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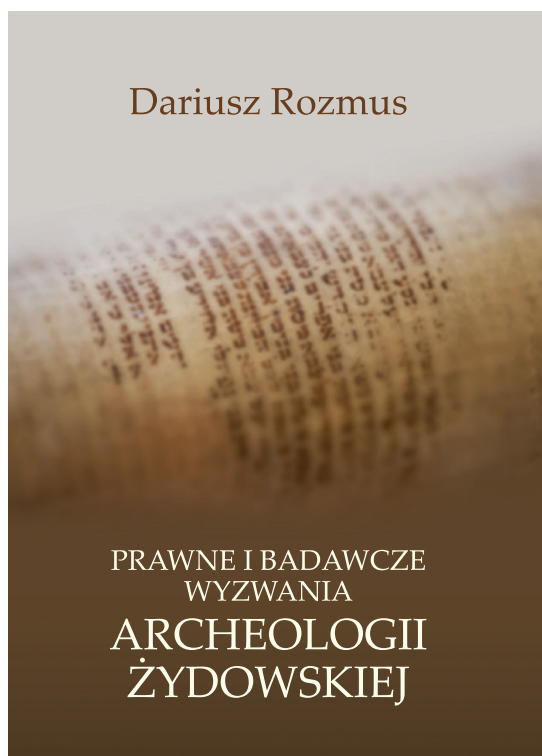
**A TASK AND A CHALLENGE FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF RESEARCHERS. SOME REMARKS ON
THE LEGAL AND RESEARCH CHALLENGES OF JEWISH ARCHAEOLOGY BY DARIUSZ ROZMUS
(PRAWNE I BADAWCZE WYZWANIA ARCHEOLOGII ŻYDOWSKIEJ.
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*Archaeology cannot be a panacea for transience. Its effects only bring back the crumbs of shattered history, which are also valuable; thanks to them we can keep the memory alive and as a warning and protect these shreds of our history from being forgotten forever;*¹ writes Dariusz Rozmus in his latest publication. This researcher, mentor, and caretaker of Jewish cemeteries on the border of Upper Silesia and Lesser Poland, is well-known not only in academic circles but also among community members fighting to preserve Jewish heritage in Poland. He recently shared his vast theoretical and practical knowledge of the methodology and methods of discovering and preserving traces of Jewish presence in the territory of Poland.

Dariusz Rozmus's book is a sort of manual, but also a must-have for those who see the need to search for remnants of Jewish culture using methods and tools drawn from archaeology and its related fields. It consists of eight chapters. The first one deals with what the author has been researching for years – the burial sites of Jewish inhabitants of Polish lands over the centuries (*Cmentarze żydowskie. Historia badań oraz przykłady działań praktycznych*). In that chapter, the author presents



the origins of the founding of Jewish cemeteries and their architectural principles dictated by the religious and practical requirements of the Jewish community. For this researcher-practitioner, each cemetery is a separate creation that should

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¹ Rozmus 2022, 136.

be treated individually because, as he repeatedly emphasises, each cemetery – although created according to religiously standardised principles – is architecturally and visually different. The author dedicated one subsection of the first chapter to those elements of religious and customary law that can be used to protect Jewish cemeteries as historic sites (or even – according to archaeological categories – as burial sites) as well as artefacts, primarily, gravestones that may be displaced or often reused. Chapter 1 concludes with examples of practical measures for the preservation of Jewish cemeteries. The author describes various initiatives, governmental programmes, and social projects related to the preservation not only of cemeteries but also of monuments and artefacts from the dismantling of abandoned Jewish cemeteries. On this occasion, the author – drawing from his own experience as a heritage protection practitioner, advises where and how the finds can be displayed in order to follow the rules of Judaism.

The second chapter of the book, titled *Sepulchral art – a rich variety of research possibilities* (*Sztuka sepulkralna – bogactwo możliwości badawczych*), is dedicated to the broadly understood artistic creation of gravestones, treated by Dariusz Rozmus as a still insufficiently researched branch of Jewish culture. The author highlights the great importance of this field of research, stating that: *Jewish cemeteries located in Poland are perhaps the largest concentration of Jewish stone reliefs in the world. Jewish sepulchral art, in my opinion, achieved its unique character in central and eastern Europe from the 17th century until the period of World War I (not World War II!), and in some places until the 1920s. It developed to such an extent that it became recognisable as [stylised] Egyptian, Greco-Roman or Romanesque art. To analyse it, one needs a combined knowledge of history, history of art, and ethnography, including Jewish ethnography, or to work with people who have such knowledge.*²

For the author, a matzevah – being a medium of artistic value – can be treated as a unique cultural artefact, a product of traditional Jewish stonemasonry. This is because it is characterised not only by symbolism but also by its ‘intricacy,’ which can be understood both literally and metaphorically. According to Rozmus, tombstone painting is another not fully recognised phenomenon of sepulchral art, about which little is still known. The author tries to find reasons why the symbolism (message) of matzevot in cemeteries, even closely located to

each other, can vary greatly and testify to the different aesthetic preferences of various individuals in decorating their tombstones. Here he refers to the results of research conducted on 20th-century cemeteries in Czeladź and Chrzanów located not far from each other. What conclusions does he draw? *We can try to explain such big differences between the stylistics of the Jewish cemeteries in Chrzanów and Czeladź in the reception of the symbols of books, a bookcase, as well as a candlestick and a crown by the fact that [following the so-called partitions of Poland] these towns were incorporated to two different states [i.e., Czeladź became part of the territory controlled by Russia and Chrzanów belonged to Austrian Galicia]. The problem is that from 1918 until the Shoah, both towns were again located in one [Polish] state, writes Rozmus. Contacts within the Jewish communities were only partly constrained by the reality of the partitions. Of course, a kind of cemetery conservatism may have encouraged the petrification of earlier customs. But was this the only reason?*³ For the author, the inability to answer this question only proves how much interdisciplinary research is still needed – the results of which could open up new fields of interpretation of the evident stylistic differences between the cemeteries.

Another issue that the author deals with in Chapter 2 and describes as still poorly recognised topic in the period up to the 19th century, is the manufacturing of matzevot (by stonemasons guilds) and the authorship of their ornamentation. The author poses the question of whether these were Jewish craftsmen or local Christian (folk) craftsmen, as evidenced by the motifs appearing on the matzevot taken from Polish folk art (for instance, rosettes). However, in all probability, concludes Dariusz Rozmus, *despite the absence of stonemasonry from the list of acceptable professions for Jews, it can be assumed that traditional matzevot, and especially the inscriptions on them, were made by local Jewish craftsmen called in Yiddish matzevah-kricers or matzevah-schlegers belonging to the funeral brotherhood (Hebrew: chevra kadisha). Thus, tombstone making was not seen as a profession, but as a religious function.*⁴ It was not until the 19th century that Jewish stonemasonry workshops emerged, often working for non-Jewish customers. The author suggests that in order to be able to comprehensively answer the question concerning the makers of matzevot we need to examine traditional tombstones created in

² Rozmus 2022, 55.

³ Rozmus 2022, 98

⁴ Rozmus 2022, 102.

the period up to the middle of the 19th century and situated in small provincial cemeteries.

In second chapter, the author also gave the readers a catalogue of practical guidelines on comprehensive recording of a cemetery and identifying sepulchral features specific to such a site. These include: making a typology of gravestones and systematising them, as well as listing the frequency of symbolic motifs and the style of ornamentation. All this will help not only to establish the aesthetic preferences of the members of the community but gradually answer important questions for historians about the causes of mortality, the dominant professions among the members of the community or their financial status.

Chapter III, titled *Archaeology in Jewish Cemeteries (Archeologia na cmentarzach żydowskich)*, seems to be the most interesting and helpful in understanding the author's key research demand (repeated on many occasions) – i.e., including archaeology in the study of Jewish cultural heritage. Dariusz Rozmus argues that it was the work of researchers specialising in biblical archaeology that made us realise how diverse and rich Jewish culture was in antiquity and at the dawn of the early Middle Ages. Thanks to their discoveries, we are already aware of how close Greco-Roman aesthetics and ancient Judaic culture became over time and how much they drew from each other. The development of archaeological research in Egypt, Palestine, and other Middle Eastern countries has resulted in the emergence of 'oriental' trends in European art, including the architecture of Jewish synagogues, and wider Jewish art, including sepulchral art, throughout the world over the past 200 years. The author thus appeals: *Treating Jewish archaeology as a separate branch of the archaeology of the Polish (and not only) Middle Ages and Polish modern times is an urgent need for Polish archaeology.*⁵ Dariusz Rozmus is aware that only the methods used by archaeologists will make it possible for us to see what is not visible to the naked eye – evidence of the oldest traces of Jewish presence in Polish lands. Archaeological excavations will allow us to gain knowledge on many elements related to the oldest burials in the Judaic tradition: rites, funeral customs, and types and forms of burials. According to the author, this will make it easier to classify and record the oldest Jewish cemeteries. While in Western Europe such research-oriented excavations are carried out, in Poland excavations at Jewish cemeteries are only of rescue archaeology nature, necessitated by human activity (new

investment projects, construction work) or forces of nature (e.g. floods). However, the author makes a clear distinction between archaeological work and archaeological research *sensu stricto*. While in his opinion, the first is limited to finding artefacts, without further analysis or classification, the intention of the latter is not only to protect heritage but also to preserve and protect human remains. This type of exploration also yields material in the form of artefacts belonging to the Jewish culture. Rozmus writes: *Paradoxically, archaeological research can save a Jewish cemetery (after all, archaeological methods are by definition destructive), and not only in a practical sense. One such case is Węgrów, where archaeological excavations were carried out only to the level of the layers where bones could be expected. Once these were found, the exploration was not continued; the dead stayed in their graves. A development project that was to be built on the site did not receive planning permission.*⁶ However, at the same time the author (also out of concern for the integrity of cemeteries) calls for intensified research of a non-invasive nature, such as the use of archival aerial photographs and modern geophysical methods to locate burials. And in such activities, archaeologists can show their competence.

Chapter 4 of the book discusses issues of the legal protection of Jewish cemeteries in Poland (*Zagadnienia ochrony prawnej cmentarzy żydowskich*). According to the author, Polish law does not secure the inviolability of all Jewish cemeteries located in the territory of Poland. This is due to problems with the ownership of the land on which they are located. The religious principle of the inviolability of cemeteries is reflected in the Act of 20 February 1997 on the Relationship of the State to the Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland and applies to the cemeteries owned by Jewish communities. However, the majority of cemeteries are owned by the State or the local government, and sometimes are even privately owned, and the supervision of Jewish communes over them is only informal. The legislator ensures their protection by prohibiting their disposal and their use for other purposes. However, this applies only to those necropolises that have not previously been used for other purposes. The author therefore states that such sites should be recognised as cultural heritage sites in the form of archaeological sites – cemeteries, which should further ensure their legal protection by making them subject to the provisions of the Polish Monuments Protection and Care

⁵ Rozmus 2022, 136.

⁶ Rozmus 2022, 157.

Act 2003 (*Ustawa z dnia 23 lipca 2003 r. o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami*): *Often, the chronology of ancient Jewish cemeteries, going back hundreds of years, clearly indicates their actual legal archaeological character, which stems from the essence of the matter and not just from the law. Moreover, the richly decorated ancient tombstones are undoubtedly exceptional monuments. Jewish cemeteries should therefore be included in the register of monuments. Besides, for old necropolises it becomes obvious, let us repeat again, that they should be assigned to archaeological categories classified as burial sites, which seems entirely logical and – what is more – necessary.*⁷

In the same chapter, the author also discusses the origins of the integrity of graves as a result of religious law, since until the 18th century, in the Jewish community religious law (or *halacha*) regulated most matters that today are subject to provisions of civil and criminal law. In addition, the author addresses the terminology concerning cemeteries, burial and mourning customs, ritual contamination, and the location of Jewish cemeteries, and includes guidelines from the Rabbinical Commission for cleaning up Jewish cemeteries.

Chapter V (*Synagogi*) discusses the topic of synagogues and, more specifically, archaeological excavations that have resulted in the discovery of the remains of such buildings. According to the author, although many synagogues have already been excavated, this applies mainly to buildings from the modern period, whereas the ancient and medieval ones still pose a challenge for researchers. Studies on synagogues are not limited to architecture but also include research on the internal decoration of the synagogues and its evolution, especially the evolution of the *bimah*. According to Rozmus, *it is worth mentioning that both in Poland and abroad the research on synagogues is carried out by local museums. This demonstrates, on the one hand, the need to recognise the remains of local heritage, which is also relevant to local area development plans (usually historic old town centres), and, on the other hand, the evident need to know and remember the histories that exist in local communities*⁸. The author discusses this topic giving his readers examples of archaeological research on several wooden and brick synagogues in Kalisz, Cieszyn, Skoczów, Oświęcim, and Olkusz. At the same time, Dariusz Rozmus points out that the research on synagogues in Poland is still at the beginning of the road, even though the

largest number of synagogues in the world has been built on Polish lands.

Chapter 6 (*Dzielnice żydowskie i osadnictwo pozamiejskie – kilka uwag*) of the book deals with the archaeology of Jewish settlement in towns (so-called Jewish quarters) and in the countryside, which, in the author's opinion, is an important element in preserving Jewish heritage. Determining and locating such settlement sites can be based, among other things, on the analysis of animal bone material. The complete absence of pig bones may indicate their exclusion from the diet, clearly indicating specific food preferences and the preservation of *kosher* laws. Here, the author uses the example of the effects of excavations carried out in the old Jewish quarter in Oxford. Other evidence indicating a location of Jewish settlement at a particular site can be artefacts, for instance, specific motifs found on pottery recovered through excavation, such as the star motif. However, Dariusz Rozmus also cautioned that while the presence of such evidence may suggest that such objects belonged to the Jews (i.e., the unearthed artefacts were lost and abandoned, at least in part, by people from a Jewish community), only under very specific conditions, when examining modern material can we strictly attribute it to the Jewish population.

Chapter 7 (*Olkusz i tajemnice początków górnictwa i hutnictwa kruszcowego*) is of an especially regional character, as it discusses the effects of archaeological work carried out in Olkusz, the author's home town, which he chose not only as a personal preference but also because in his opinion, *by using the example of Olkusz we can surprisingly make an almost holistic inquiry*.⁹ Thus, Dariusz Rozmus briefly describes the history of the town, starting with the beginnings of ore mining and metallurgy, confirmed by archaeological research, discusses the etymology of the town's name and controversies related to that topic (i.e., whether the name originated from Old Polish or Hebrew), about Jewish involvement in silver and lead trade, and about the effects of archaeological works carried out a few years ago at the site of the Olkusz synagogue, i.e. finding fragments of pottery, glass, but also building materials, thanks to which it was possible to date its origins.

While most of the content of this chapter can be considered compatible with the rest of the publication and in line with its main theme, there are also some superfluous topics, such as, for example, detailed deliberations on the etymology of the word *kilof* (mattock) to which the author devotes

⁷ Rozmus 2022, 163.

⁸ Rozmus 2022, 191.

⁹ Rozmus 2022, 253.

a considerable amount of space. Admittedly, he believes that an analysis of the word in question *is important for a correct description of mutual relations between the Jewish and Christian communities (not only Polish) in former Poland*,¹⁰ but in my opinion, this is absolutely not a convincing argument.

In the final, eighth chapter (*Zabytki luźne – kilka uwag*) of the book, the author makes a few remarks about chance finds and artefacts found without an archaeological context. There are all sorts of artefacts related to Jewish settlement obtained as a result of various kinds of work and intentional searches. The author dedicates quite a lot of space in the book to metal detectorists and the problems associated with them stating that: *Currently, there are no legal solutions that satisfy all the parties of this conflict of interest, i.e. the metal detectorists and the authorities responsible for enforcing the law on this issue, i.e. conservators, archaeologists, museum professionals, etc. One possibility is cooperation between metal detectorists and archaeologists based on trust. This is only that much and so much.*¹¹ He illustrates this problem using an analysis of two artefacts as an example. The first one is a 19th-century bronze, probably gilded, medallion with Hebrew inscriptions discovered in the Sosnowiec-Zagórze area, the exact provenance of which still remains a mystery. The second artefact is an undated lead Hanukkah spinner (*dreidel*) of an unknown provenance, which the author obtained from a metal detectorist. For the author, these two examples demonstrate that there are still many different traces of the Jewish presence in Poland that can be found virtually everywhere. Therefore, it is important to facilitate discovering more of such artefacts to increase their numbers (and thus our knowledge of the Jewish heritage in Poland) and cooperation with various communities (including metal detectorists) is an essential part of this process.

Dariusz Rozmus's book is an excellent guide for those readers who are passionate about Jewish heritage and archaeological research. In order to provide them with comprehensive knowledge on the subject, the author – and this is extremely valuable – lists a wealth of publications on the subject, both basic and specialist (e.g., instructions on how to conduct research on Jewish cemeteries), as well as websites where one can find information on Jewish cultural and historical monuments and databases. Another great advantage of the book is the rich

iconography, including photographs of clean-up work on Jewish cemeteries, archaeological work, artefacts, and religious objects, as well as drawings of inventory work and plans of excavation sites.

Rozmus's book is also one big manifesto for a broader inclusion of archaeological research in the work of preserving traces of Jewish presence in Polish lands. According to the author, the publication is *a development of the theses and presentation of the issue of the so-called Jewish archaeology, which I consider to be important and necessary in the system of archaeological research and in the process of preparing adepts of archaeology for their future work in this profession.*¹² It is therefore yet another clear call of this author for the creation of a separate, interdisciplinary field of research – a 'Jewish archaeology'.

According to the author, this new branch of archaeology would investigate (drawing on the methodological assumptions of biblical archaeology) evidence of Jewish settlement in the territory of Poland and the various material remains associated with it (cemeteries, synagogues, mikvahs). The author understands its interdisciplinarity as the combination of the research carried out by historians, Judaists, Hebraists, biblical scholars, art historians, architects, archivists, archaeologists, conservators, ethnographers, sociologists, and other scholars. In his opinion, case studies published by historians and scholars dealing with regional studies can provide a starting point, to be further developed by researchers representing other disciplines. At the same time, such an interdisciplinary approach can also create a context for already profiled research. Rozmus also recognises the problem of our fragmentary knowledge – while metropolitan cemeteries have been the subject of many publications and conferences, provincial cemeteries are still understudied and lack publications. He is in favour of publishing complete monographs on Jewish cemeteries, not only discussing their history but also taking into account the results of palaeographic and epigraphic work and documentation. Another of his research demands is the creation of a catalogue of sepulchral art motifs. With such a compilation, the heritage of folk Jewish art would be saved and research on the stylistic diversity of Jewish cemeteries in Poland would be initiated. In order to fully protect Jewish cemeteries from destruction, Rozmus also demands that Jewish cemeteries be treated as archaeological sites and that they be placed on the list of heritage sites protected by law.

¹⁰ Rozmus 2022, 282.

¹¹ Rozmus 2022, 291

¹² Rozmus 2022, 11.

Finally, a few words of criticism. I do not understand why the author reduces most titles to the phrase 'introductory remarks.' This is an unnecessary form of reassurance against... Well, against what, exactly? Or, perhaps, it is a reference to how little we still know about the past of Polish Jews, a hidden message suggesting that there is much to be done in this area and there are still many challenges for the researchers.

When reading Dariusz Rozmus's book, one can sometimes get the impression that the author loses the flow, which is the result of an excess of knowledge he wants to pass on to the reader. Hence the chaos of issues, numerous unnecessary repetitions, broken threads, lack of a leading thought and, most importantly, fluency in communicating the message. Perhaps another publication in the form of a dictionary or a lexicon of terms, would be easier for the reader? I leave this idea to the author for his consideration.

Having read Dariusz Rozmus's work, I strongly support the author's call to do everything we

can to preserve as much evidence as possible of the Jewish presence in our country. I also urge everyone to support his appeal expressed in the following words: *I believe that Polish archaeology is ripe for the separation of a new and very promising branch of it, at the core of which will be equally biblical archaeology, medieval archaeology, modern archaeology, so-called war archaeology and, in a sense, even the industrial archaeology. Jewish archaeology, as a separate branch of archaeology, [...] will also owe much to history, history of art, and numismatics. It can also be treated as archaeology sensu stricto, i.e. as a branch of the broadly defined historical sciences, based on the clear principle of interdisciplinarity.*¹³

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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¹³ Rozmus 2022, 13.

