

Gazeta

Newsletter of the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies
1583 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 547-7701

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Fay and Julian Busgang, Editors

POLIN, Volume 10

The tenth volume of POLIN, the annual journal of the AAPJS, scheduled to appear in the fall, takes as its theme the history of the Jews in pre-partition Poland. In the second half of the 18th century, Jews numbered about 750,000 in Poland-Lithuania and comprised about half of the urban population in the country. One of the salient characteristics of the period was the relationship between the Jews and the powerful magnates of the time. The latter utilized the Jews' skill to improve their material interests, and, in return, protected them in their "private towns".

The essays in this volume, drawing on both Jewish and Polish sources, show that Jewish society of the time was by no means insular. Jewish contacts with the wider Polish society found expression in the languages the Jews knew, in their marriage patterns, and even in their religious architecture. The contact between the two groups also led to accusations of Jewish ritual murder, a subject which is systematically reviewed in one of the articles. The internal factors influencing developments within Jewish society are also discussed.

Among the themes considered are the history of Polish rabbinical treatments of the Askenazi ban on polygamy and cabalistic influences on synagogue structure, Jewish prayer, and the spiritual world of Jewish women. The most dramatic expression of the popularization of *kabbalah* in this period was the growth of Hasidism and this, too, is considered through the rigorous critical analysis of the legends and stories about the founder of Hasidism, Israel Ba'al Shem Tov. Taken together, the articles devoted to early modern Poland open a wealth of important topics that help to fill the gaps in our understanding of Jewish life in this important period.

The "New Views" section of the volume incorporates valuable studies that represent the best of current research. Articles include a revisionist view of the beginnings of Polish Jewry based on an analysis of medieval manuscripts; a thought-provoking review of

the depiction of Polish-Jewish relations in recent Polish cinema; a study of the NKVD's treatment of Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter, and an erudite study of *mayufes* (the practice whereby Polish noblemen would ask their Jewish factors to sing Jewish sacred songs for them) as a window on Polish-Jewish relations.

The book reviews include a debate between Tomasz Gąsowski and Artur Eisenbach on the latter's book on Jewish emancipation in Poland and reviews of books on Auschwitz and on Isaac B. Singer. The volume closes with a bibliography of Polish-Jewish studies for 1994.

Ala z Elementarza & Koń Pana Boga

Two very special authors, Dr. Alina Margolis-Edelman and Wilhelm Dichter, spoke at the Association meeting in Cambridge on April 27 about their writings.

Alina Margolis-Edelman, wife of Dr. Marek Edelman, the surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, is a pediatrician who remained in Poland after the war, until 1968, when she moved to Paris. Her friend Andrzej Wajda, the noted Polish movie director, asked her to write up what she remembered of her life as a young girl, in the Warsaw Ghetto and later on the Aryan side, for a movie that was never made. Her interesting reminiscences have appeared as a book, *Ala z Elementarza* (which refers to the child Ala in the ABC primer known to all children in Poland).

Dichter, though a resident of the Boston area for many years, has retained his literary Polish language skills and, following his recent retirement, published an autobiographical novel, *Koń Pana Boga* (God's Donkey) in Poland. The book has had excellent reviews, particularly because of its non-judgmental, factual character, conveying unadorned recollections of a small Jewish boy living in Nazi-occupied Poland.

A lively discussion followed the reading of passages from each of the books. The audience asked the authors many questions about both the years of German occupation and the post-war experiences that caused them to leave Poland.

Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

We are very grateful to Alina Margolis-Edelman and William Dichter for being with us on Sunday, April 27 at Harvard Hillel. Each in their own different way gave us a picture of what it was like to be a child during the German occupation in Poland. It was one of our most successful meetings.

Because of the death of her mother, Bożena Szajnok was unable to address our members on "What happened in Kielce on 4 July, 1946," as planned. In her absence, Antony Polonsky introduced Marcel Łoziński's film on the Kielce pogrom, "Witnesses", which was followed by a stimulating discussion.

In a few days, I shall be going to Europe and will spend a week in Kraków at the beginning of July arranging, together with Antony Polonsky and Joachim Russek, for a Conference on the "Jews of Galicia" which we are planning to hold there May 31- June 2, 1998.

We would very much appreciate it if those of you who are interested in coming to the conference would fill out the questionnaire at the end of this issue of *Gazeta*. We would then have a better idea of how many people to expect and plan for. We have had a wonderful response so far, but many people were under the mistaken impression that the conference would take place this year.

I would like to welcome the following new members: Lilka Edelbaum, Leo Koss, Jerome and Phyllis Rappaport, Joseph Salerno, Bernard Stone, and Jack Terry.

Irene Pipes

Jewish Community in Poland Elects New Board

The Association of Jewish Communities in Poland, an all-encompassing organization which represents and serves Jews living in Poland, has elected new officers. Dr. Wildstein, who had served as chairperson for many years, did not run for re-election.

The new slate is: Jerzy Kichler of Wrocław, president; Feliks Lipman of Katowice and Piotr Kadlcik of Warsaw, vice presidents; Jakub Szadaj of Gdańsk, treasurer; and Lesław Piszewski of Warsaw, secretary.

Leaders Sign Auschwitz Plan

In March, Jewish and Polish leaders signed an agreement committing \$93.5 million jointly to preserve and expand the Auschwitz Museum, located on the site of the Nazi death camp, where approximately 1.5 million people, mostly Jews, perished between 1940 and 1945.

The Polish government will pay \$20 million of the costs over the first five years of the 11-year development plan. Remaining funds to complete the project and to finance conservation and preservation of the historic structures on the site are to be raised by Jewish organizations.

There are plans to link Auschwitz with the adjacent camp, Birkenau, and to preserve the 1,650-foot protection zone established around the museum by UNESCO in 1979.

Following protests from outraged survivors and Jewish organizations, the plan for a mini-mall, proposed by a local developer in 1995, was scrapped. The agreement provides that no commercial development will be allowed in the vicinity. The sensitive issue of religious symbols erected around the museum is still under discussion.

Helena Merenholc Dies

Helena Merenholc, a child psychologist before the war, died recently in Warsaw. Under the nickname "Stasia", she collaborated with Janusz Korczak and organized assistance for Jewish children in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the war, she worked for Polish radio.

When she was interviewed by Barbara Engelking-Bonel for the book, *Na łące popiołów...* (On the Field of Ashes...), Merenholc stated, "My stay in the Ghetto, and then on the Aryan side, helped me a great deal. I understood the dimensions of evil, but I also experienced brightness. I encountered then some remarkable people. I was saved by my optimism and faith in people who touched my life."

Concert of Remembrance in New York

The Interfaith Committee of Remembrance will have its Eighth Annual Concert of Remembrance at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City on Saturday, November 8, 1997 at 8:00 PM, featuring the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra under Federico Cortese. For further information, call (212) 629-6060.

Midrasz - A New Magazine Published in Poland

The first issue of a new monthly called *Midrasz* appeared in Poland in April of this year. The editor-in-chief is Konstanty Gebert, a well-known columnist for the Polish daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Financial assistance is being provided by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and the Academy for Educational Development.

The name of the magazine reflects its mission and comes from the Hebrew word *Midrash*, whose usual connotation - to explain, study and proclaim - generally alludes to the Torah. In this case, however, it refers to the Jewish presence in Poland.

Midrasz joins four other current Jewish publications in Poland: the biweekly, *Słowo żydowskie / Yiddishe Wort* (The Jewish Voice), in existence for the past five years, editor Adam Rok, which concentrates on Polish issues from a Jewish point of view; *Biuletyn*, since 1951, the publication of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw, editor, Alina Cała, which presents research papers on the history of Polish Jewry; *Jidele* (*Little Yid*), published since 1992, editor Bogdan Pawlisz, which is the forum for Jewish youth; and *Jesteśmy* (We Are Here), editor Mieczysław Abramowicz, which serves the Jews of Gdańsk.

Both the April and May issues of *Midrasz* are rather sad, containing pictures of ugly anti-Semitic graffiti in Wrocław - eventually removed, to be sure, but only after official intervention, the empty synagogue in Dzierżoniów with its broken windows, and the photograph of damage to the Warsaw Synagogue caused by an incendiary fire only this past February.

Henryk Halkowski, a dedicated Jewish leader in Kraków, reports in *Midrasz* on the funeral of Czesław Jakubowicz, head of the Jewish community of Kraków, whose funeral was ignored by the local administration. He also describes an incident at the Jewish cemetery shortly thereafter, where unknown perpetrators damaged and destroyed a number of graves. The beautiful synagogue of Tykocin is restored, but it is hard to erase the memory of local farmers drowning old synagogue books and scrolls in the river in 1965.

Particularly sad is the account of Natalia Aleksiu about how unwelcome the 140,000 Polish Jews were who, after the war, returned to their homeland from the USSR to which they had escaped or been deported under Russian occupation. The post-war pogroms in Krakow in August 1945, in Parczew in February 1946 and, the most bloody one, in Kielce in July 1946,

contributed to massive departures of Jews desperate to leave the country in which they were made to feel so painfully unwelcome.

In the face of this past reality, *Midrasz* communicates the courage and spirit of those who stayed behind and the efforts of the current government to recognize and apologize for these post-war hostilities against the Jewish population of Poland. Government leaders are photographed attending services in the Nożyk synagogue immediately after the fire, and there is a report on the thriving Jewish theater, on Jewish community activities in several cities, of the search for "roots" by those recently discovering their Jewish past, and a discussion of the new prospects of a Jewish education for children.

We welcome *Midrasz* and salute its publishers. Readers abroad can receive copies of *Midrasz* by sending \$3 per issue to the Lauder Foundation (*Midrasz*), ul. Twarda 6, 00-104 Warszawa, Poland. Checks should be made out to AmerBank S.A. Warsaw, account #17400006-0140-61740-02.

How to Send Money to Poland

Poland's banking system, for the most part, does not yet permit the sending of personal checks to recipients for deposit into their own bank accounts. It does, however, permit sending money to organizations when the check is made out to their bank account number.

PEKAO Trading Corporation, which has branches in New York City, Brooklyn, Chicago, and Los Angeles, is the most commonly used company to transfer money to Poland. PEKAO claims that all money transfers accepted by them (except those which are paid by personal checks, which take a little longer) are sent within 24 hours of their receipt by PEKAO and delivered to the recipient within 10 days.

The handling charge for transfer is \$5.00 for up to \$50, \$10 for up to \$500, \$20 for up to \$1000, etc. The PEKAO draft can be cashed only in Poland and only by the person to whom it was issued. There is no charge for the draft being cashed at Bank Polska Kasa Opieka (PEKAO). Other banks in Poland charge a service fee.

The New York address is: PEKAO Trading Corp., 2 Park Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10016-5692, tel. (212) 684-5320.

The U. S. Post Office also issues international money orders but the cost is somewhat greater.

The Splot School in Nowy Sącz

by Charles Merrill, AAPJS Board Member and Founder of the Commonwealth School in Boston

In the cynicism and disillusionment that are the primary qualities of post-Communist Eastern Europe, it is reassuring to find a few institutions there offering hope that democracy may still prevail. Almost every year when I visit Poland and the Czech Republic, the most rewarding school I know is one in Nowy Sącz, a town 100 km. SE of Kraków. It dates from September 1989 when the communist system formally collapsed, and a local educator named Alicja Derkowska nailed up posters around the town asking if parents and teachers would care to join in organizing a school totally different from the old communist institutions. They called a meeting, someone found an apartment with two rooms, fourteen students enrolled, and there began "Splot" - which means a ball of yarn, where every thread is both separate and mutually dependent.

Dr. Derkowska was born in 1940 in Silesia of Jewish parents. After her father was arrested, dying in a camp shortly afterwards, her mother changed her name, dyed her hair, and moved with the baby to Warsaw. Alicja grew up, became an academic, married a non-Jewish mathematician, and eventually settled in this old-fashioned provincial town near the Slovak border.

Her school, which had over 50 students its second year and now runs a bit over 100, found a barracks-like home they could rent from the Ministry of Railroads. A bit of original funding came from Polish émigrés in Norway, 20% of operating expenses from the state, but most from tuition and chance gifts. The result is a bareness - tables, chairs, a few blackboards, a couple of microscopes that no American would tolerate - but an exciting spirit, as I found on my visit last November.

From the beginning, the emphasis was upon building a practical concern for the environment. To Polish Communists, as to many American Republicans, only liberals fret about pollution. The school attracted an inspiring biologist whose teaching began with amphibians, nature's infantry. A green frog is Splot's icon. The children adventure and collect in the forests and swamps around Nowy Sącz.

Dr. Derkowska was equally committed to creating Splot as a working example of free education in a country where schooling by both church and state is heavy-handedly authoritarian. The school has hosted a

series of conferences for teachers from all over Poland to discuss democratic goals and procedures.

Although any American can imagine where money is needed - modernizing the heating and electrical systems, making the basement usable, installing an elevator, and widening the doors for wheelchairs (nothing like this exists in the entire province) - Derkowska's priority is establishing a learning center for democratic training that looks beyond Poland.

A start this past spring was her trip to Beograd, and with doors opened by the Polish ambassador, she spoke with officials in the Ministry of Education. As a result, she will be running a workshop in July for 25 Serbian teachers in Beograd. A student exchange with a Turkish school in Ankara has already begun. The salamander field trips to Nowy Sącz swamps might be shared with Slovak youngsters and their teachers from across the border.

In this part of Europe, all social services come from the state. Now, if an uneven, rather brutal capitalist system is spreading, can it be civilized enough to comprehend the value of non-governmental organizations, even philanthropic foundations? If so, new ideas may be less threatening to old-fashioned authoritarians if they come from Poland rather than from America.

Obviously, I am trying to raise money. Why? In all the jumble of news we receive from Poland today, there is an institution like this small school in one of the world's least important towns trying to give students a sense of responsibility for their country's fragile, badly damaged environment, an understanding of how an individual relates to society, and a sense, too, of concern for neighbors beyond its borders. I have been tremendously impressed by Alicja Derkowska and her vision, not least that this survivor from the Jewish world has made herself a leader in mainstream Poland.

For those who would like to give, the address for contributions is: Splot, Limandowskiego 7, 33-300 Nowy Sącz, Poland. Bank account: Małopolskie Towarzystwo Oświatowe, PBI S.A. Nowy Sącz 19801238-101749-27006-1.

Ed.: A Commonwealth School graduate will be teaching at the Splot School next year, courtesy of Mr. Merrill.

Reunion with a Rescuer

In April, Renata Skotnicka-Zajdman, one of our subscribers from Montreal, was reunited in Phoenix, Arizona with her war-time rescuer, Jan Bartczak.

Bartczak, the handsome Polish boyfriend of Renata's older sister, became a smuggler during the war, which provided him with the resources necessary to help his mother, sister, and brother-in-law in a clandestine family operation. For various periods of times, they rescued and harbored Jewish children in their apartment, providing them with new names, fictitious backgrounds, and a Christian identity.

Renata Skotnicka, then a young teen-ager, was one of these children. During the height of the deportations from the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942, she was "arrested" by Bartczak's brother-in-law, Paweł Gołombek. However, as with many other youngsters so caught, instead of carting her off to jail, the Polish policeman hid her in his family's apartment.

Renata stayed with the Bartczak-Gołombek family for a month, feeling safe for the first time after having previously endured homelessness and having been hunted down like an animal, beaten and thrown into jail.

During a Russian bombardment of the city, the family sought shelter in the basement of the building. Renata remained behind to avoid being discovered. Fearful at being left alone in the apartment and despondent over the death of her mother in Soviet-occupied Poland, she decided to take her life. At that moment, Janek Bartczak returned to the apartment. Finding her in the bathroom with a razor in her hand, he grabbed it from her, wrapped her in a blanket, and held her sobbing in his arms until she fell asleep.

After leaving the safe house with her new identity as a Polish Catholic, she was deported to Germany for slave labor. When the war ended, she returned briefly to Poland and learned, much to her sorrow, that Janek Bartczak had perished during the Warsaw Uprising.

After three years in a DP camp, Renata emigrated to Montreal, Canada, where she and her husband raised two children. In the past decade, she has become active in child survivor groups and lectures and works as an interviewer in an oral history project. Through her many trips to Poland, coordinating with the Association of the Children of the Holocaust in Poland, she has been instrumental in helping other child survivors find out more about their hidden past and even to find relatives.

While trying to find Isabella, the little girl who was staying in the Bartczak-Gołombek apartment at the same time as she, Skotnicka-Zajdman got in touch with Bartczak's nephew on one of her recent trips to Poland. She was stunned to learn from him that Janek Bartczak was still alive, living in Chicago.

Bartczak and his family had actually moved to Phoenix two years previously, but she was able to trace him. After several tearful telephone conversations, a reunion was arranged in the Scottsdale home of Rabbi Ayla Grafstein, whom Skotnicka-Zajdman had become acquainted with in Montreal when he was recording a TV program. In Grafstein's home, Skotnicka-Zajdman was reunited with Bartczak for the first time in 55 years and learned what had happened to him and his family.

Escaping through the sewers after the failed Warsaw Uprising, Bartczak was captured by the Germans and sent to a POW camp in Germany. From there, he escaped to American occupied territory and made his way to Italy to join General Anders' Polish army-in-exile.

Meanwhile, his mother, sister, and nephew, as well as Isabella, were sent to Auschwitz. Neighbors had betrayed them for saving and sheltering Jews. During one of the death marches to evacuate the camp in January 1945, as the Russians were approaching, they managed to escape.

After the war, Janek Bartczak was transferred to England and later emigrated to Argentina. Only in 1947 did his family in Poland learn that he had survived the war.

Bartczak married an Argentinean woman, opened an art gallery, fathered a son. In 1964, the family moved to Chicago and, in 1995, to Phoenix. The Jewish children Bartczak had rescued never left his mind. He often asked his son Antonio, an artist in Phoenix, how he might find them. Now, perhaps with the help of the Internet, he hopes to find them all. This electronic age phenomenon may also be useful for Skotnicka-Zajdman, who is still searching for Isabella.

After being reunited, Skotnicka-Zajdman recorded a 4 1/2 hour interview with Bartczak for "Living Testimonies", the McGill University project, co-founded by Rabbi Grafstein and Professor Yehudi Lindeman, to record oral histories of Holocaust survivors and witnesses.

The 1998 AAPJS Conference in Kraków

As reported in the last issue, the next AAPJS Conference will be held in Kraków from May 31 to June 2, 1998 at the Center for Jewish Culture, affiliated with the Department of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. Sessions will be held in the beautifully restored prayer hall of the Center located in Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter of Kraków. The theme of the conference will be the "Golden Age of Jewish Galicia". Professor Antony Polonsky of Brandeis University is the principal organizer.

The following is a list of topics that are currently being considered for presentation and discussion: "Among Three Nations – The Jews in Galicia under the Hapsburgs"; "Dimensions of the Triangle: Socio-Economic, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects of the Polish-Ukrainian-Russian Relationship in Austrian Galicia"; "The Consequences of the Galician Autonomy after 1867 for Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians"; "The Image of Galicia in the Work of Sh. Y. Agnon"; "Julian Strykowski's Galician Tetralogy"; and "Growing Up in Jewish Galicia". There will be a round-table on the triangular relationship between Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians, past and present. We are confident the meeting will prove both stimulating and entertaining.

Polish Airline *Lot* may be able to provide special rates to the participants who desire to travel as a group on a 10-day to two-week tour. The group would fly from New York to Warsaw and back to New York. Housing plans in Kraków are to be announced soon.

Participants who wish to visit Lwów, after the Conference, can sign up for a three-day guided tour of Eastern Galicia. Group arrangements will be made for travel from Warsaw to Kraków, from Kraków to Lwów, and from Lwów to Warsaw.

Please fill out the attached questionnaire in the back of this issue of *Gazeta*, if you are interested in 1) the Kraków Conference, 2) the trip to Lwów, or 3) both. None of this is binding, but we need to hear from you in order to plan and try to secure favorable rates.

Please Renew Your Membership for 1997

The Association has a vital role to play to preserve the history of Polish Jews and document their diverse cultural, social, educational, economic and artistic contributions. Please join us in this important mission.

Szczepko i Tońko

One of the best-known Polish-Jewish radio and stage comedy personalities in the pre-war Lwów was Henryk Vogelfänger, featured in the popular radio program *Wesoła Lwowska Fala* (The Jolly Lwów Wave). Vogelfänger was the Tońko of the famous *Szczepko i Tońko* comedy team and co-author of their humorous dialogues in the Lvovian dialect.

Vogelfänger was born in Lwów in 1904. He graduated with a law degree from the University of Jan Kazimierz in Lwów and held a responsible job with the municipality. He started the radio show, as an amateur, teaming up with Kazimierz Wajda as *Szczepko*. *Szczepko* was the all-knowing wise one, while *Tońko* was a naïve country bumpkin who needed to have everything explained to him but had a heart of gold.

The lighthearted humorous program of these two friends became a huge success throughout Poland and led to the 1939 film hit "The Tramps" (*Włóczęgi*) and many other performances. Like other actors of the Jolly Wave, Vogelfänger escaped and spent much of the war in England, eventually changing his name to Henry Barker. He moved back to Poland in 1989.

Today, in Poland, there is a revival of interest in the *Szczepko i Tońko* folklore and their wonderful way of overcoming obstacles and getting along. In Warsaw, there is even a café called "U Szczepcia i Tońcia".

A new Polish troop of a pianist and two actor-singers give performances in Warsaw and throughout Poland, recreating the original duo. Recently, they did a tour of the U.S. and stopped in Boston. On May 2, they gave a performance in Wayland, Massachusetts to the delight of a large group of native Polish speakers.

Future Volumes of *POLIN*

POLIN is a yearbook that provides a forum for a growing number of scholars to present historical and cultural material on Polish Jewry. Each subscribing member of AAPJS receives a copy of *POLIN* issued in the year for which annual dues were paid. Volumes 11 and 12 are in preparation

Volume 11 will have a cluster of articles on aspects and experiences of Judaism in Poland. Three articles deal with the so-called progressive synagogues in Warsaw, Lwów and Kraków.

Vol. 12 will highlight the relationship of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians in Galicia between 1772 and 1914.

If you plan to attend the Kraków Conference or think you might attend,
please fill out the following indication of interest and mail in (no obligation):

**Conference on the "Jews of Galicia"
Kraków, POLAND
May 31- June 2, 1998**

Name(s): _____ Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Address: _____ E-mail: _____

___ I / We are planning to attend the Kraków Conference – Number of persons _____

___ I / We may attend the Kraków Conference.

___ I / We would like a package deal for air transportation, hotel, and meals.

___ I / We would prefer hotel accommodations only.

___ I / We would prefer air transportation only.

___ I / We would prefer to make all arrangements ourselves.

___ I / We are interested in a group trip to Lwów (Lviv) and other towns now in the Ukraine,
following the Conference.

___ I / We are interested in visiting the following towns, if possible _____

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