



Danish and East European Jews

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Danish and East European Jews

Between 1904 and 1917 many Jews from Eastern Europe, especially Tsarist Russia fled to Denmark. They left their homes due to pogroms, i.e. violent and bloody persecutions. Unlike Danes many were poor workers and craftsmen. Some of them were very religious and deeply rooted in the Jewish culture. Others were contrary to the Danish Jews politically active on the left.

The poor Russian Jews often wore torn and patched clothes. They spoke Yiddish, a language that sounds like German, but is written with Hebrew letters. As they differed so much from Danish Jews some people were afraid that this would lead to increased Antisemitism.

Something that caused further problems between the Danish and Russian Jews was that the Jewish congregation had to maintain the immigrants who couldn't manage on their own. Most of them were horribly poor and lived in old and poor housing. A teacher who taught at the Jewish school in Copenhagen gives us a glimpse of how the poor Jewish immigrants lived: "The families were packed in a few rooms. A small girl turned out to live with five families. Chalk lines divided the room. She lived in the middle with her family and had no wall where she could pin her schedule."

The new immigrants started many associations, for example youth and women associations and sports and singing associations. In the 1930s women were successful in the Jewish sports Association *Hakoah*, above all in gymnastics, handball and swimming.

Those Danish Jews who feared that anti-Semitism would increase were right. In the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* for example many antisemitic articles were published already in the 1920s and also far into the 1930s.



Russian Jewish immigrants in Copenhagen in the Jewish quarter around Vognmagergade. Note the cafe's name "Wladivostok".



People in a backyard in the Copenhagen's poor neighborhoods, 1915.



In the 1930s, women of the Hakoah were successful, especially in gymnastics, handball and swimming.



1933 Hitler calls for a boycott of Jewish shops. Here Nazis put up a sign at a Jewish store in Berlin. It reads: "Germans! Defend yourselves! Do not buy from Jews!" (*Deutsche! Wehrt Euch! Kauft nicht bei Juden!*).

During the 1930s the harsh situation for the Jews in Nazi Germany was characterizing the discussions in the Jewish congregation and the development in Nazi Germany was closely followed in the newspaper *Det jødiske familieblad*.

How to react? Should they assimilate and adapt to the Danish society, or strengthen the Jewish culture and the cohesion? Those who argued for adaptation pointed at the development in Germany and noted how badly things had gone for the German Jews who tried to adapt. At the same time no one thought that anything like that would happen in Denmark.

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