



Review of the publication: Tim Buchen, *Antisemitismus in Galizien. Agitation, Gewalt und Politik gegen Juden in der Habsburgermonarchie um 1900*, Berlin: Metropol-Verlag 2012, ISBN 3863310829

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Tim Buchen's prize-crowned work casts bright light on a massive wave of anti-Jewish violence inflicted in summer 1898 on West Galician rural and shtetl Jewry by Polish villagers. The broad European literature, focused on the contemporaneous Dreyfus Affair, has taken little notice of this first widespread storm of anti-Jewish violence to engulf the Polish lands since the Ukrainian peasant revolts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Preceded during the 1897 Reichsrat elections by lesser but myriad anti-Jewish tumults, the rioters' aims were mainly plunder and property-destruction, especially of Jewish-operated taverns and attached dwellings, not maiming and murder. Comprehensive statistics are lacking. By Buchen's count, some four hundred villages and small towns witnessed violence; thousands were arrested, of whom 962 had been pronounced guilty by February 1899 and sentenced, on average, to one month jail terms (pp. 48, 183). During the imposition of martial law to quell the tumults Austrian soldiers killed twelve rioters. Marcin Soboń's archival data from eight of the eleven judicial districts prosecuting rioters identify 3816 defendants, among whom 2328 were convicted and sentenced to jail-terms of up to six months. [1]

Anti-Semitism and Jewish-peasant relations

Buchen's study builds on recent work, apart from Soboń's, by Keeley Stauter-Halsted, Kai Struve, and Daniel Umowsky, who took particular interest in the relationship of the 1898 violence to the burgeoning agrarian populist political movement, well-known as a multi-cornered contest between educated social radicals (Jan Stapiński), clerical organizers (Stanisław Stojąkowski), and peasant tribunes (Jakub Bojko). Antagonism toward Jews, especially those engaged in the agrarian economy, was central to peasant politics. Buchen aims to explore and refine the interpretive/theoretical context in which the Jewish-peasant relationship is understood, and especially how the concept of anti-Semitism figures in it.

He poses a series of big questions. He asks, hypothetically, whether anti-Semitism, conventionally understood as a modern ideology and mode of political mobilization, is relevant to rural Galicia in 1898, where party politics and electoral mobilization were still superficial influences leaving untouched old-established, clerically reinforced, partly magical peasant beliefs concerning Jews (pp. 17-18). He adduces Rudolf Jaworski's idiosyncratic but not unrealistic insistence that, before 1914, Christian-Jewish relations in East-Central Europe also entailed cultural-ethnic conflict between populations viewing one another as separate peoples mired in intractable conflicts of interest and political objectives, and not only – as the historical literature often implies -- an ideologically motivated campaign of religious or racial hatred directed at a defenseless Jewish sub-culture (p. 50).

Anti-Semitism as process

Buchen warns against ontologizing ideologies ("isms") as historical actors. Following Rogers Brubaker's and other social scientists' model of "process-oriented nationalism," and drawing on Bourdieu's praxis theory, Buchen proposes that anti-Semitism too is a process, especially a linguistic-discursive one but also a mode of political action—in short, something that happens, not something that abidingly is. Speech acts constitute politics, though not to the exclusion of collective violence (such as anti-Jewish riots), which itself is "a representation of social reality" (p. 72) or, more cautiously stated, one aspect of social reality. Buchen ends his preliminary theoretical-interpretive discussion with questions that might seem perilously dichotomous (or circular): did politicians use anti-Semitic slogans to mobilize the masses to their own advantage, or was anti-Semitism so widespread in society that political-institutional democratization (of suffrage and elections) served only to establish its political potency? Did the "process of anti-Semitism" exemplify

democracy's "dark side" by highlighting preexisting social hatred, or rather come to do so because competitive politics pressured politicians into overtrumping one another with anti-Semitic demagoguery? How did political anti-Semitism change pre-1914 Christian-Jewish relations, and with what implications for the twentieth century's subsequent tragedies? (p. 91).

Buchen, who profitably mined the archives, paints a lively microhistorical panorama of the 1898 violence. He applies modernization analysis in holding that, as the accustomed social roles of gentry, state, peasantry, and Jews lost their culturally naturalized specificity, villagers disadvantaged by social change – marketization, above all – came to stigmatize any and all negatively experienced phenomena as "Jewish," instead of accepting the once-limited social roles performed by Jews as fixtures of the social landscape, even if unwelcome ones. "Jewishness" became a free-floating signifier for adversity. That which previously had been sacred—such as farmland—could now be seen as having been "sold out to the Jews." In this perspective, peasant assaults on Jews and their economic operations were a "performance of the dissolution of the old order" (pp. 141-43).

Buchen does not deny that emergence of agrarian populist parties "enormously advanced the process of anti-Semitism," not only through electoral campaigning and inflammatory journalism, but through parliamentary discussions, especially interpellations staged by anti-Semitic deputies, typically charging the government with inaction in the face of alleged Jewish outrages of one sort or another. The interpellations assumed the discursive form of modern fairy-tales, mirroring the magical character of folk-cultural charges against Jews. They corresponded to the charivaris (*Katzenmusik*) that frequently preceded (or substituted for) anti-Jewish violence. They created, discursively, "anti-Semitic realities" (III, *passim*). In this sense, the peasant parties' agitation "was a necessary precondition of the emergence of violence" (p. 324).

Pogroms as "folk festival"

Yet Buchen insists that Polish Catholic villagers acted from their own motives, and were not mere tools of populist politics. Two things were vital: first, that in their eyes plundering of Jewish tavern keepers and other merchants was legitimate, given their view that Jews' accumulated capital had been gained at peasant expense, and on condition that the plunder was directed against a village's "own Jews" and distributed fairly among its members. Interlopers from other villages had no right to rob them. Second, it was necessary that villagers felt, as they did, that plundering Jews gained them "valuable symbolic capital," demonstrating their superiority over the Jews (if only of brute force) and their courage in defying the government. The ostensible reasons they gave for the plunder—to punish Jews for (improbably) attempting to assassinate Kaiser Franz Joseph, or to show support for Archduke Rudolf (who had not committed suicide in 1889, but was in hiding to protect himself against Jewish threats), or because the Pope authorized plunder as punishment for Jewish attacks on priests—were formulaic, seeking to vindicate their actions by appeal to higher authority and, arguably, not deeply believed by the rioters espousing them. In reality, "the whole Christian community presented the plunder, not as a nocturnal crime, but as a folk festival" (pp. 211, 215).

In 1903, as peasant strikes in East Galicia enflamed the sky, populist propaganda sought to incite West Galician Polish peasant attacks on Jews, but in vain. Buchen argues that peasants were loathe to sacrifice anything of their self-interest for the sake of populist politicians, as was shown by their refusal to cooperate at their own monetary loss in the boycott campaign against Jewish businesses, while largely complying with the clergy's anti-Semitically justified temperance movement. Nor could appeals to Polish patriotism or nationalism move them to violence, especially not after the government had demonstrated its readiness to order gendarmes and soldiers to fire on rioters (pp. 328-34).

Conclusion

If the reader sometimes wonders whether Buchen's overarching questions are answered (or answerable as posed), such reservations recede as it becomes clear that the book has successfully shown that modern anti-Jewish politics, with sporadically accompanying violence, moved on two parallel but often converging tracks: that of the folk culture informing the rioting of 1898, and that of political populism, which added momentum to demotic violence through its interpretation – and, sometimes, incitation -- of it. In 1898, the two discourses were distinct and separable. In 1903, the folk discourse rejected the populist one. Had Buchen looked forward to the November 1918 pogrom wave in Polish Galicia, he would have found that popular anti-Jewish violence had gained greatly in nationalist legitimation, without losing its folk-cultural force. While Buchen's dichotomy-prone theoretical discussions might suggest a bias in favor of speech-acts over physicalities, his explication of the upheaval of 1898 enlists both together in multi-causal interaction. This is a watershed book in relating the popular Christian-Jewish relationship to the emergence of modern mass politics in the Polish lands. It should be in all relevant libraries, and figure in future debates on its theme.

[1] Marcin Soboń: *Polacy wobec Żydów w Galicji Doby Autonomicznej w Latach 1868-1914*, Kraków, 2011, pp.247-48.

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