

Jan Županič, *Židovská šlechta podunajské monarchie. Mezi Davidovou hvězdou a křížem* [The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy. Between the Star of David and the Cross]
(Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2012) pp. 811.

by Václav Horčíčka

Nobility, its development, structure and lifestyle have long been the focus of attention for many historians. In the same vein, the research on Jewish history, which has, until recently, targeted mostly the tragic period of the Second World War, is now providing a more complex portrayal, examining the issue from various angles and time periods. It is noteworthy that Jewish nobility has escaped the attention of a majority of historians who study the development and status of nobility in the modern times and history of Jews.

This situation has undergone a radical change over the past few years, with three publications examining the subject. They are the studies by Georg Gaugusch (*Wer einmal war. Das jüdische Grossbürgertum Wiens 1800-1938*, Teil I. (A-K), Wien 2011), Kai Drewes (*Jüdischer Adel. Nobilitierungen von Juden im Europa des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main – New York 2013) and Jan Županič (*The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy*).

Rather than being a scientific monograph, the study by Georg Gaugusch can be viewed as an invaluable genealogic handbook, which contains an interesting introductory study. Furthermore, it is, for the moment, partially useful as only the first volume (letters A-K) has been published. In contrast, the dissertation by Kai Drewes is very different, being the first of its kind to attempt a synthesis of all Jewish ennoblements in 19th century Europe. Undoubtedly, Drewes' assets consist of a vast knowledge of history, sound expertise in methodology and clear logical text-structure, as well as the ability to ask the right questions. On the other hand, the study is not flawless. While its main focus is nobility (whether that be Jewish or not), the author fails to describe the different structures of noble communities in individual countries, and says only little about various policies of ennoblements and methods of acquisition of noble titles in the

countries studied. Moreover, although allegedly “European,” the main focus of the study is on Austria, Great Britain and Prussia, scarcely illustrating the situation in other important countries (France, Spain etc). In fact, it has been nearly impossible to compare the situation of Jewish nobility in different countries, since there are no thorough studies examining their situations. As a result, the principal benefit of the book is a list (although inaccurate) of the ennoblements of Jews and Jewish converts in Austria, Great Britain and Prussia, as well as reflections on Jewish ennoblements in the European society of the “long” 19th century.

The book by Jan Županič is of a different nature. Its principal aim was not only to provide a complex portrayal of Jewish nobility, but mostly to outline the specific features of this social group and its status in a changing world, as well as to draw a portrayal of its relations to the majority Christian society, but most of all to describe its social mobility, political engagement and variety of status symbols.

As the book aims for a better understanding of the elites in the Habsburg monarchy, its principal target is to set out the establishment and development of Jewish nobility in a wider context. Should the premise be that Jewish aristocrats were members of the Jewish elite and strove for greater self-accomplishment, it is highly likely that they would seek links to the majority (Christian) society and participate in the activities of many organisations of that time, i.e. cultural and work associations, charities, and foundations. The desire to stand out is also closely related to the relation of (not only Jewish) elites to ennoblement and their interest in the acquisition of noble titles.

It is for the above reason that the book contains two separate parts. The first studies the subject of Jewish nobility and is divided into several chapters. The longest chapter, titled *The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy*, is about the development of this group and its specific features. The next chapter, *The Austrian Noble Rights*, outlines basic information on the possibilities of an acquisition of a noble title in Austria (Austria-Hungary) and mentions several other important aspects of the-then rights of the nobility. The chapter *The Coats of Arms of the Jewish Nobility* analyses the topic of coats of arms and presents readers with the question whether there is such a thing as specific Jewish heraldry. The final chapter, *The Perishing World of the Jewish Nobility* offers a brief characterization of the stories of Jewish nobles in 1918-1945 and in the Second World War, which radically transformed the ethnic, religious, and political map of

Central Europe. It was at that time that the Jewish community, for many centuries established in this universe, practically perished, including Jewish nobles who had in the better case scenarios, emigrated and shattered for good their links to the region; or in the worst case ended up in one of the Nazi's concentration camps.

The other, encyclopaedic part provides detailed information on two hundred Jewish families. The portrayals are not comprehensive. The author presumably focused on the origin of the individual families and on the reasons behind their ennoblement, whereas any other information (including the data on conversion) tends to be concise. Contrary to the aforementioned study by Gaugusch, the extent of the present publication is undoubtedly much wider. While G. Gaugusch targets Austria's haute bourgeoisie, Županič depicts many families of the lower middle class, who acquired their noble titles for their merit in the development of arts and science, or long army service.

The author claims that the two hundred families represent less than a half of all Austrian ennoblements of people of the Jewish religion and origin. Because the Austrian and Hungarian noble communities were closely interlinked, the author included in his book several Hungarian families, but only the branches of previously ennobled families in Cisleithania. In one case, an originally Bavarian noble family is mentioned (von Hirsch) and the personality of the alleged (though never ennobled) aristocrat of a Prussian origin, Bethel Henry Strousberg, has an important position in the book.

It should be noted how the author also mentions some families that descended from Italy (Italian provinces of Austria), moved from Italy (Italian states) to Austria, or on the contrary came from Austria to Italy. Some of them, which had Italian roots, lived in Vienna and in Bohemia as well. One example could be the family of Bassevi von Treyenberg. The family of Eisner von Eisenhof has been living in today's Italy, as well as the families of Goldschmied, Herzfeld (1867), Herzfeld (1871), Landau (all in Trieste) and Taussig de Bondonia (Firenze).

Županič, like many other authors, finds himself facing the pitfall of the notion of "Jewish nobility." In the 19th and 20th centuries the number of Jewish conversions grew a great deal. Some of the ennobled Jews later converted to Christianity or left the Jewish community, while in other families, only the children did so, and in others still, the Jewish faith was

preserved. Being aware of this issue, Županič opted for the “ethnic” approach, adding to “Jewish nobility” people of the Israeli religion, as well as ennobled individuals originally born in Jewish families who had converted earlier and who had a much lower awareness of their Jewish origin.

By virtue of this ethnic approach, the author has succeeded in providing clear evidence that conversion to Christianity had not been important for the acquisition of a noble title since the reign of Joseph II, although it had made it easier (especially since mid-19th century). Analysing the two hundred families, Županič proves that noble titles in Austria were not privileges of financial and industrial oligarchs, but were often granted to freelancers, artists, officials, journalists and military officers.

Consequently, the present book is a remarkable and exceptional contribution to the study of elites in the Habsburg Empire and, thanks to the comparison provided of the situation in Prussia and Hungary, it frequently goes beyond the frontiers of Austria. Importantly, the study is primarily based on documents that had, until recently, languished, largely ignored in Austrian, Czech, Hungarian and Prussian archives. As a result, the publication contains an extensive supplement with colour pictures of the coats of arms of the individual families, based on the materials deposited in Austrian and Hungarian archives of the nobility.

The Jewish Nobility of the Danubian Monarchy answers many questions while posing many, too. Hence, it opens up space for forthcoming research for which it provides solid background information. As a result, the book is an outstanding contribution to a better understanding of the development of Jewish society and noble elites in the 18th-20th centuries.

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