

Jewish architects and builders in Krakow during the Second World War (1939–1945). Professional activity, fate, heritage

The period of the Second World War is one of the most difficult and tragic in Polish history. The state, which was rebuilt in the years 1918–1939 with great effort and in the difficult conditions of unification of the three former partitions, suffered great losses. The greatest loss was the death of millions of people, citizens of the Second Republic of Poland. There were also major territorial changes and large migrations. The enormous destruction affected the economy, culture, the arts, the health of society, as well as the buildings in cities, towns and villages. The city of Krakow was relatively less affected by the destruction of the built environment, but the human losses were very severe.

In the Interwar Period Krakow was the fourth or fifth most populous Polish city. It was surpassed by Lviv, Łódź and, of course, Warsaw, while Poznań and Vilnius were of similar size. In 1939 Krakow had a population of 260,000. After the Third Reich seized the city, it was made the seat of the German authorities of the so-called General Government, a small part of the pre-war Poland. The inhabitants of Krakow experienced restrictions and persecution. These were particularly intensified against the Jewish population, leading to the Holocaust. Of the more than 60,000 Jews of Krakow, only a few thousand survived the war.

The main subject of this study are the fate, activities and heritage of Jewish architects and builders in Krakow during the Second World War and the Nazi German occupation. In the Interwar Period, until 1939, they had constituted a group of educated and experienced professionals, numbering at least several dozen, who took an active part in the construction and shaping of the city space. Most of them lost their lives during the war.

The professional activities of Jewish architects and builders in Kraków during the Second World War have not been comprehensively studied yet. The present research deals with all aspects of professional activity as indicated by the preliminary research. In the first period of the occupation (1939–1941), these included working in design offices, supervising of construction sites, caring for historic monuments. After the deportations of the Jewish population from Krakow in 1940 and the establishment of the Ghetto in the Podgórze district in 1941 (subsequently liquidated in 1942 and 1943), these opportunities diminished further and finally disappeared. During the subsequent period of occupation, in 1942–1944, some architects and builders were "employed" in the concentration camp (KL Plaszow) established by the Nazi authorities in the southern part of Krakow. There, on one hand, they shared the fate of other prisoners and, on the other hand, continued to provide their expertise.

The research will provide considerable knowledge about the fragments of Krakow's architectural history and, at the same time, the history of the Krakow community, during a relatively short yet very important and tragic period of its history. The research includes search in archives, literature studies and field studies. The collected research materials, individual documents and other data on buildings and people and their accompanying conditions, followed by analyses and studies, will enrich the knowledge about Krakow's history and additionally bring reflections and guidelines useful for the contemporary protection of heritage.

The results of the research will be compiled in the form of information sheets on buildings and their creators, as well as texts showing the results and conclusions of the analyses and other research work. In addition, graphic studies and maps will be elaborated to show the scope, types and effects of the professional activities of Jewish architects and builders in Krakow, as well as the preserved elements of tangible and intangible heritage that can support efforts to protect this heritage.