

Foreword

The Częstochowa city edition of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, in the issue dated 1st December 2000, published an interview with the Polish historian, Sławomir Maślikowski, conducted by journalist Jacek Noszczyk. The interview appeared under the title “As if Not from This World”, and was published following a series of articles that appeared in the *Gazeta* for several weeks. Two topics were featured in them - the life of the Jews in the Częstochowa Ghetto during the German occupation, and their final extermination.

Among other things, Maślikowski was asked what the people of Częstochowa know today about the Ghetto and the Jewish past of the city.

Here is his answer:

“To be honest, they know nothing. Let us be frank, the residents, who live on these streets, now never even think about it. There is no awareness of events that happened here not so long ago, in the lifetime of our parents. It is a terrible thing both from the point of view of an historian and people who respect the past. But there are mass graves on ul. Kawia and the square on ul. Garncarska – places sanctified with the blood of Polish citizens of Jewish origin...”¹

And yet a miracle occurred.

For reasons that are presently difficult to enumerate, four years later, between 21st and 23rd April 2004, three “Days of Remembrance” were held in Częstochowa for the city’s Jews, who perished during the Holocaust. The initiator of the project was Dr Jerzy Mizgalski, director of the Higher Pedagogical School (Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna WSP). He was supported by the municipality of Częstochowa, the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH) in Warsaw and other institutions. The two sponsors of the project, natives of Częstochowa, Zygmunt Rolat-Rozenblat and Alan Silberstein, who came from the United States, took part in the events. Dozens of Częstochowa Jews from all over the world were invited to the “Days of Remembrance,” and representatives from Israel also attended, headed by lawyer Arye Edelist.

The project’s main event was the exhibition **The Jews of Częstochowa – Coexistence, Holocaust, Memory**. The exhibition became a major cultural event for the Poles, who visited it in their multitudes. Suddenly, as if by magic, the Jews were once again “creatures of this world” – close and familiar people, who reminded the city’s residents that these had been their neighbours, not long ago.

¹ “Jakby nie z tego świata”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Częstochowa, 1.12.2000

On the Monday of the conference, an academic symposium opened at the Pedagogical School on the subject of the Częstochowa Jews and their place in the city's history. Of the fifteen lectures, only two were dedicated to the Holocaust period - the first, by Rabbi Dr Mark Kiel from the United States, the son of Częstochowa Jews, who spoke on behalf of the second generation of Holocaust survivors. Among other things, he said:

*"When I went in search of the factory where HASAG once had been, where my mother went through hell, the people I asked on the street about the place not only did not know where it was – they also had no idea of what HASAG even was. When I finally found the factory, I obtained no information as to what was there before, during the War... It is a place that should have become a museum and a holy site..."*²

A similar response was received to my lecture on the topic "The Economic Expansion of the HASAG Company in the Radom District during the Second World War". I saw that, for most of the audience, the concept of "HASAG" was completely foreign.

I did not hesitate to ask those present how it happened that, in a city where there were four HASAG factories during the War, nothing is known about it? Needless to say, I received no response.

So far, I have dealt with the histories of three other HASAG camps: in Skarżysko-Kamienna, Kielce, and Leipzig, Germany (see bibliography). This was the main reason that prompted me to turn to researching the four HASAG camps in Częstochowa - Pelcery, Warta, Raków and Częstochowianka. However, it became clear that due to the abundance of material, even working on the Pelcery camp, which was the largest of all, poses a serious challenge to the researcher.

The purpose of this book is to describe the history of the Pelcery-Apparatebau camp only.

It was one of the sites of the "Kingdom of HASAG" in Częstochowa – a unique phenomenon, unparalleled in occupied Poland. This "kingdom" encompassed an average of about 7,000 Jews and, together with the two other camps in Skarżysko and Kielce, HASAG was the only German corporation in the *Generalgouvernement* that employed nearly 15,000 Jews, whom it held in six labour camps near the factories.

² Mark Kiel, Ambiwalencja i nadzieję kilka reflexji syna Żydów z Częstochowy, Konferencja naukowa, WSP, Częstochowa, kwiecień 2004

The secret of HASAG's power lay in two factors: on the one hand, problems with the production of ammunition, which had difficulty keeping up with the enormous needs of their war on two continents. On the other hand, the policy of the general manager of HASAG, Paul Budin, who managed to adapt the conglomerate's production to the needs of the army.

By mid-1942, HASAG had managed to take control of three factories: in Skarżysko, in Częstochowa ("Pelcery") and in Kielce ("Granat"). In addition, it obtained a **monopoly in the Generalgouvernement on the production of small ammunition for the infantry**.

This made it easier for Budin to present the army authorities and the SS command with an ultimate demand: if they wanted a rapid and continuous supply of cheap ammunition, HASAG had to be given the cheapest labour force – that is, Jews.

This process is described in detail in my book *Death Comes in Yellow*, which deals with the history of the camp in Skarżysko. The current research is consistent with the process in question and includes four parts:

- Part One (Chapters 1-3): The rise of HASAG and the transformation of the Pelcery factory into a factory for the production of munitions/Apparatebau. Concurrently – the events of the "Big Ghetto", until the deportations in September 1942.
- Part Two (Chapters 4-8): The first "storage" of HASAG workers in the factory; the chronicles of the "Small Ghetto" until its liquidation in June 1943; the great selection in July 1943.
- Part Three (Chapters 9-13): The establishment of a permanent camp in the Apparatebau area and the absorption of the new transports during the course of 1944.
- Part Four (Chapters 14-16): Pictures of the camp's life in various fields and its final evacuation in January 1945.

Methodologically, the chronological framework and division into phases have been maintained, but the aspect that characterises the backbone of the research is the combination of work descriptions with images from the lives of the prisoners.

And why so? Because, for various reasons, the factory became a second home for the prisoners, and it is not always possible to separate between the "external" and "internal" events. In describing the camp and the factory, I intended to clarify a few questions:

- A. What factors, both overt and covert, led to the establishment of the Apparatebau factory?
- B. How did it happen that, in research books and encyclopaedias, “Pelcery” and “Apparatebau” appear as two separate camps – even though they are one and the same camp?
- C. Why, of all the HASAG camps, only the one in Apparatebau was nicknamed *Hasag-Zdrój* (“Hasag Spa” – a *Kurort*, or health resort), and to what extent did the living conditions in the camp justify this flattering nickname?
- D. In several testimonies of the people of Częstochowa, we find expressions of local solidarity, such as: “There’s something special about our city”. Do the testimonies in the book support this view?

Many books and articles have been written about the fate of the Jews of Częstochowa during the Holocaust. There are several excellent chapters on the topic in Willa Auerbach’s research work, *History of the Jews of Częstochowa*. Much material can also be found in *Sefer Częstochowa* (in Hebrew and Yiddish) and in Benjamin Orenstein’s book *Churban Czenstochow* (Yiddish). In Hebrew were published [a translation of] Liber Brenner’s [Yiddish-language] work, *Resistance and Destruction in the Częstochowa Ghetto*, and several memoirs, including *Many Faces of Death* by Frieda Herszlikowicz and *A Star in the Dark* by Ruth Zajdman.

All of them contain many details about the HASAG-Apparatebau camp. But the majority of the material still lies in the archives.

This work is based on four groups of sources:

- The first group – excerpts of testimonies at Yad Vashem and minutes from the trial of war criminals, who worked for HASAG in Częstochowa (Tschenstochau Prozess), which was held in Leipzig in 1949.
- The second group – diaries and memoirs of the Apparatebau prisoners, some written during the War and some immediately after it. The most important among them are the memoirs of Alfred Adam Kromołowski, a talented lawyer, disabled (hunchbacked), who miraculously managed to survive. His memoirs (in Polish) extend to 830 pages and cover the period of the Ghetto and the camp. The diaries of Miriam Zalcberg and Henia Lustiger are also of value. Only Henia Lustiger’s diary was translated and published under the title *The Upheavals of Life*. In Hebrew, the memoirs of Halina Barkani, under the title *Duography*, are very important.
- The third group – documents and materials relating to HASAG and the Apparatebau factory, which are located in the State Archives in Częstochowa (APCZ), the State Archives of the State of Saxony in Leipzig (StAL), and the German Military Archives in Freiburg (MA).

- The fourth group – court files of the managers and guards, employees of the Apparatebau, which were discovered in the archives of the Central Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes (AGKBZH-IPN) in Warsaw. Very essential for understanding the history of the Ghetto is the correspondence between the Jewish aid organisations in Kraków and the *Judenrat* and its institutions in Częstochowa, which is in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (ŻIH).

For the researcher wishing to describe, in detail, the inner life of the camp's prisoners, there is only one source: the testimonies. As known, this is a source which gives rise to many reservations on account of the multitude of errors, inaccuracies in the recording of names and the almost complete lack of dates. In the description of well-known events (such as the failure of the uprising in the Ghetto, etc.), there are always several versions and only sometimes can the description of the truth be reached on the basis of comparison.

For these reasons, I fear that, even in this work, the reader will discover inaccuracies and mistakes, for which I beg his/her forgiveness. If he/she comes across a quotation that is not always accompanied by a note with the number of a testimony, it can easily be found in the list of witnesses.

With all the caveats, the words of the prisoners are a very important source. Their hundreds of accounts, appearing in the trials and interviews, make them the true *dramatis personae* of this tragedy titled *The HASAG-Apparatebau Camp in Częstochowa* – and it is primarily *they* who will erect this **written memorial monument**, which is important to us, and to the survivors of the HASAG camps and their children.

This commemoration is also important for those studying the history of the Holocaust, for it sheds light on a lesser-known aspect - the labour of Jews for the military potential of the Third Reich.