

Introduction

1. S. Y. Agnon, *Kedumot*, tr. Hava Bar-Itzhak, *Jewish Poland Legends of Origin*, pg. 33

They [the Jews] went to the land of Poland and gave the king a mountain of gold. The king received them with great honor. The Lord had mercy on them and caused the king and ministers to show mercy to them. The king allowed them to settle in all the lands of his kingdom [...] and to worship the lord according to the tenets of their religion. The king protected them against any foe and adversary.

2. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, *Paradisus Iudaeorum* (1569-1648)

<https://www.polin.pl/en/wystawy-wystawa-glowna-galerie/paradisus-iudaeorum>

During this period Jews enjoyed a high degree of autonomy: they had their own self-government, including the Council of Four Lands (Vaad Arba Aratsot) – a phenomenon unique in Europe. Unlike in other countries, they experienced no mass religious persecution. On the contrary – they could develop their learning, print books, and sometimes even debate with Christian intellectuals. It is precisely at this time that prominent authorities on Jewish religious law lived and wrote. In the town of Kazimierz near Krakow, at the very heart of an influential Jewish community, the famous rabbi and thinker Moses Isserles, known as Remuh, wrote the Mappah, a collection of customs and religious precepts for Ashkenazi Jews. The second half of the sixteenth century brought yet another change: encouraged by the nobility, Jews began to settle on vast noble estates (latifundia) in the east of the country. They engaged in new activities: leasing inns, mills and breweries, trading in grain and cattle.

3. Elzbieta Janicka, *The Embassy of Poland in Poland: The Polin Myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews as Narrative Pattern and Model of Minority-Majority Relations*, pg. 122

For years, the only symbolic center in this place with no name was the 1948 Monument to the Fighters and Martyrs of the Ghetto, designed by Natan Rapoport and Leon Marek Suzin. Facing the Monument now stands the 2013 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ), designed by Rainer Mahlamäki. But there are also ten other, additional memorials. They encircle the Monument and the Museum. Three of them are devoted to the Ghetto Uprising. One identifies the Germans as the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Six emphasize efforts by both Polish society and the Polish Underground State to help the Jews – at the risk of the helpers' own lives – without any other mention of the context. The message emanating from the content as well as the proportion of commemorations is clear: Polish solidarity with the Jews was a fact and it stood the test of terror and death brought about by the Germans.

4. Elzbieta Janicka, *The Embassy of Poland in Poland: The Polin Myth in the Museum of the History of Polish Jews as Narrative Pattern and Model of Minority-Majority Relations*, pg. 109

The exhibition's guides and their stories are among the keys to introducing some order into this chaos. One can learn from them, for instance, that in the Middle Ages "there were less than 1% of Jews in Poland but they stood out and had connections with the rulers"; that "the Jews were identified by pointy hats"; that "King Casimir was kind to the Jews because he had a Jewish mistress, Esterka"; that the synagogues in eastern Poland's *shtetls* "burned down spontaneously due to lightning strikes or arson"; that "in general, the hierarchs of the Catholic Church and kings opposed the persecution of Jews, but they were not always able to do so effectively"; that "Polish-Jewish relations developed somehow, the Jews working as servants to the Christians and the other way round"...

Who was Casimir III?

5. Key elements of the timeline

- 10th century Piast Dynasty begins the Polish monarchy
- 13th century Mongol invasions of Poland
- 1264 Boleslaw II the Pious, Duke of Greater Poland: Jewish Rights
- Early 14th century King Boleslaw III the Wrymouth divides Poland into five provinces
- 1320-1333 King Wladyslav I the Elbow-High
- 1333-1370 King Casimir III the Great

6. In case you are interested <https://culture.pl/en/article/8-peculiar-polish-monarch-monikers>

7. Jan Matejko (19th century), King Casimir III (courtesy of Hebrew Wikipedia)



8. Major achievements

- Built up the local population
- Construction - *Zastal Polske drewniana a zostawil murowana*
- Administration – Government, Education, Currency
- Defense from the Black Death

9. Excerpts from The Statute of Kalisz (1264), <http://www.info.kalisz.pl/statut/index.html>

Aided by Google Translate and Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* pp. 45-47

When there is a case against a Jew, a Christian cannot stand against him alone, but with another Jew.

When a Christian pleads for a pledge by a Jew, and Jew asserts that he did not take any, then the Jews will swear and go free.

Jews in their disputes (i.e. among themselves) are excluded from the municipal courts; they are under the protection of the king or military commander.

For wounding a Jew, just punishment and the cost of treatment.

For killing a Jew, a just punishment and confiscation of property.

A Christian who destroys the cemetery in addition to ordinary punishment, loses money.

For a rape committed against a Jew, a Christian will be punished according to the laws of the land.

The baptism of a Jewish child, as a theft will be considered.

Jews must not be accused of using Christian blood.

It is free for Jews to buy all the goods, bread and other foods to touch.

10. Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland* pp. 51-52

The Polish lawgiver was equally solicitous about enforcing respect for the Jew as a human being and drawing him nearer to the Christian in private life, in violent contradiction with the tendency of the Church to isolate the infidels from the "flock of the faithful". "If the Jew," runs one of the clauses of Casimir's charter, "enters the house of a Christian, no one has a right to cause him any injury or unpleasantness."...

Casimir was equally interested in ordering the inner life of the Jews. The "Jewish judge", a Christian official appointed by the king to try Jewish cases, was enjoined to dispense justice in the synagogue or some other place, in accordance with the wishes of the representatives of the Jewish community. The role of process-server was assigned to the "schoolman", i.e. the synagogue-beadle. This was the germ of the future system of Kahal autonomy.

11. Dr. Pearl Herzog, *The Polish Queen Esther* https://www.aish.com/h/pur/t/ts/The_Polish_Queen_Esther.html

In 1347, the Jews were accused of having murdered a child who was found in a forest not far from Krakow. The king conducted a public investigation and through his chancellor, Jacob of Melchitin, and the priest Prandola (who was also favorably disposed towards the Jews), the innocence of the Jewish people was proven. Thereafter, King Casimir promulgated an edict refuting the blood libel as well as defining the punishment for a charge not substantiated by proofs. A year later, King Casimir once again protected the Jewish people, this time from attacks by anti-Semitic mobs who falsely accused the Jews of poisoning the wells after an outbreak of the Black Plague.

12. The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, *Lewko*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lewko>
Lewko was the most important financial backer to serve Polish kings during the second half of the fourteenth century. Coming from Krakow, he was the son of Yarden and Kaszyca; was married to Swonka (Zwonka); and was the father of Avraham, Kena'an, Yisra'el, Yarden, and Golda. A member of a council convened by Casimir the Great in 1368 to discuss the organization of salt mines, Lewko became the co-lessee of such mines in Bochnia and Wieliczka and also helped administer the royal mint in Kraków.

13. Jan Długosz, *The Annals, Namely the Chronicles of the Famous Congress Kingdom of Poland*, tr. Małgorzata Łacka-Matecka, Jan Długosz Academy, *Jews in the Annals of Jan Długosz – an Eternal, Living Stereotype*
[King Kazimierz] took for himself a concubine, Esther, of Jewish origins, because of [her] extraordinary beauty. [...] Also, at the request of the abovementioned Esther, he granted all Jews, living in the Congress Kingdom of Poland, extraordinary privileges and freedoms which greatly offended Gd's Majesty (suspicions were raised that this document was forged by certain people).

14. Rabbi David Gans (16th century Poland), *Tzemach David*
Kazimierz, King of Poland, took for a concubine a Jewish girl named Esther, a *betulah* of beautiful appearance, the likes of whom was not found in the entire land. She was his wife for many days, and for her the king benefited the Jews with great benefits. She sought from the king for the Jews texts of generosity and liberation.

Casimir and Esterke: A Microcosm of the Conflicted Relationship

15. Other "Esthers" <https://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=896916>

16. Prof. Chone Shmeruk, *The Esterke Story in Yiddish and Polish Literature*, pp. 13-14
My purpose is not to examine the authenticity of this tradition, which is established for our purposes by virtue of its currency in both Polish and Yiddish literature, but to...

17. Prof. Byron Sherwin, *Sparks Amidst the Ashes* pg. 128
Scholars interpret the legend of Casimir and Esterka, as it has been developed and retold over the centuries, as a lens refracting various visions of the place of the Jews in Poland throughout Polish history. How the legend is told may reveal more about the teller than about the legend itself.

18. Jan Długosz, Encyclopedia.com
(1415–1480), Polish cleric and annalist. He acted as secretary to Cardinal Zbigniew Olesnicki in Cracow, who was violently anti-Jewish. After Olesnicki's death in 1455, Długosz began a history of Poland, which he concluded in 1479. He was appointed archbishop of Lvov in 1478. A primary source for historical material, his annals include a firsthand account of the massacre of the Jews in Cracow in 1407 and the plunder, forcible conversions, and burnings of Jewish houses which accompanied it. His work set the anti-Jewish tone of medieval Polish historiography.

19. Małgorzata Łacka-Matecka, Jan Długosz Academy, *Jews in the Annals of Jan Długosz – an Eternal, Living Stereotype*

Jan Długosz, the most outstanding Polish writer of the Middle Ages and one of the greatest historians of his time, became famous for writing, with great flair, *Annales seu cronicae incliti Regni Poloniae (The Annals, Namely the Chronicles of the Famous Congress Kingdom of Poland)*². The *Roczniki (Annals)* consists of twelve books covering the events of those times in the history of Poland, all the way through to the contemporary time of the author. In writing the *Annales*, Długosz performed a work of titanic proportions, using as sources chronicles, annals, the lives of saints, documents found in church and royal archives and eyewitness accounts. He also included his own accounts because, as a member of the church and political elite, he participated in many important state events himself....

The image of the Jew, which Długosz created in his stories concerning Host profanation and the ritual murder of children, demands us to perceive the Jewish population as murderers, servants of Satan and sorcerers. Was the chronicler overcome by a collective phobia? Did he really believe that Christian children were cruelly murdered? Writing in this

manner, as presented above, Długosz further strengthened, in the consciousness of people, the image of the Jew as a persecutor and a contemptible torturer of Christians which Europe, for the first time, came to know at the beginning of the 12th century.

20. Przesław Mojecki (16th century Poland), *Jewish Cruelties*, tr. Chone Shmeruk pg. 17

We know from our chronicles that our Polish Asswerus, Casimir the Great, took Esther in place of his own wife, the despised Adleida, and begat with her two sons – Niemira and Pelka – and daughters as well, and, persuaded by Esther, he permitted to bring them up as Jews. Likewise, Esther's gentle words induced him to devise by scheme this loathsome law under the name of the Prince Boleslaw, who died a long time ago.

21. S. Y. Agnon, *The Heart and the Eyes* (1943)

הלוא ידעתם הלוא שמעתם את שמע אסתר, מלכת קזימיר מלך פולין. צחו פניה בשלג, כשלג שיורד על בית הכנסת בשבת שירה, ועיניה כשמש בירח זיו ומתק קולה כרננת כוכבי בוקר וכל הליכותיה תענוגות בני אדם. לא נמצאה נערה יפה כאסתר בכל גבול פולין. וירא אותה קזימיר מלך פולין, ותדבק נפשו באסתר, ויביאנה במרכבת הזהב אשר לו אל עיר מלכותו. ועל דרכיה פיזר זהב וצוקר. ויבוא המלך עם אסתר אל היכל תפארתו.

וישב המלך עם אסתר ימים רבים, לא נתן שינה לעיניו, לעפעפיו תנומה, למען יראה את אסתר לילה כיום, כי מתוק היופי לעיניים, ולא תעצור עין גבר לראות חין אסתר בפעם אחת. מאהבה שאהב המלך את אסתר תחרדנה צרותיה, שלוש נשי קזימיר, אננה מליטא, איידלהייט מארץ הסן והדוויג מזאגן, ובחמת קנאתן חרתו בציפורניהן חקקי און על חומות בית אסתר, על אודות האישה היהודייה אשר לקח המלך. כי אישה יהודייה אסתר, בת חייט יהודי. ואסתר לא פחדה ולא שתה לבה, כי מזוזה כשרה שמרה את פתחיה, אשר יבוא בהם המלך אל אסתר. ותירא אסתר חיים עם אישה המלך עד אשר מתה. באהבתה את אישה המלך ותמות.

ועתה אודיעה נא אתכם את אשר עשה המלך לאשתו לאסתר, במות אסתר אשתו. כמות אסתר על המלך הוציא המלך את לבה ואת עיניה וישם אותם בקיר ביתו בהיכל תפארתו אצל מיטתו במשבצת זהב ואבני חן כי פסל ותמונה אין מאסתר. כי בעשות אסתר את ימיה עם אישה המלך לא מצאה מועד לשבת עם ציירים עושי תמונות, כי עשתה אסתר את ימיה לאדוניה לאישה המלך, ואישה המלך הן ידע את אסתר. ויכרה המלך קבר לאשתו לאסתר בגיא הפרחים מול ביתו. ויקבור המלך אותה בגיא הפרחים אשר למלך. ותשכב אסתר בגיא הפרחים, בקבר אשר כרה לה המלך.

וניבט המלך מחלון ביתו לקבר אשר כרה לאסתר ואל קיר היכלו יביט אל עיניה ואל לבה אשר קבע במשבצות זהב ואבני חפץ בקיר ביתו בחדר משכבו, ולא סרו עיניו מעיניה ולבו לא מש מלבה.

ואסתר שכבה בקברה, כאשר ישכבו המתים בקברותיהם, ולא מצאה מנוחה עם המתים. כי בכל איש ואישה אשר עיניו ולבו אין עמו לא ימצא מרגוע בקבר. וקמה אסתר מקברה בלילה ובקשה את לבה ואת עיניה, אשר נתנה לאישה למלך ואשר לקחתם לו המלך. ותעתה אסתר מבור קברה אל בית תענוגותיה לבקש את לבה, ואת עיניה, ונלאתה למצוא הפתח. כי עיניים אין לאסתר, ולא תראה, כי לקחן לו המלך עם לבה. ככה תעשה אסתר כל הלילות, עד אשר יקומו אחיה בני עמה וקראו קריאת שמע. ובקראם את דברי התורה הזאת ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם ושבה אסתר אל בור קברה, לשוב בלילה ולבקש את לבה ואת עיניה אשר תרה אחריהם.

And Esther lay in her grave, as the dead lie in their grave, and she could not rest with the dead, for each man and woman whose eyes and heart are not with him will not find rest in the grave. And Esther arose from her grave at night and sought her heart and her eyes, which she had given to her husband the king, and which the king had taken for himself. And Esther wandered from her grave to the place of her pleasure to seek her heart and her eyes, but she could not find the door. For Esther had no eyes, and she could not see, for the king had taken them for himself, with her heart. So Esther would do every night, until her brethren recited Shema. When they read the words of this Torah, "And you shall not stray after your hearts and after your eyes," Esther returned to her grave, to return that night and seek her heart and her eyes, after which she had strayed.

22. Prof. Hillel Weiss, *יהסיים פתולוגיים בין יהודים לגויים*, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1089825>

[The Heart and the Eyes] was a sort of explanation of the pathological, sadomasochistic relationship between Jews and the nations.

The Impact of Casimir III

23. Rabbi Yissachar Tamar (20th century Poland), *Aleh Tamar to Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 2:5*

This is the principle: Exile begins sweet and ends bitter, and Israel was bitter in the beginning and then ended sweet. Lore tells that when the exiles of Germany came to Poland, they said, *Poh leen* ("stay here") – meaning: In truth, this land is also not our home, but it is an inn in which we can rest until the dawn of redemption arrives. But the destruction

of the exiles of Israel in Europe in our day has shown that if Israel has no permanent home in the Land of Israel, then the exile will not serve even as a safe inn. If there is no home for Israel, then even an inn does not exist.

24. Prof. Ruth Wisse, *Jews and Other Poles*, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/history-ideas/2015/12/jews-and-other-poles/>

Poland! It's one of those words capable of causing a rift between otherwise perfectly compatible Jewish minds. When I mention an upcoming trip to Warsaw, a friend says: "How can you be going there?! I would never set foot in that place!" On my return, reporting on the country's warming attitudes toward Jews to another friend who was born and spent her childhood there, she stops me: "I don't want to hear any more." I had forgotten for a moment that Polish neighbors had killed her father.

There is no way of simplifying or ironing out the relation of Jews to Poland, Poland to Jews, each to their common history. It is a fact that Poland offered Jews some of the best conditions they ever experienced in exile. Even if one discounts the saying, "Poland was heaven for the nobles, hell for the peasants, and paradise for the Jews," it is plain that the last-named did enjoy unusual opportunities in the country—until they didn't.

25. Times of Israel, *Polish PM Cancels Trip to Israel Amid Spat Over Netanyahu Holocaust Comments*, Feb 17 '19

The crisis emerged after Netanyahu was asked by The Times of Israel in Warsaw about a controversial agreement between Israel and Poland to end a dispute over a law passed by Warsaw that criminalizes blaming the Polish nation for Holocaust crimes.

Netanyahu denied suggestions of going along with historical revisionism: "Here I am saying Poles cooperated with the Nazis. I know the history and I don't whitewash it. I bring it up," he said.

He added that "a not insignificant number" of Poles had collaborated and said, "I don't know one person who was sued for saying that."

A Jerusalem Post story (later corrected) mischaracterized the Israeli leader's quote as saying the Polish nation collaborated with the Nazis. And in some news reports, Netanyahu was quoted as saying "The Poles cooperated with the Nazis." Netanyahu's office later clarified that he did not say "the," and played reporters a recording of the comments to confirm this.

Netanyahu was in Poland for a US-sponsored summit on Mideast security.

Poland later said it had received clarifications from the Israeli government that had alleviated its concerns. The presidential office blamed "media manipulation" by the Jerusalem Post for a misunderstanding about Netanyahu's comments...

The initial news reports led Polish President Andrzej Duda to threaten to block the high-level summit from taking place in Israel.

Duda wrote on Twitter that if Netanyahu indeed had made the comments, he would offer to host an upcoming meeting of the so-called Visegrad group himself instead of holding the meeting in Israel.

"In this situation, Israel is not a good place to meet," Duda had said.