

# On Lucky's Whereabouts in 1885–1886



by Kai Kjær-Hansen

In his article "Lucky in America," Raymond Lillevik has touched on the question of whether Lucky served as a missionary in Eastern Europe sometime in the mid-1880s. Without arriving at a final decision, he writes: "However, it is possible that Lucky was in Austria on behalf of Pohlmann's congregations between 1885 and 1886. . . ." In this article, I am going to produce some sources which, to my mind, unambiguously confirm this assumption.<sup>1</sup>

The material is found in a booklet about Jewish mission ministries at that time in New York, published in 1887 by R. Andersen, the Danish immigration pastor in New York.<sup>2</sup> He completed his manuscript in November 1886. In the chapter "Pastor H. Pohlmann's Israel Mission,"<sup>3</sup> Andersen has a long extract from an article by Pohlmann, published in *Der Freund Israels*, no. 9, 1886.<sup>4</sup> In this article, Pohlmann also incorporates some notices from Wilhelm Faber in Leipzig, dated May 15, 1886, in which the German theological candidate von Velsen tells of Lucky's work in Galicia. About von Velsen, it is said that he "for a long period of time" traveled with Lucky in Galicia.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the sources are quite close to the events. This does not mean, of course, that they cannot be subjected to critical questions. What, for example, is meant by the phrase "for a long period of time"?<sup>6</sup>

1 After my editorial work on Raymond Lillevik's article in June 2009, I happened to find the source in question while working in the archives of the Danish Israel Mission. Since Lillevik's article had already been prepared for printing, I have chosen to write about it in the present short article.

2 R. Andersen, *Israelsmissionen i New-York. Historisk fremstillet* (Copenhagen: Chr. Christiansen, "Bethesda," 1887).

3 Andersen, 70–75.

4 From 1880, edited by the Jewish-born Lutheran pastor P. Werder, who became a missionary to the Jews in Baltimore in 1882, for the Lutheran Zion Society for Israel; cf. Andersen, 76. It has not been possible for me to consult Pohlmann's article in German, and I wonder if Andersen reproduces Pohlmann's article *in toto*.

5 The source in question is referred to as "Private Mittheilungen aus Leipzig an die uns verbundenen Freunde der Mission unter Israel von Wm. Faber, evang. luth. Missionär unter den Juden, Leipzig. Rosstr. 16," dated May 15, 1886. It has not been possible for me to see these notices in German. The said von Velsen is identical with F. von Velsen, cf. *Nathanael* (1911): 120. In 1911, he supported Waldmann and Lucky's declaration; see the article about this in this issue of *Mishkan*.

6 In *Saat auf Hofnung* (1886): 220, it is, e.g., mentioned that Friedr. von Velsen, on behalf

## Lucky's Road to Becoming a Missionary

Pohlmann begins by mentioning that he “found” Lucky “7 years ago,” which is another piece of circumstantial evidence for the accuracy of Lillevik’s supposition that Lucky came to America in 1879 or 1880. After they had prayed together – the place for this is not mentioned – Lucky asked Pohlmann where his church was.<sup>7</sup> “By God’s grace,” as Pohlmann puts it, he soon became aware of Lucky’s capability and managed to have him admitted at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

During his studies, Lucky was characterized by Pohlmann as a faithful member “of our church, a faithful worker in our Sunday school, and faithful in his perseverance.” He fought with doubts, had hardly had the bare necessities, and his brethren “according to the flesh” persecuted him. But he held on and worked toward the goal of serving the Lord. Before concluding his studies in May 1885, he had, together with others, formed “The Hebrew Publishing Society,”<sup>8</sup> and Lucky was going to be editor of *Eduth l’Israel*. Due to a shortage of funds, it was not possible to start with this right away.

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“Yet again my dear Saviour gave me a hint,” Pohlmann writes. He shows Lucky a “cry for help” in a Christian magazine: “More workers among the Israelites in southern Russia were needed.” Lucky “clearly understood the hint,” Pohlmann writes. In the “closet” they gain certainty through prayer: They decide to initiate a mission in southern Russia or “wherever the Lord might lead, and they were not to stand idle in the marketplace long.”

Lucky was ordained on August 15, 1885, by Pohlmann. Ordained to what? Not primarily to be a pastor in New York, but to be a pastor and missionary to Jews in Eastern Europe! “The day of ordination and dispatch for our missionary – August 16, 1885, in Bethanien Church – was a day of rejoicing for all,” Pohlmann writes. Note Pohlmann’s phrase “our missionary”: Lucky is sent out by and paid by the group around Pohlmann.

## Lucky as a Missionary in Galicia

The phrase “day of dispatch” shows that Lucky left New York immediately after his ordination on August 16, 1885. After three failed attempts to sta-

of the Berlin Society and together with the “Rev. Theodor Lucky,” has made a *short* but blessed missionary journey through the Carpathians.

7 Pohlmann held his Lutheran services in the Methodist “Wesley Chapel” at 87 Attorney Street; at the door was this sign: “Evangelisch-lutherische Bethanien Kirche.” Pohlmann himself, who was a widower, lived next to the church in no. 85. His vestments differed from those of other German pastors in New York in that he would wear the Danish pastors’ ruff; cf. Andersen, 70, 74.

8 In the spring of 1885, this society published “Prospectus of the Hebrew Publishing Society,” cf. *Saat auf Hoffnung* (1888): 59. It was translated into German and published in *Saat auf Hoffnung* (1886): 43–47.

tion Lucky in southern Russia, "the Lord called him to his mother country, Galicia," Pohlmann writes. He arrived there some time before Christmas 1885, and he mainly worked in Czernowitz, Strychance, and Karolowka. Although he works "quietly," Jews soon become aware of the "renegade." Pohlmann notes with satisfaction: "However quietly he worked, people soon became aware of it, for a light cannot and must not remain hidden." Already at Christmas 1885, "a whole family were baptized in the presence of many Jews." Through his sickbed, another Jew in Strychance had been "led into the sunshine of saving grace." Pohlmann continues:

Once our worker sent us very depressing news, but later came a closely written letter, confident and warm, with a list of what Lucky terms "the elite troops," among them no fewer than four rabbis. One of them had gone 13 German miles on foot in order to talk to the "renegade," who made so many people lapse; and what happened was that he himself became a "renegade," left the superstition and unbelief and turned to the true faith.

Two of these gentlemen, Dr Russbaum and Dr Taubes, were recently baptized in London, on which occasion there was a great celebration in the West End of London. May the Lord make them faithful workers in his vineyard.<sup>9</sup>

Referring to reports from Lucky, Pohlmann maintains that Russbaum and Taubes both left everything for Jesus' sake: "Dr Taubes has left his Jewish-noble family, house and estate, indeed even his wife and a fortune of 40,000 guilders, in order to serve his Lord in poverty." It is furthermore said that among the first baptized Jews are "Mr M.W. and Miss M.G.," who have also left everything and "are now here in New York, where they often come to the Lord's house."

Pohlmann goes on: "When Lucky sent me the report about the celebration in London, he also wrote that he again had 12 Jews to be prepared for baptism. Right now he is going back to London and then to New York and, God willing, back to the hard work in Galicia." The words can be construed as if Lucky was first in London in connection with Russbaum's and Taubes' baptisms, then returned to Galicia, after which he went to London again – maybe in connection with further baptisms of Jews – and then on to New York.

The passage quoted from F. von Velsen mentions both openness and opposition to the gospel. Some Jews "have waylaid Lucky outside the town, assaulted and beaten him so that for a long time he was unable to use his left arm." It is also said that the laws of the country and two

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<sup>9</sup> I dare not speculate on which denomination or mission society Lucky attached himself to in the West End of London.



groups of adversaries, Jews and Roman Catholics, have prevented Lucky from “establishing a station and a congregation.” The work proper is “to save souls and spread light, and once many have been won, the formation of a congregation will go of itself.” And then it comes: “Until that time, the majority must be referred to go where they can publicly confess their Saviour of the world” – meaning leave Eastern Europe and go to the western world. I am inclined to think that Lucky *at this time* would have agreed with this.

### **Lucky Immediately After His Return to New York**

Andersen claims that Lucky came to New York together with Taubes. But when? No precise date is mentioned, but it must be before Yom Kippur in 1886. (In 1886, Tishri 10 fell on October 9.)

In other words, according to Pohlmann and Andersen, Lucky was not in New York during the period from about mid-August 1885 to sometime before Yom Kippur 1886.

According to Andersen, Lucky and Taubes<sup>10</sup> worked with Pohlmann after their arrival in New York. Saturday afternoon they spoke in the church on Attorney Street, and on Sunday Taubes tried to speak in various churches. This created a stir, and he was attacked in the Jewish press, especially the *Jüdische Zeitung*. P. Werber was in New York in connection with Yom Kippur 1886, and assisted with the meetings held by Landsmann<sup>11</sup> and Pohlmann. Exactly what happened is not mentioned by Andersen, but he makes it clear that the connection between Pohlmann and Taubes was interrupted after Yom Kippur.<sup>12</sup>

The last thing Andersen writes about Lucky is that after Yom Kippur he continued his cooperation with Pohlmann and tried to publish a “Christian-Hebrew magazine; so far he has not succeeded. If it is to be through the Jewish mission in New York, through speaking or through work for Israel somewhere else, has not yet been decided. May the Lord also lead that so that it will be to his glory.” Perhaps Andersen was not fully up-to-date about Lucky’s whereabouts in New York in October 1886, and his affiliation with the Seventh Day Baptists – a question which Raymond Lillevik discusses in his article.

10 Andersen, 73, calls him “Dr Joseph Paulus Becker Taubes,” the son of the chief rabbi in Romania who served as a rabbi at a synagogue in Chernowitz; he was twenty-seven years old and abandoned a considerable fortune when he came to faith in Jesus. The copy that I have in my hands has a pencil-written note added: “a fraud.” An earlier reader seems to know more about Taubes’ later career than I do.

11 About Daniel Landsmann, see R. Lillevik’s article “Lucky in America.”

12 Andersen suggests that the young Taubes, who was “yet young in Christianity,” perhaps ought to have prepared himself better for the pastor’s service rather than immediately appear in public. And he continues: “There are many renunciations for the proselyte but there are also many dangers and temptations that the new convert may succumb to.” I wonder if Taubes succumbed to such a temptation.

## Lucky Did What He Later Fought Against

Andersen's booklet thus fills out a gap in our knowledge about Lucky's whereabouts in 1885-1886. But more important than this is the picture Pohlmann draws in his article of Lucky as a missionary. The prevailing view that Lucky was *never* employed in the service of the Jewish mission has now been dealt a severe blow.

If there is just a grain of truth in Pohlmann's description, the following may be said: Lucky was an emissary – albeit only for a short period – of a Jewish mission society. As such he was a paid missionary. He was involved in direct missionary work among Jews in Galicia. Jews who came to faith in Jesus were led to baptism, sometimes publicly in Galicia, at other times in London. He shares the responsibility for baptized Jews leaving their environment in Galicia to go to America.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of these sources, it is tempting to conclude that in 1885-1886 in Galicia, Lucky did those things which, on his return from America to Galicia in 1889, he fought against!

The factors and individuals in America that caused Lucky's "conversion" – from direct Jewish mission to indirect mission and from being a paid missionary to the Jews to opposing paid missionaries – have not yet been identified. This question is worth closer scrutiny.

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13 Cf. R. Lillevik's reflections on this at the end of his article "Lucky in America," in this issue of *Mishkan*.