

Sonderdruck aus

Alois Woldan / Olaf Terpitz (Hg.)

Ivan Franko und die jüdische Frage in Galizien

Interkulturelle Begegnungen und Dynamiken
im Schaffen des ukrainischen Schriftstellers



V&R unipress

Vienna University Press

ISBN 978-3-8471-0521-3

ISBN 978-3-8470-0521-6 (E-Book)

ISBN 978-3-7370-0521-0 (V&R eLibrary)

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Wolf Moskovich (Jerusalem)

Two Views on the Problems of Ukrainian-Jewish Relations. Ivan Franko and Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky

Ivan Franko (1856–1916) and Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940) are outstanding public figures who analyzed Ukrainian-Jewish relations from their respective national positions, Ukrainian or Jewish, and often came to familiar conclusions. Ivan Franko is unique among Ukrainian intellectuals of his times in his deep understanding of the Jewish people and its cultural tradition. As a novelist and writer of political essays he wrote more on Jewish subjects than any of his Ukrainian contemporaries.

Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky who was a generation younger than Ivan Franko is on the Jewish scene a fitting analogue to Ivan Franko on the subject of Ukrainian-Jewish relations. No Jewish leader before or after him paid so much attention to the Ukrainian national issues and to the ways of solving the so called Jewish question in Ukraine.

There are a number of similarities in their life histories. Both Franko and Jabotinsky tried to be elected to parliament—the Austrian Reichsrat in the case of Franko and the Russian Duma in the case of Jabotinsky, who was running for parliament as a candidate from Volhynia, and both were unsuccessful – falling victims to political machinations of well entrenched pro-government party machines. Thus, their attempts to become active parliamentarians defending the interests of their electorate were thwarted by their corrupt opponents. Both Franko and Jabotinsky were influential journalists, writers and thinkers during their lifetime, and remained inspiring figures for generations to come.

There are, however, many differences between these two figures. Ivan Franko is ambivalent in his relation to the Jews. Some of his statements and characterizations of Jews can be considered philo-Semitic while other ones contradict them and can be seen as anti-Semitic.¹ His positions on the Jewish question shifted with time and according to circumstances and his audiences.² I wonder if

1 Кудрявцев, П. 1929. *Єврейство, євреї та єврейська справа в творах Івана Франка*. In: Збірник праць єврейської історично-археографічної комісії. Т. 2. Київ: 1–81.

2 Hrytsak, Yaroslav. 2013. *A Strange Case of Anti-Semitism. Ivan Franko and the Jewish Issue*. In:

it is a coincidence that most of his anti-Semitic pronouncements were published in Ukrainian for the Ukrainian readers, while most of his philo-Semitic ones appeared in Polish and German.

In contrast to Franko's shifts Jabotinsky's position on the Ukrainian-Jewish relations and his support of the Ukrainian national struggle remained permanent through his life. You would find in his writings only a positive attitude towards Ukrainians.³ Jabotinsky as a Zionist leader was also an active fighter and military man. He founded the Jewish battalion, a unit of the British Army in the First World War which became the basis for the creation of the future Haganah, the underground army of the Jews fighting for their national state in Palestine. He organized the Jewish self-defense forces in Palestine and the diaspora and also the youth paramilitary organization Betar.

Both Franko and Jabotinsky made major contributions to the creation of their respective national states. They did not live long enough, though, to see the parliament, as envisaged in their work, and national dreams come true—the Ukrainian National Republic was created the year after Franko's death, and Israel—eight years after Jabotinsky's demise.

Franko's position on the relations between Ukrainians and Jews was based throughout his life on his defense of the economic interests of the Ukrainian peasants and workers. As a Ukrainian radical and nationalist, he acknowledged the national rights of the Jewish minority in Galicia but demanded that the Ukrainian peasantry and working class be protected from Jewish exploitation. Franko, unlike many of his Ukrainian contemporaries, deeply understood the various facets of Galician Jewry and the problems surrounding it. The mass of 800,000 poorly clad in black Hassids, who made their living as petty merchants and tavern keepers, he regarded as parasites. Franko wrote that this was a funny kind of paupers who existed by exploiting Ukrainian peasants who were even poorer than themselves.

On the other side of the social divide he saw Jewish industrialists and bankers, owners of enterprises where those exploited Ukrainian workers were employed. And in the middle there were assimilated Jews, who were either Polonized or Germanized, and had little contact with the Jewish proletariat.

Franko supported the recognition of Jews as a separate nation – with full equality of rights and obligations. Jews could either assimilate, emigrate or re-

O. Bartov, D. Wetz (eds). *Shatterzone of Empires. Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 228–242; Mnich, Roman. 2012. *Ivan Franko im Kontext mit Theodor Herzl und Martin Buber. Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus in Ostgalizien 1836–1916*. Konstanz. Hartung-Gorre Verlag.

3 Kleiner, Israel. 2000. *From Nationalism to Universalism. Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky and the Ukrainian Question*. Edmonton-Toronto. CIUS Press.

main in Galicia as aliens without the right to possess or farm the land.⁴ An internal Jewish reform was depriving rabbis of the power to excommunicate any Jew from the Jewish community.

As the Jewish community showed strong cohesion and solidarity in protecting the economic interests of its members, Franko saw it necessary for Ukrainians to defend their economic position by creating cooperative institutions that would eliminate eventually the Jewish middlemen. A particular danger for the Ukrainian peasants he saw in the campaign by the 'Alliance Israelite' that sought to bring Jewish colonists from the Russian pale of settlement to Galicia. He warned the Austrian authorities that uncontrolled settlement in Galicia of thousands of Jewish paupers from Russia might cause a catastrophe that he wished neither the state nor the Jews. Franko was presumably the first non-Jewish reviewer of Theodor Herzl's book 'Der Judenstaat'. His sympathy toward the Zionist idea does not originate in his deep Christian beliefs, as was the case with many Christian supporters of Zionism, but from the realization that the dire economic conditions of Ukrainians in Galicia, which he rationalized as Jewish exploitation, demanded the emigration of Jews as a safety valve. At the same time Herzl's idea of a national state for Jews stimulated his own dreams of an independent Ukrainian state, which is reflected in several of his works. He did not consider these plans realistic for his times. As for the future, their realization could be achieved by the will of the Ukrainian people.⁵

Franko did not support any Jewish assimilation in Galicia that strengthened the Polish hold on the province. He wrote that for some reason Jews had a tendency to assimilate to the more powerful nation closest to them, but not to the poorer one, the oppressed one. Why there are no Ruthenian Jews?—asks his protagonist Vagman in the novel 'Crossroads' ('Перехресні стежки'). We forget—confirms Vagman—that more than half the Jewish people live now on Ruthenian soil, and the Ruthenian hatred, accumulated over the centuries, may burst into such a flame and assume such forms that our protectors, the Poles and the Russians, will be unable to help us with.

Vagman calls for efforts to reach an understanding with the Ruthenian peasants. As soon as they advance a little and attain some strength—says Vagman—more and more Jews will begin to shift to their side. But it is important to assist them now, when they are still weak, downtrodden and unable to strengthen up.

4 Hrytsak, *A Strange Case of Anti-Semitism. Ivan Franko and the Jewish Issue*.

5 Franko, Iwan. 1896. *Państwo żydowskie*. In: Tydzień. Dodatek literacki do Kuriera Lwowskiego, We Lwowie. March: 73–74.

The positive program for a Galician Jew as expressed by Vagman is to remain a Jew and yet love the country where he was born, and be useful, or at least not harmful to Ruthenians. No assimilation is necessary.⁶

When a real representative of such a rare type of Jew appeared on Franko's horizon, he warmly accepted and supported him. This was the case of the Ukrainian poet Hryts'ko Kernerenko (Grigory Kerner, 1863–1920s?). During 1904–1908 Franko printed over ten of Kernerenko's publications, most of them translations from Yiddish of works by Simon Frug and Sholem Aleichem, in the magazine 'Літературно-науковий вістник' (Literary-scholarly herald), which was edited by him and Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi.⁷ In the same magazine Franko published his own translation of the Yiddish poet and folklorist Wolf Ehrenkranz (Zbarazher), including an introduction. Franko, it seems, who apparently knew Yiddish from childhood, also published on various occasions his translations of the Yiddish folk verses.

Magdalena Laszlo-Kuŕiuk cites a passage from Franko's 'Crossroads' where Vagman speaks of two parts of the Jewish soul: the noble one of the Biblical prophets and Jewish fighters against the Romans, and the mercantile one of diaspora Jews. She notices that as a rule Franko uses Yiddish names such as Leiba, Hershko, Shloimko, Berko for characters who run after money but evades mentioning first names for Vagman and Resselberg, who represent the dignity of the Jewish people. Motyo Parnas, another character of 'Crossroads', loses his first name from the moment he begins to help the Ukrainian workers to hold their meeting.⁸

Vladimir Jabotinsky wrote most of his articles on Jewish-Ukrainian relations in the period between 1904 and 1914. I did not find any evidence that he was personally acquainted with Franko, though perhaps he knew his works and was in contact with several Ukrainian and Polish intellectuals close to Franko. Jabotinsky met in this way Eliza Orzeszkowa in Grodno in 1905 and called her 'a friend of the Jews and in general a noble representative of the naïve generation of nineteenth-century humanists'. He began to cooperate with the journal 'Ukrainskii vestnik' (The Ukrainian Herald) edited by Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi in 1906, and with 'Ukrainskaia zhizn' (Ukrainian life) edited by Symon Petliura in 1912.

When Jabotinsky started his political career, Ukrainian-Jewish political cooperation did not exist (except for some elements in Galicia), and he began to work incessantly, against the unwillingness of Jewish circles, for the cause of

6 Франко, Іван. 1900. *Перехресні стежки* // Літературно-науковий вісник. Львів.

7 Петровський-Штерн, Йоханан. 2013. *Молитва за Україну: Химерна ідентичність Грицька Кернеренка*. In: Єгупець. Київ. № 22: 260–315.

8 Laszlo-Kuŕiuk, Magdalena. 1993. *Diachrony and Synchrony in the Rendering of Jewish Proper Names in Ukrainian Literary Sources*. In: W. Moskovich et al. (eds). *Jews and Slavs*. Vol. 1. Jerusalem-St. Petersburg: 267–280.

cooperation of Ukrainian and Jewish national forces. The fact that Ukrainian democratic parties had a positive attitude toward Jewish national aspirations was a major factor for doubling his efforts. Jabotinsky saw the similarity of the national destinies of both peoples who, not having their own states and being oppressed, strove to preserve their national identities.

As the author of the so called Helsinki program adopted by the Zionist organization in 1906, Jabotinsky defended the thesis of the democratization of Russia on the basis of national autonomy, parliamentarism and the acknowledgement of full national rights of national minorities.

He saw the Ukrainian national movement as a natural ally of Jews in the fight for the realization of this idea. The future of the Russian empire—wrote Jabotinsky—depended upon the direction in which Ukraine would turn. To become democratic Russia had to become a nation state, a “Nationalitätenstaat”. Ukrainians had to be given territorial and cultural autonomy. In his polemics with the Russian Kadet Petr Struve, who did not consider Ukrainian to be a language different or separate from Russian, Jabotinsky asserted that Ukrainians have a separate self-consciousness, which for him was sufficient reason for Ukrainian to be considered an independent language.

He elaborated on this idea in his article ‘A Lesson from Shevchenko’s Anniversary’ (Урок юбилея Шевченко) calling on the Jewish national movement not to ignore the rising Ukrainian national-liberation movement.⁹ Assimilation of the Jews into the dominant Russian culture, their identification with Russian imperialist forces, their political blindness in face of a developing Ukrainian nationalist drive might have dire consequences for them in the future—predicted Jabotinsky. In his article ‘Non multum, sed multa’, which appeared in 1906 in ‘Ukrainskii vestnik’, he describes the grave situation in Galicia where Jews played the role of auxiliaries in the economic and national oppression of Ukrainians. He wrote:

“When the struggle began among different nationalities that possessed either territorial bases or some kind of territorial support, even here Jewry was allotted the hated role of a tool, an instrument for someone else’s gain. In every single instance, the side whose influence or wealth gave it stronger means of exerting pressure forced local Jews to join it in the subjugation of another nationality. In Galicia this stronger side was that of the Poles, who took extensive ‘advantage’ of the downtrodden, uneducated Galician Jews and ‘utilized’ them for the national oppression of the Ukrainian people.”¹⁰

9 Жаботинский, Владимир. 1913. *Урок юбилея Шевченко*. In: Фельетоны. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg: 231–241.

10 Жаботинский, Владимир. 1906. *Non multum, sed multa*. In: Украинский вестник. St. Petersburg. No. 9. (16 July): 645–650, 646.

He refers several times to the figure of Moshko, after a tragicomic character Leiba, introduced by Taras Shevchenko, describing the reprehensible behavior of Galician Jewish assimilators:

“The groveling depths to which the Galician assimilator, the infamous Moshko, has now descended are well known. He runs hither and thither, ready to offer his soul to Poland. He will crush both Ruthenian and Jew for the sake of Polish culture. As for the Germans, who are oppressing ‘his brothers’ in Poznań, he hates them beyond all measure. Do you not wish to know the history of this enthusiasm for being Polish? The late deputy Emil Byk offers a transparent example of it. He died a determined Polonizer and a member of the Polish circle in 1906. Yet back in 1873 he was German to the depths of his soul and traveled through Galicia agitating for Jews to join the German party. But when he took a closer look and saw which way the wind was blowing, he ‘left off’ being German and ‘transformed himself’ into a Pole... From then on, the Poles had no more faithful lackey in Galicia and the Germans had no fiercer enemy. The entire older generation of assimilators ran the course of this evolution.”¹¹

Jabotinsky does not stop here directing his merciless criticism against assimilationists and warning of the dangerous path taken by them:

“The Poles in Galicia no longer fear the Germans, but a new enemy. A new claimant is taking the stage ever more decisively—the Ruthenians. They number 3 million in Galicia, and in its eastern portion they are the vast majority. Lviv lies in Eastern Galicia, and that is why they lay the most resolute claim to it. It is neither Lemberg nor Lwów, but Lviv, they say, the capital of Austrian Ukraine. That should be our place; the Ukrainian language should rule in the courts, the police force, and in the university. There’s enough room in Cracow for Polish... The spiritual brothers of Emil Byk should have the slogan: ‘Haidamaks out!’ with the lack of foresight typical of all renegades—forgetting that in thirty years those ‘Haidamaks’ will inevitably become full masters of Eastern Galicia... Still, what is the problem? Moshko will then become a turncoat to a third nationality.”¹²

Time and again Jabotinsky refers in his works to two kinds of anti-Semitism: the anti-Semitism of people (which is subjective) and the anti-Semitism of circumstances, which is objective. The latter is a result of the dispersion of Jews in foreign lands, and has as its source an instinctive enmity of any normal person toward ‘aliens’, not our own. This is an ineradicable consciousness in the heart of every non-Jew that his neighbor is an alien. This consciousness does not hurt normal neighborly relations, even friendship, while the public climate is quiet. But in situations of social tension it bodes disaster for Jews. Circumstances in Galicia—wrote Jabotinsky—were against the Jews. Therefore the only viable solution for Galician Jews that remained was to return to Zion and create a

11 Жаботинский, Владимир. 1913. *На ложном пути*. In: Фельетоны. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg: 259–260.

12 Жаботинский, *На ложном пути*, 260.

national state in Palestine. Jabotinsky sharply criticizes the Soviet plan of the Jewish colonization in Crimea which could cause hatred of the Ukrainian peasantry.

“In Ukraine, circumstances are against us. They were formed historically and will remain as they are. It is futile to search for who was responsible for that in the seventeenth century—whether it was we Jews, the Poles or the Ukrainians. If we face the situation as it is today, we find anti-Semitic poison being carried in the wind there, and any disturbance, whether it be an uprising or colonization, would suffice to stir that atmosphere and make the poison spill over into active hatred.”¹³

Some of Jabotinsky’s pronouncements were not acceptable for other Jewish leaders who criticized him for a statement such as:

“Because it is considered by us very distingué not to mention Jews an extremely senseless consequence occurred: one can be considered an anti-Semitic for the very word Jew or for the most innocent remark on Jewish peculiar features... Only Jews are turned into some forbidden taboo that you cannot even mildly criticize, and out of this habit Jews themselves lose the most of all.”¹⁴

The sharpest criticism was drawn for signing the Jabotinsky-Slavinsky agreement in 1921 which promoted the formation of Jewish self-defense units in the Petliura army. Jabotinsky tried to put himself right with his Jewish critics, but to no avail. Nevertheless, under Jewish public pressure, he declined the offer to appear at the Schwartzbard trial with a statement on Petliura being innocent of the pogroms. After the trial Jabotinsky ceased to write on the Ukrainian-Jewish relations. He considered his attempt at reaching cooperation with the Ukrainian national-liberation movement his great achievement, the value of which would be appreciated after his death.

Comparing the main points of the two approaches by the philo-semitic Franko and the ukrainophile Jabotinsky to Ukrainian-Jewish relations we can discern the following common features:

- democratization of Ukraine and Galicia on the basis of national autonomy and parliamentarism, recognition of rights of all national groups and minorities;
- full equality of Ukrainians and Jews;
- recognition of national rights of Jews as an autonomous nation;
- the right of Jews to develop in the direction which they consider appropriate with recognition of the same rights for Ukrainians and Poles;
- disapproval of Jewish assimilation to dominant nations;

13 Jabotinsky, Vladimir. 1926. *Di Krim Kolonizatsie*. In: *Der Morgn. Zhurnal*. New York. 4 June.

14 Жаботинский, Владимир. 1913. *Ассимилизм*. In: *Фельетоны*. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg: 77–83, 77.

- Jewish emigration to Palestine as a safety valve for lowering the tensions in Galicia and support of the Zionist idea of the creation of a Jewish national state in Palestine;
- rejection of Jewish colonization of Ukrainian lands (Franko—in Galicia, Jabotinsky—in the Crimea).

Absent in Jabotinsky's approach is the internal reform of the Jewish community, which would deprive the rabbis of the right to excommunicate straying members of the Jewish community. Jabotinsky was far from being religious but he did not want to antagonize religious circles while pursuing his Zionist agenda.

Jabotinsky understood that due to the historical background it would be difficult to persuade Jewish leaders to cooperate with Ukrainians, and therefore underlined the importance of (their) common interests:

“I am not an optimist and I do not believe in ‘love’ between nations. In particular I do not in any way conceal from myself the fact that a certain antagonism exists between the Jews and Ukrainians in Galicia, one that sometimes takes on uncivilized forms. I am certain that those uncultured forms will disappear with the growth of education, but tribal conflicts will persist until there are fundamental changes in the political and ethnographic map of the world and in the socio-economic system.”¹⁵

He goes on to say: “But I am not appealing here for ‘love’. I am stating that at this moment there is a concurrence of interests between Galician Ukrainians and Galician Jews. While each pursues an individual course, they can today assist each other. That is what needs to be done.”¹⁶ Jabotinsky suggests a concrete plan of action:

“What should Jewish assistance to the Galician Ukrainians consist of? It means in the first place a complete break with the Poles—obviously not to hand over votes to the Ukrainians, but to live and develop independently and in our own way, preventing anyone from ‘taking advantage’ of us so as to enslave another group. In the second place, it means doing joint work with Ukrainian populists for the complete democratization of the corrupt political order in Austria generally, and in Galicia in particular. In the third place, it means supporting the Eastern Galician autonomists, who are demanding home rule for the Ukrainian half of today’s ‘Crown’ Galicia.”¹⁷

From the modern point of view Ivan Franko was a combination of philo-Semite and anti-Semite. Whereas his critical attitude toward Jews is understandable in the light of Galician socioeconomic realities, his humiliating mocking description of some Jewish characters and his cruel jokes are unacceptable.

Jabotinsky in his turn considered a critical attitude toward Jews admissible.

15 Жаботинский, *Non multum, sed multa*, 648f.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 649f.

“We do not have to excuse ourselves. We are a people as all the peoples: we do not have any claim to be better. As one of the first conditions of our equality we demand to permit us the right to have our scoundrels in the same way as other peoples have theirs. Yes, we have agents provocateurs, conscription evaders, procurers of prostitutes, and it is strange that there are so few of them in the present conditions. Other nations have also a lot of such characters, but they also have embezzlers of state funds, pogrom makers and torturers, and nonetheless our neighbors live and are not ashamed.”¹⁸

In Jewish memory Franko remained a philo-Semite who warned that democrats had to beware of anti-Semitism as an infectious disease. In the Russian-language Short Jewish Encyclopedia (*Kratkaia Evreiskaia Entsiklopediia*) published in Jerusalem in the 1990s Franko is presented as a major figure in the establishment of contacts between Ukrainians and Jews. Franko demanded equal rights for Ukrainians and Jews and in his public and political life always stood up for Jews as a humanist and a liberal. At the same time, however, he depicts Jews in an unfriendly manner in some of his works of fiction and poetry.¹⁹

18 Жаботинский, Владимир. 1913. *Вместо апологии*. In: Фельетоны. 2nd ed. St. Petersburg: 195–205, 198.

19 *Украина*. 1996. In: *Краткая еврейская энциклопедия*. И. Орен Надель, Н. Прат (eds). Jerusalem. The Society for Research on Jewish Communities and the Hebrew University. Jerusalem. Vol. 8: 1209–1210.

