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Cultural, Class, or Scientific Aspirations? Polish Jews at the University of Padua

ABSTRACT

Among the students of medicine in Padua from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in XVII and XVIII centuries, we can note a certain number of Jews. This article contains a short analysis of so far findings in the area of research on this aspect of Jewish history in the First Republic of Poland. Referring to more and less known facts, the Author paid particular attention to the motivations and aspirations of Jewish scholars who had come to City of Antenor from Polish-Lithuanian land. Following the careers of Jewish medical graduates, we can see, that for most of them having a Padua diploma was not only the way to gain a better status in the Jewish community but also a gateway to overcoming cultural barriers. According to the Author, this was possible due to the fact, that many of the representatives of polish nobility, who were called "Paduans," had similar experiences of contact with the university environment and the culture of the Venetian Republic.

KEYWORDS: Padua, university, students, Jews, Jewish medics, medicine, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

RIASSUNTO

Aspirazioni culturali, di classe o scientifiche? Gli Ebrei polacchi all'Università di Padova

Tra gli studenti di medicina a Padova provenienti dalla Confederazione Polacco-Lituana, nei secoli XVII e XVIII, possiamo notare un certo numero di Ebrei. L'articolo contiene una breve analisi dei risultati fino ad ora ottenuti nell'ambito della ricerca su questo aspetto della storia delgi Ebrei nella Prima Repubblica di Polonia. Riferendosi a fatti più o meno conosciuti, l'Autore presta particolare attenzione alle motivazioni e alle aspirazioni degli studenti ebrei che arrivavano alla città di Antenore dalle terre Polacco-Lituane. Seguendo la carriera degli Ebrei laureati in medicina, possiamo osservare che

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per molti di loro conseguire il diploma a Padova non non era solo un modo per ottenere uno status migliore nella comunità ebraica, ma anche una porta per superare le barriere culturali. Secondo l'Autore, ciò era possibile poiché molti dei rappresentanti della nobiltà polacca, detti "padovani", avevano avuto analoghe esperienze di contatto con l'ambiente universitario e con la cultura della Repubblica di Venezia.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Padova, università, studenti, Ebrei, medici ebrei, medicina, Confederazione Polacco-Lituana.

Introduction

In the record of Poland kept in the archives of the University of Padua among the entries of 1692, there is a blurred text at the end of a page, beginning with the words: "Moyse Aaron Hebreus Lithuanus…" (*Album Polonicum*, 2018, p. 197)

It probably concerns Moses Aaron, Aaron's son, who 3 years later, i.e., on July 3, 1695, received a Bachelor's degree in surgery at the *Universitas Artistarum* in Padua. Jan Warchał, who at the beginning of the 20th century researched the archives of Padua, connected him with Aaron Gordon, who is also mentioned in the records of Poland at the University of Padua, in the entry dated March 7, 1692. The same Aaron Gordon was mentioned by Majer Bałaban, a pre-war researcher of the history of Polish Jews, who described his adventurous return from Padua to Vilnius after obtaining a doctorate in medicine. Aaron's fame was said to have reached the court of King Augustus II, who reportedly made him one of his personal physicians (Bersohn, 1905, pp. 27–28).[1]

Under the deleted text in the record, there is the following entry:

> Moses … this Jew, entered against the statutes of the nation thanks to the private favor of the councillor, was removed, hence for the future let the lords of counsel be vigilant that they do not disfigure so many names of great men as infidels, but that they follow the statute entitled *On the Jews*, Leaf 23 (Archiwum Nacji, I, 1971, p. 182).[2]

The author, explaining the reason for the deletion, reminded the subsequent *consiglieres* to comply with the statutes of Poland in the future.

1 This information cannot be confirmed in the sources or the literature (see also: Bałaban, 1932, p. 303).

2 Translation from latin: T. Babnis.

According to those statutes, Jews who came to Padua to study were not allowed to register. However, in order to attend the university and enjoy the rights and privileges granted to students, they had to prove their affiliation to one of the corporations, which usually gathered students from the same country. In the case of Poland, the Polish *consigliere* issued a document called *Privilegium protectionis*, bearing the image of the nation's seal. The student paid 3 ducats for the issuance of the document (Warchał, 1913, p. 58).

In my opinion, this example can be treated as an introduction to a reflection on the presence of Polish Jews at the University of Padua and the roles they played in later years, as graduates of this excellent institution, in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Polish and Jewish scholars have addressed this topic. However, the basic scientific literature we refer to nowadays comes mainly from the beginning of the 20th century. Unfortunately, outstanding Jewish historians and experts on the subject, such as Majer Bałaban or Henryk Higier, died during World War II, murdered by the Nazis. Much of the documentation that would have allowed in-depth research into the careers of Jewish graduates of the University of Padua in the Commonwealth was also destroyed.

Aspirations and motivations of the Jewish students

The key to further consideration is the complex issue of the cultural and scientific aspirations of Jews who came to the city of Antenor, examined from the perspective of the external and internal conditions and limitations. The former resulted mainly from the centuries-long religious tension, which in a world dominated by Christianity (of all denominations) resulted in the construction of a specific negative image of the Jew. Growing economic conflict with the bourgeoisie's representatives and stereotypes and myths about Jews, especially among the lower classes, often served as a basis for limiting their presence within the walls of cities and depriving them of their rights (Michałowska-Mycielska, 2005, pp. 257–258). The second limitation I want to mention in this article was internal. It resulted from the feeling of contradiction between modern science and the Jewish religious-cultural tradition. The Polish philosopher Adam Świeżyński aptly put it thusly, linking the attitude of Jewish thinkers to the natural sciences with the triad: tension – aspiration – identity:

> The tension concerns the political and social situation linked to the difficult relations existing between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish inhabitants of 16th- and 17th-century Europe. Aspirations indicate the

> desire and ambition of a significant group of representatives of Judaism to break through their isolation and achieve a social status that would enable them to be among the intellectual elite of the time and gain the respect accorded to educated people. Finally, identity means the growing problem of how to define oneself both in relation to "one's own" and in relation to "strangers" in the context of one's own religious and cultural tradition, as well as determining the degree to which it is binding in one's own life (Świeżyński, 2018, p. 14).

The author also noted that in the case of Jewish scholars, the fulfilment of their desires had a practical dimension, expressed in breaking external and internal barriers, thanks to the assimilation of scientific knowledge, attainment of recognition in the world of science, and gaining the support of influential and powerful people. It should be noted that academic education also increased the prestige of individuals and families within the Jewish community, although the greatest recognition of the community was enjoyed by experts of the Torah and the Law, who performed religious functions. They, above all, had the privilege to use the titles of *chawer* and *morenu* (Świeżyński, 2018, p. 30).

It seems that the fate of the Jews living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the period of our interest, from the second half of the 16th century to the end of the 18th century, and gaining their knowledge in Padua, is well illustrated by the above-mentioned observations. Although the Jewish community living in the Polish Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania enjoyed a relatively large number of rights and privileges, which had a significant impact on the size of the diaspora, the gates of the institutions of higher learning functioning in those areas were closed to them (Michałowska-Mycielska, 2014, pp. 107–126). Studies at the University of Padua, due to its commitment to academic freedom and the high level of teaching, offered a chance to fulfil one's dreams of becoming a physician. It should be emphasized that until the middle of the 17th century the city of Antenor, having no competition in this respect, was the main educational destination for Jews from Poland and the rest of Europe (Collins, 2013; Cosmacini, 2016, p. 99).

On the one hand, Jewish candidates for studies who came to the city on the Bacchiglione were attracted by the atmosphere of multiculturalism and religious tolerance, symbolized by the local university of sciences. This image was effectively maintained and promoted by the authorities of the Republic of Venice, who from 1516 managed the university through a body called *Riformatori dello studio di Padova* (Lenart, 2013, pp. 15–31). On the other hand – because of their cultural and religious otherness, in Padua, as in many places elsewhere in Christian Europe – they faced

a number of prohibitions and restrictions, ranging from the limited choice of places of residence to the higher rates of fees that they had to pay to complete their education with a doctorate. The obligation for Jews to settle within a designated district called the "Ghetto" was formally introduced in 1603, but already in the middle of the 14th century other townspeople strove to introduce restrictions that would block the possibility of Jews living together with Christians. Jan Warchał, quoted earlier, mentioned three reasons that were behind such a solution: preventing love affairs between representatives of both denominations, protection of Catholic processions against profanation, and the desire to prevent religious and moral conflicts. Jewish habitants of Padua also had to comply with the obligation to wear distinctive elements of their dress. Only the students could take the liberty of not obeying this order (Warchał, 1913, pp. 39–43; Shatzky, 1950, pp. 444–447; Viterbo, 2010, pp. 19–23).[3]

We can assume that as a result of the isolation resulting from both the above-mentioned external limitations and the well-established sense of separateness, Jewish students participated in the cultural and social life of the Paduan scholars to a lesser extent than representatives of other nations. Some of the protocols for the awarding of doctoral degrees testify to exceptions in this regard. In these, representatives of other nations appear as witnesses to the ceremony. In one example quoted by Warchał, written in 1589 and concerning a certain Salomon Lotio, son of Israel from Mantua, the list mentions 11 newcomers from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It is interesting that the first of those mentioned, Stanislao Bogusz de Wola Boguszowa is described as a temporary *consigliere* of Poland, formally established in 1592. Apart from them, many Italians, French and Germans participated in the ceremony (Warchał, 1913, pp. 54–56).[4]

Perhaps such records prove that the University of Padua was a space where representatives of different nations and cultures treated certain social norms with a distance that they could not afford in their homelands. Whether or not, and to what extent they transferred this open-minded custom to their native land remains an open question, although it seems that in the Polish case, we can speak of a certain continuity of views among the so-called Paduans. In my opinion, the quoted passage is a testimony to

3 Until the1499, the distinguishing element in the costume of the Jews of Padua was a piece of yellow cloth in the shape of an oval, then a yellow cap, and from the middle of the 17th century, a simple cap or a red hat.

4 In this document there are also mentioned men from the I Republic of Poland: Andrea Zavisza de Zeymy Lithuano, Nicolao Ponetouski Polono ex maiori Polonia, Hieronimo Ossoliński, Joanne Karasuki de Sieczin, Stanislao Liezko de Ryglice, Erasmo Dlugopolski, Stanislao Zawadzki Pico, Stanislao Straszovio, Simeone Lencio, Melchiore Codicio, Simeone Zvaroscio.

the aspirations that made the Jews studying in Padua cross the barriers to join the intellectual and economic elite of their times.

Exemplification

Let us take a look at several selected examples. The representatives of the Jewish community living in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth whose presence at the University of Padua is confirmed by documents, and they travelled to the city of Antenor with the intention of obtaining a medical education. We will focus on a few cases selected from the source analysis conducted by Jan Warchał at the beginning of the 20th century.

The first of the Jewish students mentioned by the Polish monk, Izaak Bacharach (Bachraach, Bachaach), son of Menachem, received his doctorate in medicine in Padua in 1628 (Warchał, 1913, p. 63). Unfortunately, we do not know much more about him, except that he already had his bachelor's degree that year. We also do not know who were the supervisors of his doctorate. According to Majer Bałaban, after his return to Poland, Isaac married the daughter of another physician, Dr. Judy de Lima, from a family with medical traditions, who came to Poland from Ferrara and settled in Poznań (Bałaban, 1932, p. 296). The son of the aforementioned Judy was Mojżesz de Lima. This representative of the de Lima family received his doctorate in medicine at the *Universitas Artistarum* in Padua in 1639 (Warchał, 1913, p. 64). He also declared to have a Bachelor's degree earlier, probably in surgery, and, in this case too, we do not know the names of his supervisors or examiners. Together with Izaak Bacharach, he was employed as a *qahal* physician in Poznań and also treated the aristocracy of Wielkopolska, including Katarzyna Rozdrażewska née Opalińska from Krotoszyn, wife of Jakub Hieronim Rozdrażewski of the Doliwa family, Voivode [provincial governor] of Inowrocław (Bałaban, 1932, p. 29; Highier, 1927, p. 2).

Another graduate of the University of Padua, Dr. Jakub Winkler, soon became associated with the Poznań branch of the de Lima family by marrying Moses' daughter. He came from a recognized family of doctors from Vienna. He found himself in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth together with his brother Isaac as a result of the decision to expel Jews from Vienna made by Emperor Leopold Habsburg in 1670. Apart from Poland and Lithuania, the exiles settled on the lands ruled by Frederick William I of the Hohenzollerns (Bałaban, 1932, p. 297; Highier, 1927, p. 2). At the turn of the century in 1700, Wolf, Jakub Winkler's son, joined the group of Polish Jewish students in Padua, although in his case, it was not without complications. He tried to join the Germans, which

met with a strong reaction of the Poles. Let us recall that according to the corporation privilege, every student coming from the Commonwealth was obliged to enroll in the Polish registry and pay a fee. The Jewish student was summoned to give explanations to the heads of the nation. He excused himself by the naivety and ignorance of the statutes that had caused his mistake (Archiwum Nacji, II, 1972, pp. 144–145). Eventually, Wolf Winkler was finally granted *Privilegium protectionis* by the Poles. As a member of that group, he took his doctoral exams the next year, as a student of Michael Angelus Molinetcus, a professor of surgery (*chirurgia ordinaria*) from Venice (Warchał, 1913, pp. 69–70).[5]

The settlement and growth of Jewish medical families was a frequent phenomenon in Poland. Such dynasties were also maintained by other communities functioning in the cities of the Commonwealth. Wealthier *qahals* were interested in employing university educated physicians, hence sending the sons of Jewish physicians to study in Padua was an investment in the economic future of the family. Among the families whose names can now be found in the archives of Padua, as evidence that their members came to the city of Antenor to secure a title for themselves, let us mention the following families: Morpurgo, de Jona, Ostilia, and Gordon.

A representative of the Morpurgo (Marpurch) family in Cracow was a certain Aaron, son of Samson, matriculated in Padua in 1666. He received his doctorate on October 10, 1671, under the supervision of Antonius de Marchetis (1640–1730), an eminent anatomist (Warchał, 1913, pp. 64–65). The Morpurgo family moved to Kazimierz near Cracow from Padua in the first half of the 17th century. After returning to Poland, Aaron got a job as a community doctor. Simeon Marpurgo was matriculated with him, but his fate remains unknown (Warchał, 1913, p. 61; Bałaban, 1932, p. 296; Bałaban, 1920, p. 98).

According to Majer Bałaban, the first graduate of the University of Padua from the de Jona family in Lviv was Jochanan Baruch (Bałaban, 1932, p. 298). He cannot be found in the extracts left by Jan Warchał. He should probably be identified with the representative of this family matriculated on June 26, 1640 as "*Giona de Giona, cum poro ad oculum dexterum*" (Warchał, 1913, p. 60). Thus, we learn that he probably had some damage to his right eye. Balaban claimed that Jochanan obtained his doctorate and settled in Lviv, where he developed his medical practice.

5 There were also some problems on this occasion. The authorities of the nation decided that the fund of the Polish association had been "too burdened in the advancement of the aforementioned Hebrew in the promotion of the doctorate," and therefore demanded the repayment of the debt. The medic paid the amount due, excluding the payment to the *bidel*. As a result, the members of the Polish Nation gathered on July 8, 1701 (7 days after Wolf Winkler's promotion) decided not to issue a protection privilege in a similar case in the future (Archiwum Nacji, II, 1972, pp. 144–145).

Another representative of the de Jona family noted in the archival records associated with the Polish nation was Emanuel de Jona, who matriculated in 1664 and 1665 (Warchał, 1913, p. 61). According to Bałaban, Emanuel, also known as Simcha Menachem, and completed his education in the city of Antenor with a doctorate obtained in 1668. In 1678, Jacob Jona de Jona (Giacob de Giona), son of Jonah enrolled at the university. A year later, he received his doctorate in philosophy and medicine (Warchał, 1913, pp. 62–65). He was suggested for promotion by Jacob Pighius (1647–1683), a native of Verona, a pupil of Antonio Molinettus, an excellent expert in anatomy and pharmacy, who also served as a physician at the court of Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg (1658–1705).

Representatives of another Jewish family living in the eastern territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – Ostilla (Hostilia, Fortis, Ostia) also studied in Padua. In 1678, Levi Liberman Ostilia, son of Samuel, matriculated here (Warchał, 1913, p. 62). He received his doctoral degree, together with the above-mentioned Jacob de Jona on July 7, 1679. Antonius de Marchetis registered him for his doctoral examinations (Warchał, 1913, p. 65). On May 10, 1704, Levi Liberman's son, Emanuel Levi Ostilia enrolled in the Padua Athenaeum (Warchał, 1913, p. 63). He offended the authorities of the Polish nation by failing to appear for the protection privilege and to pay the fee, despite being summoned by the *bidel*. In view of the above, the then *consigliere* of the nation, Jan Antoni Słowakowicz, issued a decree on May 31st, in the presence of witnesses, in which, due to "his arrogance and insolence," his obstinate disregard for regulations and reminders, Emanuel Ostilia was obliged to pay 6 Venetian ducats and to purchase the work *Opera medica theoretico-practica* by the German physician, Michael Etmüller (1644–1683), professor at the University of Leipzig, for the nation's library. Emanuel Ostilia was to fulfill this obligation within three days, under the threat of being deprived of protection and the possibility of winning a doctoral degree (Archiwum Nacji, II, 1972, pp. 155–157). The actions of the national authorities must have been effective because less than two years after these events, on February 7, 1706, his supervisor, Bernardino Ramazzini (1633–1714) registered Emmanuel Levi Hostilia for his doctoral exams in philosophy and medicine (Warchał, 1913, p. 71).

The Gordon family from Vilnius, mentioned at the beginning of this text, apart from the aforementioned Aaron and Mojżesz Aronowicz, was represented at the Padua Athenaeum by Jekutiel Gordon (Jecuziel Zorda Vilnense, Jekutil Spero Deum Gordon) son of Leon, matriculated in 1730 (Warchał, 1913, p. 63). He received his doctorate on October 13, 1732, under the supervision of Alexander Knips Macope (1662–1744), professor of anatomy and pharmacy (Warchał, 1913, p. 72).

The medical education obtained at the University of Padua and confirmed by its diploma, strengthened, as I mentioned earlier, the social position of both the graduate and his family in the Jewish community. This translated not only into employing "Paduans" as *qahal* doctors, but also into entrusting them with functions on the community board. Among others, the aforementioned Aaron Morpurgo and Emanuel de Jona were the seniors in their *qahals*. Also, Wolf Winkler would take up a communal office (Bałaban, 1932, pp. 296, 299). Additionally, Emanuel de Jona was elected the Marshall of the Council (or Sejm) of Four Lands, the central institution of the Jewish self-government organized on the model of the Polish parliament, which was recognized by the authorities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the main representative of the Jews living within its borders.

For the enlightened physicians who graduated from the University of Padua, it was probably important to break down class and cultural barriers. The doctor's laurels brought from Padua facilitated this process considerably, because the competence of the Jewish physicians who possessed them was recognized by influential representatives of the Polish nobility and magnates.

Of the aforementioned Jewish "Paduans," Emmanuel de Jona was the one whose career outside the *qahal* flourished to the greatest extent. He became one of the court physicians of the Polish King John III Sobieski and remained so until the king's death (Bałaban, 1920, pp. 49–56). Aaron Gordon, mentioned at the beginning, according to Bersohn, was to serve at the court of another monarch of the Commonwealth – Augustus II the Strong, while Moses de Lima treated magnates in Greater Poland (Bersohn, 1905, pp. 27–28; Bałaban, 1932, pp. 296).

Another graduate of the University of Padua, Vitalis Felix (Chaim Vitalis Felix, Vitalis Felicis Mojsenakij), is also noteworthy in this regard. Bałaban suspected that Vitalis may have been the son of Moses Montalto, who came from a medical family previously living in Portugal. Moses' father, Elijah Montalto, for fear of persecution, fled to Livorno, where he became Maria de Medici's physician. He then moved to Paris with her court when she became the wife of Henry IV Bourbon. We do not know how Moses Montalto found himself in Lublin, but Bałaban quoted an inscription from a tombstone in one of his studies to confirm this story (Bałaban, 2012, pp. 28–29).[6] His alleged son enrolled as a student at the

6 The content of the inscription quoted by Bałaban was to be as follows:
Poniedziałek, 24 ijar 397 według krótkiej rachuby.
Tu pochowany pobożny mąż Mojżesz, skromny
we wszystkich czynach swoich.
Czcigodny nasz nauczyciel pan Mojżesz Montalto,
lekarz specjalista, syn gaona, naszego nauczyciela pana Eliasza

Athenaeum in Padua for the first time on September 13, 1651, as "Ioachim Vitalis Foelix hebr[eus] Polonus, Moiseschit," with another matriculation entry is dated 1656. On April 8, 1658, he was registered by his supervisor Claudius Beringardus, professor of philosophy and medicine, author of the treatise *Circulo Pisano* (Padua 1661), for his doctoral exams and completed them on April 12 of the same year (Warchał, 1913, pp. 61, 64). Being noticed by the entourage of King Michael Korybut Wiśniowiecki, he was appointed by the monarch as a court servant and an examiner of Jewish doctors in Lublin (Bersohn, 1905, pp. 74–75).[7]

An important element of the functioning in the scientific community was the preparation of dissertations and treaties. In this regard, the scientific aspirations of Jewish academics encountered various barriers resulting from both the hostile attitude of the university community and the cultural and religious limitations in their own environment. Scientific discoveries and theories, especially in the field of natural sciences and philosophy of nature, could lead – as was the case with Christians – to a doctrinal conflict with the traditionalist part of the Jewish community. We cannot also ignore the doubts of the worldview, as nature was experienced by the authors themselves, who often remained deeply religious people. In their desire to pass on knowledge about the world, they had to take into account the prevailing theories due to religion and tradition.

Among the Polish Jews who graduated from medical studies in Padua, only Tobiasz Kohn was among the authors of works recognized in the world. His family lived in Narol near Bełżec until 1648, but they fled to France during the Khmelnytsky Uprising, fearing the Cossacks. There, in Metz, Tobiasz was born in 1652. Around 1660, after the death of his

Montalto, który był lekarzem i doradcą
króla Francji zwanego XIII Ludwik. 397 wedle krótkiej rachuby.
Niech dusza jego związana będzie w węzełku życia.
Zmarł w poniedziałek 24 ijar 5397 (1637).

Confirmation of the existence of this tombstone before World War II can be found in the study containing epitaphs of famous Jews from Lublin, by Szlomo Baruch Nissenbaum (Nissenbaum, 1899, pp. 51–52)

7 Confirmation of this statement can be found in the document: *Servitoratus Erudito Chaim Vitali Felici Doctoris Primo Lublinensi Iudao* of August 28, 1671 in *Metryka Koronna* (Metryka, 1669–1673; c. 493–494). In this arrchival material we can note such the words concerning Vitalis Felix: … *Doctoris Lublinensis Judai in facultate Medicinae Scientiam multoque rerum et experientiarum et praxi acquisitam peritiam, qua eo pervenit, Ut etiam in Numerum Laureatorum Doctorum Pataviensium adscriberetur, indefessum denique de Nobis bene merendi Studium faciendum esse duximus, Ut ipsum in Patrocinium et Protectionem Nostram Regiam assumereus et acciperemus, Ut ipsum in Patrocinium et Protectionem Nostram Regiam assumereus et acciperemus; prout quidem assumimus et accipimus, eundemque in Numerum Servitorum Nuovum cooptamus re: ferimus adscribius et connumeramus presentibus Cuis Nobis …*

father, Mojżesz Kohn, he returned to Poland. Continuing the medical traditions present in the family for two generations, he studied in Frankfurt (Oder) in 1678. Three years later, he matriculated in Padua as Tobia Moschide and on June 23, 1683 he was promoted to the doctorate of philosophy and medicine as a student of Carlo Rinaldini, the author of numerous works on mathematics, astronomy and philosophy, and of the outstanding philosopher Nicolas Kalliakis (Warchał, 1913, pp. 62, 66; Bersohn, 1872, pp. 7–10). After completing his studies, he returned to Poland and then moved to Constantinople, where he became one of the physicians of Sultan Ahmed III (1703–1730). He died in 1729 during a trip to Palestine. Kohn is supposed to have authored several treatises, although the only confirmed published and well-known work of his is *Ma'seh Tuvviyah* (Works of Tobias). Among the reasons for its publication were his recollections of the unpleasantness he suffered on account of his origins while in Frankfurt. This prompted Tobiasz Kohn to undertake the work in order to prove to his persecutors who denied the scientific abilities and achievements of the Jews: "… that this wisdom is not only given to themselves. … And that there is still among us a rational and enlightened man who possesses wisdom" (Świeżynski, 2018, p. 28).

Kohn gave his work an encyclopaedic character, providing lectures on metaphysics and astronomy, including a polemic against the heliocentric theory (he even called Nicolaus Copernicus a "Son of Satan"), as well as on natural sciences in general and detailed reflections on various medical problems. He became famous in Poland for his factual research approach to the issue of the so-called "Polish plait" (*Plica polonica*), which at that time fascinated the academic world. His approach to science was illustrated by a diagram comparing the structure of a house and the human body as similarities, between which the author placed a reference to the wisdom of King Solomon (Cohen, 1707, p. 228). He wrote of medicine itself that it is: "a very easy science in the mouth of charlatans, and a difficult one in the eyes of an educated physician" (Bersohn, 1872, pp. 27–28).

Conclusion

The above examples of Polish Jews who sought to realize their aspirations by studying in Padua are only a part of a larger picture. Undeniably, a doctorate in medicine and philosophy or a bachelor's degree in surgery obtained at the Ateneo in Padua provided a solid basis for building a position in the community, which also translated into the economic status of entire families. This, in turn, created favorable conditions for the next generations of Jewish physicians, who grew up in an atmosphere of

a fascination with knowledge, supported by the possibility of observing, and often participating in medical practices performed by members of their families. In addition to the academic education itself, contact with the most eminent minds of the world at that time probably played a significant role. At the same time, the opportunities that the University of Padua opened up for Jews were the reason why the graduates of this great institution had a growing desire to break down cultural and religious barriers in order to participate in the process of rational cognition and explanation of the observed phenomena. They also encouraged the sharing of the richness of Jewish tradition, which was facilitated by the knowledge of languages necessary for functioning in specific schoolarly circles and in cooperation with the environment. It seems that in spite of the aforementioned limitations imposed by the local Christian communities, as well as internal ones – resulting to a certain extent from the distrust of conservative Jewish circles towards scientific discoveries and doctrines created in the non-Jewish world – the studies in the city of Antenor were a catalyst for the interpenetration of cultures.

Returning to the example of Aaron Gordon evoked at the beginning of our considerations, let us cite an excerpt from another record of a patronage privilege left in the Paduan archives, issued in Padua on the 7th of March 1692:

> To each and every one who is or may be interested in this, and who should see this letter, having presented at the outset, upon request of any class, position, and authority, proof of our office, we make known how, appearing before us in person, the noble Aaron Gordon, a native of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a province of the Kingdom of Poland, and now residing in Padua for the study of medicine, requested to be placed under our protection and that of the entire Polish Nation, here in the study of the illustrious University of Padua at the present time. We, since we have seen his just request and have given it serious consideration, ascertaining that it is not contrary to our rights and privileges, have graciously granted it and allowed him to enjoy and benefit from our protection and that of our people, according to what we allow, convey and announce to those present. We ask each and every one to whom this present letter of ours would reach, to welcome him with due kindness and courtesy, and, if necessary, to consider it expedient to support and assist him in everything, to render in return an equal zeal in favour on every occasion. In confirmation of which we have given this letter, published it, signed it with our hand, and affixed it with the seal of our illustrious kingdom (Archiwum Nacji, II, 1972, pp. 129–130).[8]

8 Translation from Latin: T. Babnis

It is worth noting here that in the case of the Polish Jews, the specific mentality of the nobility, as the most influential group in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was also important. The atmosphere of cultural and religious tolerance, which was maintained against certain tendencies, and whose disappearance in the following decades was largely influenced by the wars waged on the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state, enabled the Jewish graduates of the Padua Ateneum to function in conditions allowing them to enrich themselves and make careers outside the *qahal* community. An important factor paving the way for such a state of affairs was probably the existence of an informal community called the "Paduans," consisting of people who, regardless of their status, had a chance to encounter cultural patterns in the years of their youth in the city on the Bacchiglione that fundamentally shaped their attitudes.

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