

FOUNDATION FOR  
THE PRESERVATION  
OF JEWISH HERITAGE  
IN POLAND



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FUNDACJA  
OCHRONY  
DZIEDZICTWA  
ŻYDOWSKIEGO



# Łańcut

THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE

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

Our mission is to protect surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. The Foundation's priority task is the protection of Jewish cemeteries. In cooperation with numerous partners we have commemorated and saved from destruction several dozen cemeteries across the country (including those in Zakopane, Kozienice, Mszczonów, Iwaniska, Strzegowo, Dubienka, Kolno, Iłża, Wysokie Mazowieckie, Siedleczka-Kańczuga and Żuromin). Our activities also include the revitalization of particularly important and valuable Jewish monuments, such as the synagogues in Kraśnik, Przysucha, Rymanów and Zamość.

Our efforts to preserve Jewish heritage are however not limited to the protection of historical monuments. Increasing the public's knowledge of the history of the Jews, who for centuries contributed to Poland's cultural heritage, is equally important to us. Our most significant educational activities include the "To Bring Memory Back" program, addressed to young people, and the multimedia website POLIN – Polish Jews' Heritage [www.polin.org.pl](http://www.polin.org.pl), which will present the history of Jewish communities in 1200 towns across Poland.

One of the Foundation's most important undertakings is the "Chassidic Route" project whose main attractions include the synagogues in Kraśnik, Rymanów and Zamość as well as the famous synagogue in Łańcut.

For more information about the activity of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland:

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Dear Reader,

This publication is dedicated to the history of the Jewish community of Łańcut, and is part of a series presenting the history of Jews in towns belonging to the Chassidic Route – a project inaugurated by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland in 2005.

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

The Route runs through many picturesque areas, such as the Roztocze Hills and the Bieszczady Mountains, linking towns in which one can find imposing synagogues as well as Jewish cemeteries with gravestones dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> or even the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many of them are still visited by Chassidim from all over the world.

Within the framework of the Route, the Foundation supports local authorities and non-governmental organizations in protecting and promoting their towns' multicultural heritage and stimulates the creation of permanent inter-sector partnerships towards developing dedicated tourism based on Jewish heritage.

The Chassidic Route gives many places the opportunity to appear on the map of Poland's tourist attractions. Apart from well-known Łańcut and Zamość, the latter placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, there are many places along the Route that are often omitted by tourists unaware of the attractions they hold.

We invite you to join us for a trip along the Chassidic Route!

Monika Krawczyk | CEO



## Why the “Chassidic Route”?

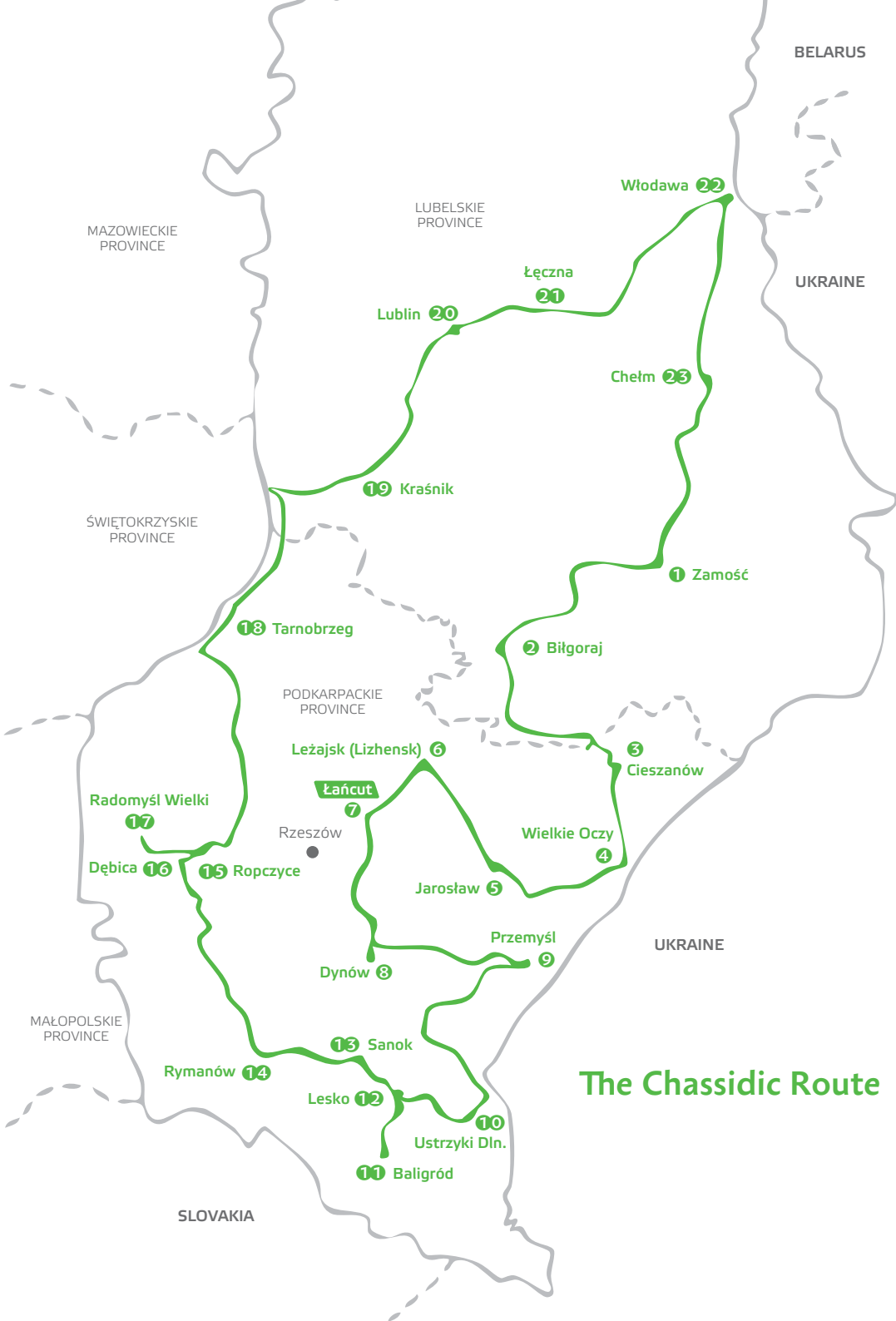
For many centuries Poland was home to several generations of Jews as well as the scene of an unprecedented development of Jewish culture, religious thought and writing. It was here that Chassidism, one of the most important currents ever to come into being within Judaism, emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup>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

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

Chassidim concentrated around tzadikim (Hebrew for “the righteous one”), charismatic spiritual leaders, each of whom preached a distinct way of approaching God – a specific way of studying the Torah and other religious texts as well as celebrating rituals. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the post of tzadik became hereditary, which led to the creation of whole dynasties, taking their names from towns where tzadikim courts took root.

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

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



## The Chassidic Route

### The Chassidic Route – Places of Interest

**ZAMOŚĆ** – Renaissance synagogue built at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., 9 Ludwika Zamenhofs St.; the so-called “new cemetery” founded in 1907, Prosta St.

**BIŁGORAJ** – cemetery founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Marii Konopnickiej St.

**CIESZANÓW** – synagogue built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., 7 Skorupki St.; cemetery founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Armii Krajowej St.

**WIELKIE OCZY** – synagogue built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., Rynek St.; cemetery founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Krakowiecka St.

**JAROSŁAW** – two synagogues built in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., 5 Ordynacka St. and 12 Opolska St.; cemetery founded at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Kruhel Pełkiński St.

**LEŻAJSK (LIZHENSK)** – cemetery founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. – resting place of Tzadik Elimelech of Leżajsk/Lizhensk (1717-1787), pilgrimage destination for Chassidim from all over the world, Górna St.

**ŁAŃCUT** – Baroque synagogue from the 18<sup>th</sup> c., 16 Jana Sobieskiego Sq.; cemetery founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. – resting place of Tzadik Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropczyce (1760-1827) and Eleazar Shapiro of Łańcut (d. 1865), Stanisława Moniuszki St.

**DYNÓW** – cemetery founded at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. – resting place of Tzadik Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dynów (1785-1841), Józefa Piłsudskiego St.

**PRZEMYŚL** – the so-called “new synagogue” erected at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., 5 Unii Brzeskiej Sq.; the so-called “new cemetery” founded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. – the largest Jewish cemetery in the Podkarpackie Province, Juliusza Słowackiego St.

**USTRZYKI DOLNE** – cemetery on Mount Gromadzyń, founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**BALIGRÓD** – cemetery founded at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Jana Duplaka St.

**LESKO** – synagogue built in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., 16 Berka Joselewicza St.; cemetery founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. – one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe, Juliusza Słowackiego St.

**SANOK** – the synagogue of the Yad Charuzim society built in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., 5 Franciszkańska St.; the Sadogóra synagogue erected in the 1920’s, 10 Rynek St.; the so-called “new cemetery” founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Kiczury St.

**RYMANÓW** – Baroque synagogue built in the 17<sup>th</sup> c., corner of Rynek and Bieleckiego Sts; cemetery with the grave of Tzadik Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (1745-1815), Juliusza Słowackiego St.

**ROP CZYCE** – cemetery founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Monte Cassino St.

**DĘBICA** – synagogue built at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., 3 Krakowska St.; cemetery founded at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Cmentarna St.

**RADOMYŚL WIELKI** – cemetery founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Kąty St.; mikvah, Targowa St.; the so-called “Tefłówka” – former house of Rabbi Chaim Englam, 2 Tadeusza Kościuszki St.

**TARNOBZREG** – cemetery founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. – resting place of Tzadik Eliezer Horowitz of Dzików (d. 1860), Marii Dąbrowskiej St.

**KRAŚNIK** – synagogue complex consisting of two synagogues built in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c., 6 and 6a Bóźnicza St.; the so-called “new cemetery” founded ca. 1850, Szewska St.

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

**ŁĘCZNA** – the Great Synagogue built in 1648 and the Small Synagogue built at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Boźnicza St.; cemetery founded in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., Pasternik St.

**WŁODAWA** – famous Baroque synagogue complex erected in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., 7 Czerwonego Krzyża St.

**CHEŁM** – the so-called “new synagogue” built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., 8 Kopernika St.; cemetery founded in the 15<sup>th</sup> c. – one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe, Kolejowa St.

### The Jews in Łańcut

Łańcut is a town in the Podkarpackie Province with a population of about 18 000. Its founding in 1349, based on Magdeburg Law, is traditionally attributed to either King Casimir the Great or Otton Topór of Pilcza, the town's first owner. The city was initially a German colony, most probably established at the site of an earlier Polish settlement. From 1385, the town belonged to Otton's daughter, Elżbieta Granowska née Pilecka, the later wife of King Władysław Jagiełło. It remained with the Pileckis until 1629, when it passed to the Lubomirskis, who raised a famous castle – one of the most spectacular noble residences in Poland there in 1629-1641. In 1816, the Łańcut estate was taken over by the Potocki family, who remained in possession of it until 1944.

### The beginnings of Jewish settlement in Łańcut

Jews began to settle in Łańcut in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest mention of a Jewish settler, referred to as *Abre Judei*, dates back to 1554. Jews by the names of Mojzes, Marcus, Marcas, Jozeph and Abraham appear in the town's tax register of 1566, their families jointly numbering about 30 people. The following year however only *Joseph Judaeux* receives a record. A kehilla – or Jewish community – is first mentioned in 1563. A kehilla was the local center of Jewish authority, bringing together Jews from a given township and the surrounding area.

In 1571-1592, there were no persons of Jewish origin among Łańcut's taxpayers. Jews did however have to appear in the town (perhaps as travelling merchants) because the *de non tolerandis Judaeis* privilege – a law prohibiting Jews to settle within the city walls – was granted to Łańcut by Krzysztof Pilecki in 1583. Although hardly ever respected, this law was commonplace in Poland at the time. This seems also to have been the case in Łańcut. From 1593 onwards, Jews made a reappearance in the tax registers, which means that they were permanent residents.

After Stanisław Lubomirski became the owner of Łańcut in 1629 the number of Jewish residents began to see a steady increase. Lubomirski hired a Jewish factor to keep the accounts of the Łańcut estate. In 1624, Jewish families living in the town already numbered 18 – the equivalent of about 100 people. In 1625-1655, Jews began to acquire a greater number of houses, either through purchase or seizure in lieu of unpaid debts. In 1640-1655, living in the eastern part of the city across from the castle were: Lewko Idzkowicz, the lessee Rakszawski, Lewko Głatki, Simon Mankowicz, Jozef Lewkowicz, Szlama Jeleniowicz, also known as Salomonowicz, as well as the Jakubowicz and Abramowicz families. A wooden synagogue was in existence prior to 1648. The first reference to a Jewish cemetery comes from 1671.

The influx of Jewish settlers was relatively small in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1683-1687, the following were listed in the wójt's (reeve's) book: Lewko Jeleniowicz – usurer, Salomon Jeleniowicz – lessee of a part of duchess Barbara Lubomirska's estate, Bonas Ickowicz – lessee, Abraham Markowicz – taverner, Berek Markowicz – butcher, Ersz Moszkowicz – soapmaker, Chaim Samulowicz – prince Stanisław Lubomirski's factor, Michał Sapsonowicz – merchant, as well as Szlama Lazarowicz and Jakub Erszkowicz. Documents from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century also mention, amongst others, two Jewish tailors, a barber and a haberdasher. In 1690, doctor Moraszek – a medical doctor and merchant – headed the local Jewish community. The Jewish population saw a visible increase after the great fire of 1695 and the epidemic of 1706.

### The growth of the Jewish community in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

The growing importance of Łańcut's Jewish community is manifest in the fact that in 1707, with consent from the owner of the town Franciszek Lubomirski, the Waad Arba Aracot, or the Polish Jews' parliament (the chief organ of Jewish authority in the Republic of Poland, holding assembly since 1580) met in Łańcut. This was a great distinction for the local Jewish community. Religious, economic and tax-related issues were discussed during the session.

The first Łańcut rabbi known by his full name was Froim Boruchowic, who received mention in the wójt's book in 1710. A rabbi was the community's spiritual leader and teacher but he also held a wide array of other posts, including that of the head of the court. The Jewish court ruled mainly in religious matters but also in small-scale civil disputes. Disputes with Christians were heard before the municipal court. Jewish jurisdiction in Łańcut was confirmed in the privilege granted by Stanisław Lubomirski in 1768, which stated that the *Jew should go to the rabbinical court*.

In 1710, Franciszek Lubomirski issued a decree against usury (lending money at interest) which seriously hit the Jewish community. In 1726, Lubomirski ordered the Jews to leave Łańcut. After Lubomirski's suicide in 1721, the Jewish community obtained the reinstatement of their rights, set out in a new privilege granted by Teodor Lubomirski.

In 1716, the old wooden synagogue burned down. Rebuilt, it soon burned down again. In order to avoid such tragedies in the future, in 1726 the kehilla launched efforts to raise a new brick house of prayer. The project was finally funded by Stanisław Lubomirski in 1761. It was then that the present edifice, one of the finest examples of Baroque synagogal architecture in Central Europe, was built (more about the synagogue on p. 17). Mosze Cwi Hirsz Meizlich was rabbi during the construction works.

Just as in any other city, the synagogue in Łańcut was not only a place for religious services and teaching the Torah but the administrative and legal center of the Jewish community as well as the seat of the kehilla executive: the three-person Senior Council. At this point, the Jews constituted about 12% of Łańcut's population, living mainly in the south-eastern part of the city. The community disposed of its own school, bathhouse, prayer hall, hospital and of course, as already mentioned, a cemetery.

Following the first partition of Poland in 1772, Łańcut became part of the territory of Austria. The partition did not impede the rise of the Jewish community, which continued to grow, taking over and buying numerous houses in the city center. By 1787, Jews already owned 47 of the 276 estates in Łańcut.

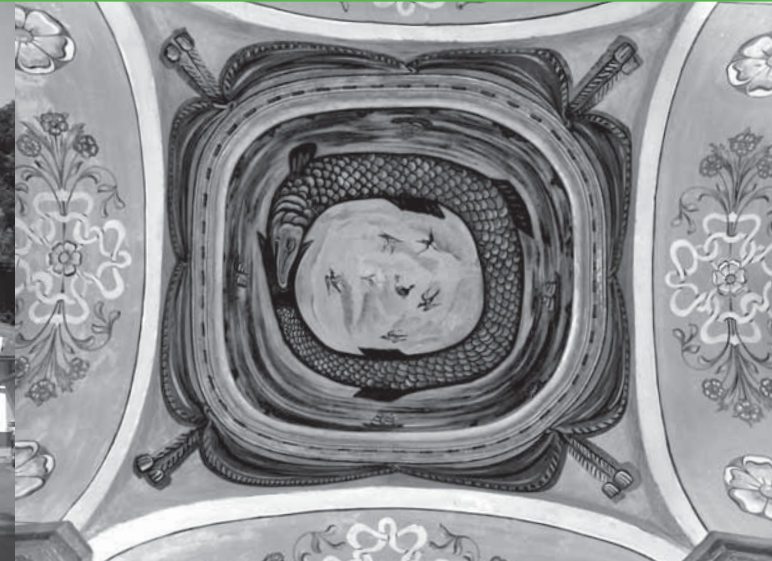
During this period, trade and crafts were the chief employment of Łańcut Jewry. Seven of the nine bakers in the town were Jewish; the same went for tailors. One Jewish butcher (and seven Christian ones) were active in the city, as well as one weaver. Jewish clothiers also held a very strong position. Alcohol was sold by eight Christians and sixteen Jews. One of the wealthiest was Berek Baumberg, who also owned an inn. The remaining inns belonged to Sander Glana, Elias Son, Lazar Wolkenfeld and Gieca Worcel. All of the inns in Łańcut were owned by Jews by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



Synagogue



Synagogue



Synagogue

### Chassidism

After 1760, Łańcut became an important center of the Chassidic movement. Chassidim became the dominant force in the religious life of the community, opposing advocates of the Haskalah (Hebrew for “enlightenment”), a pan-European Jewish movement which postulated the renouncement of isolationism and the involvement of Jews in the social and political life of the countries they inhabited.

The Łańcut rabbi Aryeh Leibush (d. 1819), the author of a famous Torah commentary – *Gevurot Aryeh*, is considered one of the holy men of Chassidism. The rabbi was known for the great care he attached to the spiritual life of the community as well as practical matters related to the halakha or Jewish law. He would often visit Jewish stores and check the weights used to make sure merchants were not cheating their clients. This won him extreme popularity both among Jews and Christians. After his death, the post of rabbi was filled by Eleazar Shapiro, the son of Tzvi Elimelech of Dynów, the founder of the Dynów tzadik dynasty. The author of several important rabbinical works, Shapiro strengthened the influence of Chassidism both in Łańcut and in the surrounding communities. After his death in 1865, the post of rabbi was held by his descendants.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tzadik Jacob Isaac Horowitz (1745-1815), one of the most important tzadiks in the history of Chassidism, known then as the “holy man of Łańcut” and later as the “Seer of Lublin”, made his residence in Łańcut. He had his own separate room at the Łańcut synagogue, where he prayed, studied and carried on discussions with Chassidim. Around 1790, he moved to Czechów (today, a neighborhood in northern Lublin), and then to Lublin itself. He did not establish his own dynasty, but his students included many well-known tzadikim from the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia. The room he inhabited inside the Łańcut synagogue, known as the “Lublin room” is to this day the destination of Chassidic pilgrimages.

Another famous tzadik associated with Łańcut was Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropczyce (1760-1827), the protoplast of a multi-branched Galician tzadik dynasty. Residing in Ropczyce, to which he drew a very

wide following, he was a masterly cabalistic interpreter of the Torah, and became famous, amongst other things, for a collection of Torah commentaries – *Zera Kodesh* (published in 1868), and the collection *Ohel Naftali* (published for the first time in 1810 or 1911). At the end of his life, Naftali severed ties with his Chassidim and lived in isolation. He died in Łańcut in 1827, on his way to Lublin. It is traditionally believed that when passing by the Łańcut Jewish cemetery, he suddenly ordered the coachman to stop, and said: *It smells of heaven here*. The moment he pronounced those words he was taken ill. He died in Łańcut on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1827, and was buried at the Jewish cemetery in today's Moniuszki St. An ohel – a simple structure placed over the graves of important Jewish religious leaders – was raised over his grave.

### The Jews of Łańcut in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

In 1820, a great fire ravaged a large section of the town. The fire almost completely wiped out the Jewish district within the quadrant defined by Kowalska (Smith), Rzeźnicka (Butcher) and Wałowa streets. The synagogue and school survived. Several epidemics broke out in the destroyed city: cholera in 1827, typhus in 1831, and an epidemic of both of these in 1855.

It was not until the second half of the century that the number of Jewish residents began to see a noteworthy increase. In 1870, there were 1113 Jews living in Łańcut – the equivalent of 41,1% of the town's total population (2690). In 1880, this ratio numbered, accordingly, 1587/3483 (45,6%), in 1890 – 1669/4486 (37,2%), in 1900 – 1940/4850 (40%), and in 1910 – 1880/5378 (35%). At this time, many Jews declared Polish as their everyday language in official censuses. However, this information was probably false because Yiddish did not figure on the official list of languages used in the Austrian Empire and did not appear on census cards. By 1910, nearly all Jews declared Polish to be their everyday language. Earlier, some of them had declared it to be German.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a significant number of the town's inhabitants were employed in crafts or trade. Jews were dominant in professions such as those of tailor and clothier, they also ran about 20 inns. In 1833 or 1837, Gabriel Danielewicz opened a restaurant and a hotel. The merchants Laib Haarkopf and



*Cemetery in Moniuszki St., ohel of Tzadik Eleazar Shapiro*



*Synagogue – exhibition*



*Cemetery in Traugutta St.*

Isaak Reicher engaged in large-scale trade, notably with merchants from Sambor and Jarosław, their transactions worth thousands of Rhenish guildens.

About 1860, a new Jewish cemetery was established in present-day Traugutta St. New grounds were also purchased for the old cemetery in Moniuszki St.

The religious life of the community was still to a large extent dominated by Chassidim, who rejected all notion of reform or assimilation. In spite of this, new ideas, such as Zionism, whose goal was to found a Jewish state on the territory inhabited by Jews in biblical times, became increasingly popular among young people. 1894 saw the founding of the "Zion" association, whose operation was initially clandestine. Following the First Zionist Congress, the Łańcut "Zion" began to function in the open; it was however strongly attacked by proponents of the status quo. During the First World War the Zionist movement died down, to be revived in 1917. Zionists gave a creative impulse to the orthodox and conservative Jewry of Łańcut, bringing a spirit of change into the lives of the local community.

### The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The importance of the Jews in Łańcut at this time is best illustrated by the fact that the community had its representatives on the City Council. In 1907, these were Meilech Perlmutter, Markus Lindenbaum and Izajasz Glanzberg.

Jewish life concentrated mainly around the synagogue and the beit midrash (house of study), open day and night to anyone who wanted to study the Torah and welcoming the poor seeking shelter from the cold. In 1908-1909, a mikvah was built in present-day Ottona z Pilczy St.

In 1910, 24% of the Jews in Łańcut were employed in various crafts. 91% of the town's citizens employed in trade were Jewish. Of these, according to official statistics, 47% were merchants, 25,4% peddlers and 9,9% were stand owners. In 1910, there were four Catholic restaurants and 16 Jewish inns (1 inn for every 269 inhabitants).

In 1911-1913, only 2,3-3,5 % of Jewish children attended the public gymnasium. Jews who wanted their children to maintain a sense of distinct national identity brought about the opening of a Jewish school for boys with classes in Hebrew (during the interwar period the same type of school, ran by the "Beit Jaakov" association, was created for girls). At this time, half of the teachers working in Łańcut were Jewish teachers employed at the cheder (religious school for the youngest boys).

Many cultural, economic and charitable institutions were established in Łańcut at this time. Just before World War I, the "Hazemer" ("Song") music society was founded. The society was co-educational, which met with the displeasure of the local rabbi. The war interrupted the activity of "Hazemer", which started up again after the end of hostilities.

### World War I

World War I broke out on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Many Jews left Łańcut escaping from the advancing Russian Army, which entered the town on September 14<sup>th</sup> and remained there until October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1914. During this time it was chiefly Jews who fell victim to theft and rape by the Russian soldiers. In October, the Austrian army was greeted by the inhabitants of Łańcut with relief, but calm was not to last. The Russians re-entered town on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1914. The occupation was a bit calmer this time – the army authorities quickly put an end to pillaging. The Russian military left Łańcut on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915. In spite of the army's departure, life in the city continued to be very difficult – many people suffered chronic hunger amid continual supply difficulties. It was with joy that the town greeted news of the war's end and the declaration of Polish independence.

### The interwar period

The interwar period saw a rapid growth of the Jewish community. Jewish educational and cultural institutions developed intensively, as did trade (during the interwar period Jews owned 2/3 of the 250 shops and stands in the city). In 1921, 1925 of the town's 4518 inhabitants were Jewish. According



Synagogue



Synagogue



Synagogue

to the census of 1931, there were 2012 Jews living in the city, residing chiefly in the city center. Nearly all houses surrounding the market square were owned by Jews (out of the 556 people living there, 511 were Jewish). 231 of the 259 people living in Sobieskiego Sq. were Jewish. A similar pattern was to be observed along Drückera, Rejtana, Słowackiego, Waclawa, Kilińskiego, Rzeźnicza (Butcher), Danielewicz, Piłsudskiego and Tkacka (Weaver) streets.

An important testimony to the growing significance of the Jewish community was the People's House (Beit Ha'Am), the Jewish community center – an imposing structure built in Łazienna (Bath – present-day Ottona z Pilczy) St. in 1930. The building was most probably designed by Władysław Pelc and Stanisław Rogowski.

There were two Jewish schools (one for boys and one for girls) in the city, while a steady 6-8% of pupils at the Łańcut gymnasium were Jewish. The gymnasium also offered Jewish religion classes, taught by Izaak Ebner. The reactivated "Hazemer" society, counting 30-40 members was also active, along with a choir and a theatrical society. The Jewish community had its own library, located at the People's House from 1930. Jewish charitable organizations bringing aid to the poorer members of the community were also active in Łańcut.

There were also Jewish sports teams. Two are known of before 1929: "Kraft" ("Strength") and "Ha-poel" ("Worker"). The first brought together young people from wealthier families, the second attracted the community's poorer members. "Kraft" later changed its name to "Trumpeldor" (in honor of Joseph Trumpeldor, 1880-1920, a hero of the Jewish pioneer movement). All sports organizations ceased to function with the outbreak of World War II. The exception was "Trumpeldor" Sports Club, which at the time also brought together Jewish policemen. The members of this club, in blue and white colors, played matches until the spring of 1940.

### World War II and the Holocaust

At the outbreak of World War II, there were about 2750 Jews living in Łańcut. The Germans entered the town on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939, immediately launching repressions against Jews and making a failed attempt to burn down the synagogue (the building was saved thanks to an appeal made by count Alfred Antoni Potocki). On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, the German occupational authorities issued a decision expelling Jews from Łańcut; they were to leave the town and cross the San river into the Russian occupation zone. With time however Jews who had hidden in nearby towns or whom the Germans had assigned to work at reinforcing military defense lines began to drift back into the city.

In December 1940, there were about 1300 Jews living in Łańcut, 400 of whom were migrants resettled from the Reich (mainly from Kalisz, Łódź, Chorzów and Katowice). At this time, the Germans set up a Judenrat, which included: dr Marcus Pohorille – president, Rachel Sapir – secretary, as well as members: Luzer Marder, Szlomo Greenbaum, Leizer Fass, Wolf Gutman, Mosze Sigl, Dawid Rosenblum, Chaim Laub Kornblau, Isaak Weinbach and Israel Gersten. The Judenrat had the daily duty of providing workers for public works ordained by the Germans. All Jews and their property were registered. Jewish citizens could be in possession of cash no greater than 2000 zloty; all money above this sum was seized by the occupational authorities. As a result of these policies people were stripped of their whole life's earnings. In January 1940, Jews were banned from using the railway and engaging in trade, nearly all Jewish workshops were also closed (only 5 out of 300 survived).

The regional Jewish Social Self Help (ŻSS) committee operating in Łańcut strove to improve conditions for the Jewish population. The committee was headed by Marcus Pohorille, and included Leizer Fass from Łańcut and Szmelke Westreich from Kańczuga. In December 1940, the ŻSS provided help to about 6000 people, not only in Łańcut but also in Kańczuga (810 people), Żurawica (700), Żołynia (660) and Pruchnik (600). The committee's meager funds allowed for the maintenance of a soup kitchen and the purchase of potatoes, which were distributed to the neediest. The committee received a small amount of funds from the Krakow ŻSS.



Following the Third Reich's aggression against the Soviet Union in June 1941, part of Łańcut's inhabitants staying in the Soviet-occupied zone tried to make it back to their hometown. They were violently pursued and murdered by the German police on allegations of belonging to the Komsomol or the Bolshevik Party.

In December 1941, the German starost of Jarosław, Eisenlohr, issued a decree prohibiting Jews to leave their place of residence and indicating the streets where they could live. This decree was also enforced in Łańcut. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1942, a ghetto was formed. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, all members of the Judenrat were called on to present themselves at the police station, where they were asked to indicate ten Jews who could serve as hostages. When they refused, they were arrested and, along with six other Jews caught in the street, transported to Jarosław, where they were probably executed on the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of July. The Germans appointed a new Judenrat, whose members were: attorney Ruben Nadel – president, Naftali Reich – secretary, and members: Mosze Siegel, Joel Perlmutter, Mottel Kern, Benijamin Zilpau, Samuel Sach, Leiser Fass, Dawid Rosenblum, Chaim Leib Kornblau and Israel Milard.

In spite of ever increasing repressions by the German authorities as well as horrifying living conditions the Jews did not expect the coming catastrophe. Most of them acquiesced in the false belief that they would see the end of the war, counting on being useful to the Germans as labor. The occupational authorities however were already planning the final liquidation of the Łańcut ghetto.

On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, a number of Jews from the ghetto were transported to nearby Sieniawa. On July 15<sup>th</sup>, the Gestapo officer Frantz Schmidt arrived in Łańcut and began the selection of the remaining Jews. Rumor had it that those whose documents he stamped would be able to stay in the city and would not be moved to work camps, as it was then thought. Many tried to bribe Schmidt, facilitated by the president of the Judenrat, Ruben Nadel. These dramatic efforts however proved useless – the Germans began the liquidation of the ghetto on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942, gradually transporting all Jews out of the city. The last transports left Łańcut on August 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 1942. About 1100 Jews were taken to the camp in Pełkinie, from where they were transported to the camp in Bełżec. About 120 people were killed in seven executions which took place in the Jewish cemetery in Traugutta St. During the following months, the Germans found and murdered several dozen Jews remaining in hiding, along with the Poles helping them. Only a handful of Łańcut Jews survived the German occupation.

### Traces of presence

Today only a handful of monuments remind us of the several centuries of Jewish presence in Łańcut. The most spectacular of these is the famous Baroque synagogue at 16 Jana Sobieskiego Sq. It is one of the most spectacular synagogues preserved in Central Europe.

The synagogue was raised in the Baroque style. The external façade is very simple and modest, clashing with the rich decor and monumental scale of the interior. One of the striking features of the building is the floor, which has been lowered to much below ground level. This device was used in order to bypass the strict limitations once set on the height of synagogues. Lowering the floor made it possible to achieve an impressive height (measuring 9,2 m at the highest point of the vault).

A monumental architectonic bima (a raised platform from which the Torah was read), whose four columns support the vault, stands in the middle of the main hall. A richly decorated aron ha-kodesh, the receptacle in which the Torah scrolls were kept, also draws attention on the eastern wall. The

western part of the synagogue houses the women's gallery. The walls and vaults are adorned with symbolic stucco and painted elements. Prayers are inscribed on the walls in shallow, semi-circular closed niches. The painted decorations in the synagogue date back to the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The synagogue was restored in 1896 and in 1909-1910. In September 1939, the Germans attempted to set it on fire – the wooden women's gallery, window frames and interior furnishings perished at this time. The fire was put out following the intercession of Alfred Antoni Potocki, who made an appeal to the German authorities. After the liquidation of the Łańcut ghetto, the Nazis turned the synagogue into a grain storehouse, and it is as a storage depot that it survived until 1956.

In 1956, the Town National Council decided to take the building down. However, protest was voiced by Dr Władysław Balicki, who forced the council to withdraw its decision. Dr Balicki, along with the head of the Cultural Department of the National Council in Rzeszów, Jan Mincal, allocated a large sum of money for the renovation of the synagogue and organized an exhibition of Judaica inside it. From 1973, the synagogue was maintained by the Łańcut Castle Museum. The building underwent major renovations in the 1980s and 90s. Since 2009, it has been the property of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.

There are also two Jewish cemeteries in Łańcut: the old and the new. The first reference to the old cemetery, located in today's Moniuszki St, dates back to 1671. Nearly all matzevot were removed and destroyed by the Germans during World War II. The cemetery is still however visited by Jews from all over the world, who pay tribute at the ohelot of Tzadik Naftali Tzvi Horowitz of Ropczyce and Tzadik Eleazar Shapiro.

The new cemetery was founded around 1860 in today's Traugutta St. During the war, all gravestones were removed from it by the Germans. A memorial plaque commemorating the site of the execution of Łańcut Jews in 1941-1944 can be found within its bounds.

A mikvah at 2 Ottona z Pilczy St, built in 1908-1910, has also survived till our day.

| Marcin Cichocki

## Protection of Jewish heritage

Thanks to the successful cooperation between the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland and the Łańcut city authorities (previously also the Łańcut Museum), the Jewish monuments surviving in Łańcut are today in a relatively good state. This gives reason to hope that traces of Jewish presence will continue to remind future generations of the multicultural history of the town. Since 2009 the town of Łańcut has participated in the Chassidic Route project.

The Foundation strives to get residents involved in caring for their city's multicultural heritage. We hope that Łańcut schools will soon take part in the Foundation's "To Bring Memory Back" educational program, in which over 300 schools and educational facilities, nearly 7000 students and almost 350 teachers from across Poland have taken part since 2005. Within the framework of the program, young people discover the multicultural history of their town, become familiar with the story of the local Jewish community as well as Jewish culture and traditions, and prepare public activities to make their findings available to the local community.

We hope that more such activities, reminding the local community and visitors of the history of the Jews, who have for centuries contributed to the social life as well as the cultural and economic development of Łańcut will be soon carried out in the city.

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