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The *Kehilla* and Its Activities

The internal life of the Jews in Poland was, during their entire history, usually reflected upon the domain of the *Kehilla* (Jewish Community Council). From reports regarding the activity of these Councils, we may glean a concept of the daily concerns and necessities of a Jewish congregation. Their conflicts in private and in general interests, their ups and downs, became apparent, in large part, in the meetings and general assemblies of these community organs. The activities of the individual and the public were recorded in the Community Council reports - the community management and the relevant institutions.



Between the two World Wars, the wealth and poverty in Poland, [both] shared and individual, in Jewish life on the one hand, and the government's anti-Jewish politics on the other, demanded a broad area of work for the *kehilla* and made its existence necessary. Both aspects gave purpose to the community-organization and determined its autonomous character.



Jewish life in Częstochowa also created a broad field of work for the *kehilla* as an organisation. The political and socio-economic interests, the religious and cultural-educational needs of the different political parties on the Jewish street were mirrored within the community's council. Its autonomous character - although limited mainly to religious functions - provided the only opportunity to freely discuss the diverse programs of parties such as Zionists, "*Mizrachi*", "*Aguda*", "*Bund*", Assimilationists, Democrats, diverse Chassidic courts, retailers, artisans, the impartial [factions] and other currents on the Jewish street. This same composition also gave purpose to the community organisation, which needed to regulate the internal life of the Jewish public. After all, it dealt with the management of the Częstochowa Jewish community's assets. It had to allocate its incomes and expenditure - the money coming both from the individual and from the public. The positive and negative of its agencies - all this, indeed, must have dictated the course of Jewish life in Częstochowa.



Although internal differences of opinion existed within the *kehilla*, to the government, it was the only external representative of the entire Jewish public. Surely, different opinions also existed in the approach to the authorities' demands. The question was debated whether the *kehilla* should be limited to religious activity only or should it also deal with national-cultural issues that fall under the community council's autonomous jurisdiction. Opinions were divided - certain factions represented the minimal program, whilst others demanded a maximal program. It is noteworthy that, in both cases, the *kehilla* spoke for a united Jewish public and with its good in mind.

The result was, we may say, that in the forum of the *kehilla*, the best traditions of the Częstochowa Jewish community were upheld. Their initiative, their political and social creations, made the most marked impression and found the correct form in all sittings of the *kehilla* organs, and it would have continued till the end of time.

(Alas, the annihilation of Polish Jewry by the German murderers also put an end to the beautiful and ideal life of the Częstochowa *kehilla*).

List of Members of the Jewish Community Council Before the Holocaust*

(according to the *starostwo* ledgers, numbers 60-64)

A. [א] *Kehilla* Committee

1. Jakob Rozenberg - Democrats
2. Szmul Goldsztajn - *Mizrachi*
3. Wilhelm Zeryker - Democrats
4. Mendel Fogel - *Agudas Yisroel*
5. Dawid Filipowicz - Retailers Organization
6. Józef Prokosz - *Mizrachi*
7. Dawid Działowicz - Artisans Organization
8. Szmul Kac - Artisans Organization
9. Leizer Rozenbaum - *Agudas Yisroel*
10. Abram Luzor Szajnfeld - General Zionists
11. Dr. M. Mering - General Zionists

B. [ב] *Kehilla* Council

1. Chaim Weksler - *Mizrachi*
2. M. Fajgenblat - Artisans Organization
3. Szmul Zelinger - *Agudas Yisroel*
4. Menachem Mendel Epsztajn - Retailers Organization
5. Szaja Granek - Artisans Organization
6. Dr. Stefan Kon-Kolin - Democrats
7. Icek Majer Krel - *Agudas Yisroel*
8. Sigmund Markowicz - Manufacturers Union
9. Berl Szybel - Artisans Organization
10. Józef Menachem Zilberberg - *Mizrachi*
11. Leib (Leon) Kopinski - General Zionists

* There may have been more members, but this list was composed according to the protocol in the ledgers of the Częstochowa *starostwo*.

Statistical Figures on Częstochowa

(gathered from various periodical sources)

Year	Inhabitants
1860	9000
1880	21,000
1900	38,000 ¹
1910	73,000 ²
1920	80,000
1931	117,000
1939	138,000 ³

The Population in 1939 by Religion

Roman Catholic	108,000
Jewish	28,538
Evangelists	748
Eastern Orthodox Slavs	447
Miscellaneous	71
Total	137,804

The Education System in Częstochowa

Public schools	18
Directors and teachers	186
Christian pupils	14,471 ⁴
Jewish pupils	2271

Clarifications to the statistical figures:

¹ In those years the population grew steadily;

² Due to the First World War, when the industrial growth of the city was almost completely halted, this also influenced the growth of the population; immediately following the war this changed for the better;

³ By the number of inhabitants in 1939 (137,804), Częstochowa was in eighth place in the Kingdom of Poland;

⁴ The percentage difference between the Polish and Jewish pupils (the former [making up] 13% of the general population and the latter just 8%) is explained with that only public school pupils are considered. The pupils of *cheiders* and *yeshivas* were not registered when the statistic was compiled.

From the same sources - the Jewish press in those years - we bring a few more interesting details:

1. In 1924 only 9 (nine) houses were built in Częstochowa!

2. At the time the voters' lists were composed for the City Council elections (in 1934), the voter [registration] cards reached over 62 thousand but, after checking the numbers through home visits to the Częstochowian citizens, it was discovered that in that year, due to the financial crisis and other reasons, over 2500 voters had left the city, who sought their livelihoods elsewhere.

It is interesting that at that same period, the magistrate carried out the measuring of Częstochowa's streets.

It turned out that already then, Częstochowa had about 70 kilometers of streets, but, it seems, that from "measured streets" no livelihood is to be pulled...And the 2500 voting citizens had to seek it elsewhere...