

'Mosaic religion' as a school subject in Galicia: programs of study, textbooks, teachers

In the Jewish tradition a young boy starts his religious education in a very early age in a traditional religious school, called cheder. The education in cheder is focused on the religious text and does not cover secular subjects, such as arithmetics, languages or history.

The 19th century brought many changes to the Jewish society in the whole Europe, including Galicia: legal emancipation, advancement of acculturation and integration. In terms of legal statute, dress, professional careers Jews differed now less from their Christian counterparts than they used to differ before. As a result Jewish children in Galicia started to frequent not only traditional cheder but also other types of schools: public ones where they learned together with their Christian colleagues and the Jewish schools of modern type. These schools taught primarily secular and general subjects which prepared children for their future professional lives. But what happened with religious lessons? Was the religion absent from the education which children received? No: the religion was still present, but unlike in cheder, where it was the only subject taught, now it became just one of the many subjects which Jewish children learned during their school week.

The aim of the project is to show how this happened and how the religious instruction looked like: how religion became a school subject, how and by whom it was taught. The project will answer the following questions: who was responsible for the program of teaching? And who were the teachers, both in small towns and in big cities, such as Lviv and Krakow? Did they constitute a distinctive social group? How were they educated? Did they have their own press and associations? How did the textbooks look like? Was the fact that religion became a school subject controversial for the Jewish society? How did it react to the changing reality?