A Polish Shtel Where Allegedly There Was No Holocaust

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A lavish, beautifully illustrated, tourist guide entitled Wybieram Dobre (I Choose Dobre, Dobre 2014) recommends ‘the idyllic landscape of Mazovian countryside, the richness of its fauna and flora’. The pages are filled with photographs of picturesque birds, beavers, wild boars, deer, horses, charming ducklings, rare wild flowers and majestic old oaks. Other relics include a renovated manor-house, a serene manorial pond and rural wayside shrines. But the main theme of the booklet is the little town with the portal of its neo-gothic church and the bust of the local sculptor on the front cover. It proudly shows the renovated belfry, the church’s nave filled with the faithful, Stations of the Cross painted on its walls, a stained-glass likeness of Saint Nicholas, Corpus Christi procession with flower girls in white dresses, school children at play, a bicycle rally, youth marching band and a firefighters’ parade. And an antique map from the XVIII century with Dobre named Dobra, Radoszyna – Radoszyn, and Rudzenko – Rudzienek, but Rynia, Nowa Wieś, Piwki, Czarnogłów, Makówiec, Stanisławów the same as today.

According to the tourist guide, Dobre’s spacious marketplace (100 x 100 meters) ‘has gained a new shine thanks to funds from the European Union’. A bare and grey square in the past, it is now adorned by trees and has a park-like appearance, with Marshal Piłsudski’s bust by the local sculptor Konstanty Laszczka at its centre, and a prewar monument to the fallen in 1914-1920 – with, at its edge, an additional plaque for the local men of the AK (underground Home Army) during World War II. In nearby Makówiec Duży, there is even a shrine on top of the collective grave of the fallen in a 1831 battle against the Russian, and in close by Nowa Wieś crosses stand on the graves of those who were then taken prisoner and hanged. ‘God forgive us’ – says an inscription on a cross and the guide explains that the Dobre parish is a resting place for the yearly walking pilgrimage from Łomża to Częstochowa.

Makówiec Duży has also a memorial boulder with engraved information that ‘in this place stood the house where on 3 September 1885 the world renowned sculptor Konstanty Laszczka was born’ and an old flour-mill with an ambiance ‘appreciated by filmmakers, who had shot here some episodes of [two] criminal mystery series for television’. This is the same flour-mill where I was delayed by a mysterious peasant woman on my way to the farm of one of my father’s murderers, which is described in my story ‘Ojczyzna’ (Fatherland), yet the criminal mystery film widely known as Miejsce urodzenia (Birthplace), also shot in the area, is not mentioned in the guide.

A satellite (GPS) photo of the marketplace shows several new red roofs courtesy of European Union funds and an old brown roof of the tenement which partly belonged to the Fryd family and partly to my grandfather from Nowa Wieś. This became a place of important action in the first half of my book Zwycięstwo (The Victory) which has appeared in several world languages with the photograph of the empty marketplace of Dobre in the Hebrew edition (Jerusalem 2014) and on the cover of the German edition (Berlin 2016). My mother, her two sisters and brother were born in Dobre. Her father
came from Rynia and so Jews called him Yankl Rynier. My father, his three sisters and brother were born in Nowa Wieś and they walked to a prayer house in Czarnogłów. Another hamlet in that area was, for some reason, called Palestyna (Palestine). Makówiec belonged to my father’s uncle, his mother’s brother, Yankl Grynbaum, whom the Jews called Makovtsover, and the gentiles nicknamed the Jewish squire. My mother told me that he gave the most money for my pidyon ha-ben (the ‘ransom’ of the firstborn). Biumek Norwint got from him a large farm in Makówiec Duży as a dowry when marrying his niece, and later passed it on to Śliwa when marrying Śliwa’s daughter. That farm became the place of action in the second half of my story ‘Ojczyzna’.

Dobre had been one of the most Jewish shtetlech. One hundred Jewish families lived there and barely anybody else. In the last decade of its existence, the authorities attached to it adjacent areas in order to change its ethnic composition, but all the houses and tenements surrounding the marketplace with its new shine thanks to the European funds – were Jewish. In the fall of 1942, my parents, my toddler brother and I were resettled from Radoszyna to Dobre like all the Jews from surrounding countryside, and a few weeks later – together with all the Jewish Dobre, to the nearby Jewish Stanisławów. From there all were taken to Treblinka. That is all except those who managed to escape as we did, or those who got killed on the spot, like my father’s sister who tried to run away with her older sister’s child. I do not know how many perished in Stanisławów, but as we ran, we heard shooting for a long time. Those who escaped were hiding in the surrounding forests, like my mother’s family, or on nearby farms like we did. Those captured in the forest were being killed in the forest like my mother’s family (see The Jewish War). Those captured on the farms were usually taken to Dobre, like the youngest sister of my father, and killed over the Giger’s pits. Testimonies collected by Yad Vashem mention a mass execution there of about fifty Jews in February 1943. Andrzej Sadowski’s grandmother sobbed when telling how the Germans forced everybody found nearby to look at the shooting of large group that included women and children. Others recall individual executions at the same place. Mr. Sadowski’s aunt saw several times Ukrainians in black uniforms escorting there two or three people. Once coincidentally, she found herself about twenty meters from an execution, because children liked to play in those sands (see Pamiętnik 2). In the fall of 1993, I went there with Andrew Nagorski, the American journalist of Polish descent. We saw the pits filled up, overgrown by conifers, surrounded by buildings, and barely noticeable.

Yes, there is a monument ‘to the victims of Nazism’ in nearby hamlet Gęsianka, where on 5 August 1944, in reprisal for a partisan action, the Germans blew up a cellar that had sheltered 38 persons including eight children. A photo shows a fenced grave with a tall cross on top of it, wreaths and a military honour guard. The guide says that annual commemorations take place there attended by clergy, local authorities, and descendants of the victims, and concludes that ‘this small, quiet hamlet contains the most painful story of the parish (gmina)’.

This premeditated obliteration of annihilated Jews is an obvious historical lie which should be punished by the appropriate paragraph in the European criminal code, while the moral code considers it an insult or approval of the crime. This insult has been published in six thousand copies by the Office of the Dobre Commune (Urząd Gminy Dobre),
which – for some pathological reason – is happy to use EU funds in order to place us in oblivion. Unaware that this cannot succeed, since Jewish Dobre has been for a long time the subject of stories and essays in many languages, with one essay unequivocally entitled ‘We, the Jews of Dobre’.