

BUILDING A CITY: WRITINGS
ON AGNON'S BUCZACZ
IN MEMORY OF ALAN MINTZ

Edited by Sheila E. Jelen, Jeffrey Saks,
and Wendy Zierler

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Buczacz

7 “The Heavenly City”: A Historiographic Paradigm in the Scholastic Cartography of S.Y. Agnon

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Translated by Batya Stein

In memory of Alan Mintz,
a devoted scholar of Agnon

The Heavenly City of Buczacz

AT THE BEGINNING of S.Y. Agnon’s second posthumous book, *‘Ir umelo’ah*, his daughter Emuna Yaron, who edited the book, placed a dedication written by her father stating that this would be “the chronicle of the city of Buczacz.” Agnon noted that he had written the book in pain and anguish “so that our descendants should know that our city was full of Torah, wisdom, love, piety, life, grace, kindness and charity.”¹

But is this indeed the case? Is *‘Ir umelo’ah* a nostalgic literary-historical chronicle of the city of Buczacz that is now lost? Does the content of this thick book really reflect the declaration at its opening, describing Buczacz as a utopian place full of Torah, wisdom and awe, life, grace, kindness, and charity?

This may have been Agnon’s intention when he began his mythological chronicle about the foundation of his city in the section titled “Book 1: The Tale of the Town.” This “foundation story,” as I have already shown,² is a kind of literary replication of the story about the founding of the Worms community that

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1. S.Y. Agnon, *‘Ir umelo’ah* (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1986). The dedication is quoted from the English translation—*A City in Its Fullness*, ed. Alan Mintz and Jeffrey Saks (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2016), vii—which contains a selection of the stories published in the original and is cited wherever possible.

2. See Avidov Lipsker, *Maḥshavot ‘al Agnon*, 2 vols. (Bar-Ilan: Ramat-Gan University Press, 2015–18).

appears in *Sefer ma'aseh nissim*, and is filled with hints about sin and blame.³ Agnon's dedication was, from the start, incompatible with the opening of *'Ir umelo'ah* given his choice to follow in the footsteps of *Sefer ma'aseh nissim*, a work suffused with a sense of guilt that persisted for generations in a community that had promised to reach Zion and then stayed back in Poland for a thousand years for economic advantage.⁴

The introductory section, "The Tale of the Town," does not portray the fullness of organic Jewish life. In truth, it does not contain even *one complete story* about a community of sages, or one detailed map of the city's streets, nor any chronicled fragment presenting a metonymy of the full communal Jewish life whose destruction Agnon mourns in his dedication. Quite the reverse: the entire first part of the book is a fragmentation of a wholeness that exists no longer. Book 1 is a collection of textual shards, archeological remnants that Agnon placed *next* to one another, not as in a chronicle *after* one another but as the broken fragments of a mosaic missing most of its stones. The entire opening section of *'Ir umelo'ah* is made up of brief memory fragments, each a few pages long, lacking any unifying organizational-narrative element. They dwell next to one another only because they were collected as urban remnants in the same archeological excavation. This archeology, however, "refuses" to become a chronicle. Its findings lie on the edge of the writer's memory trenches and they glimmer in the light of the present, without any narratological-historical context. Thus, they are presented to the reader as an accumulation of fragments—"Kise shel Eliyahu" (26), "Yeter klei hama'or shehayu beveit hakneset haggadol" (27–29), concise memoirs tracing the profiles of local dwellers (123–128), and many many others—all mere splinters of the memory remnants from a historical reality, shards of a wholeness that was plundered in the past. Indeed, the prominent visual element in these sketches, such as "Ma'reh ha'ir" (14)—is what Agnon refers to as "the disappearing line." Buczacz is a city without contours, it "goes in and out of forests," it is a fading urban experience. It merits note in this context that "Hane'elam (The Disappeared) is also the title of a central story in the collection,⁵ dealing with a youth who was conscripted into the imperial army, left the city and, when he returned, his inner world crumbled and he sunk into madness until his death.

3. Juspa Shamash, *Sefer ma'aseh nissim* (Amsterdam, 1696), 1. See also "Lama ba'u lefanim gezerot rabot 'al yehudei vermiza umeh haya het'am," in R. Juspa Shamash *dekehilat vermiza: 'Olam yehudi bame'ah hayod zayin*, ed. Shlomo Eidelberg (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 59. Eidelberg claims that the teleology of the story dates the beginning of Ashkenaz Jewry to the First Temple in an attempt to release it from the charge of participation in the crucifixion of Jesus, and also as a justification for their continued stay in exile after the establishment of the Second Temple. See *ibid.*, 12. See also Shlomo Eidelberg, "Qadmut hayishuv hayehudi beGermaniyah," *Yedi'on ha'iggud hamada'i lemada'ei hayahadut* 17–18 (1981): 19–25.

4. Lipsker, *Maḥshavot 'al Agnon*, 1: 65–70.

5. *A City in Its Fullness*, 369.

My claim is that, from the start, Agnon assumed the task of writing about Buczacz endorsing an approach that gave up on a full description of Jewish life. This poetic approach reverses the familiar version that readers of Jewish literature encountered, for example, in Zalman Schneur's novella *Shklover Yidn*.⁶ Moreover, Agnon assigned poetic value to the decision to renounce the dimension of completeness: the greatness of the loss of his city equals the greatness of his refusal to describe its fullness! Buczacz in Agnon's writings, from the time he wrote *Vehayah he'aqov lemishor* in 1912, is always a city of collapse, of dwindling, of disappearance.

The stories in *Ir umelo'ah* that trace the development of a cohesive narrative about life in the Buczacz community and its characters, are mainly based on plots happening outside it and reaching their climax in faraway places. Critics, who have not paid attention to the historical background of the stories in *Ir umelo'ah*, failed to note the ties and connections to these other locations. Seemingly marked by narrative coherence and by a developing storyline about a Jewish community and its characters, *Ir umelo'ah* is a work of fiction whose roots are not at all in Buczacz and whose plot invariably culminates in settings far away from it.

The first story with a narrative of this kind is "Ha'ish halovesh badim" (The Man Dressed in Linen).⁷ Its protagonist, Gavriel the hazzan, (*dos laynen yidl*), would occasionally come to the city from far away to visit his father's grave, and the narrator wonders—what happened before his burial in Buczacz? The meaning of these sporadic visits is clarified from the life story of the protagonist's grandfather, the elder Gavriel the hazzan, who had been captivated by a copy of the book *Torat ha'olah* by R. Moshe Isserless (1530–1572), known as ReMA.⁸ The plot focuses on the life of the last generation of halakhists in Kraków, the city of the ReMA, where he wrote this book. The first printing of the book⁹ was magnificent by the standards of the time and, because of its splendor, the protagonist's grandfather had very much wanted it. Illustrated pages that do not appear in the original printing had been added to this copy and, because the elder Gavriel the hazzan had so much desired it, he paid a great deal for it. Yet, it was precisely the book's magnificence that led to his death, when priests caught him holding it and ascribed witchcraft powers to it. The grandfather was the victim of a cruel execution, his limbs pulled apart in the market square, and was buried in Buczacz. His grandson, "the man dressed in linen," came every year to visit his grandfather's grave without the community knowing this secret.

6. Zalman Schneur, *Shklover Yiden: Noveln* (Vilna: B. Kletskin, 1929).

7. *A City in Its Fullness*, 98–139.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Prague: Mordechai Shalom Katz, 1570. Moses Isserles, *Torat ha'olah* (Prague: Mordechai Shalom Katz, 1579)

Through this story, which only ends in Buczacz, Agnon establishes the deep connection of the Buczacz community to the communal Galician center of Kraków, the capital of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Polish kings. This is the Kraków of ReMA's days that, together with Lublin and Lviv (Galicia), were considered "capitals" of an imagined Jewish kingdom that lacked a territory or a government. This is the kingdom of the Council of Four Lands that existed from 1520 until 1764 and, as shown below, seems to be at the center of Agnon's concerns. Agnon explicitly returned several times to descriptions of this historical era, full of wonder at this display of Jewish religious sovereignty that was renewed during the councils' biannual meetings at fairs.¹⁰

Agnon, as noted, related to this at length in several of his works; in his story "Meḥamat hammetsiq" that was published as a booklet in 1921. In 1930, Agnon included remarks on this issue in *Hakhnasat kallah* and then again, in a similar version, in *Ir umelo'ah*:

There they gathered, the most brilliant of the generation, the greatest Torah sages, commanders in Israel, community benefactors and leaders in Poland. And in those days, the Torah was not yet painted into a corner but was indeed the only one at the helm. The rabbis gilded themselves with the crown of Torah and the famous benefactors listened to their words. Torah and a good name wore one crown, and they would issue decrees and ordinances to strengthen Heaven's will, and all the people carefully followed them, because of humbleness and fear of sin.¹¹

10. See the interesting comment of historian Shmuel Ettinger, who tied the loss of political independence in Judah after the Second Temple period to the continuous pursuit of halakhic autonomy in the Diaspora. The Council of Four Lands, he implied, is the realization of the yearning for political governance, which was translated into a supra-political halakhic autonomy. See the introduction of Shmuel Ettinger, "Va'ad arba' aratsot," to *Pinkas va'ad arba' aratsot*, ed. Israel Halperin and Israel Bartal, 2nd edn. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik/Hebrew University, 1990) 1:15. On the issue of Jewish autonomy at the time of the Council of Four Lands, see Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004). On the participation of Kraków and its periphery in the Council of Four Lands, see Mayer Balaban, *Toledot hayehudim beKraków uveKazimierz 1304–1868* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 1:269–72. Meetings were initially convoked in Lublin, but other fairs were later added, mainly Yaroslav.

11. S.Y. Agnon, *Meḥamat hammetsiq* (Berlin: Jüdische Verlag, 1921) 54. In the version in *Ir umelo'ah*, Agnon added that a Gentile king "sets policemen who oppress the people with sticks and leashes and coerce them to fulfill their commands ... but the holy people of Israel willingly accepted all that the leaders and guardians of the Council of the Lands enjoined them to do" (308). This description is the narrator's idealization and lacks any historical basis. Testimonies actually report on debt collectors who oppressed borrowers, to the chagrin of Polish aristocrats and landowners who did not look kindly on this "Jewish policing" that afforded Jewish institutions more effective means for collecting taxes from Jews than those available to the government through coercion, bans, and communal punishment. See Jacob Goldberg, *Haḥevrah hayehudit bemamleket Polin-Lita* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1999), 131, and historic evidence of bans, fines, imprisonment, use of the rack, consignment to

Although these councils did not meet in Kraków but rather in Lublin (the Gra-menitz fair) and in Yaroslav, the sages of Kraków and of its rural periphery were significant participants in them.¹² In the perception of Agnon, who looks at the past of his urban community, Kraków, the city of R. Moshe Isserles, is “the heavenly city” in Carl Becker’s “theological-political” terms.¹³ This “heavenly city” is the civic-communal utopic image that the *boni viri* (טובי העיר), the townsmen-protagonists of *‘Ir umelo’ah*, look up to. “The heavenly city” ranks highest in Agnon’s theological-political conception, a model of community management inspired by biblical and halakhic writings entrusted to “worthy” individuals who are experts in these texts and interpret them to their community. The more they succeed in acting as a consensual leadership, the more their city will become a heavenly place, in the same sense that communities in other cities later came to perceive themselves as citizens of “Jerusalem of Lithuania” (Vilna), a “famous city” (Brest), or a “city of the mighty” (Grodno), and similar labels ascribing high sovereign value to Jewish life in a Gentile city.¹⁴

Agnon’s attachment to the historiographic and scholastic tradition of Kraków and its sages should be credited to his early scholarly training, which began at the age of twelve in the library of the Buczacz beit midrash.

death, and more, particularly those that were decreed by the Chomsk council in 1721; Shimon Dubnov, *Pinkas hamedinah* (Berlin: Ayanot, 1925). 249–51, and also in the index of subjects under *‘onashim*, 347–48. See also a contemporary testimony in the chronicle of Nathan-Neta Hanover, *Yeven metsulah* (Kraków: Fischer, 1895): “And Jews never litigated in Gentile courts, nor before any prince, nor before his majesty the king. Had a Jew gone to Gentile judges, they would have punished him with great dishonor to fulfill [what is written]: ‘our enemies being judges’ [Deut. 32:31], 666–67. Agnon added to the *‘Ir umelo’ah* version a historiosophic theological comment whereby, because of the councils’ abolition in 1764, “God retaliated against the kingdom of Poland. The kingdom abolished the Council of the Lands –and He, may He be blessed, unleashed on them three ruthless countries that abolished the kingdom of Poland” (308). This comment by Agnon is copied from a memoir published when Agnon was in Leipzig, *Zikhronot R. Dov miBoliḥov 1723–1804*, ed. Mark Wischnitser (Berlin: Klal, 1922). The text in the memoir reads: “And after the leaders of these countries were removed from their greatness and this minor honor was taken away from the Jews ... the whole country was divided in 1772 and all honor was taken away from the people of Poland and from their king, to fulfill the verse, ‘And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom’ ...” (91). On R. Dov, see Meir Balaban, *Letoledot hatenu’ah haFrankit* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1934), 1:9–10.

12. On the election of representatives to the councils and on the place of the Kraków region, see Goldberg, *Haḥevrah hayehudit*, 136–37. The fact that “the rabbi who fled” in the story “In Search of a Rabbi,” is hiding in a small village in the surroundings of Kraków does appear as a retreat. His stay there did not detract from his authority since he was still in the Kraków area, which played a distinguished and decisive role in the councils’ gatherings.

13. Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932). On the theological-political interface, see, in particular, the chapter “The Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” 59.

14. On the names assigned to city representatives, which served as identification marks at the councils’ gatherings in the fairs of the Council of Four Lands, see Dubnov, *Pinkas hamedinah*, 28, note 2.

The rare collections gathered in this library came mainly from acquisitions at the famous bookshop of Aharon Foist in Kraków, a commercial establishment that, indirectly, supported historical research projects that were published by the city's Yosef Fischer Press. The books were sold by Foist, who also relied on distribution to subscribers and to batei midrash in the city and outside it by means of sales catalogs. As a townsman of Agnon attested, these catalogs were also sent to the library of the Buczacz beit midrash when the young Agnon, only twelve years old, was engaged in the cataloging and organization of this library.¹⁵

The known chronicles of Kraków, then, had been accessible to Agnon since his youth, and it is from them that he drew his detailed knowledge about the Council of Four Lands in the generation of the *aḥaronim*. The detailed source for this and the closest to Agnon's times was the renowned chronicle about the city of Lviv by Hayyim Nathan Dembitzer, *Sefer kelilat yofi*, where the second part is devoted to Kraków. Another famous chronicle was *Anshei shem* by Shlomo Buber.¹⁶ Although these two were not the first works of this kind, they must be mentioned at the start because of their immediate availability to young Agnon given that both were published by the Fischer Press and sent by Foist (owner of the Kraków bookshop) to the librarian of the Buczacz beit midrash, a subscriber to his catalogs.¹⁷

The important and pioneering chronicle about the city of Kraków, *Ir hatseddeq* by Jehiel Matitiyahu Zunz, was also presumably found in this library. The Aramaic name of Kraków—*Krakha dekula bei* (the city with everything in it), citing BT Hullin 56b—features in it recurrently and prominently. Thus, in the description of a prestigious rabbi's arrival to the city, we read: "Because he had wisdom, counsel, and understanding, he was received by a city full of sages and writers, the holy community of Kraków, known as *Krakha dekula bei*."¹⁸ This chronicle is the source of the acclaim "a city full of sages"—that is, "a city in its fullness"—as well as of the Aramaic expression taken, as noted, from BT Hullin, which evokes in its sound the name *Kraka*, as Jews pronounced the city's name and as its name is printed in the title pages of books. In this tradition of speech and print, the Aramaic expression as it appears in Zunz's *Ir hatseddeq* spread widely, and only later was it found in Dembitzer's *Sefer kelilat yofi*.¹⁹ This Ara-

15. On this issue, see in the memoirs of Naphtali Menatseah and Yisrael Cohen in *Sefer Buczacz*, ed. Yisrael Cohen (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1957). See also, on Aharon Foist, Hagit Cohen, *Beḥanuto shel mokher sefarim* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2006), 55–65. For a broad description of Agnon's apprenticeship in the library, see Lipsker, *Maḥshavot 'al Agnon*, 2:221–25.

16. Hayyim Nathan Dembitzer, *Kelilat yofi: Toledot harabbanim hage'onim*, vol. 2 (Kraków: Yosef Fischer Press, 1893); Shlomo Buber, *Anshei shem* (Kraków: Yosef Fischer Press, 1895).

17. S.Y. Agnon, *Me'atmi el 'atmi* (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1976), 7; 261.

18. Jehiel Matitiyahu Zunz, *Ir hatseddeq* (Lemberg: Poremba, 1874), 120.

19. Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 56b: "R. Meir would expound this verse as follows: 'He has made you and established you, a city and all therein, out of it come their priests, out of it their prophets, out of it their princes, out of it their kings, as is written (Zekhariah 10:4): 'Out of

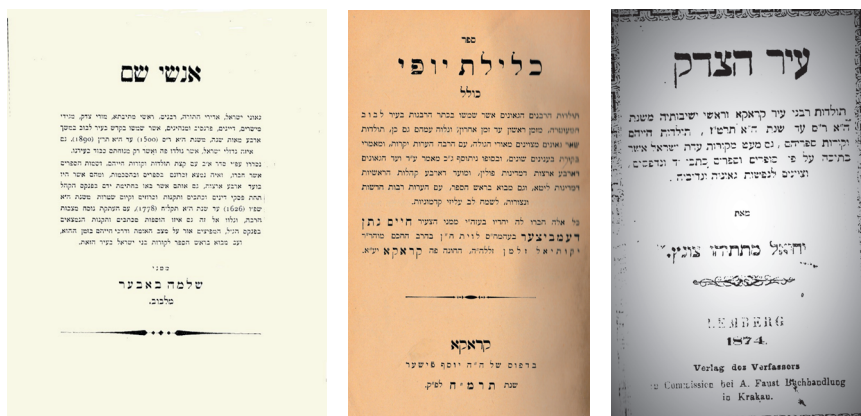


Figure 3: The chronicles of Kraków and Lemberg.

maic phrase is *ab initio* meant to denote the meaning of autonomous fullness that does not need completion from outside and resonates in particular in Rashi’s comment on the Talmudic Tractate of Hullin noted above as relating to judicial autonomy, meaning that the Jewish community need not turn to foreign judges.²⁰

This commentary is indeed the main concern of the story “In Search of a Rabbi, or the Governor’s Whim,”²¹ which condemns the way that Jews involved the Gentile governor in a legal matter and thereby brought disaster to their community. The speaker in the story is R. Moshe Avraham Abush, the rabbi of Zabno, who neither lives in the city nor is its chronicler and whose main work, *Tsiluta de’Avraham*, was about the ReMA of Kraków.²² R. Moshe Avraham Abush demanded from the

them shall come forth the corner-stone, out of them the tent peg, and so forth.” Rashi comments: “A city and all therein, and it has been said of the community of Jews that all its rulers come from them and not from another people.” On Kraków’s fame as a place of Torah excellence, there is a tradition explaining the city’s name by matching the numerological value of Kraków’s Hebrew spelling with that of the words ending the verse in Exodus 17:6, “Behold, I will stand before you there *on the rock*” (*‘al hatsur*). See Dembitzer, *Kelilat yofi*, 2:42. For a historiographic evaluation of these chronicles’ relative importance and their authors’ mutual relationships, see Balaban, *Toledot hayehudim beKraków*, 1:434–36.

20. See the full passage from BT Hullin in the previous note. The yearning for sovereignty is also reflected in the dry historical details about the legal conduct of Jews until the eighteenth century, both among themselves and with Gentiles. These subtleties emerge in the precise descriptions of Bernard Weinryb in the chapter he devotes to this aspect of Jewish life in Poland in general and in Kraków in particular. See Bernard D. Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100–1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 141–44.

21. Agnon, *A City in Its Fullness*, 253.

22. The rabbi of Zabno (1720–1802), author of *Tsiluta de’Avraham* (mentioned in *‘Ir umelo’ah*, 331). Moshe Avraham Abush Margalioṭ, “the rabbi of Zabno,” *Tsiluta de’Avraham veniqra ḥiddushei mehaReMA* (Sadiikov: Pinhas Eliezer Print, 1821). On the circumstances of his grandson’s post-

dignitaries in the Buczacz delegation that they seek a figure such as R. Mordechai, who is hidden in their city.

In *Ir umelo'ah*, Agnon devoted to Kraków, “the other place,” three stories that are the heart of the novelistic prose in this collection: “The Man Dressed in Linen,” “In Search of a Rabbi, or the Governor’s Whim,” and “The Parable and its Lesson.” The speaker in all of them is his favorite narrator, the historical figure of R. Moshe Avraham Abush, who is not a member of the Buczacz community.

The story “In Search of a Rabbi” does indeed begin in Buczacz, which had no rabbi then, but unfolds mostly outside it, when the dignitaries’ delegation was sent to persuade R. Moshe Avraham Abush to leave his current home and come to serve as the city rabbi. In the story of the actual event, R. Moshe Abush explains to the delegation his refusal to do so and suggests appointing R. Mordechai, who lives in Buczacz. R. Mordechai was a disciple of “the rabbi who fled,” who remains a mysterious figure throughout the story and whose name is never mentioned.²³

Neither the reader nor the delegation listening to R. Abush knows the location of the event that led the story’s protagonist, the exemplary halakhist who had been R. Mordechai’s teacher, to flee the terror of Gentile law. From which city did he run away? where did he hide, and where did he teach R. Mordechai Torah? Readers are thereby branded as “suspects,” with whom the narrator cannot share this important piece of information. In the details of these intimidating surroundings, which Agnon thickens in the story, he conceals the secret information in a hint that only those versed in Halakhah and Torah exegesis at the time of the Council of Four Lands might perhaps discern. The hint is given “in passing,” as it were, when Agnon tells how the rabbi who fled received a volume of the Gemara that he had been studying and had intended to teach Mordechai, his disciple:

One day a man in the village had his son circumcised. People came from the city, and one of them left behind a volume of the Gemara, but no one knew who had forgotten it. Israel Nathan took it and brought it to the rabbi. He saw the Gemara and laughed and wept. He wept for the days he had spent without a Gemara. He laughed because a Gemara had come into his possession. And which volume? The one he had been studying on the day that he fled from the duke’s wrath. We, who do not wish to profit from a miracle even in a story, will reveal things as they truly happened. R. Birekh Shapira knew where his father-in-law was hiding. He brought the Gemara with him to that village and

humous publication of *Tsiluta de’Avraham* (a historical fact that is highly significant in the story), see Hayyim Lieberman, *Ohel RaHaL* (New York: Empire Press, 1980), 1:449–50. On the narrative functioning of this character as a storyteller, see Alan Mintz, *Ancestral Tales: Reading the Buczacz Stories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 171–88.

23. In a long chapter that Mintz devoted to this story (*ibid.*, 157–210), he related to this as a final interpretive datum. In the index of names (422), this figure appears under “R. Mordechai’s teacher” although, as shown below, in the story his identity is only hinted at.



Figure 4: R. Berekhyah Birekh Shapira, *Zera' Birekh*, Kraków, 1646
Mentioning R. Shalom Me'elish in the introduction.

left it there, purposely choosing the volume that his father-in-law the rabbi had been studying.²⁴

The passing remark mentions by name a relative of the “the rabbi who fled”—his son-in-law, R. Berekhyah Birekh Shapira. R. Shapira married the daughter of R. Shalom Me'elish, a well-known community leader in Kraków.²⁵ This encoded mention sheds, as it were, a glimmer of light on the genealogy of a family representing the scholarly elite of Kraków at the end of the seventeenth century, whose details Agnon had learned from the city chronicles.²⁶ Seemingly, he became

24. *A City in Its Fullness*, 302.

25. On Me'elish and his kabbalistic leanings, see Arieh Bauminger “Toledot hayehudim beKraka bishenot 1304–1815” in *Sefer Kraków*, ed. Arieh Bauminger, Meir Bussak, and Nathan Michael Gelber (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1959), 24–25.

26. See Dembitzer, *Kelilat yofi* 20b: “And the Gaon, our illustrious teacher Berakhya Birekh Shapira, author of *Zera' Birekh*, son-in law of our great teacher Shalom Me'elish [...] (the father of Zvi Hirsch, who married Rivka, the daughter of Yom Tov Heller, author of *Tosefot Yom Tov*). [Shalom Me'elish] was involved in financing the printing of books at Menachem Maisels [...]. This Shalom Me'elish also showed kindness to the gaon who wrote the *Tosefot Yom Tov*, of blessed memory, on his arrival to Kraków at the beginning of 1644, by generously giving money to reprint here in Kraków, at the printing house of R. Naḥum son of R. Moshe Maisels, the Mishnah treatises

aware of these kinship connections through the imprimatur of R. Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller to R. Birekh's Torah commentary *Zera' Birekh*.²⁷

The protagonist of Agnon's story, then, the rabbi who fled, is R. Shalom Me'elish, who was the father-in-law of R. Berakhiah Birekh Shapira, author of *Zera' Birekh*. Agnon thus planted the story close to Kraków and presented R. Me'elish, Kraków's important benefactor, as a victim of slanderous denunciations to the Gentile authorities. An interesting dimension is that becoming a victim of such allegations is a recurring motif in the history of several important rabbis in central and Eastern Europe, among them two prominent figures in the Council of Four Lands, R. Jacob Pollack and R. Yom-Tov Heller. This historical feature would later become a significant element in the popular and written hagiography of several "leading rabbis" in the history of Eastern Europe Jewry, and it is this historical motif of the persecution of rabbis that attracted Agnon.²⁸

Alan Mintz viewed the fact that R. Abraham Abush was the main narrator and that the story moved from the present to a remote past as the poetic foundation of the story as a whole. He, therefore, outlined a hermeneutical scheme of "epic designs"²⁹ for the story "In Search of a Rabbi," which leads to a poetic conclusion: Agnon tried to set up two models of rabbinic authority, one scholarly (the remote past at the time of the rabbi who escaped) and the other integrated into the daily life and the spirit of Polish rule. I wish to propose here a reconstructed historical chronology of the actual reality that Agnon had hinted at, attempting to present it as a paradigm of autonomous Jewish life as it came alive at the time of the Council of Four Lands, for whose cessation he blamed the Jewish community itself and whose utopian foundation he continued to long for even as he came to reconstruct the life of his city, which had drawn away from it. The historical

with the *Tosefot Yom Tov* commentary." This chronicle points to the family ties, the scholarship, the communal administration, and the close ties between these personalities in mid-seventeenth-century Kraków. On the election of R. Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller as the rabbi of Kraków in 1643, see Balaban, *Toledot hayehudim beKraków*, 1:270. See also Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller's life story, particularly according to his autobiography, *Megillat Evah* (Wrocław, 1837). The choice to mention the name of R. Berekhyah Birekh son of R. Yitzhak Izick Shapira conveys an interesting side in Agnon's tendency to ascribe positive meaning to practical Sabbatean Kabbalah. R. Berekhyah Birekh, author of *Zera' Birekh*, died in Constantinople in 1666 hoping to meet Sabbetai Zevi there. See Balaban, *Letoledot hatenu'ah haFrankit*, 27.

27. Kraków: Menachem Naḥum Maisels, 1646.

28. The claim that R. Shalom Me'elish was persecuted adds a kind of etiological hallmark, an identity tag that, enhances the prestige of the entire dynasty of sages in the Council of Four Lands, branding the more distinguished ones among them as an elite. This "dynasty" opens with the story about the escape of R. Jacob Pollack, who became entangled in a legal conflict that forced him to flee Kraków in May 1522. See Elhanan Reiner, "R. Yaakov Pollack: Rishon verosh lehakhmei Kraków," in *Kraka-Kazimirz-Kraków: Mehqarim betoledot yehudei Kraków* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001), 57–60.

29. Mintz, "Epic Designs," in *Ancestral Tales*, 164–7.

model at the root of the story can only be reconstructed after identifying its vanished protagonist as a historical figure—that of Shalom Me'elish. The construct of Agnon's narrative fiction in *'Ir umelo'ah* overlaps the chronological course of historical events in seventeenth-century Kraków, and both are fully coextensive:

1641	Death of Maharam Schiff
1646	First printing of <i>Zera' Birekh</i>
1654	Death of Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, author of <i>Tosefot Yom-Tov</i>
166?	Beginning of R. Mordechai's studies with Shalom Me'elish.
1666	Death of R. Berakhiah Birekh Shapira, son-in-law of Shalom Me'elish (the rabbi who fled)
1720	Birth of R. Moshe Abush Margaliot, "the rabbi of Zabno."
1761	The revelation of Maharam Schiff to the rabbi of Zabno
1764	Decree of Stanislaw August eliminating the Council of Four Lands
1770–1800?	The delegation from Buczacz to the rabbi of Zabno
1802	Death of the rabbi of Zabno
1821	Printing first edition of <i>Tsiluta de'Avraham</i> by Moshe Abush Margaliot, the rabbi of Zabno

Agnon thus took the persecution motifs in this story from the memoirs of R. Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller as he himself had recorded them in 1643, the year he was appointed to the Kraków court. His account, *Megillat Evah*, appeared many years after his death and became his authorized biography.

By titling his last collection of stories *'Ir umelo'ah*, Agnon evoked two antithetical traditions of contextual meaning for phrases that appear to be strongly similar: *Krakha dekula bei*, and "a city and all that is in it." The former evokes the meaning of *Ir hatsedek*, like the title of Zunz's chronicle, epitomizing in the Aramaic expression *Krakha dekula bei* the denotation of Jewish autonomy and sovereignty. The latter, as the phrase "the city and all that is in it" in the verse of the prophecy from Amos 43:8 ("I abhor the pride of Jacob, and hate his strongholds, and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it") epitomizes the simpler meaning—the city is punished with the loss of its sovereignty.³⁰ The young

30. The title of his book does indeed hint at the devastation that will befall the "city and its fullness"—*'Ir umelo'ah*. The King James translation preserves this exact meaning: "The Lord hath sworn by himself, saith the Lord of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up *the city with all that is therein*," rather than *A City in Its Fullness*, as rendered by Mintz and Saks, which could also suggest a positive fullness, in the spirit of Emuna Yaron's dedication.

Agnon may already have noted in his youth the title of Zunz's chronicle, *ʿIr ha-tseddeq*, which is Kraków, *Krakha dekula bei*, and derived from it the deep substantial contrast with Buczacz—the city and all that is in it, which the prophet's rage predicts will be destroyed.

Beyond these linguistic and historical distinctions, the careful reader of these Kraków chronicles will also find that they served Agnon as a reservoir for plots in several stories of *ʿIr umelo'ah*. These stories' fictional body and ideological spirit come from that same "other place" as the time of the Council of Four Lands, from that same city where everything is a "present/disappearing space" in which Agnon plants most of the stories in the collection. Kraków is the antipodal gravity center to Buczacz the *ʿIr umelo'ah*. Through a set of historical allusions to the persecution of rabbis at the time of the Council of Four Lands (particularly at the time of R. Yom-Tov Heller) and to events in the Kraków seventeenth-century rabbinic literature (by R. Moshe Isserless, author of *Torat ha'olah*, and R. Bera-khiah Birekh Shapira, author of *Zera' Birekh*), Agnon presents a thesis about an era he views as the "Golden Age" of Kraków, a "heavenly city." This era negates and denies the decline of rabbinic institutions in "the real place"—Buczacz, and Agnon may thereby indirectly explain the end of his beloved city as well.

This poetic strategy of casting on a narrated urban realm the shadow of a distant metropolis located in the background of the story was already evident in Agnon's previous writings from the 1930s. It can be identified, for example, in the background of *Sippur pashut* as a kind of social criticism focusing on the bourgeois provinciality of Buczacz living in the shadow of the metropolis of Vienna, where Akavia Mazal came from. This strategy was also implemented when casting the shadow of Lviv/Lemberg, the dominant center, on Brody and Rohatyn in the novel *Hakhnasat kallah*. "The other place" construct as a bi-spatial composition is obviously highly prominent in Agnon's long novels—*Temol shilshom* (Jaffa and Jerusalem) or *Shira* (Jerusalem and the kibbutz).

The Heavenly City of Leipzig

I will attempt to apply the specific claim about "the other heavenly city" beyond *ʿIr umelo'ah*, to other areas of Agnon's *oeuvre*. The other city—the heavenly city—is a paradigmatic emblem. Agnon's central works from the 1930s onward reflect this writing metaphysics of the poetic space, meaning that every place has its 'other place,' its antipode location. The classic instance in this regard is the novella *Beḥanuto shel mar Lublin*, which Agnon began to write in the 1960s and wanted to conclude parallel to his efforts to finish editing *ʿIr umelo'ah*.³¹ At the center of this novella is his sojourn in Leipzig during the First World War, a

31. S.Y. Agnon, *Beḥanuto shel mar Lublin* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2001). Citations are from the English translation by Glenda Abramson, *In Mr. Lublin's Store* (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2016).

period that became for him, as it were, an experimental literary laboratory for understanding both the ancient and the new German spirit.

The city of Leipzig features twice in Agnon's biography—once when he stayed there during the First World War, and once when he visited briefly in 1930, at the time the first complete set of four volumes of his writings was published by the local Drugulin Press. In the novella *Behanuto shel mar Lublin*, Agnon records the atmosphere in Leipzig in the first months of the war, when disturbances and violent demonstrations erupted after the economic hardships that followed the conscription of its young men and the food rationing measures. Civilian life was almost paralyzed and its population extremely weakened both due to the age of the inhabitants and the limited economic means at their disposal.³² It is thus no wonder that Agnon painted Leipzig as a “nocturnal city” sunk in constant darkness whose shopkeepers, living in shops located in alleyways and inner courtyards dwell in it as if in crypts: “The shops are like crypts and the shopkeepers like bones from which the flesh has been consumed.”³³

The macabre estrangement of the dying city is spelled out in the life stories of four old shopkeepers, and particularly in that of the oldest among them, Joachim Hermann Wieselrode, who sold odds and ends at his Böttcher Street store. This shopkeeper's fiancée was kidnapped from him in his youth and he never rebuilt his personal life. Now, during the war, he emerges as a lecherous old man courting his widowed neighbor, and, for the festive meal he is planning with her, he is raising a goose in his backyard. This goose is a metonymy for his hidden sexual passion, and itself becomes an erotic object for Wieselrode and for his friend Götz Weigel, owner of a knife shop:

Through love of his geese he would give them affectionate names like the ones he called the wife his mother has found for him [...]. Not only due to neighborliness but because of the geese themselves and their impertinence that amused him. He would tickle them on their necks and say “killi, killi, killi,” the way he used to treat his granddaughters when they were little.³⁴

In this story about the two old shopkeepers, Agnon embedded a fragment from a narrative testimony: “Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel on behalf of

32. Agnon reached the city seven months after the food riots that left-wing parties organized against the shortages during the week of May 14–20, 1916. Shops, already quite empty, were vandalized and destroyed. These events continued until mid-1918. There are many mentions of these shortages in the book, without any reference to the political demonstrations that accompanied them. For the historical background, see Sean Dobson, *Authority and Upheaval in Leipzig 1910–1920: The Story of a Relationship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 145–46; 150–56; 172–73.

33. *Behanuto shel mar Lublin*, 48.

34. *Ibid.*, 61; 62.

R. Hanina, 'I saw a heathen who bought a goose in the market, raped it, strangled it, roasted it, and ate it.'³⁵

This testimony is cited from the Gemara as purported evidence for the fact that nothing should be bought from Gentiles, whose touch defiles everything, even the domestic fowl ritually permitted as food. This fragment is the basis for the third chapter of the novella, the first of the four shopkeepers' life stories. From the start, this is a narrative expansion of a fundamentally hostile attitude that rejects the urban life of Leipzig, the "Gentile city" that absolutely revolts him. And yet, this repugnant urban space too has a "high" version that fits into Agnon's writing metaphysic, whose construct is the space confronting "the heavenly city": just as confronting the Jewish city of Buczacz is the "heavenly city" of Kraków, the location of sages in the Council of Four Lands, so nocturnal Leipzig is confronted with its own heavenly city—Aachen, the capital of the Carolingian empire. In the second part of *Behanuto shel mar Lublin*, Agnon introduces a dream story about a voyage on an apocalyptic horse to the city of Aachen. In this dream, the narrator retreats to Germany's archaic sixth-century past, when Charlemagne founded the "heavenly city" as the capital of the first German Carolingian Empire. In the dream, the narrator is forced by four cavalymen to go the emperor to help him write a thank you letter to Haroun al-Rashid for a present he had received from him—a huge elephant. *Behanuto shel mar Lublin* is thus built in an open and transparent symmetric pattern of two halves—the first is the story of Leipzig and the second is the story of the narrator's dream, galloping on apocalyptic horses to Aachen's historical past. The German model also relies on chronicles, of which the most important is *Vita Karoli Magni* in Einhard's Latin version. The chronicle was translated into German, adapted into a popular version, and published in several editions from 1883 onward.³⁶ Agnon would have had access to these editions already in his first wartime stay in

35. BT Avodah Zarah 22b.

36. From the end of the nineteenth century, this Latin work appeared in several German versions and Agnon could easily have read it during his stay in Germany. One translated and illustrated edition is *Das Leben Karls des Grossen, von Einhard* (übersetzt und erläutert von Hermann Althof) (Halle a. S: O. Hendel, 1893). This version served as the basis for popular adaptations of Einhard's monograph and other similar sources. See *Einhard: Das Leben Karl des Grosen*, hersg. Herman Münzel (Köln am Rhein: Hermann & Schaffstein, 1921). On the ties of Charlemagne and Haroun al-Rashid, see in this edition, 66–68. This historical document reached the height of its popularity in a series of books published in Leipzig in thousands of copies in the course of the year that Agnon returned to the Land of Israel: *Einhard: Das Leben Karls des Grossen*, Übertragen von Johannes Bühler (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1924).

Leipzig when he assisted in the classification and recording of books at the Otto Harrassowitz Buchhandlung.³⁷

This chronicle tells how courtiers would call one another by biblical names, thereby framing the story of the new German government as a kind of imagined Christian reconstruction of King David's court. Within this symbolic act of biblical rule, which was imitated in Charlemagne's court, Agnon set a macabre fiction of his own about the desecration of a Jew's body and the use of his bones as a Christian relic. This fiction was meant to mark German evil as emerging in the imperial court of the heavenly German city. In order to link this archaic city with the concrete city of Leipzig, however, Agnon set a parallel story to that of Wiezelrode's goose. This is an imagined historical hoax about the torture of a goose whose feathers are pulled out to serve as quills when writing the letter that the narrator was called up to write in the dream.³⁸

In these two parallel stories, Agnon marked the two spaces of the German rulers' cruelty—the one hiding behind a mask of Christian biblical enlightenment and the one that, in his view, reincarnated into a modern version in the city of Leipzig during the First World War.

Agnon's cartography, then, is not a synchronic cross-section in a given historical situation such as, for example, that of Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*,³⁹ or like the model he chose in *Temol Shilshom* (Jerusalem and Jaffa), which is also historically synchronic. The two great works, *Ir umelo'ah* and *Behanuto shel mar Lublin*, which Agnon labored to finish at the end of his life and never saw complete in print, set an imagined and scholastic typological cartography, where the big cities it maps represent meta-historical entities. Through the paradigm of the contrast between two cities, Agnon surveys for the last time the realized and missed possibilities of his personal biography.

Although Agnon does not follow in Dickens' footsteps, we may be able to hear him whispering at the end of his life the opening sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity . . ."

37. On the catalogue that Agnon took part in editing, see Lipsker, *Maḥshavot 'al Agnon 2*: 176–77.

38. *In Mr. Lublin's Store*, 197–98.

39. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859). Dickens' Paris and London are synchronic historical cities. The life stories of their protagonists intersect while the cities are woven into one continuous plot.

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