

APOSTASY, FRAUD, AND THE BEGINNINGS OF HEBREW PRINTING IN CRACOW

by

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One of the most unusual episodes in the annals of Hebrew printing involved the first Jewish printers in Poland—Samuel, Asher, and Elyakim Helicz—who began to print in Cracow or, more likely, in neighboring Kazimierz, in 1534.¹ Within a year of opening their business, the brothers had produced five relatively short titles, all of which were first editions and four of which were the first Yiddish books ever printed. After about a year of work, the Helicz brothers gave up publishing only to return to the trade about three years later, when they published several classic—and more substantial—rabbinic works in quick succession. However, it was not Samuel, Asher, and Elyakim Helicz who returned to the Hebrew publishing business in Cracow in 1538 but rather Paul, Andreas, and Johannes Helicz, *neochristiani*.²

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1. During this period, most Jews lived in Kazimierz. On Jewish residence in Cracow during this period, see Bożena Wyzomska, “Did King Olbracht Banish the Jews from Cracow?” in Andrzej Paluch, *The Jews in Poland* (Cracow: Jagiellonian University, 1992), 27–37. Claims that the Helicz brothers began to publish as early as 1530 are unfounded; see, for example, A. H. Habermann, “Ha-madpisim benei Hayyim Ha’liz,” in *Perakim be-toledot ha-madpisim ha-ivriyim ve-inyanei sefarim* (Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1978), 136, nos. 1–3 (an earlier version of the article with illustrations was published in *Kiryat Sefer* 33, 509–20). See Magda Teter and Edward Fram, “Matai nosad ha-defus ha-ivri ha-ri’shon be-Kerakov,” *Gal Ed* 20 (2005): 144–49.

2. The names of all three brothers appear at the end of their editions of the *Sha’arey dura’* and *Merkevet ha-mishnah* (Yiddish works were often given Hebrew titles; therefore, we have transliterated such titles according to Hebrew orthography). Samuel and Elyakim affixed their names to the *Azharat nashim*, and only Elyakim wrote his name after *Orah hayyim* and *Ka’arat kesef*. However, given the subsequent history of the brothers, it appears that they each maintained an interest in the press even if they did not list their names as printers.

The Helicz brothers' conversion has been attributed to Christian persecution of Jews in contemporary Cracow, but a reexamination of the existing evidence and newly uncovered archival sources suggest that the story of their conversion may not be a reflection of Christian pressures on Jews but rather of personal beliefs and the vicissitudes of the sixteenth-century publishing business.³

The use of movable Hebrew type in printed books in Cracow had begun before the Helicz brothers ever opened the doors of their printing shop. Hebrew fonts were used there in a paraphrased Latin version of Psalms prepared by Jan van den Campen (Joannes Campensis) and published by Florian Ungler in Cracow in 1532.⁴ More extensive use of Hebrew fonts was made in a book of Latin grammar by Joannes Cervus Tucholiensis published by Ungler in 1533.⁵ Whole pages of Hebrew text were included in Van den Campen's Hebrew grammar book *Ex Variis Libellis*, printed in Cracow in 1534, again by Ungler.⁶ Yet these were essentially Latin works written for the Christian community that contained Hebrew text. The Helicz brothers were the first to print books in Hebrew and Yiddish for the Jewish community in Poland.

The earliest work published by the brothers was Isaac ben Me'ir of Dura's *Sha'arey dura* (1534), an often-copied Ashkenazic halakhic handbook on the laws of *kashrut*. In the pre-*Shulḥan 'Arukh* age, it was *the* handbook for the study of the laws related to *kashrut* and was extensively cited and commented on.⁷ Given the importance of the work in Ashkenazic rabbinic culture, the brothers

3. The most important studies of the Helicz brothers are Majer Bałaban, "Zur Geschichte der Hebräischen Drukereien in Polen," *Soncino-Blätter* 3, no. 1 (July 1929): 1–9, with the accompanying documents on 37–44; Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu 1304–1868*, 2 vols., (1931; repr., 1991), 131–34 (in Hebrew, in *Toledot ha-yehudim be-Kerakov u-ve-Kaz'imyez', 1304–1868*, 2 vols., trans. David Weinfeld, et al. [Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002], 106–10); and Habermann, "Ha-madpisim beney Hayyim Ha'liz," 131–47. Habermann, 132 with n. 3, suggested, we believe correctly, that the reasons for the brothers' conversion were tied to problems in the business.

4. Joannes Campensis, *Psalmorum omnium* (Cracow: Florian Ungler, 1532).

5. Joannes Tucholiensis, *Institutiones Grammaticae* (Cracow: Florian Ungler, 1533). Hebrew type may have been used even earlier in Cracow. A handbook for the study of Hebrew by the convert Leonard David, who briefly taught Hebrew at the Jagiellonian University, was published in 1530 (on David teaching at the university, see Henryk Barycz, *Historja uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w epoce humanizmu* [Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1935], 88–90). The work is not extant but was seen by eighteenth-century Polish bibliographers. It was based on Philipp Michel Novenianus' *Elementale Hebraicum* (Leipzig: Valentine Schumann, 1520), a book that contained Hebrew characters. Presumably, when David's work was published in Cracow, it also had Hebrew type, but it is unknown whether the publisher used movable type or woodcuts, which appear to have been used in the 1520 edition (see the inconsistencies in the Hebrew typeface throughout the said volume).

6. Joannes Campensis, *Ex Variis Libellis Eliae Grammaticorum Omnium Doctissimi, Huc Fere Congestum Est Opera Ioannis Campensis, Quicquid Ad Absolutam Grammaticen Hebraicam Est Necessarium. Quod Ultima Pagella Magis Indicabit. Adiecta Est Ipsius Elie Tabula, Ut Vocant, Coniugandi Omnis Generic Verba, Que Priori Editioni, Propter Inopiam Characterum Hebraicorum Addi Non Poterat* (Cracow: Ungler, 1534).

7. A search of the electronic catalogue of the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem lists almost 100 manuscripts of the work, plus commentaries, abridgements, and indexes, almost all of which predate 1534. For examples of citations, search the Global Jewish Database (Bar-Ilan Responsa Project), ver. 13, with the search terms דורא and

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

presumably expected there to be demand for the text among learned Ashkenazic Jews in Poland and beyond.

Like the *Sha'arey dura*, the Yiddish works published by the Helicz brothers were practical in nature. Asher Anshel's dictionary, the *Merkevet ha-mishnah*, provided Yiddish translations of biblical words and was undoubtedly a useful tool for many a Yiddish speaker struggling to study the Bible. Another original Yiddish work produced by the press was David Kohen's *Azharat nashim*, a handbook for women discussing the laws of *niddah*, *hallah*, and candle lighting. For women who lived outside large towns and had no local rabbi to whom they could ask their halakhic questions, this was a potential godsend if either they, a family member, or a friend were literate. For the publishers, it was a potential best seller. As for the other two works, they were ethical pieces aimed at helping readers who could not understand Hebrew learn how they could attain moral improvement.⁸

Printing works in Yiddish greatly expanded the potential market for the Helicz brothers' books—more Jews in Poland could understand Yiddish than could understand rabbinic Hebrew—but it involved extra costs because there was a perceived need to visually differentiate the holy language from the vernacular in print.⁹ To do so, the brothers introduced special fonts for printing Yiddish words, fonts that would later be known as *vaybertaytsh*.¹⁰ Yet the brothers must have believed that the market for Yiddish books justified their investment in this aspect of production.

For handbooks to be truly practical, they not only had to discuss useful subjects, they also had to be affordable and easy to handle. All the books produced by the Helicz brothers were relatively modest, both in terms of their length and their physical size. The *Sha'arey dura* was 44 folios and the *Azharat nashim* 38 folios, with pages that were only 15.5 cm high and 10.5 cm wide. The copy of *Den musar un hanhagah* produced by the press was also 38 folios long, but it was printed in a smaller sextodecimo (16^o) format. Even the largest work that the Helicz brothers

שערים*. For the place of the *Sha'arey dura* in the curriculum of the late medieval Ashkenazic academy, see Elchanan Reiner, "Temurot be-yeshivot Polin ve-Ashkenaz be-me'ot ha-16—ha-17 ve-ha-vikkuaḥ 'al ha-pilpul," in *Ke-minhag Ashkenaz ve-Polin. Sefer yovel le-Hone' Shmeruk*, ed. Israel Bartal, Ezra Mendelsohn, and Chava Turmiansky (Jerusalem: Shazar, 1993), 21, n. 20; and Reiner, "The Ashkenazi Élite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript Versus Printed Book," *Polin* 10 (1997): 86–87, 94.

8. See the introduction to *Den musar un hanhagah*, reprinted in Chone Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yidish be-Polin* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), 77, which makes reference to the second ethical work published by the brothers, *Ka'arat kesef*.

9. On the possible reasons for the use of a different font in printing Yiddish, see Herbert C. Zafren, "Early Yiddish Typography," *Jewish Book Annual* 44 (1986/87): 114.

10. See Herbert C. Zafren, "Variety in the Typography of Yiddish: 1535–1635," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 53 (1982): 157–58, as well as his "Early Yiddish Typography," 114. Literally, *vaybertaytsh* means "women's explanation," but in the context of printing, it refers to the special typeface used to print early Yiddish works. Because Yiddish works were said to be for women and "men like women" (in that they were not able to understand works in rabbinic Hebrew), the name of the fonts became connected with the presumed audience for the books.

ever published as Jews, the *Merkevet ha-mishnah*, was only 87 folios and used paper that was 21 cm × 15.5 cm.

The size, subject matter, and, in four of the five books, the use of the vernacular suggest that in the early stages of their business endeavors, the brothers sought out a market that extended beyond wealthy or scholarly patrons. This was a startup strategy that was different from that used by a number of publishers of Hebrew books in other centers. For example, in 1516–17, his first year as a Hebrew book publisher, Daniel Bomberg published two versions of the Pentateuch in Venice. One, in duo format, was more than 200 folios long, with ornate woodcuts around the Incipits of individual books, new and previously published commentaries, Aramaic translation, commentaries, the *haftorot*, and the five *megillot*.¹¹ The other was printed in a quarto format without the Aramaic translation and commentaries, yet it too was more than 200 folios in length.¹² The following year, Bomberg continued his parallel publishing of the biblical text and added the remaining books of the Bible, thus creating two full editions of the Hebrew Bible. One, in a folio format, totaled 670 folios with legal and liturgical appendices; the parallel text was 530 quarto folios long.¹³ In 1519, just two years after entering the field, Bomberg began his monumental publication of the entire Talmud while publishing a number of other significant rabbinic works for scholars of Hebrew and rabbinic literature.

The scene in Prague was somewhat different. Gershon Bak began his Hebrew publishing career in 1514 by printing a book of songs and grace after meals in quarto format with woodcuts.¹⁴ Despite the modest beginnings, the following year he began work on a prayer book for the entire year in octavo format with woodcuts that, when finished, was more than 225 folios long and included deluxe copies on vellum.¹⁵ This was followed by another prayer book in both the Polish and Ashkenazic rite in quarto format that was 185 folios long.¹⁶

11. On the volume—which was published with an approbation by Pope Leo X and openly noted the name of the editor, Felix Pratensis, a Jewish apostate—see Abraham Habermann, *Ha-madpis Dani'el Bomberg u-reshimat sifrei beit defuso* (Safed: Museum of Printing Art, 1978), 28–30.

12. On these two editions of the Pentateuch and the mode of production, see Yizḥak Penkower, “Mahadurat ha-Tanakh ha-ri’ shonah she-hozi’ Bomberg le-’or ve-re’shit beit defuso,” *Kiryat Sefer* 58, no. 3 (July 1983): 589–94. Regarding the number of folios in the smaller edition, see Nathan Porges, “Der erste Druck der Bomberg’schen Offizin,” *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie* 5, no. 1 (January/February 1901): 31–32.

13. See David Werner Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (1909; repr., London: Holland, 1963), 156.

14. Otto Muneles, *Bibliographical Survey of Jewish Prague* (Prague: Orbis, 1952), 13, no. 2.

15. Yeshayahu Vinograd, “*Ozar ha-sefer ha-ivri* (Jerusalem: Institute for Computerized Bibliography, 1993–95), s.v., “Prague,” no. 3. This is not to say that all copies of the book were on vellum. Often, books that were printed in a deluxe format on vellum were also printed on paper for a much wider market. In this regard, see Brad Sabin Hill, “Hebrew Printing on Vellum,” in *Books Printed on Vellum in the Collections of the British Library*, comp. R. C. Alston (London: British Library, 1996), 181–82.

16. Abraham Habermann, “Ha-madpis Ḥayyim Shaḥor beno Yizḥak ve-ḥatano Yosef bar Yakar,” in *Perakim be-toledot ha-madpissim ha-ivriyim ve-inyanei sefarim* (Jerusalem: Reuben Mass, 1978), 108–09; and Vinograd, “*Ozar ha-sefer ha-ivri*, s.v., “Prague,” no. 4.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

Concurrently, Bak worked on a Pentateuch with Rashi's commentary, the *haftorot*, and the five *megillot*.¹⁷ After more than three and a half years of work, the duo size work was completed in early 1518 in what Moritz Steinschneider termed "a most elegant" volume, one that probably could have been purchased only by people of substantial economic means.¹⁸

The Helicz brothers' decision to publish relatively short books suggests that they were not particularly well funded. By printing previously unpublished texts, they ensured that there would be no competition for their books; by printing practical works and texts in the vernacular, they increased their potential market; by printing short works rather than lengthy texts, even if they were sure to be useful, such as prayer books and the Bible, they limited their investment in materials, labor, and equipment and increased the possibilities for sales by offering relatively inexpensive books.¹⁹

Although their business strategy may have been somewhat different from that followed by Hebrew publishers elsewhere, the Helicz brothers appear to have been rather typical printers in contemporary Cracow. Approximately 250 works, mainly in Latin, were published in Cracow between 1530 and 1535, the majority of them by the leading printers of the town: Maciej Szarfenberg, Marek Szarfenberg, Florian Ungler, and Hieronim Wietor. A survey of the holdings of the Jagiellonian University Library from these years, where about 150 of the works are held, shows that, broadsheets aside, almost all of the volumes published by these printers during this period were printed in quarto format or smaller.²⁰ Indeed, only five titles from the Jagiellonian collection of these years were printed in a larger format, and all were printed by Hieronim Wietor, who was called by the king "our printer in Cracow" (*calcographus noster Cracoviensis*).²¹ Three of these five volumes made up a magnificent collection of laws printed on vellum by Wietor in 1535 for official use. The first was dedicated to the

17. See Habermann, "Ha-madpis Hayyim Shahor," 109–12.

18. Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana*, reprint, 1852–60 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), 7–8, no. 31. It would be a mistake to assume that Jews were the only customers for Hebrew books. A large-format Pentateuch with *haftorot* and *megillot*, published in Oels in 1530 by David Shachor and David ben Yehonatan, found its way to the collection of Gui II Arbaleste (d. 1570) in Brittany quite quickly. See the copy of the work now held in the Municipal Library of Rouen (shelf number A 15-a).

19. On the costs involved in setting up a printing shop, see Jane Newman, "The Word Made Print: Luther's 1522 New Testament in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Representations* 11 (Summer 1985): 102–3.

20. The Jagiellonian University Library has one of the finest collections of works published in Cracow during this period (see *Katalog poloników XVI wieku biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*, 3:14–88). Although it is possible that a search of all libraries would yield a few more examples of larger works published during this period by these publishers, it is unlikely that the findings would contradict our fundamental point.

21. See Joannes Ptaśnik, *Cracovia Impressorum XV et XVI Saeculorum* (1922; repr., Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1979), no. 289. Wietor referred to himself as the royal printer; see Maria Cytowska, *Bibliografia druków urzędowych XVI wieku* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1961), 23.

king, the second to the bishop of Cracow, and the third to the senators of the city.²²

Not only did Cracow printers use small formats during the mid-1530s, they also tended to print short books. Maciej Szarfenberg printed more than fifty works between 1530 and 1535, yet not one held in the collection of the Jagiellonian University is longer than 68 folios, and indeed most are not more than twenty or thirty octavo folios long, whereas the quarto texts tend to be much shorter. Florian Ungler did publish a few octavo texts that were more than 100 folios long, including Jan van den Campen's aforementioned adaptation of Psalms and a multivolume work on herbs and healing, but he, too, published mainly short works.²³ Even the royal publisher Hieronim Wietor had but two lengthy octavo works, one a psalter and the other a dictionary.²⁴

Although the publishing houses of Venice, whether they were printing for Jewish or non-Jewish audiences, published many short quarto and octavo works, they also published lengthy works in these formats that were hundreds of folios long. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decamerone* and *Filocolo*, the works of Cicero, and David Kimhi's *Sefer ha-shorashim* were all lengthy works that appeared on the presses of Venice around 1530, the likes of which never saw the light of day on the printing presses of contemporary Cracow.

Similarly, books of substantial size were being printed in Prague during the 1520s and early 1530s. In 1529, a large-format (33.5 cm × 23 cm) Czech-language Bible was published by Pawel Sewery totaling 562 folios with woodcuts. Another of similar size and length was published by Sewery in 1537.²⁵ In the Jewish community of Prague, too, there were substantial printing projects. Late in 1530, Gershon Bak completed a magnificent folio-size Pentateuch with *haftorot*, *megillot*, and Rashi's commentary printed with large type, woodcuts, and, given the lack of printed headwords, the intention that headwords would be filled in by hand and perhaps illustrated in color, as was commonly done in manuscripts. Some of the copies were printed on vellum. Indeed, the Bodleian Library copy

22. Mikołaj Jaskier, *Iuris Municipalis Maideburgensis Liber Vulgo Weichbild Nuncupatus; Iuris Provincialis, quod Speculum Saxonum Vulgo Nuncupatur; Promptuarium Iuris Provincialis Saxonici, quod Speculum Saxonum Vocatur et Municipalis Maideburgensi Summa Diligentia Recollectum* (Cracow: Wietor, 1535). The fourth volume was also a legal collection, albeit more modest, but commissioned by the Sejm and dedicated to King Sigismund (*Statuta Regni Poloniae* [Cracow: Wietor, 1532]). On the background to publication, see Karol Estreicher, *Bibliografia polska* (Cracow: Jagiellonian University, 1933), pt. 3, 18:253–54). The fifth volume was a translation of Paul's *Epistles* into Hungarian, published in duo format. On the volume, see *Katalog wystawy rękopisów i druków polsko-węgierskich XV i XVI wieku* (Cracow: Jagiellonian Library, 1928), no. 17, 20. The actual date of publication is uncertain, but it is attributed to 1535.

23. The five-volume work by Stefan Falimirz, *O ziołach i mocy ich* (Cracow: Ungler, 1534), was published in quarto size in volumes of 156, 24, 42, 60, and 120 folios, respectively.

24. Johannes Murnelius, *Dictionarius Variarum Rerum cum Germanica atque Polonica Interpretatione* (Cracow: Wietor, 1533), 8° 230 folios; *Psalterz albo kościelne śpiewanie króla Dawida* (Cracow: Wietor, 1532), 4° 140 folios.

25. See Helena Saktorová, Klara Komorová, and Emília Petrenková, *Tlače 16. storočia v piaristických knižniciach* (Bratislava: Matica Slovenská, 1997), no. 152, 153.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

of the volume is on vellum and has been carefully finished by hand, leading Steinschneider to note, “et ornamentis (nostro in cod. coloratis) splendidiss.”²⁶

The relatively modest practices of the publishing houses in Cracow likely reflected a combination of factors, including the size, tastes, and resources of the local reading public. Cracow printers did not undertake grandiose printing projects unless they had financial underwriting, and apparently, the Helicz brothers did not have such support. They were the only Hebrew publishing enterprise in Poland, but they faced competition from Hebrew presses in Prague and Italy.²⁷

After a brief flurry of printing, the Helicz press fell silent in 1535. In February 1537, the three brothers, their sister, and a number of other family members, including a cousin on their father’s side who also assumed the name Andreas, converted to Catholicism.²⁸ Seeking an explanation for their conversion, Majer Bałaban linked the apostasy of the brothers to the alleged persecution of Jews in Cracow during 1539–40, when Jews were accused of “judaizing” Christians. These matters spilled over into the Christian community and reached their height in 1539, when an eighty-year-old widow of a local city councilman, Katarzyna Malchierowa Weigel, was burned at the stake for “judaizing” and “wallowing in perfidy and the superstitions of the Jewish sect” (*in perfidam et superstitionem sectam judaicam sit collapsa*).²⁹ The church’s efforts in this regard were led by the bishop of Cracow, Piotr Gamrat, who Bałaban believed influenced or pressured the brothers into converting.³⁰

Gamrat loomed large on the religious scene in Cracow. As bishop of Cracow and a favorite of Queen Bona Sforza, Gamrat wielded power and influence in Cracow and beyond.³¹ Although he had broad interests and is said to have

26. Steinschneider, *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum*, no. 64.

27. Habermann, “Ha-madpisim benei Hayyim Ha’liz,” 136.

28. Regarding the date of conversion, see the Yiddish colophon in MS J 2870, Archiwum literatury a umenia, Slovenská Narodná Knižnica (Martin, Slovakia), fol. 1a, written by Johannes Helicz and transcribed in Martin Rothkegel, “Eine Jüdisch-Deutsche Handschrift des Buchdruckers und Konvertiten Johannes Helicz, Breslau 1537,” *Communio Viatorum* 44, no. 1 (2002): 49, which notes that Helicz completed his transcription on July 25, twenty-two weeks after his conversion. With respect to who actually converted, see Marcus Brann, *Geschichte der Juden in Schlesien*, Jahres-Bericht des jüdisch-theologischen Seminars (Breslau: Schatzky, 1910), 170–71; Bałaban, “Zur Geschichte,” 2; Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie*, 131–32; and Rothkegel, “Eine Jüdisch-Deutsche Handschrift,” 45. Rothkegel interpreted a Latin inscription in MS J 2870 to mean that Hayyim Helicz had converted with his sons. This cannot be the case because by 1534, Hayyim Helicz was dead (see the colophon to the *Merkevet ha-mishnah*, reprinted in Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yidish be-Polin*, 75–76). Although Krzysztof Pilarczyk, *Leksykon drukarzy ksiąg hebrajskich w Polsce* (Cracow: Antykwa, 2004), 147, dated the conversion to 1536, this is contradicted by Johannes’s statement.

29. Acta Episcopalia 18 (1538–40), Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej (Cracow), fol. 88v–92v. The notice of her execution on Saturday April 19, 1539, appears in the same volume, fol. 96v, as well as in Acta Officialia 62 (1537), Archiwum Kurii Metropolitalnej (Cracow), 645–46. On the Weigel case, see Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42–45. It is not clear what the ramifications of these events were on the Jewish community.

30. Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie*, 125–31.

31. On Gamrat and Queen Bona Sforza, see Kazimierz Hartleb, *Piotr Gamrat w świetle nieznanego życiorysu* (Lwów: Nakładem Towarzystwa Naukowego, 1938), 14–24.

enjoyed a rather hedonistic lifestyle, he mounted a concerted effort to fight heresies in Cracow and provided a salary for the office of inquisitor that was established in Cracow in 1536.³² Moreover, the Helicz brothers had connections with Gamrat's administration. Under his leadership, the Cathedral Chapter (a group of clerics at the cathedral whose function was to assist the bishop in governing his diocese) in Cracow gave the newly baptized Helicz brothers a one-time grant of ten marks (equal to one-quarter of the diocesan inquisitor's annual salary).³³ Ultimately, one of the Helicz brothers would even dedicate a book that he published to Piotr Gamrat.

The link between Gamrat and the conversion of the brothers is a tempting one, but the chronology of events does not allow it. Gamrat could not have been the moving force behind the conversion of the Helicz brothers because he was not appointed bishop of Cracow until July 29, 1538, well after the conversion of the brothers. Indeed, the brothers converted to Catholicism "two bishops before" Gamrat arrived in Cracow to assume his episcopal seat.³⁴

The depths of personal conviction are difficult to gauge, but within a few months of his conversion, Johannes Helicz was in Breslau (Wrocław) transcribing the popular anti-Jewish polemical work *The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel of Morocco* from German into Hebrew characters.³⁵ In the colophon of his transcription, he

32. On the establishment of the inquisitor's office in Cracow, see *Acta Actorum Capituli 3* (1524–43), Archiwum Kapituły Na Wawelu (Cracow), fol. 156v; regarding his salary, see *Libri Privilegiorum 18*, Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Kapituły Na Wawelu (Cracow), 278–80. On Gamrat's lifestyle, see Hartleb, *Piotr Gamrat*, 49, 53–54, and the note on 61. Despite his control over the two wealthiest dioceses in Poland—the diocese of Cracow and the archbishopric of Gniezno—when he died on August 27, 1545, Bishop Gamrat left no will and his debts totaled 50,000 florins. The Cathedral Chapter found only 100 ducats in gold and 2,091 florins in silver in the bishop's treasury—not even enough to pay for his funeral; see Ignacy Polkowski, *Spadek po prymasie arcybiskupie gnieźnieńskim a biskupie krakowskim Piotrze Gamracie* (Cracow: Drukarnia Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1888). By contrast, Bishop Piotr Tomicki, a recent predecessor of Gamrat's in Cracow, had left a sizable sum to be divided to hospitals, schools, churches, friends and family—and provided for his own funeral; see Kazimierz Gabryel, *Działalność kościelna biskupa Piotra Tomickiego (1464–1535)*, *Studia z Historii Kościoła w Polsce* (Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1972), 420–23.

33. Grants to converts were not unknown in contemporary Cracow. On May 16, 1537, the Cathedral Chapter granted ten florins to a young convert (*Acta Actorum Capituli 3* [1524–43], fol. 171v). The grant to the Helicz brothers on July 22, 1539, is recorded in the same volume, fol. 229r. Regarding the salary of the diocesan inquisitor, see *Libri Privilegiorum 18*, 278–80. The payment of specifically ten of a given currency to converts may have been a canonical amount. See, for example, Pope Gregory IX's letter concerning a certain Jewish convert in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth-Century* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1933), 222–23.

34. The brothers converted while Jan Latański was the bishop of the city. Latański was succeeded by Jan Chojeński, who, in turn, was succeeded by Gamrat.

35. On *The Epistle* in general and its popularity, see Ora Limor, "The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel of Morocco: A Best-Seller in the World of Polemics," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora Limor and Guy Stroumsa (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 177–94. The work was available in print in German from 1524 as part of Luther's works; see Julius Fürst, *Bibliotheca Judaica* (1960; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1849), 2:153–54; and Elisheva Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 49.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

wrote, “And God opened my eyes and heart and brought me to his divine word. May God continue to bestow upon me and everyone who believes in Christ, grace and help and a strong belief in our Paraclete, Jesus Christ.”³⁶ The actions of Paul, too, reflect a certain commitment to the church. According to a chronicle written in Poznań no later than 1539, on March 28, 1537, a certain “Paul, formerly a Jew but now a Christian” (*quondam Hebreo, sed tum christiano*), who was involved in the printing of a Hebrew Bible in Cracow, brought thirteen or fourteen Jews—men, women, and children—to the baptismal font.³⁷ Conversion did have its financial side. Some of the converts were promised a payment of ten marks by local merchants and the city council. It is not clear whether the promise was made directly to the converts or to Paul. The following year, Paul and Andreas (whether this was Paul’s brother or cousin remains unclear) appeared in front of the Poznań city council requesting that the city make good on its promised payment.³⁸

Whatever the depths of their new faith, there was an economic side to the conversion of the Helicz brothers.³⁹ On the very same March day that Paul Helicz was in Poznań helping Jews to convert, the brothers were granted a monopoly on the importing and sale of Hebrew books in Poland by King Sigismund I.⁴⁰ About three months later, on June 16, 1537, the king released the brothers from all oaths and obligations that they had entered into before their conversion. Moreover, the king granted the brothers protection from any testimony that Jews may have proffered against them.⁴¹ That their debts were forgiven was also recorded in the admission to citizenship of the city of Cracow granted to the brothers Paul and Andreas Helicz in the same year. On April 27, 1537, they received from the city a lot to build a house on.⁴² The course of events suggests that conviction alone did not lead the Helicz brothers to convert

36. Transcribed in Rothkegel, “Eine Jüdisch-Deutsche Handschrift,” 49.

37. See *Liber Obligationum Decretorum Quietacionum* (1535–39), Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu I-7, fol. 1a; and Józef Łukaszewicz, *Obraz historyczno-statystyczny miasta Poznania w dawniejszych czasach*, ed. Jacek Wiesiołowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Miejskie, 1998), 2:223–24.

38. *Liber Controversiarum*, Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu I-12 (1535–38), fol. 377r–378r.

39. Certainly, there could be more than one reason for conversion. Regarding reasons for the conversion of Jews in Poland, see Jacob Goldberg, *Ha-mumarim be-mamleket Polin-Lita* (Jerusalem: Shazar, 1985), 13–22.

40. See the material published by Pilarczyk, *Leksykon drukarzy*, 147.

41. The archival documents appear one after the other in SWPM I-12 (Teutonica 10) 1537, Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), 452–56. The material, without the introductory paragraph that appears on page 452 of the manuscript, was first published by Jan Ptaśnik, “Nowe szczegóły do drukarstwa i księgarstwa w Krakowie,” *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 38, nos. 1–2 (1924): 86–88, and was reprinted by Bałaban, “Zur Geschichte,” 36, 41–42.

42. *Libri Iuris Civilis Civitatis Cracoviae* (1493–1555), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), 312. The material appears in print in Aniela Kielbicka and Zbigniew Wojaś, eds., *Księgi przyjęć do prawa miejskiego w Krakowie 1507–1572* (Cracow: Secesja, 1993), no. 1826. Strangely, there is no evidence of Johannes ever receiving the right of citizenship in Cracow (he was likely in Breslau at the time of this particular grant). Regarding the lot, see Acta Scabinalia 11 (1528–38), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), 769; Acta Scabinalia 12 (1539–40), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie

to Catholicism. The brothers faced financial difficulties, and conversion was an escape from creditors and a path to a better future.

Given a new financial lease on life, the Helicz printing house was resurrected and focused on what it knew best: producing books for the Jewish community. As Jews, the brothers had printed small, popular works, but as Christians, they published far more substantial volumes aimed at a much different audience. Yiddish works fell from their book list and were replaced by liturgical and rabbinic titles, much like the Hebrew printing presses of Venice. The press published the first two parts of Jacob ben Asher's *Arba'ah turim* in 1538 and 1539, volumes that totaled well over 500 folios of relatively tightly printed Hebrew text in quarto format and involved significant outlays, not only for paper but for typesetting as well. A book of *yozerot* (a series of poetic prayers said in the morning service before and after the Shema), 112 folios in length in duo format, was printed using no less than three different sets of Hebrew fonts.⁴³ The Helicz firm did not totally eschew small works. Sometime before 1540, Johannes Helicz published a short (seven folios in quarto format) responsum written by Rabbi Shalom Shachna of Lublin for learned members of Jewish society in a mix of Hebrew and Aramaic; the text dealt with whether gifts given at the time of engagement form a bond between the couple that requires a formal divorce to dissolve.⁴⁴ Still, this work was an unusual one in the firm's new book list.

The size and character of these works stood in stark contrast to the works that the brothers had published as Jews. Although their earlier works had been modest in size and generally popular in character, the "new" Helicz press focused on larger works intended for communal use (i.e., a prayer book) or for use by students of rabbinic literature. The change in character of the Helicz productions was not mirrored in the other Cracow printing houses. Ungler (whose press was now under the control of his widow, Helena), Wietor, and Maciej Szarfenberg continued to publish more or less the same sorts of texts in the same range of sizes as they had in previous years.⁴⁵

(Cracow), 404; Acta Scabinalia 13 (1542–48), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), fol. 3v (*feria 6^{ta} ante festum Philipi [et] Jacobi*).

43. The work, which is now found in the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem, is generally referred to as a *mahzor* based on the colophon of the book (see the library's own electronic catalogue). However, the volume begins with *yozerot* for the Sabbath of Hanukkah and contains *yozerot* for other Sabbaths of the year, material not generally found in what is generally termed today to be a *mahzor*.

44. Shachna was alive at the time the responsum was published, but the copy of the responsum used in publication was held by Moses ben Samuel of Cracow, one of the parties involved. Perhaps he commissioned the printing of the responsum. The title page of the responsum informed readers that anyone who wanted to inspect the original could find it with Moses. Such a reassurance may not have been simply the idea of an apostate printer. A similar type of note appeared in Samuel Böhm's introduction to Solomon Luria, *Hokhmat Shelomoh* (1581; repr., Jerusalem: Meqor, 1972), in the interest of allowing people who had doubts about the accuracy of the printing to inquire further.

45. Marek Szarfenberg did publish a breviarium of substantial size in 1538, but it was printed in Venice in partnership with others. See *Katalog poloników XVI wieku biblioteki Jagiellońskiej*, no. 305.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

As *neochristiani*, the Helicz brothers enjoyed a number of business benefits that allowed them to return to Hebrew printing. Beyond the monopoly and clean slate of credit that they had been granted by the king, the brothers now had access to new sources of paper. All of the Helicz brothers' books that had been published while they were Jews had been printed on generic paper stock that had very simple watermarks reflecting only the wires and chains used in the production of the paper.⁴⁶ As Christians, however, they were able to purchase better-quality paper with distinguishable watermarks. The vast majority of the paper used by the brothers in the production of their postconversion books published for the Jewish community had a double-cross watermark, the stock of paper that had been used for some time by both the Cathedral Chapter in Cracow and the bishop's office (see figure 1).⁴⁷

This paper with the double-jointed cross came from the prominent Prądnik Wielki (also known as Czerwony) paper mill near Cracow, which had been established in 1493. The paper mill itself was not owned by the church, but having been built on land owned by the Duchaków (Holy Spirit) monastic order, the mill had appropriated one of the order's symbols. Paper from the Prądnik Wielki mill was more expensive and, by reputation, of better quality than generic paper in the early sixteenth century, much of which was imported from Silesia.⁴⁸ The quality of the paper notwithstanding, a text in which Hebrew letters rested on a paper with a cross impressed on it must have been, at best, rather disagreeable to Hebrew readers who noticed it.

Beyond the new paper supplier, conversion offered the Helicz brothers access to new sources of capital. Both the second volume of the aforementioned *Tur* (*Yoreh de'ah*, 1539) and the *yozerot* were published with the help, probably financial, of Johannes Kurtius from the Silesian town of Glogau (Głogów), who was presumably a Christian.⁴⁹ Business connections between printers also developed. The *yozerot* and the responsum of Rabbi Shalom Shachna published by Helicz both included a graphic woodcut that was identical to the one used by Maciej Szarfenberg in at least one of his works

46. For a brief but helpful introduction to the process, with a visual example of the wire lines, see Robert W. Allison, "Watermarks, Paper and Paper Making," <http://abacus.bates.edu/Faculty/wmarchive/Information.html>.

47. Examples of such paper being used in the Cathedral Chapter and in the bishop's office can be found in the Acta Actorum Capituli 3 (1524–43) and Acta Episcopalia 13 (1532–35), 14 (1525–35), and 15 (ca. 1535–36), Archiwum Metropolitalne w Krakowie.

48. See Franciszek Piekosiński, Jan Ptaśnik, and Kazimierz Piekarski, *Papiernie w Polsce XVI wieku* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1971), 17–18. Other paper from the Topór mill in Krzeszowice, near Cracow, and one unidentified watermark with an eagle are found among the pages of books printed by the brothers after the conversion, but in the copies that we have examined, paper from the Prądnik Wielki mill dominates.

49. The Hebrew text notes that it was published with "the help" (*be-siu'a*) of Johannes Kurtius (the Latin spelling of the name here follows Bałaban, "Zur Geschichte," 4). Financial assistance in publishing was certainly not unknown in Cracow. Guillerimo of Paris's *Postilla Guillerimi super Epistolas et Evāgelia* was published by Maciej Szarfenberg in Cracow in 1532 but underwritten by Marek Szarfenberg (*ductu et impensa providi*).

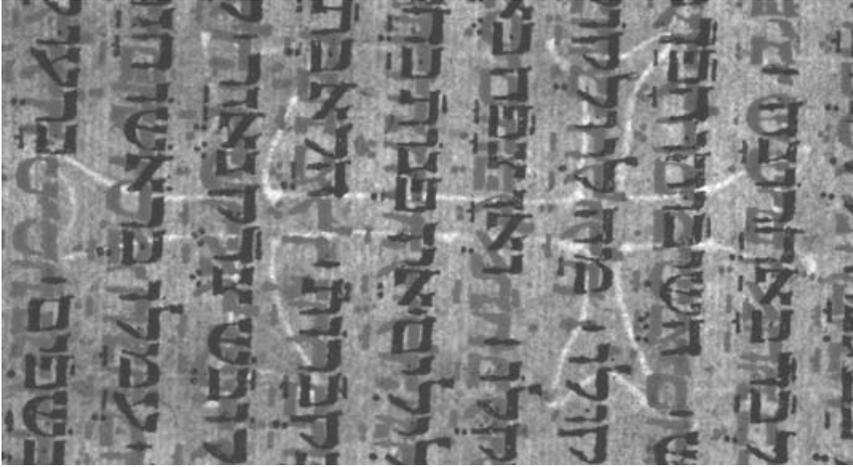


Figure 1.

Example of the double-cross watermark produced by the Prądnik Wielki paper mill used by the Helicz brothers after their conversion in *Yozerot*. By permission of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

(see figures 2 and 3).⁵⁰ How the woodcut came to the Helicz brothers is unknown, but woodcuts and fonts moved between publishing houses in Cracow, and over the years, a frontispiece used by Paul Helicz would find its way to Szarfenberg's press, where it was used again (see figures 4 and 5).⁵¹

Apparently, the Helicz brothers had gained the trust of other Cracow printers and had done so rather quickly. In 1538, Helena Ungler sent Paul Helicz to Breslau to collect a debt for her.⁵² The relationship between the Heliczes and Ungler

50. See the upper part of the frontispiece of *Tertus Parvuli Philosophiae Moralis* (Cracow: Maciej Szarfenberg, 1531) and compare it with the title page of Shachna's responsum and the second page of the *yozerot*.

51. For example, a woodcut of the crucifixion appeared in *Compendisoum Examen pro Iis, qui Sacris Iniciandi sunt Ordinibus*, published by Maciej Szarfenberg in 1529. The same woodcut appeared in *Constitutiones Grammaticae*, published by Ungler in 1533. Similarly, the frontispiece woodcut frame used by Paul Helicz in his Yiddish New Testament (1540) appeared on the title page of *Postilla Guillelmi super Epistolas et Evangelia per Totius anni Circulum*, published by Szarfenberg in Cracow in 1541 (see figures 4 and 5). A woodcut used by Helicz in his publication of the responsum of Rabbi Shalom Shachna had been used previously in *Parvulus Philosophiae Moralis*, published by Maciej Szarfenberg in 1531. Woodcuts were portable. The frontispiece of Paul Helicz's *Elementar oder Iesebüchlein*, published in Hundesfeld in 1543, used a woodcut found in *Summarius Computus*, published by Maciej Szarfenberg in Cracow in 1538. Regarding fonts, Hebrew letters were used at the beginning of each alphabetical segment of Psalm 119 in *Psalterium Davidicum*, published by Maciej Szarfenberg in 1539. The same fonts appear to have been used by Helena Ungler in her edition of *Zoltarz Dawidow*, published in the same year.

52. Ptaśnik, *Cracovia Impressorum*, no. 414. Glogau is about 80 kilometers northwest of Breslau.

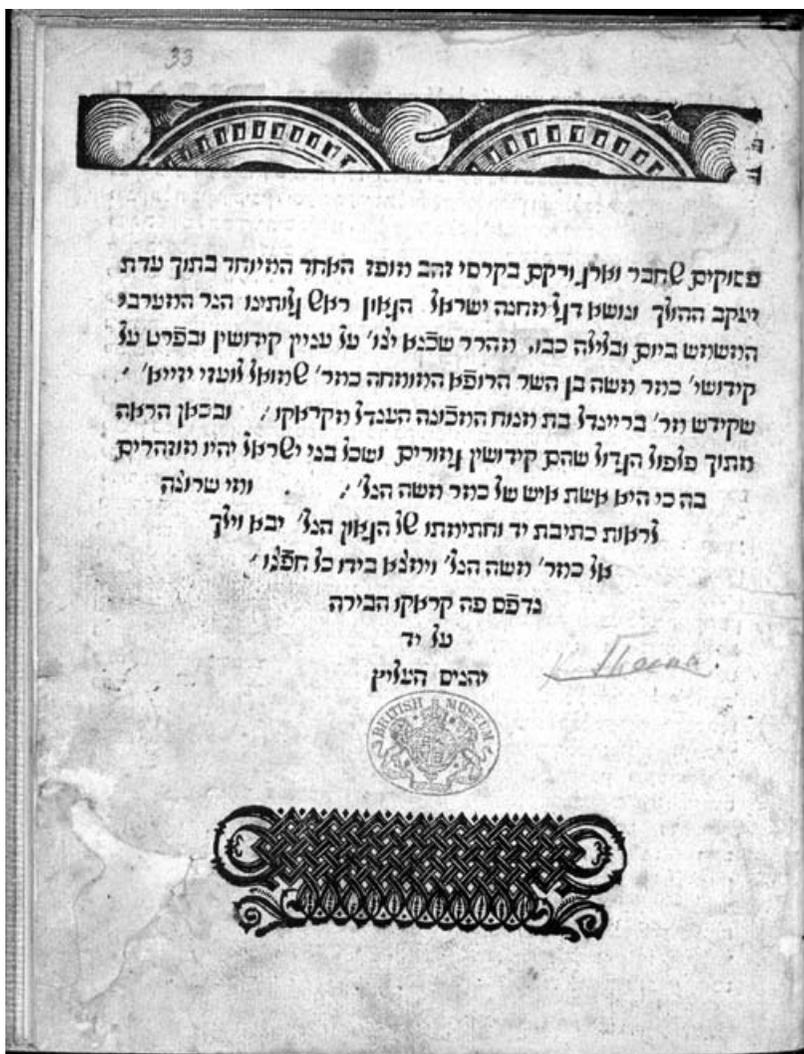


Figure 2.

Frontispiece of Shalom Shakhna's *Pesakim*, published by the Helicz firm after their conversion. By permission of The British Library, London.

became stronger when Johannes Helicz began to publish books for the Christian community in 1539. Lacking Latin (and Greek) fonts of his own, Helicz appears to have used fonts from the Ungler printing house.⁵³

53. Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa, *Drukarze dawnej Polski od XV do XVIII wieku*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1983), 384.

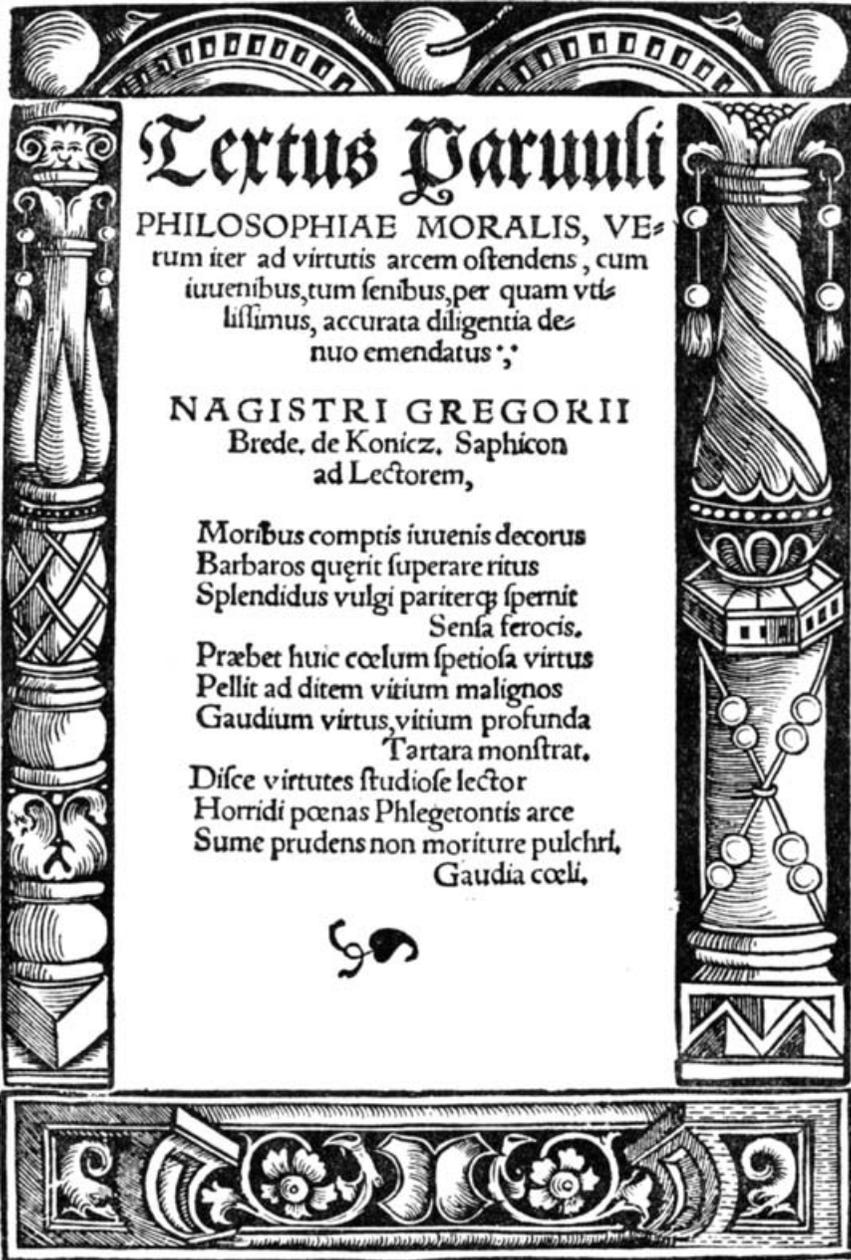


Figure 3.

Frontispiece of Parvulus, *Tertus Parvuli Philosophiae Moralis*, published by Szarfenberg (Cracow, 1531). By permission of Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw.



Figure 4.

Frontispiece of the Helicz New Testament (Cracow, 1540). By permission of the Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow.

With better paper, improved financing, ties to Christian printers, impressive titles, and a royal monopoly on the printing, importing, and sale of Hebrew books—not only in Cracow but in all of Poland—the Helicz publishing enterprise enjoyed significant business advantages. At the same time, its business activities did not impinge on other Christian printers in Cracow because, at least until 1539,



Figure 5.

Postilla Guillermi super Epistolas et Evangelia per Totius anni Circulum
(Cracow: Szarfenberg, 1541). By permission of Biblioteka Uniwersytetu
Jagiellońskiego, Cracow.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

the Heliczes published for a market that no other Christian in Cracow published for: Jews. Yet even with all these advantages, the Helicz press floundered because Jews refused to purchase their wares.

Works such as the *Tur* and large-format prayer books should have been welcome additions to local libraries and synagogues. Nevertheless, the Jewish community in Cracow refused to buy the books. In July 1539, two Christians—Martin Sibeneych, a book dealer, and Georg Moller, a bookbinder—testified in a Cracow court that local Jews had told them that no Jew would buy the Hebrew books in their possession because, so they claimed, Hebrew books held by Christians contained falsehoods.⁵⁴ Visiting one Rabbi Anselmus (*apud Doctorem Anselmum*) on business, Sibeneych was told that he had brought great financial loss upon himself (*tu ex eis magnum damnum suscipies...magno damno afficeris*) by accepting the books because not only would Jews not buy the books, they would burn them if they found them in the possession of a fellow Jew.⁵⁵ It is not that the works were censored. The *Tur* was published in toto even when, in one passage, it mentioned that under the right circumstances, a Jew should push an apostate to his death.⁵⁶ The Jewish community simply may not have wanted to support apostates. Indeed, about a generation later, Rabbi Solomon Luria evidenced no hesitation in using an edition of the Talmud that had been published by a Christian, Daniel Bomberg, although admittedly the Bomberg Talmud had been prepared and proofread by some of the leading rabbis of contemporary Venice.⁵⁷

Jewish communities in Cracow and elsewhere in Poland must have stood firm in not buying the brothers' works. Having laid out money for paper, ink, labor, fonts, and storage and finding themselves unable to recoup their expenses, the brothers were financially squeezed.

Struggling to sell their stock of books, the brothers resorted to deception. The frontispiece of a book of *seliḥot* according to the Polish rite, now found in the Ossoliński Institute in Wrocław, records that it was “*nehkak poh k(ehillah) k(edoshah) Krako' ir me-fu'arah taḥat ha-malkhut Zigmund y(ar)(om) h(odo) shanat [5]292 'al yedei ha-mehokakim ha-nirshamin*” (published here in the holy community of Cracow, a glorious city, during the reign of Sigismund, may God raise his splendor, in the year [5]292 [1532] by the licensed printers).⁵⁸

54. Acta Advocatalia Cracoviensis 133 (1539), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe we Krakowie (Cracow), 336–37.

55. See Ptašnik, *Cracovia Impressorum*, no. 443.

56. See *Tur*, *Yoreh de'ah*, 158. Also note that passages in *Oraḥ ḥayyim*, 156 were not censored. There was no known formal Christian censorship of Hebrew and Yiddish books in Poland during this period; however, Christians were wary of Jewish views and practices with respect to Christians. Assuming that Jews cursed Christians in the course of their religious ceremonies, on July 22, 1539, the members of the Cathedral Chapter in Cracow called for the establishment of a committee to investigate the nature of certain Jewish rituals (*ad interpretandas maledictiones Judaeorum quibus in ceremoniis suis utuntur*). See Acta Actorum 3, Archiwum Kapituły na Wawelu (1524–43), fol. 228v.

57. See the introduction to Luria's *Hokhmat Shelomoh*.

58. נחקה פה קק קראקא עיר מפוארה תחת המלכות זגמונד ירה שנת רצב לפק על ידי המחקים הנרשמים.

At first glance, there is nothing to suggest that this information was anything but correct.⁵⁹ Visually, the book looked like a preconversion Helicz edition. The woodcut that served as the frontispiece of the *seliḥot* was exactly the same as that found in the brother's *Merkevet ha-mishnah*, and the printing information also resonated with that of the *Sha'arey dura*. The frontispiece of the *Sha'arey dura* was framed by Hebrew text identifying the printers as *ha-ahim ha-nirshamim* (the licensed brothers). The frontispiece of the *seliḥot* was also framed by the announcement of who was printing the book (see figures 6–8). The volume of *seliḥot* was free of any Christian name (such as Johannes) on the frontispiece, and indeed, the name “Helicz” did not even appear. However, the book was uncharacteristically large for a preconversion work. Its 29.5 cm × 20.5 cm duo-size pages were unlike anything that the Helicz brothers had ever published as Jews.⁶⁰ It also had at least 93 folios—again, longer than any preconversion work. More to the point, an examination of the paper used in the book shows that the printers used exactly the same double-crossed paper from the Prądnik Wielki paper mill that the Helicz brothers had used in their postconversion works. In fact, the *seliḥot* were published after the Helicz brothers converted and simply backdated to 1532.⁶¹

The Helicz brothers' trick was not convincing. Although one extant copy of the *seliḥot* was used over the years—it contains both wax droppings (*seliḥot* are said at night or early in the morning, times when lighting would have to be used) and glosses in Hebrew characters—sales of the book must have been pretty slim because in 1539, the brothers had 850 copies of the work on hand.⁶²

Holding a significant inventory of Hebrew books and desperate for cash, the brothers pawned some of their books with the Christian book dealer Martinus Siebeneych. However, as Siebeneych and Moller learned, the refusal of the

59. At least the last page or two of the volume are missing. They may have contained a colophon noting the publisher's name.

60. The paper was originally larger. It is clear from glosses on the sides of the pages that have been cut off that over the years the paper was cropped.

61. On the bottom of one of its now cropped pages, well into the middle of the book, occurs a curious addition. Printed upside down are the words ישוע הנוצרי מלך היהודים (Jesus the Nazarene, king of the Jews). We cannot say that this phrase was added by Helicz, but this was a phrase that Johannes Helicz would add to a Christian text as well. For example, in the University of Wrocław is a copy of *Officium Beati Iacinti Confessoris per Reverendum Patrem Dominicum de Castanedulo*, published by Helicz in Cracow in 1540. On the verso of the title page is a picture of a crucified Jesus that has no accompanying text. However, a copy of what appears to be the same work in the Jagiellonian University Library in Cracow has this very image, but above it appears in red Hebrew type the phrase “Jesus the Nazarene, king of the Jews.” Polish bibliographers have not noticed that there were two versions of the *Officium Beati*. Helicz used this same woodcut in his 1540 edition of the *Speculum Haereticorum* by Politus Lancellotus but did not add the Hebrew text. The Hebrew phrase was not new to Polish books, but in earlier texts it had been written incorrectly. In 1533, the phrase was used in Ioannes Cervus Tucholiens's, *Institutiones Grammaticae* (Cracow: Florian Ungler, 1533), fol. 3b, as ישוע נוצרי מלך היהודים. It may have taken someone with a greater familiarity with Hebrew, such as a convert, to correct the grammar (see figure 9).

62. See below.



Figure 6.

Frontispiece from the *seliḥot* apparently published by the Helicz firm after the conversion. By permission of Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław.



Figure 7.

Frontispiece from the *Merkevet ha-mishnah* (Cracow, 1535). By permission of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York.



Figure 8.

Frontispiece of Isaac ben Me'ir's *Sha'arey dura'* (Cracow, 1534). By permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Jews to buy the Helicz's wares rendered their collateral worthless.⁶³ To protect his interests, Siebeneych went to the Cracow courts. Paul Helicz realized that if Siebeneych's claims were upheld in court, he would be forced to return the cash to Siebeneych immediately. On July 12, 1539, Helicz himself approached the Cracow court seeking to have the testimonies blocked, but apparently he was unsuccessful.⁶⁴ On July 22, 1539, the brothers approached the Cathedral Chapter of Cracow seeking financial assistance because the books that they had "printed at the request of the Jews" (*quos ad voluntatem Judaeorum impresserunt*) had placed them in difficult straits.⁶⁵ The brothers received ten marks and an

63. See Bałaban, "Zur Geschichte," 4, who apparently inferred this from the material published by Ptaśnik, *Cracovia Impressorum*, no. 443.

64. *Acta Advocatalia Cracoviensis* 133 (1539), 336–37.

65. *Acta Actorum Capituli* 3 (1524–43), fol. 229r. Although the record does not mention the Helicz brothers by name, it refers to *Judaeis noviter baptisatis*. Given that the Helicz brothers had a



Figure 9.

Officium Beati Iacinti Confessoris per Reverendum Patrem Dominicum de Castanedulo (Cracow, 1540). By permission of Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Zakład Starych Cracow.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

assurance that the clergy of the Cathedral Chapter would take up their case, both with the king and the bishop of Cracow, which apparently they did, but not before the Helicz brothers again found their way to a Cracow court asking for financial consideration because of their status as *neochristiani*.⁶⁶

On December 31, 1539, King Sigismund I responded to the brothers' pleas and issued a decree forcing the Jewish communities of Cracow, Poznań, and "Russia" (Lwów) to purchase all of the remaining inventory of Hebrew books held by Paul, Andreas, and Johannes Helicz and to divide the costs evenly among themselves.⁶⁷ The king's demand was a significant one: According to the royal decree, the brothers had in their inventory 800 *maḥzorim*, 850 copies of *seliḥot*, 500 copies of the *Tur*, 400 *yozerot*, 200 copies of a *minhagim* book, 300 Pentateuchs, 300 small *siddurim*, 300 large-format *zemirot* books, and 200 *zemirot* in a small format—in all, 3,850 books, valued by a royal committee at 1,600 florins.⁶⁸ Sigismund I demanded that the Jewish communities make an immediate payment of 600 florins by January 1, 1540, with subsequent payments of 600 florins by January 1, 1541, and 400 florins by January 1, 1542.

Assured of funds, the Helicz printing house had yet another new lease on life, but the brothers had learned their lesson. Because it was clear that the Jewish community would not buy books from the press of its own volition, Johannes Helicz sought a new market and, perhaps in partnership with his brothers, turned to printing for the Christian community.

The scope of Helicz's entry into Latin printing was impressive, if only in terms of sheer numbers. In 1539, he published Geoffroy Tory's *Aedilokuim seu*

royal monopoly on printing and were recent converts, the reference could not be to anyone but them. On the same day, the Cathedral Chapter discussed other matters concerning the Jews, including whether Jews blasphemed Christians in their ceremonies. They also decided to set up a committee to investigate whether the Jews proselytized and circumcised Christians; however, one clergy member was excluded from the committee because of his ties to Jews and suspected blasphemies of the faith (fols. 228v–229r).

66. Acta Dominorum Consulum 756 (1539), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), 391.

67. The decree was noted by Mathias Bersohn, *Dyplomatarjusz dotyczący Żydów w dawnej Polsce na źródłach archiwalnych osnuty (1388–1782)* (Warsaw: Gebethner and Wolff, 1911), 253–54, and published by Bałaban, "Zur Geschichte," 42–44. Although Bałaban dated the text to December 31, 1540, on page 42, in the course of his article, he correctly refers to it as being issued on December 31, 1539 (p. 4). The Latin reads, *Datum Cracoviae vigilia circumcissionis Domini anno 1540*. See also Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie*, 132. Although only Johannes Helicz signed his name as printer to the Hebrew books published between 1538 and 1540, the king's decree specifically mentions all three brothers (*Paulus, Andreas et Johannes, fratres Haliarum* [sic]) as being involved in the business.

68. Ironically, according to the king's list, there were more copies of *seliḥot*—the very work that the Helicz brothers had tried to trick the community into buying—than any other book in their inventory. Whether the brothers tried this same trick in other works that are on the inventory but that are not extant cannot be said. Given that the brothers had a monopoly on *both* printing and importing Hebrew books, it is certainly possible that some of the books that they held were imported by them. Cf., however, Habermann, "Ha-madpisim benei Ḥayyim Ha'liz," 133 n. 7, who suggests that the brothers had printed all the books in their possession.

Disticha, a ten-folio work in quarto format with a woodcut on the last page. The next year, he published a musical work that contained some Hebrew as well as Greek text,⁶⁹ two anti-Reformation pieces,⁷⁰ two printings of a Catholic devotional work,⁷¹ a poetical work,⁷² a moral tract by Hippocrates,⁷³ and a work in praise of a recent church appointee.⁷⁴ Polish bibliographers have also attributed two Latin polemical works of 1540 to Johannes Helicz's press.⁷⁵

Whatever success Johannes may have enjoyed in printing Latin works, the Helicz brothers still had debts that would plague them for years to come; they even owed money to each other. In the spring of 1540, Andreas and his older brother Paul appeared in court, apparently as part of an attempt to give seniority to Paul's debt against Andreas over that of others.⁷⁶ In 1542, Andreas and Johannes went to court to register their house as surety for their loans.⁷⁷ Johannes continued to have financial difficulties, at least until 1548, when he returned to printing as a source of income and printed a Hebrew-language grammar book, apparently with the support of the bishop of Cracow, Samuel Maciejowski.⁷⁸ A similar direction had been taken earlier by Johannes's brother, Paul.⁷⁹

In 1540, Paul Helicz began to print what was ostensibly a Yiddish translation of the New Testament, a project that was completed in 1541. The New Testament, of which there are two known copies, was printed in duo format and contained more than 140 folios.⁸⁰ The work was dedicated to none

69. See appendix II, no. 2.

70. See appendix II, nos. 3 and 4.

71. See appendix II, no. 5. In one printing of the work, Helicz printed his name *Ioānem Halicz Neochristianum*. In the second printing, Helicz spelled his name *Haeliz*. In the 1539 Tory work, Helicz printed his name *Halycz*.

72. See appendix II, no. 6.

73. See appendix II, no. 7.

74. See appendix II, no. 8.

75. See appendix II, nos. 10 and 11. On the attributions in Polish bibliography, see Alodja Kawecka-Gryczowa and Kazimierz Piekarski, *Katalog biblioteki Horynieckiej XX. Ponińskich*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1936), 22, no. 34; and Marian Malicki and Ewa Zwinogrodzka, *Katalog poloników XVI wieku biblioteki Jagiellońskiej* (Cracow: PWN, 1992), 1:182, no. 561.

76. *Acta Scabinalia* 12 (1539–40), 267–68.

77. *Acta Scabinalia* 13 (1542–48), fol. 3r and p. 45. In 1538, Johannes sold his share of the house and left the home that he shared with Paul and Andreas in Cracow, apparently because of familial conflicts involving their wives. In 1541, when Paul left Cracow, Johannes purchased Paul's share in the house and moved back in. See *Acta Scabinalia* 11 (1528–38), fol. 769; *Acta Scabinalia* 12 (1539–40), fol. 404.

78. Franciscus Stancarus (Stancar), *Gramatica Institutio Linguae Hebraeae*. No known copy of the work exists, but it was described by Ianociana, *Poloniae Auctorum* (Warsaw: Groellius, 1776), 1:249, who, based on the dedication, noted that Maciejowski supported the work. The information is repeated in Estreicher, *Bibliographia polska*, 29:173.

79. In 1548, one of Johannes Helicz's creditors came to the court asking that it seize all of Helicz's possession to satisfy outstanding debts. See *Acta Astitiones Terminorum* 64 (1530–41), Archiwum Państwowe we Krakowie, 189. Also see 191, 192, regarding other creditors.

80. The version in the Jagiellonian University Library in Cracow has 144 folios; the Cambridge University Library copy has but 142 folios, as it is missing two folios of the Latin/Greek/Hebrew

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

other than the archbishop of Gniezno and bishop of Cracow, Piotr Gamrat, who in the course of the dedication was praised for his pastoral care and support.

The dedication, said to be authored by Paul Helicz himself, explained that Jews had remained blind to the truth of the “Doctrine of Christ” (*Doctrina Christi*) because of the malevolent interpretations and blasphemies of the rabbis. Helicz claimed to know that “many” Jews clandestinely read the Gospels—a claim that may have been exaggerated but the credibility of which was strengthened by an earlier report of Christian witnesses that Jews from Kazimierz had told the brothers that a Jewish friend of theirs had died evoking “Jesus Christ” and rejecting the Hebrew prayers of the Jews.⁸¹

Helicz argued in his dedication that preaching was necessary to bring about conversion, yet according to Helicz, public preaching to the Jews was prohibited at the time. Helicz thus hoped that his translation of the New Testament into “the vernacular language, that is Theutonic” would “extol the glory of Jesus Christ” (*pro illustranda Christi Iesu Gloria hunc librum*), give Jews the opportunity to learn the truth about Christianity, and eventually lead them to conversion.⁸² The relatively well-polished Latin and frequent Latin references to the New Testament may reflect the work of an editor or even translator rather than a recently converted Jew. Gamrat was essentially Helicz’s patron and, as in other book dedications in contemporary Cracow, Helicz wrote what his patron wanted to hear.⁸³ If he could not write it himself, it stands to reason that he found someone who could, although Helicz was not averse to adding two Hebrew verses to the text, perhaps to give it the “flavor” of a piece written by a convert.⁸⁴

Despite its publication, the text of the Helicz New Testament suggests that by 1540, Paul Helicz was not a devoted Christian missionary. Unlike Sebastian Münster’s Hebrew version of the Book of Matthew, published in Basel in 1537,

dedication that are found in the Cracow copy. The Cambridge volume, however, has a woodcut on the first page of text that is not in the Cracow volume.

81. The Helicz brothers challenged a claim that three Jews from Kazimierz had visited them. According to the testimony of three Christians, the brothers asked the Jews about the fate of a Jewish friend who had recently died and were told of his final words. See SWPM I-12, 468, from November 23, 1537.

82. A Hebrew translation of the Book of Matthew was published in Basel in 1537; see Joseph Priejs, *Die Basler Hebräischen Drucke (1492–1866)* (Olten: Urs Graf, 1964), no. 48. Whether Helicz knew of this text or other Hebrew manuscript traditions of the Book of Matthew, such as the Hebrew translation of Matthew found in Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut’s *Even bohen*, is unknown; see George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew According to a Primitive Hebrew Text* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 161–65, 177–80, 224. One way or the other, a Hebrew text would have been of little use in trying to reach a broad audience among the Jews.

83. Cf. the introductions to the three volumes published by Wietor referred to previously, n. 22.

84. Rothkegel, “Eine Jüdisch-Deutsche Handschrift,” 49, suggests that Johannes Helicz knew Latin well before he converted. However, the section of the colophon that Rothkegel cites as proof of his position appears to have been written by a descendent of Johannes Helicz rather than by Helicz himself. The text notes that “This book was written by Johannes Helicz ... with him, also my grandmother, and his sister and my parent, his brothers etc.” converted (*Hic liber scriptus a Iohanne Helicz...quo cum ei, tum aviae meae et sorori eius ac parenti meo, fratribus eius etc.*).

there was no polemic against Judaism in Helicz's New Testament.⁸⁵ The closest the Helicz text came to contesting Judaism was the ongoing but inconsistent translation of the word *christus* as *mashiah* (messiah) in the margins of the text and two similarly placed translations of the phrase "Jesus von Nazareth, der Juden König" as *Yeshu'a ha-nozri melekh ha-Yehudim* (see figure 10).⁸⁶ Proud exclamations, perhaps, but hardly a sustained—let alone significant—attempt to undermine the Jewish faith.

Although he claimed to have prepared a vernacular translation of the New Testament to lead the Jews to conversion, what he printed was a transliteration of a German version of the New Testament in Hebrew characters. The syntax and vocabulary were completely German, not Yiddish. German words were used where Yiddish and Hebrew words not only existed but were in common use. For example, Helicz used the word *gesetz* in Matthew 22:36, 40, a context in which it was clearly synonymous with the word "Torah."⁸⁷ The word "Torah" was so much a part of contemporary Yiddish that Rabbi Anshel's Hebrew-Yiddish dictionary (published by the Helicz brothers) offered no translation. This word was axiomatic for Yiddish speakers. This was true not only of male readers but also females as well; when David Kohen used the word "Torah" in the Yiddish introduction to his *Azharat nashim* (also published by the Helicz brothers), he did so without explanation. Similarly, Helicz used the word *glieder* to discuss the "generations" between Abraham and David, between David and the Babylonian exile, and from the Babylonian Exile until Jesus (Matthew 1:17). However, contemporary Yiddish used the Hebrew word *dorot* (*doyros*) to mean "generations."⁸⁸ In the text, *Im jüdischen lande* appeared instead of the expected *be-erez Yisra'el* (*berets Yisroel*) (Matthew 2:1); *könig David* instead of *melekh David* (*melekh Dovid*) (Matthew 1:6); *haus Israel* instead of *beit Yisra'el* (*beis Yisroel*) (Hebrews 8:8); *tempel* instead of *beit ha-mikdash* (*beis hamikdosh*) (Matthew 12:5); and *die pharisäer* instead of *perushim* (Matthew 22:41).

This does not mean that Helicz was unaware of the difficulties that the German text posed for the Yiddish reader. In some instances, Helicz used the margins of the page to translate German words into more familiar forms. For example, *Egipten* appeared in the text, but a marginal note translated the place name as *mizrayim* (Acts 7:9), and *Hohen priester* was annotated as *kohen gadol* (John 18:3).⁸⁹ Still, Helicz was not consistent in providing such glosses, and

85. Regarding Münster, see Prijis, *Die Basler Hebräischen Drucke*, no. 48, with notes. There was no Hebrew translation of the New Testament published in Cracow in the sixteenth century; see Majer Bałaban, "Umysłowość i moralność żydostwa polskiego XVI w.," in *Kultura staropolska* (Cracow: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1932), 626–27. The reference to such a work in Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 167, is erroneous.

86. The translation appears in Matthew 27 and John 19.

87. See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, eds., *Matthew*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 274, n. 39, and his reference to B. *Shabbat* 31a.

88. David Kohen, *Azharat nashim* (Cracow: Helicz, 1535), 1.

89. The glosses that do appear in the margins of this New Testament are printed in square Hebrew fonts rather than in the Yiddish typeface that is used in the body of the text. Therefore, we have transliterated them according to Hebrew orthography.



Figure 10.

Helicz New Testament (Cracow, 1540), The Gospel of Mark, chapter 6. By permission of the Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Cracow.

words that had translations in one place often had no gloss on first or subsequent mention.⁹⁰ By contrast, contemporary Christian translations of the Bible into German used annotations extensively in the ongoing Christian religious polemics.⁹¹

Helicz made some efforts in the body of the transliteration to ease the Yiddish reader's task. In the first chapter of Matthew (verse 16), he replaced the word *christus* with the word *mashiah*. In the German, Levites were referred to as *Leviten*. Helicz made a small adaptation and spelled it in its familiar Hebrew-Yiddish form, *leviyim* (John 1:19). Similarly, the town Capernaum became *Kefar Nahum* in the Yiddish text, and in two instances even had a macron above the Hebrew letter *peh* to aid the reader in pronouncing it correctly.⁹² Moreover, cross-references to biblical works, standard even in sixteenth-century translations of the New Testament, were given using the Hebrew names of the Bible rather than the German (e.g., *Bamidbar* rather than *Numerii*).

Translating the text into Yiddish—even from German—would have taken a greater investment of time and money than a transliteration. Not only would many words have had to be translated into Yiddish, but also the syntax would have had to be significantly changed and more terms explained. It seems that Paul Helicz was more interested in publishing his book quickly and reducing costs than producing a fine Yiddish translation.

Paul also made no clear effort to market his book. In an age when books were sold unbound, the cover page and colophon of a book were the equivalent of our dust jacket, and a publisher who wanted to move his goods had to use the space. This was a chance to convince the reader to buy this work, an opportunity that the Helicz brothers had used before. In the *Merkevet ha-mishnah*, the brothers had used the colophon to urge readers to buy the books “because it is made of two languages, it is like a hammer that can break the rock and its word is like fire (cf. Jeremiah 23:29). It is a comfort and returns sight to blind eyes and shows a clear path to one who is lost on the way...therefore take strength and buy my book and do not fret over money because its wares are better than all merchandise.”⁹³ The colophon of the *Azharat nashim* had a similar sort of advertisement right above the Helicz brothers' names. Paul Helicz, however, made no such effort with his New Testament. The title page of his New Testament offered little more than a German and Hebrew translation of the word *Evanyelyon* (Gospels), information about the place and date of printing, and the printer's name. There was neither a publisher's introduction nor a colophon. There was also no translator's foreword, a common feature of contemporary translations of the

90. See, for example, Matthew 1:18 (*heylogin geyst*; German, *heiligen geist*); 2:15 (*Eypten*; German, *Ägypten*); 20:18 (*hohn pristrn*; German, *höhen priesteren*); John 1:19 (*prister*; German, *priester*).

91. On the use of the Bible in the polemics of the Reformation, see Heinz Bluhm, “Emser's ‘Emendation’ of Luther's New Testament: Galatians I,” *Modern Language Notes* 81, no. 4 (October 1966): 370–97; and, with respect to annotations, Newman, “The Word Made Print,” 95–133.

92. See Matthew 4:13, 8:5. Cf., however, Matthew 17:24, Mark 1:21, Luke 4:23, 7:1, and John 2:12.

93. The Hebrew is transcribed in Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yidish be-Polin*, 76.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

Bible by Catholics, Lutherans, and other Reformers.⁹⁴ The publisher made absolutely no attempt to convince Jews to buy the book.

Helicz may simply have been a realist. Even if he had made the effort to translate the New Testament into Yiddish and promote it, how many Jews would ever have bought the work? The Jewish community had already made it clear that it would not purchase the Helicz brothers' versions of classic rabbinic texts in Hebrew; they certainly would not buy copies of a Yiddish New Testament. Even if the New Testament would have been given out for free, there would have been serious distribution problems among a community that threatened to burn books of which it did not approve.

Paul Helicz's half-hearted translation/transliteration and fine trilingual dedication to the bishop of Cracow suggest that he published the work not out of missionary zeal but to find favor with his patron. The New Testament was a gift to Gamrat, and Helicz expressly noted that he was entrusting his fortune to Gamrat's patronage. Money seems to have played a significant role in Helicz's decision to publish it.

Although Piotr Gamrat may have been pleased with what he saw, if he had made the effort to read the Hebrew letters, he may well have taken action against the printer of this New Testament.⁹⁵ One of the most fundamental differences between the Catholic and Lutheran Bibles was Romans 3:28. In the Helicz New Testament, the verse read as follows: "Zo haltn virs nun das der mensh gerekht vertigt verdey in zu tun verk des gizetsiz aley n durkh den gloybn" (Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the law).⁹⁶ The important word, of course, was the word *allein*, "alone." This was one of the most fundamental issues in the controversy between Martin Luther and the church. For Luther, faith alone could bring salvation, and so he added the word *allein* here. For Catholics, this was a prime example of how Luther had corrupted scripture, and yet here it was in a work published by a new

94. See, for example, *Das New Testamēt, so durch L. Emser sälig̃vteuscht* (Leipzig: V. Schuman, 1528), a Catholic version; *Alle propheten nach Hebraischer sprach verteütscht* (Worms: P. Schoeffer, 1527); *Die gantze Bibel der vrsprünglichē Ebraischen vnd Griechischen waareheit nach, auff aller treüwlichst verteütschet* (Zurich: C. Froshover, 1531), a Zwinglian translation; and both the September and December versions of Luther's *Das Neue Testament Deutzsch* (Wittenberg: Melchior Lotther, 1522).

95. It was under Gamrat's leadership in 1542 that the provincial synod of Piotrków listed books it considered legitimate and others that were banned from parishes. Among the approved books were Catholic works that attacked Luther. Books suspected of promoting heresy were to be burned, the printing of new books considered dangerous was prohibited, and all scholars from Poland who were studying in Wittenberg were recalled. See Bolesław Ulanowski, *Materiały do historii ustawodawstwa synodalnego w Polsce w w. XVII*, vol. 1, *Collectanea ex Archivio Collegii Iuridici* (Cracow: Akademia Umiejętności, 1895), 388–91. On actions taken by the church against printers and booksellers of Lutheran texts, see Teter, *Jews and Heretics*, 100–101.

96. Although other sections of Helicz's transliteration do not match exactly the December 1522 text, Helicz's text is closer to the December 1522 edition than it is to either the so-called *Septemberbibel* of 1522 or the revised 1530 edition of Luther's translation. According to Darlow and Moule, *Historical Catalogue*, after 4188 (p. 487), some 85 editions of the December 1522 translation appeared by 1533. We cannot say exactly which edition Helicz used in 1540.

Christian, dedicated to the archbishop of Gniezno, bishop of Cracow, papal legate, and the primate of Poland, Piotr Gamrat. The book was printed on paper with a double-jointed cross and paid for by the church, ostensibly to spread the Gospel among the Jews—and it taught them the wrong faith.⁹⁷ Indeed, this was a transcription of Luther's Bible.⁹⁸

Helicz did not need to use a Lutheran version of the New Testament to transliterate the Bible. By 1540, several versions of the New Testament were available in German. The so-called Mentel Bible, first printed in 1466, had been reprinted 18 times before Luther published his version of the New Testament in 1522. Moreover, the success of Luther's translation moved the church to print Bibles in a format identical to Luther's—the most popular was that of Jerome Emser (1527)—leading to some confusion among less sophisticated users.⁹⁹ Given that in 1540, the church was still seeking reconciliation with Reformers, it is possible that a new convert would not have been aware of the differences in Bible translations, especially when they looked pretty much the same.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, at least one other relatively new convert to Catholicism also used a Lutheran rather than Catholic Bible.

By 1543, Paul Helicz's brother, Johannes, had prepared a manuscript copy of the Gospels in German using Hebrew letters. That this was simply a transliteration is obvious, for at times Johannes copied even the name "Jerusalem" according to its German spelling (i.e., *Yeruzalim* rather than *Yerushalayim*).¹⁰¹ But it was Matthew 16:18 that betrayed the nature of his source. Johannes transcribed it as "un oyf dizen felz vil ikh boyen meyne gimeyne" (on this rock I will build my community).¹⁰² The word *gimeyne* (*Gemeinde*) was found in Lutheran translations; *Kirche* was found in German Catholic translations.¹⁰³

97. The Apocalypse of John is missing from the transliteration, but its status in the canon was hotly debated at this time. In this regard, see Irena Backus, "The Church Fathers and the Canonicity of the Apocalypse in the Sixteenth Century: Erasmus, Frans Titelmans, and Theodore Beza," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 651–66.

98. This was noted by Brann, *Geschichte der Juden in Schlesien*, 171; Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie*, 131; A. M. Habermann, "Ha-madpism benei Hāyym Ha'liz," *Kiryat Sefer* 33 (1958): no. 19; and Shmeruk, *Sifrut Yidish be-Polin*, 78, no. 5.

99. See Newman, "The Word Made Print," 95–133.

100. Marcus Brann argued that Helicz was well aware of the fact that he was using a Lutheran Bible, a point that is well taken given that many editions of Luther's translation specifically identified him as the translator, and some even had a woodcut of his image on the frontispiece. According to Brann, by 1540, Paul Helicz had again changed his religion and had become a Lutheran (Brann, *Geschichte der Juden in Schlesien*, 171; see, however, Bałaban, "Zur Geschichte," 7 with n. 41). The claim is difficult to accept, but it is certainly true that at least one of the descendants of the Helicz brothers became a prominent Reformer.

101. See, for example, Matthew 3:5.

102. MS J 2870 (unpaginated). In German, *auf diesen Felsen will ich bauen meine Gemeinde*. Our thanks to Richard Elphick of Wesleyan University for pointing us to this verse.

103. Johannes's transcription was not based on the volume printed by his brother Paul because the texts are different in a number of instances (see, for example, Matthew 5:3–8). Also, Johannes included many marginal notes not found in the printed Helicz New Testament.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

Having completed his translation of the New Testament, Paul Helicz prepared to leave the city. He sold his share in a house near the New Gate of the town to his brother Johannes for 100 florins in 1541.¹⁰⁴ His quick departure from a town where he had just recently received citizenship makes it clear that he was hardly committed to a model life as a Christian citizen of Cracow.

In 1543, Paul Helicz was in Hundsfield (currently Psie Pole), near Breslau, where he published a new book in German with Yiddish text, *Elemental oder Lesebüchlein*.¹⁰⁵ This was not the first time that a Helicz brother had been in the German-speaking west. Even before the conversion, Samuel Helicz was said to have been engaged in publishing in Oels (also near Breslau).¹⁰⁶ The year after Johannes Helicz was in Breslau copying *The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel*, almost immediately after his conversion, Paul was sent there by Helena Ungler to collect a debt. The brothers' cousin, Andreas Helicz, received citizenship in Breslau in January 1538, and the *Tur* and *yozerot* that Johannes Helicz published were financed with help from Johannes Kurtius of Glogau.¹⁰⁷ Given such ties, it is not surprising Paul returned to the West to publish yet another book.

On the title page, he advertised this as a book that would offer Christians a chance to learn a few skills that would be useful in dealing with Jews. He taught readers the Hebrew letters, that Hebrew letters can have numerical value (i.e., *alef* equals 1, *beit* represents 2, *gimmel* 3, etc.) and then left them with a few basic texts to learn in Yiddish, including the Lord's Prayer, a short letter, and a loan agreement. In part quaint, in part useful, it appears to be an attempt to sell a few books and make a little money.¹⁰⁸

As for the brothers Andreas and Johannes Helicz, they remained in Cracow. Andreas apparently left the family business after his court case with Paul in 1540. He continued as a merchant with dealings in Lwów and had his ups and downs in business, but eventually he achieved some level of success and status in the Cracow community, even buying a second house in the city in 1546.¹⁰⁹ His wife, Anna, took an active role in the business, and his son, Augustus, was a successful Catholic merchant who also became a citizen of Cracow.¹¹⁰ Andreas died in Cracow in 1560, creditor to a number of his fellow citizens and debtor to others. His last will and testament, among the earliest recorded in Polish, left property to his wife and children, giving

104. Acta Scabinalia 12 (1539–40), 404.

105. A facsimile edition of the work was published in 1929 in Breslau by the Verein Jüdisches Museum.

106. See Brann, *Geschichte der Juden in Schlesien*, 168–70.

107. Regarding the citizenship of Andreas, see Brann, *Geschichte der Juden in Schlesien*, 171.

108. Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie*, 134, portrayed the work as a text “to uncover the secrets of the Jews,” a view that is overstated.

109. Acta Scabinalia 13 (1542–48), Akta Miasta Krakowa, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow), 747–48.

110. See, for example, Acta Consularis Cracoviensis Plenipotentium Iuramentorum, Cautionum Fideiussoriarum Salvorum Conductum 1584–96, pp. 163, 648, 767, 848.

his “faithful wife” the right to remain in “his house” on the condition that she did not remarry.¹¹¹

As for Johannes, he appears to have given up printing, at least as a named publisher, in 1540, but he continued to live in Cracow. After purchasing the aforementioned share of the house from Paul in 1541, he and his brother Andreas had to defend their rights against the claims of a creditor, one Joannes Zayancz, in 1542.¹¹² Debts continued to plague Johannes Helicz, and in 1546, he entered a particularly difficult period when financial claims were made against him by no fewer than six creditors, including his sister-in-law, Anna Helicz.¹¹³ Faced with a financial crisis, Johannes apparently returned to book publishing.

This was not the end of the Helicz family and Hebrew printing. In 1551, a printer in Constantinople began to publish a vocalized version of the entire Hebrew Bible with Rashi’s commentary. The publisher wrote on the title page, “Samuel (Heb. Shemu’el) said: Do not call me Shemu’el (שמואל) but rather Shevu’al (שבואל) who has returned to God (*she-shav le-’el*).”¹¹⁴ He continued, “After my return [to Judaism], I considered what to do.¹¹⁵ I said that this [i.e., printing the Bible] will bring me relief from my deeds and the toil of my hands.”¹¹⁶ The Samuel who “returned to God” was none other than Samuel Helicz, formerly of Cracow.¹¹⁷ Apparently, being a Christian did not suit Samuel, and he left the Christian world, both spiritually and physically, to return to live as Jew in Constantinople.¹¹⁸ There he would publish three Hebrew texts, including the Pentateuch (he seems not to have completed the Bible project), a Hebrew translation of a Latin text of Judith, and the *Sha’arey dura’*, the very first work that he and his brothers had published some twenty years earlier in Cracow as the first Jewish printers in Poland.¹¹⁹

In an age before the advent of limited liability, each and every person who failed in his or her business endeavors bore personal responsibility for the business’s debts. Those who did not have the means to pay their creditors could lose their personal assets, and those whose assets did not satisfy their creditors could find themselves in debtor’s prison. For Jews, there sometimes was an

111. Testamentum Famati Andrea Halycz, in MS 779, Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (Cracow, 1560), fol. 267.

112. Acta Scabinalia 13 (1542–48), fol. 3a. In the same manuscript, see also p. 45 (the means of pagination changes in the course of the manuscript).

113. Acta Astitiones Terminorum, 64, Archiwum Państwowe we Krakowie (Cracow), 189, 191, 192.

114. See 1 Chronicles 26:24 with B. *Bava’ Batra’* 100a.

115. See Rashi on Genesis 6:7.

116. See Genesis 5:29. The text is reproduced in Abraham Yaari, *Ha-defus ha-ivri be-Kushta’* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), no. 151.

117. See Appendix I.

118. The difficulties of integrating into Christian society led some converts to return to Judaism. In this regard, see Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, 28–29, 42.

119. See Habermann, “Ha-madpisim benei Hayyim Ha’litz,” nos. 21–24; and Yaari, *Ha-defus ha-ivri be-Kushta’*, nos. 151, 153, 155. The *Sha’arei dura’* printed by Helicz in Constantinople was not identical to the text that he printed in Cracow. Samuel Helicz may have had a son who was also involved in publishing in Constantinople. See no. 24 in Habermann’s list with Yaari, no. 173.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

escape from financial ruin through conversion to Christianity. The Helicz brothers chose this route, but as their stories show, though conversion may have brought short term relief, it was no guarantee of long-term success.

Not every Jew who faced the prospect of financial ruin was willing to accept baptism as the price of financial salvation. Even those who converted did not always live in peace with their choice. Some, such as Andreas Helicz, integrated into their new communities, whereas others, such as Samuel Helicz, ultimately returned to the faith of their youth.

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APPENDIX I: WHO IS WHO?

The question of which brother took which name after the conversion has perplexed scholars for a number of generations. Without definitive proof, scholars have made a number of attempts to identify the brothers, particularly Samuel, who returned to Judaism.

Samuel was often thought to have been Andreas Helicz (most recently, see Pilarczyk, *Leksykon drukarzy*, 68, 69). However, Samuel could not have been Andreas because Andreas died in Cracow in 1560 as a Christian.

Paul was older than Andreas (see *Acta Scabinalia* 12 [1539–40], *Acta Miasta Krakowa*, *Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie* [Cracow], 267–68), and his name always appeared first in the Latin listings. This suggests that the ordering of the names may well have reflected seniority. Samuel's name also appeared first whenever the brothers' names were listed in Hebrew. Asher and Andreas were always mentioned in the middle of the lists. Moreover, all brothers signed their earliest works. By the time the *Azharat nashim* was published in 1535, only Samuel and Elyakim Helicz signed their names. The *Den musar un hanhagah* was signed only by Elyakim. Elyakim was the only brother named in all pre-conversion works. When the Helicz brothers resumed Hebrew publishing after their conversion, only Johannes signed his name. This suggests that Elyakim may have been Johannes, "both of whom" were always mentioned last in the listing of the brothers. Asher stopped being a named publisher almost immediately after the brothers began to print books, and Andreas was never a named printer. This would leave Paul as Samuel Helicz.

This is confirmed by embellishments over certain names in Johannes Helicz's transcription of the New Testament and the lack thereof in *The Epistle of Rabbi Samuel* (MS J 2870, *Archiv Literatúry a umenia*, Slovenská Národná Knižnica, Martin, Slovakia). In his manuscript, Johannes decorated not only his own Christian name when it appeared in text in Matthew 10:2 and in a marginal note in Matthew 10:21, but also the name Elyakim when it appeared in Luke 3:30. Moreover, when the name Elyakim appeared twice in Matthew 1, it was written in a distinct square script. When the names Asher, Andreas, and Samuel appeared in the manuscript, they lacked any embellishments.

The decoration of the scribe's name was a standard feature of contemporary copying (see, for example, Parma MS 856/1, where the scribe decorated his own name Yizḥak). Thus, if Elyakim was Johannes and Andreas was not Samuel, then Samuel was indeed Paul, and Asher was none other than Andreas.

Apostasy, Fraud, and the Beginnings of Hebrew Printing in Cracow

APPENDIX II: LATIN WORKS PUBLISHED BY JOHANNES HELICZ

Bibliographic information is provided as it appears in each work. Size, length, and at least one location of the volume with current call numbers have been added.

1. Geoffroy Tory, *Aediloquium seu Disticha, Partibus Aedium Urbanarum et Rusticarum Suis quaeque Locis adscribenda. Authore Gotofredo Torino Biturigico*. Impressum Cracoviae per Ioannem Halycz neochristianum. Anno M.D. XXXIX. 4° 10 fols.

Location: University of Wrocław (395319); Czartoryski Library, Cracow (CIM 1774 II).

2. Gregorius Libanus, *De Musicae Laudibus Oratio seu Adhortatio quaedā ad Musicae Studiosos cui Annexa Est*. Cracoviae Excusum per Ioannem Halicz: Anno Deitatis incarnatae M.D. XXXX. 8° 16 fols.

Location: Czartoryski (CIM 2269 I); Ossolineum, Wrocław (XVI O 1020).

3. Andrzej Lubelczyk, *Tumuluaria Responsio in Libellum Philipi Melanctonis. Nuperrime de Ecclesiae Autoritate ex Veterum Scriptis Impie Aeditum, Autore M. Andrea Bochnen*. Impressum Cracoviae per Ioannem Haeliz. Anno Domini M.D. XL. 8° 17 fols.

Location: Czartoryski (CIM 1121 I); Ossolineum (XVI O.87 adl); Biblioteka Kórnicka, Kórnik (Cim. O. 231); Biblioteka Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, Poznań (59 339).

4. Politus Lancelotus [Ambrosius Catharinus], *Speculum Haereticorum Fratris Ambrosii Catharini Politi Senensis Ordinis Praedicatorum*. Impressum Cracouiae per Ioannem Haeliz neochristianum M.D. XL. 8° 54 fols. Location: Czartoryski (CIM 1090 I); Biblioteka publiczna M. St. Warszawy (XVI. O. 54); Ossolineum (XVI Qu. 3614); University of Wrocław (303556); Kórnik (Cim. O. 233); Biblioteka Narodowa, Warsaw (BN XVI. 0.39); Biblioteka Kapituły w Gnieźnie; Jagiellonian University Library (CIM O 429).

5. Castanedulo [Dominicus de Castan], *Officium Beati Iacinti Confessoris per Reverendum Patrem Dominicum de Castanedulo, Provinciale Terrae Sanctae Cōplilatū: et Reverendum Patrem Thomam, Magistrū Sacri Palatii Apostolici, Laudatum*. Cracoviae excusum per Ioānem Haeliz neochristianum M.D. XXXX. 8° 12 fols.

Location: Biblioteka Narodowa (XVI. 0.958); University of Wrocław (300659); Kórnik (Cim. O.234); the copy at the Jagiellonian University Library (CIM O 89) has Hebrew lettering (יהושע הנוצרי מלך היהודים) above the woodcut on fol. 1b, which does not appear in other copies. Also in the Jagiellonian copy, Helicz printed his name as *Ioānnem Halicz Neochristianum*.

6. Dathus Augustinus Senensis, *Carmen de Officio Cancellariorum et Scribarum*. Impressum Cracoviae per Ioannem Helicz, 1540. 4° 4 fols (?).

Location: Ossolineum (XVI Qu. 3068); Kórnik (Cim. Qu. 2190).

7. Hippocrates, *Epistola Moralis, Disputationem Democriti Continens, Rinutio interprete. Cum Epistola Moecenati in Sanitatis Conservationem*.

Colophon on last page: Impressum Cracoviae per Ioannem Haeliz neochristianum. Anno Domini M.D. XL. 8° 19 fols.

Location: Ossolineum (XVI O. 1122); University of Wrocław (333173 and 381061); Kórnik (Cim. O. 232); Biblioteka Narodowa (XVI.0.117 and XVI.0.483).

8. Mielieski August Rotundus, *Inauguratio Reverendissimi in Christo Patris et Domini. Samuelis Maczieiovski Dei Gratia Episcopi Chelmensis et Regni Poloniae Procalcellarii Kalendis Febrvarii Anno Domini M.D. XXXX auctore Augustino Rotundo Velvenensi*. Cracoviae per Ioannem Helicz. 4° 5 fols.

Location: Ossolineum (XVI.Qu.3093).

9. Franciscus Stancarus (Stancar), *Gramatica Institutio Linguae Hebraeae*. In Regia Poloniae Cracovia apud Ioannem Haelicz anno ab incarnatione verbi mysterio MDXLVIII mensis Februarii die XXI. 8° unknown length.

No known copy exists, but it was noted by Ianociana, *Poloniae Auctorum*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Groellius, 1776), 249.

WORKS ATTRIBUTED TO JOHANNES HELICZ

10. Ludovicus Carvajal, *Apologia Dilvens Nugas Erasmi in Sacras Religiones. Precipue Assertiones Erasmi, quibus in Apologia Respondetur*. Colophon: Craccoviae excusum, Anno 1540. 8° 48 fols.

Location: Czartoryski (CIM O. 1645); Ossolineum (XVI O.1111); University of Wrocław (300650).

11. *Consultatio an Christianae [sic] Potestati, inter Christianos Ferre Judeos Liceat; et Id si Liceat que Ratione et Modo per Doctos quosdam et Synceros Theologos in Usum Christianorum Principum, ex Divinis et Humanis legibus Congesta*. n.d.: n.p., n.p. 8° 12 fols.

Location: Jagiellonian University Library (CIM Qu 5449).

12. Valentinus Eckius (Ecchius), *Ad Reverendum Patrem Eximium Virum, Sacrae Regiae Maiestatis Doctorem, Dominum Joannem Benedictum Canonicum Cracovien. Etc. Epistola Valentini Ecchii, Adiunctis quibusdam Aliorum Versibus. I.B.: Joannes Dantiscus Jo.Be. Haec Rosa quam Virides Monstrat Pede Psytacus unco Quae Tibi cum Feurat Stematis ante Loco Hanc Voluit Caesar, Virtutis Nobile Signum Utque Illum Ostendens Judica Ferret*. Cracoviae Lazarus Andreae impressit 1561. 4to. 8 fols.

This work has mistakenly been attributed to Helicz. In the Ossolineum Library (XVI Qu. 3067), it is bound together with Dathus (above, no. 6; Ossolineum XVI Qu. 3068). This copy of Dathus is missing its first quire and having been placed after Eckius in the binding, the reader is left with the impression that it is simply a continuation of Eckius. On the last page of Dathus is the note, "Impressum Cracoviae per Iohannem Helicz." This led Theodorus Wierzbowski, *Bibliographica Polonica XV ac XVI*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: Kowalewski, 1894), no. 2378, to conflate the information from both books into one record, leading to subsequent confusion. Also see Karol Estreicher, *Bibliografia Polska* pt. 3, vol. 5 (Cracow: Jagiellonian University, 1898), 8.