

### **Statement by Dr. Gershon D. Hundert**

*recipient of PIASA's 2005 Oscar Halecki Polish and East Central European History Award, November 19, 2005, Polish Consulate General, New York City*

I accept this award with pride and gratitude. It is heartening and encouraging to have one's work recognized and particularly so when my book has been singled out by such a distinguished jury of scholars. There is also a special cachet for me in that the first of these awards went to my teacher, Andrzej Kaminski. I would note also that I have had some oblique relations with the Polish Institute over the years. For example, the first article I ever published appeared in *The Polish Review* in 1973.

In my work, I have been at pains to convince my fellow historians of the Jewish experience that the one can not write about European Jewish history as if there were no borders and as if there were no differences among national cultures. When I entitled a chapter in another book, "Jews and Other Poles" it was as much *pour epater les juifs* as *pour epater les polonaises*. In fact I thought about making that the title of the book itself but my anxiety over Peter Gay's influence – he has a book called *Freud, Jews and Other Germans* – prevented me from doing so.

Being here in the Polish Consulate reminds me of the time when as a graduate student I sought and won a fellowship from the Kosciuszko Foundation awarded to members of Polonia who wished to travel to Poland to do historical research. The award, however, required the approval of the Ministry of the Interior of the Polish Peoples Republic. After a very long delay, a negative answer was received. The refusal to approve my award was based on my not being "of Polish descent" (even though my mother was born in Łódź). Times have indeed changed.

In that respect, I want to stress the seriousness and gravity with which I view of the special significance of a book about Jews in Poland-Lithuania being honored as a work in Polish history. It is not yet self-evident that a book about the Jewish experience would be classified as Polish history and this award will help us to progress along that road. For this reason, I find this moment very moving.

Thus, and I hope this will not be taken as hubris, I accept this award not only for myself, but retrospectively or retroactively in the name of all those who have labored in the field of Jewish Polish history beginning to mention only a few names, with Majer Balaban and Yitshak Schipper and Moshe Schorr; Emanuel Ringelblum and Lucjan Dobroszycki and Yishaya Trunk and Dov Bernard Weinryb and Raphael Mahler.

There is an old saying to the effect that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who do not. I applaud the Institute for including the experience of Jews in what is defined as Polish history. It is a dramatic and symbolic gesture of great importance. I feel very privileged indeed to be the first beneficiary of this noble and visionary step. Thank you very much. Dziękuję serdecznie!

(Dr. Gershon D. Hundert, received the 2005 Halecki Award for his book Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century )