



# Gazeta

Volume 28, No. 1  
Winter 2021

Orchestra from an orphanage led by Janusz Korczak (pictured center) and Stefania Wilczyńska. Warsaw, 1923. Courtesy of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. Used with permission

A quarterly publication of  
the American Association  
for Polish-Jewish Studies  
and Taube Foundation for  
Jewish Life & Culture



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## Message from Irene Pipes

President, American Association  
for Polish-Jewish Studies

Founder of *Gazeta*

Dear Members and Friends,

Greetings from Florida where I am still sitting out this unprecedented crisis which has lasted much longer than any of us could have anticipated. I hope you are comfortable and safe and that we shall be able to resume normal activities in the foreseeable future. The beginnings of a widespread vaccination does provide some light at the end of the tunnel.

We are determined to carry on our important work. It is amazing how much one can do with podcasts and Zoom. One notable event has been the opening of the Legacy Gallery at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw. Curated by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Tamara Sztyma, and designed by Arnaud Dechelle, the gallery is located in a beautiful space on the main floor of the POLIN Museum, overlooking the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. It honors Polish Jews who have made a major contribution to the life of Poland and the wider world. The gallery highlights twenty-six such people and more, as discussed in the book, *Legacy of Polish Jews*, which accompanies the exhibition. A series of online events has marked the opening. We all hope that we will soon be able to visit it in person.

The Global Education Outreach Program (GEOP) of the POLIN Museum has also organized a series of online discussions of recent books on the history of Jews in Poland as part of the program *What's New, What's Next? Jewish Studies in the Time of Pandemic*, which is intended to lead up to the international conference *What's New, What's Next? Innovative Methods, New Sources, and Paradigm Shifts in Jewish Studies*, scheduled for October 2021. (A full listing of GEOP events can be found in this issue of *Gazeta*.)

In January, an online conference was held to celebrate the publication of Volume 33 of *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, which is dedicated to Jewish religious life in Poland since 1750. The volume reflects the recent advances in the history of Jewish religious life in Poland, examined from a series of fresh perspectives, as reported on in this issue. The event honored the memory of the late Ada Rapoport-Albert, Professor Emerita of Jewish Studies and former head of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, who was one of the editors of the volume.

We wish you the best of health, and that you find inspiration in the programs and publications described here.

With best wishes,

Irene Pipes  
*President*



Irene Pipes

## Message from Tad Taube and Shana Penn

Chairman and Executive Director,  
Taube Foundation for Jewish Life  
& Culture



Tad Taube

Recovering and preserving our history is a vital enterprise, but it is also a demanding one, as this issue of *Gazeta* reveals. In one of our stories, Paweł Śpiwak explains to his interviewer the many challenges he faced during his decade-long tenure as director of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. Upon entering his position in 2011, he found the institution suffering from years of underfunding. The building's physical structure demanded attention, but even more effort was needed to reinvigorate the programs, update the services and technology, and move the institute to the center of the Jewish historical research community.



Shana Penn

In another of our stories, two notable filmmakers, Agnieszka Holland and Roberta Grossman, discuss their mutual fascination with the great themes and events of the 20th century and the challenge of trying to understand Jewish and Holocaust subjects. “We constantly have to find ways to discover and understand the keys to the past,” says Holland, “because this will somehow enlighten our choices today.”

And for real commitment in the face of challenges, consider the decades-long efforts of Maria Piechotkowa and her husband Kazimierz to document the wooden synagogues of the Polish lands, all destroyed during the Nazi occupation. As explained in a tribute obituary in this issue, these remarkable Jewish buildings were known by few until the Piechotkas published their pathbreaking study in 1957. The Communist regime's efforts to discourage research in all things Jewish did not prevent the book from circulating abroad, with remarkable results that we are enjoying today.

Recovering and preserving our history, these stories reveal, is not a matter of pushing a button and letting a computer do the work. It requires personal dedication, effort, and persistence, along with quite a bit of imagination. We at *Gazeta* are proud to be part of that effort.

Tad Taube and Shana Penn  
Chairman and Executive Director

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# “Do Not Close the Experience in a Time Capsule”: Paweł Śpiewak in Conversation with Olga Drenda

Translated by Przemysław Batorski

*On the eve of his retirement as Director of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, Professor Paweł Śpiewak reflects on his decade of leadership over this preeminent institution, collection, and archive, and its historic pre-war building.*

**Olga Drenda:** Maybe let's start from the beginning, from 2011.

**Paweł Śpiewak:** I became the director of the Jewish Historical Institute almost by accident. Previously I had not considered such a possibility. I had no managerial ambitions. I knew something about the JHI, had a good understanding of the existing Jewish community, learned about Jewish traditions, wrote commentaries on the Torah for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, but did not wish to take up a managerial career and work for the so-called Jewish street.

It was not and is not an easy street. I had not considered



Professor Paweł Śpiewak.  
Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute

such a way of life. I imagined that for the rest of my life I would be a rebellious academician—writing essays, articles and books, like the proverbial shoemaker, working for someone who knocks and rings to order an article for a more or less popular weekly. My anvil, my computer, was full of such contracts.

I had—as the saying goes—various adventures in my career (I have been a member of the Polish Parliament for two years, an exciting waste of life), and the fact that a new opportunity might appear was

not unimaginable to me. The idea of directorship intrigued and surprised me. There was something adventurous, new and risky about it.

I was introduced by Minister Bogdan Zdrojewski to an institution that looked dilapidated from the outside. I made reconstruction of the space a priority. What is most beautiful—the architecture typical of the 1930s, resembling the interior of the Emigration Museum in Gdynia or the YIVO building in Vilnius—was then obscured. The building of

the current Jewish Historical Institute, as one of the few community Ghetto buildings, survived the war. It remained a strong sign of presence and memory of the Central Judaic Library (there was no trace of it) and of the Judaic Institute. During the war it performed important functions. It was here that Emanuel Ringelblum—the patron of the Institute since 2009—and a large group of his associates came to work every day.

The building has something extraordinary about it: traces of fire on the floor. As in the picture from Hiroshima. The nation died, only a trace of the fire remained. When the Great Synagogue was blown up in May 1943, a fire penetrated the building and burnt the ceilings and stone. The temperature must have been enormous.

I feel that this is an extremely important sign that I think of in biblical terms. In one of the *midrashim* we read that God wrote the Tablets of Moses with white and black fire. I treat this trace as a sign of what is most important in our Jewish history. Our covenant tablets and our fate are written in fire. Not to be erased. Unforgettable.

**Drenda:** What was the cause of this state of affairs, simply entropy?

**Śpiewak:** My predecessors operated under difficult conditions. The salaries were outrageously low, lower by half compared to the lowest salary in the Polish Academy of Sciences. A significant part of the expenses was covered by the support of the always gracious Taube Foundation, without which the Institute would not be able to function at all. Those were years of economic turmoil. The change came together with the transition of the JHI to the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Thankfully the late Minister Tomasz Merta, a wonderful man, managed to arrange it. Dr. Eleonora Bergman was re-organizing the Institute for three years. I had the impression that I was entering a forgotten institution hidden behind a skyscraper, covered with autumn leaves for years. The otherwise beautiful building stood, but was no longer visible in a social sense.

Nobody visited this place, unless they were doing research. There were very few exhibitions, one in ten years, and they did not

arouse any particular interest. Unfortunately, the JHI was treated as a marginal academic and archival institution. The greatest treasure, the archives, including the largest of them, the Ringelblum Archive (ARG), were being edited. If anyone made them public, it was certainly not the JHI and its employees. It was in the JHI that the documents from Jedwabne were kept, as well as the diary of a ghetto policeman from Otwock—Calel Perechodnik. Fortunately, some of this legacy was published by the Polish Center for Holocaust Research. The institution was technologically at the level of a typewriter, computers were more of an ornament. The website was extremely modest. In my opinion, the Jewish Historical Institute was heading toward marginalization. I can say that when I entered the JHI, I did not even realize how difficult a task awaited me. My social and sociological knowledge has also changed a lot.

I like to come back to one quote from Machiavelli's *The Prince*: a prince who takes control of a state in a state of decay is in a favorable position, because any move he

makes to restore order will be a move forward, will change something. It is easier to build something when institutions are non-functional and poorly staffed. The first goals are then quite easy to achieve. The second thing is that, I admit, I hadn't had much to do with the Institute before. My ex-father-in-law was once the director, in the most difficult period, 1969–70. He resigned after some minor conflict with Professor Marian Fuks.

**Drenda:** What was it like putting together the JHI?

**Śpiewak:** To some extent, this process started bottom-up. If today I know what the mission of the Jewish Historical Institute is, it is not because I came there with a clear plan.

One thing became clear to me, that apart from moving the bookstore from the middle of the hall, throwing away unnecessary wardrobes from the building's lobby, and tidying up the space, it was a requirement that the Institute should be technologically modernized, moving from the era of typescript to the internet era. It was not only about the website, but also—which was criticized by some JHI employees—about the

*“Apart from us, no one could deal with the memory of the Jewish artists who died during the war. It was a long road to go and it is not over yet.”*

—Professor Paweł Śpiewak

digitization of materials. They had to be made available, as well as books, magazines, documents written on paper, often of the poorest kind, had to be saved. Now we have a fantastic scanning center, we have rebuilt the website once again, and many new people with great competence and amazing commitment appeared at work.

The first task was to strengthen the administrative and accounting side. We managed to organize our relations with the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute. We now have a good and lasting agreement defining the property relations and the principles of mutual cooperation.

Not only has the basic budget of the JHI increased, but also specific donations,

support from various grants and foundations. The Taube Foundation, which contributes greatly to the development of our institution, the Rothschild Foundation, the Koret Foundation, and others, are also helpful; recently the Norwegian and EEA Grants play an important role. They now account for at least a third of our overall budget. We have a lot of money for our research, publishing, exhibition, digitization etc. This is our great achievement, which can be continued in the coming years. An important element of our role in the Jewish community is cooperation with the Taube Center and the Hillel Polska Foundation.

A publishing department was also needed. A long time ago, there had been one book published every seven years, and I thought there should be almost twenty books a year. In my nine years, we have published nearly a hundred books, not counting the ARG series. A significant place is held by *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* [Jewish History Quarterly], edited by Dr. Jan Doktor. We managed to increase its volume by one third (here the help of the Association was essential and



significant). Our publishing house and a beautiful bookshop are the showpieces of the Institute.

Of course, the publishing house requires not only editors, graphic designers, printing houses, but also considerable funds. Here we are aided by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and other institutions.

Each researcher has the opportunity to publish their texts. Quite an interesting collection has assembled in this way. A separate place is taken by the publication of subsequent volumes of the Ringelblum Archive (there are thirty-eight of them), plus translations of these volumes into English. It is a huge achievement of Prof. Tadeusz Epsztein, Dr. Eleonora Bergman, and Dr. Katarzyna Person. The Institute itself, whose employees enjoy a serious scientific status, benefits from this.

Once there also was no exhibition department. We didn't have a way to show our huge and little-known art collection, which was basically unedited when I came on board. In a few months, a museum and exhibition department was



Part of the permanent exhibition on the Warsaw Ghetto Archives, opened in 2017, curated by Professor Paweł Śpiewak.

Photographed by Grzegorz Kwolek. Courtesy of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute

established and I created a long-term exhibition program. Many of the exhibitions are worth remembering, they were accompanied by really good catalogs. I am thinking of exhibitions devoted to Polish rabbis, Julia Pirotte's photography, anti-Semitic caricatures, Polish art about the Shoah, and an exhibition *Hate Speech—I Exclude Exclusion*. Of course, the most important for us are the two permanent exhibitions. One is dedicated to the Oneg Shabbat group and the other is called the *House of Prayer*. Apart from us, no one could deal with the memory of the Jewish artists who died during the war. It was a long road to go and it is not over yet.

The education department conducts many classes for students, researchers, and Polish and foreign students. Academies for teachers are very important to us. We used to conduct one such session every year. Now there are two each year. Many lesson scenarios have been prepared and published on the Delet portal.

The Archives Department is our backbone. They look after millions of pages of documents (digitization is ongoing). New documents come to us all the time. We respond to numerous official inquiries. Our library works very well. We buy all important books on the history of Jews. We devote

considerable resources to this goal. The library's inventory has been completed. The book collections were put in order, including the manuscripts and the antique books department. We gained access to many research portals, including JSTOR. We are working on a new bibliography of the *Biuletyn* [Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute] and *Quarterly* of the Jewish Historical Institute.

The genealogy department has been strengthened over the years. Currently, the team consists of five outstanding specialists, who are invited to all international conferences on genealogy. Over the years, we have been visited by thousands of people from all over the world, and everyone received knowledge of the highest quality. We work with all the world's major research institutions and museums dealing with Jewish history, starting with the Yad Vashem Institute and the Holocaust Museum in Washington. We have signed many bilateral agreements, recently, with the NS Dokuzentrum in Munich, where we want to open an exhibition on the Oneg Shabbat group in two years. Thanks to digitization, we

have created a huge collection of Jewish and Judaic data and documents, one of the largest in the world. The list of achievements is long and worthy of a separate report.

**Drenda:** [What] is the division of tasks between institutions, cooperation, and the positioning of Jewish institutions in Poland?

**Śpiwak:** The geography of Jewish institutions in Poland has certainly changed during my term of office. We have to constantly reposition ourselves. The emergence of the POLIN Museum and local initiatives has had a good effect, because Jewish issues are more present in the public discourse. We also become caught up in serious historical debates. Anti-Semitic slogans will always appear, but I believe that this is a marginal phenomenon, because the Jewish community after 1989 is no longer fragile. People brought up as Catholics discover their Jewish ancestors, many people convert. Jewish culture is returning thanks to many researchers, scientists, and filmmakers who are interested in it in Poland. We are all entitled to this heritage. ■

*This article was reprinted in part from a longer version published on January 12, 2020 on the Jewish Historical Institute website. To read the full article, please visit: <https://www.jhi.pl/en/articles/pawel-spiewak-do-not-close-the-experience-in-a-time-capsule,2195>.*

# From Behind the Camera: Polish Jewish Narratives

Agnieszka Holland and Roberta Grossman in Conversation

**E**ditors' Note: The November 19, 2020 episode of *TJHTalks* (Taube Jewish Heritage Talks) is devoted to the cultural impact of films that explore Jewish and Holocaust subjects. Hosted in cooperation with the Warsaw Jewish Film Festival, this session features two universally acclaimed filmmakers, Agnieszka Holland and Roberta Grossman. Below is an excerpt from that conversation.

## **Roberta Grossman:**

In 2013, when you were doing publicity for your series, *Burning Bush*, about Jan Palach and his fraught self-sacrifice that led ultimately to a democratic revolution in then Czechoslovakia, you said in a speech in Washington, DC, that you were most interested in modern times, namely the 19th century and what you refer to as the “perversely captivating” 20th century. And you said, “according to a popular Chinese saying, ‘may you live in interesting



Agnieszka Holland

times.’ ” You refer to it as a saying. I think of it as a curse. I’m wondering what in your personal background and your life experience have kept you coming back in your films to the Holocaust and the communist era [in Poland]?

**Agnieszka Holland:** Thank you, Roberta. I think that all times are difficult somehow and interesting somehow, but yes, the first part of the 20th century was a time when a lot of issues and challenges and dangers [that] we are living through now, were born, and developed. It was the



Roberta Grossman

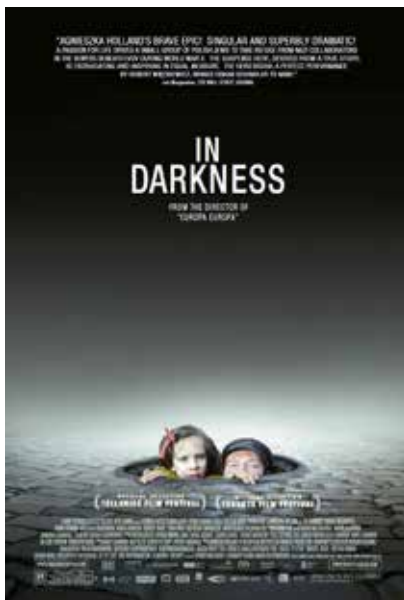
Holocaust, of course, but it was also Communism translated into the Stalinist practice. It was the Second World War. It was the long oppression in communist countries. It was colonization and decolonization. It was the birth of the modern vision of gender and of the new role of women, the birth of ... human rights, and living beings’ rights...[I]t’s why I find this time fascinating and I think somehow that we are rooted in this period, in this first part of the 20th century. It’s not an accident that so many things that are going on now are referring somehow to

Communism or to Fascism. And the reference to fascists becomes very obvious, very relevant, somehow, which is dangerous, but at the same time pushes us to ask if we are unable to invent new ideologies or new utopias or new dystopias.

We constantly have to find ways to discover and understand the keys to the past because this will somehow enlighten our choices today.

**Grossman:** I wanted to ask you about your 1990 film, *Europa Europa*, because it seems to me that everything that you just spoke about is expressed in that film. I think the thing that draws me to history and especially extreme periods of history is the sadness and confusion about how the individual can react. So how does the life experience of the main character, Solomon Perel—and of course this was based on his true story—how does his life experience exemplify these currents that you were just referring to, these ... major historical currents of the 20th century?

**Holland:** I was thinking that it was three very important ideologies or waves or new currents in the first part of the 20th century. It was Communism, it was Fascism—Nazism like some



*In Darkness*, 2011.

*“We are rooted in the first part of the 20th century. It’s not an accident that so many things that are going on now are referring somehow to Communism or to Fascism.”*

**—Agnieszka Holland**

form of Fascism—and it was Zionism. Those three things have been parallel and then fighting and then trying to create a new utopia, a new paradise. In the case of Communism, it was as the idea, something very inclusive and novel, a kind of new Christianity somehow, that people are equal, that you would not be considered

a Greek or Jew, that we all have the right to justice, to protection, to equality, and so on. And in the praxis, in reality, appeared to be at least partly very wrong.

Fascism was another side of the heritage of Christianity, this dark side of that, with nationalism as a main tool, and then racism as in the case of Nazism. It’s a very important and very powerful tool and it became clear that by creating an enemy, a scapegoat, that it’s possible to organize through hate an extremely efficient system.

And then it was Zionism, which tried to instill in Jewish people living in Europe, in Africa, and then in the Americas, with the feeling that they can always be destroyed, to give them the hope that it can be possible to come back to their roots and to create a place where they will be safe and create also—taking from different ideas and from different utopias—a new society that will be better and more just than the society they are coming from.

So somehow, all those people, the individuals, who found themselves in the middle of those three currents, they became toys in the hands of history, in the hands of the regimes. And that was quite a

typical destiny for citizens—especially of Central and Eastern Europe—in the first part of the 20th century and even longer, even up to the fall of Communism. And I was interested in that, because it was my destiny also. My roots are half Jewish, half Polish. The family of my father was killed in the Holocaust, most of them. My father survived as a young communist, escaping to Soviet Russia. My mother was in the [Polish] Home Army, which was underground. They met after the war. They believed that it was possible, after the war, to create a more just and right society, where we will all be not Greek or Jew. They failed, and I was able to observe their frustration as a child and then as a teenager and as a young person, and my personal experience was the experience with the Communists, with the oppression of the Communists.

And so what was in the story of Solomon Perel reflected the experience of my country, of my region, and also of the generation of my parents and partly my own generation. And at the same time, I found this very universal because it was the story of identity and who we are.



Theatrical release poster for *Mr. Jones*, directed by Agnieszka Holland.

Promotional material, used with permission

*“The filmmaker is somebody who can feel what’s going on underneath and to maybe capture something which didn’t happen yet, but which is coming.”*

—Agnieszka Holland

[W]hat I found in Solomon Perel was his honesty, because what was intriguing in his story and was very risky, was very provocative, was that he, in some way, became a Nazi—in his heart and in his head—and he felt like his Nazi fellows. Except for one little thing, which was a piece of skin on his penis. So I found it very paradoxical and somehow very

magical that it is your penis that can save your soul.

And my concept when I was writing the script was that it has to be a bit like a philosophical fairy tale, like Voltaire, like *Candide*, for example. But told in the style of comic books. I never did want to go too deeply into the psychology. It’s supposed to be a bit external, but at the same time, in some moments, we are approaching his soul or his feelings very closely. And afterward, we are distancing ourselves. So I think that gives some kind of storytelling energy to the film. But I was afraid, first of all, that the real hero in this, Solomon Perel, would be accused of being a kind of Nazi.

**Grossman:** Like a collaborator?

**Holland:** Right. And I didn’t want to hurt him, especially because I admired his honesty and courage to speak about the darkest moments inside his own persona. And secondly, I was afraid that the Jewish audience would refuse the film as not noble enough or not have having enough gravitas. But that didn’t happen. The film became very, very popular, with the Jewish audience especially.

We did huge tours in several countries and there were a lot of meetings with the audience. And at the beginning of the '90s, when the film came out, there were many Jewish survivors who had never told their stories, because that started quite late, the openness to tell their stories. So this film provoked a lot of people so that they came to me afterward and told me their stories. Every time it began like this: "It's a fantastic film. Thank you so much. It's an incredible story, but my story..." And the only people who attacked me, and called the film "anti-Semitic," were the Germans.

**Grossman:** Just in terms of looking at your future work, do you know what your next films are?

**Holland:** Well, it's difficult to tell because the COVID pandemic has taught us that we know nothing about the future. But I feel now that I would like to make a contemporary film. And yes, I would like to make the film with women of strong character. I'm looking for something like that. If it will happen, I don't know. What will be the cinema, the independent cinema after the pandemic, is difficult to



*Who Will Write Our History*, 2018.

*“The thing that draws me to extreme periods of history is the sadness and confusion about how the individual can react.”*

**—Roberta Grossman**

say. I feel that we are living in this interesting time, very intense, and I'm spending my time mostly watching what's going on in the world, and I have the impression that I'm watching a TV series, reality shows, one on the American presidential elections, another was Polish presidential elections. And lately I can observe the women's protests and the awakening of Polish feminism. Another reality series is the pandemic and what it does to states and societies and human beings. And all those changes and the challenges I was talking about in the beginning, they are now in flux and we don't understand very well where things are heading. I think the filmmaker is somebody

who can feel what's going on underneath and maybe capture something which didn't happen yet, but which is coming. So that will be my ambition. ■

To watch the hour-long interview, please go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcfM0VcQV9g>

*Agnieszka Holland is a Polish film and television director and screenwriter, best known for her political contributions to Polish cinema.*

*Roberta Grossman is an American filmmaker whose documentaries range from social justice to historical subjects, with a focus on Jewish history.*

## EXHIBITIONS

# When Memory Speaks: *Ten Polish Cities/ Ten Jewish Stories*. A New Exhibition at the Galicia Jewish Museum

Edward Serotta

Ten Polish Jews, the subject of the exhibition, were born in the 1920s and grew up in secular homes or religious ones. Two families were upper middle class, the others were poor and struggling. They lived within the borders of inter-war Poland, and like all teenagers, they were focused on sports, school, friendship, poetry, and first loves.

The world they lived in came to an end in September 1939, and the horrors would not stop until May 1945. All of them would lose members of their families. Some would survive the terrors of Nazi ghettos and concentration camps, while a few would flee into the Soviet Union so they could outrun the German army. One was hidden by a complete stranger in a Polish village, two fought with the Soviet army. One found a rifle and joined the Partisans. When the fighting stopped, eight of them chose to remain in Poland. Two started life over in the United States.



Poster for *Ten Polish Cities/Ten Jewish Stories*.  
Courtesy of Galicia Jewish Museum

These are the stories we tell in *Ten Polish Cities/Ten Jewish Stories*, a second permanent exhibition in the Galicia Jewish Museum, which opened on January 27, 2021. This is a very different sort of exhibition, because every story it displays is told by those interviewed by Centropa between 2002 and 2006. This is not an exhibition about 20th century history. This is about what the 20th century did to the people in this exhibition.

### The Backstory

Centropa was founded in Vienna and Budapest in 2000 with the goal of interviewing over a thousand elderly Jews still living in Central and Eastern Europe. They never used video in those interviews, nor did they focus primarily on the Holocaust. Instead, they wanted to digitize tens of thousands of old family pictures and to ask their respondents to share stories of an entire century, just as they lived it. The idea was to



Cover of the *Ten Polish Cities/ Ten Jewish Stories* walking tour guide of Kraków, based on Teofila Silberring's oral history conducted by Centropa.

Courtesy of Galicia Jewish Museum.  
Used with permission

publish their findings in an online searchable database.

There had never been an oral history project like this before. It is certainly too late to launch one now. When the website [www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org) launched in 2002, it was written up in *The Guardian*, *Times of London*, *New York Times* (twice), *Ha'aretz*, *Die Zeit* and *Der Standard*.

Spearheading the project were young Jewish historians and community activists in Budapest, Prague, Novi Sad, and Kyiv. All of them were children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and they had guidance from oral historians at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and

Central Europe University in Budapest. In order to fund the program, Centropa turned to the Claims Conference, the Austrian and German governments, regional banks, and American family foundations.

It was harder to find support for the Polish interviews. More than a few family foundations felt Centropa should focus on Polish Jews living in North America and Israel, but that is not how Centropa's historians saw it.

Enter Tad Taube. Born in Kraków and raised in Torun, Taube and his family left for the United States in 1938. After receiving a master's degree in engineering at Stanford University, Taube became a major investor in real estate and technology in northern California. After the 1989 fall of Communism in Poland, he began playing an active role in rebuilding Jewish life—supporting academic and cultural programs in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, and elsewhere throughout Poland.

The Taube Foundation, along with the Koret and the Kronhill-Pletka foundations, all provided the funding for Centropa's Polish interviews.

Anka Grupińska, an activist in Solidarity in the 1980s, led the Polish team of interviewers, translators, transcribers, and scanners. Between 2002 and 2006 they interviewed seventy elderly Jews still living in Poland and had scanned nearly 1,500 of their old family pictures.

### Using Old Pictures in Educational Programs

In 2011, the U.S. State Department provided seed funding for Centropa's educational programs in Poland. The Taube Foundation stepped in to help, and Centropa has been working closely with its partner, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, ever since.

With a traveling exhibition based on Centropa's Polish interviews, and multimedia films along with online content in Polish, 236 teachers have taken part in the nine Centropa/Galicia Jewish Museum seminars, which have been held in Białystok, Lublin, Warsaw, Kraków, and Wrocław.

Where do those teachers come from? Ninety-three of them, or 39%, teach in towns with fewer than 50,000 residents, and most of those are former



*shtetls*, a fact which seems to indicate that the smaller the town, the closer people feel to its Jewish heritage.

Despite the rightward bent of the current government in Poland, Centropa and the Galicia Jewish Museum have registered an ever-increasing interest in their seminars. In fact, Centropa's European education director, Fabian Ruehle, stated that aside from Ukraine, more Polish teachers continue to use Centropa—and bring in new teachers—than any other country in Europe.

Centropa's seminars are different because they aren't frontal. While they do bring in at least one historian to speak, most of the seminars are conducted by the teachers themselves, so they can share best practices and lesson plans, then brainstorm with each other on what works best in their classrooms. Indeed, Ruehle said the most important lesson he learned is that “no one can teach a teacher better than another teacher.”

While investing in teachers is surely the way to create a sustainable model in education, the Galicia Jewish Museum and Centropa hold student competitions each

*More than a few family foundations felt Centropa should focus on Polish Jews living in North America and Israel, but that is not how Centropa's historians saw it.*

year so that schools throughout the country can create video walking tours and websites about their towns' Jewish history. In 2018, eighty-eight students from fourteen schools in southern Poland gathered at the Galicia Jewish Museum to show off their projects.

**An Exhibition You Can See on the Walls, Listen to as You Walk, and Find on the Internet**

With more than 200 Polish teachers using Centropa every year, the next logical step was to take the most compelling Centropa interviews and turn them into a permanent exhibition—not just on the walls of a museum—also as a website and even a walking tour app of Kazimierz, Kraków's Jewish quarter. That's because—especially during the COVID-19

pandemic—museums need to bring their exhibitions to their visitors.

Kraków, the historic and cultural center of southern Poland, does not need another historical museum about the German occupation nor another Holocaust-related exhibition, especially since Auschwitz-Birkenau is so close at hand.

Jakub Nowakowski, the Galicia Jewish Museum's director, said, “what is needed is a platform in both a museum environment and on the web—one that will allow Polish Jews to tell us about their lives during the 20th century—from the small comedies of everyday life to the great tragedies that befell them. This project will also serve as a unique extension to the themes that the museum already presents and discusses at the *Traces of Memory* core exhibition.”

With that goal in mind, the Galicia Jewish Museum and Centropa teams set about securing the funding to make it happen. The German Foreign Office became the lead sponsor, with the Taube Foundation joining the donors circle in 2019, as did the



Exhibition installation of *Ten Polish Cities/Ten Jewish Stories*, including the story of Tad Taube (pictured in exhibition panel), Chairman of Taube Philanthropies.  
 Courtesy of the Galicia Jewish Museum

Lerman-Neubauer Foundation of Philadelphia and the Kronhill-Pletka Foundation of New York.

Monika Bielak, a Polish exhibition designer, helped the Centropa/Galicia Jewish Museum team envision what *Ten Polish Cities/Ten Jewish Studies* should look like. They decided to tell the ten stories on oversized panels, each of them backlit and built of polymer, glass, and plastic.

With reduced lighting in the room during the day, entering the exhibition is like stepping into a giant family photo album, one you walk through and listen to on an app as

actors read you the stories in Polish, Hebrew, English, and German. There is nothing even remotely like it in Poland.

One of the panels tells the story of Teofila, or Tosia, Silberring, who lived only a few streets away from the Galicia Jewish Museum. Tosia was born in Kraków in 1925 and died there in 2010. Except for the six years she suffered through life in Nazi hell, she very rarely left her city.

Tosia's Centropa interview is unique, in that she remembers Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter, literally by door number, which is why the Galicia Jewish Museum and Centropa

have turned Tosia's stories into a walking tour app, designed and programmed by the Viennese app developer Nous, which has also made apps for the Louvre and the Berlin Jewish Museum.

Just as important, all ten of the panels, as well as Tosia's walking tour app, are now being readied for the web, so that students (and the general public) who may never come to Kraków can delve into 20th century Poland, as told by ten Jews who will share their stories with you. ■

*Edward Serotta is founder and Director of Centropa.*

## Traces of Memory in Japan

Jakub Nowakowski

In 2020, the travelling version of the Galicia Jewish Museum's core exhibition, *Traces of Memory. A Contemporary Look at the Jewish Past in Poland*, was presented throughout Japan.

The exhibition was displayed at the Hyogo International Association in Kobe, the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, and Chiyoda City Hall in Tokyo.

Updated in 2016, *Traces of Memory* explores a variety of subjects, motifs, and themes related to Polish Jewish history and heritage. The exhibition offers a unique insight into Jewish Poland by describing a series of different processes which, although rooted in the past, directly influence today's world and our future.

The Japanese iteration of the exhibition is accompanied by a brochure containing captions of the travelling version of the exhibit translated into Japanese by Professor Taku Shinohara. This project has been executed cooperatively with the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and the Polish Institute in Tokyo, and co-financed by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund. ■

*Jakub Nowakowski is Director of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków.*



Poster for *Traces of Memory* in Japan.  
Courtesy of Galicia Jewish Museum

## *Where Art Thou? Gen 3:9*

# Temporary Exhibition on the 80th Commemoration of the Closure of the Warsaw Ghetto

Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

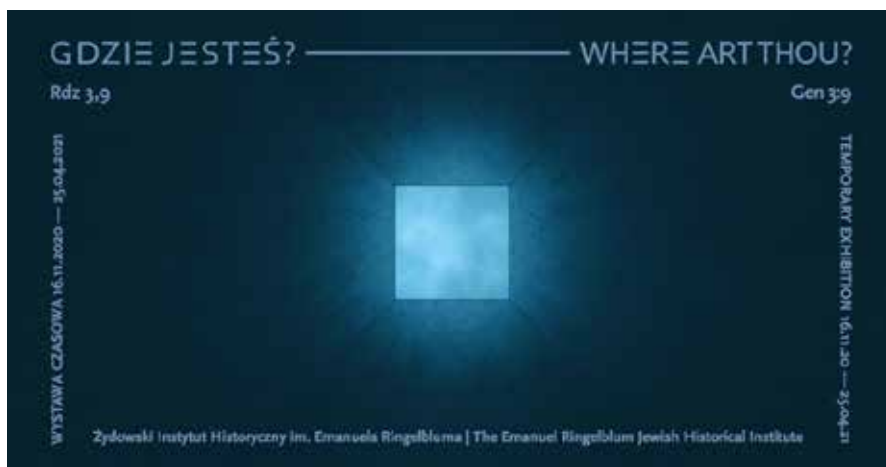
November 16, 2020–April 25, 2021

On November 16, 1940, the Warsaw Ghetto was created, and the city of Warsaw was divided into two parts by a wall. Jews trapped in the ghetto were separated from their relatives, from information, from trees, and from the view of the sky to the horizon. The exhibition *Where Art Thou? Gen 3:9* symbolically refers to this moment.

Instead of a typical chronological and factual narrative, the organizers proposed a different approach by bringing the audience closer to the emotional states experienced by the hundreds of thousands of people crammed into the “Jewish residential district.”

The exhibition space is divided into eleven positions representing states or feelings, such as uncertainty, fear, hunger, timelessness, intimacy, compassion, or faith, marking the burden of life and death in the Warsaw Ghetto.

You can understand the significance of subsequent places by listening to the war reports available on specially prepared audio guides, read by actors Magdalena Lamparska,



Poster for *Where Art Thou? Gen 3:9*. Temporary exhibition for the eightieth commemoration of the closure of the Warsaw Ghetto.

Courtesy of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute

Jerzy Radziwiłowicz, Mateusz Damięcki, and Martin Budny. The recordings are accompanied by images and photographs taken in the ghetto.

As an “open,” self-guided exhibition, the sections are designed to bring a sense of the experience of the ghetto, without any attempt at staging or using expressive scenography. As the curators state, “we would like the viewers to find a universal message referring to other places and events in the border states we touch at the exhibition.”

The exhibition was organized by the Emanuel Ringelblum

Jewish Historical Institute, as part of the commemoration of the eightieth anniversary of the closure of the Warsaw Ghetto. It was co-financed by the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport, with the following contributors:

Curators: Paweł Śpiewak, Piotr Rypson

Curatorial collaboration: Anna Duńczyk-Szulc, Agnieszka Olsten

Exhibition arrangement: Marcin Kwietowicz, Aneta Faner

Graphic design: Jakub Woynarowski

Honorary patronage: President of the Capital City of Warsaw

Media patronage: Polskie Radio Program II ■

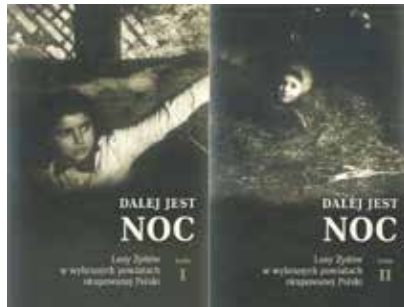
## REPORTS

# Libel Action Against Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski

In January 2018, the Polish Parliament passed legislation that amended the law on the prosecution of crimes against the Polish Nation. It was rescinded in June of that year, but a clause was retained, stating:

Protecting the reputation of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Nation shall be governed by the provisions of the Civil Code Act of 23 April 1964 (Polish Journal of Laws of 2016, items 380, 585 and 1579) on the protection of personal rights. A court action aimed at protecting the Republic of Poland's or the Polish Nation's reputation may be brought by a non-governmental organization within the remit of its statutory activities. Any resulting compensation or damages shall be awarded to the State Treasury.

On the basis of this, Filomena Leszczyńska—the eighty-year-old niece of a village elder, Edward Malinowski, from Malinowo in the Podlasie region in eastern Poland, and supported by the Polish



*Dalej jest noc* [Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland], edited by Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking, published by Polish Center for Holocaust Research, 2018.

***The case has disturbing implications for academic freedom in Poland and has been accompanied by a barrage of anti-Semitic comments on right-wing websites in Poland.***

foundation, Defenders of the Good Name of Poland (Reduta Dobrego Imienia)—is suing Barbara Engelking, author of one of the articles in the two volume *Dalej jest noc: Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied

## Gazeta Editorial Report

Poland, Warsaw, 2018) and Jan Grabowski, one of the editors of the book, for libel. The libel suit is based on the following passage in the book:

Having lost her entire family, Estera Drogicka (née Siemiatycka), equipped with identity papers she bought from a Belarusian woman, decided to leave for work in Prussia. The village elder Edward Malinowski offered her his assistance (and, using the opportunity, also robbed her) and in December 1942 she found herself in Rastenburg (today's Kętrzyn), working as domestic help in the house of a German family named Fittkau. That's where she met her second husband (a Pole, also working in Prussia), but also started a commercial exchange with Malinowski, sending him packages with items for sale. She visited him when she went "home" on vacation. Even though she knew that Malinowski was guilty of betraying many Jews who were hiding in the woods, and were later



## Statement by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski following the February 9, 2021 verdict:

We are very grateful to all people and institutions from Poland and around the world for their support and solidarity during the trial initiated by Filomena Leszczyńska (and launched with support and participation of the Defenders of the Good Name of Poland) regarding the alleged defamation of her uncle, Edward Malinowski who, during the war, was a village elder in Malinowo. We would also like to express our gratitude to our attorney, Mr. Michał Jabłoński.

The Warsaw District Court decided that we have to offer apologies to Mrs. Leszczyńska for having written in the book that Malinowski robbed Estera Siemiatycka and that he was involved in denouncing Jews in hiding to Germans. While respecting the verdict, we do not agree with it, and we shall file an appeal to a higher court.

(Published on Jan Grabowski's Facebook page, February 10, 2021.)

delivered to the Germans, during his post-war trial, she delivered false statements in his favor.

Engelking based her account primarily on the extensive testimony recorded by Estera Drogicka for the Shoah Foundation. This is what she had to say about Malinowski:

I ran away from the forest; it took me half an hour, seven kilometers, or more. I ran,

and I reached Malinowo. I met a young boy, not more than eight years old, and he said: "you, Jew, you have no right to live!" I looked around, I asked about the village elder, I went to this Malinowski Edward, the village elder, he told me that this was his name. I told him that I have an Ausweis (German identity papers), so perhaps I can go and work

in Germany (that's because the elders could select people to be sent as forced laborers in Germany). He responded with a question—"have you saved anything from the ghetto?" So, I told him that I have shoes, a dress, a shirt and bed linens. I listed all of these things to him and he said that he would go and fetch all of them. I had a very nice sweater, so he took it away from me and he gave me his wife's old sweater, I had some silk underwear, so he took that away too. I also had 100 German marks, and he took away fifty.

Drogicka later learned that Malinowski had taken her things (which had been deposited with her neighbors), but told her that he had found nothing. Finally, she stated that there were twenty-two Jews hiding in the forest, together with their children. A forest ranger found them and "together with Malinowski, they went to fetch the gendarmes, and they killed all of them, and the children, they killed them all." In the footnotes, Engelking adds that after the war, Drogicka testified in Malinowski's defense when he was tried for involvement in the murder of these Jews. This trial collapsed when the witnesses against him,

perhaps terrorized by the anti-communist underground active in the area, withdrew their charges. Drogicka explains her testimony as follows:

After the war, he would have received a death penalty. I saved him, despite the fact that he committed evil acts against me, but so what? It was really awful when I had to testify, I was in real trouble, but I saved him.

According to Engelking, “Estera testified in favor of the village elder at the trial. I think that she wanted to do him a favor and show gratitude for his having saved her life, although she didn’t have a particularly good opinion of him.” In her opinion, Malinowski was “neither a hero nor a blackmailer, but somewhere in between. During the occupation there were many such complex situations. I did not write that I believed he had handed over Jews. I gave the opinion of a witness.”

In her plea, the plaintiff claims not only did her uncle not murder Jews, he even risked his life to rescue them and had been acquitted of the charge of involvement in the murder of the Jews in the forest. She claims

*“I regret the attacks on researchers who, in accordance with the best practices and standards in force in the scientific world, pursue the mission of discovering facts and phenomena concerning one of the most tragic periods in the history of Poland and the world.”*

—Zygmunt Stępiński

damages because of her right “to enjoy the remembrance of a deceased person,” her “right to one’s national pride and identity,” her “right to a fact-based history of World War II,” her “right to the protection of dignity,” and her “right to receive truthful information from historical research funded by her taxes.” She is entitled to make this claim because of her membership in an ethnic group (the Polish Nation), and because she is the niece of Edward Malinowski. She was demanding an apology and damages of 100,000 zloties (approximately \$27,000 USD).

The case, which has disturbing implications for academic freedom in Poland, and has been accompanied by a barrage of anti-Semitic comments on

right-wing websites in Poland, closed on January 12 and a judgement was expected on February 9, 2021.

**Update:** On February 9, 2021, Judge Ewa Jończyk of the Warsaw Regional Court found Professors Engelking and Grabowski guilty of defamation. She ordered them to apologize to the plaintiff Filomena Leszczyńska, the niece of Edward Malinowski, for “violating his honor” by “providing incorrect information” that during the war he had robbed Estera Siemiatycka and caused the death of Jews hiding in a forest. According to the judgment, this apology should take the form of a letter to Ms. Leszczyńska, and in subsequent editions of the book, the sections dealing with Malinowski should be changed. The judge rejected the claim for monetary compensation.

Responding to the verdict, Professor Grabowski said, “I respect the court’s verdict, but it is difficult to agree with its findings. I hope that we will be vindicated in the appeal.” ■

**Note:** An English translation of the two-volume collection, *Night Without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland*, will be published by Indiana University Press in 2021.

# Revolution Returns to Poland: Feminists Lead Largest Demonstrations Since the End of Communism

*Gazeta* Editorial  
Report

**E**ditors' Note: On January 27, 2021—since the writing of this report and as *Gazeta* goes to press—the Polish government passed the restrictive abortion legislation and public protests resumed.

Beginning on October 22, 2020, and continuing through the wintry weeks of November into December, hundreds of thousands of Polish citizens poured into the streets in the largest nationwide demonstration since the fall of communism. This time, however, the target was not communism, but ultra-nationalism in alliance with the Polish Catholic Church. The underlying core demand in 2020, as in the 1980s, was restoration of democracy, dignity, and justice. One notable difference is that today, the lead organizers are feminists, many under thirty years old. Led by the OSK (*Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*, All Poland Women's Strike), they rallied citizens of all ages and backgrounds in nearly 600 cities and towns to protest the Law and Justice (PiS)

government's latest near-total abortion ban, marking a formidable blow to the government.

The protests drew momentum from two previous nationwide pro-choice demonstrations, in 2016 and 2017, when the government introduced sweeping legislative bans on abortion. Incensed feminist activists quickly mobilized protests via social media. They launched a new movement, the Women's Strike.

Under the banner "Black Protest," women and men dressed in black marched in cities and towns. The choice to dress in black made historical reference to the women-led resistance against 19th century Czarist occupation of Poland, known as the National Mourning, in



One of the posters for the Women's Strike, by Joanna Musiał. The inscription reads: "Freedom is a Woman."

Courtesy of Joanna Musiał. Used with permission

which black-clothed women demonstrated publicly for Poland's independence and reunification.

"[The year] 2016 will go down in history as the birth of the mass women's movement in Poland," declared Warsaw feminist scholar and activist



Agnieszka Graff. That year, and again in 2017, the government withdrew its anti-abortion legislation after feminist protests won the day. Activists celebrated, although they recognized that PiS would try again. The legislative ban, proposed then and now, would terminate abortion in the case of fetal defects, which make up around 98% of all legal abortions in Poland.

In October 2020, the government planned to roll out the new legislation in the midst of the pandemic, which they surmised would curtail public protest. However, the plan backfired, instead fueling feminist fury and an eruption of mass protests. And not only feminist fury.

Opinion polls showed a majority of the public opposed the government-controlled constitutional court's anti-abortion decision and supported the protests, whose demands exceeded the anti-abortion legislation to embrace calls for safeguarding LGBTQ+ rights and ending church-state governance. Citizens knowingly risked their health to take to the streets during an upsurge in the pandemic in Poland.

Protest organizer Marta Lempart, a forty-one-year-

old lawyer, told reporters, "The revolution that has begun is not just about abortion. It is a fight for freedom that has been brutally violated, and abortion is its symbol." Protest facilitators organized a Consultative Council to draft demands and negotiate with government representatives, although they reached no agreements or compromises. After six weeks or so, the protests dwindled in size, as the pandemic surged and the government issued new health-related restrictions.

### Gender and Generations

A new player entered the arena, noted Graff, in the collective persona of Generation Z. These twenty-year-olds, as she characterized them, "act as if they never heard of the Big Compromise [between church and state] ... [F]or them, John Paul II is a historical figure, not a saint; they treat the symbols of Solidarity as a source of ideas



Palace of Culture in Warsaw, with Warsaw Mayor Rafał Trzaskowski waving a lightning bolt, symbol of the protests.

Photo by Aleksandra Sajdak. Used with permission

for memes. This is a rebellion of the smartphone generation: individualism, network and a specific sense of humor reign in it. Each and every one obeys personally and in their own way. Together, they create history and are aware of it."

Olga Tokarczuk, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, regarded the protests as "civilizational change," she told journalist Masha Gessen. Participants born after the fall of Communism, she noted, comprise the first generation to fully enjoy the results of

EU membership. They know “how to live elsewhere. They speak foreign languages and are very familiar with what human and civil rights mean in the 21st century.” Their fearless outrage attracted supporters from all walks of life, even the police officers and officials who were ordered to restrain them. At a meeting with university rectors the minister of education warned of budget cuts should the campuses continue to support protests.

### **Jewish Advocacy**

Many Jewish organizations marched in the demonstrations. From the JCC Kraków’s four-story building, staff hung banners with the Women’s Strike red lightning-bolt symbol and the LGBTQ+ rainbow. For Hanukkah, the JCC designed a poster of a menorah with eight burning candles shaped as rainbow-colored lightning bolts, which signified its solidarity with both women and the LGBTQ+ community.

Government and popular anti-gender campaigns began soon after Poland entered the EU in May 2004. A public discourse about homosexuality became a divisive topic politicizing the private sphere, revealing contradictions between religious conservatism

and equally strong desires to be modern and European. Homophobic municipalities and church officials shut down a number of the first equality pride marches.

Framing the rights of homosexuals as Nazi ideology, the official hate speech and the fear of sexual minorities, then and today, follow the tropes and patterns of anti-Semitism in 20th century Poland, note gender and Jewish studies scholars.

They point to a “Gay = Jew” rhetorical formula that emboldens today’s politicians to establish “gay-free zones” and promote slogans such as “Lesbians to the gas” and “It’s not a myth, it’s true—you see a gay, you see a Jew.” This pre-war ultra-nationalist script under a new guise has united Jewish and LGBTQ+ communities.

In October, Poland’s Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich spoke to the Polish Press Agency (PAP) about the anti-abortion ruling and the feminist-led protests, including some that occurred



JCC Kraków’s Hanukkah poster shows support for the Women’s Strike and LGBTQ rights. Courtesy of JCC Kraków

in front of and inside churches. “The Jewish experience of living for two thousand years in the diaspora teaches us how important the separation of religion and state is. Recent events in Poland underscore its necessity,” he said. When asked specifically about abortion, Schudrich explained that Jews believe life begins with birth, not conception. “We also believe that Jews should be guided, in their approach to abortion, by Jewish religious law,” he explained, “but that this right, or any other religious law, should not be a state law.”

*“The real stake is our perception of ourselves as a society. The protests will probably expire soon, PiS will do what it wants about abortion, but the cultural change will be irreversible.”*

—Agnieszka Graff

### **Comparisons with Solidarity**

By all accounts, participants and observers of the October demonstrations felt the exhilarating winds of revolution for the first time in decades. At the annual conference of the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies last November, and in social media forums since the protests began, colleagues who experienced or studied the Solidarity movement were comparing it to the current feminist mobilization. Certainly, there are connections to be explored between the Solidarity past and the feminist present. Spanning a generational divide of thirty years, Poland championed two nationwide mass mobilizations of historic proportion, each generating an exultant sense of society’s

collective power. In each case, a passionate activism dominated by young people threw a (red) lightning bolt at the power structure. Each movement drew people who had never before been involved in political activism. Each time, a government overplayed its hand, caught unprepared for the collective demand for change.

All considered, the deepest reverberations of today’s feminist demonstrations may actually represent a repudiation of Solidarity for its inability to dignify women’s citizenship or to prevent religion from dominating democratic governance. Although Solidarity aspired to be democratic, it did not fulfill this objective, as was particularly evident in its gender policies and treatment of women activists as secondary support to their male counterparts. The recent demonstrations placed gender justice front and center for the first time in a pro-democracy mass mobilization in Poland.



A Warsaw tram during the protest. The sign reads: “Women, we are with you!”

Photo by Aleksandra Sajdak. Used with permission

Whatever our understanding of the current situation, Polish women have become critical to democratic activism. “The real stake is our perception of ourselves as a society,” declared Graff. “The protests will probably expire soon, PiS will do what it wants about abortion, but the cultural change will be irreversible.” ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

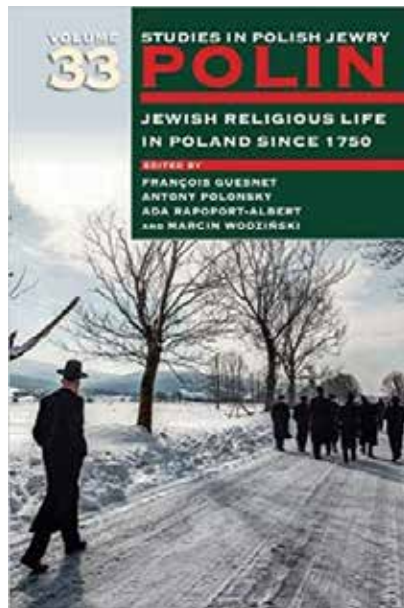
### Conferences

# Online Conference Launches Volume 33 of *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry*

Antony Polonsky

On January 11, an online conference was held to celebrate the publication of the new volume of *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, which is dedicated to Jewish religious life in Poland since 1750. It was organized by the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies and the Institute of Jewish Studies, University College London, and co-organized and supported by the Embassy of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Cultural Institute in London, with the assistance of JW3, a leading Jewish cultural venue in London, and the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies. The event honored the memory of the late Ada Rapoport-Albert, Professor Emerita of Jewish Studies and former head of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, who was one of the editors of the volume. (See her obituary in the Summer/Fall 2020 issue of *Gazeta*.)

Drawing on important advances in recent years in the study of religious belief, this volume embodies a fresh understanding of Jewish



*Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*  
Volume 33: *Jewish Religious Life in Poland since 1750*, edited by Ada Rapoport-Albert, François Guesnet, Antony Polonsky, Marcin Wodziński, published by The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press; abridged edition (February 28, 2021).

religious life in Poland from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives. The long-established interest in Hasidism is considered from new angles, as are women's religious practices in a focus, away from elites to a consideration of the beliefs and practices of ordinary people. Reappraisals of religious responses to secularization and modernity,

both liberal and Orthodox, offer more nuanced insights into this key issue. Other research areas represented in the volume include the material history of Jewish religious life in Eastern Europe, and the shift of emphasis from theology to praxis in the search for the defining quality of religious experience. The contemporary reassessments in this volume, with their awareness of emerging techniques that have the potential to extract fresh insights from source materials both old and new, show how our understanding of what it means to be Jewish continues to expand.

The conference was opened by introductory addresses by Arkady Rzegocki, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Vivian Wineman, President of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies, and François Guesnet, Chairman of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies and Professor of Modern Jewish History in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London. The participants in the first session were the three remaining

editors of the volume: Marcin Wodziński, Professor of Jewish Studies and Head of the Taube Department of Jewish Studies, University of Wrocław; Antony Polonsky, Chief Historian of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, and Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies at Brandeis University; and François Guesnet. The session combined an introduction to the volume with reminiscences of Ada Rapoport-Albert.

The first session was followed by one on Jewish religious life in the 18th and 19th centuries. The first paper was given by Moshe Rosman, Professor Emeritus in the Koschitzky Department of Jewish History of Bar Ilan University in Israel, who discussed “Two Models of Jewish Women’s Piety: Bayla Falk and Leah Horowitz.” The next paper was delivered by Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska, lecturer in the Department of Jewish History in the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. It analyzed the links between progressive synagogues in Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries. The final paper, presented by Rachel Manekin, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Maryland, analyzed rabbinic perspectives on Austrian marriage

legislation as it was applied in Galicia.

The screening of the photographs of Hasidic life taken by Agnieszka Traczewska, a film producer and photographer living in Kraków, was followed by an exchange between the photographer and Prof. Wodziński, with lively responses from Zoom participants.

The final session of the conference examined the reconfigurations of Jewish religious life in Poland in the 20th century. The first paper was delivered by Wojciech Tworek, who completed his doctorate under Ada Rapoport-Albert and is now Assistant Professor in the Taube Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław. In it, he discussed the unsuccessful attempt by the rabbi, Yosef Yitshak Schneersohn (1880–1950), the leader of Habad Hasidism, to establish a more elaborate commemoration of 19 Kislev, referred to by the Hasidim as the Festival of Redemption, which marks the anniversary of the release of the founder of Habad, Shneur Zalman of Liady (1745–1812), from imprisonment in the Petropavlovsk Fortress in 1798. The second contribution, by Havi Dreifuss, Professor of Jewish history and head of the Institute for the History of

Polish Jewry and Israel-Poland Relations at Tel Aviv University and director of the Center for Research on the Holocaust in Poland at Yad Vashem, analyzed Jewish religious life in Poland during the Holocaust, describing the way a group of young Gerer Hasid Jewish youngsters throughout Poland established an underground movement that attempted to maintain strict religious observance, and thus defeat the Nazi attempt to destroy their religious faith. She also examined how rabbis were able to retain much of their spiritual authority under Nazi rule. The final presentation, by Tali (Naftali) Loewenthal, a teaching fellow lecturing in Jewish spirituality at University College London, was an examination of the literary genre of the Orthodox Holocaust memoir in English and its significance for its primary readership, members of the contemporary *haredi* community.

More than 100 people participated in this engaging exchange, which was a fitting memorial to the life and creativity of our dear colleague Ada Rapoport-Albert, both of whose children took part in the meeting. ■

***Dr. Antony Polonsky is Chief Historian of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.***

## Commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto: “...The News Came Like a Bolt from the Blue”

Online Conference at the POLIN Museum. November 16, 2020

On November 16, 1940, armed guards appeared in the streets leading to the “Jewish residential district” established by the Germans in Warsaw. This symbolic date marks the creation of the largest Jewish ghetto in Nazi-occupied Europe. In November 2020, to mark the eightieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto being sealed off, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, and the Polish Center for Holocaust Research organized the academic conference “...The News Came Like a Bolt from the Blue.” The conference’s aims were to discuss various aspects of the Warsaw Ghetto’s establishment. Panelists discussed diverse issues surrounding the theme of the eightieth anniversary, including German policy and actions, the Jewish population’s dilemmas, and the perception of ghettoization by Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Scholars explored the little-known stories of non-Jewish Poles who found themselves imprisoned in the ghetto, and the director of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute presented a new temporary exhibition at the institute, *Where Art Thou? Gen 3:9* (announced in this issue of *Gazeta*). ■



## IPJS Symposium in Honor of Professor Antony Polonsky

March 16, 2021

The Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies will host “The Holocaust in Eastern Europe: Sources, Memory, Politics,” a symposium honoring Antony Polonsky, Chief historian of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The event will take place (online) on March 16, 2021. The symposium will bring together senior scholars of the Holocaust with the authors of significant recent studies in this area. It will reflect on archaeological investigations, the voice of witnesses and survivors, and also present-day contextualizations of engaging with the mass murder of the Jews of Europe. It is organized in cooperation with the Wiener Library on the occasion of the eightieth birthday of Professor Polonsky. Organizers: Dr. Michael Fleming (Polish University Abroad, London) and Professor François Guesnet (UCL, HJS), IPJS. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

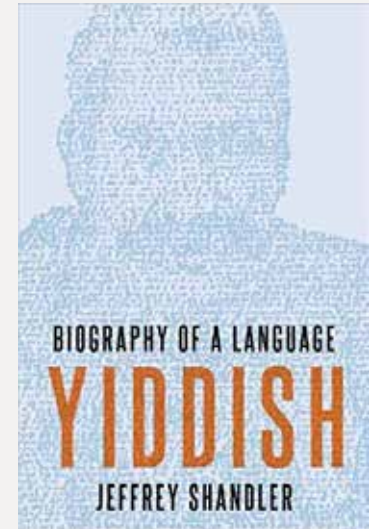
### Books and Journals

## *Yiddish: Biography of a Language*

By Jeffrey Shandler

Oxford University Press, 2020

Jeffrey Shandler, Rutgers University professor and scholar of contemporary Jewish culture, profiles Yiddish from its birth to the present day in *Yiddish: Biography of a Language*. Shandler relates the multifaceted history of Yiddish in the form of a biographical profile. Through a series of thematic chapters—from “Name” and “Date and Place of Birth” to “Religion” and “Life Expectancy”—he offers surprising insights into the dynamic interrelation of the language, its speakers, and their culture, and explores the varied symbolic investments that Yiddish speakers and others have made in the language. ■



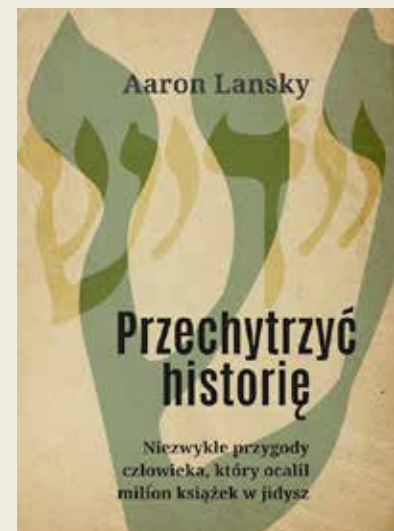
## *Przechytzyć Historię* (Outwitting History)

By Aaron Lansky

Translated by Agnieszka Nowak-Młynikowska

Smak Słowa, 2020

*Przechytzyć Historię* is Agnieszka Nowak-Młynikowska’s Polish translation of Aaron Lansky’s 2004 classic, *Outwitting History*. As a twenty-four-year-old college graduate, Lansky discovered that innumerable Yiddish books were being discarded by American Jews unable to read the language of their ancestors. *Outwitting History*, which won the 2005 Massachusetts Book Award, tells the incredible story of Lansky’s journey throughout the world to rescue over a million Yiddish books and his founding of the Yiddish Book Center. ■

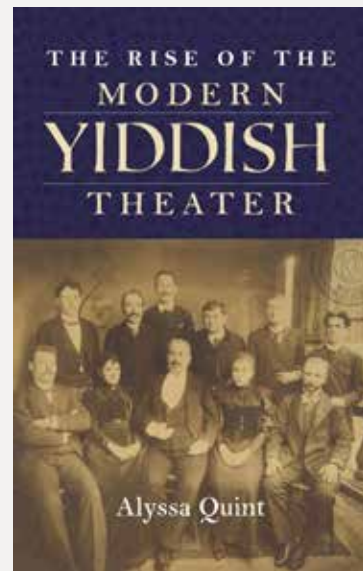


## *The Rise of the Modern Yiddish Theater*

By Alyssa Quint

Indiana University Press, 2019

Alyssa Quint, scholar-in-residence at YIVO Institute of Jewish Research, focuses on the early years of the modern Yiddish theater (roughly 1876 to 1883) through the story of its central pioneer, Russian playwright Avrom Goldfaden. Goldfaden's theatrical works, which were among the first commercially viable Yiddish-language productions, shed light on the experience of Jews in imperial Russia. The book was a finalist for both a National Jewish Book Award and the Jordan Schnitzer Award. ■

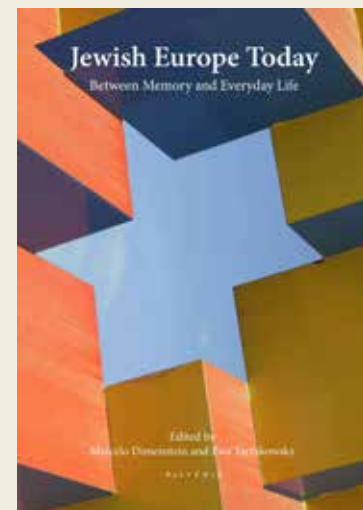


## *Jewish Europe Today. Between Memory and Everyday Life*

Edited by Marcelo Dimentstein and Ewa Tartakowsky

Austeria Press, 2020

This book, published by Kraków-based Austeria Press, explores groundbreaking research on European Jewish community trends to analyze the challenges and opportunities for Jews in Europe. Edited by social anthropologist Marcelo Dimentstein and sociologist Ewa Tartakowsky, it draws from papers delivered at the Third Conference of Emerging Researchers in Contemporary Jewish Europe, held in October 2017 at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. As the editors note: “Jewish life in Europe coexists between normalcy and vibrancy and the appearance of new vulnerabilities including anti-Semitism, terrorism, the place of minorities in society, and community demographics, which are emerging as prominent concerns impacting communities across the region. Not to mention the crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown.” ■



To sample the chapters, please visit:

<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/jewish-europe-today-between-memory-and-everyday-life/>



## *Barefoot Through Thorns and Flowers: Memoirs of the Mother of Yiddish Theater* (Boso przez ciernie i kwiaty. Memuary matki teatru żydowskiego)

By Ester Rachel Kamińska

Translated by Mirosława Bułat

PWN (Warsaw), 2020

Ester Rachel Kamińska's memoirs were published in the years 1926–27 in the Warsaw Yiddish daily *Der Moment*. The memories collected into this volume provide new insights into the actress's youth and early career, introducing women from the generation of "pioneers" of Yiddish theater into the world of Jewish experiences, feelings, and dilemmas. This is the fifth volume of the series *Jews. Poland. Autobiography*. It is published under the direction of the Taube Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław and in cooperation with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. ■



## *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich* (The Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries)

By Krzysztof Bielawski. Więź Publishing, 2020

Of the 1,200 Jewish cemeteries in Poland, virtually all have been devastated to a greater or lesser extent. No less than half have been completely wiped out, and the remaining tombstones usually constitute a negligible percentage of their original number. *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich* (The Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries) is the most comprehensive documentation of this devastation. Using Jewish cemeteries as a starting point it explores local history and dispels myths such as the total German culpability for destruction of cemeteries. The author, Krzysztof Bielawski, is a researcher of Jewish cemeteries, a specialist on Jewish heritage at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and the founder of the Polish Jewish Cemeteries website [www.cmentarze-zydowskie.pl](http://www.cmentarze-zydowskie.pl). ■

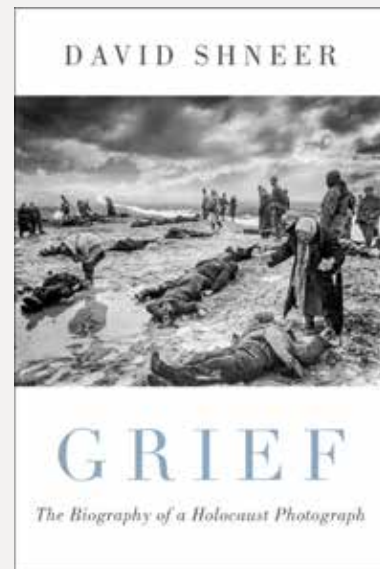


## *Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph*

By David Shneer

Oxford University Press, 2020

In January 1942, Soviet press photographers took pictures of the first liberation of a German mass atrocity, in which an estimated 7,000 Jews and others were executed at an anti-tank trench near Kerch on the Crimean peninsula. Dmitri Baltermants, a Soviet photojournalist, took photos that day that would have a long life in shaping the image of Nazi genocide in and against the Soviet Union. Presenting never before seen photographs, *Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph* shows how Baltermants used the image of a grieving woman to render this gruesome mass atrocity as a transcendentally human tragedy. Unlike images of emaciated camp survivors or barbed wire fences, Shneer argues, the Holocaust by bullets in the Soviet Union makes *Grief* a quintessential Soviet image of Nazi genocide. ■



## *Polin Volume 33: Jewish Religious Life in Poland Since 1750*

Edited by François Guesnet, Antony Polonsky, Ada Rapoport-Albert, and Marcin Wodziński

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in Association with Liverpool University Press, 2021

Following tremendous advances in recent years in the study of religious belief, this newly published volume adopts a fresh understanding of Jewish religious life in Poland. Approaches deriving from the anthropology, history, phenomenology, psychology, and sociology of religion have replaced the methodologies of social or political history that were applied in the past, offering fascinating new perspectives. The contemporary reassessments in this volume, with their awareness of emerging techniques, show how our understanding of what it means to be Jewish continues to expand. ■



# *East European Jewish Affairs* Announces Changes in Leadership

by Natalia Aleksiu

This coming year ushers in a change in the editorial team of *East European Jewish Affairs*. Karolina Szymaniak and I will assume the mantle of editors in chief, Kamil Kijek will serve as book review editor, and Laurie Fialkoff will take over as managing editor. This is a great honor and an exciting moment, tinged with sadness at the untimely passing of David Shneer z”l. In preparing for the transition, we worked for several months with David Shneer z”l, Anna Shternshis, Nick Underwood, and Deborah Yalen, and we thank them all. Our thanks also go to the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for East European Jewry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to Eli Lederhendler and Semyon Goldin, whose help and support is greatly appreciated. Please keep us in mind if you are looking for a home for a completed article or are working on a new one.

*East European Jewish Affairs*—an interdisciplinary journal—serves as the leading global journal dealing with both Jews in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as well as Ashkenazic Jews wherever in the world they may be. Serving as a bridge between Jewish studies and Russian and East European studies, as well as between the scholarly community and the public, the journal welcomes scholarly submissions of single- or multi-authored articles, review essays, and annotated archival documents. In addition, we encourage those working in the field of Eastern European Jewish affairs, whether they be museum professionals or cultural activists, to submit for the new section, “East European Jewish Affairs in Action.”

*East European Jewish Affairs* is supported by the University of Colorado Boulder, with generous contributions from the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Toronto, and the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. ■

Please visit the Taylor & Francis website for more information about the journal: [www.tandfonline.com/toc/feej20/current](http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/feej20/current)



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Book Essay

## Reflections on *The People on the Beach*

Rosie Whitehouse

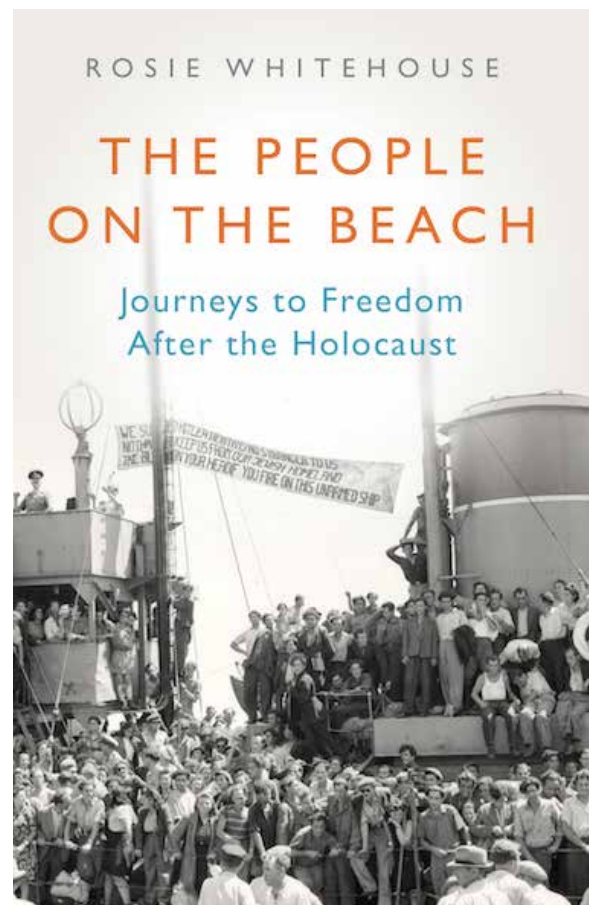
One summer's night in 1946, over 1,300 European Jews waited silently on an Italian beach to board a secret ship, the *Josiah Wedgwood*. The plan was to try and smash through the Royal Navy blockade of the Palestine coast and leave Europe behind once and for all. I stumbled across this story while researching a travel guide to Liguria. I assumed I could buy a book with one click that would tell me who these people were, where they had come from, and what they had experienced. No such book existed. To answer my questions, I had to write it.

I travelled to the survivors' hometowns and villages and then drove along the route that they took as they abandoned the places they had lived for generations.

In the Ukrainian city of Rivne, once Rovne, in Poland, it became clear that it was not just the massacre of over

20,000 Jews in 1941 that made life unbearable. In the civil war between the Ukrainian nationalists and the Soviet forces, Jews were caught in an ethnic cleansing that made it simply too dangerous to remain. The Jewish partisans who had liberated the city with the Red Army also found themselves in a head-on collision with Stalinism and decided find a way to safety in Palestine.

But that was not the end of Jewish life in Rivne. Rabbi Schneor Schneersohn finds people still come forward to tell him that they were children who were not found, but have no documents to prove their Jewishness. When he "knows in his heart" that



*No such book existed. To answer my questions, I had to write it.*

people are Jewish, he'll do all he can to help them. "The catastrophe of the Shoah has not finished: I see it in Jewish life all around me," he said.

After the liberation, the Jews found few who helped them.

Survivors who returned home were often met with hostility – even murdered by their neighbors. Those who found themselves in the American-occupied zone in Germany faced anti-Semitism even from the American General George S. Patton.

The survivors who made their way to that moonlit Ligurian beach were not downtrodden and broken, but people with agency. Their story is one of Jewish self-help by which the armed, cultural, and religious resistance of the wartime years continued.

In the displaced persons camps in occupied Germany, Jewish cultural life and Zionism flourished. The survivors, who overwhelmingly wanted to settle in Palestine, found themselves facing a new enemy – the British. They were far from colonialist settlers. Rather, desperate refugees prepared to risk their lives to get to Palestine.

It is odd for the survivors' story in the years 1945–48 to have fallen through the cracks, since it is the link between the



The Haganah ship *Medinat HaYehudim* (Jewish State) at Haifa, 1947.  
Wikimedia Commons

*The survivors who made their way to that moonlit Ligurian beach were not downtrodden and broken, but people with agency.*

Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel. Why it was forgotten begs many uncomfortable questions. That is why *The People on the Beach* is not just a story of the past, but one of the present. Along the route the survivors took out of Europe, Italians, Germans and Poles retell their stories which remind us that the Holocaust has contemporary relevance in European politics. ■

*Rosie Whitehouse is a journalist specializing in Jewish life after the Holocaust. She serves as a historical advisor to Centropa (Central Europe Center for Research and Documentation).*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS Awards

### The 2020 Gierowski-Shmeruk Prize

Antony Polonsky

The Gierowski-Shmeruk Prize, a joint initiative of the Jewish Studies programs at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and the Marie Curie Skłodowska University in Kraków, and financed by the Marcel and Maria Roth Foundation, is awarded annually for the best scholarly publication in the field of the history and culture of the Jews of the Polish lands. It is named in honor of two eminent academics whose cooperation has contributed greatly to these studies, Professor Józef Gierowski, Rector of the Jagiellonian University between 1981 and 1987, and Professor Chone Shmeruk, Professor of Yiddish Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This year, the third time the prize has been awarded, eleven publications were submitted for consideration. Because of the pandemic, the presentation ceremony took place online in the presence of Professor Dorota Malec, Pro-Rector of the Jagiellonian University for international relations.



The 2020 Gierowski-Shmeruk Prize awardees. From left to right: Marcin Wodziński, Waldemar Spallek, Hannah Kozieńska-Witt, Dagmara Budzioch. Courtesy of Jagiellonian University and University of Wrocław

The selection committee, chaired by Professor Stanisław Sroka, Dean of the Historical Faculty of the Jagiellonian University, awarded prizes to three books and honorable mentions to two additional works. First prize was awarded to Dagmara Budzioch

of the Jewish Historical Institute for her book *Zdobione zwoje Estery ze zbiorów Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego na tle tradycji dekorowania megilot Ester w XVII i XVIII wieku*. T. 1. *Zarys problematyki*. T. 2. *Reprodukcje* (Decorated Scrolls of Esther in the Collection of

the Jewish Historical Institute and Their Relation to the Tradition of Decorating Scrolls of Esther in the 17th and 18th Centuries, Volume 1). The issues raised by this subject are addressed in Volume 2, *Reproductions* (Warsaw, Wydawnictwo ŻIH, 2019).

This two-volume publication is a remarkable achievement both from scholarly and technical points of view. In order to describe the tradition of decorating scrolls of Esther read at the festival of Purim, the author studied approximately 300 manuscripts in public and private collections, including New York, London, Tel Aviv, and Zurich, as well as those which are part of the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute. The results are a richly detailed and illustrated analysis, now available as beautiful manuscripts to the general public.

In her acceptance speech of the award, Dr. Budzioch observed that “[it] is for me a great honor that my work has been recognized in this way, particularly since the topic of Hebrew manuscripts has only rarely been researched in Poland. I should like to thank all those who had contributed to my scholarly evolution, in

*Dagmara Budzioch studied approximately 300 manuscripts, including in New York, London, Tel Aviv, and Zurich.*

particular Professor Andrzej Trzciniński, who has acted as the supervisor of the grant which has made this project possible. I also express my gratitude to the institutions, libraries, museums and private collectors who made these valuable manuscripts available to me.”

The second prize was awarded to Marcin Wodziński, Director of the Taube Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław, and cartographer Waldemar Spallek of the Institute for Geography and Regional Development at the University of Wrocław, for *Chasydyzm. Atlas historyczny* (Hasidism. A Historical Atlas, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2019). This is a comprehensive examination, through maps, illustrations, and text, of the emergence and spread of Hasidism, a movement for Jewish religious revival which came to be marked by charismatic leadership and a stress on mystical communion with God. For my detailed

*laudatio* on presenting the second place prize, please see the article that follows.

The third place prize was awarded to Hanna Kozińska-Witt of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University for her book *Politycy czy klakierzy? Żydzi w krakowskiej radzie miejskiej w XIX wieku* (Jewish Politicians on the Kraków City Council in the 19th Century, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019). This book is based on extensive archival research in Kraków, Warsaw, and Lwów (Lviv), which enabled her to shed new light on the functioning of local government in Kraków both during the period of the free city, and then under Austrian rule between 1846 and 1914, illustrating clearly the role of Jewish councillors. In his laudatory speech, Krzysztof Link-Lenczowski remarked:

“Dr. Hanna Kozińska-Witt, with the skill and precision of an experienced researcher, describes the most important points of contact between two worlds—the non-Jewish and Jewish—and how both overcame their long-established world view.” ■

# On the Gierowski-Shmeruk Prize to Marcin Wodziński and Waldemar Spallek

*Chasydyzm. Atlas historyczny* (Historical Atlas of Hasidism)

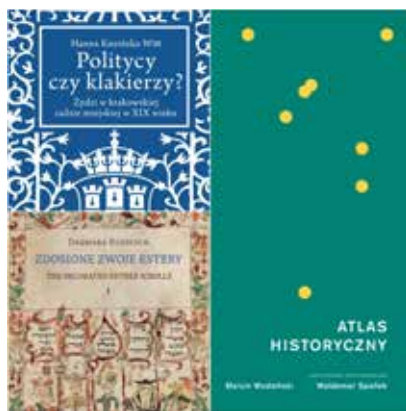
By Marcin Wodziński, Cartography by Waldemar Spallek

Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2019

Antony Polonsky

It was a great privilege and pleasure for me to present the second prize in the Gierowski-Shmeruk Prize to Marcin Wodziński and his cartographer, Waldemar Spallek, who are responsible for this beautiful and path-breaking work, which has also appeared in English and already been awarded two prizes. It is a comprehensive examination, through maps, illustrations, and text, of the emergence and spread of Hasidism, a movement for Jewish religious revival which came to be marked by charismatic leadership and a stress on mystical communion with God. Our understanding of this phenomenon has been transformed by the scholarship of the last thirty years, to which Marcin Wodziński has himself made a very significant contribution.

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (or Besht), the initiator of the movement, was invited to come to the small town of Medzhybizh (Międzybóž) (now in Ukraine) in the



middle of the 18th century as the resident kabbalist, healer, and leader of the *beit midrash*. He did not, as some of the original historians of the movement argued, see himself as a radical or as called upon to support the lower orders against the communal oligarchy. He was also not interested in creating anything more than a small circle of like-minded mystics, and in this respect resembled the many other circles of mystics in 18th century Poland-Lithuania led by charismatic figures. What made him different was that he seems to have modified in a significant manner the concept of the *tsadik*, one who is transformed from a righteous person into a mediator between the divine

and the human realms. His teaching was also marked by its anti-asceticism, very different from the pessimistic and sin-laden atmosphere which had become a feature of the religious culture of Polish Jewry.

On his death in 1760, the Besht left behind only a small circle of followers. It was they, and above all Yaakov Yosef of Polonnoe, and Dov Ber, the magid of Mezhyrech (in Polish Międzyrzec), who transformed what had been a circle of devoted followers into a major religious revival and made its rapid expansion possible. Dov Ber seems to have been responsible for the decision not to seek a single successor, but rather to support a large number of different *tsadikim*. As a consequence, from its earliest beginnings, Hasidism accommodated a variety of distinct and, at times, conflicting opinions, directions, and personal styles of spirituality which could, and occasionally did, lead to inter-Hasidic rivalries, bitter divisions, and controversies. This was in



keeping with Jewish religious tradition in which the concept of a single source of authority had long been alien. It meant that the movement never generated mechanisms for the imposition of uniformity and control. This initial absence of any centralized framework of authority in early Hasidism was accentuated by the rapid proliferation of Hasidic schools and the expansion of the movement into areas outside its Podolian-Volhynian base, which compelled it to adapt to very varied local customs and conditions, and contributed further to its variegated character.

The Hasidim were certainly interested in proselytizing. Hasidism was spread by wandering preachers who established themselves in a particular place as *tsadikim*. They recruited disciples and developed networks of sympathizers. The Hasidim also publicized their views in print, establishing more than twenty printing presses for this purpose. They took great care to place Hasidic *shokhetim* (ritual slaughterers) and *mohelim* (circumcisers) in individual communities and attempted to penetrate the complex Jewish communal structure.

As a result, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries,

**Historical Atlas of Hasidism is the first attempt to synthesize the recent research on this movement through the innovative use of maps and illustrations.**

Hasidism expanded rapidly into the rest of Ukraine and, more slowly and with less success, into Galicia, the Kingdom of Poland, and the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. It was unable to find a foothold in Wielkopolska. Outside the historic borders of Poland-Lithuania, it also established itself in present-day Romania, Moldova, Slovakia, and Hungary. As Marcin Wodziński points out in the introduction to this volume: “Although not all Jews living in these areas were followers of Hasidism, the development of the Hasidic movement influenced the lifestyle not just of Hasidim and their families, but of nearly all the Jews living in this area.”

*Historical Atlas of Hasidism* is the first attempt to synthesize the recent research on this movement through the innovative use of maps and illustrations. It includes seventy-four maps and a

wealth of illustrations, charts, and tables, which chart the movement’s emergence and expansion. It documents its dynasties, courts, and prayer houses, its spread to the land of Israel and the New World, and the crisis of the two world wars and the Holocaust, and its remarkable post-war rebirth.

The book also demonstrates how geography has influenced not only the social organization of Hasidism but also its spiritual life, types of religious leadership, and cultural articulation. Like much recent scholarship, it focuses not only on Hasidic leaders, but also on their thousands of followers living far from Hasidic centers. It examines Hasidism in its historical entirety, from its beginnings in the 18th century until today, and draws on extensive GIS-processed databases of historical and contemporary records to present the most complete picture to date of this thriving and diverse religious movement. It is easy to read, and its maps and illustrations are closely related to the text. It deserves the widest possible readership and illustrates not only Jewish spirituality but religious life in general. ■

## Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Awards from YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw have announced that Professor Daniel Grinberg and Dr. Joanna Lisek were named the recipients of the Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award for 2019 and 2020, respectively. The awards were presented at an online event hosted by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Administered by YIVO, this annual award was endowed by Jan Karski in 1992 to honor his wife, the dancer Pola Nireńska, who was the sole survivor of a Jewish family during the war. Each year, the award is given to an author documenting Polish-Jewish relations and Jewish contributions to Polish culture. The members of the jury that selected the winners are Paweł Śpiewak (former director of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute), Jonathan Brent (Executive Director of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research), Joachim S. Russek, Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, and Marcin Wodziński.

“YIVO is committed to the continuance of this award into



Jan Karski Award recipients for 2019 and 2020, Daniel Grinberg and Joanna Lisek. Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Institute

the long future in order to continue honoring the memory of Pola Nireńska and Jan Karski, and as a symbol of YIVO’s history and its commitment to Polish-Jewish understanding,” said Jonathan Brent.

### Awardees

Daniel Grinberg is a historian, former director of the Jewish Historical Institute (1990–95), and a professor on the history faculty at the University of Białystok. Among his interests are modern anarchist movements and the general history of the 19th century, the history of ideas, historical sociology, the history of social movements and the emancipation of European Jews. He has translated several

works into Polish, including *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt (with Mariola Szawiel).

Dr. Joanna Lisek is a literary scholar, translator, and faculty member of the Tadeusz Taube Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław. Among her interests are Jewish poetry and the participation of women in Yiddish culture. She is a member of the Board of the Polish Society for Yiddish Studies, and the editor and co-editor of works such as *Silent Souls? Women in Yiddish Culture*, and an anthology of translations from Yiddish women’s poetry, *Moja dzika koza* (My Wild Goat), noted in the previous issue of *Gazeta*. ■

## Yossi Klein Halevi from Jerusalem— Man of Reconciliation

The Polish Council of Christians and Jews awarded Yossi Klein Halevi its annual 2020 award as a Figure of Reconciliation. The title is presented for his writings on Jewish-Christian relations, his work in Poland, and his involvement in fostering spiritual, religious, and political dialogue in Israel. ■



Yossi Klein Halevi.  
Polish Council of Christians and Jews

## Recipients of the Maria and Łukasz Hirszowicz Award from the Jewish Historical Institute

Natalia Romik, Jacek Leociak, and Zdzisław Senczak received the Maria and Łukasz Hirszowicz Award in the category of “Artistic and Scientific Activity.” As Romik stated in her acceptance speech, “I am very touched to be granted the award. This is a great honor which only proves the potential of interdisciplinary, critical activities at the threshold of Jewish studies, architectural design and contemporary art. The award motivates me to continue my work with the spectral traces of Jewish history. Congratulations also to Jacek Leociak and Zdzisław Senczak, who also received the award.” ■



Maria and Łukasz Hirszowicz Award logo.  
Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Institute

## The 2020 National Jewish Book Awards (U.S.) Annual Biography Award

Inaugurated in 1950, the National Jewish Book Awards is the longest running and most prestigious North American awards program of its kind. The awards are intended to recognize authors and encourage reading of outstanding English-language books of Jewish interest. Nancy Sinkoff’s *From Left to Right: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the New York Intellectuals, and the Politics of Jewish History* (Wayne State University Press) won the third annual Biography Award in Memory of Sara Berenson Stone as well as the Natan Notable Book for fall 2020. ■



Professor Nancy Sinkoff.  
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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### In Brief

# Agnieszka Holland Elected New European Film Academy President

The more than 3,800 members of the European Film Academy (EFA) have elected Polish director Agnieszka Holland as the new president.

Agnieszka Holland, having chaired the EFA Board from 2014 to 2019, now takes over from German director Wim Wenders, who has been the president of the European Film Academy since 1996. “The time is challenging,” said Holland, “and to save the creative power of independent cinema and the involvement of our audience, we need to use all our experience and imagination...I believe there is an important role for EFA here and I am happy to be part of it.” ■



Agnieszka Holland in Berlin International Film Festival.  
Photograph by Martin Kraft. Wikimedia Commons

## An Online Archive of An-sky's *The Dybbuk, or Between Two Worlds*

This online archive is the product of a long fascination with S. An-sky's masterpiece and its continued appeal to readers around the world. It inspired Agnieszka Legutko's research at Columbia University's Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, and accompanies her forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Dybbuk Afterlives*. The book will explore the significance of *The Dybbuk* in modern cultural imaginaries. It serves as bibliographical notes for the performance and reception of the most frequently staged Yiddish play, An-Sky's *The Dybbuk, or Between Two Worlds*, during the century from 1920 to 2020. It is also a multimedia educational resource for courses on Yiddish and Jewish literature, culture, theater, and history. Beyond academic use, the archive offers a platform for *Dybbuk*-inspired works to be explored by all *Dybbuk* enthusiasts. ■



Shloyme Zanvl Rappaport (1863–1920), known as S. An-sky (or Ansky).  
Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Institute

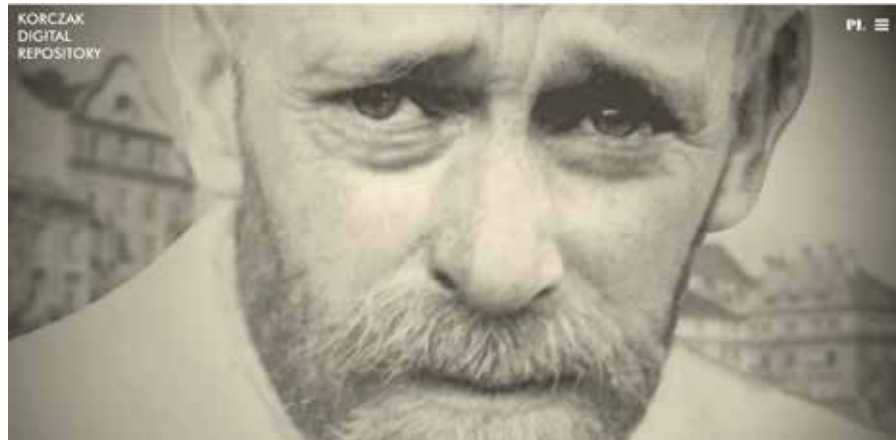
For more about the archives and performances, visit: <http://dybbukafterlives.com/>

## Opening of the Korczak Digital Archive

Jerry Nussbaum

It is my great pleasure to announce, on behalf of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada, the recent opening of the Korczak Digital Archive, the first open access repository honoring the legacy of the esteemed Dr. Janusz Korczak. The archive is a unique online resource, making accessible for the first time in a single collection a wide range of Dr. Korczak's personal writings and documents, as well as the writings of others on the subject of his life, activities, and creative output that had previously been scattered in archives and collections around the world. The repository is available in both English and Polish.

Dr. Korczak is universally respected as a doctor, activist, and author, but above all, a mentor and spokesman for children's rights. His innovative educational system and way of raising children in the spirit of mutual respect, partnership, and self-governance is to this very day an inspiration for many teachers, pedagogues, pediatricians, civic activists, and those involved in championing children's rights. Dr. Korczak's



Courtesy of the Korczak Digital Repository. Used with permission

vision of universal children's rights is the foundation for the 1989 United Nations convention on this subject. Dr. Korczak was, for decades, director of an orphanage, where he put his pedagogical philosophy into practice. He died, as he lived, alongside his children, at the hands of the Nazis in the Treblinka concentration camp in 1942.

In 2017 the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada conceived of the idea of the Korczak Digital Archive and together with a number of other organizations formed the Janusz Korczak Repository Consortium to implement the project. The archive was the result of invaluable

contributions from the consortium members, including the Department of History at the University of Warsaw (along with the KLIO Foundation), the Digital Competence Center at the University of Warsaw, the Korczak Foundation, and the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, without which the vision could never have become a reality. ■

You can find more information at the archives website: <http://korczakarchive.ca/> and <http://korczak.ckc.uw.edu.pl/>

*Jerry Nussbaum is President of the Janusz Korczak Association of Canada.*

# GEOP: Global Education Outreach Program of the POLIN Museum

## What's New, What's Next: Events and Programs

### Conference: Extended Call for Submissions

The conference What's New, What's Next? Innovative Methods, New Sources, and Paradigm Shifts in Jewish Studies has been postponed until October 3–7, 2021, and the deadline for panel and poster session proposals has been extended to April 30. GEOP invites submissions addressing such questions as: What constitutes Jewish studies today? In which direction should the field be heading? What paradigms are guiding the field today? How are theoretical and methodological developments in the humanities and social sciences shaping Jewish studies? What are interdisciplinary approaches contributing to the field? What is the impact of studies of Jewish life in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on a wider understanding of world history?

For more information visit <https://www.polin.pl/en/whats-new-whats-next-2021>.

Contact: [whatsnewconference@polin.pl](mailto:whatsnewconference@polin.pl).

### Debate Series

In December 2020, GEOP launched a new online series of monthly conversations, hosted by Chief Historian Antony Polonsky. The first conversation was devoted to a publication by Natalia Aleksium (Touro College), *Conscious History. Polish Jewish Historians before the Holocaust* (Liverpool University Press). The January 14 conversation focused on the book by David Biale, et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton University Press), which was one of *Choice Reviews'* Outstanding Academic Titles of 2018.

The February 14 meeting is devoted to the book *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement: A Revolution in the Name of Tradition* (Liverpool University Press), by Naomi Seidman. Meetings will continue monthly, in English, until June 2021. For more information visit <https://www.polin.pl/en/news/2020/11/19/whats-new-whats-next-debates-newly-published-books-field-jewish-studies>.

### New Podcast Series

In conjunction with the lead-up to the October conference, GEOP has launched a new podcast series titled *What's New? What's Next? Jewish Studies in the Time of Pandemic*. The series explores the conference themes—methodology, paradigm shifts, new sources, and new approaches to old sources—in relation to the current and earlier epidemics, Jewish responses to them, and how they have been studied from historical and contemporary perspectives. The podcasts demonstrate the kinds of presentations GEOP would like to encourage for its international conference.

You can find all the recordings on the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews' website: <https://www.polin.pl/en/podcasts-geop-whats-new-whats-next>.

### Distinguished Lecture Series

Launched in 2015, the Distinguished Lecture Series brings outstanding scholars in the field of Polish-Jewish history and culture from around

the globe to deliver lectures at the POLIN Museum. In 2020, the series premiered in its live online format with a lecture by Shalom Sabar on Jewish nuptial rituals in the arts context of different countries. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett moderated the lecture. Susannah Heschel provided an overview of the history of Jewish feminism, discussed the problems that face the movement, and presented some of the issues in Jewish studies. The meeting was moderated by Karolina Szymaniak.

In 2021, the series focuses on the museum's exhibitions, including the new Legacy Gallery. GEOP will celebrate its opening with a series of lectures on the role of Jewish legacy in Western culture and civilization. For more information visit <https://polin.pl/en/the-legacy-gallery>).

You can find all lectures recorded on POLIN's YouTube channel, [Muzeum POLIN — YouTube](#).

### **Fiftieth Anniversary Event**

On December 7, 1970, German Chancellor Willy Brandt made a symbolic gesture: he knelt in front of the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes and paid tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. GEOP marked the fiftieth anniversary of this event by inviting the public to a debate attended by international guests including Marian Turski, Chair of the POLIN Museum Council, and the ambassador

of the Federal Republic of Germany to Poland, Dr. Arndt Freytag von Loringhoven. The discussion was hosted by journalist Adam Szostkiewicz. You can follow the recording on the Facebook page "Friends of Polin": <https://www.facebook.com/280080872599975/videos/202931441338507>. For more information on the anniversary see [Willy Brandt's tribute at the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes | Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN w Warszawie](#).

### **Call for Applications for GEOP Interdisciplinary Research Workshops in 2022.**

**Application period:**  
March–July 2021

GEOP Workshops presents a unique opportunity for scholars and academic institutions to participate in a series of workshops on a topic of their own choosing. Proposals may be devoted to any topic of relevance to Polish-Jewish studies, including, but not limited to, history, cultural studies, sociology, public history, anthropology, art history, museology, memory studies, or related subjects. GEOP especially welcomes proposals that advocate introducing new perspectives and methodologies, with an equal interest in interdisciplinary approaches and comparative studies.

By opening up the museum's space, expertise, and

resources, GEOP invites the international community to join in upholding one of its core values as an institution in promoting and growing the scholarship of Polish-Jewish historiography. GEOP wishes to connect seasoned and emergent scholars by encouraging intergenerational communication from Poland and other countries, as well as institutions, to ensure the field's continued prominence for years to come.

### **Daffodils Campaign Debate in April**

April marks the POLIN Museum's annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. As part of this commemoration, GEOP will join the 2021 online edition of the Daffodils Campaign. For more information visit [Daffodils Social-Educational Campaign | Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN w Warszawie](#).

Subscribe to GEOP's newsletter to follow opportunities and events: <https://www.polin.pl/en/nauka-i-zbiory-dzialalnosc-naukowa-global-education-outreach/geop-newsletter>, and check the GEOP website for updates at: <https://www.polin.pl/en/geop>.

The Global Education Outreach Program is made possible thanks to Taube Philanthropies, the William K. Bowes Jr. Foundation, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland. ■

## OF SPECIAL INTEREST

# Saving the Great Synagogue of Slonim

Michael Mail

Visiting heritage sites of the lost Jewish communities of Eastern Europe is often a very emotional experience, and the remarkable Great Synagogue of Slonim in Belarus is no exception. Built in the 1640s, the synagogue opened at a high point of the then Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, on the eve of the terrors of the Khmel'nitsky Uprising. The Jewish community recovered and thrived, with Slonim becoming a center of commerce and scholarship well into the 20th century.

By 1939, Slonim was a Polish town with a Jewish population of 17,000 out of a total population of 25,000. After the horrific mass executions of World War II, only 200 Jews survived.

The last testament to that once-flourishing Jewish life is the Great Synagogue. In the years after the war, it was used to store furniture and, for the past twenty years, it has stood empty and abandoned, its condition deteriorating. A shattered presence close to the town center, it remains



Interior of the synagogue in Slonim.  
Courtesy of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage

a haunting and majestic memorial to Jewish culture in Eastern Europe.

The London-based Foundation for Jewish Heritage was established with a unique focus to work internationally and exclusively on preserving Jewish built heritage—a heritage that faces special challenges for reasons so amply demonstrated by the story of the Great Synagogue.

The Foundation set out to be pro-active and strategic in its approach. We commissioned

the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to create an inventory of all of the 3,347 historic synagogues of Europe. A crucial feature of this research involved rating each synagogue according to its importance and condition in order to identify the most important at-risk sites. This mapping project brought the Foundation to Slonim.

Belarus has a rich Jewish history, and Slonim had been a major center, producing



scholars, rabbis, and community leaders, even spawning its own celebrated Hasidic dynasty. Its importance is reflected in the very ambition of the Great Synagogue, which was reputedly modelled on the Great Synagogue of Vilna. The building, with its dramatic gabled roof and imposing exterior, features an impressive group of paintings and carvings, including a collection of murals depicting musical instruments, scrollwork, and biblical scenes. To this day, it remains the best-preserved and most important Jewish heritage site in Belarus, and one of the most important endangered historic synagogues in all of Europe.

The neglect of the synagogue perfectly mirrored the post-war suppression of the events of the Holocaust in what had become Soviet Slonim. The Shoah was the most traumatic event in Slonim's history and yet, to this day, there is no mention of it in the local museum.

The Soviet legacy in Belarus continues to be strong, not least in the politics of the country. Yet, Belarus has recently begun demonstrating a growing openness to addressing its Jewish history as part of a cautious engagement with the West and the European Union,



Map of the historic synagogues of Europe.  
Courtesy of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage

carefully balanced against the country's close relations with Russia. This backdrop is just one dimension of the many challenges of operating in a place like Belarus.

The Foundation began its work by establishing a steering committee that included descendants of Slonim families. Natasha Kaplinsky is a UK television personality who took part in the BBC's celebrated *Who Do You Think You Are?* family history program. In one of the more moving moments of the episode, she found herself inside the Great Synagogue, listening to her Israeli cousin's recitation of the kaddish memorial prayer for those who perished in the Holocaust. Kaplinsky's uncle Simon is the chair of the steering committee.

We established a broad vision for what we wanted to achieve, namely, to preserve the synagogue building and adapt it to serve as an educational center, a site of

commemoration, a pilgrimage destination, and a cultural venue—delivered in such a way as to ensure its long-term future.

The site is owned by the municipality of Slonim, and the Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with the mayor that gave immediate access to the building. This enabled initial work to be carried out, including a survey and some urgent repairs. Monitors were also placed over the cracks on the walls to ascertain if the structural foundations were moving—thankfully they were not!

We also reached out to the Jewish community in Belarus and to local Slonim residents. However, there is no tradition of civil society activism, so our usual approach of seeking out and engaging local stakeholders proved difficult. A significant cultural divergence arose in our very different approaches to conservation and assembling local teams.

However, over the past year and a half, we succeeded in forming a network of Belarusian advisors, including a Minsk law firm that represents our interests.

A key next step involved a feasibility study to research and test the viability of our plans. While working on this, a change of mayors resulted in the decision of the municipality to put the building up for auction. The Foundation had been considering buying the synagogue but ascertained that the conditions associated with the auction sale were unachievable. We now hope to negotiate on this. Our efforts are taking place against a worsening political situation that we are closely following and could have a serious impact on our work there, especially if it results in a complete break with Western Europe.

The Jewish story of the region remains immense and largely absent. This points to the problems we face, but also to the possibilities and significance of the project. By saving the Great Synagogue, we can gain a profound place of education for the Jewish people, for the wider society, and for the world. Restoring and preserving this sacred site can help to promote



Great Synagogue in Slonim.  
Courtesy of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage

awareness and understanding of Jewish history, and by doing so can challenge ignorance and prejudice at a time when we are witnessing growing xenophobia and overt anti-Semitism in parts of Europe.

The Great Synagogue stands as an abandoned ruin and will no doubt disappear from the landscape as a critical cultural testimony to Jewish heritage if no action is taken. The building is a symbol of a lost community, and perhaps of a wound in Slonim itself that, by being ignored, has been unable to heal. We will continue to work to save this historic synagogue and reimagine it as again a place of meaning, honoring the past while serving global Jewish heritage of today and tomorrow.

**Update:** The synagogue building was put up for auction on December 29, 2020, and the Foundation maintained its position of declining to take part. We nonetheless remain open and hopeful for future cooperation with a new owner. ■

To find out more about the work of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage, please visit: [www.foundationforjewishheritage.com/](http://www.foundationforjewishheritage.com/), and the Historic Synagogues of Europe website, <http://historicsynagogues-europe.org/synagogue-home>.

*Michael Mail is founder and Chief Executive of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage. He is a Trustee of ICOMOS-UK and the Brussels-based Future for Religious Heritage (FRH).*

# Tribute to Maria Piechotkowa

(July 12, 1920–November 28, 2020)

Shana Penn

The death of Maria Huber Piechotkowa brings to an end a remarkable story of how a seemingly esoteric scholarly fascination produced books that have touched the lives of readers, Jewish and not Jewish, throughout the world. Between the world wars, with her husband Kazimierz (1919–2010), Maria Piechotkowa began researching, and later publishing, studies about the then obscure topic of wooden and masonry synagogues in the Polish lands. Their scholarship about Jewish spiritual space was embraced not only by academic colleagues worldwide, but by the Polish general public, and especially by Israeli and diaspora Jews, many of whom had scarce connection to functioning synagogues in their own lives. With the end of communist rule in Poland, the husband and wife team published even more studies on synagogues, continuing their important contributions to the nation’s Jewish cultural revitalization, notably at



Maria Piechotkowa standing in front of the wooden synagogue model in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

Photograph by M. Starowieyska. Courtesy of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

*“The Jewish heritage world has lost a giant. Maria Piechotkowa, a pioneer in the study of synagogue architecture in Poland and mentor to generations, has died in Warsaw, just months after her 100th birthday.”*

—Ruth Ellen Gruber, Jewish Heritage Europe

the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

## **An Early Modern Polish Architectural Tradition**

Attaining their golden age in the 17th and 18th centuries, wooden synagogues were built all around the Polish lands beginning in the 16th century.

Scholarly interest in wooden synagogues began in the second half of the 19th century. Alois Breier took photographs of synagogues, including those that did not survive World War I, and in 1934 he published his *Holzsynagogen in Polen* (Wooden Synagogues in Poland).

Wooden synagogues attracted the interest of the Piechotkas during their academic studies in 1938 at the Warsaw Polytechnic Institute under Professor Oscar Sosnowski, whose research included describing and inventorying synagogues.

“I was fascinated by the synagogues,” recalled Piechotkova. “Their unique and rich architectural forms were different from everything I’d seen before. At the same time, they were Polish in their character. I wanted to see them in nature.” Thwarting her dream, the Nazi invaders burned down all the wooden synagogues and killed Professor Sosnowski.

“We decided to do something about it,” Piechotkova recalled, “to rescue them and show them to more people.” They began to record the architectural detail of destroyed buildings, with a special focus on wooden synagogues. Notes Ruth Ellen Gruber of Jewish Heritage Europe, “The Piechotkas always believed that their work was a continuation of, and an homage to, the field work of the great researchers of the inter-war years, almost all of whom were killed in the Holocaust.”

*The combination of indigenous Polish architecture with Jewish religious thought represented a “unique example of intertwining cultures,” said Piechotkova.*

### **Recovering What Was Lost**

During the war, the Piechotkas took part in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. After liberation they married, pursued architectural careers, and resumed research on wooden synagogues. Extending their studies from architecture to Jewish history and religion, they treated the wooden synagogue as both a historical document and a cultural artifact. In addition to providing detailed information on the design and construction of each synagogue, including architectural drawings and measurements, they established historical links between the architecture and local traditions of craftsmanship as well as stylistic parallels with Baroque architecture. They showed how the specific shape and construction of the buildings were ingrained in the building material itself,

primarily coniferous wood, typical of the region.

In researching who built the wooden synagogues, the Piechotkas concluded that Polish carpenters and builders who were not Jewish must have constructed them. The combination of indigenous Polish architecture with Jewish religious thought represented a “unique example of intertwining cultures,” said Piechotkova. Rich interior designs, in the form of the carved *aron kodesh*, polychromes, furniture, fabrics, embroideries, and silver, were expressions of Jewish craftsmanship. While the architectural exterior of the synagogue was largely the product of Polish regional influences, the interiors, and their elaborate wall paintings, signified a distinctly Jewish art form.

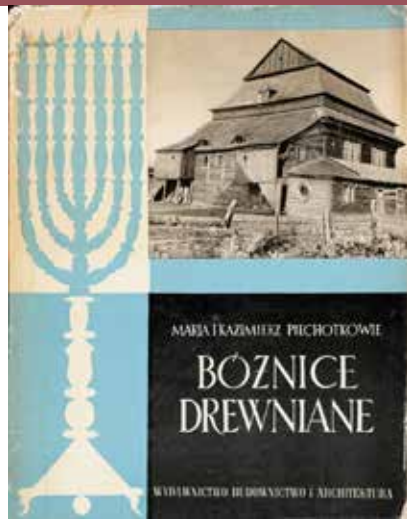
### **Inspiring New Understandings and New Works**

The Piechotkows’ seminal work, *Wooden Synagogues*, appeared in Polish in 1957, to a positive response from experts, although it received no publicity. “Those weren’t the times to popularize such a topic,” explained Piechotkova, “especially considering the

fact that we had also described synagogues ... that were not within the borders of post-war Poland. The censors made sure that books were not touching on this sensitive issue.”

Meanwhile, beyond Poland’s borders and the Iron Curtain, Jews learned about Polish wooden synagogues for the first time. The English-language version of *Wooden Synagogues* made a huge impression, especially in the United States. Piechotkova remarked: “We were told that we brought dignity to [and] restored the self-esteem of the so-called *Ostjuden*, the Jews from Central and Eastern Europe, who had been perceived as culturally inferior to Western European Jews, who were seen as wealthier and better educated.”

*Wooden Synagogues* offered a connection to the lost Jewish culture of Eastern Europe, and not only for Jews. In the 1970s, the renowned American artist Frank Stella, a Catholic, was given the Piechotkas’ book by the architect Richard Meier. Inspired by the text and photographs, he created 130 painted constructions, the *Polish Village Series* (1970–73). The monumental iron reliefs bore the names of the towns



*Bożnice drewniane* (Wooden Synagogues) by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka, published by Wydawnictwo i Architektura Publishing House in 1957.

and the Jewish communities where wooden synagogues once stood, such as Bogoria, Odelsk, and Lanckorona.

When Poland’s political life loosened in the late 1980s, the Piechotkas received Culture Ministry support to return to the subject they held dear. Their third period of research began at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. The fruits of this research are their books, in Polish and English editions: *Heaven’s Gates: Wooden Synagogues in the Territories of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*; *Heaven’s Gates: Masonry Synagogues in the Territories of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, and *Jews in the Urban Space of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*.

## Making History Tangible

The best-known expression of their work stands in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. A partial replica of a wooden synagogue placed at the center of the museum began its life in a scholarly work, *Resplendent Synagogue*, published in 2003 by Thomas Hubka, an American architectural historian. Hubka selected the synagogue of Gwoździec, in present-day Ukraine, because of the completeness of its photographic and historical records.

The studies published by Hubka, and more extensively by the Piechotkas, inspired another husband-and-wife team—Rick and Laura Brown—to lead a project to build, to an 85% scale, the roof, ceiling, and bimah of the Gwoździec synagogue. The Browns’ Massachusetts-based Handhouse Studio partnered with the POLIN Museum to construct the replica for the museum’s permanent exhibition. Not only did Piechotkova’s studies inform the stunning project, but she helped to shape the larger narrative that the POLIN Museum tells to



Maria Piechotkova (left) receiving the 2016 Irena Sendler Memorial Award from Taube Philanthropies Executive Director Shana Penn.

Photographed by Maciek Jaźwiecki. Used with permission

*What a privilege and blessing to know her, to learn from her, and to benefit from her indefatigable efforts to document Polish wooden synagogues.*

—Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Ronald S. Lauder Chief Curator, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

*We will be forever grateful for having the opportunity to meet Maria and Kazimierz and to have them challenge us, set the bar so high, take us under their wings and share their precious life's work together with us.*

—Laura Brown, Co-Director, Handhouse Studio

contextualize the cultural significance of the Polish wooden synagogue and how its memory has been preserved and continues. (See the POLIN Museum's core exhibition companion book, *POLIN: 1,000 Year History of Polish Jews*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Antony Polonsky, eds., particularly Adam Teller's chapter, "The Jewish Town: 1648–1772.")

Piechotkova's partnership with the POLIN Museum continued after the unveiling of the synagogue installation at the museum's October 2014 grand opening. Her works have been reprinted in conjunction with the museum, and her scholarship became part of an acclaimed special exhibition, *Frank Stella and Synagogues of Historic Poland*. Forty-three years after Stella's artworks were first shown, the POLIN Museum's 2016 exhibition brought together the eighty-year-old artist and the ninety-six-year-old Piechotkova, under an elaborately painted wooden synagogue ceiling at the POLIN Museum. The museum's focus on the distinctively Polish character of wooden synagogues brings the Piechotkas' legacy to bear on museum visitors of every age and background, and in this way, Piechotkova's research brings history into the future. ■

*Shana Penn is Executive Director of the Taube Philanthropies and Editor-in-Chief of Gazeta.*

## POEM

# Studnia / The Well

By Tadeusz Dąbrowski. English Translation by Antonia Lloyd-Jones

Nocny pociąg jak bobslej sunie w rynnie zimy,  
w dolinie spowite złotawą łuną snu  
bezimienne miasteczko, w którym pierwszy raz  
dotykałem piersi A., nie będąc do końca pewnym,  
czy nie zajdzie od tego w ciążę. Grudzień, późne  
lata dziewięćdziesiąte. Na rynku upstrzonym  
świątecznymi lampkami, w chmurze grzanego wina,  
z kieszeniami pełnymi zaczętych wierszy, które  
dyskretnie nie pytały o przyszłość ani o sens,  
czuliśmy się jak w środku pozytywki. Światem  
nie rządził jeszcze bóg o wielu twarzach. Dotyk  
był gwarantem istnienia. Nocny pociąg jak kot  
ociera się o łunę miasteczka, zbyt pośpiesznie,  
jak ja w późnych latach dziewięćdziesiątych o jej  
blade i pełne piersi. Patrzę w tę łunę i nic  
nie czuję. Wjeżdżam w tunel. Śni mi się, że krzyczę  
do studni: Jesteś tam jeszcze? I słyszę: Jesteś  
tam jeszcze? Jestem – mówię. I słyszę: Jestem.

A night train glides like a bobsleigh down the gutter  
of winter,  
down a valley wreathed in the amber glow of sleep,  
a nameless little town, where I first  
touched the breasts of A., not entirely certain  
if that could make her pregnant. December, the late  
nineteen-nineties. On a marketplace speckled  
with little Christmas lights, in a haze of hot mulled wine,  
with pockets full of started poems, which  
discreetly didn't ask about the future or for meaning,  
we felt as if inside a music box. The world  
was not yet governed by a god with many faces. Touch  
guaranteed existence. The night train rubs cat-like  
against the glow of the little town, too hurriedly,  
like me in the late nineteen-nineties against her  
full and pale breasts. I'm gazing at the glow and feeling  
nothing. I enter a tunnel. I dream that I'm shouting  
down a well: Are you still there? Then I hear: Are you  
still there? I am—I say. Then I hear: I am.

*Tadeusz Dąbrowski is a poet, essayist, critic, and the editor of the literary bimonthly Topos. He has been published in numerous prestigious poetry journals, including the American Poetry Review and Paris Review, as well as The New Yorker magazine. He has published eight volumes of poetry and his work has been translated into thirty languages.*

*Antonia Lloyd-Jones is the 2018 winner of the Transatlantyk Award for the most outstanding promoter of Polish literature abroad. She has translated works by many of Poland's leading writers and served as co-chair of the Translators Association of the United Kingdom.*

Tadeusz Dąbrowski.  
Photograph by Raphael Zubler.  
Courtesy of the author



## OBITUARIES

### David Shneer (1972–2020)

David Shneer, the holder of the Louis P. Singer Endowed Chair in Jewish History at the University of Colorado in Boulder, died in November of cancer at the tragically young age of forty-eight. He received his PhD in history from the University of California at Berkeley in 2001, and, before moving to Boulder, directed the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver. He was a prolific author of works concentrating on Soviet and Jewish cultural history.

His first book, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), gave a sympathetic account of the effort of some local Jews, with the not always whole-hearted support of the Soviet authorities, to create a Yiddish-based Soviet Jewish cultural identity, attempting to provide a corrective to the more negative assessment dominant in scholarship on this topic. It was a finalist in



David Shneer z"l.

2005 in the Eastern European section for the National Jewish Book Award. He followed this with *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York University Press, 2005), which he co-authored with Caryn Aviv, now rabbi of Judaism Your Way in Denver, and which reflected their radical approach to Jewish issues. Its main argument was that disillusionment with the Zionist project meant that many Jews no longer saw Israel as the center of the Jewish world. Instead they felt themselves rooted in the countries in which they lived, the United States,

### Antony Polonsky

Germany, Argentina, Russia, and elsewhere, and no longer, as the title of the book suggests, constituted a diaspora.

His two subsequent books reflected his interest in the Jewish involvement in photography and the ways in which Jewish photographers in the Soviet Union documented the Holocaust. The first was *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust* (Rutgers University Press, 2011). This built on the relatively favorable picture he had drawn of Soviet Jewish life in *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture* and described how a group of around twenty-five Soviet-Jewish photographers, among them Arkady Shaykhet, Mark Markov-Grinberg, Dmitri Baltermants, Evgenii Khaldei, and Max Alpert, attempted to provide a photographic record of the Holocaust. Shneer worked closely with the families of the photographers and amassed a large archive of previously unpublished



photographs. The book was a finalist for the 2011 National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category and winner of the 2013 Jordan Schnitzer Prize in Literature, Arts, and Performance, awarded by the Association for Jewish Studies. An exhibition, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*, derived from the book, was shown widely, including at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, the Holocaust Museum Houston, the University of Louisiana's Museum of Art, and the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Chicago.

Only weeks before his death, he published *Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph* (Oxford University Press), an analysis of the history of a single photograph by the Soviet Jewish photographer, Dmitri Baltermants, taken at the first Soviet Holocaust site to be liberated in January 1942, in the city of Kerch in eastern Crimea. Using a shocking image of a grieving woman, who is probably not Jewish, standing among a group of bodies in a frozen landscape, he shows how Baltermants used this moving image to bring out the universal aspect of the human tragedy of the Holocaust. Shneer gave a

*Shneer's deep commitment to a better and more just world was widely admired, and he was always listened to with interest and sympathy.*

poignant account of the book at the Museum of the Jewish Heritage in New York City barely two months before his death. (The image can be found on the cover of the book.)

Shneer also co-authored a number of books. *Queer Jews* (Routledge, 2002), which he edited with Rabbi Caryn Aviv, is an account of the impact of Jewish homosexuals on Jewish American culture. *A Captive of the Dawn. The Life and Work of Perets Markish* (Oxford, Legenda, 2011), which he edited with Joseph Sherman, Gennady Estraiikh, and Jordan Finkin, provides a comprehensive analysis of the life and work of a leading Soviet Yiddish writer who was executed in 1952 in Stalin's post-war purge of Yiddish culture. Reflecting his interest in Yiddish culture he also produced a short biography, *Lin Yaldati: Trümmerfrau der Seele* (Lin Yaldati: The Woman

Who Cleared the Soul of Rubble, Berlin, Hentrich and Hentrich, 2014), an account of the life of Lin Yaldati, born Rebekka Brillleslijper, a Dutch Jewish Holocaust survivor, who moved in 1952 to East Berlin where she performed widely as a Yiddish chanteuse.

Shneer was a frequent and eloquent lecturer, able to present his views to a wider Jewish audience. He also published many popular articles in both general and Jewish papers, including *Huffington Post*, *Rocky Mountain News*, *Denver Post*, *Forward*, *Pakntreger*, *Jewcy*, and *Notebook*. He was for several years co-editor in chief of the quarterly *East European Jewish Affairs*. He fulfilled this office admirably and was always open to views different from his own, seeing the journal as an important forum for discussion. Although his views were sometimes criticized as radical, his deep commitment to a better and more just world was widely admired, and he was always listened to with interest and sympathy. ■

## Piotr Grącikowski (1976–2021)

Polish philologist, librarian, Jewish studies scholar, and ethnographer. Friend and companion of academic research. Piotr Grącikowski died on the night of January 3, 2021, at the age of forty-four. Despite the hardships of his illness, he remained cheerful, creative, open to other people and changes until his last days. We will miss him very much.

Grącikowski was born in 1976 in Wrocław, Silesia. From 1991 to 1995 he attended the 7th Secondary School in Wrocław, and then started Polish studies at the University of Wrocław. He completed his master's thesis in 2001, advised by Professor Jerzy Woronczak. At that time, his most important scholarly interests, contacts, and methodological preferences were formed. His fascination with his outstanding teacher, Prof. Woronczak—and always interesting conversations with Prof. Bogusław Bednarek—involved shared interests in Jewish



Piotr Grącikowski.  
Photograph by Marek Maziarz. Courtesy of  
University of Wrocław

### *Grącikowski's work sets a new gold standard for a critical scientific edition.*

culture and an attraction to forgotten, seemingly trivial, or “frivolous” topics. It was precisely through these inclinations toward “unruly” topics (as he called them), such as Jewish games and his Yiddish flirtations, that his interests were born. During his Polish studies, he also published the satirical and

Marcin Wodziński

literary periodical, *Sporadnik Obsesjograficzny Seplenzia*, which ironically, and self-reflexively, commented on the experiences of a student of Polish studies.

After graduation, Grącikowski worked for a short time as a Polish language teacher, then an editor at the publishing houses Siedmioróg and Larousse Polska, and finally, at the Ossolineum National Library, where he worked on compiling the book collection. But perhaps more important than these professional roles were his scholarly passions, which he developed over the years. In his scientific work, Grącikowski was a self-conscious positivist, fully involved in establishing the fundamentals of academic research. In 2005, he applied to the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław with the idea of writing a doctoral dissertation. The choice very quickly fell to the life of the Jewish ethnographer, Regina

Lilientalowa, whose life and work he spent many years studying. We sometimes joked that Lilientalowa was the greatest love of his life. Behind this joke was admiration for his dedication to scholarly work and his true passion for research. His 2013 doctoral thesis, “Portrait of a Pre-War Jewish Ethnographer, Regina Lilientalowa,” is an excellent biographical study on one of the most important, and at the same time, one of the most forgotten, figures in the history of Jewish ethnography in Europe. As the reviewer, Prof. Haya Bar-Itzhak, wrote, Grącikowski’s work perfectly shows the reasons for this oblivion, and at the same time “corrects this injustice.” This was for Grącikowski not only a cognitive, but also an ethical endeavor, which well describes his scholarly attitude. Equally characteristic was his exemplary meticulousness in source queries, combing through primary and secondary literature, and, finally, his unmatched precision in analysis and interpretation. In 2016, his dissertation received

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the first distinction in the Majer Bałaban Competition for the best doctoral thesis on Jewish subjects, organized by the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute. In a slightly reworked version, the research serves as an introduction to Grącikowski’s opus magnum, *Regina Liliental’s Ethnographic Writings*, which he was preparing for publication. His work sets a new gold standard for a critical scholarly edition. This monumental, long-awaited work is almost ready. For many decades to come, it will not only serve researchers of Jewish ethnography, but it will also remind us of Piotr Grącikowski’s life and scholarly passions. Above all, we will remember his wit, warmth, and smile. ■

*Marcin Wodziński is professor and chair of the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław.*

# Krzysztof Śliwiński

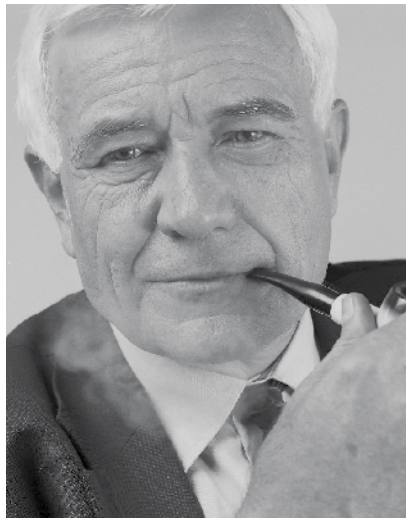
(1940–2021)

Poland's First Official "Roving Ambassador"  
to the Jewish Diaspora

We mourn the death of Krzysztof Śliwiński, a Polish diplomat and intellectual who was an early Catholic activist in Jewish heritage preservation and in fostering Polish-Jewish relations. In 1995 he was named post-Communist Poland's first official roving ambassador to the Jewish diaspora. He died in Warsaw on January 7, a week before his eighty-first birthday.

As a young man, Śliwiński was a member of the Catholic Intelligentsia Clubs (KIK), which formed part of a network of Catholic groups and publications opposed to the strictures of the Communist regime.

From the late 1960s to early 1970s he organized Jewish Culture Days and other pro-Jewish initiatives at a time when the regime sought to suppress Jewish practice and culture. These included regular clean-up sessions of Warsaw's vast, neglected



Krzysztof Śliwiński.  
Photograph by Szymon Rogiński.  
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Okopowa Street Jewish cemetery, beginning in 1973 and which continued for years.

"Part of the cemetery was covered with a forest; a dense forest of trees of equal height, which began to grow out of the stones, from seedlings no one had torn out," Śliwiński recalled in an article called "Our Jewish Cemetery" published in 1983 in the independent Catholic journal, *Więź*.

"These trees could not be even thirty years old. They indicated that the cataclysm

## Jewish Heritage Europe

that caused this great cemetery, where the dead were buried for a century and a half, to become an abandoned and forgotten place, happened not so long ago. We wanted to contribute to saving the memory of this cemetery. We wanted the fate of people who buried their relatives in this cemetery not to be forgotten too easily ... For ten years, since 1973, we would come there every afternoon in the last week of June. Of those who pulled weeds from abandoned graves, or cut trees that burst stones, or found paths between the stones, only a very few could look for traces of their distant relatives there. For the vast majority [of us], mostly young, often students, members of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club in Warsaw or their friends, it was not a matter that could be explained by the ties of blood that usually motivate care for the dead ...

"There were never very many people who came to work in

the cemetery — sometimes a dozen, sometimes several dozen. However, there was no need to persuade anyone, or to announce anything more widely — it was enough that people found out about it and came.”

Śliwiński became an activist in the Solidarność movement in 1980, and JHE director Ruth Ellen Gruber got to know him well when she was a correspondent in Poland at the time and he was a Warsaw spokesperson for the movement.

Following the fall of Communism in 1989–90, the new Polish government opened an unprecedented policy of outreach to Jews worldwide, as an attempt to improve the often-troubled relations between Poland and the world’s Jewish community.

It was as part of this policy that then-Foreign Minister Władysław Bartoszewski appointed Śliwiński as the country’s first official roving ambassador to the Jewish Diaspora. (Bartoszewski, who died in 2015, was an Auschwitz survivor himself

*From the late 1960s to early 1970s he organized Jewish Culture Days and other pro-Jewish initiatives at a time when the regime sought to suppress Jewish practice and culture.*

who was also honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among Nations.)

During his diplomatic career, Śliwiński also served as Polish ambassador to Morocco from 1990–94, and from 2000 to 2004 he was the Polish ambassador to South Africa. He also served as a press spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was deputy editor of the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper.

Reprinted with permission from Jewish Heritage Europe, January 8, 2021. To read the original article visit <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2021/01/08/poland-rip-krzysztof-sliwinski/>. ■



2020/5781

# CHANUKAH

JCC Kraków's Hanukkah poster shows support for the Women's Strike and LGBTQ rights.  
Courtesy of JCC Kraków

If you would like to suggest an author or article for the next issue of *Gazeta*, or submit one yourself, please email: [info@taubephilanthropies.org](mailto:info@taubephilanthropies.org).  
The submission deadline for the next issue is **March 30, 2021**.

We accept queries and submissions for feature articles of no more than 1500 words, and up to 500 words or less for all other announcements or reports.



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