



INTRODUCTION TO THE VISIT

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



You are about to visit the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Before you do, please read the following introduction. We hope it will help you make the most of your visit.

Let us start with “who is this museum for?”. The museum is both for Poles (some who have no background at all in Jewish history) and for people coming from outside Poland (many of whom – one can assume – are Jewish). So the museum is catering to different constituents.

How is the Museum trying to do that? The museum seeks primarily to tell a story, the story of the Jews of Poland, rather than to display artifacts, although it does that as well. The story of the Jews of Poland is as old as that of Christian Poland and the first encounters between Jews and Poles happened at the dawn of Christian Poland (sometimes referred to as the Baptism of Poland, 966 CE) over 1000 years ago. This is the story of the Jews, a people who often lived apart from Christian society, but were always a part of the country in which they lived. The Jews became part of Poland and contributed to what it became. As Poland (and the greater world of Europe) changed, so did the Jews. The narrative history of the Jews includes two major catastrophes after which the Jewish community in Poland was radically

changed – the Chmielnitsky massacres (mid-17th century) and the Shoah. The advent of modernity towards the end of the 18th century also wrought irrevocable changes in the Jewish people, enabling the birth of Chasidut, Haskalah, the Yeshiva movement, Zionism, Jewish socialism and the increasing prominence of acculturated Jewish Poles.

Remember throughout, that the history of the Jews is being told from the point of view of Jewish Poland. Even though the foci change and the Jewish communities evolve, the perspective of Jewish Poland remains constant.

The core exhibit includes 8 galleries: 1) the forest – the legendary beginning of the Jewish presence in Poland. (2) Middle Ages (10th-15th centuries). (3) Paradisus Iudaeorum (16th-17th century); the mid-17th century Chmielnitsky massacres are the transition point between this gallery and the next (4) the (Jewish) town in early modern times. (5) 19th century – a century of partitioned Poland. (6) 1919-1939 presented as a vibrant street. (7) 1939-1945, war and Holocaust. (8) 1945-the present; aftermath of the war, Soviet occupation and the freedom to be Polish and Jewish.

To see everything the core exhibit has to offer would take several days. As your time with us is limited, we will encourage you to view the highlights of each gallery and their interactive exhibits.

The narrative in the galleries includes multiple (Jewish) perspectives and raises many of the questions that Jews grappled with during different periods of Polish Jewish history: what relationships should Jews and Christians have with each other? What is the relationship between tradition and modernity? How do we rebuild our lives after a catastrophe? The galleries offer multiple answers, as did the lives that the Jews led in the past and lead in the present.