

## The Jews of Częstochowa in the Cultural Life of Their Town

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The beginnings of Jewish settlement in Częstochowa are not quite obscure, though not quite clear either. There are some references in such documents as the 1620 inventories of royal domains, but Jews did not settle in Częstochowa permanently before the Swedish invasion. The earliest extant census of Jewish population dates back to 1765, whereas the cemetery was established in 1799.<sup>1</sup>

As elsewhere, Jews decided to live in a compact neighborhood in the then center of the town, now called Stara Częstochowa. The mode of habitation was determined by Jewish occupational activity, being traditionally trade and crafts. Jews needed to offer their goods and services in the town center and consequently later moved with it to the First Alley in so-called Nowa Częstochowa<sup>2</sup>. The unwritten rules regulated their neighborly relations with Christians, also along the same neutral lines as in other towns in central Poland. They were not disturbed by any major demonstrations of hostility. In Częstochowa, which was becoming a major pilgrimage center, working out non-confrontational methods of coexistence was vital and demanded good will on both sides.

Meanwhile Jewish community was growing rapidly, from 495 people in 1808 to 24,111 in 1900<sup>3</sup>. The foundations for its major role and significance were, however, laid in the second half of the nineteenth century. Between 1869 and 1900 the Jewish population of Częstochowa multiplied seven times!<sup>4</sup> During three decades about 20,000 Jewish newcomers arrived into town in which they saw, and made good use of, their chance.

The process was set in motion with the 1863 January uprising, but the crucial factor and attraction were the opportunities that the development of industry, transport, trade, and services (for the pilgrims, mostly) offered. Częstochowa invited investments and the Jewish minority, reinforced by so many arrivals, did not miss their chance. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, before the outbreak of the First World War, was marked by the growth of powerful industry, chiefly textile, dominated by Jews. Even as late as in 1925 Jewish factory owners were twice as numerous as Polish ones, while their fortunes surpassed Polish property by one third. We have no data for 1913, when the economic boom was at its highest and the situation of Jewish entrepreneurs even better<sup>5</sup>.

That massive influx of Jews into Częstochowa was a part of a major process. With the 1862 law of the Tsar Alexander II, known as Wielopolski's decree, many legal restrictions were lifted, which had previously impeded economic expansion of Jews. Six years later, when the requirement to obtain an official permit to settle in Congress Poland was also abolished for Jewish inhabitants of the Russian empire and annexed territories, the so-called Litvaks started to arrive in large numbers. More involved with Russian culture and less religious, they differed from the native Jews in custom and life style, but were also more enterprising and open to new possibilities. Their migration coincided with the movements of the Plock, Kalisz, and Suwalki regions Jews, who decided to find new abode in industrial centers of Warsaw, Łódź, Zagłębie, and Częstochowa<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Z. Jakubowski, *Częstochowscy Żydzi. Charakterystyka problematyki i perspektywy badań*, [in:] *Z dziejów Żydów w Częstochowie*, Częstochowa 2002 p. 11–12.

<sup>2</sup> J. Sztumski, *Kulturotwórcza rola społeczności żydowskiej w Częstochowie*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Jakubowski, *Częstochowscy Żydzi*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> From initial 3,360 to 24,111 people – *ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> M. Markowski, *Sfery przemysłowe i ziemiaństwo w woj. kieleckim 1918–1939*, Kielce 1990, pp. 116–119

<sup>6</sup> P. Wróbel, *Zarys dziejów Żydów na ziemiach polskich w latach 1880–1918*, Warszawa 1991, p. 11, A. Żbikowski, *Żydzi*, Wrocław 1997 pp. 95–100.

Due to their number, the newcomers could not be absorbed in much less numerous native Jewish community. Częstochowa ghetto was also now too small and its walls too frail to enclose all Jewish inhabitants cut off from the Polish part of town. What made the isolation in Częstochowa increasingly difficult was the fact that the migration occurred in a very stormy period in the history of Polish Jews, who were then faced with new political trends. Late in the nineteenth century Jewish workers initiated their movement in Lithuania and its agencies were soon after set up in Congress Poland (including, most probably, Częstochowa). Another new and fascinating political ideology was Zionism, whose adherents, preceding Herzl, convened in nearby Katowice from 1884<sup>7</sup>.

The new segment of Częstochowa Jewish population, being less Orthodox, more powerful in size, more open to novelties and change, was more inclined to get polarized over political issues than the earlier settlers.

By no means, however, did the earlier settlers profess complete isolation from their Polish neighbors. On the contrary, the first attempts at advancing of co-existence, manifestations of Jewish interest and openness to social bonds and contacts across the religious and ethnic border, date back to the first half of the nineteenth century. They might have indicated readiness to assimilate on the part of some former inhabitants, whose educational aspirations were obvious in any case. The key figure in that field was Daniel Neufeld, a journalist, Hebrew specialist, and educator. While in Częstochowa, in the years 1840-1860, he was to run a boarding school, where “Jewish boys got not only general and Judaic education, but also patriotic upbringing with special emphasis on harmonizing religious tradition with elements of Polish culture”<sup>8</sup>. The same Neufeld, invited to Warsaw to join Samuel Orgelbrand in his work on the encyclopedia, „endorsed the idea of Jews gradually adapting Polish language culture while maintaining their own religious tradition”<sup>9</sup>.

The trust in benefits of secular education seemed not to leave Częstochowa Jews, as J. Wolynski, a Polish author confirmed in his memoirs. Writing of the late 1890s, Wolynski said: “In Częstochowa rich Jews competed with one another in the education of their children with envy that sometimes turned into real malice”<sup>10</sup>. Regardless of the anecdotal aspect, Wolynski stated the fact of positive snobbery among the Częstochowa entrepreneurs, such the Grosmans, Markusfelds, Ginsburgs, or Kohns, who vied with one another for the best education of their sons in the prestigious public high schools and at European universities, mostly technical.

At the time when Neufeld was, according to Fuks, leaving Częstochowa, it were Jewish printers and goldsmiths who came into prominence in Częstochowa. After the fall of the 1863 uprising, Wilhelm Kohn and Oderfeld brothers obtained from the Paulite Order a license to publish Catholic prayer books and other religious prints. Besides many votive offerings in Częstochowa churches, at the Jasna Gora Monastery in particular, were produced by Jewish jewelers<sup>11</sup>.

There must have been something extraordinary in the air of Częstochowa, if banners carried by Polish units in Napoleon’s army were preserved there at the synagogue as the

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<sup>7</sup> A. Żbikowski, op.cit., p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> M. Fuks, *Żydzi w Warszawie*, Poznań 1992, pp. 157–158; after J. Mroz, (*Między tradycją i asymilacją*, [in:] *Z dziejów Żydów*, p. 157; also Z. Jakubowski, ibidem, p. 18–19) Neufeld’s school was founded in 1862, „but it did not survive a year”.

<sup>9</sup> M. Fuks, op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wołyński, *Wspomnienia z czasów szkolnictwa rosyjskiego w b. Królestwie Polskim w l. 1868–1915*, Warszawa 1936, p. 98–99.

<sup>11</sup> J. Sztumski, *Kulturotwórcza rola...*, p. 71.

Torah scrolls curtains. Hardly anywhere else could such a exalted patriotic legend be recounted<sup>12</sup>.

It can be assumed from such facts and occurrences that at the time when the Jewish population of Częstochowa was taking roots, entering all kinds of relationships, and consolidating as a whole, though not homogenous, entity, the tendency to assimilate prevailed, at least among its leaders. Memories included in two Częstochowa memorial books, full of references to the atmosphere created by the advocates of assimilation, seem to corroborate this view<sup>13</sup>.

That movement owed much of its appeal and popularity to such luminaries of Częstochowa intelligentsia and upper business class as Jan Glikson, an excellent lawyer, Dr. Edward Kohn, a physician nicknamed “the heart of the Jewish community of Częstochowa”, and others, more or less assimilated representatives of these circles. Assimilation held no appeal for the famous industrialist and renowned philanthropist Henryk Markusfeld, nicknamed “the chairman of chairmen”, yet his contributions went to all kinds of charities, both Jewish and Polish. To quote the author: „From time to time Markusfeld granted minor donations to Christian institutions as well. [...]. Many institutions knew how to take advantage of his frailty and vanity and obtain his financial support in return for honorary offices and titles”<sup>14</sup>.

At the turn of the centuries political ferment rose in Częstochowa. Specific occupational structure of the local Jewish minority with high percentage of educated intelligentsia, industrial entrepreneurs and workers, generally less Orthodox, made for the early emergence of Zionist groups, while factory workers launched the organization of the Bund agencies. From 1889 Rabbi Nachum Asz provided guidance for the religious sector of the Jewish society in Częstochowa. His good will and ability for dialogue, his open mind and thorough education, not confined to rabbinical studies, were probably a vital factor in maintaining in this ideologically diverse community a kind of consensus and creative balance in the exchange of ideas. Such consensus was vital, because political differences were not the only source of potential conflicts within the community. Language was another disruptive factor, as there were three spoken by Częstochowa Jews. Such multitude was partly inherited and partly, increasingly in the new century, a matter of conscious, ideological choice. Hebrew, previously the sacred language of religion, with the emergence of Zionism was becoming modernized and adapted as a secular speech of the modern Jewish nation. Yiddish, on the other hand, was disavowed by Zionists, who treated it as a symbol of the civilization ghetto in Diaspora. “Progressive” Jews, advocates of the Haskala enlightenment, did not value Yiddish either. The assimilators in particular were contemptuous of the “jargon”, as they dubbed Yiddish, which they considered a major obstacle in the process of assimilation. Yet, being the mother tongue of the people, Yiddish found ardent upholders among the workers, especially Bundists or their sympathizers. In 1908 Yiddish was recognized as a Jewish national language at the Tshernovits conference, which added new stimulus to the efforts to introduce it into Jewish literature. Thus, from mid-19<sup>th</sup> c., the choice of language was a major issue in Jewish life (and for Jewish culture) as it defined individual ideological orientation. What added to the confusion was the fact that all the languages were living, evolving dynamically.

Beside the choice of language the ideological options went necessarily with organizational attachment. Groups of any ideological orientation created networks of

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<sup>12</sup> Comp. Z. Jakubowski, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Czenstochover Yidn*, ed. R. Mahler, New York 1947; *Czenstochov. Naye tsugobmaterial tsum buch „Czenstochover Yidn”*, ed. S. O. Singer, New York 1958.

<sup>14</sup> S. Nowak, *Z moich wspomnień*, Częstochowa 1933. p. 43–44.

educational, cultural, sports associations and organizations denoted by their ideology. Each group set up “annexes” for children and youngsters, and published its own press titles. Zionists used to visit different libraries than the Bundists, not only because of the men after whom a library was called, but because their collections differed. Assimilators sang different songs (in different choirs and language) than the Bundists or Zionists.

But before it could happen, secular cultural institutions must have been established. It took place as late as in the second half of the nineteenth century, or even later. Their emergence was impeded by the opposition or even hostility of religious Jews, who regarded secular culture as a threat to Jewish unity.

Consequently, Częstochowa Jews started to engage in cultural activities late in 19<sup>th</sup> c., along with emancipation and political ones. The earliest, as usually, were amateur theater groups, stemming from children’s performances and party games<sup>15</sup>. About 1905 a group of adult performers dared to stage Karl Gutzkov’s *Uriel d’Acosta*, a hit of Jewish theater scenes at the time. The same year two other amateur troupes began to act: one was to cooperate later with a professional company headed by the actress Orszntajn, the other staged *Jews* of Yevgeny Chirikov about 1906. The play, written in 1904, was forbidden in tsarist Russia, because of its subject matter (public feeling in the empire before the 1905 revolution) but popular and often officially staged in Congress Poland.

The development of theater life in Częstochowa was hindered by the lack of a proper dwelling. For many years professional companies touring Częstochowa had to knock about all over town and perform at random places, including movie theaters (“Odeon” at 43, NMP Alley and “Corso“ at the crossing of NMP Alley and Teatralna Street, above Jackowski’a café), the Apollo open air scene at Wolbergs’ garden (NMP Alley 12), in the 1920 renovated and rebuilt as the Nowosci movie-theater. Most often, however, performances were staged at the Apollo open air playhouse in Wolbergs’ garden (NMP Alley 12), after the renovation in the 1920s known as the Nowosci (Novelties) movie-theater. Most often, however, the performances were held in the Teatr Miejscowy (Local Theater, NMP Alley 19), after 1908 called also the Paryska (Parisian) Hall, when it housed also a cinema, and in a building at Szkolna 10, from 1906 owned by the Lutnia Society.<sup>16</sup> An illustrious example of generosity and commitment to their town and theater was a gift recorded by S. Nowak. In 1911 Henryk Markusfeld donated a building parcel for the municipality to build a theater there. The project was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War, and resumed in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

Amateur Jewish theater could act legally, as the ban on performing in Yiddish was lifted in 1905, but encountered similar difficulties with finding adequate halls.<sup>18</sup> Thus, wedding reception halls or fire stations in poorer districts were used, sporadically amateurs performed also in the above public venues. Amateur groups initially originated chiefly from the low classes, as was the case in Zagłębie as well, yet between 1900 and 1914, with the most rapid development of Jewish theater in Częstochowa, amateur acting became a fashion with the intelligentsia.

In 1908 the newly established Lira Jewish Society of Arts had its dramatic section. Their shows were staged at the Miejscowy Theater, as many Lira members were associated with upper middle class and would not act in unseemly neighborhoods.

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<sup>15</sup> M. Schwarz, *Amatorskie kółka teatralne i ich repertuar*, [in:] *Czenstochover...*, p. 89

<sup>16</sup> Comp. W. Tyras, „Dzieje >>Lutni<< częstochowskiej”, *Ziemia Częstochowska*, 1965, t. 5, pp. 227–238, same author, : ”Budyunki i sale teatralne w Częstochowie w latach 1870–1939”, *Ziemia Częstochowska* 1967, vol. 6–7.

<sup>17</sup> S. Nowak, op.cit., p. 186–187.

<sup>18</sup> A 1883 ban on performing in Yiddish issued by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs was evaded by Jewish theater in such a way that they declared acting in German. After 1905 the ban was no longer enforced, though not lifted either.

The Lira dramatic section knew its own limitations and did not risk showing full-length dramas, but one-act plays, which were easier to stage and allowed for more diverse shows. Obviously, the repertoire was chosen deliberately and carefully to avoid popular *shund*, rubbish productions. The educated and modern middle-class audience must have had a say in that matter. The one-act plays of I.L.Perec were very popular. In 1911, for instance, his *Face* and *Easter Is Coming* were shown, along with *Eternal Song* of Urnstein and Granov's *Lunatic at a Hospital*. Two years later, the very amateurs presented Sholem Alechem's one-act plays. Lira encouraged scenic endeavors of other sections. In 1913 members of the sports section put on *Agent* and *The Mystery and How It Was Solved* by Sholem Alechem. Next year Cześćochowa audience could watch Mark Arnsztein's *Question Mark* shown by amateurs of unknown group on the occasion of Purim.

In 1914 another amateur troupe made its appearance under the name of Jewish Theater Art Lovers. We do not know who its members were, but it can be assumed from their declarations concerning theater art and from their repertoire, that they treated drama as a tool to promote Jewish emancipation, and not as a pointless entertainment. The decision to contract Hersz Gotajner as a director indicated their earnest commitment to the form of their spectacles. These included *The Family* (Di Mishpokhe) of the renowned playwright and columnist Hersz Dawid Nomberg, who was to come to Cześćochowa in 1915 for several months as the editor of the literary supplement to *Folks Tsaytung*.<sup>19</sup> Since Nomberg had a reputation of an uncompromising critic of the shortcomings of Jewish community the staging of his famous play must have been a deliberate and meaningful choice. The same was true of the above mentioned *Jews* of Chirikov, also in the troupe's repertoire. Upon Sholem Alechem's death in 1916 the group produced a memorial spectacle presenting, beside tableau vivants and declamations of the late writer's prose, also his comedy *People*. In case of the Theater Lovers group the measure of their success was the fact that they lasted for four years (to 1918) with such high-brow program, showed their productions not only in Cześćochowa but also off town, and not only before small audiences at random locations, but also in the Corso movie-theater.<sup>20</sup> Cześćochowa Jewish intelligentsia participated actively in Polish theater life, though avoided Polish repertoire, as a rule with the Jewish theater. An exception to this rule was reported by *Goniec Cześćochowski* in 1915. In spring an amateur assimilators' troupe presented *Bachelors' Club* of Michal Balucki at the Paryski Theater. The choice of play was as remarkable as the cause to which the show was dedicated: support for the reading and writing course for Jews devoid of Polish skills organized at the Vocational Crafts School for Jews. The courses were „to promote Polish literacy among Jews”, while the initiators trusted that “the public will gladly contribute to this noble cause”.<sup>21</sup>

Prior to the First World War Cześćochowa was also a major stop for professional theater companies touring Polish lands. Before 1905 they claimed to act in German, whereas in fact they performed in Yiddish for Jewish audiences. Cześćochowa Jews were very attractive by their sheer number, which was a guarantee of full house and adequate profit, whereas the diversity of their political orientations, education, and assimilation tendencies provided demand for all kinds of repertoire, from operetta or melodrama to profound social dramas. Therefore no traveling theatre would skip Cześćochowa on its tour. On the contrary, they would go out of their way to perform there, especially so, as they were looked forward to. Cześćochowa public loved theater, despite the resentment of the

<sup>19</sup> Or, in fact, *Czeństochover Tagenblat*, see M. Pawlina-Meducka, *Kultura Żydów województwa kieleckiego (1918-1939)*, Kielce 1993, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> M. Szwartz, *Amatorskie kółka teatralne i ich repertuar*, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> *Gazeta Czeństochowska* 1915, nr 78, p. 2.

Orthodox. Companies from all over Congress Poland appeared at Teatr Miejscowy, Lira hall, or at Wolbergs' garden.

Personal narratives indicate that even before 1914, the audience of Częstochowa was familiar with the American Jewish melodrama, which was so popular in interwar Poland. Traveling troupes used to come to won much earlier with the repertoire loved by American Jewry: Anshel Shor's vaudevilles and operettas (*American Girl*, known also as *Girl from the West*, or *Lend Me Your Wife*), plays by Icchak Zlatarewski (*Child of Fortune*), by Jozef Lateiner and Borys Tomaszewski.<sup>22</sup> Even more important were, however, the most famed dramas of Jakub Gordin, such as *Jewish King Lear* and *The Pledge*. Gordin, the eminent writer, revolutionized Jewish drama and his works soon were included in the canon of Jewish theater.

Częstochowa audience's love of burlesques and skits made for the popularity of Josef Tunkiel (writing under a pen name of Der Trunkeler), famous Jewish author, satirist, and columnist. His lampoons, skits, and comical one-acts were favorite pieces of Częstochowa theatergoers.<sup>23</sup>

Information on the actors is scarcer than on the authors. An actress Pola Portnoy and a director Michal Zelazko are mentioned in some personal accounts.<sup>24</sup>

Theater life obviously dwindled with the outbreak of the First World War, but was resumed vigorously in 1917 with new hope for the end of the war allowing for some entertainment. Hence operetta troupes and revues began to make their appearance, while *Gazeta Czestochowska* reported with envy that Warsaw was visited by D. Celmajster's musical theater from America with its superstar, Saint-Clair.<sup>25</sup>

The other reason for reviving cultural life was poverty. The war exposed the misery or even dire destitution of a considerable sector of Jewish population. The Provisions Committee<sup>26</sup> was set up in 1915 with Dr. Jozef Markusfeld, Salomon Kronberg, Leon Weinberg, and Jozef Wizental, but it did not have means to cope with the problem in its entirety. The Jewish Relief Society came to its aid, organizing a series of concerts for charity (e.g., soup kitchen, TB preventive treatment). Thus it were Wanda Landowska, who played "for the poor" at Paryski Theatre, and a juvenile cellist, Mieczysław Rappaport with Zygmunt Taube, a pianist.<sup>27</sup> Unknown is the charity cause of the recital of Gerszon Sirota, the cantor of the Warsaw Great Synagogue at Tlomackie, nicknamed "Jewish Caruso"<sup>28</sup>. In 1917 he sang in Częstochowa with his daughter Helena and his son, Naftali.<sup>29</sup>

After the war gap, theater life in Częstochowa transformed along with the political situation. Polish censorship concerned different areas than the Russian one in the tsarist empire; after 1926 the restrictions affected the repertoire.<sup>30</sup> The proportion of amateur to professional companies was changed, as well as the mechanisms of theater life. Amateur movement was very slowly and painfully recovering from the wartime relapse, but its glory days and status were irreversibly over. After the war it became a domain of trade unions

<sup>22</sup> Comp. M. Meducka, *Repertuar teatru żydowskiego w Ameryce na przełomie XIX I XX w. i jego wpływ na kształtowanie się repertuaru żydowskiego w Polsce*, [in:] A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, M. Leyko (eds), *Teatr żydowski w Polsce*, Łódź 1998, pp. 376–383.

<sup>23</sup> No author, *Yidish teater in Czenstochov*, [in:] *Czenstochower Yidn*, pp. 87–92; comp. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, vol. 15, p. 1452.

<sup>24</sup> No author, *Yidish teater in Czenstochov*, pp. 87–92.

<sup>25</sup> *Gazeta Czestochowska* 1917, nr 39, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Gazeta Czestochowska* 1915, nr 88, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazeta Czestochowska* 1915, nr 85, p. 2 and 1917 nr 225, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Comp. M. Fuks, *Księga sławnych muzyków pochodzenia żydowskiego*, Poznań-Warszawa 2003, p. 28–29.

<sup>29</sup> *Gazeta Czestochowska* 1917 r. nr 5, p. 3

<sup>30</sup> Comp. M. Pawlina-Meducka, *Kultura Żydów...*, pp. 146–150.

and school students. Both prepared performances on the occasion of anniversaries, jubilees, or commemorative ceremonies, choosing their program with much care. Sometimes it was a work of Szalom Asz (*Motke Ganev* – a few stagings in the 1920s), of S. An-ski (*Father and Son*, *Der Dorfjung*), one-act plays by I.L. Perec.

Yet it were professional groups that provided Częstochowa inhabitants with a true festival of drama art, despite the fact, that the town acquired a modern theater construction late in the 1930s. Professional troupes evidently were not deterred by the inconvenience, especially as the audience recompensed it with their purses and applause. Besides, even esteemed professional companies were often driven to travel around Poland by the persistent lack of stable support at home. Regular tours around Poland were mutually rewarding: the audience could enjoy artistic events, and the troupes – rescue their budget. Another advantage of Częstochowa were its good communications. No wonder that major theater groups of Poland visited the town, including the famed Vilna Troupe, which stopped by at least once, in 1927. It certainly showed its production of *Kiddush ha-Shem* of Szalom Asz, and *Golem* by Halpern Leivick, a play recently introduced in Poland by the Habima theater on its tour in 1926.<sup>31</sup> *Golem*, very uncharacteristically, drew also Polish audience, while the Jewish public admired starring actors, Jozef Kamen and Jakub Wajslic. In 1922-1923 Częstochowa welcomed the first lady of Jewish theater, Ester Rachel Kaminska. Her troupe presented her production of *Kreutzer Sonata* and *Mirele Efros*, a *Jewish Queen* of Jakub Gordin, as well as a hit of the season, *Seven that Were Hanged* of a Russian writer Leonid Andreyev.

Ida Kaminska and Zygmunt Turkow called on Częstochowa frequently, together, with their Varshaver Yiddisher Kunst Teater, or individually (Kaminska as a proprietor of Kaminskis Theater). Both companies staged classical Jewish drama and Polish plays.

Privileged by the size of Jewish community there, Częstochowa twice enjoyed the visit of Jakub Adler, the celebrated star of American Jewish theater; and, late in the 1930s, of another international actor, Aleksander Granach, a former member of Max Reinhardt's troupe. He appeared in Częstochowa, as elsewhere in Poland, with his own company, in two socially committed dramas of Friedrich Wolf: *Tsyankali* and anti-Nazi *Yellow Patch*.

Częstochowa had to wait till 1925 for a local semi-professional dramatic studio, set up, according to a personal account, by Dawid Herman. This prominent Jewish theater director headed the Vilna Troupe, presenting with them several hundred times the most famous performance of *Dibbuk* by Sh. An-ski and *Old Square at Night* of I.L. Perec. In Częstochowa Herman staged with his students several one-act plays of Perec.

There must have been a will to build a proper theater, since a Bundist councilor, Rafael Federman, managed to convince the Town Council to grant a subsidy to that project in 1927. Unfortunately, the project was never accomplished and the founding committee contributed the grant of 1,000 zlotys to the appearances of visiting troupes in Częstochowa.<sup>32</sup>

Light repertoire was at least as popular with the public as dramas. General Częstochowa audience loved operetta, melodrama and burlesque. Thus vaudeville companies never failed, or even took great care, to stop in Częstochowa on their tours. A frequent visitor was Regina Cukier, the first lady of *shund* and star of Warsaw scenes. She was usually traveling with K. Cymbalist and his operetta troupe. On greater occasions Częstochowa could enjoy admired revues, like “Ararat”, set up by Mojzesz Broderson in early 1920s, “Azazel” with shows directed by D. Herman and Henryk Berlewi. On more everyday basis the inhabitants of Częstochowa had entertainment provided by numerous minor traveling vaudeville groups, whose managers included A.H. Herszkowicz, M.M.

<sup>31</sup> Comp. K. Leżeńska, „Habima” w Polsce, [in:] *Teatr żydowski w Polsce*, p. 102–103.

<sup>32</sup> No author, *Yidish teater in Czenstochov*, pp. 91–92.

Epstein, D. Dobkowska, R. Mendelbaum<sup>33</sup>. The core of their programs were American Jewish melodramas, which had made their appearance in Polish cities before 1914, and seemed to dominate repertoire in the 1920s. Out of a variety of plays the managers of traveling companies used to choose the titles that were just taken off in Warsaw or Lodz and thus a guarantee of full houses in minor cities and towns. Works of Zlatarewski, Libin, Szor or Tomaszewski were spiced up with some Abraham Goldfaden's operetta, or, occasionally, by Gordin's drama.

At early phase theater life owed much of its development to cultural societies. Their activity could have been started lawfully in 1905 in the wake of temporary liberalization of tsarist policy towards the society of Congress Poland. In Częstochowa such a society was launched by two Zionist sympathizers, Mosze Zandsztajn and Leon Kopinski, who with Zaks and Wiewiorka decided to call their group Hazamir, a Hebrew for nightingale. Hazamir musical and literary associations with similar mission, namely to promote artistic inclinations and talents of its members, were set up in other towns as well, e.g. Kielce or Bedzin. As its name indicated, the society was initially Zionist oriented, but meanwhile some assimilators and non-aligned cultural leaders joined the group of founders. Finally, the assimilators won over. The Jewish Dramatic and Musical Society „Lira” was founded in 1908 in the language and spirit of assimilation. The choir sang in Polish, Hebrew was tolerated, but Yiddish (both language and the culture) – completely ignored, as if to add to the elitist program and character of the organization. Its attitude towards Yiddish might have made prominent writers Sholem Alechem and Icchak Lejb Percec to accept Lira's invitations, as each of them had his own story to tell about working out his concept of Jewish literature and its language. Lira's distance towards that sector of intelligentsia whose sympathies were with the socialist movement declined with the emergence of the Jewish Literary Society. Its head office was located in Petersburg and agencies in Congress Poland. The idea for an association competing with Lira came from the young Bundists, including: Wolf Loewenhoff, Jakow Karpinski, Elkana Chrobolowski, Rafael Feldman, F. Szmulewicz<sup>34</sup>. According to the Petersburg society regulations, however, the initiators were too young to form a founding committee or the board, whose members had to be over 25 of age. Eventually, the board at the registration included E. Chrobolowski along with Chaim Dawidowicz, Leon Goldberg and several others. Before the First World War the society managed to organize the first official public library in Częstochowa, but after 1918 none of the two societies resumed its activity.

As far as libraries were concerned, there was an interesting project initiated in Częstochowa after 1905. A group of prominent leaders of assimilationist orientation, the cream of local intelligentsia, inspired by their fascination with Polish culture and language, founded a joint Polish-Jewish Society for Promotion of Knowledge. Their efforts were aimed at creating a public library. The timing of the project, chaired by Polish doctor Stanislaw Nowak and by Jewish lawyer Jan Glikson, lawyer, seemed perfect, judging from the number of its members (500 in the first year) and of 1,200 library volumes. That unique initiative was ruined by the Bundists, bent on opposing assimilation. They donated to the library an anonymous gift of 500 books in Yiddish. The majority of the board of the Society opted for accepting the gift, but the issue was put up at its general assembly. The members again, voted for accepting the “jargon” books, but a smear campaign launched in *Goniec Czestochowski* discouraged them and the decision was called off. The idea of Polish-Jewish library fell, even if assimilation tendencies lived on among Częstochowa Jews for a long time yet.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> APK UWK I sygn. z 2926, 3238, 3246.

<sup>34</sup> No author, „Lira” un di Yidische Literarische Gezelshaft, [in:] *Czenstochover...*, pp. 80–85.

<sup>35</sup> S. Nowak, op.cit., p. 43–44.



As for libraries, their mission was highly politicized, in contrast to the theater, which was increasingly profit-oriented, especially in the 1920s, when the broad distribution of commercial shows (operettas, burlesques, melodramas) was organized to attract a massive, if less educated, public. A good illustration of that fact was the fate of the first Jewish library founded by the young Bundists of the Jewish Literary Society. The library got a license in 1905, but was closed by the tsarist administration as soon as in 1911, and its holdings were taken over by the Lira Society. The collection amounted to over 2,000 Yiddish books, about 600 Hebrew ones, while the Polish part consisted of classical works and latest publications (e.g., Polish versions of the novels of Knut Hamsun, Emil Zola, Victor Hugo). Most of it could not be very useful for the Lira assimilators, and with the decline of their organization after the First World War, the collection went to Zionists.<sup>36</sup>

Before 1918, when the political scene in Cześćochowa was full of clashing Jewish groups, trade unions set up several libraries in town. They focused on political pamphlets and booklets, treated as propaganda tools. Since the small libraries and their holdings were rather poor, joining them seemed the best solution. The Zionist collections were merged and integrated by the trade union of leather industry. When Poland regained its independence, union librarians handed the collection over to the Jewish Education Union. Socialists followed their example. Thanks to the efforts of the JOINT, the small libraries set up by district Bund or Poale Zion (Left) groups were in the 1920s enlarged with donations from the TSISHO (the Bund school organization) or from American left-wingers. All Bundist libraries were united in the Society for Jewish Public Library in Cześćochowa. It probably eventually comprised also the Jewish Workers' Library (Algemayne Arbeter-Bibliotek) organized in 1922 by the Jewish Schools Union and functioning on its own as late as in 1929. Its holdings amounted then up to 4,000 publications, circulating among 400 patrons.<sup>37</sup> Owing to its rank of the biggest Jewish library in town, the Workers' Library received from the Town Council regular subsidies to purchase new Polish titles. The library did not confine its mission to book loans and carried on extensive educational activity for the young workers. Numerous lectures and meetings were held at the library house (in an orphanage at Strazacka 10) by the librarians, Hersz Lipszyc and J. Zarnowiecki. The former continued to run the library during the Second World War and the occupation. Despite lack of donations and moving to II Alley, Lipszyc managed to keep the library and its reading room going, he even organized some literary events till the ultimate destruction, in which all perished: the librarian, the collection and its users.

The success of the library merging policy must have encouraged the library of the Salesmen Trade Union to incorporate the Vladimir Medem Library in 1926.<sup>38</sup>

Yet some small libraries remained outside the major structures, to mention the libraries of the Oswiata Workers Society, of the Craftsmen Union and another of similar character, established by Henryk Markusfeld by the Minor Merchants Union.<sup>39</sup> They were frequented by the students of various vocational schools and courses, by workers and small manufacturers, who came from Orthodox families and, to recall a saying of I.B.Singer, in the early post-war years had their spiritual world turned upside down<sup>40</sup>. They were looking for "modern Polish books", but even more greedily – for Yiddish ones. These young Jews did not have good Polish nor Hebrew skills. The young were more interested in popular science than in pure fiction, because at the time of spiritual upheaval they needed

<sup>36</sup> E. Chrobołowski, *Yidish biblioteka*, [in:] *Czeństochover...*, pp. 85–87.

<sup>37</sup> APK, UWK I, sygn. 1715.

<sup>38</sup> E. Chrobołowski, *Yidish...*, p. 86–87.

<sup>39</sup> APK, UWK I, sygn. 1715.

<sup>40</sup> I.B. Singer, *Felietony, eseje, wywiady*, Warszawa 1993, p. 41.

knowledge more than anything. Librarians tried to cope with permanent book deficiencies by fundraising events, amateur shows, lotteries.<sup>41</sup> The collections were supplemented with such funds usually through the agency of the central organizations of Jewish education, such as Tarbut, TslShO and Kultur-Lige.

Any of such small, politically oriented libraries was as a rule affiliated to one of several political organizations of young adults. These libraries were quite often repressed for holding undesirable publications (which included, from the regime's perspective, Karl Marx' *Capital*, *Erfurt Program* of Karl Kautsky, *Fire* of Henri Barbusse, or *Pale Paryz* of Bruno Jasienski), or never obtained a license. Their reading public was also very unstable.

Public libraries, on the contrary, could count on regular patrons from the 1920s. Not only in Częstochowa had Jewish intelligentsia long valued Polish books. In the interwar period they dominated the collections of Jewish libraries. The tendency was enhanced by sending children to public schools, the increasing role of Polish in the Jewish social life, and by other acculturation processes. Popularity of Polish fiction resulted also from inadequacy of Yiddish literature written after 1918. Jewish authors seemed to detest contemporary reality and modern form, their language lacked richness. Consequently, in Częstochowa, as elsewhere in Poland, Polish literature made for about 70 per cent of the Jewish libraries holdings, 25 per cent were Yiddish books, and the rest were Hebrew. The proportions were determined by the reading public, while the municipal donations were of minor importance.

The readers, mostly women and young people, craved for Polish prose of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c., the entire spectrum from Sienkiewicz to Przybyszewski, with Reymont and Orzeszkowa in between. Foreign novelists, like Turgenev, Mann, Tolstoy, Rolland were also very popular. The favorite playwrights included Wyspianski and Strindberg, while the trendy bestsellers like *Dzieje grzechu* of Stefan Żeromski or *Kult ciała* by Srokowski were in such demand that readers had to subscribe in advance to loan the book. Still, libraries complied with the taste of women patrons, who were in majority and read widely second rate writers, as popular at the time as Mniszkowna, Marguerite, Dekobra, Pitigrilli or Baum, competing with crime and adventure novels printed in installments in almost every Jewish paper.

And Częstochowa abounded in Jewish press, both local and central, major dailies and periodicals. Their number exceeded other towns in former Congress Poland. The habit of reading the press was introduced by the enlightened Jews in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., even though their choice were publications in Polish or Hebrew, and early Yiddish newspapers held little appeal to them. It was only in the wake of the 1905 political turmoil that agencies of *Haynt* and *Moment* were set up in Częstochowa, and the local printing house of Moszek Bocian started to issue Jewish brochures and announcements of various parties. It took some more years for the benefits of having a local press to become evident and the first newspaper, *Czenstochower Reklamenblatt*, to appear in 1912. The paper was focused on advertising products of local manufacturers, but had a local news column, covering also nearby industrial settlements. Despite the title, more general issues were also quite prominent in the editorials, such as, e.g., "Jewish anti-Semitism", meaning Jewish entrepreneurs' aversion to employ Jewish workers, or promotion of sports among young Jews, who were generally unfamiliar with physical exercise, or the controversies between Częstochowa Zionists and socialists. Subsequent Częstochowa papers, *Czenstochower Vochenblatt* (1913), and *Czenstochower Tagenblatt* (1914–1919) maintained such non-party and general information profile.

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<sup>41</sup> APCz SPCz. sygn. 60.

After the First World War Częstochowa Jewish press rapidly turned political. Bundist most actively sought to campaign in press against the infringement of workers economic rights. Unfortunately their left-wing papers were usually short-lived, with the only exception of *Dos Naye Vort*, which endured for five years (1920–1925). The Orthodox Jews had more success with their press organ, *Czenstochover Tsaytung*, issued from 1918 to 1939. Under the editorship of J. Plockier in the 1930s it had a circulation of about 500 copies, analogical to other local titles, and generally followed the common practice of “just reprinting materials from the central papers, Warsaw in particular”, to quote the words of Częstochowa regional administrator.<sup>42</sup> Two attempts to attract Jewish readers to a local periodical published in Polish proved abortive: *Polacy i Żydzi* [Poles and Jews], promoting peaceful coexistence of the two nations, failed in 1933, followed next year by *Express Częstochowski*, which was addressed to Jewish middle class of Częstochowa, Bedzin, and Sosnowiec.<sup>43</sup> Both papers were published by Ido Siemiatycki, a man of dubious repute in Polish as well as in Jewish eyes. His political views could not be trusted, as suggested in a secret press interview: “his favors as an editor [...] would probably go to the best payer”.<sup>44</sup>

In the Kielce province Częstochowa prevailed in the number of its Jewish press titles. There were as many as 22 titles published throughout the inter-war period, and even if most of them were quite ephemeral, the local press milieu was the major one. It is all the more surprising that no attempt was ever made to call into being a cultural-literary journal. In other major towns of the region such initiatives were launched several times by local intelligentsia or students. In the 1920s several prominent artists and authors used to live in Częstochowa, to mention only the painter Perec Willenberg, the cantor Abraham Ber Birnbaum, or the distinguished historian Meir Balaban, who was for some time the headmaster of the Friends of Knowledge high school. They must have been too much of “detached people” to become centers of lobbying groups, similar to those whose members had had such influence on Jewish cultural life in town before the First World War. Political antagonism between the followers of Agudat and the Zionists in the board of the Jewish community must have also done much harm, as it lasted for many years and affected public Jewish life in town. The economy of the community was temporarily paralyzed, most of its activities – impeded. In the 1920s Częstochowa saw the emergence of a new political force, the Bund, but its authority was also limited.

Notwithstanding the weaknesses, Jewish contribution to the cultural life of Częstochowa was significant from several points of view.

The most obvious perspective is that of a long process initiated with the fascination of educated Jewish assimilators with Polish culture. The group included many distinguished intellectuals who made the dialogue with Polish intelligentsia easier. At its best time, the dialogue involved even the conservatives, making them more open to Polish culture and ready to contribute to joint ventures for the town. It was the heyday of cultural patronage undertaken by Jewish upper business class and intelligentsia.

In the years 1905–1914, with the rapid development of the political scene in Jewish Częstochowa, culture was acquiring more political profile, but also some independence. New press publications were increasingly articulate in formulating ideological differences between various orientations. Emerging libraries assisted the political education of the youth. The Bund centered working class milieu started to speak up in their own voice, through the leaders who came out of it. It was to their – Bundist councilors – initiative that Jewish theater and libraries owed some funds from the municipality after 1918. Yiddish dominated in the press, as well as in the amateur theater movement. Numerous, even if

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<sup>42</sup> APK, UWK I, sygn. 3011

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, sygn. 3018.

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, sygn. 3011.

short-lived, associations, clubs, organizations aimed at promoting cultural life were set up. They were usually modeled on Polish cultural organizations, whose structures were most often imitated.

On the other hand, the role and significance of Jewish intelligentsia in setting cultural patterns decreased. Their involvement was rather in the background, in discreet dialogue with Polish culture, discernible in educational aspirations or readership. Intelligentsia ceased to aspire to rule over hearts and minds; it did not sponsor cultural events, either.

Yet the inhabitants of Częstochowa seemed to put more and more energy in culture-based business enterprises. At least half of the publishing and printing houses, press editorship, cinemas were Jewish owned in the interwar period. The commercialization of culture was progressing, as the movies and theater programs and the sale of popular literature indicated. Its public was also growing.

In his book on *Tłomackie 13* Zusman Segalowicz wrote: “The entire Jewish culture actually consists of good beginnings. If its life continues, it is only to a single factor. It is a powerful drive to create in any conditions and at any cost.”<sup>45</sup> The inhabitants of Częstochowa added an amendment to this opinion. The continuation of their culture was no worse than the beginnings.

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<sup>45</sup> Z. Segalowicz, *Tłomackie 13*, Wrocław 2001, p. 106.