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"I, child of a Jewish family.... was born on the Day of Atonement..."
— Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), b. Breslau 1891—d. Auschwitz 1942

"Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary—at least the alphabet and a few roots—in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on the social duties of the Christian."
— Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot), *Middlemarch*, 1871-72

Languages of the Bible and Polish—Jewish Relations

Abstract

This paper brings together two phenomena not commonly regarded as closely connected: linguistic patterns in ancient Biblical transmission, and Jewish-Christian relations as manifest in Polish-Israeli dynamics. After summarizing the nature of Jewish-Greek language in the Septuagint (LXX) and related texts, the discussion proceeds to an explanation of the "bifurcation of meaning" that arose between Jewish and Christian interpreters who read the same words. This exegetical and translational reality exerted a strong real-world effect on Jewish-Christian interaction throughout history. Medieval and modern Polish-Jewish and Polish-Israeli relations continue to bear the stamp of such ancient linguistic and theological reconfigurations. Today a renaissance of Jewish cultural life in Poland has energized Christians as well as Jews, opening up new possibilities for collaboration and mutual understanding. At the same time, political tensions related to conflicting versions of the past—particularly the Holocaust and its memory—have laid bare fundamental contradictions between and within Israeli and Polish self-perceptions. The paper argues that study of Biblical languages and early Judeo-Christian traditions is of great relevance for the current situation and for prospective future progress in fellow feeling and inter-national understanding.

Keywords: Jewish Greek, Hebrew Bible, Jewish-Christian relations, linguistic and cultural interaction, Poland, Israel.

In Poland, the complexities of Jewish-Christian relations cannot be avoided. A long shared history, with highlights and lowlights too numerous to list, has left an indelible stamp that continues to exert a powerful influence on mentalities, behaviors, and even international relations right down to the present day. In recent years connections between the peoples and governments of Poland and Israel have both flourished and floundered, exposing both mutual aspirations and searing wounds, common pasts and conflicting memories.

Beneath all the conflict and connection lies an oft-hidden, yet fundamental question of language. Throughout history, the Judeo-Christian heritages have engendered the warmest of affinities and the deepest of antagonisms, thanks in no small part to conflicting interpretations of ancient Biblical language. The theological animus that has usually reigned between Judaism and Christianity, and among their many varieties, lives off the sap of mutual and yet mutually incomprehensible conceptions. Even the most "basic" of shared terms—such as *faith, law, Messiah/Christ, salvation*—have conveyed and often still convey completely different, even diametrically opposed meanings and connotations within the Jewish and Christian religious traditions.

Poles and Jews are simultaneously bound together and torn apart by their common reliance on ancient Biblical texts as a foundational element of their respective national cultures, as well as by their inextricably linked and fraught national histories. Evidently neither the centrifugal nor the centripetal force can be overcome at the present time. While this paper makes no attempt to treat all the multidimensionality of either Biblical languages or Polish-Jewish relations, each of which represents an enormous field of study in itself, it will propose a peculiar understanding of ancient linguistic patterns as relevant for contemporary cultural contacts. Even abstruse academic debates about multilingual blending and fragmentation in the distant past have proven pertinent for new relations developing in our day between Jews and Christians, Poles and Israelis.

Ancient Jewish-Greek Language

The Jewish Tanakh, known to Christians as the Old Testament, comprises a library of diverse texts written over centuries or millennia and transmitted in Hebrew and Aramaic. The terminology and phraseology of these Semitic books, both narrative and poetic, do not lend themselves easily to translation. Already in the second century BCE, one translator famously drew attention to this dilemma, remarking (in Greek), "The same things uttered in Hebrew, and translated into another tongue, have not the same force in them... the law itself, and the prophets, and the rest of the books have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language" (Brenton 1851: 2.74). A more recent interpreter has accused modern Bible translators of having "placed readers at a grotesque distance from the distinctive literary experience of the Bible in its original language," while lamenting that even the best-intentioned translator must sometimes "abandon the admirable principle of lexical consistency" when confronted with the "bewildering diversity of meaning" inherent in many Biblical Hebrew key words (Alter 2019: xiv, xxx-xxxi).[1]

The result of translating the Tanakh into Greek, the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean world in the Greco-Roman period, was the creation of a special form of language commonly known as

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1   Note that lexical consistency is a particularly important issue when translating from Biblical Hebrew, which makes frequent and extensive use of wordplay, Leitmotifs, and similar literary devices. For a recent linguistic study of "the translation equivalence delusion," including with regard to Biblical texts, see Krzeszowski 2017.

"Jewish Greek."[2] This adaptation of Koine Greek appropriates Hellenistic concepts for Hebraic purposes, while also adding some new vocabulary (e.g., σάββατον/σάββατα [*sabbaton/sabbata*] from Hebrew/Aramaic (א)שבת [*shabbat(a)*], "Sabbath"). Thus, the Jewish-Greek Septuagint translation (LXX), produced in the third and second centuries BCE, employs Greek χριστός (*christos*) "oil-smeared" to stand for Hebrew משיח (*mashiach*) "anointed, Messiah." The literal, physical connection between the words is obvious, though the specific messianic overtones of "anointing with oil" would not have been evident to a Hellenistic reader uninitiated in Hebraic thought. Similarly, the Septuagint frequently translates the Hebrew verb ניחם (*nicham*), which has a range of meaning including "sigh deeply, pity, be comforted, repent" as μετανοέω (*metanoeō*) "change one's mind, rethink, repent." Again the translators' rationale is not difficult to detect, but the Hebraic connotations and connections of the Biblical concept would be decipherable only if read specifically as this peculiar Jewish Greek, rather than as Common Greek. The Septuagint's use of Greek νόμος (*nomos*) "custom, law" for Hebrew תורה (*torah*) "[divine] instruction"—another famous example—has been enormously consequential historically (on which, more below). With the benefit of a couple millennia of hindsight, the modern Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel (1955: 325) called this translation choice "a fatal and momentous error," while also conceding that it had been made for the usual reason of "lack of a Greek equivalent."[3]

Not only the lexicon, but also the syntax, idiom, and grammar of Jewish Greek reflect and incorporate Hebraic and other Semitic structures. As noted by the Jewish historian and language scholar Nicholas de Lange ([2001] 2007: 641), "These constructions echo in Greek common features of Biblical Hebrew," sometimes to an extreme degree. With regard to a later revision of the Septuagint, the same scholar remarks, "It is hard to imagine that Aquila's version was comprehensible to a Greek reader who had not been specially trained to read it" (de Lange [2001] 2007: 641). The linguist Jan Joosten (2015: 137; cf. 2016: 246-256) asserts that systematic peculiarities in the Septuagint itself "indicate the development of a Jewish-Greek sociolect."

First-century Jewish apocalyptic and messianic writings, including the collection known to Christians as the "New Testament" (NT), echo, imitate, and develop the Jewish-Greek language of the Septuagint. Bruce Metzger, a principal editor of the United Bible Societies critical edition of the Greek NT, spoke of the "Semitic coloring" of these texts, asserting that to understand their language requires a greater knowledge of the Hebrew Bible than of classical or Koine Greek. Quoting "the pregnant phrase of Albrecht Ritschl, 'the [Hebrew-Aramaic] Old Testament is the lexicon of the [Greek] New Testament,'" Metzger explained that "most of the religious terminology of the New Testament can be understood only as it is read against the background of the Hebrew Old Testament and its Greek translation, the Septuagint" (Metzger 1951: 46, 55). The Qumran scholar Jean Carmignac (1982-1985: 1.xi) went so far as to assert, "Whoever has not read the Gospels in Hebrew has not truly read them," since one must

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2   The term "Jewish Greek" designates the special style or form of language that is characteristic of much ancient Jewish literature composed and/or preserved in Greek. As explained below and in the cited studies, ancient Jewish authors writing in Greek often employed vocabulary in non-standard ways, introduced borrowings from Hebrew and Aramaic, and reflected the influence of Semitic idioms and constructions. Collectively such peculiarities indicate a distinct sociolect/ethnolect or (so to speak) literary patois. Joosten (2005) describes the Jewish Greek of the "New Testament," for instance, as consisting of three main elements: 1) Hellenistic Greek; 2) Septuagintal Jewish Greek; 3) a Semitic substratum.

3   For a recent survey of the concept, see Brague [2005] 2008.

"savor the Semitic fragrance they exude."[4] The modern French translator André Chouraqui (1989: 2059) remarked, "The genius of John [regarded as the author of the Gospel] consists also in using the Greek to express the mystery of a Hebrew vision. He has succeeded in creating a new language, a kind of Hebrew-Greek in which the Hebrew sky is reflected in the Hellenic mirror.... The linguistic substratum of John is essentially Hebrew... This reflection is valid, to varying degrees, for all the books of the New Testament."[5]

If one adds in the thoroughly intertextual nature of the content itself, the deep connection to the Hebrew Tanakh becomes all the more evident. The opening sentence of NT—Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (Matthew 1:1)—already testifies to an absolute dependence on the earlier literary and cultural tradition. The first two words (*biblos geneseōs*) appear in exactly that form in LXX Genesis 2:4 and 5:1, where they translate Hebrew תולדות (ספר) ([*sefer*] *toldot*) "(book of) generations/origins," and closely related forms may be found in several other places. With this in mind, the typical translation of Matthew's opening line as "The book of the genealogy" appears not only insipid, but also inaccurate. In its Hebraic intertextual context the phrase actually signifies something more like "An account of the origins and outcomes (of some major figure or reality)." Every other word in the opening statement is similarly bound to specific, preeminent notions from the Tanakh. Read as a specifically Jewish-Greek (rather than merely Greek) announcement, this opening line virtually screams with attention-grabbing meaning—a fact that is completely lost to many readers today. Practically every verse in the corpus can be analyzed along similar lines.

Even passages that in modern translations may sound particularly Christian (and non-Jewish) in fact bear witness to the utter dependence of the language of these originally Jewish messianic writings on the special semantic universe created via the Septuagint. As an example, consider this fragment from Revelation 1:5: "...καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός...," traditionally translated as "...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness..." Today it would be hard to imagine this phrase as anything but Christian. Yet in its vocabulary and non-standard syntax, this fragment precisely imitates the language of the Jewish-Greek Septuagint. The choice of words is identical: Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*) as a Hellenized transcription of יהושע/ישוע (*Yehoshua, Yeshua*) "Joshua, Jeshua, Jesus"; χριστός (*christos*) as a marker for משיח "anointed, Messiah"; μάρτυς (*martus*) as a translation of עד (*'ed*) "witness"; and πιστός (*pistos*) as a near equivalent for נאמן (*ne'eman*) "reliable, trustworthy." The reader or hearer who recognized these Hebraic associations would have been immediately transported to a whole network of meaning associated with these concepts in the linguistic and literary traditions of the Tanakh.

The Reconfiguration of Meaning

Regarding Jewish-Greek language in the NT, Joosten (2005: 56) has noted: "Theologians are perhaps relatively unaware of the problem [of the difference between Jewish and Koine forms of Greek]. The lexicon of Walter Bauer teaches them that ἀγαπάω [*agapaō*] means 'to love' and δόξα [*doxa*] means 'glory.' One needs to read other [non-Jewish] Greek texts to discover that the first word is not the usual one to express the meaning 'to love,' and that the normal meaning of the second one is not 'glory.'" In fact, most

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4   And this despite the fact that no ancient Hebrew versions of the Gospels are known!

5   For additional studies, see (e.g.): Hill 1967; Friedrich 1976; Sjölander 1979; Joosten 1996; Walser 2001; Drettas [2001] 2007; Edwards [2001] 2007; Janse [2001] 2007; Joosten 2009; Joosten and Kister 2010; Joosten 2013; Joosten 2018.

translators and interpreters make a double error when confronted with the peculiarities of Jewish Greek: historically they have tended to read this language not even as Common Greek, but rather through the prism of specifically *Christian* Greek (a later development, in which Greek terms came to be imbued with yet another type of religious signification). If one wishes to understand NT texts in their original historical, social, linguistic, and cultural context, this situation does indeed pose a serious "problem."

The case of Hebrew *torah* and Greek *nomos* is instructive in this respect. Largely as a result of the Greek translation, the Jewish *Torah* has long been regarded as "the Law." In traditional Christian theology, this "Law" was portrayed as fundamentally opposed to "Grace"—a contradiction practically impossible, even linguistically, in the Hebrew semantic universe. In the Hebrew Bible and Judaic traditions, the *torah* ("instruction") from God explicitly represented a manifestation of "grace" or great loving mercy (Heb. חסד *chesed*). Moreover, such a rereading of Hebraic concepts—once they had been extracted from their original contexts—entailed an extreme fragmentation and reconfiguration of meaning. How many English or Polish readers of the Bible today could recognize that the "teaching of kindness" (Pol. *nauka miłosierdzia*) which rests on the tongue of a virtuous woman translates the very same Hebrew words as King Josiah's "good deeds according to the Law" (Pol. *dobroczynności jego według tego, jako napisane w zakonie*)?[6]

To a certain extent, this issue of translation is familiar and unavoidable: Biblical Hebrew words cover ranges of meaning so different from those of modern languages that a translator must select only a particular slice of the relevant semantic area, while consciously disregarding other aspects (which may be very important!). Yet an additional systemic bias—undergirded for nearly two millennia by a self-reinforcing cycle of continual (mis)reading, theological (mis)interpretation, and (mis)translation—exacerbated the problem significantly, particularly in the case of Jewish-Greek texts. One of the clearest examples concerns the consistently skewed translation of the word συναγωγή (*sunagōgē*), as attested already in the Latin Vulgate and followed ever since by the vast majority of translations in all languages of the world. In the first century the word meant "an assemblage (of persons or things)"; it did not by itself connote anything specifically Jewish.[7] Yet in textual contexts with negative implications such as Revelation 2:9, Christian translations almost universally translate this word by the markedly Jewish "synagogue" (Lat. *synagoga Satanae*)—even though the immediately preceding words explicitly state that the people in question are "not Jews." By contrast, in perceived positive textual contexts—even when

6   Proverbs 31:26: תורת חסד (*torat chesed*) "the *torah* of *chesed*"; 2 Chronicles 35:26: חסדיו ככתוב בתורת... (*chasadav ka-katuv be-torat...*) "his *chesed* [pl.] according to what is written in *torah*." The two key words here are *torah* and *chesed*. The Polish translation given above follows the Biblia Gdańska; the Biblia Tysiąclecia has instead *miłe nauki* and *czyny pobożne, zgodne z tym, co napisane jest w Prawie*. Typical Polish translations of *torah* include *prawo, zakon, nauka, pouczenia*, etc.; traditional renderings of *chesed* include *łaska, miłosierdzie, życzliwość*, etc.

7   In ca. the first century CE at least eighteen different Greek terms designated the institution commonly known today as the Jewish "synagogue" (Runesson 2001: 171-173). The word *sunagōgē* (one of these terms, alongside *ekklēsia* and others) was used in Greek literature for various kinds of assemblies, including, of course, those unrelated to Jews/Judaeans. Hence, the term was generally qualified when intended to indicate a specifically Jewish/Judaean congregation. This can even be observed in the Jewish-Greek NT, where the Jewish/Judaean context is usually obvious or already assumed; e.g.: εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς τῆς Ἰουδαίας ("into the *sunagōgē* [pl.] of Judaea," Luke 4:44); εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν τῶν Ἰουδαίων ("into the *sunagōgē* of the Jews/Judaeans," Acts 14:1). Compare the abundance of other (Jewish and non-Jewish) Greek usages of *sunagōgē*, e.g.: συναγωγῆς τῶν λογιστῶν ("of the *sunagōgē* of the auditors", Attic inscription, Böckh 1828: 116-117 [no. 76, l. 9]); καὶ συνήχθη τὸ ὕδωρ... εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν ("and the waters gathered together... into their own *sunagōgē* [pl.]," LXX Gen. 1:9, Brenton 1851: 1.1).

the Jewish nature of the specified group is clear—the translations resort to neutral (i.e., not specifically Jewish) terms like "assembly" or "congregation" (see esp. Jacob/James 2:1, despite the fact that verse 1:1 names the addressed audience as "the Twelve Tribes in Diaspora").

Such apparently biased interpretations and translations played a significant role in associating the Jewish synagogue with demonic evil in the medieval Christian mindset.[8] The translation situation with regard to the synonymous contemporary term ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*) is a mirror image: most modern versions systematically render this word by the markedly Christian "church" in perceived positive contexts, but as neutral "assembly" or "congregation" in perceived negative instances (e.g., Matt. 16:18; Acts 12:5, 19:32, 19:39-40/41, despite the fact that the Latin Vulgate uses *ecclesia* in imitation of the Greek).

From a linguistic perspective, the result has been a bifurcation (at least) of originally unitary concepts. Christians and Jews came to mean rather different things when they used identical or originally equivalent Biblical terms. Thus, the Hebrew concept ברית (*brit*), rendered into Jewish Greek as διαθήκη (*diathēkē*), fractured into the Jewish or Ancient Near Eastern "covenant" and the new Christian "testament." Hebrew משיח (*mashiach*), translated into Jewish Greek as χριστός (*christos*), splintered into Jewish "Messiah" and Christian "Christ." These bifurcated offspring could even stand in direct opposition to each other, like the siblings Cain and Abel or Jacob and Esau, already in early Christian Greek. The fourth-century archbishop John Chrysostom preached: "This is what happened to the Jews: while they were making themselves unfit for work, they grew fit for slaughter. This is why Christ said: 'But as for these my enemies, who did not want me to be king over them, bring them here and slay them.'"[9] Even at this early stage, then, the Christian "Christ" had become the destroyer of Israel, whereas Jewish "Messiah" (supposedly an equivalent term) meant precisely the opposite—the King-Redeemer of Israel.[10]

Much the same could be shown for numerous other Biblical concepts. It is no exaggeration to say that this reconfiguration and bifurcation of meaning played an immense role in creating the long and deep chasm between Jews and Christians evident throughout history.

The Paradox of Polish-Jewish Relations

The little Jewish museum at the White Stork Synagogue (Synagoga pod Białym Bocianem) in Wrocław features an exhibit on a horrific event that occurred in this city in the year 1453. In what was then Breslau in Bohemia, the Catholic inquisitor John of Capistrano arrested dozens of Jews on the pretext of a host desecration libel. In the words of one witness, "He commanded to bring four cauldrons filled with glowing coals. He then ordered that they be stripped and each strapped tightly to a board, naked and face up. Then at his command four executioners ripped out pieces of their flesh with atrocious iron spikes and threw the pieces into the cauldrons to burn there."[11]

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8   For an overview, see Trachtenberg 1943.

9   St. John Chrysostom, "Against the Jews," in Harkins 1979: 8.

10 The reader should note that some Christian traditions preserved *both* meanings (termed here the "Jewish" and the "Christian" senses of the words), at least to some degree. The situation is more complex than can be expressed in a very brief summary. However, the existence of a pattern of bifurcated meanings of Biblical concepts should be evident from these examples.

11 Wojciech Kętrzyński (ed.), "De persecutione Iudaeorum Vratislaviensium A. 1453," in Małecki et al. 1884: 1–5 (quote on p. 5). Cf. Szymański (ed., trans.), "O prześladowaniu Żydów wrocławskich w roku 1453," in Tokarska-Bakir 2008: 689–691.

On that day John of Capistrano reportedly killed forty-one Jews in this gruesome manner. Subsequently all Jews were barred in perpetuity from residing in Breslau (a ban that would remain in force for about two centuries).[12] Such religiously motivated anti-Jewish actions were by no means rare in late medieval Europe, but nonetheless they did not meet with universal approval among contemporary Christians. The city scribe and chronicler Peter Eschenloer closed his own description of the slaughter with the following words: "Whether this is godly or not, I leave to the discernment of spiritual teachers. If, according to the Gospels, Christ said that this Jewish race shall not cease until the end of the world, then they will yet have a shepherd and a sheepfold."[13]

Across the border in Poland, the equally Catholic King Kazimierz IV Jagiellon was already taking steps in that direction. In the same fateful year of 1453, he ratified and reissued the Statute of Kalisz (originally granted by Bolesław Pobożny in 1264) regarding Jewish rights and privileges in his realm. Along with his confirmatory signature, King Kazimierz added a fuller explication of a concept already present in the original version: "And desiring that the Jews themselves, *whom we preserve as a special treasure for ourselves and our kingdom,* should acknowledge that in the time of our happy reign they were benefited by us..."[14]

Any substantial treatment of Polish-Jewish history necessarily lies outside the scope of this paper. However, it may not be entirely pointless to note briefly a few of the important moments along this path. Jews as well as Christians saw Poland as a land of refuge for a people persecuted and cast out of many other lands of Europe. In the sixteenth century the famous Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Kraków wrote, "In this country there is no fierce hatred of us as in Germany.... Had not the Lord left us this land as a refuge, the fate of Israel would have been indeed unbearable. But by the grace of God, the king and his nobles are favorably disposed toward us."[15]

The traditional favor granted by the Polish king and nobility did not always endear Jews to the rest of the local population. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Jewish agents frequently served as middlemen between the magnates and an oppressed peasantry, an economic circumstance that could exacerbate already existing religious anti-Jewish sentiment. And alongside the privileges noted above, the Crown and Church also imposed disabilities and restrictions on the Jewish population.

The remarkable Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791 that appeared during the age of Enlightenment-inspired revolutions aimed to change the prevailing national realities and move toward republican ideals. The Polish and American revolutionary hero Tadeusz Kościuszko viewed this pioneering accomplishment as a major step in the right direction, but nonetheless criticized its failure to deliver full equal rights for Jews and peasants (who together represented more than 80% of the population) alongside the nobility and burghers. Kościuszko also sponsored, as part of his Polish revolutionary movement, "the first wholly Jewish brigade formed since biblical times."[16] In the midst of the 1863 Polish revolt against Russian rule,

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12 See Graetz [1853-1878] 1894: 260–263; Miller 2008: 82–83.

13 Eschenloer 2003: 168–169 (quote on p. 169). Cf. Eschenloer 1827: 12–14; Eschenloer 1872. Eschenloer first wrote his briefer Latin chronicle and then the expanded German version: see Mrozowicz 2013: 459.

14 Pogonowski 1993: 39–58 (pt. 1, no. 2; quote on p. 57). *Emphasis* added. Cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Pogonowski 1993: 54; Linder 1987: 157–158 (no. 13). The phrase may have had an economic significance, but that need not be its only meaning.

15 Quoted in Weinryb 1973: 166.

16 See Storozynski 2009: 135-136, 140-141, 148-150, 153, 201-203, 248, *passim*.

many Jews and Poles again joined forces, inspired by a common patriotic sentiment. Yet Magdalena Opalski and Israel Bartal (1992) have provided an apt summary of the dénouement of that affair—and, perhaps, of the entire paradoxical relationship between these two nations through history—by titling their study *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood*.

It needs hardly be stated that the events of the twentieth century transformed the Polish-Jewish situation utterly. Before World War II, about three million Jews lived in Poland—and almost all of them vanished in an instant. The Polish nation suffered inexpressibly much at the same time. How is one to deal with historical traumas of such magnitude? Today both Israel and Poland are still finding their ways of coming to terms with this devastating past. And perhaps each needs something from the other in order to move forward.

Poland and Israel Today

Is there an "answer" or "solution" to the complex, painful, persistent question of Polish-Jewish relations? Can the "brotherhood" be resurrected and flourish?

Some steps have already been taken in this direction. A remarkable—some might say, miraculous—renaissance of Polish-Jewish cultural life has occurred over the last couple decades. Numerous Jewish cultural organizations have been revived; significant groups of Christians have partnered with them in a major upsurge of interest in Jewish themes in Poland. Leading cities like Warsaw and Kraków now regularly host festivals of klezmer, Jewish folk dance, Israeli cinema, and the like. Some Polish universities have recently established departments of Jewish Studies. Multiple organizations of Polish Christians volunteer to restore destroyed and long-abandoned Jewish cemeteries throughout the country. Jewish-Christian dialogue and joint Bible study groups have become commonplace.

This revival has happened very quickly. The White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław reopened only nine years ago, in May 2010, with a permanent exhibition on local Jewish history going back to the twelfth century. In 2014 the first ordination of rabbis and cantors in the city since World War II took place in the same synagogue-museum (JTA 2014). The massive POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews opened in Warsaw in 2013-14, with the expressed goal of showcasing a thousand years of Jewish life in Poland. A new Jewish Community Center in Warsaw also carries out a range of activities.

In 2015, during the so-called "Knife Intifada," a leading Polish security firm sent a team of experts to Israel at its own expense in order to help prevent and defend against attacks (JTA 2015). In 2016 local sponsors in Kraków launched the now-annual March of Remembrance and Life (*Marsz Pamięci i Życia*). At the inaugural event the Israeli ambassador to Poland, Anna Azari, remarked in a voice trembling with emotion, "I am sure that the majority of my colleagues working in the embassies of Israel in other European countries would very gladly switch countries with me" (Fundacja Polania 2016).

Most or all of these events have included significant *non-Jewish* initiative and participation. They join ongoing programs like the March of the Living, which bring thousands of Jewish young people to Auschwitz and other sites in Poland every year. Travel and tourism between the two countries has risen dramatically and continues to increase every year (e.g., Liphshiz 2018). When Israel opened a new airport in Eilat in March 2019, the first flight to land was from Poland (Lewis 2019). Events including

the academic conference that occasioned the writing of this paper regularly count both Polish and Israeli institutes among their sponsors. And so on and so forth.

The recent growth and visibility of Polish-Israeli ties also explains some, though certainly not all, of the intensity surrounding the international conflict that erupted over Poland's recent "Holocaust law," i.e., the 2018 amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (*Ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej—Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*). While criticizing the Polish legislation, the Simon Wiesenthal Center also observed that similar or even more problematic laws had been passed in other East European countries without provoking anything like the same outcry in Israel or around the world (Ahren 2018a).

The ostensibly legal and diplomatic conflict centers around differing perceptions of the historical roles played by Poles during the Nazi Holocaust. It has generated heated reactions in the Israeli and Polish presses, statements by leaders on both sides that have been judged highly offensive, public spats between historians and politicians, and the cancelation of an international summit of the Visegrad Group that was to have been held in Jerusalem (e.g., Ahren 2018b; Bielecki 2019; Gera and Heller 2019).[17] In the opinion of this writer, the intensity of national feeling manifest throughout the conflict—combined with the absence of similar reactions in parallel cases—bears witness to the depth of historical, cultural, and psychological ties that still bind Israel and Poland together. In the Israeli mindset, the very word *Polin* raises associations with the entirety of the Ashkenazi Jewish experience in Eastern Europe, including (especially) the Holocaust.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that a 2019 poll commissioned by the Polish government found that about half of Israelis view Poland negatively (Ahren 2019). Meanwhile, other surveys show that approximately a quarter of Poles hold traditional antisemitic beliefs, and well over a half subscribe to anti-Jewish conspiracy theories (Snyder 2014; cf., e.g., Liphshiz 2019; TOI 2019). Clearly some work remains to be done before true fraternity can be reached.

Concluding Thoughts: Ancient Languages and Current Relations

An underacknowledged motive and feature of the recent Jewish cultural renaissance in Poland consists in a marked upsurge of Christian interest in Jewish traditions and Biblical interpretations. A wide variety of Catholic (and other) groups now regularly participate in Jewish-Christian dialogue, host informational gatherings about Jewish history and culture, help to restore Jewish monuments, and march in solidarity with Israel. This author has been privileged to witness, participate in, and hear reports of many such activities in recent years.

An undercurrent within this new movement explores the nature of Biblical language, its historical interpretation, and the poignant real-world effects of the bifurcation of meaning that took place in the Jewish and Christian traditions. An increasing acknowledgment has developed to the effect that ancient misunderstandings and mistranslations lie behind much of the historical antipathy—and even

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17 On the academic side, a conference entitled "In Dialogue: Polish Jewish Relations" sponsored jointly by Columbia University, Fordham University, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research has been scheduled for May 2019 and aims to examine the historical background and contemporary conflicts related to "a controversial law making it an offense for anyone to accuse Poland of participating in the Holocaust or other Nazi crimes" (YIVO 2019).

contemporary tensions—between Jews and Christians, Poles and Israelis. From a certain perspective, the brotherhood and the antagonism, the entanglement and the conflict began already then. The modern countries of Israel and Poland have both inherited ancient traditions as part of their core identities; they are, to a certain extent, sibling children of that long-past era when distinct religious traditions and divergent linguistic understandings were being forged out of a common repository of shared texts.

It is therefore no coincidence that the new renaissance of Jewish-Christian activity in Poland has been taking place at a time when academic scholars are engaging in a thoroughgoing reexamination of all aspects of early Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Key misconceptions of history and language, passed on for centuries in both traditions, have been weakening as the new scholarship increasingly dismantles "what everyone knows."[18] New understandings of ancient texts and traditions open up new possibilities for mutual understanding in today's world. Today Poland and Israel remain inexorably bound together by history—and manifestly incapable of indifference toward the other's interpretations of the shared past. One hopes and devoutly believes that continued joint study of Biblical language, early Jewish and Christian traditions, medieval and modern Jewish and Polish history, and indeed the Nazi occupation and Holocaust can play a major role in creating that healthy, successful brotherhood yet to be fully seen between the nations of Poland and Israel.

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18 See, e.g., Fredriksen 2002; Boyarin 2004 (among a now vast literature).

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