

The Book Committee

Częstochowa at the Time of the Opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

1st April 1925 (7th Nisan 5685), became a national holiday for the marginalised and scattered Jewry of the entire world – this was the great day upon which, on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, the first Hebrew university was opened.

This holiday was celebrated in our city in the following manner:

The Special Newspaper

A one-off newspaper, which the Celebrations-Committee printed in three languages (Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish) and which was dedicated to this great holiday, appeared first thing in the morning.

The paper was rich in content, well edited and beautifully illustrated. It was literally snatched up by the Jewish inhabitants passing by, who had already, quite early in the morning, let themselves out into the streets in their holiday clothes.

At the Old Synagogue

Our large synagogue was fully packed with a diverse crowd of young and old, men and women.

The celebratory gathering was opened by Natan Gerichter, who stressed the great importance of the historic moment, when the Jewish people had been privileged to open their first university in their home of old and in their old-new Hebrew language.

The city cantor, Mr Rozental, accompanied by a musical orchestra, sang various Psalms which were appropriate for that festive moment.

The renowned preacher and “*Mizrachi*” public figure, Reb Józef Szymon Koblenz, and the “*Mizrachi*” activist Reb Mojsze Halter, inspired the congregation with their content-rich words on the events of the day. They concluded with the hope that the Land of Israel would be built according to the Torah and the tradition.

At the New Synagogue

The celebration at the New Synagogue was of an entirely different character. Firstly, the entry to the synagogue was limited to invited guests – representatives of all the communal institutions and unions and to the schoolchildren.

The proud march of schoolboys and schoolgirls, with their banners, through the streets of Częstochowa to the New Synagogue made a colossal impression.

The synagogue was nicely decorated with blue-and-white banners as well as with the banners of all the Jewish institutions. Delegates from non-Jewish institutions also came, led by the Mayor Dr Martuszewski.

Foot and mounted police were stationed in front of the synagogue, but the large crowd maintained an exemplary order.

The cantor Mr Fiszel, with the synagogue-choir and accompanied by a pedalboard, sang various hymns and chants, including an especially composed university anthem. Afterwards, our rabbi, Rabbi Nachum Asz, spoke in good Hebrew about the great significance of this important holiday in Jewish life.

He was followed by Dr Sz wajg from Łódź, who was invited to the ceremony by the Celebrations Committee. Dr Sz wajg, too, dwelt upon the great national and educational importance of a Hebrew university in Jerusalem.

The choir then sang the Polish National Anthem and the "*Hatikvah*", which was accompanied by the enthusiastic singing of the entire congregation.

The event was concluded with the resounding singing of Hebrew songs of the Land of Israel, sung by the "guards", who came to the ceremony in the synagogue in their uniforms with their banners.

A Great *Akademia* [Pol. celebration] at the "Nowości" Theatre

The Jews of Częstochowa celebrated their happiness for the opening of the Hebrew University, not only at their Old and New synagogues, but also arranged, that same evening, a great celebratory *akademia* at the city's "Nowości" theatre.

The theatre was packed full. The *akademia* was opened by the Chairman of the Celebrations Committee, A. A. Szajnfeld, who handed over to the guest from Łódź, Dr Sz wajg.

At the main table sat the *prezesi* [Pol. presidents, chairmen] of the *Kehilla* board of management and its council: Szmul Goldsztajn and Chaim Weksler; from the Zionist Organisation – N. Richter, from the Merchants' Union – Mr Sztyller. They were joined by representatives of all the city's associations and philanthropic institutions.

The *akademia* was opened with singing the Polish National Anthem; afterwards, Mr Weksler – in name of the *Kehilla*, Mr Janowski – the Union of Zionists, Mr Halter – "*Mizrachi*", Mr Kohn – "*Tarbut*", Mr Gitler – "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*", Mr Blum – "*Akademische Jugend*" [Academic Youth], Mr Natan Kohn – "*Keren Ha'Yesod*" [Foundation Fund] and Mr Natan Richter – "*Keren Kayemeth Lelrael*", delivered inspirational speeches.

The Chairman of the *akademia* read a warm greeting from the City Council for this important celebration.

Further greetings [came from]: Mr Brandes in the name of "*Tzeirei Mizrahi*", Mr Danziger – "*Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi*", Mr Kohn - the "*Dobroczynność*" [Charity] association, Mr Sztyller – Merchants' and Manufacturers' Union, Mr Filipowicz – "*Kleinhändler-Verein*" [Retailers' Union], Mr Langer – Artisans' Union, Mrs Weksler – "*Ezra*" [Aid] association, Headmaster Mr Przysuski – craftsmen's school, Mr Krieger – Sport and Gymnastics Association.

Written greetings were sent by: the sports club “Warta”, the horticultural farm, “Hachnosos Orchim” [hospitality for guests] and “Beis-Lechem*”.

In conclusion, Dr Szwajg delivered a very content-rich presentation in which he dwelt upon various epochs in the life of the Jewish People, starting from the times of its existence as an independent kingdom and in the different periods of its exile, to the moment when the dream of returning to Zion begins to materialise. [He] affirmed that the Hebrew University in Jerusalem is an important stage in the path to the redemption of the Land [of Israel] and the building thereof.

Dr Szwajg ended his passionate speech with the call “*Let us honour the glory of our great leader, Dr Herzl z”l, who has put us on the right path to our redemption*”.

The entire assembly rose from their seats and reverentially honoured the memory of our prematurely deceased leader.

The recitation section then followed, which comprised:

Ms Wajnberg recited a prophesy of Ezekiel about the “dry bones”, Mr Szmidt sang the well-known folksong “*In Cheder*”, Ms Fridrich – “*And it shall come to pass in the last days*” [Isaiah 2] and Ms Muszka – “*Baderech Shvi***”.

The *akademia* concluded with the “*Hatikvah*” played by Mr. Szmulewicz and his orchestra.

Thus, Jewish Częstochowa once celebrated the historic day of 1st April 1925.

* [Translator’s note: literally “house of bread”, the reference here is to a soup-kitchen, although it is also the name of the biblical city of Bethlehem.]

** [Translator’s note: “Sit on the Way”, probably a poem.]