

JEWISH STUDIES IN POSTWAR POLAND¹

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Abstract: The tradition of Jewish studies in Poland has been drastically interrupted by the Second World War and the Holocaust. In the immediate postwar period the process of re-establishing research on Jewish history and heritage was undertaken by the Jewish Historical Commissions and later Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. More examples of the individual and group initiatives can be traced only in the 1970s and 1980s. The real happened in the late 1980s with Kraków as one of the first and main centers of revitalized Jewish studies in Poland. The first postwar academic institution in Krakow specializing in Jewish studies – Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland – was established already in 1986 in the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. More than a decade later, in 2000, it was transformed into the first Poland’s Department of Jewish Studies (Katedra Judaistyki) – now the Institute of Jewish Studies. Nowadays there are more similar programs and institutions – at the universities in Warsaw, Wrocław and Lublin (UMCS). Also other academic centers tend to have at least individual scholars, programs, classes or projects focusing on widely understood “Jewish topics.” Jewish studies in Poland, along with the revival of Jewish culture, reflect the contemporary Polish attitude to the Jewish heritage, and their scale and intensity remains unique in the European context. The growing interest in Jewish studies in Poland can be seen as a sign of respect for the role of Jewish Poles in the country’s history, and as an attempt to recreate the missing Jewish part of Poland through research, education and commemoration, accompanied by slow but promising revival of Jewish life in Poland.

The tradition of Jewish studies in Poland was drastically interrupted by the Second World War and the Holocaust. Not only did the people working in the field of Jewish studies comprise a great number of the victims, but also the institutions and collections (archives, libraries, private sources) were dispersed, devastated or completely destroyed. Despite all the difficulties and all the possible punishment (from the Nazi German occupying authorities), some research and education continued in the harshest conditions of wartime – such as historical research and illegal classes in the Warsaw ghetto as well as academic discussions and lectures organized in some other ghettos. We must emphasize that most of the studies in the broad field of “Jewish topics” in Poland before and during

¹ A presentation on a similar topic was presented by the author in London, in May 2010, during a symposium exploring contemporary Jewish life in Poland which marked the close of Jewish programming for the POLSKA! YEAR organized in Great Britain. The first version of it was published in the proceedings of this symposium: Poland: A Jewish Matter, ed. Kate Craddy, Mike Levy and Jakub Nowakowski (Warszawa: Adam Mickiewicz Institute, 2010), pp. 103-115.

the war were run and attended mostly by Jewish scholars and students, with only some exceptions for several topics (e.g. studies in history and religious relations between Judaism and Christianity).

After the Holocaust, the situation in the Polish Jewish academic world changed completely, and the chances for the autonomous Jewish education (at all levels) and research were very limited. Not only was the Jewish population—including both the academics and the possible audience decimated, but also for a long time the communist regime did not allow a revival of studies on the Jewish past and present.

In the first years after the Second World War some secular—primary and secondary—schools were established and run by Jewish committees (parts of Centralny Komitet Żydowski, the Central Jewish Committee) and Zionist organizations. In the meantime, Jewish education was also provided in some religious schools. These began to emerge in mid-1945, and were maintained by individual local religious congregations. The larger communities created Talmud Torah schools. As a result of the influx of repatriates from the Soviet Union (among them a large number of young Jews), several religious high schools (yeshivas) were created. The first of these arose in Kraków, Wrocław, Łódź and Szczecin. The one in Łódź—Netzach Israel Rabbinical College (Wyższa Szkoła Rabiniczna Netzach Israel)—was opened thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Zew Wawa Morejno, who became its first rector. In 1950, due to the emigration of most of the students and teachers, the Netzach Israel Rabbinical College was moved to Jerusalem. As a result of emigration in the late 1940s further development of religious education was halted. Many schools whose students emigrated closed their doors, and the number of children in the remaining Talmud Torah schools decreased significantly. All the yeshivas in Poland were closed down in 1949.²

While the collections of YIVO (the Jewish Scientific Institute)³ were moved from Vilna to New York, most of the collections of Jewish documents, archival sources from the local Polish Jewish communities, remained in or were moved to Warsaw and deposited in the Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, ŻIH).⁴

In late 1944, some of the surviving members of the pre-war Historical Commission set up the Central Jewish Historical Commission (Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna), the direct predecessor of the Jewish Historical Institute. ŻIH became home to many individually and institutionally rescued documents, books and testimonies, as well as all the documentation of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland. The Institute, beside its archive, library and museum, was the only Jewish academic institution in Poland that functioned throughout the communist period and conducted research on Jewish history and culture. It survived the political changes first in and after 1956 and then in the years 1967-1968, which resulted in a dramatically reduced number of Jews

² For more on Jewish post-Holocaust education in Poland: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993, pp. 463-466.

³ YIVO was established in 1925 as the Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut in Vilna (at that time part of Poland). Later, once it had been moved to New York, it was renamed the Institute for Jewish Research, but it is widely known by its original initials/acronym.

⁴ The history of this institute started in 1929, when YIVO established the Jewish Historical Commission in Warsaw. Among the people who were very active in its creation was Emanuel Ringelblum, whose famous archival collection of the Warsaw ghetto became the integral part of the documentation collected in a building on Tłomackie Street.

in Poland, but also in very limited access to the literature and possibilities of research on any topic considered “Jewish” or “Jewish-related.” Public libraries were requested to remove Jewish literature from their shelves, and some special lists of titles were provided by the communist officers. From then on, anyone interested in learning about Jewish history, culture or religion had to search for publications either in private libraries or in some academic institutions holding prewar collections.

The late 1970s brought some positive changes, when independent and unofficial discussion groups and intellectual centers emerged in some parts of Poland. “Alternatively repressed and tolerated by the authorities, these groups became hotbeds of the Soviet bloc’s most successful democratic opposition. One such group, later to be called the Jewish Flying University [Żydowski Uniwersytet Latający, ŻUL], became a symbol of the new developments in Polish-Jewish relations.”⁵ Konstanty Gebert, one of ŻUL’s founder members, describes the situation:

Some of us had been expelled from universities or high schools, and all had friends who had abruptly emigrated. Since then, we had been laboring at reconstructing our identities and had not had much success. Some people had, on their own, tried to re-appropriate the Jewish identity we had been denied. A young couple had spent years touring Poland to gather photographic documentation of what was left of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. Others had been studying the few but precious Jewish texts that were available in Polish, most of them published in Catholic magazines responding to the Church’s new openness to things Jewish. But the majority of us had simply kept quiet and gone on living, though newly insecure and unhappy in our lives.⁶

Some Jewish scholars in this group, as well as others in several Polish academic centers, looked for any possible scholarship or publications from abroad that were available in the Soviet bloc states. The outside world responded to such needs, and soon books, brochures and papers were delivered legally and illegally to Poland. In the early 1980s some foreign scholars representing mainly American, Israeli and British academic centers started to support various initiatives, such as conferences, debates and publications, devoted to studies on the history of Polish Jews and their prewar and wartime situation. The echoes of these events could be heard in Poland and encouraged some Polish scholars. According to Professor Antony Polonsky, “The real breakthrough came in 1984. The first major event of this year was the tour of Poland organized in the spring by Chone Schmeruk, Professor of Yiddish literature at Hebrew University. The impact on those who participated was enormous.”⁷ It influenced the scholars from Israel, but it also inspired academics in Poland. Professor Józef Andrzej Gierowski’s words recalled by Polonsky are the best comment to what happened then: “[Professor Schmeruk] visited the Jagiellonian University and (...) he opened our eyes ... [he] understood that cooperation between scholars from Israel and Poland was a necessary basis for the further development of this field of research, and an important goal of his visit to Poland was to pave the way for such cooperation.”⁸

⁵ K. Gebert, *Living in the Land of Ashes*, Kraków-Budapest: Austeria Publishing House, 2008, pp. 4-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁷ A. Polonsky, *Polish-Jewish Relations Since 1984: Reflections of a Participant*, Kraków-Budapest: Wydawnictwo Austeria, 2009, p. 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The visit mentioned above was certainly one of the most important steps in establishing international cooperation and providing an opportunity for some of the scholars to participate in the conferences organized soon after. The University of Oxford (1984) and Brandeis University (1986) hosted conferences on Polish-Jewish relations, then the following one was set up in Kraków (1986), with the topic discussed by the scholars there being “Jewish Autonomy in Pre-Partition Poland.” Once the discussion in Kraków was completed, there were also some institutional results. The Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland (Międzywydziałowy Zakład Historii i Kultury Żydów w Polsce) was established (1986) at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Led by Prof. Józef Andrzej Gierowski, the Centre was the first unit of its kind in Polish universities, and being such a pioneer institution it encouraged scholars from other cities to intensify their research on Jewish history.

In the 1990s, several conferences were organized that gathered large groups of researchers from different countries and became an important tool in stimulating the development of scholarly research in Poland. During its existence, among the conferences organized by the Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland were: in 1991, “Polish Jews until 1939 in Polish and world historiography,” and in 1992, “The future of Auschwitz.” Between 1995 and 1998 a cycle of conferences focused on Jews in contemporary Polish studies. The Center organized its last major conference in 1999, dedicated to Jewish spirituality in Poland.

The academic work at the Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland was divided into three sections: Bibliography and Jewish Book Studies, Documentation, Sociology and Ethnography. Their main goals were: creating a bibliography of Polish *judaica*, research in Polish archives on sources concerning Jewish history, and collecting memories and testimonies about the Jews in Poland. The results of the research were published, alongside other publications, in the series *Studia Polono-Judaica*, which has three subdivisions: *Series Bibliographica*, *Series Fontium*, *Series Librorum Congressus*.⁹

After the Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland was established as a research unit, initially it did not conduct any teaching. The first attempts to develop Jewish studies took place in the 1998/1999 academic year, the first such initiative in Poland. At the same time, the Jagiellonian University reorganized its administration and programs of study. This meant that the profile of Jewish studies and its location in the structure of the university had to be redefined.

In 2000, the Research Center for Jewish History and Culture in Poland was transformed into the Poland’s first Department of Jewish Studies (Katedra Judaistyki Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego), an autonomous part of the Faculty of History. Prof. Edward Dąbrowa was the head of this department throughout its existence. The department offered programs at all academic levels—Master’s (recently BA and MA) and PhD degrees, and a very rich curriculum embracing ancient history and literature, all aspects of Judaism, Jewish culture and art, Jewish languages as well as contemporary issues

⁹ At the time of the Department of Jewish Studies, the title of the series was changed to *Studia Judaica Cracoviensia*. The titles of the subdivisions remained the same, and two more were added to those that already existed: *Series Dissertationum* and *Series Variorum*.

and Holocaust studies.¹⁰ The Department of Jewish Studies followed the tradition of organizing international and national academic events and co-organized the conference *200 years of New Jewish Cemetery in Kraków* (in 2004), and a year later the International Conference *700 Years of Jews in Kraków*.

Only later, in the 2009/10 academic year, was the curriculum of the studies offered by the department reformed to define Jewish studies in broader terms than history. Thanks to this new concept, the relevant agencies of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Poland finally approved Jewish studies as a new field of study. Implementation of the new program began in the 2012/2013 academic year. This development in Jewish studies has contributed to the increase in the number of faculty and to the growth in both teaching and research. All those factors led to the decision of the Rector of the Jagiellonian University to change the status of the Department of Jewish Studies to the Institute of Jewish Studies, which happened on October 1, 2012.

Another mayor change took place when, in 2010, the institution moved from its previous location on Batorego Street (Kraków city center) to the district of Kazimierz, the area of the former Jewish quarter. The Institute is located on Józefa Street (no. 19), one of the most important streets of Kazimierz, known in the modern period as ulica Żydowska (the Jewish Street).

The Faculty of the Institute consists of twelve scholars: seven professors and five assistant professors. They are divided into three teams associated with the three chairs/units: the Chair of the History of the Jews, the Chair of the Jewish Culture and the Chair of History of Judaism and Jewish Literatures. Currently, about 150 students are enrolled at the Institute of Jewish Studies at BA and MA levels, but also almost 20 doctoral students are preparing their dissertations under the supervision of the Institute's faculty. The students and scholars have access to the Institute's specialized library, which has accumulated nearly 10,000 volumes since 1988. In recent years, library resources have been enlarged thanks to donations from various Polish and foreign institutions. Particularly valuable is the collection of about 1,000 volumes of Jewish prints from the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Institute of Jewish Studies cooperates with many academic research centers in Poland and abroad. Of special importance is our cooperation with such prestigious institutions as the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Polish Academy of Sciences, the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków, the Galicia Jewish Museum, the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Municipal Office of the City of Kraków, the Jewish Community Center (JCC Kraków) and the Jewish Religious Community of Kraków. Within the framework of international cooperation, the Institute of Jewish Studies has important academic links with the University of Tel Aviv, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and University College London. It also has a number of bilateral agreements on cooperation within the Erasmus program.

It is also worth mentioning another initiative by the Institute's faculty members—in 2009, the Centre for the Study on the History and Culture of Kraków's Jews was established within the Faculty of History. Since then it has focused on promoting the history

¹⁰ The beginning of Jewish studies programs at the Jagiellonian University was acknowledged by Marcin Wodziński, who also offers an overview of the situation in Poland concerning the development of Jewish studies: M. Wodziński, Jewish Studies in Poland, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, vol. 10 (March 2011), pp. 101-118.

and heritage of Jews in and from Kraków, organizing academic events, collecting historical sources and conducting research.

In the early 1990s some other faculties and institutes of Jagiellonian University also started to offer individual lectures and conduct research in the field of Jewish studies, understood in wide terms, or on any related topics. There were some individual scholars in the Institutes of Sociology, Institute of Religious Studies, Institute of History and Institute of Polish Philology, whose work contributed to the development of Jewish studies in Poland, in Kraków in particular. Currently also the Institute of European Studies, Centre for Holocaust Studies and the Department of Near and Far East (studies) have enlarged their teaching offer and participated in some development of research and education on selected Jewish topics (e.g. history of the Holocaust, history of contemporary Israel, Jews in Central Europe).

Beside the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, there are also at least two other local academic institutions that provide some training and possibilities of research in the field of Jewish history, culture, literature and heritage in general. Kraków's Pedagogical University (Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny) has offered classes and organized conferences, its scholars contributed to publications on Jewish history. Also, the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (Polska Akademia Umiejętności), with its Commission on the History and Culture of the Jews, has contributed to the development of research in Jewish studies and dissemination of the results.

According to the Academic Jewish Studies Internet Directory,¹¹ today there are four universities in Poland which offer Jewish Studies in their regular academic programs:

- Jagiellonian University in Kraków – Institute of Jewish Studies (added to the Directory and still listed as the Department: March 24, 2001);
- Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Lublin – Center for Jewish Studies (added: September 1, 2004);
- University of Warsaw – Department of Hebrew Studies (added: September 11, 2004);
- Wrocław University – Centre for the Culture and Languages of the Jews (added: May 11, 2006).

Certainly, these are only some of the universities and departments that have managed to develop special programs in Jewish studies—either offering full-time studies and BA, MA and PhD degrees (like the Jagiellonian University in Kraków – the Institute of Jewish Studies), offering only some courses and seminars (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Lublin – Center for Jewish Studies, University of Wrocław – Centre for the Culture and Languages of the Jews), or specializing in a particular field within Jewish studies (University of Warsaw – Department of Hebrew Studies). We should point out that the list provided by the Academic Jewish Studies Internet Directory does not provide information on recently established programs (the last Polish institution was added to the directory in 2006).

As the first institution—the Jagiellonian University's Institute of Jewish Studies—has already been mentioned, we now need to focus on the other three.

¹¹ Academic Jewish Studies Internet Directory, www.jewish-studies.com (accessed: November 1, 2012).

The Centre for the Culture and Languages of the Jews at the University of Wrocław opened its doors in 1993, when Prof. Jerzy Woronczak launched the Research Centre for the Culture and Languages of the Polish Jews, the first institution in Wrocław devoted to Jewish studies since the dissolution of the Breslauer Theologisches Seminar (in 1938). The Research Centre was transformed in 2003 into the Centre for the Culture Languages of the Jews, offering classes in Jewish history and literature open to all students of the University of Wrocław. The general aim of this institution was a revival of Jewish studies in Wrocław/Breslau and continuation of the glorious tradition of the Breslauer Theologisches Seminar. The Centre runs the *Bibliotheca Judaica* series, and organizes conferences, seminars, public lectures, and other activities. The institution's activities are led and promoted by a team headed by Prof. Marcin Wodziński.

The Center for Jewish Studies (Zakład Kultury i Historii Żydów)¹² at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin used to be managed by Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, and is now led by Prof. Andrzej Trzciniński. It was established in 2000 as an autonomous unit in the Faculty of Humanities, and since 2004 has been part of the Institute of Cultural Studies (Instytut Kulturoznawstwa). The Center's main activities include seminars and lectures offered to the students of various disciplines. The topics taught range from Hebrew and Yiddish classes, through seminars on Jewish literature and Jewish culture, to the local history of Jewish communities. The Center publishes academic works, among them recently fabulous publications on *księgi pamięci*—the memorial books of the prewar Jewish communities in Poland.¹³

The Department of Hebrew Studies (Zakład Hebraistyki) at the University of Warsaw has existed in its present form since 1990 as one of the units of the Institute of Oriental Studies (University of Warsaw). Previously (from 1977 to 1990), Hebrew studies was part of the Division of Ancient Near East and Hebrew Studies, with Prof. Witold Tyloch as the head of this former body. In 1990, the Division was split into three autonomous departments, the Department of Hebrew Studies being one of them. The current director of the department is Associate Professor Dr. Shoshana Ronen. The department offers three- and five-year programs, whose graduates receive a degree (BA or MA) in Hebrew Studies. Throughout the studies an intensive course in Modern Hebrew is held that is compulsory for all students. During the first two years, some general courses are offered: introductory courses (History of Hebrew studies, Judaism), History of Ancient Israel; History of the Jews in the Diaspora, and History of Modern Israel (taught in cooperation with the Department of History). Starting from the third year of studies, the students choose specialised courses in history/sociology, literature and linguistics.

Another online register of Jewish studies—the European Association for Jewish Studies' Directory of Jewish Studies in Europe—offers a much longer list of universities, institutes, departments and centers active in the field of Jewish studies.¹⁴ There are

¹² For basic information on the Center's structure, research and education: <http://kulturoznawstwo.umcs.lublin.pl/struktura-instytutu/struktura/zaklad-kultury-i-historii-zydow>.

¹³ A. Kopciowski, *Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich Bibliografia / Jewish memorial books a bibliography*, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2008; *Tam był kiedyś mój dom... Księgi pamięci gmin żydowskich*, selection and editing by M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, A. Kopciowski & A. Trzciniński, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2009.

¹⁴ Directory of Jewish Studies in Europe, <http://www.eurojewishstudies.org> (accessed: May 27, 2010).

26 institutions in Poland registered and/or represented in the European Association for Jewish Studies:

- Instytut Historii (Institute of History), University of Białystok;
- Instytut Filologii Polskiej (Institute of Polish Philology), University of Gdańsk;
- Instytut Historii Starożytnej (Department of Ancient History), Pedagogical University, Kraków;
- Instytut Socjologii (Institute of Sociology), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Instytut Filologii Germańskiej (Department of German Philology), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Katedra Antropologii Literaturnej i Badań Kulturowych (Department of Literary Anthropology and Cultural Studies), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Katedra Bliskiego i Dalekiego Wschodu (Institute of Near and Middle East), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Katedra Judaistyki (Department of Jewish Studies), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Instytut Religioznawstwa (Institute of Religious Studies), Jagiellonian University in Kraków;
- Instytut Teorii Literatury, Teatru i Sztuk Audiowizualnych, University of Łódź;
- Instytut Filologii Polskiej, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Lublin;
- Zakład Kultury i Historii Żydów (Center for Jewish Studies), Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin;
- Zakład Badań Etnicznych (Division of Ethnic Research), Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin;
- Instytut Historii (Institute of History), Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań;
- Center for Social Studies, Graduate School for Social Research, Warsaw;
- Jewish Historical Institute (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny), Warsaw;
- Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny w Warszawie (German Historical Institute), Warsaw;
- Dziekanat Wydziału Nauk Humanistycznych (Faculty of Humanities), Cardinal Wyszyński University, Warsaw;
- Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów (Polish Center for Holocaust Research), Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw;
- Centrum Badania i Nauczanie Dziejów i Kultury Żydów w Polsce im. Anielewicza (Mordechai Anielewicz Centre for the Study and Teaching of Polish Jewry), University of Warsaw;
- Zakład Hebraistyki (Department of Hebrew Studies), University of Warsaw;
- Zakład Dialogu Katolicko-Judaistycznego, Cardinal Wyszyński University, Warsaw;
- Instytut Germanistyki (Institute of German Studies), University of Warsaw;
- Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych (Department of Applied Social Sciences and Resocialisation), University of Warsaw;
- Studium Kultury i Języków Żydowskich (Centre for the Culture and Languages of the Jews), University of Wrocław;

- Katedra Literatury Polskiej Oświecenia, Pozytywizmu i Młodej Polski (Department of Polish Literature of the Enlightenment, Positivism and Młoda Polska Periods), University of Łódź.

Again, the above list does not include all the institutions active in the field of Jewish studies, but also the involvement of those listed is sometimes not comparable because of the number of scholars involved, programs offered and the selectiveness of the themes undertaken. In some cases/institutions there are only one or two scholars whose individual research is devoted to a “Jewish topic,” which became the only reason to list the institutions in the Directory above and therefore to be mentioned here.

The local Polish Association of Jewish Studies (Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Żydowskich), established in 1996, has over 80 members (early 2013).¹⁵ Consolidation and integration of scholars and institutions involved in Jewish studies, promotion and popularization of scholarly research on Jewish history and culture, with particular attention given to the history of the Jews in Poland, and the development of cooperation with Polish and foreign institutions and associations have been the main goals of the Kraków-based association. It organizes lectures, seminars and conferences gathering Polish and foreign scholars. For the past years, the association was led by Prof. Krzysztof Pilarczyk. Prof. Michał Galas has now taken over as chair of the Polish Association of Jewish Studies, whose office has been moved to the site of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

The Polish Association of Yiddish Studies is the other nationwide organization bringing together the scholars working in the field of Jewish studies. The association was established in March 2010 in Warsaw following a series of discussions. Some of these were held during the conference “Perspectives of the Development of Yiddish in Poland” in 2009.¹⁶ The common goal that united the association’s members was defined as the following: “to preserve Yiddish language and culture as a living part of our common culture.” The members define themselves as a group of people “who read and translate Jewish texts: literature, poetry, archival documents” and use them in their historical, philological and sociological research.¹⁷ Currently the association has more than 60 active members. It witnesses a growing number of Polish scholars in Yiddish literature, language and culture, as well as an increasing presence of Yiddish studies in Poland. It is also visible in non-academic initiatives promoting Yiddish culture among mostly non-Jewish society.

Some of the institutions and associations mentioned above have their own periodicals and series of publications. The Polish Association of Jewish Studies has published *Studia Judaica* since 1998, but this is not the only academic periodical published in Poland and focusing on Jewish studies. The Jewish Historical Institute (JHI), for example, was one of the first institutions publishing regularly on Jewish history in postwar Poland. Its *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* (Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute) was published first in 1949 as JHI’s newsletter, in 1950-1953 as a biannual, and later as

¹⁵ Polish Association of Jewish Studies (Polskie Towarzystwo Studiów Żydowskich), <http://www.jewishstudies.pl/> (accessed: November 1, 2012).

¹⁶ The conference was organized by Shalom Foundation in Śródborów, near Warsaw, in November 2009.

¹⁷ Based on the information provided on the Association’s website: <http://ptsj.pl/pl/> (accessed: May 13, 2013).

a quarterly. Since 2000 the journal has been published under the title *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* (Jewish History Quarterly). It is addressed to people dealing with Jewish history in Poland. Besides papers and essays in Polish (summaries in English), the Quarterly features source documents from Polish or foreign archives and collections.¹⁸

Another Warsaw-based institution – Polish Center for Holocaust Research, a section of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFiS PAN) has since 2005 published annually the *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* (Holocaust Studies and Materials).¹⁹

The Institute of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University is known for its *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, published every year since 2005. The articles in this journal are published in either English, German or French, so it reaches foreign scholars and readers. The Students Association of the Institute of Jewish Studies also publishes its own periodical – *Słowik* (Hebrew title: *Ha Zamir*).

Besides all the scholarly periodicals already mentioned, one can find many academic or popular texts by academics published in Jewish periodicals, such as *Słowo Żydowskie*, *Midrasz*, and recently *Cwiszn*, but also in several Polish weeklies and dailies. Also titles associated with Catholicism—like *Znak* and *Więź*, tend to offer either individual articles or entire issues focusing on Jewish issues or Jewish-Christian relations.

In his text on Jewish studies in Poland, Marcin Wodziński offers some statistics concerning the number of scholarly publications: “In recent years, around 100 books concerning Jewish subjects have appeared every year in Poland, sometimes of great scholarly significance (although not all of them are scholarly works). For example, the national bibliography has a record of 86 books concerning Jewish subject matter issued in Poland in 2006, 77 in 2007, as many as 107 in 2008, and 95 books in 2009. At the same time, the bibliography of all publications—books and articles—dealing with Jewish subjects and published in Poland in the period from mid-2008 to mid-2009 encompasses 1667 items. This seems to be a very significant achievement, even if not all of these publications conform to the highest scholarly standards.”²⁰

Knowing the most important centers of Jewish studies, their development and their main field of interests we might ask the very basic question—why has Jewish studies become so popular in Poland? And there are probably many answers to this question, or at least many elements that could be considered—depending on the circumstances, group of people involved and the position represented. Scholars would have a somewhat different motivation than students, and authors than readers and publishers. So far no proper and comprehensive research has been conducted and published about these factors, so in order to define the motivations I will use my own observations and the responses I obtain during various meetings.

“Why Jewish studies (in Poland)?” The answers given today by Polish scholars and researchers certainly include the following elements:

- Jewish issues were under the communist regime for a long time either taboo or abandoned topics (e.g. history, religion, literature);

¹⁸ For more about the *Jewish History Quarterly* plus the list of contents of the selected newest issues: <http://www.jewishinstitute.org.pl/en/kwartalnik/kwart/1.html>.

¹⁹ *Holocaust Studies and Materials* – website: <http://www.zagladazydow.org/index.php?show=1>.

²⁰ M. Wodziński, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

- there were some significant gaps in the existing research and publications, a lack of basic knowledge on Jewish history and heritage in Poland as well as the Holocaust in educational materials and textbooks;
- the history of the Jews for a long time remained an unknown part of local/regional history in/of Poland;
- the collapse of communism allowed new possibilities for researchers, among others opportunities for international cooperation and scholarships;
- access to new sources in Poland, also to foreign libraries and archives, as well as to foreign Jewish and non-Jewish scholars and witnesses;
- the need for the documentation of the existing material remains of Jewish heritage in Poland (both documentation & preservation, very often combined);
- the increasing tourist market and the needs for knowledge, guides and tours around the sites connected to the Jewish history and culture;
- other, sometimes personal and/or individual, motivation.

The same question, “Why Jewish studies (in Poland)?,” would when answered by students include some similar elements, such as focusing on the wish to study neglected/taboo topics, but it would also emphasize some other issues:

- studies on new/extraordinary topic(s);
- studies on an important part of Poland’s history and culture;
- attractiveness of the Hebrew and/or Yiddish language;
- possibility of reading Jewish literature in native/Jewish languages (connected to the above reason);
- genuine interest in Jewish history and culture, in particular in Polish Jewish history;
- interest in Judaism, and its relations to Christianity;
- interest in contemporary Israel and Israeli society;
- sense of a mission to pay tribute to the generations of Jews who used to live in Poland and to those who perished in the Holocaust;
- discovering Jewish family roots or being in a relationship/friendly with someone Jewish;
- developing Jewish tourism;
- Israeli business in Poland/Europe;
- all kinds of motifs related to the Holocaust memory and commemoration;
- willingness to fight anti-Semitism;
- fashion/trend among especially young people;
- other personal/individual reasons.

Who are the people interested in Jewish studies? Certainly there is not one type or group of them. Both scholars and students represent all regions of Poland and almost all possible social and religious backgrounds. Only a minor percentage of them are Jewish (or of Jewish origin), and that means that most people involved in Jewish studies in Poland today are Christian Poles—mainly Catholics and Protestants.

Among the factors that raise, strengthen or refresh the interest in Jewish studies one should mention the important publications—either popular (e.g. the novels and stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer) or controversial (the historical essays by Jan T. Gross), movies

(e.g. *Schindler's List*), media projects or the opening of new museums and exhibitions (such as the soon to be opened Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw).

As for the institutions offering either research or possibilities of studying Jewish issues, one might be surprised that almost all of them are state universities (e.g. the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, University of Wrocław, University of Warsaw) and state-supported institutions (e.g. Jewish Historical Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences). However, it must be added that most of the projects in the field of Jewish studies are also supported by international Jewish foundations (e.g. Rothschild Foundation Europe, Taube Foundation, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation), organizations and groups (e.g. the Association of Cracovians in Israel) and individual sponsors.

To conclude, I would like to refer to Raphael Scharf's words on Polish-Jewish relations: "The paths of 'two of the saddest nations on the earth' have been parted forever. I wonder how far the Poles are aware of the fact that with the Jews an authentic part of their Poland was obliterated. The question begs to be asked: Will that Poland one day be better, richer in spiritual goods without the Jews?"²¹ The growing interest in Jewish studies, their development in Poland as well as the attention paid to the history and culture of Polish Jews show at least great respect and sentiment. They might be also understood as sincere missing of the authentic Jewish part of Poland and an attempt to recreate it by studies and research accompanying the slow but promising revival of Jewish life in Poland. Jewish studies in Poland, along with the revival of Jewish culture, has become a phenomenon of the contemporary Polish attitude to the Jewish heritage, and its scale and intensity remains unique in the European context. This increasing interest in Jewish studies in Poland is worth attention, especially bearing in mind that the knowledge promoted within the framework of academic institutions helps to understand the past and present and to fight any stereotypes and anti-Semitic sentiments. Experts in Jewish studies play a significant role in supporting the process of preservation and promotion of Jewish heritage, as part not only of Poland's, but more generally of European heritage. Polish centers of Jewish studies not only cooperate with the best partner institutions in Europe, the United States and Israel, but are often considered the leading ones. Certainly, the program in Jewish studies offered by the Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków competes today with the biggest ones at University College London or Potsdam University, and the number of students enrolled in the classes is very often higher than similar ones at American universities.

²¹ Cf. A. Polonsky, *op. cit.*, p. 32.