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The Jewish population in Lower Silesia after the Second World War (1945–1950)

Some remarks on the state of research and new research perspectives

The history of the Jewish population in Poland has become an important and frequently discussed topic in recent years.¹ The development of Jewish studies in the country has resulted in an increased number of new scholarly and popular science publications, the establishment of academic centres conducting research on Jewish history and culture,² but also activities in the public sphere, of which the most important is the POLIN Museum, as well as other smaller institutions and various educational projects.³ Among the many works published in Poland in recent years, studies of the Holocaust constitute quite a significant part. The history of the people who survived and lived in Poland after 1945 has been of somewhat less interest to scholars. Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in the number of publications in recent years. We may take, for example, the series titled *Z dziejów Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce* (“From the History of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland”) published by the Jewish Historical Institute, which includes interesting studies on Jewish life in Poland in the years 1945–1950. In addition to this series, one can find books discussing such problems as migration (Węgrzyn 2016), anti-Semitism (Dahlmann 2018; Grabski *et al.* 2019; Kwiek 2021) and diplomatic

¹ Undoubtedly, 1989 was an important moment in this context, although even earlier, in the 1980s, works discussing Jewish topics had been published.

² Besides the well-established centres of Jewish studies in Kraków and Warsaw, a Department of Jewish Studies has been established at the University of Wrocław in recent years. Research is also progressing in other centres, for example, Łódź, Lublin and Rzeszów.

³ The Museum of Mazovian Jews in Płock is a good example of such activity.

relations (Szaynok 2007a), which are relevant to both the immediate post-war period and the communist era. A special place among these studies is held by the book *Następstwa zagłady Żydów 1944-2010* (*The Aftermath of the Holocaust of Jews 1944-2010*) (Adamczyk-Garbowska *et al.* 2012). Another study deserving mention here is the first monograph on Jewish life in Poland after the Second World War (Kichelewski 2021).

Undoubtedly, part of the research deals with the history of Jews in Lower Silesia, an area incorporated into Poland in 1945, where Holocaust survivors began a new life not only literally but also metaphorically. This article presents the current state of research on the post-war (1945–1950) history of the Jewish population in the region.⁴ Moreover, its goal is to point out new trends and perspectives, and, to some extent, identify some research areas that may prove extremely valuable for the development of further studies. At the same time, the paper indicates clearly what has been of interest to researchers in recent decades, what has been written on the subject, and on what – in terms of phenomena, places, characters, etc. – researchers have focused. Bearing in mind both the adopted goals and limitations of space, I make only occasional reference to the findings, interpretations and polemics contained in the cited works.

The following literature review can be considered another contribution to the debate on this issue, but also a specific presentation of research questions (perhaps not always obvious) and archival sources. The publications to be discussed refer to the immediate post-war period, i.e. the years 1945–1950, but sometimes, mainly due to the context or ongoing processes, they go beyond that time frame. This period was crucial for the organisation of the structures of Jewish life – it was then that Jewish committees functioned as basic, secular institutions of Jewish life (separately from religious organisations). The starting date of the period is unquestionable – it is the year that saw the end of the Second World War and of the Holocaust. It was also the time when the settlement of Polish Jews in the Western and Northern Territories began. In turn, the year 1950 saw the reorganisation of the structures of Jewish life, linked to the consolidation of the communist system. Zionist parties had recently been banned in Poland, and in October of that year the Jewish committees and the Jewish Association for Culture and Art merged to form the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland.

Lower Silesia, on which the works referred to in this article focus, is a separate matter. It should be remarked here that in some publications the authors

⁴ I have analysed and presented research conducted in Poland and published in Polish (and on some occasions in English, German or Hebrew).

refer to the present-day administrative borders of Lower Silesia, although in the post-war times the borders of the Wrocław voivodship (1946–1950) did not coincide with the modern territorial division, as they included, among others, part of today's Lubusz voivodship (including Żary and Żagań) and Opole voivodship (Brzeg, Namysłów).

The Jewish population in Lower Silesia after 1945

Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia is an important part of the post-war history of Jews in Poland (Rykała 2007). It is also a major aspect of the narrative regarding the so-called Recovered Territories.⁵ It would not have been possible if it had not been for the former prisoners of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp (now Rogoźnica near Strzegom), who decided to remain in the newly incorporated areas – the region where they had been liberated by the Soviet Army in May 1945.⁶ Relatively quickly, in the following month, a group of surviving prisoners declared their eagerness to build structures of Jewish life in these areas, demanding support from the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) in Warsaw. The issue of Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia was a subject discussed by Jewish leaders in the country in the summer and autumn of 1945 (Misztal 1992; Szaynok 1994). These talks, which were approved by the communist authorities, resulted in a decision to send to that region a large number of Jewish repatriates from the USSR, who arrived in the first half of 1946 (Głowacki 2004; Marciniak 2014). Therefore, by the middle of the year there were over 40 Jewish committees in the Wrocław voivodship with which approximately 90,000 Jews were registered, accounting for almost half of all survivors residing in Poland at that time (Szaynok 2000). Among the most important Jewish centres, with several thousand to more than ten thousand inhabitants, were Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, and Wałbrzych, followed by Legnica, Bielawa, Kłodzko, Pieszyce, Jawor, Kamienna Góra, Jelenia Góra, Bolków, and many other smaller towns. In the wake of subsequent events, primarily anti-Semitism and the Kielce pogrom, in the second half of 1946 Lower Silesia became a place of great importance for Jewish migrants fleeing across the so-called green border in the Sudety Mountains and further through Czechoslo-

⁵ Primarily in a religious context, but also in a social context, for example, in the recently published synthesis *Region or regions?* (Kucharski *et al.* 2022).

⁶ It is worth noting that for the Jewish prisoners, the actions of the Red Army meant an actual experience of liberation.

vakia (Szaynok 1995; Aleksion-Mądrzak 1996; Semczyszyn 2018; Wieczorek 2019). It was also a time when the size of the Jewish community in the province diminished. Another important wave of emigration occurred after 1948, when the state of Israel was established (Stola 2010).

When briefly discussing the history of Jews in Lower Silesia just after the war, an aspect which should be mentioned is the well-developed structures of Jewish life. First and foremost, there was the Voivodship Committee of Jews for Lower Silesia (*Wojewódzki Komitet Żydów na Dolny Śląsk, WKŻ*) in Wrocław, with Jakub Egit as chairman;⁷ however, one should not forget about the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith (from 1949 the Religious Association of Judaism) which was active in almost 30 towns, as well as numerous political parties, youth organisations and cultural institutions. Undoubtedly, in the latter category, the most important was the Jewish theatre whose building was erected in Wrocław and opened in April 1949. Furthermore, apart from the Jewish press titles published in Polish (*Nowe Życie. Trybuna Wojewódzkiego Komitetu Żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku*) and Yiddish (*Niderszlezje*), mention should be made of sports, a well-developed education system (including private education), and economic life. A manifestation of the latter was the so-called productivisation – efforts made towards the employment of Jews in various sectors of the economy.⁸ In addition to numerous cooperatives established and run by Jews, the presence of Jews in the mining industry in the Wałbrzych region and in agriculture in the Dzierżoniów area was emphasised at that time, which was in line with communist propaganda. Such rich and varied Jewish activities were fairly quickly curbed by the policy of the communist authorities. In addition to the abovementioned mass migration, it was the decisions of the dignitaries – the liquidation of the Zionist parties in 1949–1950, the changes introduced to cooperatives, the blocking of funding for Jewish activities from foreign institutions such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the merger of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) with the Jewish Association for Culture and Art to form the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland – that led to the limitation or, in fact, the degradation of the rich Jewish life in Lower Silesia in 1945–1950. And although some Jewish communities continued to be active in the following years, they did so in completely different conditions, in smaller communities and having

⁷ An important contribution to our knowledge about this period comes from Jakub Egit's early post-war publications and his memoirs published in the 1990s (Egit 1947, 1991).

⁸ Between 1946 and 1947 there existed the office of the Commissioner for the Productivisation of the Jews, established by the communist authorities.

different opportunities than before. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that researchers consider Jewish community life to be unique, bearing in mind both what was going on in the country and what happened to Holocaust survivors.

The beginnings and development of research

The first researcher to describe the post-war history of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia was Samuel Bat, whose article on the subject was published in *Rocznik Wrocławski* in the early 1960s (Bat 1961). Around the same time, Arnold Goldsztejn, the then headmaster of the Sholem Aleichem High School in Wrocław, was conducting his research. In 1962, his short article on the post-war history of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia was published in *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* (Goldsztejn 1962), and in 1967, the same journal published his article on the productivisation of Jews in the region (Goldsztejn 1967). His doctoral dissertation, supervised by then associate professor Marian Orzechowski and defended at the University of Wrocław in 1969 (Goldsztejn 1969), was a summary of his research on this subject. The years 1967–1968 and the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland at that time were not conducive to scholarly debates about Jewish history. This also affected research topics and the publishing market, and so it is not surprising that the aforementioned doctoral dissertation was not published. Goldsztejn took up the topic again at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, when he published an article in a collective volume devoted to the history of Jews in Silesia (Goldsztejn 1991). This book followed a conference held at the University of Wrocław in 1988. A few years later, in 1994, another volume was published, which this time dealt with the history of Jews in Poland and Silesia (Matwijowski 1994). In addition to the abovementioned publications, two important articles on Jewish life in Lower Silesia were published in the 1980s: one by Hanna Shlomi in Hebrew in the Israeli journal *Gal-Ed* (Shlomi 1985), and another by Kazimierz Pudło in *Rocznik Dolnośląski* (Pudło 1988).

Among the pioneer scholars in this field, one should not forget about Szyja Bronsztejn who, as early as the 1960s, published three articles following his research surveys (Bronsztejn 1963, 1964, 1970) in the *Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute*. He returned to this topic in two studies published in the early 1990s (Bronsztejn 1991a, 1991b). The first book dealing with the history of Jews in Lower Silesia after the Second World War was also written by Bronsztejn, who was an economic historian and a statistician affiliated with the University of Wrocław. Published in 1993, the book became an important reference

point for further research (Bronsztajn 1993). Many of the topics that it covered were discussed only briefly, drawing readers' attention to selected problems. The following year, Bożena Szaynok defended her doctoral dissertation on the Jewish population in the region in the years 1945–1950. The dissertation, supervised by Professor Wojciech Wrzesiński, was the first in-depth study of this subject based on rich archival resources. It was published by the University of Wrocław Press in 2000 (Szaynok 2000). In this book, which remains the most important study on the subject to this day, the author gave a systematic presentation of the most important information about the structures of Jewish life and the emergence and “shrinking” of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia. At the same time, she emphasised the importance of the decisions made by the communists, who contributed to the gradual restriction of Jewish life. Therefore, the dissertation can be considered a description of a peculiar phenomenon – the emergence of a Jewish community of many thousands of people after the Second World War. However, the study in question does not address all of the problems of that community – there is little information, for example, about anti-Semitism issues or matters with which we are much more familiar today. Separate articles by Szaynok on other issues, such as the case of the Jewish pavilion at the Wrocław Exhibition of Recovered Territories in 1948 or the Haganah camp near Bolków, should be regarded as pioneering and extremely important texts contributing to the discovery of the post-war history of Jews in Poland, especially those in Lower Silesia (Szaynok 1996, 1999). The studies by this author which I would consider fundamental also include those discussing Jewish settlement in the region (including some written in English) and those describing the post-war daily life of Jews in Wrocław (Szaynok 1994, 1997a, 1997b).

With this in mind, it should be noted that the 1990s were an extremely important period for basic research on the history of Jews in Poland after the Second World War. Apart from Lower Silesia, other areas of Jewish settlement were also examined; for example, Western Pomerania, where a large group of Jews from the USSR had settled in Szczecin in 1946. This community, along with other national and ethnic minorities, is the subject of a book by Janusz Mieczkowski (Mieczkowski 1994). Julian Kwiek's work is of a similar nature, focusing on Jews, Lemkos and Slovaks in Lesser Poland in the immediate post-war period (Kwiek 1998). Around the same time, Grzegorz Berendt compiled and published a book about Jews in Gdańsk (Berendt 2000), and Wojciech Jaworski did the same for Upper Silesia (Jaworski 2001). Finally, mention should be made of a collective volume edited by Jerzy Tomaszewski on the most recent history of Jews in Poland (Tomaszewski 1993).

One of its chapters is devoted to the post-war history of the survivors until 1950 (Adelson 1993).

The above mentioned publication by Bożena Szaynok has been and still is the most important book on the topic. This does not mean that studies uncovering other lesser-known aspects of Jewish community life in Lower Silesia have not appeared. One such publication is undoubtedly Ewa Waszkiewicz's study on the structures of Jewish religious life in the region set against Polish state policy (Waszkiewicz 1999). The book, which is the author's postdoctoral dissertation, is based on quite limited but at the same time difficult to access sources (files of the Jewish religious community in Wrocław). Despite the passage of almost a quarter of a century, it is still the only publication of this kind which deals in detail with Jewish religious life after 1945. Although many other studies have been published, there are still no articles or monographs discussing this issue, not only regionally, but on a national scale (Grabski 1997; Grabski and Stankowski 2011).⁹

Further research and current trends

The studies discussed above have always been of great importance to advancing research. In the following decades, studies relating to the abovementioned publications, many of which delve deeply into selected issues of Jewish life in Lower Silesia just after the Second World War, have been and are being conducted. The division proposed below reflects the author's view both of the works published mostly in the twenty-first century, and of current research trends that influence the development of new perspectives.

As was noted in the introduction, there were more than 40 Jewish committees in Lower Silesia in 1946, representing tens of thousands of people. Not surprisingly, some of these centres captured the interest of researchers, who decided to analyse individual communities. Studies carried out in recent years have most often been devoted to Jewish communities in a particular locality or county. Already in the second half of the 1990s, articles on selected localities and Jewish life in them began to be published. Studies on Wrocław (Szaynok 1997b; Ziątkowski 2000¹⁰) and Pieszyce (Kęsik 1997), among others, are ex-

⁹ Studies on the subject have been published by August Grabski, who is currently leading a National Science Centre project on the religious life of Jews in Poland; see <https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/opisy/543429-pl.pdf> (accessed: 13 November 2023).

¹⁰ Leszek Ziątkowski's study referred only marginally to the 1945–1950 period.

amples of this approach. Since then, the number of works and authors dealing with this topic has been gradually increasing. Researchers have been especially interested in those centres where the Jewish population was significant and their community life was richest and most developed. Let us take, for example, Dzierżoniów (known as Rychbach immediately after the war), which is a special case – the first community of Polish Jews in Lower Silesia and the first seat of the Voivodship Committee of Jews for Lower Silesia. At its peak, about 12,000 Jews lived in the town, more than half of its total population. Dzierżoniów has been the subject of many articles dealing with both the process of Jewish settlement itself, and particular aspects of the Jewish population and its institutional life. Among the most important sources of information are a chapter by Bożena Szaynok (Szaynok 2007b) and articles by Anna Gruzlewska (Gruzlewska 2020, 2022), who also successfully popularised this topic in the form of an album and popular science publications (Gruzlewska 2019b), and Kamil Kijek's publications describing the community in a broader historical context – in terms of either Jewish history or Polish and European history (Kijek 2018, 2020).¹¹ In addition to the authors listed above, it seems worthwhile to draw attention to other articles describing Jewish communities viewed either from a regional perspective (Hebzda-Sołogub 2015) or from the standpoint of former community members who had left Poland (Lavi 2017). Dzierżoniów, due to its nature, has sometimes been studied in specific contexts, such as the productivisation of the Jewish population (Rykała 2016; Szajda 2020b, 2020c).

Jewish life has been of equally great interest to researchers in Wrocław, although in this particular case the context taken into consideration is broader, as it covers different periods, especially the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (Ziątkowski 1998; Rybińska 2017, 2020). The growth of scholarly interest in Jewish life was impacted by, among other things, the case of the Jewish cemetery on Ślężna Street and the efforts made to preserve it. Among others, Maciej Łagiewski's publications (Łagiewski 1991) and actions contributed to that. The topic of the Jewish community after the Second World War is therefore an element of a broader narrative about the centuries-long Jewish presence in the capital of Lower Silesia (Łagiewski 1994; Ziątkowski 2000). It is also visible in the contemporary activity of Jewish organisations, including, above all, the Jewish community at the White Stork Synagogue. In addition to the female researchers mentioned above (Waszkiewicz 1994; Szay-

¹¹ Kamil Kijek is also head of a National Science Centre project on Jewish life in Dzierżoniów in the years 1945–1950; see: <https://projekty.ncn.gov.pl/opisy/428150-pl.pdf> (accessed 12 November 2023).

nok 1997b), it is worth emphasising the importance of Katharina Friedla's work (Friedla 2014, 2016, 2017). She is the author of a monograph on the Jews of Wrocław in the time when the city was part of the Third Reich (including the Holocaust) and in the immediate post-war period (until 1949) (Friedla 2015).¹² This is an extremely important publication, as it depicts Jewish experiences from a transnational perspective. It is a story of German and Polish Jews for whom the point of reference is a specific city – in this case, Wrocław. Such an approach is quite unusual for research conducted in Poland to date, as scholars usually consider the end of the Second World War in 1945 as end date for describing Jewish life. A similar time frame was adopted by the editors of a volume devoted to the topography of the Holocaust in Wrocław (Buchen and Luft 2023). That book, published in 2023, is the most recent study on Jews in the city.

Among the histories of other Jewish communities in Lower Silesia, Wałbrzych occupies a special place. This can be attributed, for example, to both the size of the Jewish population after the Second World War and the durability of the structures of Jewish life in the following years, including after 1950. One of the prominent researchers of the post-war history of Wałbrzych's Jews is Paweł Wieczorek, whose research focuses on both the city and the county. Initially, his studies centred around various aspects of community life (Wieczorek 2003, 2008, 2008a, 2008b, 2015). The monograph covering the period 1945–1968 should be considered a culmination point of his research in this area (Wieczorek 2017). Apart from Wieczorek, this topic has also been taken up by other researchers, some of whom discussed it in a broader national and temporal context (Kobylarz-Buła 2003; Bisek-Grąż 2008; Retecki 2017).

Besides Wrocław and Wałbrzych, Jelenia Góra and its post-war Jewish community have also been a subject of historical analysis (Szajda 2014, 2018b, 2018c, 2019b, 2020a). This interest resulted in a monograph describing the experiences of Jelenia Góra's Jews after 1945 – a community less numerous than those in the cities mentioned above (Szajda 2021b), but at the same time unique, if only because of the presence of German Jews and their establishment of a committee in the summer of 1945 – the first post-war institution of Jewish life in the city. Another community that captured the interest of researchers was Kłodzko (Włodarczyk, Einhorn, Jamróg 2006). The post-war experiences of Jews living in that town were described by Tamara Włodarczyk in her master's thesis, which is publicly available (Włodarczyk 2010). Among other Jewish communities about which we know a little more thanks to the work done

¹² The book is in German.

so far, we may list those of Legnica (Szczepański 2007, 2013), Świdnica (Wolny 2003) and Jawor (Ziątkowski 2010).

Naturally, apart from publications directly referring to particular locations, there are other texts discussing certain aspects of Jewish life in Lower Silesia; for example, settlement (Sula 1992; Shlomi 2000; Szajda 2017, 2018a), education (Techmańska 2011, 2019; Gruzłewska 2020), culture (Kałużna 2015), or sport (Einhorn 2014; Włodarczyk 2014), to mention just a few. Some studies go further and focus on Jewish experiences in the region after 1950 (Waszkiewicz 2007, 2011; Szydzisz 2019), including in the specific periods of 1956–57 and 1967–68 (Szydzisz 2006; Wieczorek 2010; Gruzłewska 2019a; Szajda 2019a; Wieczorek 2021), which are deemed years of crises for the community. Brief synthetic accounts of Jewish life in Lower Silesia between 1945 and 1950 have also been published (Szaynok 2001, 2011; Ilwicka-Sheppard 2014; Ruchniewicz and Ruchniewicz 2014; Nash 2022).

In view of their broader research context, I have deliberately overlooked publications that do not directly refer to Lower Silesia. However, important books such as those by Natalia Aleksium (Aleksium 2002) and August Grabski (Grabski 2002, 2004) deserve our attention. Mention should also be made here of memoirs, including those of Jews or people of Jewish descent who lived in the area for some time after 1945 and only then left Poland.

The growing interest over recent decades in the history of Jews in Poland in 1945 can be seen not only in the amount of research conducted and the number of scholarly studies published, but also in the number of undergraduate and graduate theses on this topic. For the purposes of this article, the author reviewed M.A. theses written since 1990 at the University of Wrocław, which due to its location has always been considered an important centre for research on Lower Silesia. The end date adopted here was 2018 – the theses defended up to that point are comprehensive and properly archived. According to the author's calculations, there were as many as 30 theses that discussed, to varying degrees, the post-war history of Jews in Lower Silesia.¹³ Most of them were written in the twenty-first century at the Faculty of History and Pedagogical Sciences and the Faculty of Letters, by students on courses such as history, ethnology, cultural studies, and Polish language. Only some of these papers deal with the immediate post-war period; others refer to such topics as the anti-Semitic campaign waged between 1967 and 1968, or Jewish identity or material heritage

¹³ The actual number of such theses might be higher, since different types of papers, traditional and digital, were reviewed. Bearing in mind that this is quite a large database, it is likely that not all papers on this subject have been found.

(cemeteries). What seems to be quite surprising is the relatively large number of studies relating to Jewish culture in the region after 1945, primarily on the Jewish theatre. The author found as many as six theses discussing this topic.

The fact that there has been interest in the issues discussed here is also evident in popular science books. One of the most important publications is a guide describing Jewish relics found in Lower Silesia, the Opole region and the Lubusz region (Borkowski, Kirmiel, Włodarczyk 2008). Although the book describes towns and the history of Jews in particular locations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a large part of it consists of descriptions relating to the years 1945–1950. The author of the parts of the book concerning the region analysed here is Tamara Włodarczyk, whose contribution to popularising the history of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia is unquestionable. Moreover, she is the author or co-author of several guidebooks to towns or regions which used to be inhabited by Jews and where traces of their activities can be found; for example, Wrocław (two editions) – in collaboration with Jerzy Kichler (Włodarczyk and Kichler 2016, 2019), the former Wałbrzych voivodship – with Ignacy Einhorn (Włodarczyk and Einhorn 2018), and the former Jelenia Góra voivodship (Włodarczyk 2021). Earlier, Włodarczyk also published a book titled *Przewodnik po świecie kłódzkich Żydów* (“Guide to the world of the Kłodzko Jews”) (Włodarczyk *et al.* 2007), and an album and guide on Jewish life in Legnica and the surrounding area (Włodarczyk 2016). Włodarczyk was also the curator of an exhibition and editor of a book about Jewish life in Lower Silesia in the years 1945–1970, displayed at the Wrocław Ethnographic Museum in 2017. As a result of this project, she compiled a special publication on Lower Silesia as remembered by its Jewish residents (Włodarczyk 2017). Needless to say, there are also other books on the market that could be classified as popular science; however, they most often focus on a longer period and on remains of the Jewish material heritage such as cemeteries or synagogues (Wiklik 2014).

Among the publications of recent decades, the significance of the Jewish Historical Institute’s series entitled *Z dziejów Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce* should be emphasised once again. The intention of the authors of the series was to familiarise readers with the extremely interesting and rich life of the Jewish community in Poland immediately after the war. As the sources compiled by the Central Committee of Polish Jews were large, this task was not easy, especially since the books in the series were intended as monographs each dealing with a specific issue, accompanied by a selection of archival documents. Among publications referring to Jewish issues are those about political life (Grabski 2015), cultural life (Żołąkiewska-Rejak 2017), the citizens’ court at the Central Committee of Polish Jews (Żbikowski 2014), special (security)

commissions (Cała 2014), as well as productivisation (Kendziorek 2016), agriculture (Kaczyńska 2021), education (Datner-Śpiewak 2016) or statistics (Rosner 2018). None of these books can be considered “typically Lower Silesian”, as the topics discussed in them refer to the whole country. However, what emerges from many of these studies is a remarkably clear picture of the uniqueness of the Jewish community in the Wrocław province at the time. Each of the publications is an extremely valuable source of knowledge about the history of this community in the region, and it would undoubtedly have been a daunting task to describe even small Jewish communities if it had not been for the studies conducted by Alina Cała and Helen Dartner. In this respect, the study by Katarzyna Kaczyńska appears to be of special value, as when describing Jewish agriculture she referred mainly to its centre in the neighbourhood of Dzierżoniów.

New perspectives

The state of research described above shows how much has been achieved in the last three decades in discovering, describing and popularising the post-war history of Jews in Lower Silesia. This does not mean, however, that all significant matters have already been examined. There are many important topics that have not been taken up so far or have been addressed only to a small extent. The following remarks offer a glimpse of what may be important for scholarly investigation in the future, or at least has the potential for more detailed analysis.

Basic research is still a valid requirement in relation to the subject matter discussed here. Studies based on a detailed and varied archive search will certainly contribute to establishing facts or data about Jews in Lower Silesia which are still unknown, ranging from quantitative data to structural and personal details. In this respect, the abovementioned monograph by Bożena Szaynok has made the greatest contribution. Nevertheless, it seems that we still know very little about, for example, particular aspects of community life, not to mention individual groups within the Jewish population (e.g. German Jews or Jewish former prisoners of concentration camps or death camps).

Current research trends in the humanities have provided an extremely valuable perspective. One of these is, undoubtedly, the discovery and appreciation of women’s role and importance in broadly defined socio-political activity (and beyond it), and consequently perspectives relating to gender studies and feminist research. Such studies in relation to Jewish history are also being

conducted in Poland, and a recent book edited by Anna Landau-Czajka (Landau-Czajka 2023) can be cited as an example. With this in mind, questions about the activity of Jewish women in the structures of local or provincial Jewish committees seem more than justified. All the more so because, unlike the pre-war Jewish communities, the committees established in 1944 were secular institutions, which created new opportunities for action.

The question of sources may be a particular issue, especially for historians. Sources continue to enrich the archives, thereby contributing to the expansion of existing knowledge. By way of illustration, I would like to focus on a few specific cases. The first concerns the State Archives in Wrocław, and more specifically its branch in Legnica. In recent years, this institution has added to its collection materials relating to the operation of one of the cooperatives in Jawor. Quite unexpectedly, it turned out that many of the documents concerned not the institution itself, but the Jewish Committee in Jawor in the years 1945–1950. A slightly different situation was encountered at another branch of the same archive, in Kamieniec Żąbkowicki. There, the obtained materials included documents relating strictly to the economic activity of Jews, for example in cooperatives. Yet another case concerns Wrocław, where one of the extremely interesting collections is the files kept in the Taube Department of Jewish Studies Library at the University of Wrocław. The documents provided by the local branch of one of the Jewish institutions shed light on the activity of the Jewish faction of the Polish Workers' Party in Lower Silesia in the years 1946–1948. Essentially, they are a collection of materials from virtually all committees in the region. Among various materials, one can find there documentation produced by the branches of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland. Obviously, the abovementioned cases are only examples of previously unknown source materials. Besides these, the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute are still the principal place to study archival sources. The most valuable information sources also include those which can be found in the Institute of National Remembrance. These documents, including those produced by the Public Security Offices and the Security Service, will certainly provide a foundation for many studies that will be conducted in the near future. Foreign archives, especially those in Israel or the places to which Jews migrated, are a separate matter. It is also worth mentioning the potential of induced accounts – stories told by Polish Jews who lived at least for a while in Lower Silesia after the Second World War (Szajda 2021c). Many of the recorded interviews are available in Polish cultural institutions such as the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the History Meeting House, or the “Remembrance and Future” Centre.

Not so much a new, but certainly a needed perspective is formed by a combination of two points of view: top-down and bottom-up, or rather those of local or regional researchers (sometimes enthusiasts) and professional academics. A synergy of these two approaches would certainly contribute to a new quality in Jewish history research. It is enough to mention a few titles: *Rocznik Wrocławski*, *Rocznik Jeleniogórski*, *Szkice Legnickie*, *Rocznik Dzierżoniowski*, *Nowa Kronika Wałbrzyska*, *Bibliotheca Bielaviana* – these are just some of the regional magazines in which texts about Jewish life in a specific town or county have been published. Texts of this type, sometimes just small contributions, do not always attract the attention of academic researchers, which is often to the detriment of research and the books published. This is also true in the case of efforts in the opposite direction, namely the use by local historians and regionalists of the results of research conducted in larger academic centres. In many cases, this is considered an opportunity both to gain a deeper understanding of the processes described locally, and to incorporate the history being analysed into a broader historical narrative.

Finally, it should be emphasised that for research on a specific region or a selected community, especially a minority one, it is important that the research problem be viewed in context. Putting research in a broader historical, and in consequence also narrative, context would be an extremely useful approach, which would undoubtedly increase the value of publications and the number of their recipients (including those abroad). A perfect example is the abovementioned research by Kamil Kijek on the immediate post-war history of Jews in Dzierżoniów, set against the Cold War and the international situation, but also focusing on the broadest possible Jewish context. Another study of this type is an edited volume on the topography of Jewish Wrocław with reference to the Holocaust (Buchen and Luft 2023). It represents a new approach to both “Jewish spaces” and various complex processes and chronologies – the analysis covers the years 1933–1949.

New challenges

Besides the perspectives discussed above, it is also worthwhile to consider some research challenges – topics that have not been described in detail so far and issues crucial for telling a story about the post-war history of Jews in Lower Silesia.

One of the most significant matters that still need to be investigated is post-war anti-Semitism. This particular problem has already been discussed in

quite a few articles and chapters of books of importance for Polish historiography (Zaremba 2012). Hostility towards Jews in Lower Silesia was not actually one of the key topics analysed in Bożena Szaynok's book (Szaynok 2000). The major reason for that is the limited number of sources available to the author at the time the book was written (the first half of the 1990s). Anti-Semitism seems to be an extremely important issue due to the distinctiveness of "Jewish Lower Silesia" in comparison to other minority population centres in the country. Since detailed studies have been made of the pogroms in Kraków and Kielce (Szaynok 1992; Cichopek 2000; Tokarska-Bakir 2018) and physical violence against Jews in other areas, such as Łódź (Rykała 2020), it is all the more worthwhile to analyse this phenomenon in such a large community and in such specific areas as those newly incorporated into Poland. Studies conducted so far have not revealed much about the specific nature of the community and areas mentioned above¹⁴ (Wieczorek 2019). It also seems interesting to examine the studies on anti-Semitism and the role that Jews played in the security system (Bereszyński 2020, 2021). However, there is little doubt that this matter needs further in-depth research.

Another still unexplored aspect of Jewish life is religion. Jerzy Tomaszewski's statement made more than a decade ago that "one of the most glaring gaps in Polish historiography is the religious life of the Jewish community" (Tomaszewski 2010: 38) is still valid. As for Lower Silesia – irrespective of numerous studies on this topic – still little is known about what Jewish religious life looked like, who conducted it, or who the religious leaders were. And most importantly, there is a lack of detailed information on how important this sphere of everyday life was for Jewish communities in particular localities. Consequently, one may ask why there were so many centres in which the structures of Jewish religious life had not been established.

Another challenge would certainly be the adopting of a comparative approach to the issues discussed. What I have in mind is not only a comparison of individual communities or committees within a particular province, but also a broader look, for example, at such significant centres of Jewish life as Wrocław and Łódź. Such a study might provide answers to such lingering questions as the extent to which Jews in Lower Silesia represented the centre of Jewish life on a national scale – perhaps not so much in terms of decision-making, but in terms of the number of structures, influence, and the perception of the country by other Jews. A discussion of that kind might be

¹⁴ A book by Alina Cała on Special Committees at the CKŻP (Central Committee of Jews in Poland) seems to be an exception.

expanded to other categories, such as politics. Another topic to consider is migration, which is well described in the subject literature (Szaynok 2016). Questions about the special significance of the region for the migration of Jews in the wake of the Kielce pogrom and later seem to remain unanswered. There is also a lack of biographical studies. Where the post-war history of Poland is concerned, there have been only a few publications describing lives of individual Jews, the most prominent of which is a book about Dawid Sford (Nalewajko-Kulikow 2009). Perhaps Jakub Egit, known at the time as the “Jewish voivode”, might eventually inspire more than just a brief article (Szajda 2021a), all the more so because his pre-war experiences of the Stalinist period place him against a broader Polish historical context. An interesting approach might be using computer data analysis or, more broadly, data science and digital research tools to analyse various materials from the Jewish committees, including their statistical data.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to look further than just studies focusing on the Jewish population. In such a perspective, creating an inclusive narrative that takes into account the role, scale of impact and importance of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia still remains an unfulfilled expectation and a challenge. Many Polish publications dealing with the post-war history of the region ignore the “Jewish question” in one way or another. This applies in the case of those areas and localities where the contribution of the Jewish community was certainly noticeable, if not significant. What I am referring to are not only monographs on particular cities or towns, but also books containing a synthesis of the history of regions (or sub-regions). Sometimes the description of a Jewish community in a particular location is reduced to just a few general sentences, which may be surprising given the current state of knowledge. In such studies, the Jewish population should be described in terms of not only their religion, but also their daily activities, all the more so when their work and contributions were important to the entire population of the country, as in the case of cultural life or cooperatives.

Summarising the literature review presented above, it should be emphasised that the last decades have been a period of “awakening” in research in this area, and have seen a systematic increase in the number of works on the Jewish population. It should be remarked that most of them consist of basic research, and bring readers closer to previously unknown facts about the life of this community in Lower Silesia. The articles that are being published nowadays more and more often refer to the local dimension of the Jewish presence in a given area, mostly to a particular locality or a specific issue – a selected aspect of that group’s life. This does not mean that all issues have already been described and

analysed. One of the most important of them seems to be anti-Semitism and its specific variety in Lower Silesia just after the Second World War.

The problem of how to present a narrative on the Jewish population in Lower Silesia in the years 1945–1950 still remains a puzzle. Studies conducted so far have largely emphasised the uniqueness of this community, a specific revival of Jewish activity in this part of the so-called Recovered Territories, and at the same time a quite rapid regression and inhibition of most processes, resulting from various political decisions taken by the authorities. Is this the only narrative framework that can be used to describe this group in the discussed context? It certainly is not, although the very nature of the community discussed here will remain an important point of reference for the authors of subsequent studies. Perhaps a debate should be started about a new synthesis of Jewish life in the Wrocław province just after the war, taking into account existing research findings, new documents, and contemporary research trends or sensitivities. All the more so since the question of how to understand the Jewish experience of this period remains valid also in the case of Lower Silesia. It encompasses emotions, thoughts, decisions of thousands of Holocaust survivors who came to live in unknown territories, in an uncertain socio-political situation, sometimes living side by side with Germans, Poles and Red Army soldiers for many months. Undoubtedly, research focused on specific experiences of individuals and communities would be a valuable supplement to the current knowledge about the richness and diversity of institutional structures or the impact of politics and the communist authorities on Lower Silesian Jews.

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ABSTRACT

The settlement of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia is an important component of the postwar history of Jews in Poland. It is also a notable part of the narrative surrounding the so-called Recovered Territories.

The article presents the state of research on the history of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia immediately following the end of World War II. The author puts forward the thesis that scholars are

somewhat less interested in the history of the community of Jewish survivors living in Poland after 1945, despite the fact that the number of publications on this topic has increased significantly in recent years.

The research problem is an attempt to show new trends and viewpoints, as well as a recommendation to identify several research areas that may prove enormously useful in the development of further studies on the topic.

In addition to noting the most important publications relating to the immediate postwar period (1945–1950), current research trends as well as new perspectives and challenges facing scholars are discussed.