

Introduction

*“You have no Jewish towns in Poland any more,
In Hrubieszów, Karczewe, Brody, Falenica.
In vain, you would look for lit candles in the windows,
And he listened to the singing from the wooden synagogue.
The last Jewish tatters have disappeared,
The blood was covered in sand and traces cleared away
And the walls were whitewashed with lime
Like after some plague or for a great holiday”¹*

There is also no Jewish Częstochowa, but there are memories. And, as wise people say, memory is the foundation upon which we build our future. Collective memory creates a community and enriches life with the value of local patriotism. It is, therefore, our duty to remember all those, who contributed to the creation and development of our city. Amongst those meritorious individuals, who have served Częstochowa for centuries, there is no lack of representatives of the Jewish community.

From the 18th to the mid-19th centuries, Częstochowa was formed as a multi-cultural city – a peculiar conglomerate of people and religions – an example of the relatively harmonious coexistence of Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox and Orthodox Jews. It provided a real entrepreneurial potential upon which the economic development of the city was based, as early as in the 19th and early 20th centuries.²

A large Jewish community³, while maintaining its own religious identity, lived and co-created the history of the town, near Jasna Góra in the city centre, which was widely recognised as the centre of Polish Catholicism. Jews not only participated in the development of the city’s economy, but also often initiated it.⁴ They were merchants, artisans, labourers and entrepreneurs. They worked in workshops, engaged in trade and were pioneers in banking and printing. They built factories as well as religious and cultural buildings. They financed schools, orphanages and aged care homes⁵. In their activities, they did not forget about any sphere of life. They organised cultural, social, sports and political life. They were highly

¹ A. Słonimski, *Elegia miasteczek żydowskich* (fragment). Antoni Słonimski (1895-1976) – a Polish-Jewish poet, playwright, columnist, member and founder of the “Pod Picadorem” cabaret and “Skamander” literary group. He survived the war in exile. In 1956-1959, he served as president of the Polis Writers’ Union.

² For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Refleksja nad historią częstochowskich Żydów*, [in:] T. Dubicki (ed.), T. Panecki (ed.), *Z dziejów Polski XIX i XX wieku*, Częstochowa 2004; A. Adamski, *Górnictwo rud żelaza w regionie częstochowskim*, Częstochowa 1994; F. Sobalski, *Przemysł Częstochowy w latach 1882–1900*, “Studia i materiały z dziejów Śląska” 1971, vol. XI; F. Sobalski, *Rozwój miasta po upadku powstania styczniowego*, [w:] R. Kołodziejczyk (ed.), *Częstochowa, Dzieje Miasta i Klasztoru Jasnogórskiego. Tom 2 – W okresie niewoli 1793–1918*, Częstochowa 2005, p. 115.

³ On the history of the Jewish community and its development, see also Z. Jakubowski, *Częstochowscy Żydzi. Charakterystyka problematyki i perspektywy badań*, [in:] *Żydzi w dziejach Częstochowy*, Częstochowa 1991, pp. 7–25, also S. Rumszewicz, *Żydzi w Częstochowie*, “Goniec Częstochowski”, dated 17th September 1915; S. Rumszewicz, *Żydzi w Częstochowie*, “Goniec częstochowski”, dated 28th December 1915; B. Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w XIX i XX wieku*, Warsaw 1930, p. 29; J. Mizgalski, *Refleksja...*, op. cit.; J. Mizgalski (ed.), M. Soja (ed.), *Tożsamość i stereotypy Żydzi i Polacy*, Częstochowa 2014.

⁴ For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Refleksja...*, op. cit.; A. Adamski, *Górnictwo...*, op. cit.; F. Sobalski, *Przemysł...*, op. cit.; F. Sobalski, *Rozwój...*, op. cit., p. 115.

⁵ For more see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna polskich Żydów w XIX i XX wieku na przykładzie Częstochowy*, Częstochowa 2008.

politicised and, at the same time, they were politically divided.⁶ Zionism and anti-Zionism, as well as Hebrew and Yiddish languages, divided Jews into camps. This was reflected in the various types of organisations and political parties.⁷

During the inter-war period, Częstochowa was a rapidly developing city. The urban atmosphere accelerated social change, as well as transformations in the sphere of religion and morality. In this situation, some Jews enclosed themselves within religiosity, others saw their way in returning to Israel, while still others wanted autonomy within the diaspora country. There were also those who were completely assimilated.⁸

The Jews constituted a very active community, although also quite specific within the mass population. They introduced a specific colour to the city. They differed in religion, customs, often in language and dress. This difference aroused curiosity and, in extreme cases, hostility.⁹

Despite their differences, they were still residents of Częstochowa and Częstochowa was their home city. It was there that they developed their own religion, tradition and education. They got together in various types of cultural, educational and sports societies. They had numerous press and publishing houses. They built their own foundations for economic existence. They were able to cultivate their own religious and cultural identity, as well as conduct multi-dimensional political activity. Their representatives sat on the City Council, stood for election to the parliament of the Second Polish Republic and participated in the decision-making processes essential for the life and progress of the city.

⁶ For more, see M. Mizgalska-Osowiecka, *Żydzi w samorządzie miasta Częstochowy w latach 1927–1939*, Warsaw 2017.

⁷ In Częstochowa, there were such Jewish parties and political organisation such as Poalei Zion Left, "Hitachdruth" Zionist Labour, poalei Zion Right, Algemajner Jidiszer Arbewter "Bund" in Częstochowa, the Independent Socialist Party in Częstochowa, the "Mizrachi" Organisation in Częstochowa, Agudas Izrael in Częstochowa, the Union of State Zionists in Częstochowa, the Zionist-Revisionist Organisation in Częstochowa. The above list does not exhaust the party-political mosaic that existed in Jewish Częstochowa. For example, in order to build a Palestinian headquarters, the Zionists created numerous agencies and organisations: the Jewish Agency working together with the Mandate authorities (in Poland from 1929); Keren Kayemet le-Israel (Jewish National Fund), the funds from which were used to buy land in Palestine; Keren ha-Yesod, which with colonial issues; the Palestinian Department dealing with emigration issues; He-Chalutz – an organisation preparing youth for agricultural work in Palestine; the Women's Zionist Organisation – a women's organisation; many school, scouting organisations. (Dror and Akiva), as well as the League to Aid Workers in Palestine. In addition, numerous organisations remained under the influence of the Zionists, e.g., Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair (Young Scouts), the already mentioned He'Chalutz, the partially Zionist academic organisation (including Auxilium Academicum). For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit. Branches of the Bund and Zionist parties were established in our city and became organisers of social life. They established organised lectures, drama circles and sports clubs. The political struggle involved contact with voters and such an opportunity was provided by the press. Prior to 1939, registered in Częstochowa, there were circa 22 Jewish magazines, including six daily, ten weekly and one bi-weekly; compare with Z. Jakubowski, *Częstochowscy Żydzi. Charakterystyka problematyki i perspektywy badań*, [in:] Z. Jakubowski (ed.), S. Podobiński (ed.), *Z dziejów Żydów w Częstochowie*, Częstochowa 2002, p. 23.

⁸ J. Sztumski considers that, in the 1930s, around 20% of Jews felt themselves assimilated with Polishness, see J. Sztumski, *Kulturotwórcza rola społeczności żydowskiej w Częstochowie*, [in:] Z. Jakubowski (ed.), S. Podobiński (ed.), *Z dziejów...*, op. cit., p. 65.

⁹ The hostility took the form of many faces. The most tragic were the "pogroms". In the 20th century, anti-Jewish attitudes resulted in riots. Those, which took place after Poland had regained its independence, were especially painful. [In Częstochowa] there were several such anti-Jewish riots – the first on 15th November 1918, the second on 27th May 1919, the third in November 1931 and the in the summer of 1933. Others occurred in September 1935, on 19th June 1937 and 20th September 1937. In the summer of 1933, a group of "endeks" attacked passing-by Jews, beating them and using the attack to rob them. The Polish arrest over one hundred participants in these incidents. From 1934 until 1936, antisemites called for a continual fight against Jews in Częstochowa. They call for the confiscation of Jewish property, robbed and destroyed Jewish houses and shops and drove Jewish merchants out of marketplaces and villages. In 1937, the "endeks" called for a boycott on Jewish enterprises in Częstochowa. They stood in front of Jewish shops, forbidding customers from entering. For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit.

Despite retaining their, mainly religious, Jewish identity¹⁰, they actively participated in the city's development and construction. However, it was not always easy. But, both Christians and Jews, over several hundred years, were able to coexist in Częstochowa. The tragic end of this community was brought about by the Nazi crime of genocide.

The tragedy of World War II, unleashed by the Third Reich, affected all nations – the Jewish nation in particular. According to Hitler's plan, the Jews were to disappear from the face of the earth. The process of exterminating that nation began "innocently", with the enactment of regulations concerning citizenship of the Reich, the protection of German blood and German honour (the "Nuremberg Laws")¹¹ and regulations implementing these laws which, basically, deprived Jews (as well as Gypsies and people of the "black race") of all civil rights, legal protection and property.

However, the situation was developing. Germany decided to intimidate its already Jewish "non-citizens". On the night of 9th November 1938, initiated by the state authorities, a pogrom against the Jews was organised throughout the country. The streets of German cities were covered in shards of glass and crystal from destroyed Jewish apartments and shops, hence the name of the pogrom – "Kristallnacht". Jews lost their life's possessions, their health and even their life itself.

After unleashing the war, the German occupiers had to deal with the "Jewish element" within the conquered countries. This element was controlled by introducing, previously tried and tested, methods in the form of terror, forced labour, as well as mental and physical abuse of the Jewish population and separating them into ghettos (i.e., in closed-off parts of cities, where only Jews and their torturers lived). Under penalty of death, Jews were forbidden from leaving these isolated quarters.

However, this did not exhaust the Germans of ideas. Subjected to daily terror, where starvation, beatings and death were the norm, the Jews were subjected to a gradual and systematic process of destruction. They were to be doomed to extinction and oblivion. But because, according to the perpetrators, this process took too long, a plan was prepared – the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question". The entire nation was intended to be exterminated.

The Germans were no longer satisfied with killing individual Jews, even if it occurred during mass executions. The ghettos and camps no longer sufficed for them. They decided to speed up the entire process of liquidating Jews and to "industrialise" it.

Some people mistakenly believe that the liquidation of the Jews gave rise to the "Wannsee Conference"¹², where the main framework of genocide was formally outlined and where all its

¹⁰ On the topic of Jewish identity, religion, etc., see more: J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit.; J. Mizgalski, *Życie religijne częstochowskich Żydów w XX wieku przed holocaustem*, [in:] Z. Jakubowski (ed.), S. Podobiński (ed.), *Z dziejów...*, op. cit., pp. 97–100.

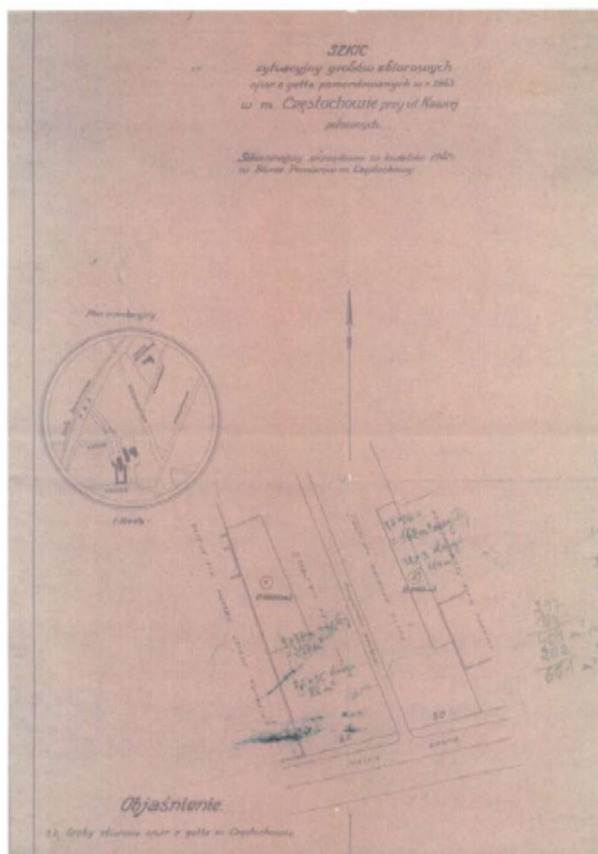
¹¹ The Nuremberg Laws – racial laws passed by the German Reichstag on 15th September 1935 and promulgated, on the same day, by the NSDAP in Nuremberg. The group of laws included the Reich Citizenship Act, the Act for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour and the Reich Colours and Flags Act. Executive ordinances were issued. The first, on 14th November 1935, was a regulation which developed provision of § 3 of the Reich Citizenship Act and excluding Jews from it. The laws became the legal basis for the anti-Jewish policy of the Third Reich.

¹² Chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, prominent German figure of the Nazi state service met in a villa on the Grosser Wannsee, in Berlin, and, at that meeting, they agreed to coordinate all responsible services, the aim of which was to "finally resolve

related activities were coordinated. It should be acknowledged that is not where the actual plan was developed. In Wannsee, representatives of offices and ministries, who participated in the meeting, were, in fact, only informed about the role which they would play in the implementation of such a plan and of their mutual service responsibilities.

The aim of this coordinated activity was to be the complete murder of the Jews – both those who found themselves under German jurisdiction and those who were in the territory of allied countries, and even those in areas which the Germans had, as yet, not managed to conquer, such as Great Britain. Everyone, sooner or later, was supposed to be caught.

None of the 11 million Jews had the right to escape and survive. The plan to murder the entire nation was accepted by the German decision-makers with understanding and without protest. Its implementation was not especially difficult, as its individual elements had already been worked out earlier. It took the Germans a little time to “catch up” with organisational and logistical matters. In the General Government (GG), to which Częstochowa belonged, 31st December 1942 was adopted as the starting date for “the cleansing the General Government of Jews”.



A location sketch map of the mass graves of ghetto victims, murdered in 1943, located on ul. Kawia, in Częstochowa.

This sketch was drawn in April 1947 by the Częstochowa Municipal measurements Office.

Source:
Częstochowa Municipal Archive

the European Jewish question”. Put simply, discussion centred on the main problems which Germany could face with the planned, physical liquidation of the Jews in Europe. The conference was held on 20th January 1942 and, from that moment, the main framework of genocide was formally outlined. The participants were Josef Bühler – Deputy Governor-General in Kraków, Roland Freisler – Deputy Minister of Justice, Otto Hofmann from the Head Office of Race and Settlement, Gerhard Klopfer from the NSDAP Party Chancellory, Wilhelm Kritzinger – from the Security Police and the SD, Georg Leibbrandt and Alfred Meyer – from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Heinrich Müller – Chief of the Gestapo, Erich Neumann – from the office of the Four-Year Plan Plenipotentiary, Wilhelm Stuckart – from the Ministry of the Interior as well as Heydrich’s chief assistant - Adolf Eichmann, head of the Jewish Department of the RSHA.

In Częstochowa, preparation for the deportation of Jews, from the ghetto, began in June 1942. The *Judenrat*¹³ were then ordered to draw up a detailed plan of the ghetto, with all its buildings indicated. The extermination machine operated “with German efficiency” – the place of concentration and selection was selected, cellars were marked, several buildings were emptied to then be warehouses for storing looted items and an area was prepared (on ul. Kawia, from which Jews had already been displaced) as a cemetery for future victims. There was even a “dress rehearsal” using a smaller selection.¹⁴

In 1939, 29,000 Jews lived in Częstochowa.¹⁵ Following the outbreak of war, Jews were also transferred to the city from areas annexed by the Reich (including Płock, Gdynia, Łódź), as well as from nearby towns. Officially, there were 40,000 people, although the *Judenrat* estimated that the number was actually about 10,000 more.¹⁶ On the day after Yom Kippur, 22nd September 1942, the actual operation began to liquidate the “Big Ghetto”. Pushed into cattle wagons, Jews from Częstochowa were sent to the extermination camps in Treblinka.

In total, from Daszyński Square, six transports were filled on 22nd/23rd and 25th/26th September, as well as on 1st/2nd, 4th/5th and 7th/8th October. Almost 40,000 Jews were deported¹⁷, with another 4,000 murdered on the spot.¹⁸ The survivors, around 6,000, mainly young and strong and fit for hard work, were placed into the “Small Ghetto”, which was turned into a slave labour camp.¹⁹

The population of the “Small Ghetto” was terrorised and murdered in several *akcje*. After further selections and liquidations, most of the circa 4,000, who were still alive, were sent to the HASAG factory labour camps. Częstochowa was one of the designated cities, in the General Government, where Jews, working in the munitions industry, were to live. For this reason, from January 1944, transports of Jews began arriving in Częstochowa, including those from the Łódź ghetto and the camp in Płaszów.

In connection with Germany’s defeats on the Eastern Front, more ammunition factories (HASAG-Częstochowianka, HASAG-Warta) were constructed in Częstochowa, along with new camps for Jews. At the end of 1944, in total, 11,000 Jewish labourers were working in Częstochowa.²⁰ HASAG provided a chance for survival, an opportunity which was paid for with hard work, sometimes beyond human strength. Every day, HASAG prisoners were required to prove that they were still useful to the Third Reich’s arms industry. Weakness or disease meant death. This was decided during selections.

¹³ *Judenrat* (ger. Jewish Council of Elders) – a form of exercising power over the ghetto population, introduced by the Nazis so as to carry out, efficiently, German orders over the Jewish population.

¹⁴ For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit., pp. 298–301.

¹⁵ For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Refleksja...*, op. cit., pp. 130–131.

¹⁶ For more, see J. Pietrzykowski, *Cień swastyki nad Jasną Górą. Częstochowa w okresie hitlerowskiej okupacji 1939–1945*, Katowice 1985.

¹⁷ Those deported did not even realise that they had become part of the implementation of the second phase of the total extermination of their nation, as prepared by the Germans. It composed the opening of the death camps in occupied Poland and the “industrial” killing of Jews, combined with robbing any of their property which they left behind. For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit., p. 303.

¹⁸ For more, see J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna...*, op. cit., pp. 298–301.

¹⁹ For more, see *ibidem*.

²⁰ For more, see *ibidem*, p. 300.

In the final phase of the war, the SS assumed control over the HASAG [camps]. Just before the entry of the Red Army into Częstochowa, the Germans began the evacuation of prisoners to camps within the Reich.²¹ Their fate was basically sealed. Fortunately, the Nazis managed to transport only half of the prisoners.

On 17th January 1945, there were circa 5,200²² Jews, of whom 1,518 had lived in Częstochowa before the war and 1,240 had been born in Częstochowa.

It was, as Feliks Tych²³ wrote,

*“It was a phenomenon on a national scale ... in none of the other Polish cities, already liberated from the Germans, were there so many surviving Jews”.*²⁴

²¹ J. Pietrzykowski, *W obliczu śmierci*, Katowice 1966, p. 82.

²² 5,194 Jews remained in the HASAG-Pelcery and HASAG-Warta camps, of whom 1,518 had lived in Częstochowa and 1,240 had been born in Częstochowa.

²³ Prof. Feliks Tych was born in Poland in 1929, into a traditional Jewish family. During the war, he was in the Radomsko ghetto and, later, in Warsaw on “Aryan papers”. He was saved by a Polish family. Prof. F. Tych was a well-known historian who, in 1996-2007, he served as Director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. His editor-in-chief and co-author of the collective work entitled *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, published in 2011. He died in 2015.

²⁴ F. Tych, *Ocaleni z HASAG-u*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (ed.), *Żydzi Częstochowianie, Losy Żydów Częstochowian 1945–2009*, Toruń 2011, p. 102.