

MONIKA SZABŁOWSKA-ZAREMBA
monika.szablowska-zaremba@kul.pl

Institute for Literary Research, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
ORCID: 0000-0002-2064-1943

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY AS A SOURCE OF NARRATION ON JEWISH SPACES IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD IN POLAND

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide an introductory description of *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*, the weekly supplement to *Nasz Przegląd*, an all-Poland pro-Zionist daily, published in the years 1924–1939. It was the only long-standing photographic supplement that remained in the market for so long in the interwar period. In the 1930s Warsaw, an abundance of photographers existed but not many specialized in press photography. The two most notable figures in the Polish–Jewish diaspora were Leon Forbert, a famous film producer, and Henryk Bojmiński, an outstanding screenwriter. Both contributed significantly to the development of Polish and Jewish cinematography. Both were enamoured by photography. Their atelier at Warsaw’s 11, Wierzbowa, was frequented by the Jewish and Polish world’s literary, artistic, and political élite. In *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*, they printed various types of photography: portraits, photos from Jewish theatres, street photography, as well as numerous reproductions of the works of Jewish painters and printmakers. Today, their photographs are one of the few sources of knowledge on Jewish life in interwar Poland.

KEYWORDS: Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany, Leon Forbert, Henryk (Jechiel) Bojm, Polish-Jewish interwar press, Jewish photography, Jewish press photography, Jewish photographers in the interwar period.

In the last twenty-five years, photography has been recognized as an important documentation tool of its times, both within the individual and the social perspectives. Through this recognition, case studies have become one of the most popular research methods. Moreover, photography also enables connecting the humanities with sociology as, through visualising the existing reality, it talks about society, its behaviour, and its transformation.

In this article, I approach photography as a cultural testimony, which, next to literary sources, provides invaluable knowledge on Jewish matters in the territory of the Second Polish Republic in the years 1918–1939. Photography is a new form of building narration based on what has been purposefully recorded as a response to the social needs of today. Photography may be viewed from many perspectives. Placing the photographs within a specific cultural order seems worthwhile, since the sequence will provide an opportunity for a new reading.

When discussing press photography, one should start with its definition. Even though today's state of research is quite impressive,¹ Since the subject of our study is interbellum photography, we need to refer to the definition of press photography from the period in question. Marian Fuks might have raised the problem

1 See J. Mikosz, "Ogniskowanie uwagi czytelników poprzez fotografię prasową – jej gatunki informacyjne i publicystyczne" in: *Szkice Medioznawcze, Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna*, 2017, no. 13, pp. 11–31; R. Mariański, "Fotografia w polskim systemie prasowym", *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, 2003, no. 2, pp. 145–164; J. Szyłko-Kwas, "Fotografia jako wypowiedź dziennikarska – odmiany gatunkowe", *Studia Medioznawcze*, 2019, no. 1, pp. 83–98; K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, *Jaka informacja? Rzecz o percepcji fotografii dziennikarskiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2010; ibidem, "Jak oceniać i wartościować fotografię dziennikarską", *Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski*, 2016, no. 2, pp. 326–33; ibidem, *Fotograficzne gatunki dziennikarskie*, WAiP, Warszawa 2017.

for the first time² in his short book *Zaranie fotografii dziennikarskiej w Polsce* [‘The dawn of press photography in Poland’]. Fuks published it in 1925 in Warsaw to introduce some order into the chaos that accompanied the still-new phenomenon:

press photography is a self-sufficient art, demanding, apart from the ability to take photos, first of all: a knack for journalism, a sensitivity to current events, the skill to instantly seize that which in a second will disappear forever, a quick reflex, spot-on decision making skills, sharpness, the knowledge of holiday customs and festivities, knowing people, relationships, habits and mores, traditions, people who play now – or might do so in the future – important social roles, perfect memory, agreeability, the ability to obtain interesting background information on the photos taken; and apart from this – calm, sensibility, confidence at work; an indispensable skill is the ability to compose the image nicely, shoot it against a beautiful background so that the photo lends itself well to technical reproduction in a journal.³

Almost a hundred years have passed since the publication of these words, but they are still relevant. Today one could add that photography should primarily shock the viewer, be loud, and stand out from the multitude of images published every day in the virtual world. Two things strike me the most in Fuks’ text. First, that a press photograph is an independent work, and therefore, on its own, it constitutes a piece of information about events, not needing verbal commentary. Moreover, it has value, like a painting, a sculpture or a poem; it demands technical knowledge and some artistic

- 2 Marian Fuks (1884-1935) - photographer, photojournalist and filmmaker. Fuks became the founding member and, for many years, the chairman of *Stowarzyszenie Pracowników Fotografii* [Association of Photography Professionals] in Warsaw. See *Marian Fuks – pierwszy fotoreporter II RP*, photos chosen and captioned by K. Wójcik, Dom Spotkań z Historią, Warszawa 2017. A collection of his photography at POLONA https://polona.pl/search/?query=Marian_Fuks&filters=public:1&sort=creator%20asc [19.03.2021]
- 3 *Zaranie fotografii dziennikarskiej w Polsce*, Warszawa 1925, pp. 5-6. The booklet was published on the fifteenth anniversary of the first Polish photographic agency “Propaganda,” founded by Marian Fuks. The article is not signed by Fuks, and the account of his work is written in the third person. Yet, it is more than certain that he is the author because he not only shares his thoughts on the photojournalist’s work but also describes the circumstances in which particular photos were taken.

talent. These words helped elevate the status of press photography, which is of special importance at the time when it was a shared conviction that photography was ancillary to art. Allegedly press photography did not require artistic talent, only technical savvy.

Secondly, Fuks pointed out photography's cultural role: it is a medium for memory. Its task is to record fleeting events. It needs to contain the probability of reflecting something real instead of a posed image imitating everyday life. In the light of the photographs considered in the present study, it is a critical postulate.

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY - A DOCUMENT OF ITS TIMES EXCLUSIVELY?

The history of interwar press photography is brief but dynamic.⁴ Historians specializing in the subject tend to agree that the first Polish photojournalists were Konrad Brandel⁵ and Marian Fuks, who worked mainly in Warsaw. Very soon, Lviv had become another centre drawing amateurs of the new profession. The first periodicals devoted strictly to photography were founded in Lviv: *Kronika Fotograficzna* [1898] and *Wiadomości Fotograficzne* [1905]. In Warsaw, in 1904, the Towarzystwo Fotograficzne Warszawskie [Warsaw Photographic Society] started issuing *Fotograf Warszawski* [Warsaw Photographer], renamed in 1925 to *Fotograf Polski* [Polish Photographer] - one of the important journals for photography professionals. Every year the number of press photographers grew, just as the number of photographers who considered photography not only an occupation providing income but also a means of artistic expression.⁶ The number of photos in newspapers grew. For

4 See also E. Nowak-Mitura, *Początki fotografii w prasie polskiej: „Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1859–1900*, Liber por arte, Warszawa 2015; M. Krzanicki, *Fotografia i propaganda. Polski fotoreportaż prasowy w dwudziestolecu międzywojennym*, Universitas, Kraków 2013.

5 Konrad Brandel (1838–1920) - photographer, inventor, cooperated with, among others, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* and *Fotograf Warszawski*. This work permits us to see unique photos of Warsaw from the end of the 19th century and the turn of the 19th and 20th century. A collection of his photography at POLONA https://polona.pl/search/?query=Konrad_Brandel&filters=public:1&sort=creator%20asc [19.03.2021]

6 One should quote the names of the precursors of Polish photography such as Karol Beyer, the organizer of the first exhibition of Polish photography as early as 1857 (sic!), Jan Mieczkowski, Jan Elsner or Franciszek Wyspiański, Stanisław

readers in those early days, the photos, (apart from illustrating the event in question), were also a means to visualise a world either physically remote or spatially close, but mentally or physically undiscovered. Good examples of this approach for that period are press photos showing Roma children or praying Jews. These were pictures from the quotidian lives of the citizens of Warsaw, Lublin, Krakow or Lviv, but because of the lack of contact with the residents of Jewish quarters, they introduced Polish readers to areas unknown or neglected before. Consequently, it became clear that photography could be used to familiarize the Polish reader with Jewish life and culture. Jewish periodicals played the dominating role in this endeavour in Polish; it was rare that Polish papers attempted to describe the Poles' Jewish neighbours.

The situation was different in the Jewish community. One of the precursors of Jewish photography was Maksymilian Fajans, a graduate of *Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych* [School of Fine Arts] in Warsaw, the owner of 19th-century Warsaw's most popular lithographic and photographic atelier. Marian Fuks is another individual who must be mentioned. He came from a Jewish family but was a Lutheran of the evangelical-Augsburg denomination.⁷ Yet, his background was an obstacle to joining Christian unions. Therefore, in 1914 he founded *Żydowskie Stowarzyszenie Pracowników Fotografii* [the Jewish Association of Photography Professionals] which, after the end of World War I, was renamed to *Cech Fotografów Żydowskich* [Guild of Jewish Photographers]. Fuks led it until 1932. He founded the first Polish photographic agency and already then was called "the king

Wyspiański's father. In 1916 in Warsaw *Związek Fotografów Zawodowych Królestwa Polskiego* [The kingdom of Poland's association of professional photographers] was founded. In the interwar period numerous photography associations were founded. The discipline became the subject of academic research - particularly at the John Casimir University in Lviv and at the University of Poznań. On the history of Polish photography see: I. Płażewski, *Dzieje polskiej fotografii 1839-1939*, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 2003.

7 B. Zubowicz, "Król fotoreporterów II RP", *TVP Tygodnik*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190610100259/https://tygodnik.tvp.pl/35521048/krol-fotoreporterow-ii-rp> [12.04.2021]

of photojournalists.”⁸ Another dynamic working group was gathered around Warsaw’s *Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze* [Jewish Sightseeing Society]. Yet the scenic photography inspired Jewish researchers and amateurs – it was used in their famous ethnographic travels that attempted to preserve the dying Jewish culture.⁹ The latter group was quite numerous; some of the photographers opened professional ateliers and offered their services. Only a handful took up art and press photography, but what they left behind deserves all the praise. Among the amateur documentalists, two figures need to be named: Menachem Kipnis,¹⁰ – an opera singer, ethnographer and collector who, for financial reasons, worked for *Forverts–The Jewish Daily Forward* documenting the life of Polish Jews, and Alter Kacyzna – a writer who learned photography and prepared extensive documentation for HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) for financial reasons. At the time, he also collaborated with *Forverts*. Both photographers gained some fame in the interwar period. Today their photos, like the work of Roman Vishniac, Mojżesz Worobiejczyk, and Henryk Ross, constitute a part of the heritage, a piece of memory captured in images that can never exist again.¹¹

8 See “Jak to jest być Polakiem i Żydem jednocześnie? Wywiad Tomasza Stańczyka z prof. Marianem Fuksem”, *Rzeczpospolita*, 12.05.2008, <https://www.wp.pl/arttykul/133307-Jak-to-jest-byc-Polakiem-i-Zydem-jednoczesnie-.html> [12.04.2021]

9 One of the most famous of such voyages was led by Szymon An-ski, the author of the most famous Yiddish drama *Dybuk*, (1912). The trip was ethnographic in nature. Among the written accounts accumulated more than two thousand photographs also existed.

10 See M. Szablowska-Zaremba, “Szkiec o artyście-fotografiku Menachemie Kipnisie”, in: *Żydzi Wschodniej Polski, seria VIII Artyści żydowscy*, eds. J. Ławski, J. Wildowicz, Temida 2, Białystok 2020, pp. 299-314. Between 20 January and 20 June 2014, the *Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute* in Warsaw held an exhibition presenting photographs by Menachem Kipnis. The event, curated by Krysia Fisher and Teresa Śmiechowska and entitled *Miasto i oczy*, proved very popular. Earlier, in the summer of 2001, at Biała Synagoga in Sejny, another exhibition was presented: *Menachem Kipnis – fotografie przedwojenne*. Both were possible through the cooperation with Krysia Fisher and Mark Web from YIVO in New York.

11 See L. Dobroszycki, B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Image Before My Eyes. A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864-1939*, Schocken Books, New York 1977.

Unlike written texts, photographs' universal message makes these images legible to people outside a particular language circle. This universality, in my opinion, does not cover the ability to fully interpret the cultural import of these photos. Reading images from a recent, yet eradicated, past requires a sound knowledge of the history and the culture, and also of the mentality of the nation or the society in question. Thus, photography connotes two possibilities: it gives a chance to fill in the blanks in the narrative about the past. Still, it can also become an efficient tool for manipulating the message, particularly successful with those who do not possess the knowledge mentioned above.

NASZ PRZEGLĄD ILUSTROWANY [OUR ILLUSTRATED REVIEW]

The basis of my considerations is *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* – a weekly supplement to the Polish–Jewish daily *Nasz Przegląd [Our Review]*.¹² The supplement was published in the years 1924–1939, i.e., a year shorter than the daily itself. The publisher was Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza “UNIA.” The paper was printed in Warsaw, yet printing houses were changed several times during the fifteen years of its existence. The journal's editorial board were Jakub Appenzlak,¹³ Natan Szwalbe,¹⁴

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- 12 *Nasz Przegląd* [1923–1939]. See also M. Fuks, “Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823–1939”, Warszawa 1979, pp. 259–272; J. K. Rogozik, “Nasz Przegląd”, *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 1997, no. 1–2, pp. 123–138; also, “Nasz Przegląd, czyli pomiędzy ‘hajmatyzmem’ a ‘mechesyzmem’”, *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 1997, no. 3–4, pp. 124–139; A. Czajka-Landau, “Polacy w oczach *Naszego Przeglądu*”, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2011, no. 4, pp. 491–507; M. Szablowska-Zaremba, “O polsko-żydowskich kontaktach literackich na łamach *Naszego Przeglądu* w latach 1918–1939”, in: *Naruszone granice kulturowe. O kondycji ludzkiej w dwóch przestrzeniach: polskiej i żydowskiej XX wieku*, eds. M. Szablowska-Zaremba, B. Wałęciuk-Dejneka, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2013, pp. 223–249.
- 13 Jakub Appenzlak (1894–1950) – publicist, translator, literary critic, writer. Associated with numerous Jewish– Polish journals, including *Izraelita*, *Głos Żydowski*, *Nasz Kurier*. Just before the war he left for Geneva, then for the USA. He cooperated with the Polish Government in London. In New York he published *Nasza Trybuna (Our Tribune) Pismo Żydów Polskich* [1940–1951] – modelled on *Nasz Przegląd*.
- 14 Natan Szwalbe [1883–1941/43?] – journalist, publicist, zionist activist. He collaborated with, among others, *Nowa Gazeta* and *Głos Żydowski*. Awarded with the Gold Cross of Merit. During World War II he found himself in the Soviet Union, where he died in unclear circumstances.

and Saul Wagman,¹⁵ and the managing editor was Daniel Rozenzweig. The newspaper represented the Zionist idea, even though its subtitle stressed its independence throughout its history. Soon the paper began to be regarded as influencing opinion. Readers all over Europe and in Palestine subscribed to the newspaper. Therefore, after a year, every Sunday the paper added an illustrated, four-page insert with its own title. Today it is a “treasure trove of images,” showing events and people in the first half of the 20th century. This rare source of recorded portraits illustrated how two nations lived next to each other: Poles and Jews. The photos included persons known and unknown, pictures of cultural, social, and political events from the towns and the cities of the Second Polish Republic. These photographs represented a new quality of narration that could not be ignored, saved from oblivion and salvaged from hundreds of other documents. The newness was enhanced because the newspaper was shared on the digital platform POLONA. Thus, providing readers acquired full access, unrestricted by time or space.¹⁶

One needs to state that in comparison with similar supplements, *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* is an exception. In the interwar period, other Polish–Jewish papers played a similar role to that of *Nasz Przegląd*:

- 15 Saul Wagman (1893–1943/44) – journalist, writer, translator, brother of A. Ważyk and L. Trystan. He collaborated with Polish language newspapers, including *Chwila* and *Nowy Dziennik*, as well as Yiddish ones such as *Blat* and *Unzer Ekspres*. When the war broke out, he fled to the Soviet Union, where he probably committed suicide.
- 16 The online archive only contains issues from the years 1930–1939, which means significant number of issues are unavailable: there are gaps in the years 1924–1929, the whole of 1926 is missing. They can be found in special resources marked with the letter A (Archival). It would be an excellent initiative to make all the issues of *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* available online, which would facilitate research on the title and the research on the Polish–Jewish space in interwar Poland. Moreover, the scans of the supplements are often in low resolution. It must result from the low quality of the equipment the National Library had at its disposal. I believe, therefore, that the National Library, which plays a vital role in the digitalization of Polish source collections, should receive generous subsidies as it preserves Polish culture and heritage recorded in words and images, often so fragile in the face of the future generations’ memory and their lack thereof. A more comprehensive collection of *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* is available at the Warsaw University Library.

- two dailies - Krakow's *Nowy Dziennik* and Lviv's *Chwila* - and the
- weeklies: Lviv's *Opinia* and its Lviv-Warsaw-Krakow's continuation - *Nasza Opinia*.

From among them, only *Chwila*, in the years 1930-1935, published a four-page insert *Chwila. Dodatek Ilustrowany*. The relative lack of popularity of such illustrated supplements was due to the high cost of a weekly publication. I think that to a lesser extent, the lack of photographic materials might have been another reason. Therefore, *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* (NPI) remains a unique document of its era. The absence of illustrated supplements does not imply that photographs were not printed in the Polish-Jewish press. On the contrary, supplements would be published systematically, but they functioned as merely supplements to written information in those situations. NPI even provided space for photography to show its artistic power. The supplement's creators and editors - Appenzlak, Wagman, and Szwalbe - demonstrated considerable experience in journalistic and literary work. Appenzlak in particular, previously cooperated with Polish journals. The editorial team were familiar with Polish periodicals (particularly *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*) that used photography as a means of recording current news. The editors were aware that with photography, they could accomplish more and reach their readership faster. Moreover, *Nasz Przegląd* was issued by the same publisher - Spółdzielnia Alt-Naj - as one of the biggest Yiddish dailies *Hajnt*,¹⁷ which also had such a weekly supplement. Therefore, images supported a constant means of communication between the editors and the readership. The editors believed that photography authenticated the message delivered and more intensely and emotionally moved the audience. Consequently, these periodicals looked for photographers who both demonstrated wide technical knowledge and facilities - preferably had their own darkrooms - and a knack for journalism.

17 *Hajnt* - [Yid. 'today'] - a socio-political daily, published in the years 1908-1939 in Warsaw, with the circulation of 40,000-50,000 copies.

What distinguishes the first period of NPI's existence is that the vast majority of photographs were not signed with the name, surname, or even the author's initials. Moreover, up until the journal's demise, a significant portion of the photos were reprints from foreign magazines. Those sources of the unsigned reprints were also not indicated. Sadly, this approach was a common practice of all newspapers, irrespective of the country and their language. Eventually, photography was protected by copyright laws in 1908, when the Bern Convention - (International Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works) - was ratified in Berlin. A popular sentiment amongst photographers - as opposed to writers, authors, who managed to win the right for their work to be protected - was that their works belonged to the guild of craftspeople. Therefore, photographers were makers, not artists. Even though formally their work was protected by copyright laws, it took a lot of time and effort for photographers to convince the world that taking a good photograph, just like writing a good novel, required artistic talent, a gift not granted to everyone. In the meantime, photographs showing events e.g., in Paris, London, or Warsaw, were distributed between various periodicals, sometimes with the mediation of agencies that did not care about the work's authorship.

I cannot emphasize that the founding of NPI and keeping it on the market for fifteen years was an exceptional achievement. For this reason, the need for visual material in Jewish newspapers in Polish could be, on the one hand, viewed as following the trend of the era. On the other, the material was a manifestation of the need to show Poles that sometimes Jewish diaspora converged with the spaces they inhabited, and sometimes it is the very same space. Photographs published in Jewish newspapers were an invitation for the audience to become acquainted with a world full of life, movement, and dynamic developments. Those photos were part of global trends, thus, also preserving Polish and Jewish national and cultural identity.

“FOTO BOJM-FORBERT”

The Warsaw photographers who lent NPI prestige were Henryk [Jechiel] Bojm and Leon Forbert. Their signed photos printed in the supplement identified their names, and the names of their co-partnership “Foto Bojm-Forbert.” They probably joined forces in 1930, creating a special atelier or, more precisely, transforming the atelier that belonged to Bojm and was situated in Warsaw at 11, Wierzbowa. We know that earlier Bojm owned a photography atelier at 29a, Królewska, apartment 31.¹⁸ Briefly tracing the lives of these (un)known photographers is valuable.



FIG. 1. Leon Forbert, *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1938, no. 30

Leon¹⁹ Forbert’s actual name was Lajzer Forbert. He was born in Włocławek on 6 February 1880,²⁰ the son of Jehuda Lejb (born

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- 18 An advertisement in Polish in the Yiddish newspaper *Unzer Express*, 3 April and 9 May 1930.
- 19 Records throughout Forbert’s life show three versions of his Polish name: Leo, Leon, and Leopold.
- 20 An article published in memory of Leon Forbert’, in *Wiadomości Filmowe* (1938, no. 15, p. 2), quoted 6 February 1880 as his birth date. Yet from the surviving records of the State Archive in Płock, the collection for the city of Płock, signature 28108,

13 April 1852 in Płock, later changing his name to Julian) and his first wife Liba Rojza, née Majerkiewicz (born in 1857 in Włocławek).²¹ His family first lived in Włocławek, but in 1879 relocated to Płock, surely seeing more possibilities for cultural development. To the relocation may also have been executed because of the need for more significant financial support, because in Płock they moved in with Jehuda Lejb's parents to a tenement house at 1, Szeroka. Łajzer had a stepsister Rachela, (born in 1894 in Płock). We also know that he and his wife Maria Weiss (Wajs) had been officially registered under a permanent Warsaw address since 1912. They must have been living in Warsaw before this date, as on 21 October 1911, their first son, Adolf, was born, and 26 May 1915 is the birthdate of their second son, Władysław.²² The resident registration book shows that Weiss was of the evangelical denomination. According to his reminiscences printed in *Wiadomości Filmowe*, as a young man, Forbert travelled extensively in Europe and America,²³ where

regarding persons of the name Forbert, it transpired as 5 February 1881 - the original record is the following: "24.01./5.02.1881 r."

- 21 I should like to thank the following for assisting me in finding the information: first of all, Anna Przybyszewska-Drozd, head of Genealogy at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; also, the employees of the State Archive in Płock. The information on the Forbert family comes from the collection for the city of Płock, Books of Residents of the city of Płock, 1, Szeroka, signature 50/1/0/201/28108. In response to my enquiry about the birth certificate I received a negative answer from the State Archive in Włocławek - unfortunately, the archives of the Jewish community have been to a large extent destroyed.
- 22 Little doubt exists concerning Adolf's date and place of birth - an ID application form has survived. Finding documentation confirming the birth date of Władysław Forbert proved very difficult. In all internet sources, as well as on the director's grave, the date given is 26 May 1915, see Władysław Forbert, at the website Billion Graves <https://billiongraves.pl/grave/Wladyslaw-Forbert/32501696> [21.04.2021]. According to an ID application form from 1963, however, he was born on 26 May 1916 in Otwock, not in Warsaw. While one can assume that the discrepancy in the year of birth (1915 and 1916) is merely a mistake, one cannot say the same about the different place of birth. Also, in the same document we find the date - 4 November 1969 - he left for Israel. According to other, generally available sources, in 1970 he left Poland for Denmark, where he died and was buried. [Archiwum Dokumentacji Osobowej i Płacowej w Milanówku Centralny Rejestr Metryczek, Władysław - sygn. 4/528, Adolf, sygn. 2/1598].
- 23 A document survived, the passenger list from a passenger ship, where he is mentioned travelling in 1904 to visit his aunt Taube, who lived in New York. I received the photocopy from Anna Przybyszewska-Drozd.

he trained and worked, among other jobs, as a photographer. He left for the USA in 1904, and after returning to Poland in 1906, he founded his Warsaw atelier “Leo Forbert” at 39, Nowy Świat. Forbert quickly decided to combine his fascination with photography with the new invention – cinema. Describing the history of Yiddish cinema in Poland, Sheila Skaff referred to the words of Forbert’s cousin – Seweryn Steinwurzel – that he took up cinema for financial reasons, hoping for easy and fast money.²⁴ Forbert was one of the first film producers in Poland, and his first, short-lived film production company was Meteor.²⁵ He debuted as a producer in 1922 with *Ludzie mroku* [‘twilight people’], and already within next year, a new film appeared – *Syn szatana* [‘Son of Satan’]. Bruno Bredsznajder directed both movies, and the cinematographer was Steinwurzel. Also, in 1923 Forbert met Jechiel Bojm, an, ambitious, talented young man who dreamed about becoming a screenwriter. Forber must have been impressed, since by the end of the year they made a movie in Yiddish based on Bojm’s script, called *Ślubowanie* (‘Vowing’, dir. Zygmunt Turkow, cinematography Steinwurzel. The film featured the best actresses of the time, Estera R. Kamińska and her young daughter Ida Kamińska). In the years 1923–1935, Forbert and Bojm made four more movies together. Their feature films included *Jeden z 36* (‘One in 36’, dir. Henryk Szaro, cinematography Steinwurzel) from 1925 and their most famous work, based on Józef Opatoszu’s trilogy about the January Uprising, *W lasach Polskich*²⁶

24 Cf. S. Skaff, *The Law of the Looking Glass: Cinema in Poland, 1896–1939*: “According to his cousin Seweryn Steinwurzel, Forbert founded Meteor simply because he figured out that film was a good business. Forbert was the first postwar producer interested in making films with which both Jews and Catholics could identify.” [2.05.2021] [https://books.google.pl/books/about/The_Law_of_the_Looking_Glass.html?id=dO7fuEHARnIC&redir_esc=y]

25 See footnote 25.

26 Józef Opatoszu – Joseph Opatoshu (1886–1954) – writer, mostly the author of historical novels. See also M. Szablowska-Zaremba, “Oto Polska właśnie – o literaturze, kulturze i historii Polski w powieściach Józefa Opatoszu”, in: *Dialog międzykulturowy w (o) literaturze polskiej*, eds. M. Skwara, K. Krasoń, J. Kazimierski, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2008, pp. 485–502.

(‘In Polish woods’, dir. Jonas Turkow, cinematography Ferdynand Vlassak). In 1935 they created their last work together – the documentary *Świt, dzień i noc Palestyny* [‘Morning, noon, and night of Palestine’] – a tale about the founding of the new university and the hope for the resurrection of the state of Israel. The narrator in the film was Appenzłak. The story of the film production company Leo-Forbert is not very well-known. According to Waclaw Malczewski’s research presented in *Polscy aktorzy filmowi* [‘Polish film actors’], Forbert founded the company in 1922, which was the source of his productions.²⁷ Yet, in February 1926, he left for Australia in search of better prospects for development and fame. However, he failed and returned to Poland in May 1928. According to Malczewski, upon his departure to Australia, Forbert sold his shares to his collaborator Maria Hirszbein. She renamed the company to “Leo-Film”, and became highly successful. Nonetheless, Forbert was no longer connected with the enterprise. He focused on photography, demonstrated a great deal of success, and since 1930 and until his death, he printed a significant volume of his photos in NPI.

As the short note in *Chwila* states: he died of a heart failure on 21 July 1938, while traveling from Świder to Warsaw.²⁸ A photograph was printed in NPI with the caption “Leon Forbert, one of the pioneers of the cinematographic and photographic industries in Poland, passed away last week.”²⁹ In *Nasz Przegląd* several obituaries were published along with a short note:

Yesterday died Leo Forbert, who, with Mr. H. Bojm, has for many years led the photography section of our publication [...] He was a man of many social virtues, deeply attached to his nation. Among those who worked with him and knew his righteous, noble character – he left a deep sorrow. All hail to his memory!³⁰

27 W. Malczewski, *Polscy aktorzy filmowi*, Polska Biblioteka Filmowa, Warszawa 1928, pp. 15-17.

28 “Zgon operatora filmowego”, *Chwila Wieczorna*, 22.07.1938, p. 12.

29 *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*, 1938, no. 30, p. 6.

30 “Zgon b.p. Leo Forberta”, *Nasz Przegląd* 23.07.1938, p. 12.



FIG. 2. Forbert's obituary, *Nasz Przegląd*, 23.07.1938

Both sons inherited their love of cinema from their father. During World War II, they escaped to the Soviet Union and joined the newly formed General Berling's army. They soon demonstrated skills and talent, becoming directors and cinematographers of war documentaries. They worked for the Polish Film Chronicle. But this is an entirely different story.

Despite Forbert's death, Henryk Bojtm remained faithful to NPI and his works, signed "Foto Bojtm-Forbert," appeared in NPI until September 1939.³¹

Jechiel (Chaim) Bojtm was born in 1898 in Sochaczew - this is the information we can find on Ładoś's list,³² as it turned out Bojtm was one of those given Paraguayan passports, enabling them, at least in theory, to save their life during World War II.³³ Various monographs on the history of Jewish cinema in Poland³⁴ show that he

31 Cf. "Na kolonii letniej 'TOZU' w Warszawie", *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*, 1939, no. 28 [9.07.], p. 6; "W dwudziestą rocznicę zgonu pisarza Jakuba Dinesona" (18.08.1939 - M.Sz.-Z.). "Literaci, dziennikarze i najbliższa rodzina nad grobem zmarłego", *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*, 1939, no. 35 [27.08.], p. 6.

32 The document's name derives from the name of Aleksander Ładoś, a Polish diplomat in Switzerland in the years 1940-1945. The list was published by the Pilecki Institute after two years of research in cooperation with the Jewish Historical Institute, the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Institute of National Remembrance. *Lista Ładosia: nazwiska 3262 Żydów objętych tzw. "akcją paszportową"* [The Ładoś list: the names of 3262 Jews issued the illegal passports]: <https://instytutpileckiego.pl/pl/instytut/aktualnosci/instytut-pileckiego-opublikowal-liste-nazwisk-3262-zydow-obj>

33 Unfortunately, at the Grodzisk Mazowiecki branch of the National Archive in Warsaw - where the documents concerning the Jewish community in Sochaczew are stored - no documents regarding the name Bojtm have been found.

34 Cf. A. Attisani, A. Cappabianca, eds., *Cercatori di felicità : Luci, ombre e voci dello schermo yiddish*, Accademia University Press, Torino 2018; N. Gross, *Film żydowski*



FIG. 3. Henryk Bojm, *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1933, no 25.



FIG. 4. Henryk Bojm, photographer of *Nasz Przegląd*

came from a Hasidic family. His father, a wealthy grain merchant, sent him to Warsaw to study in a yeshiva. Unfortunately for the father, Bojm's dreams did not include becoming a merchant. Allegedly, already at six, the boy voraciously read Yiddish literature, particularly the work of Icchok Lejb Percec. Condemning himself to poverty, he dropped out of the yeshiva and travelled from town to town, portraying their inhabitants. Apparently, this is when he learned photography. With his brother-in-law, Ojzer Warszawski, they founded an atelier in Mszczonów. During World War I, they operated as smugglers, the events being masterfully documented in Warszawski's famous novel *Szmulglerzy*. Soon, however, they parted ways. Warszawski emigrated to Paris, and Bojm met Forbert, which changed his life forever.³⁵

For Bojm this cooperation was significant, since he became one of the creators of Jewish films in Poland. He was also a natural-born photojournalist, and his work merited praise. He died during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, while hiding in a bunker with his wife Rachela née Gliksman (she was a shareholder of "Foto-Forbert"). This was probably also when their son, Izrael, died.³⁶ According to research and the information from the Ringelblum Archive, a secret archive kept in the Warsaw Ghetto, he was the principal photographer of everyday life of the Jewish nation in the closed district between 1939 and 1943. The 'Ghetto's historians commissioned the photographs he took.³⁷

w Polsce, transl. A. Ćwiakowska, Rabid, Kraków 2002, J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film between Two Worlds* (Interfaces: Studies in Visual Culture), Brandeis University Press, Waltham 2010.

- 35 Cf. A. Attisani, A. Cappabianca, *Cercatori di felicità*; also N. Gros mentions that Bojm had such an atelier (*Film żydowski w Polsce*, p. 34), but does not mention the name of Warszawski.
- 36 The information about their death was given by Henryk Graubart, who, when talking both about Jechiel and his wife, referred to himself as "brother-in-law".
- 37 The photographs were a part of the exhibition *Światło negatywu/Light of the Negative* that took place between April and August 2019 at the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. The curators were Anna Duńczyk-Szulc and Rafał Lewandowski. See *Rozproszony kontakt : fotografie z Archiwum Ringelbluma na nowo odczytane*, ed. A. Duńczyk-Szulc, ŻIH im. E. Ringelbluma, Warszawa 2019, pp. 50-56. The biographical note to the book was prepared by A. Żółkiewska.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM *NASZ PRZEGLĄD ILUSTROWANY*

The majority of interwar periodicals aimed to have, if not separate supplements to their newspapers, then at least some photographs published in their papers from time to time. Bojm-Forbert belonged to the most famous photographers and were a model for others. Today their pictures also belong to the unique collection of visual testimonies of the past Jewish diaspora.

NPI printed a variety of photos. The magazine always made sure to show the most notable events in Europe or the USA. A separate category consisted of the photographs presenting Palestine that, in Zionists' view, was the sign of the modern national thought's strength and power. This was where the new, dynamic state of Israel would be built.

Yet, another important subject was the events in Poland. The photographs that have an exceptional value for us today could be gathered under the general heading of Jewish life in Poland. Political events were important, but the little minute vignettes show-

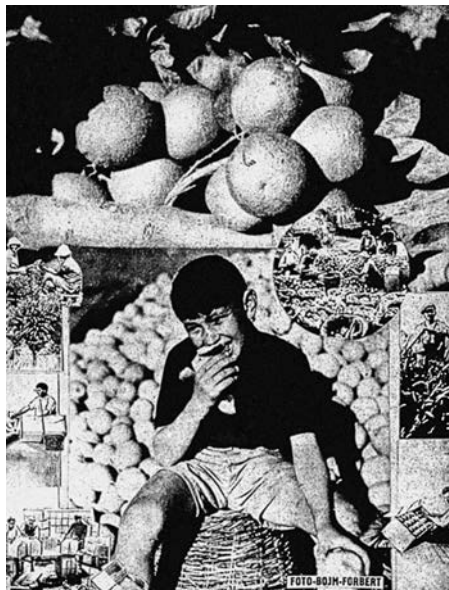


FIG. 5. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1935, no. 47 – photo taken during the filming of the documentary by Forbert and Bojm in Palestine

ing fleeting moments of social and cultural life of towns and cities provoke more emotions. The photographs that mean the most to me are those depicting literary and theatrical events. A significant portion of the photographs was unsigned. Those showing events abroad were reprints from periodicals from the USA, France, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere... Names other than Bojm and Forbert appear sporadically; these two are the most frequent, and therefore I focused on their work.

Forbert made a name for himself as an exceptional portrait photographer. The literary and cultural Jewish and Polish elite loved to have their photos taken by him in his atelier. The two photos juxtaposed here represent two types of portraying. The first - showing one of the then most famous Yiddish writers Zusman Segalowicz - is an atelier portrait, the fact made clear by lighting, the even background behind the model and the model's positioning. Even with a low-resolution print, we notice that the light falls from the side so that one side of the face is lit strongly and the other side - hidden in darkness.

The part of the face hidden in the penumbra has sharp features, contrasting with the other side. The photo is a bust shot, with the face adequately framed in such a way as to focus our gaze upon the eyes. They are framed according to the rule of thirds, which gives the impression that the model is looking at the viewer. It would be better if the photograph showed the so-called interesting type. Thus, it was up to the photographer to appropriately depict the photographed individual. Often a normally inconspicuous person can reveal qualities missed by others, when carefully modelled by the light. Of course, at the Bojm-Forbert atelier, they had mastered the technique of retouching, so they could easily cover unglamorous spots, blemishes, and other defects. Even though these interventions were successful, we must admit that compared to today's technology, their methods were primitive. Therefore, the photographer had to produce a vision for the photo. The picture had to be made well enough from that start to easily introduce any changes. The image of Segalowicz was a photo that was supposed to present

the model, i.e., be printed next to an article, or even be a purported ID photo.

The alleged environmental portrait is a different case. Forbert took Majer Bałaban's portrait during a discussion at the Jewish Historical Institute. The professor did not pose, nor did he pay attention to the photographer's actions. While in the case of Segalowicz's portrait, the contact and the understanding with the photographer played a crucial role. In the case of an environmental portrait, the photographer was the one in charge. He decided on the composition of the whole, the cropping, and the lighting, whereas he needed to use the available light the best way he could. The photographer employed a clever manoeuvre: he shot the professor so that his back forms a vertical line and lengthens the figure. Bałaban was not placed in the centre of the picture. Nonetheless, a sense of emptiness was absent because of the objects in front of him on the table. The vertical and horizontal lines "break" the model's arms. Thus, we do not feel that he took the portrait in a hurry. Contrary to our expectations, the picture is balanced and well thought through, even though the photographer had to consider possible shifts in the body's positioning or changes in lighting. This duo of photographers published quite a collection of such portraits.³⁸

Let me mention one more type of photos collective portraits. I suspect that Bojtm made most of them. He, being nearly twenty years junior to Forbert', preferred to go outside, into the world, and record the events around him. One could call the photographs journalistic, containing a clear message about how a meeting or celebration went. But I think that, apart from being informative, we could describe these pictures as group portraits. If they were composed a bit differently in their perspective, we would find no technical shortcomings. Photos of this kind prevail in NPI. One of

38 E.g., of Chaim Nachman Bialik, the father of modern Hebrew poetry, NPI 1931, no. 39; of Nachum Sokołow, the president of the World Zionist Organization, and of the writer and member of parliament Izaak Grünbaum, NPI 1933, no. 44.



FIG. 6. Portrait of Zusman Segalowicz, Jewish writer



FIG.7. Portrait Majer Bałaban, historian

them shows three ingenious figures: Nachman Mayzel, a prominent critic, publicist, the editor of “Literarische Bletter,” the best literary weekly in the interwar period; Saul Stupnicki, a writer and publicist; and Icyk Manger, an outstanding poet, writer, and collector of Jewish folklore.

One could consider this photo a “typical” document of an event of this kind. However, let us look at its composition: the vertical and horizontal lines, their crossings; and there is one more line that upsets the rigid arrangement - a transverse line going from left to right. On the left, someone suddenly turns their head; perhaps unwittingly, it might have been time for questions, and the man in the first row turned his head to see the person talking. The photographer did not expect the movement, which shows in the slight blurring, there was little time, and the face became blurred as a result. Through a chance event, the photo gained a dynamic dimension, only strengthened by a static image. Over Manger’s head, hangs a gigantic painting in a highly imposing frame. It dominates over everyone. In the subject of the picture is of minor importance, since together the frame and the man’s face have disrupted the harmony of the entire image.



FIG. 8. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1935, no. 18

The reader should focus on the three persons - so different in their appearance and age. Mayzel peers at someone with a reporter's curiosity, the elderly Stupnicki with his huge moustache provides staidness and stability, and Manger must be thinking about the party that was surely scheduled after the main event. He is looking straight into the camera as if the photographer's work was more interesting to him than somebody's words. To take the photo that records so much emotion, the photographer must have felt the mood of the entire room and was sensitive enough to recognize the right moment - during a bombastic event in the honour of the father of Yiddish literature Icchok Lejb Perec.

Both photographers must have loved the theatre. And the theatre loved being photographed - when you look at the NPI content, it turns out to be a veritable album of Jewish actors' portraits and scenes from selected performances. Yet this is not the only source of delight. We can clearly see that the Bojzm-Forbert partnership wanted to be up-to-date with the latest fashions. Therefore, they did not shun new technologies.

The duo tried their hands at photomontage - usually, their work was made up of pictures taken in the atelier at Wierzbowa. Another challenge was taking photographs at the theatre, where the photographer needed work with artificial light and needed to harness movement, which was 'dominated by the performance. Bojzm-Forbert were fully aware of photography's message and that the medium could be an efficient marketing tool, drawing the viewer via the light, movement, and the intensity of the people and objects shown. On the other hand, photography is a document of a special event. Therefore it is an artefact of memory, and memory always includes transitoriness and selection. For viewers in the 1930s, the photographs from Jewish theatres were simply invitations to come and encounter the art; for us, they are the only way to glance at the people and the artistic passion. Subsequently, apart from serving as documents, these photographs display the desire to seize the emotions that accompanied the actors on stage.



J. Domb i Ida Kamińska

FIG. 9. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1938, no.43, Ida Kamińska's Theatre, performance of *New People* by Joshua Perle



FIG.10. Photomontage by Bojim and Forbert.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE SERVICE OF ART



FIG.11. Painting by Icchak Cukierman, *Jewish Ghetto in Vilnius*

Photography granted both professionals and amateurs the possibility of the mass production of images. Being the younger sister of painting, sculpture, or graphic art, and granting both professionals and amateurs the possibility of mass production of images, photography was doomed to lose in a confrontation with high art (created by inspired, artistically gifted individuals). Yet, the history of photography shows us something completely different. The groups that fell in love with photography in their early days were artists and chemists. They considered it a new form of art and became fascinated with the development of science that the latest photographic techniques demanded. The innovative photographers were fine art school graduates. Among the most famous and respected retouchers in those days were Polish painters: Wojciech Kossak, Wojciech Gerson, even Witkacy (Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz). At a certain point, photography became a perfect vehicle for art.



Stoją od lewej: Rozental, Tykociński, Feuring, Weintraub, Centnerszwerowa, Śliwniak, Rabinowicz.

FIG.12. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1937, no. 1

However, it meant photography could be used to reproduce paintings and disseminate the images around the world because of the possibilities of fast reproduction photography. Previously, to view the art one had to go to a gallery, a closed space designated especially for this purpose in a particular place. Expressed differently, seeing a work of art depended on the (in)capability of covering the distance between the viewer and the picture. Sharing the photograph in a newspaper makes the painter and, more importantly, the work recognizable. A good example is Grupa Siedmiu – some of their work survived only in the photographs published by *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany*. World War II devoured most of their painting and wiped out the memory of their creators. Today the photographs are the testimony of not only their creative imagination but of their lives.

STREET PHOTOGRAPHY



FIG.13. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1933, no. 29

Today street photography is one of the most common ways of capturing our reality. Yet the need for such images was felt at the very beginning of photography. One of the first pictures in history showed events happening in the open air. In the city of Warsaw's archival documents (*Dziennik Urzędowy Komisariatu Rządu na m. stołeczne Warszawę*) we find the following note from 7 February 1924: "Leon Forbert was given permission to take photos in the streets of Warsaw."³⁹ It showed that a professional photographer needed an official permit from the authorities. Unfortunately, in the issues of the NPI we have a few pictures by the duo showing Warsaw. However, the ones preserved clearly showed that they - and particularly Bojm, as a great reporter - could be amazed by an ordinary event.

39 *Dziennik Urzędowy Komisariatu Rządu na m. stołeczne Warszawę*, 7 February 1924, no. 18, p. 4.

Here he is, rushing through a Warsaw street, the camera bag in his hand. Perhaps his assistant is trying to keep up, out of breath, carrying the heavy wooden tripod with many iron screws. Suddenly Bojm stops in the failing light because he sees a tired old man, for whom selling newspapers is the only way to make his living. He has had few customers that day; he still has some papers stored in his stall; he only carries the latest papers, the most important titles. He is waiting, while around him is all the hubbub and commotion. He is asking himself: where are all of you rushing to...? Bojm stops quickly sets up the tripod and attaches the camera. He now has his picture. Even the composition is not that important. Had more time been available, he would surely have moved the camera slightly to the left. It does not matter. In this scene, he sees so much of both the ordinary and the otherworldly that he records it forever. He asks the paper to print it because this is his place, his experience, his city. What does the photograph of an old newspaper vendor mean to us today? It is a fragment of a narrative of a time certainly gone forever. Perhaps, it is also a reminder to appreciate the ordinary moments of everyday life.



FIG.14. Old newspaper vendor on a Warsaw street

Among these pictures, those showing the ordinariness and the festiveness of a Jew's days are of particular interest. The following is, in my opinion, one of the best photos of the interwar period. It is Rosh Hashanah - the beginning of Jewish new year. This celebration is an extremely momentous time, not because of the festivities, but because of the sign that is conveyed to the faithful: their sins have been forgiven, and now they again have time to do good. The days of Rosh Hashanah are full of prayer and joy. Here is Warsaw turning for a while into the strangest land of happiness. We watch the commotion outside the synagogue.



FIG.15. *Nasz przegląd Ilustrowany* 1930, no. 39

We see a bird's eye view of the synagogue as if we were symbolically hovering above all these waiting people. They are so agitated, busy, and gregarious. Viewing the picture, we can hear some of their words, their laughter, but also their anxious questions. We cannot be with them because we would break the sacred character of the event. Suddenly someone turns, a young man stares straight into the camera, apparently with some interest, perhaps with irri-

tation. You cannot interrupt when someone is praying. The photo is signed only by Bojm. There are very few like this photo in NPI. But this one is an expression of all his sensitivity and love of life. Like a painter, he has a sense of light and penumbra. The black and white photograph contains an entire palette of colours.



FIG.16. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1933, no. 52

These pictures are full of life because they talk about life. Today they should be restored, processed, and issued in an album so that they can speak to us again. Despite the passing of time and even though the streets, houses, trees, and certainly, the people, are no longer there, these photographs are not dead. Due to their preservation, we can compose a certain story about what life was like and what was so special and common.

THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The FOTO BOJM-FORBERT is probably the only Jewish company to gain some recognition and a permanent presence in the press published in Polish. Such a short article is not copious enough to



FIG.16. *Nasz Przegląd Ilustrowany* 1937, no. 35

convey all aspects of this enterprise. We owe a lot to the photographers' need to record on film the life they knew. Beginning somewhere in the 1930s, Bojm fell in love with photojournalism, presenting in particular Jews that were strong, athletic, and far from the stereotypes of isolation and seclusion. Even though they were strongly Polonized, Bojm and Forbert never denied their identity, culture, and the nation that gave them birth. They always cared equally about showing both the sublime and the simple in equal measures. Their photographs permit the viewer to enter this world not only through words but also through images. The words gain shape and colour, even though all these photographs are black and white. What makes them so powerful is their ability to stir emotions and make us appreciate their content.

translated by Adam Zdrodowski