

The Katowice Synagogue



This is a photo of the synagogue in Katowice, taken sometime in the 1930s.

Katowice was this Polish-German city. There weren't many Jews and they were mostly progressive. I don't remember any Jews with beards, side locks.

Orthodox Jews, if there were any, lived in Sosnowiec, Bedzin, in that area. There was no Jewish district in Katowice. Jews were scattered throughout the city, they lived where they wanted.

In Katowice people used to drive their cars to the synagogue for the holidays. This was a western fashion, you could say German. Their religiosity was not very strong. Even those who were not religious celebrated the holidays, because that was the tradition.

It was a reformed synagogue. I think there was no mikveh in the city, no talmud torah or cheders. I remember the synagogue was very beautiful, large. I think the women had their own separate part, upstairs.

There were also services on Polish national holidays, for example on the 3rd of May. In addition, when Pilsudski died, there was a service, we all cried. The service was in Polish and the rabbi talked about the Marshal.

There was singing, 'Boze, cos Polske' [Polish, 'God, you protect Poland,' a song from 1816 considered to be one of the Polish national anthems]. The entire school gathered in mourning, everyone.

We had two rabbis in Katowice. One was called Doctor Vogelmann. The second one was Doctor Hajmades, who had a beautiful wife and he was, in general, very European, with a small beard, elegant. And Doctor Vogelmann was more traditional, with a longer beard.

I sometimes went there to ask him whether a specific hen was kosher, my mother would send me. He lived very close to us, on 3 Maja Street. I was really ashamed to do this, I was shy and going to the rabbi was a huge event for me.