

DANKOWICZ Szymon Herszlik (1834-1910), Jewish lexicographer and Hebrew philologist, the first Jewish folklorist, a rabbi and teacher. He was born on 28th February 1834 in Częstochowa, the son of Jakub (1809-1886), a guild clothier, and Perla (1816-1880), a midwife. Szymon was the eldest of six children: four sisters - Sora Bina (1836-), twins Maria and Rywka (1840-), Estera (1844-) and a brother Zanwel (1845 - 7th February 1927 Częstochowa). His grandfather Samuel (-1839 Częstochowa) and grandmother Salka (-1847 Częstochowa) were connected with Częstochowa.

Dankowicz graduated from the public elementary school in Częstochowa and, later, was a student at a district school outside of Częstochowa, perhaps in Wrocław. There, he began studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary (*Das Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar - Fränkelscher Stiftung*), opened in 1854. He belonged to the first group of graduates from that institution. (One of this institution's main tasks was to reconcile religion with modern life.) From there, he was convinced that it was possible to modernise Judaism, but that it must be in accordance with tradition. Students at the Seminary were required to undertake additional university studies and Dankowicz probably took up studying at the University of Wrocław.

He did not complete the seven years of study at the Seminary, but he received a recommendation from Seminary Director, Zachariasz Frankl, to take up a teaching position at the Rabbinical School in Warsaw – he lectured in theology there from 1859 or 1860. The school was closed in 1862. In 1862, in Warsaw, he published a Polish translation of Peter Beer's book *Toldot Israel – A History of the Jews*, one of the most important textbooks of *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment). In the introduction, he emphasised that the Polish language is more appropriate for teaching religion than the Yiddish language used thus far.

It was probably during this period that he received his *smicha* (rabbinical ordination) from Rabbi Ber Meisels. In 1865, he unsuccessfully applied for the position of preacher at the progressive synagogue on ul. Daniłowiczowska in Warsaw. Upon his arrival in Warsaw, he began studying at the Medical-Surgical Academy. When the Academy was incorporated into the *Szkola Główna*, he interrupted his medical studies. In 1862, he moved to the Faculty of Philology and History. It was probably in 1865 that he received a scholarship from the Warsaw *Lomdei Torah* society and he left to study in Berlin. He graduated from the *Szkola Główna* in 1867 and, on 27th April 1867, he received his Master's

degree on the basis of his thesis “On the Influence of Avesta¹ on the Culture of Semitic Peoples”.

During his time in Warsaw, Dankowicz participated in the meetings of the “salon of young Jewish intellectuals” in the Toeplitz home. A current of polonisation was very clear in the “salon” but, within it, Dankowicz represented the right-wing, strongly attached to Judaism. In a paper written in 1860, he stated that the Jews were a separate nation. It was one of the first voices with a Zionist tone, not just within the country. In 1862, in response to an appeal to collect Jewish proverbs and to publish them, he worked with → Daniel Neufeld’s “Jutrzenka”. There, he also published three parts of his own collection of proverbs.

He was accused of referring to Jews as a nation and not as a minority, and of promoting the Yiddish language (then considered as jargon), which Dankowicz officially denied. The project, which he initiated, failed due to resistance from the progressive Jewish quarter. However, Dankowicz became one of the pioneers of Jewish ethnography in Central and Eastern Europe. He worked with the “*Izraelita*” periodical dates back to 1867.

After graduating, he left for Kraków. In January 1868 (after a Polish language test), he was employed, on contract until 15th January 1871, as rabbi of the progressive Tempel Synagogue. He became an object of attacks - his choice not being recognised by the Orthodox Jewish Committee. His salary was withheld, but was then paid from private funds. Dankowicz’s greatest success was a sermon delivered on 8th July 1869 at the reburial ceremony of the remains of King Kazimierz Wielki (Kazimierz the Great). He called the Jews “a part of the Polish nation” and called for understanding between the Jewish and Christian communities. The sermon was printed and the proceeds from its sale was applied towards the coffin and the renovation of the royal monument.

From 1868, he gave free Polish lessons to adult Jews. He was a teacher of religion in several schools. In 1869-72, he was director of *Szkoła Główna Izraelicka* [Main Israelite School] in Kazimierz, where he introduced Polish as the language of instruction. From 1869, he worked as a full-time teacher of religion in Kraków high schools. From 1872, he also taught at the Male Teachers’ Seminary. He resigned from these positions in 1875.

¹ [TN: *Avesta* is a sacred book of Zoroastrianism containing its cosmogony, law, and liturgy - the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster (Zarathushtra).

In 1875, he published his own textbook entitled *Dzieje biblijne ułożone na podstawie pierwotworu Pisma św.* During the summer semester of the 1968/69 academic year, he studied in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University. He did not continue these studies yet, from 1869, he used the title of “Doctor”. In the autumn of 1875, he took up the position of rabbi in Świecie (Schwetzen) in the Prussian partition, in 1879 w Międzychodzie (Birnbaum) and in 1883 in Strakonice in the south of the Czech Republic.

From 1888, he served as Chief Rabbi of Bulgaria, based in Sofia. The expiration date of his contract coincided with his trial for insulting the Christian population. Despite being acquitted, [his contract was not renewed and] he was dismissed. He left Sofia in the spring of 1892 but, for at least a year, his family was already living in Vienna. In 1897, he moved to Tarnopol, probably on his own. He worked as a preacher-rabbi in the progressive synagogue and as headmaster of a four-grade Jewish school. In 1899, he returned to Vienna.

His contemporaries described Dankowicz as being of “above average height, being broad shouldered, with a massive neck, a face more square than oval, small eyes hidden behind large dark glasses, a short beard and bald”. His gestures were “cold, heavy, a little awkward – without any livelier movement, without a warm or friendly word”. He had extensive general knowledge and, to a lesser degree, religious knowledge. He spoke several languages, but struggled to win the sympathy of his fellow Jews. Progressive deafness (from at least 1888) hampered him and later prevented him from working. From April 1910, he was in Dr. Fürth’s sanatorium in Vienna, where he died of pneumonia on 8th May in that same year. He was buried in Zentralfriedhof in Vienna (Jewish section, group 50, row 43, grave No. 90).

His wife (from circa 1870) was Maria Schermesser (13th November 1846 Brody – 24th April 1910 Vienna). In Kraków, they had daughters Rozalia (1871-), Cecylia (1872-) and Helena (1874-). In Świecie, they had sons Filip Samuel (2nd May 1877 – 5th March 1898 Vienna) and Zygfryd Fritz (15th April 1878) who, in 1897-1902, studied in the Law Faculty of Vienna University (he only received his degree in 1905). He worked as a bank clerk. The father’s obituary also lists Paula Dankowicz, probably the youngest of the children. Their daughter Rosa (Rozalia) Minzes, the widow of an editor, also lived in Vienna. Cecylia, married → Michał Hertz and → Helena Wierzbicka lived in Częstochowa

Corpus studiosorum (A–D), p. 721; PSB, vol. IV, (M. Bałaban), p. 422. – J. Szacki, *Jidn in Czenstochow bis cu der erszter welt-milchome*, w: *Czenstochower Jidn*, pp. 17–18; Z. Borzy-

mińska, *Szkolnictwo żydowskie w Warszawie 1831–1870*, Warsaw 1994, pp. 93, 94; A. Maślak-Maciejewska, *Rabin Szymon Dankowicz (1834–1910) - życie i działalność*, Kraków 2013.

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