

EZRA MENDELSON

Art and Jewish–Polish Relations: Matejko and Gottlieb at the National Museum in Warsaw

The visitor to the National Museum [*Muzeum Narodowe*] in Warsaw will eventually arrive at the splendid gallery devoted chiefly to the works of Poland's most celebrated nineteenth-century history painter, Jan Matejko. There his or her attention will inevitably be drawn to a gigantic painting, occupying an entire wall of the gallery, that depicts in stirring and graphic terms the famous battle of Grunwald (also known as Tannenberg) of 1410, when Polish arms defeated the Order of the Teutonic Knights and halted, for a while at least, the *Drang nach Osten* of the German enemy [fig. 1]. The subject of *The Battle at Grunwald* [Bitwa pod Grunwaldem] had long interested Matejko; the execution of this work took him three years. Its completion in 1878 coincided with his being presented with a royal scepter by the mayor of Cracow, symbolizing his uncontested rule in the realm of Polish national art. *Bitwa* has always attracted large, admiring, and inspired crowds. The Polish cultural journal *Kłosy* published, in 1879, an illustration of such a gathering viewing it in Warsaw, at the palace of the viceroy [fig. 2]. To this very day busloads of Polish school children are taken to see it and to imbibe its very obvious message.¹

Matejko's huge canvas portrays not only a famous Polish victory, but also a victory of an alliance of the small East European nations fighting against German incursions on their territories. The battle took place not long after the conclusion of the first union between Poland and Lithuania, and the figure in the center of the painting is Grand Duke Witold (Vitautas, Vitovt) of Lithuania, a commander of the allied army and one of the greatest heroes of Lithuanian history.² We know that among the troops were not only Poles and Lithuanians but also detachments from what is now Ukraine, Belarus and Russia as well as Tatar fighters and soldiers from Bohemia.³ Indeed, Matejko has actually introduced into his painting the Czech hero and Hussite warrior Jan Žižka, who apparently did not take part in the battle. Matejko himself was half-Czech, and no doubt wished to emphasize the close relations between these two small and closely related Slavic peoples of East Central Europe, both struggling against the hegemonic German powers of their day.

It is possible to read this canvas as a vivid visual expression of the well-known Polish idea that the Poles should ally themselves with other nations of Eastern Europe in order to preserve their independence in the face of the rapacious intentions of both the Germans and the Russians.⁴ We should recall that *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* was painted at a time when Bismarck's newly united Reich was setting out on a policy of germanizing the Polish

¹ There is, of course, a large literature on this painting. See, for helpful introductions, *Matejko. Obrazy olejne. Katalog*, ed. K. Sroczynska (Warszawa, 1993), pp. 151–57; E. Micke-Broniarek, *Matejce w holdzie . . . W stulecie śmierci artysty. Katalog wystawy* (Warszawa, 1993), pp. 33ff; M. Porębski, *Jana Matejki Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* (Warszawa, 1953).

² In fact in Lithuania this painting is sometimes read as representing a Lithuanian victory. See the textbook by S. Žukas, *Istorinis pasakojimas. Lietuvos metraščiai* (Vilnius, 1997), pp. 24–25. I should add that I do not read Lithuanian. This school-book was brought to my attention during my visit to Lithuania in 1997.

³ It is interesting that Henryk Sienkiewicz, in his fictional account of the battle between the Poles and the crusading order, has also emphasized the multinational character of the Polish–Lithuanian host, adding to the usual list of allies Wallachians, Bessarabians, and even Serbs. See his *The Teutonic Knights*, trans. by A. Tyszkiewicz, preface by Lord Vansittart, (n.p., 1943), pp. 695, 696, 698. The novel was first published in 1900.

⁴ On the connections between Poles and Czechs at the time of the battle see F. Heymann, *Poland and Czechoslovakia* (Englewood Cliffs, 1966), p. 47, and, by the same author, *John Žižka and the Hussite Revolution* (Princeton, 1955), pp. 30–31. See also A. Zamoyski, *The Polish Way* (London, 1987), pp. 47–49. On the multinational character of the army see M. Porębski, *Jana Matejki Bitwa*, pp. 12–13.

borderlands of Germany. Surely Matejko, himself living under “German” (Habsburg, Austrian) rule, had this well-publicized policy in mind when he executed his painting.⁵ Finally, let us keep in mind that the painting was made not many years after the disastrous revolt of 1863, as a result of which the Polish lands under the rule of the tsar were russified and many of the Polish elite were either killed or forced into exile. In the wake of this revolt some Polish intellectuals abandoned the old romantic vision in favor of a more sober, realistic policy generally known as “positivism”. Matejko himself, however, maintained at least some elements of the old ideology associated with the insurrectionary tradition.⁶ For him art was inextricably associated with the national mission of preserving Polish historical memory; the artist’s mission was to remind those who viewed his canvases of the glories (as well as the catastrophes, sometimes self-inflicted) of Polish history.

One other feature of this painting is worthy of our attention. Appearing in the sky above the bloody battlefield is a religious figure clad in the robes of a bishop—according to one authority this is St. Stanisław, the martyred bishop of Cracow, Matejko’s city, and the patron saint of Poland.⁷ His presence emphasizes the religious content of this painting. The union between Poland and Lithuania, that made possible the victory over the German knights, was among other things a religious union, and facilitated the Christianization of the last pagan nation in Europe. Later on Matejko, as part of his series of paintings entitled *The History of Polish Civilization*, painted a work called *The Christianization of Lithuania in the Year 1387* to commemorate this decisive event in East European history.⁸ Matejko was obviously conscious of the major role of Christianity in Polish history, and he seems to be telling us that the victory at Grunwald was divinely inspired. He is reminding us too that the Poles regarded themselves as a bastion of Western Christianity in Eastern Europe, and perhaps also that Poland was seen by some nineteenth-century romantics, among them Mickiewicz, as the “Christ among the nations.”

Matejko’s Grunwald has become a familiar icon in Poland. It has received the ultimate accolade of being made into a jigsaw puzzle. It has been endlessly reproduced, and even parodied.⁹ The gallery in which it is exhibited remains a place of pilgrimage, where visitors are inspired by its vision of Polish bravery and take to heart, no doubt, the need for eternal vigilance against Poland’s rapacious neighbors.

There are no Jewish figures in Matejko’s scene. In fact, they represent the only major national or religious group in fifteenth-century Poland to be excluded from this bloody, memorable scene. This is not because Matejko was uninterested in Jews—far from it, as we shall soon see. There were, after all, no Jewish soldiers in the Polish–Lithuanian host, and certainly no Jewish presence among the fanatical Christians of the Teutonic Order. Nevertheless, a number of Jewish “subtexts” may be discovered in this epic work. First of all, let us note that Grand Duke Vytautas is a positive figure in East European Jewish history. It

⁵ This is noted by Micke-Broniarek in *Matejce w holdzie*, p. 33, and Porębski in *Jana Matejki Bitwa*, p. 16. On German policy in the East see W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews* (Chicago and London, 1980), pp. 128ff. In 1876, as Matejko was working on his painting, German was made the sole legal language of the administration, courts, and political institutions of the German State.

⁶ It is interesting that Bolesław Prus, a leading spokesman of the positivist school and one of Poland’s greatest writers, includes an unfavorable remark on *Bitwa* in his novel *The Doll*, trans. by David Welsh, (Budapest, London and New York, 1996), pp. 465–66. Here it is described as “a large and showy picture, which should not be exhibited to soldiers who took part in real battles”.

⁷ M. Porębski, *Jana Matejki Bitwa*, p. 10; *Matejko. Obrazy olejne*, ed. K. Sroczyńska, p. 153. The latter source identifies the figure as St. Stanisław.

⁸ The picture was painted in 1888. See on it *Matejko. Obrazy olejne*, ed. K. Sroczyńska, pp. 242–43.

⁹ See the material in *Janowi Matejce w stulecie śmierci. Pamiętnik wystawy w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, (Cracow, 1994). P. Wandycz’s recent survey of East European history, *The Price of Freedom. A History of East Central Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London and New York, 1993), features this painting on its cover.

was in his name that privileges were issued, in 1388–89, to the Jewish communities of Lithuania. According to the great Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnov, Vytautas “exhibits, like Casimir, an enlightened solicitude for a peaceful relationship between Jews and Christians and for the inner welfare of the Jewish communities.” In fact, he continues, “the position of the Jews was more favorable in Lithuania than in Poland.”¹⁰ Ironically, in 1941, the year of the Nazi invasion of Lithuania, a terrible pogrom took place in Kaunas on a street named after the Grand Duke—Vytautas Prospect. The well-known Lithuanian dissident Tomas Venclova made note of this in an article written in 1976, in which he says that “Grand Duke Vytautas, to whom Lithuanians relate as the Russians do to Peter the Great or the French to Napoleon, in 1388 granted privileges to the Jews in the first known document relating to the position of Jews in Lithuania.” As for those Lithuanians who took part in the murderous assault on the Jews of Kaunas, “it did not occur to them that they were insulting not only Christ, but also Prince Vytautas, for whom the Prospect was named . . .”¹¹

Bitwa pod Grunwaldem has other associations with the “Jewish question”. Grunwald, also known as Tannenberg, was of course the scene of a great German victory over the Russian army in 1914, a reversal—if we substitute Russia for Poland—of the battle of 1410.¹² In the discourse of the German right the Teutonic Knights (whose order had been founded in the Holy Land during the crusades), and Tannenberg itself, became important symbols of German nationalism, which by the late nineteenth century was often identified with anti-Semitism (and anti-Polish sentiments). The great Tannenberg Memorial, erected in 1927, was an important site of memory for *volkist* Germany, including, of course, the Nazi movement. One of its towers was dedicated to the memory of Bismarck, whose policy of germanizing the German East we have already mentioned in connection with Matejko’s painting. The historian George Mosse tells us that a Rabbi was not allowed to participate in the ceremonies when the monument was opened to the public.¹³ Similarly, Grunwald has become a symbol for nationalist-minded Poles. Suffice it to say that in 1981, in communist Poland, the right-wing national–communist and outspokenly anti-Semitic Grunwald Patriotic Union was founded. It was led by the infamous Mieczysław Moczar, one of the most unpleasant characters of that unpleasant time.¹⁴

We cannot, of course, blame Jan Matejko for the later uses to which Grunwald was put. Nor can we assume that he knew of Vytautas’ positive role in the settlement of the Jews in Poland–Lithuania. But there was one other “Jewish” aspect of *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* of which he definitely was aware. This monumental painting was purchased by Dawid Rosenblum, a Warsaw banker of Jewish origin, who paid the painter the princely sum of 45,000 gulden (or 40,000 Russian rubles). The banker received as a gift a preliminary study for the painting.¹⁵ I shall return to this “Jewish connection” later on in this essay.

The Gallery in which *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem* is displayed also contains other paintings by Matejko and by several other Polish artists of his time. Directly opposite it is to be found an important though unfinished work by Maurycy Gottlieb entitled *Christ Preaching at Capernaum* [Chrystus nauczający w Kafarnaum] [fig. 3]. This placement is surely not

¹⁰ S. M. Dubnov, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, Vol. I (Philadelphia, 1916), pp. 59, 60. See also H. Ben-Sasson, ‘The Middle Ages’, in *A History of the Jewish People*, ed. Ben-Sasson (London, 1977), p. 582, and S. W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Vol. X (New York, 1965), p. 33.

¹¹ Venclova’s essay is excerpted in Sima Ycikas, ‘Lithuanian–Jewish Relations in the Shadow of the Holocaust’, in *Bitter Legacy. Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Z. Gitelman (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997), pp. 191, 192.

¹² For a comparison see G. Evans, *Tannenberg: 1410: 1914* (London, 1970).

¹³ G. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975), pp. 68ff.

¹⁴ M. Chęcinski, *Poland. Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1982), p. 260; T. Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (London, 1985), p. 175.

¹⁵ As noted in *Matejko. Obrazy olejne*, ed. K. Sroczyńska, p. 154.

accidental. Gottlieb was a great admirer of Matejko's, and studied for brief periods at the School of Fine Arts in Cracow, of which Matejko was the director. I believe that it would not be far-fetched to claim that it was Gottlieb's ambition to become the "Jewish Matejko"—that is, to devote himself to Jewish historical (and other) themes in an effort both to enlighten his Jewish and non-Jewish viewers and fill them with pride and admiration. As for Matejko, we know that he took an active interest in the young painter from Drohobycz, a small city in Eastern Galicia, and actively promoted his career. He attended Gottlieb's funeral in Cracow in 1879, and wrote to his wife of his grief at Gottlieb's tragic death and of his high opinion of his work and character.¹⁶ He even promised Gottlieb's heartbroken father that he would look after a younger brother, Marcin, who also displayed artistic talent.¹⁷ We have here, no doubt, a prime example of a relationship between an aspiring Jewish artist and a famous Gentile patron smoothing his way into the world of high European culture, the most famous example of which is that of Moses Mendelssohn and Gotthold Lessing. Fittingly enough, Maurycy Gottlieb produced several illustrations for Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise*, which was inspired by the German writer's friendship with the sage of Dessau. The fact is that Gottlieb's high reputation in the Polish art canon is due not only to his undeniable talent but to this "special relationship" with Matejko. He is often referred to in the Polish literature as one of Matejko's most talented pupils.¹⁸

According to some sources, Matejko also promised Gottlieb's father to finish Maurycy's painting of *Christ Preaching at Capernaum* so as to ensure that the promised payment for the work would be made.¹⁹ But there seems to be little if anything to link the two paintings—Matejko's *Bitwa* and Gottlieb's *Christ*—that face each other in the gallery of the National Museum. Indeed, if anything they seem to be complete opposites, one celebrating martial valor, in the Polish tradition, the other celebrating the power of the spirit, of the word, as befits the Jewish way. Still, I wish to suggest that there is some sort of dialogue here between the two paintings (that were executed, by the way, at the same time). Matejko's canvas represents the triumph of a multinational army, consisting of virtually all the diverse elements within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and directed by divine guidance. Was there room for the Jews in this state? This was a question that Gottlieb, like so many other Polish Jews, wrestled with during his entire adult life. At times he suffered from the slings and arrows of anti-Semitism, while upon occasion he seemed to have achieved acceptance by his Polish peers, most notably when he attended a banquet in Rome arranged by the local Polish artistic colony in honor of the visit of Matejko. Here he was applauded by several notable Polish artists and informed by them of his full membership in the Polish artistic fraternity.²⁰

But what has *Christ Preaching at Capernaum* to do with the issue of Jewish-Polish relations? Ostensibly, nothing. What strikes the observer immediately is the interesting effort made by Gottlieb, following in the wake of certain other artists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to portray Christ as a Jew, complete with head-covering and *tallit*, or prayer shawl.²¹ He is

¹⁶ The letter is quoted in Z. Soltysowa, 'Dzieło Maurycego Gottlieba', *Rocznik Krakowski*, Vol. XLVII, 1966, p. 156, whose source is *Listy Matejki do żony Teodory, 1861–1881* (Cracow, 1927), p. 174.

¹⁷ See the letter of Maurycy's father, Isak, in *Der Israelit*, No. 15, 8 August, 1879.

¹⁸ See, for example, J. Sandel, 'Maurycy Gottlieb—uczeń Matejki', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, No. 4 (8), 1953, p. 97; T. Dobrowolski, *Sztuka Krakowa* (Cracow, n.d.), p. 500. In the Polish version of Lea Shinar's novel about Gottlieb, originally published in Hebrew, the title is *Maurycy uczeń Matejki* [Maurycy, Pupil of Matejko].

¹⁹ See D. Kaufmann's obituary of Gottlieb in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 15 October, 1879, p. 10. See also *Russkii evrei* 9, 31 December, 1879, p. 316.

²⁰ Information on this banquet is contained in J. Wiesenberg, *Maurycy Gottlieb 1856–1879. Szkic biograficzny* (Złoczów, 1888), p. 41. According to a citation from a letter of Gottlieb's, cited on p. 42, the Polish artist Henryk Siemiradzki announced to Gottlieb that "you are our friend".

²¹ On the subject of Jewish artists portraying Jesus see Z. Amishai-Meisels, 'The Jewish Jesus', *Journal of*

shown preaching at a synagogue in Palestine, whose classical, Corinthian columns resemble those portrayed by Poussin in his famous painting, *The Conquest of Jerusalem by Titus*.²² Gottlieb is obviously interested in calling attention to the fact that the founder of Christianity was a Jew, and he is following such authorities as the great Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz in insisting on Jesus' unquestioned loyalty to Judaism.²³ In this sense we can read his canvas as an exercise in reclaiming Jesus for Jewish history, and as a statement of Jewish pride. The Poles may have their victories over German invaders; the Jews have given the world a great prophet, recognized by millions as the Messiah.

But Gottlieb's painting conveys much more than this. I believe that *Christ Preaching at Capernaum* should also be read as a plea for tolerance, for cooperation and mutual respect between Jews and Poles, and for a peaceful solution to the ethnic divisions that so bedeviled the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The message of Jesus, here represented in the guise of a Jewish prophet preaching in a splendid synagogue, was a universal message. We have already mentioned too that Jesus, or Christ, was also a symbol of Poland. Mickiewicz's views on the necessity and divine approbation for Polish-Jewish cooperation were surely known to Gottlieb, who wrote of his desire to do everything in his power to bring about such a reconciliation.²⁴ Jesus the Jew is also Christ the Pole, whose vision of peace and love, if heeded, might bring about a solution to the evils of anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred.

In Gottlieb's painting Jesus is preaching to a mixed crowd. The Christian Messiah, himself a loyal Jew, is speaking to a congregation of men and women, including one woman (or young girl) standing alongside the men and not in the section reserved for female worshippers.²⁵ The artist himself is pictured here, in a pose of contemplation, and so is a Roman figure dressed in a toga—perhaps the Centurion of Capernaum who was a friend of the Jewish people and helped to build the synagogue in that famous town. In the lower left-hand corner is a case in which scrolls are kept, decorated with a Shield of David [*Magen David*], a famous Jewish symbol. Also to be seen, on the rug draped over the low wall separating the women's section from the men, is what appears to be a representation of the Dome of the Rock, the most important Moslem structure in Jerusalem and a symbol of Jerusalem itself, built on the site of the Jewish Temple destroyed by the Romans.²⁶ We have here, then, a multiethnic and multi-religious portrayal—in this way, at least, not unlike Matejko's canvas.

Maurycy Gottlieb's Jewish milieu, best represented by the newspapers *Der Israelit* in Lvov and *Izraelita* in Warsaw, was identified with what I have called the "integrationist" solution to the Jewish question.²⁷ This meant an emphasis on Jewish acculturation (Gottlieb's main language was German), modernization, and integration into non-Jewish society, coupled with a pride in Jewish achievements and a loyalty to "Jewishness", usually expressed in an adherence to some form or other of Reform Judaism. The "Temple" in Cracow, built in the 1860s to offer an alternative to old-style East European Orthodoxy in Galicia, attracted the kind of people—professionals, men and women of means—who adhered to this general

Jewish Art, Vol. IX, 1982, pp. 84–104.

²² This reading of Gottlieb's painting is based on my Hebrew-language article "Art and Jewish History: Maurycy Gottlieb's "Jesus Preaching at Capernaum"" *Zion*, Vol. LXII, No. 2, 1997, pp. 173–92.

²³ We are told in several sources that Gottlieb read Graetz's *History* while studying in Munich. See especially B. Spira, *Matsevet zikaron* (Cracow, 1893), p. 6.

²⁴ See J. Wiesenberg, *Maurycy Gottlieb 1856–1879*, pp. 42–43; see also the "motto" of the biography of Gottlieb by M. Waldman, *Maurycy Gottlieb 1856–1879* (Cracow, 1932), in which Gottlieb is quoted as saying: "I am a Pole and a Jew, and God willing, I would like to work for the benefit of both."

²⁵ It seems that in Jesus' time the sexes were not always strictly separated, as they are today in Orthodox congregations. But surely Gottlieb was not aware of this. Perhaps, as Ziva Amishai-Meisels has suggested to me, the girl in the painting is only a child.

²⁶ I wish to thank my friend and colleague Professor Richard Cohen for pointing this out to me.

²⁷ See my book *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York, 1993), pp. 3–36.

program. East Galician Jews of Gottlieb's generation suffered from severe identity problems: were they Jews, Poles, or Germans (the Ukrainian option did not yet exist for them). What language should they speak—Yiddish, Polish, or German? Different answers were suggested to these dilemmas, and Gottlieb's was to combine a loyalty to German culture, an admiration of Poland, and a pride in his Jewishness. What he was hoping for—and what, I think, this painting expresses—is that the universal message of the Hebrew prophets would eventually triumph and that all the peoples of the Empire in general, and of Galicia in particular, and especially the Jews and Poles of Galicia, would live together in peace and harmony based on mutual respect.²⁸

We may wonder if Gottlieb really believed that this was possible. Was he confident of the efficacy of Jesus' irenic message? After all, according to the Gospels Jesus was angry at the people of Capernaum for not hearkening to his words, and predicted that the city would be destroyed.²⁹ The sad, even depressed atmosphere of the painting too seems to hint at Gottlieb's lack of certainty. Whatever the case, I wish to suggest that Gottlieb is reminding his master, Matejko, that the Jewish people has played a major role in the history of Western civilization and that the Jewish presence in Poland, as partners with the Poles in building a new Polish society (and perhaps even state) is not only a fact, it is potentially a positive state of affairs.

What were Matejko's views on this subject? Here we must examine another canvas, namely his remarkable *The Reception of the Jews in Poland in the Year 1096* [Przyjęcie Żydów do Polski w. r. 1096] [fig 4]. This painting, also in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw but on display at the city's royal castle, was included in Matejko's series *The History of Polish Civilization*, and was concluded in 1889. It exists in two versions, since Matejko was commissioned to make an extra, larger version (which is almost exactly identical) by the Jewish lawyer and politician Arnold Rapaport, a leading member of the "progressive" Jewish community of Cracow and a Polish patriot.³⁰ This same subject was portrayed in an earlier work by the noted Polish artist Wojciech Gerson [fig. 5], painted in 1874, which must have been known to Matejko. Even earlier, the first notable Polish artist of Jewish origin, Aleksander Lesser, made a sketch for a painting on this subject which has been published by the Polish art historian Jerzy Malinowski.³¹ Moreover, we know that Gottlieb himself had planned to make a large painting of this decisive and memorable event in Polish Jewish history, and it seems that Matejko himself had both encouraged him to do so and had promised to help him in the undertaking. We know too that Gottlieb hoped that Polish Jews would join forces to purchase this painting, just as Poles had done in acquiring one of Matejko's canvases for the nation.³² Unfortunately we can only speculate as to how the Jewish artist would have portrayed this scene, which for Jews, at least, symbolized the positive dimension of Polish-Jewish relations. He made a preparatory sketch for it, just before

²⁸ Let us note that 1878 was a particularly tense year in Austria, due to the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbian question divided the Poles of Galicia, and Gottlieb was involved in a dispute over it with a Polish colleague. See J. Wiesenberg, *Maurycy Gottlieb 1856–1879*, p. 36.

²⁹ *Matthew* 11:23.

³⁰ See *Matejko. Obrazy olejne*, ed. K. Sroczyńska, pp. 238–39, 246–47. On Rapaport see A. Zbitkowski, *Żydzi Krakowscy i ich gmina w latach 1869–1919* (Warszawa, 1995), pp. 64–65. On his collection of art, kept at his residence in Vienna, see A. Nossig, *Szkice artystyczne z Wiednia* (Warszawa, 1894), p. 148.

³¹ J. Malinowski, 'Aleksander Lesser—malarz historyczny', in *Żydzi w obronie Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa, 1998), p. 128. Malinowski also writes, in his *Maurycy Gottlieb* (Warszawa, 1997), p. 76, that the well-known artist Franciszek Żmurko, Gottlieb's friend, also made a painting on this theme.

³² See Gottlieb's letter to "Verehrtester Herr Doktor" (Dr. Heinrich Gottlieb) apparently of early 1879, in the archives of the National Library of Jerusalem, Schwadron Collection. This letter notes that Gottlieb hopes to profit from Matejko's historical expertise in making this image, and also that the publisher of Kłosy, Salomon Lewental, had expressed interest in the painting.

his tragic death in 1879, but it has been lost.³³

Matejko's rendition of the arrival of the Jews in Poland is idiosyncratic, to say the least. For one thing, it dates the arrival of the Jews to the year 1096, which makes no sense historically. For another, Matejko informs us (in his published commentary on the painting) that the Jewish "delegation" to the court of Władysław Herman in Płock is led by none other than Benjamin of Tudela, who in fact lived in the twelfth century and never set foot on Polish soil.³⁴ It would be interesting to know what historical sources were being used by our artist, but we should recall that even in the case of Grunwald he allowed his fancy and perhaps his ideological preferences to take precedence over historical fact. It is noteworthy that he links the arrival of the Jews in Poland with the crusades, which, as is well known, were the cause of horrific pogroms and terrible Jewish suffering. The crusader association provides a link between this painting and *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*. The crusaders were the enemies of both the Poles and the Jews—in this sense, at least, the idea that these two nations shared a common fate finds expression in Matejko's work. Another link with the two paintings discussed above—*Bitwa* and *Jesus Preaching at Capernaum*—is the presence of Jesus, portrayed on the portal of the Romanesque Cathedral in Płock, before which are situated the Jews, on the left, and the Polish dignitaries on the right.

The artist was, in fact, anxious to demonstrate that Poland was an oasis of toleration in Europe, that when the Jews were being expelled and murdered everywhere they found safe haven there. He was, moreover, convinced of the critical importance of the arrival of the Jews—devoting as he did one of his series of twelve paintings on Polish history to this subject. But even a cursory look at the painting will reveal that, unlike Gerson's rather sweet, benevolent image (which is historically more accurate, since it associates the arrival of the Jews with the period of King Kazimierz the Great), its treatment of the Jews is far from positive.³⁵ The Jewish refugees are depicted as a wild band of alien, grotesque, gesticulating men, women and children, totally different in every way from the calm Poles considering whether or not to admit them. On the extreme left of the painting is a figure who appears to be a wandering Jew, complete with Arab-style *kaffieh*, staff, and sack over his shoulders.³⁶ The wandering Jew, condemned to walk without rest over the face of the earth till the second coming of Christ, is a stock figure in anti-Semitic images, for example in Wilhelm von Kaulbach's *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus* of 1846, that Matejko (and Gottlieb) may have seen in Munich.³⁷ In the upper right-hand corner the Duke's wife, Judyt, is being presented with a valuable jewel box, a gift from the refugees. Is not Matejko hinting that the Jews are bribing their way into Poland, especially since he writes in his commentary that this gift played a role in deciding the authorities in favor of the Jews? Matejko also tells us that one of Herman's sons, Bolesław the Wry-Mouthed, may well need Jewish money in order to carry out his ambitious campaigns.³⁸

³³ See the reports in *Tydzień Literacki*, Vol. 9, no. 30., 1879, p. 475; *Kłosy*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 716, 1879. In this last-named source "G" (Wojciech Gerson?) states that Gottlieb had the idea of making a large painting of the granting of rights to the Jews by Kazimierz the Great, and of executing the work in Cracow under the benevolent eye of Matejko. As for the existence of a sketch for this work, see the report in *Dziennik dla Wszystkich*, 9 August, 1879. See also, for the genesis of this painting, J. Wiesenberg, *Maurycy Gottlieb 1856–1879*, p. 43

³⁴ For Matejko's own comments on the painting see *Wystawa cyklu obrazów Jana Matejki. Szkice do dziejów cywilizacji w Polsce* (Warszawa, 1910), pp. 7–8.

³⁵ This is pointed out by Marek Rostworowski in *Żydzi w Polsce. Obraz i słowo*, ed. M. Rostworowski, Vol. I (Warszawa, 1993), pp. 118–19. I am grateful to Ms. Hannah Volovich for drawing my attention to an article on Matejko and the Jews published in Poland in 1939, in which the author delights in pointing to the anti-Semitic attributes of this painting. See Z. Cielinski, 'Matejko a Żydzi', *Gazeta Kościelna*, 1939 (offprint, 16 pages).

³⁶ Once again, my thanks to Professor Richard Cohen, with whom I consulted regarding this figure.

³⁷ This was a very famous painting at the time, and is still prominently displayed at the Munich museum. See *Neue Pinakothek, München*, (Munich, 1989), pp. 148–49.

³⁸ *Wystawa cyklu obrazów Jana Matejki*.

Not all the Poles approved of the idea of granting the Jews asylum in Poland. The edict allowing them to enter has already been prepared, but St. Otto, the court chaplain and apostle to Pomerania, who is situated under the balcony with his hands crossed over his chest, is distressed by the positive attitude of the regime towards the refugees. There are other signs that this is not likely to be a happy event for the Polish nation. Particularly interesting is the use made by the artist of various animals. The Duke's second son, Zbigniew, holds a falcon, that threatens the peaceful doves flying above the heads of the wretched refugees. A large dog, staring at the Jews, is held back by a servant. And, at the bottom of the picture, next to the half-naked, twisted figure of a child, a snake emerges from a vessel belonging to the Jews.³⁹ Interestingly enough, in Lesser's sketch too a dog appears, and here too supplicating Jews in oriental, Arab-looking garb are begging for entrance into the Polish promised land. In Gerson's painting, as in Matejko's, we have a falcon and a dog, but the dog seems peaceful and tame, and the falcon has no doves to threaten. The general atmosphere in this painting is altogether different—more calm, more peaceful—and the Jewish refugees are dignified representatives of their oppressed nation.

There is no doubt in my mind as to the central message in Matejko's image—the Jews are a strange, alien race, and their admission to Poland, even if it is likely to bring some (monetary) benefits, is also potentially dangerous. This fits well into Matejko's general attitude on Jews. We know from his closest co-worker at the Cracow School of Fine Arts, Marion Gorzkowski, that Matejko resented very much having to “work for” Jews who commissioned some of his paintings. In 1882 the artist, during a speech inaugurating the academic year at the School, warned his Jewish students (whom he terms *hebrajczy*) that if they had come to study only in order to make money, and if they had no love for the country in which they lived and did not wish to be Poles, then they should leave Poland and go elsewhere.⁴⁰ This remarkable outburst was widely reported in the Jewish press; a number of Jews, including Dawid Rosenblum (who had financed *Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*), published a protest, and there was even a court case.⁴¹ But Matejko did not retract. Gorzkowski reports, summing things up, that “Matejko could not abide Jews, claiming that they constituted the most harmful race in the world.”⁴² Matejko went so far as to identify with the extreme anti-Semitic position of Jan Jelenski, editor of *Rola*, to whom he sent a message of support in 1883 in which the Jews were accused of regarding the Poles as “walking corpses, whom it is permissible even to persecute”.⁴³

Matejko the outspoken anti-Semite co-existed somehow or other with Matejko the patron of Gottlieb (and teacher of other notable Jewish artists as well, such as Szymon Buchbinder).⁴⁴ Matejko's fairly frequent portrayal of Jews in his canvases indicates that he saw them as an important presence in Poland, and he even went so far as to collect articles of Jewish dress from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This collection is to be found today at the Matejko House museum in Cracow.

Nonetheless, if we return to a consideration of the “dialogue” among the three

³⁹ As noted by Rostworowski in *Żydzi w Polsce...*, p. 119. On the dog see the interesting remarks of Cielinski, ‘Matejko a Żydzi’, p. 15, who claims that this animal, unlike the weak and bribable Poles, possesses a healthy, instinctive hatred for the Jews.

⁴⁰ M. Gorzkowski, *Jan Matejko. Epoka od r. 1861 do konca życia artysty* (Cracow, 1993), p. 237.

⁴¹ See *Nedel'naia khronika voskhoda* 45, 5 November, 1882; *Izraelita* 42, 22 October, 1882; *Russkii evrei* 46, 19 November, 1882; *Izraelita* 44, 5 November, 1882; 47, 26 November, 1882; 48, 3 December, 1882; 2, 31 December, 1882; 11, 4 March, 1883; 13, 18 March, 1883.

⁴² M. Gorzkowski, *Jan Matejko*, p. 371.

⁴³ *Rola* 6, 29 January, 1883, pp. 1–2. I wish to thank Professor Brian Porter for directing my attention to this passage.

⁴⁴ Buchbinder's self-portrait is included in a painting consisting of the portraits of several of Matejko's students, presented to the master in 1881. It is to be seen at the Matejko House [Dom Matejki] in Cracow.

paintings I have discussed in this article, the situation seems clear enough. Matejko has presented us with a dramatic icon of Polish nationalism, in which a coalition of the small nations of Eastern Europe unites against the hegemonic aspirations of their powerful neighbors. As if addressing himself to this image of Polish nationalism—which later became, as we have pointed out, a symbol of exclusivist Polish chauvinism—Gottlieb presents us with an image projecting the hope for a society based on universalism and love, in which Jews and Poles, both connected to the figure of Christ, will live in peace and harmony. Matejko then responds with a painting vividly emphasizing the foreignness, the “otherness” of the Jews in Poland, thereby rejecting the idea, found in Mickiewicz and maintained by Gottlieb, that privileged the notion of Polish–Jewish cooperation and maintained that there was a place for Jews in Polish society.

By the time that Matejko painted *The Reception of the Jews in Poland* Gottlieb had been dead for ten years. In 1892 a number of friends and admirers raised enough money to erect an obelisk over his grave at the new Jewish cemetery in Cracow. At the ceremony Gottlieb was extolled, most notably by the literary critic Wilhelm Feldman, as a man who both loved Poland and was a proud Jew.⁴⁵ The notion that such a combination was possible remained alive at least until 1939, if not later, and in the Jewish political/cultural “camp” that identified with this idea Gottlieb remained an important presence. However, one cannot help thinking that, in the end, it was Matejko’s vision, not that of Gottlieb, that triumphed.

List of Figures

Fig. 1: Jan Matejko, *The Battle at Grunwald*, 1878, The National Museum, Warsaw.

Fig. 2: Matejko’s *The Battle at Grunwald* on display in Warsaw in 1879, illustration in *Kłosy*, No. 713, 15 (27) February, 1879.

Fig. 3: Maurycy Gottlieb, *Christ Preaching at Capernaum*, 1878–9, unfinished, The National Museum, Warsaw.

Fig. 4: Jan Matejko, *The Reception of the Jews in Poland in the Year 1096*, 1889, The National Museum, Warsaw.

Fig. 5: Wojciech Gerson, *The Reception of the Jews* (also called *Kazimierz the Great and the Jews*), 1874, The National Museum, Warsaw.

⁴⁵ Feldman’s speech is published in *Pamiętka odsłonięcia pomnika Maurycego Gottlieba artysty-malarza* (Cracow, 1892), pp. 19–22.