

Kraków 2007

Kamila Klauzińska

## A MODERN APPROACH TO THE GENEALOGY OF POLISH JEWS: ZDUŃSKA WOLA AS A TEST CASE

The first texts about genealogy may be found in the Old Testament. Especially precious is the information that appears in the Book of Genesis, the Book of Exodus and the Book of Numbers. In the Book of Genesis the descendants of Adam and Eve are listed:

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.<sup>1</sup> And she again bare his brother Abel.<sup>2</sup> (...) This is the book of the generations of Adam (...) And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, and after his image; and called his name Seth.<sup>3</sup> And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters.<sup>4</sup> And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.”<sup>5</sup>

The Book of Numbers 3: 14–39 provides information about the house of Levi, which the Lord instructed to take care of the Temple.

Arthur Kurzweil,<sup>6</sup> one of the most important Jewish genealogists, wrote: “The Talmud says that when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the survivors of that cataclysm had to say to themselves, ‘What are we going to do? Is this the end, or do we rebuild?’ The Talmud says that when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, then the Jews did their family trees. A commentator makes the observation, as we know so well, that sometimes if you want to go forward, you first have to go backward. You see where you are coming from, and you know where you are going.”<sup>7</sup>

This process continues up to the present time. Within the last twenty years Jewish genealogy has become extremely popular. However, in Poland genealogy is still treated

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4: 1

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 4: 2

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 5: 3

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 5: 4

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 5: 5

<sup>6</sup> A. Kurzweil, leader of Jewish genealogy, author of: *From Generation to Generation: How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History*, San Francisco, 2004; *My Generations: A Course in Jewish Family History*, Behrman House Publishing, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> A. Kurzweil., Foreword: Genealogy As a Spiritual Pilgrimage, in: *A Guide to Jewish Genealogy*, (eds) S. Amdur & G. Mokotoff, New Jersey, 2004, p. xii.

marginally, as a domain auxiliary to history, anthropology or sociology. The development of computerization and of the Internet has led to the creation of a large number of computer programs designed to construct family trees. A large number of specialized databases have appeared. The main professional tool on the web for researchers of Jewish genealogy is Jewishgen,<sup>8</sup> which began its activity in 1995. Since then, various databases are freely available on the Jewishgen site: JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF), Family Tree of the Jewish People, All Country and All Topic Databases, Discussion Groups, and Info Files. Special projects include the Yizkor Book Project, Shtetl Links, the Holocaust Global Registry, Shtetl Schleppers, and much more. Stanley Diamond initiated a database specific to Polish Jewry which, initially, was called Records Indexing Project – Poland but was later changed to JRI – Poland.<sup>9</sup> This organization, which is independent from Jewishgen but cooperates with them, owns the largest database (mainly metrical data) of Polish Jews for the period that ranges from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century until World War II. Both Jewishgen and JRI – Poland closely cooperate with the Polish National Archives.

What is the source of the present-day Jewish genealogical thrust among this worldwide interest group that genealogist Sallyann Amdur Sack likes to call the Jewish genealogical community? The answer may simply be that the current avid need for Jewish genealogical research is the reflection of a cultural phenomenon: to conserve Memory. The words of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi seem to be of essence, when he says that we should look in the Bible for the cause of this phenomenon. In his opinion, only in Judaism is there a command of remembrance, which seems to be a religious imperative. In the Bible the verb *zakhar* (Hebrew: remember) appears in many forms and at least 169 times, usually in portions about Israel or about God.<sup>10</sup> Originally, a commandment in the Bible was defined as a *mitzva*. With time, any good deed was called in this way, Arthur Kurzweil perceives “doing” genealogy in a similar way: “I am thinking about the mitzvahs that we do as genealogists. It seems to me that every step of the way when we pursue our genealogical research, we are involved in mitzvahs. Who more than we reach out to the elderly people in our family and our communities and make them feel like we need them – because we do. And what is that but a mitzvah, to honor the elderly.”<sup>11</sup>

The first International Conference of Jewish Genealogy took place in 1981. Subsequent conferences of the same character took place over the last 25 years,<sup>12</sup> each in a different city around the world. The 24<sup>th</sup> IAJGS Conference of Jewish Genealogy took place in Jerusalem in 2004. 150 speakers lectured about the genealogy of the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews. In 2005 the Conference was held in Las Vegas. In 2006 it took place in New York.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.jewishgen.org/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.jewishgen.org/JRI-PL/>

<sup>10</sup> Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Znaczenie w historii, pamięć i pisanie historii. Podstawy biblijne i rabiniczne, Konteksty*, no 1–2, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> A. Kurzweil, Foreword: Genealogy As a Spiritual Pilgrimage, in: *Jewish Genealogy*, (eds) S. Amdur and G. Mokotoff, p. ix.

<sup>12</sup> S. Sack Amdur, *Jewish Genealogy: The Past 25 years, Avotaynu*, vol. XX, No. 2, 2004, p. 3.

The year 2006 was crucial for Jewish genealogy, with the launching, in January, of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy. It is located in the National and University Library in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> The IJG is directed by Neville Yosef Lamdan, former Israeli Ambassador to the Vatican. The founding committee includes authorities in Jewish genealogy, such as Sallyann Amdur Sack, Alexandre Beider, Stanley Diamond and Gary Mokotoff. The thrust of the new Institute is in an effort to systematize genealogy as an independent academic discipline: we are dealing with an attempt at crystallizing a new research discipline.

In the last two decades hundreds of books about genealogy have been published, including a large number about Jewish genealogy. The most popular are the trilogy of Alexander Beider: *A Dictionary of Ashkenazic Given Names*,<sup>14</sup> *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*,<sup>15</sup> *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia*.<sup>16</sup> The books: *Jewish Roots in Poland*<sup>17</sup> by Miriam Weiner, and *A Guide to Jewish Genealogy*<sup>18</sup> by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Amdur Sack, also deserve our attention. Over hundred articles about the genealogy of Polish Jews have appeared in the quarterly *Avotaynu*.<sup>19</sup> In Poland, however, publications about genealogy are so far focused on broader aspect, and are not specifically dedicated to Jewish facets, with the exception of some memoirs and diaries concerned with specific families, where the authors present selected family trees of famous families. A few deal with Hasidic dynasties and rabbinical houses.<sup>20</sup> Some publications about synagogue metrical districts have deserved attention, for example the Jewish metrical districts and Jewish communes in Galicia<sup>21</sup> or the Jewish metrical books of Jews from Sławków and Strzemieszyce.<sup>22</sup>

A conclusion that may be drawn from the above is that the investigation of the genealogy of Polish Jews is an activity that currently is largely concentrated outside the borders of Poland.

## Jewish genealogy in Poland

In Poland, Jewish genealogy, in the last years, is mainly dealt with by the Genealogy Research Department at the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. This Department is headed by Yale Reisner and Anna Przy-

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ijg.org/>

<sup>14</sup> A. Beider, *A Dictionary of Ashkenazic Given Names*, *Avotaynu*, vol. XVII, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> A. Beider, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, New York 1996.

<sup>16</sup> A. Beider, *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia*, "Avotaynu", vol. XX, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> M. Weiner, *Jewish Roots in Poland*, Routes to Roots Foundation, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> *A Guide to Jewish Genealogy*, Bergenfield, New Jersey 2004. Sallyann Amdur Sack and Gary Mokotoff (eds).

<sup>19</sup> *Avotaynu* quarterly is the most popular international journal about Jewish genealogy; <http://www.avotaynu.com/>

<sup>20</sup> A. Grupańska, *Najtrudniej jest spotkać Lilit*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 267–287.

<sup>21</sup> J. Michalewicz, *Żydowskie okręgi metrykalne i żydowskie gminy wyznaniowe w Galicji doby autonomicznej*, Kraków 1995.

<sup>22</sup> L. Hońdo, *Księgi metrykalne Żydów ze Sławkowa i Strzemieszyc*, in: *Cmentarze żydowskie w Sławkowie i Dąbrowie Górniczej*, Kraków 2004, pp. xxxi–xxxiii.

byszewska Drozd. It is the main contact point for Jews both from Poland and from the world who wish to research their roots. Reisner and Przybyszewska Drozd co-operate with a few private researchers in Poland.

These investigations generally focus on specific families from Poland. However, specialized computer programs could be designed to virtually reconstruct the Jewish population of entire towns by merging data lists from different sources.<sup>23</sup> Zduńska Wola is one such town, which may become a model example of a town for which the whole Jewish population will be documented on the basis of a number of sources. In 2006 an Association was created in the town, the Historical Society YACHAD. One of the objectives of this association is to become a center of information and of education about the Jewish Community of Zduńska Wola.

An important task of this association will be – among other things – to virtually reconstruct the Jewish community which lived in Zduńska Wola from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until the year 1942.

## The Jews of Zduńska Wola

Zduńska Wola is, today, a town without Jews. Before World War II up to 40% of the population of the town was Jewish and together with the local Poles and Germans they contributed to the rise and development of this factory town. Zduńska Wola didn't have remarkable *tzadikim* or famous rabbis and, in general, it was not a town with intellectual aspirations. The Jews belonged for the most part to the working-class, with many factory workers among them. A large number of Jewish factories in Zduńska Wola were branches of, or supported, those in Łódź, a city that was much bigger and wealthier. However, some of the Zduńska Wola factories belonged to local Jewish proprietors. A few exported their commodities to China.

The Jewish community in Zduńska Wola constitutes a very interesting example of a common industrial town in the midst of Poland. It was a diverse community, with on the one hand *sheyne yidn* who devoted themselves to study and fulfilled religious duties, and on the other hand, simple Jews involved in the small trade. An important role in the community was played by some of the rich *belabatim*, who were among the first to abandon the traditional Jewish clothes, whose children began to attend non-religious schools, and whose houses began to adapt to the modern world surrounding them.

The end of the Jewish community in Zduńska Wola fell in August of 1942, when the Nazis liquidated the ghetto in the town and, with it, almost all the Jews from Zduńska Wola.

## Sources of information about the Jewish community in Zduńska Wola

The registration books constitute an invaluable source of information for the genealogist. In Zduńska Wola all the books have survived the tests of war and time. The

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<sup>23</sup> H.D. Wagner, *Genealogy as an Academic Discipline, Avotaynu*, vol. XXII, No. 1, p. 11.

certificates for the years 1808–1825<sup>24</sup> and 1826–1907<sup>25</sup> are kept in the national archives in Łódź. However the register books for the last hundred years are located in the municipal Register Office (USC). In most cases these are duplicate copies. Each book contains the births, marriages and deaths certificates for a single year. These records are written according to a standard formula with slightly different version for birth, marriages and death certificates. They include about 34 500 registrations.

The Books of Permanent Residents<sup>26</sup> – these still appear to be underused by researchers and genealogists, who mostly concentrate their attention on the registration books. These sources actually complement each other. In fact I strongly suspect that the Books of Permanent Residents are an even more interesting and abundant resource (note however that they do not include any information about non-permanent residents of a town). These Books provide the following information: date and place of birth and death; civil status [married/unmarried, divorced, widow/widower]; divorces, livelihood [for woman this simply reads: with husband; for children: with parents]; children's first names; parents' first names; mother's maiden name; religion; background; previous place of residence; army service [for men]; court verdict if applicable (if guilty, of what and when a person was convicted, population migration (who, when and whereto); identity card (when and by who it was issued); citizenship (date of issue or revocation, legal validity).

The Books of Permanent Residents provide ample information about the Jews who moved to Zduńska Wola. Contrasting with the metrical books, they include people who were born back to the year 1750. The records in those books, as in the metrical books, are written in a standardized way, according to the registered property number (*numer hipoteczny*). Thus, all families living in a given house number are included. The exact address can be found based on the number of the registered property.

All residents of the town were included in the Books of Permanent Residents, regardless of religion: we thus can find intermingled records for Catholics, Evangelists and Jews. Note that a resident who had lived in Zduńska Wola for an extended period of time, and even had created a family in town, but was not recorded in the Books of Permanent Residents, had to submit a formal request to the City Hall to be included in these Books. In his request he had to indicate how long he had resided in Zduńska Wola, what his occupation was, and which members of his family he wanted to include in the Books. Examples of such cases appear in the National Archive in Łódź.<sup>27</sup> The City Hall that received such a request from an individual had to formally request some extracts from registration books in the town of origin of the individual. There was a payment due for registration in Books of Residents: in 1905, for example, this payment amounted to 2 rouble and 60 kopeck.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, file 191, 1743.

<sup>25</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, file 1745.

<sup>26</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, houses no.: 1–18, 19–48, 48–80, 81–99, 100–132, 133–160, 161–200, 201–260, 261–289, 290–344, 345–364, 365–409, 370–376, 411–453, 453–485, 486–508; index of these books is in the author's private archive.

<sup>27</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Rząd Gubernialny Kaliski, sygn. 6567, 6510.

<sup>28</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Rząd Gubernialny Kaliski, sygn. 6510.

For Zduńska Wola, 28 Books of Permanent Residents have survived. In these, according to an index I constructed in 2004–2005, there are about 3500 registration entries for the Jewish families.

The Books of Permanent Residents were closed in 1931. At that time, a register of inhabitants (*rejestr mieszkańców*) was started.<sup>29</sup> Almost all of these books survived and 9 volumes are included in the archive at Sieradz. Unfortunately they are not so precious as a source: the amount of comments is limited and the book of Sieradzka Street, where a large amount of Jewish families lived, did not survive. In these books the records are classified according to the street name, house and apartment number. The names of the streets are written in alphabetical order, and the houses are recorded from first to last number.

Another interesting source of information is the 1930–1934 applications for identity cards.<sup>30</sup> In the Sieradz archive there are almost 500 applications from Jews of Zduńska Wola. These documents are especially important because each application includes a photograph of the individual (Fig. 1).

Do Rejestru  
w Zduńskiej woli.

.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....

Uprzejmie proszę o wydanie mi dowodu osobistego w następującym  
Dane o osobie podaje niżej:

I. Dane osobiste

1. Nazwisko i imię.....  
2. Data i miejsce urodzenia.....  
3. Miejsce zamieszkania.....  
4. Zawód.....  
5. Najlepiej wykształcenie do k. l. i s. o. t. ....

II. Dane rodzinne

1. Stan..... 4. Dług.....  
2. Płeć..... 5. Inni członkowie rodziny.....  
3. Działy.....

III. Dane o wykształceniu

1. Podstawa wykształcenia dowodu osobistego.....  
Podpis.....

Wniosek o wydanie dowodu osobistego Nr.....  
z Zduńskiej woli, dn. .... 1930r.  
Podpis.....

RR.  
ostatni numer: Nr. 14/30  
Zduńska Wola, dn. ... 1930r.  
BURMISTRZ:  
*[Signature]*

Fig. 1

Jewish cemeteries are an invaluable resource for genealogists. For a number of years now, Jewish cemeteries are being documented in Poland. Unfortunately,

<sup>29</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, the books of permanent residents vol. 12, 14, 17, 18; index of this documents is in the author's private archive.

<sup>30</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, sygn. 90, 91, 99–103; index of this documents is in the author's private archive.

extensive devastation of these places often limits the documentation efforts. The Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola is the largest in the Sieradz region, and one of the 44 biggest Jewish cemeteries in Poland. In 2001 the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola was divided into 11 sections, each marked by a letter of the alphabet, and a photographic and topographic census project was initiated. This effort led to the current count of about 3500 *matzevot* or fragments of *matzevot*. Data from the Jewish cemetery have been used for genealogy research for the last 5 years. Thanks to such research, we have been able to assign surnames to a large number of patronymic-only *matzevot*, which would have remained anonymous without this effort. The inscriptions on the *matzevot* provide the following information: name, surname, name of father, names of grandfathers, name and surname of husband on a female *matzeva*, age, date of death, town of origin of the deceased. If the dead person was a Hasid, we can often learn who was his master/teacher, and what was his position in the community. Merging data from different sources often leads to surprising results, which will be discussed a bit more in a further section of this article.

In the archives, a number of other interesting sources have survived for Zduńska Wola, which can potentially be useful for genealogy research. Over the last two years I have prepared the following indexes:

- Index of 91 Jews who came back to Zduńska Wola in 1946. Their town of origin and last residence address in Zduńska Wola are included.<sup>31</sup>
- Index of properties in Zduńska Wola from 1950, including Jewish properties.<sup>32</sup>
- Index of war losses from 1945, including address, surname of landlord, degree of destruction.<sup>33</sup>
- Index of 445 Jews who collected tax money for the Jewish community and were entitled to vote for the new rabbi in 1907.<sup>34</sup>

A number of indexes prepared by Prof. H. Daniel Wagner have additional genealogical value:

- Index of factories in Zduńska Wola, as shown in the 1929 Polish Business Directory which itself include 1083 alphabetic surnames records.<sup>35</sup>
- *Family Finder*,<sup>36</sup> a list of about 630 Jewish surnames used in Zduńska Wola, including the email address of the families currently researching their roots in Zduńska Wola.
- *Yizkor Book* Necrology,<sup>37</sup> 2300 records.

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<sup>31</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, sygn. 170; index of this documents is in the author's private archive.

<sup>32</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, sygn. 159; index of this documents is in the author's private archive.

<sup>33</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Oddział w Sieradzu, Akta Miasta Zduńskiej Woli, sygn. 149; index of this documents is in the author's private archive.

<sup>34</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Rząd Gubernialny Kaliski, sygn. 1660; index of this documents is in author's private archive.

<sup>35</sup> This index is in H. Daniel Wagner's private archive.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.weizmann.ac.il/wagner/ZdunskaWola/Contents.htm>

<sup>37</sup> This index is in H. Daniel Wagner's private archive.

It is worth mentioning here that a few thousands registration cards and home address books are stored in the local Historical Museum in Zduńska Wola, but unfortunately those documents are not yet available for genealogists.

## Using various sources for the genealogy research

In Dan Rottenberg's opinion, around the year 1700 the Jewish population worldwide varied between one and two millions. Rottenberg notes in 1998 that in the computer age the merging between data from different families should not represent a major problem: "The ultimate dreams of most genealogists is that someday all existing genealogies can be cross – indexed and computerized so that your family history can be linked up with histories of any other families that are related to you, thus making your own task much easier. This is a far – fetched and in fact, impossible task if we are talking about cross – indexing the entire population of the world. But it is not an impossible dream if we limit ourselves solely to Jews." Today this indeed seems possible.<sup>38</sup>

An example of this approach is the extensive research conducted by an individual in New York for the KRONMAN<sup>39</sup> family. His research includes a compilation of individual family trees from Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine, Hungary and Russia, as well as members of the family who immigrated to the United States. The researcher postulates that in most cases all branches converge to a small number of ancestors in Poland. So far 1519 people from the KRONMAN family have been found, including 471 people from Poland.<sup>40</sup> This research project is still in progress and the researcher's assumption above has yet to be proved.

In Daniel Wagner's opinion, modern genealogy focuses on a double framework. macrogenealogy and microgenealogy. In this perspective, the first subfield of modern genealogy, also termed global genealogy, involves issues and tools relevant to genealogy as a whole, such as the development of improved mathematical models for the study of human migration or of backward or forward population growth, generic tools to facilitate merging and comparing databases, or genetic research techniques designed to trace the ancestors of *homo sapiens*.<sup>41</sup> As to the second subfield on which modern genealogy rests, microgenealogy, Daniel Wagner distinguishes two branches. The first investigates a specific surname or family, the local history of a town, and so on, whereas the second branch of microgenealogy focuses on a wider area like the effects of specific large-scale historical events (the Holocaust), or genealogical myths

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<sup>38</sup> D. Rottenberg, *Finding our fathers, A Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy*, Baltimore 1998, p. 6. In: 2007 such a database merging project was indeed initiated by prof. D. Wagner, A.M. K. Klauzińska and A.M. J. Zajdel, with funding from the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy (Jerusalem, Israel), the aim of which is to develop efficient database merging software for Jewish databases.

<sup>39</sup> The name KRONMAN, according to A. Beider, originates from the word Krojna ( Yiddish "kroyne"). This name originates from word "crown": A. Beider, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, New York 1996, p. 263, 264.

<sup>40</sup> The author of this article also performed a research for the KRONMAN family in Poland (mostly in Zduńska Wola, Koło, Łódź and Zagorów); The data are stored in the archives of the author.

<sup>41</sup> H.D. Wagner, *Genealogy as an Academic Discipline, Avotaynu*, vol. XXII, No. 1, p. 11.



(do European royal families descend from King David? Do specific families from Alsace descend from Charlemagne?), etc. Daniel Wagner notes that this classification is far from being accurate, because some of these issues have a mixed character, for example generic research tools, such as mitochondrial DNA, that “belong” to the field of macrogenealogy may be used to investigate microgenealogical problems such as the ancestry of Kohanim.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, modern genealogy takes advantage of, and merges, different sources and research methods. Recent investigations in cemeteries are particularly helpful, as evidenced from the documentation of the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, this effort – initiated in 2003 – yielded a non-negligible amount of individuals who were buried in the cemetery but whose names does not figure in the metrical books or the Books of Permanent Residents. The cemetery project is especially important because the *Pinkas* of the *Chevra Kadisha* of Zduńska Wola did not survive the war. This is further illustrated below.

During a genealogy investigation focusing on the ANCER<sup>44</sup> family, I searched for a woman named Cerka (Fig. 2.).



Fig. 2.

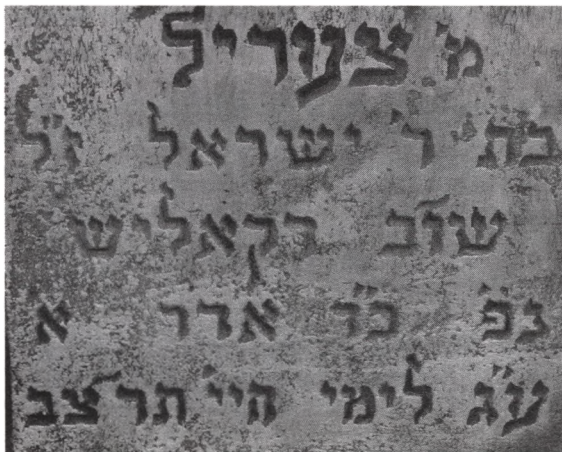


Fig. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Photographic and Topographic Census Project in the Jewish Cemetery of Zduńska Wola. The index of 3505 *matzevot* from the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola is located in Daniel Wagner's private archive and in the author's archive.

<sup>44</sup> The meaning of the name ANCER according to A. Beider, should be looked for in the similarly sounding ANCYJER. It derives from the German word “anziehen”, which means “attractive, interesting”: A. Beider, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, New York 1996, p. 80.

She was born in 1858 in Kalisz, and was married in Dąbie. Her children were born in Zduńska Wola. Unfortunately no information about the death place of Cerka was available. A death certificate could not be found neither in her place of birth nor in Zduńska Wola. During the documentation of the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola a *matzeva* bearing the name of Cerka ANCER was discovered. But was it indeed the same woman? The ANCER surname definitely did not appear in the metrical books of Zduńska Wola (except for one entry only, but not Cerka). Based on the information found on the stone, Cerka ANCER's father was Israel, a *mohel* (Fig. 3): This was also the name of the Cerka I had been looking for.

Moreover, looking again at the birth certificate of Cerka I could read that her father had indeed been a *shohet*! Final confirmation of the very high probability that this was indeed the Cerka ANCER I was looking for was provided by key additional information inscribed on the tombstone: the father of Cerka had come from Kalisz.

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Ceril                                | 1. מ' צעריל           |
| 2. daughter of Israel of blessed memory | 2. בת ר' ישראל ז"ל    |
| 3. shohet from Kalisz                   | 3. שו"ב דקאליש        |
| 4. died 24 Adar I                       | 4. נפ' כ"ד אדר א'     |
| 5. at age 73 in 5692 [1932]             | 5. ע"ג לימי חי' תרצ"ב |

Fig. 4.

The information on *matzevot* is not always that exhaustive. According to Jewish tradition, mainly until World War I, often only the father's first name appeared on the stones, without a surname. For married women, sometimes the name and surname of her husband are present. In the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola only about 18 percent of the *matzevot* have a surname, the rest being patronymic *matzevot*. Nevertheless, a surname can often be assigned to a patronymic *matzeva* by comparing death registration data with the cemetery data. In Zduńska Wola, database merging led to the assignment of 1541 surnames on patronymic-only *matzevot*, thus 44 percent of the total cemetery population. This exercise, called database merging, is a major genealogical tool that can lead to breakthroughs of primary importance for descendants. This comparison process is particularly simple for a *matzeva* with a relatively rare first name, or pair of first names (see the example below), but is frequently ineffective for common first names (Yosef, Abram, Rachel,...) because many such entries are present in a given year. As an example, take the case of a family which was looking for the *matzeva* of Iska Poria LASKER. They knew the exact date of death (1907), from the metrical books of Zduńska Wola. *Matzeva* B-107 in the Zduńska Wola cemetery (Fig. 5), which read: "Porja Iska bat Yosef, died 23 Av 5667," was rapidly identified as the correct one, thanks to the exact date of death.

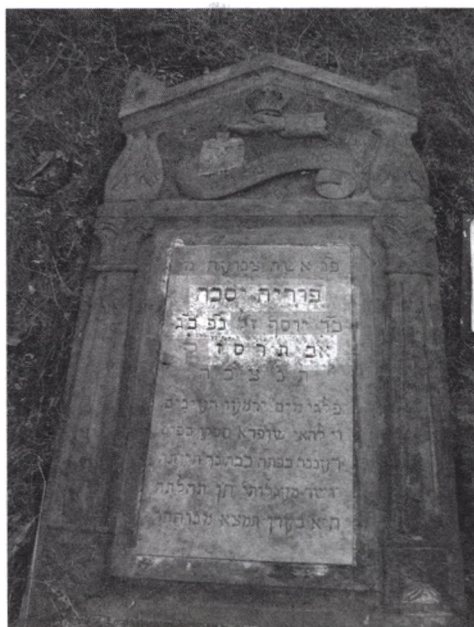


Fig. 5.

Difficulties with merging data from cemeteries and from death certificates arise when there is not enough text on the *matzeva* or when the text is confusing. A good example is *matzeva* A-320 [Fig. 6, 7, 8].<sup>45</sup>



Fig. 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Matzevot* in the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola are catalogued according to 11 sections: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

The fragments of the *matzeva* read *Bajla Mindel daughter of Henich GOLDHAMER*.<sup>46</sup> However, there is no Bajla Mindel GOLDHAMER listed in the death metrical data books. This time the identification problem was solved with the help of the *Family Finder* database and a set of old pictures from the cemetery in families from Zduńska Wola (fig. 7). The stone was found to be that of Bajla Mindel KOBER nee GOLDHAMER. Bajla Mindel was married and when she died the surname of her husband had been used. Thanks to the old photograph from the cemetery, we managed to identify the death certificate of this woman which is included in the 1928 metrical book of Zduńska Wola. As a matter of fact, her marriage with Szaja Icek KOBER<sup>47</sup> was also listed in the 1911 data and could have helped solve the issue as well.

The foregoing examples illustrate the use of one of the many tools of modern genealogy, namely database merging. Database merging will be further discussed in a separate article. I won't mention here other aspects and tools related to mathematics, statistics or molecular biology,<sup>48</sup> or software issues such as the soundex system which was created and adapted for Jewish genealogy by Randy Daitch and Gary Mokotoff.

<sup>46</sup> A. Beider translates this surname like a gold hammer: A. Beider, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, New York 1996, p. 188.

<sup>47</sup> The meaning of the name KOBER according to A. Beider, should be looked for in the similarly sounding KOJBER – koyber [Yiddish] – basket: A. Beider, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, New York 1996, p. 250, 251.

<sup>48</sup> H.D. Wagner, *Genealogy as an Academic Discipline*, *Avotaynu*, vol. XXII, No. 1, pp. 7-8.

To conclude, genealogy and especially Jewish genealogy undergo in the recent years a giant transformation. It was once treated only like a hobby, but today it is becoming a pole of far-reaching information and knowledge. Within the last twenty years the character of genealogy research has not only become complex and multifaceted, but – according to Sallyann Amdur Sack – it reflects a deep cultural phenomenon, that so far seems to be absent in Poland.

