

Introduction

Jerzy Mizgalski, Janusz Spyra

The 19th and 20th centuries were particularly important in the history of Częstochowa and its region. With the second partition of Poland in 1793, the Prussian army entered the city and established, within it, a garrison. In November 1806, the city was occupied by the army of the Duchy of Warsaw, manning the Jasna Góra fortress. The fortress was besieged twice – in 1809 and in 1813. Following the turbulent years of the Napoleonic Wars, Częstochowa became part of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, thereby being united with tsarist Russia.

In the second half of the 19th century, along with changes in the economic world, the Russian zone underwent a process of modernisation. This was aided by customs duties on gold, introduced by the Russian Tsar in 1877. This protected emerging local industry from foreign competition, as well as opening up the protected Russian market to its products. The administrative changes which took place after the demise of the January Uprising are not without significance. The Częstochowa District (*Powiat*) was created at that time. It survived, unchanged, from 1867 to 1952. The city's intensive development, with short periods of economic downturn, essentially took place at the turn of the 20th century. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, Częstochowa could be proud of its production growth – the highest in all of the Congress Kingdom of Poland. As a result, it also underwent a huge demographic growth – from 495 in 1808 to more than 20,000 before World War I. The growth in the city's population affected changes in its social, ethnic and religious structures. Jews formed a significant part of the growing population. In 1914, they formed one-third of the populace, slightly less during the inter-War period. The majority of Częstochowa's Jewish residents perished during the Holocaust. Those who survived, in the main, left Poland a few years after the end of World War II.

Jews played a significant role in the city's economic, cultural and social life. Hence the historical research, that has evolved, of the history of Częstochowa and its region has, by necessity, begun to include the introduction of the Jewish community. Without reliable surveys into ethnic minorities, it is impossible to fully present the history of Częstochowa and its region. As a result, there were numerous, diverse articles written by, among others, Franciszek Sobalski.

Gradually, research into the history of Częstochowa Jews was concentrated within the walls of the Jan Długosz Academy (to 2004, known as the Higher School of Pedagogy). After modest beginnings¹, research gained momentum with the involvement of Elżbieta Mundlak-Zborowska, great-granddaughter of Częstochowa Chief Rabbi Nachum Asz, as well as that of Sigmund Rolat, originally from Częstochowa and permanently living in the United States.

In the first years of the 21st century, the concept was born of expanding research and presenting its results to contemporary generations of *Częstochowianin*, as well as to the descendants of Częstochowa Jews living around the world. Inspired and funded by Sigmund

¹ The first, larger work was the publication *Żydzi w dziejach Częstochowy (Jews in the History of Częstochowa)*, ed. Zbigniew Jakubowski, Częstochowa 1991.

Rolat and his cousin Alan M. Silberstein, the First Reunion of Częstochowa Jews took place in Częstochowa in April 2004. Over 200 Jews attended, coming from Europe, North America, South America, Africa, as well as Israel and Australia. During the Reunion, an exhibition entitled *Żydzi Częstochowianie. Współistnienie, Holocaust, Pamięć (Częstochowa Jews – Co-existence, Holocaust, Memory)* was opened in the Częstochowa Museum. A book of the exhibition, under the same title, was published and an academic conference was also held. Two years later, edited by Jerzy Mizgalski, with a foreword by Sigmund Rolat, a book entitled *Żydzi Częstochowianie. Współistnienie, Holocaust, Pamięć (Częstochowa Jews – Co-existence, Holocaust, Memory)* was published. It summarised four-years' research conducted by Polish and Jewish academics (from Poland, the United States and Israel). In 2009, an English-language version of the book was published in electronic format in the United States.

Subsequent Reunions were held in 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2016. Meeting with the descendants of Częstochowa Jews always enjoyed great interest from the city's residents. The outcome of subsequent academic conference held at the Jan Długosz Academy (AJD) were further publications - *Losy Żydów Częstochowian 1945–2009* edited by Jerzy Mizgalski and Jerzy Sielski. This book was translated into the English language by Andrew Rajcher, descended from a Częstochowa Jewish family and living in Australia. In 2012, it was published in Toruń under the title *The Fate of Czestochowa Jews 1945–2009*. Based on material from the 2012 conference, a book of collected papers was published in that same year. It was entitled *Tożsamość a stereotypy. Żydzi i Polacy (Identity and Stereotypes – Jews and Poles)*, edited by Jerzy Mizgalski and Małgorzata Soi (Częstochowa 2014).

In the meantime, *Żydzi Częstochowianie (The Jews of Częstochowa)* was created. It was a travelling exhibition which utilised materials provided by descendant of Częstochowa Jews and which had been preserved in the Museum and in archival collections. During the 2016 Reunion, the Częstochowa Museum opened a permanent exhibition entitled *Żydzi Częstochowianie (The Jews of Częstochowa)*. The exhibition's substantive concept was developed by the AJD's Dr hab. Prof. Jerzy Mizgalski, who also supervised the exhibition's creation. The exhibition's graphic concept, design and implementation were carried out by the AJD's Dr hab. Prof. Andrzej Desperak.

Previous research into the Jewish community's past centred on the history of Jews, in the first half of the 20th century, within Częstochowa itself – which is understandable as, prior to World War II, it held one of the largest concentrations of Jews within central Poland. Little attention was paid to other places in the region within which the lives of other followers of Judaism were flourishing. Sporadic publications² do not change the fact that the “Jewish” history of the region is just waiting to be researched, particularly due to the current interest in it. As a result, the Social History Department of the History Institute of the Jan Długosz Academy, under the directorship of Dr. hab. Janusz Spyra, came up with the idea of organising a symposium devoted to the history of Jews in the Częstochowa region, entitled *Dawne dzieje ludności żydowskiej w regionie częstochowskim (The History of the Jewish Population of the Częstochowa Region)*. The event, organised with the excellent participation of the Department's doctoral students, was held in March 2017, was the first academic event to take place in the Jewish section of the Częstochowa Museum.

This publication contains texts that were the result of that event. It begins with a paper by one of the editors of this volume. It is an attempt to present the most important tendencies

² For example, Michał Galas, Mirosław Skrzypczyk (ed.), *Żydzi lewoscy. Obecność i ślady*, Kraków 2006.

which dominated the lives of the Jewish population of the Częstochowa region up to 1914 (Janusz Spyra, *Żydzi w regionie częstochowskim przed I wojną światową – Jews in the Częstochowa Region Prior to World War I*). As well as providing legal, political, demographic and economic information relating to the entire region, this paper attempts to provide important facts about the largest Jewish population in this area which, in the 19th century, contained active Jewish communities.

Complementary to the introductory text and its discussion of the status of Jewish communities in the area, another article presents important source information about Jewish communities in the Kalisz Province (to which, during the period under discussion, Częstochowa belonged) in the first half of the 19th century. It is based on specific research material produced by the central administration of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, which related to religions (Mateusz Matuszczyk, *Gminy żydowskie w województwie kaliskim w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku – Jewish Communities in the Kalisz Province in the First Half of the 19th Century*).

The next two papers discuss the history of Jews in two specific localities in which, during the 19th century, Jewish community councils operated, albeit under different conditions. Jewish settlement of Konięcpol dates back to 1629. On 14th May of that year, Stanisław Konięcpolski issued the settlement privilege for Jewish settlement in Konięcpol (Adrian Musiał, *Zarys historii gminy żydowskiej w Konięcpolu do I wojny światowej – An Outline of the History of the Jewish Community of Konięcpol to World War I*). For a long time, there was a ban on Jews living in Kłobuck. They could settle there and organise themselves only from the 19th century (Olga Gregorczyk, *Zarys dziejów Żydów w Kłobucku do I wojny światowej – An Outline of the History of the Jewish Community of Kłobuck to World War I*).

Any publication regarding the Częstochowa region must contain texts regarding Częstochowa itself, which contained one of the largest Jewish communities in the Congress Kingdom of Poland. Its founders came from several families (Berkowicz vel Nachman, Majzel, Kohn, Ginsberg, Landau), who oldest members were already active in the Częstochowa region in the 18th century. At the turn of the 19th century, they built the foundations for an independent Jewish community and, for the greater part of the 19th century, they played leading roles in community life (Janusz Spyra, *Najstarsze żydowskie rodziny w Częstochowie – The Oldest Częstochowa Jewish Families*).

The next administrative unit, to which the Częstochowa region belonged, this time in the second half of the 19th century, was the Piotrków Trybunalski Governate. The most important economic indicators showing the living conditions of the Jews in this area are presented in the next article, prepared on the basis of statistical data collected by the Statistical Bureau of Jan Bloch – a Warsaw banker and entrepreneur, a railway industrialist and businessman (Anna Wojcik, *Obraz guberni piotrkowskiej w raportach Jana Blocha z 1886 roku – A Picture of the Piotrków Trybunalski Governate Based on Jan Bloch's 1886 Reports*).

The original intention of the symposium was to present the history of Jews in the Częstochowa region in the 19th century, a lesser-studied and lesser-known subject. However, several texts exceed this benchmark. The first is an attempt to assess the contribution of Jews, living in Częstochowa, to the city's cultural, educational and, in particular, its theatrical development. They were particularly active in this field at the beginning of the 20th century.

Częstochowa was also, quite often, visited by travelling Jewish theatrical groups, both amateur and professional (Agnieszka Pobratyn, *Kultura teatralna częstochowskich Żydów. Stan i perspektywy badań – The State of Theatre Culture of Częstochowa Jews and Its Research Perspectives*). The other text, a sketch devoted to the activity of Jewish sporting clubs in the city on the Warta River, covers the period from the late 19th century to World War II (Wiesław Pięta, *Kilka słów o żydowskim sporcie w Częstochowie – A Few Words About Jewish Sport in Częstochowa*).

The last two articles are kind of annexes, supplementary to the overall publication. The first contains an overview about archival source material, stored in the National Archive in Częstochowa, relating to the history of the Jews. Historians researching the history of the Jews have often used these materials (Elżbieta Surma-Jończyk, Ewa Dubaj, *Źródła do badań historii częstochowskiej społeczności żydowskiej do roku 1939 w Archiwum Państwowym w Częstochowie – Sources, at the National Archive in Częstochowa, for Researching the History of the Częstochowa Jewish Community to 1939*). The second article discusses sources, written in Yiddish, regarding the history of the Jews of Częstochowa and the Częstochowa region. Primarily, it is the press media. Numerous Yiddish press publications appeared in Częstochowa during the inter-War period. The other information sources are the “memorial books”, most often compiled on the basis of the memories of the Holocaust survivors, the Jewish inhabitants of the city and its region. They are almost unknown to Polish researchers and, if they are utilised, it is in their English translations (Magdalena Ruta, *Jidyszowe źródła do badania historii i kultury częstochowskich Żydów w pierwszej połowie XX wieku. Rekonesans – Yiddish Language Sources for Researching the History and Culture of Częstochowa Jews in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*).

The articles on the history of Jewish living in the Częstochowa region are supplemented by a paper by Jerzy Mizgalski entitled *Żydowskie prawo religijne a życie codzienne dziewiętnastowiecznej społeczności żydowskiej w Częstochowie (wybrane problem) – Jewish Religious Law and the Everyday Life of the Częstochowa Jewish Community (Selected Issues)*. The editors believed that readers, who may have had little to do with the discussion and interpretation of the rich and complex Jewish culture over the centuries, may find useful a kind of guide explaining the religious background and fundamentals of the daily lives of the followers of Judaism. The author discusses important issues such as the approach to the religion and the most important texts of Judaism, the attitude to study and teaching, to the home and to work. Using examples, he attempts to illustrate the lives of the former Jewish residents of Częstochowa.