One of the most striking developments in the Judaica publishing world during the past decade has been the appearance in Poland of scores of books and journals devoted to Jews and Judaism (see montage on cover). The purpose of this paper is to examine the dimensions of this development, as well as its significance. But first, let us take a quick glance at some recent Polish—and Polish Jewish—history.

Historical Background

In 1939, Poland was the seat of the largest Jewish community in Europe; three-and-a-half million Polish Jews constituted fully ten percent of that country's total population. Prewar Polish Jewry was a beleaguered community, menaced by anti-Semitism both within the country and in neighboring Nazi Germany, and threatened with material ruin during the Great Depression. The Poland of 1939 was a multi-ethnic country, with Jews, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians, ethnic Germans, and other nationalities comprising a third of its population. This diversity was regarded by many Polish nationalists as a "problem."

Poland was invaded and occupied by Germany at the very outset of World War II. For European Jews, the results of that brutal occupation can be summed up by enumeration of a series of Polish place names that are now all too chillingly familiar: Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Maidanek, Treblinka and Oświęcim (Auschwitz). Perhaps 50,000 Jews survived the war in Poland proper; afterwards they were joined by a quarter of a million Polish Jews who had survived the war in the Soviet Union.

The postwar history of the Polish Jewish community has been troubled, to say the least. Virtually the entire remnant of Polish Jewry emigrated between 1945 and 1970, reducing the total current Jewish population to fewer than 10,000, mostly elderly individuals. The last major exodus took place in the wake of the 1968 antisemitic campaign. Ironically, now that they have practically vanished from the Polish landscape, Jews are no longer considered a "problem" by Poles; they have become part of history.

Or rather, after having been all but written out of Polish history since 1945, Poland's Jews are now finding themselves being reincorporated into the Polish literary, cultural, and historical consciousness.

Since the mid-1970s, groups of young Polish Catholics have devoted themselves to restoring portions of Warsaw's gigantic Jewish cemetery; exhibits on Polish Jewry have been mounted in many places; former synagogues in several cities and towns have been restored and turned into Jewish museums; plays such as Fiddler on the Roof and The Dybbuk have been mounted on Polish stages; and, last but not least, there has been a veritable flood of books, journal issues, articles in the press, and letters-to-the-editor on Jewish topics since 1980. This Polish-Jewish "memory project," as Prof. Iwona Irwine-Zarecka (1989) labels the rediscovery by young Poles of their country's Jewish heritage, amounts to nothing more and nothing less than the reinvention of the Polish Jew—this time in absentia.

It is to the proliferation of Judaica publications since 1980 that we now turn. The approach taken is both quantitative and descriptive. Some suggestions relating to the selection and acquisition of Polish Judaica are also offered. Finally, the publishing trends described here are placed into the political and social context of Poland during the 1980s.

The publications discussed in this paper are strictly works that have appeared under either official or church auspices in Poland proper. Works published underground are excluded, as are publications issued abroad, regardless of whether they were written by Polish residents or by members of the emigre community. From a distance, it is hard to gauge the full range of Polish underground publications, not least because they are virtually unobtainable here. On the other hand, even though emigre publications are accessible to us, they are not readily circulated in Poland proper. For these reasons, this discussion is restricted to works published "above ground," in Poland.

General Overview

The Polish foreign trade enterprise "Ars Polona" has recently issued two bibliographies of Polish Judaica, one covering the years 1980 to 1986, and the second covering 1987 and 1988. These two bibliographies, which were prepared by the staff of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland [Zydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce], located in Warsaw, may be regarded as reasonably comprehensive, though here and there a book or periodical may have been accidentally omitted. (For example, by an apparent oversight, the first list does not include a citation for the Yiddish- and Polish-language weekly Folks-sztyme, whereas that official organ of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland [Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce] is cited in the second bibliography. Also, the recent Holocaust memoir, I hid myself in Warsaw [Ukrywałem się w Warszawie, 1988], by Stefan Chaskielwicz, does not appear in the Ars Polona list covering the years 1987 and 1988.)

In overall terms, what do these two bibliographies tell us about Judaica publishing trends in Poland since 1980? First there are the sheer numbers: from 1980 to 1988, a total of 291 books on Jewish topics appeared in Poland, for an average of 37

titles per year. (Two books published in 1979 are also cited in these lists.) The number of books appearing annually ranges from a low of 9 in 1980 to a high of 82 in 1988. Prior to 1988, the high-water mark for Polish Judaica publications was 1983, when 45 book titles appeared. It was no accident that the year 1983 saw the largest number of books on Jewish topics to appear in Poland (at least up to 1988); the reason is discussed below.

In addition to books, the two Ars Polona bibliographies list 51 issues of periodicals devoted to Jewish subject matter. This figure is somewhat deceptive; of these 51 issues, fully 28, or over half, are accounted for by the two serial publications of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland: its Biuletyn, in Polish, and Bieter far geszichte, in Yiddish. In addition, there are four citations for the annual Jewish calendar [Kalenderz jydowski], a literary calendar that far transcends the format of the pocket luah that is issued by the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in the Polish People’s Republic [Zwi 9 zek Religijny Wyznania Mojzieszowego w PRL], the official religious body of Polish Jewry, plus one entry for the weekly Folks-sztyme newspaper. The remaining 18 citations are divided among 7 general-interest Polish periodicals. In effect, the bibliographers have analyzed the contents of these 18 periodical issues, in order to include them in these two Judaica bibliographies.

An annual average of 37 Judaica book titles may not seem like much to the librarian accustomed to scanning the pages of Kuryat Sefer or the Jewish Book Annual, but it is a significant figure when compared with what came before in Poland, in the dozen years of official silence on matters Jewish following the antisemitic campaign of 1968. Moreover, it is an eminently respectable figure, one conjectures, when compared with the volume of Judaica publications appearing in other countries with a significant Jewish heritage and with small present-day Jewish populations, such as Romania, Czechoslovakia, Iraq, or Tunisia.

Let us turn now to a subject profile of the Judaica books that are included in the two Ars Polona bibliographies. In a very rough attempt to classify their contents in the broadest terms possible, I counted 69 works of belles-lettres, 135 works of general nonfiction (excluding works on the Holocaust), and 86 nonfiction works devoted to the Holocaust. In addition, three reprints of prewar historical classics by Majer Balaban and Hilary Nussbaum appear in these lists. In percentages this breaks down to 23.5% fiction, 46% general nonfiction, and 29.35% nonfiction Holocaust.

Of course, a number of fictional works devoted to the Holocaust also appear in these bibliographies, but rather than classify them under Holocaust, I have treated them as fiction. Other fictional categories include Polish novels on Jewish themes by both Jewish and non-Jewish Polish authors, translations of fiction, drama and poetry, and Jewish wit and humor. The general nonfiction category includes works on the following subjects: Bible, Judaism, literary criticism, memoirs, Polish Jewish history, Polish-Jewish relations, linguistics, and traditional Jewish cookery. The Holocaust category includes both scholarly monographs and works aimed at a more general readership.

A few examples in each of the three main categories—fiction, nonfiction, and Holocaust—serve to convey an idea of the scope of these recent publishing developments in Poland. (Most titles are given in English translation.)

**Fiction**

The prolific Polish-Jewish author Julian Strzykowski has written several historical and Biblical novels, bearing such titles as Judah the Maccabee [Juda Makabi, 1986] and King David lives! [Kroi Dawid żyje!, 1984]. Strzykowski is best known in the West for his novel Austeria, about a Polish Jewish country innkeeper and his entourage. (A film version of Austeria was made in Poland about five years ago.) The non-Jewish Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski’s name appears in several entries, including two editions of his collection of Holocaust poems, Reading the Ashes [Odczytanie popiólow, 1983, 1988], his poetic Letter to Marc Chagall [List do Marc Chagalla, 1988], a collection of letters and literary fragments by the Polish Jewish writer Bruno Schulz [Listy, fragmenty, 1984], which he edited and which has just appeared in English [Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz, 1988], and two editions of his rendition of the Hebrew and Yiddish poet Yitzhak Katzenelson’s epic dirge for Polish Jewry, The Song of the Murdered Jewish People [Polish edition: Pieśni o zamordowanym żydowskim narodzie, 1982, 1986; Yiddish original: Dos lid funem oysehgeren yidishn folk].

Translations of works by Sh. Ansky, Isaac Babel, Paul Celan, Ilya Ehrenburg, Itzik Manger, Bernard Malamud, Anatoly Rybakov, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Philip Roth are also noted in these lists. (While Roth himself vigorously resists being classified as a Jewish writer, the Polish bibliographers apparently felt no compunctions about including the Polish translation of Portnoy’s Complaint [Kompleks Portnoya, 1986] in a Judaica list!)

The third album, Krakowski Kazimierz, by Jan Władysław Rączka, is a nostalgic look at the old Jewish quarter of Krakow, and was published in Polish only. "It includes..."
some lovely pictures," notes the Israeli critic Natan Gross, "but a moribund and Judenrein Kazimierz is depicted therein—sad and lacking deeper significance." (Gross, 1987, p. 36).

Works on Polish Jewish history and Polish-Jewish relations run the gamut from the scholarly to the popular. On the one hand, one finds serious studies of Jewish life in Poland in the 18th and 19th centuries by such scholars as Artur Eisenbach and Marian Fuks. The Republic of Many Nationalities [Rzeczpospolita wielu narodów, 1985], which is the title of a study by Jerzy Tomaszewski, is an attempt to recall the multi-ethnic past of Poland. On the other hand, there are polemical studies such as Józef Orlicki's monograph on Polish-Jewish relations between 1918 and 1949 [Szkice z dziejów stosunków polskożydowskich 1918–1949, 1983], which our bibliographers blandly describe as "controversial"—a euphemism, one suspects, for "antisemitic." And now, Aleksander Hertz's classic study The Jews in Polish Culture [Żydzi w kulturze polskiej], which was first published in Paris in 1961, and recently in an English translation [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], has finally been published in Poland proper [1988].

One rather curious book is a thick 1986 study by Maria Brzezina, based on literary and folkloristic sources, about the way that Jews spoke Polish from the 17th to the 20th centuries [Polszczyzna Żydów]. These are just a few examples of historical works on Polish Jewry that have appeared in Poland during the 1980s.

The memoir category includes two books by the non-Jewish writer Michal Strzemski, in which he reflects upon the Jewish friends of his youth, in his native town of Pulawy [Nasze Pulawy: kolekcja wspomnień, 1986; W blasku memory, 1981].

Polish works on Judaism, which are clearly directed at a non-Jewish audience, also abound, many of them published under Catholic auspices. Given the painful relationship that has prevailed in this century between church and synagogue in Poland, this development is ironic, to say the least. Bible translations include the Books of Ecclesiastes, Job, Lamentations, and the Song of Solomon [Przekłady biblijne z języka hebrajskiego, 1983], translated by the Polish Jewish poet Roman Brandstaetter, who has also produced a fictionalized version of the Book of Jonah [Prorok Jonah, 1983]. These and other books by Brandstaetter were published by Pax, a Catholic publishing house. Coincidentally, Polish translations of the Book of Psalms and the Five Scrolls were rendered from Hebrew and Greek by the Nobel Prize-winning poet Czesław Milosz (who lives in California), and published in 1982 and 1984 by the Catholic University of Lublin [Księga psalmów; Księgi pięciu megalot]; Translations of books on Hasidism by Martin Buber [Opowiesci chasydów, 1986] and by the Czech Jewish contemporary of Franz Kafka, Jiří Langer [9 bram do tajemnic chasydów, 1988; translated from the English version of this work, Nine Gates to the Chassidic Mysteries, New York: David McKay, 1961], have also appeared in Poland. The publication in 1983 of a special issue of the Catholic monthly Znak, devoted exclusively to Catholic-Jewish relations [no. 2-3: Żydzi w Polsce i w świecie: Katolycyzm - Judaizm], was a landmark event in the Polish rediscovery of the Jews.

Even more striking, perhaps, in light of the general disdain with which Catholicism has traditionally regarded Jewish Oral Law, was the publication in 1986 of a collection of Talmudic quotations [Z madreosci Talmudu]; one year earlier, the journal World Literature [Litteratura na świecie] devoted an entire issue [no. 4] to the Talmud and its history. World Literature, as the title implies, is a journal that features translations from and appraisals of literary creativity the world over. In recent years, there have been at least two other issues of this journal that have been devoted to topics of Jewish interest, including one issue on Isaac Bashevis Singer [no. 12/137, 1982] and one on other major Yiddish writers [no. 12/161, 1984].

The predicament of the "Polish writer of Jewish descent" was discussed in a 1982 book of essays by the critic Arthur Sandauer [O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku: rzecz, która nie ja powinnem być napisać ...]. The three authors discussed in Sandauer's book are the poets Julian Tuwim and Antoni Slonimski, and the fiction writer Bruno Schulz. Schulz, in turn, is the subject of a critical monograph by Wojciech Wyskiel, published in 1980 [Inna twarz Hioba: problematyka alienacyjna w dziele Brunona Schulza].

Finally, among works of nonfiction we must not neglect the essential realm of cookery. 'Im en kemah en torah, as the saying goes; "where there is no food, there is no learning." In 1988, the bookstore windows in the Old City of Warsaw prominently displayed a rather pricey (by Polish standards) Jewish recipe book, Cooking the Polish Jewish Way [Polish edition: Kuchnia Żydów polskich, by Eugeniusz Wirkowski, 1988], published in four languages—Polish, French, German, and English—and obviously aimed at the passing tourist trade. Around the same time, a less expensive cookbook, apparently intended for local readership, was published in Polish only. This book by Katarzyna Pospieszyńska bears the title Cymes [1988] (pronounced isimes, a classic Jewish dessert).

Holocaust

So many books on the Holocaust have appeared in Poland that it is hard to do justice to this subject category. We note, in passing, the latest and least expurgated Polish editions of Emanuel Ringelblum's Warsaw Ghetto Chronicle [Kronika getta warszawskiego: wrzesień 1939-styczeń 1943], published in 1983 and reissued in 1988, along with the first Polish edition of his monumental study, Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War [Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej, 1988; first published in English by Yad Vashem, 1974]. A number of books on wartime assistance rendered to Jews by Poles have been published, as well as the first Polish edition of Adam Czerniakow's Warsaw Ghetto Diary [Adama Czerniakowa dziennik getta warszawskiego: 6 IX 1939–23 VII 1943, 1983; English-language editions: Warsaw Ghetto Diary, 6.9.1939–23.7.1942, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1968; The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow: Prelude to Doom, New York: Stein and Day, 1979], and a 1982 book by Roman Zimand inspired by the oral-deal of reading that diary, "I Did Not Sleep from Midnight to 5 a.m." ["W noce od 12 do 5 rano nie spałem": dziennik Adama Czerniakowa - proba lektury]. Jack Eisner's bestselling memoir The Survivor has been translated into Polish [Przeżytem, 1988; first published in New York: Morrow, 1980], and a number of other Holocaust memoirs and diaries from that period have also been issued. Last but not least, there is what has been described as the first novel by a non-Jewish Pole to be devoted exclusively to the experiences of Jews in wartime Poland, Umschlagplatz, by the young novelist Jaroslaw Marek Rymkiewicz [1988]. The book, which is set in the Warsaw Ghetto, properly belongs in the fiction category, but is mentioned here because it is a fact-based historical novel.

Selection and Acquisition

Having given a brief overview of Judaica publishing developments in Poland, let us now consider ways of finding out about these books and serials and methods of acquiring them. Besides the two bibliographies that were issued by Ars Polonia, the principal current bibliographic source is the weekly Polish national bibliographic,
Significance of the Publishing Phenomenon

How are we to interpret the Polish Judaica publishing developments that have been examined here? The trials of World War II in Poland and, specifically, the trauma of the Final Solution, are the events that bracket this discussion of trends in Judaica publishing in that land. It is no coincidence, surely, that prior to 1988, the year that saw the publication of the greatest number of Polish books on Jewish topics was 1983. That was when the Polish government organized major commemorative events, on the occasion of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising’s 40th anniversary. Though the military regime of General Jaruzelski played a crucial role in facilitating the publications’ appearance, the books and journals unleashed by the government’s green light were responding to a pent-up curiosity in Poland about Jewish matters, a curiosity that was awaiting an opening.

Signs of this interest are evident as early as the mid-1970s, with the formation of underground “flying university” seminars on Jews and Judaism. “Jewish memory work” has proceeded on all levels of Polish society—in the official, government-sanctioned sector, in the semi-official domain of the Roman Catholic Church, and in the unofficial, private, underground arena.

The existence of this phenomenon needs to be placed into its historical context. While culturally, Poland is very much oriented to the West, for geopolitical reasons it has been yoked to the economic, political, and military interests of its Soviet neighbors. The election of a Polish pope, John Paul II, in 1978 and the tremendous success of the Solidarity trade union movement in 1980 and 1981 were powerful boosts to Polish national pride. For a brief period before the imposition of martial law in December 1981, the preoccupations of Poland’s unofficial, underground sector were allowed to surface. These preoccupations included a reassessment, on many fronts, of the Polish past.

When martial law was introduced, the Polish government was not able to make effective use of an age-old weapon, antisemitism, for the simple reason that Jews could no longer be reckoned as a threat to anyone in Poland. Indeed, one of the first official acts of the Jaruzelski regime under martial law was to invite the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to resume its relief and welfare activities in Poland for the first time since the 1960s. The Warsaw Ghetto anniversary ceremonies in 1983 and the gradual rapprochement of the Polish People’s Republic with the State of Israel are further signs that there has been an easing of official, state-sanctioned antisemitism.

On the unofficial level, Poles have been permitted to contemplate the messages of Polish history. The ethnic homogeneity that was “gained” by Poland as a result of postwar border changes and population transfers, and by the wartime Nazi genocide of Poland’s Jews, has not proven to be the panacea to that country’s problems that was preached by prewar Polish nationalists. Poles, particularly those belonging to the intelligentsia, have begun to look back nostalgically to what, in retrospect, now seems to be the “golden age” of the Twenties and Thirties. They find there a country whose ethnic and religious blend added more than a touch of the cosmopolitan variety so lacking today. Jews are part and parcel of the cultural landscape of the reinvented Poland’s idealized past. Cultural and political pluralism have finally become positive values in today’s Poland.

On the other hand, a Polish-born colleague of mine—a member of the 1968 generation of Polish-Jewish émigrés—has cynically summarized the contemporary Polish attitude towards Polish Jewry in the following way: “Those Jews, they were a bunch of scoundrels, but you know, maybe there was something to them.” He predicts that interest in Jewish matters will soon dissipate, that it amounts to a temporary intellectual fad.

I am not so sure. Perhaps the next generation of Poles, removed by five decades from the climactic events and fateful outcome of World War II, will feel less of a compulsion to come to grips with the vanished civilization of Polish Jewry. On the other hand, the Jewish presence in Poland provides Poles with a mirror to their country’s past, and any serious contemplation of that past is incomplete without a solid awareness of that presence. [The recent controversy surrounding the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz (which peaked during the autumn of 1989, shortly after the accession to power of the first non-Communist government in Poland since the war] certainly underscores the potency of both the Polish and Jewish collective memories. The books and journals that have been published over the past decade are a further indication of the powerful grip that the past has on today’s younger Polish intellectuals. Given the obsession that so many Poles have with their country’s fate, the present-day rediscovery of the Jewish skeletons in their nation’s closet may mark only the beginning of a long voyage of self-exploration.

Annotated Bibliography

of Judaica publishing trends in Poland from the 1970s to the mid-1980s.


Sources of Polish Judaica

*Ars Polona,* Foreign Trade Enterprise. 7, Krakowskie Przedmieście, 00–068 Warszawa, Poland.

Biblioteka Narodowa, Zakład Uzupelniania Zbiórów, Sekcja Wymiany i Darów [National Library, Acquisitions Department, Gifts and Exchanges Section]. ul. Hankiewicza 1, 00–973 Warszawa, Poland. [Many other Polish libraries are also interested in exchanges.]

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