

STEPHAN LEHNSTAEDT
Touro College Berlin

Prejudices of an Elite. The Central Powers in Occupied Poland, 1915–1918

When in 1915 the Central Powers conquered Congress Poland, which had been under Russian rule up to that time, they were not meeting Poles and Jews for the first time. Quite the contrary: Poles and Jews already served in their armies and were citizens and subjects of their kingdoms. The Austrians had treated Poles in Galicia very favourably, made them the ruling ethnicity in the region and discriminated against Ruthenes (Ukrainians) and Jews for their benefit. The Galician Poles had sent a large fraction to the Vienna Reichsrat, a fraction which was mostly conservative and rather loyal; from 1895 until 1897 Kazimierz Badeni even served as prime minister for the Cisleithanian half of the Dual Monarchy. The Prussians had mostly suppressed Polish national sentiments. They supported the large German minority in these regions, fought against Catholic influence and tried to Germanize — and assimilate — the locals. Polish political influence remained small; in Berlin Poles hardly made up five percent of the members of the Reichstag¹. However, when war broke out in 1914, these elites remained loyal to the Kaiser².

This article wants to show the sentiments and politics that the new rulers developed in the newly occupied German Generalgouvernement Warsaw and the Austro–Hungarian Military Generalgouvernement Lublin during the war. I will

¹ Ph. Ther, *Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte. Polen, slawophone Minderheiten und das Kaiserreich als kontinentales Empire*, [in:] *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, ed. S. Conrad, J. Osterhammel, Göttingen 2006, p. 129–148, here 137–141. Especially on Galicia: A.V. Wendland, *Imperiale, koloniale und postkoloniale Blicke auf die Peripherien des Habsburgerreiches*, [in:] *Kolonialgeschichten. Regionale Perspektiven auf ein globales Phänomen*, C. Kraft, A. Lüdtke, J. Martschukat, Frankfurt am Main 2010, p. 211–235, here 216–219.

² P. Szlanta, *Der Glaube an das bekannte Heute, der Glaube an das unsichere Morgen. Die Polen und der Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs*, “Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas”, vol. LXI, 2013, p. 411–432, here 425–427.

consider attitudes towards Poland and Poles as well as towards Jews, who were the largest ethnic minority — in 1913 roughly 1,95 million Jews lived in Congress Poland³. Given the large gaps in research on the occupation of Eastern Europe and Poland in World War I will restrict myself to the perceptions of the leading personnel, while the soldiers of the occupation forces cannot be considered here⁴. For the Germans, I focus especially on Hans von Beseler, the Governor General of Warsaw, and for Austria–Hungary on Leopold von Andrian, the long-term envoy to Warsaw⁵. I want to raise the question of how Poles and Jews were perceived by Andrian and Beseler, and how this contrasts with other information on the occupation. Were they seen as equal, or did imperial, colonial or antisemitic views veto this kind of sentiment? And were they considered to be “racially inferior” already in the First World War?

Andrian and Beseler knew each other and, although allied through the Central Powers, saw themselves as adversaries as their empires had contrasting aims in Poland. Both wrote many private letters which historians up to this day have largely ignored; this goes also for the somewhat less interesting diaries of the two antagonists. Many important papers drafted by these two men cannot be considered as private material but rather are official reports and briefings, which raises the question of whether to consider these as ego-documents and, more generally, what constitutes an ego document.

³ W.M. Glicksman, *In the mirror of literature: The economic life of the Jews in Poland as reflected in Yiddish literature (1914–1939)*, New York 1966, p. 23.

⁴ For the German side there is research only on the dislocation of the troops: J.E. Szczepeński, *Niemiecka Piechota Zapasowa w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie Warszawskim 1915–1918*, Warszawa 2008; idem, *Landszturm w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie Warszawskim 1915–1918: Formacja głębokich rezerw*, Warszawa 2012. For a first orientation concerning front soldiers cf. P. Hoeres, *Die Slawen. Perzeption des Kriegsgegners bei den Mittelmächten. Selbst- und Feindbild*, [in:] *Die vergessene Front. Der Osten 1914/15. Ereignis — Wirkung — Nachwirkung*, ed. G.P. Groß, Paderborn 2006, p. 179–200. Cf. also: E. Mühle, *Weltkriegserlebnis an der galizisch-polnischen Ostfront 1914/15. Zur Wahrnehmung des Ostens in Feldpostbriefen des Ostforschers Hermann Aubin*, “Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung”, vol. LI, 2002, p. 529–75.

⁵ For their respective biographies see R.M. Spät, *Für eine gemeinsame deutsch-polnische Zukunft? Hans Hartwig von Beseler als Generalgouverneur in Polen 1915–1918*, “Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung”, vol. LVIII, 2009, p. 469–500; A. Stempin, *General-pułkownik Hans Hartwig von Beseler — generalny gubernator warszawski w latach 1915–1918*, “Dzieje Najnowsze”, vol. XLIII, 2011, No 3, p. 21–34; G. Riederer, *Der letzte Österreicher: Leopold von Andrian und sein Nachlass im Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach*, Marbach 2011; *Leopold von Andrian (1875–1951): Korrespondenzen, Notizen, Essays, Berichte*, ed. U. Prutsch, K. Zeyringer, Wien 2003; U. Prutsch, *Historisches Gedächtnis in kulturpolitischer Machtstrategie. Deutschland, Österreich–Ungarn und die polnische Frage (1915–1918)*, [in:] *Ambivalenz des kulturellen Erbes. Vielfachkodierung des historischen Gedächtnisses*, ed. C. Moritz, K. Zeyringer, Innsbruck 2000, p. 69–91.

For the German side, the discussion has been greatly influenced by Winfried Schulze, a historian of the Early Modern period⁶. He argues that all documents that voluntarily or involuntarily reveal personal perceptions can be called ego-documents. This very broad definition makes many texts ego-documents. It is in this sense that Carlo Ginzburg in “The Cheese and the Worms” in 1976 used protocols from the French inquisition to reveal the everyday life and the ideas of people who did not write themselves⁷, and in the previous year Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie had done the same for the peasant village of Montaignou in the Pyrenees⁸.

However, there are differences between the reports and other, “classic”, ego-documents such as diaries or letters to friends: When writing to other, superior authorities, Beseler and Andrian mostly pursued political aims. And a self-justification for incidents in Poland in front of the Kaiser or the Austrian foreign ministry is different than explaining to a relative why certain things went wrong. As much as no ego-document is part of an action other than the writing itself, and part of an ex-post discourse on the legitimacy of the past, this is all the more true for the reports used here. Official documents usually are based on a higher degree of reflection prior to their being written, which is why personal sentiments can be over- or understated and always have to be seen in the context of the recipient’s suspected reaction. Yet this goes for all documents and even for most oral testimonies too. In the end, Andrian’s and Beseler’s papers will demonstrate that the distinction between private and official papers is not so huge and of lesser importance than the category of intent.

As these reports reveal many personal sentiments, they quite definitely can — and should — be used when investigating elitist perceptions among the Central Powers in occupied Poland. Together with private letters and texts from other high-ranking personnel, they allow us deep insight into prejudices against Jews and Poles. And as these men greatly influenced or even determined ethnic and national policies, they also allow reflections on the importance of these feelings for actual politics. This is what the last part of this article will address: What role do the personal sentiments of a leadership elite play — or how are they being transmitted into politics?

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⁶ W. Schulze, *Ego-Dokumente. Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte? Vorüberlegungen für die Tagung “Ego-Dokumente”*, [in:] *Ego-Dokumente: Annäherung an den Menschen in der Geschichte*, ed. W. Schulze, Berlin 1996, p. 11–30.

⁷ C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, Baltimore 1980 (French first edition in 1976).

⁸ E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaignou: The promised land of error*, New York 1979.

In May 1916 a report by the Vienna Foreign Ministry stated that Poland's material supply was completely in the hands of "German [meaning Austrian] and Jewish officers", with the latter preferring to cooperate with the local "Jewish merchants and speculators". The Jews allegedly conducted "the most sophisticated speculation", which in turn increased "the bitterness of the Polish population, which considered the Jews as a national enemy"⁹. As Jews comprised 15 percent of the population in the Kingdom of Poland, antisemitism was of great relevance for the perception of the locals. This is even more true as roughly 85 percent of the Jewish population lived in cities¹⁰, where most of the occupiers were stationed, so that contact was more common than suggested by the mere percentages.

The comments noted above point to a central feature: Polish antisemitism. I will not discuss this at length here, but it is remarkable how often the occupiers referred to it and justified their own actions by reference to it. In this way, their own antisemitism was tied to an alleged will of the Polish people¹¹. And indeed, policies especially in the Austro-Hungarian Military Generalgouvernement turned more and more against the Jews, first and foremost because it was felt that the Polish population could be won over in this way¹². Nevertheless, it has to be noted that neither Germany nor Austria-Hungary possessed a clear national policy for Congress Poland at the outbreak of war.

Against this background, the perception of the Jews is of particular importance because of concepts of national politics developed subsequently which aimed at a clear distinction between the Polish and Jewish populations. For Austria-Hungary it was Leopold von Andrian who first provided something like guidelines for policy towards the Jews. Born on 9 May 1875 in Berlin as the only son of an Austrian imperial aristocrat, he grew up in a well-off household. The family wealth, however, came primarily from his mother, who was the daughter of the famous composer Giacomo Meyerbeer. As a passionate supporter of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, Andrian saw himself as doubly marked out, for he was both half Jewish and born outside the Habsburg realm in Prussian territory. His Jewish ancestry played a major role in that he under no circumstances wanted to be "discovered" as a Jew, for example through being seen as pro-Jewish. This perception as an outsider was reinforced by his homosexuality, a subject frequently

⁹ Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna (ÖStA HHStA), PA I, Liasse Krieg 11a — Polen / 919. Memorandum by the k.u.k. Foreign Ministry (Dr. Habicht) on Militärgeneralgouvernement Lublin, 15.5.1916.

¹⁰ W.M. Glicksman, *In the mirror of literature*, p. 23. For the economic relevance of Poland's Jews cf. K. Zieliński, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach Królestwa Polskiego w czasie pierwszej wojny światowej*, Lublin 2005, p. 32f.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 234.

¹² P. Maclean, *Control and Cleanliness. German-Jewish Relations in Occupied Eastern Europe during the First World War*, "War and Society", vol. VI, 1988, No 2, p. 47–69, here 50.

discussed in his diaries, of which he was deeply ashamed — partly due to his strict Catholic upbringing — and which he attempted to conceal through two marriages¹³.

Andrian had been an emissary in Warsaw since 1911, at that time the third city of the Russian empire. Andrian's General Consulate had been established in 1818 and, while formally subordinate to the Embassy in St. Petersburg, it was able to act fairly independently due to the great significance of Poland and the Poles for the Habsburg Monarchy. As an envoy of an enemy nation, Andrian was forced to leave Warsaw at the outbreak of the war, but immediately took the position of advisor for Polish issues at the Foreign Ministry in Vienna. In this capacity, he made a name for himself before the end of 1914 with a highly annexationist and, considering the military situation at the time — the Russian Army had advanced deep into Galicia and eventually even captured Lemberg and Przemysl — utterly utopian memorandum¹⁴, which was not far removed from the German "Griff nach der Weltmacht" (Fritz Fischer).

Already in 1911 Andrian, who always portrayed himself as an expert on Poland and friend of this nation, had written a briefing on the "Jewish problem" of the Russians. He examined the tough policy of the Czarist Empire, forcing Jews to settle in the "rayon", that is outside of Central Russia and mainly on the territory of the old Rzeczpospolita, thus contributing to the Jews' "national decomposition"¹⁵. In terms of the economy, he said, this would lead to a rise of Poland because Jews were born tradesmen, but it also would lead to a cultural decline of the country and a strong "growth in antisemitism as a political factor previously not known in this country" — which of course Jews had brought upon themselves¹⁶.

Under Russian rule, Jews were discriminated in various ways and could not hold government position. When the Central Powers occupied Poland, this changed slightly. Both Germany and Austria–Hungary had Jewish soldiers, officers and administrative personnel. Local administration remained largely Polish, and after 5 November 1916, when the governors–general in Warsaw and Lublin proclaimed the Kingdom of Poland, gained influence. But as neither Germany nor Austria–Hungary were actually willing to share their power, the Polish state and later privy council remained without greater influence. However, as will be shown later, Jews were granted voting rights on the communal level and thus could now take part in politics.

Looking at expressions by Austro–Hungarian officials in Poland during World War I, one can find substantial agreement with Andrian's anti–Semitic attitude. In fact, the occupation authorities did receive unspecified Polish complaints about

¹³ G. Riederer, *Der letzte Österreicher*, p. 36–47.

¹⁴ W. Bihl, *Zu den österreichisch–ungarischen Kriegszielen 1914*, "Jahrbücher für die Geschichte Osteuropas", vol. XVI, 1968, p. 504–30.

¹⁵ Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marchbach (DLA), Nachlass Andrian / 78.2.314 [formerly: 3753]. Andrian to Aehrenthal, 7.12.1911.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

a Jewish influence being “too much to bear”. The reaction of these authorities was characteristic: although they explained that those “protests were somewhat exaggerated”, they nevertheless conceded that Jews did “have a greater role in government” than “actually is desirable”; thus, one was willing to deal with this “mischief”¹⁷. The choice of words in Andrian’s letter points to the emerging discourse on hygiene that equated Jewish attributes with diseases: the army high command wanted “to cure these unhealthy conditions”¹⁸. Another pattern of argument can be found in this letter: the characteristics ascribed to Jews as a whole actually did not pertain to all Jews: “In leading administrative positions only two Jews can be found at all, and those two did distinguish themselves”¹⁹. *Nota bene*: these investigations did not refer to Jews from Poland but to Austro–Hungarian occupation personnel.

Apart from that, Austro–Hungarian occupiers often distanced themselves from Polish complaints that they considered exaggerated — thus portraying themselves as objective observers, who neutrally diagnosed true grievances, whilst they characterized antisemitism as primitive. This in turn included a denigration of Poles, as the occupiers did not consider themselves as antisemitic. In more than one case local Poles and Jews were thus considered equally unreliable or as susceptible to corruption²⁰, even if complaints mostly focused just on Jews.

The implicit disparagement of their own colleagues, which can be found in the documents much more often than that of Polish Jews, was a political statement towards the Poles: their antisemitism was considered in a way normal and unchangeable. It seemed necessary to make concessions to the locals and to approve this sentiment to convince them of the advantages of Austro–Hungarian rule. In this sense it seemed reasonable not to use Jews for any economy–related tasks: “It has to be made clear towards the public, that the philo–Semitic trend has come to an end once and for all”²¹.

In the German Generalgouvernement in Warsaw antisemitism existed too. Until now, it has attracted considerably greater attention than that in the Austro–Hungarian zone of occupation. However, although there were similarities, conditions differed in important aspects. In general, the occupiers shared the idea of Poles being antisemitic — the Dual Monarchy thus deciding to ally itself with the majority sentiment — with their own attitudes mixing with the perceived attitudes of the locals. Germany followed a course eventually leading to an equal treatment

¹⁷ DLA, Nachlass Andrian / 78.2 [formerly: 3957]. Minutes of a meeting between the Army High Command and the Foreign Ministry on 3.6.1916, dated 5.6.1916.

¹⁸ P.J. Weindling, *Epidemics and genocide in Eastern Europe 1890–1945*, Oxford 2000, p. 103f.

¹⁹ DLA, Nachlass Andrian / 78.2 [formerly: 3957]. Minutes of a meeting between the Army High Command and the Foreign Ministry on 3.6.1916, dated 5.6.1916.

²⁰ ÖStA HHStA, PA I, Liasse Krieg 56 h,i / 1032. Honning to Czernin, 24.11.1917.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

of Jews and gradually granting them full rights. Yet, this approach was driven by a pedagogical impetus that can be demonstrated by the example of communal voting as viewed by Hans von Beseler, the German Governor–General. The newly established system was intended to teach Jews — as minority — that they had “to pay attention to Polish sentiments”²². The curial election system introduced by the Germans forced them to do so, as it divided male citizens into six voting registers according to their profession. “As the vast majority of Jews in fact are merchants, Jewish domination in other curiae is impossible. This is unavoidable due to the conditions in Poland and does not mean differentiating Jews for religious reasons, but results from the link to how Jews actually behave, from which each Jew can liberate himself”²³.

With this antisemitic undertone the occupiers were able to consider the wishes of the Polish majority and at the same time teach it a lesson in its “immoderateness” because the curia system favored the wealthy, many of whom were Jews. Consequently, in the towns Siedlce and Będzin communal elections actually resulted in a Jewish majority. In Beseler’s words: “Although such Jewish majorities are undesirable, they are nevertheless not to be objected to [...] as they have an educational influence on Poles by strengthening their contact with reality and at the same time show them that they must use all their power if they want to stand their ground in the cities”²⁴. Basically applicable was the assessment of Leopold von Andrian, who judged the curia system as follows: It discriminated against the Jews and thus was “more Polonophile than any Polish nationalist might have wished for”²⁵. As in the election Polish candidates sometimes lost against Jewish ones, this indicates against Andrian’s comment — but in his mind only showed that Poles did not really understand the “Jewish problem”.

This idea of educating Jews to become “normal” citizens — which of course is connoted with antisemitism — was widespread at that time²⁶. Clearly, it was derived from images the occupiers had in mind from home. In Germany, Beseler had met mostly assimilated Jews, often even baptized, who in the end were very “German” and patriotic. The Austrians, and with them Andrian, had dealt with “Eastern” Jews much more already prior to the war; they could meet them in Galicia, often also in Vienna, and for sure Andrian had seen them during his stay in Poland. Chassidism and the archetypical caftans, caps and beards were something

²² Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Warsaw (AGAD), 532/9. “Halbjahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General–Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. Oktober 1916 bis zum 31. März 1917”.

²³ AGAD, 352/8. 6. (8.) “Vierteljahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General–Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. Oktober 1916 bis zum 31. Dezember 1916”.

²⁴ AGAD, 532/9. “Halbjahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General–Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. Oktober 1916 bis zum 31. März 1917”.

²⁵ DLA, Nachlass Andrian / 78.2 [alt: 3287]. Andrian to Burian, 14.5.1916.

²⁶ P. M a c l e a n, *Control and Cleanliness*, p. 52.

known — and it was known that these Jews were no “proper” citizens like those in Germany. So whilst the anti-Semitism of the Germans and of Beseler was, so to speak, optimistic because it allowed Jews to alter themselves, this was much less widespread among Austrians. Andrian is a clear example for this perception, for him Jews were a lost cause. In Germany, the image of the Eastern Jew that was so devastatingly influential in World War II, became popular only through the masses of soldiers returning from the Eastern front after 1918. In a way, the Austro-Hungarian interpretation was adopted, and then of course radicalized.

This perception also played a role when Jewish labor was to be used. The German authorities were indeed interested to lure as many men as possible to the Reich — mainly as farm hands during the harvest — but those should be only Poles because Jews were generally considered weak and unsuitable for heavier tasks. In a back and forth between necessities of war and prejudices the idea of education was ever present, because after all this would grant Jews the chance to become capable workers²⁷.

Nevertheless, despite a certain policy of Jewish emancipation, the Generalgouvernement Warsaw was not interested in “trying to regulate the extremely intricate and difficult Jewish question”. Already in 1915, this seemed too complicated and possible only against increased resistance by Poles. During the war restlessness and agitation had to be avoided by all means²⁸. At the same time, the Germans subscribed to Enlightenment thought and the concept of citizenship, to which all members of society should contribute. In November 1916 they therefore enacted a “Jewish Statute” which defined a religious community in public law and focused on the rights and obligations of this community and its local branches²⁹. In addition, the Germans organized conferences of rabbis that were instructed on the importance of “often neglected pastoral care and social assistance activities”. At the same time they emphasized — in general correctly — that they had respected “the strictly orthodox views of the majority of Polish Jewry [...]”³⁰. Of course this attitude was arrogant, but it was a quite moderate form of antisemitism, limited mainly to instructions.

²⁷ L. Heid, *Maloche — nicht Mildtätigkeit: Ostjüdische Arbeiter in Deutschland 1914–1923*, Hildesheim 1995, p. 139–145.

²⁸ AGAD, 352 / “1. Bericht über die Entwicklung der Verwaltung des Generalgouvernements Warschau”, 23.10.1915.

²⁹ *Handbuch für das Generalgouvernement Warschau*, ed. O. Palandt, E. Ginschel, Warschau 1917, p. 384–396. “Verordnung die Organisation der jüdischen Religionsgesellschaft im Generalgouvernement Warschau betreffend”, 1.11.1916. Andrian criticised these measures, as they had “become known in Polish political circles and understandably had created much reluctance”. ÖStA HHStA, PA I, Liasse Krieg 56m–n / 1035. Andrian to Foreign Ministry, 8.11.1916.

³⁰ AGAD, 352 / 7. “5. (7.) Vierteljahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General-Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. Juli 1916 bis zum 30. September 1916”.

Hans von Beseler was of the opinion that the Jews were to be “enhanced”, but not necessarily to be made into Poles. Among some of them he observed “in the language the foundations of higher culture [...]”; Beseler wanted to “gradually develop out of the Yiddish–German school an exclusively German school, thus introducing them to German culture, which is far superior to the witty but, in terms of general education values, backward Polish one. [...] The education of the Jewish national group in the sense of German culture [...] will be of paramount importance”³¹. This was the kind of “Germanization” that Warsaw’s General Governor envisaged — and with which he could hardly distance himself more from later Nazi ideas³². For him, assimilation meant the merging of Jews into German culture, because Jews were closer to it than were Poles.

However, Beseler was no philosemite. Even if he imagined a long-term assimilation of Jews, the Governor–General saw Polish Jewry as being very opportunistic and simply opting for the side from which they believed themselves gaining the greatest advantage — which in turn made them ungrateful for not heartily appreciating German policies³³. In private letters to his wife, Beseler was even more pronounced and chose words that differed from his official statements: He regarded Jews as “a squalid, miserable people, whose rebirth will be long in coming”³⁴. This should not come as a surprise, as antisemitism was widespread among the German military³⁵ — and Beseler was a professional soldier.

He had been born in 1850 as the son of the prominent jurist and member of the Prussian Herrenhaus (House of Lords), Georg Beseler; his brother was Max von Beseler, from 1905 until 1917 Prussian Justice Minister and also a member of the Herrenhaus, and who in 1917 received the title of ‘von’. Hans von Beseler had already received this honor in 1904, as a kind of compensation for becoming not chief of the Prussian General Staff but only General Inspector of Fortresses. In 1911

³¹ Bundesarchiv–Militärarchiv, Freiburg (BAMA), N 30 / 9. “Immediatbericht” by Beseler, 23.1.1916.

³² There existed the idea of a German border strip in Poland, but this was not an idea of Germanization, but of defense against Russia: A. Watson, “Unheard-of Brutality”. *Russian Atrocities against Civilians in East Prussia, 1914–1915*, “The Journal of Modern History”, vol. LXXXIV, 2014, No 4, p. 780–825. For the rather different idea of a German East as an area of almost colonial dominance cf. H.C. Meyer, *Drang nach Osten: Fortunes of a slogan-concept in German–Slavic relations, 1849–1990*, Bern 1996; V.G. Liulevicius, *The German myth of the East: 1800 to the present*, Oxford 2009. Cf. also W. Wippermann, *Der “deutsche Drang nach Osten”: Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes*, Darmstadt 1981; idem, *Die Deutschen und der Osten: Feindbild und Traumland*, Darmstadt 2007.

³³ BAMA, N 30 / 15. Minutes of a meeting at the Foreign Office, 3.11.1917.

³⁴ BAMA, N 30 / 53. Beseler to his wife, 16.10.1915.

³⁵ J. Matthäus, ‘*Vorboten des Holocaust? Deutschland und die litauischen Juden während des Ersten Weltkriegs*’, [in:] *Judenmord in Litauen. Studien und Dokumente*, ed. W. Benz, M. Neiss, Metropol, Berlin 1999, p. 35–50, here 49.

he took leave, but in 1914 was reactivated into military service. As a commanding general he distinguished himself by conquering the fortresses of Antwerp and Nowogeorgiewsk, the latter 20 miles north–west of Warsaw and soon to be known again by its Polish name Modlin. This victory cleared the path for the conquest of all of Russian Poland and was the main reason Beseler was named Governor General on 26 August 1915 and officiated until the end of the war — although he did not even speak Polish.

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Already prior to the war the estimates of the Polish majorities' attitude towards the two Empires were of great importance for Vienna and Berlin, as their transnational connections were of significant relevance for domestic policy. Nevertheless, even Andrian was unable to report much positive news in this regard; in the years leading up to the First World War he considered the mood to be hardly favourable towards the Austrians, and put any positive attitudes down to utilitarian motives. In 1912 he wrote from Warsaw: "In the end, every Pole — regardless of his status and political affiliation — will always be a total nationalist, which means that among the overall political considerations he is only interested in the fate of the Polish nation, its re–creation, unification and possible consolidation. Some groups now do hope to get this from our Kaiser and from Austria, and in this hope rests on their austrophilia"³⁶.

Due to his comprehensive dealings with Poland, his contacts and also his considerable efforts to learn the Polish language, within the space of just a few years, Adrian had become an expert on Polish issues, which he always viewed within the context of imperial politics. Considering the standing and the freedom that he enjoyed in Warsaw, it is reasonable to assume that his assessments must have been able to find a wide consensus within the Austro–Hungarian Foreign Service. Together with Austro–Hungarian officers Adrian promoted leniency only when affordable, that is when genuine political interests were not endangered³⁷. A hard hand seemed to be necessary in any case, as concessions would be viewed as weakness — at least this is what Vienna feared. Andrian conceded that the Russians had been quite successful with this kind of tactics, as they had ruled without many difficulties. Yet any comparison of the three partition powers should be in favor of the Dual Monarchy, as Prussian bureaucracy and Germanisation were daunting and Czarist rule inefficient and undermined "due to corruption especially among the lower ranks of its government bodies"³⁸.

³⁶ DLA Marbach, Nachlass Andrian / 78.2 [formerly: 3830]. Andrian to Berchtold, 7.12.1912.

³⁷ AGAD, 312 / 78, Bl. 185–191. "Bericht des Gm. Ebenhöf über die Wahrnehmungen im besetzten Russisch–Polen", 29.12.1916.

³⁸ Andrian to Berchtold, 6.6.1914, in: *Leopold von Andrian (1875–1951)*, p. 224–228.

This last quotation from June 1914 almost reads like a prophecy for an upcoming Austro–Hungarian occupation. Andrian’s assessment was critical towards Austro–Hungarian ambitions, too: In his opinion, Poles would always react very cautiously towards Habsburg courting not only for economic and ethnic reasons, but especially because they feared St. Petersburg more than Vienna. Their worst nightmare, however, would be that “in case of a victorious Austro–German war against Russia, due to the military dominance of the Germans, the lion’s share of the ceded parts of Poland would come under Prussian rule. That would be seen as the biggest national tragedy and as a ‘fourth partition of Poland’”³⁹.

Andrian’s judgements would have remained hypothetical and of minor significance, had the First World War not broken out in the summer of 1914. Now ideas on politics towards Poles in Russia would be put to a test. And the perceptions of the Austro–Hungarian rulers in Russian Poland hardly differed from what their envoy had written in Warsaw some months previously. It is quite obvious that the diplomatic service and the officers’ corps of the Dual Monarchy shared a common sphere of experience — which resulted in similar patterns of interpretation. Poles from Galicia served only partially as an image for those from the Lublin Military Government. Official reports observed a “deeply rooted passivity” among the “wary peasant population”, which was troublesome particularly after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland on 5 November 1916. With the new allies, “too much ruthlessness and hardship during the requisitioning” of resources had to be avoided, and thus the upbringing deteriorated⁴⁰. Just like Andrian, who had written on the necessity of a hard fist, the occupiers now reported the Poles’ unwillingness to contribute to the Central Powers’ war efforts. In their eyes, the locals were a lazy, lethargic and backward people that in the end only responded when methods were applied that the Russians already had used⁴¹.

Furthermore, Poles were seen as ungrateful for their liberation from the Russian yoke, because they rejected requisitioning — although “according to a consensus among all experts” this “did by no means reach the extents like in some parts of the Dual Monarchy; there can be no doubt that one lives significantly better here than at home”⁴². These biases were multi-layered, as ostensive accolade came with antisemitism: Jews were not considered to be lazy and sluggish, but born traders. The county commander of Sandomierz attributed the “outstanding” provisioning of his city mostly to the fact that he cooperated with Jews and not with Poles: the

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ ÖStA, Kriegsarchiv, AOK–Quartiermeister–Abteilung, Referenten–Faszikel / 2590. “Übersicht über die bisherige wirtschaftliche Ausnutzung der okkupierten Gebiete von Polen, Serbien und Montenegro”, AOK–Quartiermeisterabteilung, 22.12.1916.

⁴¹ AGAD, 312 / 78, Bl. 185–191. “Bericht des Gm. Ebenhöf über die Wahrnehmungen im besetzten Russisch–Polen”, 29.12.1916.

⁴² ÖStA, HHStA, PA I / 56a/1,2 / 1011. “Bericht Nr. 98 des Gesandten des Außenministeriums beim MGL”, 10.9.1917.

latter “would never reach the business routine of Jews and in this respect in many ways unfortunately are quite passive”⁴³. Elsewhere, complaints were raised about the simultaneous “presumptuous” attitude of Polish institutions, which officially collaborated with the occupiers and always demanded a leading role. However, the Austro–Hungarian officials were not willing to concede this prerogative, because from a psychological point of view one should not limit one’s own competences, as this would damage the standing of the administration⁴⁴.

Despite all these prejudices it was absolutely clear that Poland could be treated not as occupied enemy territory, but instead with consideration and as a potential ally. Austria–Hungary always pointed to the example of its rule in Galicia and depicted Prussia as horror. But self–administration was not an option, and in 1915 Leopold von Andrian characterized it as being in “stark contrast to the [Russian] regime so far and to the deeply rooted habits of the population”⁴⁵. As a passionate monarchist and supporter of Austro–Hungarian rule in Eastern Europe, Andrian felt that autonomy would be “an abrupt contrast to the previous regime and to the deeply rooted habits of the population”, and thus advised against such liberties⁴⁶.

This hypocrisy contrasted with insightful reflections and was influenced by a learning process — for example, when in 1917 Andrian warned that Congress Poland should not be seen only against the background of the positive relations in Galicia. At that time, he saw no homogenous society, but quite the opposite: differing, in part competing stakeholders, which were by no means automatically austrophile just because they refused German or Russian rule. Still, Andrian was convinced that Polish political parties would at any time prefer the way that offered the most chances for a national unity and independence. If this was to happen via Austria–Hungary, first and foremost one had to act consequently and get rid of outdated ideas of a quasi–natural bond between Poland and the Habsburg Empire⁴⁷.

Accordingly, in the Lublin government sympathies towards Poles were not very pronounced, but the occupiers still saw Jews as the greater of two evils and had less prejudices towards the Catholic population. Yet, the situation in Congress Poland was different from the accepted and privileged position Poles enjoyed in Galicia. The Austrians perceived a cultural gradient and were especially displeased because they were not warmly welcomed. The eagerness for independence did not match the expected gratitude for the sacrifices they had made to conquer — and liberate — the country⁴⁸.

⁴³ AGAD, 312 / 205, Bl. 97–100. Kreiskommando Sandomierz, 1.6.1916.

⁴⁴ AGAD, 312 / 215, Bl. 523 f. Kreiskommando Jędrzejów to Militärgeneralgouvernement Lublin, 16.8.1916.

⁴⁵ ÖStA, HHStA, PA I, Liasse Krieg 11a — Polen / 918. Andrian to Burián, 23.6.1915.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ DLA Marbach, Nachlass Andrian / 78.2.82 [formerly: 3992]. “Rückschau auf die Tätigkeit in Warschau”, February 1917.

⁴⁸ S. L e h n s t a e d t, *Der koloniale Blick? Polen und Juden in der Wahrnehmung der Mittelmächte*,

Andrian's actions and argumentation reveal him as an avid proponent of Austro–Hungarian interests who was interested in real Polish autonomy merely for tactical reasons. In this regard, his opinions were consistent with those of the German occupying forces, for whom the independence of the locals was relevant only if it served their own benefit. Both empires competed for Polish support and were well aware of their respective policies — which in turn they tried to sabotage. This is why Governor General Hans von Beseler commented on a suggestion by Andrian to entrust the puppet Polish State Council not only with the administration of justice and schools but also with that of farming, mining and public works, in a marginal note simply with the word “nonsense!”⁴⁹.

Beseler was not a diplomat like Andrian, and neither was he an expert on Poland. However, already in 1892, he had travelled through Russian–Poland for a study trip for the German General Staff. This had led him to the conclusion that in case of a war, the local population might be useful for the German army command, but probably unreliable allies for German politics⁵⁰. On the one hand, the years before 1914 had seen a hardening of Prussian policies towards Poles; on the other, in Russia the revolution of 1905 brought some easing. It is not clear in how far Beseler reflected these changes in his views. Yet in his first months in office in Warsaw he wrote quite positively about Poles. He praised their commitment to reconstruction and their patriotism, yet he also reported that this was hardly based on actual experience, as the Russians had rejected any form of cooperation and instead had installed a “paternalistic system”; at the same time, Poles would tend to overly politicize economic and communal problems⁵¹. This halfway positive evaluation was based on Beseler's self–perception as an explicitly apolitical man, who wanted to guarantee prosperity and order but did not consider processes of political negotiation as necessary.

Beseler saw Poland's “physical, mental and political development” in the previous century as “rudimentary” due to “Russian mismanagement”⁵². At the same time he was well aware how sweeping his judgement was, which is why he rarely wrote about “the” Poles, because like Andrian he observed a “deep division between the different layers of the population”. They had adapted themselves to St. Petersburg's rule — the lax, corrupt administration had opened up possibilities which under German governance in 1916 no longer existed — and which they

[in:] *Jenseits des Schützengrabens. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Osten: Erfahrung — Wahrnehmung — Kontext*, ed. B. Bachinger, W. Dornik, Innsbruck 2013, p. 391–410, here 404.

⁴⁹ Bundesarchiv–Militärarchiv Freiburg, Nachlass Hans von Beseler (N 30) / 14. Telegram of the Reich Chancellor to Beseler, 9.5.1917. At this time, Andrian was already back in Vienna as an advisor for Poland (see below).

⁵⁰ F. Hartung, *Graf von Hutten–Czapski*, “Historische Zeitschrift”, 1936, p. 548–559, here 557.

⁵¹ AGAD, 532 / 4. 2. (4.) “Vierteljahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General–Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. Oktober 1915 bis zum 31. Dezember 1915”.

⁵² BAMA, N 30 / 9. “Immediatbericht” by Beseler, 23.1.1916.

now bitterly missed⁵³. Already in January 1916 Beseler had rejected the popular desire for full independence: “Poland bases her claims upon historical incidents and actual or alleged injuries in the past; nobody can demand from us that we take this into consideration”. The country was now no longer “entitled to see its national and political wishes being completely fulfilled. Despite its vitality and its ability to learn and to develop, it will never again be called to an autonomous, let alone decisive role in the great struggle of the modern world of states; arguably, it can be a valuable aide for Western culture against the rigid and uninspired lack of culture (*Unkultur*) of the East. It has to come to understand that its intellectual and material interests will receive nourishment only from the West, but never from the East”⁵⁴.

It is remarkable that Beseler did not see Poles as being part of the “unculture of the East”, but quite the contrary as a bulwark against it. He thus attributed to them positive features and considered them — despite using the term “folk culture” [*Volkstum*] — to be a nation, and saw their culture as being influenced from the West. As a kind of transition state between East and West — or better a buffer state between three empires — it might after all only play a junior role under the Central Powers’ dominance. Like other observers⁵⁵, Beseler repeatedly criticised Polish nationalism, which he considered to be arrogant; given the position of Poland as an occupied country, many claims for sovereignty and self-determination in his eyes were simply unrealistic and hyperbole⁵⁶.

In official reports and in letters to his wife Beseler emphasised again and again just how much Poland had suffered under Czarist rule. In the first years of the war he pitied “the people that certainly is talented and has lovely qualities”⁵⁷. In the course of the occupation Beseler’s assessment changed as his anger about the political complications involved in the “Polish Question” grew, anger which also was due to the underhand and tactical maneuvering of the local elites. His attitude towards the country became increasingly negative, and the more Beseler’s ambitions crumbled, the more embittered he became. What had been, at least initially, partial openness towards the country and its people diminished, whilst his prejudices against the Catholic Church and Catholics emerged. Like the head of Warsaw’s civil administration, Wolfgang von Kries, Beseler was a deeply Protestant man with close relations to the Hohenzollern court chaplain Ernst Dryander⁵⁸.

⁵³ Ibidem. See also BAMA, N 30 / 53. Beseler to his wife, 16.10.1915.

⁵⁴ BAMA, N 30 / 9. “Immediatbericht” by Beseler, 23.1.1916.

⁵⁵ Kurt Riezler: *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, ed. K.D. Erdmann, Göttingen 2008, p. 313. Tagebucheintrag vom 29.10.1915, Reise von Warschau nach Berlin.

⁵⁶ BAMA, N 30 / 53. Beseler to his wife, 16.10.1915.

⁵⁷ BAMA, N 30 / 53. Beseler to his wife, 1.10.1915.

⁵⁸ A. Stempin, *Deutsche Besatzungsmacht und Zivilbevölkerung in Polen im Ersten Weltkrieg. Polen, Juden und Deutsche im Vergleich*, [in:] *Besetzt, interniert, deportiert. Der Erste Weltkrieg*

In 1917 at the latest Beseler consistently voiced complaints about the “country of unlimited troubles”⁵⁹. Thus, guilt for an occupation that did not meet expectations of resources to be delivered and soldiers to be recruited was transferred from himself to the Poles. The Governor General increasingly felt he was in a “witches’ cauldron” of dog–eat–dog and constant intrigue⁶⁰. This is why he insinuated that the population had no interest in the Central Powers’ war efforts and, in contrast to the altruistic and helpful Germans, were always and only looking for their own benefit. In the course of these reflexions he also changed the national attributes he ascribed to the Poles, attributes that now were much more negative. Beseler wrote for instance of the “in parts quite regressive culture” and the necessary enhancement of the country⁶¹. Where, earlier on, he had stressed positive characteristics, he now emphasised negative ones and described the country as backward, hardly modern and unorganised. By contrast, this meant that the Germans and he himself were above all more highly developed and capable of improvement⁶². It seemed to be necessary to rule “with a hard hand and a clear will”, since peasants for instance had a “natural laziness and passivity”⁶³.

Still, Beseler did not speak of racial attributes, as this kind of thought was alien to him and his leadership cadres, all of which came from the conservative elites of the Kaiserreich. One’s own hubris, however, was attributed to the Poles, who “constantly looked down with contempt upon the Russians, and often with arrogance upon other nations”. This again was largely anger at the ingratitude of the Poles for all the alleged German sacrifices: the locals “only rarely had a deep understanding of the German culture of mind”⁶⁴. And when dealing with other ethnic groups like Ukrainians, Belarussians or Jews they would present themselves as “rather cruel and ruthless brutal persons”, who had “never quite understood how to win over other people, despite always babbling on about their great tolerance”⁶⁵. The same was of course true also for the German occupation, and it clearly demonstrates that in the end, Beseler had not understood the ethnic situation in Poland. To a lesser degree, this is even true for Andrian, and links the attitude towards Poles with the one towards Jews: In the occupiers’ eyes, Poles still had to learn how to deal with ethnic ideas if they wanted to become a “proper” state — of course from Germany or Austria Hungary.

und die deutsche, jüdische, polnische und ukrainische Zivilbevölkerung im östlichen Europa, ed. A. E i s f e l d, G. H a u s m a n n, D. N e u t a t z, Essen 2013, p. 153–172, here 160.

⁵⁹ Deutsche Warschauer Zeitung, No. 262, 23.9.1917: “Empfang deutscher Reichstagsabgeordneter durch Generalgouverneur von Beseler”.

⁶⁰ BAMA, N 30 / 53. Beseler to his wife, 26.3.1916.

⁶¹ BAMA, N 30 / 56. Beseler to his wife, 11.8.1918.

⁶² A. S t e m p i n, *Deutsche Besatzungsmacht und Zivilbevölkerung*, p. 163.

⁶³ AGAD, 532 / 10. “Halbjahrsbericht des Verwaltungschefs bei dem General–Gouvernement Warschau für die Zeit vom 1. April 1917 bis 30. September 1917”.

⁶⁴ *Zwei Jahre deutscher Arbeit im Generalgouvernement Warschau*, Berlin 1917, p. 6.

⁶⁵ BAMA, N 30 / 56. Brief Beselers an die Frau, 25.1.1918.

The German high-handedness, often combined with missing empathy and a lack of understanding for Polish wishes, could be observed again and again in assessments of the local elites, which officially were considered to be partners. For instance in December 1916 Beseler commented about Józef Piłsudski, who at that time was commander of the Polish Legions that were to fight side by side with the Germans against the Czarist army: “He is not ungifted, personally certainly honest, but insubordinate and probably lacking serious insight military amateur and demagogue has a virtually hypnotic influence on Polish circles and, as the creator of the Legions, is admired and adored as a national saint”⁶⁶.

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About fifteen years ago Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius published a widely read study on the “War Land on the Eastern Front”⁶⁷. His results may be valid for Ober Ost, but this territory was not representative of occupied Eastern Europe; it was an exception⁶⁸. The start of a radicalization which began in 1914 and led eventually to the Holocaust⁶⁹ cannot be observed in occupied Poland – in neither its German nor its Austro–Hungarian part. There was no single perspective on the occupied nor were conclusions derived directly from experience. Thinking in racial categories occurred only in exceptional cases, even if both occupiers considered themselves as part of culturally and militarily superior civilizations.

The dynamic and changing perception of the locals by Germany and Austria–Hungary — as expressed here exemplarily by Leopold von Andrian and Hans von Beseler — had much in common. Both characterized Poles as hopeless nationalists and antisemites; this characterization may have been applicable, but it also perpetuated their own sense of superiority as they did not ascribe these attributes to themselves. Apart from that, Andrian differentiated much more clearly between Poles and Jews than the Germans did. This was symptomatic of the antisemitism of the Habsburg Empire, which also was strongly directed against its own personnel and was a sign of the weaker internal cohesion in the empire. The same was

⁶⁶ BA Berlin, R 1501 / 119710, Bl. 16–24. “Immediatbericht” by Beseler, 20.12.1916.

⁶⁷ V.G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Identity in World War I*, Cambridge 2000. See also idem, *Von “Ober Ost” nach “Ostland”?*, [in:] *Die vergessene Front. Der Osten 1914/15. Ereignis — Wirkung — Nachwirkung*, ed. G.P. Groß, Paderborn 2006, p. 295–310.

⁶⁸ Vgl. für differenzierende Ergebnisse z.B. *Die Ukraine zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Fremdherrschaft 1917–22*, ed. W. Dornik, et al., Graz 2011.

⁶⁹ V.G. Liulevicius, *Von “Ober Ost” nach “Ostland”?*, p. 295f. See also J. Zimmerer, *Die Geburt des “Ostlandes” aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus. Die nationalsozialistische Eroberungs- und Beherrschungspolitik in (post-)kolonialer Perspektive*, “Sozial.Geschichte”, 2004, p. 10–43. This was criticised most prominently by R. Gerwarth, and S. Malinowski (*Der Holocaust als “kolonialer Genozid”? Europäische Kolonialgewalt und nationalsozialistischer Vernichtungskrieg, “Geschichte und Gesellschaft”*, vol. XXXIII, 2007, p. 439–66).

not apparent in the Warsaw Generalgouvernement. There, Poles and Jews were considered to be similarly backward, with Jews more likely to become allies and to be “Germanisable”. As Oded Heilbronner recently pointed out, the Kaiserreich had developed social codes that often were directed more against Catholics and Poles than against Jews⁷⁰. In Austria–Hungary, Andrian and his compatriots saw Poles much more positively than Jews; Vienna’s envoy even propagated discriminating against the latter in order to win over the former.

Already before 1914 Andrian was Vienna’s expert on Poland and must be considered the most important figure in the foreign service concerning this issue. Via the foreign ministers Burián and Czernin he directly influenced occupation politics — and the relations with their German ally. Especially in Warsaw this influence can be seen indirectly through Beseler’s eyes. More than once Beseler complained about the Austrian emissary and his politics, and in early 1916 he began working to have him replaced. This was achieved by the end of the year via the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, as the Austro–Hungarian ambassador there, Gottfried von Hohenlohe, considered Andrian’s attitude to be counterproductive; Hohenlohe had also noticed how tendentious Andrian’s sources were, mostly being from conservative–clerical sections of society⁷¹. Hans von Beseler commented on Andrian’s exit on 9 January 1917: “good that he is gone”⁷². Andrian’s successor was Stephan von Ugron, who until then had been the advisor on Polish affairs at the Foreign Ministry and with whom Andrian now switched places, working subsequently on his area of expertise from Vienna. This again shows the degree to which he was indispensable to the Foreign Ministry.

Having returned to Vienna, Andrian wrote a comprehensive concluding report on his activities in Warsaw which was intended to represent a culmination of his Poland expertise⁷³. The self–justifying character of this work cannot be overlooked, and Andrian emphasised repeatedly how much more positive the situation would have been for Vienna in 1917 if his recommendations stretching back to the period before the war had “been accepted and put into practice not only by the Foreign Ministry, but also by the Habsburg government”⁷⁴. He also claimed that the only reason for his removal from his post in Warsaw was the animosity towards him

⁷⁰ O. Heilbronner, *Von der Peripherie ins Zentrum. Die regionale Bedeutung des Antisemitismus in der modernen deutschen Geschichte*, “Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft”, vol. LXI, 2013, p. 404–424, here 410f.

⁷¹ U. Prutsch, *Historisches Gedächtnis*, p. 83.

⁷² BAMA, N 30/2. Hans von Beseler, *Diary*, 9.1.1917.

⁷³ Cf. also his text from 30.12.1916 in: H. Lemke, *Die deutsche Polenpolitik 1914 bis 1916 in der Sicht eines österreichisch–ungarischen Diplomaten*, “Jahrbuch für Geschichte der UdSSR und der volksdemokratischen Länder Europas”, vol. VII, 1963, p. 495–504.

⁷⁴ DLA Marbach, *Nachlass Andrian / 78.2.82* [formerly: 3992]. “Rückschau auf die Tätigkeit in Warschau”, February 1917.

within the German Foreign Ministry and within the occupation authorities in Warsaw due to his vision and clear-sightedness⁷⁵.

When war broke out, neither Germany nor Austria–Hungary had a precise idea of the complex national and ethnic interrelations in Poland. Thus, they did not claim to view the interests of all groups in a differentiated way — or even to meet them. Rather they simply were convinced that the whole population would welcome them as liberators from the Russian yoke⁷⁶. At the same time, both occupiers came from empires that quite clearly had pursued specific policies in Galicia and Western Prussia when it came to national issues: To distinguish between ethnicities had been — in quite dissimilar ways — fundamental, and in accordance to imperial action elsewhere the different population groups were, each in a specific way, subject to their empires.

The Central Powers started observing and assessing Poland’s inhabitants within this known framework. Hans von Beseler noted in January 1916 that the approaches in the two General Governments were not as fundamentally different as had been the prior approaches of the empires: Austria–Hungary had “developed Galicia as a solely Polish territory”, whilst Prussia had tried “if not to Germanize its Poles, at least to incorporate them fully into the German state society and to infuse them with German intellectual and economic culture”⁷⁷. In short, Beseler thus had identified the differences between the politics of the two occupying powers. Yet, for the occupied territory, which he labelled as Polish, he referred to certain ethnic minorities and mentioned particularly the high number of Jews.

As Beseler was certain that Jews had to “comply without reserve, but self-evidently as equal citizens” with a Polish state⁷⁸, he first and foremost aimed at equality of treatment. Arkadiusz Stempin has characterized this policy as “pragmatic reluctance”, because German ideas of a just administration forbade favoring one ethnic group over another — which applied even to the German minority⁷⁹. In this respect, Warsaw avoided taking determined steps onto the complex terrain of national rivalries; this most certainly would have evoked trouble, which due to the unclear future of the country prior to the proclamation of the Kingdom on 5 November 1916 seemed unnecessary⁸⁰.

The same was true for the Habsburg zone of occupation. When the historian and field rabbi Meir Bałaban was sent to Lublin as a consultant for Jewish affairs in January 1917, he was highly critical of the education politics for Jews and attested to considerable ignorance with regard to Jewish interests and needs⁸¹. At the same

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ P. Maclean, *Control and Cleanliness*, 50.

⁷⁷ BAMA, N30 / 9. “Immediatbericht” by Beseler, 23.1.1916.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ A. Stempin, *Deutsche Besatzungsmacht und Zivilbevölkerung*, p. 155.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ F.M. Schuster, *Zwischen allen Fronten: Osteuropäische Juden während des Ersten Weltkrieges (1914–1919)*, Köln 2004, p. 363f.

time, like Julius Berger in Generalgouvernement Warsaw, he wanted to introduce the Jews in Congress Poland to the advantages of enlightened rule and modern citizenship. Austria–Hungary should elevate them from the “gloomy alleys, from the mud of the ghetto and from the depression of the middle ages”: in this war, one could finally “raze the walls of the last ghettos”⁸².

In the end, for Austria–Hungary it was especially the Ukrainian (Ruthenian) minority that became politically relevant. In the Military Generalgouvernement in Lublin, the problematical rivalry of Ukrainians and Poles — already encountered in Galicia — continued, even if the authorities in the crown land were much more favorable to the latter. The envisaged cession of the counties Chełm and Hrubieszów to Ukraine, with which a peace treaty had been negotiated in February 1918, led to huge protests and riots throughout the Polish territories⁸³. However, in Vienna the planned transfer was interpreted only as a continuation of the nationality politics in Galicia that privileged the dominant ethnic group — and in these two counties that group was Ukrainians. Hans von Beseler regarded things in a much more realistic manner and considered the ceding of these territories as a fourth partition of Poland; he regarded this as undermining all efforts to get along with the Poles⁸⁴.

This rather reluctant approach of the occupiers is remarkable, because their leading personnel were by no means free from antisemitism and prejudices against Poles. However, they did not formulate recommendations — let alone instructions for action — on the basis of these stereotypes. The Generalgouvernement in Warsaw took deliberate care not to discriminate against a national group. Concepts of social order were limited rather pragmatically to securing and facilitating German rule — which did not imply a rearrangement of ethnic relations. Even the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland in November 1916 did not change this. A bit later, however, Beseler abandoned this principle of neutrality in favor of the German minority, sponsored their legal status and guaranteed them autonomous schooling⁸⁵. Nevertheless, this did not imply primacy over Poles; it was much more about preserving some minority privileges.

Beseler even recommended in Berlin the resettlement of Germans from the Generalgouvernement to the Reich. This, however, was to be conducted on a voluntary basis, and he did not consider it opportune to weaken small German villages by resettling only some of their inhabitants because this would hasten

⁸² M. B a l a b a n, *Die Judenstadt von Lublin*, Lublin, 2012 (reprint of the first edition from 1919), p. 5f.

⁸³ J. C a b a j, *Spółczesność guberni chełmskiej pod okupacją niemiecką i austriacką w latach I wojny światowej*, Siedlce 2006, p. 160–183; K. K i n d l e r, *Die Cholmer Frage 1905–1918*, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 304–311. For the unrest in Warsaw cf. M. P o l s a k i e w i c z, *Spezifika deutscher Besatzungspolitik in Warschau 1914–1916*, “Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa–Forschung”, vol. LVIII, 2009, p. 501–37, here 534f.

⁸⁴ R. M. S p ä t, *Für eine gemeinsame deutsch–polnische Zukunft?*, p. 490–492.

⁸⁵ A. S t e m p i n, *Deutsche Besatzungsmacht und Zivilbevölkerung*, p. 169.

assimilation. In this respect, his nationality policies did not aim at ethnic diversity, but neither did they imply discrimination or even Germanisation. Given the huge numerical dominance of Poles and the weakness of the German minority, Warsaw hardly tried to strengthen the latter. Beseler's recommendation was clear-cut: "Poland is too heavily populated for it be considered as a territory for settlers"⁸⁶.

Can these perceptions be described as a colonial discourse? Shelley Baranowski writes in reliance on Liulevicuis: "Rather than looking upon the district as composed of peoples with complex histories and cultures, albeit underdeveloped ones, who could be manipulated into submitting to German benevolence, the east evolved in German eyes into a project with the potential for Realizing the Pan German vision of a vast space ripe he continued civilizing effects of Germanism"⁸⁷. The empirical research on the Kingdom of Poland shows little that allows such a view⁸⁸.

The planned extensive exploitation of the country led to a dichotomy in the ways the occupation developed⁸⁹, and of course this was driven by the highly imperialist intention at very least to integrate Poland permanently into one's own sphere of rule. Yet, German nationality politics aimed at indirect dominance over another state, while Austria-Hungary's aimed at incorporation as a crown land — and both changed after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Poland. As mutuality to overseas colonialism there existed a certain alienation strangeness towards the locals, and these were also the subject of stereotyping, but that was due only to a small part on racial reasons⁹⁰. Poles were regarded as a nation, not as people; they were less developed, but still a part of the European culture area. Also, 'politics of difference' were applied in another form, as was common in the colonies⁹¹: Poles

⁸⁶ BAMA, N 30 / 15. Minutes of a meeting at the Foreign Office, 3.11.1917.

⁸⁷ S. Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler*, Cambridge 2011, p. 90. The same argument by K. Kopp, *Germany's Wild East: Constructing Poland as Colonial Space*, Ann Arbor 2012.

⁸⁸ See also: S. Lehnstaedt, *Imperiale Ordnungen statt Germanisierung: Die Mittelmächte in Kongresspolen, 1915–1918*, "Osteuropa", vol. XII, 2014, No 2–4, p. 221–232; for cultural politics: J.C. Kaufman, *Schools, State-Building, and National Conflict in German-Occupied Poland, 1915–1918*, [in:] *Finding Common Ground. New Directions in First World War Studies*, ed. J.D. Keene, M.S. Neiberg, Leiden 2011, p. 113–138; A. Stempin, *Próba "moralnego podboju": Polski przez Cesarstwo Niemieckie w latach I wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2013; Austria-Hungary is dealt with by T. Scheer (*Österreich-Ungarns Besatzungsregime im Königreich Polen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Religions- und Kultusfragen (1915–1918)*, [in:] *Besetzt, interniert, deportiert. Der Erste Weltkrieg und die deutsche, jüdische, polnische und ukrainische Zivilbevölkerung im östlichen Europa*, ed. A. Eisfeld et al., Essen 2013, p. 173–198).

⁸⁹ J. Lewandowski, *Okupacja austriacka w Królestwie Polskim (1914–1918)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze", vol. XXX, 1998, No 4, p. 29–42, here 29.

⁹⁰ This in contrast to Ph. Ther, *Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte*, p. 140.

⁹¹ P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton 1993, p. 16. For Germany's oversea colonies see G. Steinmetz, 'The Devil's Handwriting'.

should after all be won over as a kind of junior partner. And even if there was the idea of an ‘elevation’, this was not a fundamental civilizing mission like in Africa, but rather rising to a higher level. Furthermore, in Poland the connection with the Christianization, which in Africa was a key element of this ‘mission’, was lacking. Jews, in that respect, were to become proper citizens and assimilated, but not baptized or removed from the country.

For Austria–Hungary it is even harder to speak of colonialism, because there Poles were regarded even better than in Germany, and also were courted more. Not even anti–Semitism fits into this concept, as not even he was legitimized racially in Poland, but once more aimed on cultural issues and allowed assimilation, whereas colonialism explicitly excluded the latter. In total, its ‘maritime’ form had less in common with the perception of the locals in the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, the occupiers’ images of Poles and Jews should rather be described as imperial views upon nations of the European periphery.

In the end, Andrian’s and Beseler’s diaries and letters tell much about their perceptions and thoughts. Beyond that, their reports reveal personal perceptions that are not filtered by someone else’s views. What sets them apart from other writings produced by state personnel is their top–level position. This explicitly allowed them to state their own impressions, even if they tried to make these look objective. Yet in contrast to lower–level bureaucrats, the writer is clearly recognizable as a specific individual⁹² — and this fact is not hidden, but appreciated by the readers. It is exactly this intention that makes the papers special: It can offer valuable insights into “classic” ego–documents, as most texts probably tell something unwittingly about their author. In this sense, they can be considered ego–documents themselves.

Still, from none of these papers one can deduce a direct link to Andrian’s or Beseler’s political actions, which often opposed personal sentiments. In no way was there a government–run attempt to destroy Jewish existence or to implement the existing stereotypes. Quite the contrary, the Central Powers largely tried to respect Jewish identity and associated way of life. Poland was not actually a striking exception among the territories in occupied Eastern Europe; even in infamous Ober Ost Jews were affected mostly by the consequences of the brutal exploitation⁹³. If a cause–and–effect relationship is true not even for influential top–level personnel, what relevance do their ego–documents have at all? Such sources from only two

Precolonial Discourse, Ethnographic Acuity, and Cross–Identification in German Colonialism, “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, vol. XLV, 2003, No 1, p. 41–95.

⁹² On the importance of these differences see von B. K r u s e n s t j e r n, *Was sind Selbstzeugnisse? Begriffskritische und quellenkundliche Überlegungen anhand von Beispielen aus dem 17. Jahrhundert*, “Historische Anthropologie. Kultur, Gesellschaft, Alltag”, vol. II, 1994, p. 462–471, here 463.

⁹³ J. M a t t h ä u s, *German Judenpolitik in Lithuania during the First World War*, “Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook”, vol. XLIII, 1998, p. 155–74, here 173.

men are probably too limited to allow for generalising conclusions, and in principle more research is necessary. Yet it seems quite clear that during World War I social and political norms existed that — despite all prejudices — restricted the horizon of action and thought. This would then be the exact opposite of what occurred under German rule during World War II. State ideology and politics do matter, for the Kaiserreich, the Dual Monarchy, and National Socialism.

Upředzenia elit. Państwa centralne na ziemiach polskich 1915–1918

Autor prezentuje sposób, w jaki Polacy i Żydzi postrzegani byli przez państwa centralne w czasie I wojny światowej na przykładzie poglądów generalnego gubernatora okupowanej przez Niemców części Królestwa Polskiego Hansa von Beselera i przedstawiciela Austro–Węgier przy niemieckim generalnym gubernatorze Leopolda von Andriana. Obaj znali się i — mimo sojuszu łączącego państwa centralne — uważali za przeciwników z powodu sprzecznych celów realizowanych na ziemiach polskich przez swoje państwa. Obaj napisali dużą liczbę prywatnych listów, które dotychczas nie wzbudziły szczególnego zainteresowania historyków, podobnie jak ich nieco mniej interesujące pamiętniki. Ponadto ich oficjalne raporty również ujawniają wiele osobistych opinii i odczuć. W sumie źródła te z powodzeniem mogą zostać wykorzystane do badania sposobu postrzegania Polaków i Żydów przez elity zaborców.

Ze źródeł tych wyłania się obraz raczej niechętnego stosunku okupantów do Polaków, przede wszystkim z powodu przypisywanego im antysemityzmu oraz upředzeń odczuwanych wobec społeczeństwa polskiego przez wyższych urzędników obu państw. Stereotypy te nie doprowadziły jednak do sformułowania oficjalnych zaleceń ani tym bardziej poleceń podjęcia konkretnych działań. Niemiecka administracja okupacyjna w postaci Generalnego Gubernatorstwa Warszawskiego dokładała specjalnych starań, aby nie dyskryminować żadnej z grup narodowościowych na terenach okupowanego Królestwa Polskiego. Założenia polityki społecznej ograniczały się przede wszystkim do zapewnienia niemieckiego zwierzchnictwa bez ingerencji w istniejące relacje narodowościowe. Nie zmienił tego nawet akt 5 listopada 1916, zapowiadający utworzenie Królestwa Polskiego. Niewiele później Beseler odszedł od tej zasady neutralności na korzyść popierania niemieckiej mniejszości narodowej poprzez uregulowanie jej statusu prawnego i zagwarantowanie autonomicznego szkolnictwa; w praktyce nie oznaczało to nic więcej, niż zachowanie niektórych przywilejów tej mniejszości narodowej.

Z żadnego z przeanalizowanych dokumentów nie da się wywnioskować istnienia bezpośredniego związku politycznych działań Andriana czy Beselera, które pozostawałyby w sprzeczności z ich osobistymi opiniami. Wydaje się, że w czasie I wojny światowej obowiązywały normy społeczne i polityczne, które — pomimo wszystkich upředzeń — ograniczały swobodę działania i myślenia przedstawicieli władz okupacyjnych. Zupełnie inaczej, niż w czasie niemieckiej okupacji w czasach II wojny światowej. Spostrzeżenie to prowadzi do wniosku, że oficjalna ideologia i polityka państwa są ważne — dla Cesarstwa Niemieckiego, Austro–Węgier i narodowego socjalizmu.