Editor’s Foreword

The present volume includes the papers presented at the seminar on The Jews of Częstochowa – Coexistence – Holocaust – Memory held in Częstochowa on April 22-23, 2004. The seminar was a major event of the Częstochowa Jews Remembrance Days, which attracted both Jewish and Polish, former and present, inhabitants of Częstochowa. The seminar was organized mainly by the Pedagogical University of Częstochowa (presently the Jan Długosz Academy), while the contributors came from Poland, the United States, and Israel.

Some of the opinions expressed in the present volume are not those of the editor. Yet the texts have not been abridged, since they indicate that discovering the truth about the common past of the two nations requires a lot of further effort on both Polish and Jewish sides. The restoration of democratic system in Poland, new trends in international politics, and the development of electronic means of communication provide many opportunities for this to happen. I believe that further exchange and cooperation between Polish historians and their Jewish colleagues in Israel, the United States, or any country in the world, will improve mutual understanding, expand the knowledge of the other’s tradition and history, in particular the ones, which emerged in the Polish land. This cooperation was best illustrated by the visits of Rabbi Nachum Asz’s granddaughter, Prof. Elżbieta (Elizabeth) Mundlak-Zborowski. At the turn of the third millennium, while working in Częstochowa on her film autobiography entitled History Lesson: I Was Lucky, Prof. Mundlak inspired me and many of my colleagues: historians, archivists, museum curators, and artists, to undertake or continue thorough studies or artistic projects aimed at making the younger generations aware of the major contribution of the Jewish community to the development of Częstochowa.

I would also like to point out an interesting though controversial piece by Rabbi Mark W. Kiel. His approach seems characteristic of a post-war generation, of people who could not, for a variety of political and emotional reasons, maintain any direct contacts with the native town of their ancestors. Consequently, they could not, either, notice any change in the Polish attitudes, most evident among the young Poles, who were also most influenced by the teaching of John Paul II and by the new position of the Roman-Catholic church. For the people born after the war, memories and narratives of their parents or grandparents have been an important emotional factor in the formation of oral history. The scholarly cooperation should continue to promote objective analysis of the sources, verification of the facts and their interpretations.

Another significant step towards knowing each other’s life in present day Częstochowa and in the United States has been initiated by the Jewish Americans, whose roots are in Częstochowa. Their leader in this respect is Mr. Zygmunt (Sigmund) Rolat. His indefatigable energy, encouragement, and funding efforts have resulted in many cultural, scholarly, and studio projects. Their outcome has advanced new perspective in the Jewish-Christian relationship, and as such have been readily supported by the Częstochowa Archbishop Stanislaw Nowak and by the City Council with Mayor Tadeusz Wrona.

Jerzy Mizgalski