

The site of the Jewish cemetery in Głowno.  
Photograph from the project *Currently Absent* by  
Katarzyna Kopecka, Piotr Pawlak, and Jan Janiak.  
Used with permission.



# Gazeta

Volume 25, No. 4  
Fall/Winter 2018

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



## CONTENTS

Message from Irene Pipes ..... 2

Message from Tad Taube and Shana Penn ..... 3

### FEATURES

The Minhag Project: A Digital Archive of Jewish Customs  
*Nathaniel Deutsch* ..... 4

Teaching Space and Place in Holocaust Courses with Digital Tools  
*Rachel Deblinger* ..... 7

Medicinal Plants of Płaszów  
*Jason Francisco* ..... 10

### REPORTS

Independence March Held in Warsaw Amid Controversy  
*Adam Schorin* ..... 14

Explaining Poland to the World: Notes from Poland  
*Daniel Tilles* ..... 17

A New Home for the Jewish Theater in Warsaw  
*Fay and Julian Bussgang* ..... 20

### ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS

#### BOOKS

*New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands*  
Edited by Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski.  
*Antony Polonsky* ..... 22

*East Central European Migrations During the Cold War: A Handbook*  
Edited by Anna Mazurkiewicz ..... 24

#### FESTIVALS AND PERFORMANCES

Fifteen Years of the Singer Festival  
*Fay and Julian Bussgang* ..... 25

*Don't Cry When I'm Gone* Wins Best Documentary at  
Toronto Polish Film Festival ..... 26

*The Auschwitz Volunteer* Performed in New York City  
*Reported by Tressa Berman* ..... 27

## EXHIBITIONS

- Terribly Close* Exhibition at Ethnographic Museum in Kraków ..... 28
- The Sejm Hosts Exhibition of Former Jewish Cemeteries  
*Fay and Julian Bussgang* ..... 29

## CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

- Urban Jewish Heritage Conference Held in Kraków ..... 30
- Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies  
(ASEEES) Convened in Boston ..... 33
- International Workshop at POLIN Museum  
*Antony Polonsky* ..... 34

## AWARDS

- National WWII Museum Receives Grant  
*Reported by Taube Philanthropies* ..... 36
- Bella Swarcman-Czarnota Receives Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award ..... 39

## OF NOTE

- Jewish Cemetery Memorial Inaugurates New Multicultural Heritage Trail  
in Gostynin  
*Reported by Jewish Heritage Europe* ..... 40
- Ben Helfgott Knighted  
*Fay and Julian Bussgang* ..... 42
- Leopold Kozłowski, the “Last Klezmer of Galicia,” Turns 100 ..... 44
- The Sejm Adopts Resolution Honoring Isaac Bashevis Singer ..... 45
- New Progressive Congregation in Kraków  
*Adam Schorin* ..... 46

## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- POLIN Museum Events  
*Reported by Karol Kwiatkowski* ..... 49
- GEOP Announcements ..... 53

## OBITUARIES

- The Oldest Righteous Person, Mother Cecylia Roszak, Dies at 110 ..... 55
- Jacob “Kobi” Weitzner  
*Marek Tuszewicki* ..... 56

## Message from Irene Pipes

President, American Association  
for Polish-Jewish Studies

Founder of *Gazeta*

Dear Members and Friends,

While visiting my granddaughter in San Francisco, I had the pleasure of visiting the Taube Foundation office and meeting Shana Penn and her staff. We also visited the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley, where Arthur Szyk's art works are currently on display.

I am glad to let you know that in October the inaugural Józef A. Gierowski and Chone Shmeruk Prize for the best scholarly publications on the history and culture of Polish Jews was awarded at Collegium Novum at Jagiellonian University. First prize was awarded to Dr. Joanna Nalewajko-Kulik for her book *Mówić we własnym imieniu. Prasa jidyszowa a tworzenie żydowskiej tożsamości narodowej (do 1918 roku)* (Speak On Your Own Behalf: The Yiddish Press and the Creation of a Jewish National Identity Before 1918). Second prize went to Dr. Grzegorz Krzywiec for his book *Polska bez Żydów. Studia z dziejów idei, wyobrażeń i praktyk antysemitycznych na ziemiach polskich początku XX wieku (1905–1914)* (Poland without Jews: Studies on the History of Anti-Semitic Ideas, Concepts, and Practices in the Polish Territories in the Early 20th Century [1905–1914]). Third prize was presented to Agnieszka Zolkiewska for *Zerwana przeszłość. Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej inteligencji twórczej. Pomoc materialna i organizacja ze strony CKŻP* (The Broken Past: The Post-War Circle of the Jewish Intelligentsia). The high quality of the entries is a testimony to the health and wealth of Jewish studies in Poland today.



Irene Pipes

In the same month, our association organized two events in New York and Boston. Witek Dabrowski, actor from Lublin, and Leora Tec, board member of our association, presented the work of “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (dedicated to preserving the memory of the Jews of Lublin) and discussed how their different backgrounds led them to the same goal of Jewish remembrance. Interwoven in the presentation were stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer of his youth a hundred years ago.

On September 21, a memorial service for my husband Richard was held at the Harvard Memorial Chapel. Rabbi Norman Janis, former students Marvin Kalb and Jonathan Daly, good friends Gerry Holton and Roman Szporluk, son Daniel, and granddaughters Sarah and Anna spoke.

Best wishes,  
Irene Pipes  
*President*

## Message from Tad Taube and Shana Penn

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



Tad Taube



Shana Penn

In this issue of *Gazeta* many of our contributors raise issues or pose questions that suggest new ways of thinking about seemingly familiar and accepted ideas. Nathaniel Deutsch introduces us to *minhag*, “the most important Jewish concept that most people, including many Jews, have never heard of.” He is asking us: Do you know about this? Rachel Deblinger asks if digital tools have any special utility in helping students better understand accounts by Holocaust survivors. Her answers are intriguing and could be important for how we educate future generations. Jason Francisco asks, after contemplating the medicinal plants growing freely on the site of the former Nazi concentration camp Płaszów, “What forces of healing is the genocidal earth of Płaszów generating? And, “Is it possible to harness the power of that natural healing for social healing?” His answers are deeply moving.

Even when we can’t definitively answer an important question, we have to ask it. Of course, we want to base our examination on sound information. *Gazeta* presents ideas and questions from a variety of viewpoints, along with reliable and engaging information about noteworthy people, events, and places. The immediate purpose is to provide a sound basis for our search into the richness and realities of Jewish life in the Polish lands during the eras of blossoming, the painful years of the Holocaust and its aftermath, and the amazing revitalization of recent decades. But the ultimate purpose is to examine how that heritage is perceived and lived today, both by those who reside in the original lands and those who have grown up in so many transplanted homelands. New insights into the topics at hand will, we hope, encourage further research and debate.

Tad Taube and Shana Penn  
*Chairman and Executive Director*

## FEATURES

# The Minhag Project: A Digital Archive of Jewish Customs

Nathaniel Deutsch

*Puk chazi mah ama davar:*

“Go and see what the people are doing.”

—Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 45b

With funding from the Taube Foundation and other sources, I have been collaborating with computing specialists to develop a website that will serve as an online, crowd-sourced archive of Jewish customs. At the core of this interactive website, called the *Minhag Project: A Digital Archive of Jewish Customs*, will be a searchable, bilingual Yiddish-English edition of The Jewish Ethnographic Program, a massive life-cycle questionnaire that Sh. An-sky created a century ago, before he passed away in Otwock. He was buried in the Mausoleum of the Three Writers (along with I. L. Peretz and Yakov Dinezon) in the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw.

*Minhag* is the most important Jewish category that most



Photograph of Sh. An-sky, c. 1910.  
Wikimedia Commons.

***Minhag is the most important Jewish category that most people, including many Jews, have never heard of.***

people, including many Jews, have never heard of. Typically translated into English as “custom,” *minhag* describes the myriad ways that Jews have performed their Jewishness on the ground—from Poland

to Morocco, Hungary to Yemen. Over the centuries, every Jewish community developed its own distinctive *minhagim* (plural of *minhag*), which helped to define and differentiate its members not only as Jews, but also as Sephardim or Ashkenazim, Bialostokers or Baghdadis, and so on. By way of illustration, Jews everywhere traditionally waited between eating meat and dairy—based on the biblical prohibition against

cooking a kid in its mother's milk—but exactly how much time Jews in a particular community waited depended on *minhag*. Similarly, it is an Ashkenazi *minhag* not to eat *kitniyot* (legumes) on Passover, while the Sephardi *minhag* is to allow these foods.

Yet, *minhag* also governed many aspects of daily Jewish life that were not directly linked to the laws of the Torah, including whether and how to celebrate the birth of a daughter, what dances to have at a wedding, how to drink a toast, what to do if someone becomes ill, and even how to die. In short, for Jews everywhere, *minhag* has served as a means for transforming practically every possible human activity into something distinctly “Jewish.”

*Minhag* was so important in Jewish life that some traditional sources actually describe it as a form of Torah in its own right, as in the saying, *Minhag avotaynu torah hi*, “The *minhag* of our ancestors is Torah.” It was the only form of Torah that could be created by all Jews, no matter how educated.

*In most cases, however, Jews did not learn how to perform minhagim—basically how to “act Jewish”—from reading a book like the Shulhan Arukh, but by listening and observing those around them.*

This included women, who typically had their own distinctive *minhagim*.

Local *minhag* was taken so seriously that when the Sephardi Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575) created the *Shulhan Arukh* (The Set Table), which would eventually become the most important legal code for Jewish communities around the world, many Jews in Central and Eastern Europe initially rejected it until Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530–72), a native of Kraków and one of the greatest sages in early modern Poland, added Ashkenazi customs to the text in a gloss that became known as the *Mapah* (The Tablecloth).

In most cases, however, Jews did not learn how to perform *minhagim*—basically how to “act Jewish”—from reading a book like the *Shulhan Arukh*, but by listening and observing those around them. This led Mordechai Kaplan (1881–1983), the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, to describe *minhagim* as the “folk ways” of the Jewish people.

Given this significance, it is not surprising that when the first ethnographers of the Jewish people started to study Jewish folk practices at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they devoted a great deal of effort to documenting *minhagim*. Foremost among these ethnographers was Sh. Ansky (1863–1920), best known today as the author of *The Dybbuk*, who led the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition into the Russian Pale of Settlement between 1912 and 1914, and who also published *Dos Yidishe Etnografishe Program* (The Jewish Ethnographic Program), a Yiddish-language survey consisting of over 2,000 questions concerning Jewish life and death in the *shtetl*. The word *minhag*

appears more than any other term in this remarkable document.

Today, there are still some traditional Jewish communities whose members continue to rely on *minhag* to guide aspects of their behavior. Yet, even the great majority of Jews who no longer lead their day-to-day lives according to *minhag* continue to preserve and transmit certain *minhagim*, often without being aware that they are doing so. Indeed, for many Jews, it is precisely *minhagim*—perhaps learned years ago as children from a parent or grandparent—rather than normative religious beliefs, that have survived the longest and will likely be transmitted to the next generation.

Visitors to *The Minhag Project* website will be able to browse The Jewish Ethnographic Program and create accounts of their own that will include information about where their ancestors came from and whether they belong to a particular contemporary community such as the Satmar Hasidim in Williamsburg, Brooklyn,

***Minhag was so important in Jewish life that some traditional sources actually describe it as a form of Torah in its own right, as in the saying, Minhag avotaynu torah hi, “The minhag of our ancestors is Torah.”***

or the Persian Jews of Los Angeles. Once they create an account, users will be able to answer the questions of The Jewish Ethnographic Program, and their responses will become part of the world’s only online archive of Jewish customary practices, a resource for scholars and members of the general public alike. Account holders will also have the ability to explore answers provided by other users. We expect to launch the website by the end of 2019. ■

For updates on our progress, please visit the Digital Jewish Studies webpage of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz: <https://digitaljewishstudies.sites.ucsc.edu>.

***Nathaniel Deutsch, PhD,*** is Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he holds the Baumgarten Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies.

# Teaching Space and Place in Holocaust Courses with Digital Tools

Rachel Deblinger

Teaching with technology is more than just brandishing a shiny new tool. Using technology in the classroom should further the teaching objectives and enable learning. We must ask ourselves, with each new idea and innovation: Does this tool serve an intellectual or pedagogical purpose?

Digital methods offer particular benefits for Holocaust studies courses. In my classes at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), I use a range of digital assignments to explore Holocaust representation—from text analysis to mapping, to digital exhibit-building and meme creation.

Each assignment uses free online tools to consider how we know what we know about the Holocaust. Spatial evidence is a meaningful starting point. Students often think about the Holocaust through the lens of individual survivors and conceptualize the experiences of the Holocaust as a trajectory—

*Digital methods offer particular benefits for Holocaust studies courses . . . to explore Holocaust representation—from text analysis to mapping, to digital exhibit-building and meme creation.*

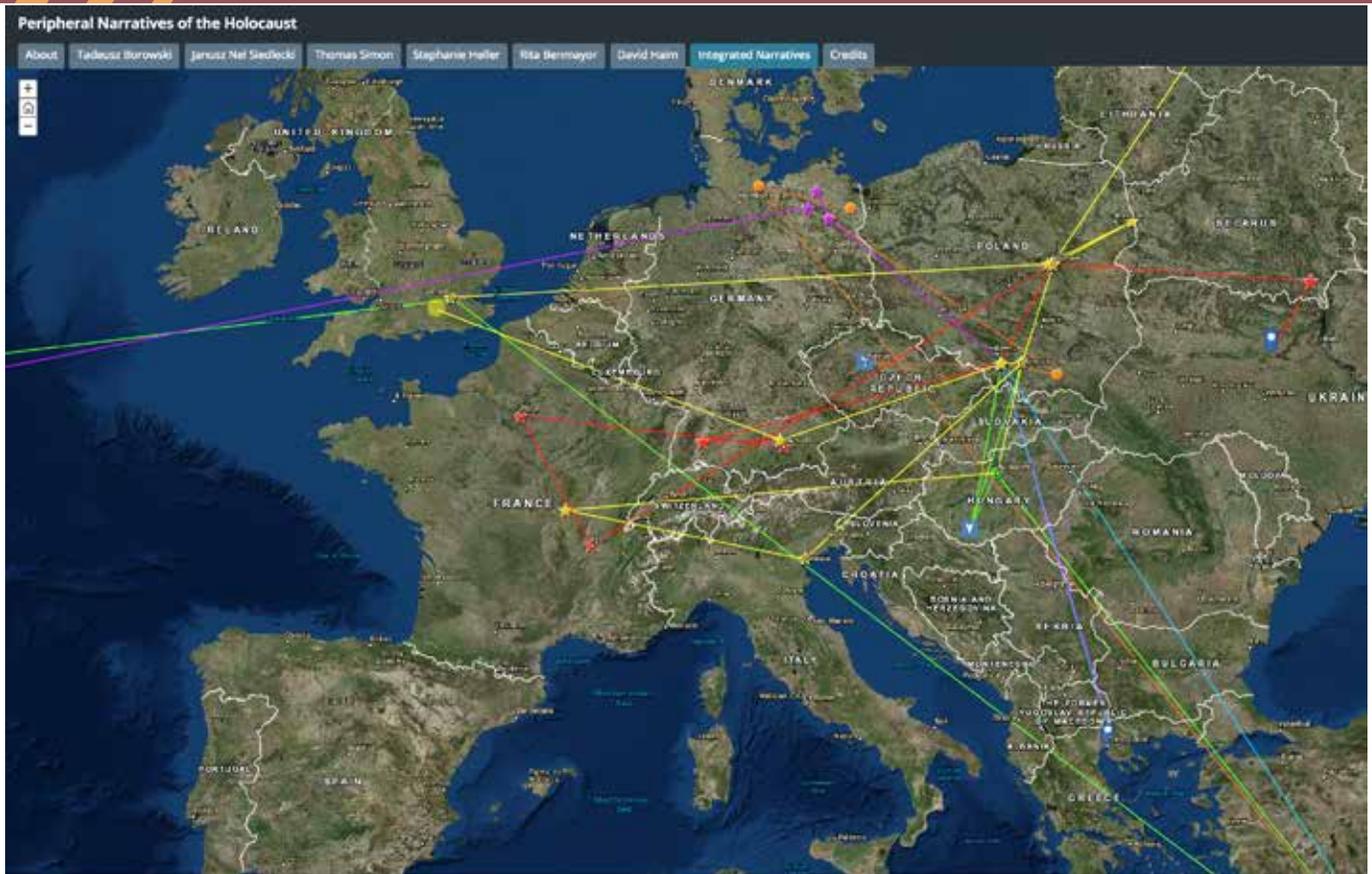
jumping from one place to the next. In this sense, students' mapping matches how they are already thinking about Holocaust history.

By contrast, assignments that ask students to consider testimony as a constructed text based on the memories of survivors require a much more difficult theoretical and conceptual leap. Additionally, students use Google Maps almost every day. As a result, thinking with a tool like Google Maps has a low barrier to entry and the potential for great impact.

What does this look like in the classroom? I introduce spatial thinking through texts and examples of digital mapping projects. Only after we have investigated the concepts of space and place do we turn to building or representing, most often using the My Maps tool in the Google Suite.

The assignment asks students to map one testimony. It is not computationally intensive. Nor is it research-driven. Rather, the assignment is meant to push students toward a critical engagement with using maps as storytelling platforms. They must ask themselves: How can I represent chronology when there is no time component to the map? At what scale do I place a point? Do I need a street address or a neighborhood? What if I only have a city name? What if a survivor talks about a village that can't be found on Google Maps?

These questions drive the learning. Students must confront the kinds of knowledge-making structures, like metadata and titles, that



This map was created by four students in Rachel Deblinger's 2016 course Holocaust in the Digital Age. The project employed ESRI Storymaps to map the Holocaust experiences of six survivors from three different victim groups that the students considered to be peripheral to dominant narratives of the Holocaust: Jews from Greece, non-Jews, and twins. Image courtesy of Rachel Deblinger.

are often obscured in historical texts. They consider how the viewer will understand the narrative and what categories they want to highlight.

Most students choose to depict places mentioned in a testimony in chronological order. They use layers to organize places in a testimony from before the war, during the war, and after the war. Sometimes, however, they find entirely different modes of storytelling. One student used layers to separate the places where a survivor had been taken from the places where the survivor had imagined

*I love when students experiment with these creative ways of representing a Holocaust narrative and use the mapping exercise to conceptualize testimony as more than just one survivor's experience of being taken from place to place.*

going throughout the war years. Another student told the story of a whole family separated throughout the war, using various colors and icons to show when family members were separated and how they reunited.

I love when students experiment with these creative ways of representing a Holocaust narrative and use the mapping exercise to conceptualize testimony as more than just one survivor's experience of being taken from place to place.

Regardless of the result, the assignment asks students

to consider the problem of place in general. How do they reconcile place names as remembered by survivors with the names of cities or countries today? How do they represent the borders of places that no longer exist? The inconsistencies serve as reminders that places are not constants, maps are constructions, and even the satellite images from Google are not realistic representations of our world.

Most important, I have found that asking students to build maps—even using entry-level tools—invites them to think about the scale of the Holocaust in a new way. As they place points on a map that detail the distances travelled by one person, and imagine the lived experience of that displacement, they recognize the gap between history as experienced and how it is represented.

Through this exercise, students develop a critical approach to online content that allows them to interrogate biases of data too often obscured by front-end platforms. Students are encouraged to critically engage with online content

and to rethink their own understanding of the history of the Holocaust. ■

*Rachel Deblinger, PhD, is Research Program Manager at the Humanities Institute at the University of California, Santa Cruz.*

# Medicinal Plants of Płaszów

Jason Francisco

One of my preoccupations in recent years has been the area in Kraków known as Płaszów, which before World War II was the site of two Jewish cemeteries and, during the Holocaust, was a major forced labor, transit, and death camp. Estimates of the number of people who passed through the camp between November 1942 and January 1945 range from 30,000 to upwards of 50,000, most of them Jews. At its peak in 1944, the camp's slave laborers numbered some 25,000, the size of a small city. Approximately 5,000–8,000 prisoners perished in the camp—from disease, starvation, exhaustion, beating, and firing squad—and the remains of 2,000 victims from the Kraków Ghetto were also interred there.

In today's Kraków, Płaszów remains a deeply ambivalent space. Though publicly signed as a site of genocide—most recently through a project undertaken by graduate students of the Jagiellonian



Remains of two pre-war Jewish cemeteries in Płaszów.  
Photograph by Jason Francisco. Used with permission.

## *What forces of healing is the genocidal earth of Płaszów itself generating?*

University—it remains the only major former Nazi camp not incorporated into a museum or cultural institution. It functions primarily as a public park: a popular place to sunbathe, picnic, ride bicycles, play games, and have barbeques.

Płaszów's everyday life is altogether different than that of Auschwitz, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Chełmno, not to mention dozens of smaller former camp locations in Poland.

The way that Płaszów is simultaneously remembered and forgotten, understood and misunderstood, has been the subject of my photographic work and also socio-cultural research over the past decade.

Now it is also the subject of an experimental work of historical memory, created in response to the questions: “What forces of healing is the genocidal earth of Płaszów itself generating?” and “Is it possible to harness the power of that natural healing for social healing?”

These questions came to me two years ago, when I began to study and photograph the medicinal plants growing at Płaszów. Since then, a vision has taken shape of a multidimensional encounter with Płaszów: an exhibition bringing together the historical consciousness of Płaszów, frank examination of the everyday life of Płaszów, the earth of Płaszów itself, and some kind of engagement with the healing plants growing on the site of the former camp.

FestivALT—the Kraków-based experimental artist’s collective that I co-founded in 2016 and co-direct with Magda Rubinfeld Koralewska and Michael Rubinfeld—decided to take up the project as part of this past summer’s program.

With FestivALT, the vision became more focused. We conceived the idea of a community garden made of



Sunbathers near the Cipowy Dolek execution site.  
Photograph by Jason Francisco. Used with permission.

*Two types of awareness—the medicinal and the genocidal—came together in a single complicated encounter.*

medicinal plants brought from Płaszów, planted and tended to by neighbors. We imagined a garden that would bring people together and strengthen the community, as so many community gardens do, and at the same time serve as a place where a change in historical awareness might develop.

We found a partner in Berenika Błaszak, director of the Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej (Municipal Social Welfare Center). MOPS is a community center located in an old

building in the former area of the Nazi ghetto in the Podgórze section of the city, across the street from the site where the great Yiddish poet and singer Mordechai Gebirtig was murdered on June 4, 1942.

Ms. Błaszak offered us the community center’s courtyard—small, neglected, humble, perfect in spirit—and she convinced the board and the families of the center to invest their time and hearts in a community garden of healing plants harvested from Płaszów.

During FestivALT, in June 2018, we went to Płaszów with members of the MOPS community and Karol Szurdak, a Polish ethnobotanist and expert in plant-based medicine. Mr. Szurdak gave a remarkable tour of the dozens of

medicinal plants growing at Płaszów, from which medicinal tinctures, teas, and compounds can be made. He spoke of natural medicine and plant pharmacology, I spoke of Płaszów's history, and the two types of awareness—the medicinal and the genocidal—came together in a single complicated encounter.

That afternoon, Mr. Szurdak described some three dozen species of medicinal plants growing at Płaszów, and we collected eighteen of them—the number that corresponds to the Hebrew word for life. We brought them back to MOPS, where other community members were building planters and filling them with soil. We transplanted the specimens, one per planter.

A few days later, we built the garden and within it hung a small exhibition of my pictures and texts, in Polish and in English. We placed signs in each planter with information about the plant species, its chemical compounds, its medicinal uses, and, in one case, its appearance in a Płaszów survivor's testimony.

I was still putting in the last screws when members of



Berenika Błaszak (left), FestivALT's technical director Miko Szatko, and community members help construct the garden.

Photograph by Jason Francisco. Used with permission.

*Following Poland's 2018 law criminalizing speech about Polish involvement in the Holocaust, open examination of Płaszów's everyday life has become even more controversial, though the law itself has since been rolled back.*

the MOPS community and a few interested others arrived for the dedication. As we described the project and our hopes for its future, the skies opened and rain came to water our garden in what seemed an impossibly poetic moment.

The exhibition is a braid of two image types: small-format

photographs made in 2010–18 showing the wide range of things people actually do at Płaszów, and large-format photographs made in January–May 2018 contemplating the earth of Płaszów. These pictures constitute my project *The Camp in Its Afterlives*. Printed differently, the pictures could be used for a museum exhibition. As they are, they are printed for outdoor use. The texts provide basic information about the camp's history and about the complications of Płaszów as a site of both memory and forgetting.

The community garden plus the pictures and texts are Kraków's first long-term exhibition about the realities of contemporary Płaszów,



The completed garden in the MOPS courtyard.  
Photograph by Jason Francisco. Used with permission.

an exhibition that none of Kraków’s museums or cultural centers will accept—not the Galicia Jewish Museum, not the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, not the International Culture Centre, not the Historical Museum of the city of Kraków, not the Kraków Fotomonth.

For all of these institutions, the complications of contemporary Płaszów remain too difficult, too tangled. Following Poland’s 2018 law criminalizing speech about Polish involvement in the Holocaust, open examination of Płaszów’s everyday life has become even more controversial, though the law itself has since been rolled back.

On the day following our garden’s dedication, the FestivALT group returned to Płaszów with Mr. Szurdak for a second medicinal-plants and history tour. We collected more specimens. The adults seemed to find a measure of wonder in the combination of Płaszów’s melancholy and the bounty of its flora. The children channeled the energy of what grows. Taken together, the event seemed both the culmination and the beginning of a remarkable process.

In the text for the exhibition, I wrote:

*If we were only to recognize that the wounded earth grows plants from which we can make medicine—that would be enough. And if we were*

*to create a special garden of those plants, where the forces of pain and healing come together—that would be enough. And if that special garden were tended by the hands of the community in whose midst the former camp sits—that would be enough. And if that community were to make from this one garden other gardens of healing and remembrance—that would be enough. And if from those other gardens new seeds of consciousness and understanding were to be planted—that would be enough. And if from those seeds other kinds of actions, thoughts and hopes were to grow—that would be enough.*

The garden of medicinal plants was built in the courtyard of Dąbrówki 7, in Kraków, where it was on display for most of the summer. Though the garden was moved, in part, to the nearby Park Stacja Wisła, work on it will continue during next year’s FestivALT, with the hope of securing it a permanent home. ■

**Jason Francisco** is a photographer, writer, and book artist. He is also co-founder and co-director of FestivALT: <http://www.festivalt.com>.

## REPORTS

# Independence March Held in Warsaw Amid Controversy

Adam Schorin

On Sunday, November 11, more than 200,000 people marched in Warsaw to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Poland's independence. It was the most highly attended Independence March yet, but it nearly didn't happen.

Four days before Independence Day, on Wednesday, November 7,

*In spite of the tensions brewing in the days before, there were significantly fewer overtly racist banners and chants than in last year's march.*

Warsaw's mayor, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, announced that she was

banning this year's march. "Warsaw has suffered enough from aggressive nationalism," she said in a televised statement. Since 2008, the annual march has been organized by the far-right National Radical Camp (ONR) and All-Polish Youth. The former organization sees itself as an ideological successor to a fascist



A girl waves a Polish flag amid red flares at the 2018 Independence March. Photograph by Jacek Smoter. Used with permission.

movement of the same name from 1930s Poland. All-Polish Youth has been heavily criticized for its homophobia and anti-Semitism by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the United Nations.

Last year's Independence March, in which 60,000 people participated, received a great deal of international attention for the nationalist, xenophobic, and racist slogans some marchers chanted. People carried signs with hateful slogans, such as, "White Power, Ku Klux Klan," "Pure Poland, White Poland," and "Refugees, get out!"

Barely a few hours after Mayor Gronkiewicz-Waltz's announcement, President Andrzej Duda, who had previously said he would not partake in the march organized by the far right, declared the government would organize a march along the same route. "Let's show that we are one community," said Błażej Spychalski, the president's spokesperson, at a press conference. "The march will be a national celebration."

*"I also don't understand how it happened that the nationalists, who are politically irrelevant, have become an equal partner for the government."*

—Andrzej Rychard,  
Polish Academy of Sciences

On Thursday evening, Mayor Gronkiewicz-Waltz's ban was overturned by the court. As a result, the government and the nationalist organizations that had initially planned the march negotiated a last-minute agreement: participants in the state-sanctioned march would march first, followed by participants in the nationalist march. The two groups would be separated by a squad of military police.

Andrzej Rychard, a sociologist at the Polish Academy of Sciences, told the *New York Times* that he did not "understand how it happened that the nationalists, who are politically irrelevant, have become an equal partner for the government."

On Sunday, when a record number of participants showed up to march, President Duda addressed them all. "Let this be a joint march, let it be a march for everyone," he said. The march was "to give honor to those who fought for Poland, and to be glad that it is free, sovereign, and independent." In the crowd, Polish soldiers stood in columns alongside members of the ONR and the All-Polish Youth. Families who had come for the state-sanctioned march were in the same audience as representatives from Forza Nuova, an Italian neo-fascist movement, who had come to show support for Polish nationalism.

In spite of the tensions brewing in the days before, there were significantly fewer overtly racist banners and chants than in last year's march.

Much of the offensive chanting came when the march met protestors along the way, who, organized by the progressive groups Citizens of Poland, Women's Strike, and Committee for the Defense of Democracy, carried banners with the slogan "*Konstytucja*"

(Constitution), in criticism of actions by the government that have been perceived as attacks on the rule of law. Video obtained by *OKO.press* shows participants in the Independence March throwing flares and firecrackers at the protestors, and calling them “prostitutes” and “whores.” One group of marchers is seen shouting, “The constitution will be Polish, but for now is Jewish.”

The anti-fascist coalition also organized a protest march of

8,000 people along a different route. Participants in this march carried banners that read, “For your freedom and ours,” and chanted, “Warsaw free of fascism.”

But the prevailing attitude of the day was not one of confrontation. The majority of those marching did not engage in racist or offensive rhetoric and many sought to distance themselves from any controversy. “I just want to celebrate the 100th

anniversary. To see all those Polish flags, it’s a beautiful view,” Piotr, attending the march for the first time, told *The Guardian*. “The atmosphere is very good, except for a couple of groups whose slogans are not okay.”

“The joint march is a huge success,” said Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the ruling Law and Justice Party. “This is a great day.” ■

*Adam Schorin* is Assistant Editor of *Gazeta*.



Participants in the 2018 Independence March wave Polish flags, ONR flags, Forza Nuova flags, and Italian flags. Photograph by Jacek Smoter. Used with permission.

# Explaining Poland to the World: Notes from Poland

Daniel Tilles

There has never been a more important time to understand Poland. Twenty-six years of uninterrupted economic growth (a unique achievement in the European Union) has made the country a regional powerhouse and increasingly significant at the European level. Next year, Poland is set to pass Sweden as the EU's sixth largest economy and overtake Portugal in terms of GDP per capita at purchasing power parity. It is an increasingly assertive (albeit not always cooperative) player in Brussels, and will play a central role as the EU embarks on a crucial period of discussion over its future direction. In particular, it is at the heart of a struggle to balance the interests of the "old" western member states and the "new" eastern ones, among which Poland is by far the largest. Finally, it is a key outpost on NATO's eastern front at a time of growing geo-political uncertainty.

*Poland is at the forefront of a number of global political, economic, and social trends: the rise of the populist right; the challenge to liberal democracy and the rule of law; the backlash against mass migration; growing emphasis on national sovereignty and a more insulated domestic economy.*

Moreover, Poland is at the forefront of a number of global political, economic, and social trends: the rise of the populist right; the challenge to liberal democracy and the rule of law; the backlash against mass migration; growing emphasis on national sovereignty and a more insulated domestic economy,

rather than supranational institutions and global trade.

Poland, like many countries, is at a crossroads, confronted by questions, doubts, and disputes over its identity, culture, and history—not the least of which is how to deal with its Jewish past.

Unfortunately, the growing importance and relevance of Poland has not been matched by a concomitant improvement in reliable international media coverage of the country. A number of English-language news websites covering Polish affairs have emerged, but all are either run by the Polish state or by private media firms with close ties to the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS). Consequently, their coverage is skewed in favor of the government's party line. Reporting and commentary on Poland in western media are sporadic and limited, often written by correspondents who lack

the background knowledge, language skills, and time to properly understand the issues at stake. In particular, criticism of Poland—over questions like the rule of law and the “Holocaust law”—while sometimes justified, is often undermined by a lack of familiarity with the background, context, and details necessary to fully understand the issues at stake.

It is these gaps that *Notes from Poland* has sought to fill by providing regular, independent reporting and analysis of current affairs in Poland, as well as broader insights into the country’s culture, politics, history, and society. Initially founded four years ago as a blog by my colleague Stanley Bill, Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in Polish Studies and Director of the Polish Studies Programme at the University of Cambridge, its primary focus is now on social media, where it has become the most followed and influential outlet reporting on Polish affairs, with more than 25,000 followers on Facebook and almost 8,000 on Twitter.



The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw.  
Wikimedia Commons.

***Our goal is to create a professional online publication that hosts regular analyses and opinion pieces on Poland by experts from a range of fields and from across the political spectrum.***

Currently, our activity is two-fold. Our social media feeds make multiple daily posts offering summaries, translations, and explanations

of news stories about Poland. These posts are widely read and shared, and regularly re-reported in both the Polish and international media. There is also the blog itself (at [www.notesfrompoland.com](http://www.notesfrompoland.com)), on which we post less frequent but longer articles, written by us, offering in-depth analyses of Polish affairs. Recent subjects we have covered include: immigration to Poland (which, contrary to PiS’s anti-immigration image, is currently at the highest level in history); new research on Poles’ treatment

of Jews during WWII and the international controversy over this year's "Holocaust law" (which introduced prison sentences of up to three years for those, at home or abroad, who falsely accuse the Polish state or nation of responsibility for German crimes); and the government's judicial reforms (which have provoked mass protests domestically and legal action against Poland from the EU). We also post articles by guest authors on subjects such as underground publishing in communist Poland; the illegal, government-approved logging of UNESCO-protected Białowieża, Europe's last medieval forest; and the teaching of religion in Polish schools.

The rapid growth of *Notes from Poland* has so far been entirely organic. We have never received any funding or raised any revenue from our work, which is carried out around our full-time academic jobs. However, given the size of our audience, the growing attention being paid to Poland, the lack of other reliable sources, and the approach of pivotal elections

over the next 18 months, we are now looking to expand our work. Our goal is to create a professional online publication that hosts regular analyses and opinion pieces on Poland by experts from a range of fields and from across the political spectrum. We also aim to enhance our news reporting to become the primary forum for news, analysis, and discussion on Poland.

These plans depend on raising sufficient funding, a challenge we are currently tackling. We hope that by building on the work we have already done, we can continue to be an informed voice about Poland for the rest of the world, especially at this time when greater knowledge of the country and its region is needed. ■

***Daniel Tilles, PhD, is Assistant Professor of History at the Pedagogical University of Kraków and co-editor of Notes from Poland.***

## A New Home for the Jewish Theater in Warsaw

Fay and Julian Busgang

On August 30 of this year, *The Jewish Telegraphic Agency* and *The Jerusalem Post* reported that the Warsaw City Council approved a proposal by Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz to turn a five-story apartment building into the new site of the Ester Rachel and Ida Kamińska Jewish Theater – Center for Yiddish Culture. The city has assigned \$41 million for the project, which is expected to take five years. Małgorzata Zakrzewska, a Warsaw City Council member, called the Jewish Theater “one of the most important guardians of Jewish culture in Warsaw and all over Poland.” At a news conference she said, “It is our commitment, but also our responsibility to a culture that was a permanent element of the Warsaw landscape before the war.”

The original Jewish Theater, located on Grzybowski Square, was named for the legendary actors Ester and Ida Kamińska. It was built in the



A recent production of *Chumesz lider* at the Ester Rachel and Ida Kamińska Jewish Theater in Warsaw.

Photograph by Magda Hueckel. Courtesy of the Jewish Theater.

***The original Jewish Theater, located on Grzybowski Square, was named for the legendary actors Ester and Ida Kamińska.***

late 1960s with the financial support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. For fifty years, it

was a link to Poland’s pre-war Yiddish-speaking Jewish community, and people from all over the world came for performances. It was the only permanent theater in Poland with performances in Yiddish, and one of only two in Europe. The theater was demolished in 2017, after the owner of the building, the Jewish social organization TSKŻ, was forced to sell it



The old building of the Ester Rachel and Ida Kamińska Jewish Theater – Center for Yiddish Culture on Plac Grzybowski in Warsaw. It has since been demolished.  
 Photograph by Adrian Grycuk. Wikimedia Commons.

due to financial difficulties. The new owners plan to build a skyscraper office building on the property.

The building chosen to house the new theater is on Próżna Street near Grzybowski Square, close to where the original theater building stood before its demolition. This late 19th-century building is one of the few remnants of former Jewish Warsaw.

The \$41 million donation by the city will be used to hold an architectural competition and for design documentation. According to preliminary plans, it will contain two stages as well as facilities for

*It was the only permanent theater in Poland with performances in Yiddish, and one of only two in Europe.*

the activities and promotion of Yiddish culture. The city is waiting for conservation recommendations from the Provincial Conservator of Monuments, which will provide the basis for the competition by the architects.

Meanwhile, the theater troupe, under the direction of Gołda Tencer, has continued to

perform in various venues. Its temporary home is at 35 Senatorska Street, with most performances being held at the Warsaw Garrison Command Club and guest appearances in other theaters such as Nowy Teatr, Polish Theater, and TR Warszawa. For current information about performances, visit the theater's website at <http://www.teatr-zydowski.art.pl>. ■

*Fay and Julian Bussgang edited Gazeta for more than twenty years. Today, they serve as senior contributing editors.*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS

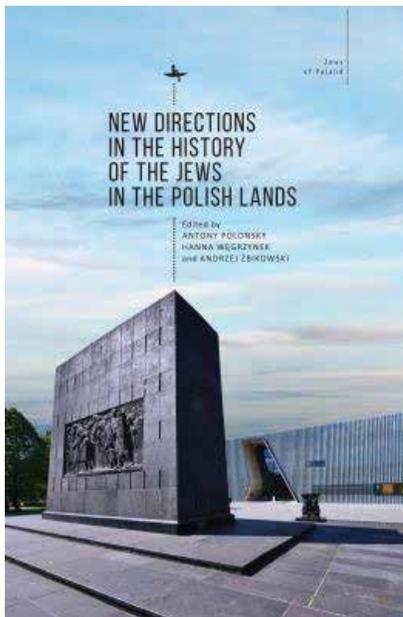
### Books

# *New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands*

Edited by Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski. Academic Studies Press, 2018.

In the last forty-five years, tremendous progress has been made in the study of the Polish-Jewish past. The enormously disruptive impact of the Holocaust, Stalinism, and the imposition of Marxist-Leninist norms of historical writing in the Polish People's Republic meant that a new cadre of scholars had to be created from the 1980s, and that many topics had to be investigated anew. In addition, after 1945, Poles and Jews (insofar as these are mutually exclusive categories, which is not always the case) were divided, above all, by their diametrically opposed and incompatible views of a shared, yet divisive past, which made its investigation both difficult and controversial.

One clear indication of how far understanding of the Polish-Jewish past has evolved since then was evident in the 2014 opening of the permanent exhibition of the POLIN Museum. The



*New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands*. Edited by Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski.

museum's impressive building is located in the heart of the former Jewish district in Warsaw on the site of the imposing monument of Natan Rappoport's *Jewish People, Its Martyrs and Fighters* and nearby 18 Miła Street, the site of the bunker where Mordechai Anieliewicz, the leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, committed suicide rather than be captured by the Germans. The permanent

Antony Polonsky

exhibition provides a comprehensive account of the history of Polish Jews from the 10th century to the present day. Making use of innovative techniques and based on current research, it offers a vivid picture of the complex past of what was once the largest Jewish community in the world. As such, the POLIN Museum has already begun to transform the way in which the history of Polish Jews is understood and appreciated in Poland and the world, for Poles, Jews, and for international audiences.

The volume *New Directions in the History of the Jews in the Polish Lands* is made up of selected essays derived from papers delivered at a May 2015 conference that introduced the scholarly community to the permanent exhibition at the POLIN Museum. Its publication was made possible through the support of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, the William K.

Bowes, Jr., Foundation and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland.

The book is divided into sections that follow a general overview by the three editors: Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski. The first section deals with museological questions—the voices of the curators, comments on the museum and discussions of museums, and education. What emerges clearly from these collective observations is the crucial role of the Chief Curator of the permanent exhibition, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. It was her vision that inspired the development of the individual galleries, each one part of a series of galleries organized like stage sets that take the visitor through eight historic periods into which the permanent exhibition is divided.

The second section of the volume examines the current state of the historiography of the Jews in the Polish lands from the first Jewish settlement to the present day. Comprising research of leading scholars from Poland, Western Europe,

North America, and Israel, it provides a definitive overview of the history and culture of one of the most important communities in the long history of the Jewish people. An initial part considers pre-modern Poland-Lithuania and contains papers that range from studies on the relationship between the *szlachta* (nobility), the Church, and the Jews (Adam Kazmierczak) to the role and significance of Jews in the economy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Jacek Wijaczka).

Ranging from the 19th century to the inter-war years, topics include anti-Jewish violence in the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and ideals of unity and disunity in inter-war Polish Jewry. Of note, the propagation of educational values and their impacts on children (Ann Landau Czajka), and especially Orthodox girls (Naomi Seidman), shed light on lesser-known subjects.

The penultimate section on the Holocaust engages with the state of current research

on Polish-Jewish relations in the context of the challenges of the new historiography about the Holocaust in Poland. The final section deals with the postwar period, with particular attention to its representation in the POLIN Museum itself, as well as the identities and images of Poland among Polish Jews in the post-war period. The editors sought to give a clear picture of the present state of the historiography of the long history of the Jews in the Polish lands, and also to show how the permanent exhibition of the POLIN Museum has attempted to portray this history. ■

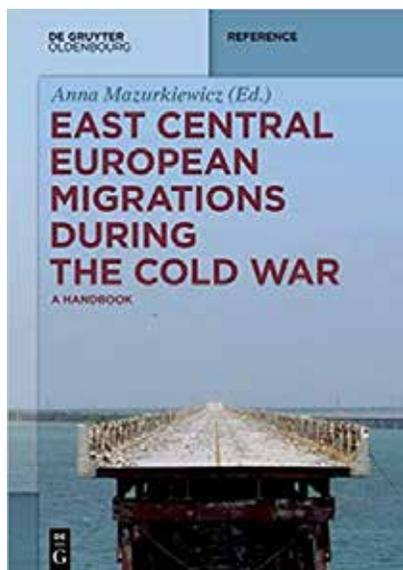
*Antony Polonsky, PhD, is Chief Historian at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.*

## *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War: A Handbook*

Edited by Anna Mazurkiewicz. De Gruyter Oldenbourg. Forthcoming, 2019.

A new reference book, *East Central European Migrations During the Cold War: A Handbook*, edited by Anna Mazurkiewicz, catalogues migration patterns from sociological and historical perspectives from pre- to post-World War II. This important compilation is the result of contributors from eight countries, each one a specialist in their own region. As a landmark survey, this book will be of value to anyone interested in migratory routes considering pre-1939 movements and their marked changes through post-World War II population transfers, up through Cold War shifts in travel and migration laws.

Anna Mazurkiewicz, currently a visiting scholar at Stanford's Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, is Associate Professor of History at the University of Gdańsk, and the president of the Polish American Historical Association. She has published books on the American



*East Central European Migrations During the Cold War: A Handbook*, edited by Anna Mazurkiewicz.

responses to the elections of 1947 and 1989 in Poland, and on the role of political exiles from East Central Europe in American Cold War politics (1948–54). ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS Festivals and Performances

### Fifteen Years of the Singer Festival

Fay and Julian  
Bussgang

This past August, a plaque commemorating the Yiddish writer and Nobel Prize laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer was unveiled on Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, where Singer lived with his family 110 years ago. The ceremony was held in conjunction with the Festival of Jewish Culture in Warsaw, an annual celebration organized by the Shalom Foundation, whose purpose is the popularization of Jewish culture in Poland and the remembrance of its Jewish communities. The director of the Shalom Foundation is Gołda Tencer.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, born in Poland in 1902, was known for his stories in Yiddish about life in pre-war Poland. In 1935, fearful of the Nazi threat in Germany, he emigrated to the United States. While continuing to write stories and novels, he became a journalist in New York for the Yiddish language newspaper *The Jewish Daily Forward*. He received several significant awards for his writing, including the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature.



A plaque commemorating Isaac Bashevis Singer was unveiled at 1 Krochmalna Street in Warsaw, where the author once lived with his family.  
Wikimedia Commons.

The Festival of Jewish Culture in Warsaw, which began in 2004 and is named in honor of Singer, attempts to recreate Jewish culture from the period of inter-war Poland, complete with historical buildings and atmosphere. It is a week-long celebration of Jewish theater, music, films, lectures, and expositions. Regular features include kosher food, dancing, songs, crafts, ceramics, and posters. Numerous workshops, discussion groups, and seminars are also offered on topics related to Yiddish culture. The events are held in various venues around the

city, primarily in the area of the former Jewish quarter.

When the festival was started, it was only four days long. This year's festival, the fifteen-year jubilee, took place, from August 25 through September 2, and was celebrated with performances by Jewish artists from all over the world and attended by local and international visitors. ■

## *Don't Cry When I'm Gone* Wins Best Documentary at Toronto Polish Film Festival

**G**azeta extends a hearty *mazal tov* to director Sławomir Grünberg and producer Zygmunt Sieradzki, whose documentary film *Don't Cry When I'm Gone* won the Best Documentary Award in September, at the 10th Annual Toronto Polish Film Festival. The film portrays the remarkable life of Wanda Sieradzka, Holocaust survivor and famous television actress, poet, and lyricist. The jury's statement notes: "After she survived the Holocaust, Wanda did not dwell on the past, but instead built a rich and joyous creative life in Poland." ■



Poster for *Don't Cry When I'm Gone*.

## *The Auschwitz Volunteer* Performed in New York City

Reported by Tressa Berman

On November 11, 2018, the United Solo Festival and the Polish Cultural Institute of New York presented the sold-out New York premiere of *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Captain Witold Pilecki*, a monodrama directed and performed by Marek Probosz, at Theatre Row in New York City.

“It’s one of the most amazing stories to come out of World War II,” said Terry Tegnazian, a producer of the show and the publisher of Pilecki’s autobiography, *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery* (2012), translated by Jarek Garlinski. “His experience that he’s written down gives the details and a view of what went on in Auschwitz even in the years before it became a death camp for the Jews. In 1940 and 1941, it was primarily a camp for Polish political prisoners and anybody the Germans thought capable of resisting them.”

In September 1940, Pilecki volunteered for a secret mission for the Polish Underground to



Marek Probosz as Witold Pilecki.  
Image courtesy of Marek Probosz.

smuggle out intelligence about the new German concentration camp and to organize inmate resistance, with the goal of helping the Allies liberate the camp from the inside.

Reviewing Pilecki’s astonishing account, Timothy Snyder wrote that the report on Auschwitz, unpublished for decades in Communist Poland, “is a historical document of the greatest importance. Pilecki was able to smuggle out several brief reports from Auschwitz in 1940, 1941 and 1942, and wrote two shorter reports after his

escape in 1943. The long report that constitutes this book dates from 1945 and summarizes what he noted along the way: the brutality of Auschwitz as a German concentration camp for Poles in 1940 and 1941, and its transformation into something worse over the course of the war.” Pilecki himself was also the subject and a survivor of the inhumane abuses of the camp, until he escaped.

In the book’s foreword, Poland’s Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich writes that Pilecki’s early warnings, if heeded, “might have changed the course of history.”

By bringing the page to the stage, the show offers a critical reminder and an important message for our collective humanity. Adapted for this one-man performance, Pilecki’s account attests to the horrific potential of unchecked human brutality, as well as the courage of witnesses, like Pilecki, to make themselves heard. ■

**Tressa Berman, PhD**, is  
*Managing Editor of Gazeta.*

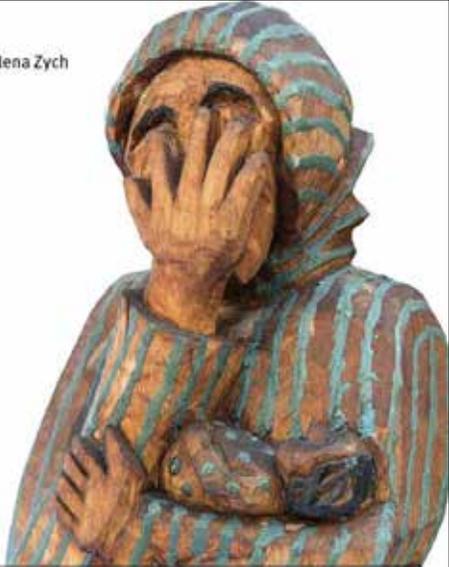
## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS

### Exhibitions

# *Terribly Close. New Temporary Exhibition at Ethnographic Museum in Kraków*

Currently on display at the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków is the exhibition *Terribly Close: Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust*. Included in the exhibition are sculptures and paintings by Władysław Chajec (*Nazis*, 1967), Jan Staszak (*Gas*, 1969), and Adam Czarnecki (*Jews Get to Work*, 1965–1967), among others. These works “tell about World War II as seen from up close, from a bystander’s perspective,” according to the museum’s website. While some depict the Holocaust, others “obscure the specifically Jewish character of the genocide, framing it instead as Catholic Polish martyrology or a universal human tragedy.”

The exhibition is completed by Wojciech Wilczyk’s series *Blow-ups* (2016–18), which includes photographs of selected artworks and tries to understand the perspectives of their creators. In presenting



The curatorial team  
Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech Wilczyk, Magdalena Zych  
together with  
the Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University  
and the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow

invite you to the exhibition

# TERRIBLY CLOSE

## Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust

**1.12.2018 – 31.03.2019**  
Kraków Ethnographic Museum, ul. Krakowska 46

The exhibit and the research that informed it were undertaken by the Polish team of the international transatlantic project (Transatlantic Connections Cultural Heritage with the Arts, from Intervention to Co-Production, 2016–2018) as part of the European Commission research area Reflective Society program. The project is based at the Jagiellonian University Faculty of Polish Studies.

The exhibit is not recommended for children under the age of 14.

Media partners:

The event is held under the auspices of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018.

Flyer for the exhibition *Terribly Close: Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust*.

the exhibition, the curators ask: “How did these works come about? Who made them, and why? [and] For which audience?”

*Curated by Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech Wilczyk, and Magdalena Zych, the exhibition will be on display until March 31, 2019. ■*

## The Sejm Hosts Exhibition of Former Jewish Cemeteries

Fay and Julian Bussgang

An exhibit displaying photographs of former Jewish cemeteries in Poland opened on October 2, 2018, in the main hall of the Polish Parliament (Sejm). Organized under the leadership of Katarzyna Kopecka from Łódź, the exhibit is called *Obecnie nieobecni* (Currently Absent). Through the prism of the cemeteries, the creators of the project aim to remind viewers of the centuries-old presence of the Jewish community in Poland.

The photographs are of sites that are no longer used or even identified as cemeteries. To illustrate that the sites had been Jewish cemeteries, the exhibit superimposes transparent, ghost-like images of Jewish gravestones on current photographs of former cemetery sites—some of which are now shooting ranges, children’s playgrounds, swimming pools, or even factories.

The exhibit’s opening ceremony was hosted by



The site of the Jewish cemetery in Tuszyn, currently a public recreation center. Photograph from the project *Currently Absent* by Katarzyna Kopecka, Piotr Pawlak, and Jan Janiak. Used with permission.

Marek Kuchciński, the Marshall of the Sejm, from the leading Law and Justice Party. The exhibit ran through November.

Of note, the exhibit opened during a time of protests by Jewish groups, such as the World Zionist Organization, on current cemetery desecration in Poland. Several groups are working to preserve the Jewish cemeteries that still exist, including the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in

Poland, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŻ), and the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative. ■

For more information about the exhibition, see <https://wprawo.pl/2018/10/03/w-sejmie-otwarto-wystawe-fotografii-zniszczonych-cmentarzy-zydowskich/> and <http://www.obecnieobecni.pl>.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS

### Conferences and Workshops

# Urban Jewish Heritage Conference Held in Kraków

As part of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, the conference, Urban Jewish Heritage: Presence and Absence, was held at Villa Decius in Kraków September 3–7. Organized by the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and the Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage at the University of Birmingham, the conference focused on

issues and challenges in the field of Jewish heritage, tourism, conservation, artistic practice, and education. The conference brought together 142 participants from thirty-three countries and a wide range of disciplines. Sociologists, anthropologists, historians, artists, writers, community leaders, and museum educators all presented their work and research.

Conference highlights included abstracts from the following participants:

### **Ghosts in the Gallery: Historic Synagogues and American Jewish Nostalgia**

*Rachel B. Gross, San Francisco State University*

In 2004, tourists visiting the Eldridge Street Synagogue on New York’s Lower East Side looked up to see



Participants at the Urban Jewish Heritage Conference in Kraków.

Photograph by Paulina Fiejdasz Film Productions. Courtesy of the Ironbridge International Institute for Cultural Heritage.

ghostly dresses hanging in the women's balcony. Thin garments crafted from antique laces, household linens, and old clothes, dyed and printed with gold text, the dresses comprised Carol Hamoy's installation *Welcome to America*, representing the stories of immigrant women from the synagogue's original congregation. This evocative exhibit encouraged visitors to long for the history of urban American neighborhoods once populated by Jewish immigrants and their communities of origin in Central and Eastern Europe.

Throughout the United States, historic urban synagogue buildings have acquired new public roles as heritage sites. Many were abandoned as Jews left ethnic urban enclaves for the suburbs. A handful, including the Eldridge Street Synagogue, still house dwindling congregations. Symbols of communal pasts, they are popular settings for family outings and school trips. While teaching a standardized narrative of Ashkenazi American history, they promote nostalgia for

*American Jewish  
nostalgia is not  
simply an individual  
disposition, but an  
emotion that shapes  
the world of  
American Jews*

America's immigrant era, a sentimental longing for irretrievable communal pasts that cannot be fulfilled.

Through ethnographic research and interviews with staff members, visitors, philanthropists, and artists at the Eldridge Street Synagogue, the Vilna Shul in Boston, the Jewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach, and the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, I find that American Jews practice nostalgia as a *mitzvah*, something that is both praiseworthy and required.

While cultural critics often deride nostalgia as reductive, I argue that it is also productive, providing personal and communal meaning. American Jewish nostalgia is not simply an individual disposition but

an emotion that shapes the world of American Jews. Evoking shared longing for bygone pasts, staff members at historic synagogues provide narratives that help American Jews honor ancestors, create communities in the present, and pass on particular sentiments and values to the next generation.

### **Shtetl Routes: Jewish Heritage Tourism in the Borderlands of Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus**

*Emil Majuk, "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre, Lublin*

The *shtetl*—a unique kind of town inhabited by Jews and Christians of various ethnicities, a cultural phenomenon particular to Central and Eastern Europe—strongly influenced our local cultural landscape. Despite the lasting traces of Jewish presence over many centuries in the areas where we live (the Polish, Ukrainian, and Belarusian borderlands), local memorial sites related to Jewish history and culture have not yet been sufficiently appreciated or incorporated into European and local heritage.

In 2013, the Shtetl Routes project was established with the goal of supporting tourism and local development initiatives based on Jewish cultural heritage in the borderlands. The idea for the project came out of documentary, artistic, and educational work completed with regard to the Jewish cultural heritage of Lublin as part of the work of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre, a Lublin-based cultural institution that has been active since 1992. In its projects, the Centre draws on the symbolic and historical significance of the building where it is located—Grodzka Gate, which was once the passageway between the city’s Jewish and Christian quarters.

In organizing the Shtetl Routes project we considered the following questions: How should we talk about multicultural heritage of towns in the borderlands? What is the heritage of the *shtetl*? How should we, the current and mostly non-Jewish residents, talk about and relate to Jewish cultural heritage? How can we present this heritage as a part of

*How should we, the current and mostly non-Jewish residents, talk about Jewish cultural heritage?*

*How can we present this heritage as a part of cultural tourism?*

cultural tourism without falling into commercialization, simplification, or the repetition of stereotypes? In sum, how can we show Jewish heritage as common to both the descendants of Eastern European Jews and the present-day inhabitants of the borderlands?

We chose sixty towns (twenty each from Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine) and designed tourist development supportive tools for them. We chose locations on the criteria of tangible heritage (still-present sites of Jewish cultural heritage such as synagogues, cemeteries, *mikvehs*, schools); intangible heritage (stories presented in museums and cultural centers); accessibility; local agents; and existing infrastructure for tourism.

In addition to organizing study tours, creating virtual models of historical *shtetls* and wooden synagogues, compiling oral testimony, and printing maps, we published in four languages a 540-page guidebook titled *Shtetl Routes: Travels Through the Forgotten Continent*.

For the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, we have produced a traveling exhibition based on the work of the Shtetl Routes project called *There Was a Town...* New workshops study tours are currently being prepared.

More information is available at [www.shtetlroutes.eu](http://www.shtetlroutes.eu). ■

# Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Convened in Boston

The Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) held its fiftieth annual conference on December 6–9 at Boston’s Marriott Copley Place. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Association—a nonprofit, non-political, scholarly society—which is the leading international organization dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia, and Eastern Europe in regional and global contexts.

In keeping with the 2018 conference theme, papers explored the meanings of performance in and for the regions under study. Presentations that considered performance and performativity from an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary perspective addressed topics such as: the formation, consolidation, and transformation of identity for individuals, societies, and nations; gender

*In keeping with the 2018 conference theme, papers explored the meanings of performance in and for the regions under study.*

and sexuality; diversity, equity, and inclusion; local vs. global stages; political performativity; and performance technologies.

Beyond performance as it relates to music and the performing arts, conference participants were asked to consider how their research relates to broader, yet more incisive, aspects of “performance” in sociocultural and political contexts, including underlying questions related to bodily practices of health, hygiene, gender, and sexuality, performative utterances that change the social reality they describe, and the rituals that constitute and legitimate political power, including the

narrative framing of events in the media. ■

For conference information and the conference program, please visit <https://www.aseees.org/convention/program>.

## International Workshop at POLIN Museum

An international workshop, *Deported, Exiled, Saved. History and Memory of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1940–1959)*, was held at the POLIN Museum on October 10–12. It was organized under the auspices of the Europa Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw, and the POLIN Museum. Its conveners were Dr. Katharina Friedla, Research Fellow at the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, and Dr. Markus Nesselrodt of the Collegium Polonicum of the Europa Universität Viadrina. The event was one of a series of workshops organized within the framework of the POLIN Museum’s Global Education Outreach Program (GEOP), with the support of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, the William K. Bowes, Jr., Foundation, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland.

More than 230,000 Polish Jews survived the Holocaust in the unoccupied territories of the Soviet Union. Some of them had fled the advancing German army in 1939 and 1941, while others were deported from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland between 1939 and 1941 as “class enemies” or “politically unreliable elements.” Their experiences were for the most part painful and traumatizing. Most lost relatives and found themselves in exile, where many suffered poverty, hunger, and disease—whether in Soviet forced-labor camps, prisons, penal camps, and other sites of banishment or on collective farms and in urban industrial centers such as Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, or Omsk. However, in retrospect, most of them considered deportation to have been a blessing since it ensured their survival.

At the end of World War II, the Polish and Soviet governments agreed that most

**Antony Polonsky**

of the Polish-Jewish survivors were to be repatriated to Poland. As a result, about 200,000 Jews returned to Poland by the end of 1946. A second repatriation wave followed in 1956–59, when another 19,000 Polish Jews returned, though most soon fled to the western zones of Germany. They were unwilling to live in a country where many of their relatives had perished, and which was marked by anti-Jewish violence in the immediate post-war period. Their fate has only begun to arouse scholarly interest since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of its archives, an action that has also spurred the production of memoirs of life in the Soviet Union in 1939–46.

The POLIN workshop sought to bring together leading scholars to examine the issue from different perspectives. It began with a tour of those galleries of the museum that address issues of flight and

deportation, and was followed with formal opening addresses by Dariusz Stola, director of the POLIN Museum, Andrzej Żbikowski of the Jewish Historical Institute, and workshop organizers Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt.

The first formal session addressed the topic of Jews in Soviet-occupied Poland (1940–41) with scholarly papers focused on early flight from the Wehrmacht to Soviet territory. The second day featured presentations by Renata Piątkowska and Przemysław Kaniecki of the POLIN Museum on the museum’s archival resources, and specifically on the topic of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union during World War II. Other papers delved into such topics as the experiences of Polish-Jewish children in the USSR (Eliyana Adler of Pennsylvania State University) and Polish deportees in the Soviet Union. With many stellar presentations on the cultural and religious conflicts and tensions between Soviet and Polish Jews, the final keynote address, “Rethinking Polish-

*They were unwilling to live in a country where many of their relatives had perished, and which was marked by anti-Jewish violence in the immediate post-war period.*

Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union” (Atina Grossmann of Cooper Union in New York), provided a framework through which to understand these complicated relationships.

The final day of papers and panels was devoted to the aftermath of the Holocaust, 1944–59, closing with a roundtable discussion chaired by Antony Polonsky of the POLIN Museum, with Eliyana Adler and Oleg Budnitskiy of the National History Institute of Russian History and the Russian Academy of Sciences, Krzysztof Persak of the POLIN Museum, and Katharina Friedla. Speakers and participants engaged the lively question of how research in the field should be pursued

in light of new findings raised by the workshop itself. The papers will be compiled for future publication. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS Awards

# The National WWII Museum Establishes Taube Family Holocaust Education Program

**Reported  
by Taube  
Philanthropies**

**S**an Francisco-based Taube Philanthropies has pledged \$2 million to the National WWII Museum in New Orleans to develop the Taube Family Holocaust Education Program. The program will present lectures, symposia, film screenings, programs highlighting recent research,

and personal accounts of the Holocaust—leveraged through local and national partnerships—to ensure public remembrance of the atrocities that led to the genocide of more than six million Jews.

The foundation’s gift will support ongoing Holocaust educational initiatives at

the museum, including free public programming presented annually on International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27), as well as distance learning programs that will allow students nationwide to explore individual and collective responsibility in the Holocaust.



The National WWII Museum in New Orleans.  
Courtesy of The National WWII Museum.

“Many initiatives of Taube Philanthropies focus on World War II, the deep and powerful effects of which continue to influence world events,” said Tad Taube, Founder-Chairman of Taube Philanthropies. “The new Holocaust Education Program is critical as Americans are remembering less and less about the war and the lessons of the Holocaust.”

#### **Advisory Committee and Education Center**

The Taube Family Holocaust Education Program will be overseen by an advisory committee of scholars, who will provide guidance on educational content that focuses on the historical significance of the Holocaust, its lasting impact on society, and the lessons that remain pertinent to our world today. Programming will be streamed nationally and accessible online.

The advisory committee is comprised of renowned Holocaust experts, including Daniel Greene, Adjunct Professor, Northwestern University; Wendy Lower, John K. Roth Professor of History, Claremont McKenna College; Samuel Kassow,

*“This new program allows the museum to explore the connections between the Holocaust and the American experience: the US soldiers who liberated the death camps and encountered the survivors, US immigration policies toward Jewish victims of Nazism, US Jews whose relatives suffered in the Holocaust, and survivors who rebuilt their lives in the US.”*

—Shana Penn,  
Taube Philanthropies

Charles H. Northam Professor of History, Trinity College; Robert Citino, Samuel Zemurray Stone Senior Historian, the National WWII Museum; and Shana Penn, Executive Director, Taube Philanthropies.

The museum’s WWII Media and Education Center offers Holocaust education

to middle and high school students across the country, including through two distance learning programs—*The Holocaust: One Teen’s Story of Persecution and Survival* and *When They Came for Me: The Holocaust*. Taube Philanthropies’ gift will allow the museum to expand its program content, update technology for online education, and provide additional staffing.

“As the WWII generation passes away, the National WWII Museum has been entrusted to continue telling their stories to future generations—especially the important story of the Holocaust,” said Stephen J. Watson, President and CEO at the National WWII Museum. “The gift from Taube Philanthropies makes it possible for the Museum to expand its teachings about the atrocities of the Holocaust and why we should all stand together against genocide.”

#### **Launch Event for the New Program**

To kick off the expanded Holocaust education initiative, on Thursday, October 25, the

museum hosted a screening of *Who Will Write Our History*, a feature-length docudrama examining how Polish Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum rallied a clandestine group within the Warsaw Ghetto to chronicle the lives of thousands of Polish Jews as they starved, suffered, and ultimately were deported to death camps. Ringelblum and his team buried their documents in milk canisters and metal containers with the hope they would be found after the war and ensure their voices and culture would live on. Nancy Spielberg is the film's executive producer. Producer and Director Roberta Grossman was featured at the film's screening.

The documentary is based on the book of the same title by historian Samuel Kassow, who gave the keynote on the morning of the daylong public symposium held on October 25. The symposium focused on the question: "What do we do when the witnesses are gone?" At the afternoon panel, speakers included Holocaust and WWII scholars Daniel Greene (Northwestern University), Sarah Cramsey

(Tulane University), and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York University and POLIN Museum).

Taube Philanthropies' Executive Director Shana Penn welcomed the attendees to the launch events, explaining the foundation's aim in partnering with the WWII Museum to establish the Holocaust education program. "This new program allows the museum to explore the connections between the Holocaust and the American experience: the US soldiers who liberated the death camps and encountered the survivors, US immigration policies toward Jewish victims of Nazism, US Jews whose relatives suffered in the Holocaust, and survivors who rebuilt their lives in the US."

**The National WWII Museum** tells the story of the American experience in the war that changed the world—why it was fought, how it was won, and what it means today—so that future generations will know the price of freedom and be inspired by what they learn. Dedicated in 2000 as the National D-Day Museum

and now designated by Congress as America's National WWII Museum, it celebrates the American spirit, the teamwork, optimism, courage, and sacrifices of the men and women who fought on the battlefield and served on the home front. The 2018 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards ranks the museum number three in the nation and number eight in the world. For more information, call 877-813-3329 or 504-528-1944 or visit [www.nationalww2museum.org](http://www.nationalww2museum.org). ■

## Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota Receives Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award

**B**ella Szwarcman-Czarnota has received the 2018 Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award. The award, established in 1992 by Jan Karski shortly after the death of Polish-Jewish dancer Pola Nireńska, recognizes authors of published works documenting Polish-Jewish relations and Jewish contributions to Polish culture. Along with the award, the author receives a \$5,000 prize.

Ms. Szwarcman-Czarnota has long been prominent in the Polish literary world. Since 1997, she has been a columnist and associate editor at *Midrasz*, a Jewish monthly based in Warsaw. She has translated approximately forty books (from Yiddish, French, and Russian) and published five of her own, primarily about Jewish women in relation to Jewish traditions. Her work has also helped introduce the Polish readership to Yiddish authors like I.L. Peretz, Menachem Kipnis, and Eliezer Steinberg. Most recently, she co-edited



Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota speaks at the ceremony for the Jan Karski and Pola Nireńska Award on Monday, November 26.

Photograph by Grzegorz Kwolek. Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Institute.

an anthology of translations of Yiddish women's poetry, *Moja dzika koza* (My Wild Goat), which will be published later this year.

The award ceremony took place on November 26 at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. ■

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND REVIEWS

### Of Note

# Jewish Cemetery Memorial Inaugurates New Multicultural Heritage Trail in Gostynin

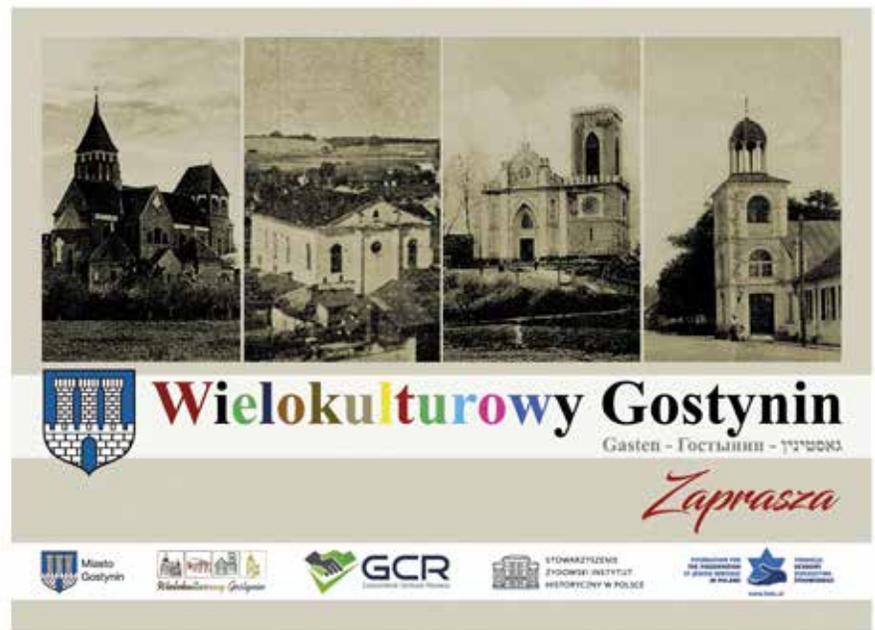
Reported by  
Jewish Heritage  
Europe

A ceremony on September 20 unveiled a memorial at the destroyed Jewish cemetery and officially inaugurated a new, multicultural heritage trail in the small town of Gostynin in central Poland. The new memorial includes a metal cage containing fragments of *matzevot*, situated behind a commemorative stone.

The trail, two years in development, includes information panels at ten locations around the town that highlight the pre-war communities of Poles, Russians, Germans, and Jews who once lived in Gostynin.

The aim, the project website states, is to “educate and provoke a deeper interest in the past multi-faith and multicultural Gostynin.”

Three panels—in Polish, with summaries in English and Hebrew—deal with Jewish history in the town. Jews settled in the second half of



Banner for Wielokulturowy Gostynin (Multicultural Gostynin), the organization behind the town's new multicultural heritage trail.

Image courtesy of Wielokulturowy Gostynin.

*The aim...is to educate  
and provoke a deeper  
interest in the past  
multi-faith and  
multicultural Gostynin.*

the 18th century. On the eve of World War II nearly 2,270 Jews lived in the town, making up between one-quarter and one-third of the population.

Multicultural Trail's website states:

*The Jewish cemetery in Gostynin was founded in the second half of the eighteenth century in the south-western part of the city... The cemetery was completely destroyed during World War II. Germans used the gravestones to harden the roads and sidewalks. Part of the tombstones survived*

*the war, but “disappeared” when estate houses and apartment buildings were built on adjacent plots. No gravestone survived on 0.8830 ha area. Moreover, awareness of the inhabitants of Gostynin that this area is a Jewish cemetery is very faint.*

Local activists, headed by Piotr Syska, and the city worked together with several Jewish institutions and organizations in the commemoration. The cemetery memorial was organized by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODŻ) and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute. ■

This article originally appeared on September 21, 2018, in Jewish Heritage Europe: <http://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2018/09/21/poland-jewish-cemetery-memorial-inaugurates>.

More information about Multicultural Gostynin can be found at: <http://wielokulturowygostynin.blogspot.com>.



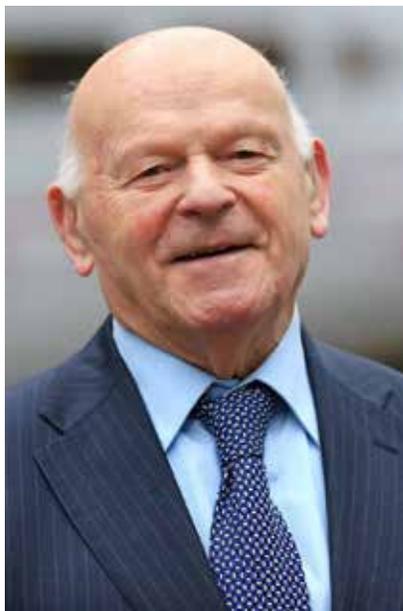
One of the ten information panels on the heritage trail. This one describes Gostynin's pre-war Jewish history and *shtetl*. Image courtesy of Wielokulturowy Gostynin.

## Ben Helfgott Knighted

In June of this year, Ben Helfgott, chairman of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies in London, the sister organization of the American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies, was granted knighthood by Queen Elizabeth.

Helfgott has been involved for many years in Holocaust education and related activities and was integral to efforts to establish a national Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK. He served as the president of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and was a prime mover for the development of a new national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. He was one of the founders and the chairman of the Holocaust Survivors '45 Aid Society and also served as chairman of the Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies in Great Britain.

Born on November 22, 1929, in Pabianice, Poland,



Sir Ben Helfgott.  
Courtesy of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

*Helfgott has been involved for many years in Holocaust education and related activities and was integral to efforts to establish a national Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK.*

Helfgott grew up in Piotrków Trybunalski. When the war broke out in September 1939, he was confined with

## Fay and Julian Bussgang

his family to the Piotrków ghetto, the first ghetto established in Poland, and was later assigned to forced labor in a glass factory. He was sent to Buchenwald in December 1944 and later to the Schlieben and Theresienstadt concentration camps. Liberated by the Russian Army in August 1945 along with other child survivors, he was brought to the Lake District in England where he returned to health and rebuilt his life. He attended the University of Southampton and University College London.

Helfgott took up weightlifting and participated in the World Maccabiah Games, where he won a gold medal. In 1956, as captain of the British weightlifting team, he participated in the Olympic Games in Melbourne. In 1960, he again served as the captain of the British Olympic weightlifting team, this time in Rome.

Over the years, Helfgott has received many honors. In

1944, the Polish government awarded him the Polish Knights Cross of the Order of Merit, and in 2005 he received the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. In January 2015, as a tribute for his work with the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, bringing awareness of Nazi atrocities to the general public, he was awarded "Freedom of the City," the highest honor of the City of London.

Helfgott was active in the Yad Vashem project to recognize non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust, serving on the committee to recognize the Righteous Among the Nations. He was a member of the Claims Conference Committee Board of Directors and one of the founders of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO).

Ben Helfgott and his wife Arza, who was born in what is now Zimbabwe, were

married in 1966. They have three sons and nine grandchildren and live in Harrow, north of London. ■

## Leopold Kozłowski, the “Last Klezmer of Galicia,” Turns 100

Leopold Kozłowski, the conductor, pianist, and composer affectionately known as the “Last Klezmer of Galicia,” celebrated his 100th birthday on Monday, November 26. In honor of the date, the Kraków Forum of Culture organized a celebratory concert in which musicians including Jacek Cygan, Katarzyna Jamróz, Halina Jarczyk, and several others performed klezmer classics and Mr. Kozłowski’s own compositions.

Mr. Kozłowski was born in 1918 in a town now called Peremyshliany, near the city of Lviv. He grew up in a Jewish family. His father and grandfather were also well-known musicians. During the Holocaust, Mr. Kozłowski survived with his brother Adolf, but both of his parents were killed. He moved to Kraków after the war, where he studied at the National Higher School of Music (now called the Academy of Music in Kraków). He has written



Leopold Kozłowski in 2007.  
Wikimedia Commons.

music for the Jewish Theater in Warsaw, collaborated with Jacek Cygan and Sława Przybylska, and played with the “Gypsy band” Roma. In 1991, he conducted a concert of Jewish music with the Polish Radio and Television Orchestra in the Tempel Synagogue in Kraków. In 1994, American director Yale Strom made a film about him titled *The Last Klezmer: Leopold Kozłowski, His Life and Music*.

In 2014, Mr. Kozłowski received the title of Honorary Citizen of the Royal Capital of Kraków. At the celebration, he said, “My music is my marriage to Kraków and I am faithful to that love.” ■

## The Sejm Adopts Resolution Honoring Isaac Bashevis Singer

On Wednesday, November 21, the Polish Sejm adopted a resolution to commemorate Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer. The decision came on the author's birthday, forty years after he received the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Singer was born in 1902 in Leoncin, Poland, to a Hasidic rabbi and his wife, and grew up in Warsaw. He wrote many short stories and nineteen novels, among them *Shosha*, *The Magician of Lublin*, and *Enemies, A Love Story*. The resolution states, "Isaac Bashevis Singer occupies a unique place in the history of Poland as a writer who, in his work, embedded and memorialized [in the Polish consciousness] images of a traditional Jewish community that no longer exists in our country."

Just five days before the resolution was adopted, on November 16, Beatles legend Paul McCartney wrote to



Isaac Bashevis Singer at the Miami Book Fair in 1988.  
Wikimedia Commons.

Paweł Kukiz, a former punk rocker and 2015 Polish presidential candidate, asking for his help in officially making November 21 Isaac Bashevis Singer Day in Poland, in honor of the author, "who, like me, used his artistic platform to support animal rights." McCartney wrote the letter on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and the resolution makes explicit reference to Singer's defense of animal rights.

"Appreciating the great contributions of Isaac Bashevis Singer to Polish and world culture, his sensitivity and originality of thought," the resolution reads, "the Sejm of the Republic of Poland today adopts a resolution regarding the commemoration of an outstanding artist, expressing the highest recognition of his work and honoring his memory." ■

# New Progressive Congregation in Kraków

Adam Schorin

On Sunday, November 18, the coldest day so far of the season, thirteen people met at JCC Krakow to discuss the future of Or Hadasz, a new progressive congregation in Kraków. The agenda proceeded with the usual Jewish congregation items: introducing the rabbi, clarifying the membership process, announcing services and activities, reviewing

finances. Then someone in the audience asked what the process of converting to Judaism looked like if you were Jewish but weren't sure if you'd been baptised or not. Another congregant, a Holocaust survivor, chimed in that baptisms received under the Nazi occupation did not count. The discussion then turned to issues of Jewish law, and the lack of a Beit

Din (a rabbinical court) in Poland.

This perhaps highlights why a community like Or Hadasz is needed. "The situation of the Jewish community in Poland is specific in that there are large numbers of people who either are of Jewish origin and are interested in recovering their Jewish identity, or are Jewish, know that they are



Or Hadasz's High Holiday services in 2017 at the High Synagogue in Kraków. Courtesy of Or Hadasz.

Jewish, but can't prove it," said Barry Smerin, a founding member of Or Hadasz. The majority of Jews in this position, according to Mr. Smerin, are not inclined to join an Orthodox or Hasidic community. "From the point of view of helping these returning Jews or non-Jews who are interested in Jewish community [or in converting to Judaism, a] progressive Jewish community is absolutely essential."

Estera Stopińska, president of the community, described Or Hadasz as a "nonjudgmental environment" in which members could figure out what Judaism might mean for them. Years ago, she had gone to to an Orthodox community in Kraków, hoping to meet other Jews and learn more about Judaism. "I was looking for spirituality, and I found rituals," she said. She envisioned instead a community for "people who want to find their way through Judaism, around Judaism . . . Or Hadasz is just one way of answering that question" of what it means to be Jewish.

Several of the founding members of Or Hadasz

*"For us Poles, Polish Jews, we are still in the process of becoming.*

*It's not like something is there already."*

—Estera Stopińska,  
president of Or Hadasz

had already been part of a progressive Jewish community in Kraków, Beit Kraków, but started a new community when they disagreed with the path it was taking. Ms. Stopińska summarized the rift: "Do you know the joke about the guy on the desert island? One Jew, three synagogues."

Or Hadasz, which is on its way to being officially recognized by the European Union for Progressive Judaism, held its first services in April 2017 at the Galicia Jewish Museum. For the 2018 High Holidays, services took place at the High Synagogue, a 16th-century synagogue in Kazimierz. Prayers and psalms were read aloud in Hebrew, English, and Polish.

"This is a complicated linguistic situation that we have to deal with," Mr. Smerin

said. While many congregants are Polish, a fair number are expats from the United States or the United Kingdom. Indeed, of the seven founding members of the community, only two are native Poles. More have since joined the congregation.

"For us Poles, Polish Jews," Ms. Stopińska said, "we are still in a kind of process of becoming. It's not like something is there already. Many people from abroad who have been raised in Judaism are helping us bring this life on track."

One such Jew from abroad is Or Hadasz's rabbi, Shmuel Rosenberg, who grew up in Tel Aviv. Rabbi Rosenberg may seem an unusual choice for the spiritual leader of a fledgling progressive community. He was raised in a Hasidic family, received an Orthodox *smicha* (rabbinical ordination), and has spent much of the last decade working with the Conservative movement in Israel.

"I see myself as an independent rabbi," said Rabbi Rosenberg. "I think those words like Reform, Orthodoxy—those are not

Jewish words. This is Latin, or Greek; it's not Jewish. Judaism is Judaism, *halacha* is *halacha*, prayer is prayer.”

Ms. Stopińska first noticed Rabbi Rosenberg when he performed Zofia Radzikowska's *bat mitzvah* in November 2017. Ms. Radzikowska, a Holocaust survivor better known to Kraków's Jews as Pani Zosia, celebrated her *bat mitzvah* on her eighty-second birthday; she is also a founding member of Or Hadasz. At the suggestion of Jonathan Ornstein, Executive Director of JCC Krakow and a founding member of Or Hadasz, Ms. Stopińska approached the rabbi with a possible job opportunity.

“The rabbi is wonderful,” said Pani Zosia. “He leads services, workshops, and lectures.” Pani Zosia has been an active member of the JCC since it opened in 2008, and welcomes having another Jewish community in which she can participate.

“It's a new community,” Rabbi Rosenberg said, “so it's a big challenge first of all to establish the community and to start something stable.”



Rabbi Shmuel Rosenberg.  
Photograph by Adam Schorin. Used with permission.

Rabbi Rosenberg will be attached to the congregation for at least a year. The community hopes to eventually have a Polish rabbi who will lead services in Polish, said both Mr. Smerin and Ms. Stopińska.

For Ms. Stopińska, the primary goal is bringing families into the fold. “If you will ask anyone outside of Poland how many members does your synagogue have, they will say, ‘Oh, we have 200 *families*,’ and we would say, ‘twenty people,’ ... I want Judaism to bring people to this kind of family which they do not have.”

So far, Or Hadasz seems on the right track. At the meeting on that cold Sunday

afternoon, the discussion quickly turned to the eight children who are part of the community, and how they could be entertained during services. At the end of the meeting, attendees submitted applications for membership. (Given the “complicated linguistic situation” of the community, it is perhaps worth mentioning that this meeting was held almost entirely in Polish.)

“Since we have been getting going,” Mr. Smerin said, “our services have been very well attended.” The weekly Kabbalat Shabbat services, held at the JCC, typically host twenty to twenty-five people. About fifty people in total attended High Holiday services in September. As service attendance goes in Kraków, that is a considerable figure.

Said Mr. Smerin: “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” ■

## GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

# Events at The POLIN Museum

Reported by  
Karol Kwiatkowski

### TISH Jewish Food Festival

The biggest cultural-culinary event at POLIN Museum in 2018 was the inauguration of TISH Jewish Food Festival, held September 26–28. It is the first culinary festival in Poland devoted entirely to Jewish cuisine and its place in Jewish culture and history and today's Poland. Food serves here as a point of departure to spin a tale of Jewish residents of Poland—both in the past and in the present. The first edition of TISH Festival was devoted to vegan and vegetarian cuisine and to its pre-war pioneer, Fania Lewando.

The festival included organizing a market which offered *challah*, *gefilte* fish, kreplach, blintzes, and goose-meat products. During special walks we wandered around the city seeking traces of former kosher stores, restaurants and vibrant marketplaces of pre-war Jewish Warsaw. We also visited places that specialize in Jewish cuisine today. TISH

Festival contributed to a return of Jewish food to Warsaw—over the course of its duration, ten restaurants introduced Ashkenazic dishes to their menus. Festival participants were also offered an opportunity to prepare Jewish dishes themselves, for example during a culinary workshop held at Menora InfoPunkt.

The festival was not limited to cooking and eating: on the first day, we organized a debate on kosher and vegan food, accompanied by a snack-bar and the Comedy Club show. We also prepared a special culinary tour of the core exhibition. On the last day, we planned a film screening of *In Search of Israeli Cuisine* combined with a debate titled “Jewish—What Does That Mean?” Many more accompanying events of TISH Festival were organized by the JCC Warsaw, the Jewish Theater and the Center of Yiddish Culture.

The festival lasted for five exciting days, but Jewish

cuisine remains with us for the entire year. Menora InfoPunkt regularly organizes workshops devoted to it, run by renowned chefs such as Sabina Francuz, Bartek Kieżun, or Maryla Musidłowska. This year, Alessia Di Donato joined the team. As part of her project, she took our guests on a virtual journey across Italy, searching for the traces of Jewish-Italian cuisine.

TISH Festival concluded with a unique Shabbat dinner, during which we tasted dishes inspired by the recipes found in the book *Vegetarish-Dyetysher Kokhbukh* by Fania Lewando from 1938. The menu was developed by five distinguished chefs: Aleksander Baron, Alessia Di Donato, Sabina Francuz, Malka Kafka, and our special guest, Laurel Kratochvila. The wine was selected by sommelier Katarzyna Federowicz. Each serving of a new dish and wine was preceded by a short speech introducing the Jewish context behind them.



Children at the opening of the POLIN Museum's exhibition *In King Matt's Poland. The 100th Anniversary of Regaining Independence*. Photograph by Maciek Jaźwiecki. Courtesy of the POLIN Museum.

“*Tish*” means “table” in Yiddish. In the Hasidic tradition, the term also refers to a joyous time spent eating, drinking, singing, and talking while sitting at a family table. That is exactly what it was like during TISH Festival—see for yourselves at: [www.polin.pl/tiszfestiwal](http://www.polin.pl/tiszfestiwal)

Menora InfoPunkt is an information center on Jewish Warsaw run by POLIN Museum on Grzybowski Square, next to the Charlotte Menora bistro. We rent the InfoPunkt’s conference room to institutions that work

toward the preservation of Jewish heritage and oppose racism and xenophobia. We organize culinary workshops there during which renowned chefs reveal the secrets of Jewish cuisine. In 2018, over twenty NGOs and 3,500 individuals took advantage of Menora InfoPunkt’s offerings.

TISH Festival was co-organized by the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, and was supported by the Organ Family, Ken & Wendy Ruby, and The Ruby Family Foundation.

For details, visit: <https://www.polin.pl/en/news/2018/09/05/program-of-tish-jewish-food-festival>

***Heaven’s Gates. Masonry Synagogues in the Territories of the Former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka***

The second volume of the monumental work by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka is devoted to masonry synagogues built in the lands of the former Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania—

in other words, in most of the territory of present-day Poland and a large part of Ukraine, together with the whole of Lithuania and Belarus, and also a part of Moldova (on the left bank of the River Dniester). The greater part of the world's Jewish population lived in these territories in modern times and in the 19th century, comprising around ten percent of the total population of these lands.

Nineteenth- and early 20th-century emigration, and above all the Holocaust, resulted in the almost complete disappearance of the Jewish population from these territories. Memorials of the past remain in the form of synagogue architecture represented in drawings, photographs, and other materials, as well as in the surviving urban framework of towns in which Jews once lived.

In contrast with wooden synagogues, which were almost completely obliterated by Nazi Germans during the war, masonry synagogues, although mostly destroyed,

with the remaining ones devastated also after 1945, have to a greater extent survived.

Thanks to conservation and reconstruction efforts, they now remain a vital element in the cultural heritage of Poland and of Central-Eastern Europe.

Details on the publication: <https://www.polin.pl/en/research-collections-research/publications>

**International Conference: *How to Talk About the Righteous: Representations in Culture, Meaning in Education***

In October 2018, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews hosted an international conference for teachers and educators, *How to Talk About the Righteous: Representations in Culture, Meaning in Education*. The conference was devoted to teaching about the ways in which Jews were helped by non-Jews during World War II, and how, by using these examples, it is possible to

address fundamental ethical issues that touch upon student identity and empathy.

During the conference, attended by Georgette Mosbacher, United States Ambassador to Poland, and Anna Azari, Ambassador of Israel to Poland, among others, the participants had the opportunity to take part in a series of lectures, discussions, and workshops led by leading academics and educators in the field. They could also learn about new technologies used in *Dimensions in Testimony*—a new program of the USC Shoah Foundation—and attend a theater play, produced by the Jacek Kuron Educational Foundation, involving student actors, dedicated to the memory of the Jewish community of Białowieża.

The recordings from the conference will be available at [www.polin.pl](http://www.polin.pl). More information about the Polish Righteous Among the Nations can be found at: <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/en>

## **POLIN Music Festival**

What is Jewish music? What stories does it tell? How can it inspire artists and audiences today? The POLIN Museum seeks answers to these questions through a unique series of concerts inspired by its core and temporary exhibitions and related to important dates in Polish-Jewish history. Capping this remarkable musical scene is the museum's new annual festival of Polish and Israeli music, POLIN Music Festival.

The museum cooperates with cultural institutions all around the world in its musical program, including the festival, which has quickly proved to be the museum's top music event of the year. In this first year of the festival, held February 16-18, the museum's auditorium resounded with classical, contemporary, symphony, chamber, and avant-garde experimental music. The opening concert was dedicated to Zygmunt Rolat, a distinguished benefactor of the POLIN Museum and a great music lover.

The festival began with a concert by Sinfonia Varsovia under the baton of Israeli conductor Bar Avni, featuring solo performances by Jing Zhao, Michael Guttman, and David Krakauer. The audience listened to renowned pianist Martha Argerich, who performed pieces by Bloch, Chopin, Laks, Lutosławski, and Shostakovich. David Krakauer, together with pianist Kathleen Tagg from the Republic of South Africa, presented a multimedia project titled "Breath and Hammer." Warsaw-based Hashtag Ensemble performed world premieres of pieces by Israeli composers. For the festival's finale, the audience enjoyed the pulse of an Argentinian tango joined with a Jewish fiddle in the setting of a Parisian café.

In February 2019, the museum will host the second edition of the POLIN Music Festival, with the theme of Home. The museum will also inaugurate The Weinberg@100 series of concerts to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of composer Mieczysław Weinberg. ■

*Karol Kwiatkowski is Head of Promotion Unit, Communication Department, POLIN Museum.*

# GEOP Conferences and Opportunities

## POLIN Museum's Global Education Outreach Program

### **GEOP Distinguished Lecture Series—new lectures online!**

New lectures within the GEOP Distinguished Lecture Series are now online! Watch the lectures “How Jewish Jokes Migrated” by Professor Gabriella Safran and “Shelter from the Holocaust: Rethinking Polish-Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union” by Professor Atina Grossmann, and listen to the lecture “Icchak Rabin. The Ultimate Native Born Israeli Leader,” by Professor Itamar Rabinovich.

The lectures are online at: <https://www.polin.pl/en/geop-distinguished-lecture-series>.

### **International conference, November Hopes: Jews and the Independence of Poland in 1918**

On November 29–30, 2018, the conference November Hopes: Jews and the Independence of Poland in 1918 was held at the POLIN Museum. The papers and discussions focused

on varied attitudes among the Jewish community in Poland toward both the process of regaining independence itself and the shape of the reborn state.

The conference was made possible thanks to the support of the European Association for Jewish Studies, Taube Philanthropies, the William K. Bowes, Jr., Foundation, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland. The Institute of History at the University of Warsaw was the organizing partner.

Further details about the conference can be found at <https://www.polin.pl/en/event/international-academic-conference-november-hopes-jews-and>.

### **GEOP Research Fellowships for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Candidates—first Fellow for 2018–19 has arrived!**

In October the first of the four GEOP Fellows for 2018–19 began his fellowship at the POLIN Museum and the

Jewish Historical Institute. Jan Rybak, a PhD candidate in the Department of History and Civilization of the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, is researching the Zionist movement in East Central Europe during World War I and its immediate aftermath. The project examines local practices of Zionist activists within the Jewish communities.

Details on the GEOP Research Fellowships for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Candidates: <https://www.polin.pl/en/news/2017/11/02/call-for-applications-geop-research-fellowships-for-doctoral-and>.

Details on the GEOP Fellows: <https://www.polin.pl/en/research-collections-research-global-education-outreach-program/current-fellows>.

### **Launch of the 2018–19 GEOP Doctoral Seminar**

On Wednesday, October 17, the fourth edition of the GEOP Doctoral Seminar was launched. During the 2018–

19, academic year fourteen PhD candidates from Polish universities and research institutions will present and discuss their research in the presence of their colleagues and members of the Academic Board, invited distinguished guests, and GEOP Fellows.

Details on the program:  
<https://www.polin.pl/en/nauka-i-zbiory-dzialalnosc-naukowa-pobyty-badawcze-i-warsztaty/geop-doctoral-seminars>.

**GEOP-supported book,  
*New Directions in the  
History of the Jews in the  
Polish Lands*, is published**

This landmark publication, edited by Antony Polonsky, Hanna Węgrzynek, and Andrzej Żbikowski, contains the essays delivered as papers at a GEOP conference held in May 2015 at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

In this publication, leading academics Moshe Rosman, Marci Shore, David Assaf, and Gershon Bacon, among others, offer a coherent overview of the history and culture of Polish Jews.

The publication is available at: <https://www.academicstudiespress.com/browse-catalog/new-directions-in-the-history-of-the-jews-in-the-polish-lands>.

## OBITUARIES

# The Oldest Righteous Person, Mother Cecylia Roszak, Dies at Age 110

March 25, 1908–November 16, 2018

**M**other Cecylia Maria Roszak, of the convent of Dominican sisters commonly known as “On Gródek,” died on November 16 at the age of 110. She was the oldest Dominican nun in the world. In 2009, Yad Vashem award Mother Cecylia the title of Righteous Among the Nations for her role in rescuing and hiding Jews during World War II.

Cecylia Maria Roszak was born on March 25, 1908 in the town of Kielczewo, near Poznań. She graduated from the State Commercial and Industrial College for Women in Poznań, and at the age of twenty-one she joined the Dominican cloister “On Gródek,” located in Kraków’s Old Town. Five years later, she took her vows.

In 1938, Sister Cecylia traveled with a group of nuns to Vilnius to establish a new convent. Though the start of World War II thwarted their plans, the nuns stayed in



Sister Cecylia Maria Roszak.  
Image courtesy of Dominikanie.pl.

*During the war, the Dominican sisters hid Jews, at the risk of their own lives.*

Vilnius; when the Nazis took control of the city, they hid Jews at the risk of their own lives. One of the people they hid was a scoutmaster named Adam Kowner who, after the war, sought out Sister Cecylia to thank her for saving his life.

Mother Cecylia served in the order for nearly ninety

years. In that time, she was a porter, organist, and cantor; for several years she was also prioress of the convent. Even after undergoing hip surgery at the age of 101, Mother Cecylia continued to be an active member of the community, using her walker to attend prayers and visit infirmed sisters.

When asked about the secret to her long life, according to *Gazeta Krakowska*, she said, “One must pray and study languages.”

At her funeral, on November 22, Father Tomasz Nowak said in his homily, “It is an honor to attend a ceremony about life, rather than death.” Mother Cecylia was buried in Rakowicki Cemetery in Kraków.

More information about Mother Cecylia Maria Roszak can be found at <https://www.dominikanie.pl/2018/11/zmarla-matka-cecylia-najstarsza-dominikanka>.

## Jacob “Kobi” Weitzner

March 24, 1951–September 20, 2018

**D**r. Jacob “Kobi” Weitzner passed away on September 20, 2018, in Warsaw. His family lost a husband and a father, and the world lost one of its most unconventional and brilliant Yiddishists, teatrologists, and teachers.

Born March 24, 1951, in Tel Aviv, Dr. Weitzner was raised by parents who emigrated to Israel from towns of the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. He lived in Israel until the early 1980s and served in the army during the first Lebanon war. As a young man, however, he became interested in Yiddish culture. In 1984 he received his PhD in theater and Yiddish studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he was supervised by renowned Polish-Jewish scholar Chone Shmeruk

Dr. Weitzner held academic positions on three continents. He was an accomplished lecturer at Tel Aviv University



Dr. Jacob Weitzner.  
Image courtesy of Virtual Shtetl.

*His unusual talent allowed him to act on the border between university, theater, and film.*

and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and worked as a visiting professor in the United States at Columbia University and at the Hebrew Division of Hunter College in New York. In the first decade of this century, he moved to

## Marek Tuszewicki

Poland and regained the Polish citizenship his parents never renounced. It was here, in the land of his forefathers, where he married, established a family, and raised children.

I met Dr. Weitzner for the first time when he was the Yiddish-language editor of the magazine *Słowo Żydowskie—Dos Yidishe Vort*. Our correspondence, though irregular, lasted a long time. After his review, I was privileged to print my first articles written in Yiddish, which had a pivotal impact on my career. While not sparing either praise or criticism, he helped a young writer find a path to Jewish journalism, writing, and scholarship.

In recent years, Dr. Weitzner worked as a literary director at the Ester Rachel and Ida Kamińska Jewish Theater—Center for Yiddish Culture in Warsaw, where he witnessed and promoted artistic changes that brought this stage again to its highest potential. His

unusual talent allowed him to act on the border between university, theater, and film. Engaged in an endless number of projects as playwright, screenwriter, and director, he was also an actor. People of all ages gathered around him, attracted by his sincerity and kindness mixed with a *heymish* Yiddish wit.

To me personally, he was most of all a teacher. During the past few decades, we collaborated on several occasions, particularly during Yiddish summer seminars in Warsaw (previously in Śródborów near Otwock) organized by the Center for Yiddish Culture and the State Jewish Theater. We both taught the same groups of young Yiddish enthusiasts, but I always considered myself to be merely one of Kobi's students.

Dr. Weitzner's sudden departure was unexpected and shocking. His beautiful life will always be cherished by those who had the privilege of knowing him and experiencing his passion for Yiddish, people, and folks who love Yiddish. Funeral services at

the Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw gathered his heartbroken family and friends. ■

***Marek Tuszewicki, PhD**, is a historian and Yiddishist at the Institute of Jewish Studies, Jagiellonian University in Kraków.*



The site of the Jewish cemetery in Osjasków.  
Photograph from the project *Currently Absent* by Katarzyna Kopecka,  
Piotr Pawlak, and Jan Janiak. Used with permission.

If you would like to suggest an article and/or author 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 **February 15, 2019**.



[info@taubephilanthropies.org](mailto:info@taubephilanthropies.org)

[www.taubephilanthropies.org](http://www.taubephilanthropies.org)