



Culture in the Warsaw ghetto

“COOLIES” – SONG PERFORMED IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

Jews resisted the dehumanizing conditions of the Warsaw ghetto in many ways, among them in poetry and song. *Kulis* (“Coolies”) describes the plight of Jewish rickshaw drivers in the ghetto: “A Jew can be a coolie, too ... He’s been tested by good and bad ... [He] stands tall despite his troubles. He pulls it all around.” Sh. Sheynkinder wrote the →**Yiddish** words, which were sung to a prewar “Chinese” tune. Diana Blumenfeld, who performed this song in the Warsaw ghetto, recorded this song right after the war. Her performance can be heard here, accompanied by German film footage of bicycle rickshaws in the Warsaw ghetto.

Pass through the first four sections of the Warsaw ghetto area to the Culture section. “Coolies” is included in the film projected on the wall.

GALLERY 8: POSTWAR YEARS, 1944 TO THE PRESENT

G8

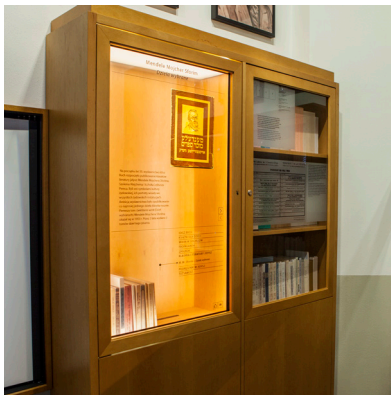


Sara Hurwic’s desk

SARA HURWIC’S QUESTIONNAIRE

“In which language are you most comfortable when thinking and speaking?” Sociologist Sara Hurwic (Irena Nowakowska) included this question in her 1948 survey of Jews registered in Łódź, Dzierżonów, and Warsaw. She concluded from the 817 responses that 84% of the respondents knew →**Yiddish**, but that Polish was gaining ground. Read what the respondents had to say about Yiddish at the interactive presentation on Sara’s desk.

Walk straight through the first two sections of the gallery to Sara Hurwic’s desk. It is just before and across from the red table.



Interactive bookcase

YIDDISH BOOK PUBLISHING HOUSE (*FARLAG YIDISH BUKH*)

Thanks to communist cultural policy – “national in form, socialist in content” – Poland became one of the largest publishers of →**Yiddish** books, second only to Buenos Aires, during the postwar period. *Yidish Bukh* published everything from a Yiddish translation of Julian Tuwim’s poetry for children and illustrated classics of Yiddish literature to propaganda volumes and Yiddish textbooks. *Yidish Bukh* and the books it published are presented in an interactive bookcase in the 1950s club, the setting for exploring Jewish life under communism. With the onset of Stalinism, pluralism ended, and the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) became the official Jewish organization, with the TSKŻ club a center of Jewish life.

The bookcase is on your left in the 1950s club, just past Sara Hurwic’s desk.

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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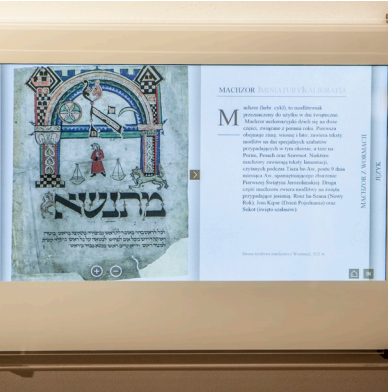


Yiddish: 14 Highlights

Yiddish, the vernacular language of Ashkenazi Jews, is a fusion of medieval German city dialects and Hebrew and Aramaic, with elements of Jewish Romance and Slavic languages. Yiddish arose in the medieval period in Germanic lands, known in Hebrew as Ashkenaz. Before the Holocaust, an estimated 13 million people spoke Yiddish. Today, almost 1 million speak Yiddish.

GALLERY 2: FIRST ENCOUNTERS, 965-1500

G2



Maḥzor Worms, interactive screen

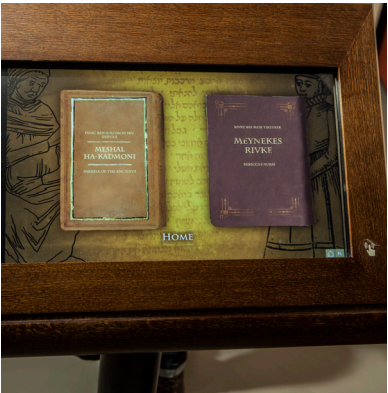
MAḤZOR WORMS – FESTIVAL PRAYER BOOK

The earliest known complete →**Yiddish** sentence appears in an illuminated →**Hebrew** manuscript dated 1272 – “Let a good day shine for him, who will carry this →**maḥzor**, festival prayer book, to the →**synagogue**.” These words are written inside large calligraphic Hebrew letters. This maḥzor was created for an elderly →**cantor** it was too heavy for him to carry. Pages from this manuscript are featured in an interactive presentation of the culture and languages that →**Ashkenazi** Jews brought to Poland from German lands. Also presented here is a page from an illuminated festival prayer book in Yiddish that was made by a scribe from Kraków in the mid-16th century.

Walk towards the wooden stronghold, past the round bracteate table with its two round interactive screens. Continue to the Town Wall on your left. Beneath the first town, Magdeburg, is an interactive screen.

GALLERY 3: PARADISUS IUDAEORUM, 1569-1648

G3



Meynekes Rivke, interactive screen

MEYNEKES RIVKE – ADVICE FOR WOMEN

“Who has ever heard of or seen such a novelty? Has it ever happened in countless years that a woman has written something of her own accord?” This is how the printer of *Meynekes Rivke* (Rebecca’s Nurse) referred to Rivke bas Meir Tiktiner, the first Jewish woman known to have published a book. *Meynekes Rivke*, which she wrote in →**Yiddish**, offers moral instruction and advises Jewish women on housekeeping, good family relations, and raising Jewish children. The book was first printed in 1609 in Prague, where Rivke had died a few years earlier. Not only her name – Tiktiner refers to Tykocin, a town near Białystok – but also some features of her Yiddish point to her possible Polish origins. On entering the gallery, make a hard left and approach the printing presses beneath a large map of Europe. Just past the printing presses is the library. Touch the interactive screen at one of the lecterns.

GALLERY 4: THE JEWISH TOWN, 1648-1772

G4



Excerpts from *tkhines*

TKHINES – WOMEN’S PRAYERS

Tkhine imohos (Supplication of the Matriarchs) is a prayer written in Aramaic and →**Yiddish** by a woman for women. Leah Horowitz, daughter of a →**rabbi** and learned herself, wrote the prayer during the late 18th century. Women were to recite this prayer on the →**Sabbath** before Rosh Ḥodesh, the day of the month when the new moon appears, an occasion of special importance to Jewish women. Women also recited *tkhines* when lighting the Sabbath candles or in relation to childbirth, illness, finding marriage partners for children, success in business, or safety when traveling. Some *tkhines* were recited at the cemetery in the hope that the dead would intervene on behalf of the living.

On entering the gallery, turn right into the Marketplace. Behind the second façade on your left is the Jewish Home. On the table are excerpts from *tkhines*.



Eighteenth-century edition of the *Tsene-rene*

TSENE-RENE – WOMEN’S BIBLE

The most popular book in →**Yiddish** was the *Tsene-rene* by Yankev ben Yitskhok Ashkenazi from Janów – the title comes from *Song of Songs* 3:11, “Go forth and see, daughters of Zion.” This book, which was intended for women, provided a summary of the weekly →**Torah** portion, abridged and paraphrased commentaries, and edifying stories. Later editions might also be illustrated. Mothers would read from this book on the →**Sabbath** and holidays and tell the stories to their children. The earliest edition to survive is dated 1622.

The *Tsene-rene* is inside the green cupboard in the Jewish Home.

GALLERY 5: ENCOUNTERS WITH MODERNITY, 1772–1914

G5



Modern Yiddish Culture

Y. L. PERETZ AND MODERN YIDDISH CULTURE

“Without →**Hebrew**, the folk has no past. Without →**Yiddish** we have no folk.” Y. L. Peretz wrote these words in 1908, when the question of a Jewish national language was hotly debated. Peretz was the leading Yiddish writer of his generation and a charismatic figure. For “Jewish writers, publishers, actors, sculptors, and painters ... being in Warsaw and not visiting Peretz was equivalent to being in Rome and not seeing the pope,” recalled Gershon Lewin. Enter Peretz’s literary salon, an interactive presentation of his life and influence. Nearby, explore the beginnings of Yiddish theatre and the Yiddish mass press.

On the wall to your left as you enter the last section of this gallery is a large portrait of Y. L. Peretz. On the desk below the portrait is an interactive screen.

YIDDISH THEATER

One of the earliest films of a →**Yiddish** theater performance is the 1916 silent movie of *Shulamis*, an operetta by Abraham Goldfaden, father of Yiddish theater. The silent film is accompanied here by one of the earliest sound recordings of songs from the Yiddish theater. The performers are from Gimpel’s Yiddish theatre in Lemberg, today Lviv, the first permanent Yiddish theater. These artists made about 600 recordings between about 1904 and 1911. Gimpel’s theater performed many Goldfaden works, many of them directed by Goldfaden himself. Aiming for a higher artistic standard, Esther Rokhl Kaminska, mother of the Yiddish theater, starred in the permanent Yiddish art theater established in Warsaw in 1909.

On the wall, below and to the right of the large portrait of Y. L. Peretz, is a screen.



Yiddish theater film presentation

GALLERY 6: ON THE JEWISH STREET, 1918–1939

G6



Collecting Yiddish folklore, interactive screen

YIDDISHLAND – VILNA AND YIVO

“→**Yiddish** itself has been recognized as a territory, an anarchic republic with its capital in Vilna,” and “YIVO is the scholarly academy of the territory of Yiddish.” So declared Noyekh Prilutski in 1935. The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research enlisted the Jewish public in its efforts to document Yiddish language and culture: “Help us collect treasures of Jewish folklore! In towns and cities around the world, where the Yiddish language is still alive, where Yiddish songs resound and Jewish stories and customs still persist – it is there that the treasures of our folklore are scattered. Let’s not lose them!” Become a YIVO zamler, a collector, at the interactive station dedicated to collecting Yiddish folklore.

Enter On the Jewish Street. The first archway on your left leads to Vilna.



The press wall



The Bund presentation



In the classroom

YIDDISH PRESS AND LITERATURE

Literarishe bleter, which appeared weekly from May 1924 to June 1939, brought modern Yiddish culture to Jews across the globe. The magazine also included features on the newest cultural developments in Poland and abroad. Articles on Albert Einstein, Esperanto, Julian Tuwim, the filming of *The Dybuk*, the latest book on motherhood, and visual and graphic art are featured in an interactive presentation of this magazine. On the wall, to the right, is an interactive presentation of modern Yiddish literature inspired by micrography, the art of composing the portrait of an author from the words of his text. On the opposite wall are the front pages of many Yiddish newspapers.

Pass from the Vilna area to the space with the dance floor. Below the portrait of Y. L. Peretz, are the *Literarishe bleter* interactive screen (left) and micrographic interactive screen (right).

BUND, THE JEWISH LABOR MOVEMENT

A rousing rendition of *Di shvue* (The Oath), recorded in the 1940s, is the earliest known sound recording of the Bund anthem. Sh. An-ski, author of *The Dybuk*, wrote the words in 1902. *Di shvue* was sung at meetings and demonstrations. The Bund, founded in 1897, defended workers' rights and →Yiddish language and culture. In a showcase on the far wall is the original commemorative cigarette case given to Vladimir Medem, a leader of the Bund, in 1917. Engraved on one side is a miniature of the Yiddish front page of the first issue of *Lebensfragen* (Life Questions), the labor weekly that he founded during the First World War.

Enter On the Jewish Street. The first archway on your right leads to Politics. The Bund presentation is at the far end.

YIDDISH SCHOOLS

Supporters of Jewish national culture in the →diaspora made education in the →Yiddish language a priority. In 1921 the Central Jewish School Organization CYSHO was created in Warsaw. Its schools, which were run mainly by members of the Bund, the Jewish labor movement, and Poalei Zion Left, a Zionist labor organization, promoted Yiddish secular culture and socialist ideas. By the late 1920s, there were 219 CYSHO branches, including primary schools as well as preschools, night schools, six middle schools, and a teachers' seminary in Vilna. Open the desk to explore the curriculum and activities of the Yiddish school system. You will find a Yiddish textbook, an anatomy exercise book, and postcards from an exhibition of student work.

Enter On the Jewish Street. Go through the first archway on your left, through Vilna, to a corridor and stairs to the mezzanine. Pass through the Family Album and Courtyard areas to reach the classroom. Open the second desk on the left.

GALLERY 7: HOLOCAUST, 1939–1944

G7



Emanuel Ringelblum, who created a secret archive

OYNEG SHABES

On 22 November 1940, Emanuel Ringelblum, a historian and social activist, established an underground archive, *OyNEG Shabes* (Joy of Sabbath), in the Warsaw ghetto. Risking their lives, the team collected every shred of evidence, from official German notices to ration tickets and diaries, in an effort to “provide an all-encompassing picture ... of what the Jewish population experienced, thought, and suffered.” Ringelblum wrote these words in his diary at the end of January 1943. Excerpts from his diary, in →Yiddish, appear vis-à-vis quotations from Adam Czerniaków's diary, in Polish. Czerniaków was head of the Judenrat.

Pass through the first part of the Holocaust gallery to the entrance to the Warsaw ghetto area, which is defined by its sloping grey walls.