

Unforgotten Heritage.

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Abstract: While working on the design of the historic market square arrangement, we found out that several tenement houses were missing in the northern frontage. They were burnt down during World War II and their Jewish owners perished.

Material evidence of the presence of Jewish community consists of a neglected cemetery with a grave of 500 Jews who had been shot there. Near the square there is a building that used to be a mikvah and now houses a shop. In the former rabbi's house, there is an exhibition of the objects that remained after their Jewish owners had vanished .

Although the memory of the wiped-out inhabitants and their culture seems to live on, the problem is how to restore the material evidence of Jewish community's presence in the town after more than half a century has passed.

While working on the design of the historic market square arrangement, we found out that some tenement houses were missing in the northern frontage. They were burnt down during World War II and their Jewish owners perished. Until 1939, Jews made up 60% of the town population.

Memory of the former inhabitants of the town is part of the spirituals heritage of the town. The leading 20th century playwright, Arthur Miller is said to have had his ancestors in Radomysl Wielki.

Material evidence of the existence of Jewish community consists of a neglected cemetery with a grave of 500 Jews who had been shot there and a stone commemorating the execution. Near the square there is a building that used to be a mikvah and now houses a shop. Further away, in the former rabbi's house, there is an exhibition of the objects that remained after their Jewish owners had vanished.

Although the memory of the annihilated townsmen and their culture seems to live on, the problem is why the material evidence of Jewish

community's presence in the town for nearly four centuries has not been restored.

Inventory of the market square frontage was taken for the first time in 1987. The condition of the objects adjacent to the market square was then documented. The 2004 inventory documented the up-dated condition following some alterations (such as demolitions and erection of new objects) and created grounds for developing design guidelines with regard to architectural form and colour of the planned transformations of the buildings around the market square.

A significant issue was the historic urban plan of the town. "Radomysl was founded by Mikolaj Firlej in 1581 and was granted a town charter by King Stefan Batory. The town plan was a regular quadrangle with two perpendicular streets coming out from each corner. The houses in the square were originally made of wood and in the late 1800s and early 1900s they were replaced by brick-built houses" (Ziobron R.1997). The 19th century regulations and their spatial consequences combined with the effects of the social and political situation at the time gave the town its specific character. In 1866, Radomysl became a district town for a brief period. It was a major event in the history of the town. At the time, the town had a court, which employed five judges, and a tax collecting office. The time when Poland regained independence was not particularly favourable for Radomysl which was deprived of the town charter in 1919 for a period of 15 years.

The Jewish community that made up a considerable part of the population until the end of Word War II played a significant role in providing the town with its atmosphere and character. "An analysis of the 1849 town plan of Radomysl reveals a division of the town into a Jewish and a Christian district with the boundary starting at the parish church and going right across the market square to the synagogue. The Catholic church and the synagogue were quite close to the market square. To the east of the dividing line there stood the houses of rich Jews which have been preserved(...) In the western part of the market square there were the Stadnickis palace and some wooden manors that were property of rich Christian merchants who traded in pigs and cattle. This division of the town continued until the period between the wars with some changes that were not favourable to the Christian community" (Ziobron R.1997, 11). The town was first destroyed during Word War I and then burnt down in 1944. The post-war restoration process was slow. Unfortunately, although the war damages were repaired, the town never recovered its former appearance. Inventory of the frontages around the market square was first taken in 1987, It made possible an assessment

of the transformations in all the four frontages around the market square in the years 1987– 2004.

A comparison of the current and former condition of the buildings around the market square revealed the extent and range of the changes and made possible their analysis and evaluation. It also led to some conclusions concerning the direction of future changes. However it should be pointed out that the history of the town is much longer and that is why the prospective appearance of the market square was based on an analysis of historical iconographical documents so as not to deviate from local building tradition but to preserve vernacular architecture with its unique and original character.

The time when the project was carried out did not foster free ventures into the past. A major obstacle was rigorously observed property law or often just usucaption coupled with little investment capacity. As the years go by, sentimental journeys into the past become more real.

At this point, it is worth stressing the fact that the people of the town take a tremendous interest in the town's history and have an extensive knowledge of the town's past, local tradition and customs. Restoring the memory of both Christian and Jewish culture is a unique phenomenon. The local community is exceptional in that it puts a lot of effort into particular projects. Several groups of people have made a significant contribution to creating the town's image. They include historians such as dr Maria Przybyszewska (Przybyszewska 2001) and dr Ryszard Ziobron (Ziobron R.1997) whose thorough scientific documentation gives grounds for authentic history restitution. The administration of the town and the mayor Jozef Rybinski give great support to particular projects and provide funding. Since 1987 Towarzystwo Przyjaciol Ziemi Radomyskiej (Society of the friends of Radomysl and the area) founded and chaired by Jan Ziobron has been creating a new image of Radomysl which is a small yet modern town rich in history.

On the corner of the south-west frontage there is a detached building of the Town Council built in the early 1970s. It is standing on the site of former Kaufmanowka, a single -storey wooden house that was destroyed during World War II. Before the end of the war it was a place of burial of Soviet soldiers.

Another plot, slightly further away, was occupied by the building of Sokol (Gymnastic Society) which was later demolished. Sokol played a very important role in the history of the town therefore its restoration required giving consideration both to its function and form.. Sokol Gymnastic Society acquired the building from the Association of Savings and Loans which went bankrupt during World War I and was taken over by the Lvov Economic Bank which sold it at an auction to Sokol

members who were allowed to pay by installments. The last installment was paid in 1934 and two years later, the IIIrd district of Krakow organized a convention of Sokols in Radomysl. At the time, the building had one storey, a gable roof and an elevation with four axes. An irregular composition of narrow windows added specific charm to the building. It is said that Sokol also owned a building to the left whose elevation was so narrow that there was only one window. The building housed a theatre room. Unfortunately, there are no documents to confirm this and scrutiny of iconographic documents reveals that this segment of the building was in fact an integral part of the adjacent object. Sokol was an important element of urban space. It certainly integrated local people and encouraged them to organize meetings and demonstrations. The building was pulled down in the early 1990s and the remaining gap was an ugly sight. The plans to rebuild and restore Sokol Gymnastic Society seemed fantasy at first. It was only after Poland had joined European Union and funds had appeared that the project called 'Restoration of the building of Sokol Gymnastic Society to meet the needs of the Centre for Culture, Tradition and Tourism in Radomysl Wielki together with a tourist and recreation route' was developed. Local authorities co-funded the project and the building was ready for use in 2008.

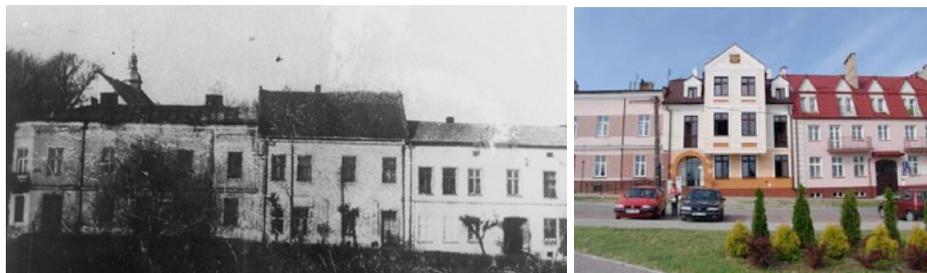


Figure 1. The building of Sokol Gymnastic Society

On the corner of the opposite north-east side of the market square at Rynek 11, Local Cooperative built a village department store in 1961 (Przybyszewska 2001, 190). Its ground floor was occupied by shopping facilities and the first floor was office space. The building had a flat roof, set back ground-floor corner and huge shop windows at ground level. The site was occupied by tenement houses during the period between the wars.

While working on the design of spatial arrangement of the historic market square we found out that several tenement houses were missing in this frontage. They were burnt down during World War II and their Jewish owners perished. "On the east and south side of the

market there are single-storey houses of brick that are property of rich Jews and behind them there are wooden huts inhabited by the poor. In fact it is a separate street called "Jewish hinterland" (Bartłomiej 2007). "In the post-war years Radomysl changed its appearance. The synagogue no longer towers the town, Jewish hinterland is gone and so are other buildings that used to belong to Jewish people. The town centre also looks different" (Przybyszewska 2001, 191).



Figure 2. Several tenement houses were missing in this frontage.

In 2004 it was still impossible to buy out the current owner, i.e. the Local Cooperative. The project suggested changes in the elevation of the building but the building itself could not be demolished. At Rynek 12 there is a post-war modernist villa with a basement, an attic and fine modernist architectural details. Although its flat roof and façade with three axes are elements stylistically alien to the architecture of the market square they have an architectural value of their own. The Mayor of the town sees a chance of buying out this fragment of the frontage and restoring the prewar architecture and character of the place. And this is the beginning of a return to the past, to the history of the Jews who made up 60% of the town population before 1939.

The memory of the former inhabitants of the town is part of its spiritual heritage. All over the world there are people who cherish the memory of the town: "... What makes Radomysl special is the number of famous people who have their roots here – they are both Polish and Jewish and some of them are famous all over the world. We mention only the most

famous of them all such as Jakub Mr_gowski who was born in 1856. He was an outstanding cantor in Rowne (nicknamed ‘grandpa of Rowne’), Lvov and London. As a composer, he adapted numerous pieces of synagogue music. He died in 1943. Another well-known townsman of Radomysl was Eliezer Margoshes (1866-1955), a renowned historian and writer, a descendent of Salomon Luria. Reuven Ajzland – Iceland (1884-1955), a famous poet and fiction writer also came from Radomysl. He wrote both in Hebrew and Yiddish. Other well-known people whose roots are in Radomysl include: Melach Neustadt, Secretary General of Poalei Zion and author of historical publication of the Holocaust and Jewish uprising in Warsaw, Josef Pfeffer Altman, Secretary General of Poalei Agudas Israel in Israel, Samuel Margoshes, editor of the Tag daily in US and chairman of Zionist Organisation in USA, Sam Salz, a well-known art collector, Pinkas Lander, an Israeli poet. Two prominent figures of world-wide renown have their roots in Radomysl. One of them is Steven Spielberg, a famous American film director and author of Schindler’s list. His grandparents are said to have lived in Radomysl. The other is Arthur Miller, a dramatist (‘The Crucible’) and Marylin Monroe’s last husband. According to old documents, his father was born in Radomysl where he lived until the age of 7 before emigrating to the United States. The Millers’ house was said to have been situated to the south of the road to Tarnow” (Bartlomiej 2007).

Although so many years have passed since World War II some traces of Jewish culture can still be seen in the cityscape while others have disappeared such as the XVIIIth century brick synagogue that towered the town in the eastern part and was surrounded by a cemetery (kirkut). In its place there is now a bus station. Until World War II the synagogue and the church marked the dividing line between the Jewish and Christian parts of the town. Yeshiva Katana building in a nearby side street has been preserved. There are flats in it now. Along the Przelaw-Mielec road there still stand several wooden houses and a kirkut which witnessed the Holocaust and the execution of 500 Jews from Radomysl that took place on July 19, 1942 and is commemorated by a huge stone. “It is a monument to Jewish martyrdom – the first in Poland, founded by several Poles with little support from the government. Around the monument there are several matzevahs some of which are in a very good condition and a piece of the synagogue column which is a ‘valuable relic’ [...] At this point I have to mention Mr Jan Ziobro_, a one-man band who was once called the successor. He is a former geography teacher from the local lycee. He has made a great contribution to the preservation of the heritage of Radomysl Wielki. As chairman of the Society of Friends of Radomysl Wielki and Area he put

great effort into erecting the monument to the martyrdom of Jews. It was the first time an object like this was erected by a Pole without the support of any Jewish organization“ (Bartłomiej 2007).



Figure 4. The monument to the martyrdom of Jews.

The former mikvah building is near the market square. It is in ruins now. On July 19, 1943 the building was bought by Feliks Wosiewicz who turned it into a mill. The plots next to it were occupied by a sawmill which worked until 1950s when the government policy made private business impossible so it was taken over by Local Cooperative which ran a shop and a fertilizer warehouse there. The Cooperative is on the verge of bankruptcy which makes taking any action difficult. Jan Ziobron, a proxy of the Committee of the Townsmen of Radomysl and Area in Israel has been making attempts to have the building refurbished and the memory restored to the site. Yet the formal and legal matters make it impossible for the Jewish Commune or anybody else to make any decisions. Establishing ownership rights will become possible only after the Cooperative has gone bankrupt and its property has been auctioned off.



Figure 5. The former mikvah building.

The former house of the Tafels is part of the frontage of the market square. This is the place where the rabbi Chaim Engel used to live. There is a School Complex there now. Jewish objects were exhibited there until recently. Temporarily they are in the custody of Mr. Ziobron and will be transferred to two rooms at the newly-completed *Sokol* building.

The memory of the annihilated inhabitants of the town and their culture seems to live on but there still remains the question why the material evidence of the four centuries of Jewish presence in the town has not been restored even though nearly half a century has passed since the annihilation. There is no simple or unequivocal answer to this question. The current inhabitants of the town are mostly people who do not remember the pre-war times. July 19, 1943, the day when the Jews of Radomysl were exterminated was a key event in the history of the town community but for them it is the past. They respect it but it is history.

On the other hand, former townsmen of Radomysl return to the town but only on sentimental journeys. Nobody wants to resettle, live and work there. They reminisce, see sights but will never come back. Others want restitution of their property, for which there is no consent of the locals or the government because many of those people lost everything during World War II or because of post-war treaties.

Legal intricacies, equivocal law lets some people hope that the current state of affairs can be revised and prevents others, such as Jan Ziobro_ from doing good. However, there is still hope since there is more readiness to return to the past. "The question is if the memory of those who disappeared from the town 60 years ago will live on. Things have changed and most of the oldest townsmen both Polish and Jewish who used to be neighbours are now dead.. However we need to believe that the memory of the remarkable town where so many prominent people were born will not perish" (Bartłomiej 2007).

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przekształceniu elewacji domów oraz ich kolorystyki. Inwestor: Urząd Miasta w Radomyślu Wielkim, Kraków.



Figure 6. The unforgotten heritage. The poster.