

Cultural Life

The scholastic system occupied a prominent position in Częstochowa. All the political parties endeavoured to have their own schools. Of the most important educational institutions, we may enumerate the following:

The kindergarten at ul. Krótka 22 was founded by the American [Częstochower] workforce, named after the deceased Bundist activist Vladimir Medem. Mrs Jadzia Brener was in charge of this kindergarten.

The kindergarten at ul. Przemysłowa 6 was organised by the "Dobroczynność" Society.

The I.L. Peretz primary school at ul. Krótka 28 had Yiddish as the teaching language. The children, who received education and instruction there, were those recruited from the working and people's classes. This school was run by the Bund party, under the directorship of Raphael Federman and L. Brener.



Photo №3: Primary School №13. On the right side stands the school manager, Miss Szacher. During the first "akcja" of liquidating the Big Ghetto she was sent away to Treblinka and perished there.

The general school was where great attention was paid to the Hebrew language. It was set up in the new building which the *Kehilla* Management Committee built for a third Jewish gimnazjum on the corner of ul. Jasnogórska and Wały Dwernickiego and was run by Professor Janowski, Lauer and Sziper.



Photo №4: Primary School №15 at ul. Narutowicza 15.
The pedagogic personnel, with Mmes. Wajnsztok and Gutermacher among others, together with the children on an outing to Kraków and Wieliczka. It was taken on 4th June 1937.



Photo №5: Primary School №15.
The pedagogical personnel together with the pupils of the IV-b division. This picture was taken in 1936.



Photo №6: Primary School №12 on ul. Przemysłowa 12.
The teacher Anka Ajzykiewicz is in the picture. She perished in the "akcja" in the Big Ghetto.

Berisz Wajnberg's private school on Aleja 8 was also famous in town and it educated the children in the [Jewish] national spirit. Primary school, which taught in Polish, were run by Leder, Awner, Miss Szacher, Miss Lajzerowicz and Margulies.

There was an entire array of 2-4-class primary schools appointed by the governmental school board and also a 4-class general school run by Zofja Wajnsztok. After completing these schools, the children were admitted to the *gimnazjum*. Agudas Yisroel had the religious *Cheder Yesodei Ha'Torah* [Foundations of the Torah Cheder] school for boys and a *Bais Yaakov* [House of Jacob] school for girls. The *melamdim* [religious teachers] were Herszl Besserglik ("Wolbromer"), Icek-Majer Jakubowicz ("Amstower"¹), Eksztajn ("[The] White"), Josl [sic Mojsze] Frank (a brother of the editor Szmul Frank), Mojsze-Dawid Landsman and Lajzer Landsman.

Besides the communal and religious institutions, there were also private *cheders*. Selected children from better homes studied in Chil Grylak's *cheder*. To be admitted to his *cheder* was considered an honour.

Berisz Wajnberg [had] a progressive *cheder* and a school on the First Aleja, with Hebrew as the teaching language. Wajnberg ran the school with the aid of his children, who specialised in the field of pedagogy. At ul. Berka Joselewicza 8, Fajwlowicz [had] an advanced *cheder*. There were also the following [private] *melamdim*: Binyomin "Litvak"² (Wierzbicki), Jankiel "[The] Tall" (Zombek), "The Gambler" (Sztajnic), Icchok "[The] Lame", "The Burnt [Melamed]",

¹ [TN: Viz. from nearby Mstów, which was called "Amstov" in Yiddish.]

² [TN: Sobriquet used in ref. to Jews from Lithuania and the vicinity (Belarus, Latvia and north-western Poland).]

“The Zhuriker”³, Kurland, Old Market 9, Brat, ul. Targowa 12, “The Stutterer”, ul. Targowa 12 and Montag, ul. Targowa 13.

The first [Jewish] *gimnazjum* was founded in 1916 during the German occupation. This *gimnazjum* educated the youth in a national [viz. Zionist⁴] spirit and had first-class headmasters and pedagogical forces at its disposal, such as Professor Majer Bałaban, Dr Brysz, Dr Einhorn, Professor Axer⁵, Dr Frost [sic Prost], Dr Anisfeld, Dr Szofer [sic Szefer], Professor Lauer, Dr Sak, Professor Gincburg and others. With the aid of respected burghers of the city, such as Żeryker and others, Professor Axer’s private *gimnazjum* was established. A new building was also built by the Jewish *Kehilla* for a third *gimnazjum*, managed by Zionist leaders, but the War broke out and the goal was not achieved. There was no Jewish teachers’ seminary, so the Jewish schoolboys and schoolgirls, who wished to study for the teacher’s profession, studied at the Polish teachers’ seminary. Mrs Szumacher’s evening courses for adults were also very well-known. There, they studied accountancy, correspondence, stenography, typewriting and similar practical subjects.

The vocational school [aka the Crafts School], run by the engineer Przysuskier at ul. Garncarska 8/10 occupied a special position. It was founded by the American JCA (Jewish Colonisation Association) society, before the First World War. The first headmaster was a Jew from Warsaw named Assorodobraj. Following the First World War, the leadership was taken over by the successful headmaster Przysuskier, who was active until the tragic days of the deportation in 1942. The main founder of the Crafts School was Henryk Markusfeld.

The school had the following departments: metalworking, mechanical engineering, carpentry, electronics and also women’s tailoring and stitching. The school had the most modern machinery and the professional training stood on a high level. Each course took three years. Mr Sukenik headed the metalworking department. After completing the training period, an examination was conducted. Graduates received a valid certificate, which was recognised by the government. Those graduating from the Crafts School were admitted to the technical university in Warsaw and to Wawelberg’s technical school, also in Warsaw.

There was also a Polish vocational school in the city, the standing of which was [at a] much lower [level] than the Jewish one. As consequence, there were many cases of Polish pupils studying at the Jewish one.

There was also a horticultural school, which was founded in 1916, shortly before the establishment of the independent Polish state. This school served as “*hachshara*”⁶. Youth studied agriculture both in theory and in practice. Many [of them] emigrated to the Land of Israel and, with their professional instruction, were integrated into productive farming life.

During the time of the occupation, when the ghetto was established on 23rd April 1940, after difficult efforts, they were able to continue running the [Crafts] School, but on a smaller scale. There were only two departments - metalworking and carpentry, directed by Szlama Wien,

³ [TN: From nearby Żarki.]

⁴ [TN: It was in fact called “The Hebrew Gimnazjum”.]

⁵ [TN: Professor Axer served as headmaster of the Hebrew Gimnazjum, but later went on to open his own secondary school, as stated subsequently.]

⁶ [TN: Heb., “training”; the term was used by Zionists in the Diaspora in ref. to training in preparation for emigrating to Palestine, as follows.]

Eugeniusz Turowski and Aleksander Wilhelm. The engineer Rozental became the deputy to the headmaster, the engineer Przysuskier.

The leadership of the Polish vocational school took advantage of the Jewish loss of all rights and intervened with the *Stadthauptmann* [City Captain] and obtained permission to take the Jewish Crafts School's machinery. The leadership of the school and the pupils looked on with great anguish as their "Polish friends" took away the machines and the more important equipment. The machinery and equipment are, to this day, in the Polish crafts school.

After losing the machines and equipment, the school lost its former glory and educational character. As a result, it switched to manual labour.

During that period, the German authorities implemented forced labour for Jews and every Jew was forced to carry out various [forms of] arduous, dirty work. Thanks to the efforts on part of the school leadership, the *Ältestenrat*⁷ [and] the parents of the pupils, they were able to convince the German authorities to recognise the school as a workplace and the students were not forced to perform other jobs. The school's carpentry and metalwork workshops worked for the German forces. Theoretical instruction was resumed once more. A women's tailoring course was opened led by Szmul Katz. One hundred girls and women participated.

The German authorities did not tolerate this situation for long. Gradually, the pupils were forced to carry out different [types of] dirty work. IN close formation, they were taken to unload coal, clear snow and perform other jobs. A fortnight prior to the deportation, an order arrived to liquidate the school. The pupils were forced to dismantle the remaining machinery and to transport them, along with all the supplementary accessories, on platforms, to the Polish school. After over thirty years of the school's existence, it was fully closed down. The *Ältestenrat* moved into the school's three-story building and set up its offices there.

During the deportation of the Częstochowa Jews, the meritorious headmaster Przysuskier and his family, as well as the greater number of the teachers and instructors, shared the fate of the six million victims and perished at [our] people's graveyard in Treblinka. Nowadays, the Crafts School's building houses a Polish seminary.

The Częstochower pedagogues were: Professor Dr Axer, Professor Lasker, Professor Janowski, Leon Wajnsztok (linguist, teacher of languages), his sister Zofja Wajnsztok, Professor Wilenberg (world-famous artistic painter, who did the artwork and decoration of the Old Synagogue), Professor Grinberg (who was awarded a gold medal at the convention of Polish philologists), Aron Luksemburg, Anisfeld (the last headmaster of the Jewish *Gimnazjum*), Margulies, Professor Lauer, Doctor of Philosophy Mering and Aleksander Haftka, who worked in the Ministry of Education.

Mrs Wierzbicka also played a respected role in the scholastic system. She was involved in organising summer camps for impecunious children. The children spent a month in Blachownia and in various health resorts.

⁷ [TN: Ger., "Council of Elders"; alternative name for the *Judenrat*.]

The press occupied a prominent place. The general party-affiliated and non-partisan newspapers, weeklies, monthlies and various publications were distributed and read in large numbers. Of the Yiddish newspapers, people read *Der Moment*, *Hajnt* [Today], *Folkscajtung* [People's Paper], *Unser Express* [Our Express], *Dos Wort* [The Word], *Unser Frajnd* [Our Friend], as well as the afternoon issues of those same newspapers (*Radio*, *Hajntike Najes* [Today's News], *Cwej Bajtog* [Two O'clock] and *Kurier* [Courier]).



*Photo №7: A Jewish newspaper salesman;
the Nazi authorities used this picture as propaganda, labelling the Jewish press as "agitational press"*

The Jewish newspapers in the Polish language, *Nasz Przegląd* [Our Review], *5-ta Rano* [5:00 AM], *Ostatnie Wiadomości* [Recent News], *Nowy Dziennik* [New Journal] and others were [also] read. Among the weeklies [were] *Welt Szpigel* [World Mirror], *Unser Welt* [Our World], *Arbeiter Stimme* [Workers' Voice], *Jugend Wecker* [Awakener of Youth], *Befreiung* [Liberation] and many, many others.

Besides the general press that was published in Warsaw, Kraków and other cities and was brought to Częstochowa, three local weeklies appeared in the city. These Yiddish weeklies were called:

- 1.) *Częstochower Cajtung* [Częstochowa Newspaper], published by [Berl] Bocian and edited by Szmul Frank;
- 2.) *Unser Weg* [Our Way], published by the Zionist organisation and edited by Dr Mojsze Mering and the pedagogue Aron Luksemburg, with the active participation of the well-known Częstochowa writers, Fiszal Blumenkranc, Sziper, Izrael Dancyger and Turner;
- 3.) *Die Zeit* [The Time], published by the Retailers Union and edited by Chaim Wajsberg.

A literary-political publication by the leftist factions also appeared. It was closed down by the government. The editor responsible for it was Nuchim Wajsberg. An entire array of Jewish-Polish newspapers, published by the editor Ido Semiatycki and Aleksander Haftka, also appeared in Częstochowa. These papers were both weeklies and dailies. The daily papers were *Express Częstochowski*, *Nowiny Częstochowskie* [Częstochowa News], *Głos Częstochowski* [Częstochowa Voice] and *Echo Poranne* [The Morning Echo].

During the period of rising antisemitism, a weekly publication appeared, which deserves special attention. It was called *Polacy i Żydzi* (Poles and Jews). The purpose of this weekly paper was to fight the antisemitic currents and to polemicise with the Częstochowa antisemitic weekly, *Gazetka Narodowa* (National Gazette). This Jewish-Polish weekly was read by both the Jewish and Polish population. The main contributors to the weekly *Polacy i Żydzi* were the editor Ido Semiatycki and his wife Felicia Semiatycka (née Wolfowicz).

There was also an entire array of libraries. [The following] were the most prominent:

- The library of the “*Handlowces*”, which was later taken over by the Culture League, which was under the Bund’s influence. This library was supplied with the greatest selection of books and was managed by Mrs Berkensztadt. The library was regularly open until the outbreak of the War. In the first period of the Nazi occupation, the Gestapo sought out former communal activists to detain, basing themselves on tip-offs from the Polish police, who were in their service. Among others, the cultural activist Mrs Berkensztadt was also arrested and killed by the Gestapo.
- The “Independents” (Dr Kruk’s party) had a large library. The books were in two languages - Yiddish and Polish.
- The private “*Nowości*” [News] library at Aleja 40 was also popular.

Częstochowa did not have a permanent Yiddish theatre, because all the most respected theatrical troupes, with the greatest actors would come on tour. There was a society [named] “Lira” and a drama troupe. Around itself, the “Lira” society concentrated the youth of all echelons and factions. There, they studied music and singing. The professional management lay in the hands of the conductor, Professor Zaks. The soloists Edelist, Sieniesie [?], Grobiner [sic Grabiner], Srebrnik, Szmidt and Jerzy Richter very rapidly became famous. The latter is currently a singer in the Hofmockel [sic Michael Hofmekler’s⁸] orchestra in [the ex-concentration camp] of Saint Ottilien in Germany.

The management committee of the “Lira” society consisted of Gomulinski, Gostynski, Dr Mering, Leon Lewit and others. One hundred and eighty people took part in its last performance - 120 singers and 60 musicians. First-rate and the most difficult works were performed, such as *The Walpurgis Night*⁹, the Talmudic rhapsody *Ba’Meh Madlikin*¹⁰ ([by

⁸ [TN: Michael Hofmekler was a renowned Jewish Lithuanian virtuoso violinist and conductor; the translator has ascertained this information through a conversation with Hofmekler’s nephew Eyal Hofmekler, a renowned Jerusalem luthier.]

⁹ [TN: This is probably a reference to “The First Walpurgis Night”, a poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, set to music as a cantata, in 1831, by Felix Mendelssohn.]

¹⁰ [TN: “With what do we light (the Shabbos candles)”; an excerpt from the Mishna (Shabbat, Ch.2), which is recited at the beginning of the Shabbos prayers on Friday evening.]

Abram-Ber] Birenbaum), *Czardasz, The Four Seasons*, etc. The successful performance evoked great awe within the community.

Following the performance, the conductor, Professor Zaks was engaged [to work] in Łódź. This caused the “Lira” to split into two groups. The first remained loyal to “Lira” and was headed by Jerzy Richter and the second consisted of a men’s choir under the directorship of Lewkowicz.

The drama troupe was organised at the TOZ society and was led by Szmul Frank and Borensztajn. Szmul Frank, Edelist, Orbach, Lewensztajn, Fajwel Altman, Mrs Roziner, Miss Orbach and Borensztajn were distinguished for their talents as actors. The latter played the role of Charlie Chaplin in a film. People called him “the second Dżigan”¹¹. He endeared himself loved to the public with his humorous monologues.

The working youth learned dancing with Berliner and Najman (“Kuczer”¹²). The “band” consisted of a gramophone and they danced to the sounds of the records. The dancing school had great success and the leaders did not have time to speak with the clients. Consequently, the conversations were held while dancing. The youth also danced at the numerous entertainments in the organisation premises and at Lubinski’s Jewish dance-hall on ul. Piłsudskiego.

The city’s most revered personalities, who were respected around the world, were:

Professor Majer Bałaban, the first headmaster of the Jewish *Gimnazjum*. He was known for his historical research and works and for his *magnum opus*, “*Jewish History and Literature*”¹³.

Rabbi Nachum Asz, author of a book on the laws of ritual slaughter. This work was dedicated to the fight for ritual slaughter. The attack was led by the Sejm deputy [Janina Amelia] Prystorowa, who was a notorious antisemite, conducting a campaign to liquidate [viz. ban] ritual slaughter. The book was translated into Polish by the Rabbi’s son, the lawyer Leon [Lajb] Asz.

[Reb Josef-Szymon] Koblenz, the Częstochowa town *maggid* [preacher], was renowned for his learned sermons. He was always visited by the Jewish world’s greatest figures, who spent time in the city - among them, Chaim Bialik, Leib Yaffe, Nachum Sokolov and others.

[Rebbe Pinchas-Menachem-Eluzor] Justman, the Rebbe of Pilica, had many followers and was renowned as a sharp talmudist.

[Rebbe Henoah-God Justman], the Rabbi of Wieruszów - the son of the Rebbe of Pilica - was distinguished for his oratorical skills and in casuistry.

Rabbi [Dawid-Aron] Twerski, the Rebbe of Zhurik [Żarki], was gifted and talented in every way.

¹¹ [TN: Szymon Dżigan (b.1905 in Łódź, d.1980 in Tel-Aviv) was a renowned Jewish comedian.]

¹² [TN: This word means either “coachman” or “curl” in Yiddish; in this context, the latter is more likely.]

¹³ [TN: Published in 1921; the work’s full title is “*Historia i literatura żydowska, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem historii Żydów w Polsce*” (*Jewish History and Literature, With Particular Emphasis on the History of Jews in Poland*).]

Chief [sic¹⁴] **Rabbi Josse'le Prokosz**, who was nicknamed Reb Josse'le "*Kira*" ["Austrian"].

Rabbi [Dr Chaim-Ze'ev] Hirszburg from the German Synagogue [The "New Synagogue"].

[Rebbe] Reb Awigdor'I [Szapiro] on ul. Senatorska.

Reb Szulim'I¹⁵ from ul. Berka Joselewicza, who gained renown for his prayers on the High Holidays and singing the Rozprza *nigunim* [Chassidic songs].

Abram-Ber Birenbaum was the master of Jewish music. His compositions reached all parts of the world.

Bronisław Huberman, the virtuoso master violinist, who appeared on all the world's stages and was awarded a gold medal in Italy in 1908. He was distinguished around the world. He taught an entire generation of artists, founded the symphonic orchestra in the Land of Israel, and was also active in literature, publishing the following books: *Vaterland Europa*, *Mein Weg zu Paneuropa* and *Aus der Werkstatt des Virtuosen*¹⁶. He died in Switzerland in June 1947 at the age of sixty-five.

Dr Josef Kruk, linguist (expert on languages), was a candidate to the Polish Sejm. He took part in international conferences, penned a great number of treatises on scientific and social themes and, as a brilliant orator, always travelled about delivering lectures.

There were also numerous communal activists who devoted their energy, time and money to political [and] cultural-educational work. Among others, these were the alderman Dawid Szlezinger; the TOZ leader, Jakow Roziner; Abram Brum and many, many others.

The craftsmen's and workers' activists played a special role. These were mostly impecunious people, who worked hard from morning to night in order to earn for bread for themselves and [their] families. After a whole day of arduous physical or even mental work, the second work now began for them - communal, political and cultural work, until late into the night. The same [people] also held lectures, wrote newspaper articles, organised demonstrations and functions and led political organisations and communal institutions, educating a generation of *chalutzim* [Zionist pioneers] and proletarian fighters.

¹⁴ [TN: "Überrabbiner" in the original, which was the position occupied by Rabbi Nachum Asz at the time; according to all other sources, Rabbi Prokosz was an halachic authority and not the Chief Rabbi.]

¹⁵ [TN: Most likely ref. to Rebbe Szulim Rotenberg of Wolbrom, who lived in Częstochowa – although, if so, we do not know why he would have sung the songs of the Rozprza dynasty, as follows.]

¹⁶ [TN: Ger., "Fatherland Europa", "My Road to Pan-Europa" and "From the Virtuoso's Workshop", respectively.]