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EXAMINING JANUSZ KORCZAK'S FAMILY HISTORY. JAKUB GOLDSZMIT – FROM POLAND TO THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Genealogical surveys of the Henryk Goldszmit family, known around the world as Janusz Korczak, has produced significant results in recent years. Technological breakthroughs and the mass digitalization of archival records have spurred a paradigm expansion regarding the availability of information regarding the Old Doctor's ancestors. It has become apparent that numerous documents pertaining to the members of this family have survived. One of the most outstanding examples to date is Jakub Goldszmit (1848-1912), the younger brother of Józef, Korczak's father. The purpose of this article is to provide a retrospective on this remarkably active publicist and activist for Polish-Jewish integration in the second half of the 19th century as well as an inquiry challenge for the broader community of historical research. The co-editor of a recently published anthology of texts by Józef and Jakub Goldszmit, entitled *O prawo do szacunku* [For the Right of Respect], presents the literary legacy of Jakub Goldszmit and its impact on Polish-Jewish relationship studies and provides a deeper understanding of the standpoint Janusz Korczak had of himself the beneficiary of ideologies that were rooted within the

Goldszmit family. The author reconstructs the fate of this famous figure after the year 1894 when Jakub Goldszmit, as a political emigrant, found himself in the United States of America (USA). Documents uncovered via the database available through Ancestry.com aid in the recreation of certain basic facts in terms of his activity across the ocean. Bibliographic sources indicate that in New York and Boston, Jakub Goldszmit participated in the cultural life of the Polish diaspora in America. The author of this article seeks the opportunity to locate concrete traces of his activities, such as the thorough exploration of libraries in addition to archives associated with specific Polish journals with which Jakub collaborated and oversaw at the turn of the 20th century.

KEYWORDS: Janusz Korczak, Henryk Goldszmit, Jakub Goldszmit, Haskalah, Polish-Jewish-American relations, emigration to the USA

Janusz Korczak is a well-known figure in Poland as well as throughout the world for both his literary work and philanthropic work. His given and recorded name is Henryk Goldszmit, making him a descendent of a Polonized Jewish family. Korczak's most historically renowned act is as a guardian of orphans as well as his decision to remain alongside his wards during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, which ultimately resulted in his own death. As a result, he died on August 1, 1942, in a German extermination camp in Treblinka¹. His literary work, along with his other advocacy undertakings regarding the rights of children as paramount to their existence, remains a universal inspiration to scholars from various disciplines to this day.

However, there has been a struggle to ascertain and acquire expanded information about Janusz Korczak's ancestors in published biographical books². For years it was believed that the fam-

1 See A. Witkowska, *Mniej strachu. Ostatnie chwile z Januszem Korczakiem*, Warszawa 2019.

2 See H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, *Janusz Korczak*, Warszawa 1949. Further editions 2-5 in 1957-1978; I. Newerly, *Żywe wiązanie*, Warszawa 1966, editions 2-3 1967, 1971;

ily's life and death records had been destroyed in the Second World War³. Due to the extensive digitalization of archival records, as well as various international projects to index the collections, it is possible to conduct a more complete revision of Henryk Goldszmit's family tree. The data obtained, following searches in Poland and the Jewish Record Indexing - Poland database, in addition to Ancestry.com, among others, significantly expands the scope of knowledge regarding the ancestors of the Old Doctor, the beloved Korczak. The results of this broad-reaching search have recently been made available in the form of an online collection located on Nowa Panorama Literatury Polskiej's website. The collected data on individual members of this family provides a new look at Korczak himself and allows for an in depth understanding of the accomplishments this outstanding reformer and children's advocate made within the greater context of previous generation aspiration.

By the author's own admission, the title of this article serves as a slight exaggeration. Korczak did not have many ancestors in the US. Additionally, he had never been in the country himself. From recent research on Henryk Goldszmit's genealogy, it appears that Aleksander Hieronim Gołębiewski, the grandson of his aunt "Magdzia" (Mindla Rajnerowa, née Goldszmit), lived in Chicago after the First World War, where two of his daughters were born, one in 1919 and the other 1920⁴. However, a few years later, the Gołębiewski family returned to Lublin. It is a matter of record that only one member of the Korczak family permanently relocated to the United States. Only one, but in the author's opinion, is important for consideration regarding the achievements of Janusz Korczak. The research on Janusz Korczak's ancestors;

M. Jaworski, *Janusz Korczak*, Warszawa 1973, ed. 2-3 1977, 1978; A. Szlązakowa, *Janusz Korczak*, Warszawa 1978; S. Wołoszyn, *Korczak*, Warszawa 1978, ed. 2 1982; K. Dębicki, *Korczak z bliska*, Warszawa 1985; B.J. Lifton, *The king of children*, New York 1988.

3 See H. Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, op. cit., s. 23.

4 See <http://nplp.pl/artykul/zofia-golebiewska/> and <http://nplp.pl/artykul/jadwiga-golebiewska/>.

therefore, has focused on his uncle - Jakub Goldszmit. Goldszmit's activity, first in Poland and then in the US, provides the elements and primary historical background depicting the future accomplishments of his famous nephew. An exploration of this close relative captures the atmosphere in which the future writer and teacher grew, showing these subtle, unspecified moments that shape a human from their earliest years. Korczak referred to them as a unique "educational area," "the soul of the family that prevails."⁵ Jakub Goldszmit is depicted as extremely colourful and an active presence, which provides additional context for Janusz Korczak's achievements. Archival research, in addition to journal searches of Jakub Goldszmit, yielded a bounty of information and allowed for the recreation of his life in greater detail. However, during the last stage of his life, which he spent in the US, remains a mystery. Unearthing the journals detailing his work and life in New York City, among others, would provide an expanded view, potentially completing this picture. Current biographical research, along with contextual extrapolation, provides the following details.

Jakub Goldszmit was born the sixth child of Dr. Hirsz and his wife Chana Goldszmit, on May 14, 1848, in Hrubieszów. He attended Polish primary school and continued his education at the Lublin Middle School. Two photographs were discovered; the first, from 1866, is a school photograph. His school colleagues included, among others, Aleksander Głowacki (known as Bolesław Prus) - one of the eminent Polish writers (whom Korczak loved and revered); Aleksander Świętochowski - writer and editor, called "the father of Polish positivism"; and Julian Ochorowicz - Polish psychologist, philosopher, inventor, poet, and publicist who was a very dear friend to Jakub.

The tradition of Jewish enlightenment (referred to as Haskalah) is vividly present in the Goldszmit family home. Hersz Goldszmit

5 J. Korczak, *How to love a child*, in idem: *Selected works*, ed. by M. Wolins, transl. J. Bachrach, Warszawa 1967, p. 139.



FIG. 1. 7th grade of the Lublin Middle School, 1866. To the left of Jakub: Aleksander Świętochowski and Julian Ochrowicz

instilled early in his sons, Józef and Jakub, a sense of responsibility for their religious community. As pupils of the Lublin Middle School, Józef and Jakub had already joined the reform movement, assuming a rapprochement with the Polish nation combined with the internal modernization of the Jewish community's life. The brothers made their debut in the pages of "Jutrzenka," the most important integration journal in Warsaw. Subsequently, for years, both co-operated the successor of the weekly, "Izraelita." They treated writing as a civic act, like other areas of Jewish education. At the time, Jakub, together with his father, belonged to the *Kasa wsparcia podupadłych lekarzy, wdów i sierot biednych po lekarzach pozostałych* [Association for the support fund for the dilapidated doctors, widows, and orphans of the poor after the remaining doctors]. In 1868-1869 he continued to live in Warsaw, taking courses for law candidates and working as a journalist and reviewer publishing in "Kurier Lubelski" and "Izraelita."

In 1870 Jakub began studying at the Imperial Law Department at the University of St. Petersburg. During this time, he married

Gitla Warman, who on January 6, 1873, gave birth to his only child, daughter Anna Henryka⁶. Upon graduation, he returned to Lublin and in 1875, became involved in the creation of an evening school for adults in Lublin. For one semester, he lectured on social sciences and the lives of famous people. Afterward, he was employed as a court attorney at the Congress of Judges of Peace in Lublin, but his daughter soon became ill. Nevertheless, he also continued his journalistic activity, collaborating with “Kurier Lubelski” and their successor - “Gazeta Lubelska” (1876-1878) as well as with “Izraelita” (with breaks until 1881). In 1877, he served as a regular correspondent for the Warsaw “Echo.” Legal articles were published in “Gazeta Sądowa Warszawskiej” (1878-1879).

In 1880, Jakub moved to Warsaw and connected with Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, one of the most important writers of the period. As is recorded, Korczak took his pen name from Kraszewski's book *Ballad About Janasz Korczak*. Another one of Jakub's important correspondents was Eliza Orzeszkowa, an outstanding Polish writer and supporter of Polish-Jewish integration. In June 1881, Jakub wrote to her, “As a result of certain family circumstances, I dropped the Temple of Themis and came to Warsaw where I was devoted solely to journalistic work.”⁷ He ultimately decided to publish calendars, because as he expressed, they had “superiority over periodical writings, that they perpetuate the message and memory of the reader more in their minds.”⁸ Thus, he created the “Calendar for the Israelites” [“Kalendarz dla Izraelitów”]. Following that, he was editor of the “Household Calendar” [“Kalendarz Domowo-Gospodarski”] (1882-1885) and the “Varsovian Family Calendar” [“Warszawianin. Kalendarz familijny”] (1882-1885), then “Noworocznik Warszawski” (1883) and “Farmer” [“Rolnik”] (1885). Apart from articles, Jakub also published translations, primarily from

6 See <http://nplp.pl/arttykul/anna-henryka-goldszmit/> [accessed 01.12.2021].

7 *Listy Jakuba Goldszmita do Elizy Orzeszkowej*, Part 1, ed. B. Wojnowska, “Pamiętnik Literacki” 2015 no. 3, p. 226.

8 “Kujawianin. Kalendarz na Rok 1883”, p. 40. See in: . Goldszmit, J. Goldszmit, *O prawo do szacunku*, ed. by B. Wojnowska, M. Sęczek, Warszawa 2017, p. 224.

German, although he was also proficient in Hebrew, Russian, French, and English.

In 1883, Jakub's daughter succumbed to her illness, and he also became seriously ill, retreating for respite. In letters to Orzeszkowa and Kraszewski, he wrote that he lost "three closest people"⁹ ("beloved child," "best wife," and "dearest sister"¹⁰) at that time. This could not be confirmed in the available documents (both his wife and sister died much later). The supposition regarding these "three closest people" could have expressed the deep love he had for his daughter. At the beginning of 1884, he returned post-restorative convalescence and became involved in the creation of the *Stowarzyszenie Pielęgowania Chorych po Domach Prywatnych w Warszawie* or *Towarzystwo Opieki nad Chorymi w Warszawie* [Association for Nursing after the Private Houses in Warsaw otherwise known as the Society for the Care of the Sick in Warsaw].

Confirmation regarding other aspects of Jakub's life in Poland has not been readily available. It is affirmed that during these almost 20 years from 1866 to 1885 he wrote approximately 200 shorter articles, sketches, columns, biographies, reviews, as well as poems and attempts at prose. Previously, the Institute of Literary Research Polish Academy of Sciences issued an edition containing a selection of the writings of by Jakub and his brother Józef Goldszmit, entitled *O prawo do szacunku* [For the Right of Respect]¹¹. The articles, fragments of brochures, and other literary samples written by Korczak's father and uncle is a unique collection of the family's tradition. Józef's texts come almost exclusively from the 1860s because, after university, Korczak's father abandoned the pen and worked as an attorney.

However, Jakub continued to write. The material collected in the anthology has been grouped into thematic sections: *Little Home-*

9 "Listy Jakuba Goldszmita do Józefa Ignacego", ed. B. Wojnowska, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2013 no 4, p. 194.

10 Ibidem.

11 J. Goldszmit, J. Goldszmit, *O prawo do szacunku*, eds. B. Wojnowska, M. Sęczek, Warszawa 2017.

land [*Mała ojczyzna*] shows Jakub's participation in the cultural life of the Lublin province; *Education, Charity, Mutual Aid* [*Oświata, dobroczynność, pomoc wzajemna*] reveals interest of both authors in Jewish education and socio-philanthropic activities; *Jewish Affairs* [*Sprawy żydowskie*] brings to light the issues of Polish-Jewish relations as well as matters of religion and Jewish culture; *Biographies* [*Życiorysy*] raises discusses the good name of Jews; *Literary Trials* [*Próby literackie*] gathers texts from various theses written by the brothers in a lighter form; *Calendars* [*Kalendarze*], which is also dedicated to Jewish matters.

There are also fragments of a booklet entitled *Z życia żydowskiego* [*Of the Jewish Life*]. The income from its sale was earmarked for the foundation in Warsaw of the so-called "ochronka" for Jewish boys. It was a charitable institution, established for the care for and upbringing of poor, young children, deprived of parental care. "Always and everywhere a pedagogical issue, I put on the foreground because I consider it the most important one"¹² - Jakub wrote in another article about homestay for poorer Israeli pupils. Indeed, advocacy of education was very consuming for him. Beyond this, he wrote biographies of meritorious individuals as an example of nobility and civic engagement and patterns of societal norms. Many years later, Korczak also considered these factors important in a child's upbringing. He attributed this to the characters of the biography having a greater impact than the protagonists of the novel¹³.

Jakub contemplated respect for diversity, otherness, the struggle for education for the lower social classes, approaches to increasing morality, the problem of prostitution, and poverty. All these matters, as is evident in his life's work, were very close to Korczak's own experience. During the collection of materials for the book, as

12 "Izraelita" 1967 no 1. See in: J. Goldszmit, J. Goldszmit, op. cit., p. 170.

13 In the article *Życiorysy* (1902) Korczak wrote: "The biography will not give birth to genius, but will teach it to worship, it will learn to empathize with the thought of an independent, and yet closely related people, with their fortune and misery." J. Korczak, "Życiorysy", *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* 1902 no. 9, p. 97.

well as upon reading subsequent texts written by Jakub Goldszmit, there remains an irresistible impression that Korczak is simply and eloquently continuing the family tradition. He is not an anomaly but is fulfilling both self-imposed goals and those established by his family; Korczak's ideology of transformation in the world lived in and by his ancestors. Paraphrasing his words - his ancestors collected the nectar in quietness and in shadow before they come out into the light with the flower of the family¹⁴.

Korczak wrote in *Memoirs* in 1942:

"I ought to say a good deal about my father: I pursue in life that which he strove for and for which my grandfather tortured himself for many years.

And my mother. [...]"¹⁵

His uncle should be added to this list as multiple generations of his family had an immense influence on Korczak's choices. Prior to the birth of the great educators Henryk Goldszmit and Janusz Korczak, his uncle Jakub was already established in education for excellence, diversity, and respect. Together with his brother, Józef (Korczak's father), they introduced important precursors to ideas later implemented by the Old Doctor.

One must emphasize clearly that Korczak never mentioned this uncle directly or by name. It is, however, clear that during the time when Jakub lived in Warsaw, he maintained relations with Korczak's parents, and with the Gębicki family (the parents of Cecylia, Korczak's mother)¹⁶. This family was drawn together by a shared lineage, history, expectation, and calling, which surely resulted in meeting together as well as further communication. Even though Jakub emigrated from Poland when Henryk was nine, there were

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- 14 See J. Korczak, *Słowo wstępne* [do rozprawy Jędrzeja Śniadeckiego] *O fizycznym wychowaniu dzieci*, Warszawa 1920. Idem: *Dzieła*, vol. 13, Warszawa 2016, p. 13.
 - 15 J. Korczak, "Memoirs", in idem: *Selected works...*, p. 497 http://www.januszkorczak.ca/legacy/9_Memoirs.pdf.
 - 16 After the death of Adolf Gębicki, Korczak's grandfather, Jakub wrote very warm memoir about him. See J. Goldszmit, *Z Lublina do Ciechocinka. Kartki z podróży*, "Gazeta Lubelska" 1877 no 100; reprint in J. Goldszmit, J. Goldszmit, op. cit., p. 115-118.

those intervening years with family interactions and the impact Jakub must have had on the members who remained in Poland.

Reaching the final stages of Jakub's life, one enters a more unexplained, quite unexplored, and rather mysterious period. Various information about Jakub's further fate comes from his letters to Eliza Orzeszkowa. From them, it is learned that in 1887 he was arrested by the Tsarist authorities for "disloyalty," then as a political emigrant he lived in Budapest (most likely sojourning with his mother's family, named Rotman).

"[I stand] before you in my present role: that is, as a political emigrant, as a wanderer, deprived of all his possessions at once; thrown suddenly, with the force of random accidents into the "far distance"; into a country with a similar history to ours and once identical aspirations, although today, alien to us both in speech and in national notions."¹⁷

From there, he voyaged on to the United States of America, where he continued his journalistic activity. In 1891, he published biographies of distinguished Poles in the English-language press. In 1894, there are reports of him living in Philadelphia. A letter from May, signed by Dr. Goldszmit, indicates his private address was 428 Fifth St., Philadelphia, PA, USA. The stationary used for this letter shows that he worked at the American Sick Benefit and Accident Association.

What is perhaps the most interesting, according to bibliographic sources¹⁸, is his position as the editor of Polish literary magazines published in New York such as in 1892 the weekly "Orzeł Biały" (White Eagle) and the periodical "Biały Husarz" (White Hussar) then during the years 1894-1905 the "Przegląd Międzynarodowy" (International Review), a monthly. Research regarding these publications both in Poland and from Poland to the US, unfortunately, has not yet netted a positive result. It is believed that there are no

17 *Listy Jakuba Goldszmita do Elizy Orzeszkowej*, Part 2, ed. by B. Wojnowska, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2016 no. 3, p. 196.

18 See for example J. Wępsiec, *Polish American Serial Publication 1842-1966. An Annotated bibliography*, Chicago, Illinois 1968.

remaining editions or exemplars. With further inroads and on location in the US, it may be possible to trace and obtain at least one.

Following the trail, in February 1909, a letter from Boston was signed (by seal/rubber stamp): Prof. Jakób C. Goldszmit Doktor Filozofji i Medycyny [Prof. Jakób C. Goldszmit Doctor of Philosophy and Medicine]. This time, he wrote on paper with the watermark: The International Hebrew Publishing Co. To date, many questions remain about this connection regarding it and the Federation of Polish Jews in America founded in 1908. He wrote here that he had recently established the first Polish library in Boston. His request to Orzeszkowa was to obtain books for inclusion in the library. The history of this initiative has not yet been explored.

Utilizing the database at Ancestry.com, a few documents were found, from which the following pieces of data were gathered: on



FIG. 2. Jakub Goldszmit, ca. 1909

January 31, 1910, Jakub married 37-year-old Eugenia Bodzyńska. Jakub appears in the book of marriages as a widower, even though his first wife, Gitla Warman, was still alive (she died in Otwock, Poland in 1925). Therefore, it is concluded that he was a bigamist. Jakub and his second wife lived in Boston at 353 Broadway. In the text field for occupation, it reads that Jakub was a professor, and Eugenia a stay at home mother.

The information was confirmed in the Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910 - Population. Here Jakub is listed as a journalist and that they rented their home. Although, it appears as if his age was reduced by 5 years. Two years later, on July 11, 1912, Jakob C. Goldsmith died of cancer. According to the death certificate, he was buried in the Mt. Hope cemetery in Boston. It should be noted, in the statistical details of the documentation, it was entered that he was single at the time of his death.

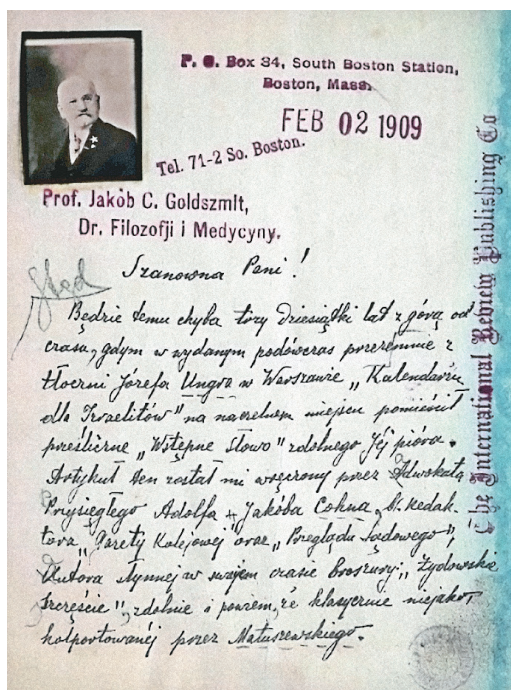


FIG. 3. Fragment of a letter from Jakub Goldszmit to Eliza Orzeszkowa

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
CITY OF BOSTON

RETURN OF A DEATH—1912.

FULL NAME Jakub G. Goldszmit Registered No. 6492
 Place of Birth Boston 300 Ashmun St., Chicago 260 North St.
 Date of Death July 11 1912. Age 50 years 13 months 18 days

PREDECESSOR'S CERTIFICATE.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that I attended deceased during last illness, from 1912 to 1912, that to the best of my knowledge and belief death occurred, on the date stated above, and the CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows:

Gender Male Cause Cancer (Glands of Prostate)
 Marital Status Single 1 yr.
 Religion Poland
 Name of Deceased Hebrew Goldszmit
 Signature of Father Poland 1 mo.
 Usual Residence of Deceased Chicago
 Signature of Mother Annie Goldszmit
 Occupation Journalist (Signed) Annie Goldszmit M.D.
 Informant July 12 1912
 SPECIAL INFORMATION (from Hospital, Institution, or Board of Health)

Place of Burial or Interment St. John
 Burial Date July 16 1912
 Burial Place St. John
 Signature Edith A. Peak

FIG. 4. Jakub Goldszmit's death certificate

The American phase of Jakub Goldszmit's biography still has many unknown fragments. One must agree that the questions remain such as: Where did he work as a professor? Was he a professor? Why had he called himself a doctor? About what did he write as a journalist? Where were his writings published? All these are essential questions to explore. What is known is the articles in "Echo," a weekly from Buffalo, New York referred to as "a progressive newspaper supporting the Republic Party." However, he also published in "Ognisko," a periodical from the Hearth Association, described by biographical sources as an "ultra-radical and socialist" publication. However, one must then inquire: What about the first Polish library in Boston? And what is known about the International Hebrew Publishing company? Also, what the "White Eagle" and "White Husar" were should be determined. It cannot be that 10 years of the publication "International Review" has simply disappeared. The decoration of the jacket flap (visible in the only known photograph from this time), leaves questions about his associations upon leaving Poland. It cannot be determined at this time, whether he stayed within his Jewish roots, Polish roots, or moved beyond into society outside of his origins.

At present, the quest to complete the biographies of the known ancestors of Janusz Korczak continues. For this expansive work to

be undertaken, it would require further efforts from the Institute of Literary Research Polish Academy of Sciences in conjunction with international cooperation among academics in sociology, history, journalism, and research areas as well as in private archives - as publications were ostensibly made available to the general public. Delving further into Janusz Korczak's extended family would provide a depth and breadth of knowledge of the influence which was wielded during their lives as well as the influence that their labour produced. One can only look at the fruit of Korczak's lifelong efforts and acknowledge the enduring and profound influence they possess. It would be beneficial to ascertain whether there are other areas in which this Polish-Jewish family influenced the Old Doctor. Jakub Goldszmit provides the most appealing and enticing member with whom to explore that contention.