

“VWI invites the Department of History, University of Sheffield”

Wednesday, 2 February 2022, 3.00 pm

Online: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81907635320?pwd=bjVLZWJMZTN6K1hDZVFKUjiYdGY1dz09>

Timo AAVA

JEWISH CULTURAL AUTONOMY IN INTERWAR ESTONIA AND THE LIFE TRAJECTORIES OF JEWISH AUTONOMY ACTIVISTS AFTER ITS DISSOLUTION

The principal aim of the presentation is to trace Jewish cultural autonomy in interwar Estonia. The Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities (1925) enabled minorities to establish their self-governments to independently administer and fund through taxation their cultural and educational affairs. Baltic Germans were the first to establish their self-governments in 1925, Estonia’s small Jewish community followed them a year later. These institutions existed until Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union in the summer of 1940. Jewish autonomy in interwar Estonia, which survived with a limited scope of activity even during the years of the authoritarian regime of the 1930s, is a rare example of relatively minority-friendly legislation in the context of nation states in interwar Europe which has received very little attention in historical literature until now.

The presentation will outline the extent to which Estonia’s Jews were involved in achieving the legal provisions enabling autonomy and analyse the establishment of Jewish autonomy in 1926. Based on extensive archival research, it will show how autonomy functioned, focussing on topics such as ethnic belonging, the relationship between autonomy and state institutions, and the political dynamics within autonomy. The project will further focus on some leaders of autonomy and trace their life trajectories in the years of Sovietisation and the Holocaust.



Commented by Laura ALMAGOR

Timo Aava is a PhD student and a member of the ERC-funded project NTAutonomy in the East European History Department at the University of Vienna. He studied history at the University of Tartu and obtained his MA in 2015. His main interests are the history of political thought with a focus on the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Baltic and Estonian history, Marxism, nationalism, and non-territorial autonomy.

Laura Almagor is a lecturer in twentieth-century European history at the University of Sheffield. Her research deals with Jewish political behaviour and trajectories in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Her monograph, *Beyond Zion. The Jewish Territorialist Movement* will be published by the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in 2022. She is co-editing *Global Biographies. Lived History as Method*, to be published by Manchester University Press in 2022.

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Photo: Synagogue in Tallinn, between 1910 and 1917,
Museums Public Portal, Number: AM N 5631:635.