

GALLERY 7: HOLOCAUST, 1939–1944

G7



Religious life in the Warsaw ghetto

RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

“All . . . Jews who perished at the hands of the evil ones . . . are martyrs, even those who had not been forced to deny their Jewish faith,” wrote Rabbi Szymon Huberband, a member of Oyneg Shabes, the secret Warsaw ghetto archive. Diaries written by Jews trapped in the Warsaw ghetto reveal their struggle to follow their religion. The Germans demolished →**synagogues**, desecrated cemeteries, and forbade →**kosher** slaughter. Religious life moved underground. The Germans also ordered Jewish converts to Christianity to move to the ghetto. They attended the two Catholic churches in the ghetto.

Pass through the first five sections of the Warsaw Ghetto area to the one with illuminated panels on the wall. The central one is an interactive screen.

GALLERY 8: POSTWAR YEARS, 1944 TO THE PRESENT

G8



Film presenting the burial of desecrated Torah scrolls

RESTORING DIGNITY

→**Torah** scrolls profaned by the Germans during the Holocaust were discovered just after the war in the Łódź ghetto area. The burial of the scrolls at the Jewish cemetery in Łódź was captured on film. Torah scrolls, the most sacred object in Judaism, must be treated with the same respect as a human body, and if damaged, given a proper burial – or stored in a safe place. Bodies in mass graves were exhumed and also given proper burial. Listen to a →**cantor** chanting *El male rakhamim* (God full of compassion), a prayer for the dead.

On your left, as you enter the gallery, is a wall of “registration forms.” Straight ahead, projected at high level is a film showing the ritual burial of Torah scrolls.



Interactive interviews

AFTER 1989

Although one does not have to be religious in order to be Jewish, “Each one of us has had religious ancestors,” remarked one woman. In a series of video interviews, Jews in Poland answer the question: “What does it mean to be a Jew in Poland?” Religious life, which had been marginalized during the communist period, showed small signs of renewal during the late 1980s. Today, Jews in Poland can join Orthodox and progressive congregations. Even those who do not consider religion important may celebrate Jewish holidays with family and friends.

Final section of the exhibition.

From the collections of: Beit Hatfutsot: Museum of the Jewish People, Filmoteka Narodowa, Jewish Historical Institute, Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, St. Mary's Church in Kraków, Yad Vashem, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.



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Thematic Tour: Jewish Religious Life

Explore the religious life of Polish Jews in all its variety from the Middle Ages to the present, starting with these fourteen highlights.

GALLERY 2: FIRST ENCOUNTERS, 965–1500

G2



Detail from the Altar of Veit Stoss

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Jesus is debating with the →**rabbis** in the Temple in this scene from the 15th-century altar by Veit Stoss in St. Mary's Church in Kraków. Their exchange symbolizes the debate between Judaism and Christianity. Both faiths are based on the Bible, but Jews and Christians interpret this book differently. For Christians, the Old Testament prefigures the New Testament, which Jews do not accept. Accordingly, Jews were to be tolerated because they witnessed the life and martyrdom of Christ, but subordinated because they did not accept Christianity.

Walk towards the wooden stronghold, past the round bracteate table with its two round interactive screens. On the opposite wall are the Gniezno Doors. To their right is the scene showing Jesus debating with the rabbis in the Temple.

GALLERY 3: PARADISUS IUDAEORUM, 1565–1648

G3



Interactive table devoted to the *Shulhan arukh*

SHULHAN ARUKH

Explore the *Shulhan arukh*, a concise code of Jewish law related to the →**Sabbath**, holidays, →**kashrut**, and many aspects of daily life. The original text, by Joseph Caro, reflected →**Sephardi** custom. The notes by the Remu, as →**Rabbi** Moses Isserles was known, reflected the →**Ashkenazi** customs of Polish Jews. The Remu called his notes a *mapa*, tablecloth, for Caro's *Shulhan arukh*, which means “set table” in →**Hebrew**. This book, with the Remu's notes, was first printed in Kraków in 1578–1580 and continues to guide Jewish religious life to this day.

On entering the gallery, make a hard left and approach the printing presses beneath a large map of Europe. On a bench opposite the printing presses is a standing interactive screen where you can explore the *Shulhan arukh*.

TORAH AND TALMUD

The →**Talmud** is the most important compilation of Jewish legal literature. The trunk represents the →**Torah**, the first five books of the Bible. The branches represent the commentaries and other texts “growing” from the Torah. Together they form the Talmud. A life devoted to studying Talmud continues to be an ideal for many Orthodox Jewish men.

Just past the printing presses is the library. Touch the tree trunk and branches on the central interactive table to explore the evolution of the Talmud.



Talmud interactive table

GALLERY 4: THE JEWISH TOWN, 1648-1772

G4



Cupboard with glass cabinet containing an eighteenth-century edition of the *Tsene-rene*



Replica ceiling of the Gwoździec synagogue

WOMEN'S PIETY

The *Tsene-rene* is one of the most popular →**Yiddish** books ever printed. The author translated and adapted the →**Hebrew** Bible as well as commentaries on it. Women would read the *Tsene-rene*, often called a woman's Bible, on the →**Sabbath** and holidays. This original illustrated edition from the 18th century is in a sideboard together with original ritual objects: candlesticks for lighting candles on the eve of the Sabbath and holidays, a silver goblet for blessing wine, and an oil lamp for the holiday of Hanukkah.

On entering the gallery, turn right into the Marketplace. Enter the Jewish Home, behind the second façade on your left. Inside the green cupboard is the *Tsene-rene*.

WOODEN SYNAGOGUE

The →**synagogue** is at the center of Jewish communal life. The original Gwoździec synagogue was built around 1650. Its interior, which was covered with hand-painted prayer texts, zodiac signs, animals, and flowers, was renovated in 1729. The central bimah, the platform for the public reading from the →**Torah** scroll, is typical of Polish synagogues. The Gwoździec synagogue was destroyed around 1914, but in 2011 and 2012, a team of 300 volunteers and experts, led by Handhouse Studio, reconstructed the roof and magnificent painted ceiling using traditional materials and tools. There were once more than 150 wooden synagogues in the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. None of them have survived.

GALLERY 5: ENCOUNTERS WITH MODERNITY, 1772-1914

G5



Film about the modern Volozhin yeshiva

MODERN YESHIVA

Why are the hands of the clock moving so quickly? Twenty-four hours pass in less than five minutes in this film about a day in the modern →**yeshiva** in Volozhin, which was established in 1803. Hundreds of young men in this private religious academy studied the →**Talmud** and other religious texts day and night. In the modern yeshiva, the study of →**Torah** was an end in itself, rather than preparation for earning a living as a →**rabbi**. The earliest yeshivas in Poland date from the 16th century.

Proceed through the first few sections of the gallery until you come to the Wedding. From there, pass through the Haskalah to the modern Yeshiva, where you will see a film is projected on the entire wall.



Interactive screen featuring kvitlekh sent to tsadik Eliyahu Guttmacher

HASIDISM

Explore the petitions, kvitlekh, that →**Hasidim** send or hand to their →**tsadik**, their religious leader, during an audience. The *tsadik* might offer advice, a blessing, or an amulet. *Kvitlekh* are an expression of faith in the *tsadik* to intercede with God. Here are some of the 6000 *kvitlekh* from 707 locations that were sent to one *tsadik*, Eliyahu Guttmacher, in a single year, 1873-1874. Hasidism is a mystical movement of religious renewal that emerged in the 18th century in Podolia and spread rapidly thereafter.

From the yeshiva, enter the space devoted to Hasidism.



Scale model of the Great Synagogue on Tłomackie Street

GREAT SYNAGOGUE

The Great →**Synagogue** on Tłomackie Street in Warsaw, which opened in 1878, was the pride of progressive Jews. These "Poles of the Mosaic faith" identified with Polish language and culture and believed in the possibility of integration. While services in the Great Synagogue were in →**Hebrew**, the sermons were in Polish, and women sat in a separate gallery. Listen to the voice of Gershon Sirota, one of the Great Synagogue's cantors, who was the first →**cantor** to make a sound recording.

Go straight from the Train Station, through two spaces devoted to industrialization, to the far wall of the gallery and area dedicated to integration.

GALLERY 6: ON THE JEWISH STREET, 1918-1939

G6



Presentation of the Agudas Yisroel party

AGUDAS YISROEL

The platform and achievements of Agudas Yisroel, the religious party, are featured in a film and supported by two original objects: a pocket edition of the →**Talmud** for study anywhere at anytime, and a pushke, money box, for donations for the prestigious →**Yeshivas** Chachmey Lublin (Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin), which opened in 1930. As perhaps the largest and most modern Jewish talmudic academy of its day, Yeshivas Chachmey Lublin was a symbol of the strength of Orthodoxy. Agudas Yisroel defended religious tradition and opposed the secularism of other Jewish parties.

Upon entering the Street, go to the right and into the area dedicated to Politics. At the center of the far wall is a presentation of Agudas Yisroel.



Presentation of a Hasidic wedding in Bobowa

HASIDIC WEDDING

The wedding of the daughter of the Bobover →**tsadik** in March 1931 was such a spectacular event that Światowid, the Polish photographic agency, sent Ze'ev Aleksandrowicz to photograph it. Thousands of →**Hasidim** from far and wide flocked to Bobowa to attend the wedding. They were welcomed by Hasidim on horseback in costume. "It is our custom to dress up as Cossacks, Cracovians, uhlans, and hussars to bring joy to the wedding, just like on Purim," they told a reporter from *Nowy Dziennik*. Joyful processions, accompanied by music, made their way to the hupah, the wedding canopy, where the marriage ceremony took place. Photoreportage of this event appeared in the Polish and →**Yiddish** press in Poland and New York.

Upon entering the street, go to the left and straight through the section on Vilna to a corridor and stairs to the mezzanine. At the top of the stairs, turn right into the area covered with maps and head for the far left corner, where there is a sign "Bobowa."



School desk presenting religious schooling

RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

"I was sent to a heder at the age of 3," a young man recalled. Open the last school desk to see films from the 1930s about the religious school system, from →**heder**, a primary school for boys, to →**yeshiva**, an academy for young men. Under pressure from the Polish state, the religious schools agreed to introduce a few secular subjects. The Beys Yankev schools, founded by Sara Schenirer, provided girls with a modern religious and secular education. There were also Jewish secular schools, but most Jewish children attended Polish public schools.

Return to the top of the stairs and head for the second part of the mezzanine. Pass through the Family Album area and Courtyard to reach the classroom.