

Eugeniusz Sakowicz

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EUGENIUSZ SAKOWICZ, WARSZAWA

RELIGIONS AND CHURCHES IN POLAND

In the history of Europe, Poland appears to be a country of tolerance, where people of different cultures and religions have lived in unity for ages. Since the beginning of its existence, Poland has been in the sphere of Latin civilization. In the very same sphere, in the centuries that followed, believers of religions from the East and from the West showed up. Jewish synagogues were often erected not in the suburbs or outside the city walls but next to Catholic churches or Protestant temples. Christian cemeteries were contiguous to Jewish ones. In some towns, the same necropolis had its Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant sections. The sound of church bells interwove with the Muslims calling for prayers from small minarets situated by the Tatar mosques in the Polish and Lithuanian settlements and villages on the „outskirts” of the country.

The multinational Republic of Poland enjoyed the state of spiritual harmony, which did not get destroyed by sporadic events directed against the unity of those who inhabited the land. Religious pluralism was considered natural for a long time, because it was here in Poland that the routes from the East and West would cross, and the Latin culture would meet the Byzantine. The evidence of this contact has left its traces in many works of art and architecture. They can also be found in literature. Followers of non-Christian religions felt at home here. The religious variety and multiplicity was the treasure of the state of Poland. The religious multitude stands for the wealth of the country, whose capitals of Krakow (Cracow) and Warszawa (Warsaw) are situated on the Vistula river.

The unique role in preserving and looking after the national identity was played by the Catholic Church – the Church of most Poles. The followers of other religions respected the Polish rulers as Christian kings. They supported Poland as their fatherland, working for its prosperity and enriching its culture. The Catholic

Church had a special function at the time of threat to the existence of the nation, at the time of revolutionary wars and uprisings. It remained the source of hope during the period of the partitions, when the nation's identity was being eradicated.

Memory of this heritage should create the image of Poland in the world today. It should also influence the directions of its development in the future.

Catholics and the Roman-Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is a Christian community that believes that their Church is the only universal, common one. The name refers to the Greek word „katholikos” – common. The Catholics believe that the founder of the Church was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the true God-Man. The Church created its structures in the first century. The word Catholic was used for the first time in the second century. In the sphere of faith, morality and organization it relies on the authority of the pope. The source of God's revelation according to the Catholic Church is the Bible and the Tradition. The organization of the Church is hierarchic-al, or monarchical. The Only Holy Universal and Apostolic Church consists of numerous particular Churches. In 1999 there were about 35 million Catholics in Poland.

The first historic duke of the state of the Piasts, Mieszko I accepted baptism from Bohemia in 966. In 968 the first bishopric was established in Poznan, which meant joining the Latin, western sphere of culture. By the end of his rule, Mieszko, whose intention was to exclude the German influence on the Church in Poland, devoted the country to the pope. When Boleslaw I the Brave was in power, in 1000 the Gniezno assembly decided to create the metropoly there, with subordinate bishoprics in Poznan, Krakow, Wroclaw and Kolobrzeg. The Christianization of Pomerania was initiated by Boleslaw II the Wrymouth, who founded the Pomeranian bishopric in Wolin, in 1140. In 1226 the Teutonic Knights settled on the land of Chelmino (Kulm), supposedly to protect the Polish against the attacks of the Lithuanians and Old Prussians. The fourteenth century and some time later on, was the period of wars with the Teutonic Order.

The Cracow Academy was founded in 1364, and reformed in 1400. The heart of the Academy was the Theology Department. Si-

multaneously with the birth of the Academy, which had a considerable status in Europe of that time, historical literature dealing with religion and the Church developed. By the end of the fourteenth century, the queen of Poland, Jadwiga (Hedwig), daughter of Louis d'Anjou (also king of Hungary) married Jagiello, the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Baptised and named Wladyslaw he started the Jagiellonian dynasty. The fall of the Teutonic state began in 1410 with the Polish-Lithuanian victory in the Battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg). After the thirteen-year-long war (1454-1466) the Teutonic order ceased to be dangerous.

The Jagiellonian dynasty managed to gain enough power to have the right of appointing bishops. At the Lublin assembly (the Sejm) in 1569, Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were united. With the expansion of the country eastwards during the rule of Casimir III the Great, the Orthodox population grew in number. Part of the Orthodox Church in Poland subordinated itself to Rome in 1596 on the basis of the Brzesc (Brest-Litovsk) Union, creating the Greek-Catholic hierarchy parallel to the Roman-Catholic one. During the period of elected kings (1575-1795), Poland was involved in numerous wars. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mark the deterioration of moral and social life. The first partition of Poland (between Austria, Prussia and Russia) took place in 1772, the second one (between Russia and Prussia) in 1793 and the third one in 1795. As the result, Poland lost its statehood which was not regained until 1918.

The invaders undertook actions the aim of which was to take over control of the Church organization. Their intention was to isolate the hierarchy situated in different sectors of the partitioned country. They limited their contacts with the Apostolic See. It was then that the opinion „A Pole means a Catholic” became so characteristic. The Church's role in supporting national trends was remarkable and evoked hopes for regaining independence. It supported and initiated patriotic actions. In the Prussian (German) sector, the society strongly opposed the germanization of the Church. In all three parts of the divided Poland the Church protected the national identity. Then the territorial organization of the Church was changed and, what is more, all the religious orders and convents were dissolved. After the fall of the uprisings against the Russian state („November Uprising” 1830-31 and „Ja-

nuary Uprising" 1863-64), the clergy were sent to Siberia, deep in the territory of Russia.

A real chance for regaining independence occurred during World War I, when the partitioning states fought against one another. In 1920, during the Polish-Bolshevik war, the Soviet invasion was forced back on the outskirts of Warsaw. The Poles called that event „a miracle on the Vistula”. During the inter-war period, Poland, which was a multinational state, was inhabited by 27 million Poles. The followers of the Roman Catholic Church constituted 62% of the society, the followers of the Greek-Catholic rite (in union with Rome) made up 12%, the Orthodox believers – 11%, and the faithful of Protestant (Lutheran and Calvinist) Churches constituted 3.7%. During World War II the Catholic clergy were subjected to extermination. Nazi Germany aimed at destroying the Church which constituted the support to the Polish identity.

In the period of the Polish People's Republic, the Polish state (sovereign, in the understanding of the international law) suffered repressions from the communist authorities. In 1945 the Concordat was one-sidedly broken up. The struggle against the Catholics got intensified after 1947, and it did not stop even after an agreement was signed in 1950 between the state and the Church. In 1953 the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was imprisoned and kept in internment till 1956. (Due to his non-compromising attitude as the defender of the Polish identity at those times, he was called the „Primate of the Millennium” after his death in 1981). Following the Great Novenna of the Millennium (meant to prepare for the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of Christianity in Poland, in 1966) and peregrination of the copy of the picture of Madonna of Czestochowa to all the parishes in Poland, persecution of the Catholic community started to increase. In the years 1962-1965 representatives of the Polish Episcopacy took part in the Vatican Council II.

In 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was appointed to the Apostolic See in the Vatican. The first pilgrimage of John Paul II to his homeland in 1979 was an unprecedented event. It began the process of social changes followed by political ones. When the Third Republic of Poland came into being in 1989, the Church actively joined the process of moral restoration of the nation, supporting the process of the state's democratization.

Over the years, the Church in Poland has played a special role as the patron of science and art. This is proved by numerous sacral monuments (churches of various epochs and styles). The Church has fulfilled the culture-forming function for a thousand years. It is reflected in organizing the institutions of social life, schools and in introducing the achievements of civilization into the environments of towns and villages.

The cult of the Virgin Mary is a characteristic feature of Polish Catholicism. For over 600 years the Polish people have worshipped the miraculous picture of God's Mother at Jasna Gora of Czestochowa. The Black Madonna of Czestochowa is often referred to as the Queen of Poland (king John Casimir made vows in 1656 in Lvov proclaiming God's Mother as the Queen of the Polish Crown, and Jasna Gora as „the spiritual capital of Poland”).

The unity between religion and patriotism is expressed in a Latin saying: „Deo et Patriae”, which characterizes the Polish nation very aptly.

Orthodoxes and the Orthodox Church

Orthodox Church is the Church of the eastern tradition. It came into being in 1054, following a permanent break of unity between the patriarchates in Rome and Constantinople. Both the Latin Church and the Orthodox Church claim the right to the name of the only heirs of the teaching of the early Apostolic Church. The name „Orthodox” comes from a Greek word, „orthodoxia”, which means „holding the true faith”. The term „Orthodox” was translated into the Slavonic language as „pravoslaviye”, which emphasizes the liturgical dimension of faith and the proper (true, orthodox) worship of God.

In 1340, when Red Ruthenia was annexed by king Casimir the Great, a big community of Orthodox believers found themselves in Poland. King Casimir the Great sent requests to Constantinople to form a separate, independent metropoly. King's elect Anthony was appointed Halicz metropolitan. That metropoly included the dioceses of Chelm, Turow, Przemysl and Wlodzimierz. After the Polish-Lithuanian union, a considerable number of Orthodox followers lived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. During the reign of Wladyslaw Jagiello, Orthodox religion dominated in Lithuania.

The Union between two Churches, which was concluded in Brzesc (Brest-Litovsk) in 1596, was to become an expression of unity between Poland, called the „Crown’s area” (which was Catholic), and Lithuania. When the Brzesc Union was signed, the Orthodox believers ceased to play any significant role in the life of the country. Mutual persecutions began and they were directed both against the Orthodox (who did not accept the Union) and the Uniates (Greek-Catholic), who accepted the Union. At that time, numerous Cossack and Polish-Moscovian wars began, as a result of which a considerable part of Lithuanian area found itself within the borders of the Moscow state (future Russia).

Revival of the Orthodox hierarchy and rebuilding of the structures of Orthodox churches took place in 1620. It was done by Teophanes, an Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem. During the reign of Stanislaw August in the epoch of the Grand Sejm of 1791, legislative regulations of the functioning of Orthodox dioceses on Polish areas were established. During the partitions, Orthodox dioceses which had been so far within the borders of the Republic of Poland, were included into the Russian Orthodox Church. Uniates were forced to convert (return) to Orthodox religion. In the region of Podlasie they were converted by force. Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church survived only in the Austrian part of partitioned Poland.

Shortly before Poland regained independence in 1918, the life of Orthodox Church in Poland almost came to a standstill. After the Republic of Poland became sovereign, the Orthodox Church could not remain in juridical connection with the Russian Orthodox Church. At that time, revindication of the properties that were in the possession of the Orthodox and that had been earlier the property of the Catholic Church began. The Orthodox Church in Poland achieved autocephaly (independence), which was officially proclaimed in 1925. It was accorded by the patriarchate in Constantinople. Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Poland was also recognized by other autocephalic churches, with the exception of the Russian church. The patriarch of Moscow confirmed Polish autocephaly in 1948.

After World War II, the number of Orthodox believers in Poland decreased, as a result of change of the state’s borders. Finally, the canonical-juridical situation was settled in 1951. In 1999 the

Orthodox Church included 561,400 believers. In the same year, the Orthodox Church in Poland had 229 temples. The structure of the Church is made up of six dioceses: Warszawa (Warsaw)-Bielsko (archdiocese), Białystok-Gdańsk, Łódź-Poznań, Wrocław-Szczecin, Przemyśl-Nowy Sącz, Lublin-Chełm. Female monasteries can be found in Grabarka near Siemiatycze („holy mountain of Grabarka”) and in Białystok, while male ones are in Supraśl in the Białystok region, Jableczna in the Podlasie region and Ujkowice near Przemyśl. There are more than 350 Orthodox temples in Poland. The most precious monuments include Orthodox cathedrals with rich interior decoration (iconostases, icons) and cemeteries.

Protestants and the Protestant Churches

Protestant Churches constitute a Christian community initiated by the theses of Martin Luther in 1517. The first community of this movement was Evangelical-Augsburg Church (commonly known as Lutheran) founded by Luther. Then, other communities came into being, for example the Evangelical-Reformed (Calvinist) Church. Protestantism rejects the primacy of the Pope and follows the Bible as the highest authority in the issues of faith and morality. It negates the value of tradition emphasizing the individual dimension of religious life.

The ideas of Reformation began to spread in Poland right after Luther's announcement. The Evangelical-Augsburg Church found recognition in some circles of the gentry, magnates and townspeople. Lutheranism began to gain popularity in numerous cities of Pomorze (Pomerania) (Gdańsk, Toruń, Elbląg) as well as in Śląsk (Silesia) and Wielkopolska (Greater Poland) region. Most frequently, the people of German descent became its followers. In the middle of the 16th c. the Czech Brothers came to Wielkopolska. The ideas of the Evangelical-Reformed Church also got rooted among the Polish gentry in Małopolska (Lesser Poland) region and in Lithuania. The Polish Brothers. Unitarians (called „Arians” in Poland), were a sect of Calvinism. In the second half of the 16th c. they began to organize their posts in Małopolska and Wołyń (Volhynia) regions.

An important fact for the development of Protestantism in Poland was „secularization” of Ducal Prussia. In 1525 Krolewiec (Ko-

nigsberg, now Kaliningrad) became the cradle of the Polish Reformation literature. The growth of Protestantism was set back in the middle of the 16th c. when a reform of the Catholic Church, called Counter-Reformation, was introduced. An outstanding representative of this trend was Cardinal Stanislaw Hozjusz, a defender of the Church structures and Catholicism against the „religious novelties”. The Jesuit order was the leading one at that time. Jesuits are famous for remarkable achievements in education, they established and ran numerous colleges, where excellent scientists and clergymen were teachers, for example, Rev. Piotr Skarga, the founder of Wilno (Vilna) Academy and Rev. Jakub Wujek, translator of the Bible.

In 1645 „Colloquium charitativum” took place in Torun. It was a meeting of Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists summoned by king Wladyslaw IV in order to redress unity and agreement among those religions. Although it did not produce the desired effect, it became an important point in the history of inter-confessional relations as anticipation of ecumenical aspirations initiated in the 20th c. In 1658 Unitarians were driven out from Poland, and in 1668 a prohibition of desertion from Catholicism was proclaimed. The manifestations of intolerance towards the Protestant Church (es) went hand in hand with the state crisis.

In the 18th c. king Stanislaw August Poniatowski allowed the Protestants to build a church dedicated to the Holy Trinity in Warsaw. In the period of the partitions, there were Polish Lutherans also in Cieszyn Silesia, in Mazury (Masuria) and in Cracow region, while in the Prussian sector of partitioned Poland (Pomorze and Wielkopolska) the Germans prevailed among Protestants. In the 19th c. a big wave of immigrants of Protestant craftsmen and farmers came to Poland. In the inter-war period, the Evangelical-Augsburg Church got united in Poland. After the war this Church was recognized by the state. In 1999 the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in Poland included 87,300 followers, while the Evangelical-Reformed Church – 4,000.

The Polish Reformation exerted an important influence on the development of writing; it contributed to the creation of national literature. Thanks to it, printing in Poland developed. In spite of periodical intolerance, the presence of Protestants strengthened the picture of Poland as „a state without stakes”.

Jews and Judaism

The Jews are a Semitic nation. The name „Jews” derives from a Hebrew word „Yehudi”, which means an inhabitant of Judea. At the beginning, the word referred to the members of Juda’s tribe, one of the 12 Israelite tribes; then, it came to mean the community living in ancient Judea. As a consequence of numerous migrations and displacements, the Jews got mixed up with the populations of the countries where they settled. As a result, various ethnic and cultural groups came into being, including the Sephardim (the Jews in the Mediterranean area who stayed under the Arabian-Muslim influence) and Ashkenazim (the Jews influenced by the Latin-Christian civilization).

The history of Jewish religion is inseparable from the history of the Jewish nation. In the times of biblical Israel, there was no distinction between lay and religious history of the Israelite community. The genesis of Judaism and its development are presented in the Hebrew Bible, which is the holy book of the Jews. That book has been accepted by Christians who called it Old Testament, or the books of the Old Covenant.

Rabbinic Judaism, a form of which is the religion professed by the Jews today, was shaped in the 1st c. AD.

Tradition is the central value in the life of contemporary Jews. Nowadays, 50% of Jews admit to profess the religion-rabbinic Judaism (referring to the monotheistic religion of biblical Israel, whose main idea was the covenant between God and the chosen nation). According to credible sources, 80% of Jews living in the world today have their roots in Poland.

At the end of the 15th c. Poland was inhabited by about 30,000 Jews, at the end of the 17th c. – between 350,000 and 500,000, at the time of the partitions – about 800,000; at the end of the 19th c. approximately 2,200,000 Jews lived on the territories of the partitioned Poland, while in 1939 they numbered about 3,000,000. As a result of extermination (Shoah, Holocaust) by the Nazis, about 90% of Polish Jews were killed. Nowadays, several thousand people of Jewish descent live in Poland (slightly more than 1,000 people practice the religion). Throughout the history of Jewish presence in Poland, the majority of the Jews inhabited cities (in different periods – from 2/3 to 3/4 of the Jewish population).

Jews have lived in the area of Poland since the 10th c. Jewish merchants coming to Poland were already mentioned by Ibrahim Ibn Jacob, the author of the first description of the state of Mieszko I. The Jewish population started to flow into the area of Poland at the end of the 11th c. A huge migration wave took place between the 15th and the mid-17th century. As a result Poland became the greatest center of Jews, who belonged to the Ashkenazi group.

The Jewish population living in the Republic of Poland enjoyed a special status. They took advantage of the privileges given them for example in the Kalisz statute announced by duke Bolesław the Pious in 1246, and confirmed by king Casimir the Great in 1334, 1364 and 1367. Thanks to those privileges, the Jews received a position similar to that of a separate class. They were merchants, they were involved in usury, they held inns on lease. In the times of Casimir the Great, when the economic importance of the Jews increased, social tensions began to grow in Pomorze (Pomerania) and in Krakow (Cracow).

As a consequence of the wars waged by the Republic of Poland with Cossacks, Tatars, Russia, Sweden and Turkey, the towns began to decline economically. A part of the Jewish population moved to the Eastern boundaries. There, in the 17th c. anti-Jewish demonstrations (pogroms) took place. The most tragic one took place in 1648, during the uprising of Bohdan Chmielnicki.

In those circumstances, mystic-religious movements originated, including Hasidism whose development fell on the 18th c. Poland became the world center of that movement and the main center of orthodox rabbinic Judaism. The persecuted Jews were protected by the Four Years' Sejm (1788-1792). In 1792 the Jewish community came within a law of personal inviolability.

Discrimination of the Jews was begun by the partitioning states. Prussia aimed at their germanization. A duty of settlement was imposed on them in the Russian part. The rights of the Jewish population were limited after the fall of the January Uprising in 1864. Some Jews tried to assimilate to the population, many of them got polonized.

At the end of the 19th c. Zionism appeared, a movement the aim of which was to secularize the Jews. The Zionists' main goal was to create a national Jewish state in Palestine.

In the 1920's a considerable part of the inhabitants of Warszawa (Warsaw), Lodz', Krakow (Cracow), Lwow (Lvov) and Wilno (Vilna) was made up of Jews. During the economic crisis in Poland in

1929-1935, the so-called economic anti-Semitism appeared which resulted for example in boycotting the Jewish trade. This form of anti-Semitism had nothing to do with racial hatred which was implied by various anti-Polish circles. The Yeshivah of the Sages of Lublin was a Talmudic School educating rabbis for all Central-Eastern Europe.

When World War II broke out, Nazi Germany began extermination of the Jewish population. They created extermination camps (Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka) for the Polish Jews and for the Jews brought here from all over Europe. They were killed in concentration camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek). After World War II, 137,000 Jews came back to Poland within a repatriation program. In the years 1946-1950 about 120,000 Jews emigrated from Poland to Palestine. The successive migration waves took place after 1956 and in the years 1968-69.

Muslims and Islam

Islam is an Arabic expression meaning „giving oneself up”, „giving oneself in” – especially to God. In its broader and more common meaning, it refers to a religion proclaimed in the 7th century AD by Muhammad to a community of its followers. The Tatars who have lived in Poland for over six hundred years are followers of Islam.

Tatars, who were not yet the followers of Islam, started to invade the Polish area in the 12th century. In the first part of the 14th c. the raids by the Muslim Tatars from the Golden Hord began. At the end of the 14th c. the Grand Duke of Lithuania Witold supported Toktamish, who wanted to achieve the title of khan of that Hord. After Toktamish's defeat, some of his followers settled in the area of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hence the names of Lithuanian and Polish Tatars). Later, the Muslims from the areas belonging to the Great Hord and also – though in smaller numbers – from Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Turkey came to the Polish land. The Tatars had their own detachments within the Polish arms. In 1410 they fought against the Teutonic Knights in the battle of Grunwald (Tannenberg).

The greatest inflow of the Muslims (approx. 100,000) in the Polish history took place in the 16th and the 17th centuries. As a result of their assimilation, which occurred at the turn of the 17th

and 18th centuries, most of them started to use the Polish language, while Arabic remained the language of prayer. The Tatars inhabiting the Polish area were Sunnites from the Hanaphic school. In the 16th c. they were subjected to the „Kadi of all Tatars of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania”, in the following centuries to the Turkish mufti, and later (till 1918) to the Crimean mufti. The Tatars fought on the Polish side during the Confederation of Bar, in Kosciuszko Insurrection, in the November and January Uprisings. In 1858, a Polish Muslim Jan Murza Tarak Buczacki translated the Koran from French into Polish.

In 1919 a Regiment of Tatar Uhlans (cavalry) was established, called also the Tatar „Light Horse”. It took part in the Kiev campaign and in 1920 it defended Warsaw and Plock against the Bolsheviks.

In 1925 the Muslim Religious Association was founded in the Polish Republic and a mufti’s seat was established in Vilna. Twenty Muslim communes existed in Poland in the interwar period, for example in Wilno (Vilna), Nieswiez, Nowogrodek, Slonim, Kruszy-niany, Bohoniki and Warsaw. At that time, the Polish Muslims numbered around 6,000 believers having 17 mosques.

The Polish Muslims took part in the defensive war of 1939. When it was over a lot of Tatars stayed in the areas incorporated into the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1990’s there were six denominational communes in Poland organized in the Muslim Religious Association: Warsaw, Gorzow Wielkopolski, Bialystok, Bohoniki, Kruszy-niany, Gdansk (with mosques in the last three mentioned places). Now, about 15,000 people of Tatar origin live in Poland. Around 5,000 of them still profess Islam. They are associated in the Muslim Religious Association of the Republic of Poland.

The monuments of the Muslim art include wooden mosques from the 18th c. at Kruszy-niany (restored in 1957) and from the 19th c. at Bohoniki. There are also cemeteries in both places. A modern mosque was built in Gdansk in the 1990’s.

Karaites and Karaism

Karaites („kara” in Hebrew means „to read”, „to recite”) are a community of Turkish origin coming from a nomadic people – Khasars. They are followers of an ethnic religion called Karaitic religion or Karaism. The founder of the Karaitic religion was Anan

of Basra (7th c.), who rejected the Talmud, and introduced elements taken from Christianity and Islam into the new doctrine. Karaism is considered either a section of Judaism or an independent religion. Its followers regard the Torah, Psalms and a few other books of the Hebrew Bible to be the only normative sacred texts, while rejecting later commentaries which constitute the doctrinal core of the Jewish religion. The rites and legislation of Karaites were influenced by Islam. According to experts on religion, Karaism is a dying religion.

Karaites inhabited Crimea, where Eupatoria was the main center. At the end of the 14th c. a part of the Crimean Karaites moved to Lithuania. The Grand Duke of Lithuania, Witold, settled them at Troki near Wilno, in a newly built castle on Galve lake. They also settled in Poniewieze. Now, a wooden Karaite kinesa from the 19th c. and several wooden Karaite houses from the same period can be found at Troki. In the 14th c. Karaites also came to Ruthenia, where they formed settlements in Halicz and Luck. Besides, they established a centre in Lwow (Lvov). In the interwar period they continued to form groups in those places and they created a new commune in Wilno (Vilna).

The spiritual and lay head of Karaites, hachan, stayed in Troki. According to the statistical data of 1935 from 900 to 1,500 Karaites inhabited the areas within the borders of the Second Republic of Poland. Before World War II, a newspaper in the Karaite language was published: „Karaj Awazy” („Karaite's Voice”).

Nowadays about 200 Karaites live in Poland. A Majority of them assimilated and do not practice the traditional religion any more. Contemporary Karaites live in Warszawa and in the Warszawa district, in the areas of Gdansk, Sopot, Gdynia and in Dolny Slask (Lower Silesia) (Wroclaw, Opole). In Warszawa there is the only Karaite cemetery in Poland. Karaites who feel attached to their religion are grouped in the Karaite Denominational Association, with the seat in Warszawa.

Eugeniusz SAKOWICZ