

GAL-ED | On the History and Culture of Polish Jewry



Gal-Ed is a peer-reviewed journal, published continuously since 1973.

Publications of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center
Book 207



GAL-ED

On the History and Culture of Polish Jewry

Volume 26-27

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Associate Editors: Scott Ury, Avner Holtzman and Adam Teller

The Institute for the History of Polish Jewry and Israel-Poland Relations

The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center

Tel Aviv University

2021

The publication of this collection was made possible by the support of Beth Shalom Aleichem and the Faculty of Humanities at Tel Aviv University

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ISSN 0334-4258

Cover picture: A child drinking from a feeding bottle. From the book *Artzneybuch köstlich für mancherley Kranckheit des gantzen Leibs [...] gegeben*. Erfurt: M. Sachse, 1546.

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CONTENTS

PREFACE – Gershon Bacon	9
--------------------------------------	---

ARTICLES

Aleksandra Jakubczak

‘Protecting the Jewish Daughters’: Mass Migration, Trafficking, and the Crisis of Traditional Jewish Society, 1880s-1914	15
---	----

Marta Marzanska-Mishani

Hersh David Nomberg and the lost ‘mother land’	41
--	----

Kamil Kijek

“The Road to Przytyk”: Agitation and the Sociotechnique of Violence in the Kielce region, 1931-1936	59
--	----

Anne Klotz

The Warsaw Yiddish press and its struggle against the Persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, 1933-1935	103
---	-----

Maria Ferenc

<i>The ghetto decree gnaws away at our depressed world!</i> Rumors about the ghetto in Warsaw, 1939-1940	131
---	-----

Elżbieta Kossewska

The Hebrew Translation of <i>Mitologia</i> [Mythology]: The Correspondence of Jan Parandowski, David Lazer and David Ben Gurion.....	161
--	-----

Bożena Szaynok

Jewish Affairs in the Operations of State Security Services in East Central European Communist Countries, 1948-1953	185
--	-----

Monika Stępień

The Returns of Polish Jews to Their Hometowns in Light of Personal Document Literature. Examples from Warsaw, Łódź and Kraków	207
--	-----

NARRATIVE

Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak and Gabriel N. Finder

Apart: Polish-Jewish Relations in Communist Poland Part II	227
--	-----

BOOKS

Ela Bauer

Daniel Blatman (ed.), *Historia Mitnageshet veKiyum Meshutaf: Perspektivot Hadashot al haMifgash haYehudi Polani* [Conflicting Histories and Coexistence: New Perspectives on the Jewish-Polish Encounter]271

Przemysław Zawada

Zofia Trębacz, *Nie tylko Palestyna. Polskie plany emigracyjne wobec Żydów 1935-1939* [Not only Palestine: Polish emigration plans towards Jews].....281

Gershon Bacon

Marcin Wodziński, *Hasidism: Key Questions*

Marcin Wodziński, *Historical Atlas of Hasidism*284

ENGLISH SUMMARIES OF HEBREW ARTICLES293

CONTRIBUTORS TO GAL-ED VOLUME 26-27299

HEBREW SECTION

PREFACE – Gershon Bacon 11

Anat Vaturi

Similar but Different: Breastfeeding among Jews and Christians in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and its Demographic Implications..... 15

Arie Yariv

The History of the Jewish-Karaite Community Leadership (*Wójt*) in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth..... 37

Chen Mandel Edrei

“Stories that I have heard from men of truth”: Authority, Poetics, and Modernization in Hasidic Hagiography..... 69

Oz Bluman

Antokolsky as a Man: Hillel Zeitlin and Visual Art in Vilna 101

Simha Shlasky

Constructing a Career through a Youth Movement: *Hashomer Hatzair* in Interwar Poland 123

Irit Eilam-Abadi

The Image of the Jewish *Shtetl* as a Graveyard in Hebrew and Yiddish Literature up to 1939 157

Jacob Barnai and Irith Cherniavsky

‘To be a Communist with all your Heart and Soul is not easy’: Kalman Gelbard (1905-1950) – The Story of a Polish-Jewish-Israeli Communist 175

IN MEMORIAM

Matityahu Mintz (1923-2017)

Marcos Silber 215

BOOKS

Yaacov Shavit

Daniel Kupfert Heller, Jabotinsky’s Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism..... 231

Naomi Sarig

Serguey R. Kravtsov, Vladimir Levin, *Synagogues in Ukraine: Volhynia* 235

Marcos Silber

Shoshana Ronen, A Prophet of Consolation on the Threshold
of Destruction: Yehoshua Ozjasz Thon, an Intellectual Portrait 241

Ruthie Abeliovich

Diego Rotmann, *HaBama keBa'it Era'i: haTeatron shel Dzigan
ve Schumacher (1927-1980)* [The stage as a Temporary Home:
On Dzigan and Schumacher's Theatre (1927-1980)] 245

HEBREW SUMMARIES OF ENGLISH ARTICLES 249

BOOKS RECEIVED 253

ERRATUM..... 256

PREFACE

We are pleased and honored to present this latest volume of Gal-Ed to the scholarly and reading public. This is the first volume to appear after the three decades of able editorship of David Engel, and I thank him for his encouragement and support as we enter a new era in the history of this distinguished journal. His is definitely a hard act to follow.

The wide variety of subjects covered in this volume reflects the sweep of the field of Polish-Jewish studies, both chronologically and topically. Regarding the former, of late there is a decided skewing of research interest and activity towards the modern era, leaving the medieval period and the so-called Golden Age of Polish Jewry generally neglected.

Another aspect of Polish-Jewish studies that should not be taken for granted is its truly international scope, with scholars from Israel, Poland, the United States and Canada, and a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe participating regularly in international conferences, collaborating on research projects, and generally creating an ongoing, vibrant community of scholars. This reality has developed over the last three or four decades, but remains for me a source of wonder and inspiration. The list of contributors to this present volume reflects this new and important change in the field.

In the Hebrew section of this present volume, we have two articles that are a welcome exception to the relative dearth of studies on pre-modern or early modern topics. Marshalling an impressive variety of sources, both Jewish and general, Anat Vaturi offers a convincing comparative analysis of nursing practices of Jewish and non-Jewish families in Poland-Lithuania, demonstrating how longstanding Jewish customs in this area promoted the survival of infants in the crucial first years of life. Vaturi's findings are a significant contribution to the ongoing debate among historians and demographers regarding the relatively high natural increase among Polish Jews. Arie Yariv chronicles the history and unique structure of the communal leadership of the Karaite community

in Poland-Lithuania. Using a diverse assortment of archival and printed sources, Yariv analyzes the evolving nature of the office of Judge of the Karaites, showing both similarities and differences between that office and the elected communal leadership of the Rabbanite communities. An appendix to the article lists the holders of office of Judge of the Karaites over three centuries.

In the single historical article in the present volume dealing with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aleksandra Jakubczak examines Jewish reactions to the trafficking of women and prostitution in Eastern Europe. Her paper analyzes the responses of Jewish elites in Eastern Europe through the lens of moral panic to demonstrate the direct link between the Jewish discourse on trafficking and the deeper crisis of authority within the Jewish community. Trafficking narratives reflected larger anxieties about a changing society that, unlike Argentina and the United States, was not facing a large population influx, but was in fact facing the opposite — significant transformation due to the out-migration of its members.

Three articles deal with the interwar period. Kamil Kijek provides a new perspective on the anti-Jewish agitation and violence in Poland in the 1930s. On the basis of new archival material, he presents a case study of activities of the Polish radical right in Kielce province in the years 1931-1936. It was in this region that several of the most-publicized examples of anti-Jewish violence took place, as well as hundreds of other, largely unreported incidents. Kijek demonstrates the key role played by outside, urban agitators who came to small towns and villages, exploiting the growing economic crisis in the Polish countryside to blame Jewish "economic exploitation" for the plight of the peasants, preaching violence against the Jews and attacking the government for serving as the Jews' protectors. In a sociologically-based study, Simha Shlasky's Hebrew article describes the construction of a new career path for youth developed by the *Hashomer Hatzair* youth movement. Instead of the traditional view of "takhlis," a practical view of career aspirations based on acquiring the educational and social tools for a career that would enable young people to find their place in Polish society and establish and provide for a family, the movement offered an alternative vision of a "career" centered on preparation for emigration to the Land of Israel and communal existence

on a kibbutz. Anne Klotz discusses the role of the Warsaw-based Yiddish press in the struggle against the persecution of Jews in the early years of the Nazi regime in Germany. Jewish journalists in Poland had long regarded their role as educational and not just informational. In the case of Nazi Germany, they not only wanted to cover the news about events there, but also to collect evidence and mobilize the Jewish community of Poland to become part of the protest movement. The author describes the involvement of leading journalists in the boycott actions, and also shows the methods of gathering information and reporting on ongoing events at a time when the new regime put severe limits on foreign Jewish journalists.

As regards the Holocaust period, Maria Ferenc discusses the functioning of rumors among the Jewish and Polish population surrounding the creation of a ghetto in Warsaw during the period from the beginning of the German occupation of the capital until the actual creation of the ghetto in the fall of 1940. She surveys the mechanisms employed by Jewish and Polish inhabitants of the city to "decode" the meaning of actions and rumors of actions regarding the eventual establishment of the largest of Polish ghettos. Her analysis is grounded in findings in general sociological and psychological research.

As regards the period of Communist rule in Poland, Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlik and Gabriel N. Finder present the second and final installment of their monograph on Polish-Jewish relations in Communist Poland between 1945 and 1989. In this section of their synthetic and interpretive essay, they examine several key topics: the divided collective memory of Poles and Jews; Poland's relations with the State of Israel; the ambiguous embrace of Poland's Jews and its Jewish past by forces in Polish society opposed to the Communist regime; and the postwar Polish government's failure to resolve Jews' legitimate claims to property abandoned or looted during the Holocaust. In the article's conclusion the authors summarize their overall findings. Bożena Szaynok widens the perspective to discuss the ways in which the security apparatus in the Communist states in Eastern Europe, including Poland, dealt with Jewish affairs in the last years of Stalin's rule. In many ways the patterns established in the USSR served as a model for the policies carried out in the satellite states. Using a combination of archival and printed sources, the author describes the

general features of that model and shows how it was adopted in those states, but is careful to point out the many local variations in those policies. In their Hebrew article, Jacob Barnai and Irith Cherniavsky examine a number of aspects of the history of Jewish Communists in Poland and Israel in the first half of the twentieth century through the lens of the biography of a leading Communist activist, Kalman Gelbard (1905-1950). Assembling an impressive number of sources, the authors trace his life from his early years in Płońsk, through his Communist activity in interwar Poland, in Mandate Palestine and the first years of the State of Israel, to his final illness and tragic end in a sanatorium in Poland. Finally, Monika Stępień analyzes forty narratives of return of Polish Jews to their hometowns after the Holocaust, returns that took place between 1957 and 1990. All of the returnees whose texts were analyzed in this paper share common generational experiences: childhood in interwar Poland, surviving the Holocaust, and emigration from Poland. In most of the narratives, the ultimate goal of the return was to visit the former family home.

In the literary sphere, the present issue of Gal-Ed includes five articles. Chen Mandel-Edrei's Hebrew article presents an original perspective on the development of Hasidic hagiographical literature in mid-nineteenth century Galicia. Using critical-literary tools, she demonstrates that the new Hasidic hagiography also took part in modern literary discourse, and that it was a reaction to the organizational transformation and changes in consciousness that swept Galician Jewry in that era. Oz Bluman's Hebrew article offers an innovative interpretation of the Vilna years (1905-1906) in the career of Hillel Zeitlin. The author contends that it was not just the momentous political events of the time (pogroms, revolution, emigration and war) that affected Zeitlin's intellectual and artistic development. He also underwent an aesthetic transformation, as expressed in his Yiddish essay on the sculptor Mark Antokolsky. Bluman suggests that it is no exaggeration to claim that the later Zeitlin — Hasidic author, mystic and translator of the Zohar — began his unique path with his encounter with the visual arts in Vilna. A Hebrew translation of Zeitlin's essay is appended to the article. Irit Eilam-Abadi's Hebrew article on the image of the shtetl as a cemetery in Hebrew and Yiddish literature until 1939 is an important contribution to understanding the large number of literary works dealing

with the perception of the decline and imminent disappearance of the traditional Jewish market town. The article includes interesting analyses of specific works, most notably Agnon's *Guest for the Night* and Peretz's short story "City of the Dead." Marta Marzanska-Mishani analyzes the enigmatic, brooding figure of Hersh David Nomberg (1876-1927), a colleague and friend of major Hebrew and Yiddish writers of his era, but whose works in those languages have been relatively neglected. The author offers a reading of several of Nomberg's earliest stories, showing the development of Nomberg's personality and of his most famous literary construct – the young Jewish intellectual traumatized by the loss of his familiar world (the "talush" of Hebrew literature that Nomberg brought to Yiddish literature as well). The final literary item, by Elżbieta Kossewska, presents the improbable correspondence between three figures surrounding the Hebrew translation of a Polish volume on mythology. The volume, about the myths of the ancient Greeks and Romans, was published in Hebrew soon after Israel's independence. The author, Jan Parandowski, the translator David Lazer, and David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, had a shared fascination with antiquity, which emerges clearly from the correspondence. Kossewska provides background information about the three men and about the reception of Polish literature in the young Israeli state.

The section on necrologies in this volume includes the sweeping and moving bio-historiographical essay by Marcos Silber on his mentor Matityahu Mintz (1923-2017).

A series of reviews and review essays rounds out this volume of Gal-Ed.

At the completion of Volume 26 of Gal-Ed, I would like to thank all those who made its production possible. First of all, thanks to my associate editors, Avner Holtzman, Scott Ury and Adam Teller, who have always been ready to assist, whether in the Sisyphean task of seeking out contributors or in reviewing submissions. Special thanks to my managing editor, Dror Segev, who has been an endless source of information and guidance, serving as the keeper of the "institutional memory" of the journal. Last but not least, my thanks to the many people who, in material matters and those of the spirit, made the publication of this volume possible: Prof. Havi Dreifuss, head of the Institute for the History of Polish Jewry and Israel-Poland Relations at Tel Aviv University; Prof.

Avraham Novershtern, head of the Shalom Aleikhem House; Avi Ben-Amity, language editor of the Hebrew section; Ruvik Danieli, editor of the English section; Sara Appel, secretary of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center at Tel Aviv University. To all of them, our thanks and appreciation for their important assistance.

Gershon Bacon