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18th CENTURY MEMOIRS OF POLISH JEWS.
MEMOIRS OF MOJŻESZ WASERCUG
FROM GREAT POLAND

The first three memoirs written by Polish Jews date from the 18th century¹, the best known of them being the autobiography of a well known philosopher, Salomon Majmon, written in German and translated into several languages, including Polish. Its author was born on a Radziwiłł estate in 1754, spent his childhoods and youth in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and then migrated to Germany, where he died in 1805. He often reverted in thought to the country of his birth, and it was not mere chance that he dedicated his work on transcendental philosophy to the Polish King Stanislaus Augustus².

Dow of Bolechów is the author of memoirs covering the years 1723–1805³; they appeared in Hebrew, the language in which they were

¹ In speaking of memoirs we naturally ignore earlier chronicles concerning Polish Jews. News on Poland and Polish Jews can be found in earlier memoirs written by a German Jewess, Glücke von Hameln, *Die Memoiren von Glückel von Hameln*, ed. L. Feilchenfeld, Berlin 1914. It is characteristic that women initiated not only Jewish but, as has recently been pointed out, also Polish memoir writing in the 18th century; A. Cieński, *Pamiętnikarstwo polskie XVIII wieku (Polish Memoir Writing in the 18th Century)*, Wrocław-Warszawa 1981, p. 205. Jacob Adam was born in Chodzież in 1789 but he spent his life in Germany; in his memoirs he briefly mentions his childhood in Great Poland; Jacob Adam, *Zeit zur Abreise, Lebensbericht eines jüdischen Händlers aus der Emanzipationszeit*, ed. J. H. Fehrs, M. Heitman, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 1993.

² S. Majmon, *Autobiografia z dołączeniem portretu autora i listu jego do króla polskiego Stanisława Augusta (Autobiography including the author's portrait and his letter to the Polish King, Stanislaus Augustus)*, translated and prefaced by L. Belmont, Warszawa 1913. These are the only memoirs by a Polish Jew mentioned by Cieński in *Pamiętnikarstwo polskie XVIII wieku*, pp. 87, 208.

³ Reb Dow m' Bolechów, *Zikronot (Memoirs)*, ed. M. Wischnitzer, Berlin 1923 (in Hebrew). These memoirs are mentioned as a source to the history of the Jewish Council of the Four Lands by I. Bartal, *Dow m' Bolechow — pamiętnikarz czasów kryzysu Sejmu Czterech Ziem w XVIII stuleciu (Dow m' Bolechów — Diarist of the Period of Crisis of the Council of the Four Lands in the 18th Century)*, in: *Żydzi w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, ed. A. Link-Lenczowski, Wrocław 1991, pp. 81–84.

written, as well as in Yiddish and English⁴. This is a source used profusely in Israel, for it contains information in Hebrew on the Jewish community and its self-government institutions in the Polish Commonwealth. However, historians have not yet made use of what Dow says on the Confederation of Bar, Jewish social, economic and cultural life and fundamental questions in Poland's history at that time. Dow's remarks on Polish-Jewish relations and his close friendship with a nobleman whose name he does not reveal also deserve attention⁵.

We will deal with a third volume of memoirs of this group written by Mojżesz Waserzug, who was born at Skoki, a small town in Great Poland, in the middle of the 18th century⁶. Mojżesz Waserzug's grandson presented his grandfather's memoirs to Henryk Loewe, a researcher of Jewish folklore and Zionist activist, who published them in 1910⁷. It must have given the editor a lot of trouble to decipher this small, blurry, now lost, manuscript (it comprises 28 tightly printed pages after publication) if he was forced to leave out not only single words but even some small fragments of the text⁸.

Waserzug's memoirs are a unique relic of Hebrew writing from the times of the Polish Commonwealth and, like the autobiographies of Majmon and Dow of Bolechów, they differ radically from other works of this kind, that is, from earlier Hebrew chronicles which contain descriptions of the martyrdom and fate of entire Jewish groups and communities. They differ from Jomtob Lippman Heller's autobiography, also called a family chronicle, which covers the years 1629–1644⁹. Heller was born in Germany and his personality was shaped by the community and culture of German Jews. Although he described a few events connected with his stay in Poland, these are not characteristic of his autobiography. The title itself, *Megilat eyva* (*Description of Hostility*), shows that the main stress in his narration was laid on the persecution to which he was subjected when performing the

⁴ Ber of Bolechow, *The Memoirs*, ed. M. Wischnitzer, Oxford 1922.

⁵ Dow m' Bolechow, *Zikhronot*, pp. 33 ff.; J. Goldberg, *Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Rejection or Acceptance*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", vol. 22, 1974, p. 259.

⁶ The late Paul Glikson, a meritorious bibliographer and demographer from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, drew my attention to these memoirs years ago.

⁷ *Memoiren eines polnischen Juden*, ed. H. Loewe, "Jahrbücher für Jüdische Literatur und Geschichte", 1910, vol. 2; and a separate off-print, *Memoiren eines polnischen Juden. Lebenserinnerungen von Mosche Wasserzug*. Nach der Originalschrift herausgegeben von H. Loewe, Berlin 1911. The Hebrew title given by the editor was *Korot Moshe Waserzug v'nevidat lev aviv r'ha'manoakhr 'Iserls'l*.

⁸ Wishing the text to be a true copy of the original, the editor published it *in extenso* and, as was the practice in those days, without the punctuation indispensable to understand it.

⁹ Jomtob Lippman Heller, *Megilat eyva*, Vienna 1862 (in Hebrew). Cf. M. Bałaban, *Historia Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu* (*All History of Jews in Cracow and at Kazimierz*), vol. 1, Kraków 1931, pp. 354, 417.

function of rabbi in Vienna and Prague. It was only later that he moved to Poland and became a rabbi first in Niemirów, then in Włodzimierz and finally in Cracow¹⁰.

The memoirs of Dow of Bolechów and Mojżesz Wascug reflect the beginning of the cultural changes which occurred in some milieus of Polish Jews during the authors' lives. Majmon, who came from the Jewish community in the Polish Commonwealth, lived among *Haskalah* supporters in Germany and was inspired by the atmosphere prevailing in that milieu. Wascug's memoirs contain descriptions of his own experiences as well as information on and appraisals of people and relations in the Jewish community, rarely met in sources from that period. Although memoirs are a source intensely used by historians, Wascug's memoirs, unlike the autobiographies of Majmon and Dow of Bolechów, have remained almost unnoticed. They have been ignored by historians and researchers into Hebrew literature, both groups having disregarded the possibility of expanding the source base of research into the history of Polish Jews and their culture and the aspects of the Polish Commonwealth's history linked with Jewish questions.

Majmon and Dow of Bolechów came from the eastern territories of the Polish Commonwealth and they described events which took place in their native Jewish communities. Majmon also mentions the milieu grouped round Moses Mendelssohn in Berlin, of which he himself was a member for some time. Wascug, on the other hand, presents the life of Jewish communities in two small towns of Great Poland, his native Skoki and Kórnik, as well as in Płock, where he moved later and where he lived until the end of his life. He also writes of German Jewish communities in West Pomerania, where he lived and worked for three years. The first entry in his memoirs concerns an event from his childhood and the last one comes from 1818. Wascug's road in life differed from those of Salomon Majmon and Dow of Bolechów and his personality differed too; this is reflected in his memoirs.

Wascug rarely goes beyond his own affairs; if he does, these are the political events or economic changes which determined his personal fate in a noticeable way. He writes of the second partition of Poland, the establishment of the Province of southern Prussia and the incorporation of the town in which he lived into it in order to state that he became collector of excise duty, introduced by the Prussian authorities¹¹. He mentions the

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 501–502.

¹¹ Cf. J. Waśicki, *Ziemie polskie pod zaborem pruskim. Prusy Południowe 1793–1806. Studium historycznoprawne (The Polish Territories under Prussia. South Prussia 1793–1806. A Historical–Legal Study)*, Wrocław 1957, pp. 140–141.

Napoleonic wars and the establishment of the Duchy of Warsaw, for the transformations taking place at that time complicated his financial affairs. But he does not mention the establishment of the Polish Kingdom even though he describes his life in the first years of its existence. His choice of facts was motivated by his interests and his own hierarchy of values; he writes of himself and of what was happening in the local Jewish commune, ignoring general affairs. The first diaries written by Polish peasants reflect an almost identical limited range of interests and information¹².

The range of perception of Salomon Majmon and Dow of Bolechów, who were born in magnatial estates, was different; the former, as has already been mentioned, was born in a Radziwiłł estate, the latter in a small private town belonging to the Potockis. This gave them opportunities to come into direct contact with estate owners and members of their entourage, who participated in political events. Wascrucg, who lived and worked in small towns in Great Poland and in Płock, and later under Prussian rule, never had such opportunities. He mentions a Radziwiłł, but he does so in connection with the case of a Jewish merchant who held a Radziwiłł forest on lease¹³. Majmon, who as a philosopher, was more prone to reflection, outlines the characteristics of Karol Radziwiłł by-named "My Dear Lord" (*Panie Kochanku*) on the basis of his own experience and the stories he heard. Dow of Bolechów mentions the Potockis' participation in the Confederation of Bar, his own activity in the Jewish Council of the Four Lands and the role he played as an interpreter in a public discussion with Frankists in Lwów.

Wascrucg, on the other hand, deals with public affairs on a local level and provides a great deal of information on the functioning of the *kehillah* institutions and the everyday life of Jewish communities. Thanks to this, we obtain supplementary or even unknown information on Jews in Great Poland, where the state of economic and social relations in the 18th century¹⁴, and consequently the professional structure of the Jewish population, were different from what they were in other parts of Poland. Particularly noteworthy is Wascrucg's statement that demand of the local market was small in this most economically developed region of the Polish Commonwealth. As a result, the Jewish traders living there did not confine themselves to local trade but visited fairs to earn a living. Hence, Wascrucg frequently speaks of home-absent fathers of Jewish families. The author himself was brought up in such an atmosphere, for his father earned his living in a similar

¹² Cf. A. Cieński, *Pamiętnikarstwo polskie XVIII wieku*, pp. 85–86, 191.

¹³ He does not say what the place was called.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Topolski, *Wielkopolski model gospodarczy drugiej połowy XVIII w. (Great Poland's Economic Model in the Second Half of the 18th Century)*, in: *Dzieje Wielkopolski*, ed. J. Topolski, vol. I, Poznań 1969, pp. 814–824.

way. The economic situation in Great Poland where, as in neighbouring Silesia and Brandenburg, the cloth industry was well developed, made it possible for Jews to engage in the thriving wool trade, which was almost completely in their hands. This is confirmed by facts cited by Wascrucg, who was in contact with Jewish merchants active in this branch. As long as his father lived, Wascrucg did no paid work and was engaged in studying the Talmud and the Bible; it was only after his father's death that the duty to maintain the family devolved upon him. Having no experience, he took up trade in wool and clothes and lost all he had inherited.

Wascrucg could not extricate himself from his financial difficulties in a way open to Jews in other regions of Poland; the latter could take inns and breweries on lease when they were in a similar predicament, for despite attempts to restrict the participation of Jews in the production and sale of alcohol, such a possibility still existed. The situation in Great Poland was different; unlike their co-religionists in other regions, the Jews there did not as a rule engage in this occupation¹⁵. This is clearly stated in a paper drawn up in connection with a discussion on a reform of the Jews during the Four Years' Sejm, which said that "the province of Great Poland and the Mazovian voivodships ... should have no Jews; they can do without them in leases, for they have for long had suitable foreign people from neighbouring countries as well as their own people accustomed to do this and therefore suitable"¹⁶. Wascrucg's memoirs show that the alternative was to find an occupation in a Jewish commune in Germany, where for two hundred years Polish Jews had been employed as rabbis, *melammedhs* (religious teachers) and *shohets* (ritual slaughterers). The author was not ordained as a rabbi nor did he have the skill of a *shohet*, but he was well versed in the Talmud and the Bible and could easily supplement his knowledge and meet the requirements set to candidates. Wascrucg decided to content himself with the post of *shohet* in a German Jewish community. Thanks to this sudden change in his life his memoirs are enriched with a description of the experiences and situation of a Polish Jew who emigrated to Germany for economic reasons and with information on differences in the organisation of German and Polish Jewish communities. The vicissitudes which Wascrucg experienced as a *shohet* initiate the reader into the secrets of *Shehitah* (ritual slaughter),

¹⁵ R. Mahler, *Jidn in amoliken Pojnl in licht fun eifern* (Jews in Old Poland in the Light of Figures), Warszawa 1958, table III A (in Yiddish).

¹⁶ (K. Hryniewiecki). *Uwagi na projekt reform Żydów* (Remarks on the Plan to Reform the Jews), in: *Materiały do dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, ed. A. Eisenbach, J. Michalski, E. Rostworowski and J. Woliński, vol. 6, Wrocław 1969, p. 160 "... only in Great Poland are there people fit to be innkeepers", *ibidem*, p. 159.

the other kosher requirements and the resulting complications in the life of Jewish communities in Poland and Germany.

Before departing for Germany Wasercug was taught the profession of *shohet* for nine months in Poznań. After completing his education he received a rabbi's certificate which stated that he had the required qualifications. Like other Polish Jews seeking the post of *shohet*, *melammedh* and cantor in eastern Germany, he went to a fair in Frankfurt-on-Oder, where representatives of Jewish communities in Germany recruited candidates and checked their qualifications. This was a practice he did not know, for although various transactions were concluded at Polish fairs¹⁷ and the Jews from the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania used to convoke their Councils on such occasions and arrange marriages with the help of matchmakers¹⁸, they did not look for candidates to Jewish communities' posts on these occasions, having an abundance of local candidates to choose from.

All the three diarists describe their journeys in Poland and abroad and their adventures during these trips. Some parts of their reminiscences are simply travel stories. Wasercug also writes about his father's constant trips to fairs and markets in the neighbourhood. The rich collection of diverse information presented in these memoirs makes it possible to define the role of journeys in the life of the Jewish community in the 18th century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. All the more so as the journeys of each memoirist had a different aim in view; Salomon Majmon departed from his family and milieu to get secular education, while Wasercug left his native town to find means of subsistence for his near and dear ones and returned to them after three years. Dow of Bolechów used to go to Hungary to import wine. Wasercug and Majmon went to Germany partly along the same route and on their way slept at night in second-rate inns frequented mostly by Polish Jews. The innkeepers sometimes put Wasercug up in a stable or a coshed, forcing him to share it not only with the cattle but also with other travellers, his likes. Wasercug was not only frugal on lodging but also tried to reduce his travel costs to the minimum. On finishing an odd job at Karlino, a small hamlet in West Pomerania, he had to go to Gryfino, 40 miles away; the *kehillah* defrayed the cost of a 20 mile coach journey, but he had to pay the rest himself. He was advised not to pay the fare but give the postillion a

¹⁷ Cf. M. Wąsowicz, *Kontrakty lwowskie 1676-1685 (Contract Gatherings at Lwów 1676-1685)*, Lwów 1935.

¹⁸ J. Goldberg, *Die Ehe bei den Juden Polens im 18. Jahrhundert*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", vol. 31, 1983, p. 501.

small bribe, and he did so. What was unpleasant was that he had to hide when the controller came.

Both the 18th century Jewish memoirs and other sources less rich in details show that the Jews were the most mobile element of the Polish Commonwealth's population. A German who described Polish highways at the end of the 18th century emphasized that *überhaupt sieht man auf den Landstrassen nichts als Juden, Edelleute und reitende Posten*¹⁹, and Waser-cug's memoirs confirm this observation. On the basis of this information we can, to some extent, classify the journeys of Polish Jews in the 18th century. One category consisted of merchant trips lasting one or several days, like Dow of Bolechów's journeys to Hungary. The next category included young men's journeys to a *yeshiva* (high religious school) and, less often, to a foreign university; the third category consisted of frequent trips of syndics, called *stadlanim*, who, endowed with full powers, were sent by *kehillot* or Jewish Councils to judicial institutions and the royal and magnat-ial courts to intervene on behalf of a community or the whole Jewish population. Trips in Poland and abroad in search of work, like those described by Waser-cug, belonged to the fourth group. The next two groups are not connected with the accounts of the three memoirists. The fifth group included the peregrinations of *hasidim* to *tzaddiks'* courts, which began in the second half of the 18th century. The sixth numerous group consisted of carters, a very popular trade among Polish Jews, who naturally were practically all the time away from home.

Waser-cug was at first engaged as a cantor at Karlino for the *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement). To his great joy, on completing his job he was given a much higher remuneration than the one the *kehillot* in the Commonwealth paid for analogous services. The prospect of getting a similar pay undoubtedly induced Jews of Waser-cug's type to seek employment in German communities. Waser-cug then got a permanent job as a *shohet* at Gryfino, which in 1782 had some 2,762 inhabitants of whom 83 were Jews. He was also a cantor, teacher, secretary and syndic of the community and controlled the construction of a synagogue. In small Jewish communities in Poland *shohets* were also saddled with duties which went beyond their proper functions²⁰. This is confirmed by Waser-cug, who on his return to his native parts was appointed *shohet* at Kórnik, where he performed various functions in the

¹⁹ *Schilderungen oder Reisen eines Kosmopoliten*, Leipzig 1795, pp. 26–27; cf. J. Goldberg, *Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Rejection or Acceptance*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas", vol. 22, 1974, p. 250.

²⁰ *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth*, ed. J. Goldberg, Jerusalem 1985, pp. 167, 220.

local Jewish community. Wascug's description of the way *shohets* were paid at Gryfino shows the difference between German and Polish Jewish communities. Contrary to his expectations, Wascug did not receive a regular pay, for the small Jewish community could not afford this. Instead he was given a loan on favourable terms and was expected to use it for usury and derive profits from it.

He reacted strongly and said bluntly what he thought about this²¹. His surprise was a form of reflection by a Polish Jew who found himself in a German Jewish community where the conditions were different and the customs unknown to him²². A loan as an equivalent for his work was less to his liking than the good pay he had received as a cantor at Karlino. It turns out that the Jews from Great Poland who crossed the frontier to earn money did not know the norms and conditions in German Jewish communities in West Pomerania.

The situation in which Wascug found himself forced him to take to usury and he managed to scrape together 300 talers, a by no means trivial sum. But he concluded risky transactions, and as his contracting parties and debtors vanished in a mysterious way, he lost everything he had earned.

Driven to despair by this misfortune, he decided to return to his native Skoki. It was a common opinion that a Jew who had worked in Jewish communities in Germany for a few years returned home with a fortune. This is why many people asked Wascug's wife for a loan. But Wascug returned poor as a church mouse and to the disappointment of his children, did not even bring them sweets and presents. Nevertheless, the opinion that work in a Jewish community in Germany meant a good pay was undoubtedly fully justified.

In any case, Wascug's stay in Germany did not bring him the profits usually derived by Polish Jews employed in Jewish institutions in Germany in the 18th century. Wascug himself says that he received a good pay for his work as a temporary cantor at Karlino and, as has been mentioned above, he managed to gather 300 talers at Gryfino. The facts quoted by him show that he himself was to blame for the difficult situation he found himself in. His attempts to continue his father's trade in wool ended in failure. He succeeded neither as a merchant nor as a usurer for he was helpless in commerce and made incompetent financial transactions. It follows from

²¹ Cf. A. Mączak, *Zu einigen vernachlässigten Fragen der Geschichtsschreibung über das Reisen in der frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Reiseberichte als Quellen europäischer Kulturgeschichte*, ed. A. Mączak and J. Teuteberg, Wolfenbüttel 1982, p. 316.

²² Cf. M. Harbsmeyer, *Reisebeschreibungen als mentalitäts-geschichtliche Quellen: Überlegungen zu einer historisch-antropologischen Untersuchung frühneuzeitlicher deutscher Reisebeschreibungen*, *ibidem*, pp. 1–2, 3.

what he writes that the lack of commercial talents made it difficult for a Polish Jew to attain decent living standards. It was only at the end of his life, during the time of the Duchy of Warsaw, that Wasecug managed to build an inn and improve the situation of his family. On the other hand, thanks to the good traditional Jewish education he had received in his youth and his intellectual talents, he had no difficulty in getting the job of a *shohet*, for small communities tried to find persons who could at the same time perform the functions of a cantor and a teacher. Moreover, Wasecug was able to combine these functions with work as secretary of the *kehillah*, entrusted to him at Gryfino in West Pomerania and later at Kórnik and Płock. He also knew Polish and German well. The fact that he wrote memoirs is another proof of his talents and intellectual interests.

Wasecug's memoirs show the author's great sensitivity to the structure of social relations among Polish Jews, a trait rarely met in other contemporary writings. The author proudly emphasizes that in his parents' home the servants shared the table with him and his parents at meals, and regards this as a rare occurrence in his milieu. He reacts spontaneously to all changes in the social position of individuals; this can be clearly seen in the way he describes his situation after his father's death and in the description of his setbacks in trade, which forced him to take the job of *shohet* and religious teacher. In his view this was social degradation, for he was the son of a Jewish merchant who was respected in the local community. Wishing to escape the shame resulting from this degradation, he decided: "I will go to another state where I am not known"²³. This is the only motive he mentions for his decision to migrate in search of work, but there must have also been other motives of which we have spoken above. He was also sensitive to the situation of persons dear to him, in particular an emaciated, ragged bare-footed orphan of a prosperous merchant from Wronki, who came to his parents' home. Wronki was the native town of Wasecug's mother, and this induced the author's parents to take the boy under their roof. It turned out that the boy was very talented and after a few years became a rabbi and preacher combating Hasidism, which was then spreading in the Polish Commonwealth.

Wasecug reconciled himself quickly to his new social position and even stressed that *shohets* should be selected from among persons having certain personal qualities and a proper external appearance. In Berlin he met a Polish Jew who was looking for the job of *shohet* in a Jewish community in Germany; Wasecug says that "he looked like a person engaged in the distillation of vodka and his physiognomy and dress betrayed a villager; he

²³ *Korot Moshe Wasecug*, p. 91.

had neither the polish nor the traits which a *shohet* should have”²⁴. Wasercug was convinced that he himself had them. His negative opinion was typical of the attitude of a Jew from Great Poland to Jewish village innkeepers, who were seldom met in Wasercug’s native region but formed an integral part of landscape in other regions of the Commonwealth. Having found that it was difficult to check whether an animal had been killed in accordance with the rules of *Shehitah* and to collect remuneration for each head of cattle killed, he changed his attitude to the trade of a *shohet*. During his stay at Gryfino he failed to prevent the sale of meat which he suspected of not being kosher to the local Jewish population. He encountered similar difficulties when he returned to his native parts from West Pomerania in the 1780s. He was then engaged by the Jewish community in Kórnik, a town with 1,683 inhabitants of whom 336 (about 25 per cent) were Jews²⁵. He could not cope with the local Jewish butchers, quarrelled with them and had difficulties in exacting his dues. He says that in other towns, too, *shohets* carried on their work under strong pressure from butchers. He mentions an event in Poznań when a butcher, armed with an ax, ran after a *shohet* and threatened to kill him if he did not certify that his meat was kosher; this finally deterred him from continuing his function. At the end of Prussian rule he accepted the offer of the Elders of Płock, who were looking for a German- and Polish-speaking syndic and secretary of the kahal; he was glad to be able to give up the function of a *shohet* in Kórnik.

Wasercug praises the social and ethical values of Polish Jews. He is proud of his father who, even though he was not one of the richest men in the town, bestowed money for Jewish philanthropic purposes, contributed to dowries for indigent girls, gave board to poor Jews and students and, as has been mentioned above, kept one of them in his house for years.

Wasercug emphasizes that it is important for the Jews to study the Bible and Talmud and repeatedly expresses his attachment to Jewish tradition. When Jews were being given surnames during Prussian rule he chose the name of Wasercug, for as a child he was saved from drowning by a happy coincidence. He says that the adoption of a surname does not detract from the value of his proper name, *Mojżesz*, but supplements it in a way, for the biblical Moses, whose name he bears, was also drawn out of water as a child.

Wasercug combined fidelity to Jewish customs and tradition with attachment to Polish and German cultures which influenced him throughout his life. He knew Polish and German and sometimes spoke Polish with his

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

²⁵ A. Heppner, J. Herzberg, *Aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Juden und der jüd. Gemeinden in den Posener Lande*, Koschmin-Bromberg 1909, p. 585.

wife. His interest in Polish culture induced him to see “a comedy”, as he calls it, in a theatre in Płock which had existed since 1812²⁶. Being encouraged to see it by a certain Ajzyk, a man greatly respected in the Płock Jewish community, Wasercug after some hesitations let himself be persuaded. The two men were the first Polish Jews known by name to attend a performance in a Polish theatre at the beginning of the 19th century, but their visit did not denote that they were departing from the traditional Jewish community and its culture.

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)

²⁶ B. Król-Kaczorowska, *Teatr dawnej Polski. Budynki — dekoracje — kostiumy* (*The Theatre in Old Poland. Buildings — Scenery — Costumes*), Warszawa 1971, p. 64.