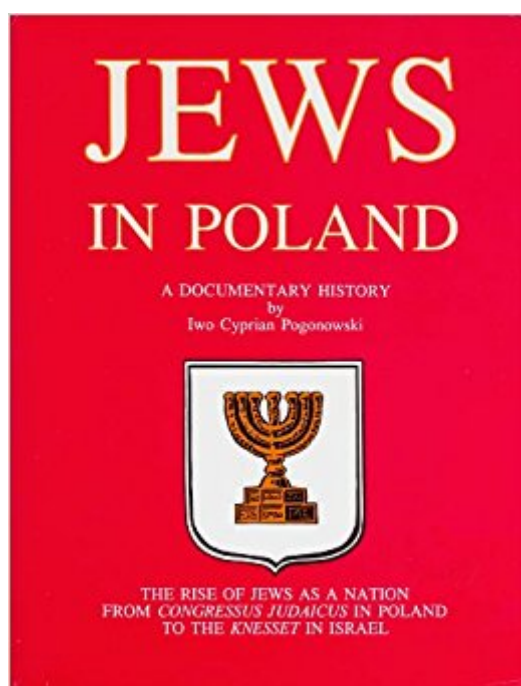


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Jews In Poland: A Documentary History : The Rise Of Jews As A Nation From Congressus Judaicus In Poland To The Knesset In Israel



Synopsis

This book describes the rise of Jews as a nation and the crucial role played by the Polish-Jewish Community. A detailed description is given on the progress from anonymous Congressus Judaicus in Poland to the Knesset in Israel. Included is a new English translation of the Charter of Jewish Liberties known as the Statute of Kalisz of 1264 and an illustrated description of the cultural, social, and political issues of the 500 years of Jewish autonomy in Poland. 114 historical maps. 172 photographs.

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Customer Reviews

This book describes the rise of Jews as a nation and the crucial role played by the Polish-Jewish Community. A detailed description is given on the progress from anonymous Congressus Judaicus in Poland to the Knesset in Israel. Included is a new English translation of the Charter of Jewish Liberties known as the Statute of Kalisz of 1264 and an illustrated description of the cultural, social, and political issues of the 500 years of Jewish autonomy in Poland. 114 historical maps. 172 photographs.

This review expands an earlier one, and refers to the 1998 paperback edition. This latter edition contains several articles not found in the original hardback edition. The authors trace many mischaracterizations of Polish-Jewish history in the American press. The informed reader can appreciate how little has changed since then. For example, the recent publications of *NEIGHBORS* and *FEAR* by Jan T. Gross have resurrected many old Polonophobic canards that should have

been, if nowhere else, laid to rest by this 1998 edition. Pogonowski shows, in detail (pp. 296-297) how the pro-German Zionists formed the Zionist Association in Germany in 1897, and how they opposed the resurrection of the Polish state. Instead, Max Bodenheimer, its president, proposed the creation of a German Protectorate out of the western parts of formerly Russian-ruled Poland. (The German-ruled and Austrian-ruled parts of Poland would remain the same). The new German protectorate would be German-Jewish ruled; the latter facilitated by the Germanophilic orientation of many Jews living on Polish soil, the abundance of Jews in influential positions, the affinities of Yiddish to the German language, etc. For a time, famous Jewish existentialist philosopher Martin Buber supported this plan. The reader can clearly see that the concept of Judeopolonia (Judeo-Polonia) was not simply an anti-Semitic fantasy: It had some basis in fact. This work contains an extensive expose of the so-called Kielce Pogrom--A Soviet-staged event (pp. 403-422). The Soviets wanted to discredit a free Poland in the eyes of the west, and to terrorize the remaining Jews into fleeing to Palestine. Other anti-Jewish actions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia got little press in the west, probably because anti-Communism had been relatively weak in those countries. In Kielce, the tale of the blood libel had been spread by agent provocateurs (p. 414). The Jews were shot by Communist police, and club-wielding fake "steel workers" also took their toll. Other Communist police involved in the so-called pogrom had been dressed as goons or priests. There is the fantastic myth of the 15,000 to 75,000 cheering Polish onlookers (p. 406), a myth recently repeated by Gross in his FEAR. The actual number of Polish onlookers, most of whom were probably motivated by curiosity, didn't ever exceed several hundred at its peak. After the "pogrom", inconvenient eyewitnesses met their deaths. The Kielce files themselves were burned in November 1989, shortly before the Communists left power. Pogonowski makes clear that the Communist anti-Jewish policies of 1968 were not Polish. They were plainly Soviet-dictated (pp. 30-31). The atlas itself is chock-full of useful information. The reader soon learns that, despite the frictions and mutual prejudices which sometimes developed between Poles and Jews, Poland was historically one of the most tolerant nations in the world for Jews. If the fact that 80% of the world's Jews, at one time, made their home in Poland does not prove this fact, then what does? This book makes it clear that Poland had been centuries ahead of others in terms of human rights and religious tolerance.

Iwo Pogonowski's book is a veritable mine of information about Polish-Jewish relations since the Middle Ages. This subject has been badly distorted in the English-language publications, mostly for reasons that have nothing to do either with history or honesty. "Jews in Poland" needs to be read

slowly, in small doses, with frequent returns because sometimes a very important fact is hidden in a footnote or some such obscure place. This volume looks and reads like a scrapbook, and the impression is reinforced by its graphic aspect. "Jews in Poland" is full of very instructional maps and diagrams, it also carries a good selection of illustrations (although their quality is rather so-so). All in all, a book that stands head and shoulders over any other treatment of Jewish-Polish history in the English language.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of emphasis on Polish anti-Semitism. This is despite the fact that anti-Semitism existed virtually everywhere, and in Poland never approached the level which Jews encountered in many other European nations. Moreover, the positive aspects of Polish-Jewish relationships have been virtually ignored. Pogonowski's excellent book does much to show, in fact, how Jewish communities flourished in Poland.

Despite the frictions and mutual prejudices which sometimes developed between Poles and Jews, the fact remains that Poland was historically one of the most tolerant nations in the world for Jews. If the fact that 80% of the world's Jews, at one time, made their home in Poland does not prove this fact, then what does? This book makes it clear that Poland had been centuries ahead of others in terms of human rights and religious tolerance.

Excellent book, unbiased and very informative

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