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Staszów

IN REMEMBRANCE OF  
STASZÓW'S JEWS: THE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE *STASZOWSKIE TOWARZYSTWO KULTURALNE*  
(STASZÓW CULTURAL SOCIETY)

The Jewish people have played an important role in the history of Staszów. They came to the town on the River Czarna in the second half of the 16th century. The Jews co-created the history of this place alongside their Christian neighbours. They were the largest ethnic group in Staszów from the mid-19th century to 1942. There is little left of the Jewish community today; hence the *Staszowskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne* (STK, Staszów Cultural Society) has taken up the mission of guarding the memory of their Jewish co-inhabitants.

In January 1981, during an event prepared by the *Teatr Małych Form* (Small Forms Theatre) at the *Zespół Opieki Zdrowotnej* (Healthcare Centre) in Staszów under the supervision of Maciej Zarębski PhD, the initiative to establish the Staszów Cultural Society was raised. The STK's Founding Committee<sup>1</sup> developed a programme for the Society, which outlined its goals, such as integrating and coordinating the activities of various professional societies operating in Staszów;

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<sup>1</sup> The founding members of STK were Adam Bień, Michał Skorupski, Antoni Drozd, Zofia Iżyłowska, Eugeniusz Ciepela, Jan Sikora, Eugeniusz Lech, Krzysztof Pawlik, Janusz Janik MD, Zdzisław Sularz, Janusz Dulęba MD, Halina Lech, Stefan Kaczmarek and Maciej Zarębski PhD (*Goniec Staszowski* 1991, no. 4, p. 4).

initiating, stimulating and coordinating the cultural, educational, artistic and scientific life of the town; expressing the residents' opinions to the local authorities with regard to their cultural and educational needs; organising events popularising the region's participation in the voivodeship's and country's life, and publishing an annual entitled *Zeszyty Staszowskie*, which reviews all important events in the town and the region and presents the cultural and educational achievements of the Society. The idea of forming the Society drew considerable attention from the local intelligentsia, activists and people of culture, and other associations in Staszów. Support also came from the *Wydział Kultury i Sztuki Urzędu Wojewódzkiego* (Department of Culture and Arts of the Voivodeship Office) in Tarnobrzeg, along with the municipal and communal political and administrative authorities. The first statutory meeting of the Staszów Cultural Society took place on 24 May 1981 in the Staszów Cultural Centre. The statute and programme were then approved, three research sections were established (history and literature, nature and technology, culture and arts) and the STK's Board was appointed.<sup>2</sup> Since the very beginning, the Society's efforts have focused on three main areas: publishing, organising & managing events, and museum-related activities. Nowadays, STK runs the publishing house *Biblioteka Staszowska* (the Staszów Library) and publishes *Goniec Staszowski*, manages the STK University of the Third Age and organises exhibitions and special lectures at the Staszów Region Museum.<sup>3</sup> Over the 35 years of the STK's activities, the *Biblioteka Staszowska* has overseen the publication of 223 books and 5 volumes of *Almanach Staszowski*, several brochures promoting the region's tourism and history, a series of postcards and some original calendars.<sup>4</sup> The *Biblioteka Staszowska* has published (and still publishes) literature, manuscripts on the region, memoirs and poetry.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Drozd, 'Staszowskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne kontynuatorem ambitnej działalności Klubu Miłośników Ziemi Staszowskiej' in *Almanach Staszowski. Staszów 1525–1982*, Staszów 1982, pp. 208–211. The members of the first Board of the Society were Maciej Zarębski PhD (the STK's president), Adam Biń (deputy-president), Michał Skorupski (deputy-president), Antoni Drozd (secretary), Zofia Iżyłowska (treasurer), Eugeniusz Ciepela (head of the Review Panel), Jan Sikora (spokesperson), Eugeniusz Lech (head of the Disciplinary Panel), and Krzysztof Pawlik, Janusz Janik, Stefan Kaczmarski, Zdzisław Sularz, Janusz Dulęba and Halina Lech.

<sup>3</sup> *Almanach Staszowski 2016*, Staszów 2016, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> The first publication of the Staszów Library was a poetry book by Regina Bachmińska entitled *Poezje wybrane*, printed in May 1982.

The publications issued by Staszów Library also include titles touching upon Jewish matters. Particular attention should be paid to a work by Maciej Andrzej Zarębski entitled *Życie i zagłada Żydów staszowskich* [The Life and Extermination of Staszów's Jews], published in 1992, 50 years after the extermination of the Jewish community in Staszów.<sup>5</sup> The author dedicated it to all the inhabitants of Staszów, especially the young people, so that they could be better acquainted with the history of the Jewish people who co-shaped their town. The history of the Jewish community in Staszów was divided chronologically into four chapters: prior to 1914, between 1914 and 1939, between the outbreak of World War II and 1942, and 8 November 1942, which was the final day of the community. The publication is enclosed with extracts from the memoir of a young Jewish girl from Staszów, Chawa Kestenberg, and the biographies of famous Staszów Jews.<sup>6</sup>

To commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Staszów ghetto's liquidation, the Staszów Cultural Society organised a scholarly symposium on 8 November 2007, and contributed to unveiling the *Sprawiedliwym z Ziemi Staszowskiej* ["For the Righteous of the Staszów Region"] plaque. The symposium materials were printed as item 204 of the Staszów Library, bearing the title *Sprawiedliwym z Ziemi Staszowskiej. Materiały z sympozjum i uroczystego odsłonięcia tablicy "Sprawiedliwym wśród narodów świata" oraz 65-tej rocznicy likwidacji getta w Staszowie* [For the Righteous of the Staszów Region". Materials of the symposium and of solemn unveiling of the plaque 'For the Righteous Among the Nations' as well as the 65th anniversary of the Staszów ghetto's liquidation], edited by Lucjan Zaczkowski.<sup>7</sup> The publication includes materials gathered by Dariusz

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<sup>5</sup> The Jewish community ceased to exist on 8 November 1942. On that day, at 5:30 a.m. the Jewish police announced in the ghetto that all Jewish inhabitants were to gather on the Staszów marketplace by 10:00 a.m. At that hour, a column of approximately 5000 Jews left the square. The path led them through Stopnica to the railway station in Szczucin. The Jews of Staszów were then taken to the death camp in Bełżec.

<sup>6</sup> M.A. Zarębski, *Życie i zagłada Żydów staszowskich*, Staszów 1992. The publication was edited by the Staszów Cultural Society thanks to an initiative by Szymon Tuchman and Jack Goldfarb, the latter being the main sponsor of the book. It features photographs shared by Jack Goldfarb and Marek Sobieniak, and from the STK archive. The book has 51 pages.

<sup>7</sup> *"Sprawiedliwym z Ziemi Staszowskiej". Materiały z sympozjum i uroczystego odsłonięcia tablicy "Sprawiedliwym wśród narodów świata" oraz 65-tej rocznicy likwidacji getta w Staszowie*, ed. L. Zaczkowski, Staszów 2007. The publication contains the speeches delivered during the symposium, which took place on 8 November 2007 in the conference room of the Municipality and Communal Office in Staszów. The publication has 37 pages.

Kubalski ('Dzieje staszowskich Żydów – rys historyczny' [The history of Staszów's Jews: a historical outline]) and Marek Maciągowski ('Sprawiedliwi...' [The Righteous...]), a poem by a Staszów writer, Wiesław Kot, entitled 'Sprawiedliwym wśród narodów' [For the righteous among the nations], a paper by Weronika Litwin ('Działalność Fundacji Ochrony Dziedzictwa Żydowskiego' [Activities of the Foundation for Protection of Jewish Heritage]) and Ernest Bryll's *Dybuk*, based on the drama by Szymon Anski.<sup>8</sup>

Another book published by the Staszów Cultural Society that touched upon the Jewish community was written by Dariusz Kubalski entitled *Staszów 1918–2008*. The publication includes photographs of the synagogue and local Jewish people, in addition to basic information concerning Staszów's Jews.<sup>9</sup>

Wiesław Kot, a Staszów poet, devoted an entire volume of poetry to the Jewish community of Staszów. *Zakamarki żydowskie* is a rhymed history of the Staszów Jews published in 1988 by the Staszów Cultural Society.<sup>10</sup>

On 16 March 1990, the Staszów Cultural Society presented the first issue of a newspaper, *Goniec Staszowski*, which covered local and cultural issues. From March to June 1990, the issue was published biweekly, and then as a monthly from October 1990 to 2004. The first editor-in-chief was the president of the STK, Maciej Zarębski PhD.<sup>11</sup> Since 2005, the editor-in-chief has been Lucjan Zaczkowski. The newspaper is published quarterly and is free of charge. *Goniec Staszowski* features articles on the history of the Jewish community in Staszów and the activities of the Staszów Cultural Society aimed at preserving their memory. It includes materials on the restoration of the Jewish cemetery on Kościuszko Street, the anniversaries of the extermination of the Jewish community, and the visit by the descendants of Staszów Jews, including Jack Goldfarb, an American traveller and writer, and Szymon Tuchman, the president of the Staszów Holocaust survivors organisation in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> A separate paper was devoted to the memory of Yesekiel David

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<sup>8</sup> The play was staged by the students of the Card. Stefan Wyszyński General Secondary School in Staszów.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kubalski, *Staszów 1918–2008*, Staszów 2008.

<sup>10</sup> W. Kot, *Zakamarki żydowskie*, Staszów 1988.

<sup>11</sup> M.A. Zarębski, *Sprawy, ludzie, historia, czyli "to i owo" z "Gońca Staszowskiego" z lat 1990–2000*, Staszów 2000, pp. 3–4.

<sup>12</sup> Szymon Tuchman was born in 1920 in Staszów, and emigrated to Palestine in 1938. His parents and two sisters perished in the Holocaust.

Kirszenbaum, also called Duvdivani. Born in Staszów in 1900, this painter gained considerable fame in Paris.<sup>13</sup>

At the initiative of the STK, the Staszów Region Museum was established in 1991. It was initially located in the basement of a block of flats on John Paul II Street. It was supposed to be a temporary location, but the museum operated there until 2016. As there was only 100 m<sup>2</sup> available, every inch of space had to be used for the exhibitions. On 9 November 1992, during the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the extermination of the Staszów Jewish community, an exhibition entitled *Judaica staszowskie* was opened. As the collection grew, a separate room was set aside for the memorabilia of the Staszów Jews. The most precious item was the original 18th century Torah from the Staszów synagogue. Furthermore, the Museum gathered photos, documents, the so-called *stambułki* pipes manufactured in Jewish workshops, and fragments of matzevahs.

The mayor of the Staszów municipality and commune, Leszek Kopeć, and Ewa Konder PhD, the deputy mayor, decided to move the institution to a new location in 2015, after consultations with Lucjan Zaczkowski, the museum's curator. The Staszów authorities granted it four rooms in the building of a former educational centre managed by the Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce on 14 Szkolna Street. The collections were displayed in the four rooms and the hall on the first floor of the building. The museum's collection included paintings by local Staszów artists, Judaica related to Staszów, militaria, and the products of past craftsmanship and railway items. A separate room was set aside to hold all the Staszów Judaica.

The Staszów Cultural Society has also organised or co-organised events commemorating the Jewish community in Staszów. On 9 November 1992, the STK commemorated the 50th anniversary of the extermination of the Jewish community in the city, including the unveiling of a commemorative monument in the Jewish cemetery and setting up the few surviving matzevahs.<sup>14</sup> On 6 November 1997, on the 55th anniversary of the liquidation of the Staszów ghetto, the Staszów Region Museum opened commemorative exhibitions: photographic, presenting

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<sup>13</sup> *Goniec Staszowski*: 1992, no. 11, p. 4; no. 12, p. 2; 1999, no. 2, p. 4; 2002, no. 12, p. 2; 2000, no. 12, p. 2; 1997, no. 11, pp. 1, 4; 2016, no. 3–4, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> The monument was raised at the initiative of Jack Goldfarb with the help of the Staszów Cultural Society members (M.A. Zarębski, *Staszów wczoraj i dziś*, Staszów 1999, p. 112).

pictures of the synagogue and the Jewish inhabitants of the town; and artistic, including sculptures, reliefs and paintings by Józef Reguła from Połaniec. The exhibitions also encompassed some Judaica, such as the 18th-century Torah, Jan Rogala's Righteous Among the Nations medal, and the *Staszow Sefer*. During the event, a lyrical and musical programme entitled *Zakamarki żydowskie* was staged, which was based on a text by Wiesław Kot, a poet from Staszów, and directed by Jolanta Adamowicz.<sup>15</sup>

On 8 November 2007, the Staszów Cultural Society participated in unveiling the commemorative plaque 'For the Righteous of the Staszów Region' during the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of Staszów's Jewish community. The plaque was placed on the building of the District Office in Staszów, which is located in the place where Staszów's synagogue had been before World War II.

On 4 October 2012, on the 70th anniversary of the extermination of Staszów's Jews, a March of Memory walked down the Staszów streets, with Jews and Poles side by side, including 70 descendants of Staszów's Jews and three Holocaust survivors who came to Staszów from all over the world. Furthermore, the event was attended by Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi in Poland, Nadav Eshcar, the Israeli deputy ambassador in Poland, and the Reverend Infulate Professor Józef Krasiński. The march ended at the Jewish cemetery on Kościuszko Street, where all participants prayed together for the Jewish inhabitants of Staszów. Seventy symbolic candles were lighted at the headstones. On this occasion, a photographic exhibition was held to present pre-war pictures captured by a famous Staszów photographer, Abraham Josef Rotenberg. The exhibition is a part of the Staszów Region Museum's collection.<sup>16</sup>

The Staszów Cultural Society's activity related to commemorating the Jewish inhabitants of the city was noticed by the organisers of a popular scientific conference, *Spółeczność żydowska w Małopolsce* [Jewish communities in Lesser Poland].<sup>17</sup> The president of the STK, Dariusz Kubalski PhD, was invited to attend the event, and on 5 July 2017 he delivered a speech at the State Archives in Kielce

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<sup>15</sup> M.A. Zarębski, *Staszowskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne w latach 1994–2004*, Staszów–Zagnańsk 2005, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> *Goniec Staszowski* 2010, no. 4, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> The conference was organised by the State Archives in Kielce and the Institute of History of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce.

entitled 'Pamięć o staszowskich Żydach w działaniach Staszowskiego Towarzystwa Kulturalnego' [The memory of the Staszów Jews in the activities of the Staszów Cultural Society].

In 2007, the Staszów Cultural Society established (and still runs) the University of the Third Age.<sup>18</sup> The attendees participate in various lectures, including the questions of the Jewish community. The November 2010 lecture, entitled 'Społeczność żydowska w historii Staszowa' [The Jewish community in Staszów's history] was delivered by Dariusz Kubalski.<sup>19</sup> In April 2016, Professor Jerzy Ciecieląg from the Pedagogical University of Cracow presented a lecture entitled 'Judeofobia, antyżydowskość, antyjudaizm w epoce starożytnej. Korzenie antysemityzmu' [Judeophobia, anti-Jewishness, anti-Judaism in antiquity. The roots of anti-Semitism].<sup>20</sup>

Since 1981, the Staszów Cultural Society has presented the multicultural past of the town. The Society's long-lasting activity has contributed to the permanent commemoration and the increased awareness of Staszów's Jewish community.

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<sup>18</sup> The University of the Third Age in Staszów was founded by Henryk Albera, president of the STK, Lucjan Zaczkowski, the deputy president of STK, Rev. Dean Henryk Kozakiewicz, and Kazimierz Sztaba PhD, a researcher at the Jan Kochanowski University.

<sup>19</sup> History teacher at Public Postprimary School no. 2 in Staszów.

<sup>20</sup> T. Cierlik, 'Z dziejów Staszowskiego Uniwersytetu Trzeciego Wieku STK', *Almanach Staszowski* 2016, pp. 34–40.