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## Foreword

Urban life has always epitomized diversity, encompassing as it does a variety of types, voices, and cultures. Yet, each place, develops a specific character from the historical accretion of its contributing interactive partners; that is how it becomes a particular place. Plurality has always produced strife and tensions among groups. But what is unique to our modern history is that these tensions unleashed the vicious destruction and uprooting of people with the consequent loss of their culture. Sometimes it is only through archival material and the memories of others that we can reconstruct the older life styles and the extraordinary contributions of that destroyed past. Jews and Lublin experienced both historical intimacy and abysmal destruction. For Jews, as injured people and culture, the loss has been devastating. We and many others argue that the loss is injurious to mankind.

This book is about a Lublin that is not to be found in any atlas: a Lublin built 800 years ago, whose character as a city was defined by the various people that have lived in it. To understand the Lublin we refer to, and what it is that no longer exists, one needs to exercise imagination. But, of course, it is not merely a matter of walking the city's streets and conjuring up what might have been in these streets in the past; instead, we need to activate our imaginations and re-create, from the palimpsest of the past, what and how was there. The life of the city today is very different from what this book recounts. We rely on the work of historians, sociologists, folklorists, and anthropologists – experts in literature and memories – to construct a picture that has some depth and vibrancy about what is gone: Lublin's Jewish past.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century can be characterized as a century that has attempted to homogenize society: one people, one language, one religion, one idea, one ideology. Both Nazism during World War II and totalitarian Communism represent two enormous governmental machines that sought to eliminate people, destroy diversity and rewrite history. Millions of Jews – the vast majority of its members – and their culture, had been living in these lands. They were deeply rooted. In Lublin, their voices and activity were part of the music of these streets for centuries. Their energy fueled the life of these regions. They lived with others – as best as they could – for almost a millennium. But they were viciously uprooted from most of Europe. What had been home became hell and much was severed: lives, culture, faith, hope, and humanity. The Majdanek extermination camp, just a bus ride away from the city, remains one of the tombstones of that destruction.

But what did Jews construct in Lublin? What did they have? No monument attests to their creativity, to the social solutions they invented or to the cultural expressions of their thinking in literature, politics, religion, and civic life. The city with its old city center is a small historical jewel; but one needs to imagine so much to see and understand that Jewish past intertwined with the life of all Lubliners. What was it like here a few hundred years ago? How did people coexist? How did it sound when Jews and Poles and others all spoke in public places? How did they argue and fight and how did they resolve their issues?

When I first visited Lublin in 2002 to gather and organize my materials in preparation for writing about the Jewish past, I encountered young people that were struggling with the past they had inherited: the city they were left with and the silence they were handed. These young pioneers – as I see them – were working to imagine the obliterated past; they struggled to conceive and recognize the Jewish contribution to their history in order to be able to understand ‘their’ past. Some ached from the slaughter that was staged in those streets. But their work revealed to me that, out of that past, they sought to imagine a future for themselves. They dreamt of rebuilding their world based on values of decency, respect to others, and the recognition of Jewish memory.

This book is an invitation to walk that past, to acquaint the reader with something of that lost world. The book harbors a hope that in imagining that past and dignifying the efforts of those who built it, it can serve as a prelude to imagining other futures. I am grateful that the Center for Jewish Studies at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University and the Brama Grodzka – Teatr NN Center in Lublin have undertaken the publication of this book. We can only trust that it will help build better futures.<sup>1</sup>

*Adina Cimet*

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<sup>1</sup> This book was first published as part of a more comprehensive package of educational materials, known as EPYC, the Educational Program in Yiddish Culture, for the study of life and culture of Eastern European Jewry, up to WWII, developed under the sponsorship of the YIVO Institute in New York. EPYC is designed for teachers and older high school students. The educational package has also a website titled “*When these streets heard Yiddish*” which includes the complete educational materials in PDF format. Some schools are using the materials already, but the publication of the entire curriculum is still pending. I would like to thank the team from the Brama Grodzka Center who worked closely with me, especially Marta Kubiszyn and Marcin Skrzypek who became friends in their own right. The first person from Lublin that I met in relation to this project was Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska: she opened her heart and the city to me, and she became a colleague and friend that has only continued to open doors. Her diligence and thoroughness in seeing this publication to its completion elicits my heartfelt gratitude and profound respect.



## Introduction: migration and settlement

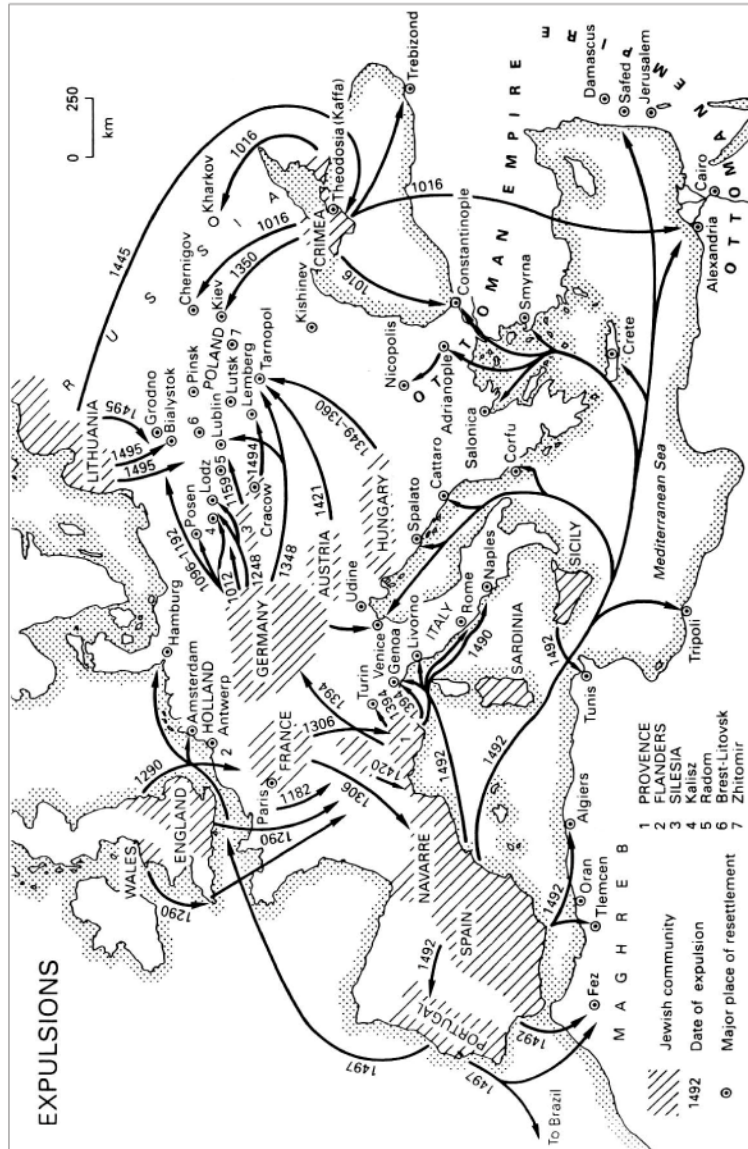
All historical periods have witnessed migrations and resettlements. At the turn of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Jews returned to Northern Europe. Although they had been there when those lands were part of the Roman Empire, their traces disappeared once the Empire dissolved. Much of history concerns accounts of who controlled the lands, the activities carried out within, and even the thinking of the people who inhabited a given space. Thus it should not be surprising if Jews were among those that attempted to gain some control. Unexpectedly, that was not the case. We know that they had at times a tenuous control at best, but in their imagination, they were not potential contenders for control.

Different legends in Jewish folklore attempt to explain the origins of the Jewish settlement in Poland, and it is interesting to see what Jews themselves thought of these possibilities. One legend, recognizing Jewish presence at the very beginning of Polish settlement, suggests that at the time a dispute broke out in the capital, Kruszwica, concerning who should be king. The people finally agreed that the first man to enter the town the following morning should be the main ruler. Abraham Prokhovnik [Pol. Prochownik], a Jew, wandered into town early the next day, and thus became king. But he remained king for only one day, because he and the Jews persuaded the Poles to choose one of their own for the position.

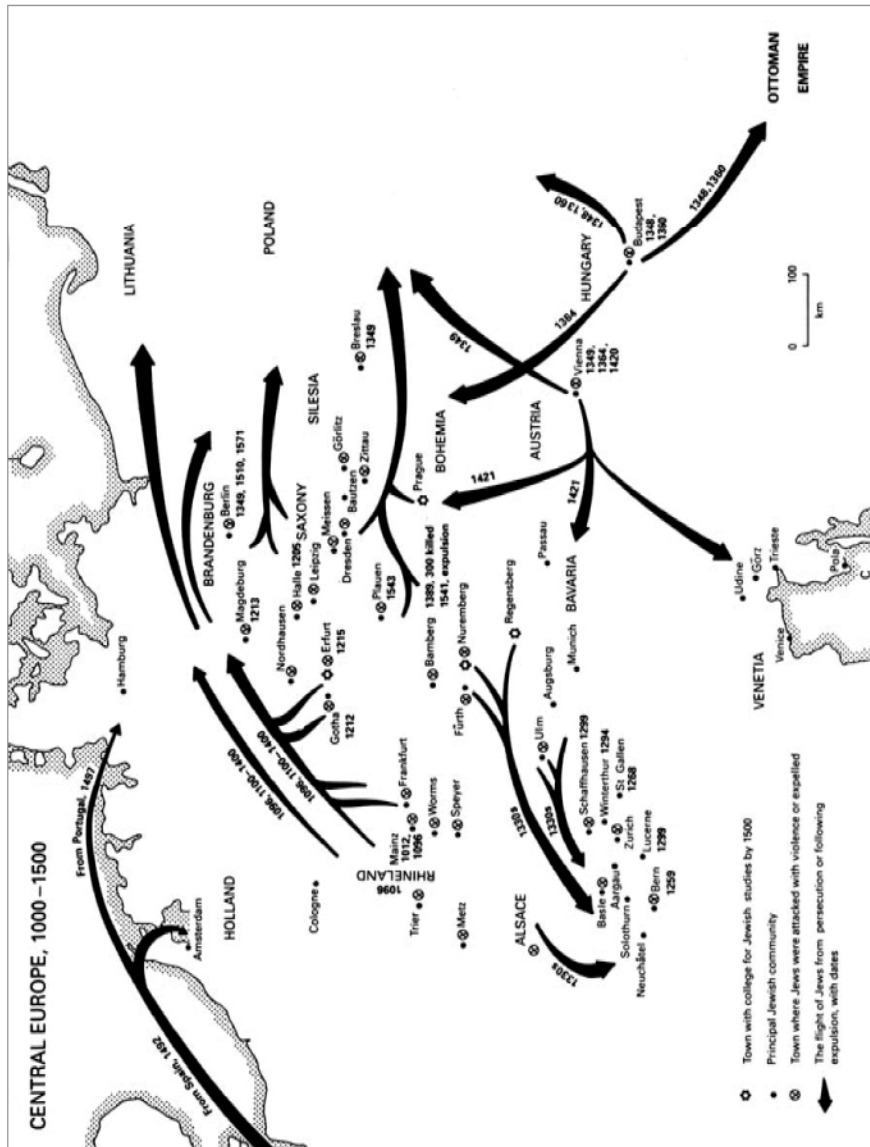
Abraham Prokhovnik's name does not provide clues to locate Jews in Poland at that time: "Prokhovnik" means 'powder merchant', [*proch* is gunpowder in Polish] and that is not an item that was available then. Nevertheless, the legend suggests that Jews were unable to see themselves as real contenders for power, as full legitimate members of society, even when they seem to have been also early settlers. Reflecting this feeling long after they were settled, Jews continually expressed "gratitude" to the Poles, and asked for "permission" to stay in the region. For many centuries, non-Catholics were prohibited here from holding public office, a ban that affected all minorities in the territory. However, the folkloric story of a Jew's "refusal" to lead reflected political reality. Jewish folkloric imagery furthered the prevailing societal arrangements and did not challenge it either.

Another legend links the word Poland as pronounced in Hebrew (Polin) with its homonym Po-lin, meaning "will rest here." Jews perhaps felt that they could settle in these regions at the same time that they repeatedly tried to convince others that they legitimately belonged. The land was organized into principalities, each with its own set of laws. There were as many as 16 of these entities. When Jews arrived or settled as a group, they were often backed by charters,





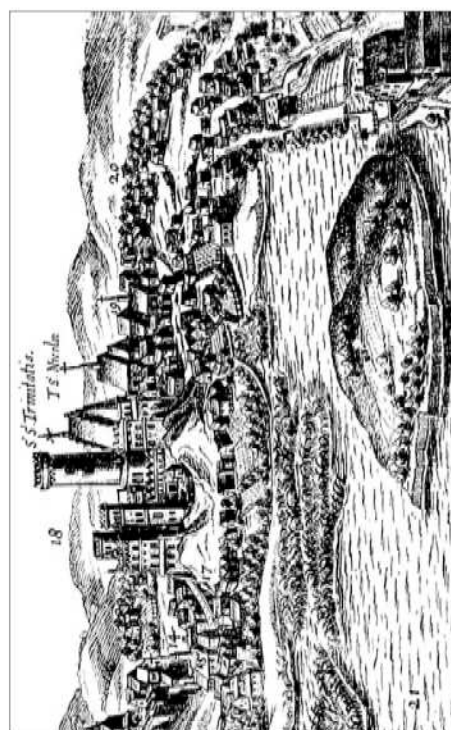
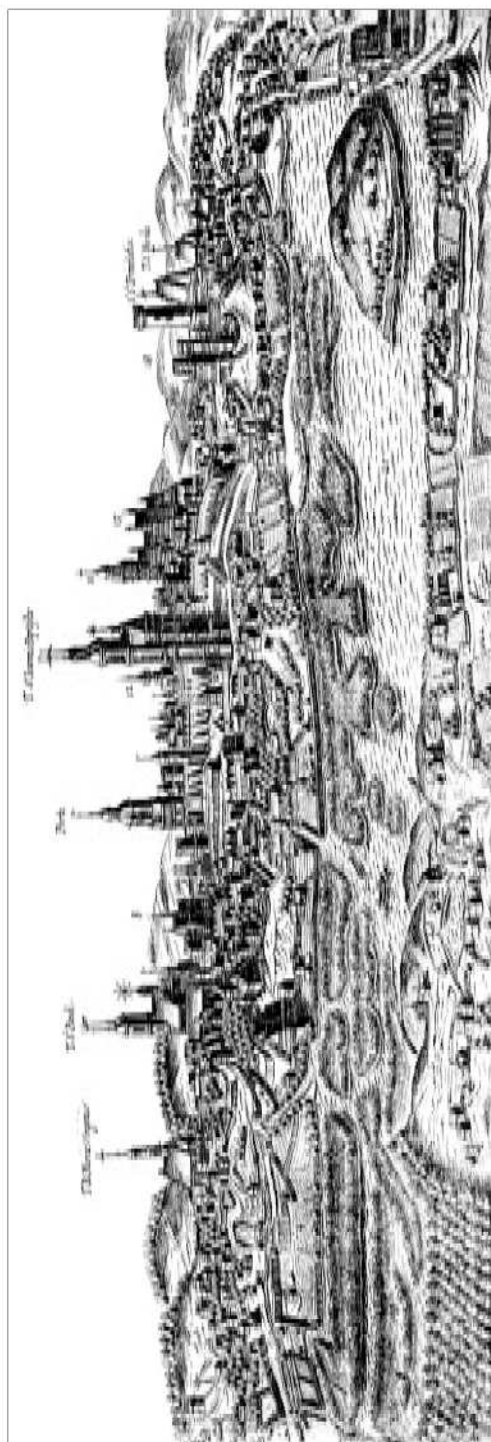
Jewish expulsions and migrations in Europe.  
 Map from Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Atlas of Jewish History*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 91



Jewish expulsions and migrations in Europe.  
 Map from Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Atlas of Jewish History*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 102

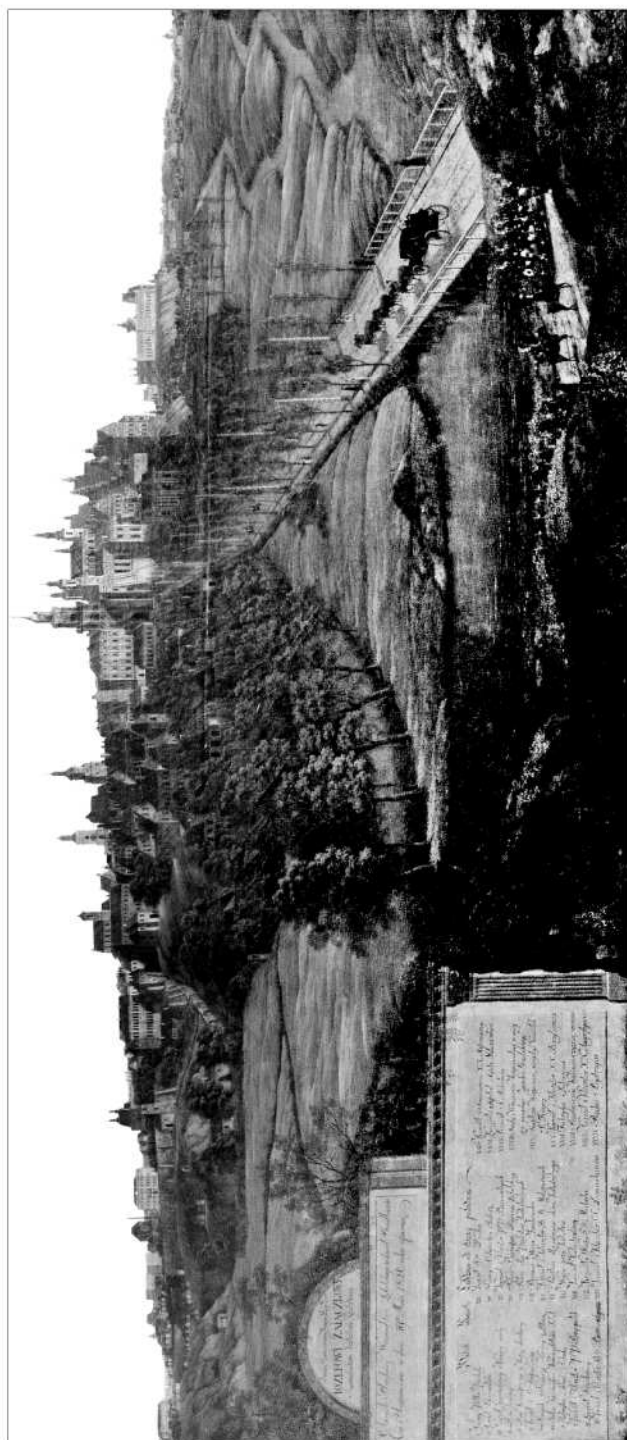
quasi-legal invitations that granted them permission to settle in a particular place. While negotiations among the inhabitants about who could settle where were constant, Jews often referred to the charters granting them privileges to the nobles they encountered. They also used them whenever conflicts emerged with the local populations, who quickly and persistently identified the Jews as outsiders.

A permanent Jewish population in Poland is known to exist since the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Jews emigrated from the west (Germany, Bohemia and Moravia), where they had been connected and separate from the Sephardic Jewry, able to develop and contribute to Jewish culture with their interpretations of it. Their movement towards the east coincided with the interest of the Polish rulers to populate their vast dominions. Poland then got its early Jews as refugees that came from the Rhine and Provence. Like all refugees, Jews brought their local traditions, their languages and a sense of distinction with them. Most were poor, and psychologically fearful. But the Polish nobles invited them and, once a 'privilege' or concession was issued to them, their settlement had legitimacy. There is a story of a pluralistic experiment in which they maintained and developed their own ethnic culture in distinctive ways not often seen in history. While most minorities try to adapt by merging into the surrounding culture, the Jewish community sought integration without assimilation. It is to the story of what these Jews built over the next 500 years that we turn our attention.



Lublin in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A fragment of a copperplate engraving by G. Braun and F. Hogenberg from the atlas of European cities of 1618 and its enlarged fragment showing the Jewish section of Podzamcze (settlement outside castle walls). From the collection of the Lopaciński Regional Public Library in Lublin





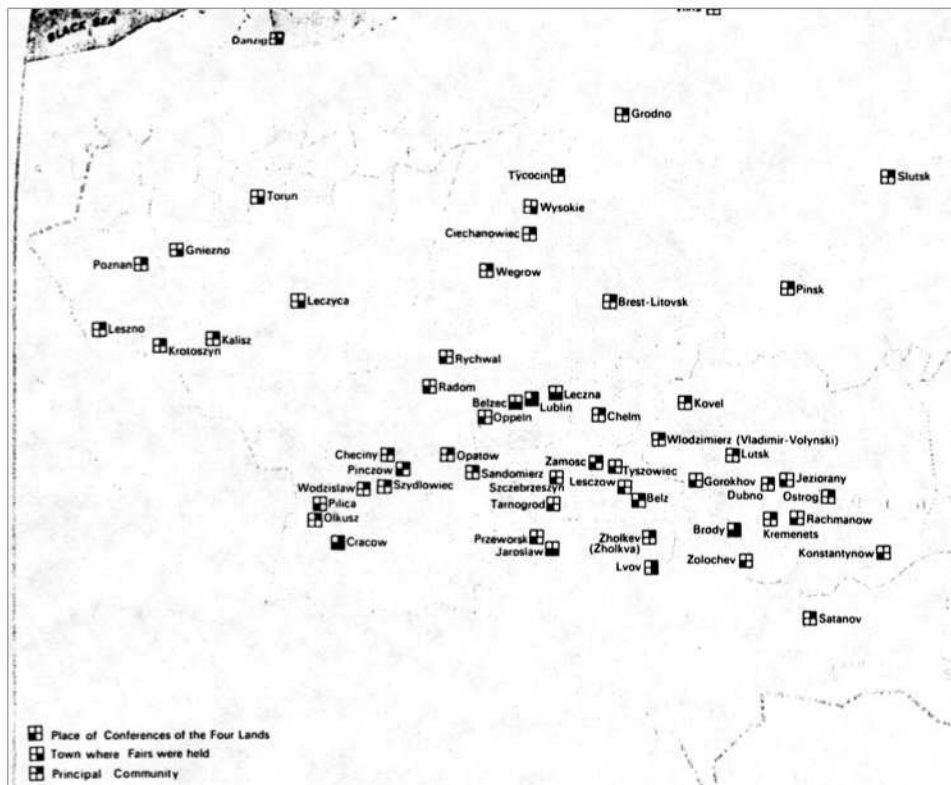
A fragment of Filip Dąbek's painting *General Zajęczek Entering Lublin in 1826* and its enlarged fragment showing the Jewish section of Podzamcze. Displayed in the Town Hall in Lublin



## The Jewish City of Lublin

Lublin presents a historical microcosm of the Jewish community in Poland. It became a center of commerce, politics, education and culture for Jews. Living arrangements were varied and complex, and were often subject to the vagaries of political power and individual negotiation.

Lublin is in today's Poland as a hub of a trade route connecting far into the east and much into the west of the region. To the north, it has a very old castle, beyond it an affluent of a river, and a hill offering natural protection. Like other old cities, Lublin was a walled city, in this case with four gates. The present castle is from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but has an original chapel and tower dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.



Market fairs. Map from Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Atlas of Jewish History*. London: Routledge, 1994





The Grodzka Gate, shown here, separated the old city from the Jewish district. Photo of the Grodzka Gate from *Heritage Trail of the Lublin Jews*, 2002. Photo Marta Kubiszyn

Poland developed many important settlements. Small cities, villages, towns, feudal private towns and royal owned towns, each offer us a part of the history of the country and these particular people. What makes Lublin attractive as a subject of our study is its Jewish importance at many levels. Economically, it was the center of regional markets. It was also a royal town in which several royal legal departments were housed. The castle was the residence of the starostas, representatives of the royal authority to whom Jews were accountable. In a parallel fashion, Lublin was the home of the broadest of Jewish political organizations: the Council of Lands. This council was the dominant institution within a large pyramid of communal organizations (*kehillot*); it incorporated at times three, four



The Cracow Gate connected the old city to the western outskirts of the city. A pre-war postcard by Jan Bulhak, 1924. Courtesy of the Brama Grodzka Center

and even five lands (regions) as far as Lithuania today. Its importance and complexity will become clear only later. Lublin had recognized *yeshivot* (houses of learning) as well as various legal institutions. There were other important Jewish centers in Poland at the time of the golden period of Lublin: Kraków, Lwów, and Poznań. But, although neither the largest Jewish center nor permanently the most economically powerful, Lublin became a metropolis for Poland, the recruiting center for Jews from nearby settlements as well as from the hinterlands.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century document states that the city of Lublin was known with the Hebrew expression "*Ir Va'em B'Israel*" (City and mother of Israel). The Hebrew term comes from a biblical passage in which a center town is seen as spawning other surrounding smaller settlements. The fact that Lublin earned this title conveys not only the importance of the center but the respect that such a center com-



The Ir V'em phenomenon allowed Lublin to grow as a Jewish center, while towns on its periphery depended upon the structures of Lublin. This phrase (lit. a city and a mother) is used to describe the relationship between larger and smaller cities. During the period of study, smaller villages and towns were dependent upon the larger villages for a variety of services. A large city is referred to as a "mother-city," while its dependent villages are referred to as its "daughters." While the term was originally applied to cities in old Israel, this phrase was applied as well to cities in the Diaspora, including Lublin. In this case, Lublin was referred to as the mother city, for instance, while the smaller, neighboring town of Lubartow would be referred to as its daughter. Such use of this term implies dependence on Lublin by the towns of the Lublin region, not only politically and administratively, but also socially and religiously. This theme will be examined more thoroughly later. Map copyright PPWK S.A.

mandated at a particular time. The term is accurate for a city that played a "motherly" role in the growth of peripheral smaller cities by being the center of economic and cultural life at the time. By the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Lublin region encompassed 15 royal towns. These included: Lublin itself, Kazimierz Dolny, Ostrów, Chełm, Hrubieszów, Tarnogród, Izbica, and Tyszowce, to mention a few of the most important ones.

Different sources allow us a glimpse into how and where Jews lived in Lublin. The Jewish quarter was established in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Later, the Jewish section relocated to the foot of the castle. There were many different residential arrangements; we have documentation for some, while others are inferred from what we know about occupations, taxes, home ownership, and special quarters or residential streets. These tend to describe close quarters, with many families living together. Some living arrangements required Jews to live totally segregated in the outskirts of a city. Given the dynamics of demographic growth and social changes, these living arrangements were in constant flux.

The latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of another urban phenomenon in Poland: the "Jewish town," where 40 to 60% or more of the total population was Jewish (a *shtetl*). Part of this development was the result of demographic changes. However, for early settlements (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century) with Jewish concentration, historians have often concluded that Jews were either forcefully segregated by the Polish nobility or that their own authorities, their rabbis, reinforced this kind of separation. The traditional method of insuring solidarity, geographical consolidation (living together), may have re-emerged as needed and logical in time of violence and tensions. But from the very beginning, Jews found it was easier to protect themselves and their identity when they lived close to one another: it made Jewish religious life style possible, it made the production

of a common culture possible, and it was easier to collect taxes. The religious requirement to have a quorum for prayers (a *minyan*, ten male adults) three times a day, for instance, dictated the need for proximity. Proximity also allowed the Jewish authorities to enforce a style of life that required the close supervision of traditions and religious precepts. Yet, some of the community experienced life in many places and traveled far. No matter how united Jews lived among themselves, they always had contact with non-Jews. But for most, living far from centers and being a small group had its consequences: prescriptions coming from afar – whether from their own authorities or the government’s – concerning how to live and what to do with whom were often ignored or not strictly enforced by either group. Therefore, there always were simultaneous life styles within the group.

Jews and non-Jews intermingled in daily activities. In fact, the lower the economic status of Jews in small towns or settlements, the more likely they were to have contact with non-Jews. Even though there was segregation, historians have established that smaller towns allowed for mixing of populations (Jews with non-Jews) even when there were special living quarters for the Jews. The smaller the group living in an urban setting, the more they depended on each other. Jews and non-Jews conducted transactions of trade and credit. There are reports of sexual promiscuity, on occasion ignored, and very often sternly punished by the elders. And, in keeping with their surroundings, there were also Jewish thieves among the local ones, however infrequently these may appear. These behaviors suggest the integrative exchanges that occurred.

But to be and feel protected, Jews needed to live in an area surrounded by a significant number of Jews. This urban style implied a somewhat strict economic allocation of resources to help maintain separation and ensure a flourishing culture. Consequently, the living arrangements in old Poland, now seem complex, varied, and difficult to generalize. There were private noble towns, villages, and smaller settlements that developed within the boundaries of the noble estates; there were also royal or crown towns owned by the King, and Church-owned towns and villages. Although Jews had special charters (settlement and work permits) based on the Kalisz Statutes authorized by Casimir III the Great, they remained for a long time under the direct control of the specific landowner magnate who hosted them, or who invited them to settle in a specific royal town.

Life was not easy for these immigrant, minority populations. After Jews had been invited to live in a royal town, the local authority (*wojewoda*) often reversed the legitimacy of the Charter by producing an edict that limited Jewish freedoms for settlement, confining Jews to the outskirts of the town. Although Jews were invited to settle in private towns and in royal towns, there were groups already there who wanted to oust them. When authorities in the royal towns acceded to this trend, there was a considerable increase in the Jewish population of the private towns nearby. Jews entered regions that made them “belong” to the noble owners. As this situation progressively arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, elders

of the communities realized that the privileges issued were not absolute or perfect guarantees for their rights. All Jews, whether they were in royal towns or in private ones, continuously worked to attain additional privileges. So using the older basic privileges, Jews always tried to reaffirm their rights with and from the people in power in a specific moment at a specific locale. Legal precedent did not insure a sense of belonging and tranquility.

Jews represented both a demographic reserve to be distributed among the large latifundia or landholdings as well as a trustworthy sector that would be grateful and perhaps loyal for its participation in the workings of society. After frequent population losses due to epidemics, wars, Cossack uprisings, fires, and other disasters, Jews often searched for new locations to settle and work. As they migrated, they worked hard to renew or obtain privileges that would attest to their new status. Once established, they served in a variety of roles: as caretakers, representatives for the owners or governors in outpost areas, co-participants in the defense of the towns in case of threat or war, helpers in maintaining the fortifications, and as active members of the military. Still, there was frequent opposition to their communal privileges, especially from those who identified them with the dominant groups for whom they worked. The Church and the burghers often wanted them banished altogether. Thus, although there were good reasons to have the Jewish population be part of the societal structure, some found it useful and important to keep Jews as socially invisible and unobtrusive as possible.

But reality was always more complex than the wishes of a particular faction. Even in the more segregated situations, rules were often set in ways that allowed Jews and others to circumvent them. For instance, Jews were forced to live in the outskirts of a city and yet were allowed in the city periodically, on market days or during fair seasons. It was then that people rented space, exchanged goods, and forged business agreements. The periodic reactivation of the statutes justifying segregation together with the periodic need to grant settlement charters, suggest a clear general ambivalence toward Jews.

### Charters: the rules of how and where to live

**Charters were the official documents offered or achieved by the Jews from the authorities. They described the conditions under which a particular population, activity or trade could be conducted. They were used as documents to either support or challenge interactive living arrangements.**

Poland was often seen as a heaven for Jews. Despite the uneasy accommodation, foreign writers on occasion referred to Poland as *Paradisus Judeorum* (Jewish Paradise), reflecting envy or criticism rather than just mere fact. While regulations segregating Jews from the rest of the population were intended to limit Jewish economic advancement, loopholes allowed Jews and others to circum-

vent the rules (like allowing Jews to come into town during market days). There were strong interests – especially among the nobility, King and some townspeople – to further the economic relationship with the Jews because it was profitable for them. Townspeople and burghers, however, often felt threatened by the Jews, considering them competitors for the social products of the time. By challenging the market rules that the guilds guarded, Jews undermined the power of the burghers, and were thus a force to contend with.

Charters were used as legal documents but they were not used only for Jews and other minorities. The most famous charter aimed at granting privileges to the Christian population, for instance, known as *privilegia exclusionis "non tolerandis Judeais"* [exclusionary privilege of non toleration of Jews] was the most severe legal enunciation of this thinking, although it is difficult to determine how and where it was applied. The Polish kingdoms were divided into different territorial units endowed with distinct legal statuses. Once the kingdom became a constitutional monarchy, all documents had some validity everywhere, while the old dominions retained their internal autonomy to some extent. In the debates concerning whether to uphold or limit a rule, the famous charters and their counterparts, the *non-tolerandis Judeais* documents, were mentioned as precedents to be used to either limit or permit Jewish movement in a particular territory or city. For example, municipal jurisdictions often limited Jewish participation or living permits, while nobles allowed Jews into their towns. Often, permits allowed Jews into an area only temporarily. The system of combined prohibitions, restrictions, and flexible exceptions, allowed Jews to periodically elude the limitations of settlement; i.e., Jewish traders could work for a period of three days, which allowed them to participate in the fairs that were the major economic activity of a region.

Individual Jewish communities often attempted to negotiate restrictions of settlement, thereby removing the larger and more ominous threat of expulsion that loomed over them. These restrictions represented a legal code that people – magnates, impoverished nobles, burghers, and Church representatives – used to further their political and economic goals. These anti-Jewish attempts were often combined with the Church's anti-Jewish tendencies to allow the mobs to express their frustration against a specific group of people. Jews were therefore made the target of their grievances. The attacks were often only threats; but at other times, Jews were convicted, regardless of evidence, and blamed for crimes that were interpreted as religious rituals. Jews were sometimes driven out of towns following accusations of ritual murders, and they were almost always forbidden to live in towns owned by the Catholic Church. For the Church, Jews always remained an alien and antagonistic group, "subversive of the *res publica christiana*."

### Segregation and interaction: the parapolis

**A legally sanctioned urban style for a particular living arrangement with the minority, the “parapolis” created an homogeneous setting for a particular group. While it allowed for the flourishing of cultural particularities, it masked the legal discriminatory policies that were essential for its implementation.**

In a few centers, Jews obtained the “right” of *De non tolerandis Christianis*, i.e., the right to live without Christians in their midst. This was the case in Kazimierz near Kraków in 1568, Poznań in 1633, and in all Lithuanian communities in 1645. In royal towns from which Jews were largely excluded but allowed only as a special case or as an exception that confirmed the rule, Jews tended to live in specified areas that were purchased through privileges, creating a city next to the city. Such was the case in Lublin. Segregated and relegated to the outskirts, Jews built a town for themselves, the parapolis, as we will call this city outside the city. This allowed Jews to adhere to the rules while benefiting from the adjacent large town from which they were banned. Strategies and negotiations to break into the “real” town to expand their economic activities became part of their daily goals.

Tax collection documents from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century reveal that there were about 170 Jewish communities in Poland at that time. Jews had settled either in the countryside, or in villages or towns, wherever they could or were allowed to. Although Jews as a group arrived in larger numbers as an immigrant group, the centuries that had passed had given them longevity in the location but not a sense of belonging. How and where they could settle was indeed an issue for them as well as for the population at large. The charters granting settlement privileges had great importance to Jews, to those who issued them, and to those who looked for ways to abrogate the invitations.

The very wealthy magnates or very rich nobles often controlled large land holdings, some of which included between two to ten manors, a town or two, more than twenty villages, and major residences for the owner and his general manager. About 70% of Jews in Poland lived in the areas, villages and towns of these very wealthy magnates, invited to serve as lieutenants for them, to increase the population density in their claimed territories, and to function as loyal caretakers, overseers, and providers of certain services needed within the territory. Jews were also expected to serve as effective tenant farmers, lessors, etc. The generic name that was applied to this activity became “arendar.”

Royal cities, built to satisfy the administrative needs of the King, who was the most powerful and wealthiest of the elite, also attracted Jews. These cities represented power and control, and were also major centers of economic activity. Lublin, strategically placed, became the center of a trade route connecting important and distant locations. In addition to being a hub for trade, it was a judicial center for the court system which negotiated and resolved conflicts between people and businesses. Jewish interest in being part of Lublin was therefore strong.

## Podzamcze, the “Parapolis” of Lublin

**The growth of Podzamcze, the Jewish parapolis of Lublin, illustrates the potential and pitfalls of a segregated community. Jews had relative autonomy within its borders, but were also excluded from the daily commercial and political transactions that took place in the center of Lublin.**

Jews settled next to the royal city of Lublin by invitation. Although transient Jews in Lublin are mentioned in documents dating to 1316, the first settlement that mentions Jews in the Lublin area is “Piaski Żydowskie” (Jewish Sands) in 1336. This settlement was allowed by King Casimir III the Great. But it was only in 1455, on the outskirts of Lublin, next to the castle, that Jews were granted a permit to settle in an identified area; it became known as Podzamcze. It was there that Jewish life began next to the royal city. The site was probably wetland, not attractive to anyone, yet close enough to the castle so that Jews felt they would be able to enter the city if they so requested. They were also close to a river, and they were made responsible for protecting the waters of the river; this justified their being allowed to settle there. Land was given as property to some of them, and houses must have been built to accommodate a few families. Each unit probably housed three to four families.

The struggle to enter Lublin or to approach Lublin and benefit from the proximity to such an important center is amply documented. On many occasions, Jews petitioned and negotiated with the authorities to obtain accommodation with respect to living/working permits. But the tension concerning the status of Jews was constant; unable to attain an unequivocal legitimate status, they lived with uncertainty and fear for centuries. As late as 1780, King Stanisław August Poniatowski ordered the expulsion of Jews from Lublin. This expulsion did not take place until 1795 as a result of the delaying efforts of the Jewish leadership who sought to overturn the order. Yet, by then, Lublin had been annexed by Austria, and Jews as well as others, were to face issues of legitimacy again.

In Lublin, individual Jewish families arrived as either Jewish intermediaries or special business contacts. At first, Jews found it difficult to stay; but later, settlement for newcomers proved to be impossible. The region was too densely populated. Although Jews used to refer to the two charters that offered them recognition and protection – the one from Prince Boleslaw in Kalisz of 1264, and the other from King Casimir IV in Kraków, issued in 1453 – specific new charters and ordinances were issued by nobles or representatives of the king who oversaw the settlement. Eventually, Jews were granted the opportunity to settle in Podzamcze, outside the walls of Lublin. Jews could therefore call it the “Jewish City,” or “Jewish Lublin,” taking advantage of the proximity to the city, and being able to either break the rules or circumvent them, entering the city at times of economic fairs and other such events.

The designated area given to Jews eventually spread from the river Czechówka in the north around the castle as far as Krawiecka Street – today no lon-



ger there. It then included the streets of Jateczna, Zamkowa, Podzamcze, Krawiecka and Szeroka, the latter becoming the main center for Jewish institutions: synagogues, study houses, and the slaughterhouse. The road to the old cemetery, to which all identifications have been lost, was also in that section.

While Jews were protected by the Charter of Privileges given to them by the King, each specific region and royal town worked out its own set of rules. The fact that documents describing Jewish activity and occupations begin to appear in Lublin at this time, should not be taken as evidence of recent arrival or organization. On the contrary, it more realistically illustrates the complex lifestyle in place. The 1535 charter *De non tolerandis Judaeis* given to the people of Lublin against Jews ensured that none of the latter would settle within the city of Lublin. Interestingly, then, two positions were enacted at the same time: a welcoming charter allowing Jews to settle outside of the city, and a “charter” allowing non-Jews to live without Jews. As simultaneous messages, even when they survive as remnants of a feudal society, we must examine the contradictory meanings that they conveyed: while those in power had the ability and will to open or close a physical space to an incoming group, the actual decision of whether to open or close the space was subject to the contingencies of those specific groups who made their on-site analysis and decisions. Thus, at a particular moment, a region could and did support “toleration” of the Jews, while at the same time, somewhere else, the decision was the exact opposite one. Because “privileges” depended on the actions of those in power towards Jews or other minorities, the granting of an allowance was always a “special temporary case” among the gamut of possible choices of the time.

Different groups were involved in arguing the case for toleration or against it. Church officials, burghers in the noble towns and villages, and burghers in the royal towns were the key players in the debate on whether Jews should or should not be accepted under the “*non tolerandis*” statute. The irony was that Jews living “outside” the settlements, whose territory could theoretically be expanded ad infinitum, felt it to be constrained and tight. They sought acceptance into a world from which they were excluded.

In 1568, Jews got, for their densely populated parapolis, a *non tolerandis christianis*, the privilege parallel to the one that limited their movement within Lublin itself. By then, Jews were prominent and autonomous enough within the life of the city to exclude any “foreign” body within their quarter. In 1532, we encounter a *Doctor Judaerum Lublinensium*, Rav Sholem Shachne, leading the Jewish life there. Shachne was a very prominent rabbi, son of a prominent merchant, and a highly acclaimed leader in the community. The title of Doctor conferred recognition from the general society to a Jewish representative. This type of achievement could not have occurred if the community had not already had there and elsewhere in Poland, prior to their settling in Lublin, a network of complex institutions structuring their cultural life. We therefore have evidence of the

internal complexity of the Jewish community and of the fact that this was recognized by the society at large.

### The rise of Jewish Lublin

**The urban growth of organizations and institutions is historically unique but also illustrative of a trend: the definition of Jews seen as the institutions necessary for cultural survival.**

While other cities where Jews lived were larger and more important than Lublin was at the time (Lwów, Kraków, Poznań, Jarosław, among others, were known as centers of Jewish life), it was Lublin that became the real hegemonic center, and the heart for Polish Jewry of the time. How that was achieved is part of our story.

Once Jews were granted a permit (for which they had to pay taxes) to stay in the newly formed parapolis, other permits to organize their life followed. In 1555 land adjacent to what was called "Podzamcze" was either given to Jews or bought by them, to establish kitchens, a hospital and the foremost element for a stable, viable Jewish community: a cemetery. Two years later, Dr. Yitzkhok May bought land with an additional permit to build a pool (*mikvah*, or ritual bath house). Within ten years, he had built a synagogue and a yeshiva in those lands. While in early 1550 there were 24 Jewish homes next to the castle, fifty years later, there were 66. In the city itself, we know of four Jews living within the city walls: the wealthy Yoske Shachnowicz, a land owner and representative *shtadlan* (political negotiator); a businessman, Shabden; and in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Chaim (Felix) Vitalis and Marek Nepl. These were the only known exceptions to the rule that limited Jews to the outskirts of the city.

Records from 1555 report the granting of additional land to the Jews. King Zygmunt August gave Jews three land extensions: one adjacent to the house of Tzvi Doktorowicz up to the river Czechówka, to be used as a kosher slaughterhouse and butcher stores; the second one, located close to the castle mount, in close proximity to the old Jewish cemetery, was to serve as a new cemetery plot; the third, adjacent to Dr. Yitzkhok May's house, was intended as a hospital site (*hekdesch*). Two years later, the same government official from Lublin gave Dr. May an orchard, a piece of land with construction rights. Eventually a series of institutions important for Jews were built there: the *Maharshal* (these are letters representing the name of the rabbi in charge) synagogue, a yeshiva, etc. Soon, a single street had three synagogues.

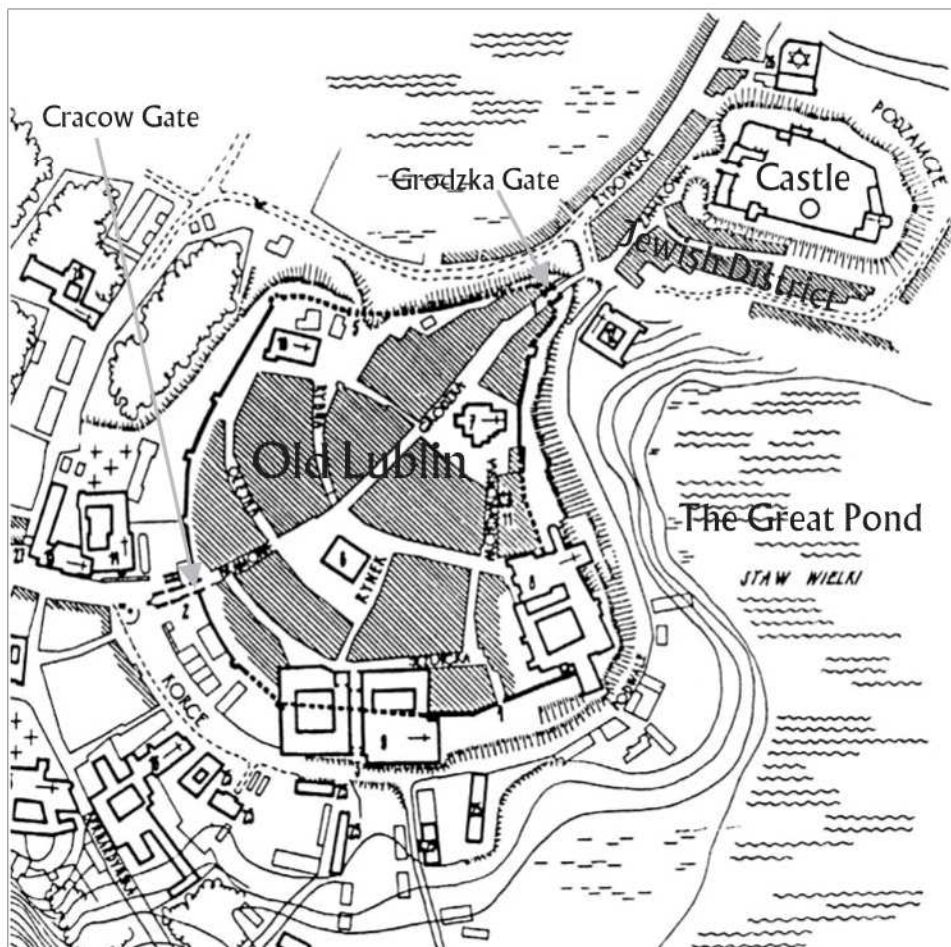
By 1600, new permits, offered or bought, allowed Jews to build and own stores of diverse kinds in their parapolis. (The area of the parapolis comprised what later became Jateczna [Butcher's Stall street], Zamkowa [Castle street], Podzamcze, Krawiecka [Tailors' street], and Szeroka [Broad street] in contemporary Lublin). Szeroka was the widest and most important street of the parapolis.

Not all of these streets remained intact with the development of the town and certainly after the destruction by the Nazis. In the sixteenth century, they housed the most important Jewish organizations: the yeshivot, synagogues (like the Maharshal, the Parnas Shul, and Hirsh Doktorowicz's Shul), the Lubliner Chozé Kloyz, and guild synagogues, the ritual bath house (*mikvah*), the slaughterhouse, and stores. Other organizations located themselves on other streets of the parapolis, but Szeroka was the main thoroughfare of the city, housing the offices of all important local and regional organizations.

Although the *De non tolerandis Judaeis* charter offered to satisfy the unhappy burghers of Lublin who feared competition from the Jewish presence there, Jews obtained a permit to take part in the Lublin market during the city's fair. During those weeks, Jews rented stores, housing, and warehouses from the non Jewish population (the Church, the nobles, and any willing burgher), thereby conducting business within the city. The intricacies of this interactive economy that maintained both some geographical separation as well as some temporary economic and political integration, appear to have provided a *modus vivendi* for all.

In 1655, together with the internal turmoil that the country experienced with the Cossack invasions, a fire consumed most of the wooden buildings of Podzamcze. After absorbing some of the initial shock, a new rebuilding effort met with some success following many years of terrible impoverishment that coincided with the beginning of the decline of Lublin as a center and of Jewish Lublin as a commanding hub for Jews.

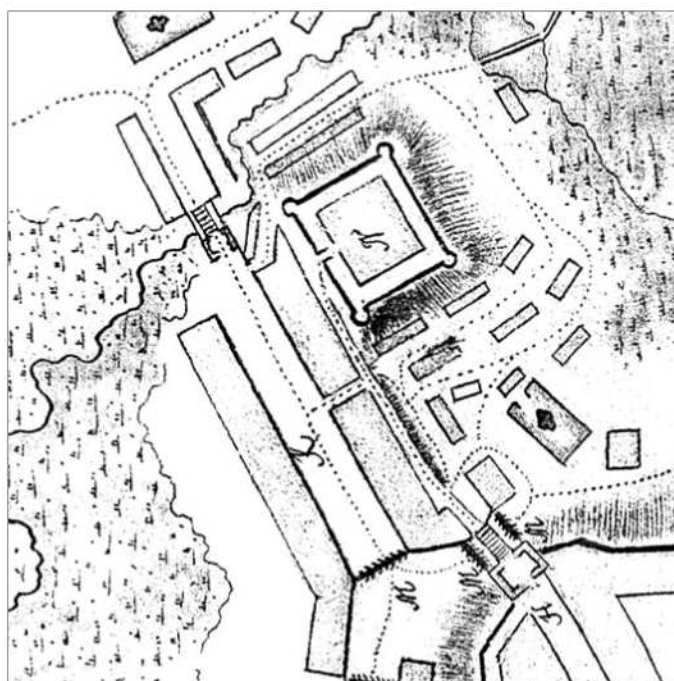
The specific Jewish life that Jews created for themselves is not only interesting but also unique, given the Polish context. Within a few years, Lublin took on an effervescence that became legendary. There is no parallel between the scant information we have available today about the period and the complex organizations that these Jews created in a short period once they developed the parapolis in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. As both a judicial center and a commercial hub for local and international products, Lublin became a natural magnet for Jews seeking to take part in such activities. The ability of some of them to speak several languages while maintaining Yiddish as a lingua franca among themselves; their multiple connections and contacts; the wide network of support among themselves, as well as the trust they established with others, all made them appropriate allies in building and modernizing the market economy of the time.



Lublin in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, in: Henryk Gawarecki, Czesława Gawdzik, *Lublin: Krajobraz i architektura*, Lublin 1964, p. 26



Podzamcze in 1829. Szeroka Street and the Castle after its reconstruction in neo-Gothic style (1824–1826). From the collection of the Lopuski Regional Public Library in Lublin



Area around Szeroka Street on the city map of 1716. The former royal castle is visible. From the collection of the Lopuski Regional Public Library in Lublin



The old Jewish cemetery on Sienna Street, the *matzevah* of Sholem Shachne (d. 1558), the founder of the first yeshiva in Lublin. From the Photo Archives at Beit Lochamei Hagetaot in Israel



## Street life and culture: the interwar years

At every stage of the history of Jewish Lublin we cannot help wishing we had more than words or pictures of the city and its Jewish life. Whether it was the medieval period, the modern period, or after the political partitions, we would have enjoyed seeing the past as if it were a film. We have imagined the place as we linked it to the remnants of daily life as it must have been experienced by Lublin's inhabitants at a particular point in time.

The interwar years represent the last historical period in the Poland of Eastern Europe that allows us to re-create Lublin's Jewish past. On the one hand, this should be less challenging than other periods: after all, we are speaking of a lifestyle that in historical time did not disappear so long ago. Yet, the gulf that separates us from that untouchable past, precisely because it seems so close to us, frustrates us even more. The knowledge that an entire lifestyle was erased from that land, and the reasons and conditions under which that obliteration took place, make it extremely difficult to address; but it is therefore imperative for us to recapture some of what was, to understand how and why it was destroyed, and to identify the social loss which the events entailed.

Many changes create an abyss between that society and our own, including technological advances in transportation, communication, electricity. Poland in the interwar period may appear to be a place from another era. Indeed, it was another era. That period ended not only because of the gradual changes that altered society and lifestyles, but because it was deliberately modified. We cling to it because for some of us it represents our cultural roots: the connecting chain of the ethnic/religious group. Yet, many others may also be interested in looking back. Studying that past is a way to look at humanity. With Poland as a microcosm, we encounter elements of both the best of the self-defined "great civilizing cultures of the west" in Europe, and their worst.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after WWI, the Poland that had ceased to exist with the partitions, was once again an entity on the world map. Russia had become a completely new type of state: following a revolution, it tried to create a new economic structure and offered an alternative to the west. A new world was taking shape, but not without violence. But nothing prepared people to envision the terrifying future that was gestating: totalitarianisms in two political guises.

The Holocaust that befell Jews, the result of the Nazi-Fascist ideology and practice, marked a break from all previous conceptions of reality. Today, far from that experience, we are still touched by it either directly, or indirectly. Because we live in a disenchanted world that has witnessed the annihilation of entire peoples as a possible fact of political life, we face a new intellectual task: to



remember, to try to understand, to study, to respect, to value, to discern, to criticize, to protest, and above all, to hold on to the basic moral and civic principles that any society needs in order to avoid the nightmarish destructive machine that men can create and history witnessed.

### Jewish life in the city

**Archival materials and personal testimonies allow us to reconstruct some aspects of everyday life in Lublin. The memoirs of a Lublin childhood capture the daily rhythms of life, as well as the values, joys, and ongoing dangers that shaped Jewish Lublin.**

As a young girl, Roza lived in Lubartowska Street, a long street full of well built, 4 to 5 story buildings. The street stands almost intact today; it was not bombed during the war. Today we can see the same buildings, the only obvious modification being the store-fronts, which have been modernized. The street abuts the old wall that surrounds the old city. More modern than Szeroka Street, which was at the heart of the old Jewish part of town, Lubartowska housed institutions, businesses and homes that ranged from middle class to poor, with a few wealthier families as well. In general, it was considered a little better than the very old, poorer center, yet not the best part of the city. Roza lived in #21. The buildings were often occupied by their owners, who lived on the ground floor or in the apartments just above. The higher the apartment, the cheaper it was. The “view” obtainable from the higher floors, now so treasured an amenity in our dense cities, was then a drawback: in the absence of elevators, people had to climb, and to carry everything upstairs, from water to groceries. The stairs were dangerous in winter, because some of the water spilled, making steps slippery, dirty, and icy.

Buildings were often known by the name of their one-time owners; Roza’s was known as “Khaim Katchermakher’s building.” The building had long been inherited by a daughter and sons, but the original name was maintained. Buildings numbered 19 and lower were in the direction of the market, which everybody visited. The buildings themselves were full of workshops and storefronts. Some of the stores were better stocked, but others were places where goods barely filled one shelf: a few candles, a few threads, a bottle of oil. The homes in Lubartowska in the 20s did not have electricity, something that started to change in the mid thirties. The roof or attic of the building, the *boydem*, was used by all tenants to hang clothes, but its use was restricted to those who had paid their rent on time, and that was a problem almost every month. In fact, Roza’s family had had to go to court twice to explain their delays. Much tenant-anger was directed at landlords, who were often not very charitable and lost their patience with the innumerable stories of their tenants’ excuses. The appearance in court

was very difficult: that day, Roza was wearing a newer coat (a hand-me-down) which the landlord interpreted as evidence of money misused.

Everybody knew one another in the building, some more, some less. Everybody knew the basic facts about everyone else, even about those who kept to themselves. Roza's neighbors included Itche the butcher; the Alters, with two children; a man that sold cheese and eggs and traveled to the villages to sell his products, while his wife managed a small storefront on the street; the Shwartz family, a Hasidic family whom everybody knew because the man of the house made a point of not taking the stairs when a woman or older girl was passing by, avoiding physical closeness to other females; the Nissenbaums, headed by a seller of cereals who eventually moved to a better building, #24, as soon as he could; the Perl family who sold clothes; Peske, the teacher, who also sold hay, and his sister, who lived with him and was known for her angry looks, loud voice, and for her tendency to strike children. On another floor, the Feyns were known for having a radio, a very precious item, the most wonderful form of home entertainment. The Papiroshikes family, as their name informed, sold cigarettes, and had three children: one went to Warsaw to study, another was a traveling salesman, and the youngest daughter was still in gymnasium, or high school. The Fishman family included a wonderful woman, a charitable soul that helped whoever knocked at her door requesting an egg, some salt or sugar. Roza's mother loved visiting her. She seemed more refined than others, and when in the afternoon, after all chores had been done, and Roza's mother was free before her own family came home for supper, she would often go to Mrs. Fishman's and talk about the current fashions, a possible new dress she may want to have, or the loans that people took from her and were seldom repaid. Such chats were much enjoyed by these women, who had limited time and few resources. Roza's mother always praised Mrs. Fishman, who was a seamstress. She worked from home, thus avoiding taxes that she would have had to pay if she had had a storefront shop. Other more transient tenants also came to live in #21: Roza remembered the Fishers, fishmongers who kept a smelly place; a writer that was a legal expert who wrote in Polish; an apple seller, who once gave Roza an apple as a special gift.

Baths were taken at home; some had a nice tub, but most used a large barrel. Those who did not have running water required many buckets brought by a water peddler. The water peddler was the best person to discuss other people's apartments and their baths. Roza's mother had a good relationship with the water peddler that came to her; she would offer him some tea and try to have a chat. While he sat on the floor to rest, he would comment on the local gossip and goings-on of many neighbors, and everybody looked forward to his tales.

As Roza got older, she was interested in hearing about who married whom, and who was engaged to whom, and who left whom. Visits to uncles and aunts, or to the grandparents, were perfect opportunities to expand her horizons. And then, of course, there were friends. For example, the Śpiewaks were the Bundists

who had no children but were friends of the family. The wife could afford some vacations, and she went sometimes to take baths and cures in Nałęczów, a spa-town near Lublin. Mr. Śpiewak was often bed-ridden for weeks; he had poor eyesight and a bad leg. But they had connections, and they helped Roza get a job and become a children's counselor in a children's camp. Mr. Śpiewak's brother had a store in Lubartowska #13, and when money was needed he always helped. This brother was also known and respected because he often volunteered as an arbitrator (*boyrer*) for the Jewish courts.

One of Roza's uncles, Aharon, lived in Lubartowska #20. He was the "richest" of the family; his daughter had married a rich cow-seller (*oksnhendler*) and her home was furnished with the loveliest items: there was a large grandfather clock, furniture made of fine woods, everything beautiful. In the storefront of their building Aharon sold an apple-drink (*epl-kwas*) as well as frozen apples in the winter season. Next door was a store that sold bread, and hot beans and peas (*bob un arbes*). There were also bagels in one single lonely breadbasket there. Across from #21 there was an "elegant" building: it had balconies, it was clean all the time, and it was next to a vinegar factory that looked very new. There was a *beys medresh* in that building, a small synagogue-study house, in which local people gathered for prayers. Some even bought a permanent seat there (*shtot*) to ensure themselves a sitting place when it was crowded. Śpiewak, the Bundist, came to this synagogue on the High holidays.

For the children, one of the neighborhood's attractions was behind #22. There, the back yard had an alley to reach other buildings. That in itself was not particular to this building. Many buildings could communicate from the back and one could take a shortcut and save time when walking to school or back. But the back part of the yard in #22 had a huge mound of tinted clay that was used by one of the stores in the vicinity. Children would often go through and wait to see that the porter was not there to be able to "paint their shoes" by playing in the tinted mud. For a while – a day or two, if it did not rain – their shoes would look new!

Household chores were time-consuming, with no appliances and limited public facilities. Laundry, for example, was handled differently by different families, according to their resources. Some washed in the river, most washed at home, some hired help twice a year for the activity, usually near Passover and the High holidays. There were also commercial laundries where the richer could send their bed linens. Some had occasional help to handle chores in their homes, some had help with the care of young children; most families did all by themselves.

Visiting the grandparents was a treat because children always got something, even a few coins for sweets. At the paternal grandfather's home, Roza got paper toys that he would make: a boat, a hat. Her grandfather was a musician that played in orchestras, circus and weddings; he always wore a black hat and maintained a white short beard; he kept a few roosters and ducks on the roof of

his house. He took Roza to the circus, and showed her animals, his and others, that she had never seen before, because Lublin had no zoo. He also explained to her that the world was really round even though it felt flat, and taught her to dance while he played music!

*Motzei Shabbat*, after the Shabbat ended, was the time to visit relatives. That is when Roza went to see hers too. Along the way one would see the coiffure stylist, where some women had their hair cut and shaped, or a bakery or two in which the fresh bread smelled heavenly during the week. This was the place to buy bagels, rolls, loaves, the special onion rolls, and *matza* during Pesakh. Passing near a synagogue, a *beys-medresh*, when services were held, one could hear the prayers; in the environs of a *shtibl*, one would see a concentration of people with forelocks (*peyes*), hats and black coats coming and going. Lublin was indeed a city (*shtot*), with all activities of a city, with occasional visitors and travelers. Yet, parts of Lublin felt like a small town, a *shtetl*, where the environment was heavily Jewish, and the language one heard was dominantly Yiddish, and few outsiders would show up.

## Jewish schools

**Education was a priority, and schools proliferated as new approaches were introduced. Institutions varied by language, ideology, age, sex, and sponsorship, as each family sought to provide its children with the values they upheld.**

Capturing the interwar period in Poland is now our challenge. We have to imagine the lifestyle of different types of Jews to feel the city's daytime pulse and hear the quieter sounds of its nights and its nightlife; to smell the scents of its markets and to hear the exchanges; to see the poor and the way they struggled, to visit their homes and encounter the ethics by which they lived; to taste the foods and recognize the kitchen smells; to hear the discussions at the table on a Shabbat and gauge the passionate tone of the different voices; to see women assume new roles; listen to the songs that were popular and attend a performance; hear the laughter of its children when playing in a courtyard and try to identify their games, the voices of teachers, teamsters, and butchers in a political meeting; watch elders scolding the young; eavesdrop on the words of those in love; watch sports matches and take long walks on the main streets; hear the music of the murmurs of the *minyanim* (quorums) in the synagogues, the intricate *khevruse*-meetings (dialogue-discussion as a system of learning) during a regular yeshiva day.

Most history books give us a much more compartmentalized image of what life was there: they tell us that people pursued diverse political lines, activities, and associations. Some, disenchanted with religious life, distanced themselves from tradition and religious practices. We see pictures of the very poor, beggars

perhaps, children in orphanages, children in schools, water carriers, a teacher, a simple tailor. We hear there were thieves, cheats, wealthy families, great synagogues, butchers, brokers, doctors, and intellectuals. But nothing prepares us to see and understand that world as a world in effervescence: politically rich, diverse; a world searching for change, reevaluating tradition and its functions; reconciling religion with the new secular trends.

When encountering real people, their families, we often see a variety within them that is unknown today: parents that can be religious, children that are socialists, Zionists, workers active in unions. Youngsters that became staunch defenders of a particular political line as their younger siblings in the house enter new alliances and switch political parties to join friends, a teacher or a rabbi. If some left religion as a way of life, others take it up. We encounter homes where the grandparents are the more traditional; parents that have secularized and still maintain many of the traditions, food regulations, holidays; and children that explore attachments within the new Jewish horizon as it was defined at the time. None of this was as divisive as the categories of the textbooks suggest; but neither was this a homogeneous society. Our “Fiddler on the Roof” was not prototypical; the milkman was not the only type of Jew in Poland. From the great spectrum we had, we can detect a variety of types in a world that was creating dreams and proposing solutions to its own crises.

Against the backdrop of problems with which these people lived, there was hope. Hope is a commodity that not all generations have in equal supply. Whether it was hope to be able to build a safe and nurturing living space, or the hope of a larger vision that would change the world, different groups of Jews dealt with these issues differently. But hope and despair often merged. After WW II, against a backdrop of death, despair and aimlessness, the State of Israel represented historical and moral hope for Jews. For most Jews, it embodied the possibility of political normalization and a protection they had been lacking. Israel therefore emerged as a beacon towards a future that is still marked by hurdles and challenges.

### Meir Shapiro and the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin

Although Lublin was clearly an impoverished town in the interwar period, it still had a sizeable Jewish population. Jews numbered about 40,000, which accounted for 34% of the city’s total population (1920s). It was therefore still considered a center by the smaller Jewish towns and settlements in the periphery. While more important cities and centers were increasingly in competition, the past glory of Lublin lived in the memory of its Jews. Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1886/7–1933), an active Sejm (Polish Parliament) member who had served as a deputy while he had been rabbi of Piotrków, was determined to recapture Lublin’s old glory and distinction. In order to create a new center of learning in Lublin, Shapiro, the quintessential modern religious leader of Lublin, traveled



Meir Shapiro (1887–1933), founder of the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin. *Dos Bukh fun Lublin, p.172*



Congratulatory telegram sent from Brooklyn on the opening of the Yeshiva, 1930

**חגיגת התורה נומער**

**פון יודישען מאגבלאט**

**סיום ש"ס כללי מחזור שני**

**של לומדי רח-היום**

**ישבת חכמי לובלין או ד-היום**

**די ערעפנונג פון „ישבת חכמי לובלין“**

די ערעפנונג פון „ישבת חכמי לובלין“ איז געווען א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום. די שולע פון חכמי לובלין איז א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום. די שולע פון חכמי לובלין איז א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום.

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**ישבת חכמי לובלין או ד-היום**

**די ערעפנונג פון „ישבת חכמי לובלין“**

די ערעפנונג פון „ישבת חכמי לובלין“ איז געווען א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום. די שולע פון חכמי לובלין איז א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום. די שולע פון חכמי לובלין איז א גרויסע און פארטאגליכע צעלערונג פון אונזערע יודישע לומדי רח-היום.

Newspapers from Warsaw report the opening of the Yeshiva, 1930



The building of the former Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin in 2002. Photo by Michael Cohen



The building of the former Yeshiva in 2008. Photo by Marcin Skrzypek



around the world; by 1922 he had raised enough money for the establishment of a Yeshiva which the Polish government supported. The corner stone was placed in 1924; and it would take another six years to build. The greatest achievement of his religious Agudah party, which benefited from the support of the Polish Pilsudski government, was underwriting the land for the building of this modern Yeshiva.

The Yeshiva, known as the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin (Sages of Lublin), included a wonderful library, spacious rooms for the student body, lecture halls, gardens for the recreation of its students, clean and modern kitchens and facilities, including a *mikvah*, ritual bath. This Yeshiva sought to be a modern institute for higher Jewish learning. Its goal was to modernize higher education and offer renewed recognition to the activity of learning itself. From it emerged the world project and tradition of *daf yomi* (the daily page), which promoted the systematic studying of a daily page of the Talmud. (It is speculated that, in 1929, 250,000 learners around the world participated in this project). Because the Talmudic text is volumes long, completing it at the rate of a page a day would take seven years. This system required all adherents to study the same text wherever they were. The yeshiva was inaugurated on June 1930, and the first reading was completed in 1931, and the organized tradition of studying a page a day has continued in various Talmudic environments ever since. The Yeshiva, however, had only another nine years of existence. The war cut short its life. Rabbi Shapiro, who had died in his mid-forties a few years earlier, did not live to see his work destroyed.

The Nazis destroyed the 22,000 books of this library and all other materials that had been there gathered. The last two rectors were killed. But the building itself was not ruined; that was unusual, because so many other important Jewish buildings were destroyed. After World War II it was made into a medical school, yet, always a silent monument to its past life. It has been returned now to the Jewish community, though nothing evokes its former function. In 2005 Hasidim gathered there to celebrate the completion of a reading of the Talmud.

Today as yesterday, Lubartowska Street, which was once thoroughly a Jewish street – poor, busy, and very crowded – leads to the Yeshiva building. When it was built, the yeshiva was on the edge of that area of town, where the land was cheaper. Next to it the *Hekdesh* or Jewish Hospital for the most part used by the poor, was built; today with some renewals it functions as a maternity ward. Even today, the yellow painted building of the Yeshiva is impressive in its size and majesty. There is little left around it of turn-of-the-century architecture with which to compare it. Nor is there much that is Jewish that would be comparable. One cannot but wonder at the scope of the school, and at the impressive stature that it commanded within the physical landscape of the city. Today, a plaque on the side of the main entrance commemorates its origin. Few remember its character: the rooms and their silent memories in its walls can remember the chants and prayers that were heard there.

### From the voice of a Lublin woman

Following the autobiographical book of a Lublin survivor, Roza Fishman-Sznajdman, we can attempt to recapture part of the life that was. She takes us by the hand and offers a glimpse of her childhood and family. Her experiences, complemented by archival sources, provide us a motion picture, in words, of the world that was.

Things were changing slowly in Lublin. In 1926, a tower providing electricity became a landmark and electric lamps began to replace kerosene in the homes. The smell of the homes changed, especially when water started slowly to become available in apartments. Bathrooms, however, were less common. Buildings such as Lubartowska #21, like its neighbors, each had about 20 families who used the sanitary facilities in an outdoors shed. The yard was shared by all, and there was always a queue waiting to use the outhouse, which was famous for the smell around it. Ironically, the worst day to use it, was the day it was cleaned. A cleaner emptied out the large containers, and this created an intense foul odor that all had to tolerate.

Roza's apartment had an area of about 25 to 30 square meters. When her parents first moved there, they had the luxury of two rooms and a kitchen; but as children came and they became a family of six, the same quarters were very tight. There were two regular beds, which had storage space underneath them, as well as shelves that became tables or beds depending on the time of day or night. Even the bench in the kitchen doubled as a bed. There was one large cupboard for the clothes, and above it, all the special kitchen pots and tableware for *Pesakh* (Passover) stored in a box. Roza's mother worked hard to keep the place neat and clean. There was always a competition between her and Mrs. Rapaport, a neighbor, as to who kept their premises tidier. After polishing the floor, each called the other to show off her work, never actually getting the highest ratings from the other.

Roza's father worked in Ruska Street # 10 next to the train station. He was a cobbler who specialized in the making of spats. His life was always hard. He was a very good craftsman and did good work. But he had to deal with other shoemakers, and leather merchants, and although he had a helper, a few evenings a week, after closing his shop he had to go around to collect the debts others owed him. Some would pay back only after the actual sale of the shoes took place. He, in the meantime, had to leave them the product of his work and wait. His workshop was filled with the tools of his trade: from the leather to the knives, to all sorts of tools to hold the lasts, pliers, lead pencils, and different glues made out of flour and potatoes. His helper was a journeyman in training. When a government representative showed up unexpectedly to check the store, there was always panic: taxes were often checked, and pending payments demanded. Often, new rules were imposed, and merchandise was confiscated. Even the workshop's furniture was sometimes removed. This was then resold by the gov-

ernment very cheaply to raise money; often, the former owner attempted to buy back his property.

Continuing to walk from Lubartowska one would end up next to the Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, a new building finished in 1930. In another part of town stood the Catholic University, an impressive, important center for higher learning. The yeshiva intended to accommodate students as if the most modern Jewish institution ever built: large, spacious, with modern facilities for kitchen, rooms, and recreation. The landscape of the city was marked by these two pillars of learning: separate, independent, different. Unlike a Torah scroll, in which two poles are linked by a spreading parchment, these two pillars were not connected to one another. These were two symbols, together and separate at the same time: geographically linked but isolated, contemporaneous and atypical; one had the fortune to survive, and the other's fate was to remain, from the Jewish point of view, a lonely monument to a truncated past and a life cut short.

Schooling had always been vitally important to Jewish communities. As "the people of the book," Jews have paid inordinate attention to the education of the young. Although for some time this meant primarily formal education of boys, girls were also educated more informally, and we have their memoirs as evidence. Yet, schooling could always be improved. Raising the level of knowledge in the community required that a high priority be given to schooling. In fact, as we saw historically in Lublin itself, schools were organized as soon as the community was formed: the *kheders* for the boys, the *Talmud Torahs* for the poor, and the yeshivahs for young adults. In addition, once printing became possible, the Talmud, commentaries, and analyses, and other literature was printed and new books translated from the Biblical Hebrew into the Yiddish, some specifically for women and plain folk. In fact, the history of printing in Europe is closely linked to the communal life of Jewish communities, their thinking and their absorption of ideas. Reading levels and the interest in studying text were characteristic of the evolving Jewish world. The number of Jewish printing houses as well as that of cities that had printing facilities attest to the great emphasis placed on the dissemination of knowledge and ideas.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Jews in large numbers began to embrace different ideologies reflective of how they intended to reorganize society for themselves and others, there were immediate changes in the schooling of children. Indeed, schools and new philosophies about the schools began to flourish. Socialists imbued their schools with their ideas, intent on educating youths as potential followers; similarly, Zionists sought to create a new type of Jew, one that would undertake the renewal of the Hebrew language and the Land of Israel. And even the religious sector, which had devoted so much attention to the traditional skills required to tackle old, complex texts, also modernized and competed for the attention of youth; they created special schools for girls as one of the necessary changes to compete for loyal followers.

Lublin, then, had as many different types of Jewish schools as the whole of Poland. Indeed, Jews made extraordinary efforts to modernize education, exploring an array of possibilities to reach the masses. The emerging diverse ideological perspectives were translated into different ways of reaching the youngsters. Schools mushroomed. The number and variety of schools, and the different institutions created to supply teachers for them, attest to the importance placed on education in a country and period of limited resources. More than any other indicator, the rapid development of Jewish schools in Poland provides evidence of the tremendous desire for, and commitment to, maintaining culture. Yet, that does not mean that schools were secure institutions: on the contrary, most were plagued by constant economic deficits, and children were often very aware of the difficulties for their parents in arranging for payment of tuitions.

No other community in the US and Canada, Europe or most of Latin America has ever come close to creating the network of schools the Jews in Poland erected for themselves. There were *kheders* for the young boys in which the *melamed* was the teacher; *Khoyrev* schools, and also Orthodox counterpart *Beys-Yakov* schools (House of Yakov) for girls. Secular schools competed for the attendance of children: the TSYSHO school system (Central Jewish School organization) promoted Yiddish, and Diaspora-centered culture; the *Tarbut* school system ("Culture" schools) promoted Hebrew language and culture. All of these schools had no models to follow; they created their own educational blueprints and their own curricula as they developed their networks. Far from being marginal efforts, these schools were numerically and culturally important. During the interwar period, the numbers of the schools fluctuated; but even imprecise statistics convey the complexity of the educational network: *Khoyrev* schools had about 580 institutions; the TSYSHO network had about 160 schools all over Poland, including 26 kindergartens, 3 high schools, and 2 teachers' colleges; the *Tarbut* network enrolled 37,000 students at its peak. In addition, there were other government-subsidized schools for Jewish children and the Gymnasium schools.

In Lublin, the state schools that exempted Jewish children from writing on the Sabbath and were less costly than the private schools were called *shabesuvkas* (in Polish, *szabesówki*). Children enrolled in state schools often also attended afternoon schools to study Jewish subjects. Lubartowska street had a few private schools. In #24, across from the police station, there was an "expensive" girl school. It was close to an elegant building which also housed a few musicians and a printer. Number 18 was an older building that had two schools on alternating time schedules. Double shifts were often used to meet the demand with the short building supply. But children did not go to school with the security and nonchalance that they do today in many western countries. They were very aware that a delayed tuition payment could send them home, for instance, and that the building itself may be intermittently shut by inspectors. Occasionally, the school

would have to find new premises if the rent could not be paid by its owners. As a result, schools merged with others or changed location.

The state school for Jewish children in Lublin had an agenda: although most, if not all, teachers were Jewish, children were forbidden to speak Yiddish among themselves. Often, a teacher would send the student to a corner when this rule was broken. One can only imagine the repetitive infractions to the language rule: forbidding children from speaking in the language used at home and on the street was harsh and difficult to monitor. Roza was expelled once from school for such a violation and had to have her *zeyde* (grandfather) plead for her to be accepted back. Aside the discomfort this rule imposed on the children, the sanctions hid only slightly the negative value system applied to Jewish culture by the government.

In the gymnasium, the subjects covered included history, religion, language, geography, mathematics, music, drawing, handwork and physical education. The more modest the school, the more modest all the facilities; this was most noticeable when it came to gymnastics. Rooms had poor lighting, old benches, and students had no place to hang when they were in class. Students walked to school, if they did not live close by, they would have to walk a few kilometers back and forth, which meant getting up earlier and eating later on their return. But along the way students could meet kids from other schools. These relationships flourished during vacations or weekends, when youths socialized with others in the park, in the youth groups, and during evening or weekend activities. Younger children played on the street in front of their home often and knew their neighbors; strong bonds were forged among adolescents in youth-groups.

In the Tarbut schools, the Hebrew language was the language of instruction as was Yiddish for the TSISHO schools. Geography, history, mathematics, science and biology, for instance, were taught in those languages. The development of these language skills in specific fields promoted intellectual debate and stimulated cultural creativity. Formal education in these languages assured the production of future writers and thinkers; but, more than that, it linked the youth to the cultural sources of the ethnic group. Teaching a language did not mean learning to conjugate a verb or translate a paragraph; it meant making language and its products a living, useful tool. Further, this also insured the development of a group that would create and enjoy the products of the culture. Youth read literature in Yiddish and some managed to read Hebrew as well; they read and wrote poetry. Once they could express themselves in the languages, they could contribute to the development of the culture. In the terminology of our society: there was a market for these cultural "goods." They were in fact, active consumers and producers of all the products created in the languages, enhancing the culture and helping it evolve.

Conversation was valued as an intrinsic part of the society. People talked, students discussed. The image of a family gathering is that of people in the midst

of a discussion: "Finish your meal and talk later!" – the mother would say. Political issues were hotly debated. Youth were often involved in their parents' diverse political worlds although they often chose their own political paths. This domain was often filled with contention during the teenage years. For example, there would be a traditional home where the son was a Bundist and the younger daughter, too young to make up her mind, defied parental traditions of the Sabbath by going out to meet with friends and perhaps skate or play in ways that the Sabbath-observing children would not do. Religious students had a strong and protective environment that helped them develop and maintain their ways. In Lublin you could see many Hasidic youngsters walking together at the same time that secular kids would be playing ball in the street: different, but all part of the same cultural world.

People talked about sending students to foreign schools abroad, but this was a far-fetched dream. In any event, not all shared this dream: there were always some students who sought to finish school, the sooner the better. Many never completed the gymnasium (high school), not just because it was so difficult, but also because examiners often had quotas, giving passing grades to only two to four Jewish students at a time, as those that went to the Shper Gymnasium recall.



Students of the Shper Gymnasium in Lublin, circa 1928.  
*Encyclopedia Shel Galuyot: Lublin, 1957, cols. 563–564*

## Synagogues

Lublin had a large number of synagogues and prayer houses: large and small, rich and poor, reflecting different traditions and customs. The synagogue was then, as it has always been, more than a religious center. It was a meeting place, a center for learning, a center for socializing and a center for organizing most of the traditional activities of the community.

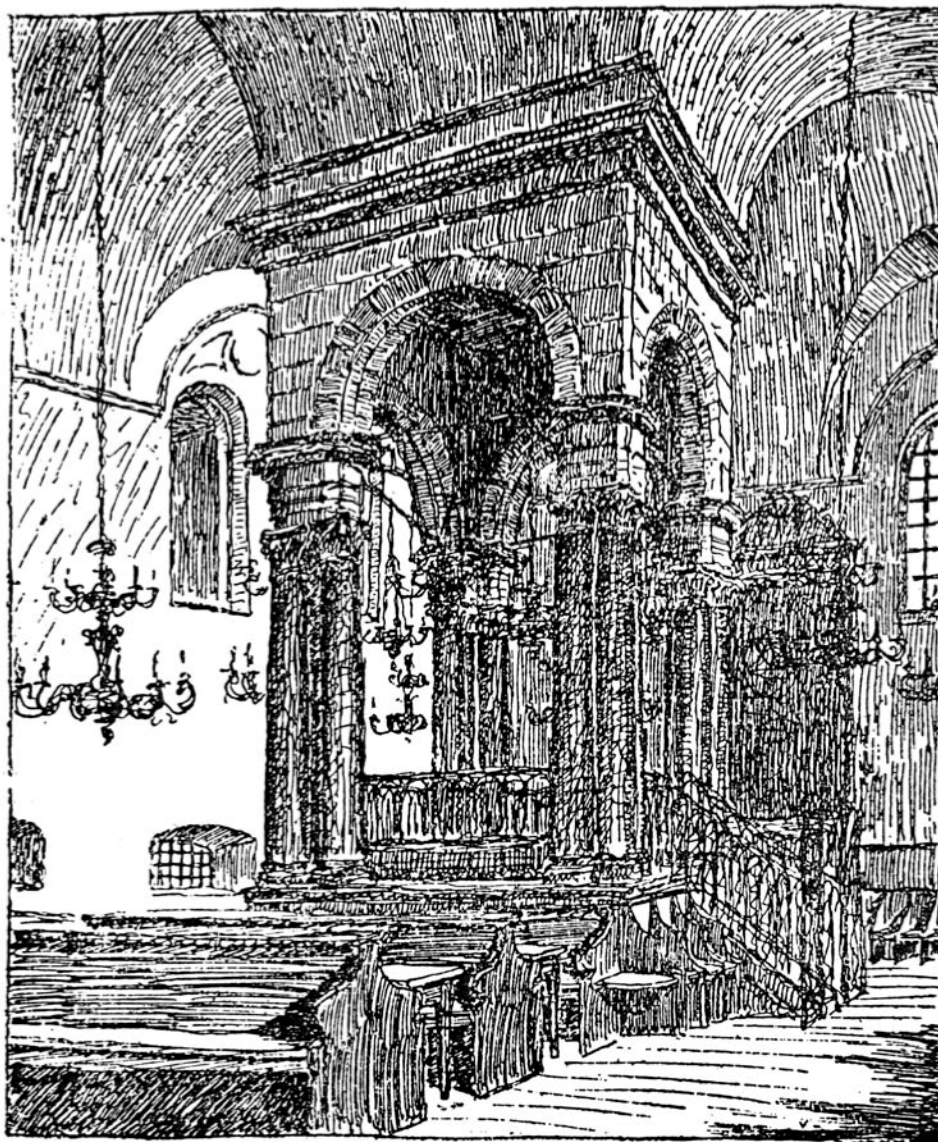
Jewish Lublin lived with the memory of its having been a great center: a great center of learning, a center where Jewish personalities were seen and heard. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, and for a long time before that, this more ordinary city, plagued with many economic problems from its light industry, had nothing new or thriving to offer the masses. Yet, the revered name of Lublin, the “Jerusalem of the Kingdom of Poland,” still resonated for some.

Because Lublin was part of a strong Hasidic region, we can assume there were many prayer houses that Hasidim attended. But with them, there was also an old established line of synagogues that was linked to the Maharshal Shul, the oldest great synagogue in honor of Rabbi Shloyme Luria founded in 1567. Next to it was another synagogue; both had sections for men and women. The great synagogue had a smaller prayer hall for daily activity, as well as other rooms adjacent to it. The synagogue burned down in the midst of the Chmielnicki Cossack invasions in 1648–9 and again in 1854. The only original piece that the synagogue had left was the great *Aron Hakodesh* (the Torah ark). We have some etchings of the interior, and aerial photographs of the building taken during the Nazi occupation. The area where the great synagogue stood, in the midst of the Jewish old quarter, was bombed. The synagogue was lost, as were most other Jewish buildings around there.

Survivors remember the list of synagogues in the city as follows: the Rabbi’s beys medresh; the Kotler shul; the Leyfer shul; Beys medresh d’khevra nosshim; the Trisker shtibl; the Bialer shtibl; the Umanier shtibl; the Beys medresh d’Bikur Kholim; the Beys medresh d’Katzovim; the Shneider shul; the Hakhnosat Kala Beys medresh; the Beys medresh d’okhrone; Dovidl Tzimberg’s medresh; Tzigelmans beys medresh; Farshteters beys medresh; the Zamd synagogue, the Tchechiver shul, and the many, many quorums that formed day in and out around the city. Again, some were very old or were attached to an old memory of an old synagogue: to the Doktorowicz synagogue or Kotler shul, for example, built originally in the 1600’s.

Most quorums met in private homes. In general, synagogues were supported by donations from their members and bequests. There was the tradition to “buy” a place (*shtot*) in a synagogue for themselves and their spouses. Synagogue records reflect these payments, which in turn supported the finances of the building. Smaller synagogues were often established by breaking off from larger congregations: often, a trade group or a specific association would organize its own prayers. This was the case, for instance, with the Bikur Kholim synagogue (visiting the sick grup), as well as other Khevra (fraternity) groups, like the Khevra Noshim. Thus, while there were 11 official synagogues, there were close to a hundred small prayer locations with 20 to 30 people attending each of these. There were no Reform synagogues; that movement did not take root in Lublin.

The many synagogues were used as congregation centers as well as prayer houses. Almost all neighborhoods had them and the rhythm of the day as well as the week was marked by the activities there. Each synagogue had its own style,



Interior of the Maharshal Synagogue in Lublin. Etching by Karl Richard Henker from Majer Balaban, *Die Judenstadt von Lublin*, p. 78





ties buried in the old burial grounds. The records of these graves reveal some of the history of these personalities and their ideas and activities the community wanted to remember. Ordinary Jews were remembered by the deeds that the community designated as valuable: the studious, the charitable, the thinkers, the caretakers, and more.



Images from the Old Jewish Cemetery of Lublin, 2002 (all photos by Michael Cohen)

## Literature

Jews and books have long been linked; Jews are therefore known as “the people of the book.” Jewish culture is heavily dependent on texts and Jews have produced diverse literatures in the different settings they have lived in: from the Babylonian multi-volume Talmud, to the Arabic, Greek and Hebrew translations of hundreds of texts, to Ladino folk poetry, liturgical texts, legal texts, and so on. In Eastern Europe, Yiddish literature and the Yiddish language itself reached their highest level of development. Indeed, the literature of this period is perhaps the most significant product of modern, secularized Ashkenazi Jewry (aside from the innovative Jewish ideologies which were political responses to ongoing social problems).

While Hebrew is the older language, Yiddish, the product of life in Europe, is associated with Ashkenazi Jews. It became the tool for the group’s self-expression as well as a marker for its cultural organization. Both languages gave the group the ability to expand intellectually and branch out, drawing creatively from diverse cultural sources.

The textual production of both languages during their millennium in Eastern Europe is so extensive that it is impossible to encompass here. A comprehensive study of the literary output of the Jews is beyond the scope of this book, and deserves a separate volume. But a few examples can perhaps begin to illustrate the extraordinary literary corpus of many Jewish generations: in Hebrew, the epistolary *responsa* exchanges through which rabbis conducted their discussions; texts that address ethical issues; later on, the development of a new group of secular Hebrew users that sought to update the language and incorporate it into daily interactions, in newsletters, newspapers, and books. At the same time, Yiddish, the daily language of the masses, was developing its own literature with successful texts for them (e.g. the Shmuel Bukh, Mayse Bukh, and Bovo Bukh, written for women or the less educated). But it was in the late 1800s when the secular Yiddish literature took off with great vigor: while Hebrew books sold an unprecedented 1000 copies when published, for instance, Yiddish books sold close to 100,000 copies, if the description of A.M. Dik (1814–1893) is accurate. Literary groups of Yiddish and bilingual writers, and a massive readership began to develop while writers became legendary figures within the community. Writers played many roles: they were spokespersons for the masses, political visionaries, poetic dreamers, philosophers, singers, leaders. In short, they were the voice of the people.

Yiddish literature has been recognized internationally with the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Isaac Bashevis Singer. While Hebrew was gaining popularity and the great bilingual writer Chaim Nachman Bialik later became Israel’s foremost national poet, the literature published in Yiddish was outstanding for its large output, variety, and excellence. Among the most acclaimed Yiddish writers were Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Aleikhem, Y. L. Peretz, Avrom Reisen,



advocates constituted only a small circle of users and dreamers. Eventually, it evolved into the modern spoken language we know today. Yiddish was the base from which it was launched. Yiddish literature has left a treasure that must be explored separately. Lublin and its region produced writers of the highest caliber, however, anybody interested in Yiddish literature must venture into the field by learning the language or, alternatively, look into anthologies or direct translations of these authors. These few lines just begin to pay tribute to this most distinguished and rich cultural legacy of the Ashkenazi Jews.

### The jail

Many Jews were incarcerated for their political beliefs and anti-government activities. In a confined environment, prisoners found a number of ingenious devices to communicate, share goods, and maintain their political beliefs especially when their beliefs also signaled and linked to their ethnicity. Communal organizations were created to support their families and help with their legal defense.

During the partitions, the old castle in Lublin became a jail in which different types of prisoners were incarcerated: ordinary thieves, of course, but mostly political prisoners who opposed the current political regime. The castle housed those awaiting sentencing as well as those already condemned and serving a sentence. The old castle, the great old symbol of power, found a new use once a new political system came into place. There were separate sections for women and men. During periods of political turmoil, dissidents as well as political foes often fell prey to the government's charges. The jail was full of Jewish inmates but not exclusively so. Many of the Jewish inmates were fighting for political ideals against political realities. Socialists and Bundists were often thrown in for going on strike, distributing flyers, etc. Illegal communist organizers and university students were also well represented there.

From the Jewish organizational point of view, the community felt it had to help inmates and their families. There was an organization known as "MOPR" whose goal was to help Jews and their families by sending them food, clothes, etc. But organizing this was complicated: first, money for the packages was collected, coin by coin, from the workers, students and intellectuals, who felt a sense of solidarity with their colleagues in jail. In general, however, only relatives were allowed to deliver the packages to inmates. Because many inmates from other cities or towns had no local kin, the organization recruited volunteer women who stood in line to deliver a basket with food to an assigned "relative." Across the castle, in the basement of a home, Jews created a center to collect goods for the inmates, primarily food and clothes.

A second goal of the organization was to help the families of the arrested. There was state housing in a building that was in such disrepair that government officials periodically threatened its destruction. There, many broken families

lived, awaiting the release of one of the members of the family. More often, it was the wives and children of an inmate, people who survived with no income, who lived in dilapidated housing, with broken walls, pipes, roofs. But, again and again, petitions were sent, requesting the government's benevolence in ignoring the building that they saw as hazardous, so that the inmates' families could have a roof over their heads rather than be homeless on the streets.

The best way of communicating with the Jewish political inmates was through tiny secret letters written on cigarette paper, folded and crumpled in between the food or clothes. Newspapers that were allowed in were censored; any article that was considered unfit was cut out or torn. But Jews organized immediately, and each week a different inmate was charged with collecting and organizing the "news" of the week. The outside organization kept tabs on the inmates, and also helped with their legal defense. They found lawyers and helped prepare the legal documents for the defense.

In 1938 there were about 700 political inmates. These included not just communists, but also Poalei Tzionists, members and sympathizers of the Bund, Polish Socialists, and a number of independent political activists, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish. Dovid Shtokfish was an inmate for two years, living in cell #22, 4<sup>th</sup> floor. He recalled his life in jail: after a few months in jail, with difficulties increasing by the day, he found solace in cultural symbols. The anniversary of Ber Borochov, the labor leader and Zionist ideologue, was an occasion to commemorate. On the 21<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Borochov's death, he requested permission from the internal communal organization to help organize the evening. On December 21, in his cell, inmates sat down to listen to Shtokfish deliver his talk, while a few patrolled the cell and made it appear an ordinary talk. An elegy to Borochov was sung to Chopin's funeral march music.

#### DOVID SHTOKFISH'S BIOGRAPHY IN HIS OWN WORDS

I understand, you want some biography. I was born 90 years ago, in 1912 in the city of Lublin. I began and finished public school – a Polish government public school at a very high level of learning, equal to gymnasium. Whoever finished a school like this, it was as if he finished gymnasium, 5 classes. In my youth I worked in a printing house. In 1937, I was married; and this is my only wife since then, for 65 years (points at his wife). In 1939, I went into the jail – as if I was guilty for communist activity, but this was not true. I was the chairman of the branch Poalei Zion Smol (left Zionist organization) in Lublin. But then there was a strongly anti-Communist atmosphere in Lublin. Aside from this, I had a familial "stain"; my 3 brothers were really communist. They were put on trials, in jail. So I belonged to this family, it was guilt by association.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, after the beginning of the war, as the Germans bombed Lublin, I ran away from Lublin as did much of the Jewish youth from the city. There was a rumor that the Red Army was standing not far away from Lublin and was coming closer. On the 17 of September, the Red Army really entered Western Ukraine and Byelorussia. I reached Kovne (Kovno, Lithuania) and also then I was behind Soviet lines. One or two months later, my wife also managed to escape, with my sister and we met in Kovne. Afterwards, we were conscripted by the Russians to travel into Russia. Generally, if you were sent by the Russians into Russia, you were sent to Siberia. But this did not happen to us. We managed to travel to Kiev, the capi-



The Shtokfish family, photographed c. 1910 (photo courtesy Michael Rosenbush)

tal of Ukraine. There was born to us a son. After Kiev we reached Kramenchuk. Then the war between the USSR and the Germans broke out. So again, my wife and son ran away, and I stayed in Kramenchuk. We were separated for the first time. But we knew to where was the separation. My brother and his wife were in Kuybishov and my wife and son after many tries managed to reach Kuybishov. Then I reached there, too. Afterwards we escaped to Uzbekistan. I was conscripted into the Red Army. Then came out the order from Stalin to release all Polish Jews from the Red Army. This was in 1942. I was really released as were the rest of the Polish Jews. I managed in 1945 to reach Bukhara. Then, I returned to Poland.

In Poland, I was of course a member of Poalei Zion Smol and it was after the Holocaust. Adolf Berman invited me to Warsaw from Lublin (where I had come to from Russia) to become secretary of the party and after a few months my wife managed to reach Warsaw. We were in Warsaw until 1947 when we were separated again. My wife and son traveled to Belgium. She had a sister there. After a year I also managed to reach Paris. In 1948 we reached Israel. Since then, we have lived not only in Israel but in the same apartment. We're the only Israelis who have been in one apartment for so long. Since then I have been very active in public life. I have been the secretary of the Yiddish writers' group in Israel for the last 20 years. I was also in Merkaz Mapam. I was involved in many Yiddish activities in Israel. Head of the Yotzei Lublin group for 50 years. This is a little of my biography.

Avi Patt (henceforth AP): We'll return to your time in Israel later. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about Lublin and your youth. You said that you went to a public government school. Why did you go to this school instead of another one? Was this your parents' decision, your choice?

DS: First, we went to public school. This was the law. We had to go to this school. If we hadn't, our parents would have been fined. It really happened to me that after the 5<sup>th</sup> grade they had to put me to work, my parents sent me to work.

AP: What kind of work?

DS: As a goldsmith. Dad received a fine and so I was sent back to school. Then, I managed to... Dad sent me to work not for pleasure but because we had problems. We were seven children at home. Thank God. A family blessed with children. Dad had a store for painting and building supplies. He did not have a lot of income. For that reason we did not go to the most prestigious gymnasium. My oldest brother managed to attend gymnasium for a few years. But to attend the gymnasium it cost money. And the family income was not enough.

AP: Were your parents also from Lublin?

DS: My parents, yes.

AP: Were your parents also politically active?

DS: No. My father was a gabbai in the Bikur Holim. He wrote slips for the doctor to visit poor people who needed medical assistance. From Bikur Holim.

#### YOUTH MOVEMENT ACTIVITY

DS: I joined the youth movement at the age of 16, thanks to my older brother who was a member of Poalei Zion Smol and he influenced the rest of the family. Then I joined the *Jungbor*, this was the youth movement of Poalei Zion Smol. *Jungbor* is an abbreviation for *Junge Borochovistim* (Ber Borochochov). And then there were groups for... we were opposed to the dances. Those things that were to the... I'm losing the words in Hebrew... *kleynbirgerlikhe* (Yiddish) – petit bourgeois.



So I joined *Jungbor* at the age of 16 and then I began the party movement activity. I wasn't just a member, I was in the leadership. We held activities and the education was Zionist, worker-focused; I would say almost Marxist in the lexicon of then. From *Jungbor* I moved to *Jugend* – this was the name of the Noar Poalei Zion. Then to the party. I became the chairman of the party.

AP: If we return to your activity in the *Jungbor* – you spoke before about the ideology. When you were young, what did you know about the ideology, Ber Borochov; you said it was Marxist. What did you know that was different in Poalei Zion Smol from, let's say, from Poalei Zion Z" S (Zionist Socialists) or from other movements?

DS: We knew from the slogans that we read in the newspaper of *Jungbor* – *Kinderwelt* – that came out in Warsaw. They called for a Jewish workers' center in Palestine (*A yidishe arbeter tcenter in Palestine*). And this was the situation – a Jewish workers' center in Israel. In terms of international policy, this was Marxist. The workers in France and America – we worried about their fate, too. So we knew about those things. We learned about them in our educational groups. It was a worker's education. And also Zionist. But also labor...

Mrs. Shtokfish: We met when I was 18. When I was young I was in a different movement, Betar. You know, for the young people, it was not so much a matter of ideology... Then we met and went out together until we got married in 1937.

AP: How did you meet each other?

Mrs. Sh.: In *Jungbor* he was the chairman and he gave wonderful lectures and he was interesting. He was active and he knew a lot and read a lot and this attracted me.

AP: Even though you were in Betar?

Mrs. Sh.: In Betar it was completely different. In youth you weren't looking so much for ideology. You were looking for a social group from school, to come and dance and this appealed to me. When you grow up, you look for something else. Also from my home, we weren't communist. In 1937 we were married and in 1938 he went to jail and after he got out of jail, not much after, the war broke out. He was afraid that the Nazis would first look for those who belonged to the parties, so he escaped first and I stayed. Then there were people who returned from Ukraine for parents or thought Hitler wouldn't come. We couldn't believe and didn't know what would happen. Even though the refugees came from Germany to Lublin in 1933, and we heard how they behaved there but it still wasn't what it would be later. And this we took from Ukraine. There were many refugees in Kiev and those from Lublin. They said Shtokfish is in Kovne so I went to Kovne and found him (after the beginning of World War II).

DS: It was interesting, those who thought to return to Poland for their parents or what, the Russians took them and sent them in the opposite direction, instead of sending them to Poland, they send them to Siberia. They said to us clearly... we went to Kiev. (Mrs. Sh. :) In Kiev they said there was an evacuation – to send people to work. So we signed up to work in Russia rather than to Siberia. (DS:) But there we went to train station and my wife was pregnant. (Mrs. Sh. :) There in Russia at the time they didn't do abortions. And we had a very successful son, and we have 3 great-grandchildren from this son. He married a woman from Ramat Gan...

DS: The point is I wrote and edited 27 yizker books (memorial books of Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust) of town and cities in Poland. And you can see them all here. Of many cities. And also a book.

AP: So I'd like to ask you a little about the books. Why was it important for you to write the books? What did you want to save and remember? Also about the political (and cultural) activities from the 1920's and 1930's?

DS: About this I didn't write myself. But in the stories of the towns it is recounted. How this Jewish youth, in anti-Semitic Poland before the war – can you imagine how in this town a Jewish youth edited a book, and knew many things without reading books – (Mrs. Sh.) – *Zelbstbildung* – self-education. (DS) It was a mission to tell about (aside from income) this wonderful world that was. (crying)...

Stories about these Jews – how we, in their surroundings, around the Poles, managed from an economic perspective as well as educational, political. Worlds of stories about the beautiful cultural world that existed in these towns. Also important stories about the Shoah. Authentic stories. That a few years after the Shoah these people who told the stories still remembered the conditions they lived in – in the ghettos, the forests, among the partisans – so that after the Shoah, to the deniers of the Holocaust there was nothing to say against these authentic stories – therefore it was a responsibility to record these stories.

AP: In the yizker books how did you decide who would write the articles?

DS: First there were Jews who wrote by themselves. They wrote things without much literary talent, but they had natural talent. They told everything that happened to them. So I took it and edited, so that it would be easier to read. And this is what appears in the yizker books. But they had there extraordinary talent. For example in *Sefer Dembitz*, one Jew wrote with such talent about what happened to him in the ghetto. This is something that would have appeared in a book of literature.

AP: So they came to you? How did they know to come to you?

DS: It was known from one to the other. But I wasn't the only one, there was also another Jew who put out a few yizker books.

Mrs. Sh.: But after all, you were the first.

AP: Did you have experience in writing books?

DS: My first book was one that appeared in Hebrew, on the small town of Markuszów. This was my first book. I only have one copy in Hebrew. They translated it into Yiddish. My physical therapist was from Markuszów.

AP: Always in Yiddish – you had no question whether or not to write in Yiddish?

DS: No, these books are only in Yiddish. These were Jews of the Shoah and thanks to their initiative and what happened to them, they themselves wanted to save everything and they just wanted to tell and tell and tell – and they came here and told their stories. My mission was not only to tell about what happened (in the war) but also what was there before the war. And all of these books have the same structure – what was before and the Shoah.

*Interview with Dovid Shtokfish, Ramat Gan, Israel, January 2002 (translated from Hebrew)*

## Workers and unions

**Labor issues permeated many aspects of everyday life in Lublin. Even low-status workers who were self-employed began to organize. Haulers and domestic workers were therefore able to gain concessions, improving their lot and economic situation.**

Lublin had three large tanning factories that belonged to the Eikhenboym, Zilbershtein and Brickman families, and the workers' movement, specifically the

strikes to protest working conditions, began there. But ideas to improve the workers' situation were everywhere and touched everybody. The tanners for example, were predominantly religious bearded Jews, dressed in long coats (*kapotes*), people that we do not associate with secular pursuits and politics. But they were the ones that demanded changes and that eventually obtained the owners' compliance. Other workplaces followed. These were smaller businesses or workshops that were more difficult to picket: cobblers, leather specialists of different types, etc. Even women, who labored as packers in a sugar factory and were less willing to confront management, went out on strike and got the changes they sought. Once the tide to mobilize workers began, it engulfed almost everyone.

Even a group that was difficult to organize, the haulers, was part of the trend. Certain parts of the city would have a distinct day life and a much quieter night life. In the area between Kowalska, Furmańska, Lubartowska and Cyrulicza streets, close to the warehouses and stores, where packages were moved daily into and out of these buildings, carriages from diverse towns would come and station themselves and create impromptu markets. These workers – from coachmen, draymen, peddlers, dealers, porters and packers, brokers (and even thieves) – would know when the train was approaching and they would flock to the platform in search of customers, looking for work that would pay them even just a few coins. But on the social scale, the porters had the least status: they worked hard, they competed with each other, and they hardly had a place to rest during the day. In the evening, when some of them went either to the *beys medresh* (to pray or learn) or to the local tavern to drink a beer, the streets would become silent, drastically different from the daytime activity. Lublin had many haulers (*treger*). They plied their trade on many streets, particularly on commercial streets or next to the station where packages arrived or were moved. They often stood disorganized for hours, waiting outdoors to spot a potential customer. Each time, they would negotiate their work for a fee. Often old, always untrained, with no qualifications of any sort, religious, these were honest workers trying to make a living. How could they organize and establish a uniform fee for their work?

Their first meeting was very effective: they came from all the streets where they worked: Lubartowska, Grodzka, Szeroka, from both the Jewish quarters and the Christian areas. They showed up in their work clothes, which had remnants of flour, bricks, coal, and iron all over them, after a day of work; they often bound their own coats with ropes. They spoke of their own needs: the desire to have enough to eat and provide adequate food for their children; to buy a new shirt; to be able to clothe a child with something new rather than with mended hand-me-downs. Everybody in town talked about the carriers and porters, first in deprecating tones (after all, these were there the lowest paid workers), but later, with increasing respect. Slowly, things began to change.

Economic justice was at the center of the changes sought by the various labor organizations or unions, although the adjudication of disputes sometimes took strange turns. An incident that took place in 1918 in Lublin sheds light on the climate of conflict and the meting of justice. A mute worker was robbed. Robbers entered his house and took his belongings. He went to his union to report the incident. The union immediately sent a delegation to the thieves and tried to appeal to their consciences, asking them to return the stolen goods of the poor worker. The thieves rejected the claim, and laughed it off. As the delegation was leaving, the thieves even struck them with blows. This was on a Friday evening, as they returned to the worker-kitchen in Rynek (the market square). Immediately, all those who heard about the story and the attack took spoons and tools from the kitchen and confronted the thieves. The "battle" was a long one, and both sides suffered injuries until the police appeared. The following day, when people entered the kitchen, they saw that the thieves had destroyed it completely: dishes, furnishings, benches. That incident unleashed a real war between the unions and the underworld. Both central unions, from the Bund and the Poalei Tzion, joined to fight these fringe groups. There were physical battles and verbal attacks, all reported in the "Lubliner Togblat," the local newspaper. For two full weeks Lublin was taken with the battle against the "underworld," until the thieves were controlled, and peace negotiations ensued. Delegates met to work out a settlement: the thieves (known by their nicknames, e.g. "Bernard," "fat Moishe," "Mordkhile Benkart," and Yedidie "Buf" agreed not to operate in the workers' circles, and to pay for the destruction they had caused in the communal kitchen.

Another milestone in the labor movement was the organizing of domestic workers by the Poalei Tzion. This became a women's union because domestic workers were all housemaids. The first meeting was a gathering of 10 or 12 maids who kept laughing and joking, probably nervous and in disbelief. For them, the key demand was not so much a salary increase, but getting better conditions for their work hours. They therefore demanded some free time every day and a full rest day a week. They also asked for a monthly salary rather than a seasonal fee, as was the custom. And so it went with the printers, with the *kehillah* workers, etc. Despite these victories, the union leaders did not find their work easy. Some of them had to leave Lublin, and even Poland. Leaders went to Palestine, to France, Argentina; in all these communities they worked for their ideals and adapted to the local possibilities.



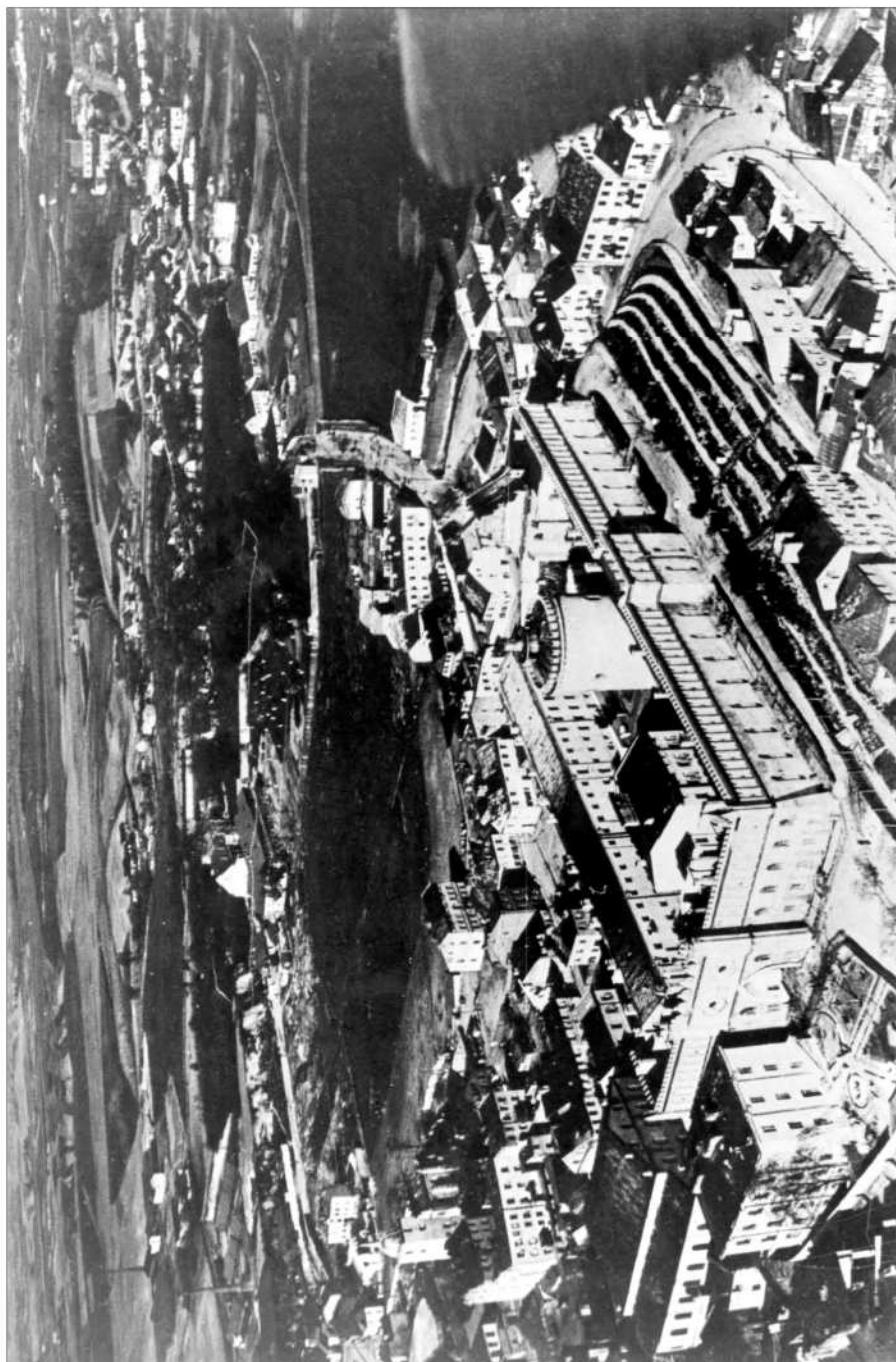
Cover page of the yizker book *Dos Bukh fun Lublin*, a memorial to the Jewish community of Lublin assembled after the war. Dovid Shtokfish served on the editorial committee for this volume, and was responsible for over 30 other *yizker* (memorial) books. He died in Israel in 2008



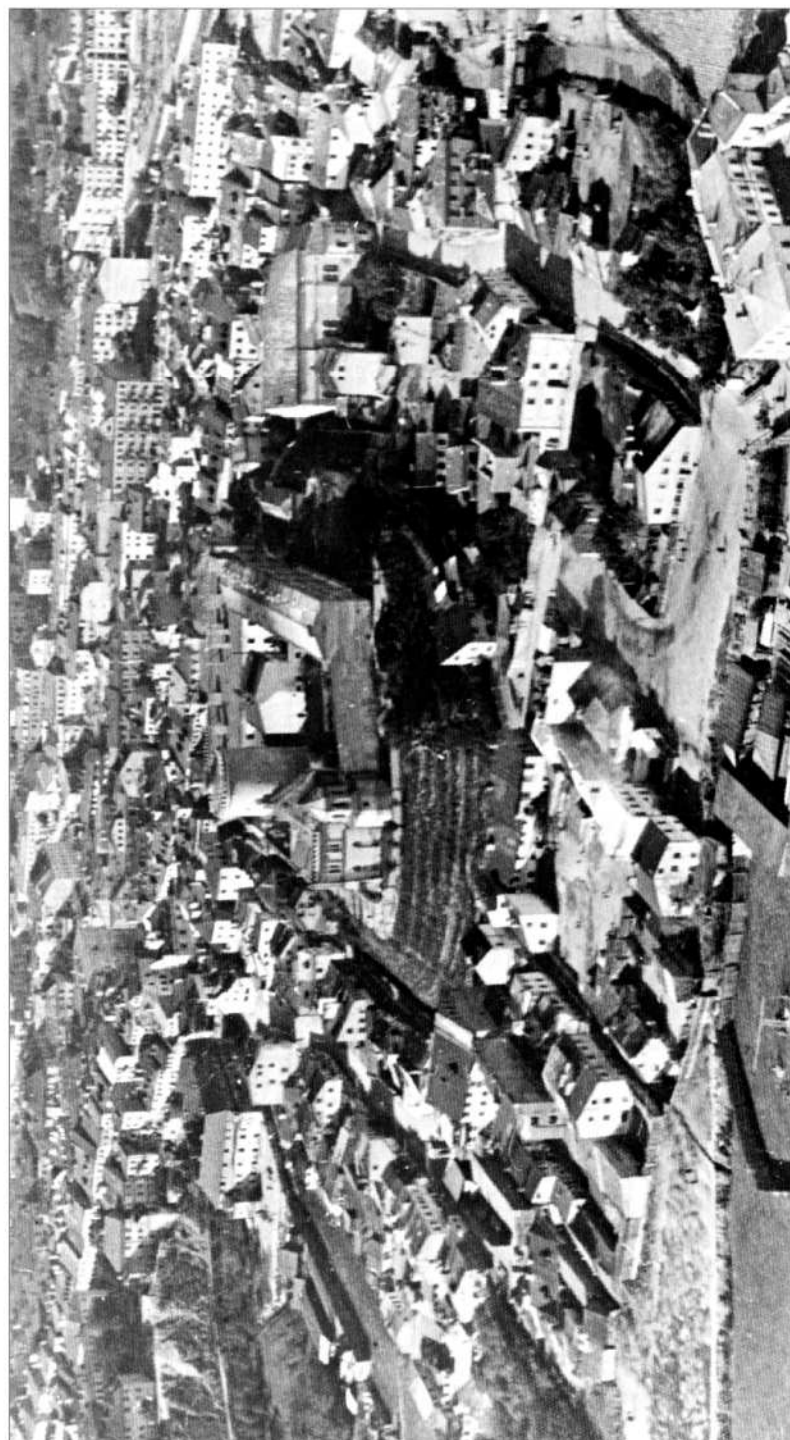
Bela Dobrzyńska together with kids from the "Ognisko" (Fireplace) kindergarten



Members of "HaSharon" kibbutz situated in the house at 41 Krawiecka Street. From the collection of Kibbutz Museum Yad Mordechai in Israel



Neighborhood of Podzamcze between the wars – the buildings of 41 Krawiecka Street are under the tip of the airplane wing. Collection of the Brama Grodzka Center



The Jewish quarter at Podzamcze, 1930s. To the left from the Castle: Krawiecka Street. The large building to the right is the Great Synagogue. Szeroka Street runs behind the Castle across the upper part of the photograph. Collection of the Brama Grodzka Center





"A triangle of three temples." A significant fragment of the Podzamcze area signifying Lublin's multicultural character, depicting St. Nicholas church at Czwartek Hill (1), the Russian Orthodox church at Ruska Street (2), the Great Synagogue (3) and two market squares (4, 5). In the middle the top of the remaining public water supply well (6). A fragment of a photograph from Jakub Kamiński's collection

