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**Beyond Borders: transnational exchanges between “Jewish Councils” in occupied Europe**

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**Abstract**

“Jewish Councils” and similar representative organisations that were established at the behest of the German occupier during the Second World War have primarily been examined in the context of the nation-state. This has obscured the fact that (prominent) officials who worked for these Jewish organisations exchanged knowledge and information on a regular basis. Such exchanges were not limited to bordering regions or countries but rather extended across occupied Europe. This research examines the relations and connections between “Jewish Councils” in close vicinity and in faraway places, focusing not only on the communications between Jewish organisations in Western Europe (De Joodsche Raad voor Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the Association des Juifs en Belgique in Belgium and the Union Générale des Israélites de France in France), but also between these organisations and their counterparts elsewhere in (occupied) Europe.

Through the course of the war, those who worked for Jewish Councils, or similar organisations, exchanged letters, reports and other written accounts. This research investigates the nature of these exchanges. It examines whether and how the Jewish leaders across Europe kept each other informed about the situation in their countries, and explores how they aided each other in facing Nazi regulations. This research also addresses the nature of the information that reached Jewish leaders across Europe through personal exchanges and via other (non-written) forms of communication. In doing so, we gain better insight in the broader transnational dynamics of which these organisations were part.

In terms of the nature of the interactions, the research I have carried out to date has shown that they can roughly be divided into three different areas of interest. First, Jewish leaders corresponded on the whereabouts and well-being of individual members of their communities who resided abroad. Second, there were specific request for aid to individual Jews who had been arrested, interned, or were threatened with deportation; these requests for aid included money, goods and birth certificates or marriage certificates that would exempt Jews from deportation. Third, there were exchanges of information on local conditions, and attempts to gain better understanding of the fate of Jews who were deported to Eastern Europe.

In my presentation for the FMS seminar in January 2022, I will be focussing in particular on the case study of the Association des Juifs (AJB) in Belgium, and the communication Jewish officials of this organisation maintained with dozens of their counterparts in Poland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary (as well as other countries). In doing so, this paper highlights the efforts these organisations undertook in protecting their communities. The numerous (successful) attempts to reach out to their counterparts elsewhere in Europe shows that, despite these limitations, Jewish officials tried their best to provide aid, to share information, to gain intelligence on the situation elsewhere, and that they sought to improve the situation of the Jews across Europe.