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# Jewish Libraries

The modern movements in Jewish life, and especially in the Labour Movement, did not bring shame to the name of the “People of the Book” of old. The Jewish book took the foremost position in every society, in every union and in every party.

After Emanuel Bajgele and Henech Lapides, the bookbinders and booksellers in Częstochowa who provided the Częstochowa Jews with reading material, came the illegal libraries of the Jewish workers’ parties SS, Bund, [and] *Poalei Zion*. The first large, illegal, Jewish library with *belles-lettres* works, both by Yiddish writers and non-Jewish writers translated into Yiddish, was created by the SS [Party]. The library was in a building on ul. Ogrodowa, which was one of the locations of the SS [Party]. There, the member of the Party, Nuta Szwarcbaum, and Party sympathiser Berliner, had an ironmonger’s. Szaja Lewenhof also worked there as bookkeeper. A side room was provided in the building and large crates of books were brought from the Warsaw bookdealers. The books were registered in a catalogue and distributed throughout the factories, small plants and circles. The designated librarian gave out and took in the books by request of the readers through their representatives.



[Text: Opening of the Henryk Markusefeld Library (top); Lira (bottom)]

the translations to Yiddish, the most read were Knut Hamsun<sup>1</sup>, Zola, [and] Victor Hugo. Scientific books, such as [those on] natural sciences, chemistry, biology, etc., made up 20% of the reading, novels – 20% [and] dramas – 10%.

During the German occupation, when *Lira* collapsed and the members of various factions took its possessions, the Zionist members took over the library, which continued functioning in the Zionists’ premises at ul. Dojazd 19.

By then, however, the Labour factions had already founded their separate unions, tea-halls and libraries. From the books left from the SS [Party’s] former illegal library, a library was created anew at the Leather Workers Union, the first authorised, professional union under the German occupation. The SS [Socialist-Zionist] Organisation stood behind this same union. Afterwards, the Education Union was legalised, which took over the library and expanded it. The librarians were Chaja Waga, Ester Fuks and S. [w] Landau. *Poalei-Zion* and the Bund had smaller libraries.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: A Norwegian writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920.]

When the delegates of the Czenstochover Relief in New York came to Częstochowa, they also brought, with them, a large sum of money for books. Under their influence, all the workers' libraries were unified into one "General Workers' Library". Representatives of *Vereinigte*, the Bund and *Poalei Zion* formed the management committee.

The General Library was enriched with a great number of books that were gathered by the members of the Czenstochover Relief in New York, and from the CYSZO [Central Organisation of Yiddish Schools] in Warsaw. Through the lobbying of the representatives of the Jewish workers at the Town Hall, the Częstochowa municipality allocated a certain sum of money for the purchase of Polish books for the library. The General Library was open to all and anyone who felt a desire to read made use of it.

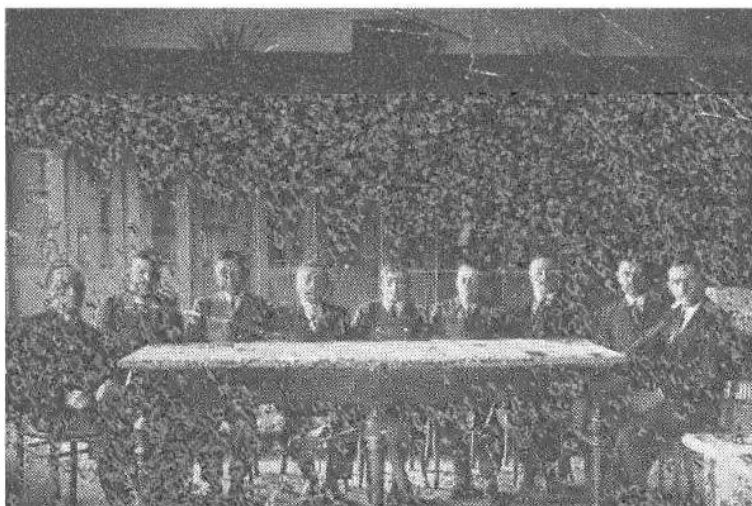
At the beginning, the library was in the building of Kindergarten №2 at ul. Strażacka 10. Later, it was relocated to the primary school's Peretz building at ul. Krótka 23.

The librarians were, at first, Jakow-Icek Czarnowiecki and, later, Herszl Lypszyc, who attended the evening courses and was a great lover of the Yiddish book.

On Saturdays, talks were held at the General Library with the readers - especially with the younger readers - on subjects that were suitable for them.

The report, that is reproduced here, gives one a concept of the activities of the largest and most important library in Częstochowa

A separate library – not a Yiddish one, but one with Polish and Russian books – also existed at the Commercial Employees Union. This library was used by those Jewish readers who did not speak or read Yiddish. After a lengthy struggle, which took years, the Commercial Employees Union turned Yiddish.



**Management Committee of the Medem Library.**  
**Seated (R-L): J. Rozenfeld, L. Kamiński, Ch. Wilczyński, Ch. Lajzerowicz, Zamel, R. Federman, A. Perec, Brenner and M. Lederman**

This library later merged with the Medem Library, which had been set up at the Cultural Bureau in 1926. The foundation for the Medem Library had been laid by Jakób Rozenberg, by allocating a large sum of money to this purpose directly following Medem's death. At the end of 1926, the Medem Library already possessed over one thousand Yiddish books, besides Polish ones. In 1927, the library was open, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, at *Aleja* 20, in the premises of the Cultural Bureau,.

The registration fee for the library was one *złoty*; deposit for a book - two *złoty*; monthly [membership] fees – 50 *grosz*; for youth, registration fee - 50 *grosz* [and] monthly fees – 25 *grosz*.

In September 1926, the Medem Library functioned in two rooms of the Commercial Employees Union. The first librarian was Andzia Monowicz.

In 1938, the library operated under the name “Kultura” and was run by Rajzla Berkensztadt. Under her directorship, the library functioned illegally during the most horrific times of the Gestapo terror during the Nazi occupation of Częstochowa, until the Nazi hangmen tortured her to death. At this time, the library had one thousand readers.

The General Library was later relocated to the Second *Aleja*, and continued functioning under the leadership of Herszl Lypszyc. Regarding the library’s role in the difficult years of the fascist rule in Poland, the director of the library, Herszl Lypszyc, writes the following in a letter:

*Firstly, the municipality has decreased the subsidy to the library from 500 złoty to 200. Nevertheless, we have managed - under the most difficult conditions - to expand and to beautify the exterior. Portraits of Jewish and non-Jewish writers adorn the walls. In the library, we have created a reading room, where almost all the country’s periodical publications are to be found. From time to time, we hold talks on literary subjects. Thus, the library has become the centre that lifts the spirits and boosts the morale of the masses, in these times when apathy and despondency have set down deep roots.*

Thus, with the greatest of sacrifices, the Jewish workers and Jewish youth held high the flag of the People of the Book to the last breath of their lives – because Herszl Lypszyc, the poorest child of the poor Jewish masses, in whose cellar home there was nothing but bare hay mattresses on which to sleep, also perished among all the martyrs of Jewish Częstochowa.

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To the libraries in Częstochowa must be also added:

- the library and reading room of the Craftsmen’s Club, which was partly founded by Henryk Markusfeld;
- the Crafts School’s Adolf Bryl Library;
- the botanical library at the Horticultural Farm;
- the I.L. Peretz primary school pupils’ own children’s library.

The *Vereinigte* and “General Workers Cooperative Bund” cooperatives also had bookselling departments.

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