



[Preface]

The history of every large, Jewish, urban community in Poland reflects, in miniature, the most important aspects of the development of the great [?<sup>1</sup>] and creative Jewish group that, before the Catastrophe, was famed as Polish Jewry. Already, for that reason alone - that of enriching and deepening our knowledge of the history of the Polish Jewry, which constituted the greater part of bygone Eastern European Jewry - each new historical monograph, on a prominent Jewish community in Poland, is an achievement of very great importance, not only for Jewish history/science, but also for the historical and consequently national and cultural awareness of the Jewish People throughout the globe.

A history of a Jewish community in Poland is, however, also something more than a restricted typical fragment of the history of the country's community. Each community was *a City and a Mother in Israel* [2 Samuel 20:19], not only in the traditional sense of this fine title, but precisely due to its particular significance and role in Jewish people's lives. Each community possessed its own fully formed individuality, which was a product of a unique, specific development over the course of long generations.

The *Częstochower* Jewish community shared in the suffering and joys, the fight for existence and the struggle for the cultural advancement of the entire mother-community in Poland. With that, it nevertheless also possessed its own characteristic physiognomy, its unique charm and its proud awareness of its own great achievements. Although much smaller than the Jewish community in Łódź (the second largest Jewish community in Poland), it displayed so many similar aspects in its historical development and in its socio-economic and cultural structure, that it may rightly be dubbed "Little Łódź". Even as late as the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Łódź barely had one Jewish family of leaseholders and by 1931 it was a community of more than 200,000 Jewish souls. Częstochowa, at the end of the period of Old Poland<sup>2</sup>, housed just seven Jewish families and, on the eve of the Second World War, there was a robust community of nearly 30,000 souls there.

In Częstochowa, as in Łódź, the Jewish population grew along with the city's industrial advancement and it constituted in a large proportion of factory workers. [Neither of] both these relatively young communities could refer to any pedigree of ancient synagogues and study-halls, prodigies in Torah and leaders in Chassidism. They could, however, boast of the wonderful achievements of the Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup> [TN: דערניקן in the Yiddish original; we have as yet been unable to ascertain the meaning of this word – it is perhaps a misprint.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Ref. to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which ceased to exist in 1795, whereupon Poland was divided among Germany, Austria and Russia, and did not exist as an independent state again until 1918.]

entrepreneurial spirit, financial initiative and energy and of the impressive accomplishments of the Jewish labourers and men of the people in the realm of the occupational and political struggle, just as in the realm of modern Jewish cultural institutions. However, due to the fact that Częstochowa was a “Little Łódź” and not a “Big Łódź”, it combined the uniqueness and positive points of an industrial centre with the familiarity and the warm, intimate atmosphere of a medium-sized Jewish community. Its geographical position on the German border also meant that the *Częstochower* Jews were, as a rule, more enlightened than the Jews in other medium-sized Jewish communities in Poland. Above all, Częstochowa, as a Jewish community in an industrial city of medium proportions, was one-of-a-kind amongst Polish Jewry.

The first hundred years of the history of the Jews in Częstochowa are one [long] chain of stubborn, courageous grappling with legal decrees for the right to live and to reside in the city. In Old Poland, the small Jewish community in Częstochowa, a “*przykahatek*” [small subordinate *kehilla*] of the neighbouring mother-*Kehilla* of Janów, defended the first positions against the feudal, clerical monarchy and the municipal administration which, by law, did not allow Jews to settle in town near the “Bright Mountain” [Jasna Góra]. Under Prussian occupation, a ghetto was already authorised for the Jews in Częstochowa, although the poor “beggar-Jews” were forced to continue employing devices of every kind in order not to be thrown out of the town for being a “useless element”. In the semi-feudal Kingdom of Poland, the ghetto in Częstochowa, just like in an array of other Polish cities, was referred to with the better-sounding name of “Jewish District” and, apart from a few wealthy individuals, the Jewish populace was squeezed into a few narrow and filthy little streets.

With the reforms of Marquis [Aleksander] Wielopolski in 1862, a new era began for the Jews in Częstochowa, as in the whole of Poland. The fight for the right to live in the city ended, but the no less difficult struggle for financial existence, for a place in life, continued.

Reading the history of Jewish industry in Częstochowa, one is simply astounded. Without significant capital, without professional training [and] without any support, first from the tsarist and later from the Polish government, the Jews in the city built up almost all of its medium and small industry (the large factories belonged to foreign firms - mostly Belgian and French ones). Young Jewish men, who had received all their education in the study-hall and who, even as “manufacturers”, would still interrupt their work at sundown in order to go, with their Jewish workers, into the little *shule* to attend the afternoon and evening services, built up entire branches of new industries of toys and haberdashery, celluloid and paper, mirrors, paints and an array of others. The Jewish manufacturers, who had previously only “had a sniff” of a fair in Leipzig or a German factory, exported their wares not only throughout the whole of Russia, but even in the Balkans competed with German manufacturers. In contrast with Łódź, this industry was Jewish not solely due to its ownership. Jewish labourers, from the backstreets of the River Street and the Meat-market Street, the Potters Street and the Goats Street<sup>3</sup>, had their share in this impressive industrial advancement, with their toil and sweat, and with their practical knowledge and experience - no less than the Jewish entrepreneurs with their initiative and agility. Toiling arduously from dawn to late in the evening, twelve to fourteen hours a day, men, women and even children, who barely reached the workbench, built up working positions for themselves and the city’s entire working class. More than one Jewish manufacturer, who became rich from Jewish labour, later closed the doors of his factory to Jewish workers. Thus, even in this substantial industrial centre, the greatest part of the Jewish workforce was squeezed into the traditional Jewish professions of tailors, hatters and cap-makers, cobblers, butchers and bakers.

Under the layer of modern, capitalistic industry and wholesale trade, the old *shtetl*, with its colourful, old-fashioned physiognomy, still remained almost untouched. Chaim-Lajb Szwarc’s

---

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Ul. Nadrzeczna, Targowa, Garnczarska and Kozia, respectively.]

description<sup>4</sup> of the New Market [Nowy Rynek] in Częstochowa, on the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - with the Jewish used clothes dealers, fruit sellers and little herring and grains shops, with the Market Day stalls on Tuesdays with earthenware pots, dishes, baskets, trunks, beds, cupboards, lime, rope, pasta boards [and] graters, with paint shops, fine fabrics and haberdashery, Jews with handcarts and package couriers – reminds one of the description of the fair in Sholem Asch's *A Shtetl*, just like his lemonade vendors - the Kopels, Szaja "Stopa" [Foot] and Nuchem-Jankel are the physical brothers of Sholem Aleichem's *Motl, Peysi the Cantor's [Son]*. A world with energy and lust for life was teeming in the *petit bourgeois* mass of shopkeepers, traders and craftsmen.

The awakener, the organiser and the leader of the Jewish masses, both in the realms of economics and politics, and in the cultural realm was in Częstochowa - as everywhere in Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine - the Jewish working class. Despite the fact that the Jewish workforce was split up into small factories and workshops, and perhaps precisely due to its abnormally long and difficult oppression as a nation, it showed more revolutionary spirit and fighting energy than the surrounding well-established proletariat. Having been prepared by persistent, systematic instructional work at illegal discussion meetings in the woods and at the cemetery, in the synagogue and in the tearoom - the Częstochowa Jewish working class, in the revolutionary years 1905-1906, emerged as the recognised, supreme leader of the Jewish masses in the city. The Jewish workers played a very important role in the battle against Tsarism, not only through systematic political instruction, but also by the organised fight against the police (terrorist bombings) and their underworld aides and abettors.

A unique aspect of the Jewish Socialist Movement in Częstochowa was the predominance of the SS [Zionist Socialists] (Territorialists), which lasted until the end of the First World War. In his sketch about the SS Party, A. Chrobolowski very cleverly remarks that this party's relative strength in Częstochowa was not just because it happened to have a series of [good] leaders there, such as Dr Aron Singalowski and Dr Józef Kruk. Częstochowa's geographical location was a more important factor here. As a border city and as an important point for the transit of emigrants, it had the favourable conditions for the growth of the workers' party, which put precisely the regulation of emigration at the centre of its program on the Jewish question.

Following the failure of the 1905 revolution, the political and professional movement of the Jewish workers' parties (SS, Poalei Zion and the Bund) in Częstochowa, just like everywhere else in Poland, was diminished. As a result, however, during that period, all the legal possibilities for cultural work were put to use. The Jewish Literary Society, which merged in 1911 with *Lira*, with the combined forces of Labour activists and democratic Zionist intelligentsia, conducted cultural work that is worthy of being cited as an example of the advancement of secular Jewish culture in Poland. A drama section, a choir and a sports circle, public talks by prominent lecturers (I.L. Peretz) and the first public Jewish library - this is the manner in which modern Jewish culture was built in Poland, whilst still under the yoke of Tsarism. An important cultural achievement was also the local Jewish press, which began to appear before the First World War, as an organ for the fight against assimilation and to make the Jewish masses turn to productive labour.

Thanks to the local Jewish community's high state of enlightenment, Częstochowa was also one of the rare Jewish communities which were not content with preaching productivity, but in fact did significant [things] in this field. The Horticultural School (Farm) and the Crafts School, which were established back on the threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, educated dozens of experienced farmers, locksmiths, carpenters and wheelwrights. After the First World War, many graduates of these two schools emigrated to the Land of Israel and, with their professional knowledge, helped build the Jewish country.

---

<sup>4</sup> [TN: See his article "Częstochowa Becomes a City" below, on pp.32-46.]

The institution of philanthropy is rightly [considered] a compromise in society. That said, the *Częstochowa Dobroczynność* (Polish word for "charity") serves as a positive example of the things that Jewish communal self-help, initiative and energy would accomplish. Besides organising emergency aid, an aged care home and an orphanage, this same society, in 1913, also built a hospital, which was a model, with its cutting-edge facilities and departments for all fields of medicine.

Thus Jewish *Częstochowa* fought, built and created under the yoke of Tsarism, until the First World War.

The First World War and the German occupation brought extraordinary misery and need upon the Jewish populace in *Częstochowa*. Once again, the local Jewish workforce emerged as the most active and most responsible force in Jewish communal life. Taking advantage of the new legal possibilities, professional unions of various branches of industry were established. The workers' parties were also those who organised self-help institutions for the Jewish masses, such as public soup kitchens, a bakery [and] a children's home, and which developed cultural work around the newly-founded lecture hall.

In aristocratic-capitalist Poland, the state of the Jewish masses was determined by the country's changed political and economic conditions. Legally, Jews in Poland were citizens with equal rights. Indeed, we see in *Częstochowa*, too, how in the altered legal conditions a strong and broadened professional organisation developed. The middle class organised in the solid Craftsmen's Club. A school system is built, with two kindergartens, two primary schools, evening courses for workers, and a Hebrew-Polish *gimnazjum* [high school]. A large Jewish library grew and the Jewish Sports Movement spread.

However, despite the fact that the Jews' lack of rights had formally ended, the difficult financial situation. First and foremost, the antisemitic reactionaries in the country bore down on the Jewish population much more painfully than in the times of Tsarism. In Tsarist days, especially since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fresh wind of the approaching liberation was felt. In "Independent" Poland, one watched with concern and unease how the [right-wing] reaction was progressively intensifying from year to year. That is why, even though in quantity Jewish social and cultural life branched out and expanded, the work lacked the impetus and self-confidence that had been present before the First World War. As the financial need deepened and the political reaction became more acute, Jewish cultural life also diminished in quantity. Suffice it to state that, in the last years leading up to the Second World War, of the Jewish scholastic system in the Yiddish language in *Częstochowa*, they barely managed, with great self-sacrifice, to maintain *one* kindergarten.

The pogroms which *Częstochowa* Jews has experienced - the pogrom of 1919, which heralded, as it were, the brutal antisemitic trajectory of the newly-founded Polish State and the second one in 1937, which already cast the black shadow of Hitler's impending devastation - serve as a kind of mournful symbol of the condition of the Jews in the whole of Poland in the period between the two World Wars.

The brightest period in the history of the Jews in *Częstochowa*, as throughout Poland, over the course of these twenty years, is the extraordinary activity in the political arena. With the growth in the national awareness of the Jewish bourgeoisie and particularly that of the *petite bourgeoisie*, the Zionist Movement spread wide and gained strength. The Jewish workforce's awareness of class [distinctions] grew in no smaller measure, which found an expression in the movements of the proletarian parties.

The former SS, re-organised as "*Vereinigte*" [United] and, later, as "Independent Socialist", lost their former positions even more. In 1938, they were [finally] dissolved by the government. The Jewish workforce's strongest parties were the Bund and the Communists. The left-wing *Poalei Zion*, the *Ha'Chalutz* Movement and *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* - which reigned as the broader circles of Jewish youth - developed as a bridge between Zionism and Socialism. With its blood, Częstochowa Jewish youth wrote a page of the highest human idealism. Dozens of Jewish socialists and communists languished for long years in Polish prisons for their fight for the liberation of the Jewish and the Polish nations. More than one *Częstochower* youth gave his life away in the fields of Spain in battle against Franco's fascist Falangists. In that same period, numerous dozens of young people from Częstochowa set forth to the Land of Israel and, with their sweat and blood, drained swamps, irrigated deserts and hewed out roads, in order to set the Jewish People's old-new home on its path. All of these - the *Chalutzim* [Pioneers] and *Shomrim* [Jewish Scouts], rightist and leftist *Poalei Zion*, Bundists and Communists - later joined hands together against the deadly foe during the black hour of Hitler's extermination and, together, they fell in the heroic fight for the honour of the Jewish People.



A book about Jewish Częstochowa would not be complete, unless it included a report on the activity of the *Częstochowers* throughout the entire globe. The feeling of connectedness with one's hometown is particularly strong among the *Częstochowers* and, to wherever they emigrated, they organised themselves as a group, with the primary goal of coming to the aid of their brothers and sisters in Poland. In the Land of Israel, the majority of the almost 2,000 local *Częstochowers* are organised into an "*irgun*" [organisation] of their own. In faraway Argentina, an association of *Częstochower landsleit* has already been active for two decades. Here, in North America, the *Częstochower* organisation of *landsmannschaften* is so strongly consolidated and active in such a lively manner, that it may [well] serve as a model for other organisations of the same character.

The Jewish Community of Częstochowa shared the horrific fate as did the entire Polish Jewry. There, where during two centuries the Częstochowa Jewish community laboured, fought and created - ruins sown with ash and blackened bricks, burnt all around, spread forth today. Fifty thousand Jews of Częstochowa and the little *shtetls* all around breathed their last breaths in the hell-ovens of Auschwitz and Treblinka. The chapters regarding the fearsome dying throes of the Jewish community in Częstochowa, which have been compiled in this book, constitute an important contribution to the history of Jewish martyrdom under the Nazis. Using the same vile system as in every large Jewish community in Eastern Europe, using the same demonic plan that the Germans carried out in Warsaw and in Łódź, in Białystok and in Wilno, in Kowno and in Lemberg [Lwów], they gradually wore down the Jewish community in Częstochowa - first with hunger, torment and yellow patches. The second stage was to incarcerate all the Jews in a huge ghetto-prison. Then the ghetto was liquidated and a "Small Ghetto" was left behind, in order to squeeze the last working forces from the starving martyrs. The last act was the annihilation of the remaining ghetto.

The history of the destruction of the Częstochowa Jews is, however, not solely a scroll of blood and tears - but an epic of Jewish heroism. Częstochowa Jews have proven [well] that they are the worthy brethren of the immortal Jewish heroes of the ghetto uprisings in Warsaw and Białystok. The fighting force of the sons and daughters of Jewish Częstochowa was unbreakable.

The Jews of Częstochowa have not only written an important chapter in the history of the Polish Jewry but, through their heroic fight against the Nazis, they have immortalised themselves in the history of the Jewish People in general.

It is the wish of all of us, that the small Surviving Remnant of Jews in Częstochowa, who show such energy and selflessness in rebuilding their financial and cultural positions, should be able to hold back the wave of antisemitism, which is trying to flood the new Poland in Jewish blood. May they live to experience joyful times in Poland and not need to abandon their hometown, [thus] washing away any traces of a Jewish community in Częstochowa. But whatever the fate of a renewed Jewish community in Częstochowa may be, the spirit of the two-hundred-year-old Jewish history in the hometown cannot go to waste for *Częstochowers*. The history of their own hometown must become, for *Częstochowers* throughout the entire globe, a source of inspiration [and] a reservoir of strength in the battle for a happy Jewish nation in a liberated world.

**Dr Raphael Mahler**