

Summary

The subject of this dissertation is the Jewish community in German Szczecin (Stettin), the capital of the Prussian Province of Pomerania, during the years 1871–1933, i.e., from the proclamation of the German Empire to the Nazi seizure of power. This period represents a crucial stage in the history of the local Jewish community, which had been developing since the early 19th century following a long period of minimal Jewish settlement in the city. It was also the peak of the integration of Jewish population into German society, but also the moment of growing many doubts about its future. Legally, Jews could function on an equal footing with other citizens, but anti-Semitic prejudices remained a significant barrier. The post-unification period was also a time of rapid economic development and industrialization in Germany, in which Jews played an active role. Szczecin itself experienced dynamic growth as a centre of trade and industry. However, the city was not immune to the rise of modern anti-Semitism, as evidenced by the riots of 1881. World War I was a particularly important event in the history of German Jewry. The Jewish community in Szczecin provides a valuable case study for examining the complex processes of acculturation, assimilation, modernization, and social exclusion that German Jews experienced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For this group of people, the period under study was also a time of searching for their place in the modern world and redefining their identity—marked by ideological and cultural transformations, including progressive secularization, the rise of Zionist thought, and ongoing debates about Jewish identity.

The dissertation draws on research approaches and methods successfully employed in previous studies on the history of German Jews. Its aim is to provide a comprehensive account of the life of the Jewish community in Szczecin during this period, addressing as many aspects of its existence as possible. These include, above all: demographic trends; professional and economic activity; private, cultural, intellectual, and religious life; involvement in associations; and participation in the life of the state and broader society, including the challenges and limitations encountered in those spheres. The study also attempts to place the Jewish community of Szczecin within a broader comparative framework, particularly in relation to Jewish communities in other cities in Germany's eastern territories—most notably the other

two major Baltic port cities of the Prussian state, Königsberg and Danzig—as well as within the overall situation of German Jews during that time. The central thesis of the dissertation is that the Jewish community in Szczecin underwent a far-reaching, but ultimately incomplete, process of integration with the surrounding society. The identity-forming processes observed here broadly mirrored the general tension among German Jews between assimilation and the desire to maintain religious and cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, these phenomena had here their own unique dynamics and course, which resulted from local conditions and therefore deserve a more detailed analysis.

The first chapter provides a general overview of the key phenomena, essential for understanding the history and character of Szczecin's Jewish community between 1871 and 1933, which dates back to the previous period with earlier developments, particularly those concerning the origins and initial formation of the community. The second chapter focuses in detail on the functioning of the Jewish population from 1871 to the outbreak of World War I. It is organized into thematic subchapters, each dealing with different aspects: demographics, professional structure, economic activity, institutional frameworks, intellectual and religious life (including the roles of individual rabbis), and everyday life among the Jewish bourgeoisie. This chapter also includes broader reflections on acculturation and assimilation and examines how the Jewish population functioned within the broader framework of German society. It concludes with an analysis of antisemitism in Szczecin and its impact on Jewish life at the turn of the 20th century. The third chapter is dedicated to the participation and attitudes of Szczecin's Jews towards World War I and its impact on the community, particularly in terms of issues such as the identity of the group and their relationship with their German homeland. There are also considerations about the development of the idea of patriotism in the community that relate to the earlier period. The fourth chapter discusses the Jewish community in the Weimar Republic in more detail. It follows a similar structure to the second chapter, with an emphasis on the changes and continuities observed during the interwar years. The final section of this chapter deals with the development of Zionism within the Szczecin Jewish community, which was visible during the Weimar Republic. The fifth chapter serves as an epilogue, outlining the decline of the Jewish community in the face of Nazism. A brief overview of developments after 1933 is included as a necessary conclusion to the community's history and the themes addressed in the earlier chapters.

The analysis of Jewish life in Szczecin makes it possible to identify and examine selected social processes and phenomena within the community. In many respects, these developments paralleled those observed in other Jewish communities in the eastern provinces of Prussia and among German Jews more broadly. This was particularly true of acculturation, which progressed rapidly among Jews who had migrated to Szczecin from the East. However, in detail it is also possible to capture the specificity of the Szczecin Jewish community. For example, by the late 19th century, the proportion of Jews employed in commerce in Szczecin was significantly higher than in many other German cities. Jewish entrepreneurs played a major role in the local economy, such as the Kunstmann family shipping company. However, few Jews belonged to the group of the richest inhabitants of the city. Szczecin also played a key role as a transit point for Jews from eastern Germany and the Russian Empire migrating westward. The Orthodox Jewish population in Szczecin was relatively small compared to other cities, and most local rabbis were aligned with liberal Judaism. Some of them, such as Rabbi Heinemann Vogelstein—a prominent liberal Jewish figure and outspoken critic of Zionism—had a broader influence on German Jewry. Vogelstein's presence likely shaped the early attitudes of the Szczecin Jewish community. One of the most important events for understanding the complexity and transformation of Jewish identity in Szczecin was World War I. Jews in Stettin did not form an isolated microcosm but rather participated in the city's broader social fabric, alongside Protestants and Catholics. They often maintained cordial professional or neighborly relationships and took part in various aspects of public life. However, these interactions did not always extend into the private sphere. Many Jews felt deeply integrated into German society, yet antisemitism remained a persistent obstacle to full inclusion. Additionally, some Jews feared that excessive assimilation could erode their distinct identity. Faced with both external exclusion and internal concerns, many members of the Szczecin Jewish community came to see the modern Jewish national idea—Zionism—as the best response to the challenges of modernity. In the face of rising Nazism, it increasingly appeared to many as the only viable option.