Bits

of the History of Jews in Silesia

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Bits of history

There are books whose authors describe in detail and analyse historical processes and events, speculate and propose hypotheses.

This book is quite different in its very assumption. Its initiators have decided that it should be an inspiration, a moment of curiosity and an invitation to reflect.

It is composed of bits of memory of the Jews who lived in the south-western part of Silesia and who left here traces of their life. The traces are not numerous and not as distinct as the curiosity of those who are now setting off on a journey to discover them.

Jews were and still are a special kind of people – with their own culture and customs so different from others. They have cultivated them for centuries. Their customs are different – from birth until death. But among the Jews are also war heroes, model entrepreneurs, and outstanding artists and scientists as well as poor relatives, generous philanthropists and skilful politicians. They are both different and the same as anyone else.

There is no book presenting a comprehensive history of Jews in Silesia and such a book is probably impossible because it would be an enormous work. It would have to cover the presence of Jewish communities from the time of the Middle Ages to the hysteria provoked by preacher John of Capistrano, followed by their slow return to the region over centuries, the recognition of their rights as citizens at the start of the 19th century, torment and extermination during World War II, with Nazi death camps. And the book would have to include internal quarrels of the Jewish community on the one hand and the activity of outstanding brains on the other, or the Orthodox behaviour of some of them and the secularization of others. Research into the causes and results of these processes would be a task for generations and few would take an interest in it.

Bits of memory are equally important – the awareness that among those who were building Silesia's identity were people of Mosaic faith who left here the legacy of their factories and synagogues, cemeteries and libraries. Some of them would preserve even the tiniest mementos, traces of their work and life; others would destroy all mementoes of their life so that no one could prove their background.

This book does not fully explain anything because no book is able to do that. This book, illustrated with bits of carefully selected images, may be a lasting trace of the existence of these communities. It is designed to provoke curiosity and reflection, like the pieces of rock placed on the headstones (matzevahs) which have survived in the few Jewish cemeteries which still exist.

Jews – eternally wandering people

The history of the Jewish people is a history of perpetual wandering throughout our era. They have wandered across the world for almost 2,000 years. How come a people who did not have their own state for almost 2,000 years has managed to survive?

Diaspora

Diaspora is the keyword in explaining this secret but it does not clarify everything either. It is worth realizing that the wandering Jews - persecuted by the ancient Romans and harassed for their religion by Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and others – have survived. They resisted assimilation. Many of them did not give up any of their religious norms, even the strictest ones, manifesting for 2,000 years the idea of being kosher. They built their community. Even though many of them integrated into other ethnic groups, in difficult times their special sense of solidarity always prevailed.

A variety of forces fought against the Jewish people by various means: from Pope Paul IV - who in the middle of the 16th century approved of the system of Jewish ghettos aimed at isolating Jewish communities within many contemporary cities - to Hitler. The latter, in the middle of the 20th century, made the word ghetto assume an exceptionally dreary meaning. In some cases it became synonymous with martyrdom and the Holocaust. The Nazis did not limit themselves to destroying Jewish structures or isolating the ghettos to an unprecedented extent. They made it a point of honour to physically exterminate all Jewish people across the world, starting with Europe where they created an ideological "industry of death."

It is ironic that soon after World War II, which was a hecatomb for the Jewish people, a Jewish state, Israel, was established in 1948 after almost 2,000 years.

But earlier, every other method had been tried to make Jews disappear from the face of the earth – not necessarily in the physical sense but as a relatively homogeneous community sharing common ideas, religion and mind-set. Rumours were being spread that the blood of innocent children was added to the Jewish matzah, Jews were forced to convert to Christianity and killed for adhering to Judaism. How come they have survived? It is an important question in the world's history, a question which has largely remained unanswered.

Secret of survival

"Like the four winds blowing in all directions,"* says prophet Zechariah, *"God dispersed Jews all around the world."

And as the world cannot do without the winds, it cannot do without Jews likewise.

Jews are often compared to the dust of the earth. They are scattered across the world like dust and like the dust of the earth are trampled by the feet of every passer-by, but despite that they stay alive. All the peoples who tread and trample on them die while Jews survive.

The rulers of Babylon, Media and Greece go up the ladder first to reach the height of their power and then fall down to the very bottom. And they will never raise themselves while the Jewish people live on.

In his prophecy about the punishment awaiting Jews, Moses said: "You will become lost among nations."

(*The verses above and below come from Talmudic Aggadah*)

In daily practice, one should understand all these quotes as an expression of the destiny of Jews, eternally wandering and trusting that when the Galut – the banishment which began in 135 AD by Emperor Hadrian's decree - comes to an end they will all return to their Homeland and their diaspora (dispersion) will be over.

Scattered across the world, Jews are exposed to bad treatment from other nations. Not only do they accept this fate, but they even regard it as an advantage because one of its consequences is that they have managed to maintain their cohesion and identity as a nation and have resisted assimilation. The Aggadah stress that if the life of Jews among other nations was easy their motivation to return to the Homeland would weaken.

"The Jewish people (...) live among nations and do not find rest among them. If they found peace and rest, who knows if they would return to their land."

Persecutions strengthen their unity and are a fertile soil for the development of culture and arts.

And it is no different with Poland's history. Our most outstanding works of culture were created in the times when Poland was occupied by foreign powers or soon after the occupation when the memory of the injustice was still alive and the sense of our independence being under threat had not yet died out. Our writers, many of them in exile, wrote "to uplift the hearts."

And one can hardly overestimate Poland's cultural achievements, recognized across the world, in the years 1945-1989. It is enough to mention Polish film school and Polish poster school. When we are independent and in "our own home" it is much more difficult for us to be united. Isn't it an analogy?

SYNAGOGUES
houses of prayer

Synagogues were not only places for prayer, but also symbolized the importance of the congregation. This is why Jews tried so hard to ensure their existence and the Nazis were so eager to destroy them and wipe them off not only from the face of the earth but also from human memory…

Synagogue in Jelenia Góra (Hirschberg)

It is known that only three persons of Mosaic faith lived in Jelenia Góra in 1797. A bigger inflow of Jewish people was noted in the 19th century following Prussian reforms, under which Jews were granted equal rights before law. Thirty five adherents of Judaism were registered in Jelenia Góra in 1812, the first year when the new regulations became effective. However, the community did not build their synagogue immediately.

Initially, they satisfied their religious needs in the private apartment of a merchant's wife called Lipfert. The head of the congregation was Meier Berkowitz. It was only in 1845 that the congregation bought a house on the present Kopernika Street - the house number was 20 and the street was called Hintergasse and later Priestergasse (Tylna Street, and then Kapłańska Street).The house was demolished and the construction of a synagogue began on the site on August 6, 1845. The construction was initiated by a ceremony of laying the cornerstone; which was immortalized in two commemorative documents. The project was carried out by Moritz Altmann, a well-known bricklayer and then factory owner. The synagogue was officially opened on September 14, 1846 in the presence of people representing all denominations.

The synagogue stood on the site of the present stores with household appliances and bicycles. We know how it looked like from the building documentation, which however dates to a later time than its construction. The building, not very big, was on a rectangular plan measuring 18 by 13 metres, with the longer side facing the street. The interior was composed of two main parts: a vestibule from the western side leading to the prayer hall. The hall measured 13 by 11 metres and was divided into two parts: the main player hall on the ground floor reserved for men and balconies for women. The balconies were situated next to both side walls and the vestibule. Access to them was initially through the staircase in the vestibule. In 1874, the staircase was moved to an extension, which could be accessed from the vestibule or from the backyard. The staircase led to a small corridor above the vestibule. An additional wooden stairway, covered with a little roof, was constructed in 1887 also in the backyard. It led directly to the northern balcony. A drawing dated to 1874 shows an organ on the western balcony.

The prayer hall contained two rows of benches. A special cabinet called Aron Kodesh, where the scrolls of the holy book Torah were kept, was situated on a podium at the eastern wall. Just in front of the cabinet there was a bimah, the podium from which the Torah was read out aloud and a cantor led prayers. The bimah was surrounded by a balustrade, but it is unclear whether it was covered by a canopy. There were also two stoves in the hall, installed in 1894 in the north-eastern and south-western corner. In 1934, the stoves were replaced with new ones.

The hall of prayer must have been very bright because its northern and southern wall each had three rows of windows: four round ones with a diameter of 1 metre just below the ceiling, another four measuring 3 by 1.3

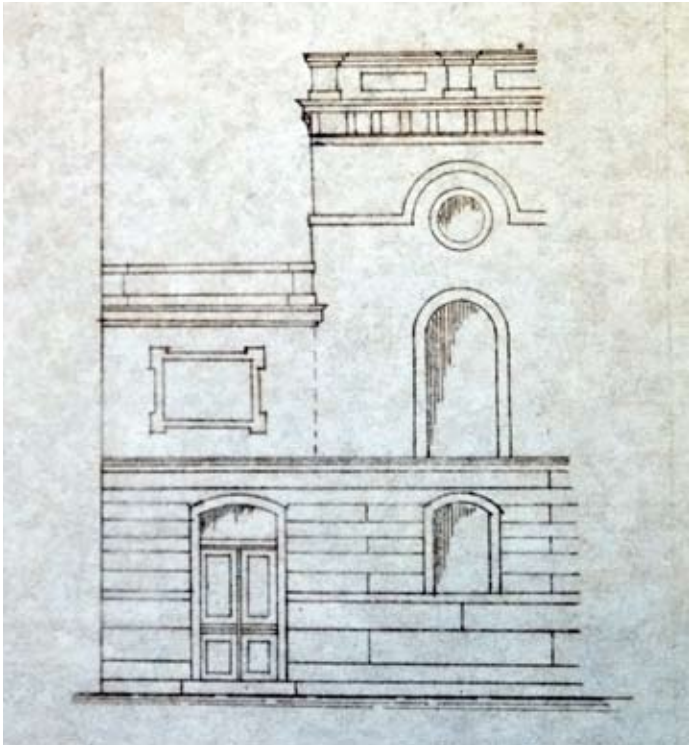
In the centre of the picture: The flat-roofed building is the synagogue in Jelenia Góra

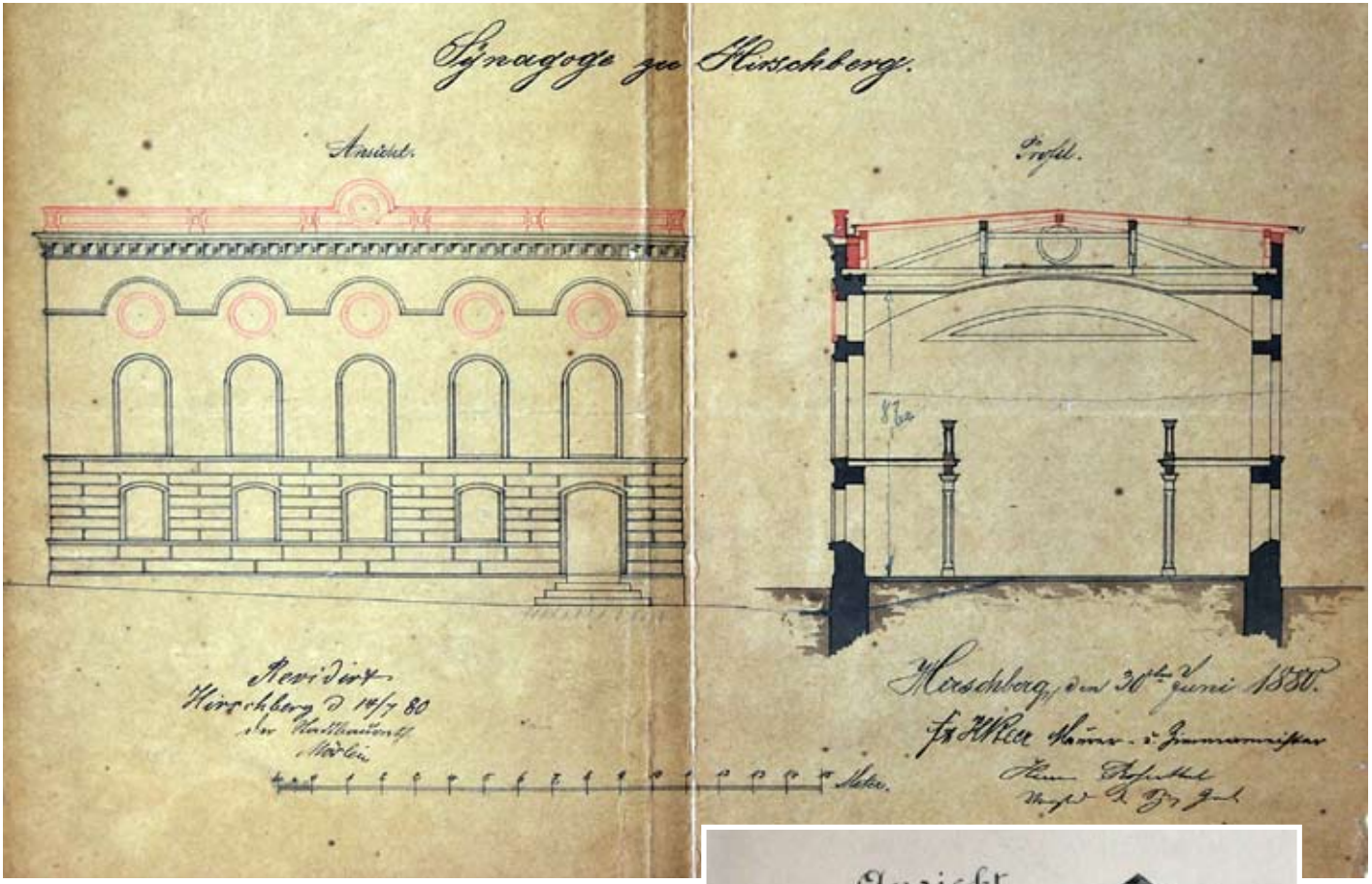
metres below the first row, and four windows measuring 1.5 by 1.3 metres at the bottom. The vestibule was lit by three windows - one of each type.

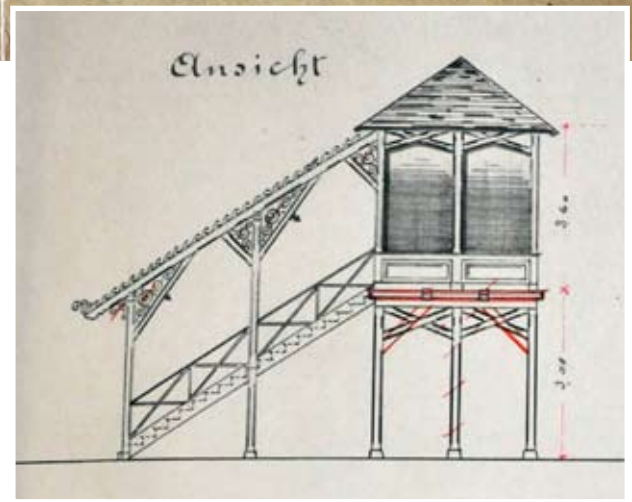
The synagogue building was made of brick and had a flat wooden roof with a decorative frieze. One entered the building from the street by four steps. In the backyard, there was a privy in a separate little building. To the west, the synagogue adjoined another building while to the east there was a three-metre wide passage to the backyard.

We do not have much information about the history of this synagogue. It is known that after Hitler came to power in 1933 the Jewish population in the city started to shrink quickly and so did the incomes of the congregation. The situation was becoming increasingly difficult once Nazism and all its manifestations started to dominate daily life. Jews were banned from certain occupations and various constraints were imposed on them so virtually they could only do manual work to earn money.

But despite that, in 1935 the congregation asked the municipal authorities for a permit to repair the facades of the synagogue. Whether or not the congregation managed to carry out the repair project is unclear. The formalities which had to be completed to receive permits, supervised by the Baupolizei, did not make it easy to organize such projects. During the Crystal Night of November 9-10, 1938 the synagogue was most likely vandalized by Nazi hit squads. Probably, no service has ever been held there since that time. On April 13, 1939 the municipal authorities estimated the value of the building and its site at 13,664 marks, but whether a buyer was found is not known. We also lack full information about the post-war fate of the building. It was certainly not used after the war, although the building survived relatively intact. The process of destruction was fast, mainly because the building was not used and because of the weather. Photographs were taken inside the building as late as 1957, indicating that it still existed. But soon afterwards it ceased to exist together with other historic buildings as there began the process of demolishing most of the old dilapidated tenement houses, which were not repaired after the war. By the early 1970s all of the buildings in the area were demolished and the present ones were soon constructed on their site.







Structural drawings for the synagogue

Synagogue in Kamienna Góra (Landeshut)

It follows from "The Chronicle of Kamienna Góra," written by Wilhelm Kliesch, a bell-ringer at the local Evangelical Church, on the basis of earlier records by Perschke, Semper, Hayn and Zimmermann, that the first synagogue was built here relatively late – in 1826. The Polish version of the Chronicle was published in 2005 as a translation from German. The term "first synagogue" is quite misleading because detailed records show that the synagogue was a converted upper storey of the residential building at 21 Friedrichstrasse (now Mickiewicza Street). This means that for several years the Jewish congregation had to do without a shul. It follows from historical records that the congregation was set up in 1821, less than a decade after the Prussian authorities' edict, under which Jews had been given equal rights as citizens of Prussia.

The synagogue was sufficient to meet the needs of the congregation for more than three decades. A new synagogue, as an independent building, was constructed in 1858 on Wallstrasse (now Wojska Polskiego Street). There is no trace left of this second synagogue – it was burnt down by NSDAP hit squads during the Cristal Night of November 9-10, 1938. The site has since remained undeveloped. It is now partly occupied by a car park.

The construction of the synagogue preceded by only a few years the beginning of the rapid development of Kamienna Góra. In 1862, Falk Valentin Grünfeld, a Jew from the town of Leśnica (Leschnitz) in Upper Silesia, founded in the city a linen weaving plant and a spinning mill. Also in 1862, another Kamienna Góra resident of Jewish origin, J. Rinkel, set up a company to "fabricate linen." The two companies developed rapidly; the latter had its own stores selling linen and threads in many local towns.

Other entrepreneurs then came to the city or expanded their existing businesses. Their contemporaries perceived them not only as wealthy entrepreneurs, but also patrons of many important local undertakings.

But less than 100 hundred years passed and the Jews who had built the economic power of the city were not only deprived of their synagogue during the Crystal Night, but - even earlier - were being gradually driven out from their factories and houses and then exterminated by the Nazis.

View of Kamienna Góra, a lithograph of ca. 1870. In the centre – the synagogue built about a decade earlier

The building to the left was constructed in 1912 on the site of the former municipal cemetery on Wallstrasse (now Wojska Polskiego Street). The synagogue stood at the bend of the road. The site is now undeveloped, occupied partly by a makeshift car park. To the right, one can see a part of the building which now houses the prosecutor's office. The photograph dates to ca. 1930.

The synagogue built by the Jewish congregation in Kamienna Góra in 1858. The building next to it, in the centre of the photograph, was occupied by a Jewish school and the rabbi's apartment. The Jewish congregation recovered this building in 2007 and sold it.

A postcard dated to ca. 1915. To the right – the synagogue building

A postcard dated to ca. 1913. In the background – the Jewish synagogue which later, on the night of November 9-10, 1938, was burnt down by NSDAP hit squads during the Crystal Night.

Short histories of some Lower Silesian synagogues

Synagogue in Jawor (Jauer)

The synagogue was built in 1364 on today's Stefana Czarnieckiego Street. In the wake of the anti-Semitic witch-hunt inspired by John of Capistrano's sermons, Jews were expelled from Jawor and rumour has it that more than 10 people were burnt. The abandoned synagogue was converted three years later into a Catholic church with the consent of Czech king Albrecht II. After the construction of a nearby hospital was completed in 1446, the building became the hospital chapel of St. Adalbert. On the initiative of Countess Schaffgotsch, the building was thoroughly remodelled in 1729 and finally lost any features of a Jewish synagogue.

Synagogue in Strzegom (Striegau)

It still is a sacred building – a Catholic church of St. Barbara on today's Kościelna Street. The synagogue was built in the 14th century as a single-nave building. Jews were expelled from Strzegom in 1454 and the synagogue was converted to meet the needs of Catholics as early as 1455. Jews returned to Strzegom around 1812 in the time of Prussian rule. But the local Jewish congregation never grew in strength, in terms of size and affluence, enough to be able to build its house of prayer.

Synagogue in Kowary (Schmiedeberg)

It was built at the end of the 19th century – the exact date has not been established. It is located at 6 Poprzeczna Street. The Nazis vandalized the building during World War II. The building was turned into a warehouse after a period of disuse and continues to perform this function. Apart from small details, like for example window shapes, the building retained no architectural features associated with its original function.

Synagogue in Legnica (Liegnitz)

Built around 1320, it was destroyed in the wake of the 1453 developments. The institution of synagogue was revived in a private apartment in 1812 where it existed until a new synagogue was built in 1847.

Synagogue in Kłodzko (Glatz)

In 1884-1885, a synagogue was constructed on the street now called Wojska Polskiego. It was officially opened on September 2, 1885. It survived less than one century. It was burnt down during the Crystal Night of November 9-10, 1938. The building was one of the more original synagogues because it was built in the Moorish style, with a characteristic dome, patterned against the larger and better-known synagogues in Wrocław and Hanover. There was a plaque on the wall commemorating a declaration of the local Jews' loyalty to the government and then, after World War I, another plaque was placed there with the names of Jewish war heroes. An important element of the interior was a women's gallery – not always installed in a synagogue – which enabled them to pray in the synagogue together with men without distracting their attention. In the late 20th century (1995), an obelisk was placed where the synagogue had once stood to commemorate it.

Old synagogue in Świdnica (Schweidnitz)

The first synagogue was built in Świdnica in the 14th century. The street where it stands is now called Kotlarska. As elsewhere in Silesia, all Jews were expelled from the city in 1453, a development prompted by sermons of John of Capistrano. The synagogue was converted into a Corpus Christi church. The building was subsequently converted into a municipal arsenal in the 16th century and then into a warehouse in the 18th century. It is still used as a warehouse. Over the years the building was repaired and remodelled many times.

Lubań (Lauban) – a synagogue that did not exist

Internet sources (Wikipedia) provide a vague description of "a synagogue in Lubań on Grunwaldzka Street" but caution, and rightly so, that the description may be fully or partly incorrect. The Virtual Shtetl portal writes that the synagogue was damaged during World War II and that "the Star of David can still be seen in the eastern façade."

The truth is different because the only architectural element which can be regarded as characteristic of synagogues is the shape of the windows, to be exact - the rounded upper parts of the windows in the western façade. There are no more analogies.

Although the Virtual Shtetl provides information that a Jewish synagogue was located in a private apartment in a different building, now non-existent, situated at the intersection of Grunwaldzka and Tkacka Streets, this narrative in inconsistent.

The building described as a synagogue was in fact the seat of a Masonic Lodge while the decorative element called the Star of David is in fact a pentagram (a five-pointed star) rather than a hexagram (a six-pointed star), which is regarded as the Star (Shield) of David.

This kind of decorative element proves the Masonic history of the building because the pentagram was once a symbol of Freemasonry. As is typical of symbols, the pentagram also underwent an evolution. It was later treated as a symbol of Satanism, especially if inscribed in a circle, and earlier as a Christian symbol of the five wounds of Christ or the five virtues of knighthood.

Whatever it symbolized, the presence of the pentagram negates the view that the building was a synagogue. It is true however that there was a Jewish community in Lubań as evidenced by a publication kept at the National Library in Berlin.

(The above information was corrected with the help of the Museum in Lubań, which keeps the only piece of Judaica known to have survived in the city – a table top of brass sheet with Judaic symbols and an inscription.)

The seat of the Masonic Lodge considered by many, but wrongly, to be a synagogue building


SKUP ZŁOMU

The **PAROCHET** (screen) is the richly decorated curtain which separates in synagogues the sacred sphere from the profane. It is usually made of velvet with the centrepiece decorated with raised embroidery.

The layout is governed by strict rules, with the centre of the embroidered decoration occupied by the Star of David, a Torah crown or a pair of lions presenting the tablets of the Decalogue. Some parochets also bear Hebrew inscriptions. On both sides of the curtain there are strips of a different fabric. They symbolize the columns of the Temple in Jerusalem. Another strip of fabric, called the kapporeth, is also hung on the parochet.

Parochets of different kinds (colours) are used for specific holidays: the white one symbolizes the absolution of sins or forgiveness, the black one is used as a sign of mourning.

Jewish cemeteries
unquiet places of final rest

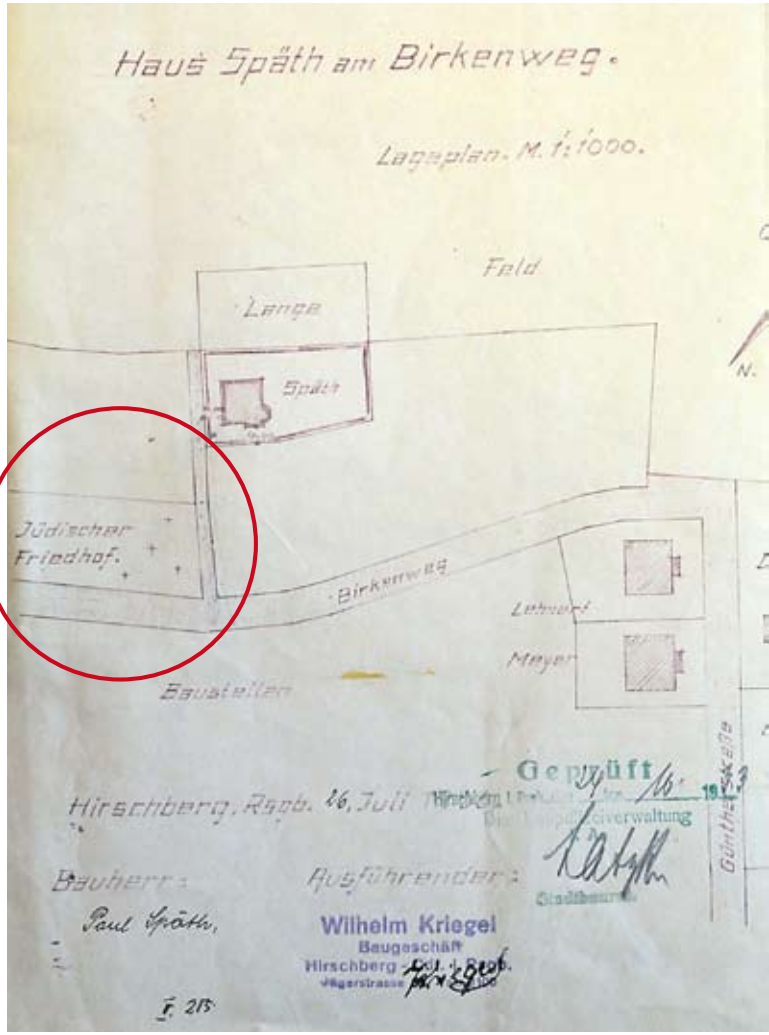
Jewish cemeteries were sites of various excesses since the Middle Ages. Bad emotions hovered above these places with unexplainable aggression. People of different nationalities, for reasons known to themselves or without any reason, destroyed Jewish tombstones (matzevahs), vandalized chapels, leaving "no stone upon another."

Cemetery in Jelenia Góra

There were two Jewish cemeteries in Jelenia Góra. The older one was established around 1820 in the area of today's Nowowiejska, Na Skałkach and Studencka Streets. There are no records about the date when it was closed down or perhaps even completely cleared. According to people living in nearby buildings, a commemorative stone, which could still be seen there in the 1960s, proved that the cemetery had once occupied the site. At present, it is even difficult to establish where exactly the stone stood.

The new cemetery, on today's Sudecka Street, was founded in 1879 and expanded in 1910. It existed for almost 100 years. According to some historians, the last burial took place here in 1946, but it is difficult to confirm this. Some remnants of gravestones from earlier times have survived, but there is no trace of the funeral home. Its location and architecture are only known from technical drawings and pictorial views (pp. 22-25), a part of the German Baupolizei documentation dated to the 1930s. The cemetery was finally closed down in 1974 and a commemorative stone with a plaque was placed on the site.

The cemetery was at the centre of a conflict at the end of the 1970s because the construction of the modern Jelenia Góra hotel (now Mercure) began on an adjacent parade square, where Workers' Day parades on May 1, popular at that time, were formed. One of the Jewish congregations protested against the project, arguing that the hotel car park encroached on the cemetery site. The dispute was resolved through negotiation.



Bober
Hälterhäuser
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Mühlgrabenstrasse
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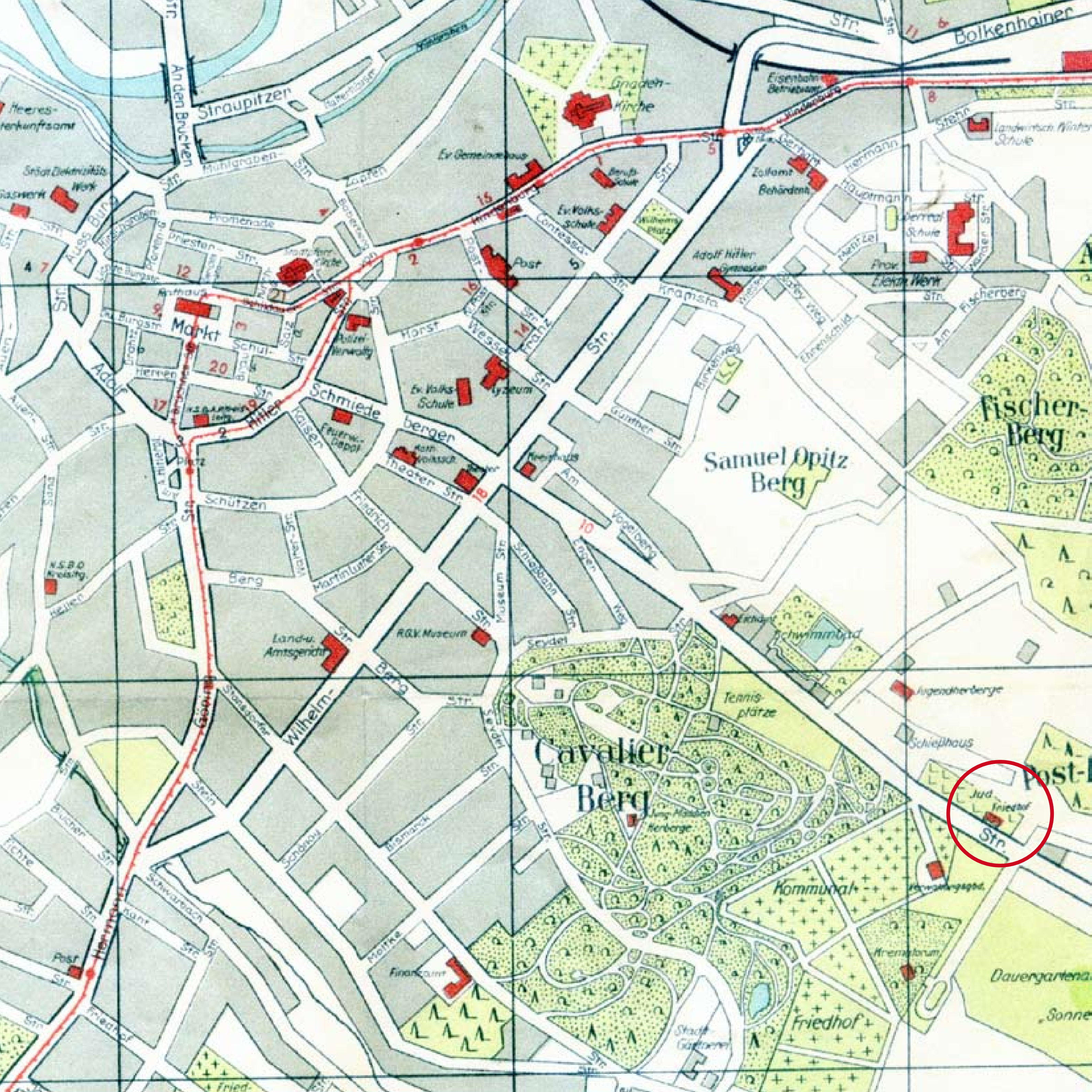

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Gaswerk
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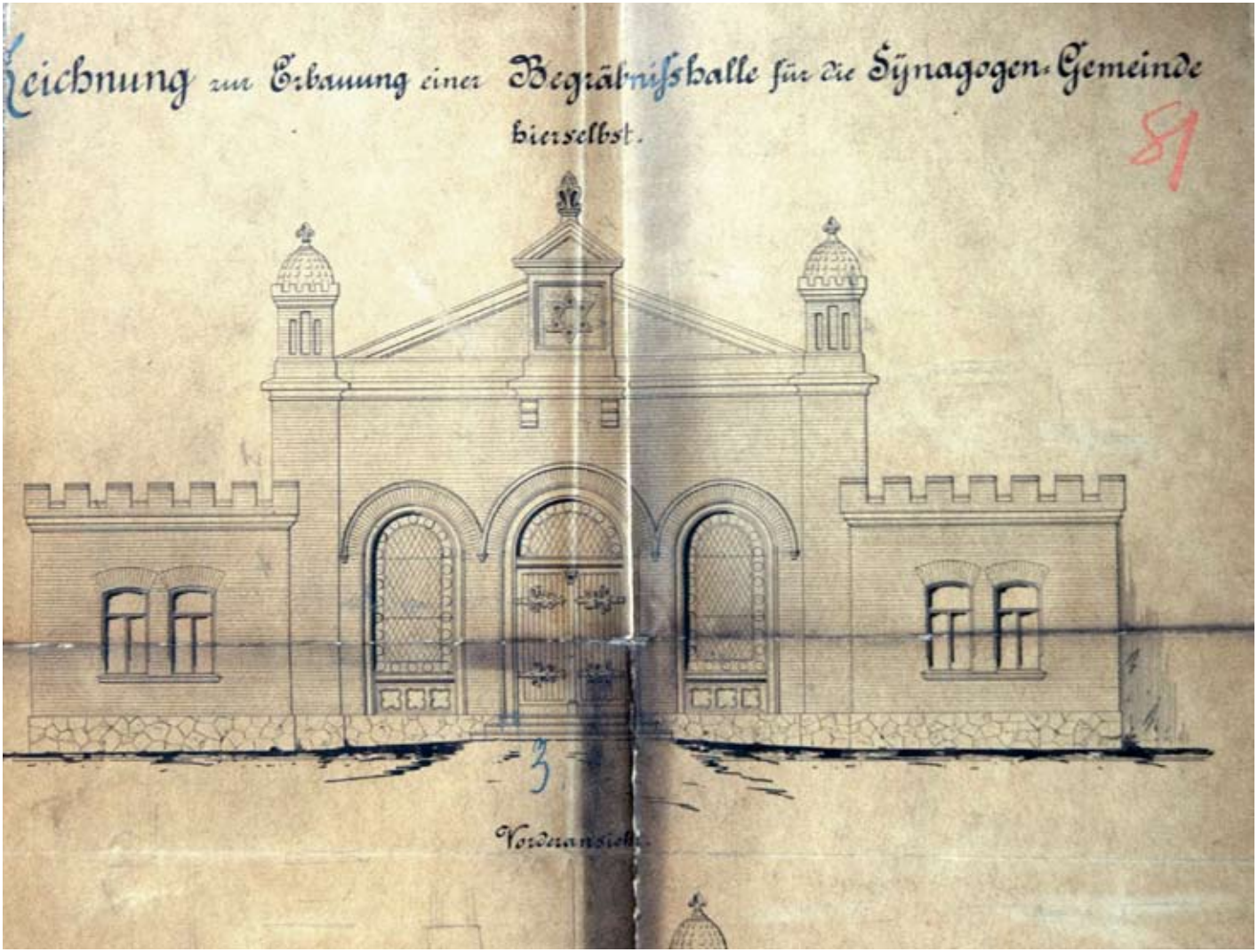


Cemetery in Jelenia Góra on Sudecka Street – a drawing of the funeral home

Map of Jelenia Góra (before 1933) with the Jewish cemetery on Sudecka Street marked by the red circle


CMENTARZ
ŻYDOWSKI
W JELENIEJ GÓRZE
ZAŁOŻONY W ROKU 1879
ZAMKNIĘTY W ROKU 1974


Wilhelmine
Danziger
geb. 1. 3. 1848
gest. 20. 12. 1930
Lehy Ucko
geb. 11. 5. 1876


Rosel
Apfelmann
geb. Hirschstein
19. 12. 1891
23. 11. 1938

Cemetery in Kamienna Góra

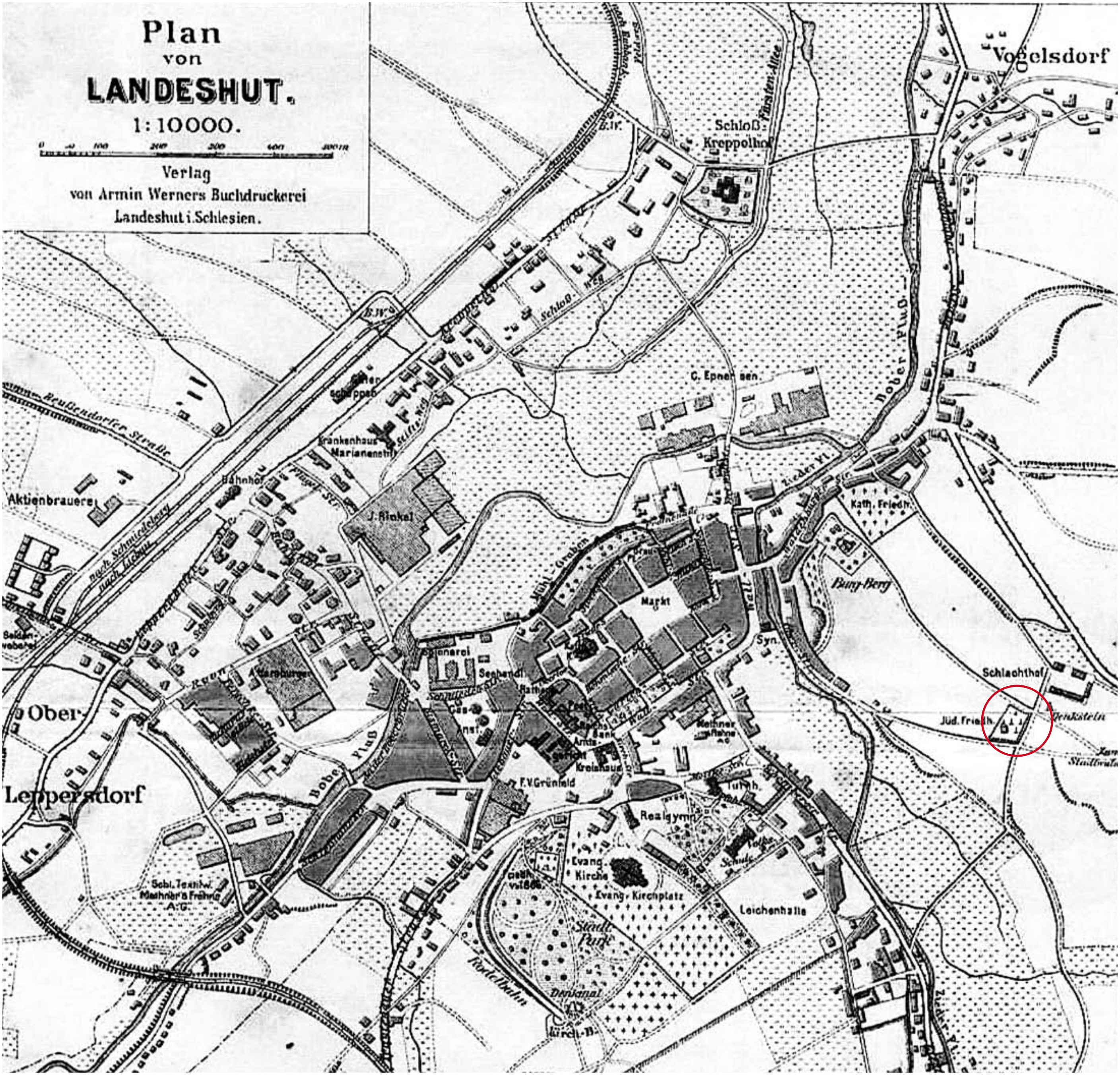
There is an entry in the city chronicle for 1881 that "a new cemetery of the local Israelite congregation was consecrated on August 16." The cemetery, picturesquely situated above an artificial lake, was closed down in the 1970, but its fate had actually been sealed at the end of World War II when it became a site of burials not only for Jews.

Among the sources which wrote about it was the "Pionier" monthly, one of the first periodicals published after World War II in Recovered Territories, as the land granted to Poland by the peace treaty was called. In its issue no. 112 of May 15, 1946, there is a report entitled "The discovery of new mass graves in Kamienna Góra." The author reported that "mass graves – containing around 200 corpses dressed in striped prison uniforms - have been uncovered at the Jewish cemetery. It has been established that these are the bodies of prisoners of the nearby Gross Rosen concentration camp and its branches – Poles, Russians, Belgians and the French." The last Jewish burial in the cemetery was at the beginning of the 1950s – most probably in 1951.

But the fact that this cemetery was called "new" means there was also an "old" one. The old cemetery had been established around 1824. What is left of the new cemetery are only rows of trees typical of cemetery pathways. But in the old cemetery, a few dozen Jewish gravestones have survived in a relatively good state. The place was renovated only at the beginning of the 21st century (2003) thanks to volunteers' effort. Before that the site had been neglected and covered with construction rubble.

A painting by Tomasz Duda, an amateur painter, is one of the mementos of the "new" cemetery. It features the funeral home which once stood there. The painting is in the collection of the Weaving Museum in Kamienna Góra.

Map of Kamienna Góra with the new Jewish cemetery marked by the red circle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Bober Fluß
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Aktienbrauerei
Reußendorfer Straße
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nach Liebau
Kath. Friedh.
Burg-Berg
Mühl-Graben
Markt
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Schlachthof
Jud. Friedh.
Denkstein
Seiden-weberei
Ober-
Leppersdorf
Rathaus
Post
Bank
Amtsgericht
Kreishaus
F. V. Grünfeld
Turnh.
Realgymn.
Evang. Kirche
Evang. Kirchplatz
Leichenhalle
Stadt-Park
Denkmal
Schl. Textilw. Methner & Frahne A.G.
Bober Fluß

Old Jewish cemetery in Kamienna Góra (photo: 2014)

Jewish gravestones and gravestone pieces in the old Jewish cemetery in Kamienna Góra

Painting by Tomasz Duda – the funeral home (non-existent) in the new Jewish cemetery

What is left of the new Jewish cemetery in Kamienna Góra are only rows of trees along former cemetery pathways.

Jewish cemetery in Legnica

It was established in 1826 in the vicinity of today's St. John church. The location was unfortunate because the site turned out to be boggy. This is why as early as 1837 the graves were relocated to a dryer place, close to the municipal cemetery set up in 1822 – in the vicinity of today's Cmentarna and Wrocławska Streets.

A Neo-Romanesque funeral home was built at the new cemetery in 1877. The cemetery has survived until this day and is still in use. The oldest gravestones come from the first half of the 19th century - the years 1835-1838.

Chapel – funeral home in the Legnica cemetery

Old Jewish matzevahs and contemporary tombstones in the Legnica cemetery

Matzevahs in the Legnica cemetery

Matzevahs in the Legnica cemetery

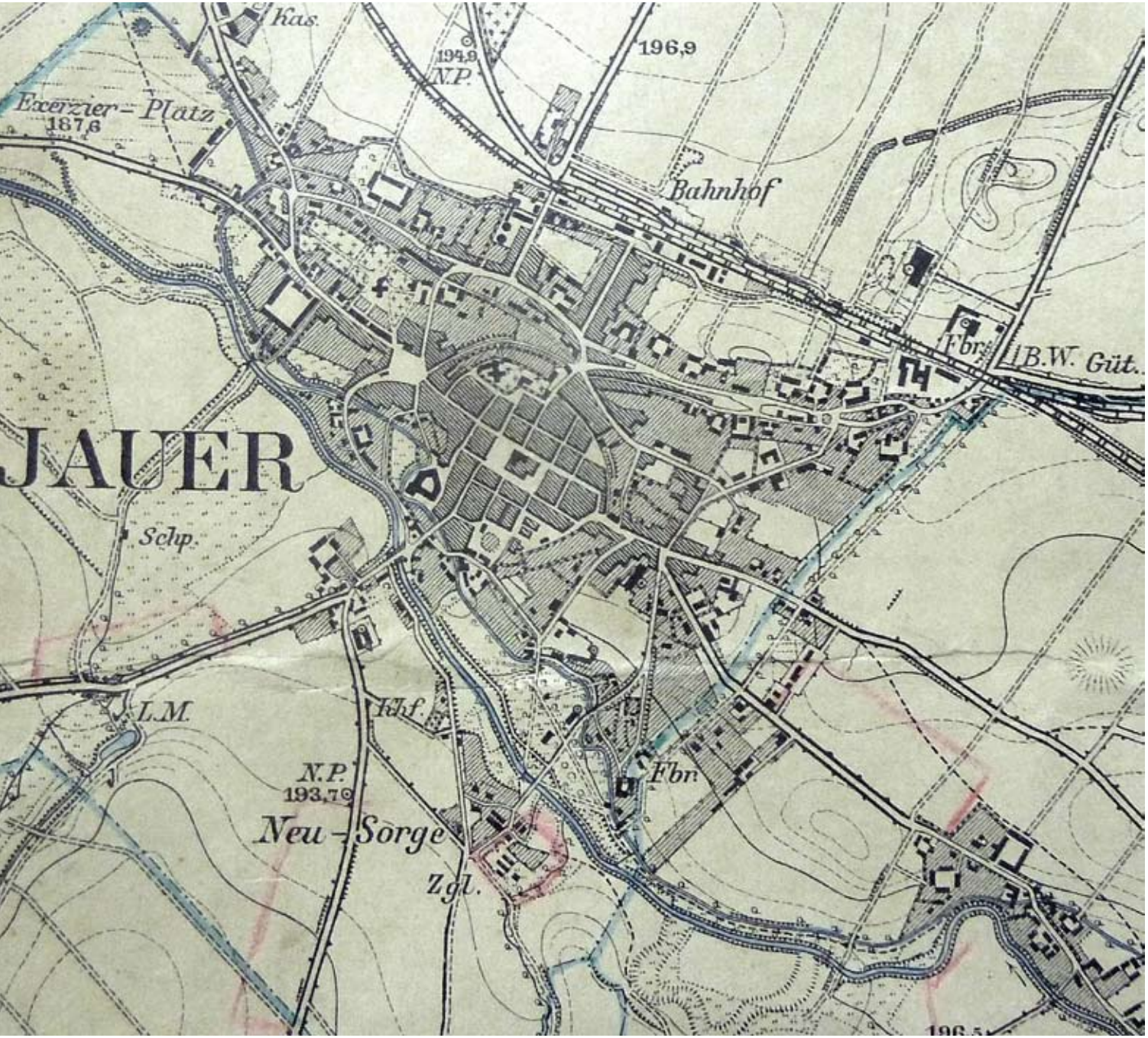
Jewish cemetery in Jawor

It was founded in the middle of the 19th century – it is difficult to establish a more exact date – on today's Głucha Street and closed down in 1974. Around 40 Jewish tombstones have survived there in a relatively good condition, many of them still bearing legible inscriptions.

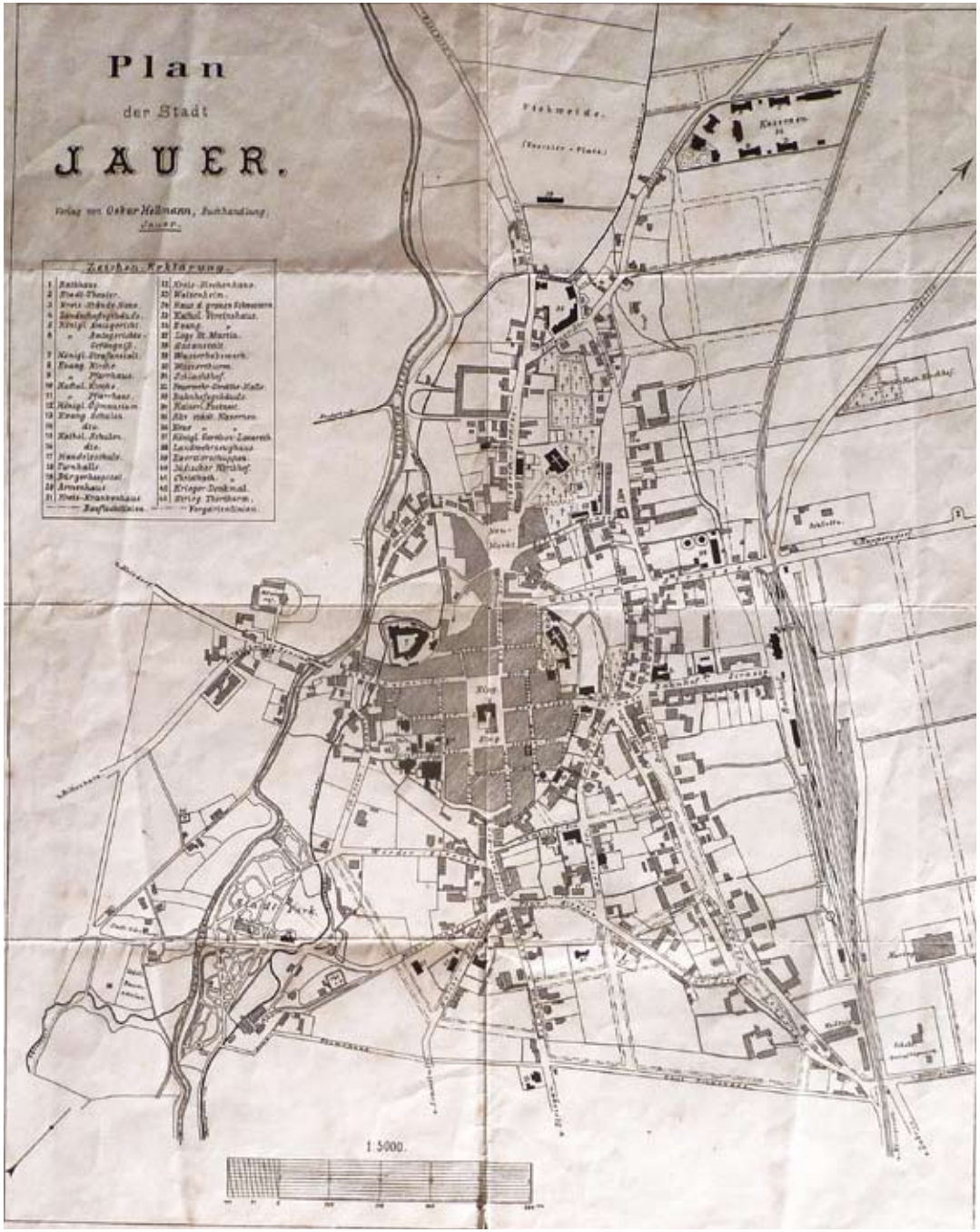
The cemetery is situated in an enclosed area with a concrete fence, part of which is damaged.

Burials, though infrequent, continued there after World War II. The youngest grave dates to 1957, the oldest of those found to 1864 – the cemetery is overgrown with bindweed and bushes. Not all inscriptions and dates are legible because the sandstone matzevahs have been severely damaged by weather.

Map of Jawor with the Jewish cemetery


Kas.
194,9
N.P.
196,9
Exerzier-Platz
187,6
Bahnhof
Fbr.
B.W. Gut.
JAUER
Schp.
L.M.
Hhf.
N.P.
193,7
Neu-Sorge
Zgl.
Fbr.

Cemetery in Jawor



Map of Jawor with the Jewish cemetery

Cemetery in Jawor


Mordko Markus

The **MENORAH** is a special seven-branch candelabrum. Its original was made strictly according to Moses' instructions. The detailed description even specifies what the cups should be like – they should resemble the calyces of almond tree flowers.

The menorah symbolizes the burning bush which appeared to Moses, but each branch also has its own separate meaning. The central light is a symbol of the holy presence of God. The side branches represent Understanding, Might, Fear of God, Knowledge, Counsel and Wisdom.

PRECURSORS
OF MODERN ECONOMY

In contrast to eastern Poland, where Jews usually belonged to poorer social classes and the wider population was not rich either, many of the Jewish people living in Silesia and in big cities in central Poland were rich entrepreneurs. One example is Kamienna Góra.

Kamienna Góra textile manufacturers

Kamienna Góra, from today's perspective, is regarded as a town where linen fabrics have always been produced. But in fact it was only in the 19th century that the town's power in this respect was built. This is when Jews came to the town, including Grünfeld, Rinkel, and then Hamburger and many others. They created the whole structure of the linen industry and then linen trade.

Since the middle of the 19th century Kamienna Góra was gaining in importance. When the residents were counted up in 1868 their number was 5,190, quite a lot by the standards of the time. But the status of the city was even higher than the size of its population would merit when judged by the reputation of the products manufactured in local factories and their owners. It is enough to say that in 1876, one decade after the start of his activity, merchant and factory owner F.V. Grünfeld received the title of "court supplier" from the emperor. This should be seen as a great honour for a man who appeared in Kamienna Góra as a poor newcomer, but eventually turned out to be a skilful merchant and then manufacturer. His company was constantly expanding. It follows from the city chronicles that his new mail order business (later ZPO Kamodex) was blessed in August 1885.

It seems that the Jewish factory owners in Kamienna Góra did not compete with each other and went from success to success almost in parallel. In 1887, Rinkel's firm built a new mechanized weaving plant with 100 workstations, which enabled the whole business - with subsidiaries in Berlin, Vienna and Trutnov (German: Trautenau) – to expand. Also in July 1887, but a dozen or so days later, on July 31, Grünfeld's firm held a grand celebration of its 25th anniversary. Apart from holding parades and banquets, the company set up a savings and loan scheme for its workers. It comes as no surprise that before the end of the year the company owner was elected royal counsellor. He kept going – the establishment of retail stores is Berlin in 1890 was his next step.

Neither did Rinkel stop his expansion. In 1896, he became the sponsor for the construction of the railway line linking Kamienna Góra to Chełmsko (Gollmutz). He granted a significant amount of money for this purpose and at the same time bought many plots for the expansion of his factory.

The first stage in the development of manufacturing in Kamienna Góra, driven by its Jewish residents' capital, ended in 1897 when F.V. Grünfeld died in San Remo. And before his body reached Kamienna Góra, his wife Johanna also died. The two were buried on the same day in a Jewish cemetery. It is unclear whether it was the old or new cemetery because no trace of their grave has survived. But given the time of their death, one can assume that it was the new cemetery.

However, the living retained the memory of them because less than a month after their funeral, the heirs

Contemporary view (2014) of F.V. Grünfeld's factory

founded the Grünfeld Foundation and donated 2,000 marks to the city for this purpose.

In 1900, the management of the F.V. Grünfeld company relocated their headquarters to Berlin. For Kamienna Góra it was a loss, which can hardly be overestimated.

The Jewish industrialists and merchants who lived in Kamienna Góra carried on amassing wealth. They were constructing and expanding their houses and factories. Despite the subsequent turmoil, two world wars and then the change of the economic system, many of their properties have remained parts of the city's architecture to this day. This shows just how important they were.

Frontage of the linen weaving plant and spinning mill building, the former factory of F.V. Grünfeld built in 1862. The director's office was on the first floor in the room with a balcony. After 1945 the building was occupied by various firms: Polgar, Intermoda and Kamodex. It is now a private property.

Next page: Contemporary view of the building (2013)

In contrast to other cities, it is impossible to find in Kamienna Góra any decorative features in buildings indicating that their original owners were Jewish. The only trace, and quite uncertain, is the floor in the hallway of the residential building called “House under the Swans” where one can see an outline which appears to be the Star of David. But there are many doubts about it. The reason, at least to some extent, is that Jews in Kamienna Góra were not Orthodox. According to some historians, with time they departed from practicing their faith.

Albert Hamburger A.-G.

Mechanische Leinenweberei, Färberei und Ausrüstungsanstalt

Landeshut in Schlesien

Die Firma ist wie alle schlesischen Großbetriebe der Leinenindustrie aus der Handweberei hervorgegangen. Sie wurde im Jahre 1872 als offene Handelsgesellschaft gegründet und im Jahre 1922 in eine Aktiengesellschaft umgewandelt.

Die große Nachfrage nach Leinenstoffen in der Vorkriegszeit erforderte Jahr für Jahr erhebliche Betriebserweiterungen und fortlaufend technische Erneuerungen und Verbesserungen. Die Leiter des Werkes haben aber ihr Hauptaugenmerk nicht auf eine übermäßige Produktionsvergrößerung gerichtet, sondern auf die qualitative Ausgestaltung der Weberei und namentlich der Ausrüstungsbetriebe. Gerade die Spezialisierung in der Veredlung leinener Stoffe hat den Ruf der Fabrikate der Albert Hamburger A. G. im In- und Ausland gegründet und befestigt.

Der Export geht nach den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika, nach den nordischen Ländern Europas und dem Balkan.

Das erforderliche Garnmaterial liefert der Weberei zum großen Teil eine eigene Leinengarnspinnerei in Ober-Adersbach.

Advertising card for the factory of Albert Hamburger, one of the sponsors of decorations in the villa of Gerhart Hauptmann, the Silesian Nobel Prize winner who lived in Jagniątkowo (Agnetendorf)

Above: Contemporary view of the former house of Rinkel. Below: Part of the exhibition in the Weaving Museum in Kamienna Góra devoted to the activity of F.V. Grünfeld

A house of a Jewish factory owner in Kamienna Góra – now a residential building with services.

Next page: "House under the Swans," with distinct Art Nouveau details but no trace of Jewish decorative elements. According to the city chronicles, there was once a garden of the wealthy owner of the property in the back of the building.

Jelenia Góra – decorative details in buildings

Decorative details characteristic of Jewish buildings have survived in Jelenia Góra, although the Jewish community was not as affluent there as in Kamienna Góra.

Some Jewish decorative architectural details can still be seen in several places in Jelenia Góra. The buildings were most likely occupied by Jewish residents of the city, who were proud and wealthy enough to afford decorating the frontages of their houses, verandas and eaves with decorative motifs in the shape of the Star of David.

The details can still be seen in the eaves of a house on Grabowskiego Street, the frontage of a house on Wiejska Street and the wooden verandas which survived in quite a good condition for almost a century on Drzymały and Wolności Streets.

The most impressive of the buildings once owned by Jews is undoubtedly the former hotel in Cieplice which is now occupied by the Dąbrówka children's home.

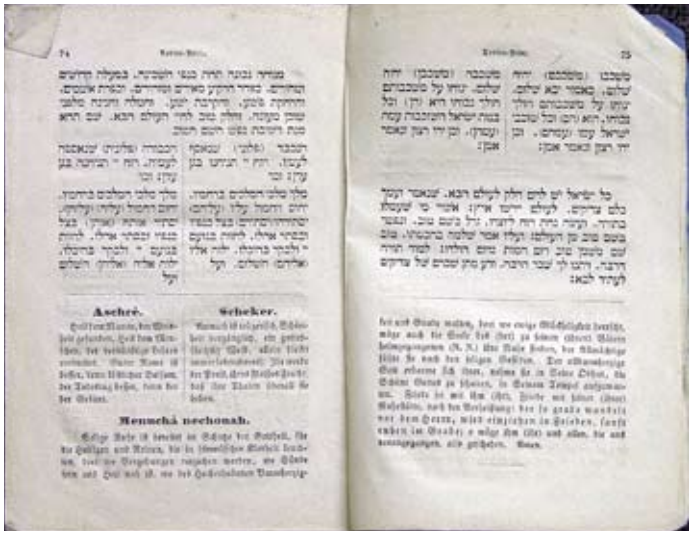
In the very centre of Jelenia Góra, there is a building, now residential one, with a striking architecture. It was constructed to serve as a Mikvah, a ritual Jewish bath. It is difficult to say how long it performed this function. Later descriptions say that it was a bath and that there were bathtubs in individual rooms there but there is no longer any mention of it serving as a Mikvah.

Above: Wooden ornamentation under the eaves of a building on Grabowskiego Street, a rabbi's house according to reports

Below: The Star of David in the frontage of a house on Wiejska Street

Impressively decorated veranda of a house on Drzymały Street in Jelenia Góra – details in the shape of the Star of David

Veranda of a house on Wolności Street – the Star-of-David ornamentation has survived for around 100 years



Aschré.

Scheker.

Menuchá nechonah.

Bilingual prayer book, in Hebrew and German, published in Jelenia Góra

The situation in Jelenia Góra proves that the issues of property, inheritance rights and the real estate involved are very complex. The problem concerns a part of a former Mikvah, which ceased to be Jewish property decades ago (before 1945). But … the Regulatory Commission for Jewish religious congregations in Warsaw, by a ruling of October 10, 2003, gave the right to the residential building at 16 Langego Street in the Jelenia Góra district of Cieplice to the Jewish congregation. Since the building housed council flats, a notarial agreement was signed on November 28, 2006 between the municipal authorities and representatives of the Jewish congregation, represented by the Foundation for the Protection of Jewish Property in Warsaw. Under the agreement, the Foundation gave up its claims on the building on Langego Street and in exchange took over an annexe of the former Mikvah building at 37 Wyszyńskiego Square.

The Dąbrówka children's home – former Jewish guest house run by the Barasch brothers

Located in a large park on the border of Cieplice and Podgórzyn, the guest house of the Barasch brothers was converted after the war into a facility for the care of children. Old postcards from the beginning of the 20th century.

Holzcement-Bedachungs-Erfindungs-Patente: Kaiserreich Oesterreich, Königreiche Ungarn und Böhmen, Wien und Budapest.

CARL SAMUEL HAEUSLER.

Hirschberg i. Schles.,

Inhaber des

Königl. Preuss. rothen Adlerordens IV. Classe.

Erster Champagner-Fabrikant

in Schlesien.

Erfinder des Obstweins, der Frucht-Säfte

und des

Rosshaar-Grases,

sowie Erfinder der nur allein

echten flachen Holzcement-Bedachung,

dreimal patentirt, concessionirt und vielfach prämiirt

in

London, Altona, Cassel, Moskau, Lissabon, Wien,

und ist privilegirt für die k. k. Oesterreichische Monarchie.

Ich beehre mich, die Aufmerksamkeit auf diese feuersicheren, in die erste Hauptclasse erhobenen wasserdichten und unverwüstlichen flachen Dächer zu lenken, welche nach Carl Samuel Haeusler's Erfindungs-System (in 4 Lagen echtem Holzcement und 4 Lagen Papier) prompt ausgeführt werden.
Ich bitte freundlich um geehrte Aufträge.

Mathilde von Schmeling, verwittwete Haeusler,

Fabrikbesitzerin und alleinige Geschäfts-Inhaberin der Firma:

Carl Samuel Haeusler in Hirschberg in Schlesien.

Haupt-Niederlage: Breslau, Tauentzienstrasse 65.

Carl Samuel Häusler was a well-respected citizen of Jelenia Góra, a producer of a binding material used as a sealant for roofs, and – as he proudly emphasized in his advertisements – a knight of the Order of the Red Eagle of the fourth class. He was also the "first producer of champagne in Silesia."

In an advertisement printed in the Jelenia Góra address book of 1875, Häusler was presented as an uncommon man, who had a prominent position in the local community, which shows that at that time no one even thought of reviling him for his Jewish origin.

It follows from a later mention about this company that it "became Aryan," but it is unclear whether the producer's property was nationalized or sold by his inheritors. After World War II, the Central Imported Wine Cellars, now non-existent, were established in its place.

Gerhart Hauptmann and Jews

Gerhart Hauptmann, a Laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912, who lived in Jagniątkowo (then Agnetendorf) in the Karkonosze Mountains in Silesia, deserves respect not only because of his literary talent, but also – and perhaps first of all – for his outstanding flair for politics.

Highly regarded by Germans long before Nazism, he was also tolerated by the Nazis after 1937. And, which is the most surprising, he was also respected by Russians, who not only allowed him to live in his estate after they had occupied the area, but also the highest ranking Russian commanders visited him to hold discussions. After Hauptmann's death in 1946, they allowed his widow Margarete to take to the West anything she wanted from the Meadow Stone, as the villa in Jagniątków was called. A long freight train left from the Jelenia Góra railway station carrying Hauptmann's mortal remains and his whole property packed by the widow.

Hauptmann's connections with Jews are a less know issue but at least equally interesting. The Nazis knew about this but turned a blind eye to the playwright's "whims".

The decoration of the Paradise Hall in the Meadow Stone villa was painted by Avenarius, a popular artist at that time born in Gryfów Śląski (Greiffenber). It was a birthday gift for Hauptmann – not from Avenarius, who received a generous pay for his work (reportedly over 20,000 marks) but from two friends of Hauptmann.

Both were Jewish – Max Pinkus, an entrepreneur from Prudnik (Neustadt) in Opole Silesia, and Max Hamburger, an entrepreneur from Kamienna Góra. One can learn more about Hamburger from documents held by the museum in Kamienna Góra. He was not only a factory owner but also a highly regarded sponsor of many undertakings. Hauptmann's relations with Max Pinkus would have incriminated Hauptmann in the eyes of the Nazis if they had wanted to see them. This philanthropist, well-known in Silesia and the Opole region, loved Hauptmann's literary work and organized his exhibitions, like for example the big exhibition in Wrocław in 1922, Leipzig in 1927 and New York in 1932. Newspapers wrote that without M. Pinkus' collections, including the most valuable first editions, the exhibitions would not have been possible at all.

G. Hauptmann also showed his devotion to his friend, dedicating his poems to him or calling him the Magus of the Temple, with the word Temple meaning Pinkus' library and especially the collection of Hauptmann's works. Hauptmann also immortalized M. Pinkus as a character in his plays. In "The Black Mask," Löwel Perl, a humanist and generous sage, is the only good character among scoundrels and provincials. Hauptmann modelled this character after Max Pinkus. Pinkus was a guest of honour at the premiere of the play in Vienna on December 3, 1929. Pinkus is also present – as the main character - in the play "Before Sunset," which premiered in Berlin on February 16, 1932. The plot is so coincident with M. Pinkus' life – a late love, sui-

cide attempt, failed efforts to get married – that no one had any doubt about who had been immortalized in this play, as critics wrote. The third work devoted to M. Pinkus was the one-act play "Darkness." It is little known but interesting because the author criticized in it the witch-hunt against Jews well noticeable since January 1933, despite their contribution to German culture and economy. This criticism is veiled but obvious. Hauptmann was the only non-Jew at M. Pinkus' funeral.

G. Hauptmann and his family had more ties with Jews but not all of them are so "transparent" and evident. His relationship with Ida Orlov, a young actor with a Jewish background, was an open secret. The result of this relationship was reportedly a child, whom Hauptmann did not acknowledge as his own. Hauptmann's wife Margarete fiercely denied these allegations. Ida Orlov and her family, chased by the Nazis, did not survive the war.

But Hauptmann managed to protect one of his sons, who was married with a Jewish woman from a well-known artistic family. When the Nazis started their purges in Germany Hauptmann found a place for his son and his wife in a factory run by the AEG company. Ironically, the company had also been established by a Jew – Emil Rathenau. His son Walther Rathenau, a German foreign minister during the Weimar Republic, was assassinated in 1922. The family of Hauptmann's daughter-in-law did not receive support and they all died in Theresienstadt (Terezin).

Walther Rathenau made a personal contribution to the history of the Meadown Stone villa. It was him who presented Hauptmann with big light bulbs - ultramodern by the standards of the time. They excellently illuminated the villa and can be seen in many of the pictures taken at that time. Because of their very modern look they were regarded as decoration and were not even covered with lampshades.

A fragment of the frescos painted by Avenarius in the Paradise Hall – a gift from Pinkus and Hamburger

Silesian Nobel Prize Winners of Jewish Descent

Many of the Nobel Prize laureates who in various periods were associated with Silesia had Jewish roots. This was no secret to anyone, but Germans did not always take pride in that. Among the laureates were:

Reinhard Selten – Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences (1994). Born in 1930, he was a son of a Jewish bookseller from Wrocław (then Breslau). In the mid-1930s, his father had to sell his bookstore.

Otto Stern – Nobel Prize in Physics (1943). A secondary school pupil and then physical chemistry student in Wrocław (then Breslau), he emigrated to the United States in 1933.

Max Born – Nobel Prize in Physics (1954). Born in Wrocław (then Breslau), he was a son of a Jewish comparative anatomy professor at the local university.

Paul Ehrlich – Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (1908). He was born to a Jewish family of liqueur producers in Strzelin (then Strehlen).

Konrad Bloch – Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (1964). He was born to a Jewish family in Nysa (then Neisse).

Fritz Haber – Nobel Prize in Chemistry (1919). He was born to a family of rich Jewish merchants in Wrocław (then Breslau). Unfortunately, his inventions contributed to the introduction of war gases used by Germans during World War I at Ypres and other places. As a result, he was regarded by Allied nations as a war criminal.

Jews in Lower Silesia after 1945

Historians argue that the Jewish community in Lower Silesia in the years 1945-65 was the most numerous in Poland. Perhaps the reason was that during World War II many of the Jews who lived in great numbers in eastern Poland were murdered by the Nazis. In contrast, Lower Silesia (Recovered Territories) was a region where one could make a new start, despite the fact that before 1945 Jews had suffered here from various forms of persecution, including the infamous Crystal Night when Jewish cemeteries, synagogues and residential buildings were either destroyed or seriously damaged.

But after 1945, many prisoners of the Gross Rosen concentration camp decided not to leave for their previous places of residence. It is estimated that this group of Jewish survivors alone numbered about 6,000.

The Provincial Jewish Committee (WKŻ) in Lower Silesia, headed by Jakub Egit, was set up in 1945 to support the settling of Jews in the area. They inhabited mainly the counties of Dzierżoniów, Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Legnica, Kłodzko, Złotoryja and Ząbkowice. The total number of settlers was estimated at 80,000 – 100,000. More accurate estimates in this period of sudden migrations have to be regarded as not quite reliable.

More Jews reportedly settled in Dzierżoniów (16,000) than in Wrocław (15,000), and slightly less in Wałbrzych (about 10,000). A mystery for history researchers is the issue of the small group of German Jews who after the war were treated as native Germans and resettled to Germany.

Various Jewish organizations were quickly being established. Among them was the Healthcare Society for Jewish People, which was opening clinics and even sanatoriums, orphanages and crèches. The Jews even set up the Dawid Guzek Jewish Hospital in Wałbrzych.

As early as 1946, the WKŻ ran 23 schools with Yiddish as the language of instruction. For a short period there was also a Jewish ballet school in Wrocław and two music schools – in Wrocław and Wałbrzych. Seventy worker cooperatives came into being within a short time. The Artistic Development Organization was established.

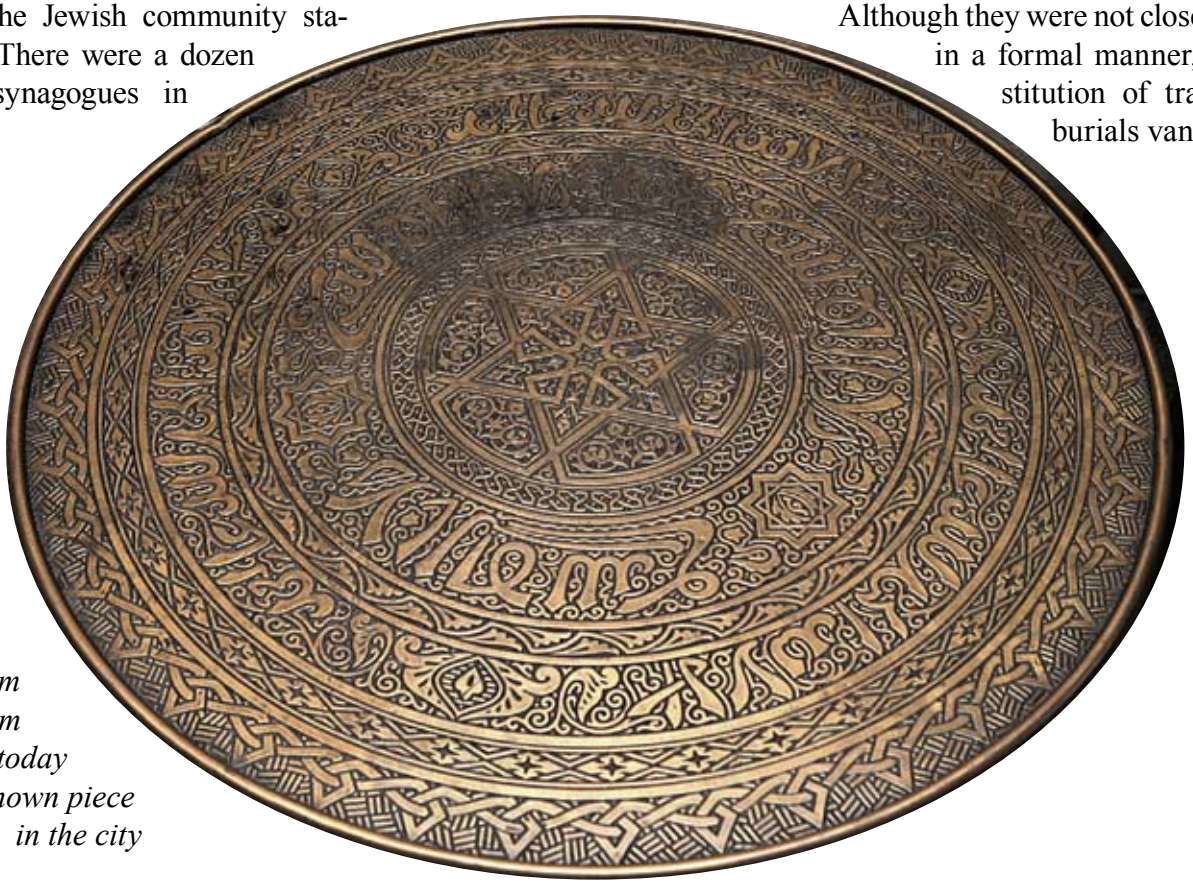
In the most difficult post-war years, cultural life flourished, Jewish theatres were set up in Wrocław (Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre), Dzierżoniów (Mikt) and Wałbrzych (Renaissance Theatre), and two newspapers were being published: one in Yiddish ("Niderszlezje") and the other in Polish ("Nowe Życie – Trybuna WKŻ na Dolnym Śląsku").

Religious life went on without problems, rites like weddings, burials and circumcisions were performed, there were kosher canteens, slaughter houses and Mikvahs.

But cracks started to emerge in this bright picture: accusations of separatism, the eagerness to emigrate to become reunited with one's family and fears associated with the increasingly hard-line political course after 1946. It has been estimated that in late 1946 and early 1947 – after the Kielce pogrom – about 35,000 Jews left Lower Silesia and emigrated via Germany, Austria and Italy. Another 16,000 people left after September 1949, when the authorities permitted official emigration to Israel.

But despite that, and owing to a decrease in the number and diversity of Jewish organizations, with practically one organization (Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, since 1950) having replaced all others, the life of the Jewish community stabilized. There were a dozen or so synagogues in operation and rabbis. Then, in 1957, as a result of an agreement between Poland and the Soviet Union, about 13,000 Jews arrived in Lower Silesia. However, most of them almost immediately emigrated. The political course became even more stringent in the 1960s. The White Stork Synagogue in Wrocław was closed in 1966. The political crisis of March 1968, accusations of Zionism, ostracism and a witch-hunt against Jews resulted in a situation where only about 3,000 Jewish people remained in Lower Silesia due to successive emigration waves.

A clear consequence of these changes was that various measures were taken - this time justified by the small size of the Jewish community. These included the closure of Jewish cemeteries in the early 1970s. Although they were not closed down in a formal manner, the institution of traditional burials vanished.



A table top, an exhibit from the Museum in Lubań, today the only known piece of Judaica in the city

Returns

After long decades when people talked about Jews, Jewish culture and mementoes of their stay in Silesia in emotionally charged ways, curiosity about "that world" is coming to the fore today, both at the northern and southern side of the Karkonosze Mountains.

"Jewish culture in the Polish-Czech borderland"… It could seem that this notion would be difficult to fill with content. Younger residents of Jelenia Góra usually know little about Jewish culture in their hometown, and actually the same is the case with older people… The Festival of Jewish Culture, whose two editions were held in 2012 and 2013, is proof of this curiosity. The programme of the 2013 Festival was composed of only several events: a concert by Mackie Messner Klezmer Band, Jewish parables, a short scholarly session with the participation of Julia Makosz of the Jagiellonian University (UJ), who talked about "The Jews' Religious Life Cycle," and Przemysław Piekarski, PhD, also of UJ, who talked about "Shmontses Jokes – What Do Jews Laugh At." This was coupled with a performance by a youth theatre ensemble, composed of performing arts enthusiasts from Jelenia Góra and Turnov, and a showing of a film about Czech cultural heritage associated with the life of the local Jews.

The Festival was a significant event. Why? Well-known feature writers say the fact that we are fully aware that Jewish and Polish cultures interpenetrated for centuries is an encouragement for us to discover those values. Certainly, some credit for this goes to the Festival of Jewish Culture in Cracow, which is already over two decades old, and the greatly-moving and famous music films and operas we have heard about even if we have not seen them. For who has missed the legendary "Fiddler on the Roof," or "The Magician of Lublin"?

Perhaps the (partial) answer is that folk music in the world is growing in strength while Jewish music is for us both "ours" and exotic? Both music and games, like dreidels - blocks with Hebrew letters – are interesting because they are new to us.

And there are more serious elements - presentations by university researchers: Julia Makosz and Przemysław Piekarski.

Julia Makosz – "The Jews' Religious Life Cycle"

From the first days after birth to the last ones the physical and spiritual life of Jews is governed by clearly defined rules and symbolism, which are adhered to by Orthodox Jews (more strictly), but also people who do not treat faith as rigorously. The fact is that there is no room for emancipation in the symbolism of Jewish life. Circumcision, performed eight days after birth, is reserved exclusively for boys as is the tradition of redeeming a mother's first-born son for five shekels and the first haircut when a boy turns three and is allowed since then to wear a yarmulke. Only when a girl turns 12 and a boy 13 there is a similar ritual for both of them: Bat Mitzvah for girls and Bar Mitzvah for boys. But also in this case, the boy's ceremony is of greater significance. Besides, the girl's ceremony was only introduced in the 20th century. For both sexes it is a religious coming of age ritual, giving them symbolic rights, like the right to publicly read from

the Torah and make comments on its verses, but also responsibilities, like the duty to observe strict fasting rules. Then, there is a wedding, with a male or female matchmaker, and under a baldachin. And before the ceremony there is a short time of isolation for the bride and groom, who for the last week before the wedding should not see each other, followed by further rituals during the wedding ceremony. One of them is the tradition of the groom putting a veil on the bride's head to avoid the mistake, described in the Bible, made by the groom who married Leah, although he loved Rachel … Before the wedding there is a ritual bath in a Mikvah and afterwards the couple's first meal together far from the wedding party hustle …

Rituals and symbols – none of them is treated as a nuisance, none of them is trivialized or commercialized. The source of these symbols is the Bible, the constant reading of the Scripture and reference to such developments as the destruction of the Temple as a turning point important for thousands of years. It is probably because of these analyses that a popular day for weddings is Tuesday, a propitious day for getting married as the third day of Creation when God is said to have twice sighed with relief finding that his work was going on as he intended. Although on the wedding day - for practical reasons - the ketubah, which is read out publicly, mentions the terms of a possible divorce, no one regards this as a bad omen for the marriage contract just being signed.

The whole cycle has repeated itself for generations. There is a place in it for a chevra kadisha, a society preparing the bodies of deceased Jews for their last earthly journey. It is modest so that everyone appears

in heaven dressed in a similar garment because a proverb says: "There is no pocket in the shroud." Since the body placed in the grave needs to have contact with earth there are many small holes in the coffin to enable this. And then, the time comes for the Kaddish Yatom, the prayer a son says daily for 11 months after a parent's death, and then on each anniversary of the death. Little stones are sometimes placed on the grave

of the deceased when visiting the cemetery because if "God is a rock then a human soul is its piece."

Symbols of the Jewish religion have deeply permeated daily life, like for example the Star of David, a protective shield, and menorah, a seven-branch candelabrum, a symbol of the burning bush and the six days of Creation with the seventh day – the central light – representing the light of God.

How much Jews are attached to their symbols, observances and rituals is reflected among others in their decisions during the Holocaust period when – aware that circumcision brought the risk that their origin will be revealed, resulting in a certain death – performed this procedure on their children because: "It is better for God to recognize us than for the enemy not to recognize us." And being hungry beyond the limits of their physical ability to survive, they observed the required fast days, although their whole life was then a period of fasting. Many refused to eat nutritious soups cooked with horse meat because they were not kosher.

Perhaps this is the secret of the survival of the people so mercilessly exterminated by the Nazis?

Or maybe it is something else - the captivating sense of humour, the ability to mock their own traits and vices, with a distance to themselves and the values to which they adhere?

Przemysław Piekarski – "Shmontses – What Do Jews Laugh At?

To make it short – everything. Even the Creator appears in some jokes, though in a tactful and delicate manner.

A Jew to God: "What am I to do, oh Lord. My son has got baptized." "I've no idea," comes the reply. "So has mine."

However, even the Orthodoxes do not condemn such jokes. Shalom Ash mocks in his books even events which could have taken place during Creation. This Jewish scandalmonger, a good acquaintance of Witkiewicz and Żeromski, is the author of a drama whose protagonist – a Jews - runs a brothel. Nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature, he has been awarded the Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order.

But Jews love wicked little jokes aimed at themselves, especially those which expose the character of many of them, but also show their ability to come out of the most difficult situations:

A Jewish jester, a king's favourite, fell into such disfavour that the king condemned him to death. But because of the jester's former services, the ruler allowed him to choose the manner of death. "If so, then I ask you for death of old age," the jester said.

Shmontses is a kind of joke, but it is worth distinguishing between Jewish jokes and jokes about Jews. Another example of a "Jewish" joke:

A delegation of farmers came to a rabbi during a time of severe drought asking for the miracle of rain. Seeing a clear sky, the rabbi said firmly that there would be no miracle because the envoys do not have faith. "Why,

we do. Haven't we just come to you?" they protested. "If you did," he replied, "you would have come with umbrellas."

But shmontses should be understood more as a short cabaret piece than a joke. One reason why cabarets were gaining in popularity in Poland before the war was that they showed such short pieces. Some of the authors based their great popularity on them.
A strange situation appeared because the cabarets, besieged by audiences, were receiving criticism from both sides. Jews often claimed it was a sign of nationalism and discrimination while some Poles were outraged at the cabarets, saying they were a source of the expansion of Jewish humour. The audiences, Polish and Jewish, who both laughed like a drain during such shows, brought everyone together. Some elements of humour can be found in the Talmud, so why should one be surprised that Jews mercilessly mock themselves on a daily basis?, connoisseurs ask.

Never-ending joy is a great commandment, say those who are criticized for spreading jokes and cite Sigmund Freud, a Jew himself, who reportedly said that "Jewish humour is a dead serious issue."

In the two countries, Poland and the Czech Republic, which are close to each other not only geographically, there are places it is good to remember about, although it is a painful memory. On our side, these are numerous towns in eastern Poland inhabited by Jewish families but also Auschwitz, Majdanek and Treblinka; on the Czech side – Turnov, Jicin, Hořice, Liberec, Mlada Boleslav, where Jews lived, and Terezin (Theresienstadt), where they died. Looking back, their life and death appear to us quite different now.

This palace was the seat of the local Jewish Committee in Jelenia Góra until the end of the 1940s. Later, the building housed a kindergarten. At present, it is a private property.

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