

IMAGES OF THE JEWS

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JEWS AND THEIR LANGUAGE IN WUJEK'S BIBLE 1599

The Bible in the translation of Jakub Wujek (1541–1597) was the most popular old Polish translation of the Holy Scriptures. In 1593 he published the New Testament.¹ In 1599, two years after his death, the whole Bible was published, after a review by a committee of Jesuits.² It is, therefore, legitimate to conclude that the text of the translation of the whole Bible is that of Wujek, albeit corrected by the committee. The comments on the text were made by Wujek, and as far as the New Testament is concerned, they are almost identical with those of the Bible of 1599 and the New Testament of 1593. The Bible had an extensive preface, titled *Apparatus sacer*, expanded probably by Marcin Łaszcz.³ Both the commentary and *Apparatus sacer*, contain a lot of informa-

¹ *Nowy Testament Pana naszego IESVSA CHRISTVSA. Z nowu z Łacińskiego y z Greckiego na Polskie wiernie a szczyrze przelożony: y Argumentami abo Summariuszami każdych Książ / y Rozdziałow / y Annotacyami po brzegach objaśniony. Przydane są Nauki y Przestrogi mało nie za każdym Rozdziałem : Porownanie Ewangelistow SS. Dzieie y drogi rozmaite Piotra y Pawła S. y Regestr rzeczy gównieyszych na końcu. Przez D. IAKVBA WVYKA, Theologa Societatis IESV. Z dozwoleniem Starszych. Pod rozszakdek Kościoła S. Powszechnego Rzymskiego wszystko niech podlęże, Kraków, A. Piotrkowczyk, 1593, 4° (copy: National Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław, catalogue number XVI.Qu.3065) [hereafter abbreviated as NT 1593].*

² *BIBLIA TO IEST KSIĘGI STAREGO Y NOWEGO TESTAMNETV WEDŁVG ŁACINSKIEGO przekładu starego, w kościele powszechnym przyiętego, na Polski ięzyk z nowu z pilnością przelożone, Z DOKŁADANIEM TEXTV ZYDOWSKIEGO y Greckiego, y z wykładem Katholickim, trudnieyszych mieysc do obrony Wiary świętey powszechney przeciw kacertzwóm tych czasów należących: PRZEZ D. IAKVBA WVYKA Z WĄGROWCA, THEOLOGA SOCIETATIS IESV. Z DOZWOLENIEM STOLICE APOSTOLSKIEY, a nakładem Iego M. Księdza Arcybiskupa Gnieźnieńskiego, etć. wydane, Kraków, Drukarnia Łazarzowa, 1599, 2° (copy: Warsaw University Library, catalogue number Sd. 612.49) [hereafter abbreviated as B 1599].*

³ See Smereka, „Wstęp,” XXXIII.

tion concerning the Hebrew language, the Jews and their writings, helping to understanding better how Polish Catholics (particularly the Jesuits) at the end of the 16th century perceived the Jews and their languages.

The research problems identified are: What did Polish Catholics know about the Hebrew language at the end of the 16th century? How did they perceive the Jews? Which were the sources of their knowledge? What was the influence on Polish society (mainly the Catholics) by the mere fact that they had been reading mainly Wujek's translation the Bible for 366 years? This research will refer to Wujek's Bible of 1599 and supplement of the New Testament of 1593. First, I am going to present the knowledge of the Jesuits about the Hebrew language (1) and Jewish holy writings, their canon and interpretation (2). Second, I will deal with the image of the Jews in Wujek's Bible (3), the knowledge of their customs and festivals (4). Finally, I am going to present the issue connected with Christian-Jewish relations (5).

The Knowledge of the Hebrew Language

The Jesuits were fascinated by the biblical languages which they learned in their colleges.⁴ As far as the Hebrew language is concerned, they were of the opinion that along with Greek and Latin it belongs to the three "most eminent and outstanding"⁵ languages of the world. It is in these languages that the Bible was written,⁶ and, according to the Gospel of John, they were used to make an inscription on the cross of Jesus. According to the Jesuits, the Hebrew language is the oldest and the most important of them all. It is the language that has been spoken by people since the beginning of the world, what is more, it is the language which God chose Himself to communicate with the first people.⁷ It was the language that the whole humanity spoke until they were all confounded at the Tower of Babel. The very term "Hebrew language" stems from Eber (Hebr.: *'ēḇer*), who was the descendant of Sem (Gen 10:24-25; 11:14-17). After the

⁴ See. Pietkiewicz, *W poszukiwaniu „szczyrego słowa Bożego,”* 75–78, 152–160; Piechnik, *Dzieje Akademii Wileńskiej*; Piechnik, *Powstanie i rozwój jezuickiej „Ratio studiorum.”*

⁵ B 1599, p. **2r.

⁶ The Jesuits were of the opinion that Latin was a biblical language. According to the authors of *Apparatus sacer*, St. Mark wrote his Gospel in Latin and translated other parts of the Bible (or maybe the whole of the Bible) into Latin. It is in this way that the authors understood the words of St. Jerome (Eusebius Hieronymus Stridonensis, *De viris illustribus*, caput 1) that St. Mark was the translator of St. Peter "he was so-called for the reason that the Latin Holy Scripture was made by him" (B 1599, p. **3r, **3v). They also thought that the Letter to the Hebrews was originally written by St. Paul in Hebrew and then translated into Greek (B 1599, p. **3r). See also B 1599, p. ***1r.

⁷ B 1599, p. **2r-v.

events under the Tower of Babel, only the family of Eber could use Hebrew.⁸ God used the Hebrew language and its letters to pass on His Word onto mankind. Hence, the Hebrew language is known to be the divine language.⁹ The reader of Wujek's Bible receives a little more of the basic information about the Hebrew language. For example, he learns that the Jews used two alphabets: the Samaritan and the Square script. Ezra changed the alphabet because he did not want the Jews to use the same system of writing as the Samaritans.¹⁰ The Jesuits inform the reader that some Hebrew letters are very similar and that is why they can be easily mistaken, they can also be written with or without the so-called vowel points, which can help with the deciphering the words.¹¹ With respect to the custom of using holy writings with or without vowel points, the author of *Apparatus sacer* introduce to the readers to some customs he met in synagogues of his time: The Jews were aware that the so-called points do not belong to the Holy Scripture. In order "to testify this up till now ... in their synagogues during solemn festivals, when they take out the Scrolls from their shrine which they show them written without vowel points."¹²

Holy Jewish Writings, Their Canon and Interpretation

The Jesuits held Jewish holy writings in high esteem. They were of the opinion that they went through three redactions. (1) Before Ezra they had been written by means of "Mosaic letters" that is in the Samaritan way. (2) In the times of Ezra the change of the alphabet from the Samaritan to the square one took place. Ezra collected the dispersed Hebrew holy writings in one book and removed the mistakes of copiers. (3) Around the 5th century AD the Masorettes added vowel points to the Hebrew letters given in the form of consonants by Ezra, keeping them intact. The motive behind the Masorettes' action was an anti-Christian one: the vocalization of the text was to deprive the Hebrew Bible of its Christological sense – on account of that the Masoretic text used in the 16th century differed from Latin Vulgata.¹³ The Jesuits claimed that "the points do not belong to the Holy Scripture."¹⁴ Even rabbis themselves sometimes dissent from Masoretic vocalization.¹⁵ Because of all that, the Catholics preferred the Vulgata, which they regarded as the Christian interpretation of

⁸ B 1599, p. 13–14.

⁹ B 1599, p. **2r-v, **6v.

¹⁰ B 1599, p. **2r.

¹¹ B 1599, p. **2v.

¹² B 1599, p. **4r.

¹³ B 1599, p. **2v, **3v, **4r.

¹⁴ B 1599, p. **2r.

¹⁵ B 1599, p. **4r.

the consonantal text produced by St. Jerome in the pre-Masoretic period. According to the Jesuits, it is possible to change individual words which are determined by the Masoretes by eliminating their vocalizations.¹⁶ Moreover, the knowledge of biblical Hebrew was much better among the Jews at the time of Jerome's translation of the Holy Scripture.¹⁷ St Jerome became acquainted with Hebrew through personal contacts with the pre-Masoretic generations of Hebrew scholars.¹⁸

The Jesuits did not trust the philological skills of the Jews living in the 16th century. Those Jews themselves, while being involved in a continuous dissemination all over the world, lost the competence of the Hebrew language. Therefore, the Protestants and the Antitrinitarians, who learned from them, cannot in any way be sure of this acquired knowledge.¹⁹ These allegations constitute a pretext for the criticism of heretical philological studies and their interpretation of the Bible, as well as for the undermining of the validity of the scholarly contacts between Christians and Jews.²⁰ The Jesuits also had a low opinion of the practices of their opponents (the Protestants and the Antitrinitarians), who had translated the Bible from the original languages, but not from Vulgata. The scepticism of the heretics towards the Vulgata was understood by them as a lack of trust in St Jerome's knowledge and his competence, who must have known the biblical languages, including the Hebrew language, much better than the 16th century Jews for whom Hebrew was not their mother tongue but an acquired language learned at school.²¹

According to the Jesuits, the contacts of heretics with the Jews brought about one more negative result. The Protestants accepted, as canonical, only those writings in the Old Testament which were considered holy by the Jews. The Jesuits are acutely critical of this kind of approach, treating it as yet another example of the Judaization of Christianity.²² Wujek was of the opinion that although the Jews and the heretics read the holy writings, they still did not understand them in the right way.²³ The author of *Apparatus sacer* thinks that the knowledge of biblical languages including the Hebrew language is not enough to read the Bible correctly. The Jews themselves along with the heretics are the perfect example of that, as they read the Bible, but somehow cannot find the Christian faith in it.²⁴ The commentaries provide clear hints

¹⁶ B 1599, p. **2v.

¹⁷ B 1599, p. ***1r.

¹⁸ B 1599, p. **4r, **5v.

¹⁹ B 1599, p. **4r.

²⁰ B 1599, p. **5r-v, ***1r, ***2v.

²¹ B 1599, p. **4v, ***1r.

²² B 1599, p. **6r-v.

²³ NT 1593, p. 324; B 1599, p. 1239; cf. NT 1593, p. 337 and B 1599, p. 1244.

²⁴ B 1599, p. ***2r.

to the situation of the 16th century: some representatives of the radical Reformation movements rejected the Truths of the Christian Faith and adopted Jewish beliefs by rejecting the divinity of Christ and His messianic dignity, by celebrating the Sabbath and performing circumcision (the so-called Sabbatar-ians). The reason for their fall was the improper reading of the Holy Scripture, which did not take into consideration the teaching of the Church and the authority of Church Fathers. In their opinion sole reading of the writings is not sufficient but the application of appropriate interpretations is necessary.²⁵ It should be noted that the polemics against the Jews was connected with the ones of the Catholics against different fractions of the Reformation. Wujek's Bible appeared at the end of the 16th century (1599). At that time the negative results of the study of different Jewish writings had already being known, which created a threat of Judaization of Christianity (for example the Sabbatarian Movement).²⁶ The Jesuits were well aware of the danger and aimed at presenting it as the result of the Reformation which had rejected the authority of the Church and her Tradition of the interpretation of the Holy Scripture. They resorted to the study of the holy writings in the original versions on the basis of their own principles, or even in a totally arbitrary way, which is indicated by the lack of unity among the Reformers.²⁷ According to the Jesuits, the Judaization of Christianity constituted the next logical step in the process. While associating Reformation movements with the Jews, the Jesuits showed their readers the consequences resulting from accepting the views of Luther, Calvin, the Anabaptists and the Antitrinitarians, namely one turns into a follower of Judaism.²⁸

The Image of the Jews

Wujek used several terms to describe the Jews. The most popular of them was the very word "the Jew." He also used the word "Hebrews," explaining that the term "Hebrews" refers to the Jews who lived in Judea.²⁹ Wujek also uses the expression "the nation of Israel."³⁰ These words appear in the Wujek's Bible with different designations which express his unfavorable attitude toward the Jews. The following are some examples of the vocabulary used: "the

²⁵ B 1599, p. ***2r.

²⁶ See more: Pietkiewicz, *W poszukiwaniu „szczyrego słowa Bożego,”* 60–63, 64–66, 68–70, 78–81.

²⁷ B 1599, p. ***2r, ***2v, ***3r, **5r.

²⁸ B 1599, p. ***2v.

²⁹ NT 1593, p. 751; B 1599, p. 1419.

³⁰ NT 1593, p. 393; B 1599, p. 1268.

ungrateful,”³¹ “the enemies of Christ,”³² “unfaithful people, greedy people, cruel murderers full of every maliciousness,”³³ “resistant and irredeemable.”³⁴ These expressions refer mainly to the Jews of the New Testament era; however, the saturation of the commentary with denigrations could not go unheeded in the formation of the negative image of the Jews in the eyes of the readers of Wujek’s Bible of the 16th and the 17th centuries.

Yet, the picture of the Jews in Wujek’s Bible is not one-sidedly negative. This image stems not from ethnic motivators but religious ones. Wujek systematizes the teaching of the New Testament about the Jews by dividing them into three groups: The first one consists of the believers in Christ. The second group consists of those who believed in Christ but kept Jewish traditions at the same time. Finally, the third group comprises those who rejected Christ and who persecuted the Christians.³⁵ Wujek criticizes the two latter groups. Only the first group is fully acceptable to him. The Jews believing in Christ were also persecuted by the Jews, who stuck steadfastly to Judaism, and by the so-called “false Apostles,” that is Judaizers.³⁶ As it has been mentioned above, the complicated and turbulent religious atmosphere in Europe of the 16th century had great influence on the image of the Jews presented in Wujek’s Bible. The supporters of the Reformation with its factions (Lutherans, Reformed, Polish Brethrens) were all univocally equated with heretics and dissidents. The followers of Judaism or Islam were perceived in a similar way.

Jewish issues appeared also in the context of the discussion on justification at the time of Reformation. The Protestants were teaching that justification is realized only through faith, whereas the Catholics believed it happened as a result of “faith and good works.”³⁷ Wujek defines “God’s righteousness” (Gr. δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) as the one “which is exercised in man by God who makes man really just”³⁸ and he contrasts it to “Jewish self-righteousness,” “supported by the Law, without any assistance of faith in Christ’s grace,”³⁹ “attributing too much to their own deeds, according to the Law, having no intention or desire to admit that the death of Jesus the Lord was absolutely crucial for them and for the pagans to obtain salvation.”⁴⁰ The Jews still celebrate the solemnities of the Old Law not understanding that “the solemnities ceased to exist.”⁴¹

³¹ NT 1593, p. 392; B 1599, p. 1267.

³² B 1599, p. ***2v.

³³ B 1599, p. ***2v.

³⁴ NT 1593, p. 392; B 1599, p. 1267.

³⁵ NT 1593, p. 517; B 1599, p. 1321.

³⁶ NT 1593, p. 751; B 1599, p. 1419.

³⁷ NT 1593, p. 518; B 1599, p. 1321.

³⁸ NT 1593, p. 559 and B 1599, p. 1338.

³⁹ NT 1593, p. 559 and B 1599, p. 1338.

⁴⁰ NT 1593, p. 517; B 1599, p. 1321.

⁴¹ NT 1593, p. 517; B 1599, p. 1321; cf. B 1599, p. 946.

Knowledge of Jewish Customs and Festivals

Wujek's commentary also contains much information about the Jews, their festivals, faith and lifestyle. The information refers mainly to the biblical times, but it contains updated elements as well, allowing a Christian reader to associate, for example, Jewish festivals with his own calendar, pointing out that some of them heralded the events of the New Testament. In this very way Wujek describes the feast of Passover and the Day of Atonement, which he regards as the proclamation of the Passion, death and resurrection of Christ, the New Year and Sukkot.⁴²

Christian-Jewish Relations

Wujek was aware of the long-lasting Christian-Jewish feud and tried to show its origin. According to the Jesuit the ultimate cause of the conflict is the person of Jesus of Nazareth, regarded by Christians as the Messiah (Christ) and the preaching of faith in Christ among the pagans. The conflict dates back to the times of the New Testament.⁴³ The Jews did not admit that Jesus was the Messiah, because they could not come to terms with His death on the cross. They had different expectations: "they waited for a Christ who could be akin to other secular kings, and who could make them great and wealthy in this world."⁴⁴ God tried to convince the Jews to believe in Christ, but they took the liberty to reject the call, which was announced by the prophets and is being realized up till the 16th century.⁴⁵ The history of the relation between the Jews and the Church did not end with that. Once all the pagans had entered in the Church by then "the whole Israel will be saved and then the Last Day will come"⁴⁶ (cf. Romans 11:25).

Conclusion

As far as the sources of the commentaries and prefaces are concerned, the Jesuits refer to the text of the Bible itself, reading it in a strictly literal way (hence their statements that Hebrew was used in Paradise). The majority of information about the Jews in the commentaries was provided by the New Testament for exegetical purposes. The works of the Church Fathers and other ancient Christian and Jewish writers constituted another important source of

⁴² B 1599, p. 132; NT 1593, p. 337 and B 1599, p. 1244.

⁴³ NT 1593, p. 517; B 1599, p. 1321.

⁴⁴ NT 1593, p. 517; B 1599, p. 1321.

⁴⁵ NT 1593, p. 560 and B 1599, p. 1339; NT 1593, p. 391, 517; B 1599, p. 1267, 1321; B 1599, p. ***1v.

⁴⁶ NT 1599, p. 560.

information about the Jews. The Jesuits also made use of the writings of contemporaneous Jewish grammarians, e.g. Elias Levita (1469–1549). However, it should be mentioned that Wujek was not alone in writing the commentaries. He relied extensively on already existing works, e.g. the works of St Jerome,⁴⁷ St Augustin,⁴⁸ St Robert Bellarmin⁴⁹ or the English New Testament issued in Rheims in 1582.⁵⁰ With respect to the range of influence of Wujek's translation of the Bible on Polish society, its impact was very wide. Yet the situation was different with the commentaries and the prefaces. In the 19th century, editions without commentaries or editions with newly updated commentaries started to appear. The extent of the influence of a commentary from the editions of the 16th and the 18th centuries is considerably limited, because until 1821 the whole Bible was issued only three times (Kraków 1599, Wrocław 1740 and 1771).⁵¹ It has been estimated that over that long period of time (222 years) the number of copies of those editions amounted to about 3000.⁵²

As far as the influence of Wujek's Bible on Polish society is concerned, it is worth considering the way and intensity of its use in the developed and popular education run by the Jesuits. Jesuits' schools were putting particular emphasis on the study of the Holy Scripture and different commentaries to the Bible, especially of the Fathers of the Church. Already in 1578, the Bible was taught as a separate subject. However, the text of Latin Vulgate and Latin commentaries constituted the core of the studies. In Jesuits' schools the Polish language played only a secondary role in the process of education and formation. Hence, it can be concluded that Wujek's Bible, so popular in the Jesuits' environment,⁵³ must have played some role in their formation and education. Nevertheless, it was still a supplementary role. Other biblical translations into national languages functioned in a similar way in Jesuits' schools. For example, in the 90's of the 16th century, that is before Wujek's translations appeared, the Holy Scripture was commented in Polish in lower classes in Vilnius Academy

⁴⁷ See e.g. B 1599, p. 2, 9, 12, 39, 40 and more.

⁴⁸ See e.g. B 1599, p. 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 23 and more.

⁴⁹ See NT 1593, p. 27.

⁵⁰ See NT 1593, p. 27.

⁵¹ See Sieg, "Jakub Wujek," 10–12; Sikora, „Reedycje Biblii ks. Jakuba Wujka,” 101–123.

⁵² Average circulation of prints in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Renaissance amounted to 500 copies. Few books, for instance, translations of the Bible, might have been printed in larger quantities, about 1000–1500 copies. See Siess-Krzyszowski, "Warianty typograficzne Biblii brzeskiej," 52, 80; Pilarczyk, "*Biblia Radziwiłłowska* vel *Brzeska*," 75.

⁵³ The second and third edition of the whole Bible was published in the Academic Printing House in Wrocław. Those editions contained elaborated critical apparatus and extensive commentaries, being to a great extent a compilation of the texts of Church Fathers.

on Sundays and on public holidays. As one can see, the influence of Wujek's Bible had its limitations, here as well.

The radical and "undiplomatic" language, as we would put it today, was conducive to the negative image of Judaism. In order to understand it fully, we must take into consideration the conditions of the epoch, marked by very intense and emotional religious polemics. The language used in Wujek's Bible in the comments regarding the Jewish issues was not very different from the one used in disputes and arguments between Christians of the time.⁵⁴ What is more, because of the sacred character of the text, the language itself was much softer and more diplomatic than in the real polemics.

Summary

The author, on the basis of the study of the commentaries and prefaces to Wujek's Bible of 1599, depicts the image of the Jews, their language and their customs as it was presented by Jakub Wujek and his contemporaneous fellow Jesuits. The author refers to the sources of the information contained in Wujek's Bible, evaluates it in the context of the religious situation in the Renaissance Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and attempts at establishing the realm and power of the influence it had on readers.

Keywords: Wujek's Bible, Jews, Hebrew, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation

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⁵⁴ Piechnik, *Dzieje Akademii Wileńskiej*, vol. 1: *Początki Akademii Wileńskiej (1570–1599)*, Rzym 1984, 87–88; vol. 2: *Rozkwit Akademii Wileńskiej w latach 1600–1655*, Rzym 1983, 137–140; vol. 3: *Próby odnowy Akademii Wileńskiej po klęskach Potopu i okres kryzysu 1655–1730*, Rzym 1987, 223.

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