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SZTETL LUBICZ,* WINDOW INTO A LOST WORLD
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Looking at the history of Polish Jews and Polish-Jewish relations from a regional perspective, it transpires that it is very difficult to make a generalisation and statement that is true for the entire country. This relates to both the subject of research (in the renowned study by Ezra Mendelsohn, there continue to be references to the division into historical partitions even in that part of the narration related to interbellum Poland¹) as well as the state of research, for particular regions, towns or shtetls were not subject to the same degree of interest on the part of researchers. In a similar vein, when we speak of the historical memory or awareness presented by local communities, differences between various centres and regions come to the fore. Therefore, in the case of regions such as Pomerania, Kujawy and Dobrzyń, where the number of Jews in the context of the Second Polish Republic was low, the state of research devoted to this group of people is much

* K. Famulska-Ciesielska, *Sztetl Lubicz* (Toruń: Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Marii Znamierowskiej-Prüfferowej, 2019), 111 pp.

¹ E. Mendelsohn, *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, trans. A. Tomaszewska (Warsaw, 1983), pp. 31–122.

lower, and the memory of this community, more faded. Thus, it is all the more a pleasant surprise when such publications and activities contribute to a change in this state of affairs. It would appear that, in fact, this is so in the case of Karolina Famulska-Ciesielska in her work *Sztetl Lubicz* (Shtetl Lubicz), published in 2019 by the Ethnographic Museum in Toruń.

The author is a scholar of literature and a specialist in the writings of Polish Jews in Israel, having finished a doctorate on this very subject at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.² Her latest publication, popularising the field of Jewish studies, is not the result of changing her research interests but, in fact, a personal return to her hometown of Lubicz, a shtetl, where, as a result of the Holocaust, it lost its Jewish identity. Just as Wojciech Wilczyk, in *Niewinne oko nie istnieje* (*There's No Such Thing As An Innocent Eye*), in his travels across Poland pointed out the particular type of “desertion” characteristic of some towns,³ so too Famulska-Ciesielska was for a long time under the impression that in her mind “there is something about Lubicz – there is a kind of blank,” but was unable to define it.⁴ In both of the above it transpired that this was a gap left by the Jewish community that in days gone by constituted an important part of the local social landscape. Similarly, as Wilczyk, in his hundreds of photographs of (former) synagogues, showed the state of (non-) memory of Jewish residents in small towns, so too Famulska-Ciesielska decided to familiarise readers with the Jewish shtetl of yesteryear, presenting the last Jews living there.

Though in formal terms, the study was not divided into sections, it is possible to discern a short historical outline on both Upper and Lower Lubicz and the Jewish community that had settled there from the eighteenth century, as, in fact, one serving the role of an introduction. Although there were two towns, the Jewish communities there used one cemetery and belonged to one religious association. In the Second Polish Republic, the border dividing the small towns between the Russian and Prussian states ceased to exist, though it is only since 1938 that they

² K. Famulska-Ciesielska, *Polacy, Żydzi, Izraelczycy – tożsamość w literaturze polskiej w Izraelu* (Toruń, 2008).

³ “Fotografowanie niedozwolonych obiektów. Z Wojciechem Wilczykiem rozmawia Elżbieta Janicka,” in W. Wilczyk, *Niewinne oko nie istnieje* (Łódź, 2009), pp. 34–35.

⁴ K. Famulska-Ciesielska, “Ta pamięć jest pełna bólu,” 19 November 2019, <https://ototorun.pl/artikul/karolina-famulska-ciesielska/863718> (accessed 26 August 2021).

belonged to the one province, Pomerania, which was characterised by the lowest percentage of Jewish people in Poland. In this context, first and foremost, the historian Tomasz Kawski wrote a study on the Kujawy-Dobrzyń Jews, and quite justifiably, Famulska-Ciesielska relies on his findings in her work.

The main part of her study is the outline of Lubicz residents before the war and their tragic fate during the Holocaust. Famulska-Ciesielska presents the names of Jews in Lubicz in alphabetical order and goes on to outline often entire generations of families connected to this town. On account of the paucity of source material it was difficult in many cases to develop the narration further and go beyond presenting the basic facts themselves. The assiduous “excavation” of information on the part of the author is cause for great respect, as she does not forego even the slightest iota of information that she was able to reach.

The source base itself of this work is worth noting. The author made use of archival materials collected by the Yad Vashem Institute that are available on the Internet, mainly the *daf ed* (Page of Testimony), where interested parties or relations bear witness to the circumstances of victims’ death in the Holocaust. In this respect, the *List of Persecuted Persons*, as it turned out, proved less useful. It should be noted that all of this information can be found in the one search base, The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names.⁵ Moreover, the lion’s share (if not all) of *daf ed* forms used in Famulska-Ciesielska’s book were written in Hebrew and it is all the more one should appreciate the importance of this work for the Polish reader, especially for those interested in the history of their hometown. Although the author notes that these testimonies are submitted from the mid-1950s, it should be emphasised that the Institute in Jerusalem is still collecting this documentation. Yad Vashem estimates that over a million names of Holocaust victims are still unknown and have yet to be added to their database.

Apart from the above, the author made use of similar historical materials deposited in the Institute of National Remembrance Archives such as court files from cases confirming a person’s death. For a historian this is an interesting observation on the differences between the information contained in these two types of documents that is worth further examination. In this context therefore, the publication

⁵ Available at: <https://yvng.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en> (accessed 26 August 2022).

under review may serve as an inspiration not only for others trying to popularise knowledge about other *shtetl*, but also for professional historians.

Unfortunately the book presents a lack of further detail or excerpts from the unique sources found by Famulska-Ciesielska such as discussions and interviews that she had conducted as well as the documents she was given. In this respect, the author informs the reader about the manuscript of memoirs by Aleksander Makower that she received from his sons and in fact thanks to this, the section devoted to the Makower family is exceptionally comprehensive, although it is not known to what degree this makes use of the source base. It is perhaps a good idea to publish these memoirs – for their absence is all the more disappointing in that the author decided to include entire such accounts devoted to Lubicz that found their way into the Ringelblum Archive volume VIII, *Tereny wcielone do Rzeszy: Okręg Rzeszy Gdańsk – Prusy Zachodnie, rejencja ciechanowska, Górny Śląsk* (Territory Incorporated into the Third Reich: Gdańsk–Western Prussia Reich Region, Ciechanów District, Upper Silesia).⁶ Here it should also be noted that this monumental series has been recently finished and that the comprehensive documentation collected by Oneg Szabat is published in 36 volumes in total. Further, it is a pity that Famulska-Ciesielska did not emphasise that these particular accounts were originally written in Polish (many others were translated from Yiddish for the purposes of publication).

An additional strong point of this publication – especially considering its informative, popularising nature – is the comprehensive graphic material included. The author took the trouble of reprinting fragments of the historical map of Lubicz, as well as the unique photographs made available by family members from Lubicz that she shared with the reader. Based mainly on discussions with Polish neighbours, Famulska-Ciesielska made the attempt to recreate the historical layout of households in the nearby surroundings and to remind the specific places where Jews once lived. In the result, the author managed to create an image that affects the reader's imagination – and as a strongly incomplete and fragmentary, it is also moving on an emotional level.

⁶ Edited by M. Siek (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012). Moreover, it is now available online: <https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/730162/0/> (accessed 26 August 2022).

The reader of the publication under review will find themselves taken on a personal journey, one that Famulska-Ciesielska also made, bringing to life the history of people living in the above mentioned shtetl of Lubicz. In line with the intention of the author the reader is not confronted on this occasion with an anonymous mass whose fate is defined in common as a collective, but with an attempt, difficult at times, to portray the lives of individuals as well as to establish and preserve the names of those that have faded into the annals of a deeper, lost history. Though this work was not meant to be – and in fact is not – a scholarly monograph, it should be nonetheless valuable for scholars interested in the history of this specific region, considering for example the usefulness of sources used in this publication. Moreover, Famulska-Ciesielska's work also constitutes a worthy form of commemoration of the events of more than eighty years ago when the Jews of Lubicz at the beginning of the German occupation were forcibly deported from their hometown – at first to nearby Lipno and Włocławek, only to find themselves in the Warsaw Ghetto shortly after. Ultimately, the community of Lubicz's Jews became dispersed, and their tragic fate saw their end across various towns of occupied Poland. *The Shtetl Lubicz* is therefore an opportunity to open a window into a world then lost.