

FOUNDATION FOR
THE PRESERVATION
OF JEWISH HERITAGE
IN POLAND

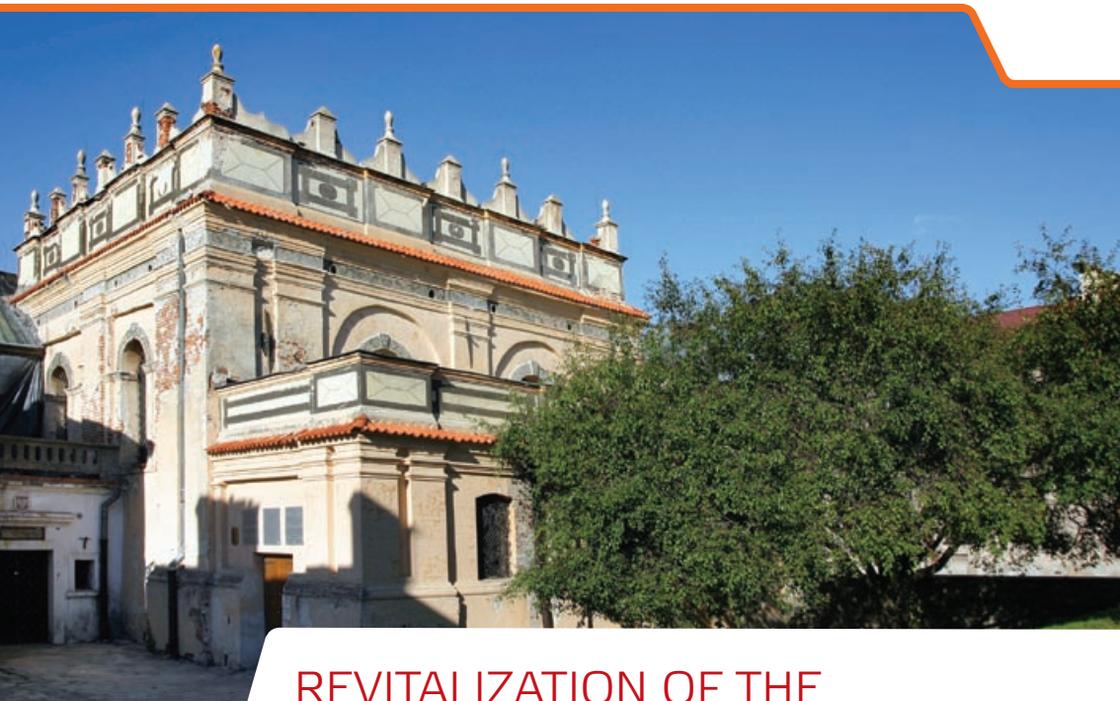


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REVITALIZATION OF THE RENAISSANCE SYNAGOGUE IN ZAMOŚĆ

for the needs of the Chassidic Route
and the local community



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland was founded in 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO).

The Foundation's mission is to protect surviving monuments of Jewish heritage in Poland. Our chief task is the protection of Jewish cemeteries – in cooperation with other organizations and private donors we have saved from destruction, fenced and commemorated several burial grounds (in Zakopane, Kozienice, Mszczonów, Iwaniska, Strzegowo, Dubienka, Kolno, Iłża, Wysokie Mazowieckie, Siedlecza-Kańczuga, Żuromin and several other places). Our activities also include the renovation and revitalization of particularly important Jewish monuments, such as the synagogues in Kraśnik, Przysucha and Rymanów as well as the synagogue in Zamość.

The protection of material patrimony is not the Foundation's only task however. It is equally important to us to increase the public's knowledge of the history of the Polish Jews who for centuries contributed to Poland's heritage. Our most important educational activities include the "To Bring Memory Back" program, addressed to high school students, and POLIN – Polish Jews' Heritage www.polin.org.pl – a multimedia web portal that will present the history of 1200 Jewish communities throughout Poland.

One of the Foundation's major undertakings is the Chassidic Route project, whose center of gravity will soon shift to the revitalized synagogue in Zamość.

We invite you to have a look at our activities.

Monika Krawczyk CEO

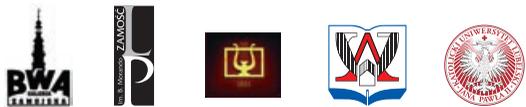
For more information about the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland visit:
www.fodz.pl
www.polin.org.pl
www.pamiec.fodz.pl

This brochure has been published within the framework of the project "Revitalization of the Renaissance synagogue in Zamość for the needs of the Chassidic Route and the local community" implemented by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland and supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism.



Activities implemented at the synagogue following the completion of renovation works will involve our local partners:

the Artistic Exhibitions Agency – the Zamość Gallery
the Bernardo Morando Fine Arts High School
the Karol Namysłowski Symphonic Orchestra
the Zamość University of Management and Administration
the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin



as well as
the Jewish Community of Trondheim, Norway (Det Mosaiske Trossamfunn, Trondheim).



ABOUT THE PROJECT

"REVITALIZATION OF THE RENAISSANCE SYNAGOGUE IN ZAMOŚĆ FOR THE NEEDS OF THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY"

The Renaissance synagogue in the Zamość Old City is one of the most spectacular monuments of Jewish heritage in Poland. The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage has been the owner of the building since 2005. Our goal is to transform the synagogue into a modern cultural institution serving Jewish visitors to Zamość as well as the local community.

Due to several years of neglect the synagogue was in very bad technical condition when it was taken over by the Foundation in 2005. The Foundation immediately carried out crucial renovations and secured the historical structure. We also developed a revitalization scheme for the building and launched efforts to acquire the necessary funds.

Since 2008, the project "Revitalization of the Renaissance synagogue in Zamość for the needs of the Chassidic Route and the local community" is supported by a grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. Construction and conservation works were started in July 2009 and will be completed by October 2010.

In 2011, the Chassidic Route tourist and cultural information center as well as a multimedia museum dedicated to the history of the Jews of Zamość and the surrounding area will be established within the renovated synagogue. Visitors will be able to learn about Jewish figures who contributed to shaping of the region's intellectual, religious and cultural character. A part of the building area will also be adapted for the needs of local NGOs.

Following the completion of renovation works the synagogue will serve as a venue for educational activities and cultural events designed with both the inhabitants of Zamość and tourists traveling along the Chassidic Route in mind. These activities will also involve our local partners: the Artistic Exhibitions Agency – the Zamość Gallery, the Bernardo Morando Fine Arts High School, the Karol Namysłowski Symphonic Orchestra, the Zamość University of Management and Administration and the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin as well as our Norwegian partner, the Jewish Community of Trondheim. The synagogue will also be available for religious services.



THE ZAMOŚĆ SYNAGOGUE

The Renaissance synagogue in the Old City was erected at the beginning of the 17th century, probably in 1610–1618 or 1620. It was initially a single chamber structure, with annexes for women added to the main building probably in the 1630's. The edifice is topped by an attic concealing a recessed roof; finely carved stucco elements adorn the vaults. The eastern wall of the main hall contains the aron ha-kodesh – a richly-ornamented niche in which the Torah scrolls were kept.

In the 18th century the synagogue underwent extensive refurbishments: the façade was changed, the attics removed and a new roof raised, while a second floor was added to the annexes for women. A vestibule connecting the synagogue to the adjacent kehilla house was built on the western side. In 1788, a beautiful bimah made of wrought iron, funded by rabbi Samuel Barzel, was placed in the center of the main hall.

Following the outbreak of World War II the interior of the synagogue was looted and devastated by the Nazis. The southern annex for women was taken down, while the northern suffered extensive damage. In 1941, the Germans established a stable, followed by a carpenters' workshop inside the synagogue.

After the war the Zamość synagogue was renovated – its function as a house of prayer was, however, not restored. Between 1951 and 1954 the building functioned as a warehouse, and between 1959 and 2005 as the provincial and municipal public library. A number of works aiming to restore the building's form prior to its 18th century reconstruction were carried out. The southern annex for women was rebuilt in 1948–1950 (with one floor), and the second floor of the northern annex was eliminated. The attic was reconstructed in 1957–1972.

In 2005, ownership of the building was transferred to the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland which launched efforts to revitalize the synagogue for the needs of the Chassidic Route and the local community.

THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE

The Chassidic Route is a tourist route following the traces of Jewish communities through southeastern Poland, and soon also western Ukraine. Twenty-three communities in which priceless reminders of a centuries-old Jewish presence have survived have already joined the project. These are: Baligród, Biłgoraj, Chełm, Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Jarosław, Kraśnik, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Łańcut, Łęczna, Przemyśl, Radomyśl Wielki, Ropczyce, Rymanów, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, Ustrzyki Dolne, Wielkie Oczy, Włodawa and Zamość.

The Chassidic Route runs through many picturesque areas, like the Roztocze Hills or the Bieszczady Mountains, and joins localities where one can find imposing synagogues and Jewish cemeteries with gravestones dating back to the 18th, 17th or even the 16th century. Many of them are still visited by Chassidim from all over the world.

Within the framework of the Route, the Foundation supports local authorities and non-governmental organizations in protecting and promoting their townships' multicultural heritage. Our aim is also to stimulate the development of dedicated tourism based on Jewish heritage through the establishment of permanent inter-sector partnerships.

The Chassidic Route gives many places in Poland the opportunity to appear on the map of tourist attractions. Apart from well-known Zamość, included on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, there are many places along the Route that are often omitted by tourists unaware of their significance.

The Chassidic Route
is a tourist route following the
traces of Jewish communities
through southeastern Poland

We invite you to take a trip along the
Chassidic Route!





THE MOST INTERESTING MONUMENTS OF JEWISH CULTURE ALONG THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE

WHY THE "CHASSIDIC ROUTE"?

For many centuries Poland was home to several generations of Jews as well as the scene of an unprecedented development of Jewish culture, religious thought and writing. It was here that Chassidism, one of the most important currents ever to come into being within Judaism emerged in the 18th century. Chassidism gained particularly many supporters in eastern Poland, including territories through which the Chassidic Route runs today.

It is traditionally believed that the creator of Chassidism (in Hebrew, chassid means "pious") was Israel Ben Eliezer of Medzhybizh in Podolia (today, a region of the Ukraine), known as the Baal Shem Tov. Chassidim believed that religion could not be limited to the strict observance of the commandments of Judaism, and that obeying them in too literal a manner could even distance man from God. They therefore strongly emphasized the emotional experience of faith.

Chassidim concentrated around tzadikim (in Hebrew, tzadik means "the righteous one"), charismatic spiritual leaders, each of whom preached a distinct way of approaching God: specific ways of studying religious texts and celebrating rituals. Some tzadikim became famous for their theories, for example that prayers would be heard by God only if shouted or accompanied by dancing. In the 19th century the post of tzadik became hereditary, which led to the creation of whole dynasties, taking their names from the towns where tzadikim courts took root.

On yartzeit, or the anniversary of a tzadik's death, Chassidim gather round the tzadik's grave, believing that on this day the rabbi's soul visits his place of rest. They pray and leave kvitlech – pieces of paper bearing their requests – on the tzadik's tomb. This tradition is still alive and Chassidim from all over the world still regularly visit the graves of tzadikim in Dynów, Leżajsk, Ropczyce or Rymanów.

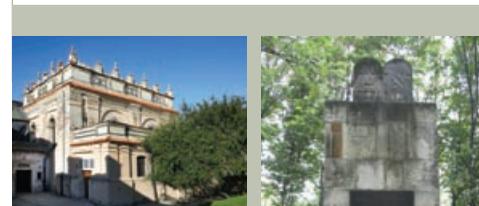
However, not all the places along the Chassidic Route were centers of the Chassidic movement. Tzadik "courts" existed in Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Lesko, Leżajsk, Lublin, Łańcut, Przemyśl, Ropczyce, Rymanów and Tarnobrzeg (or, more precisely, in nearby Dzików). The most important center of Chassidism in Poland was Leżajsk, where the famous tzadik Elimelech was active. Other places along the Route were home to smaller groups of Chassidim, affiliated with tzadikim from other towns and villages. This, however, does not reduce the appeal of the Jewish heritage sites located there.

Zamość

renaissance synagogue built at the beginning of the 17th c.
9 Ludwika Zamenhofa St.

the so-called "new cemetery" founded in 1907 Prosta St.

1



3

Cieszanów

synagogue built at the end of the 19th c.
Ks. Ignacego Skorupki St.

cemetery founded in the 19th c.
Armii Krajowej St.

Biłgoraj

cemetery founded in the 19th c.
Marii Konopnickiej St.

2



4

Wielkie Oczy

synagogue built at the beginning of the 20th c.
Rynek St.

cemetery founded in the 18th c. Krakowiecka St.



Jarosław

two synagogues built in the 19th c.
5 *Ordynacka St.* and 12 *Opolska St.*

building of the Yad Charuzim Society
1 *Tarnowskiego Sq.*

cemetery founded at the beginning of the 18th c. *Kruhel Pelkinski St.*

5

Leżajsk (Lizhensk)

cemetery founded in the 18th c.;
resting place of Tzadik Elimelech of Leżajsk/
Lizhensk (1717–1787), pilgrimage destination
for Chassidim from all over the world
Górna St.

6

Łańcut

Baroque synagogue built in the 18th c.
16 *Jana III Sobieskiego Sq.*

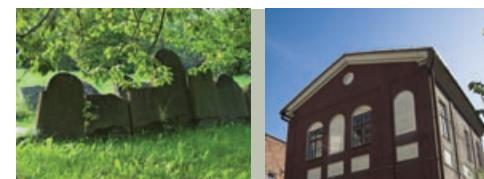
cemetery founded in the 17th c.;
resting place of Tzadik Naftali Tzvi Horowitz
of Ropczyce (1760–1827) and Eleazar Shapiro
of Łańcut (d. 1865), the founder of the Dynów
tzadik dynasty *Stanisława Moniuszki St.*

7

Dynów

cemetery founded at the end of the 18th c.;
resting place of Tzadik Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro
of Dynów (1785–1841) *Józefa Piłsudskiego St.*

8



9

Przemysł

the so-called "new synagogue"
erected at the beginning of the 20th c.
5 *Unii Brzeskiej Sq.*

the so-called "new cemetery" founded
at the beginning of the 19th c.; the
largest Jewish cemetery in Podkarpackie
province *Juliusza Słowackiego St.*

10

Ustrzyki Dolne
cemetery on Mount
Gromadzyń, founded
in the 18th c.

11

Baligród
cemetery founded
at the beginning
of the 18th c.
Jana Dułaka St.

12

Lesko

synagogue built in the 17th c.
16 *Berka Joselewicza St.*

cemetery founded in the 16th c.; one of the
oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe
Juliusza Słowackiego St.

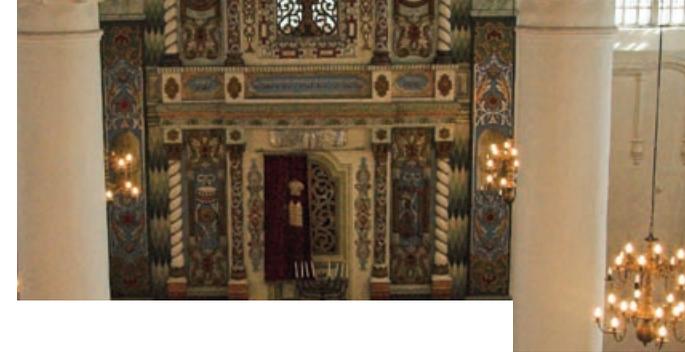
13

Sanok

the synagogue of the Yad Charuzim Society
built in the 19th c. 5 *Franciszkańska St.*

the Sadogóra synagogue erected in the interwar
period 10 *Rynek St.*

the so-called "new cemetery" founded in the
19th c. *Kiczury St.*



Rymanów
Baroque synagogue built in the 17th c.
restored since 2005
corner of Rynek and Ignacego Bieleckiego St.
cemetery founded in the 16th c.; resting
place of Tzadik Menachem Mendel of
Rymanów (1745–1815)
Juliusza Słowackiego St.

14



Ropczyce
cemetery founded in the
18th c.
Monte Cassino St.

Dębica
synagogue built at the
end of the 18th c.
3 Krakowska St.
cemetery founded at the
turn of the 18th c.
Cmentarna St.

15

16



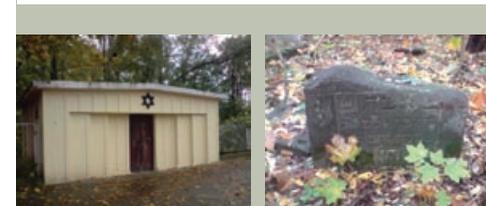
Radomyśl Wielki
cemetery founded in the 19th c. *Kąty St.*
mikvah (ritual bath) *Targowa St.*
the so-called "Tefłówka"; former house of
rabbi Chaim Englam *2 Tadeusza Kościuszki St.*

17



Tarnobrzeg
cemetery founded at the beginning of
the 20th c.; resting place of Tzadik Eliezer
Horowitz of Dzików (d. 1860)
Marii Dąbrowskiej St.

18



19

Kraśnik
synagogue complex consisting of two
synagogues built in the 17th and 19th c.
6 and 6a Bożnicza St.
the so-called "new cemetery" founded
ca. 1850 *Szewska St.*



20

Lublin
the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin (the School
of the Wise Men of Lublin) built in 1930 as
the biggest Jewish religious school in the world
85 Lubartowska St.
the so-called "old cemetery" founded in
the 16th c.; resting place of Tzadik Jacob Isaac
Horowitz, known as "The Seer of Lublin"
(1745–1815) *Sienna St.*
the so-called "new cemetery" founded at the
beginning of the 19th c. *Walczych St.*



21

Łęczna
the Great Synagogue, built in 1648
19 Bożnicza St.
the Small Synagogue, built at the
beginning of the 19th c. *21 Bożnicza St.*
cemetery founded in the second half of
the 16th c. *Pasternik St.*



22

Włodawa
Baroque
synagogue
complex erected
in the second half
of the 18th c.
*7 Czerwonego
Krzyża St.*

23

Chełm
the so-called "new
synagogue" built at
the beginning of the
20th c. *8 Kopernika St.*
cemetery founded in
the 15th c.; one of the
oldest surviving Jewish
cemetaries in Europe
Kolejowa St.



THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT
OF THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE
WILL BE THE RENAISSANCE
SYNAGOGUE IN ZAMOŚĆ

ZAMOŚĆ – A CITY OF MANY CULTURES

Zamość is Poland's only – and one of Europe's very few Renaissance urban complexes. It was founded in 1580 by the Hetman and Grand Chancellor of the Crown Jan Zamoyski as the Renaissance „ideal city” and designed by the Italian architect Bernardo Morando.

In 1992, the town's Old City complex was added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites.

The uniqueness of Zamość derives not only from its architecture and urban design. Taking a walk down the city's Renaissance alleyways one should keep in mind that nearly from its very founding Zamość was a multinational metropolis where the ideals of tolerance and harmony flourished. Zamość was home to Poles, Armenians, Greeks, Scots, Hungarians, Ukrainians and Jews, all enjoying equal rights and contributing to the city's multicultural image.

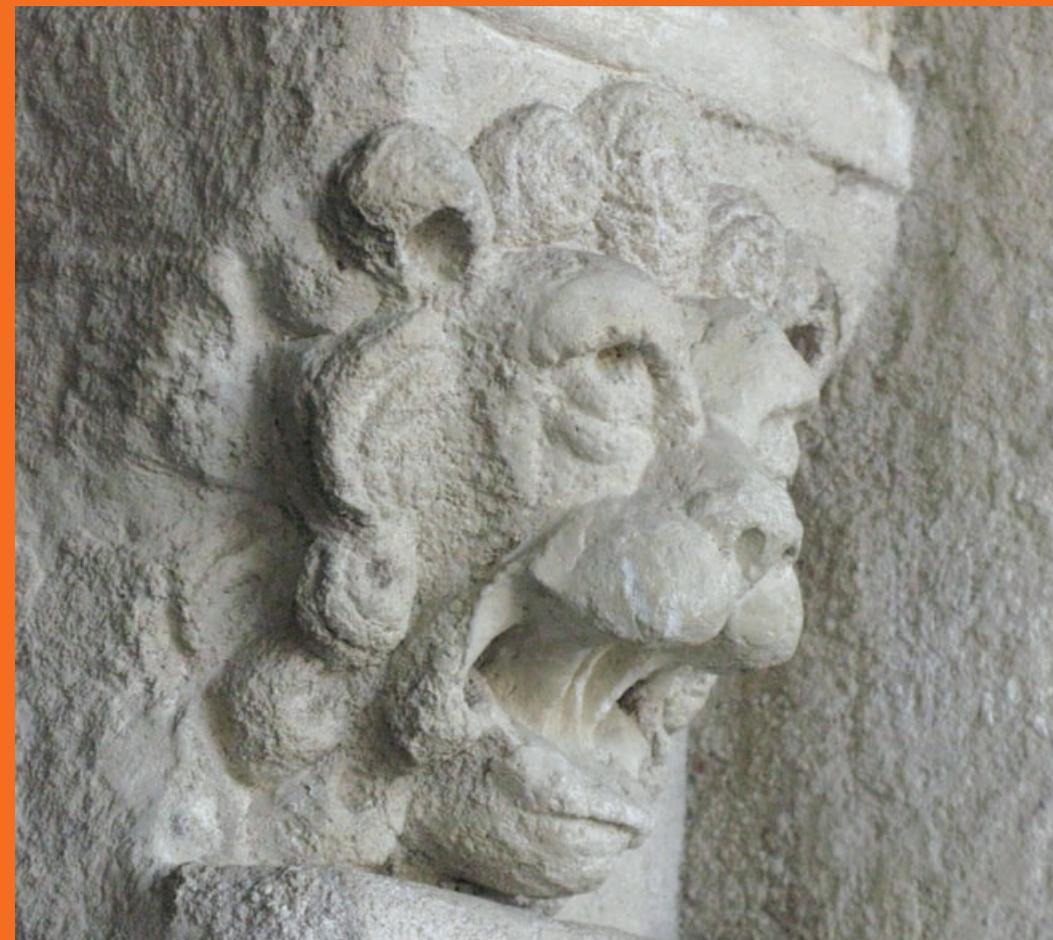
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HISTORY OF THE ZAMOŚĆ JEWISH COMMUNITY

The First Jews in Zamość

When Jan Zamoyski founded Zamość there was nothing to indicate that the town would soon become a multicultural and multi-ethnic center inhabited not only by Poles, but also by Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Germans, Italians, Scots and Jews. At first, the Hetman granted Catholics the exclusive right to settle in the city, however, he was soon forced to change plans. As early as 1585, settlement rights were granted to Armenians, and in 1588, to Jews.



Zamoyski gave his consent to Sephardi Jews coming from Italy and Turkey (after 1623, following Zamoyski's death, Sephardim also arrived from Flanders and the Netherlands) to settle within the city walls and to establish their own kehilla (religious community). It was thus that Jewish merchants from Europe's most important centers of commerce, able to provide the city with excellent trade contacts with the Levant (the Middle East), came to settle in Zamość. Sephardim are the Jews that lived in the Iberian Peninsula until their exile from it at the end of the 15th c. Some of their customs, liturgy as well as music and language differ from those of the Ashkenazi Jews who came from Germany and were dominant in Poland at the time.

Zamoyski's privilege allowed the Sephardim to build houses in Żydowska (pol. Jewish) Street (now Ludwika Zamenhofa St.) and to erect a synagogue, a cheder (religious school for boys) and a mikvah (ritual bath). More importantly, Jews settling in Zamość were granted legal rights equivalent to those enjoyed by other citizens – an exception at the time. They could earn their living as craftsmen and tradesmen, pharmacists and doctors. The privilege also gave them the right to produce luxury goods – elegant clothing, jewelry and household items. The Jewish community of Zamość was to remain Sephardi, although Ashkenazi Jews could be admitted to it if they obtained permission from the owner of the town and from the Jewish community. At this time, however, the Sephardim did not allow mixed marriages with Ashkenazi Jews, as differences between the two groups were regarded as too serious.



The turn of the 17th century saw the founding of the first Jewish cemetery. It was there that Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, the famous Maggid of Dubno, was buried in 1804. The cemetery was located in today's Partyzantów St. but no trace of it remains; the site is occupied by the Zamość Cultural Center. In the beginning of the 17th c. the famous Renaissance synagogue was erected in Żydowska St. (today at 9 Ludwika Zamenhofa St.), followed by the communal house of learning and prayer – the Bet Midrash. The Jewish district gradually grew, expanding into today's Iczhaka Leibusza Pereca (Isaac Leib Peretz) St. and the Rynek Solny (Salt Market). The intellectual excellence of the community is attested to by the fact that already in the 17th c. Jewish Zamość was frequently described as “a town full of scholars and writers alike”.



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The End of the Sephardi Community

The wars which struck Poland in the 17th c., especially the Khmelnitsky Uprising and the Swedish invasion (commonly known as “the Deluge”), brought an end to the Sephardi community of Zamość. Most of the Sephardim left town to be replaced by Ashkenazim, which led to the incorporation of the town kehilla into the vast communal organization of Polish Jews. Since the second half of the 17th c. Zamość was represented at the Council of Four Lands (the central Jewish authority in Poland from 1580 to 1764), in which the town’s deputies also acted on behalf of the smaller Jewish communities from the Zamość Entail.

Religious and Intellectual Life

In the 18th c. Zamość became an important center of education for future rabbis. Rabbi Yaakov Isaac Hochgelentner founded the city’s first rabbinical school – the Yeshiva of the Wise Men of Zamość. Unlike other communities in southeastern Poland, the Jewish community of Zamość never joined the Chassidic movement which drew a considerable following in Poland in the second half of the 18th c. This was probably due to the attitude of the well-educated local rabbis and the traditional Jewish



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elite. Unlike the smaller communities surrounding Zamość, where Chassidism found many supporters, the capital of the Entail became a significant anti-Chassidic center, and later, a center of the Haskalah (Hebrew for “Enlightenment”), a pan-European movement calling for the renouncement of isolationism and the involvement of Jews in the social and political life of the countries in which they lived.

Zamość was also the hometown of Rabbi Ezriel Halevi Horowitz, a major opponent of Chassidism, and, above all, of Rabbi Jacob Isaac Horowitz, known as “The Seer of Lublin”, the famous leader of the Lublin Chassidim. In the first half of the 19th c. there were only two small Chassidic groups in Zamość, consisting of the followers of the Tzadik of Góra Kalwaria and of the Tzadik of Belz.

While Chassidism never gained many followers in Zamość the ideas of the Haskalah became very popular there at the end of the 18th c. One of their supporters was Rabbi Israel Ben Moshe Halevi Zamość, a philosopher and mathematician who became famous throughout Europe and was the teacher of Moses Mendelssohn, whose theories led to the assimilation of the German Jews.

The Haskalah gained popularity not only among the local rabbis. People like Alexander Tzederbaum, the creator of the first newspapers in Yiddish (“Kol Mevasser”) and Hebrew

("Hamelitz") published in Russia were also drawn to the movement. Zamość was the hometown of Isaac Leib Peretz (1852–1915), considered to be one of the fathers of Yiddish literature. Although most of his works were written in Warsaw, many of them take place in Zamość, for instance *Chassidic Tales* or the play *Night in the Old Marketplace*. Rosa Luxemburg, a famous socialist activist, was also born there (in 1871). One should however keep in mind that the Zamość kehilla was dominated by traditional Jews, with the progressive intelligentsia constituting a minority.

Under the Partitions

After the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the incorporation of Zamość into the Congress Kingdom of Poland (a puppet state under Russian imperial rule), the tsarist authorities decided to enlarge the Zamość fortress. In 1822, civilians living in the Old City, located within the fortress walls, were relocated to the suburbs, mainly to Nowa Osada ("New Settlement"), later called Nowe Miasto ("New Town"). The kehilla also established itself in these new surroundings.

At this time, the Jewish community constituted the majority of the town's population. In 1827, Jews numbered 2 874 out of 5 414 inhabitants, comprising 53% of the total population. In 1857, they numbered 2 490 out of 4 035 inhabitants. In 1897, there were 7 034 Jews living in Zamość (62% of the population).

It was not until 1866 that the Russian authorities allowed civilians back into the Old City as a result of the town's loss of its fortress status. An interesting situation then occurred: many of the poorer Jews stayed in the New Town, while the elite moved back into the



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Before World War I, over 90% of shops and over 75% of craftsmen's workshops in the city belonged to Jews.

Old City. There were thenceforth two Jewish communities in Zamość with their own synagogues and rabbis. The cheders and mikvahs were also separate. From 1866 to 1872 a new synagogue, still in existence today, was erected in the New Town (32 Gminna St.). The New Town community became dominated by supporters of Chassidism, with the descendants of "The Seer of Lublin" assuming the posts of rabbis.

Most of the Zamość Jews earned their living with trade and crafts. Before World War I, over 90% of shops and over 75% of craftsmen's workshops in the city belonged to Jews. During the interwar period this number fell, with Polish businesses gaining an advantage. However, until 1939 Jews still dominated trade and crafts in Zamość and other towns in the Lublin region. In 1907, as the old Jewish cemetery ran out of space, the community established a new burial ground, located in Prosta St. In 1910, there were 9 188 Jews among the town's 14 593 inhabitants.

In the second half of the 19th c. a new group appeared among the Jewish elite: assimilated Jews who had adopted Polish culture. This group was small, but very active. One has but to mention the Hernhut family, who ran a well-known Russian-Polish printing house and bookstore. In 1913, all of the six bookshops in Zamość belonged to Jews, and apart from the Hernhuts' there were three other Jewish-owned printing houses, publishing books not only in the Jewish languages but also in Polish and Russian. As early as the second half of the 19th c. lay Jewish schools with lectures on Jewish history and modern Hebrew classes began to appear. The first Jewish public library in the Lublin region was also established in Zamość.

Zionist and socialist movements made their appearance in Zamość quite early on. The Bund, a Jewish socialist party, was active there already in 1903. However, modern Jewish political life did not begin to flourish until World War I, especially under the Austro-Hungarian occupation which was much more liberal than Russian rule. Most of the modern Jewish political parties became active in Zamość at this time, with Jews gaining seats on the Municipal Council. Many social, cultural and economic institutions, independent of those run by the kehilla, were founded, e.g. the Jewish Old People's and Handicaps' Home or the orphanage.

But World War I also brought many tragic moments. In 1914, the Russian army accused the Jewish community of collaborating with the Austrians, which led to the execution of 11 Jews and a number of Poles. Soon after the end of the Great War, during the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919–1921) when Budyonny's Cavalry Army besieged the town, soldiers from general Bulak-Balakhovitch's division carried out a pogrom, accusing the Jews of helping Bolsheviks.

The interwar period (1918–1939) saw an unprecedented economic, cultural, political and social development of the Zamość Jewish community.



Just before the outbreak of World War II Zamość was inhabited by 12 531 Jews who made up 43% of its population.

The Interwar Period

The interwar period (1918–1939) saw an unprecedented economic, cultural, political and social development of the Zamość Jewish community. It is worth noticing that in 1927 the Jewish Communal Co-Educational Humanities Middle School was established with classes held in Polish. Numerous magazines came out in Yiddish, e.g. a bi-weekly "Zamoscher Shtime" ("Voice of Zamość"), published by the Zionist-Socialist Party Poale Zion, appearing in 1928 as well as from 1937 to 1939. Jews also had 9 libraries, 4 bookshops and 3 large printing houses. Apart from lay schools, there were also religious ones, mostly traditional cheders, as well as a small yeshiva, the "Aitz-Chaim" (Tree of Life).

During the interwar period, 94,7% of the Jewish citizens of the town declared Yiddish as their daily spoken language, although for the younger generation Polish was gradually becoming the most important. At the same time 4,1% of Jews declared Polish as the language they spoke at home – more than in Lublin, a bigger city, where this figure amounted to 2,5%. Jews still dominated trade, crafts and industry, although many Polish businesses had been established during the interwar period. In 1924, 75,7% of trade firms in Zamość belonged to Jews, as did 54,5% of factories.

Just before the outbreak of World War II Zamość was inhabited by 12 531 Jews who made up 43% of its population. They lived mainly in the Old City and in the New Town.

After the Russians left Zamość in 1939 there were some 4 000 Jews left in the city.



After the Russians left Zamość in 1939 there were some 4 000 Jews left in the city. Within a short time this number rose as a result of the influx of Jews expelled by the Germans from Polish territories incorporated into the Third Reich. The newcomers included large groups of Jews from Włocławek, Koło, Kalisz and Łódź. At the end of 1940, there were about 2 500 displaced persons in the town.

For the Jews, German occupation meant systematic and brutal persecution. Their property confiscated, they were forced to work both in the town and in labor camps throughout the Lublin district, mainly in the nearby camps at Bełżec and Bortatycze. On May 1st, 1941, the German authorities ordered all Zamość Jews to move to the New Town, thus creating a separate Jewish quarter (a closed ghetto, however, was never established).

In March 1942, the Germans launched "Operation Reinhardt", aimed at exterminating Jews in the General Government (a part of the Polish territories which were not annexed into the Third Reich). For this purpose the Nazis created a death camp in Bełżec, 40 km from Zamość. The first deportation took place on the Jewish holiday of Passover on April 11th, 1941, when almost 2 500 people were transported to the camp. The elderly and the infirm were murdered by the Germans right in their own homes or in the streets.

World War II and the Holocaust

Following the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 Zamość found itself under German occupation. At the time, Jews were violently persecuted, beaten and stripped of their property by German soldiers. It was no surprise then that the entry of Russian troops into the city was met with relief – if not with joy – by the town's Jewish population. The rule of the Soviets lasted for two weeks. Some Jews, especially those with leftist views, openly collaborated with the new authorities. With the withdrawal of Russian troops from the city it was officially announced among the Jews that they could evacuate with the Red Army. Having already experienced the cruelty of the Germans during their short stay in Zamość, a significant part of the Jewish community decided to escape over the Bug river. It is estimated that around 7 000–8 000 Jews fled the town. Most of them halted just beyond the Soviet demarcation lines, mainly in Volodymyr-Volynskiy and Lviv. In 1941, when those areas were seized by the Nazis, the refugees shared the tragic fate of the local Jewry. A small number of the displaced were deported by the Russians to Siberia in 1940 and 1941, and many of them survived there until the end of the war.





Only about 50 Jews from Zamość survived the Shoah; a few hundred of the Zamość Jews survived the war in the Soviet Union.

Officially, the Germans told the Jews that they were being sent “to the East” to work. In reality, all of them were killed in the camp at Bełżec. 15-year-old Leib Wolstein managed to escape from the camp to tell the truth about Bełżec to the officials of the Zamość Jewish Council. The story of young Wolstein, however, was never officially transmitted to the ghetto inhabitants.

After the first stage of “Operation Reinhardt” three other large transports arrived in Zamość: almost 1 000 German Jews from Dortmund and over 2 000 Czech Jews from the Theresienstadt ghetto. The second stage of deportation began on the Jewish holiday of Shavuot on May 24th, 1942. On May 27th, 1942, almost 2 000 Jews were taken to Sobibór, the second largest (after Bełżec) death camp in the Lublin district. On August 11th, 1942, about 400 Jews were transported from Zamość to the death camp at Majdanek, and in September 1942, another 400 were deported to the death camp at Bełżec.

The final liquidation of the Jewish quarter in Zamość took place on October 16th, 1942, when the few Jews remaining in the New Town were ordered by the Germans to move to the nearby village of Izbica. On October 18th, 1942, the Germans officially announced Zamość Judenrein – a town “free of Jews”. Most of the Zamość Jews were deported from Izbica to the death camps at Bełżec, Sobibór and Majdanek. Only a few managed to flee, and, thanks to the help of Poles, to survive the war. At the time, small groups of Jewish prisoners were still kept in labor camps in Zamość. In 1943, all of them were killed or deported to Majdanek.

Only about 50 Jews from Zamość survived the Shoah; a few hundred of the Zamość Jews survived the war in the Soviet Union. In 1945, just after the liberation of Poland, only 224 Jews lived in the town, and it is hard to estimate how many of them originally came from Zamość. As a result of post-war migration from Poland, in 1947 their number shrank to only 5 people. The Jewish survivors from Zamość and their descendants are now associated within the Israeli Organization of Zamość Jewry, the Vicinity and their Descendants which currently has about 2 000 members.

Traces of Presence

Today numerous objects still remind us of the rich history of the Zamość Jews. Soon after the war, a monument built of broken matzevot was erected to commemorate the murdered Jews of Zamość at the Jewish cemetery in Prosta St., razed to the ground by the Germans. The synagogue in the New Town (32 Gminna St.) still exists, however, it has been transformed into a kindergarten and a part of it is used as a Protestant church. The former mikvah (5 Ludwika Zamenhofa St.) was home to a jazz club until recently and the building of the kehilla (11 Ludwika Zamenhofa St.) has remained empty for several years. The most interesting and valuable monument of Jewish culture in Zamość is the Renaissance synagogue in the Old City.

| ROBERT KUWAŁEK



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