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How the Jews of Austria Went to War in 1914

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Abstract

When the First World War broke out, Jews in the Habsburg Empire found themselves in a series of overlapping conflicts and crisis – young men were drafted and sent to the front, the Russian army threatened Galicia and Bukovina, Jews' loyalty was questioned, and the nationalist and imperial rhetoric of the day left little room for ambiguities or second thoughts. This article analyses how Jews responded to the outbreak of the war and its multiple crises, as well as how they aimed to position themselves in the tense weeks of summer 1914. As seemingly every nation and community went to war, Jews needed to take part too. They did so in public assemblies where they recalled the eternal figures of Jewish heroism, through prayers for victory over the Muscovite archenemy of the Jewish people, and by public expressions of loyalty in a space where 'nation', 'empire', and other (ascribed) categories continuously overlapped and reinforced each other. This article analyses Jewish responses to the outbreak of the war in the Cisleithanian half of the Habsburg monarchy. It thereby not only highlights the interdependence of Jews and wider society, but also suggests that traditional approaches to explain the Jewish experience in the Habsburg lands in the beginning of the Great War ought to be reconsidered.

Keywords: *World War One; Jews; Habsburg Empire; Austrian-Jewish history; antisemitism; nationalism*

> As the year 1914 flowed in its usual way, Bubrka's Jews lived their daily monotonous lives. In the morning, some Jews went to the synagogue and some to Beith Midrash carrying a bag of Tefillin (or a Talith and Tefillin) under their arm. In the morning, the children went to the gentiles' school and in the afternoon to the Heder. The wagon drivers delivered flour to Lemberg and brought back from Lemberg all the commodities needed in the city. All the bad news and all the sad events always happen on Tish'a B'Av. On that year, Tish'a B'Av fell on a Saturday and was postponed to Sunday. But the authorities could not postpone the war to the next day, so they hurried and announced it on Friday before the start of the Sabbath. […] We were young, and we did not understand much about politics, but what is left in our memory is the fact, that this Sabbath was a black Sabbath, and we cannot remember another Tish'a B'Av when so many tears were shed like that Tish'a B'Av. (Kallay, 1964, p. 31)

These memories of the outbreak of the First World War in Bibrka (Bóbrka/Bubrka), a small town just south of the Galician capital Lviv (Lwów/Lemberg) include many narratives widely shared in Jewish memories of this moment. Remembering Tish'a B'Av, the day of the destruction of the First and Second Temple (as well as the day of the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290 and the beginning of deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka in 1942) as the day on which the First World War broke out is commonplace and emphasises the gravity of the event, the scale of the catastrophe.[i] Intimately connected to this is the idea of the tranquil life that from one day to the next was shattered, almost like a natural disaster of biblical proportions. Minah Reich Shachar (1985, p. 29) from Ropczyce (Ropshitz), who was five years old at the time, remembered life before the war and wrote: "Those were good days for the Jews who were able to earn a living and were satisfied with what they had. And then came the deluge! The First World War broke out!"

This deluge entailed unprecedented challenges for the Jews of Habsburg Austria – both shared by the wider population as well as specific to them as Jews. In many respects, as Jonathan Frankel (1988, p. 4) put it, "the experience of the Jewish people mirrored – but also magnified – that of the belligerent societies in general". Like their fellow non-Jewish citizens, Jewish men were conscripted into the army, fought, and died on the battlefields, while civilians suffered hunger, disease, and deprivation in villages, cities, and refugee camps throughout the country (Rozenblit, 2001; Schuster, 2004, Rybak, 2021; Rechter, 1997). Jews from Galicia and Bukovina were forced to flee the Russian invasion in their hundreds of thousands, while those left behind were subjected to violence and a brutal, antisemitic occupation regime (Prusin, 2005; Mick, 2015, Holquist, 2011). Over the course of the war, Jews' loyalty to state and society was questioned, hunger protests often turned into antisemitic riots or outright pogroms, and with the collapse of the state, ethno-nationalists came to – often violently – exclude them from the body politics of the emerging new states (Schuster, 2004; Hagen, 2018; Lamprecht 2015).

This article discusses the first moment in this long and painful process – the outbreak of the war in the summer of 1914. It analyses Jewish responses to this experience, shared in different ways by all communities in the Habsburg state, while centring on their multiple and unique minority perspectives. While highlighting the specific experiences and responses of Jewish individuals, communal representatives, and political movements, etc., it situates these in the context of wider Habsburg-Austrian society during the outbreak of the war, relating these with the responses and actions of others in society.

1. An 'upsurge of enthusiasm'?

The historiography on the Jews of the Habsburg Empire during the First World War is largely in agreement about the Jews' enthusiastic support for their country's war effort (Panter, 2014, pp. 53–58; Rechter, 2014, pp. 18–19; Rozenblit, 2001, pp. 39–58; Schmidl, 2014, pp. 125–129; Berger, 2015, pp. 108–109). In her seminal work on Austrian Jews during the First World War, Marsha Rozenblit (2001, p. 40) stated: "The Jews of Austria did far more than their duty. They embraced the war effort with passion and conviction." The main reason for this, she argues (Rozenblit, 2001, p. 39), was that in Austria – as across Europe – "the war offered them the perfect opportunity to demonstrate with their blood their utter loyalty to the nations in whose midst they lived." Similarly, Sarah Panter (2014, p. 54) observed that "with the outbreak of the war many Austrian Jews were caught by emotional patriotism which suffocated any criticism of the war in the summer of 1914". Aside from dynastic loyalty and patriotism and the hope for full integration and recognition through their contributions to the war effort, historians also emphasise the idea of fighting a 'war of liberation' against Tsarist Russia, the archenemy of the Jewish people, making it a 'Jewish war' (Rozenblit, 2001, pp. 43–54). While these accounts have centred primarily on the Western urban centres of the Empire and its often German-speaking Jewry – particularly Vienna and Prague – Frank M. Schuster (2004, p. 114), who focused on Galicia and Bukovina, described Jewish reactions as "highly ambivalent"; while mentioning widespread ideas, such as performing loyalty and the wish for the 'liberation' of Russian Jews, he particularly emphasised a prevailing atmosphere of fear and anxiety, not least because these regions were closest to the enemies and would be more affected by the war than the country's Western centres. (Schuster, 2004, pp. 114–116; pp. 118–122)

The narrative of enthusiasm and patriotism fits into a wider understanding of responses to the outbreak of the war. Several prominent Jewish figures, such as Stefan Zweig and Sigmund Freud, are often referenced, illustrating the supposed widespread sense of war enthusiasm among the Austrian populace and its intellectual elite (e.g., Mayr-Harting, 1988; Rauchensteiner, 2014; Evans, 1988; Herwig, 1998; Kann, 1977; Sauermann, 2000). Sigmund Freud famously expressed in his first comments on the war: "Perhaps for the first time in thirty years, I feel like an Austrian and would like to give it another try with this rather hopeless Empire. […] The mood everywhere is excellent." (Rauchensteiner, 2014, p. 139) This moment could be fleeting, however. On 23 August, the father of psychoanalysis had reconsidered, writing to his Budapest colleague Sándor Ferenczi:

> The upsurge of enthusiasm had swept me away at first. [... I hoped] to have a viable fatherland, from which the storm of war would have blown away the worst miasmas [...]. Like many others, I suddenly mobilised my libido for A-U [Austria-Hungary]. [...] Gradually an uneasiness set in [...]. Since yesterday's communiqué on the situation in Serbia, this conviction for A-U has finally settled, and I am experiencing the fermentation of my libido into anger, with which nothing can be done. (Falzeder & Brabant (Eds.), 1996, pp. 65–66)

A somewhat similar transition from initial enthusiasm and preparedness to go to war can be observed in the memories of David Jakubowicz (1967, p. 78) from the West Galician town of Wadowice:

> Like thunder on a clear day, the news fell about the murder of the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, carried out in June 1914 by the Serbian nationalists in the city of Sarajevo, a murder that led to World War I. Even in our city there was no shortage of supporters of the unfortunate policy of the Austrian government which sought to oppress the Serbs. A group of demonstrators in front of the windows of the district governor's offices, the 'starost' of Wadowice, expressed their loyalty to the Empire by declaring that it sympathises with the ultimatum sent to the government of Serbia and shouted: "Forward to Serbia! With the hats of our soldiers, we will cover the entire land of Serbia!" […] Even among the Jews of Wadowice an uplifted mood prevailed, until that disappointing and gloomy moment when the announcements of general conscription were published by the authorities.

With a somewhat different emphasis, Erna Segal (1956), who was raised in Lviv and then lived with her family in Vienna remembered:

> There was great turmoil on the streets of Vienna. Parades – nothing but parades flags flying on all houses, music rang out and recruits were marching by – I was aghast and despite my youth had the impression that people had no idea what war meant. […] We accompanied our brother, who was one of the first to be called up, to the *Nordbahnhof* [station of the northern rail line] where an incredible crowd welcomed us. But here, the scene was totally different than on the streets. With heavy hearts, fathers and mothers took leave from their sons and husbands, everyone cried and sobbed heartbreakingly, children broke free from their mothers and ran after their fathers – I was deeply shaken and troubled, everyone said farewell to their loved ones, including us from our brother, nobody knew whether they would see each other again alive – I hated war from the depths of my soul before it had even begun.

These three perspectives point to some of the complexities regarding popular reactions in the summer of 1914. They should serve as qualifiers to the idea of 'universal' war enthusiasm or support for the war and lead to different questions. Crucially, we should ask who responded to the war in which ways, what reasons they had for doing so, what kind of war was expected, what they hoped or feared it would bring, and whether people changed their opinions. The quotes above point simultaneously to specific people being enthusiastic and performing accordingly in public, to a feeling of 'togetherness' and the hope for victory, and to disillusionment and fear when faced with the reality of war and its human costs.

These factors are crucial in the analysis of popular responses to the events of summer 1914. While the notion of universal support for the war remains a powerful trope in both popular and scholarly narratives of the First World War, more recent historiography has profoundly challenged this conception (Bruendel, 2016; Van der Linden & Mergner, 1991; Verhey, 2000; Cole et al., 2021) Centring specifically on local cases, such as rural France, Bavaria, Freiburg, and Salzburg, historians have highlighted the complexities of popular reactions, rejecting the idea of universality in experience and response and asking instead which groups in society particularly supported the war, who opposed it, what people's motivations were, and how different emotions and responses could live simultaneously, both in society and within families and individuals (Ziemann, 1997; Becker, 1977; Geinitz, 1998; Cole et al, 2021). Historians have particularly emphasised differences with regard to class, age, and gender, identifying primarily young, urban, middle-class men as those who expressed public support for the war (Watson, 2014; Bobič, 2012; Hämmerle, 2014; Healy, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, the analysis of Jewish responses to the outbreak of the war has primarily centred on political aspects – the hope for equality, liberation, and of refuting antisemitism. The aim of this article is to re-approach Jewish responses in Habsburg Austria, looking at both the distinct minority perspective and the social and political implications this had, as well as community and individual experiences. There was not one, unified Jewish way to respond to this situation. Indeed, responses varied according to location, social, political, and cultural context, as well as gender, etc. Indeed, in some respects, it was the war itself that to a large extent brought different Austrian Jewries 'together', through flight and expulsion, joint service in military units, and new forms of social and political organisation (Rozenblit, 2001; Rozenblit, 2017; Rybak, 2021). In this respect, the first moments of the First World War are important markers in the development of Central European Jewry, as well as for the Empire of the Habsburgs itself, with the story of the supposedly "only true Austrians" (Corbett, 2019) being a key element of it.

Responses

In the summer of 1914, two serious matters occupied the Jewish community of Mielec. The murder of the heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife in Sarajevo was cause for great concern and sorrow. The Jews of Mielec were shocked and felt genuine grief – less for the deceased but for the much-beloved old monarch, Franz Joseph, "the exalted" (*yarom hodu*), the "saintly king" (*melekh fun hasid*), who had to endure so much. But after the initial shock, the community, like most people in the Empire, turned their attention to other matters. Specifically, a local rabbi moved away and scandalously decided to sell his house on the town's market square, in the very heart of the Jewish quarter, to a Gentile. Adding insult to injury, the new resident, a dressmaker by profession, not only came to display immodest imagery in his shop window but his wife cooked pork with *treyfe* odours spreading from the kitchen through the neighbourhood (Klagsbrun, 1977, pp. 14–16). Jews assembling on the market square to discuss this commotion were, however, interrupted. A policeman came, beat his drums and made an announcement: "'In the name of the Law and of the Emperor and King Franz Joseph the First, a general mobilisation of all military servicemen.' Then he read all paragraphs and regulations. He said: 'Yes, yes, Zhidki [sic!; Polish, derogative for Jews]! A war on the world!'" (Klagsbrun, 1977, p. 16).

That the murder of the heir to the throne was noted – at times with sorrow and compassion – but not ascribed the great significance the event later attained was not unusual.

In the probably most famous literary representation of these events – Stefan Zweig's 'World of Yesterday' (2013, pp. 189–90) – the music band in the Baden spa park briefly fell silent when they heard the tragic news but soon recommenced playing.[ii] Virtually all Jewish newspapers reported on the murder of Franz Ferdinand and his morganatic wife and expressed shock and sorrow, while prayers were held in synagogues and letters of condolence and sympathy were sent to the imperial court (*Jüdische Zeitung*, 3 July 1914, p. 1; *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 2 July 1914, p. 1; *Neue National-Zeitung*, 3 July 1914, pp. 1–2; *Die Wahrheit*, 3 July 1914, pp. 3–4; *Dr. Bloch's Oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, 3 July 1914, pp. 461–62; *Ha-Mitspeh*, 3 July 1914, pp. 1–3; *Kol mahazike ha-dat*, 3 July 1914, pp. 1–3). None of the articles from late June or early July indicate a sense that this event would lead to war. It is only in hindsight that this was seen as a possibility, or even inevitability, like in the memories of Yitzhak Leventer (1962, p. 93) from Rohatyn: "When the Austrian Archduke Franz-Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, everyone knew it would lead to the outbreak of war." At the same time, Leventer claimed that they tried to avoid the terrible thought of a war: "Yet people still comforted themselves with 'maybe' and 'perhaps.'"

The Austrian ultimatum and its declaration of war on Serbia set in motion a process during which, within days, much of the European continent was set aflame. In many respects, Austrian Jews experienced this moment very similarly to their fellow non-Jewish neighbours. As throughout Europe, many young men publicly expressed their support for the war. The scenes reported from Bukovina could in some ways have been taken place in multiple cities on the continent:

> Tens of thousands of Jews filled the streets of Czernowitz and other provincial cities in Bukovina when partial mobilisation was ordered on 26 July 1914. The population was gripped by war fever. Jubilant cries and martial music were heard everywhere. This patriotism was engendered by two generations of imperial rule, under which the Jews had attained equal rights and high positions in public office. Their nationalism was matched by an absolute trust in the armed forces, who had distinguished themselves in brilliantly executed parades and manoeuvres. "We shall conquer the Russian and beat the Serb and show that we are Austrians", was the song which resounded in the streets and houses. (Schmelzer, 1958, p. 67)

While this suggests a universal response, an account from the Galician town of Gorlice (Horlytsi) is more precise regarding who in the Jewish community publicly celebrated the declaration of war:

> After the Sabbath meal [on 1 August], young Jews gathered in a group – I am sure that there was no Gentile among them – and walked […] to the town hall; they sang "*Gott Erhalte*" [the imperial anthem] and called on the mayor to come out and speak to them. He came out and addressed them, but [then] asked them to disperse quietly and to go home, because hard days were about to come. When he finished, Pinia Yafe (Pinchas Bodner) shouted: "Long live Austria, long live the war!" (Chen, 1962, p. 82)

As has been observed in other regions and communities, responses to the war differed substantially with respect to gender (e.g. Hämmerle et. al. 2014). While, as here in Gorlice, young men welcomed the war, an account from Borszczów (Borshchiv) clearly captured the different responses by men and women to the war and the mobilisation: "Women started to cry: their husbands, sons must report for duty. While davening in the *kloyz*, people [read: men] already debated the current events and concluded that Russia would come out of the war beaten, and no larger than the palm of one's hand. Nobody even dreamed that it could be otherwise. Our military! 'A trifle!' [*A kleynikeyt!*]" (Reybl, 1960, p. 123).

2. Mobilisation

Cities and towns were soon teeming with soldiers. Peasant men, often with their families, came from the surrounding villages and young Jewish men were handed conscription notices by public officials and gendarmes. Shlomo Klagsbrun (1979, p. 17) remembered the scene: "Later that same day, military music was heard over the market and a long line of riders dressed in brand new colourful uniforms, with golden helmets and long silver swords at the side. They rode hopefully as if to some military parade. In the evening, the market was filled with gentile recruits from the neighbouring villages. They sang military songs hopefully, went into the Jewish pubs to grab a drink of brandy, and left for the train station to join their units."

Jewish communities throughout the country were eager to participate in the societal mobilisation, especially those in some proximity to the Russian border. In Kraków, a regional centre of mobilisation, Jews came into the streets and handed alcohol and fruit to the recruits, the "defenders of our land and the avengers against our enemy" (*Ha-mitspeh*, 14 Aug. 1914, p. 3). Israel Isser Zeydman (1957, p. 165) from Kołomyja (Kolomyia) remembered: "On the first day of the war […] masses of soldiers were taken – on foot and by train – to the eastern front. And the Jewish population provided large tables with food and drink – on both sides of the road and near the train station – and food and packages were divided generously for all the soldiers." Jewish newspapers called on people to donate money for soldiers and their families, Jewish soup kitchens expanded their offer from the local Jewish poor to soldiers assembled in towns, and Jewish communities collected money for the Red Cross and aid for mobilised soldiers and their relatives (e.g. *Jüdische Volksstimme*, 19 Aug. 1914, pp. 3–4; *Die Wahrheit*, 7 Aug. 1914, p. 8; *Dr. Bloch's Oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, 7. Aug. 1914, pp 550–52; *Selbstwehr*, 27 Aug. 1914, pp. 2–3). In the experience of many people – Jews and non-Jews – there was a sense of unity, or in the words of Stefan Zweig (2013, pp. 299–300): "As never before, thousands and hundreds of thousands felt what they should have better felt in peacetime: that they belonged together."

Public spaces became the scenes of carefully staged military parades and events. The performance of Austrian military prowess made a strong impression on locals – whatever their ethnicity or religion. Writing many decades later, Israel Isser Zeidman (1957, p. 165) could still vividly "remember when the military was sworn in at the market, an immense group of soldiers stood organized with discipline with the colours and officers, and all of them ready to go to war." For the locals in areas near the front, this instilled confidence that the war would be won. Mordekhai Galer (1964, p. 39) from Bibrka recalled: "The First World War broke out with fanfare and drums. Austrian soldiers marched in our streets, troop after troop. Day and night they moved towards the Russian border and we the young men rejoiced with happiness and curiosity. We were sure, that our soldiers will beat the 'pony' soldiers and smite them hip to thigh."[iii]

While enthusiasm and confidence in the might of the imperial and royal army was widespread, other emotions were expressed simultaneously. These public responses were gendered with different social expectations of what emotions men and women were to show in public. For example, in his diary Bernhard Bardach (Appelbaum, 2018, p. 17), originally from Lviv but then serving as an army doctor in Trieste, noted the mood when his regiment was boarding the train to the front in the middle of the night: "Despite the very late hour, the whole of Trieste is awake and humming: columns echo with continuous cheering of *eviva!* and *alla guerra!* The platform is crowded with people, and there is no end of leave taking by waving scarves and handkerchiefs, until finally the train leaves the station. There are many tears, especially from women and children, and I am happy that I spared my family the pain of accompanying me to the station."

An estimated 300,000 Jews served as soldiers, around 25,000 as officers, in the Austro-Hungarian army during the war (Rozenblit, 2001, p. 4). There is no evidence that Jews – because of the fact that they were Jews – tried to avoid the draft in greater numbers than anyone else. While especially from May 1917 onwards, when censorship restrictions were eased, antisemitic propagandists publicly accused them of cowardice and avoiding service, these defamations did not seem to have had any impact on government policy unlike the infamous *Judenzählung* in Germany, for example. There were, however, widespread stereotypes and accusations of Jews as draft dodgers, cowards, and weaklings, longstanding libels of which Jews were painfully aware (Presner, 2007, p. 187). For some, this may have contributed to a certain urge to perform masculine virility and an eagerness to go to war to refute these hurtful and untrue accusations. It may also be reflected in the way some Jewish organisations phrased their calls to war. For example, the ‘Association of Polish Academic Youth of Mosaic Faith’ proclaimed (*Kurjer Lwowski*, 12 Aug 1914, p. 3): “Polish Jews! Show that you are a people with a brave heart and a stern forehead!”. The Central Committee of Galician Zionists called its supporters to arms (*Kurjer Lwowski*, 12 Aug. 1914, p. 4): “Everyone will march as Maccabaeus and Bar-Kochba marched and show that the Jewish nation can be grateful to its friends.” In Vienna, Joseph Samuel Bloch’s *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift* stated (31 July 1914, p. 529): “Peacefulness is in the Jew’s nature. […] But the Jew bravely faces the fight when it is for the defence of his honour, his family’s honour, and when it is for protecting the honour […] of the large family of peoples living in this great empire, united in its love for the emperor.”

3. War aims

Such proclamations not only reflected awareness and anxiety over antisemitic defamations, but also point to the positionality and strategies of different social, religious, and political institutions and organisations. Political and social interests and conflicts did not disappear with the outbreak of the war; however, they were now expressed in a new language – the language of patriotic self-sacrifice for the war effort. At the same time, as Michael Berkowitz (1997, p. 7) has shown in respect to western European Zionism, all movements believed that by supporting ‘their’ government’s war efforts, they would further the fulfilment of their own political goals.

Two important and mutually reinforcing ideas shaped how Jewish organisations and institutions made sense of the war: a strong sense of loyalty to the Habsburg state and its ruler, derived from decades of relative peace and prosperity, especially compared with the lived realities of Jews under the Tsar. Tsarist rule and Russian persecution of the Jews was the other key element that mobilised Austrian Jews in the summer of 1914. To be sure, with the onset of the war and the implementation of advance censorship in the press and postal censorship, the public space became extremely limited, making it virtually impossible to articulate opposition or to express anything but loyalty and support for the war effort (Cornwall, 1992; Ehrenpreis, 2005; Halliday, 1988). Without exception, all newspapers – including Jewish ones – that were not forced to close due to censorship or to the drafting of their editorial staff fell in line.

Expressions of loyalty and solidarity with the state and its ruler were not unique to the Jews but had uniquely Jewish dimensions. Habsburg Austria was perceived and represented as the great benefactor, a place where political and religious freedom and the Jews' connection to soil and society made them the first to fight – out of gratitude, loyalty, and self-preservation (e.g., *Dr. Bloch's Oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, 31 July 1914, p. 529). Jewish nationalists believed that it was the multinational Habsburg state that was unique in enabling – or would enable – the free life and development of the Jews as a nation alongside all the other nations (*Jüdische Zeitung*, 18. Sept. 1914, p. 1; *Neue National-Zeitung*, 31 July 1914, p. 113). Religious community boards throughout the country declared their loyalty and public support for the war effort, called on Jewish men to enlist, and donated money. Throughout the country, special services were held in synagogues, rabbis called on their congregants to support the war effort and interpreted the war and Austria's struggle in the language of the Torah (Rozenblit, 2015). In his memoirs, Avraham Levite (1984, p. 35) of Brzozów expressed disapproval at the religious figures who gave their blessing for the war:

> The Rabbis and Dayanim, were given a task far beyond their powers – to preach to their congregations and arouse their patriotic emotions. They did their utmost and, in the presence of representatives of the establishment, expounded on the wisdom of the Torah, cited lines from the Gemarra on the debt of loyalty owed to the state, and ended with a prayer for its well-being.

The second key factor was the enemy – Tsarist Russia.[iv] As one newspaper put it, this was a war against "the cursed land of bloody and inhumane persecution of the Jews… the country in which the pogrom is the government's program." (*Die Wahrheit*, 7 Aug. 1914, p. 3) Indeed, this was, as a Prague Jewish newspaper put it, a "sacred war against the hereditary enemy of the Jews" (*Selbstwehr*, 27 Aug. 1914, p. 2). It was a war of revenge for the pogroms while, at the same time, recalling these 'Russian horrors' included the warning that if the Tsar's army would prevail then this would be the fate awaiting the Jews of Austria as well (e.g. *Ha-mitspeh*, 7 Aug. 1914, pp. 1–2). It was this fear of Russian rule, and what it would mean for the Jews, that connected Austrian-Jewish positionality during the war with the fate of their state even more. Already on the day of the ultimatum to Serbia (24 July 1914), Armand Kaminka, of the *Israelitische Allianz zu Wien*, wrote to Lucien Wolf that the war would bring about “a historic decision over whether Tsarism, which enslaves nations and drives millions of Jews into misery and desperation” would be beaten back. In this struggle, the Habsburg monarchy was not only the protector of the Jews but “a mighty bulwark against the enslavement of Europe by Russia”. From this understanding of Russian rule, the aim of fighting a war to liberate the Jews under the Tsar emerged as a key trope (Rozenblit, 2001, pp. 43–58). The Jewish National Party in Bukovina (*Jüdische Zeitung*, 18 Sept. 1914, p. 1) formulated its war aims: “Freedom for us and freedom for our Jewish brothers who have for too long suffered in Tsarist torture chambers. Rest assured; Austria’s victorious arms shall and will bring you all of her joys.” In many respects, this mirrored ideas articulated by Polish nationalists (among others) about liberating fellow Poles, with little evidence that anyone was genuinely waiting there for violent ‘liberation’ (Zimmerman, 2022, pp. 222–249). Jewish nationalists claimed (*Neue National-Zeitung*, 14. Aug. 1914, p. 121): “If we remind ourselves of the spiritual and physical torture one-and-a-half million Polish Jews in Russian Poland have to endure every day, then we will realise how the entry of the united [German and Habsburg] armies in Russian Poland almost means the dawn of the messianic age for the Jews there.” A liberal Jewish paper (*Dr. Bloch’s Oesterreichsche Wochenschrift*, 14 Aug. 1914, p. 562) was similarly confident that “the Austrian Emperor’s banners will be greeted like the standards of a new, blessed era”. To what extent Jews in Poland genuinely felt a sense of ‘liberation’ by the Central Powers is debatable (e.g., Zieliński, 2016). Importantly, this was how many Austrian Jews and particularly many of their organisations and representatives viewed the war, creating a lasting trope that would give sense to their suffering.

It was the war against Tsarist Russia and what it stood for that uniquely mobilised Jews of all persuasions, including those who would generally not subscribe to Habsburg imperial loyalty. Even socialists, who had until then agitated against war and imperialism, were swept away by the mobilisation, following the example set by most Social Democrats throughout Europe (Braunthal, 1978, pp. 45–47). Yitzhak Frenkel (1970, p. 374) from Nowy Sącz (Sants) remembered with anger and disappointment how the leaders of the Jewish Social Democratic Party (*Żydowska Partia Socjal-Demokratyczna*, ŻPS) surrendered their internationalism and went to war:

> When the war broke out in 1914, Dr Sh. Fensterbloy [the local leader of the ŻPS] and the propagandists from PPS [Polish Socialist Party] said farewell from all their comrades in the

> middle of the market. It was Friday at 5 o'clock in the evening. They were to leave for the front on Saturday night. He spoke near the city hall with these words: "We go as one man to fight the Tsarist regime. Let freedom come." The cars with the military that were going to the front were veiled in red banners. All the trade unions were closed. The idealists left for the front. That is how the Second International ended in Sants; that is how the ŻPS ended.

The socialist Zionists of Poalei Tsiyon may have opposed the war – at least at a later stage – but there is no evidence that they articulated this in the summer of 1914 (Allweltlicher Jüdischer Arbeiterverband Poale Zion, 1915; Balshan, 2004, pp. 131–162). Similarly, many trade unions gave in to the pressure of the situation, with the dressmakers' union in Lviv for example merely appealing to its members to remain loyal to the organisation in these difficult times and imploring them not to do anything that would endanger it (e.g., *Der Shneyder-Arbeyter*, 31 July 1914, p. 1).

While the war was fought by multinational empires, it had unique national dimensions. German nationalists in the Habsburg monarchy believed they fought "for Germandom" (e.g., *Ostdeutsche Rundschau*, 2 Aug. 1914, p. 2), Ukrainian and Polish nationalists created their own military units to fight for both the Habsburg state and for their own liberation (Rutkowski, 2009; Zimmerman, 2022, pp. 222–49). Jews who identified as being German, Polish, etc., similarly subscribed to these ideas. Many joined the ranks of Józef Piłsudski's Polish Riflemen and a small number even enlisted in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (Zieliński, 2005, pp. 144–145; Nasaruk 1916, p. 143). The war would be fought for both Empire and nation, because, as the Polish National Committee stated (*Kurjer Stanisławowski*, 16 Aug. 1914, p. 1): "Poles remember that only in the Habsburg Monarchy they have the freedom of national development, which they are deprived of everywhere else. At the moment when the monarchy was threatened by war, every Pole of this country felt and understood that it is the duty of Polish honour to stand up and make the greatest sacrifices of blood and property." Appeals in the Polish-language press called on the Jews of Galicia to enlist, to fight for Austria, and for Polish and Jewish freedom and Jewish community boards in Galicia donated for the struggle of the Polish Riflemen (e.g., *Kurjer Lwowski*, 12 Aug 1914, p. 3).

Jewish nationalists mirrored this. For them, the war meant that they could publicly refute accusations that because they were Jewish nationalists, they could not be proper patriots. They were, in the words of Egon Zweig (*Jüdische Zeitung*, 31 July 1914, p. 1), "longing for a fatherland in which the waves of patriotic and national excitement not only feed into each other but beat by the same rhythm, mutually reenforce each other." Lviv, only a few kilometres from the enemy, where Poles and Ukrainians mobilised simultaneously for empire and nation, also came to be the place for Jewish national mobilisations. In August 1914, Zionist activists formed a Jewish Riflemen Corps, styled in all respects after their Polish and Ukrainian counterparts (Rybak, 2021, pp. 153–155). While the established leadership of the Jewish community opposed the effort, seeing it as a competition to the Polish Riflemen, around 300 young men enlisted, some of them still underage. It would have blue and white insignia and serve both the Austrian fatherland and the Jewish nation. Eventually, the unit was created too late and never saw battle, as it fell apart during the Austrian retreat from the city in early September (Washitz, 1914). It nonetheless reflects the overlapping motivations, identities, loyalties, and war aims – which were in no way in contradiction to one another – as the Jews of Habsburg Austria went to war.

Conclusion

Whatever initial enthusiasm there may have been – and, as stated above, it was probably more limited than often assumed – this withered away with the catastrophic Austrian defeat and retreat in late August/early September 1914. Near the front, Jews were again on the streets, seeing the army passing by. Again, they provided food for the soldiers, as two observers remembered from Rzeszów: “That Sabbath, in which the Austrians retreated through Rzeszów, the rabbis of the city permitted cooking. The women of the house were to go out of their houses and stand with large pots and pans in the streets of the city. They were to cook soup and other foods and feed the retreating soldiers.” (Ben-Moshe, Wechsler, 1967, p. 238). The troops, which had marched off just days earlier with such pomp and fanfare, were now beaten and demoralised. The collapse of the imperial and royal army in Galicia and the subsequent retreat caused desperation and panic: “And they heard the sad news: An Austrian defeat on the Russian front near Kraśnik. In the morning, the retreat began through the streets of the town. Large hosts of soldiers, tired and exhausted, ran in panic and it was heard in the town: The Russians are coming!” (Klagsbrun, 1979, p. 17) Hundreds of thousands made their way westwards. Among them was young Mordekhai Galer (1974, pp. 39–40) from Bibrka:

> One morning a panic broke out: the Cossacks were approaching the city, and they were robbing killing men, women, old and young. All the people in the city escaped. Each person carried a bundle containing all their possessions on their back. It was a horrible sight, and as a boy with a pure belief, a patriot of the king, the merciful Franz Joseph the First, I was bitterly disappointed.

> How? – I cried to heaven with a bitter heart – did You desert our army, the people of our city, Rabbi Yechazkeli, and my [friend the] wood carver?[v]

In the more Western cities, the train stations were again full of people – but now it was refugees fleeing the Russian invasion, as Erna Segal (1956) remembered: "One day, Vienna was caught by a new scare. People were standing in every street, telling each other in an agitated way that the *Nordbahnhof*, where only weeks earlier the troops had been sent off, was crammed with thousands of refugees from Galicia. Nobody knew what to do with those people, the refugees themselves knew it the least." The Jewish communities of the Habsburg Empire organised considerable efforts to care for the refugees. This was both their patriotic service for the common war effort and a Jewish duty (Morelon, 2016; Hoffmann-Holter, 1995; Rechter, 2008). But the efforts had changed their meaning. This was now part of a struggle for survival – for the survival of the community, reflecting the Habsburg state's struggle for survival.

The experience of Austrian Jews in the summer of 1914 mirrored that of wider society. They were affected by the draft, by propaganda and censorship, and by the Russian invasion, while aiming to find meaning and perspective in face of the carnage. Like in other communities, enthusiasm for going to war was primarily displayed by young men, with fear, anxiety, and sorrow principally expressed by women, for whom the display of such emotions was socially accepted. While sharing many of their neighbours' experiences, this 'moment' nonetheless had uniquely Jewish dimensions. Jews were aware of their antisemitic misrepresentation as cowards and weaklings, making it necessary to publicly show their prowess and preparedness to fight and die even more.

With the main enemy – Tsarist Russia – considered the heart of darkness, the arch enemy of the Jewish people, the war, almost from its very onset had a specific dimension for the Jews. Especially considering this enemy, patriotism and loyalty to the Austrian cause was particularly strongly formulated in Jewish contexts while at the same time imperial and national causes not only existed side-by-side but could mutually reinforce each other. In this sense, both the ideas of forming an Austrian community based on civic virtues – that is the virtues of patriotic warfare – as expressed by liberal Jewish leaders (e.g. Reifowitz, 2003) and ethno-nationalist concepts of Jewish community, such as Zionism, could relate to the same effort. I would argue that given both the contemporary evidence as well as most later reminiscences from multiple social, political, and geographic contexts of Habsburg Austria, it ought to be questioned whether Jewish performances in this moment can be attributed (primarily) to their supposed special relationship in the Habsburg state. Their actions were situational, their explanations and rationalisations relying on a multiplicity of tropes, and their strategies reflected wider political considerations. The comparability of Jewish responses to that of other communities in the state – specifically in regard to nationalism – similarly suggests that Jewish responses, despite their uniqueness in the face of a unique enemy, can only be understood when read in the wider imperial and, indeed, European context.

Notes

[i] While it may be possible that in these particular towns Tish'a B'Av 5674 (1/2 August 1914) was of local relevance, very little actually happened then in the Austro-Hungarian context. Most notably, Germany declared war on Russia and officially mobilised (1 August) and invaded Luxembourg (2 August). While important events, their immediate impact on Jews in Galicia may be questionable, which underlines even more the symbolic significance of Tish'a B'Av as the start of the war.

[ii] Something very similar is recalled by Erna Segal (1956) in her memoirs.

[iii] The 'pony soldiers' referred to the Cossacks and their light and fast horses; possibly meant as mockery.

[iv] Aside from a few very early accounts, the war against Serbia did not feature.

[v] Rabbi Yechazkeli was his much-admired teacher in the Heder. The woodcarver was his best friend.

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