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# Poland's Cultural Relations with Middle-Eastern Arab Countries

**Abstract:** The article takes up the subject of Poland's cultural relations with some Middle Eastern Arab countries, i.e. with Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Palestine in particular. It has been done in historical perspective, analyzing development of the connections, the determinants influencing the course of changes, and political events and processes that have been strengthening or weakening the ties. Despite the long geographical distance between Poland and the Middle East, the cultural ties have turned out to be astonishingly rich, which was so partly due to the idiosyncrasy of their history – abound with wars and full of dramatic transformations. The three-part text begins with a historic overview of the relations that have gained a momentum during the World War II and in the post-war decades. Part two concerns the relations on official diplomatic level, usually ending up in initialed agreements and exchanging official visits. And the last part scrutinizes the spontaneous grassroots links forged between groups, individuals and non-political institutions. In this case the links embrace the field of academia, education, high culture and private lives of individuals and families.

**Keywords:** *cultural relations, Poland, Middle-Eastern Arab countries, diplomatic ties and agreements, grass-roots cultural ties*

The Middle East<sup>1</sup> is indeed strategically one of the most crucial regions of the today's World. The routes between the three continents – Africa, Asia and Europe have crossed there for

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<sup>1</sup> Although the terms Middle East and the Near East, concerning the region encompassing southwest Asia and northeast Africa, “are now used interchangeably among English speakers”, it was not always the

millennia, making it the center or even the “navel of the world” (Frankopan, 2015, p. xix). People wandered along these “silk roads”, and goods were sent (not complete) and the spheres of political influence were established.

As early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, groups of people of Arabic origin started to settle there and in the following centuries they dominated the terrain. The changes that took place in later times led to establishing in the Middle East several countries inhabited mostly by Arab people. They were Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon and Syria. With a historical perspective in mind, one can also speak about Palestine, but in the effect of some international subjects' actions the decision was made to form, after the World War II, the state of Israel<sup>2</sup> in this region, which does not belong to the Arab cultural heritage. Although the Arab states as the subjects of the international law were made mainly after World War II, their regional names had already been in occurrence much earlier. Historically then, contemporary borders of Arab states have been largely defined by their past. The object of analysis undertaken in this paper are the factors directly influencing Poland's cultural relations with Arab states located in the Middle East. In terms of the structural approach, the primary subject is Poland, and the secondary are the Arab states. In the process discussed there have been both institutional forms of inter-state relations as well as links forged spontaneously. All these factors importantly influenced the structure of the article, which has three main parts describing the potential of the Polish – Arabic cultural relations.

Such an approach derives from adequate theories and methodology of the subject that one can find in literature. Some scholars are of the opinion that international cultural relations should be examined in a twofold way (Zenderowski et al., 2010, p. 149). Firstly, they are to be understood as real relations between two sovereign states, and as such they are strictly institutionalized and often normative because of the formerly defined and accepted forms of cooperation. Secondly, it is about broadly understood issues of social relations, in which internationality takes the form of cultural exchange. Our focus here is on exchange between ethnically and culturally distinct groups. This exchange may be spontaneous and initiated by individuals or self-organized groups. It can also manifest itself in the form of similarly unprompted and voluntary contacts forged by state officials.

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case. In the early 20th century “Middle East essentially supplanted Near East”, though both of them refer to the same region. Moreover, “the term Near East was coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Westerners divided the Orient into three parts: The Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East”. So, it is important to bear in mind a cultural note that the terms are “completely Eurocentric”, and as such against “the recent trends in academia to de-Westernize core education”. Bearing all this in mind, we shall use the term Middle East for the sake of this text. As for the borders of the region, we shall define it as the area stretching between Turkey, the Arabian Peninsula, the Mediterranean Sea and the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris (Cf. Grannan).

<sup>2</sup> It was only recently (1994) that the government of Israel agreed to establish within its territory the Palestinian Autonomy, which has not gained the status of a state yet. With regard to the historic Polish – Arabic relations, Palestine has often been treated as a separate international being, which is why it has been taken into consideration here.

## Historic Determinants of Cultural Relations

In an attempt to define the character of Polish-Middle Eastern cultural relations, a special emphasis ought to be put on the background of historic relations that have linked the Polish and Poland with the Arab world, the analysis of which will provide us with the information indispensable for better understanding of the rate and intensity of the relations, and why some Arab states were more interested and engaged in their development than others. What contributed to such state of things were the complex history of the Polish state and its people, as well as the rich history of the Middle Eastern countries. In either case the history heavily influenced the shape of mutual relations. A more in-depth description of both sets of factors will facilitate our understanding of the analyzed problem.

When the Polish state was born in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Middle East was a region characterized by a cultural, ethnic and political mosaic. Apart from the presence of Arabic culture, the Byzantine Empire was of crucial importance in the same region. It is on these historic territories that the Turkish tribes started to appear, and eventually gained a dominant position in the region. The growing strength of the Turkish state after conquering Constantinople sparked long-lasting wars with Poland that did not vanish until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, Poland's contacts with the Arab world were limited and carried out only by knights, slaves, pilgrims, clergy and travelers. So it remained until the fall of Poland in the closing years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Simultaneously, the Turkish state also drastically weakened. However, as nature abhors a vacuum, new agents emerged in this void and started to play an increasingly important role – the European empires of France and Great Britain<sup>3</sup>.

Because Poland had been partitioned and consequently disappeared from the map of Europe, the Polish could only be present in the Middle East through the agency of France and Turkey. And to those countries, civilians, ex-militaries or insurgents could make their way after the thwarted 19<sup>th</sup> century national uprisings. The same thing applied to those who were threatened with arrest or imprisonment by the authorities of the states that had partitioned Poland. In the Arab countries they found jobs or were hired by the local administration and military authorities. As for Polish-Arabic cultural connections at that time, they were rather informal and spontaneous. All this changed in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when regaining independence by Poland after World War I allowed the new state to institutionalize the relations. Whereas Poland reappeared on world maps after 1918, the Arab World continued to be dependent on third-party states. In the Middle East the presence of France and Great Britain rose in significance. The two countries replaced and took over the position of Turkey – then limited by borders and international treaties. Thus, Poland's capacity of cultural influence in this region was reduced again. This period was also characterized by

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the historic development of Poland and of the Arab world the following publications have been used: Bennassar et al., 2003; Hourani, 2002; Ichnatowicz et al., 1988.

a mass migration of the Polish Jews who started settling down in Palestine. Practically, however, they did not play any special role in Polish-Arabic international relations.

The cultural connections between Poland and the Middle East changed again with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. In the aftermath of the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in September 1939, thousands of Polish citizens, along with the Polish government, had to leave the country and seek the help of other states. One of the group of refugees managed to get to the Middle East, via the Balkans and Turkey, where they started to form army units. They were joined by the evacuees from the Soviet Union, who travelled to the Middle East together with the Polish army of Gen. Władysław Anders. In this period the Polish government in exile in London, with the aid of western countries, established in the Middle East an honorary consulate, academic and cultural institutions, societies and organizations. Their aim was to create a positive image of the Polish diaspora among the local communities.

Due to on-going military actions and the waged war, the French émigré government in London and Great Britain made it possible to establish such autonomous institutions in the Middle East that were only dependent on the authorities of Arabic communities. They formed the basis for the forthcoming proclamation of sovereignty and the shaping of independent Arab countries. Thanks to such an initiative, cultural connections could become more institutionalized.

The end of World War II brought about transformations in international political relations that gave the United States and the Soviet Union the status of superpowers actively involved in politics on the world stage. Western European states preserved a powerful status, but were not able to undertake single-handedly such spectacular political actions as they had in the past. One of the outcomes of this new situation was establishment of the state of Israel, which became a strategic partner of the USA. In the meantime, the Soviet Union was actively working to join the international political competition. It had already taken the first step toward it making Central Europe a sphere of its influence. And thus, the Polish state became heavily entangled in Moscow's political interests, which had an effect on Polish relations with the Arab world and the Middle East (Zajac et al., 2006, p. 194 et seq.).

The character of Soviet Union's policy with regard to the Arab states was first signaled in 1956, when Moscow condemned the actions taken by France and Great Britain against Egypt after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Just as important was the support given by Soviet Union to socialist-oriented ideological movements that later led to overthrowing monarchies in Iraq and Syria. As a result of these actions the two countries became Middle Eastern allies of the socialist states. Military and economic aid started coming, weaponry and industrial plants were delivered and established, and as for human resources, various specialists were sent to the Middle East. Arab youth travelled to gain education in socialist countries. Poland's involvement in the Middle East region was largely of a similar nature. However, the policy of the Polish People's Republic on Middle East had yet another aim – to obstruct the involvement of the Polish government in exile that had been located in London

since the end of the WWII. Its strong influence could be noticed in Lebanon. The growing rapprochement between Poland and the Arab countries at the time led to various cultural initiatives (Spirewski, 2016, p. 262 et seq.; Knopek, 2016, p. 292 et seq.).

The form of Polish-Middle Eastern ties changed after 1989, the year of political transformation in Poland from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one, and the redirection of foreign policy toward a western-oriented outlook. The will to accede to the European Community and the NATO brought about a restriction of contacts not only with the Soviet Union, and subsequently the Russian Federation, but with Iraq and Syria as well. This resulted in a change in the status of cultural connection with these subjects.

Historical circumstances have had a vital impact on the process of shaping Polish foreign politics toward the Arab world in the Middle East which is reflected in the process of establishing political relations and diplomatic posts. The following data provide some more details.

Table 1. Establishing Polish-Middle Eastern relations (in alphabetic order)

<b>Arab state</b>	<b>Date of recognition of the state by Polish diplomacy</b>	<b>Date of establishing diplomatic relations</b>	<b>Status of diplomatic relations</b>
Iraq		1932	Diplomatic mission level
		April 16, 1946	Diplomatic mission level
		July 15, 1958	Embassy level
Jordan	December 1956	February 20, 1964	Embassy level
Kuwait		May 17, 1963	Embassy level
Lebanon		August 1, 1944	Diplomatic mission level
		October 20, 1956	Diplomatic mission level
Palestine		July 1982	Embassy level
Syria		September 18, 1945	Embassy level

Source: the data worked out by the authors on the basis of materials lodged in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw and on the publications: Palyga, 1986, pp. 335–336; Patryas et al.; Szczepanik et al.

As the table reads, the Polish side set up political relations with the Arab world generally in two historic periods – the interwar time with World War II included (Republic of Poland and the government in exile) and the post WWII period (the Polish People's Republic). With reference to molding the Polish-Middle Eastern relations one may observe political and ideological priorities in Polish foreign politics. At first the interest was in Iraq and Lebanon (the interwar period and WWII) and next the leftist systems that emerged in Iraq and Syria (the post-war period). The advancements in Polish-Middle Eastern cultural connections took a similar course, as we shall see in the following paragraphs.

## Institutional Forms of Cultural Cooperation

Within the paradigm of academic research, the term institutionalization stands for such actions that adopt a form of an institution. Although historically the best examples of such institutionalizing actions one could find in the field of political institutions, they also appeared in American political economy from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And then the category started to denote social aspects of group activities in the local, regional and finally national dimension. In our times, the prevailing understanding of institutionalization consists in social consolidating of some facts or customs and then transforming it into an institution.

The arrival of a vast group of refugees to the Middle East during World War II made the Polish government in exile establish numerous socio-cultural institutions in those countries. These included the representatives of the Polish radio, societies and organizations, magazines and their editorial boards. What helped Polish culture not to fall into oblivion in the Middle East were concerts and recitals given in Lebanon by residents or travelling artists<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, there were painting exhibitions<sup>5</sup> or artistic public showings, like the exhibition prepared by the students of the Polish School of Painting and Drawing – a school run by Bolesław Baake, a former assistant and lecturer at Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Locally, there were commemorative plaques endowed to help to remember the stay and activities of the Poles in this part of the world, for instance one devoted to the poet Juliusz Słowacki or another to a Jesuit priest Fr. Maksymilian Ryłło.

One of the most vital institutions operating for the sake of cultural relations was the Polish Institute set up in Beirut and active in the Middle East between 1945 and 1950. It served as continuation of the Society of Iranian Studies (*Towarzystwo Studiów Irańskich*) transferred from Teheran. Its founder and director was Stanisław Kościałkowski. In January 1946 the Institute became a branch of the Polish Scientific Institute in New York. The board was composed of Stanisław Kościałkowski (head), Melania Gołaszewska, Władysław Błotnicki (secretary), Kamil Kantak, Franciszek Machalski, Antoni Markowski, Edward Romański, Wincenty Samolewicz, Stanisław Krystyn Zaremba. The orientalist and economic sections ran the scientific activity of the Institute. The Institute was also a publisher and its organ was called „Teki Bejruckie” (Beirut Files). From 1946 till 1948 it ran Polish Studies School (*Studium Polonistyczne*, till 1948) and Economy and Trade School (*Studium*

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<sup>4</sup> In 1944 Arabs attended the concerts of Zbigniew Grzybowski and Hanna Kannel. In the following years the concerts gave: Leontyna Herchenreder, Stanisław Pieczora, Irena Stadnik, Tadeusz Zaufal (1945–1947), and Stanisław Niedzielski (1948).

<sup>5</sup> These were the works of painters and artists temporarily settled in the Middle East: Bolesław Baake, Zofia Bobrowska, Maria Chmurzyna, Stefan Felsztyński, Stanisław Frenkiel, Józef Galuba, Irena Gołębiowska-Teska, Jerzy van Haardt-Brodnicki, Maria Joczówna, Zbigniew Kasiński, Gertruda Kościałkowska, Zygmunt Mazur, Hanka Ordonówna-Tyszkiewiczowa, Piotr Pawluczuk, Mary Schneiderowa and others.

*Ekonomiczno-Handlowe*, till 1947). Both schools had academic character of a higher education institution and were based on the Humanistic Faculty and the Faculty of Trade Sciences of the American University; the initiative to open them came from Michał Tyszkiewicz. The Polish Institute in Beirut cooperated with the Department of Culture and Press of the Middle East Forces Military Units. This institution operated till the mid-year of 1950, that is to the moment of evacuation of the last transport of the Polish refugees from Lebanon to Great Britain (Draus et al., 1984; Draus, 1993; Pietrzak, 2012).

Polish – Middle Eastern cultural connections became institutionalized after World War II, which came as a result of the political and economic interest in this region of the world. Usually, the recognition of a new Arab state as a subject in international relations was followed by setting up diplomatic posts and exchanging diplomatic notes. The next step was to initiate agreements between states, of which especially important were the ones concerning culture, media and science. The scope of such cooperation is presented in the table below.

Table 2. The more significant agreements concerning culture issues signed by Poland and Middle East Arab states (in alphabetic order)

<b>Arab state</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject of agreement</b>
Iraq	January 1, 1959	Agreement on economic, scientific and technological cooperation
	April 2, 1959	Agreement on cultural cooperation
	June 8, 1971	Agreement on strengthening cooperation and exchange of information between Polish Press Agency and Iraqi Press Agency
	December 21, 1976	Protocol on cooperation in the field of radio and television between the Committee for Radio and Television „Polskie Radio i Telewizja” and Iraqi Broadcasting and Television Establishment
	February 27, 1977	Protocol on cooperation in the field of sports and physical education between The Main Committee for Physical Culture and Tourism of the Polish People’s Republic (GKKFiT PRL) and the Ministry for the Iraqi Youth
Jordan	November 16, 1977	Agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation
Kuwait	November 15, 1982	Agreement on cultural cooperation
Lebanon	-	-
Palestine	November 25, 1996	Agreement on cooperation in the field of higher education between the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Higher Education of Palestine for the years 1997–1999
Syria	December 5, 1967	Agreement on cooperation in the field of radio and television between the Committee for Radio and Television „Polskie Radio I Telewizja” and the General Management for Radio and Television of Syria
	February 18, 1973	Agreement on cultural cooperation



Arab state	Date	Subject of agreement
Syria	January 21, 1976	Agreement on radio and television cooperation between the Committee for Radio and Television „Polskie Radio i Telewizja” and the General Management of the Committee for Radio and Television of Syria
	December 11, 1977	Agreement on cooperation between the Polish Writers Union ( <i>Związek Literatów Polskich</i> ) and the Arab Writers Union in Syria
	September 22, 1985	Agreement on mutual recognition of the higher education courses, diplomas and academic degrees

Source: the data worked out by the authors on the basis of materials lodged in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, the archives “Dokumentacja prasowa” and “Kroniki”, the chronicles included in the magazines: *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* and *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, and on the publications: Łętocha et al., 1972; *Patryas et al.*, 1982; *Szczepanik et al.*, 2010.

After 1956, Iraq and Syria became important Polish partners, and it is with those Middle Eastern countries that the largest number of agreements was initiated. That stemmed from specific practical, ideological and socio-economic circumstances. A lot of Polish scientific and technological research personnel who worked in these countries needed proper cultural care. Less attention was paid to those states that took advantage of technological aid from the West (Jordan, Kuwait). Agreements like these were not initiated with Lebanon because there a honorary consulate had already been established in Beirut by the Polish government in exile in London after World War II. Later, the civil war in this country made it impossible for both sides to initiate the necessary agreements. After 1989, with the acceptance of Israel, Poland also set up an agreement with Palestine.

The agreed documents were based on some prior fundamental bilateral regulations that, just like in the case of the Polish-Iraqi agreement of 1959 provided for:

- exchange of the representatives of scientific institutions and organizations, health service institutions, educational and cultural institutions of either state;
- organization of exhibitions, theatre performances, film showings, lectures, concerts, radio and televisions broadcasts by either of the contracting party states;
- cooperation between institutions, scientific organizations, the health service, cultural and educational organizations of both countries, and carrying out scientific research and studies in adequate institutions, archives, libraries and museums;
- education of guest-students from the other country in vocational schools and universities;
- awarding scholarships to research workers and providing the in-coming students and research workers with sufficient opportunities to work and study at adequate universities; regardless of who pays their fees – individuals or governments;
- teaching the language and acquainting with the culture of the host country;
- dissemination of information concerning scientific, cultural and social achievements of either country, with establishing of Cultural Centers;



- exchange of books, magazines, newspapers and other publications of scientific, educational or scientific character;
- cooperation between Press Agencies and magazine editors;
- cooperation and exchange between social and youth organizations, and holding sports events (Staszewski, 2016, pp. 50–51).

As a consequence of these agreements came visiting delegations on government or ministerial level. These helped to establish the rank of bilateral enterprises to be undertaken and to initiate diplomatic documents including protocols, agreements and memorandums. Such meetings served not only the purpose of getting to know each other better, but also helped to determine some practical actions that would back both Polish and Arab initiatives.

The high-ranking meetings on government or ministerial level are presented in the table below.

Table 3. The more significant visits concerning cultural issues paid by the Polish and Middle Eastern Arab states officials (in alphabetic order)

Arab state	Date	Description of the event
Iraq	February 18–20, 2004	The Minister of Culture of Iraq, Mufid M. Al-Jazairi on an official visit to Poland
	May 23–26, 2004	A delegation of the State Council for Antiquity and National Heritage of Iraq, led by the general conservator-restorer Barham A. Salih, on an official visit to Poland
	July 26–27, 2005	Polish government delegation led by the Prime Minister Marek Belka with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Culture paid an official visit to Iraq
Jordan	September 20–22, 2007	The Minister of Tourism and Antiquities of Jordan, Osama Dabbas, on an official visit to Poland
	September 13–15, 2011	The Minister of Tourism and Antiquity of Jordan, Haifa Abu Ghazaleh, on an official visit to Poland
Kuwait	-	-
Lebanon	-	-
Palestine	24–26 XI 1996	The Minister of Higher Education of Palestine, Hanan Ashrawi, on an official visit to Poland
Syria	May 10–18, 1973	The Minister of Culture and National Orientation of Syria, Fawzi Kayali, on an official visit to Poland
	February 17–24, 1986	The Polish Minister of Culture and Arts, Kazimierz Żygulski, on an official visit to Syria
	July 10–29, 1986	A delegation of the Ministry of the Higher Education of Syria led by the Minister Kamal Sharaf on an official visit to Poland

Source: data worked out by the authors on the basis of materials lodged in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, the archives “Dokumentacja prasowa” and “Kroniki”, the chronicles included in magazines: *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* and *Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny*, and publications: Łętocha et al., 1972; Patryas et al., 1982; Szczepanik et al., 2010.

After World War II, Polish-Iraqi and Polish-Syrian exchange of representatives in the field of education, culture and science outnumbered Polish interactions with other Arab countries. With regard to Syria, such visits were paid until 1989, and in case of Iraq, the visits began after 2003. The fact that Iraq once again became the object of Polish foreign politics is tied up with the Gulf War, on occasion of which the Polish government backed US intervention in that country. A Polish military contingent was assigned a stabilizing mission at a key archaeological site in Iraq. This in turn sparked cultural exchange between the two countries, resulting in a series of visits. After 1989, socio-cultural connections with Jordan were also somewhat intensified, which, however, was mostly the result of culture initiatives undertaken already in the 1980s.

The visits of Polish and Arab officials representing the world of arts and culture brought about a further series of visits by academic staff, students, journalists and other media specialists, film crews and artistic ensembles. This renewed relationship promoted joint archaeological, ethnographic and anthropological field expeditions. Representatives of the world of culture, arts and science who travelled to the Arab countries or to Poland could count on the necessary aid and care of the host country.

In case of Jordan, it was archeology that became a key platform of cooperation after 1981. Since 1982, a group of Polish researchers led by Michał Gawlikowski from the University of Warsaw participated in several projects carried out in Jordan, including the uncovering of the Umayyad house. When the first leader of the group had left, the work was continued on the spot by Dr Antoni Ostrasz, an employee at the Department of Antiquities of Jordan (Bojko, 2015, pp. 40–41). For Zbigniew Fiema, a graduate from the Department of Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw, excavation work in Jordan brought international renown. Working with the American Centre of Oriental Research at the ancient site of Petra, Fiema uncovered a number of papyrus scrolls with inscriptions in Ancient Greek. This discovery caused a stir in the world of academia and received special publicity from the 21<sup>st</sup> Congress of Papyrologists (Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses) held in Berlin in 1995 (Bojko, 2015, p. 53).

As a consequence of the cultural ties linking Poland and the Arab World, Polish musicians came to Middle Eastern countries on tour. Between the 26<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1998, the popular folk music and dance ensemble 'Mazowsze' took part in the International Festival of Culture and Arts in Jerash. Warsaw Puppet Theatre 'Guliwer' paid a visit in the same year (Bojko, 2015, p. 54).

A more intensive cooperation with the Arab world was accomplished after World War II by Polish universities and other types of higher education institutions. Within the framework of initiated agreements, Polish academics and scientists undertook employment as lecturers or even founders of academic faculties in several Arab countries. On May 15, 1988, at the invitation of the rector of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, a rector of Jordan University, Abdul Salam Al Majali came to visit Poland. During his stay, the two universities signed cooperation agreements. As a follow-up to this visit, Jacek Fisiak, the

Adam Mickiewicz University rector, travelled to Amman in order to continue the talks on potential future collaboration. Soon afterwards, a group of Polish students undertook study in Amman; they arrived with duplicates of selected Polish books that were to enrich the collection of the bibliographical department at Amman University. In December 1989, a special cabinet display devoted to Poland was unveiled at the Jordan University. It presented the latest Polish achievements in the field of science and arts. Earlier that year, relations of similar type were established between the University of Wrocław and the Mutah University of Karaku (Bojko, 2015, pp. 42–43).

Another contribution to Polish-Arab relations was made by Polish organizations that had been set up by the Polish diaspora in the Mediterranean countries. In Jordan, the 1980s were characterized by a positive climate for establishing cultural societies, largely thanks to the involvement of the Prime Minister and member of the Senate Bahjat Talhouni. The meeting between the Polish leader General Wojciech Jaruzelski and King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan further contributed to this positive atmosphere. A Jordanian section of the Polish-Arab Friendship Society was created in 1987. This section was ultimately turned into a separate Polish-Jordanian Friendship Society, officially registered on January 9, 1989. Its first chairman was the mayor of Amman, and later the Prime Minister of Jordan, Abdel Rauf Rawabdeh. A delegation of the Society led by Wasef Azar visited Poland at the beginning of August 1990 at the invitation of Juwentur (a Polish Travel Agency) (Bojko, 2015, pp. 45–46).

In the years 2009–2014, Polish-Jordanian cultural cooperation manifested in various forms, including:

- the commemoration of The Year of Chopin in Jordan;
- Łódź Philharmonic Orchestra concert in Amman;
- naming one of the streets of Amman after Frederic Chopin;
- scientific cooperation between higher education institutions (Bojko, 2015, pp. 91–101).

After 1989, Polish authorities based their politics toward the Arab World on the premise of soft power. Higher education institutions continued recruitment of Arab personnel, mostly doctors, engineers and other specialists who would later perform important social and cultural roles in the Arab world. On the other hand, Polish students of Arabic studies went to continue their education at Arab universities. Scientific cooperation involved mainly archaeological excavations. Polish archaeologists conducted their activity in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. As for non-governmental initiatives, Polish charities provided developmental aid to communities in Iraq and Jordan. Polish Catholic Charity (*Caritas Polska*) and Polish Humanitarian Action (*Polska Akcja Humanitarna*) also brought medical aid to Iraq and Syria (Bury, 2016, pp. 93–95).

Since its accession to the European Union, Poland has brought developmental aid to various countries in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions (ACP group of states). It has also offered aid to the Arab countries, particularly in the social and cultural sectors. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland issued many small grants which were

spent in the Arab countries. One example of how this funding was used was an initiative realized in Jordan in the first decade of this century, which was aimed at equipping school libraries of the towns of Anjara and Smakiyyeh with books and indispensable teaching aids for children. In 2010, another project was implemented for the benefit of Palestinian refugees in Hitten – a computer lab was opened at the local school. A similar project was carried out the following year for Palestinian refugees in Irbid. In the same year, a school library and a computer lab were set up for Jordanian children in Akaba. In the years to follow, many more projects were designed with Jordanian schools and children in mind (Bojko, 2015, p. 106–108). Much the same initiatives took place in Palestine and Syria.

### Spontaneous Aspects of Cultural Cooperation

The history of the Polish nation and state abounds in spontaneous actions that have deeply affected its course since the beginning of the modern era. These would include rebellions, national insurrections, confederacies, anti-communist strikes and mass protests; in other words, social pluralism in full swing. On numerous occasions, it was the influence of individuals or small groups of determined people that shaped history. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it often proved to be the case with socio-cultural connections between nations. This of course included Polish-Middle Eastern cultural cooperation.

During World II, because of the arrival of thousands of Polish refugees from the Eastern Europe and the lands of the Soviet Union, centers of social and cultural life were set up in the Middle East. Radio *Levant* broadcasting in Beirut and run by the government of the so-called Free France began to broadcast Polish programmes in November 1941. Its distinctive feature on-air became the tune of Chopin's Polonaise, played at the beginning and end of each broadcast (Kościałkowski, 1949, p. 150).

In the same wartime period, Polish students who had not managed to continue their education due to the outbreak of World War II came to the Middle East to complete it. Thanks to the diplomatic agreement in place, the HQ of the Polish Armed Forces could temporarily send these young people, including a high percentage of young women, to four higher education institutions in Beirut to finish their studies – St Joseph's French Catholic University (Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth), the Lebanese American University, the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts and the Graduate School of French Literature. Their number grew steadily until in the academic year of 1946/1947 there were more than 250 Polish students in Beirut. In 1944, they established the Polish Students' Mutual Aid Society (*Bratnia Pomoc Studentów Polaków*) which brought together over 80 percent of the students (Kościałkowski, 1949, p. 155).

The Polish Institute in Beirut made efforts to publish an edited book on Polish history and culture called *Bolonia* (Beirut, 1947). The graphic design of the cover and editorial style resembled a certain Teheran publication issued by Society of Iranian Studies in 1944. The authors' intention was to provide the reader with general knowledge about Poland and Poles

in the Arab world, and on the other hand it was to become a starting point to build future Polish-Arab cultural relations (Kościałkowski, 1949, p. 164). However, due to a change in international climate and attitudes to Eastern Europe, and the rise to power of the communist regime in Poland, these plans could not be carried out.

Seeing as qualified science and engineering staff are an indispensable for any modern economy, one form of cooperation undertaken between socialist countries and developing countries was education (Brzost et al., 1979, p. 108). Poland was able to join in this shared mission as part of the framework of cooperation in the Eastern Block. In Eastern Europe, Arab students learnt local languages, made friends with their peers and gained knowledge about the culture and traditions of the host country. These experiences and the connections they made while studying abroad often proved helpful once they returned home.

Foreigners from developing countries, including the Arab countries, were accepted after World War II to participate in the following forms of education: degree courses, postgraduate studies, doctoral studies, research placements and vocational work placements. The vast majority of Arab students came to Polish schools and universities as a result of international agreements and contracts. In 1973, 1492 young citizens from developing countries had student status in Poland. Out of this number, 363 were awarded diplomas and certificates of completion of studies, courses or vocational placements. The last group included 50 representatives of Middle Eastern Arab societies, constituting 3.4 % of all the 1492 incomers from Africa, Asia and Latin America. The nationality breakdown of Arab students who graduated from Polish universities and high schools in 1973 is presented in the table 4.

Table 4. Citizens of Middle East Arab countries educated in Polish People's Republic in the early 1970s (a country of origin order)

<b>Near East state</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>%</b>
Iraq	26	52
Jordan	2	4
Kuwait	1	2
Lebanon	0	0
Palestine	0	0
Syria	21	42
<b>In total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Obcokrajowcy z krajów rozwijających się wykształceni w PRL, „Współpraca Naukowa i Techniczna z Zagranicą dla 1973 r.”.

Promoting such educational initiatives, Polish state authority pointed out three fundamental spheres of long-term actions as their expected benefits:

- providing an adequate point of convergence between the Polish political system and the systems of Arab partner countries;
- education of foreign graduates in Polish universities who then would be ready to participate actively in the professional, socio-political and cultural life of their home

countries and to become advocates of Polish achievements in science, technology and culture;

- sustaining stable relations with graduates in order to improve their professional qualifications, strengthening their emotional bonds with Poland and the alma mater they graduated from, and encouraging them to perform the role of ambassadors of Polish culture (Sułkowska-Kusztelak, 1983, p. 60).

The preferred forms of interaction between foreign students and graduates, and Polish students, graduates and universities were as follows:

- exchange of correspondence on professional and scientific matters between the university and graduates; consultations – by mail or personal on informal occasions; providing the graduates with information by academic staff and persons recommended by university, e.g. Polish specialists staying in their country;
- meetings of graduates with the academic staff in the form of conventions, scientific conferences and professional discussions;
- contacts with graduates as a part of the cooperation of Polish universities with foreign universities and institutions;
- various forms of occupational development prepared by Polish institutions of higher education in Poland or abroad including research placements, seminars, symposia, courses, doctoral courses, traineeships, etc.;
- inviting the distinguished foreign graduates back to their alma mater in order to deliver a lecture, take part in a conference or symposium, or meet the current students from their countries or regions (Sułkowska-Kusztelak, 1983, p. 72).

When in Poland, representatives of Arab communities quite frequently got married here, resulting in mixed Polish-Arab families. When they decided to stay in Poland, the cultural heritage was disseminated to their home countries by means of family relations. In the case of Polish-Arab married couples who opted to leave for an Arab country, the Polish person in the relationship (usually female) could transfer some elements of Polish culture, provided the Arab family considered it appropriate. Polish-Arab couples were quite often better educated than the general population, and in consequence better off financially. Being university graduates, they worked as professionals and found themselves living in cities that usually resembled the European urban order. They were often able to find a comfortable situation within bustling city environments. However, when female Polish migrants ended up on the peripheries of the city, in the countryside, or in small towns or villages, their situation could be very different. The dominant character of provincial culture often limited the scope of their activities.

The interest of Polish academics in the Arab world in the post-war period, has since 1956 resulted in a systematic growth in the number of scientific conferences and publications on subjects related to Arab culture (Knopek, 2013, pp. 414–415). Since then, several Polish academic centers have carried out systematic research on Arab culture, history, science, and other fields. Among them are some of the biggest Polish universities, including those based

in Warsaw, Cracow, Poznań, Łódź and Toruń. All the research has brought about numerous monographs on the subject, contributing to the ongoing interest of Polish academics in the Middle East and giving expression to Polish academic achievement in that field.

Poland's cultural relations with Middle Eastern Arab countries were carried out on two platforms – institutional and non-institutional. What influenced such situation was the historic relations, as well as contemporary actions carried out by government organs. In the historic perspective, the spontaneous relations played domineering role. The Middle East controlled by the Arab world, and then by the Turkish state was conceived as a constant threat. It changed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and after the partition of Poland when emigrants from Poland came to this corner of the world. And it stayed so until the establishment of the Middle Eastern Arab states in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century which consequently made it possible to create institutionalized forms of cooperation. State visits, international cooperation and agreements initialed by Poland and Arab countries opened the way to multifaceted cultural cooperation. As a result, came bilateral academic visits, exchange of journalists, archaeological excavations, education of the Arab youth in Poland or holding the Polish culture days in the Middle East and, vice versa, Arab culture days in Poland. Non-institutional relations, promoted by migrants, mixed Polish-Arab marriages, scholarship holders, journalists and representatives of national culture complemented the spectre of forms of cooperation.

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