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Pilgrimage souvenirs in the collection of the Commissariat of the Holy Land of the Franciscan Order in Cracow

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*Pilgrimage Souvenirs in the Collection of the Commissariat
of the Holy Land of the Franciscan Order in Cracow*

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The present paper draws on inquiries made in 2001 in preparation for an exhibition organized by the Museum of the Jewish Historical Institute under the provisional title “Jerusalem. The image of the city in Polish collections of the second half of the 19th century through 1939”. Among the material that I collected then, which included paintings, sculpture, drawing and graphic prints, there were also items, often personal souvenirs from journeys to Jerusalem. The National Museum in Warsaw holds in its collections souvenirs from a journey to the Near East, the goal of which was the Holy Sepulcher, made in 1853 by the Count and Countess Adam and Katarzyna Potocki in thanksgiving for their release from an Austrian prison.¹ This small collection also includes, for example, pebbles from the river Jordan.

Most souvenirs from pilgrimages to the Holy Land are handwritten journals illustrated with photos, photo albums, postcards and souvenir herbaria (presenting most frequently lithographs of the holy places framed in dried plants from Palestine). One such herbarium is kept in the collection of the Museum of the Jewish Historical Institute. Our collection also includes pictures painted by artists traveling to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, e.g. Adolf Behrman and Abraham Neuman.² One typical feature of the

¹ E. Raczyński, *Pani Róża z domu Potocka, synowa Zygmunta Krasieńskiego, potem Edwardowa Raczyńska*, Warszawa 1997. Adam Potocki (1822–1872), he was the legatee of a great fortune from the Potocki and Branicki families. He was a politician and a patron of literature and science. He married Katarzyna Branicka in 1847. They went to the Middle East in 1852–1853; visited Egypt and other countries, traveled with the Polish painter Franciszek Tępa (1829–1929).

² Adolf Behrman (1876–1942), painter. He lived in Lodz and studied in Paris. He traveled in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. His exhibitions were held in Warsaw, Lodz, New York,



1. Souvenirs and publications related to the pilgrimages; Franciscans Commissariat of the Holy Land, Cracow; phot. by Magdalena Tarnowska.

souvenirs from the Holy Land under discussion is that they represent places connected with the three faiths present today in Jerusalem: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, customarily visited then and now by pilgrims and travelers. Therefore, the second theme of our project was Jerusalem – city of three religions.

Of the collections that were covered by our inquiry, the least known and perhaps the most interesting one was the collection belonging to the Franciscans' Commissariat of the Holy Land in the Monastery of St. Casimir in Cracow, located in Reformacka Street (Figs. 1–3). The commissariat was created to cooperate with the Custody of the Holy Land (Custodia Terrae Sacrae) in February 1902 by a letter of Friar David Fleming, vicar general of the Franciscan Order in Rome. Prior to Poland's liberation it was called the Commissariat of the Holy Land for Galicia (Province), and after 1919 for all Poland. The first commissary, from 1902 through 1911, was Joachim Maciejczyk. Initially, the commissary resided in Lvov, but in 1913, during

Hamburg, Morocco and Palestine. During the World War II he was imprisoned and killed in the Bialystok Ghetto. Abraham Neuman (1873–1943), painter. He studied in Warsaw, Cracow, and Paris. He lived in Cracow and Zakopane. He traveled in Europe and visited Palestine twice – in 1904, and 1925–1927, when he was a teacher at Beceal Art School in Jerusalem. He died in the Cracow Ghetto.



2. Pope Leo XIII medals from the Holy Land; Franciscans Commissariat of the Holy Land, Cracow.



3. Souvenir cards from the Holy Land; Franciscans Commissariat of the Holy Land, Cracow.

the term in office of the second commissary, Zygmunt Janicki (1911–1923), the Commissariat was transferred to Cracow, where it has remained to this day.³ The present commissary, nominated in 1999, is Friar Nikodem Gdyk; he has actively pursued the study and cataloguing of the collection. He has also prepared a number of exhibitions and is editor of the Polish-language quarterly “Ziemia Święta” (Holy Land).

The chief tasks of commissariats around Europe and even in the United States – there is one in Washington which has been in existence since 1899 – is to collect funds in support of the activities of the Holy Land Custody in Jerusalem. This Custody, ran by the Franciscans in Jerusalem ever since 1299, was initially located at the Cenacle, and after 1557, when it was evicted from there, in the Holy Savior Church. From the start the order has cared for pilgrims and for the sacred places of Christianity. Prior to 1902 Poles transferred money for this purpose through the General Custody in Vienna which had been reactivated in 1843. The Polish Franciscans active in the Custody and later also in the Cracow Commissariat were involved in popularizing the Holy Land in Poland through the publication of travel reports and guides in the daily press, such as the periodicals *Kronika Rodzinna*, *Towarzystwo Bożego Grobu*, and published guides (including one published by Feliks Lassner in 1855); they also collected funds for Polish mementos in the Holy Land.

The pilgrimage movement was not widespread until the mid-19th century.⁴ Members of the nobility or wealthy merchants used to travel in small groups with their own guides and ecclesiastics. Representatives of the lower classes also traveled on occasion. One such pilgrim was the famous Feliks Boroń, whose report was recorded and published in Cracow in 1863.⁵

The second half of the 19th century saw a gradual development of religious tourism and sightseeing in the Near East. From 1862 to 1890 Jerusalem was visited by 1286 people from Poland.⁶ This justified the establishment of a Polish House, which was realized in 1876 by Friar J. Bielak (1834–1900), who stayed in Palestine from 1862 to 1876. Bielak was the archivist and notary of the Custody.

³ OFM A. J. Szeinke, *Polscy Bracia Mniejsi w służbie Ziemi Świętej 1342–1995*, Poznań 1999; the book includes all information pertaining to the history of the Custody and Commissariat.

⁴ Cf.: S. Burkot, *Polskie podróżopisarstwo romantyczne*, Warszawa 1988.

⁵ Feliks Boroń (1802–1864) a farmer who lived near Cracow; his first pilgrimage to Rome was in 1861, in 1862 he traveled alone to Palestine.

⁶ O. Z. Janicki, *Pierwsza polska pielgrzymka do Ziemi Świętej, 1907 rok*, Kraków 1907.

Even so, before the creation of the Commissariat Poles did not visit the Holy Land in large organized pilgrimage groups. Friar Maciejczyk, the first commissary already mentioned, organized the first two national pilgrimages, one in 1907 and the second one in 1909. He participated personally in the first one. In later years the Commissariat undertook the organization of similar undertakings in 1914, 1934 and 1935. The first Polish pilgrimage following World War II did not take place until 1989.

The Commissariat collection contains numerous souvenirs and publications related to the pilgrimages, including a sizable book collection on the topic. Of the greatest interest is a set of souvenirs from the first and second national pilgrimage. The first pilgrimage, in 1907, lasted from August 30 to September 20. It involved 467 pilgrims from all of the subjugated Polish territories and from all classes of society. The Commissariat arranged for the support of the Emperor Francis Joseph and the Vatican. Pilgrims started out with the blessing of Bishop Nowak. The organization was excellent with participants divided into five groups of 90 persons each, each group having its number inscribed on a banner with the emblem of the Holy Land. Every pilgrim received a flask and was required to wear on the left arm a white band embroidered with the number in red and the same emblem. Luggage was marked with the same number, too.

Accompanying the pilgrims were two physicians, three nurses and 85 ecclesiastics. They started out by train to Vienna, from there to Trieste where they boarded the ship *Tyrol* that took them to Jaffa. They arrived on September 5 and took a train to Jerusalem. Writing about this pilgrimage, Friar Zygmunt Janicki described the emotions that were usually evoked in those times when the goal of the pilgrimage came into sight: 'The mountains that surround the Holy City are completely barren and empty, the stones that stick out appear no different from huge whitened bones gathered here by the centuries. The shroud of death or a curse seems to be spread over the entire land and only when you looked into the distance did you see a city of considerable size, full of quite spectacular structures. [...] But what is distinctive above all these are the two church domes [...] of the Holy Sepulcher.'⁷ The pilgrimage entered Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate, walking in fours, and went to the Holy Sepulcher basilica. Mr. Cepach, the head of the Bronowice territorial commune, dressed in a Cracow *sukmana*, a traditional peasant overcoat, led the procession with a banner. The banner terminating in the cross of the Holy Land had a sash with the text in gold

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

embroidery: 'First Polish Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 30 August 1907'. The statue of the Virgin Mary, which accompanied the pilgrims, was carried by girls dressed in white. The pilgrims spent eight days in Jerusalem. Particular groups were located in the hospices of the Franciscan friars, the Casa Nova, and the Austrian and French hospices. A souvenir album with characteristic ornaments imitating the above-mentioned herbarium, contained photographs of all the Holy Places visited during the pilgrimage: apart from a community mass at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher and on Mount Sion, where the Dormition of the Virgin Mary was said to have taken place, and at the Custody, the pilgrims also took part in the Franciscan Way of the Cross organized every Friday in the streets of the Old Town, they went to the Mount of the Olives, to Gethsemane, the Ascension temple that remained in Moslem hands, the Cave of Agony, and the tombs of Joseph, Anna, Joachim, Mary, in the Valley of Josephat (Cedron); they visited the Church of St. Anne in the birthplace of the Virgin Mary, Ecce Homo, the House of Caiphas, and the Cenacle.

They also went to places connected with Judaism and Islam: the Temple Mount with the Golden Gate, Solomon's Stables, and the Al-Aqsa and Omar mosques. At the Wailing Wall they met old Jews from the Cracow area who had come to Jerusalem to die and be buried as tradition required in the Valley of Cedron. Outside Jerusalem the pilgrims saw Bethlehem with all the places commemorating the birth of Christ, the tomb of Rachel, the Dead Sea and the Jordan River where they took water as a souvenir. A few of the participants also went to Egypt. The souvenir album ends with group photographs of all five groups made in the courtyard of the Custody in the Holy Savior Monastery. At the close of the pilgrimage the pilgrims gave the Franciscan superior a silver chalice. The Treasury of the Custody still holds a silver vase for myrrh that was offered in 1618 by the Cracow castellan Mikołaj Zebrzydowski, 6 lamps offered in 1746 by Prince Czartoryski of Lithuania and other items.⁸ The pilgrims returned on September 20 and were enthusiastically greeted by the residents of Cracow. During an official procession to St. Casimir monastery crowds of people waited to touch the robes of the pilgrims, as custom requires. In the Holy Savior Church each of the pilgrims received a souvenir medal, of gold, silver or bronze, instituted by Pope Leo XIII (1810–1903, pope since 1878) and a pilgrimage certificate.

⁸ Mikołaj Zebrzydowski (1533–1620), Palatine of Cracow, High Chamberlain, he was a founder of one of the most famous Calvarias in Poland – Zebrzydowska Calvary. Aleksander August Czartoryski (1697–1782). Cf.: Z. Bania, *Święte Miary, Jerozolimskie. Grób Pański, Anastasis, Kalwaria*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 80–99.

The second national pilgrimage went in 1909, on the 700th anniversary of the establishment of the Franciscan Order in Assisi. It was organized by popular demand from enthusiasts of the first pilgrimage. Participants numbered 453 and, judging by surviving reports, it followed much the same program. Apart from these souvenirs, the Commissariat collection includes a huge number of leaflets, informative and propagandist in nature, meant to serve the purpose of collecting funds for the Custody and the two Polish Houses, the original one and a second one that was built in the 1940s. Also present are souvenir cards with dried plants from the Holy Land and many other items donated by travelers.

The collection is a specific form of guide to places visited by pilgrims in the Holy Land in the early 20th century. These items permit us to follow the pilgrims in their pious travels. Not surprisingly, we still visit the same Holy Places today and experience similar emotions.

Revised by Nicholas Smith