From 1918 to 1939, the Jewish community in Kielce formed one of eleven ‘large’ communities in Kielce province. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Jewish population numbered 20,942 persons or 3,500 families. It was one of the newer Jewish communities, as the right of free settlement had not been granted to the Jews of Kielce by tsarist edict until 24 May (5 June) 1862. Only after the failure of the January uprising did larger numbers begin to arrive. In 1872, a total of 505 Jews settled in Kielce; this number increased to 1,046 (in 1874) and grew steadily to 1,121 (in 1876); to 2,640 (in 1880); to 2,649 (in 1887); 2,946 (in 1896); 14,794 (in 1915); 15,530 (in 1921); and 18,683 (in 1931).

The influx of Jews to Kielce was mainly associated with shifting attitudes of the state authorities toward national and social problems. Settlement increased particularly after 1867, when Kielce became the capital of the province, and after 1882, when village dwellers lost their milling licenses and manufacturing shops. A similar wave arrived following the expulsions of 1893. Part of the Jewish population settled permanently in Kielce, and part moved within a year to other centres.

Indigent arrivals settled mainly in peripheral streets such as Targowa, Pocieszka, Bodzentynska, and Nowy Świat, as well as in the suburbs of Szydlowki, Barwinki, Piaski, and Czarnów. Wealthier Jews bought or rented accommodations on central streets such as Duza, Mala, Konstantego, Poczta, Leonarda, and Wesola, or in the market area. The majority of houses built by Jews were located in the northwest part of town, parallel to the Silnica River; it was in this area that the Nowy Świat quarter, dominated by a middle-class Jewish population, came into being.

As Jewish settlement grew, attempts were made to establish a synagogue district. Despite official written opposition from the rabbi of Checiny dated 1 February 1868, such a district was established, and on 22 August of that year, a synagogue supervision committee was confirmed. Mordka Goldret was appointed as Kielce’s first rabbi. The synagogue supervision committee, headed by the large landowner Mojzesz Pfeffer, adapted a building on Bodzentynska Street for a prayer house. The municipal authorities also granted permission for a kosher butcher’s stall to be opened at St. Tekla Square and for a ritual bath house to be located on Nowowarszawska Street. By 1870 the community also established a cemetery in the suburb of Pakosz.1

The arrival of the Jewish population and their place in the town’s economy coincided with Kielce’s sudden economic boom. The 1874 Kielce record states that the influx of Jews caused increases in trade in all branches of commerce. Each year, several new groceries, fancy goods stores, and textile shops opened. While in some areas Jews met stiff competition from Polish companies (in food, groceries, and drinks), in many others they quickly became magnates. Jews, for example, were highly successful in the book trade.

New prospects opened in the 1880s, when a railway line from Dęblin to Dąbrowa Górnicza was built to pass through Kielce, providing train links with Zagłębie Dąbrowskie and Warsaw. More and more people with capital arrived and invested in local raw materials either for themselves or on behalf of larger companies.

From 1874 on, deposits of Devonian limestone were mined on Wietrznia Hill, producing slaked lime in underground kilns. Two dome kilns were built between 1881 and 1882, but a full-scale expansion of the factory was undertaken only after the Wietrznia property was purchased by Abram, the son of Gojman Zagajski, with a
contract drawn up by Franciszek, son of Sylwester Golemowski, on 5 (17) September 1885. Mendel Lipszyce Ehrlich then bought the Kądzielnia quarry, located on the Kraków road, from the Dobrzański and Ska Company. The fact that this company owned its own railway siding had an impact on further development. Two Heiman brothers who owned factories in Krasocin founded the Leonów glass works in 1897, taking advantage of a local sand deposit. Rachmil Rozenholec’s brick works business expanded quickly as well, and Henryk Nowak and Henryk Bruner founded two modern sawmills on the Głęboczka site. Other nineteenth-century enterprises owned by Jews included Judka Cukiernar’s brewery, Litman Rubinek’s soap and candle factory, Aron Berdowicz’s fancy goods factory, Wolf Minski’s tannery, and similar businesses owned by Mendel and Szulc Bekerman.2

In 1871, Chaskiel Landau, of Chęciny, won the tender to construct a trade hall in Kielce. Over the next two years, he built a structure containing fifty-six shops, butchers, and stores. In 1898, Jewish craftsmen received the contract to pave Kielce’s streets with cobblestones. Jewish-owned firms also succeeded in obtaining contracts for joinery, roofing, and building work. As the newspaper Gazeta Kielecka reported in 1913, Christians hired Jews to oversee the construction of entire buildings.

Certain financial institutions lent money to help factories modernise and expand. A municipal credit society was founded in Kielce in 1899, followed a year later by a savings and loan society. The Łódź branch of the Commercial Bank was very popular, as were banking houses owned by Moritz Goldhaar, Judka Ehrlich, and Dawid Rozenberg. Salomon Rzedkowski and Mendel Ellencweig granted short-term loans at high interest rates.3

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish political life began to take shape under the sway of political events deep inside Russia. During the first quarter of 1902, with the guidance of solicitor Henryk Auszer, the first pro-Zionist meeting was organized, resulting in a decision to set up a library and reading room that would emphasize the history of Palestine. A lecture series on the Zionist movement was also proposed. Older Jews wanted nothing to do with these activities; however, younger people could not envision a future for themselves in Poland. Between 1900 and 1904, the Polish Socialist Party and the All-Jewish Workers’ Union—the Bund—began to receive attention in Kielce. At first, members concentrated on organizational matters and did not vigorously publicize their activities.4

The life of the Orthodox Jewish community was dominated by another important concern: the building of a grand synagogue. Its fruition became a real possibility after Mojzesz Pfleffer donated a large site on Nowowarszawska Street for this purpose. Due to energetic efforts, it took only two years to erect it according to a design by local architect Stanislaw Szpakowski; the building was presented to the Jewish community in 1903. This synagogue signalled the fact that a second generation of Kielce’s Jews were a permanent part of the community. A dozen or so prayer houses were located near the synagogue, including Mordka Charendorf’s on Bodzentyńska Street, Perl Goldberg’s on Wesola Street, Dawid Chroberson’s on Cicha Street, and Mejloch Sosnowski’s on Bazarowa Street.5

During the period of revolutionary upheaval (1904–1906), tsarist authorities stirred up national antagonisms. On 28 December 1904, thugs in Kielce attempted to destroy and loot Jewish market stalls, while Russian police looked on with total indifference.

In view of this situation, the Kielce Workers’ Committee of the Polish Socialist Party issued a proclamation declaring the anti-revolutionary character of the excesses against Jews.6 In July 1905, a three-day strike in support of the struggling Łódź
proletariat was organized in Kielce. According to the newspaper *Gazeta Kielecka*, the crowd of demonstrators consisted mainly of 'Jewish teenagers'. On 3 July, the army shot and wounded two Poles and two Jews on Piotrkowska Street. In October, tsarist proclamations and state coats-of-arms were systematically torn down. The local Polish Socialist Party and the Bund began to form self-defence units. These revolutionary activities excited the intelligentsia. Jews, including Salomon Paradistal (a banker), Adolf Wolman (an engineer), and Stefania Wolmanowa (a teacher), proclaimed their support for 'more progress and democracy' alongside the Poles. At the end of October and the beginning of November, Kielce witnessed an exceptional upsurge of activity of both the Polish and the Jewish working class. On the day that the October Manifesto was proclaimed, 6,000 workers organized a mass meeting in the municipal park. It was reported that 'following speeches in two languages, Polish and Yiddish, the crowd staged a demonstration but there was no sign of the police'. The next day a crowd successfully demanded the release of all political prisoners. Thanks to S. Rzedowski's sons Zygmunt and Henryk, who owned and operated a printing house, the Kielce Polish Socialist party was able to publish the paper *Kielczanin*.

The announcement of elections to the First Duma produced a considerable, albeit varied, reaction. After the Polish Socialist Party and Poalei Zion declared their boycott of the elections, Kielce residents who supported these parties upheld this position, but the intelligentsia and the middle class saw hope in the elections. It seems as if the latter approach was justified when thirteen Jews were elected to the First Duma and significant attention was devoted to the issue of citizens' rights during the sessions. Among Jews who stood as candidates for the Second Duma were the merchant Natan Hassenbein, the engineer Adolf Wolman, and the landowner Mojzesz Pfeffer. Nonetheless, Wiktor Jaronski, a Pole, won the election. It very soon became clear that the tsarist authorities were not prepared to make any concessions on national questions. Neither the First nor the Second Duma could boast of passing definite laws related to the Jewish question. But the positions of the Bund and Poalei Zion were consolidated during the revolution. Young activists of these parties formed self-defence groups and Jewish young people also took active parts in activities.

On 12 August 1914, the Austrian army invaded Kielce. Food was requisitioned and soldiers were billeted in peoples homes. Ignacy Boerner, representing the Polish Army Committee, worked out a plan for a progressive tax of 40,000 roubles, and Michal Skolnicki lodged an appeal for a single tax. Appeals were also made to the Jewish Communal Council. Under pressure from Herman Liebeman, the latter promised to pay 20,000 roubles. The inconsequential orders received from the Polish divisions by the business community in no way compensated for these financial burdens.

In September 1914, first Prussian and then, in their turn, Austrian, Russian, and Polish divisions marched through Kielce. The Prussian divisions were particularly hard on the local population; these troops stole food, fuel, bedclothes, and even underwear. It is thus not surprising that some Jews welcomed back the Russians and a prospect for normalization. It was reported that 'The market place is very busy, full of commotion and noise. With foresight, the Jews were busy setting up tables laden with all kinds of food along the pavements.' But this did not protect them from trouble. Immediately after the Russians took the town, they hanged two local Jews in the park--'for services rendered to the Teutons'--according to Tadeusz Woloszek.

When fighting broke out near the Nida River in the spring of 1915, a wave of refugees from the destroyed villages and towns of Ponidzie poured into Kielce. Approximately 11,000 Poles, Russians, and Jews passed through. Kielce’s residents, both Polish and Jewish, tried to help the refugees by organizing soup kitchens, lodging, and
medical help. On 9 May 1915, the Russian divisions left, taking with them (along with many other items) 40,000 roubles worth of factory equipment, some officials, and prisoners. The latter included 103 Jews accused of collaborating with the Austrians. The Prussians arrived four days after the Russian units had left, and immediately imposed a 15,000-rouble contribution on the town. The municipal council managed to collect these funds from 206 citizens, including 104 Jews. The Prussians claimed more than 1,000 houses and 100 hotel rooms for their quarters. Whole buildings were also requisitioned, including those belonging to Herszel Zagajski, Chaim Kaminer, Mendel Ellencweig, Szlomo Rotman, Chaim Berlinski, and Todorys Herszkowicz. The army was billeted in the Wietrznia and Kądzelnia factory buildings, the Jewish secondary school, and market halls. Of course, no one paid for these billets.

After three months, Kielce was occupied by the Austrians. This turn of events actually created a situation conducive to the development of a municipal government as well as for philanthropic, educational, and even political activities. By the terms of the ordinance of the Kielce county headquarters, an advisory committee was created on 20 October 1915 that, with the synagogue supervision committee, constituted the Jewish local authority. Rabbi Abella Rapoport and Jakub Nowak, Adolf Wilner, and Jozef Skorecki were placed in charge; Herman Frajzyngier was appointed secretary. A resolution was passed at that first meeting, stating that the official language was to be Polish. Sections dealing with charities, schools, food, synagogue supervision, ritual baths, and circumcisions as well as with burials and cemetery maintenance were designated. The local authority came into being at a very difficult time for the Jewish community: large numbers of people lived below the poverty line and raging epidemics of infectious diseases were prevalent. It was immediately necessary to look after seventy-five Jewish families who had been evacuated from the Wolynia quarter.

The ordinance of 18 August 1916 produced excitement among the Jewish population, as 2,296 Jews became eligible for five electoral groups. As a result of the votes cast at the first municipal council in Kielce, the following Jewish councillors were elected along with Poles: Izaak Rajzman, Menesa Jankielewicz, Henryk Auszer, Jakub Jakubowski, Jozef Lewinson, Jakub Sztarnfeld, Natan Hassenbein, Salomon Paradistal, Herman Lewi, Herszel Zagajski, Lejzor Kohn, Adolf Wilner, and Abram Wargon. The following Jewish deputies were elected as well: Nikodem Freiman, Abram Eisenberg, Izaak Harin, Mendel Ellencweig, Szlojma Rotman, and Jozef Szor. What was significant here was the fact that the majority of the Jewish councillors considered co-operation with the Polish community essential in order to develop the town and its economy. Jewish councillors founded the so-called Circle with J. Lewinson as chair. On 24 January 1917, the day the municipal council opened, prayers were said in the synagogue; the service was attended by the ‘presiding officers of the newly created Kielce Municipal Council as well as all the leading members of the Jewish intelligentsia’.

Jewish councillors participated actively in all of the council’s organizations. S. Paradistal and J. Rajzman were on the organization committee, and H. Auszer and H. Lewi served on the education committee. Henryk Rotman-Kadera described the prevailing atmosphere in November 1918: ‘Everyone kept on calling meetings to decide what had to be done. Military men met with other military men, National Democrats with other National Democrats, socialists with socialists and Poles with Poles. The Jews also held meetings. The intelligentsia, the artisans and the traders. Meetings were held in the theatre. They asked the lawyer Frajzyngier to start the meeting and make a speech. So he did. Suddenly there was a lot of noise in the hall and everyone started shouting:--Speak in Yiddish! We don’t want Polish! Someone didn’t listen to us and got it all wrong!’
The Poles considered Jews’ demands for far-reaching political and cultural autonomy to be a provocation. Resulting incidents caused two Jews to lose their lives; many others were injured and a number of Jewish shops were destroyed. Consequently, General Waclaw Iwaszkiewicz brought in the army and restored order in the town; an appeal for calm was also issued. Ultimately in June 1922, the Kielce court sentenced five persons to prison terms; four received sentences of four months each, and one was ordered to jail for three months. Even though the November events did produce some dissonance, they did not stop Jews and Poles from co-operating. At a meeting of the Municipal Council held on 11 December 1918, N. Hassenbein declared that ‘the majority of Jews holds the view that we should co-operate with the Polish community.’ He was supported in this statement by S. Paradistal. And the widely distributed proclamation by the Zagiew, the Association of Polish Youth of Jewish Origin representing the assimilation movement, appealed to everyone: ‘Jews, Poles! We hope that seeing the joy reigning in Poland, your hearts will also sound a conciliatory note and will tell you what you ought to be doing.’

The fact that Poland had regained its independence provided new opportunities for the Jewish population, whose legal position was now defined in articles 95, 96, 110, 111, 113, 115 and 117 of the Constitution of 17 March 1921. These articles ensured freedom and equality for all and guaranteed the right to foster languages and customs. Nonetheless, some circles distrusted the creation of a Polish state. In her memoirs, Alicja Brinhak wrote about her father Oskar Strumwa, an eminent physician in Kielce: ‘To tell the truth, my father did not place a great deal of trust in the Polish Republic in those inter-war years.’

But others felt quite differently: approximately thirty Jews from Kielce volunteered for the army and took part in the war of 1919–1920.

The years 1918–1921 were difficult for Kielce’s residents. There were shortages of most items, including flour, cereals, sugar, oil, and meat. Bread contained a large admixture of bran. A wave of strikes occurred, with shoemakers, tailors, and bakers not working. In May 1919 even the workers employed by companies supplying the army went on strike. The Jewish Council of Workers’ Delegates, which was formed on 10 February 1919, came out in defence of the strikers. On 14 May 1919, a starving mob tried to rob market stands. Approximately twenty traders were robbed, including several Jews. In an attempt to restore order to the town, the president introduced a number of actions, including holding talks with Jewish butchers to ask them not to raise their prices above the indicators set by the municipal council. The rabbi declared that he would excommunicate any trader who introduced unwarranted price rises. In June 1919 the Jewish Community Administration in Kielce donated one-and-a-half railway carriages of wheat flour that had originally been intended for matzos. However, these gestures were basically futile; in late 1922 and 1923, the cost of living rose 75–85 per cent in just two weeks, throwing the market and production into a state of confusion.

The majority of Kielce’s Jews felt that their place was in Poland; they wanted to live and work there, especially as the economy began to improve and local businesses became more successful both there and abroad. People were eager to invest in industrial development and established new firms such as Sitkowice-Nowiny, founded by Moryc and Jakub Goldfärb, and Czarnow-Slichowice, founded by the Urbeitel and Rosenberg families, in addition to the existing mineral industrial plants Kądzielnia and Wietrznia. The J. Urbeitel and Son Company set up a marble milling factory, and in 1919 Stanislaw Starke, the director of the Suchedniowska Iron Casting Factory Company, sent a proposal to the Kielce Municipal Council to organize an iron-casting factory in Głęboczka. The municipal council accepted the plan, and production started at the end of 1919. This factory produced threshing machines, horse gear, and chaff cutters. In 1924 the factory
added a foundry, steel plant, and open-hearth furnace. In 1922, with Moszek Kuperberg, the printer Dawid Rzedowski founded Kubir, a factory that produced floors. A similar enterprise was started by Hersz Maliniak in Bialogonie. In 1922, Mordka and Szmaria Machtynger opened a barrel-manufacturing plant in the area of Planty, and Kalma Lewkowicz established a wood-packaging factory. One year later, the Zjednoczenie [Union] Steam Sawmill Company was set up; its shareholders included Szymon and Moszek Rozenblum, Nuta Wajncberg, and Moszek Kuperberg. Moszek Ajzenberg founded the furniture factory Kartel. In the mid-1920s, sawmills belonging to Bernard Bugajer, Abram Golebiowski, Szymon Zylbering, Moszek and Chaim Dabski, Eliasz Rozenblum, and Ruchla Grunberg were thriving. In 1929, Herman Lewi and Bernard Bugajer joined with forty-six wood producers to create the Union of Wood Manufacturers and Traders of the Radom-Kielce District.¹⁹

The largest food-industry firms included the brewer A. Wilner, the lemonade factory Zdrój (its shareholders were Moszek Rekosinski, Icek Goldfeder, Chaskiel Fortynski, and Chana Strosberg), the electric mill Ekonomia (owned by partners Sura Muntz, Szmul Owsianny, and Uszer Eichler), and a steam mill (owned by Zajwel Gross, Jankiel Cymrot, and Szmul Zylbering). Jewish capital was also prominent in the tanning industry. Leading tanning factories in Kielce included businesses owned by Kiwa Joskiewicz, Szmul Urbeitel, Boruch Laksa, Dawid Knobel, and Jankiel Tenenbaum (the latter won the gold medal at the Poznań Trade Fair in 1935). According to the Address Book for Poland of 1930, eight of twelve sawmills in Kielce belonged to Jews, as did four of seven furniture factories, seven of twelve cloth factories, and five of six soap factories. All the town’s tanning, stocking, and feather-processing factories belonged to Jews. Nonetheless, these were all small businesses employing only a few or, at most, a dozen or so workers.²⁰

The economic crisis of 1929–1933 slowed down industrial production in the Zagajski and Ehrlich wood businesses, and in most other industries. The glass works in Herby stopped production altogether; some owners could not pay workers their wages. As Jan Naumiuk recorded, ‘Toward the end of 1931 and during the following year, in the face of increasing redundancies, unemployment was becoming the most burning social and economic problem.’²¹ According to unofficial sources, the number of unemployed workers in Kielce reached 8,000.

The crisis, however, did not seem to halt the creation of new companies. As a rule, these were limited liability companies. This period saw the founding of factories whose products were sent by lightning speed to Austria, Germany, France, and even to the United States. In 1929, Icek, Moszek, Rajzla, and Chil Fried, and Josek and Dawid Urbach founded the Plumpol Company, which processed feathers and exported down. By 1938 this factory, which had initially employed barely ten people, had a turnover equal to Wietrznia’s and a workforce of two hundred. According to financial documents of the twelve industrial enterprises in Kielce that earned the highest profits in 1938, six were owned by Jews, including Wietrznia, Kądzelnia, Plumpol, Henrykow, and the Klos and Zagorze mills.²²

At the outbreak of World War I, Jews comprised 33 per cent of craftsmen in Kielce, and in 1918 they made up nearly 50 per cent. By the 1920s, there were 1,185 Jewish masters, including 34 metal workers, 25 builders, 34 wood craftsmen, 20 precision instrument workers, 924 employees in the clothing, leather, and related trades, 109 in food processing, and 11 in other branches. Jewish masters belonged to unions such as the Master Leather Stitching Union, the Master Tailor Association, and the Master Tanners Union.²³ There was strong competition in these fields, for example, there was one bakery for 217 people and one tailor’s shop for 278. Jewellers, confectioners, and
butchers earned the highest incomes, while shoemakers and leather stitchers earned the lowest. Most craftsmen in Kielce were poor; 85–95 per cent of masters worked independently and did not employ journeymen. The great economic crisis undermined the Kielce business community even more, causing a steep decline in the number of locksmiths, tinsmiths, shoemakers, and barber shops. In 1930, cottage workers such as shoemakers were earning a maximum of 20 zlotys a week from a sixteen-hour day, and received no social benefits. Shoemakers went on strike on 3 September 1931; this strike spread to the Kielce and Jedrzejow administrative districts, with a total of 2,500 people affected. Wholesalers promised to pay 5 zlotys a pair for men’s shoes and 4 zlotys for women’s. But when in 1935 the Bata Company opened a shoe warehouse on the corner of Foch and Sienkiewicz streets, the striking shoemakers broke their windows. The newspaper Gazeta Kielecka defended this action in print, maintaining that ‘the Kielce shoemakers live in dire poverty.’

The crisis also increased the growth of illegal businesses, with a quarter of the shops being run without a required permit.

In July 1921 the Association of Jewish Craftsmen, with its headquarters at 2 Kozia Street, was officially registered, though it had existed since 1917. It provided legal advice, organized training courses, and took charge of educational and cultural matters. From 1929 on, a large number of Jewish guilds were registered; the more prominent included the Jewish Shoemakers’, Tanners’, and Saddlers’ Guild, numbering 247 members; the Jewish Tailors’, Capmakers’, and Furriers’ Guild, with 60 members; and the Jewish Bakers’, Ginger-bread Makers’, and Confectioners Guild’, with 79. It cost 2–5 zlotys to join a guild. The guild offices later moved to 4 Orla Street.

There was also a presence of Jewish masters among the members of the Kielce Chamber of Craftsmen, who supplied the guilds with raw materials, trained its journeymen and masters, and waged war on illegal businesses. Among the active leaders of the chamber were Boruch Laks, a master shoemaker, Chaim Tenenbaum, a master tailor, and Lejbus Bruk, a master bookbinder.

In the inter-war period, commercial activities remained a main source of income for Jews in Kielce. In 1919, 45.5 per cent of all permanent trading points belonged to Jewish tradesmen; this number rose by 1926 to 60 per cent and by 1938 to 61.4 per cent. In 1930 there were 38 haberdashery shops, 3 dairy shops, 6 ready-made clothes shops, 2 shops selling dress-makers’ articles, 5 bookshops, 10 china shops, 5 kitchenware shops, 3 grocer’s shops, 11 stores selling flour, 1 milk merchant, 19 beer shops, 139 food stores, 5 stationery shops, 5 soap-sellers, 5 thread stores, 2 vinegar shops, 10 greengrocers, 8 alcoholic drink shops, 6 tobacconists, 7 shoemakers’ tools shops, 4 animal-feed shops, 6 coal merchants, 23 Hardware shops, and 13 shops selling suits. These places were supplied by wholesale warehouses owned by Idel Rotenberg (food articles), Jakub Goldblum (flour and cereals), and Izrael Herszkowicz (coal). Other wholesalers were located in Czestochowa, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Piotrków Trybunalski, Łódź, and Warsaw.

Trade was equally affected by the crisis. Many went bankrupt, including enterprises such as Ester Szarogreder’s haberdashery, Josek’s Steigman’s jewellery store, Lejb Horowicz’s bookshop, and Ester Szachter’s sugar warehouse. At the same time, though, a number of joint stock companies were founded, among them the Kolor paint store, Zelazo [Iron] which traded in construction iron, and the vodka company Likwor. In their attempts to counteract the crisis, Jewish traders tried to be progressive. Bolesław Gristal imported modern radio sets, Mendel Piotrowski traded in electronic equipment, and K. Haslingier sold Swiss watches. Adolf Lewi, the owner of the American-Auto Company, imported new models of cars produced in the United States. Pelagia Rodel and Etla Roza Walich offered fashionable outfits directly from Vienna.
Fairs and markets continued to play an important part in the life of the town. Stalls were set up mainly in the market place and in St. Tekla’s Square. Cattle and horses were traded in a square located on Targowa and Pocieszka streets. In 1933, the municipal council decided to relocate fairs and markets from the market place to the so-called Bazary [Bazaars], resulting in a chorus of remonstrations on the part of both Polish and Jewish traders. The general opinion was that this decision would ruin the shops on Duza, Sienkiewicza, and Leonarda streets. The worries were in vain, though, as the municipal council was attentive to the traders. Profits were so high that the councillors gave up the plan of doing away with the market on Targowa Street in order to build a cycling racecourse on a site proposed by Szmul Grysman. The traditional trade links between Jewish and state institutions was also maintained. Jews supplied the Kielce garrison and the Kielce and Chęciny prisons with meat. According to magisterial decisions, the shops had to observe fixed trading times; butchers operated from 7 am to 7 pm, grocers from 8 am to 7 pm, and bakeries from 8 am to 8 pm. In November 1926, Polish traders complained to the municipal council that for many years ‘Jewish traders had been constantly trading outside opening hours, selling things via the back door.’

Jewish activities were dealt with by the Association of Jewish Merchants, founded in 1922 with its headquarters at 1 Duza Street, with Roman Edelstein acting as chair for many years. After four years of attempts to establish itself, the Association of Jewish Small Traders, with headquarters on Silniczna Street, was finally founded in 1925.

Access to cheap credit played an essential role in the development of crafts and trade. Jews were able to borrow money in the Kielce Town Credit Society, the Municipal Savings Bank, 18 credit co-operatives (12 of which were run by Jewish shareholders), banks, and banking firms. The most popular were the D. Rosenberg’s Banking Firm, the Co-operative Bank of Property Owners (owned by the Fried and Rosenberg families) and the Co-operative Lending Society (owned by the Kaminer and Rodel families). The Gemilus Chesed Interest-free Lending Bank was founded in 1928, providing credit up to 3,000 zlotys annually.

During the inter-war period, some 200 Jewish families made their living from renting apartments or even entire houses. Those who could afford it built on Bazarowa, Czysta, Wspolna, Złota, Rowna, Żytnia, Slowackiego, Mickiewicza, and Hipoteczna streets, considered to be the most fashionable at that time. On 28 May 1922, H. Zagajski, the owner of several apartment blocks on Hipoteczna and Bazarowa streets, built a detached prayer house for his family and tenants in the yard of his property on 12 Hipoteczna Street. This building measured 54 m² and had room for 80 people. The owners of the property were members of the Jewish Association of Property Owners, chaired for many years by Adolf Mauerberger. That association offered legal advice and financial help, and acted as agents in property sales.

Approximately 200–250 persons worked in the so-called free professions as administrators or office workers in institutions and schools. These included doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers. Physicians were particularly well represented in such names as Stanisław Zylberszlak, Jakub Szatz, Jozef Lewinson, Chaim Krauze, Jozef Jokiel, Izidor Chotiner, and Mojżesz Pelca, who belonged to the Jewish Doctors’ Union, chaired for many years by J. Lewinson and then by M. Pele. A Union of Jewish Hospital Attendants was also set up in 1920, with Moryc Binsztok as chair. In the legal profession, successful attorneys included the court defence lawyer Gabriel Hassenbein and solicitors Eisig Rottner and Witold Checinski. Well-respected teachers included Stefania Wolmanowa, Noe Braun, and Izaak and Hersz Zielinski. Secondary-school teachers belonged to the Jewish Professional Association of Secondary Schools (with its headquarters at 38 Wesola Street); its chair was Henryk Drechtinger.
Despite numerous points of contact between Poles and Jews, there was minimal common social life. A. Birnhak writes about the 1930s in Kielce: ‘There was practically no social mixing among the Jewish and Catholic Polish population of that time and so my mother’s circle of friends and acquaintances was almost exclusive Jewish and consisted of doctors’, lawyers’ and engineers’ wives.’

Jewish political life was complicated. Despite many disagreements, the rich bourgeoisie and intelligentsia set to work in the newly reborn Polish state. In January 1920, Jewish councillors joined the National Gift to the Head of State Committee, and on 7 February, ceremonial prayers of thanks were offered in the synagogue for the restoration of Polish sovereignty on the Baltic coast. Jews also made financial commitments to the Committee for the Defence of the Western Borderlands, and funds were collected to develop a naval fleet. In June 1920, a Jewish Propaganda Committee for a National Loan was appointed; its chairs were A. Rapoport, H. Lewi, and B. Bugajer. In 1927, the administration of the Jewish community in Kielce dedicated 100 zlotys to the Committee for the Celebrations Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Renaissance of the Polish State. In 1933, in connection with a loan floated by the government, the newspaper Kielser tsaytung exhorted Kielce’s Jews in the following fashion: ‘Jewish Businessmen! Your country is calling you! Every citizen of the Polish Republic should answer the call! As loyal and fully integrated citizens of this country, like the rest of the population, we must make every effort to contribute to the National Loan within one’s reach and according to one’s abilities—and even more. This appeal applies to every single Jewish tradesman and represents the unanimous opinion of the entire Jewish business community.’

To show support for the loan to the army and navy, the Association of Jewish Participants in the Struggle for Polish Independence wrote in 1939: ‘Colleagues, it is not enough to loudly declare our readiness to fight and to offer sacrifices . . . your financial sacrifice should be a testament to how seriously our Association views our obligation to offer help to the Great Powers of the Polish Republic.’ And each year, along with the Polish population, Jews celebrated on 11 November and 3 May, joining the ‘March Along the Kadowka Route’, the route taken by Piłsudski’s First Brigade from Galicia to Kielce in August 1914.

In Kielce, where small traders, peddlers, and craftsmen predominated, the majority belonged to the Organization of Orthodox Jews, popularly known as the Aguda. It was officially registered in Kielce on 28 July 1921 (the party’s headquarters were first located at 131 Niewachlowska Street, and then at 13 Kozia). In the mid-1920s, the group had approximately 500 active members and as many supporters. Aguda’s active members took part in elections to the Sejm and the municipal council. Prayers were recited in the synagogue on the anniversary of the Constitution of 3 May and on the date commemorating the regaining of Polish independence. Leading party activists in Kielce included Pinkus Finkler, Jakub Pasyman, Sender Strosberg, Beniamin Lew, Henoch Kaminer, Lipa Kaner, Mendel Kaner, Eliasz Rotenberg, Szloma Kupfermitz, I. Rajzman, and H. Zagajski. The following Aguda members were elected as councillors in the first elections to the municipal council: H. Lewi, H. Zagajski, M. Kaminer, I. Rajzman, and W. Braun; their seats were retained during the elections of 1923 and 1927. The end of the 1920 experienced a significant increase in activity among party members, with lectures, talks, festive celebrations, and meetings with prominent individuals. On 14 July 1929, some 300 people attended a lecture by Josek Kaminer titled ‘The Aguda Isroel Organization and Its Tasks.’ At the end of July, a twenty-fifth anniversary commemorating the death of Theodor Herzl’s death was organized, followed on 28 and 31 August with the party’s shared organization of several large public meetings to discuss
the situation of Jews in Palestine. On 2 September, at a public meeting at the Orfeum cinema, the leading active members of Aguda attacked Zionists and socialists, accusing them of ‘building a religious state, with socialist slogans being introduced’ in Palestine. In 1933 Aguda and the rabbinate organized several public meetings to protest the persecution of Jews in Germany. The largest rally of this type took place on 23 March 1933, with approximately 5,000 Jews marching from the synagogue to the municipal authorities, carrying banners denouncing the Nazis. Jews also supported the formation of League of Air and Anti-Gas Defence groups. Following the news of Piłsudski’s death, several days of mourning and prayers were ordered; a telegram with condolences was sent to the president. Aguda, with Rabbi A. Rapoport heading the committee, also contributed significantly to building the J. Piłsudski’s House of Emigrants in Palestine. However, after Piłsudski’s death, a change of attitude in government circles toward Jewish issues occurred, with the National Unification camp promoting the idea of an economic struggle against Jews. Following such statements by the Minister Bogusław Miedzinski, the Kielce branch of Aguda took an active part in the protest movement’s Day of Fasting and Prayer.

Despite internal divisions, the Zionist movement enjoyed great popularity in Kielce during the twenty-year period after World War I. A high level of interest in Zionism among young people led the secret police to continuously monitor that movement; the authorities worried that Zionists might encourage Jews not to join the Polish army. Two Jews, Jakub Izacihar and Moszek Najman, co-operated with the police in this matter. During the Polish–Soviet war, police broke up several Zionist meetings and sealed the Workers’ Hut building on Orla Street. Between 1920 and 1924, the secretary of the Jewish Zionist Union, Chaim Zielony, and the director of the Jewish grammar school, Moryc Zielinski, played an important role in the Zionist movement. Zielinski attracted a wide circle of Jewish intelligentsia and older pupils to the Zionist idea, by organizing lectures, meetings, and discussion groups. In July 1927, the Kielce branch of the Zionist Organization in Poland was officially registered; its work was guided by the ideological principles of the Universal Zionist Organization. By June 1930, during a conference of the Kielce branch, the party split into several fractions, among them Eih Livnot (Time to Build) led by Eliezer Goldberg, Al Hamishmar (On Guard) under Nachemisz Kajzer, and the Revisionists under Mojzesz Klinbeil. On 16 April 1930, some 1,500 members of the Kielce Zionist Organization met in the town. Discussion centred on the harmful influence of the split. On 6 December 1931, representatives of 28 cells of Betar, representing the Youth Organization Brith Trumpeldor, arrived in Kielce. The conference, which was held in the People’s Bank building on Niecala Street, led to the founding of an independent Kielce district branch. Six months later, on 21–23 August 1932, the Kielce delegation took an active part in a gathering in Radom organized to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Palestine Legion. At a follow-up meeting held in Kielce on 18 June 1933, the need to study history, geography, and sport was emphasized. At the beginning of March 1932, a general meeting of the Young Revisionist Zionist organization Masada was held; Herman Rozenbaum was elected chairman. Vigorous efforts to develop Jewish scouting activities in Kielce were undertaken. However, the provincial authorities did not approve of these plans.

In 1933, the Revisionist Zionist Organization in Poland (Brith Hazohar), established a branch in Kielce, with the aim of calling the attention of the Jewish community ‘to the rebuilding and development of Palestine’. Its administration assigned different sections—for propaganda, physical training, and professional development. On 4 July of that year, the propaganda section organized a rally in which approximately 800 people took part, during which Great Britain was denounced for placing obstacles on
Jewish immigration to Palestine. Leaders of the chapter included Dr. J. Szatz, Michal Wittlin, Jedale Preis, and Lucjan Kopf. At a meeting of the Zionist Club in 1936, a Kielce branch of the New Zionist Organization was founded, headed by Aron Lew. The merchant Leon Rodel contributed generous support to this branch.

On 18 December 1926, the ‘right wing’ of the Poalei Zion Jewish Socialist Party was officially registered in Kielce. A short time later its ideological opposite, the left-wing Poalei Zion Jewish Social Democratic Workers Party in Poland was established as well. Official registration made it possible for both parties to open clubs, to organize lectures, meeting, and gatherings, as well as to try to obtain mandates from the municipal council. According to a police estimate, the right wing numbered approximately 400 members; the left counted about 300. Leading activists in the right wing included Abram Chil Kirszenbaum (a clerk), Szyja Cukier (a butcher), Aron Bursztyn (a clerk), Mordka Mordkiewicz (a baker), and Hersz Zelnsztajn (a joiner). Leading activists on the left were Abram Wajncwajg (a printer), Mendel Borenstajn (a tailor), Szyja Gros (a clerk), Moszek Berliner (a tailor), Chil Gepner (a labourer), Berek Karpusinski (a shoemaker), and Moszek Hefter (a tailor). Both parties sought members among active workers in the trade unions. A total of 80 per cent of members of the Food Industry Workers’ Trade Union, 10 per cent of the Transport Workers’ Trade Union, and as many from the Unskilled Workers’ Trade Union were under the influence of the right wing. The Master Jewish Artisans’ Trade Union came under the influence of the left.

From the mid-1920s, Mizrahi, the Orthodox Zionists’ Organization, was active; its slogan—"Religion, Work and Learning"—summarized its programme. According to the police, the group had approximately 300 followers, mainly among the petty bourgeoisie and the young. Providing education was an important element. Mizrahi struggled for many years to keep the financially troubled Jewish Boys’ Grammar School open in Kielce; the organization insisted that the Jewish community could afford to maintain the school. On several occasions it also appealed, with negative results, to municipal and provincial authorities for permission to set up a reading room, community centres, and a sports club. In 1927, Mizrahi actively joined in the electoral fight for the municipal council and managed to obtain one mandate. The party’s leaders were Ella Rozenblum, Wolf Kluska, Dawid Goldfryd, Abram Ajzenberg, and Izaak Kohn. Its activities were facilitated by the fact that the party owned premises in the market square. It was there that a provincial conference, chaired by the rabbi of Płońsk, took place in 1929. He also gave several talks in the local synagogue. After many efforts, the provincial authorities allowed Mizrahi to collect money for poor young Zionists wanting to emigrate to Palestine. The collection took place from 16–31 December 1933. On 4 June 1934, the party co-organized a rally in the synagogue square, strongly criticizing Great Britain for its policies in Palestine. On 7 July a festive commemoration dedicated to Herzl was organized at the Kozia Street premises belonging to the Association of Jewish Artisans. Tarbut, the cultural and learning society, which owned a library of 7,000 volumes in Polish, Hebrew, and Yiddish, was also under the influence of Mizrahi. An affiliated youth organization, Ceire Mizrahi, promoted Hebrew culture.

A branch of the Zionist Labour Party, with headquarters at 1 Leonard Street, was founded in Kielce on 24 June 1934: its administrative board included Chil Rozenkrane, Kalman Kluska, and Estera Zylbersztajn. The party organized annual commemorations dedicated to Herzl and Ber Borochow, but did not gain major influence in the town. Zionists activities nonetheless found a fertile soil in Kielce.

Zionists had their own club, with meetings also frequently held in the B. Borochow Kibutz on Szeroka Street. Schools and artisans helped by making their premises available. In 1924, the Jewish Management Committee, which collected funds
for Keren Kayemet (to buy back land in Palestine) and Keren Chayset (to create a national seat) was created in Kielce. Kielce’s immigrants to Palestine settled in the Haifa region where, in time, a large Kielce colony existed. But emigration was not all that simple. In 1925 Great Britain decreed that only 800 Jews could emigrate from Poland; each immigrant was required to have at his disposal £250–500, an almost impossible sum.

Just before independence, the Bund was considered one of the more important parties in Kielce. It organized strikes and demonstrations against the war with Russia, and collaborated in appointing workers’ representatives to the council and trade unions. It also vociferously demanded reform for the hederim. In 1920, active members in Kielce offered considerable help to their party colleagues who had been brought to the Kielce prison from Chełm. In 1921, in tandem with the Polish Socialist Party, the Bund protested against the state of emergency and organized collections on behalf of the starving Russian population. During 1922–1923, the police recorded several meetings organized by the youth faction of the Bund, at which the group’s attitude toward communism and the trade union movement was discussed and the political situation in Poland was analysed. The Kielce branch of the Bund maintained close contact with the town of Radom, which provided it with money, propaganda materials, and lecturers. Speakers from Warsaw and Łódź were very welcome as well. But after Kombund became a separate party and then united with the Polish Workers’ Communist Party, the Bund’s activities went into a long-term decline, its work limited to sporadic meetings and gatherings, distribution of newspapers, and support of the Polish Socialist Party. The Bund become so weak that in 1926 its was not even regarded as part of the provincial structure. However by 1927, with the passing of the crisis, it was again organizing evening courses, opening a library and setting up the Muza dramatic society. This revitalizing of the party was largely associated with one person, Hilel Weltman, who established firm contacts with Warsaw and received widespread support for his activities.

From 1938 on, many Jews who had hitherto belonged to the Polish Communist Party began to join the Bund; this led to an immediate intensification of police surveillance. The Bund also sought support from trade unions; its influence in the Trade Union of Unskilled Workers, the Trade Union of Workers in the Leather Industry, and the Union of Jewish Artisans grew steadily. Activists who had supported the Polish Communist Workers’ Party found themselves in the most difficult circumstances. Jewish activists who belonged to the Polish Communist Workers’ Party (and then the Polish Communist Party) were subjected to mass arrests as members of a party ‘striving to overthrow the existing regime’, and were interned and given long prison sentences. Activists from communist youth organizations and the so-called Red Relief Organization in Poland (which helped political prisoners) had the same fate. A large number of Jews, particularly from the poorest sector of the community, had been attracted to communism. A world revolution promised not only social liberation, but also possibilities for rapid advancement. After being accused of being communists, Tobiasz Szankier, Lejba Zyndel, and Mendel Bornsztein were arrested and incarcerated in 1923 in the prison on Zamkowa Street. In 1925, Abram Włoszczowski, a member of the Communist Youth Union in Kielce, was sentenced to four years of prison; another Kielce resident, Icek Kalmus, received a two-year sentence for helping political prisoners in Checiny. In 1926, a number of activists from the Communist Youth Union, including Abram Bergier, Sendel and Chil Dresler, and Icek Inzelsztain were also in the Kielce prison. Zyndel Fuchs and Szeftel Cwajgel received a harsh sentence of three years for taking part in the May Day procession of 1927. Leokadia Szyndler, the owner of a tailor shop on Nowowarszawska Street, received a similar sentence for keeping communist brochures in his shop. The
premises of the Jewish Union of Garment Workers at 11 Silniczna Street were subjected to frequent searches where, it was said, the authorities were furiously looking for illegal communist literature. There were also a large number of Jews involved in the largest communist trial in the Kielce district; known as the Aleksander Domagalski and Thirty-Four Companions trial, it took place in October 1933. Attempts were made to present the Polish Communist Party as bristling with spies and on the enemy’s payroll, ‘anti-national and driven by lowly profit motives’. Among those sentenced were Jankiel Frymer, Hersz Trajster, Lejzor Meszberg, Dawid Goldsztajn, and Smycha Moszelewicz. During Abram Taft’s trial, thirteen other Jewish activists were sentenced; some prison terms ran to eight or ten years.

Kielce’s Jews attempted to participate in all forms of governmental activity. Although I. Zielinski, B. Lew, A. Rapoport, A. Wilner, S. Ehrlich, and Sz. Waksenberg stood as unsuccessful candidates for the Sejm and the Senate, the municipal council election produced decidedly better results: in the 1919 elections, Jews won ten out of thirty-four council seats. Of the five Jewish lists, the most successful one was presented by the Association of Orthodox Jews and Zionist. In the supplementary elections of 1923, thirteen additional persons were co-opted to the council, including three Jews. Twenty-two councillors were elected in 1927, including ten Jews. In 1934, as a result of support given to the Polish Economic Block programme by a significant section of the Jewish population, only three Jews were admitted to the council, and five years later, only one. The industrialists H. Zagajski, H. Lewi, and M. Lipszyc; the doctors M. Pelc and W. Jokiel; the merchants G. Goldwasser, B. Lew, J. Fiszman, and S. Goldman; the printers M. Rawicki and A. Wajncwajg; and the banker D. Rozenberg served as councilors.

Jews were also active in trade unions. Leading union activists included Judka Goldman, Szyja Cukier, Joska Bergier, Herz Kohn, and Elias Wilk. During the period of crises, the unions organized a number of successful strikes, including at the Wietrznie, Kądzielnia, and Henrykow plants. In addition to Zionists, communists had a great deal of influence in the unions. During 1928–1930, the Jewish Shoemakers, Gaiter Makers, and Related Trades Union achieved a number of successes in their battle with footwear wholesalers such as Wolf Bajnusiewicz, Szloma Strosberg, Mordka Piasecki, and Mordka Wajcman. Some manufacturers, including Jewish ones, forced their workers to become members of the pro-Piłsudski Union of Trade Unions. In August 1935, the Kielce Council of Trade Unions, The Builders’ Union, and the Chemists’ Union called upon members of and sympathizers to the trade-union class movement to start boycotting the use of lime from the Kądzielnia, Wietrznie, and Miedzygorze plants because those enterprises compelled their workforce to belong to the Union of Trade Unions.

The Jewish Community Administration and Council also looked after the various needs of Kielce’s Jews. The administrative board had twelve elected members and as many deputies; the council had twenty elected members and deputies. During election campaigns there were flare-ups between Orthodox, Zionist, and Bundist factions. The following individuals took turns as chairmen: Herman Lewi, Izaak Rojzman, Wolf Kluska, and Szmul Goldman, and the council chairmen were Herszel Zagajski, Dawid Rozenberg, and Abram Piotrowski. Well known in Kielce, they enjoyed respect in the Jewish community. Annual contributions provided basic funds for the work of the administration. In 1925, out of the 3,500 Jewish families in Kielce, 1,953 paid taxes; the number of taxpayers rose to 1,688 in 1928 and then fell to 1,251 in 1938. These numbers testify to the impoverishment of the community. The lowest contribution was 3 zlotys and the highest 1,450 zlotys. Harsh living conditions, particularly during periods of crisis, caused some people to ask to be released from their obligation to pay; others just did not pay at all. In 1926, the Jewish community’s budget deficit, due to the non-payment of tax
contributions, reached 10,827 zlotys; in 1933 this deficit was so great that even the rabbis had to have their annual salaries reduced.\textsuperscript{46} It was expected that every year the taxes collected would amount to 250,000–300,000 zlotys, but only on rare occasions was that sum achieved. Generally, one-third of this amount was used to pay the rabbis, the cantor, and other religious overseers; one-third was paid to the administrative staff and was used for offices and repairs to houses and other property belonging to the Jewish community. The remaining third supported philanthropic, educational, and cultural institutions. Among these were orphanages, the Zagajski Brothers Old People’s Home, The Jewish Boys’ Grammar School, the Talmud Torah, and the Jabne Cultural Society. Small amounts were sent to higher educational institutions in Warsaw and Lublin as well as to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There was also a tradition of giving 200 zlotys to Jozef Mizesow, the chief rabbi of the Polish Army. During periods of severe economic crises, some of this support had to be curtailed and took on a more symbolic than practical character.\textsuperscript{37}

Over the entire twenty-year inter-war period, Abella Rapoport served as rabbi along with two assistant rabbis, Alter Holberg and Hersz Griszpan. Recurrent disputes among the rabbis and also between the rabbis and the circumcisers made it necessary for the council to frequently arbitrate between parties. Co-operation between the council and the administration and among the municipal authorities and the municipal council and councillors was good; they managed to sort out many problems affecting the Jewish community in the areas of sanitation, health, education, and philanthropic requirements. When the mayor, Mieczyslaw Lukasiewicz, died, a Jewish delegation to his funeral carried a wreath with the words ‘To our kind-hearted Mayor—from the Jewish Community and the Jewish Councillors’. The death of the voivode Ignacy Manteuffel was also honoured with prayers of mourning. Crowds of Jews took part in the funeral of the bishop of Kielce, Augustyn Losinski.\textsuperscript{48}

Social work activities were an important part of the life of the community, but as these were not well co-ordinated, they tended to produce varied results. In 1919, a Jewish distribution committee, which distributed gifts such as sugar, flour, cereals, and oil sent by Jews from the United States and Canada to the poor, opened on Mickiewicz Street. There was also a soup kitchen for the underprivileged and for children. The Association of Friends of Children was active during 1920–1922 but went bankrupt. In 1921, following an initiative by Jewish doctors and teachers, the Society for the Care of the Refuge for Poor Orphans was founded. The physicians Szymon Zylberszlak and Mojzesz Pelc and the teacher Rozalia Zimnowod handled its operations; funds were raised through charity events, dances, and parties. The administration of the Jewish community also supported this society.\textsuperscript{49} In 1930, Jankiel, Smycha, Ela, and Herszel Zagajski planned a retirement home at 22 Seminarska Street; one year later, the J. H. Zagajski Brothers Foundation Old People’s Home was created.

In addition to these institutions, other social organizations assisted the Jewish community. Examples included the Achi Ezer Aid Society for the Poor (chaired by H. Zagajski), the Linas Hatsedek Aid Society for Poor and Invalid Jews (chaired by M. Pelc), the Aid Society for Poor People of the Jewish Persuasion (chaired by I. Kaminer), the Aid Society for Poor Women in Child-bed of the Jewish Persuasion (chaired by T. Mauerberger), the ‘Tomchaj Enyim Israel Aid Society for the Poor (chaired by J. Kohn), and the Jewish Invalids’, Widows’ and War Orphans’ Union. Jewish doctors participated in activities organized by the Society for the Protection of Health of the Jewish Population and the Polish Red Cross.\textsuperscript{50}

There was also considerable growth in the field of education during the inter-war period. In addition to the heders, whose numbers vacillated between six and ten, new
Jewish schools with programmes based on those of the public schools, opened in the late 1920s. Girls could attend the Beis Yankev school at 3 Aleksander Street and the eight-grade school run by Stefania Wolman; the latter was later taken over by the couple Stefania and Wladyslaw Zimmnowod. Jan Dinces, Wladyslaw Rabinowicz, Maria Friedman, and S. Wolman succeeded one another as the school’s directors. Four hundred girls were attending the institution in 1919, but this number fell to just 220 by 1930. Despite considerable financial problems, the Jewish Boys’ Grammar School, which had 150–200 pupils, remained open throughout the period. Moryc Zielinski, Noe Braun, Antoni Russak, and Salomon Feuer each ran this school. Szymon Datner taught physical education at the grammar school in 1923–1924; at the same time, he conducted an anthropological study of Jewish children in the Kielce district. In his account on life in Kielce, published in the Jewish Calendar, he wrote: ‘I remember my colleagues well, Dr. Schaechter the German teacher, Mrs. Ellenbogen who taught history, Miss Fried the Polish teacher, Mrs. Pariser who taught biology. Among the men was the engineer Krebsa who taught drawing, Dr. Halpern the Latin teacher; and I think that there was another female Latin teacher, Dr. Zussman’

Several institutions in Kielce were also associated with Jewish education, including Friends of Learning, the Society of Jewish Primary and Secondary Education, the Circle of Well-wishers of the Boys’ Grammar School, and Chojerw, the Society for the Support of Religious Schools. From 1923 on, the Committee for Providing Aid for Jewish Students was active, and from 1925 there was also a Society of Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. There were, in addition, several institutions that emphasized Jewish culture. In 1926, Hazomir, the Jewish Music and Literary Society, was founded in Kielce. Jabne, the cultural and educational association, helped to popularize the Hebrew language. The activities of the Culture League Association were centred on the dissemination of Jewish themes. The Tarbut Cultural Society and the I. L. Peretz Jewish Library at 19 Leonard Street owned substantial collections of books. Performances by professional artists from Łódź, Lwów, and Warsaw were well attended. From 1926, Zygmunt Turkow and Ida Kaminska came to Kielce on a regular basis. Residents were able to see performances by the Łódź Ararat Theatre, the Jewish Chamber Theatre of Warsaw, and the Wilno People’s Theatre. From time to time the famous violinist Willi Krysztal, who came from Kielce, gave concerts. In order to raise funds, in most cases for charity, the schools organized amateur performances: ‘These would consist of staging of a medley, such as “Eastern Evening”, performances based on biblical subjects or concerts given by local groups or talented amateurs.’ Films were very popular, particularly at M. Ellencweig’s Phenomenon Cinema and The Palace, located on Staszic Street. The most loyal clients received discounts and frequently even free tickets.

Kielce had an active Jewish press. In 1926, the first copy of the Kieltser vokhenblat appeared, edited by Hersz Niebelski and published by Idel Kaminer. This weekly literary and journalistic paper did not last long, and a similar fate befell the Kieltser Radomer vokhenblatt, another weekly that appeared in 1929. Then in 1934, the Kieltser unzer ekspres (Our Express in Kielce), a variant of the Unzer Ekspres of Warsaw, was issued for one month. In April 1932 the first copy of the Kieltser tsaytung, a newspaper devoted to the economic and political life of Kielce’s Jews, was launched. Its editors, Mojzesz Trejgier and H. Niebelski, claimed that their newspaper did not follow the line of any particular party, but in fact the paper did have Zionist leanings. Niebelski was also the editor of Naye kieltser tsaytung (New Kielce Newspaper), published by Hitachuth, and the right wing of Poalei Zion. Two newspapers published by Jewish youth, Olameynu and Masada, also appeared in Kielce from time to time.
Young people were very interested in sport. The largest association in town was the Maccabi Jewish Sports Club, founded in 1923, which offered football, boxing, tennis, and chess. In 1933 the club built modern tennis courts at 76 Sienkiewicz Street. Its leading players were Gustaw Sobel, Pikus Charenslup, Marian Mauerbergier, Mordka Frydman, and Kopel Zloto. In 1925, the Union of Workers in the Food Industry set up the Kraft (Power) Sports Club; additionally, the Stern (Star) Jewish Workers’ Sports Club was supported by funds provided by the Bund and the left wing of Poalei Zion. On days off, people went on excursions to the stadium, to Slowik, and to Checiny; these were organized by the Jewish Tourist Society. Outings organized by Jewish members of the scouting institutions were common.

In general, life in Kielce was peaceful. There were, of course, certain unpleasant incidents, but as time passed, people began to understand others better and to respect different views and customs. A 1929 report by the provincial subprefect says: ‘On June 26 of this year at 11 pm, a transferring of the Torah ceremony from the premises at 15 Rynek Street to the local synagogue on Nowowarszawska Street took place. The procession of 2,000 religious Jews led by a band marched along the Marshall Pilsudski Square and Nowowarszawska Street to the Synagogue, where the band played a Polish patriotic song and then a number of Jewish songs were played and sung. There was no disturbance of any sort throughout this ceremony.’

Moreover, any attempts of anti-Jewish behaviour were nipped in the bud. Police instructions for 1931 read as follows: ‘Any anti-Jewish excesses must be decisively eliminated.’ And this is what was being done. In March 1932, six residents who had thrown foul-smelling rags into Jewish shops were taken to court, and in October 1933, four secondary school pupils were arrested and accused of the same offence. An attempt to create an anti-Jewish League of the Green Ribbon was also unsuccessful. And when, as was reported by the Naye folkscaytung on 12 August 1937 a group of young nationalists tried to picket Jewish shops, the demonstration was dispersed by Polish workers.

However, from the earliest days of Hitler’s rise to power, the situation of Jews in Germany was watched with growing concern. When German authorities expelled Polish Jews in 1938 and they found themselves in a transit camp in Zbąszyn, funds were immediately collected to aid them. In April 1938, Dr. J. Lewinson contributed 1000 zlotys to the National Defence Fund on behalf of the Jewish Doctors’ Association. A collection of valuable objects carried out for this purpose by Sara Rapoport, the rabbi’s wife, included 71 gold wedding rings, 57 rings, 5 watches, 13 pairs of earrings, and 1,537 silver coins.

A nervous atmosphere prevailed at the end of August 1939. The Jewish population hurried back from their summer holidays. Some moved in with their families in larger towns such as Lublin, Lwów and Kraków. According to Aleksander Bieberstein: ‘Large groups of Jews from Łódź, Kielce and even from Warsaw were arriving in Kraków during this migration.’ But quite a number of Jews also arrived in Kielce from smaller towns such as Jędrzejow, Końskie, and Pińczów.

German troops entered Kielce in the late afternoon on the fifth day of the war. In order to thwart trouble, ninety Jewish hostages were taken along with the Polish ones. Some of these included the industrialist H. Bruner, the lawyers Henryk Frux, Jakub Wittlin, and Jakub Wajnberg, the doctors S. Rotman, O. Strum, and O. Serwetnik, and the merchant B. Lew. The first repressive measures against Jews were also implemented.
Notes
(Polish titles have been translated into English)

7. Kielce State Archive, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 2361, card 53.
11. Reports by the Jewish Local Authority in Kielce for the Period from 22 November 1915 to 31 December 1916. Historical Section of the National Museum in Kielce, folder 1546 B.
14. Gazeta Kielecka 1923, no. 27.
15. Proclamations, Historical Section of the National Museum in Kielce, folder 3011.
19. Kielce State Archive, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 2424, card 34; call no. 2443, card 3.
20. Address Book for Poland for Trade, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture for 1930 (Warsaw, 1930).
23. Gazeta Kielecka 1921, no. 15.
24. Gazeta Kielecka 1935, no. 43.
25. *Journal of Laws of the Polish Republic* (1928, no. 52), item 500.
46. Ibid., call no. 1913, card 10.
47. Almanac of Jewish Communities in Poland (Warsaw, 1939), 18; The State Archive in Kielce, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 1902 cards 81–82; call no. 1908, cards 27–29.
49. The State Archive in Kielce, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 589, cards 14–15.
50. Ibid., call no. 1903, card 66.
53. M. Meducka, Jewish Cultural Institutions, 67.
56. The State Archive in Kielce, Kielce County Subprefecture, call no. 207.
58. A. Bieberstein, Extermination of Jews in Kraków (Kraków, 1985), 11.