

The image of the Jews in Polish historical thought of the Second Polish Republic period

Syntheses, parasyntheses and textbooks of native history

The purpose of this dissertation is to show the multidimensional image of the Jews presented in Polish historical thought of the years 1918-1939. The main subject of the study and research became syntheses, parasyntheses and textbooks of native history, which were written by Polish historians.

The time caesura of the dissertation is marked by Poland's regaining of independence on the one hand, and the outbreak of World War II on the other.

The structure of the work was based on a chronological and problematic arrangement. The exception is the section devoted to school textbooks in the 1930s. Due to the uniform educational patterns that existed at the time, resulting from the functioning of state education, as well as the consistency and uniformity of the content conveyed, the individual works were discussed in a problematic manner. In some cases, I used quantitative analysis, allowing me to determine the extent of interest in the subject matter discussed.

In the first chapter, I showed the image of the Jews in syntheses, parasyntheses and school textbooks of 1900-1914. In the second, in turn, I analyzed the syntheses and parasyntheses of 1918-1939. I divided it into two subsections. In the first, general studies and studies of political history were analyzed. Then, in subsection two, I discussed parasynthetic works. I counted among them specialized publications pertaining to particular fields of history.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, I discussed the textbooks of domestic history that were in use during the interwar period. Within this chapter, I divided the works published up to the Jędrzejewicz reform and those published between 1932 and 1939.

I also analyzed the curricula of the time. The field of my interest also included historical excerpts that supplemented textbook news. When discussing textbooks, I took into account their purpose (common school, middle school, high school).

In presenting the image of the Jewish community in Polish historical writing of 1918-1939, I first of all tried to show to what extent interest was taken in the history of the Jewish population in Poland at that time, how its role in the history of the homeland was perceived and evaluated.

After analyzing the syntheses, parasyntheses and textbooks on the history of the homeland of this period, it should be concluded that, compared with the 19th century, the historical thought of the interwar period devoted more attention to the history of the Jews and their role in the history of Poland, and the image of the Jews presented by individual authors was quite diverse both in terms of the number of mentions presented and the content they contained. Looking at the syntheses of 1918-1939, it can be concluded that the image presented in them was non-exhaustive and mostly negative. A relatively broader presentation of Jewish issues was made by the authors of the works, holding unambiguous national, conservative views. Directing their studies to a specific group of readers, they did not avoid blatant, extremely negative opinions about the role of Jews in Polish history.

On the other hand, in the analyzed studies of a specialized nature, the number of mentions of Jews was small in relation to studies of the general history of Poland. Nevertheless, the picture of the Jewish community portrayed by the authors, representing particular fields of science, was more complete and disproportionately more significant due to the broader treatment of the Jewish question.

The authors of non-political studies, compared to the authors of syntheses and parasyntheses of the general history of Poland and political history, also presented the Jewish question in much warmer colors. They emphasized the tolerant attitude of Polish society, testifying to its sympathy for the Jewish people and understanding of Jewish tradition.

Looking at the attitude of the authors of the syntheses and parasyntheses towards Jews, it should be noted that it flowed primarily from political views. The vast majority spoke moderately critical of the Jewish community.

A separate place was occupied by textbooks on the history of native history. The overall picture of Jews in Poland was significantly influenced by ideological assumptions, which were reflected in the curricula. The authors of textbook studies were obliged by their requirements.

Textbooks from the 1920s contained more information about Jews in books intended for junior high school students than those addressed to children. The creators of school books intended for elementary schools usually showed little interest in the Jewish minority (stereotypical information often appeared), and new editions of post-war textbooks usually provided less information about it in comparison with analogous works of the partition era.

Information about Jews was presented differently by textbooks from the 1930s. Their authors were more likely to speak about the Jewish community in textbooks for elementary schools. The picture of the Jewish community presented at that time was distinguished by the consistency of the interpretation of events relating to the history of Jews in Polish lands.

Over the years under discussion, the picture presented evolved: in the 1930s it was characterized by more positive, balanced information, which was also in line with the state policy of the time. As a result, a more positive image of Jews was forming in the minds of readers.

It should be noted that the portrayed image of Jews had different tints. Historians showed the glories and shadows of their residence in Polish lands in the past. The statements did not lack sometimes harsh criticism of the conduct of the Jewish population, but also positive assessments of it. Compared to the pre-war period, the authors more often pointed out the value of tolerance, emancipation and assimilation of the Jewish community, and saw the need for joint activities of the Polish and Jewish people for the benefit of the reborn Polish state.

Keywords: historiography, synthesis, parasynthesis, textbooks, Jews, Second Polish Republic