Hasidism as a social movement. In a quest to understand the social composition and institutional development of the Hasidic movement, I will analyze the hierarchy and structures of power within the grassroots level institution of Hasidism, that is the Hasidic groups at the level of the Jewish community. Contrary to the prevalent assumption of the radically egalitarian nature of the Hasidic movement and apparent equality of all the followers of

* This article is based on a section of Chapter 6 in my book *Hasidism and Politics: The Kingdom of Poland, 1815–1864*, forthcoming with the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

the *tsadik*, the available sources in fact suggest many instances of the existence of clear hierarchies of social involvement and social influence within these groups. Whether flat and egalitarian, or well-structured and highly hierarchical, the social structure and composition deserve thorough examination.

This is, of course, only a fragmentary analysis with no ambitions to cover the full picture. A full discussion of the structure of power in the Hasidic family, inside the Hasidic group, between Hasidic groups existing in the same community, and relations between Hasidic groups and different segments of the non-Hasidic population of the community, together with a discussion of Hasidic politics at the communal level, is naturally beyond the scope of this article.¹ These issues demand separate and very broad studies (to which I would hope to return some day). Therefore, the discussion below, necessarily abbreviated, is more of an introduction than a culmination of research on the presence of Hasidism in the community and their social structure.

Women

Firstly, one should note that more than 51 per cent of Jewish society habitually and permanently remained outside the range of active and passive communal activities of a public nature. This number, of course, indicates women,² the exclusion of whom is clearly revealed, for example, in the elections to the board of the Jewish community, when all widows, even those paying relatively high communal fees, were included in the fifth tax class, in accordance with the electoral law depriving this class of the right to vote. This practice remained almost unchanged in all electoral protocols of the Jewish community boards throughout the entire period under discussion. The election of the rabbi was similar. In accordance with the law, all “fathers of families” were supposed to participate in the election of a rabbi, without regard to the taxes paid, thus giving electoral rights to taxpayers in the fifth class, which formally included women registered as heads of families, e.g. widows. The regulation of the law regarding fathers of families was interpreted literally, however, meaning that in cases when the household was managed by a woman (a widow), she was excluded from the electoral list, as she did not meet the strict definition of “father of the family.”

The exclusion of women pertained not only to formal political activity such as elections but also to informal activities, such as requests, reports, and petitions, and even entirely informal and spontaneous actions such as street disturbances, public arguments, and minor domestic matters. While women were quite likely absent from communal petition actions or reports to city officials, it is difficult to imagine and believe that they

¹ While similar studies exist, it is difficult to regard them as satisfactory. For the most important studies dealing with the communal aspect of the Hasidic expansion see Shmeruk 1991: 59–65; 1993: 186–195; Ettinger 1996: 63–75; Dynner 2006a: 55–88.

² The literature on the place of women in Jewish society is already immense, but while much attention has been paid to attempts to define the gendered boundaries of the social roles of women and an analysis of the limitations of earlier Jewish historiography, the question of political participation has not yet been a topic of particular interest. A solid discussion of the literature on Jewish women in Eastern Europe can be found in Freeze 2005: 3–24. See also Rosman 2005: 25–56.

were indeed completely absent from communal conflicts of a very spontaneous nature. The reality was certainly radically different; traces in the sources allow us to discern the occasional participation of women in communal conflicts (examples below). However, characteristically, the voices of women are consistently excluded in later accounts (and this is basically our only source of information about these conflicts), and their participation in events erased. The authors of these false narratives did not intend to falsify past reality; they were simply describing it according to socially accepted categories. It is especially important to realize this, because the accounts not only depict how ideal social norms looked according to representatives of society authorized by that society to make normative judgments, but in a certain sense they also reveal how those who were interested and involved perceived these events. An exception is the 1840 account from Bełchatów, which states that a certain woman, Rothszyldowa, publicly dared to shout during the service in the synagogue that the local Jewish community board members "shaved their beards and cut their hair."³ The situation was unusual enough that witnesses were forced to record it formally.

A significantly more typical situation concerned a certain Naftali Flomenbaum from Kazimierz Dolny, who testified: "I went to the rabbi to ask him for a certification for a marriage, but he did not give it to me, because he wanted from me 5 złoty and 6 groszy, though I am poor and in the fifth class."⁴ In his last sworn testimony, however, Flomenbaum stated: "I can swear to this, because my wife told me all this, as she went to the rabbi."⁵ However, this contradicts what he said several minutes earlier, that he, not his wife, went to the rabbi. This did not prevent Flomenbaum from presenting previous events in the first person, attributing his wife's actions to himself and even offering sworn testimony on her behalf. Though this in itself may seem trivial, I think this incident illustrates well the mechanism of excluding women from the arena of public activity even in those situations when they did in fact participate in events of a public nature. Their participation was seen as not in accord with the normative public and political view of the life of the community, so the authors of the narratives used men as symbolic substitutes. The source of the societal norm was, on the one hand, the general principle of excluding women from the public spheres of life of all societies of Eastern Europe and, on the other, the halakhic principle of the incapacity of women to take legal action, even as witnesses, and the practices of Jewish society that stemmed from this idea.

It might be the case that this double exclusion, real and symbolic, equally affected women in the sphere of the social activities of Hasidism and those from non-Hasidic families. Within the Hasidic community, the question of women's public participation is additionally complicated because of a fundamental doubt as to whether women really belonged to the Hasidic world prior to the beginning of the 20th century. This question has repeatedly been, and still is, the subject of study,⁶ but this is not the place for a more

³ AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2496: 586.

⁴ Wodziński 2011: no. 40.02; AGAD, CWW, no. 1632: 145–180.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The most important historical studies so far on the relation between women and the Hasidic movement have been published by Horodezky 1953, IV: 65–71; Rapoport-Albert 1988: 495–525; 2009; Polen 1992: 1–21; Loewenthal 2000a: 21–28; 2000b: *7–*65; Deutsch 2003; Lewis 2007: 21–40; Rosman 2009, I: 151–164. This topic is currently being researched by several scholars of Hasidism, including Moshe Rosman, Ada Rapoport-Albert and David Assaf.

detailed analysis.⁷ However, I shall state briefly here that I am inclined to agree with the *tsadik* Meir of Opatów, when he said during the 1824 anti-Hasidic investigation that “generally women are not Hasidim.”⁸ This statement stems directly from the nature of the Hasidic community, which, in spite of the prevailing terminology, was not a sect but rather a religious brotherhood on the model of other confraternities, in which membership was usually limited to men. However, I will leave this question for further explanation elsewhere.⁹

The fact that women were not members of the Hasidic community in the full sense of the word does not exclude the possibility of their emotional and even institutional ties with the Hasidic community and the court of the *tsadik*. The pilgrimages to the courts of the *tsadikim*, in which numerous women participated, were a clear expression of these ties. We know, too, of women who identified themselves with Hasidic values; a good example is the wife of the famous Russian-Jewish memoirist Yekhezkel Kotik, who “leaned towards Hasidism” and was very disenchanted when her husband rejected it.¹⁰ So, in spite of women’s lack of formal ties with Hasidism and their general absence in communal activities, we can legitimately expect women sympathizing with Hasidism to appear occasionally in the arena of communal politics.

In reality, however, women typically appear in only one social role, as a patroness or benefactor of the Hasidic community or an individual *tsadik*. The best-known example of such a woman is Temerl Sonnenberg, the wife of Berek Sonnenberg and wealthy patroness of numerous Polish *tsadikim*, who was mentioned in previous chapters. Significantly less wealthy and less influential women, however, also appear in similar roles. For example, in 1819, the daughter of the wealthy Warsaw merchant Melekh Liwerant offered her hospitality in the Warsaw suburbs to the *tsadik* Moses of Kozenice, and in 1860s Lublin a certain Krajndel Sejdenwajsowa offered “half of her home, a part of the ground floor, at No. 620 in the city of Lublin in perpetuity as a new synagogue for Hasidim.”

The role of patroness and benefactor was not only a source of prestige for these women but also entailed a certain political influence. The most famous of female patronesses of Hasidism, Temerl Sonnenberg-Bereksohn,¹¹ and certainly other women, were well able to take advantage of this. This type of influence of women on public life was socially acceptable, because it could be substantiated in the traditional system of values of women’s public charitable activity, but it was very limited, because women could only act in the arena of the communal public sphere under the veil of this kind of charity work. To be socially effective, the charity had to be substantial, and so by nature was limited to a very small number of rich women possessing their own property. The memoirist from Galicia Hinde Bergner (1870–1942), one of those who had to limit their generosity to

⁷ On this, see Wodziński 2010: 77–104; an expanded English version in Wodziński 2013b.

⁸ AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 168–179, 181–186. The protocol of the interrogation was reprinted in Wodziński 1994: 235–239. See also Wodziński 2013a: 106. For a detailed discussion of the truthfulness of this statement, see Rapoport-Albert 2009: 10*–11*.

⁹ The question of Hasidism as a brotherhood (*hevrah*) will be discussed in my essay on the nature of Hasidic ties and real elements of Hasidic identity, now under preparation. For a partial introduction to the subject, see Wodziński 2012a: 135–156; 2012b.

¹⁰ Kotik 2002: 361.

¹¹ On Temerl Sonnenberg-Bereksohn and her support for Hasidism see Dynner 2006a: 150–159; 2006b: 64–110. See also Schiper 1992: 86–88.

a few pennies and a bottle of brandy donated each Friday to a local Hasidic leader, recalls that her mother certainly did not gain any social influence out of this kind of charity.¹² Thus, the presence of women in the incidents of interest to us is completely marginal; those active in communal politics were almost exclusively men.

Hasidic centers

Thus, those active in the life of a Hasidic cell were almost exclusively men. Regarding the structure of the social organization of these publicly active men, a basic distinction is to be made between the centers that were the homes of *tsadikim* and those significantly more numerous communities where a *tsadik* was not in residence. In those centers where *tsadikim* lived, the focus of politics and the structure of the Hasidic community naturally concentrated around his person. Interestingly, however, the personal engagement of *tsadikim* in public activities at the communal level and in the resolution of ongoing communal conflicts was shockingly low, at least as far as can be determined from the extant archival sources. The *tsadik* appears somewhat more often in communal politics only in those rare instances when he is at the same time the communal rabbi, and so an official of the community, and his position or his activity is contested by part of the local society. Such was the case in Radomsko from 1850 to 1852, when the new Jewish community board tried to take away from *tsadik* R. Solomon Rabinowicz part of his income from his function as rabbi and, in essence, his guaranteed rabbinical contract.¹³ Indeed, in the copious official correspondence concerning the case the Jewish community board argued that Solomon was the leader of the Hasidim and not the rabbi of the entire community; in fact, R. Solomon of Radomsko did not appear in this conflict as *tsadik* but as the communal rabbi, and in no situation did he benefit from the support of the Hasidic community. A similar situation occurred in Łęczna in 1852, when the anti-Hasidic opposition tried to block the payment of a salary to the local rabbi and *tsadik* Joshua ben Solomon Leib of Łęczna.¹⁴ These were, however, rare and atypical cases, because they were limited to places in which the *tsadik* was at the same time the communal rabbi and where his position was contested.

In centers where the *tsadik* did not fulfill the function of communal rabbi, including the largest and most established centers of Hasidic influence such as Przysucha and Kozienice, the presence of the local *tsadik* in ongoing communal public life was actually invisible. This does not mean, however, that the *tsadik* was absent from this area. Certainly, his significant influence allowed the *tsadik* to realize his goals through groups and individuals representing him; he simply did not have to engage personally in the process of implementing the accepted goals. There is also no doubt that in many cases the *tsadik* pulled the strings of communal politics. This influence, however, should not be overestimated: an example from Radomsko shows that even an influential *tsadik* was not domi-

¹² See Bergner 2005: 42.

¹³ On the conflict between R. Solomon of Radomsko and the Jewish community board there see Wodziński 2011: no. 30.01-03; AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2559: 692–694, 900–901, 906–907, 913, 917–918. For the rabbinical contract of Solomon Rabinowicz of Radomsko, see Wodziński 2011: no. 17.01; AGAD, KWK, no. 710: 290–291, 295; see also AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2559: 909–911; Rabinowicz 1967: 47.

¹⁴ See Wodziński 2011: no. 31.01-03; AGAD, CWW 1613: 210–220.

nant in his own community and could count on strong internal opposition; his strength repeatedly turned out to be too little to maintain the *status quo*.¹⁵ Secondly, and more importantly, a *tsadik* who did not fulfill communal functions was not only independent of the community to a significant degree but in a certain sense outside its structure. Therefore, the *tsadik* and his court entered into conflict with the interests and activities of the *kahal* only sporadically. Throughout hundreds of files concerning Jewish communities in 19th-century Poland traces of social involvement on the side of the *tsadikim* appear strikingly rarely, and this is true not only for the places of Hasidic dominance, in which – as has been said – this is easily understandable, but also in places which were far from Hasidic dominance and where the *tsadik* had to struggle for his social recognition. This might, in fact, suggest reconsidering the accepted understanding of Hasidism as a social structure *alternative* to *kahal* and regarding Hasidism as a *supplementary* rather than an alternative form of social organization.

Outside the court: youth peer group

Let me now come to the core of my argument, i.e. the social organization of Hasidic groups far from the residence of any *tsadik*, that is the most typical structure of Hasidic life in the period of the Hasidic mass expansion. This, in fact, is the focus of my research of Hasidism beyond the courts of the *tsadikim*, which is intended to bring to scholarly attention this neglected aspect of Hasidism of those thousands of rank-and-file followers across Eastern Europe that had until recently been marginalized in research on Hasidism.

Not surprisingly, social organization and public activity of the Hasidim in communities far from the residence of a *tsadik* developed in a completely different way than those centered around the *tsadik* in the major Hasidic centers. Quite regularly these communities went through three phases of development, from an early, unstructured stage, through a period as a relatively united Hasidic group, to emergence as a distinct group with its own internal hierarchy and social and political representation.

In the first of these phases, Hasidim in Jewish communities usually appeared as a completely spontaneous and unstructured group of unaffiliated individuals, at least in terms of public activity that can be recognized as political. Their only common feature was evasion of some of the communal obligations, above all participation in certain religious festivals, which Hasidim preferred to spend at the court of their own *tsadik*. One of the most typical conflicts between *kahal* authorities, who aimed to maintain full control over the local Jewish population, and the supporters of Hasidism (and certainly numerous other factions), who tried to weaken this control or simply completely to free themselves from it, was Hasidic absence during the religious festivals, especially the major festivals of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, when numerous Hasidim left for the Hasidic courts, the seats of their *tsadikim*. In such cases, ties with the host community weakened.

¹⁵ Interestingly enough, the British missionaries visiting Radomsko in 1850 reported that “the local Rabbi because of his exaggerated ideas and behavior fell into disfavor among the local population,” see AGAD, CWW, no. 1458: 402.

The extant sources show unequivocally that the flight of Hasidim from their native communities during important festivals was seen by the *kahal* elite as a serious threat to the social order. It is not strange, then, that *kahal* authorities tried at any cost to halt these practices. However, it was a sign of the times that the means employed by the *kahal* to reach this goal was a petition to governmental authorities, and not internal restrictions of the *kahal* against a resistant group. Even if the incidents took place before the formal liquidation of *kahals* in the Polish Kingdom in 1822, the authorities of the *kahal* were not in a position to restrain the tendencies of breakaway groups with the means which remained at their disposal. This, of course, was a further factor which facilitated the development of Hasidism.

However, on the part of the Hasidim it is difficult to speak of any kind of coordinated public activity and common goals and measures that might make them into a self-conscious group, since the escape from the control of the *kahal* was completely spontaneous, and these individuals still prayed in the communal synagogue and participated in almost all public activities of the community after their return.

The turning point was the creation of a separate prayer house, i.e. a *shtibl*, a moment which suggests the distinct structure of the Hasidic group.¹⁶ This is completely understandable; in accordance with Jewish law, the creation of a separate prayer house is only possible for a minimum number of ten formally adult men (that is, age 13 or older) praying together, and so would demand an already significant group of Hasidim determined to mark their religious difference.¹⁷ At the same time, the creation of a Hasidic *shtibl* was usually the catalyst for the first sharp confrontation of the Hasidic group with the non-Hasidic majority and the board of the community, and so it was the first occasion in which an activist group of potential leaders of the Hasidic group could reveal itself. Therefore, the most typical structure of early active Hasidic groups was a group of several people praying in one *shtibl*, often supporters of the same *tsadik* (which may suggest that "general Hasidic" *shtiblekh*, though very popular, were structurally less close-knit and less effective),¹⁸ usually a group of peers, and usually a group of young people.

Young age is the most celebrated aspect of the leading and most visible members of the Hasidic groups. When in 1823 the Jewish community board and local authorities in Parzew complained about an emerging Hasidic group, they unequivocally defined the group as a concentration of young people.¹⁹ Similarly, in 1840 in Międzyrzec Podlaski,

¹⁶ There is hardly any research on the Hasidic *shtiblekh*, arguably the most important institution of Hasidism outside of the court of the *tsadik*. So far, the most comprehensive approach to this issue is Jacobs 1972: chap. 3; Stampfer 2013. See also Wertheim 1992: 106–108; Wodziński 2005a: 334–335.

¹⁷ However, we should note that there were at least some *shtiblekh* where less than ten men usually gathered, e.g. in 1823 in Terespol, where there were only "five men attending the Hasidic prayer house regularly." See Wodziński 2011: no. 11.20; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 7–8.

¹⁸ On the two fiercely competing Hasidic groups from Parzew in 1823–1824 being the followers of two antagonistic *tsadikim*, see e.g. R. Simha Bunim of Przysucha and R. Simeon Deutsch of Żelechów in Wodziński 2011: chap.11; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 4; on the group in Węgrów being the followers of R. Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica, see Wodziński 2011: no. 29.04; AGAD, CWW, no. 1789: 209–217; on the group in Częstochowa being followers of R. Issachar Ber of Radoszyce see J[akub] B[ursztyński], 'Russland und Polen. Czenstochau', *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 5/40 (1841), 567–568.

¹⁹ See e.g. Wodziński 2011: no. 11.01; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 4; Wodziński 1994: 229; Wodziński 2011: no. 11.17; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 11–21. See also Wodziński 2011, no. 11.25; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 39; AGAD, KRSW, no. 6634: f. 233v.

when a Jewish community board complained of Hasidim breaking the rules by smoking tobacco in the *beit midrash*, the board pointed out that those doing this were primarily young men.²⁰ The high percentage of young men among Hasidim is not surprising. The complaints against Hasidim of anti-Hasidic critics, both *mitnagedim* and *maskilim*, very often stressed that this movement attracted naive people, women, and especially young men.²¹ As the well-known maskil Abraham Stern said, Hasidim tried with all their strength “to beguile and ensnare youth and less sensible Israelites, particularly the rich and women.”²² Stern also complained elsewhere of the “deplorable influence on Jewish youth” exerted by Hasidism. This description may not accurately reflect the age structure of the Hasidic community, especially in its later stages, when Hasidism was already a movement well established socially, and all ages were equally represented. However, interestingly, the dominance of young men among politically active Hasidim is evident not only in the earlier formative phase of the creation of the community but actually throughout the entire classical period of Hasidism up to the First World War.

The considerable dominance of young men in social and political activity was not, then, an exclusively transitory phenomenon. The technical characteristics of the public activity of Hasidim, in which group pressure and even physical force played a considerable role, may partly explain this. Of course, young people always and everywhere dominate in triggering street fights, so it should not be surprising that the same is true among Hasidim, who in 1838 in Płock attacked the local anti-Hasidic rabbi Isaac Auerbach.²³ Isaac Auerbach was a descendant of a well-known rabbinic family, first appointed rabbi in Dobrzyń and subsequently (1838) in Płock, where he came across strong Hasidic opposition. The investigation showed that all the perpetrators of the attack belonged to a group of peers in their twenties whose leader was the 20-year-old Shmul Moses Szpiro.²⁴ Similarly, when in 1840 in Bełchatów there were riots, disturbances, public insults, and the extinguishing of candles in the synagogue, the Hasidic group was unequivocally defined as consisting of “only youth employed in nothing but idleness and drunken nights.”²⁵ This is, in fact, the most consistent pattern of the socially active part of the Hasidic group.

Outside the court: the interest group

An alternative structure of the Hasidic “cell” to the peer group was the interest group. An excellent example of this is the Hasidic community concentrated around Majer Rypiński in Włocławek, described in detail elsewhere.²⁶ To summarize the case briefly,

²⁰ Wodziński 2011: no. 23.01; see also AGAD, CWW, no. 1780: 34–35.

²¹ See e.g. memorials by Elias Moszkowski in AGAD, CWW, no. 1436: 215–233. Menahem Mendel Lefin especially emphasized the attractiveness of Hasidim for youth, see Sinkoff 2004: 113–167.

²² Wodziński 2011: no. 4.07; AGAD, CWW, no. 1871: 43–46; AGAD, KWK, no. 702: 137–141; AGAD, KRSW, no. 6634: ff. 239–242; Mahler 1961: 477–481; Wodziński 2005a: 260–263.

²³ Isaac Auerbach was the son of Haim Auerbach, the rabbi of Łęczyca. After the death of his father, he became rabbi in Łęczyca. He is the author of the well-known Halakhic tract *Divre Hayim* (Breslau, 1852).

²⁴ See Wodziński 2011: no. 20.01–06; also AP Płock, AMP, no. 568: ff. 142–148.

²⁵ AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2496: 586.

²⁶ See Wodziński 2006/2007: 171–185.

from the 1820s two wealthy families competed for dominance in the Jewish community of Włocławek. At the beginning of the 1830s one of them took the upper hand. Soon afterwards, the leader of the losing group, the wealthy merchant Majer Rypiński, along with his supporters established a Hasidic group and separated from the Jewish community. A fact worthy of note is that Majer Rypiński and several dozen of his followers that we know by name were interconnected by a variety of means: family relations, business contacts, shared addresses, etc.

More or less clear traits of an interest group are also evident in many other cases, for example in the conflict regarding the position of the rabbi in Płock in 1829 mentioned elsewhere. Here I should mention, though, that from the beginning the internal hierarchy and political leadership within the interest group emerges significantly more clearly than the hierarchy and leadership within the peer group. This is understandable because the so-called interest group usually relied on the clientele system, an arrangement of informal dependencies in which the wealthy patron protected clients dependent on him economically in exchange for their political support. In such an arrangement, the rich patron, or his entire family, took on the natural role of a leader.

Moreover, it seems that the influence of the clientele arrangement appears not only in the case of an interest group, but also in many Hasidic groups for whom economic dependency may not have been the factor or was just one of the minor factors behind the emergence of these Hasidic communities. The co-dependency of economic and political roles was most likely universal for all Hasidic communities. We find a lot of examples of this in each of the incidents. For example, Józef Gayfler and Joachym Lerner, both very wealthy members of the highest tax group, were representatives and leaders of local Hasidim in Częstochowa in 1820.²⁷ The situation was similar in the incident in Włocławek, as mentioned above, and an almost identical conflict in Koniecpol in 1836–1837.²⁸ Acting as the leaders of the local Hasidim, the Wargoń brothers and their relative Jakub Hejszek were not only ex-members of the Jewish community board, dismissed in an atmosphere of scandal; they were also wealthy members of the financial elite of the community.²⁹ Quite characteristically, after losing in the struggle for the control of the Jewish community, the Wargoń family and Jakub Hajszyk detached themselves from the religious institutions of the community to establish, precisely on the Simhat Torah holiday, a Hasidic prayer hall, and soon after began to nag at the Jewish community board with chicanery, disparagements, and lampoons. In Pilica Aryeh Leib Hirschberg, a wealthy merchant and a learned Talmudist, and his brother Moses, the richest Jewish resident of the town, played dominant roles in a local Hasidic cell and clearly arranged the local Hasidic group around their economic, social, and political dominance.³⁰ In Piątek the organizer of the Hasidic group and its unquestioned leader was Chuna Ungier, a grain merchant and the richest Jew in the town, who was related to the communal rabbi and a follower of Hasidism, too.³¹ As the testimonies unequivocally confirm, the wealth of Chuna Ungier was one of the most important means of attracting new followers of the

²⁷ See AGAD, KWK, no. 702: 17, 26, 29, 31. See also Wodziński 2005b.

²⁸ See Wodziński 2011: no. 20.01–06; also AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2512: 109–111, 260, 304–314.

²⁹ See tax lists in AP Łódź, APRG, no. 2512: 117–120, 319–320.

³⁰ See AGAD, CWW, no. 1472: 355–360.

³¹ See AGAD, CWW, no. 1716: 131–243.

Hasidic “cell” and an important instrument of his social power, which in turn made him into a natural leader of the emerging Hasidic group. We may conclude then, that economic dominance was almost always very important, indeed one of the most important factors in the emergence of the leadership of the Hasidic group and its political representation in localities outside of the Hasidic courts. At the same time, the incidents in Pilica and Piątek show that at least sometimes economic position was in itself insufficient to dominate the local Hasidic group. Real leadership depended on at least two criteria: religious scholarship and economic strength. If, as in Pilica and Piątek, both these instruments of power were concentrated in the hands of one family, that family easily acquired a dominant position in the group.

Conclusion

To sum up, the development of the essential Hasidic structure at the communal level can be traced through several stages. The earliest one is the stage of unorganized individuals, whose Hasidic identification on the communal level is primarily negative, i.e. through the forms of communal and family life in which they do not participate. The turning point is the creation of the most important communal institution of Hasidism, i.e. the *shtibl*. The two most typical social structures of the group establishing and running a *shtibl* are peer groups and interest groups. It also seems that interest groups were critical for the development of more sophisticated hierarchies in the Hasidic cell, as we saw in cases of Włocławek and Koniecpol, but also in many other communities across the Congress Kingdom. This might suggest several further implications for our understanding of the Hasidic movement. First, it brings back an old anti-Hasidic argument, of economic gain as one of the factors in the creation and development of the Hasidic movement. Though I do not wish to overprivilege the economic aspect, I think it is worth reevaluating its influence as one of several potential factors in the development of the movement. Secondly, it makes us reconsider the nature of social relations within the Hasidic group. The clientele system is a complex structure of economic but also social and cultural interdependencies. If the local Hasidic groupings were based on the clientele system, even if only to a very limited extent and only selectively, the map of economic, social, and cultural relations within a Hasidic group must be radically redrawn, making the situation very far from the radical egalitarianism so often suggested in scholarly literature. Thirdly, the cases of a family alliance of economic strength and scholarship, or, as the famous Talmudic saying has it, of *kemah* and *Torah*, as just hinted at in the cases of Pilica and Piątek, possibly bring us closer to understanding the nature of leadership in the Hasidic groups at the communal level.

However, as stated previously, the intention of this article is to open the field to further queries and exploration rather than to deliver the concluding answer to the issue of the social composition of the Hasidic group at the community level. The final resolution will come after historians better explore this new field of researching Hasidism focusing not on the *tsadikim* and their doctrines, but rather on the everyday life of thousands of their followers.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AGAD, CWW – Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Centralne Władze Wyznaniowe, Warszawa.
 AGAD, KWK – Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Komisja Województwa Kaliskiego, Warszawa.
 AGAD, KRSW – Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Komisja Rządowa Spraw Wewnętrznych, Warszawa.
 AP Łódź, APRG – Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Anteriora Piotrkowskiego Rządu Gubernialnego.
 AP Płock, AMP – Archiwum Państwowe w Płocku, Akta miasta Płocka.

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