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Jews in Industry

The role of the Jews in Częstochowa industry was very significant, both in the Russian times, when it produced for the broad Russian market and, also, later in independent Poland, when it adapted itself to the inner market within the country itself.

True, the largest factories in the city belonged not to Jews, but to Franco-Belgian firms such as Mottes, Częstochowianka, and Geltzer's [sic Peltzer's].

They manufactured cheap textiles and employed about 15,000 workers, exclusively Poles, whilst all the technical and commercial personnel were French and Belgian. Jewish workers and contractors would be employed there in such work as building, painting, mechanical installations and the like.

Among the large factories in Częstochowa must also be reckoned the twine factories, which manufactured not only twine, but also sacks which they delivered widely throughout Poland. The most renowned were Szpagaczarnia, Warta, Gnaszyn and Stradom.

As consequence, however, the medium-sized and small industries in Częstochowa were built almost exclusively by Jewish entrepreneurs and, in a large part, also by Jewish labourers. In addition, we must note that Jewish industry in Częstochowa did not enjoy any financial aid or economic privileges on part of the authorities, neither in the Tsarist era nor also later in independent Poland. As far as the Polish government is concerned, it was quite the opposite - it simply hampered the development of Jewish industrial undertakings. In 1924 - viz. still during the "good times", before the open anti-Jewish economic discrimination on part of the Polish government had begun - the county clerk unambiguously declared to the writer of these lines [that] "it does not bother the Polish government that the small industry in Częstochowa will suffer. On the contrary, a benefit will emerge from it - that the small toy industry in Teschen [Cieszyn], Katowice and Szczawnica will develop". The Polish economists, against the interests of the Częstochowa factory-industry, supported plans to decentralise toy and haberdashery production through the system of home-based workers, who in Poland were called "*chatupnikes*"¹.

Jewish industry in Częstochowa, and the manufacture of toys and haberdashery in particular, stood on such a high technical level that certain technical systems, which were implemented there twenty years ago, are still being used in the production of the same articles, both in Western Europe (Bohemia, Germany, Belgium, France) and in America. This is even more of a wonder, when we take into consideration that these technical methods were thought up by people who had not had any technical or theoretical training. The Jewish entrepreneurs had often taken to manufacture almost as soon as they had risen from the *yeshiva* bench, or had left the Chassidic *shtiebel*. Some of them, even later, did not discard the long caftans. They would, sometimes, hastily refresh their professional expertise, which they had gained solely through experience, in the following idiosyncratic manner: they would sometimes run round to the fair in Leipzig and inspect the factory-produced articles there, or they would sometimes visit a German factory and literally just "take a sniff" - like a good card player, who recognises his partner's card when he only catches a glimpse of its corner.

Needless to say, this industry developed from very small beginnings. The "factory" would, often times, be set up inside the owner's bedroom. The relationship between manufacturer and labourer

¹ [TN: From the Polish word "*chatupa*," meaning "hut."]

was “patriarchal”, even long after the factories had been built in a modern fashion. Several workers from Werde’s gold factory, from Jerzy Landau’s celluloid factory, [and] from Wajnberg’s comb factory sometimes still recount how, together with their employers, they would sometimes interrupt the work at dusk and go to pray *minche-ma’ariv* [the afternoon and evening services] in the little synagogues, which were set up inside the factories themselves. With great effort, the manufacturers would bring the money together which with to pay the workers and they would also often wrack their brains as to how to have a voucher from a merchant discounted [by a discount-broker]^{*)}. At the time, the toy manufacturers faced another great problem in acquiring raw materials, such as celluloid, sheet nickel, mirrors and the like. These [following] reminiscences of that bygone pioneering era were presented to the author of these lines by the manufacturers Landau, Wajnberg, Zeligson, Ringelblum, Haberman, Rozenberg and others.

The following pioneers distinguished themselves in the celluloid, toys and haberdashery industries:

Jerzy Landau founded his factory at the end of 1900. He produced combs, beads, [and] dolls, and distributed them throughout the whole of Russia, using his own travelling representatives. The Jewish workers in his factory were increasingly replaced by Christians. Some of the old Jewish workers worked their way up to becoming office employees or technical personnel; a certain number took advantage of their experience to open their own little factories.

The St. [Stanisław] Wajnberg factory on ul. [Prawe] Wały² specialised in the manufacture of combs.

Szmulewicz, Ferleger, Bryll, Hocherman, [and] Mic produced toys. Rozenberg, on ul. Krótka, manufactured combs, dolls and, for the most mirrors also.

Zeligson, at Ogrodowa 55, through his travelling representatives, sold not only combs of his own production throughout Russia, but also those which he bought from smaller manufacturers.

Ruzewicz produced celluloid dolls, combs and mirrors.

Glazer, whose family is now in America, was one of the first manufacturers of rubber clothing [accessories] – i.e. celluloid collars, cuffs, [and] shirtfronts, which people in Poland wore in those times.

Fridman, on ul. Fabryczna, had a factory of beads and combs. Besides these enumerated, there were many other larger and smaller factories of this type.

The Częstochowa Jews also developed a huge industry of souvenir articles, which consisted of devotional objects - although Jews were officially banned from engaging in this. This industry’s most important manufacturers were Fajgelewicz and Wajnbaum. The latter was a family with many branches and was a very capable one.

In the metal industry, the Szaja brothers’ cufflinks factory took the first place. They were renowned for having sharp minds in constructing the most complex templates. They had inherited this skill from their father. Even though each of the brothers worked for himself, they were still always

^{*)} In the Russian times, it was customary for the tradesman to present the manufacturer with a voucher for a year’s time. This custom even found an expression in a humorous play on words: “*Gad* [pronounced “God” in Yiddish], a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.” [Genesis 49:19] The pun is built upon the word “*God*,” which in Russian means “a year.” [TN: Meaning that, although the voucher system was devastating for them, the manufacturers somehow managed.]

² [TN: Its name was changed in 1919 to Aleksandrowska, and then in 1926 to Wilsona (source: <http://cjk.czestochowa.pl/miesiecznikartykul/36>).]

connected. The leader was Herman Szaja - not the eldest, but the most intelligent. He would travel to Germany with great frequency. He would also be appointed as mediator to resolve disputes among traders.

As president of the Jewish Merchants and Manufacturers Union in Częstochowa, it was often his lot to intervene with the Polish government. In 1920, he headed a delegation to the Częstochowa *starostwo* [district office] concerning the law of rest on Sunday, which forced the Jewish craftsmen and manufacturers to rest two days a week (this law was specifically aimed at Jewish trade and Jewish craftsmen).

Among the pioneers of the toy industry and metal “novelty” (souvenir) articles, the Weksler family was of renown. The father of the family was named Herszl Weksler. His two sons made templates for the little manufacturers who did not have their own machinists. Mojsze Weksler, one of the sons, graduated from the Crafts School and became an artist in his trade. He allowed himself to be paid well for his work or for his professional recommendations. He was a much esteemed and good man, and was very active in the SS [Zionist-Socialist] Party in 1905 and later.

Częstochowa also had factories making heavy-duty iron articles, such as chains for industry, implements for farming, [and] hinges and other household items.

The foremost position in this field was held by manufacturers Ickowicz and Horowicz. The Ickowicz family consisted of half a dozen brothers. Each had his own little factory and each manufactured a different metal item.

The large needle factory, which was set up in the most modern manner, not only according to the concepts of Russia and Poland, but also those of Western Europe – belonged to Henig and Werde. Both partners were great philanthropists.

Chanania Goldberg’s watch factory was, for a long time, the only one in Poland. Goldberg’s patents were utilised in the production of watches in Switzerland. He would receive regular payments for this (royalties). He was also a good organiser and had, in the middle of the day, enough time to sit in Błaszczynski’s [café] playing a game of chess, at which he was a master.

The production of knives, [both] cheaper and better ones, was for the most part in Christian hands. In this case, the Jews were suppliers of raw materials and buyers of the finished products. The owner of the largest factory, [however], was actually a Jew by the name of Rozenchwajg.

The Częstochowa iron foundries had sales, very far from the borders of Poland, of pots, ovens, irons and various other household items. They also manufactured machine parts for the Częstochowa industry. One of the first was Wulkan, founded by a Russian company. The director of the factory was Engineer Ratner, a well-known communal and cultural activist in Częstochowa. Other Jewish employees were Ajzenberg, Szwarc, Kisin, [and] Jakób Rozenberg. Following Poland’s independence, the Polish government took over the factory. All the Jewish employees were removed. Some of them, together with Szmul Goldsztajn, established another ironworks - *Metalurgia*.

Also, the large ironworks in Raków, *Huta Hantke*, was alive thanks to Jewish commercial spirit, because only Jews distributed and took up their products.

Częstochowa was famed for its two categories in the mirror industry:

- 1) Factories which made mirrors from window glass, which was cut [to size] and delivered to the factories which inserted them into metal, wood or celluloid frames; and

- 2) Factories which manufactured finished mirrors, which their commission agents distributed throughout the whole of Russia. Later, after 1918, when the Russian market collapsed, these mirrors found a market not only throughout all Poland, but also in Romania and Bulgaria, where they competed with the German products. Such was the state of affairs until the Germans implemented the dumping system³.

The renowned mirror factories were J.L. Bezbrodko, Stopnicki & Orbach, Grylak, Sercarz, Waga, Epelbaum, Bryll & Hocherman, Gedalia Szpizman, Rozenberg, Mendel Szmulewicz, H. Hocherman, [and] Hamburger [&] Hocherman.

One of the first mirror manufacturers was Josef Bezbrodko. He came from Russia. Being the second generation in the production of mirrors (in Moscow in 1864), he was well-acquainted with the good taste of the Russian market. Warsaw, too, had a large mirror industry, but they bought the raw materials in Częstochowa, mostly due to the superior technical facilities and the better working system.

Kohn's paper factory was one of the largest paper factories in Russia. Old Jews used to call it "the mill", because it utilised a great deal of water power from the Warta.

Markusfeld's *Malarnia* distributed its wallpaper and coloured paper to the furthest corners of Russia. This same Markusfeld also owned *Kapeluszarnia* - a hat and cap factory - and *Klejarnia*, which manufactured glue and other chemical products.

Częstochowa Jews were also the pioneers of the paint industry. Certain Częstochowa paints [even] competed with the German [firm] IG Farben. We must mention, first and foremost, the two large factories - one of Dr Zaks, a public activist from the assimilationist faction, and [the other] of Dr Wolberg, whose children were active in Częstochowa's radical circles.

Alongside the production of sacred icons, the manufacture of wooden baguettes⁴ for frames developed early on in Częstochowa. The most well-known firms were Kopiński and Szmulewicz.

Another branch of the wood industry - the manufacture of furniture - only developed in the later years.

The button industry also belonged to those industries in which Częstochowa played a pioneering role. The button factories in Częstochowa were among the leaders in Poland and even throughout the whole of Russia. The most renowned and largest factory in this field was Grosman's. Some of his descendants have already left the Jewish People altogether. The first automobile in Częstochowa was brought by one of the Grosmans.

Częstochowa had the first joiner's glue factory in Russia - the *Klejarnia*, founded by Henryk Markusfeld. The technical work at the factory was managed by a great man of science in chemistry, and a warm Jew. He was the founder of the Częstochowa Horticultural Farm.

Smaller industries, in which Jews took part, were in the manufacture of brushes from imported rice-straw, apart from an entire array of smaller factories such as Handelsman and others - the most well-known was the Rozencwajg firm. In the chemical industry, we must mention Fajga's candle factory [and] the soap factories of Dziubas & Fiszel, Chaskiel Broniatowski and the German, Krüger.

³ [TN: Viz. flooding foreign markets with low-priced goods.]

⁴ [TN: Thin, half-round moulding, sometimes carved, and enriched with foliage etc.]

The Częstochowa bankers were not in the style of the great European banks, but nor were they usurers. They aided the manufacturers extensively with their discount credit. For [the duration of] the Russian era, promissory notes were given for a period of nearly a year. The manufacturer was unable to withstand them.

The most important local banks were:

- 1) Bergman;
- 2) Markus Gradsztajn;
- 3) Zorski;
- 4) Moszkowicz & Pinkus;
- 5) *Warszawski Bank Handlowy* [Warsaw Commercial Bank], founded in Warsaw by the famous Natanzon family (director - Nowinski);
- 6) the branch of the [St] Petersburg Bank in Riga (director – Maurycy Ruff).

One of the great Częstochowa industrialists was Majtlis. He had his own coal mines and supplied coal to all the factories.

Częstochowa's shipping agents occupied an important position in the business world. The most renowned among them were Ludwik Tempel, Dankewicz, Krak and Gradsztajn.