

An EPYC Jewish Story

Early Lublin: Cradle of a Culture

In the shadow of Lublin's 14th-century neo-Gothic castle — now a museum — and less than 15 minutes from the former Majdanek concentration camp, YIVO scholars have gathered puzzle pieces to help them assemble a portrait of Jewish life in this once-thriving center of Talmudic scholarship. Led by Dr. Adina Cimet, director of YIVO's Education Program on Yiddish Culture (EPYC), the delegation walked the streets of Podzamcze, a district that was established for Jews who at different times were alternately barred from and allowed to live in Lublin proper.

"Little remains of the once-crowded Jewish borough of Podzamcze because most houses were made of perishable materials like wood, and many of the stronger buildings and community records were destroyed by the Nazis," said Cimet before leaving on her trip. "But we are collecting photographs, films, art and primary documents to enhance our picture of the richness of Jewish life in Eastern Europe."

Those materials will be incorporated into EPYC's curriculum on Lublin, which is being designed for high school teachers, along with a web site and CD-ROM.

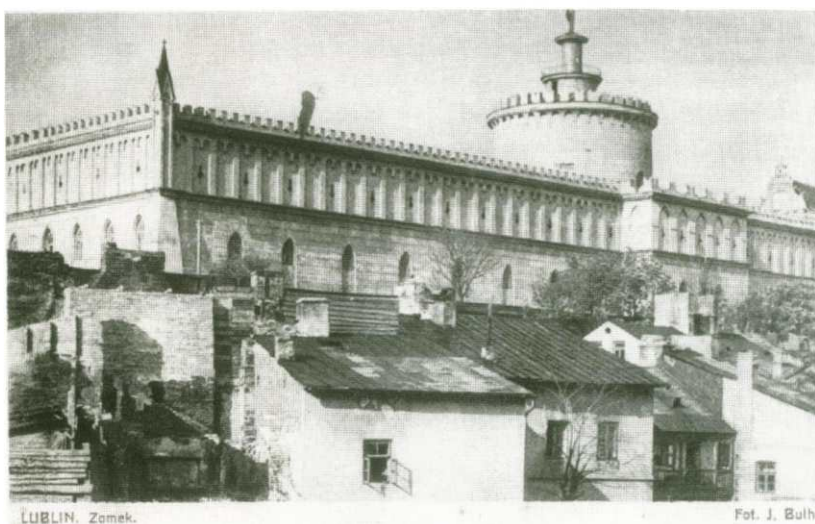
Among the topics in the curriculum are:

- The Jews of Podzamcze, with special emphasis on the role of women
- City history and layout
- Economic, political and labor relationships between Jews and non-Jews
- Jewish autonomy and governance
- Printing houses and their output
- Religious life, including the Yeshiva and the personalities who made Lublin a center of Jewish scholarship from the 14th century until the Nazis destroyed the community
- Life along Lubartowska Street, a broad avenue where the six-story Yeshivat Hachmei Lublin building now serves as a medical college

According to Cimet, few Jews if any remain in the city that was home to 40,000 Jews in 1939. However, an organization called the Grodzka Gate Cultural Center in Lublin is developing a program to educate local students in the rich history of Jews and other minorities in their region. Called *Forgotten Past—Multicultural Traditions of the Lublin Region*, it tries to break down stereotypes and foster dialogue on issues arising from interactions between minority and majority cultures.

The EPYC staff met with Dr. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, Professor of Jewish Studies at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University of Lublin, and co-editor of *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Poland: An Anthology*. Various members of the Grodzka Center are collaborating directly with the EPYC project. In addition, Cimet delivered two lectures at the university and at the Center.

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A postcard from the 1920s shows the Castle of Lublin.

Images from Today's Lublin



Dr. Adina Cimet (R) discussing the EPYC program with Grodzka Gate Cultural Center director Tomasz Pietrasiewicz and Monika Garbowska of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University.



This stone is from a Lublin Jewish cemetery, one of the oldest Jewish burial grounds in Poland. The oldest preserved tombstone in the cemetery dates to 1541. Many distinguished scholars were buried here.