

Bridges of Reconciliation

*"I am building bridges of reconciliation. I have been able to accumulate funds which enable me to erect them. Bridges enable my children and grandchildren, as well as Jewish and Polish youth to meet together, during which they become acquainted with the history and multicultural traditions of the Polish state. We lived here, together fated to good times and bad. Here, Jews fought for Poland. They were the driving force behind the development of factories and culture. The traces of this past deserve to be remembered and respected."*¹

A growing interest in Jewish topics coincided with the revival of Polish-Jewish relations which began at the beginning of the 1990s. A factor of significant importance, which influenced this state of affairs was, of course, the change in the political system of Poland, which occurred in 1989. It also meant that, since the break in 1967, diplomatic relations were re-established between Poland and Israel.²

As the result of these political changes, [the system] of local government was reactivated in Poland. In retrospect, it turned out that this was very important in supporting Jewish activities, which aimed at perpetuating the memory of the history of Jews in Poland. It was, in fact, local government and various circles representing the Jewish community which found "a common language" the fastest and which undertook joint activities and initiatives.

It was no different in Częstochowa. From 1990, regardless of which political "flavour" was in power in the city, there was a respect for the centuries-old presence of Jews in the city. It was a respect for cultural, traditional and socio-economic achievements. There was also a sensitivity towards their contemporary initiatives, all of which were of important value to the communal life of Częstochowa residents. One of the important elements in the maintenance of partnership relations with the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ.³

The TSKŻ entered a period of transformation into an independent organisation, no longer subject to any higher authority. The branch elected a new board, which was basically the same as the old board. Halina Wasilewicz became Chairperson of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.⁴ Independence for the TSKŻ meant that it needed to increase its own income in order to carry out its statutory activities. Although the Ministry of Culture and Art⁵ provided subsidies, they

¹ Excerpt from a statement by Zygmunt Rolat, [in:] C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 110.

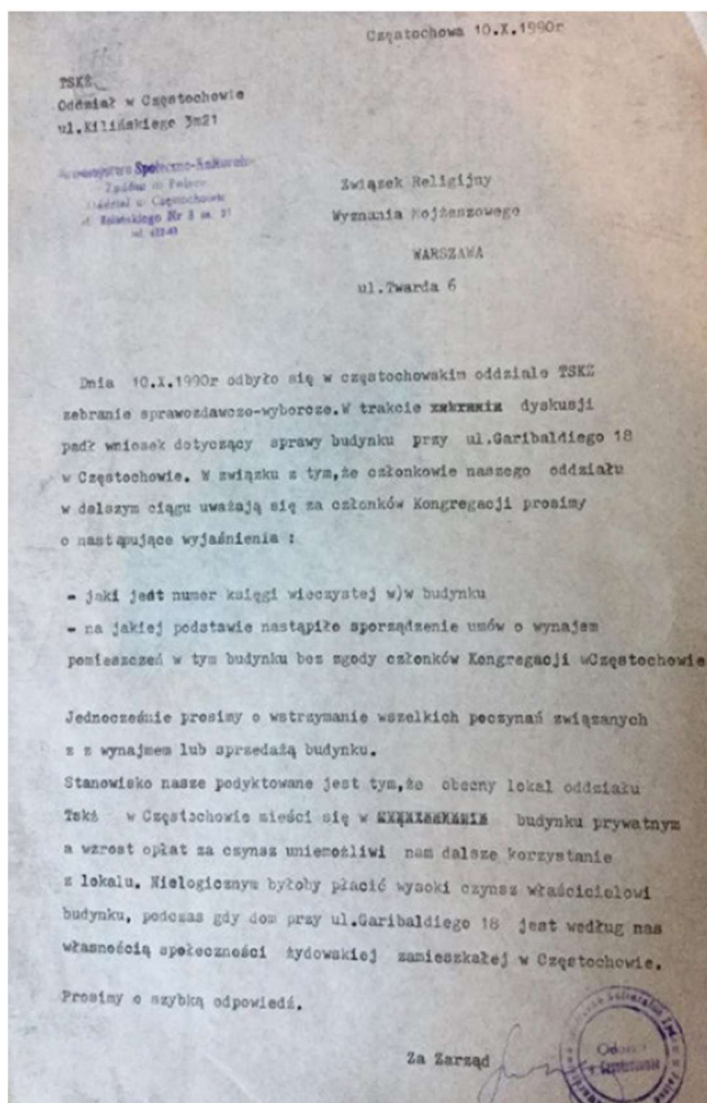
² Relations began to improve visibly in the mid-1980s. From 1986, an office operated in Tel Aviv in the interests of the Polish People's Republic. In 1992, the Israeli President, Chaim Herzog, visited Poland and, in April of the following year, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin attended the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 407–409.

³ Despite the political changes which, after 1989, resulted in the establishment of over a dozen new Jewish organisations, mainstream Jewish life is focused on organisations which bring Orthodox Jews together and, of course, the TSKŻ. For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 419.

⁴ Based on the documents collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

⁵ It is now known as the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

were specific subsidies for specific activities, many concerning the organisation of events for Jewish holidays. What was clear, they did not cover all the costs. Unfortunately, from year to year, these subsidies became smaller, not larger.



Letter from the Czestochowa TSKŻ to ZWRM,
regarding the suspension of the sale of the mikvah building, 1990
Source: the document collection of the Czestochowa TSKŻ

The TSKŻ's situation was somewhat saved by transfers of funds from the JOINT. In the first half of the 1990s, the JOINT covered approximately 30-40% of the expense budget allocated towards statutory activities, costs allocated to activities aimed at youth and children, as well as for the organisation of local events for Jewish holidays.⁶ The activity of the local structures largely depended upon the financial capabilities of the [TSKŻ] Central Office.

Meanwhile, the TSKŻ's financial problems caused delays and reductions in planned subsidies for local branches.⁷ It is no wonder that the Czestochowa branch sent requests, to the City Council for a reduction in the rent on the premises which the branch used as its headquarters.

At the beginning of the 1990s, a battle began to determine the rights, of the TSKŻ, to the building located at ul. Garibaldi 18.⁸

⁶ Source: Audit committee report on the activities of the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland in the years 1991-1995, archive copy.

⁷ Source: Audit committee report on the activities of the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland in the years 1991-1995, archive copy.

⁸ These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. Even before the June 1989 elections, the Sejm passed the "May regulations", which ended the conduct, by the Polish authorities, of policies regarding religion. In practice, this meant the end of state control and interference in church matters, allowing them to operate freely. Naturally, this also contributed to the revival of Jewish religious life, which was supervised by the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith [MRWM] which, in 1991, was renamed the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (ZGWŻ). Then, following the example as laid out by the Catholic Church,

This was a pre-War *mikveh* [ritual bath] run by the Congregation. The problem was that the Congregation in Częstochowa remain only as a memory, but many people appeared, who had an appetite for real estate. In any case, issues relating to the restitution of Jewish property remained in the public forum for many years. To this day, in principle, they have not been fully and legally resolved.

So, the Jews of Częstochowa had something to discuss at their meetings. But their problems were not the only things on their minds. There was a clear improvement in the atmosphere surrounding Jewish issues, as well as a growing interest in topics relating to the lives and contributions of Jews to the development of Częstochowa. An important element of these ongoing changes was an academic symposium, organised in April 1991, which was devoted to the Jewish community of the Częstochowa region during the inter-war period.



Advertising poster for the symposium on the Jewish community of the Częstochowa region during the inter-war period, 1991

Source: private collection J. Mizgalski

the ZGWŻ declared itself to be the successor of pre-War Jewish communities and demanded the return of Jewish property from the State Treasury. Following the 1997 regulations, this resulted in a significant enrichment of the organisation, which is now divided into nine *gmin* (community councils), as independent legal entities, with nine branches. The situation of Jews in Poland was more precisely defined in February 1997, when the Sejm of the Third Polish Republic (SLD-PSL coalition), passed legislation regarding the State's relations with Jewish Religious Communities. The document guaranteed broad autonomy to the ZGWŻ in the running of its own schools, the possibility of conducting charitable activities, with broad customs and tax relief. It also guaranteed its members exemption from work of study during the Sabbath (Saturday) and on major Jewish holidays. The legislation also allowed for the return of real estate owned by Jewish communities as at 1st September 1939. For more, see: <http://www.swietokrzyskisztetl.pl> (accessed 2nd June 2020).

The symposium was organised by a group of academics associated with the Higher School of Pedagogy in Częstochowa,⁹ and was also joined by academics from Katowice. It was actually Janusz Lipiec, Zbigniew Jakubowski and Jerzy Mizgalski, from Częstochowa, who provided the first impulse for academic research into the history and role, over the centuries, of the Jewish community in the life of Częstochowa. In their activities, they proceeded with a simple conviction – telling the truth about the life of the Jewish community in Poland, before the Holocaust, was an obligation to the Jews who had survived the hell of World War II. The work, that was initiated then, continues to this day.

The accession to the papal throne of a Pole, who had witnessed the tragedy of the Holocaust of the Jews, was of great importance in terms of a certain normalisation in Polish-Jewish relations and, therefore, on the situation of Jews in Poland. John Paul II condemned antisemitism. On 13th April 1986, he visited the Great Synagogue in Rome and on 20th-26th March 2000, he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. These gestures cemented the mutual relationship between the two religions.

They also had an impact for positive changes in the attitude of Polish society, especially that of the younger generation, towards their “elder brothers in faith”. Antisemitism gradually gave way to a growing interest in Jewish religion, culture and tradition.

Also, Jews who had emigrated, observing the changes taking place, began to open mutual contacts more willingly. Częstochowa was, again, at the forefront here. Through the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel, which was then chaired by A. Edelist, contacts were established with Częstochowa residents who had Jewish origins. These contacts resulted in numerous initiatives aimed at commemorating the presence of Częstochowa Jews in the social life of our city.

The development of Polish-Jewish dialogue was also supported by official visits of Israeli state authorities to Częstochowa, such as the meeting, on 27th November 1991, of Częstochowa Mayor Tadeusz Wrona with the Israeli Ambassador to Poland Miron Gordon. The spectrum of issues, raised at that time, was very broad, from issues related to the functioning of the Jewish community in Częstochowa and the restoration of the Jewish cemetery, to the possibility of confirming partnership agreements with Israel cities (particularly Nazareth).¹⁰ Such meetings were used not only to exchange pleasantries and good wishes, but also resulted in specific activities.¹¹

Already in 1991, at the initiative of the Theory and History of Culture Group, of the Higher School of Education in Częstochowa, as well as the Research Group of the History and Culture of the Jews of the Częstochowa Region, an academic session took place – it was entitled *Poles – Jews – The Richness of the Common Heritage – the Reconstruction of Memory*. It was designed for a broader understanding of Jewish culture.¹²

In the spring of 1992, the Częstochowa City Council and the Foundation for the Reconstruction of the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery and Preservation of Jewish Cultural Heritage Sites

⁹ Now, the Częstochowa University of Humanities and Natural Sciences.

¹⁰ And also, Bethlehem.

¹¹ For more, see: “Nasza Częstochowa. Miesięcznik Urzędu Miasta Częstochowy” 1992, No. 1, p. 3.

¹² For more, see: *ibidem*, p. 5.

undertook activities aimed at commemorating, in a special manner, places relating to the life and martyrdom of the Jewish population of Częstochowa. As a result, numerous commemorative plaques were installed.

On 9th April 1992, a plaque, by sculptor Jerzy Kędziora, was placed on the wall of the Dr. Ludwik Rydygier Hospital. Probably few Częstochowa residents remember that the Rydygier Hospital, which has been serving the Częstochowa community for years, was built with contributions from the Jewish population. The Hospital Construction Committee was headed by well-known social activist and philanthropist, Henryk Markusfeld, who was the initiator for the creation of many charitable facilities and organisations in Częstochowa. The inscription on the plaque reads:

"This hospital was built between 1903 and 1913, at the initiative of the Jewish Charitable Association and the Częstochowa Jewish community. The official opening of the hospital took place on 16th November 1913. During the years of German occupation, 1939–1945, staff and doctors, with few exceptions, were murdered by the Nazis."

On that same day, 9th April 1992, a commemorative plaque, by sculptor Maciej Kędziora, was hung on the building of the Częstochowa Philharmonic on ul. Wilsona. We recall that the Częstochowa Philharmonic building was erected on the foundations of the pre-War synagogue, which was destroyed by the German fascists. Until 1939, the Częstochowa synagogue, on the then named ul. Aleksandra, was one of the most impressive architectural structures of its type in Poland. German barbarism is recalled within the inscription of the plaque in Polish, English, Hebrew and Yiddish. It reads:

"The 'New Synagogue' was erected on this site. On 25th December 1939, it was burned down by Nazi barbarians. This act was the beginning of the extermination of Jews in Częstochowa. The State Philharmonic building was constructed on the remains of the 'New Synagogue'".

The installation of these plaques was also a success for the members of the Częstochowa TSKŻ. They had been endeavouring to do this over many years, as evidenced by letters sent to the Częstochowa Provincial Governor [*wojewoda*] back in the 1980s.¹³ It must be said that the guardians of the Jewish presence in Częstochowa were not disappointed in this matter either. They must have been bursting with pride and joy on that day.

This was because the unveiling of the plaques was connected with a solemn ceremony in which, apart from municipal authorities and representatives of the local Jewish community, other participants included the Israeli Ambassador to Poland, Miron Gordon, the Director General of the Office of Religious Affairs of the Office of the Council of Ministers, Marek Pernal, Częstochowa Jews from abroad, as well as representatives of the Foundation for the Reconstruction of the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery, headed by Arye Edelist from Israel. There were hugs, joy and speeches.

The Israeli Ambassador to Poland said,

¹³ Based on the documents collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

*"We have a long, shared history and, without it, today, we cannot build. I would like us to remember this day as the beginning of building better relations."*¹⁴

The Mayor of Częstochowa expressed the hope that:

*"this event will not only be a symbolic history lesson, but will also be a gesture of mutual understanding and reconciliation."*¹⁵

Unfortunately, despite the solemnity of the moment, there was an unpleasant incident. A group of young people could not understand the importance of the events which were taking place and, during the ceremony, to put it mildly, they behaved inappropriately.

That incident reminded everyone that efforts, to create a new quality of perception of each other, had only just begun. The basis of understanding was to get to know each other. Among events to facilitate this were a "Culture of Polish Jews" exhibition organised, at the time, by the Częstochowa Regional Museum, as well as a performance of "An Enchanted World – Chagall" at the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw.¹⁶

The initial ice had been broken – the good streak had to be continued. One of the reasons for this were the joint commemorations, by Poles and Jews, of important events and anniversaries. Among them was an event on 20th April 1993, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The event took place by a building on the Ghetto Heroes Square, during which a commemorative plaque was mounted in honour of the Jewish partisans fighting against the Nazi Germans. Participants in the event included the Chairman of the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel, Arye Edelist and Chairman of the Katowice Jewish Gmina, Feliks Lipman.

The trilingual plaque (in Polish, English and Hebrew) bears the inscription:

*"In memory of the Częstochowa Jews who were murdered by Nazi torturers and the heroes of the Jewish Combat Organisation, who died in battle against the German occupier in the years 1939–1945"*¹⁷

In that same year, municipal services cleaned up the mass graves, on ul. Kawia, of the murdered Jewish citizens of Częstochowa, with the city continuing to care for them.

On 10th June 1994, the Yad Vashem Institute of National Remembrance, in Jerusalem, honoured Częstochowa City Councillor, Bogdan Jastrzębski with the medal and [the title] of "*Righteous Among the Nations*".¹⁸

These were wonderful, solemn moments. Meanwhile, on a regular basis, the Jews of Częstochowa continued meeting in the club at the TSKŻ. Club activities included lectures,

¹⁴ Based on the authors' private collections.

¹⁵ Based on the authors' private collections.

¹⁶ *Nasza Częstochowa - Miesięcznik Urzędu Miasta Częstochowy* 1992, No. 5, p. 12; 1992, No. 6, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Nasza Częstochowa - Miesięcznik Urzędu Miasta Częstochowy* 1992, No. 5, p. 12; 1993, No. 6, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Nasza Częstochowa - Miesięcznik Urzędu Miasta Częstochowy* 1994, No. 6/7, p. 9.

evenings with authors and with meetings with ŻIH activists.¹⁹ There were social gatherings, exchanges of views and mutual assistance. Lectures and celebrations of various kinds continued to be organised, with artists from Warsaw sometimes being invited for special performances.



Bogdan Jastrzębski (1925–2019)

Source <http://www.czystochowajews.org/bogdan-jastrzebski>

Of great concern to the Częstochowa Jews was the state of the cemetery. Unfortunately, a lack of funds did not allow for the cemetery to be properly cared for. The Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery is a typical necropolis of a thriving, industrial city. In a way, the cemetery is a reflection of the social structure of Częstochowa Jews.

That community was highly diverse in material terms, but also in tradition. This diversity is also reflected in the form of the tombstones. So, we can find traditional *matzevot* with Hebrew and Yiddish inscriptions. There are also those with Polish inscriptions. Apart from the typical *matzevot*, there are sophisticated tombstones - from columned through obelisks, to sarcophagi.

Despite *ad hoc* cleaning and restoration works, the state of the property was still very bad. Many *matzevot* were still broken or overturned. Lush vegetation made it difficult to recognise graves and to determine the names of those buried there. Easy access to the cemetery allowed for further devastation, which definitely worsened an already bad situation.

Inventory work, on the cemetery, was carried out several times. We have already mentioned the activities in 1970, during which a detailed plan of the cemetery was drawn up and which

¹⁹ ŻIH – the Emanuel Ringelblum Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (Jewish Historical Institute) – an institution, based in Warsaw, researching the history and culture of Jews in Poland. Between 1994 and 2008, it formally operated as a state-owned Research Institute, the only state-owned research institution in Poland relating to a national minority.

included the numbering of the graves. A list of graves, bearing Polish inscriptions, was also created.²⁰ In 1997, Benjamin Yaari took up the task of listing the *matzevot* in the cemetery, inviting a group of several dozen students from Israel to help him. It involved a huge amount of work - overturned *matzevot* were lifted, cleaned and listed. This was an extremely valuable initiative, although, unfortunately, not without errors, especially in its last element.²¹ As a result, a partial list of tombstones, found in the cemetery, was created²² but, in practice, locating a grave, according to the findings of Benjamin Yaari's team, is often impossible.



A view of the cemetery, after cleaning work, in 2019.
It shows the scale of difficulty in the proper management of this area.

Photograph: A. Goldman

The main problem with the cemetery was its lack of an owner. In the land register, the owner of the land was the Częstochowa Jewish Religious Community. The problem with that was that this *gmina* had not existed for a long time. Regulatory proceedings, in 2001, were initiated by the Regulatory Commission for Jewish Religious Communities in Warsaw. However, the issue of the takeover of the property by the Jewish Religious Community

²⁰ The description of the graves was prepared by Jan Wojciechowski, "*noting down everything that he could read*", but he did not notice all the graves with Polish inscriptions. For more, see: W. Paszkowski, *Cmentarz żydowski w Częstochowie*, Vol. I, Częstochowa 2012, p. 10.

²¹ It is difficult to carry out research work and to coordinate all the activities, when using volunteers who are unfamiliar (author).

²² For more, see: www.zchor.org. (accessed 2nd June 2020).

[*Gmina*] remained, for years, unresolved.²³ The city authorities did not take over the cemetery either. However, in accordance with the applicable regulations, of legislation concerning war graves and cemeteries, and the provisions of a 2007 agreement, between the Śląsk Province and the City of Częstochowa, the city takes constant care of the war graves located in both the cemetery and in the city itself.

Returning to the tombstones, the *matzevot*, recording and rescuing them, the work was continued as part of the “Gidonim” project. Groups of several dozen students, from the Reut School in Jerusalem and led by Dina Winer, have been continuing the inventory since 2008.²⁴

However, the greatest expert on the cemetery remains Wiesław Paszkowski. He is a staff member of the Częstochowa Museum, as well as, at the same time, being an enthusiast who, for years, has uncovered the secrets of the ivy-covered fate of Częstochowa Jews. Utilising the work of his predecessors and his own discoveries, he has created a most readable guide²⁵ to the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery. To this day, he helps to solve the particularly complicated cases.²⁶

We leave the cemetery for a while, although we will return to it later.

On 19th-21st September 2003, the First Congress of Częstochowa Citizens took place in Częstochowa. The Congress was conceived as a meeting of eminent individuals who, in various ways, were associated with the city. The Częstochowa Philharmonic was attended by people from all over the world – people who were respected and admired in their own communities, bringing honour to Częstochowa. The Jewish community was represented by Arye Edelist and Zygmunt Rolat.

In his speech, Arye Edelist, representing the Częstochowa *landmannschaft* in Israel, stated that, amongst Częstochowa Jews in Israel, sentiments towards their hometown were growing and deepening. In expressing thanks for the decision to commemorate places connected with the life and martyrdom of the Jewish population, he also appealed for the intensification of these activities. Edelist said,

“We want the city authorities and other institutions in Częstochowa to set themselves the task of preserving the remnants of Jewish culture which still remain in the city. This activity – the preservation of historical Jewish heritage sites and the preservation of the memory of the city’s Jewish population – should be the duty of the current population and the authorities in our city [...] We ask that you continue these efforts to

²³ Ownership of the property, upon which the cemetery is located, has not yet been settled. The Jewish *Gmina* in Katowice has always claimed that the area is not possible to be physically taken over and subsidised due to its size. For more, see: E. Zięba, *Na cmentarzu żydowskim – zginiesz!*, “Puls Regionu” 2012, no. 101–102.

²⁴ As part of the project, the mapping of the cemetery was completed in 2016. Alon Goldman, Vice-President of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, was very involved in the project’s last phase, organising funds, mobilising Częstochowa youth and members of the Matzeva Project (USA) to become involved. For more, see: <https://www.kidum-edu.org.il/en/the-gidonim-project-the-reut-school/> and <http://www.gidonim.com/galleries/galleries-2/cemeteries/czestochowa-cemetery/> (accessed 2nd June 2020).

²⁵ For more, see: W. Paszkowski, *Cmentarz...*, op. cit

²⁶ In 2020, he was the only person to, for example, determine the probable burial place of two young Jews - Szmul Rembak, aged 25, as well as Dawid Josef Gruszka, aged 38, who were murdered on 4th July 1946, while travelling on a train from Kielce to Częstochowa. Based on correspondence with Alon Goldman, Vice-President of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants.

*strengthen ties with Jews around the world, including Jews of future generations, with the city of their parents”.*²⁷



Arye Edelist

**From the collection
of J. Mizgalski**

Zygmunt Rolat also attended the First Congress of Częstochowa Citizens. Responding to an invitation to the Congress, this American businessman stated, among other things, that:

*“I was lucky enough, like millions before and after me, to see what America is and the possibilities which it offers. [...] My roots are here, in Częstochowa, and I am proud of them! Even more so, since my roots are both Polish and Jewish. [...] I am a Częstochowa Jew. I have the duty and honour to show my children and all young people a little-known part of the history of this unique place, which is Częstochowa. But I also ask that our common past be remembered with truth and dignity ...”.*²⁸

To this day, Zygmunt Rolat strives for a dignified and true presentation of the common Polish-Jewish past, as a foundation for building the future.

The first spectacular step along this road was the organisation of the exhibition entitled *The Jews of Częstochowa*.

²⁷ A transcription of A. Edelist's speech, [in:] *I Światowy Kongres Częstochowian 2003*. Post-Congress material, City of Częstochowa 2003, pp. 44–45.

²⁸ Excerpt from Z. Rolat's letter to the City of Częstochowa authorities, [in:] *I Światowy Kongres...*, op. cit., p. 9.

*"Beginning in 1989, I became a frequent visitor to my homeland and, on one visit to Częstochowa, I was offered a wonderful opportunity. Prof. Jerzy Mizgalski asked me for help in organising an exhibition containing original archival material, artifacts, photographs and multimedia presentations, which would present, for the first time, the long history of Jews in this city."*²⁹

The story of the organisation of the exhibition began at the beginning of the new millennium. It was then that the great-granddaughter of Chief Rabbi Nachum Asz, Prof. Elżbieta Mundlak-Zborowska, appeared in Częstochowa. Collecting material for a documentary film and information about her great-grandfather, she naturally contacted members of the TSKŻ, as well as academic staff of the Jan Długosz Academy (today, the Jan Długosz Humanities and Natural Sciences University). Jerzy Mizgalski recalls:

"Working together in the preparation of Elżbieta's documentary film, entitled 'I Was Lucky' made it necessary for me to conduct detailed research into the history of the Częstochowa Jewish community. The collected document material exceeded the possibility of using it all in just one film. It was then that the project of a small exhibition was born, under the working title of 'The World of Rabbi Nachum Asz'.

"The exhibition was intended to draw attention to the life of the Częstochowa Jewish community prior to the Holocaust. Rabbi N. Asz was rabbi of Częstochowa for more than forty years. He died in 1936. His world, namely life in Częstochowa, was the life of the city, where Poles and Jews lived side-by-side. At the turn of the twentieth century, new social and cultural processes were taking place within the Jewish community, which intensified during World War I and in Poland Reborn.

"The issue of the modernisation processes within the Jewish community is still an interesting research topic. The diversity of cultural life and the social and political diversity amongst Jews, indicate the immense vitality of this community, prior to the tragedy of the Holocaust.

*Elżbieta introduced me to the Częstochowa Jew, Zygmunt Rolat. As a result of the discussion, an idea was born to expand the original concept and to create a large exhibition – 'The Jews of Częstochowa'".*³⁰

It was not only Zygmunt Rolat who like the idea. He also convinced his cousin, Alan Silberstein, to [help] implement and finance it. Thanks to their initiative and funds, in 2004, the exhibition opened to the public. It turned out to be a real hit. Residents of Częstochowa, in a special plebiscite, considered it as the most important cultural event of 2014.

The exhibition consisted of large-format photographs, maps, documents and original pre-War exhibits, collected by the organisers. It covered a variety of topics, such as Jewish institutions, private lives, education and culture. A large section was devoted to the Holocaust period. But its essence was to present the richness of the life of the Jewish community and to provide

²⁹ An excerpt from a statement by Z. Rolat, [in:] C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 99.

³⁰ J. Mizgalski, *Ocaleni – w poszukiwaniu swojego miejsca w powojennej rzeczywistości*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (ed.), *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 11.

examples of the coexistence with neighbouring Christians at the beginning of the 20th century. The exhibition was displayed in Częstochowa, Warsaw, in the Polish Consulate in New York, in the Library of United States Congress in Washington and in many other cities in the United States and Canada.

The creation of the exhibition was also an opportunity to initiate the First Reunion of Częstochowa Jews.



The banner in the park beneath Jasna Góra, announcing the academic conference
"The Jews of Częstochowa – Coexistence – Holocaust - Remembrance.

Photograph: private collection of J. Mizgalski

Zygmunt Rolat says,

"With the opening date of the exhibition approaching, we decided to organise the first, post-World War II, meeting of Częstochowa Jews. This event, on 21st-23rd April 2004, was intended for meetings, discussions and memories. The banners, hanging across the Aleja Najświętszej Marii Panny, read 'The Jews of Częstochowa – Days of Remembrance'".³¹

³¹ An excerpt from a statement by Z. Rolat, [in:] C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 97.



Z. Rolat and Cardinal Edward M. Egan, Archbishop of New York
view the exhibition *The Jewish of Częstochowa*.
Photograph: private collection of J. Mizgalski

"At that time, more than two hundred people came to Częstochowa. They were Jews from Częstochowa and their descendants, living in a variety of cities – in the USA, Canada, South America, Israel. They came from many European countries and even from distant Australia. For the first time since World War II, large-scale cultural events served precisely the idea of 'building bridges' – bridges between both Polish and Jewish nations, but also, and perhaps above all, between generations of Częstochowa residents – Poles and Jews who were born after the Holocaust.

"Curiosity and immense interest by the city's current residents – that is how I would briefly describe the period of preparations for the 'Days of Remembrance'. Already, during the initial work, I received information about the revival of discussion about the past – within both Jewish and Polish circles. The reading of literature and viewing of films on Jewish themes were also on the rise.

"We understood that the demand had to be met. We wanted to spread knowledge about the participation of the Jewish community in the development of the city and to bring closer the tragic events of the Holocaust, especially to the younger generation. We organised an academic conference – 'The Jews of Częstochowa – Coexistence – Holocaust – Remembrance'".³² The principal organiser of the conference was the

³² Z. Rolat, *Mój wyjazd i powroty do Polski*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (ed.), *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 23.

Higher School of Pedagogy in Częstochowa. Academic papers, memoirs and various studies, presented during the conference, broadened the knowledge about the presence of the Jewish community in Częstochowa.

“The Reunion became an opportunity to present the Jews of Częstochowa with the contemporary image of the city. Zjazd zaś stał się okazją do przedstawienia Żydom częstochowianom współczesnego obrazu miasta.”

The autobiographical documentary film, entitled “As If it Was Yesterday”, inspired by Zygmunt Rolat’s memories, became a kind of addition [to the events] – although an extremely important one. It was the first documentary film devoted to the life of the Częstochowa ghetto and the juvenile prisoners in the HASAG-Pelcery camp in Częstochowa. A limited-edition album was also released on this occasion. It was entitled *Żydzi Częstochowianie. Współlistnienie – Holocaust – Pamięć*.

Shortly after the Reunion, with the support of Szewach Weiss, Zygmunt Rolat and Chaim Hecht (journalist, independent film producer from Israel), Częstochowa and Nazareth successfully established a sister-city relationship. The “Nazareth Agreement” was signed in the Holy Land on 2nd December 2004. It provided for the maintenance of permanent contacts, the exchange of experiences regarding pilgrim tourism, economics and education, as well as youth and cultural exchanges. An important part of the future ties would be the exchange of school students.

During their stay in Israel, the Częstochowa delegation met, in Tel Aviv, with members of the Association of Częstochowa Jews in Israel. In Haifa, they met with the Polish community in Israel and, in Nazareth, they met with owners of travel agencies which were associated with the local Chamber of Tourism. They also visited the Yad Vashem Institute where, assisted by Szewach Weiss, victims of the Holocaust were commemorated.



The *sukkah* on the campus of the Malczewski Graphic Arts High School Częstochowa, 2006

Photograph: private collection of Z. Rolat

During the Second Reunion of Częstochowa Jews, which was held during 9th-12th October 2006, over two hundred Częstochowa Jews and their descendants came to Częstochowa. This time, the greatest impression on Reunion participants, city residents, television and the American press, was made by the *sukkah*³³ - the first such *sukkah* erected in Częstochowa in sixty-four years.

The *sukkah* was built, under the direction and supervision of Rabbi Michael Schudrich³⁴, on the campus of the Jacek Malczewski Graphic Arts High School in Częstochowa. Amongst the Jews, both locals and visitors, this aroused great emotion. The school's students were equally moved by the project.

Zygmunt Rolat recalled,

*"For me and for the other Reunion participants, it was a great experience. We were all moved. We saw something that was not expected in Częstochowa or Poland"*³⁵.

The event became famous around the world.

Zygmunt Rolat continued:

"I received an interesting call from Australia. A teacher from a Jewish school called to ask if her students could decorate the sukkah. Of course, I agreed. Soon, I received more telephone calls from other Jewish schools, which had learned about the project in Częstochowa – from Paris, Haifa, San Francisco and Toronto. We also received beautiful decorations from the Salomon Shechter School in New Jersey, where my grandson and his classmates made beautiful coloured, paper chains. The sukkah was decorated with children's drawings and other art works.

"For all of us, it was an eloquent symbol of victory over violence and destruction, and the survival of first, second and third generations following the Holocaust. The work of the children became a symbol of that. We ate a kosher meal, brought from Warsaw by Rabbi Schudrich. This was another experience for both the Jews and the residents of Częstochowa, who were eating kosher dishes for the first time.

*"At the time, I said, 'We are happy to be with you. However, we are sad because there are so few Częstochowa Jews'"*³⁶

As the years passed, Jews from Częstochowa (as well as from other European cities) began to prosper. *Landsmann* associations focussed on protecting and cultivating memory. Most of these organisations held annual *Yizkor* commemorations to remember those who had died and to pass on their legacy to their children and grandchildren. However, the passage of time

³³ *Sukkah* – an external hut erected for the festival of *Sukkot*, which can be a gazebo or timber porch at a synagogue. [Meals are eaten there and some even sleep in it.] It is to remind Jews under what conditions Jews had to live during the migration from [slavery in] Egypt.

³⁴ Michael Joseph Schudrich - American-Polish religion expert and historian, appointed as Chief Rabbi of Poland in 2004.

³⁵ Excerpt from statement by Z. Rolat, [in:] C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 104.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 105.

was relentless. At the beginning of the 21st century, the number of these *landmannschaften* decreased significantly, as did their activity.

The initiative to organise Reunions in Częstochowa, by involving four generations (from former residents to their great-grandchildren), re-activated this community. In order to preserve this enthusiasm and to further promote the memory of the heritage of the Jewish community in Częstochowa, the World Society of Częstochowa and Their Descendants was established.

In Częstochowa itself, between the First and Second Reunions, many cultural events were held, many conferences and meetings took place and a number of studies on the history of Częstochowa Jews was undertaken. Importantly, there was a growing interest in knowing about the history and culture of this community – not only amongst academics, but also amongst the city's residents, especially the youth. This gave rise to new ideas for artistic works “inspired by Jewish culture”, youth theatrical performances, student competitions on their knowledge of Jewish history and culture, as well as student conferences devoted to the tragedy of the Holocaust, etc. Thanks to these activities, post-War generations of Częstochowa had the opportunity to understand the image of the Jewish past.



The march of Częstochowa Jews through the city during the Second Reunion, 2006.

Photograph: private collection of J. Mizgalski

Activation of the Częstochowa Jews from abroad did not mean the end of the activity of the Jewish community within Częstochowa itself. Members of the TSKŻ were actively involved in their own projects and continued their own activities. As usual, the TSKŻ branch in Częstochowa had little funds at its disposal, which would explain why these activities lacked much momentum. But they still fulfilled their main goal – to integrate the Jewish community of Częstochowa. A new and very important element was also the meetings with the growing number of Jews, coming to Częstochowa, in search on their roots.

TSKŻ representatives, together with representatives of the City Council, also took part in developing a methodology for commemorating the Jewish cultural heritage of the city, as well as activities in order to protect the cemetery.³⁷ At that time, the board of the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ consisted of Halina Wasilewicz (Chairperson), Anna Goldman (Deputy Chairperson), Jerzy Ślęzak (Secretary), as well as board members Danuta Ajon and Zdzisław.³⁸

It seemed that almost all areas of Polish-Jewish cooperation, contact and mutual relations were working at their best. And, then, in August 2007, there was confirmation of this mutual trust. A group of vandals had desecrated the cemetery, destroying numerous headstones and painting on them, with black paint, antisemitic symbols as well as Celtic crosses. The atmosphere was tense and a major scandal was hanging by a thread.

For Częstochowa society and the Jewish community, an important signal was the response of the city authorities to these acts of vandalism. The response was clear – to condemn and to remove the results of the vandalism. Students from Częstochowa schools, supported by the Mayor of Częstochowa, Tadeusz Wrona, and the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, joined in the tidying of the cemetery. The Polish President, Lech Kaczyński, and the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent their thanks to the city authorities for their efficient actions to remove the evidence of this vandalism.³⁹

Cemetery vandalism was not the only problem of those times. The passing of the *mikveh* building, into private hands, was perceived with a sense of loss by the Jews of Częstochowa. As if this was not enough, during the first decade of the millenium, a new entity appeared in Częstochowa, claiming to represent the Jewish community – the Częstochowa Mosaic Faith Gmina. It was established as a branch of the Independent Mosaic Faith Gmina in Gdańsk, which was registered, in 2000, with the Ministry of the Interior and Administration.⁴⁰

Members of the TSKŻ protested loudly against this use of the Jewish community as a means to obtain EU funds. The dispute escalated. Padlocks were placed on the gate of the [Jewish] cemetery prior to the commemoration of the 66th anniversary of the liquidation of the

³⁷ Based on documents in the document collection of the Częstochowa TSKŻ.

³⁸ In 2008, Izabella Sobańska replaced J. Ślęzak as Board Secretary and Board member Danuta Ajon was replaced by Bożena Płuciennicka. Based on information sheets from 2003-2008.

³⁹ Source: www.czestochowa.pl (accessed 2nd June 2020).

⁴⁰ The issue was complicated and involved several entities – the Foundation for the Protection of Monuments and Assistance to Artists, the Historical Association of Jews of Częstochowa and the already mentioned *gmina*, with one owner and chairman. After taking over the *mikveh*, it was promised that it would house a cultural and religious centre, a concert hall, a gallery, a museum, a youth hostel and two restaurants. For more, see: M. Mamoń, *Zamknął na kłódkę*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 9th October 2008.

Częstochowa ghetto. The police intervened, letters were exchanged, accusations were exchanged. Over time, moods calmed down, although the mutual disdain remained.

During the Second Reunion, the decision was made to erect a monument in memory of the forty thousand Częstochowa Jews who, between 22nd September and 7th October 1942, were transported from the city to Treblinka. As was usually the case with Zygmunt Rolat, dreams and plans are rapidly brought into fruition.

During the next Reunion of the World Society of Częstochowa Jews and Their Descendants, official ceremonies took place in front of the new monument.⁴¹ Its creator, inspired by his work together with Jerzy Kędziora, was Samuel Willenberg – originally from Częstochowa. Willenberg survived not only the War, but also his time in Treblinka and the uprising there.⁴² He was also the longest-living witness to these events.



Z. Rolat with his family, as well as W. Markowicz
in front of the monument in memory of Czeŝtochowa Jews.

Photograph: Z. Rolat family archive

Zygmunt Rolat said,

"For me, it was also a great, personal event.⁴³ This is a monument in the form of a broken wall, bearing a fragment of railway tracks and a Star of David, made from such

⁴¹ All costs, regarding the erection of the monument, were covered by Zygmunt Rolat.

⁴² Samuel Willenberg was one of the initiators of the construction of the monument and was the longest surviving participant in the Holocaust.

⁴³ Excerpt from a statement by Z. Rolat, [in:] C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 106.

rails. Next to it, on a glass board, is the timetable for the transports to Treblinka. In this way, we honour the memory of the thousands of Jews, who were sent from Częstochowa, to die in that camp - among them being my father. He was sent in the first of the sixth transports. In Treblinka, he took part in the famous uprising of Jews.

Too few people know that Treblinka ceased to be a death camp, when rebellious Jews destroyed the gas chambers. Almost all the rebels lost their lives, among them being my father. One of the very few to survive was Samuel Willenberg".⁴⁴

The official unveiling ceremony of the monument attracted many Częstochowa residents, Jews who came from around the world, as well as many guests. Among those who took part in the ceremony were the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich and the Israeli Ambassador to Poland, David Peleg. Also present were the ambassadors from Great Britain, France and also Australia. As was usually the case, during events in Częstochowa, it was also attended by the former Israeli Ambassador to Poland, Szewach Weiss.

Other guests included Tad Taube, Honorary Polish Consul in California, whose foundation, based in San Francisco, supports Jewish culture in Poland. The former Polish Ambassador to Israel, Maciej Kozłowski, was also in attendance, as was Stanisław Nowak, Archbishop of Częstochowa. The highest level of Polish government was represented by a representative of the President of the Republic of Poland.

Concluding the ceremony, floral wreathes were laid at the foot of the monument. An honour guard fired a volley of honour and *kaddish* was recited by Rabbi Michael Schudrich, followed by the beautiful singing of Cantor Joseph Malovany.⁴⁵

Jews from Częstochowa, their children and grandchildren, come to subsequent Reunions, each time trying to find traces of their past. Of course, they visit the cemetery. But they also look for traces of the past throughout the city. They visit places relating to their [previous] daily lives and their wartime suffering or that of their ancestors. Walking freely through the streets of Częstochowa, often in the company of younger or older Częstochowa residents, whether they were former neighbours or students, they are met with kindness and help. It was always a time for discovering and remembering a common past and a common identity. Many also claimed real pride in being from Częstochowa.

In searching for their past, they never forget the one which they had in common. For that reason, priority events have always included ceremonies at the cemetery at the graves of the ŻOB⁴⁶ fighters and the forty-six Jews murdered during the War, or the laying of wreathes and praying together at the mass graves on ul. Kawia and at the site of HASAG⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ The unveiling of the Częstochowa Jews monument, 21st October 2009, www.czestochowa.pl (accessed 2nd June 2020).

⁴⁶ ŻOB - Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa [Jewish Fighting Organisation].

⁴⁷ HASAG – an abbreviation for Hugo Schneider AG; Schneider was a German manufacturer of metal products, who received contracts to produce ammunition for the German war effort, using Jewish as well as Polish slave labour. To this end, HASAG transformed four factories in Częstochowa into slave labour camps, which were named Pelcery (or *Apparatebau*), Częstochowianka, Raków and Warta.

TSKŻ members have always actively participated in the organisation of all the activities of subsequent Reunions. Chairwoman, Halina Wasilewicz, was a member of the Reunions Organising Committee. During each Reunion, a traditional special social gathering was held of TSKŻ members with the visitors from the diaspora.



Flowers at the mass grave
(on ul. Kawia)
of Jews who were
murdered by the Germans.

Photograph: private
collection of A. Goldman

As was the case of the exhibition, *The Jews of Częstochowa...*, so it was in the following years, mainly on the occasions of subsequent Reunions of Częstochowa Jews and also in his working together with the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa. Rolat initiated and was patron of several international conferences organised by the university. [Coinciding with the First Reunion,] on 22nd-23rd April 2004, a conference took place entitled *The Jew of Częstochowa: Coexistence – Holocaust - Remembrance*. In October 2009 [coinciding with the Third Reunion], another conference was held entitled *The Fates of Częstochowa Jews 1945-2009*. On 4th October 2012 [coinciding with the Fourth Reunion], yet another conference was held, this time entitled *Identity and Stereotypes – Jews and Poles*.

From 2004, Zygmunt Rolat has promoted academic research conducted by academics at the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa. He had provided them with assistance in obtaining source materials from the USA and Israel, as well as in publishing their completed works. This resulted in the publication of, among others, the album entitled *The Jews of Częstochowa: Coexistence - Holocaust - Remembrance* (first and second editions; *The Jews of Częstochowa, The Fates of Częstochowa Jews 1945-2009*,⁴⁸ *the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery: A Guide vol.1*⁴⁹ and *Identity and Stereotypes: Jews and Poles*.⁵⁰



Halina Wasilewicz, with her son Jakub
Photograph: private collection of A. Goldman

For promoting and supporting academic work, by Resolution No. 91/2014 of the Senate of the Jan Długosz Academy, on 25th June 2014, Zygmunt Rolat was awarded the title of Honorary Professor of the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa. Earlier, in 2009, he joined in the organisation of the competition *The Traces of Judaism*, organised as part of the project *Artistic Confrontations Inspired by Jewish Culture*, which was part of the program *Understanding Other Cultures* implemented by the Municipal Cultural Centre in Częstochowa. Competition entries, from outside Poland, were received from Argentina, China and Romania. Their main concept was to learn about Jewish culture, develop an aesthetic sensitivity inspired by Jewish culture and to document the mutual cross-cultural penetration of Judaic culture with that of other cultures of nations in various regions of the world.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Also, the English-language version, entitled *The Jews of Częstochowa. The Fate of Częstochowa Jews 1945–2009*, ed. Jerzy Mizgalski and Jerzy Sielski.

⁴⁹ Author: Wiesław Paszkowski.

⁵⁰ Ed. Jerzy Mizgalski and Małgorzata Soi, Częstochowa 2014.

⁵¹ *The Traces of Judaism*, <http://www.czestochowa.pl> (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

Zygmunt Rolat's passion, commitment and determination inspire respect from all over the world. He receives recognition for both his financial and organisational activities in order to protect the memory of the history of Polish Jew and Polish-Jewish dialogue. Proof of this was when he was awarded with the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by the President of Poland, Lech Kaczyński⁵² and when he was awarded the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland by the President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski – that ceremony took place in New York on 24th September 2013. He was also respected by New York⁵³, and also by USA President Barack Obama, who received him in the White House, as well as taking him on board Air Force One.⁵⁴



The posthumous presentation of the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Jan Karski, Washington 2012.

From left: Andrzej Rojek (Jan Karski Educational Foundation), Zygmunt Rolat, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, President Barack Obama

Photograph: private collection of Z. Rolat

⁵² The highest distinction, after the Order of the White Eagle, awarded to foreigners and to Poles living abroad. The award was presented on 19th April 2008 at the Presidential Palace, in the presence of the then president of Israel, Shimon Peres, on the 65th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

⁵³ The Mayor of New York, the city where Zygmunt Rolat lives, Bill De Blasio, established In New York, 11th June 2015 as "Zygmunt Rolat Day" to recognise Zygmunt's undertakings in Poland and around the world to protect the memory of Jews.

⁵⁴ For more, see: C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., pp. 119–123.

Zygmunt Rolat's significance in the development of Polish-Jewish dialogue was also recognised by his hometown Częstochowa. His initiatives, in support of cultural activities in Częstochowa, were honoured. By decisions of the Mayor of Częstochowa in 2010 and in 2013, he was awarded the title of "Patron of the Arts". It is impossible to enumerate all the honours which have been awarded to him. It can only be said that his "patronage"⁵⁵ and the realisation of his dreams are second nature to Zygmunt Rolat.

An example of this was bringing, to Częstochowa, Huberman's Stradivarius violin and inviting, to the city, outstanding violinist Joshua Bell.⁵⁶ The residents of Częstochowa could then listen to Bell play in a place which was symbolic for Jews - the Częstochowa Philharmonic⁵⁷, the walls of which were erected upon the ruins of the pre-War New Synagogue. Thanks to the efforts and generosity of Zygmunt Rolat, Częstochowa residents had the opportunity to listen to the sound of another Stradivarius. The 8th Bronisław Huberman Violin Festival was honoured with a performance by amazing violinist Midori. Bell performed, on Huberman's Stradivarius, the Concerto in D-major by Brahms.

Thanks to Zygmunt Rolat's efforts, it was possible to permanently commemorate the presence of the Jewish community of Częstochowa who, for centuries, had lived at the foot of Jasna Góra. Help was obtained regarding the cemetery on ul. Złota and the mass graves of those murdered on ul. Kawia. A commemorative plaque was posted on the former Pelcery factory which the history of the Częstochowa HASAG labour camp.

Various publications, academic conferences and books, inspired by Zygmunt Rolat, shed more light on the history of Częstochowa Jews and the contribution to the development of the city. Concerts, various types of performances, cultural projects, support for youth exchanges and personal contacts between young Jews and young residents of Częstochowa were an excellent way to not only learn about Jewish culture, but also to bring generations closer together, to understand each other and to build, the already mentioned, bridges. These are bridges between two peoples – Poles and Jews – but also, and perhaps above all, between Poles and Jews who were born before Holocaust. At his initiative work began on the creation of the Jewish Museum of Częstochowa – as part of the Częstochowa Municipal Museum.

By inspiring and funding these various activities, Zygmunt Rolat emphasises his connection with Częstochowa - always and everywhere. It can be said that Częstochowa and the activities benefitting our city are very special to him.

⁵⁵ For years, Zygmunt Rolat has been one of the pillars of the Jewish Cultural Festival in Kraków, the Singer Festival in Warsaw and has supported many other cultural events and projects to perpetuate the memory of the presence of the Jewish community throughout Poland. He engages his knowledge, experience and money into activities aimed at preserving the memory of places where Jews were murdered in various parts of Poland, publishing, researching and film activities which display all shades of the coexistence of Poles and Jews over the centuries in Poland. Above all, he is one of the most generous donors supporting the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews.

⁵⁶ Joshua Bell (b. 1967) – American violinist of Jewish descent, considered to be one of the greatest violinists of our time in the world. J. Bell played in Częstochowa in 2009 and 2014. He owns the Stradivarius violin, Gibson ex Huberman made in 1713. The history of the violin is, in itself, interesting. It was stolen and recovered twice. It should be remembered that it is not only a musical instrument, but it is also an item of great value. In 1895, Count Jan Zamoyski gave the violin to Bronisław Huberman as a gift. In 1919, it was stolen, but was quickly recovered. It was stolen for a second time in 1936, from a dressing room in Carnegie Hall. Huberman never regained it. In 1985, on his deathbed, a violinist from New York admitted to stealing the instrument and returned it. The violin was purchased by Joshua Bell.

⁵⁷ The Częstochowa Philharmonic carries the name of Bronisław Huberman. Bronisław Huberman (1882-1947) – Jewish, Polish violinist and teacher. He is one of the greatest Polish violinists of the 20th century.



Częstochowa Mayor, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, and Chairman of the Częstochowa City Council, Zdzisław Wolski awarding Zygmunt Rolat the title of "Honorary Citizen of Częstochowa", 2012.

Photograph: private collection of Z. Rolat

On 26th January 2012, the Częstochowa City Council passed a resolution granting Zygmunt Rolat the title of "Honorary Citizen of Częstochowa". During the ceremony, Mayor Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk thanked Zygmunt Rolat for his involvement in promoting the city and for being a Częstochowa ambassador everywhere around the world.

Not hiding his emotion on receiving this honorary citizenship, Zygmunt Rolat said,

"Częstochowa is my home town. I've been here again and again and I always feel at home here. This time, I came with my family - my children and grandchildren. To be an Honorary Citizen of Częstochowa is truly the greatest honour of my life. I accept this Citizenship on behalf of my family and those residents of Częstochowa and their descendants, who are no longer here. We have only their memory.

For many young Jews, those from Israel and the descendants of those who left Poland and dispersed around the world, Poland was only associated with the Holocaust. When they came to Poland, they visited Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek. This only reinforced their association of Poland with being just one great German death camp for Jews. However, that was only one of the chapters, albeit an extremely tragic and significant chapter.

But I emphasise that it is only one of the chapters in the almost thousand history of Polish Jews. It was and is important to me that the memory and knowledge of the

*remaining chapters, the memory of our beautiful, common, thousand-year history, not be lost, both amongst Poles and Jews. Memory is the basis for mutual respect and this basis can be used to build successful contacts between Poles and Jews into the future.”*⁵⁸

Granting a Jew Honorary Citizenship of the city is a symbolic sign of appreciation not only to Zygmunt Rolat, but also to the entire Jewish community for its significant contribution to building history and the present. It is a symbol of mutual respect and a manifestation of a desire to create a better future - a future that cannot be built without the truth and without overthrowing harmful stereotypes.

⁵⁸ For more, see: C.K. Szymański, R. Stefaniak, *Zygmunt...*, op. cit., p. 117.