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CATEGORICALLY JEWISH, DISTINCTLY POLISH: THE MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS AND THE NEW POLISH-JEWISH METAHISTORY

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Metahistory: Scholarship vs Museum

Given their druthers, most historians today would prefer to write history that is not a component of some metahistory. Rather than project the Big Story, which entails beliefs and assumptions about **"HISTORY"**, they want to tell a small story, "history", that stands on empirical findings and logical reasoning. They don't desire to contribute to an overarching grand narrative that purports to give order and meaning to large chunks of history by defining a framework that is more historiosophy than historiography, more ideology than research.

This reluctance has been reinforced over the last forty years by critics like Hayden White and Robert F. Berkhofer Jr.[1] who have been demonstrating how metahistory does not grow out of history research and writing, but rather proceeds from other sources, while it precedes and directs the historiographical project. Moreover, the master narratives that individual historical studies wind up composing proffer grand interpretations that can only be explicated—each in its own terms—but not proved. Not one has withstood critical testing and analysis. Upon close inspection, no paradigm convincingly accounts for all of the individual phenomena that are purported to fit it. All such

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[1] Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973); *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1978); Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass. 1995); cf. Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish Is Jewish History?*(Oxford, 2007), pp. 1-18.

paradigms have been confounded by exceptions, counter-examples, lack of evidence, proof of bias, etc.[2]

Alas, the same critics have also posited that despite historians' ambitions to write history, and not metahistory, there is no escaping connecting one's impeccably researched and source-grounded historiographical small story to some extrapolated, contingent, refutable, metahistorical Big Story.[3] Better then not to allow the metahistory to dominate our work unawares, but to consciously decide which metahistory we believe in (whether as an intuition that influences the work of historiography as the critics claim, or as the convincing result of that work as some traditionalists would like to think), declare it, and then let the reader decide.

Interestingly, in a later phase of his career Hayden White himself voiced the opinion that historiography is not a polysemous, self-referential hall of mirrors, but that there is room for establishing and comparing the validity of different accounts:

> Obviously, considered as accounts of events already established as facts, "competing narratives" can be assessed, criticized and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain.[4]

By adducing the elements of factual record, comprehensiveness and coherent argument, White conceded that metahistorical interpretation can be judged in terms of positivist criteria. This means that a historiographical account is not merely a farrago of rhetorical tropes intended to reinforce a predetermined, ideologically-flavored interpretation of history. There are tools that enable the consumer of scholarship to test the metanarrative before accepting it (or parts of it). Historians may still defiantly contend that, however imbued they are with various prior ideas, they write with at least one eye on the sources, ever ready to subordinate their preconceptions to their

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2 Cf. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 2012). Historical paradigms are subject to similar fallibility and process of replacement as scientific ones, as theorized by Kuhn.

3 Rosman, *How Jewish* (above, n. 1), pp. 17-18, 47-55.

4 Hayden White, "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth", in Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), p. 38.

otherwise derived perceptions of what the sources mean, and to challenge the received master narrative.

Among the most astute consumers of scholarship are curators of historical museums. An important part of their task is to evaluate metahistories, choosing among them and among their respective components. They fashion a thesis and accompanying narrative line that lends their museum order, meaning and cohesiveness. Then they invent modalities by which to present their narrative in as convincing and attractive a way as possible. Modern historical museums tend not to stress collections of artifacts; they tell stories.

Typically, a huge part of the museum's initial budget is expended with the goal of making the architecture of the museum building expressive, coherent, distinguishing, and esthetic. Similarly, the exhibit inside the historical museum should be of a recognizable, engaging, communicative and consistent, yet complex, fabric. Visitors should be offered an inviting, sensible, historically accurate, comprehensive and coherent vision of the subject—a story. Simultaneously they should be challenged to respond to, analyze and perhaps criticize that story.

A museum with a clear thesis arouses a sense of purpose and expectation in visitors as they move from space to space (not necessarily in any fixed order). The thesis is a focal point that organizes the exhibit around it and offers visitors an archimedean position from which they may relate to what they see and hear. They are free to agree or disagree; the important point is that there is a portal to engagement—and engagement may mean challenge or objection.

A museum lacking a clear master narrative can appear as a confusing pastiche, a curiosity collection leaving visitors wondering from what perspective they are viewing that which is on display, how to digest the experience, what the exhibit is actually "about".[5] They may be distracted and bewildered by an array of individual artifacts or displays which do not clearly relate to each other or transition smoothly from one to another. The lack of a "story" makes for a flat,

[5] For example, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Paris Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme and the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv, each impressive in its way, all have to differing degrees, in my opinion, confused, disconnected, inconsistent or contradictory and therefore perplexing narratives. Cf. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's remarks in her *Destination Culture* (Berkeley, 1998), on concepts of museums (pp. 31, 138-139), on museums as theatre (pp. 3, 34-35), and on confusing display (pp. 230-241).

uninspiring experience. The overlaying of too many poorly connected stories muddles the experience. Contradictory theses may confuse the visitor. Such conceptual problems even make it difficult to object to the museum's underlying principles, since they are not readily apparent.

Not only is a historical museum well-advised to embrace a metanarrative; once it does so it cannot be coy about it. Scholars who trade in words on the page can qualify, hedge, camouflage, intimate, imply. Those who read their words are expected to take as long as necessary to parse, comprehend and interpret the message. Museumologists portray primarily by means of visual, aural and sometimes tactile material. Striving to minimize written verbiage to be read, they seek to create an environment and an experience to be confronted, absorbed and assimilated, and to minimize what the visitor is told or must read. Their audience pays attention for a fixed, relatively short amount of time, usually one or two hours, and rarely more than once. There must be, then, a cogent, powerful, memorable statement, which may still be sophisticated and calibrated. Couching the message in an idiom that challenges visitors to decode it is fine. Hedging the statement, however, can frustrate the visitors. Subtlety does not mean obscurity. There must be a commitment to the statement.

This means that a museum will actively seek to do what the writing scholar at times appears to be trying to avoid: distill the metanarrative in a way that makes it both apparent and compelling.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews: A Metahistory Distilled

Since 2007 I have had several opportunities to become familiar with the developing core exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, currently being completed in Warsaw and scheduled to open in 2013. I have heard and seen the core exhibition program director, Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett of New York University, make extensive presentations of the plans for the exhibit on several occasions. I have read various materials and seen models and illustrations pertaining to the development of the exhibit and have met with several members of the exhibition development team. In June 2010, I spent an intensive three days in Warsaw as a consultant to the project, closely analyzing and critiquing three of the planned galleries. In November 2010, I served on a panel analyzing some of the galleries and participated in other sessions in which aspects of the museum

were presented as part of a conference held jointly at Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. In 2011 and 2012 I served as a (paid) outside historical consultant dealing with specific issues in some of the galleries.

My contact with the Museum and its planners has convinced me that the planned core exhibition will be framed by a certain metahistory. This has indeed been distilled from the scholarship on Polish-Jewish history that was renewed beginning in the 1970s and grew to impressive proportions as Poland successfully revolted against Communism and democratized. The reasons for this prodigious growth and the course that it has taken have been analyzed elsewhere at length and in detail.[6]

To my mind the outlines of the Museum's metahistory provide a felicitous vehicle for reflecting on the larger renewed Polish-Jewish history that has developed over the past thirty or forty years and has received its most extensive and comprehensive expression to date in the YIVO Encyclopedia of East European Jews[7] and the magisterial three-volume work by Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*.[8] By focusing on salient points and fashioning a striking message, the Museum core exhibition will highlight several main points of this new metahistory and make it more accessible. It certainly has aided me in clarifying the elements of this renewed Polish-Jewish metahistory and my own conception of it.

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[6] Antony Polonsky, *Polish-Jewish Relations since 1984: Reflections of a Participant* (Krakow, 2009); Krzysztof Pilarczyk (ed.), *Z˙ydzi i judaizm we wspo´łczesnych badaniach polskich. Materiały z konferencji Krako´w 21–23 XI 1995* [Jews and Judaism in Contemporary Polish Research. Proceedings of the Krakow Conference 21–23 XI 1995] (Krako´w, 1997); Marcin Wodzinski, "Jewish Studies in Poland", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 10 (2011), pp. 101-118 and the bibliography he brings in the notes.

[7] Edited by Gershon David Hundert, published in 2007, now available, free, on the Internet: http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/. For a critique of the encyclopedia see my review in *Gal-Ed* 23 (2012), in press. For a survey and characterization of Polish-Jewish historical bibliography, 1945-1995, see M. Rosman, "Historiography of Polish Jewry, 1945-1995" [Hebrew], in Israel Bartal and Israel Gutman (eds.) *Kiyum Va-Shever: The Broken Chain—Polish Jewry Through the Ages* (Jerusalem, 2001), pp. 697-724.

[8] Oxford, 2010-2012.

The New Polish-Jewish Metahistory: 'Rzeczpospolita Wielu Narodow', A Multinational Commonwealth

The very existence of this museum devoted to *Jewish* history, its scale, its planned educational role, its central location in Poland's capital, and the extensive financial and political support it has received from Polish governmental sources, all point to a basic tenet of the new metahistory. As one steps into the core exhibit, all of the elements just cited will merge to highlight the notion of Poland as 'Rzeczpospolita Wielu Narodow', a commonwealth of many nations. Liberated at last from Communism, but still heirs (albeit reluctant ones) to its legacy,[9] Polish historians searching for the historical roots of a non-Communist, liberal, independent, democratic, genuinely "Polish" Poland found them in the multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious Poland of the past. The early modern period, from the Union of Lublin in 1569, that officially created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, until the period of the Partitions of Poland, 1772-1795, has come to be viewed as Poland's golden era.[10]

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[9] Michael Magner, "Civil Society in Poland after 1989: A Legacy of Socialism?", *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 47 (2005), pp. 49-69.

[10] E.g. Jozef Andrzej Gierowski, *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the XVIIIth Century* (Krakow, 1996), p. 264: "By its creation of a modern, democratic society the Polish-Lithuanian 'Enlightened Commonwealth' occupies its own distinct position, not always appreciated by historiography"; and see Gierowski's later Polish articles reprinted in his *Na szlakach Rzeczpospolitej w nowozytnej Europie* (Krakow, 2008), pp. 63-87: "On the New View of the History of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth", "The Commonwealth as the Keystone of East-Central Europe", "The Commonwealth of Many Nations and Faiths"; Daniel Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795* (Seattle, 2001), p. 336: "The Polish-Lithuanian legacy left its imprint on the Polish mentality. Four hundred years of success instilled in the Poles the self-confidence of a Great Power and a sense of their historical destiny….In sum the Polish-Lithuanian state played a vital role in European politics, diplomacy warfare, economics, and intellectual life over its four centuries of existence. Its unique institutions enriched Poland's European identity….Effects can still be felt today". Cf. Jerzy Lukowski and Hubert Zawadzki, *A Concise History of Polan*d (2nd edition, Cambridge, 2006), p. xviii: "From the late Middle Ages onwards, [Poland's] elites evolved a remarkable consensual political culture….The nation-state is not dead, but, if it were, a reading of Poland's history would be much facilitated." Adam Zamoyski, *The Polish Way: A Thousand Year History of the Poles and their Culture* (New York, 1993), p. 91: "Throughout this period Polish society concentrated on an attempt to build utopia on earth." Joanna Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other* (Lincoln and London, 2006), p. 30: "The premodern Polish state was a polity in which, until

The Commonwealth was large, stretching from the Oder river in the west to past the Dnieper in the east and from the Baltic Sea in the north to just short of the Black Sea in the south. Less than half of its people were ethnic Poles, and it included critical masses of Germans, Belarusans, Lithuanians, Letts, Ukrainians (Ruthenians), Armenians, Turks, Italians, Scots, Jews and others. Each group had its language, religion, culture and forms of social organization. Some eventually polonized to one degree or another, while some, especially the Jews, maintained a strong proprietary identity. Political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the nobility and the Church (whose leaders were themselves largely from noble families), but the nobility constituted a huge proportion of the population for the time—around ten per cent. They had the right to elect their king whose powers were limited by law and by the nobility's representative parliament (Sejm). For much of this period Poland was a significant military power and political player on the European scene. Culturally, the Commonwealth had important ties with Italy and France and some other western countries as well. Economically, it served as the breadbasket of central and western Europe. There was an active overland trade with the German-speaking regions immediately to the west and Moscow to the east. There was also important river and sea trade with the Ottoman lands and with countries along and across the Baltic and to the west. Religiously, there was a certain toleration—inconsistent, rough, *de facto*, to be sure—for non-Catholics. The presence of such a large Jewish community, which originated in immigration from the west, was representative of the larger, relatively hospitable religious atmosphere.[11]

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the seventeenth century, 'others'—meaning non-ethnic Poles–were treated in an inclusive way." For the influence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's tradition on post-1989 Poland, see Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *The Consolidation of Democracy in East Central Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 68-70.

[11] For surveys of the history of the Commonwealth, see Stone, *Polish-Lithuanian State*, ibid.; Lukowski & Zawadzki, *Poland*, ibid.; Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol. 1 (New York, 1982). Magda Teter, *Sinners on Trial: Jews and Sacrilege after the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011), has qualified the portrayal of early modern Poland as a model of religious toleration. There were many legal and cultural expressions of toleration for non-Catholics and there were no religious wars, or mass trials with accompanying *autos da fe*. However, numerous individual acts of religious violence against both Christians and Jews, imposed by *secular* courts, played a key role in Polish re-Catholicization.

Polish interwar nationalist and later Communist historiography on this commonwealth of many nationalities had not conceptualized it as such. These historians wrote from the perspective of "Polish" history centered on ethnic Poles, with the other groups portrayed as incidental, alien or marginal, or ignored. Perhaps the subject of the Jews was the one that was treated the most superficially.[12] Yet it was precisely this subject that during the Communist and early democratizing period seemed still to be an issue for Polish society, mostly because of a residual—and, to many young Poles, incomprehensible—widespread image of Polish antisemitism in the world, as well as lingering mutual recriminations between Jews and Poles with regard to the fate of the Jews in Poland in the twentieth century.

During the last thirty years this Polish historical perspective has been significantly modified. Two books appeared with 'Rzeczpospolita Wielu Narodow' in their titles, and there were now Polish historians who began to write about the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and even the Second Polish Republic (between the wars) as states of all of their peoples.[13] Symbolic of this profound shift and an important component of it was the generous historiographical attention given to the Jews.

The history of the Jews in Poland is now seen as part and parcel of Polish history. As the doyen of Polish-Jewish historians, the late Jacob Goldberg, repeatedly remarked: "There is no history of Poland without the history of the Jews."[14] Moreover, to emphasize Jewish history is to evoke that early modern era of the Commonwealth which in retrospect appears to be Poland at its most powerful, most enlightened and most influential; much more salutary in so many ways than Poland of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which was subjugated on several levels and often tinged with ethnonationalist

[12] Moshe Rosman, "Reflections on the State of Polish-Jewish Historical Study", *Jewish History* 3 (1988), pp. 115-130.

[13] Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Rzeczpospolita wielu narodow* (Warsaw, 1985) (the subject of this book is the interwar Second Polish Republic); Andrzej S. Kaminski, *Historia Rzeczpospolitej wielu narodow* (Lublin, 2000) (this book focuses on the 1569-1795 period); Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland* (Seattle, 1984); and the later writings of J.A. Gierowski cited in n. 10.

[14] E.g. Goldberg's speech at the University of Warsaw in January, 1993, published in his festschrift, Adam Teller (ed.), *Studies in the History of the Jews in Old Poland* [=*Scripta Hierosolymitana* 38] (Jerusalem, 1998), p. 9. Cf. Jacob Goldberg, "The Changes in the Attitude of Polish Society towards the Jews in the Eighteenth Century", *Polin* 1 (1986), pp. 35-48.

chauvinism. The "truly Polish" Poland, the one that embodied Poland at its strongest and most noble[15], was (perhaps ironically) the relatively tolerant, multiethnic, multicultural one. In this spirit one of the Museum's objectives is, at least implicitly, to recover Poland's long history of cultural and religious diversity.

The Museum's focus on the Jews not only concretizes a basic postulate of the new metahistory. On a more practical plane, it is also a Polish gesture seeking to settle Poland's Jewish account by attempting a reckoning with the past in all of its complexity, but more on this later.

The Jews Did Not Live in Yiddishland or Shtetl-Land; They Lived in Poland

In his lyrical post-Holocaust eulogy for East European Jewry, *The Earth is the Lord's*, Abraham Joshua Heschel epitomized many scholars' cavalier attitude with respect to the geographical dimension of Jewish life in Poland and Eastern Europe in general: "The Jews in Eastern Europe lived more in time than in space."[16] That time was spent in what was often portrayed as an unacculturated and unadulterated *Yiddishland* where all was authentically and quintessentially Jewish. More reified ideal than real place, the archetypical "Jewish town", the *shtetl*, was ensconced in a geography that instead of being physical, economic and political was spiritual and cultural.

Historiography over the past generation has reacted against this decoupling of the *shtetl*, and with it all forms of Polish-Jewish life, from their Polish ecosphere. It has emphasized the relationship between Jewish life and its Polish—physical, demographic, economic, religious, political, cultural and social—context. Jews were constantly negotiating the terms of both their individual and collective existence with the elements of that context. Moreover, throughout the ages Polish Jews exhibited a consciousness that they were indeed in Poland and that Poland was different from other countries of their Exile/Diaspora in various ways.[17]

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[15] A double entendre, given the political, economic and cultural importance of the nobility in the period.

[16] Abraham J. Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's* (New York, 1949), p. 15.

[17] Polonsky, *Poland and Russia*, vol. 1, Part 1 and *passim*; Jacob Goldberg, "Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Rejection or Acceptance", *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 22 (1974), pp. 248-282; Gershon D. Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town* (Baltimore, 1992), Chapter 3;

For its part, in addition to the material and structural elements (size, location, financial investment, political support) already noted, the Museum will stress with maps, models, graphics and texts, that the community it is portraying over time was in a definite place during each segment of that time. Moreover, it was conscious of being in that place and that place was Poland. Polish scenery and architecture form the background for many museum scenes. Polish personalities such as King Kazimierz the Great, Piotr Skarga and Jan Zamoyski in the earlier periods, or Jozef Pilsudski, Wladyslaw Gomulka and Lech Walesa in the later periods are shown in various interactions (for better or for worse) with Jews and the Jewish community. Polish documents and Polish art constitute key components of the exhibit.

This is not only an attempt to accurately reflect history. It is also a response to a sensitive issue in Poland. Many Israeli high school and other Jewish pilgrimage/tour groups—some of the anticipated audiences for the Museum—seem determined to visit sites in Poland of Jewish—and especially Shoah—interest and have a "Jewish experience" while insulating themselves as much as possible from the Polish surroundings. They seem to try to avoid experiencing "Poland" (unless it offers up stereotype-fulfilling antisemitic incidents). It is almost as if they envision the sites of interest to them to be detached from the country in which they are located. Certainly, that country holds no attraction or curiosity for them. This attitude seems wrong and even offensive to many thinking Poles. Just as they have come to understand that there is no Polish history without the Jews, they now insist there was and is no Jewish experience in Poland except as embedded in its *gestalt* (see next section). By illustrating the myriad connections of Jews to the people, towns and countryside of Poland, the Museum will imply that such an artificial detachment borders on the surreal.

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idem, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania* (Berkeley, 2004), pp. 7-20 and *passim*; Moshe Rosman, "Jewish Perceptions of Insecurity and Powerlessness in 16th-18th Century Poland", *Polin* 1 (1986), pp. 19-27; idem, "A Minority Views the Majority", *Polin* 4 (1989), pp. 31-41; Adam Teller, "'In the Land of their Enemies'? The Duality of Jewish Life in Eighteenth-Century Poland", *Polin* 19 (2007), pp. 431-446; idem & Magda Teter, "Borders and Boundaries in the Historiography of the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth", *Polin* 22 (2010), pp. 3-46. Contrast all of these with the older view as summarized in Gershon Bacon, "Unchanging View: Polish Jewry as Seen in Recent One-Volume Histories of the Jews", *Polin* 4 (1989), pp. 390-401.

Jews Were Not Only *in* Poland; They Were *of* Poland.

The notion of illustrating connections and embeddedness means that the Museum not only places the Jews firmly *in* Poland; it shows how much they were *of* it. Jacob Goldberg's above-cited epigram about the relationship between the Jews and Poland continued, "… and no history of the Jews without the history of Poland."[18] In a notable turn of phrase, Gershon Hundert once entitled a chapter in one of his books, "Jews and *Other* Poles".[19] With this he connoted that the Polish context did not serve as mere background to Jewish life in Poland, but that the Jews were fully engaged with the Polish polity, economy, society and culture. Jewish geography and demography in Poland were subsets of Polish geography and demography. The Jews were not only in dialogue with Poland, they were part of Poland. This engagement went beyond "interaction" to a kind of integration. In the earlier periods this engagement was seldom explicitly articulated and usually paired with signs of Jewish alienation from Poles and Polishness. Yet, Jews understood, by implication at least, that they belonged to Poland.[20] For example, the various Jewish foundation myths involving the Jewish "kingmaker" Abraham Prochownik; or the Jewish queen of Kazimierz the Great, Esterke; or the Jewish "King for a day", Saul Wahl, all implied that it was important to Jews to see themselves as rightful inhabitants of the country and involved in its politics.[21]

By the second half of the nineteenth century, for a financially and socially elite sector of Jewish society this Polish engagement was out in the open. They believed in and promoted integration. They spoke Polish, identified with Polish culture, mixed in Polish circles, took Polish names, fought in Polish battles, and created a style of being Jewish in Polish. Their approach to Polishness took material form in Warsaw's Tlomackie Street synagogue (erected 1875-1878) with its church-related architectonics, university-trained rabbis, Polish sermons, translated prayers and stream of prominent Polish-Christian visitors.

But not only the haute bourgeoisie was engaged with Polish culture. From the numerous Orthodox Jewish girls who studied in

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[18] See above, n. 14.

[19] Hundert, *Polish Private Town* (above, n. 17), pp. 37-39.

[20] Moshe Rosman, "Innovative Tradition" in David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews* (2002), pp. 523-530.

[21] Haya Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland: Legends of Origin* (Detroit, 2001); cf. Rosman, *How Jewish*, pp.140-141.

Polish Catholic schools at the turn of the twentieth century, to the 34 (out of 66) Cracow Jewish periodicals that appeared in Polish, more "Jewish" Jews came increasingly closer to Polish culture.[22] Even the negative aspects of Polish existence in Poland might confirm Jews' embeddedness in Polish culture. Explicitly anti-Jewish policies and actions were frequently partly or mainly an element in complex larger Polish religious and political conflicts where the Jews served as a convenient target for one side or the other .[23]

In the latest phase of Polish history, the fall of Communism and the creation of the new Polish commonwealth, there were Jews who played an active role, working hard to liberate and liberalize Poland while simultaneously reconstituting a meaningful Polish-Jewish community. These are proudly "*Polish* Polish Jews".[24]

In the Museum this intertwining of Jewishness and Polishness will be explored through such expedients as a model of the entire city of Cracow (not just the Jewish quarter, Kazimierz), along with an interactive Royal Town Game demonstrating how the dynamic interrelations among Jews, townspeople, Church, and municipal and royal authorities were the lifeblood of Polish cities and their Jewish communities. Visitors will also experience a nineteenth century mock railroad station and the Tlomackie Street synagogue as entrepôts and

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[22] Rachel Manekin, "The Lost Generation: Education and Female Conversion in 'Fin de Siecle' Krakow", *Polin* 18 (2005), pp. 189-219; Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "Jewish Polish Writers in Cracow Between the Two World Wars"[Hebrew], in Elchanan Reiner (ed.), *Kroke-Kazimierz-Cracow: Studies in the History of Cracow Jewry* (Tel Aviv, 2001), p. 241; Gershon Bacon, "National Revival, Ongoing Acculturation: Jewish Education in Interwar Poland", *Jahrbuch des Simon Dubnow-Instituts* 1 (2002), pp. 71-92. See also the many studies of Ezra Mendelsohn, esp. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington, 1983); and the collection, I. Gutman, et al. (eds.), *The Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (Hanover, 1989).

[23] Magda Teter, *Sinners* (above, n. 11), and eadem, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland* (Cambridge, 2006); Ezra Mendelsohn, "Reflections on East European Jewish Politics in the Twentieth Century", *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 20 (1991), pp. 23-37; David Engel, "Away From a Definition of Antisemitism: an Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description", in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (eds.), *Rethinking European Jewish History* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 30-53; Marcin Wodzinski, *Wladze krolestwa polskiego wobec chasydyzmu: z dziejow stosunkow politycznych* (Wroclaw, 2008).

[24] Stanislaw Krajewski, *Poland and the Jews: Reflections of a Polish Polish Jew* (Krakow, 2005).

symbols of Jewish-Polish social, cultural and economic interchange. A main message of the Museum is that the Jews were part of the texture of Polish life.

Categorically Jewish, Distinctly Polish

However, the Museum will not pretend that the Jews were just one variant Polish subculture. One of the centerpieces of the Museum will be a walk-in, almost full-scale reconstruction of the eighteenth-century wooden synagogue of the town of Gwozdziec. This embodies what might come to be the unofficial—and paradoxical—motto of the entire Museum: **"Categorically Jewish, distinctly Polish"**. Polish Jewry was authentically and intimately linked to the Jewish past as well as interconnected with contemporary Jewry the world over. It was also leavened with characteristically Polish features. The synagogue is both unmistakably a synagogue and definitely a *Polish* synagogue. Its design, furnishings, décor, books, prayer service and other activities parallel, mirror and continue those of synagogues throughout history and throughout the world at that time. Its architecture and accoutrements imply that all of these were adapted to the Polish milieu.[25]

This theme of being wholly Jewish, yet simultaneously, if syncretistically, Polish reverberates throughout the Museum core exhibit: the Polish-Jewish wedding, Polish-Jewish food, Polish-Jewish literature, Polish-Jewish politics, Polish-Jewish modern popular culture, Polish-Jewish languages—none of it was disconnected from a larger Jewish civilization (although this is more implied than displayed in the Museum), but none of it can be completely understood without reference to the Polish realities it reflects as well.[26]

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[25] Thomas C. Hubka, *Resplendent Synagogue* (Waltham, 2003); cf. Tamar Shadmi, *Wall Inscriptions in East European Synagogues—Their Sources, Meanings and Role in Shaping the Concept of Space and Worship* [Hebrew], (Doctoral diss., Bar Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, 2001); Ilya Rodov, *The Torah Ark in Renaissance Poland: A Jewish Revival of Classical Antiquity* (Leiden, 2013); Bracha Yaniv, "Jewish Wood-Carvers in Eastern Europe and the Design of Torah Arks from the mid-Eighteenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Centuries" [Hebrew], *Zion* 77 (2012), pp. 31-66.

[26] Cf. Adam Teller, "Hasidism and the Challenge of Geography", *AJS Review* 30 (2006), pp. 1-29; idem, "The Shtetl as an Arena for Polish-Jewish Integration in the Eighteenth Century", *Polin* (2004), pp. 25-40; Judith Kalik, "The Inn as a Focal Point for Jewish Relations with the Catholic Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth", *Jews and Slavs* 21 (2008), pp. 381-390.

A Story of Overall Achievement and Stability, Punctuated by Crisis and Persecution

Perhaps the most significant change of the new Polish-Jewish metahistory is the answer to the traditional question: Was it good for the Jews? One of the postulates of the new historiography is that if Polish Jewry numbered an impressive three million in 1939, they did not get there as a result of antisemitism and persecution. While there was no shortage of antagonism toward Jews in Poland throughout their history there, the story must have also had an abundance of salutary themes[27] or else the Polish Jewish community would have been much smaller and its history much less interesting.

One of those themes is achievement. In the earlier periods this was exemplified by the most ramified and sophisticated system of institutionalized Jewish autonomy in history, hundreds of distinctive synagogues with their accompanying artistic features, numerous and important learning academies, and rich literary and legal legacies.[28] In modern times there was impressive Jewish economic enterprise in the new industrializing economy. There also developed a secular culture including musical, artistic, journalistic, athletic, theatrical and literary expressions. There was an organizational infrastructure and a dizzying array of organizations that were the envy of other national minority groups.[29]

The eighteenth century Gwozdziec Jewish community and its synagogue can serve as an illustration of the achievement theme. The historian of this synagogue, Thomas Hubka, has evoked the dialectical nature of Polish-Jewish existence:

> Wooden synagogues like that at Gwozdziec were built by relatively affluent communities who could afford to build a synagogue using the highest regional standards of construction

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[27] Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania* (above, n. 17), Chapters 1-5; Polonsky, *Poland and Russia* (above, n. 17), vol. 1, Introduction; Teller, "'In the Land of their Enemies'?" (above, n. 17); Goldberg, Poles and Jews; idem (ed.), *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth*, 3 vols., Jerusalem 1985-2001; idem, "Gminy zydowskie (kahaly) w systemie wladztwa dominialnego w szlacheckiej Rzeczpospolitej", in M. Drozdowski (ed.), *Miedzy historia a teoria* (Warsaw, 1988), pp. 152-171.

[28] Polonsky, *Poland and Russia* (above, n.17); Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania* (above, n. 17); Gutman, *Jews of Poland* (above, n. 22).

[29] Gutman, *Jews of Poland* (above, n. 22); Mendelsohn, Jews of East Central Europe.

> and craftsmanship. Despite restrictions placed on Jewish communities, despite acts of persecution against them, and despite the well-documented reversals of the Chmielnicki massacres that occurred in the middle of the seventeenth century, the overall climate in this region of eastern Poland was still quite favorable to Jewish settlement and growth. Although they were never unrestricted environments, small towns like Gwozdziec did allow extensive Jewish cultural development wherein Jewish populations increased and many remarkable wooden synagogues were built.[30]

The point is that the impressive synagogues, like the one in Gwozdziec, reflected the communities they served. Never short of poor individuals, these communities were nonetheless collectively prosperous, largely self-governing, growing, confident, and secure enough to be able to invest time, money and effort in cultural monuments. These might be material, like the synagogues, or spiritual, like the books, religious poetry, music and theological and mystical ideas that were produced by the religious avant-garde of this Jewry and that have left their mark on Judaism and Jewish life till today.

The synagogue was a fitting metaphor for the status of the Jews in the town—and in Poland. Located in a closed-off "Jewish Courtyard" (containing various Jewish communal and commercial structures), the Gwozdziec synagogue was a tall, centrally-located building juxtaposed to the town square and adjacent to the Bernardine Monastery church (the synagogue was built alongside the monastery's garden wall). Like the Jewish community, it was self-contained, yet figured prominently in the life of the town.[31]

However, Jewish life in towns like Gwozdziec could be fragile. Popular parlance would make it clear that "sly Jews" or "perfidious Jews" were definitely "the Other". The nobleman owner of the town might require exorbitant payments or fail to protect "his" Jews from hostile Church, town or peasant elements. From time to time there might be basic disputes with local townsmen over Jewish residential and commercial rights. Towns might gain the privilege "not to tolerate Jews" in their midst. Theological students might demand the payment of the *kozubalec* tax from the Jews to help support their studies, implying the threat of violence if monies were withheld. In any given

[30] Hubka (above, n. 15), pp. 14-15.
[31] Ibid., pp. 4-6.

town there might arise a potentially lethal desecration of the host accusation or blood libel against the Jews there. The list goes on.[32]

The Museum will portray Polish-Jewish life, at least in the periods preceding the First World War, in this way: fundamentally rooted, not defenseless, largely self-assured and poised, governed mostly by routine and custom; but liable to disruption, threats, and violence. In particular there will be graphic illustrations that some Churches presented as pictorial "representations" of how Jews supposedly carried out ritual murders.[33] On the other hand, Jews' ability to defend themselves through a combination of their own resourcefulness and Christian allies will also be shown.[34]

Moreover, the Museum will present prominent Jews: Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema) famous for his glosses on the *Shulhan Arukh*, the financier Rachel Fiszel, army purveyor and financial tycoon Judyta Zbytkower, industrialist Israel Poznanski, educator and Holocaust hero Janusz Korczak, historian Emanuel Ringelblum, sociologist Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising veteran, Dr. Marek Edelman and many many others.

The Polish-Jewish Nexus is Not a Story of Unrelenting Antisemitism

The emphasis on Jewish achievement in Poland is in part a reaction against one popular notion, as famously expressed by an Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, that Poles suck in antisemitism with their mothers' milk. Here, as already alluded to above, the Museum does not flinch from exploring manifestations of Jew-hatred, from various religiously-inspired attacks and blood and desecration of host libels from the medieval and into the modern period, to the depredations

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[32] Jacob Goldberg, "'De non tolerandis Judaeis': On the Introduction of Anti-Jewish Laws into Polish Towns and the Struggle Against Them"[Hebrew], in *Studies in Jewish History Presented to Professor Raphael Mahler* (Merhavia, 1974), pp. 39-52; Teller, "'In the Land of their Enemies'?" (above, n. 17); Rosman, "Innovative Tradition" (above, n. 20), pp. 522-523 and sources cited in n. 7 there.

[33] Displaying these vivid pictures, the Museum curators of course intend for them to be interpreted ironically, as invented depictions of scenes that never happened, cynically calculated to supply a perverse sort of "evidence" that they did. There is a risk, however, that visitors will view these paintings naively, seeing them as verisimilar illustrations of how Jews executed ritual murders.

[34] Cf. Teter, *Sinners*, (above, n. 11), p. 224; Marcin Wodzinski, "Hasidism, 'Shtadlanut' and Jewish Politics in Nineteenth Century Poland: the Case of Isaac Warka", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (2005), pp. 290-320.

accompanying the Chmielnicki Uprising in the mid-seventeenth century, to the rabid, political antisemitism of the "Endeks" beginning in the late nineteenth century, the boycotts and beatings of Jews and the ghetto benches in the interwar period, betrayal and murder of Jews by Poles during the Shoah and in its aftermath, the attempts to stifle Jewish life during the Stalinist period and the official, openly and proudly antisemitic campaign of 1968.

There is no whitewash. However, while these episodes and others are individually significant and collectively an essential part of the story, they do not overwhelm the historical or Museum narrative. There is no gallery devoted to "Polish Antisemitism". Neither is it the running subtext of the Museum's story. The thrust of the new metahistory—and the Museum core exhibit—is that Poland's relationship to its Jews was expressed in a range of behaviors and attitudes. These were combined in a complex calculus of cause and effect, mixed motives and unintended consequences. Yes, there were many modes and examples of Jew-hatred, but there were also, in varying measures, tolerance, religious freedom and economic opportunity for Jews, Jewish-Polish continual cultural cross-fertilization, Polish-Jewish political and economic cooperation and episodes of solidarity and even brotherhood.[35] There were blood libels, but there were kings and powerful nobles who actively guaranteed Jewish security.[36] There were anti-Jewish riots and pogroms but there were also some shoulder-to-shoulder marches.[37] There was Jedwabne[38] and Kielce[39], and those who rejoiced at—and

[35] See sources in note 26 above and Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal, *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood* (Hanover, 1992).

[36] See, for example, M. J. Rosman, *The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990; cf. Adam Teller, "The Legal Status of the Jews on the Magnate Estates of Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century", *Gal-Ed* 15-16 (1997), pp. 41-63; Judith Kalik, "Jewish Leaseholders in 18th Century Crown Poland", *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 54 (2006), pp. 229-240; eadem, "Jews in Catholic Ecclesiastic Legislation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth", *Kwartalnik Historii Zydow* 209 (2004), pp. 26-39.

[37] See Polonsky, *Poland and Russia* (above, n. 17), esp. vol. 1, 273-321 and *passim*.

[38] Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2002).

[39] Idem, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz* (New York, 2007); David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946", *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998), pp. 43-85; Natalia Aleksiun, "Jewish Responses to

contributed to—the catastrophic fate of their Jewish neighbors during the Shoah; but thousands of Poles risked—and many of these lost—their own lives attempting to save Jews from the Final Solution.[40]

Overall perhaps the most apt metaphor for much of the history of the Polish-Jewish symbiosis[41] is "a marriage of convenience".[42] In such a relationship the partners are bound not by love, but by interests—yet they are bound. One or both partners may at times resent this bond and act out against it, hurting the other partner and maybe herself or himself as well; but they remain in the relationship because it facilitates the conditions that enable them to live purposefully and prosperously. I think that this is the kind of message that the Museum is shaping. Neither romanticizing, nor demonizing, but attempting to portray a most intricate, chiaroscuro relationship.

There is *Polish*-Jewish History in the 19th Century

Until recently there was a historiographical tendency to assimilate Jewish history in Poland between the partitions and the First World War to Russian Jewish history. The Museum's nineteenth century gallery, Encounters with Modernity, will depict Jewish life under the respective rule of the three partitioning powers, Russia, Prussia and Austria. It will also illustrate the unique legal and cultural status of Jews in the Congress Kingdom of Poland. It will explore a Polish, non-nationalist and non-Hebrew version of *Haskalah* and present the spread of Hasidism in nineteenth-century Poland as well as the yeshivot of "Polish" Lithuania. In short, it will show that even when

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Antisemitism in Poland, 1944-1947", in Zimmerman, *Contested Memories* (see below, n. 52), pp. 247-261.

[40] More than six thousand Poles have been certified as "Righteous Gentiles" by Yad Vashem, more than any other nationality; cf. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York, 1987); David Engel, "Possibilities of Rescuing Polish Jewry Under German Occupation and the Influence of the Polish Government-in-Exile", in David Bankier and Israel Gutman (eds.), *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution* (Jerusalem, 2003), pp. 136-148; John T. Pawlikowski, "Polish Catholics and the Jews During the Holocaust: Heroism, Timidity and Collaboration", in Zimmerman, *Contested Memories* (see below, n. 52), pp. 107-119.

[41] Cf. Gershon Bacon, "Polish-Jewish Relations in Modern Times: The Search for a Metaphor and a Historical Framework", in Eli Lederhendler and Jack Wertheimer (eds.), *Text and Context* (New York, 2005), pp. 444-73.

[42] Rosman, *The Lords' Jews* (above, n. 36), p. 210; cf. Polonsky, *Poland and Russia* (above, n. 17), vol. 1, p. 8 and *passim*.

under foreign hegemony there was still a distinctive Polish-Jewish experience.[43]

The Shoah Was Not the Culmination of Jewish History in Poland

The Holocaust Gallery in the Museum is not the last one. Moreover, neither its main entrance nor its exit can be accessed directly from the entrance area to the core exhibition. Visitors will traverse at least one other gallery to reach it or leave it. This architectural arrangement is intended to underscore that the Shoah does not encapsulate the Jewish experience in Poland. Of supreme importance in Polish-Jewish history, it was not the quintessential, nor the climactic, nor the final chapter. Conceived, imposed and executed by Germans (as the Holocaust Gallery emphasizes, see below), it was not emblematic of Polish-Jewish history; neither was it that history's organic or logical conclusion. It was not a conclusion at all.[44] As tragic, traumatic and catastrophic as the Shoah was, the Post-War Years Gallery attests that Jewish life was not totally snuffed out and, since the rise of Solidarnosc in the early 1980s, has been undergoing a renewal. Devastated, victimized, crippled, truncated, literally decimated, and then, in 1968, after most Jewish survivors had re-constituted their lives, ruthlessly attacked once again, Jewish life in Poland somehow and in some modest measure revived. A now tiny Jewish community still had an outsize impact on Polish cultural and political discourse. Outlasting Communism, it has, since 1989, had a significant part to play in the formation of the newest Polish commonwealth.[45] The Post-War Gallery and the Museum itself are expressions of that process.

Controversies

While hardly in concert with conventional wisdom, the preceding eight principles of the new Polish-Jewish metahistory as it has developed over the past generation represent the general scholarly consensus. I expect that the Museum will play an important role in popularizing this consensus and gaining public acceptance for it. Of course, as implied at the outset of this essay, no sooner will the Museum's version of metahistory be proffered than it will be criticized and contested.

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[43] Cf. the many studies of Marcin Wodzinski that make this point, esp. his book, *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict* (Oxford, 2005).

[44] Cf. David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford, 2010).

[45] Cf. Krajewski, *Poland and the Jews* (above, n. 24).

In the face of criticism, the Museum's creators should judge themselves against White's standards cited above. They must assess how faithful their portrayal is to the factual record, how comprehensive it is and whether it coheres in its own terms. If their work scores high by these measures, they need not be daunted by criticism which inevitably will be elicited by any endeavor of this ambition and scope. Of course, the Museum creators made choices, and it is self-evident that options picked carried some disadvantages while the alternatives not taken always had some virtues to recommend them. It is the critics' job to remind us of what both these disadvantages and virtues were. It is up to the public to decide to what extent the gains offset the losses.

In such circumstances serious criticism, by prompting profound analysis of and reflection on the exhibition's conception, plan and execution, will only confirm the Museum's centrality and promote its influence. The Museum should be at the focus of an ongoing examination of the realities and meanings of the history it portrays. However, among the challenges facing the Museum will be how to respond to probative critique, how to stay abreast of new research and new historical conceptions and how to find ways to give expression to all of these within the confines of the "permanent" core exhibition.

The next section lists some of the areas that continue to be the subject of popular or scholarly controversy, particularly across the Polish/Jewish divide. Here the Museum alludes to varying opinions and in some cases stakes out a definite position.

A Polish Story or a Jewish Story?

The aforementioned postulate that "the Jews were not only *in* Poland; they were *of* Poland" potentially conflicts with the postulate of "categorically Jewish, distinctly Polish".[46] The Museum underlines the extent to which Jewish history in Poland is part of Polish history. But is it also part of some larger Jewish history? There certainly was a meaningful Jewish context, but was it of equal importance to the Polish one? Or was the relationship of Polish Jews to other Jews analogous to the relationship of Poles to other Christians, that is, a second order connection, greatly subordinate to the primary culture and society in which all of Poland's people were actually living?

So, for example, how should the Museum present assimilationists and Jewish converts to Christianity? Were they guilty of diluting

[46] David Engel, "On Reconciling the Histories of Two Chosen Peoples", *American Historical Review* 114.4 (2009), pp. 914-929.

Jewishness, perhaps traitors to their people and its traditions? Were they, rather, pointing the way to a new basis for Jewish existence in a modern world where Judaism and Jewishness had to adjust to survive? Or were they a bridge fostering all-Polish brotherhood and a herald of a new Polish identity?[47]

Should the portrayal of *Gezeirot Tah-Tat*, the persecutions accompanying the Cossack-Peasant Uprising, 1648-49, and Shabbetai Zvi's messianic movement and its aftermath emphasize how these events resonated in the world Jewish community and became catalysts of international Jewish solidarity, or should it limit itself to their effects in Poland?

Should the narrative of interwar Jewish Poland depict Poland as the crucible in which a secular, left-leaning, new Jewish society and culture were cultivated; where the political nature of the Jewish people was established and the need for a nationalist solution to the precariousness of their Jewish existence was proved? Alternatively, the interwar period might be shown as the time when a critical mass of Jews finally polonized and made significant contributions to Polish culture and society in virtually all walks of life, yet found their newly intensified love for Poland and things Polish unrequited as antisemitism became institutionalized. Or, was interwar Poland burdened by an annoying "Jewish problem" that was only one instance of the larger "minority issue", which itself was but one of a myriad of difficulties that beset the recently reborn Polish state?[48]

Should the Museum take sides in controversies between contemporary Poles and Jews concerning issues that touch on the question of "ownership" of the Polish-Jewish experience? For example, how should the Museum relate to the painful controversy over the convent and cross at Auschwitz? Is the Holocaust fundamentally a Jewish story or a Polish one? Is it perhaps two related

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[47] Cf. Marcin Wodzinski, "Good Maskilim and Bad Assimilationists, Or: Toward a New Historiography of the Haskalah in Poland", *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (2004), pp. 87-122; Agnieszka Jagodzinska, *Pomiedzy: Akulturacja Zydow Warszawy* (Wroclaw, 2008). The Museum distinguishes between acculturation as a social and cultural process and integrationism as an ideology and political project. It strains to abstain from rendering value judgement.

[48] See discussions of the treatment of this issue in David Engel's articles, "Writing Polish-Jewish History in Hebrew", *Gal-Ed* 11 (1989), pp. 15-30, "Works in Hebrew on the History of the Jews in Inter-War Poland", *Polin* 4 (1989), 425-423, "Poles, Jews and Historical Objectivity", *Slavic Review* 46 (1987) 568-580; Ezra Mendelsohn, "Jewish Historiography on Polish Jewry in the Interwar Period", *Polin* 8 (1994), pp. 3-13.

stories, the Shoah for the Jews and the German Occupation for the Poles?[49]

In general, the Museum does not explicitly treat Polish Jews as part of a larger Jewish context. There are some exceptions (e.g. there are various maps and other graphic and textual references to the Diaspora, clear references to Polish Jewry as a daughter of Ashkenazic Jewry, the presentation of Rema and his additions to the *Shulhan Arukh* as part of an international halakhic effort, the allusion to the international Jewish print industry and book trade, the largely positive treatment of interwar Zionism and the State of Israel). References to the Jewish library, Jewish autonomy, Jewish economic activities, Jewish learning, etc. imply that Polish Jews were part of Jewish history through the ages and linked to other Jews throughout the world. But it will take perceptive visitors to turn implication into inference. For the most part the Museum is committed to highlighting Polish-Jewish history as an integral part of the Polish story (and frequently when Jews outside of Poland are presented, the intent seems to be to emphasize the existence of a *Polish* Jewish Diaspora).[50]

Burning issues like the Auschwitz convent and cross are dealt with diplomatically, attempting to avoid partisanship. In this particular case the anonymous Museum narrative notes that the fact that this and other controversies can be aired publicly, freely and frankly is testimony to the new Poland and the new status of Jews within it. No opinion is ventured on the substance.

Hasidism: Primarily a Phenomenon of the Eighteenth Century or the Nineteenth?

There is a debate between intellectual historians on the one side and social historians on the other as to the chronology, and hence the historical development, of Hasidism. Intellectual historians champion the traditional view of Hasidism, articulated by Simon Dubnow, as a "movement" in some sense founded by Israel Ba'al Shem Tov ("Besht", 1700?-1760), organized and institutionalized by his disciple and "heir", Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezerich, and disseminated by

[49] Krajewski, *Poland and the Jews* (above, n. 24), pp. 29-66. It is the latter construction that the Museum chooses to represent

[50] In what may or may not be a relevant sidelight to this question, it might be noted that the original core exhibition development team included a number of Israeli scholars. By the end of the process all of them—for various stated reasons—had left the project. My own association began at a later stage and consisted of commenting on and criticizing virtually completed work.

Dov Ber's disciples who established the courts which in effect served as branches of the movement that ultimately "conquered" many Jewish communities in Jewish Eastern Europe. By 1815, these third generation leaders had all died and with their demise the three-generation, theologically creative, organizationally innovative, "classic" phase of the movement came to an end. Nineteenth century Hasidism was largely a story of stagnation and decline: theological epigones, dynastic struggles, petty rivalries and occasional corruption.

Social historians over the past thirty years have developed a different picture. Neither the Besht nor the Maggid had intentions of starting a new religious or social movement. They innovated or renewed a certain pietistic style. At the very end of the Maggid's life, the Vilna Gaon chose to frame their style of pietism as unacceptable heterodoxy. He changed their status from that of "another style of pietism" to that of the heterodox sect of "the Other". The following generation of the Maggid's disciples then spent three or four decades evolving from a loosely associated, pluralistic collection of a relatively few, small, simply organized, ephemeral groups, barely distinguishable from conventional mystical-ascetic conventicles, into a self-conscious, non-centralized, non-bureaucratic, still relatively pluralist confederation comprising an ever increasing number of tightly knit, expanding, highly organized groups. They crystallized a Hasidic ethos, framed Hasidism as a renewal of Jewish mysticism, created a Hasidic literary canon, and established patterns of leadership, succession and finance. On the basis of the foundation that they created, it was post-1815 Hasidism that became the large, religiously, economically, socially, culturally and politically powerful movement that played a key role in the Polish Jewish community (and in all of Jewish Eastern Europe) through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.[51]

[51] Glenn Dynner, *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish-Jewish Society*, (Oxford, 2008); Marcin Wodzinski, *Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland, 1815-1867: Historical Sources in the Polish State Archives* (Cracow, 2011); idem, "How Modern is an Anti-Modernist Movement? The Emergence of Hasidic Politics in Congress Poland", *AJS Review* 31 (2007), pp. 221-240; cf. Moshe Rosman, "Hasidism as a Modern Phenomenon: The Paradox of Modernization without Secularization", *Jahrbuch des Simon Dubnow Instituts* 6 (2007), pp. 215-224; idem, "The Rise of Hasidism", Adam Sutcliffe and Jonathan Karp (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 7, chapter 24 (in press); Teller, "Hasidism" (above, n. 26).

By placing its focus on Hasidism in the nineteenth century gallery, Encounters with Modernity, the Museum demonstrates that it accepts the social historians' construction of Hasidic history.

Polish Role in the Shoah

It is by now a commonplace that the Shoah was a German Nazi project, not a Polish one. The once popular view, especially among Jews and many others in the West, that the Nazis decided to place their extermination camps in Poland because they knew they could count on Polish collaboration, has largely been displaced by the realization that "Poland was where the Jews were." Simple efficiency directed siting the killing machine where the largest group of intended victims was located.[52]

However, Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, and Jan T. Gross' book, *Neighbors*, have contributed to a different accusation against Poles. It is true that Poles neither planned nor implemented the Final Solution, but it is a fact that at least a fair number of Poles enthusiastically cooperated with the Nazis in its execution in Poland.[53]

The Museum has crafted a sophisticated, nuanced "Polish response"[54] to this charge. First of all, while not hesitating to show Polish antisemitism in its manifold manifestations, the Museum asserts that this had nothing to do with the German Nazi Final Solution. The Holocaust was of a whole different order. Genocide was not the objective of even the most rabid Polish antisemites, in any period.

Second, the Museum goes into detail about heroic, *organized* Polish efforts to save Jews during the war. It took a network of people to save a single Jew; it took but one malevolent person to denounce a whole group of hiding Jews *and* their non-Jewish protectors. The Museum duly notes that there were those Poles who "hindered" the

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[52] Cf. Joshua Zimmerman (ed.), *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, 2003), esp. Zimmerman's introduction: "Changing Perceptions in the Historiography of Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War", pp. 1-16.

[53] Cf. Jan Blonski, "The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto", *Polin* 2 (1987), pp. 321-326; Antony Polonsky, "Polish-Jewish Relations and the Holocaust", *Polin* 4 (1989), pp. 226-242; Bacon, *Polish-Jewish Relations* (above, n. 41), pp. 57-59.

[54] One that some Jews will contest, see Krajewski, *Poland and the Jews* (above, n. 24), pp. 99-112, 163-182 and Zimmerman, *Contested Memories* (above, n. 52).

rescue efforts. For Jewish survival, Poles might be the only hope or the main hazard.

Third, with respect to cases of Poles killing Jews during the war independently of the Germans in places like Lwow and Jedwabne, the Museum classifies these as "local violence". These were not systematic components of the Final Solution, but rather spontaneous violent episodes. They should be seen in the context of traditional antisemitism and contemporary local conflicts with Jews. The Shoah can perhaps be considered to have created an opportunity and an environment conducive to such violent outbreaks. These outbreaks did not, however, constitute mass collaboration with the German project. The collaboration that existed was on an individual basis.[55]

There are many Jews who will see such distinctions as a kind of apologetics.

Who Is a Jew?

As the already tiny Jewish population of postwar Poland became progressively smaller due to demographic trends, emigration and continuing antisemitism, the locution *pochodzenie zydowski* (PZ), Jewish origin, gained popularity in common, and even academic, discourse. Employed unrigorously, PZ loosely refers to anyone who has some genealogical connection to Jews, ranging from one Jewish parent to a Jewish grandparent to a more distant Jewish relative. Converts to Christianity, even after several generations, were often called PZ. In Communist Poland, labeling a prominent person as PZ was a surefire way to stigmatize her or him. The PZ label was a common tool of antisemites, a means of inflating and targeting the supposed threat from ubiquitous "Jews" at a time when Jews were hard to find. But not only antisemites played the PZ card. Frequently, well-meaning philosemites might apply the term to individuals they held up as a "credit to the Jewish people". Jews, seeking to highlight "the Jewish contribution" to Poland, might be eager to claim someone important as PZ.

So does a museum of Polish Jewish history follow popular Polish convention and include the stories of people who may have had some Jewish genealogical link, but for whom that connection was irrelevant both to their own self-consciousness and to their activities in society? Or does such a museum consider PZ to be "none of our business" and place only those who identified as Jews within its purview? The

[55] Cf. Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic (eds.), *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton, 2004).

Warsaw Museum attempts to bridge these two positions by featuring some prominent PZ individuals who grappled with the question of their place in Polish culture.

How Did Jews Treat Poles?

This may be only somewhat less sensitive an issue than the Shoah. The Museum core exhibit can be characterized as depicting Jewish communal, religious, cultural, political and economic life in relation to the Polish environment on many levels. It also has much to say about Polish attitudes towards Jews and Polish treatment of them, as well as what Jews thought of this treatment. There is relatively little**,** however, on Jewish attitudes towards and treatment of non-Jews. In part this is due to the paucity of research on this subject.[56] But I would venture that there also is a tacit fear that probing this issue would yield some unwelcome consequences. Antony Polonsky's assertion "that Jews reciprocated the contempt in which their religious beliefs were held by the Christians"[57] does find modest expression in the core exhibit. There is no restatement, however, of Jacob Katz's pronouncement that the traditional early modern Ashkenazic Jewish community that included Polish Jewry practiced a double standard of morality vis-à-vis Gentiles.[58] Overall, not too much attention is paid to less than noble feelings or dishonorable actions of Jews towards their countrymen[59] lest they be taken out of context by those eager to discredit the entire Museum and to libel today's Jews.

Polonsky also wrote, "One should not equate the position of the two groups [Polish Jews and Polish Christians]. Effectively all power was in the hands of the Christians." With so many seemingly determined to disregard this truth, full treatment of this topic is apparently still too great a risk for the Museum's creators to take in

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[56] Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, trans and ed. Bernard Cooperman (Syracuse, 2000); idem, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York, 1961) and see the works cited in n. 17 above.

[57] YIVO Encyclopedia, sv: "Relations between Jews and Non-Jews", col. 1538.

[58] Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (above, n. 56), pp. 32-34; cf. idem, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (above, n. 56), pp. 3-12, 37-47, 143-155.

[59] A major exception to this is the Museum's treatment of sporadic episodes of *Jewish* collaboration with the Nazis during the Shoah.

contemporary Poland, and possibly in the contemporary world outside of academia.[60]

A Daring Enterprise

That said, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is still a daring enterprise. It asserts that Poland has the financial, technical, cultural, educational and scholarly resources to create a historical museum that ranks with the best in the world and can attract both Poles and non-Poles to visit and learn. It aims to re-establish in a new mode Warsaw's place as a locus of Jewish history and culture. It presumes to teach contemporary Jews new ideas and myriad details about a heritage over which they claim ownership. It insists to Poles that without knowledge of Poland's Jewish past, their education and understanding of their own history lack a crucial dimension. It dares both Poles and Jews to take seriously a new metahistory, derived from the last thirty or forty years of scholarship, contradicting some deeply held stereotypes and cherished conventional notions. It tells the world that there is indeed a new Polish commonwealth that is willing to confront problems and settle past accounts. This Poland has re-discovered a worthy tradition that can help forge its path into the future.

[60] Cf. Jacob Katz, *With My Own Eyes* (Waltham, 1995), Chapter 11 concerning hesitations about publishing his *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* in England in the late 1950s for similar reasons.