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The Society of the Progressive Israelites in Krakow in 19th century: its religious views and the idea of progress

The aim of my PhD project is to analyze the history and the religious life of the progressive synagogue (Tempel) in Kraków in the period from the establishment of the Progressive Society until the end of the 19th century. Progressive synagogues existed in several cities in the partitioned Polish lands. In Galicia those synagogues operated, besides Kraków, in Lwów, Tarnopol, Stanisławów.

Kraków's progressive milieu emerged in the 1840s. At the beginning the religious service was held in a private prayer house which in 1862 was replaced by a newly built synagogue. In 1868 the Society of the Progressive Israelites hired a first regular preacher, Szymon Dankowicz. At the same time language of the sermon became Polish, instead of German. The synagogue adopted only a minor changes in the liturgy, such as introduction of choir and a small organs. Moreover a special emphasis was put on decorum and the elegance of the service.

The main concern of progressives was a proper education of youth – this included a moral and religious instruction given in the Polish language and an access to the general, secular education.

Kraków's Society of the Progressive Israelites was highly Polonized. Already among the first generation of progressives we can find many Polish patriots, who were active in the Polish uprisings. In 1860s a tradition of organizing the Polish patriotic manifestations in Tempel began and lasted until the outbreak of the second world war and the end of the Progressive Society. The manifestations in Tempel, during which not only Jews but also Christians were

present, served as an opportunity to improve mutual relations and understanding. They were also a visible sign of progressive's attitude towards their identity, which was Polish and Jewish at the same time.

During the workshop in Haifa, Dec. 19 several issues pertaining to the progressive synagogue in Kraków were discussed. The special emphasis was put on the methodological issues and the problem of research on the progressive synagogues in general.

Discussed topics included the following:

- the problem of defining the terms such as "progress, progressive, progressiveness" (in Polish: postęp, postępowy, postępowość) in the contexts of this trend itself and the research on this subject. In the center of my interest were relations between the above mentioned terms and concepts such as reform and modernization.
- the history of the research on the so-called "Progressive Judaism" on Polish lands since the interwar period until the last few years. The most important research areas and the most visible research perspectives were characterized.
- state of research on Krakow's Tempel synagogue and the most important research questions which are discussed in my PhD project.
- characteristics of the Society of the Progressive Israelites in Kraków – a short history of the society, the religious views of Kraków's progressives in the Central-European context and the question of the placement of the progressive synagogues within the divisions of Judaism.