

HAFFTKA (HAFTKA) Aleksander Zyskind (1888-1962), pseud. Fritz Marburg. Journalist, columnist, education activist, Jewish communal life researcher. He was born on 22nd November 1888 in Częstochowa, the son of Tobiasz Hafftko, brick factory owner (at ul. św. Barbary 64), and Salomea Sura née Gradon.

His education began in a traditional *cheder*, after which he attended the Russian Boys Gimnazjum in Częstochowa. He took part in the 1905 school strike and from 1906, he attended the No.1 Polish Gimnazjum, from where he graduated in 1911. In 1911-14, he studied a consular-commerce course at the University of Liège (Belgium). Those studies were interrupted due to the outbreak of war.

He returned to Częstochowa in 1914, where he conducted educational activities. He co-organised courses for the illiterate. He delivered lectures including, on 12th December 1915, at the "Harmonia" hall at ul. Mikołajewskiej 8 (now ul. Katedralna 13) – the topic was about Jews in medieval Poland. In 1916, he resumed legal studies at the University of Warsaw. In 1917, he co-organised the Jewish Community Gimnazjum in Częstochowa.

In November 1918, he volunteered for the Academic legion, which soon became the 36th Infantry Regiment. He left the army in 1919. During the Polish-Bolshevik war, he served, with the rank of captain, in the Lithuanian-Belarusian Infantry Division, as adjutant to General Lucjan Żeligowski. Following the occupation of Wilno, he moved to the state apparatus of Central Lithuania. To 1922, he headed the nationalities department of the Civil Board of the Eastern Territories, later becoming deputy head of the nationalities section of the Political Department of Central Lithuania. He was then transferred to the chancellery of General Żeligowski, there being given special assignments.

In 1922, he resigned from the civil service, returned to Częstochowa and, initially, took over the running of his father's factory. Very soon, he became active communally, including the delivering of lectures. In 1924-1925, for nine months, he published and edited the liberal, Polish-language, Jewish daily "Głos Powszechny".

He returned to the civil service following the May 1926 coup. On 1st January 1927, he became Jewish affairs officer (with the rank of counsellor) in the Nationalities Department of the Interior Ministry (MSW). He was the highest-ranking Jewish official in the Polish state administration. He served as counsellor in the Interior Ministry (MSW) from 1924.

However, he still maintained contact with Częstochowa. For example, in 1925, his article was published in the one-off journal "*Universita Ivrit*" (Hebrew University), published to mark the occasion of the opening of the [Hebrew] University of Jerusalem.

In 1927-1937, he headed the Jewish section of the Nationalities Department of the MSW. He was a member of the Main Board of Union of Jewish Participants in the Fight for Polish Independence. (He wrote articles for the Union's bulletin "*Na przełomie*" [*At the Turning Point*]). He was active in *Ezrat Cholim Anijim* (*Aid for the Poor Sick*). In 1939, he lived in Warsaw at Hoża 23.

He was co-editor of "*Przegląd Wileński*", "*Kurier Wileński*", "*Nasz Kraj*", "*Epoka*" and "*Wiener Morgenzeitung*". In the second half of the 1920s, he worked with the "*Sprawy Narodowościowe*" and "*Palestyna*" magazines. In his articles, he dealt with nationality issues, mainly Jewish. He was co-editor of the monograph *Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej* [*Jews in Reborn Poland*], vols. I-II (Warsaw 1932–1933) and the author of an article in vol. II of that publication, entitled *Żydowskie stronnictwa polityczne w Polsce Odrodzonej* [*Jewish Political Parties in Reborn Poland*].

He authored books:

- *Kongresy mniejszości narodowych w Genewie w latach 1927–30* [*Congresses of National Minorities in Geneva in 1927-1930*],
- *Agraryzacja Żydów w Rosji sowieckiej* [*The Agrarisation of Jews in Soviet Russia*],
- *Żydzi w Grodzieńszczyźnie w czasie wielkiej wojny* [*Jews in the Grodno Region During the Great War*],
- *Zagadnienia autonomii kulturalno-personalnej mniejszości narodowościowej* [*Issues of Cultural and Personal Autonomy of National Minorities*] and
- *Der Antisemitismus in der deutschen Republik* [*Antisemitism in the German Republic*, Vienna 1931).

On 18th February 1937, he lost his position in the Ministry and was accused of corruption and the betrayal of state secrets. In 1938, he won a libel lawsuit, but was unable to return to work.

Following the outbreak of war in 1939, together with his wife and six-year-old daughter, he fled to Lithuania. In 1940, they obtained visas, from Japanese Consul Sugihara, and left for Japan via Moscow and Siberia. From there, they

travelled to the USA. During World War II, he lived in New York. He wrote articles for the Polish Jews' magazine *Nasza Trybuna* ["Our Tribune"].

He died on 1st June 1962 in New York and was buried there.

His wife was Ola Rachela née Jonisz, the daughter of Dr Sylwia Wassertheil-Smoller (born circa 1933), an outstanding epidemiologist, Emeritus Professor at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. In 2007, their daughter published a novel entitled *Rachel and Aleks*, about the motives behind her parents' flight during the war.

Łoza, *Czy wiesz kto to jest*, vol. I, pp. 243–244 (photograph). - Cała, *Żydowskie periodyki i druki*, pp. 53, 95, 104, 128, 204; J. Hulewicz, *Studia Polaków w Uniwersytecie w Liège w latach 1880–1914*, Kraków 1969, p. 34; Pawlina-Meducka, *Kultura Żydów*, pp. 108, 176; S. Stach, *Żyd Polski Odrodzonej: studium przypadku Aleksandra Haftki, urzędnika ministerialnego i żydowskiego działacza społecznego w II RP*, trans. D. Fryzowska, "Kwartalnik Historii Żydów" 2016, No. 2 (258), pp. 381–405. – "Goniec Częstochowski" 1915, No. 299, p. 3. - Handlowiec. Kalendarz 1914, p. 253 (re: the father Tobiasz). – APCz, group No. 58, birth record No. 78/1892 (delayed).

Juliusz Sętowski