"Reception History Meets History:
The Case of the Zabludowsky Epitaphs from Bialystok"

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What counts [in the overall history of memory] are not objects,
mere signs and traces,
but the nature of the relationship to the past,
and the ways that the present uses and reconstructs the past.
Pierre Nora, Realms of Memory, 1993.

Introduction

The Jewish epitaph is static. Unlike biblical texts or other literary texts, it is not translated over place or time. Composed in near proximity to a person's passing, the Jewish epitaph offers a reflection on the deceased's life, aligned with individual preferences, family values and/or community preconceptions. Its formulaic structure and general language are part of the Jewish epitaphic tradition, dating back to the 13th century in Eastern Europe.[1] In these components, the epitaph can contribute meaning beyond that of individual remembrance to community ideals, for example. When combined, however, with language composed for the individual, the epitaph offers the potential to remember and create a more precise history of the individual set against his or her milieu. That the Jewish epitaph holds meaning that can contribute to remembering and (re)creating history is not uniformly held but more recently its potential as a source for writing history is under discussion.[2]

The current paper seeks to explore the Jewish epitaph as a product of reception history (what is chosen to be remembered) as well as its potential value for writing a history of Bialystok's Jewish community (what did happen) from approximately 1865 to 1939. This time frame marks the limits of the extant Zabludowsky epitaphs from Bialystok, the specific focus of this paper. These epitaphs are recorded in two sources. The first, Abraham Samuel Herszberg's *Pinkos Bialystok*, a record book of the Jewish community of Bialystok from its inception in the 16th century until just before World War II, contains epitaphs once preserved on the Old Rabbinic Cemetery in Bialystok, dating from c. 1780-1900 as well as epitaphs that may still be extant on Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery, dating from 1892-1969.[3] The other source is the extant epitaphs on Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery in Bialystok. Today about 3000 of this cemetery's original 30,000-35,000 tombstones, dating from 1892-1952 remain. The Bagnowka corpus of epitaphs, with reference to the inscriptions preserved by Herszberg, was recently taken up in my book, *Bagnowka: A Modern Jewish Cemetery on the Russian Pale*. Drawing on the epigraphic approach in that volume,[4] the current paper will more narrowly examine

the potential historical value of the Zabludowsky inscriptions in Bialystok. The choice of the Zabludowsky epitaphs derives from the prominence of this family in Bialystok beginning at the turn of the 19th century. This research will demonstrate that regardless of what is remembered, such recollection respects the *mithnagdic* (traditional) nature of Jewish Bialystok.

The (Yitshak) Zabludowky Family: A Brief History

Yitshak[5] Dawidowicz Zabludowsky, the ancestor of one of Bialystok most influential families, was borne in 1803 in Ruzhany, today Belarus, about 140 km east of Bialystok. Ruzhany's Jewish community dates to the early 17th century.

(Image 1)

Yitshak Dawidowicz Zabludowsky, d. 1865.
Bialystok Photo Album.

Under Russian control in the late 18th century, Jews there became active in textiles and tanning plants.[6] *Pinkos Bialystok* records that "there living and in partnership with [Russian] aristocracy, were the brothers Noah and David. Noah remained in Ruzhany and became the ancestor of the Pines family of textile manufacturers. David was not from Zabludow but still named himself Zabludowsky. His sons Michal and Yitshak [also] were not from Bialystok." Working in conjunction with the Russian government, *Pinkos Bialystok* also records that "he [Yitshak] exploited the nearby Bialowieza government forests and chopped down their famous oaks and transported them abroad. He became a very wealthy man from this. His rich children founded the first self-contained Jewish fine cloth factory in Bialystok and, in addition, expanded the commerce from the textile industry in the city."[7] Tradition holds that Yitshak became the first Russian millionaire because of these collaborative business dealings, which also included the efforts of two or three brothers.[8]

Yitshak's eleven children with first wife, Peshe, were raised by his second wife (name unknown), and then third wife, Hinda Leibe.[9] Hinda Leiba's son, Eliezer, with Chaim Halberstam, is said to have brought the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) to Bialystok. Eliezer became Yitshak's son-in-law, marrying his oldest daughter Pelte, and merging his business interests with the intellectual and secular inclinations of the *Haskalah*. Eliezer Halberstam and brothers-in-law Sender Bloch, husband of Yitshak's daughter Malka Reyzel, and Nukhem Minc, husband of Yitshak's daughter Chaya Fruma, developed "very close relations with the German manufacturers and their products. … With the agreement and the help of their rich father-in-law, they created three self-contained cloth factories, with distinguished master craftsmen and directors."[10] The Germanicized names of Yitshak's nephew (?), Karl (Yiddish Kopel) Zabludowsky, that of his wife (Awgusta-Gitel) and some of his children, supports existing evidence of the Germanic influence in Bialystok and the new Germanic manufacturing connections in which the Zabludowsky family engaged.[11]

On Yitshak's death in 1865, he not only left behind an extensive legacy in business and an expansive progeny but also major contributions to the Jewish community in Bialystok. In 1834, Yitshak had founded a *beth midrash*, which later became the Chorsul (Choral) Synagogue in Bialystok. Zabludowsky is also credited with

contributing the funds to found the hospital on Warszawska Street in 1872, ten years after he had granted the house and land to the Jewish community.[12] His tombstone inscription, discussed below, suggests that this hospital was what was known as a *hekdesh*, a Yiddish term for a poorhouse hospital for travelers and the poor and needy.

The *Vsia Rossia Business Directories of Bialystok* confirm the ongoing involvement of the Zabludowskys in lumber as well as in produce in 1895 and 1903. In 1903, businesses in produce, dry goods and wool-weaving machinery in the surrounding communities of Suchowola, Janow and Bransk are also recorded.[13] In the photographic record of Bialystok, the Zabludowsky family are remembered as a *gabbai* in the Chorsul Synagogue (Ilya, 1910); a volunteer fire chief (Ilya, 1909); administrator for the Bialystoker Youth Society (David, 1916); a Hebrew and Yiddish journalist and correspondent (Noah b. Nash, d. pre-1914); a scholar, author and Hebrew teacher (Chaim Tsvi, d. in the Bialystok Ghetto); an executive committee member of the Consumption Relief Society (H. M., 1932); actor, artist and writer (Joseph, pre-1930s); an industrial engineer (Mordechai, 1917); a teacher in the Hebrew

Gymnasium (Moshe, 1919); and a member of the city council of the Bialystoker Democratic Kehillah (Noah, 1918-1928).[14] Indeed, on the occasion of Tsar Nikolas II's visit to Bialystok on 23 August 1897, civic leader Leon Zabludowsky is seen seated in the front row in the public gardens at the gathering, an acknowledgement of his and his family's prominence in Bialystok society.[15] In nearly all photographs, the Zabludowskys are depicted as assimilated Jews as opposed to the traditional language that will be seen in their epitaphs.
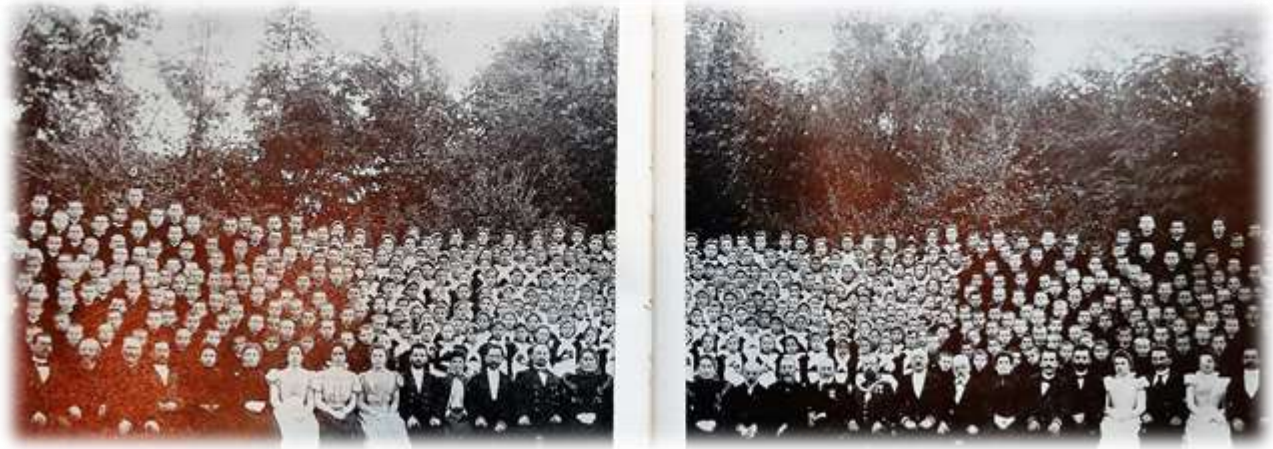

(Image 2)
Ilya Zabludowsky (front, 2nd right), volunteer fire chief, 1909.
Bialystok Photo Album.

(Image 3)
Mordechai Zabludowsky, industrial engineer and instructor, 1917. *Bialystok Photo Album.*

(Image 4)

Leon Zabludowsky (front, 8th right),

Tsar's visit to Bialystok, 23 August 1897.

Bialystok Photo Album.

The Zabludowsky Epitaphs from Bialystok

Like other extant Bialystok epitaphs, the Zabludowsky epitaphs[16] reflect a prevailing *mithnagdic* (traditionalist) ideal despite the growing assimilated nature of Bialystok in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries. Thus, for example, several bilingual epitaphs in German, Polish and Russian reflect the growing assimilated nature of Bialystok.[17]

(Image 5)

Bilingual inscription of Yehiel Michal b. Shraga Zabludowsky, 1908.

The obelisk that stood atop this base is still missing.

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Several Zabludowsky epitaphs also present a trend in literary simplicity that began in the 1920s-epitaphic record in Bialystok, with *less* use of *mithnagdic*[18] vocabulary, that is language that reflects traditional Jewish teachings and philosophy.[19] Such language, for example, describes men as prominent scholars and teachers, versed in Torah – whether or not they were, and recognized as truthful, perfect and upright. Women are praised as women of valor (in keeping with Proverbs 31); they are righteous, modest,

important and precious. Above all, men and women are God-fearing. Although such language was more common in the first decade of epitaphs from Bagnowka (1892-1902), it still perseveres in varying degrees throughout the *extant* history of this cemetery (1892-1952), including in the Zabludowsky epitaphs.[20] Indeed, one of the finest examples of *mithnagdic* language is found in the acrostic poem of Yaakov Shmuel Zabludowsky (d. 1911):

> Matzevah[21] of the burial of/ a God-fearing man and one splendid to His word/ He acted [with] righteousness and kept trustworthiness;/ Cut from the root of the upright and honorable ones,/ the honorable teacher and rabbi,/ Yaakov Shmuel, son of Benjamin/ Zabludowsky./ He died on Wednesday, 13th Kislev 5671 [1 December 1910./
>
> Sons [Y] will raise up a lamentation [because] you are distinguished; /-ta/
> [A] a song of righteousness belongs to their songs of praise [because] you are wise; /-ta/
> the upright ones and those with integrity [K] offer a dirge; /-im/
> the humble, beloved and pleasant [V] weep for you; /-im/
> you acquired [S] a good reputation because of your deeds; /-im/
> [M] deed and doer, you are righteous; /-im/
> [WE] and what is here in the lowland that you planted; /-im/
> [L] though cut off, there in the heights you shine. /-im/
>
> May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life."

His acrostic[22] conjoins the alphabetic structure with end rhyme, drawing on themes of lament, in particular, offering songs that extol the "distinguished" and "wise" character of Yaakov Shmuel, (his) righteous deeds, and good reputation.

(Image 6)
Megalithic block tombstone for Yaakov Shmuel Zabludowsky, 1910.
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Three Zabludowsky epitaphs subtly reflect the harsh realities of life in the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries in Bialystok, not uncommon details in this corpus, in general. Twenty-six-year-old, Sheyna Sora b. Shmuel David Zabludowsky's (d. 1903) epitaph describes her as "the modest, God-fearing woman, *who died in confinement*

(Hebrew *yuledeth* / יולדת /)," denoting a woman, who died while pregnant, in childbirth or in the traditional period of seclusion that followed childbirth. Her death record similarly notes "(complications) in delivery" (то родов) as the cause of death.[23] Such designation, however, is not uncommon in the Jewish epitaph.[24]

(Image 7)

Matzevah for Sheyna Sora b. Shmuel David Zabludowsky,

who "died in confinement," 1903.

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The inscriptions of siblings, Eliezer (22) and Golda (17), children of Baruch Mordechai Zabludowsky, who both died in 1920, reflect another reality of life at this time, death due to anti-Semitic violence.[25] Their epitaphs preserve the expression "plucked off in the *desolation* of her/his days," language uniquely used of premature death *due to*

violence .[26] The verb 'to pluck off' is also used in a variety of expressions for premature death in the Bagnowka corpus, adapted from the biblical text, building on the imagery of the soul (a person) being plucked off the metaphoric tree of life. The Bagnowka corpus preserves more than a dozen epitaphs with this same language, spanning the years 1899 to 1952, four in 1920. For these four victims, such language suggests death was amidst the events of the Red Army's final months in Bialystok, and the subsequent pogrom and unrest that followed the Bolshevik retreat as the Jews of Bialystok were accused of conspiring with the Communists.[27]

(Image 8)

Tombstones for siblings, Eliezer (right) and Golda b. Baruch Zabludowsky,

killed amidst violence, 1920.

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More specific to the Zabludowsky biography are six epitaphs with content that potentially comments on their secular engagements. The epitaph(s) for Yitshak, son of David, Zabludowsky (d. 1865) as well as a detailed description of his tombstone are preserved in Herszberg's *Pinkos Bialystok*. Yitshak's four-sided tombstone was made of white marble and is reminiscent of the black pillar-style preserved in the photographic record of the Old Rabbinic Cemetery by Bialystok historian Jan Glinka and also extant today in the memorial pillar on Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery.

(Image 9)

Yitshak Zabludowsky's tombstone may resemble the black Memorial Obelisk to victims of 1905 Massacres and 1906 Pogrom.

Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery, Bialystok, Poland.

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On the eastern (primary) façade, in accordance with Jewish practice, is Yitshak's epitaph:

This matzevah [tombstone] is a witness [Joshua 24:27]! Here rests upon his grave the man who was known by the designation, the honorable 'citizen' [lit. 'native', one grown from the soil] to his generations, the devoted, elderly, precious [man], our teacher, the rabbi, Yitzhak, son of our teacher David, Zabludowsky. May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life [1 Samuel 25:29]. Walk about Zion and go around it so you will know this man and his deed(s) [Ps. 48:13]. He was 84 years old when he came to the grave, on the evening of Passover, year 5625 as the abbreviated era [10 April 1865]. To quote: Yitzhak expired and was gathered to his people [Gen. 35:29].

This epitaph, composed by his son-in-law, the *maskil* Eliezer Halberstam,[28] extols his character in *mithnagdic* language ("devoted, elderly, precious, our teacher, the rabbi"), set within the formulaic opening language from the book of Joshua ("This matzevah is a witness") and the closing abbreviation from the book of 1 Samuel ("May his soul be bound in the bond of everlasting life"). His epitaph concludes with a passage from the biblical book of Genesis 35:29 that aligns Yitshak with the passing of his biblical namesake, the patriarch Yitshak: "Yitzhak expired and was gathered to his people."

Distinct to his epitaph is the Hebrew designation אזרח / *'ezraḥ*/ "the honorable citizen (to his generations)," a designation (e.g. Ps. 37:35) developed further in the inscription on the fourth side of his

tombstone. The directive to the reader "know– this man and his deed(s)," also will be clarified in the details on the other sides of his tombstone. Most unique *here*, however, is an adaptation of Psalm 48:13a, a verse that implores the kings of ancient Canaan to walk about Jerusalem (Zion) and see the grandeurs of its bulwarks and palaces, so that they may tell generations to come of its grandeur. In Yitshak's epitaph, this language cryptically describes his philanthropic contributions to Bialystok as Jerusalem metaphorically represents Bialystok. Jerusalem's bulwarks and palaces are the hospital, the synagogue and the palace-homes that Zabludowsky built and bequeathed to the city. These structures are not literally noted in *this* epitaph as such would be contrary to the religious proscriptions of the Jewish epitaphic tradition for what is permissible to record on the eastern (primary) façade of the tombstone. This information is found on the southern and northern sides.

On the *southern* side of the pillar was engraved a picture of Yitshak's *beth midrash*, constructed in 1834, which became the Chorsul (Choral) Synagogue. The inscription here notes that he also contributed [funds] for its books and synagogue vessels, and funds for its

ornamentation and lighting. The inscription also reads: "This is the law of his house [Ezek. 43:12]": a house of prayer, which today serves "for a name and a praise [Jer. 13:11]." The meaning of the final expression ("for a name and a praise") indicates that, through the contribution of the Chorsul Synagogue, Yitshak Zabludowsky will gain both a reputation (name) and (eternal) praise.[29] On the *northern* side of the pillar is the inscription: "a model of the hospital which he endowed, a big house, vast and wide [Ps. 104:25], full of "splendor and majesty" [e.g. Ps. 111:3]. A carving of the hospital was engraved below these words, followed by a more extensive inscription, which again conjoins then contemporary remembrance with biblical passages.[30] Finally, on the *western* side – a side in the Jewish tradition and attested to on Bagnowka, which may preserve just a record of the deceased's name as a means to identify a burial place from the reverse, is engraved another mosaic of biblical verses that expand on Yitshak Zabludowsky as the extraordinary 'native' citizen, literally 'native' tree, first noted in his formal epitaph.[31]Archival records indeed designate him as a "hereditary honorable citizen," a designation that may also refer to his position as a merchant of the Second Guild,

noted as his occupation in the 1861 birth record of a granddaughter from his daughter, Pelte,[32] or *Pinkos Bialystok*, which records that Yitshak was one of only three members of the First Guild when guild membership was first designated in 1814 in Bialystok.[33]

Yitshak's (half-)brother, Yehiel Michal, son of Chaim Zabludowsky (d. 1874), was an author of both religious and scientific volumes. His epitaph, again composed by Eliezer Halberstam, is preserved in Herszberg's *Pinkos Bialystok*:[34]

> The wise rabbi, a man of charity and compassion, with a sharp eye, our honored teacher, Reb Yehiel Michael, son of Reb Chaim Zabludowsky, may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing. God-fearing, pure, pious, compassionate, goodness and mercy, integrity and a sense of justice, pure faith, one who has gathered all these in his delicate soul. [His writings:] *Ruah Chayyim* [The Spirit of Life], *Bemey Michal* [In the Waters of Mikhail], *Mish'an Mayim* [The Support of Water]. With many legends and commentaries, he enlightened our eyes; on his right, he kept the banner of the Torah and on his left, the candle of science. He scattered his fortune among the poor and the humble and cared for the needy with justice. He named his people 'a jewel', his community 'a crown', the Zabludowsky's family, 'a flawless splendor'. He left three thousand for the poor. This memorial is erected for the man who shall rest in peace here in his grave; he was born on 22 Tevet 5564 [6 January 1804], died on 1 Kislev 5635 [10 November 1874]. May his soul be bound in the bond of the living.

Mithnagdic language is engaged that emphasizes his virtuous and especially

charitable nature ("a man of charity and compassion"), while simultaneously he is "the wise rabbi." His epitaph, however, only mentions by name the *religious* books, he authored; the scientific tractates he wrote for the periodical *Ha-karmel* (The Carmel) are only alluded to in the expression, "on his right, he kept the banner of the Torah and on his left, *the candle of science* (נר המדעים)."

The epitaph of David, the youngest son of Yehiel Michal Zabludowsky (d. 1885), is also preserved in Herszberg's *Pinkos Bialystok*:

> Here is found the grave of the great and wise scholar. The previous generation proclaimed his virtues and righteousness, this generation proclaims his praise and fame; his great wisdom earned him a good name, "Yehiel died but his frond was luxuriant" [e.g., Jer. 17:8]] and he shall live in Heaven because of his good name and splendor, and his honor is upon the mouths of all the people of the town. It is he, [honored]in wisdom, [knowledgeable] in language, our master and teacher, David, son of the Rabbi Reb Yehiel Michael Zabludowsky. He died on Sunday 22 Tevet 5645 [9 January 1885].[35]

David's abilities in languages and as a legal scholar brought him distinction. Regarding the latter, *Pinkos Bialystok* records the outcomes of two legal cases: procuring an ancestral inheritance and arranging the freedom of Bialystok's Chief Rabbi Lipele from arrest in Grodno.[36] Of these abilities, Halbersham wrote in David's eulogy: "In him Torah and wisdom came together. / In

him religion and intelligence met/ and many sought his advice and common sense."[37] His epitaph, however, only cryptically alludes to abilities in languages and law ("[honored]in wisdom [בחכמה], [knowledgeable] in language" [בלשון]), again amidst *mithnagdic* expressions.

Malka Reyzel Zabludowsky-Bloch (d. 1878), the daughter of Yitshak Zabludowsky and the wife of Sender Bloch, is perhaps the most prominent of his children and renowned for her business acumen. Her marriage to textile entrepreneur Sender Bloch (ca. 1830), alongside whom she worked in his business, continued her association with the world of business that began under her father. On Sender's early death at age thirty-nine in 1849, Malka carried on and expanded these businesses [for 29 years]. Less-known is that she also had fifteen children with Sender, arranging significant marriages for many of them.[38]

(Image 10)
Malka Reyzel Zabludowsky-Bloch, d. 1849.
Bialystok Photo Album.

On her death in Tevet 5638 (December/January 1878); her brother-in-law, the *maskil* Eliezer Halberstam, "lamented her" with these words: "An *eshet hayil* [woman of valor], she was more precious than rubies [Prov. 31:10], a kind and wise companion with an upright soul. Her generous charity was [given] to all who knew her. Indeed, her words [lit. sprouting] were pleasant to every ear. Rest, you who are singular among the myriad of daughters. Rest in peace until the morning is no longer darkened [cp. Prov. 4:18]."[39] It is unclear, however, whether these words were composed by Halberstam for her epitaph or as a eulogy. The language, nonetheless, is *mithnagdic*, drawing on Proverbs 31 *Eshet Hayil* to remember Malka, a passage recited each Sabbath by the head of the household to honor his wife, and the most common passage used in women's epitaphs.[40] This proverb extols a woman's acumen in business (31:24) and accords praise from an *eshet hayil's* children (31:28), two details most relevant to but *not* recorded about Malka Reyzel. Rather Halberstam's accolade emphasizes traditionalist epithets of kindness, wisdom, uprightness and

charitableness. This pattern of emphasizing a traditional Jewish woman's world while ignoring her contributions to the secular realm is also found in the epitaph of Malka Reyzel's sister, Pelte Halberstam, preserved today on Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery.

Pelte Halberstam (d. 1893) was the oldest daughter of Yitshak Zabludowsky with his first wife, Phoebe. Her husband, the *maskil* Eliezer Halberstam, was the son of Yitshak's third wife, Hinda Leiba, with her first husband, Chaim. The historical record preserves little else about her life, excluding a comment by Herszberg that she was "a skillful Jewish woman" in the home and assisted with her father's textile business. Pelte's bilingual epitaph reflects the Prussian cultural influence of her father then husband's business engagements. The eight lines of poetry, in end rhyme, craft a remembrance using traditional language drawn again from Proverb 31:10-31:

> Here lies the precious and honorable woman, the married Pelte, wife of R. Eliezer Halberstam, daughter of / the late Mr. Yitshak, of blessed memory, Zabludowsky.
>
> While yet in her father's house, during the days of her youth, /
> her hands did not restrain from the ways of his house /
> and she performed service all the days of her life. /
> She was known in the gates by virtue of the integrity of her ways. /
> She smelled the scent of the Fear of God, pure and refined. /

> (With both) a heart and a hand willingly she supported the contrite. /
> She rejected vile language; she cared for that which is perfect. /
> Truth was in her heart; truth was upon her lips. /
>
> (Obverse in German:) Pelte Halberstam, died 20/1 1893 [20 January 20 1893].
> (Base:) She died at daylight Wednesday 15 Shevat 5653 [20 January 1893] according to the abbreviated era. תנצבה.

The first three lines of poetry ["while yet in her father's house, during the days of her youth, her hands did not restrain from the ways of his house, and she performed service all the days of her life"] might suggest she was active in her father's business and then in her husband's intellectual movement. This allusion, however, is concealed in traditional *mithnagdic* religious language, which predominates in this inscription. The last two lines of her Hebrew epitaph ["She rejected vile language; she cared for that which is perfect. / Truth was in her heart; truth was upon her lips"] extol the propriety of her speech, antithetical to the gravest sin in the Hebrew tradition, that of gossiping.[41] One wonders, too, if the extraordinary emphasis on her speech was to counter the liberal Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) atmosphere, initiated by her husband.

(Image 11)

Bilingual tombstone for Pelte b. Yitshak

Zabludowsky-Halberstam, d. 1893.

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One epitaph in the Zabludowsky sub-corpus and also in the entire extant Bagnowka corpus today records that a woman was a merchant; such designation for a man was not uncommon.[42] This epitaph is for a Zabludowsky-by-marriage, *Rivke, wife of Meyer Zabludowsky*, (d. 1900), Yitshak's second son:

> What is this memorial!
> Here is the grave of an honorable woman, who feared the Lord. While she was still strong [healthy],
> she was a merchant and they vouched for her truthfulness.
> ["Yet] the days of her life were bitter as wormwood" [Prov. 5:4].
> She had no sons or daughters.

After the death of her husband, she remained lonely and childless.
Her latter years, she could not see; her eyes no longer saw the light.
Her strength forsook her because of "convulsions" [2 Sam. 1:9];
the strong illness brought her to the land of death, to earth,
together with those who dwell with Shades until the time when they awaken and are ready for eternal life./ The woman Rivka, daughter of R. Shmuel of blessed memory, wife of R. Meyer Zabludowsky.
She departed on the first day of Shavuoth 5660 [1900]. תנצבה.

In Eastern European Jewish tradition, women frequently engaged in business endeavors while their husbands engaged in Torah study, or they worked side-by-side with men in the family business,[43] for which Malka Reyzel was renowned. Rivke's mercantile expertise ("she was a merchant and they [men or community] vouched for her truthfulness"), however, is tempered, indeed overshadowed, by her loneliness, owing to her childlessness and widowhood ("['Yet] the days of her life were bitter as wormwood' [Prov. 5:4]. She had no sons or daughters. After the death of her husband, she remained lonely and childless"). Then follows, loss of vision and convulsions that "brought her to the land of death." Ultimately, this epitaphic record places more value for a woman on traditional roles of motherhood and wife, along with good health, over business acumen.[44]

(Image 12)
Matzevah for Rivke b. Shmuel, wife of Meyer
Zabludowsky, d. 1900.
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Conclusion

Bialystok was a culturally diverse world, as the Germanic, Russian and Polish cultures sequentially infused this city with their language and traditions, merging with an initially *mithnagdic* Jewish community. By the turn of the 20th century, however, this traditional Jewish world was no longer monolithic as Hasidism and the Haskalah, in particular, challenged traditional (*mithnagdic*) Jewish philosophy and practices. Bilingual inscriptions on Bagnowka, including some of the Zabludowsky epitaphs, hint at this cultural diversity, while *mithnagdic* language reflects the triumph of traditionalism over Jewish religious and cultural diversity in the Jewish epitaph, revealing that non-Jewish diversity can be promulgated in the epitaph but rarely so Jewish diversity.

In the subtle presence of select vocabulary (death in confinement or death due to anti-Semitic violence, here), commentary on the harshness of life in this period is however revealed. For the Zabludowsky biography, more specifically, the older epitaphs of Yitshak, his brother, Yehiel, and nephew, David, offer specific commentary on their lives. Yet even in the presentation of this detail, *mithnagdic* language is utilized (as for example, when Yitshak's contributions to the city of Bialystok are alluded to through biblical text). In the epitaphs of Yitshak's daughters, known history allows the reader to interpret the innuendo behind poetic words (to suggest, for example, that lines of Pelte's epitaph might provoke contemplation of her work in her father, Yitshak's, business). The one aberration is the term 'merchant' (Hebrew f.s. *soherah*) in the epitaph of daughter-in-law, Rivke, a remembrance overshadowed by the lack of the *mithnagdic* ideals of husband, children and (perhaps) health.

When considering the Zabludowsky epitaphs as representative of the Jewish epitaphic tradition, at least of those in Bialystok, what then can be said of the contribution of the Jewish epitaph to the writing of history? The words of historian Pierre Nora are provocative: "What counts [in the overall history of memory] are not objects, mere signs and traces, but the nature of the relationship to the past, and the ways that the present uses and reconstructs the past."[45] The Jewish epitaph (and tombstone) is an object. Its primary function is to bring remembrance to the deceased; this fact should never be forgotten. In its choice of recollections about history (both of the person and of the milieu), the Jewish epitaph is a product of reception history, preserving what was deemed worthy of remembering, regardless of the historical validity of such remembrances. If such recollection, however, preserves precise historical details (true history), it is accomplished through the medium of *mithnagdic* language, thus emphasizing the perennial *mithnagdic* ideal of the Jewish community.[46]

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[1] Marcin Wodzinski, "Tombstones," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Yale University Press, 2008), 1888.

[2] See the literature review in Heidi M. Szpek, *Bagnowka: A Modern Jewish Cemetery on the Russian Pale* (iUniverse Press, 2017), 11–5.

[3] Abraham Samuel Herszberg, *Pinkes Byalistok* [*Pinkos* (the chronicle of) *Bialystok*], 2 vols (New York: Bialystok Jewish Historical Association, 1949–50). Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery functioned from 1892-1969; however, Herszberg's volumes end in about 1935.

[4] The epigraphic approach engaged in that volume considers tombstone style and art, in conjunction with formulaic patterns, languages, semantic and linguistic details of the Bagnowka corpus, viewed against the larger epitaphic tradition, from an historical perspective as well as relevance to gender and age.

[5] The given name Yitshak is spelled a variety of ways in documentation and historical works, depending on the source and its cultural background. Thus, attested are: Icak/Icchok/Icek/Izak/Isak/Izaak/Isaac and Yitzhaq.

[6] "Rozhana." *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust*, edited by Shmuel Spector, vol. 2 (New York University Press, 2001): 1101.

[7] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 1 (1949), 141.

[8] "Bialystok–A Historical Survey," *Der Bialystoker Yizkor Buch (The Bialystok Memorial Book)* (New York: The Bialystoker Center, 1982), 3–5.

[9] Archival records indicate Zabludowsky had three wives: Peshe (Phoebe), daughter of Mordechai Mattia Krinkers, d. 1817, bore him four sons and seven daughters (Mordechai Marcus Zabludowsky; Meyer Zabludowsky; David Zabludowsky; Pelte Halberstam; Joshua Michel Ovsei Mekel Zabludowsky; Malka-Reizl Bloch; Chaya-Frume Minc; Hinda Perlis; Sheine Rachel Finkelstein; Nechama Perlis and Frida-Lea Cohen); an unknown woman (d. 1832), daughter of Jacob Koppel Heilprin of Bialystok and Fayge Heilprin; and Hinda Liebe Halberstam, the widow of Chaim Halberstam (c. 1812).

[10] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 2 (1950), 29.

[11] See the Bialystok Archives in which marriage, birth and death records for Karl, his wife and children frequently record given names in both German and Yiddish.

[12] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 1 (1949), 459.

[13] The 1895 Directory only records a Grocery belonging to a Zabludovskaya and a sawmill belonging to a Gustav Zabludowski, both within the city of Bialystok. The 1903 Directory records: ZABLUDOVSKAYA, Sora, daughter of Fai[el], in nearby Suchowola, in Grocery goods; ZABLUDOVSKI, Abr[aham], son of Leib, in nearby

Janow, in Flour; ZABLUDOWSKI, Gersh-Lieb, son of Shmul, on Bazarnaya Street in Bialystok, in Dry Goods; ZABLUDOWSKI, R, in nearby Bransk, in Woolweaving Machine; and ZABLUDOWSKI, Ign., son of Gotzel, on Nikolaevskaya Street in Bialystok, owner of Sawmill.

[14] These photographs are distributed throughout *Bialystok: Photo Album of a Renowned City and its Jews the World Over,* edited by David Sohn (New York, 1951), now in public domain.

[15] Sohn, ed., *Bialystok Photo Album*, 57–8.

[16] As noted earlier, the Zabludowsky epitaphs from Bialystok are preserved in two sources. Herszberg's *Pinkos Bialystok* records the epitaphs of Yitshak b. (son of) David Zabludowsky (d. 1865); his (half-)brother, Yehiel Michael b. Chaim Zabludowsky (d. 1874); Yitshak's daughter Malka Reyzel Zabludowsky-Bloch (d. 1878); and that of Yitshak's nephew, David Zabludowsky (d. 1885), the youngest son of Yehiel. The largest corpus of Zabludowsky epitaphs (14 total, at present,) are extant in Bagnowka Jewish Cemetery; their exact relationship to Yitshak cannot always be ascertained: They include:

> Pelte Zabludowsky-Halberstam (d. 1893), Yitshak's daughter
> Yisrael b. Yehiel Zabludowsky (d. 1896), Yitshak's nephew and Yehiel's middle son
> Flora Zabludowsky (d. 1897)
> Karl Zabludowsky (d. 1898)
> Rivke b. Shmuel, wife of Meyer Zabludowsky (d. 1900), daughter-in-law
> Yehiel Michal b. Shraga Zabludowsky (d. 1908)
> Shraga Feivel b. David Zabludowsky (c. 1909)
> Yaakov Shmuel b. Benjamin Zabludowsky (d. 1911)
> Peshe b. Nahman Zabludowsky (d. 1913)
> Shejna Sora b. Shmuel David Zabludowsky (d. 1917)
> Eliezer and Golda b. Baruch Mordechai Zabludowsky, (d. 1920)
> Yehuda b. Daniel Zabludowsky (d. 1931)
> Yaakov Yehoshua b. Moshe Yehiel Zabludowsky (n.d.)
> Shmuel Zabludowsky (n.d.)

[17] Extant are: Hebrew-German for Karl (Kopel) Zabludowsky reflect the German cultural influence that impacted the mid- to late 19th century Bialystok and environs. The bilingual Hebrew-Polish inscription of Flora (Feigl Dvora) Zabludowska (d. 1897) and the bilingual Hebrew-Russian inscription of Yehiel Michal b. Shraga Zabludowsky (d. 1908) both reflect the changing political regimes that would prevail in Bialystok. Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 129–30.

[18] The term *mithnagdic* was first used in the 1770s by traditional Jews who were opposed to Hasidism.

Allan Nadler, "Mithnagdim," *YIVO Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 1182. See Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 168.

[19] The fragment of Yehuda b. Daniel Zabludowsky (1931) preserves this minimalistic epitaphic trend, as opposed to the more loquacious nature of Pelte Zabludowsky-Halberstam's epitaph. This same trend toward minimalism is also evident in the symbols used in the Bagnowka corpus. See, Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 72–73, 115.

[20] Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 242–57; 298–305.

[21] The Hebrew term "matzevah" refers to a tombstone that was crafted in a distinctly Jewish style and typically by Jewish artisans.

[22] Though not apparent in the English translation, the words that create the acrostic in the Hebrew poems are located at the beginning of each line. At times, these words can also be arranged horizontally, even using more than one word of a line to spell out the deceased's name.

[23] Bialystok Record of Death, 1903, Fond 264, #310F.

[24] See my discussion in *Bagnowka*, 305–7.

[25] Their epitaphs read: A memorial: Here lies the God-fearing and upright young man, who was plucked off in the desolation of his days, Eliezer, son of R. Baruch Mordechai Zabludowsky. He was born 15 Sivan 5669 and he died 13 Adar 5680. 20 March 1898–3 March 1920; A memorial. Here lies the intelligent, unmarried woman, who was plucked off in the desolation of her days, Golda, daughter of R. Baruch Mordechai Zabludowsky. She was born 25 Sivan 5662 and she died 25 Sivan 5680. 3 August 1902–8 June 1920.

[26] See my discussion in *Bagnowka*, 142–48.

[27] Sara Bender, *The Jews of Bialystok During World War II and the Holocaust* (Brandeis University Press, 2008), 45–7; Antony Polonsky, *The Jews of Poland and Russia. Volume III 1914–2008* (Oxfore: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization), 51–4.

[28] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok,* vol. 1 (1949): 459.

[29] Compare the expression *yad vashem* "a hand and a name" (Isaiah 56:5), which is the name used for Israel's foremost memorial to victims of the Holocaust.

[30] The inscription reads: "In the year of salvation, for the poor and needy is a *hekdesh* [poor house], house with a wall [protection], in which the poor and needy found refuge and healing. And in the garden, those weary of strength rest 'beneath lotus flowers' [Job 40:21], while his pious hand, his exalted hand, still waves [e.g., Is. 13:2]. And he [Yitshak] commanded his sons after him to establish a contribution from his funds for a cornerstone to finish the building, the sum of seven thousand, five hundred silver shekels. Behold, for this reason the seed of Yitzhak was in the

land of his sojourn for righteousness and loving-kindness [e.g., Gen. 28:13]."

[31] The inscription reads: "He was great to the Jews and one who sought goodness for his people. Indeed, people praised him and princes saw him and rose up, a luxuriant 'native' tree [Ps. 37:35], a majestic 'native' tree, on a lofty mountain in Israel. In the shadow of his doors, all who seek help found rest. His lovingkindness and righteous deeds are great and lofty like the mountains of El [Ps. 36:6], and just as he goes out to the salvation of his people, his loins are like a mighty warrior equipped with strength as a refuge [Ps. 46:2]. He was a salvation to his brothers in a time of distress, from the dungeon, he sent out the prisoner [Is. 42:7], and liberty to the captives. He called and blessed the Lord his strength, a valiant man to his brothers; they established him and increased his seed [progeny], 30 indeed 40 resembled him and he became a splendid tribe for his generations. His name was praised in the north and south, east and west [Gen. 13:14]. Therefore, just as the days of heavens are upon this earth, his remembrance will not end for goodness from among the living [Esther 9:28]."

[32] *Bialystok Archives*, birth record for Gitla Zabludowsky, Fond 264, F20,

[33] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok,* vol. 1 (1949): 142. Since Catherine the Great's Charter for the Towns, issued in April 1775, the urban population was divided into estates, and each estate into three guilds. Placement into an estate and guild was dependent on one's capital. See Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 267–68, for the guild of Bialystok's Beloch family.

[34] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 1 (1949): 233.

[35] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 1 (1949): 234.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 289–90.

[39] Herszberg, *Pinkos Bialystok*, vol. 2 (1950): 31.

[40] Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 298–300.

[41] On the sin of gossiping in the Jewish tradition and within the Bagnowka corpus, see Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 340–1.

[42] Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 161–3, 179, 181, 267–71.

[43] Paula Hyman, "Gender," *YIVO Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 547–80.

[44] For this epitaph, see Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 317–8.

[45] See Harold Marcuse's inclusion of this translated quote in his discussion of the definition of reception history, http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/receptionhist.htm.

[46] The emphasis on traditionalism in the Jewish epitaph may be comparable to what Natalie Aleksiun's research revealed on portraits of Jewish women as depicted in community memorial books (*yizker bikher*). She notes that the choice of what is preserved in *yizker bikher* "say[s] a great deal about the lost communities' ideas of family, education and leadership" of women. (Natalia Aleksiun, "Gender and Nostalgia: Images of Women in Early Yizker Bikher," *Jewish Culture and History* 5, no. 1 (2002): 69). See, also, Szpek, *Bagnowka*, 16–7, 319–20.