

## Abstract

This book focuses on an exciting, dramatic and tragic chapter in Jewish history, which, though never recounted in full, and forgotten over time, is of invaluable importance to the history of the late Hasidic movement and the history of East European traditional Jewish society.

In its pages, two separate but related stories are described. The first tells the story of the Zaddik Dov Ber Friedman, known as Bernyu, son of the famous Zaddik Israel of Ruzhin, who, in 1869 publically renounced his ties to Hasidism and joined up with the Maskilic camp. He took this drastic step, which climaxed with his threat of conversion, at a time of personal stress and psychological crisis. Fearing that he would make good his threat, his family arranged for him to be kidnapped from his hometown Leova (Rumania) and brought to his brother's Hasidic court at Sadigura (Sadagóra, Austrian Bukovina). After the involvement of the local police and his release from this forced imprisonment, Bernyu moved to the nearby city of Chernowitz, and resided at the home of the maskil Dr. Yehudah Reitman, who served as vice-president of the Jewish community. During his stay there, Bernyu refrained from ritual observance and published a manifesto in the Jewish press announcing his defection from the Hasidic camp and his new way of life. These scandalous events provoked great interest and widespread reactions among the Jewish milieu, from joy and expectation among the Maskilim to grief and sadness among the Hasidim. Finally, after much internal and external agitation, Bernyu recanted his actions and returned to his brother's Hasidic court in Sadigura where he lived in seclusion until his death (1876).

Detailed in the second part of the book is the story of the fierce internal Hasidic controversy that broke out in February 1869, in the midst of the Bernyu affair.

Under the leadership of Rabbi Haim Halberstam of Tszanz (Nowy Sącz, Western Galicia), a well-known Zaddik and much admired halachic authority, Bernyu's behavior was interpreted by his followers as the reasonable outcome of the dangerous and heretical ideological path of Hasidism known as 'the regal way,' which was promoted by the lifestyle and conduct of the Friedman dynasty of Sadigura. In a series of epistles Halberstam called on several communities to excommunicate and persecute the Sadigura Hasidim. This was the beginning of an unprecedented controversy in the history of Hasidism, in which hundreds of rabbis (including non-Hasidim) and dozens of communities, mainly in Galicia but also Russia, Congress Poland, Hungary and Palestine took part. The dispute, reflected in many polemic tractates (not all have been preserved), comprised mutual bans, violence and brutality, informing to the authorities, expropriations of livelihoods, and promoting of hatred between brothers. The controversy died down after the passing of its protagonists in 1876 but still percolated for years after. Tension between the two camps is still recognizable in our time.

These events have barely been described, let alone studied, in their entirety and what has been done so far in terms of scholarly research has been incidental and based on a very limited selection of primary sources. Hasidic historiography almost completely ignores this affair, considering it to be one of the most embarrassing events in its history. Based on hundreds of primary and secondary sources of all types, including rare books and manuscripts, archival and governmental records, contemporary newspapers, testimonies and memoir literature, this book is the first comprehensive study of this topic. The reader will be introduced to a detailed anatomy of a fundamental controversy which is interpreted not only as an ideological dispute between two confronting systems in Hasidism but mainly as an exciting and moving social and human drama.