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COLLOQUIA HUMANISTICA

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Introductory Comments

Abstract

The thematic block of the 14th issue of *Colloquia Humanistica* (2025) is entitled *Commemoration of Jewish Culture, Tradition and Heritage Outside Western Europe*. The *Discussions. Presentations. Book Reviews* section complements this subject matter, as it contains an article in which Jolanta Sujecka discusses Jewish sites of memory on the examples of Sofia, Kielce and Warsaw, Muhammad Muhammad's paper on the perception of Jews in the Qur'an, but also Grzegorz Kwiatkowski's text on the memory of the Jews from Pomerania, Nourit Melcer-Padon's presentation of an Italian monograph by Benedetto Ligorio, and Katarzyna Taczyńska's review of an anthology of Polish Yiddish women poets translated from Polish into Serbian. An article by Teresa Dobrzyńska outlines the Slavic Comparative Metrics programme, headed by Lucylla Pszczołowska, at the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of Literary Research.

Keywords: *Colloquia Humanistica* 14, *Commemoration of Jewish Culture, Tradition and Heritage Outside Western Europe*, Muhammad Muhammad, Jolanta Sujecka, Teresa Dobrzyńska, Nourit Melcer-Padon, Benedetto Ligorio, Katarzyna Taczyńska.

The focus of this year's issue – already the 14th – of *Colloquia Humanistica* is the commemoration of Jewish culture, tradition and memory, mainly in Central Europe, in Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia and Croatia.

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Prepared by Jolanta Sujecka, Monika Stobiecka and Katarzyna Taczyńska, the thematic block *Commemoration of Jewish Culture, Tradition and Heritage Outside Western Europe* is only partially the outcome of a panel with a similar title (*Commemorating the History, Culture and Tradition of Jews: Israel, Poland and the Balkans*) that was held on 16 November 2023 at the University of Warsaw's Faculty of "Artes Liberales" as part of a seminar entitled *Tradition Wanted and Unwanted. Past Accepted and Rejected. The Case of National Cultures and the European Context*.

The aim of the panel from 2023 was to stir the conscience of decision-makers, museum directors, municipal authorities and, finally, Jewish communities managing buildings that are valuable not only to the Jewish memory but to the Polish, European and global memory as well.

The present thematic block also focuses on various national images of the memory of recent history, (understandably) dominated by the Shoah, but its field of observation also includes people who are important but forgotten, to mention Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska (1881–1943) (Mariola Dorota Wilczak) and Czesława Rosenblat (1877–1949) (Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagała).

Essentially, however, both the thematic block and the *Discussion. Presentations. Book Reviews* section in issue 14 of *Colloquia Humanistica* contain studies, articles and presentations that demand not only remembrance for people, buildings and objects, but (through a critical depiction of the status quo) active efforts to change the official memory paradigm in countries such as Bulgaria, Poland (Jolanta Sujecka, Katarzyna Taczyńska) and Hungary (Borbála Klacsmann).

Analysing the works of Polish Jewish poet Zuzanna Ginczanka (1917–1944), who was recently discovered for Polish readers, Khrystyna Semeryn makes us realise that it is possible to process the tragic history of several nations through good actions. The NGO project *Paths of Memory* (with support from the German foundation Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft) aims to restore the memory of Volhynia that was erased by the war, the Holocaust and, finally, by the Volhynia massacres conducted by nationalists from the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) against Poles, Jews and other minorities (Russians, Czechs, Armenians), also against Ukrainians. Meanwhile, Rivne in Ukraine is making an effort to incorporate Ginczanka's poetry and her biography into the history of a city that was once Jewish-Polish and today is Ukrainian.

Dragana Stojanović describes the very good effects of non-standard educational activities aimed at upholding intergenerational memory connected with Jewish heritage, as if in defiance of the war and the Holocaust, thanks

to projects (*The Midrasha Project* and *The Interactive Tour of Jewish Belgrade*) that revive intergenerational dialogue and make small Jewish communities more open to collaboration with the non-Jewish communities around them.

Katarina Lazić ("Fictionalizing the Holocaust: Narrative Strategies and Elements of Denial") raises the question – extremely relevant today – of denial of the Shoah. Analysing selected cinematic representations of this issue, she shows us their originality (*Inglourious Basterds*), their interweaving with national historical contexts (*Life Is Beautiful*) and, finally, the problems caused by the impossibility of presenting a complete panorama of human behaviours (*The Zookeeper's Wife*). And although all three films were made outside Central and Eastern Europe, one of them (Niki Caro's *The Zookeeper's Wife*) is set in Warsaw and tells the story of about 300 Jews being saved by Jan and Antonina Żabiński. The author analyses films directed in Western Europe or Hollywood, so her paper appears not to fall within our thematic block (*Outside Western Europe*), but the Shoah, which found its "final solution" in Eastern Europe and concerned Jews from all over Europe, invalidates the old division into East and West.

In the *Discussion. Book Reviews. Presentations* section, we publish an article by a researcher from Indonesia, Muhammad Muhammad ("Perceptions of Jews in the Qur'an: A Critical Examination of Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar*"), which creates a very good context for our thematic block. The author poses an interesting question: "…why has Judaism remained peripheral in Indonesia, while Islam has flourished and expanded extensively?…". Answering it by analysing *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka, an important text for Islam in Indonesia, he makes us aware that interpretations of religious texts may contribute to building stereotypical prejudices against Jews, Christians, the Other.

And although texts in the 14th issue of *Colloquia Humanistica* describe a horrific world created not by religions but by national ideologies that wanted to eradicate the memory of the Jews and change the ethnic composition of Europe, Muhammad Muhammad's article reminds us how easy it is to overstep boundaries and how difficult the art of text interpretation can be.

It is very hard for me to write about my own text, but maybe it is not a bad thing that we have placed it neighbouring on Dr Muhammad's article, because it highlights the significance of sites of memory, something that is fundamental for the Jewish tradition as a religious tradition. The site of Abraham's circumcision, the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah, the Akedah (עקדת יצחק) and his miraculous rescue, are examples of sites of memory. However, as we read in *Pirkei Avot*, everyone and everything has its time, or, as Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi put it, every person, every animal,

every plant, and even every stone, every object, even earth and water have a soul that only the completely righteous – *tzaddikim* – can see. An object may thus be elevated to a higher level, which is the task of every Jew once the object becomes part of an important ritual. That is how the table where a circumcision ceremony is performed is elevated to a higher level. The level of objects over which blessings have been pronounced cannot be lowered, which is why a building where prayers are held may not be degraded by lowering its status and should not be destroyed. And this is precisely the context in which I try to answer the question of what we today are doing to Jewish objects, sites and events connected with the history of Jews, at the same time trying to make the humanities audience aware of how the Jewish tradition is placed within national narratives ("Jewish Sites of Memory in Europe: Local, National and Transnational Memory (Sofia, Keltz – Kielce and Varshe – Warszawa – Warsaw)").

The same section also contains a wonderful essay by poet and activist Grzegorz Kwiatkowski, about restoring the memory of the Jewish residents of Gdańsk and Pomerania. The author recounts the tragic story of his grandfather, a Stutthof prisoner, and his wife's Jewish grandmother, writes about commemorating Jewish Gdańsk, but also underlines the necessity to protect German cultural artefacts such as the Srebrniki Manor in Wrzeszcz where Joseph von Eichendorff, a great German Romantic poet, wrote his *Memoirs of a Good-for-Nothing*.

Somewhat in opposition to the subject matter of both articles in the *Discussion. Presentations. Book Reviews* section, Nourit Melcer-Padon's presentation of Benedetto Ligorio's Italian monograph *L'interesse comune nel Rinascimento: I network dei sefarditi della Repubblica di Ragusa tra Italia e Balcani* takes us to the world of the 16th-century trade and social networks that the Sephardic Jews of the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) built with Venice, Ancona, the Ottoman Empire, and the Balkans. Jews as mediators between Christians and Muslims contributed to the development of ties between different worlds and consolidated Ragusa's position as a flourishing Mediterranean economy of the time.

Katarzyna Taczyńska presents a Serbian anthology of Polish Yiddish women poets compiled and translated by an outstanding Serbian translator of Polish literature, Biserka Rajčić, on the basis of the three Polish anthologies of Yiddish poetry from 1986, 2012 and 2018. However, the poems published in the Serbian anthology were not translated from the original Yiddish texts, but from their Polish translations. Nevertheless, this could be treated (as suggested by the reviewer) as "… an excellent starting point for a broader conversa-

tion about Yiddish literature and women's poetry … unknown in the (post-) Yugoslav cultural sphere". On the other hand, we might view Rajčić's Serbian anthology as a continuation of the long tradition of adaptations of literature in the Balkan cultural context.

Teresa Dobrzyńska's article introduces us to a world very different from the main theme of this year's *Colloquia Humanistica*, as it discusses a unique project of the Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute of Literary Research and its initiator, Professor Lucylla Pszczołowska. The programme in question was called Slavic Comparative Metrics and concentrated on the comparative analysis of verse forms in Slavic literatures.

Collaborators in the programme included leading versologists from Polish and international centres (from Russia, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria), who continued the concepts of language and poetry known from the work of the Russian formalists and the Prague structuralists, being additionally inspired by personal contacts with Roman Jakobson. Professor Lucylla Pszczołowska's article outlining the whole project was published in English in 2014, in the University of Tartu's journal *Studia Metrica et Poetica*.

This year's issue of *Colloquia Humanistica* revolves around themes usually present in our annual, but for the first time it also has an interventionist element, which could also be interpreted in the spirit of Jewish thought as a kind of *tikun olam*, Jewish repairing of the world to make it a better place for us. We would like to invite you to our discussion and to active participation in saving the memory of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the Balkans, as an integral part of our European history.

I wish you a rewarding read.

Jolanta Sujecka
Warsaw, 4 August 2025

Uwagi wstępne

Czternasty numer „Colloquia Humanistica" (2025) zawiera blok tematyczny zatytułowany: *Commemoration of Jewish Culture, Tradition and Heritage Outside Western Europe*. Dział *Discussions. Presentations. Book reviews* jest jego tematycznym dopełnieniem. Zawiera artykuł Jolanty Sujeckiej o żydowskich miejscach pamięci na przykładzie Sofii, Kielc i Warszawy, artykuł Muhammada Muhammada o percepcji Żydów w Koranie, ale także *Memory of the Jews from*

Pomerania [Wspomnienia o Żydach z Pomorza] Grzegorza Kwiatkowskiego, prezentację włoskiej monografii Benedetto Ligorio (Nourit Melcer-Padon) i recenzję serbskiej antologii polskich poetek jidysz (Katarzyna Taczyńska). Artykuł Teresy Dobrzyńskiej przypomina realizowany przez Lucyllę Pszczołowską program Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN poświęcony Słowiańskiej Metryce Porównawczej.

Słowa kluczowe: „Colloquia Humanistica" 14, *Commemoration of Jewish Culture, Tradition and Heritage Outside Western Europe*, Muhammad Muhammad, Jolanta Sujecka, Teresa Dobrzyńska, Nourit Melcer-Padon, Benedetto Ligorio, Katarzyna Taczyńska.

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