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The religious Jewish life in Poland (1944-1989)

Objectives: the main objective of the planned research is a reconstruction of the picture of collective life of religious Jews in Poland in the years 1944-1989. The project will focus to reconstruct: a portrait of the religious Jew in the days of the People's Poland, internal problems of religious organizations, their relations with the Polish society, the Polish state, secular Jewish organizations and foreign Jews.

The justification of the project: despite the significance of the Jewish topic in the post-war Poland, over 30 years after abolition of censorship still there is no academic synthesis of post-war Polish Jews' history, and also there is no synthesis of their religious milieu. The project aims to change the situation as regards the latter question. What is more (archival, press and memoirs') sources used in the project will be richer than in any other project about the post-war Polish Jewry.

Research questions: we will answer the following questions: how highly did the consequences of the Holocaust influence functioning of the Jewish religious environment? How can we characterize age, professional, educational status of religious Jews and their political attitudes? How organized were and worked Judaistic worship, education and charity activities? To what extent the memory of the Holocaust, and to what degree relations with Poles determined the Jews in making decisions concerning their future (e.g. staying in the country or emigrating, taking up work in Polish offices and enterprises or Jewish cooperatives and their own workshops, sending children to a Polish or Jewish school, active participation in the public life or a passive attitude)? Did decisions of the authorities and attitudes of Poles support the existence and activity of Jewish religious communities? Did opinions of the Jews go hand in hand with the new state ideology imposed upon the society? To what degree did the political system installed in Poland give the Jews a margin of freedom and possibility of self-realization in various fields, including a religious one? Were the processes of assimilation, acculturation and secularization of the Jews an inevitable phenomenon or these processes were forced by the authorities' actions? The above mentioned questions will serve subsequently to answer another, fundamental question: did a real chance exist for the Jews to become a long-lasting element of the society in the post-war Poland or without democratic transformation in 1989 the Jewish religious community was doomed to disappear?

Initial hypotheses: 1. Steady and fast tendency of secularization, acculturation, mix marriages and assimilation of the Polish Jewry (concerning younger generations). 2. Decomposition of religious home practices (e.g. concerning kashrut and Shabbat restrictions). 3. Weak connection of the majority of the religious milieu (composed of older generations) to Polish culture. (Yiddish as a main language of the milieu until 1990s). 4. Weak religious educational activities among the youth. 5. Antagonistic relations with the TSKŻ (the Socio-Cultural Association of Polish Jews) until 1970s. 6. Highly changing state policy towards the religious milieu (with turning points and redefinitions especially in 1949, 1956, 1968 and 1981). 7. Dependence of the religious milieu on financial assistance of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Results of the project: in this project we plan to prepare edition of three publications: 1. A detailed monograph on the Jewish religious life in 1944-1989, 2. A source volume on the Jewish religious life in 1944-1989, 3. A photography album showing the Judaistic community in the People's Poland. The three planned books would radically change the current state of knowledge about the post-war Jewry