

FOUNDATION FOR  
THE PRESERVATION  
OF JEWISH HERITAGE  
IN POLAND



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FUNDACJA  
OCHRONY  
DZIEDZICTWA  
ŻYDOWSKIEGO



# Ropczyce

THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE

[Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland](#) was established in March 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO).

Our mission is to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. The priority of our Foundation is the protection of the Jewish cemeteries: in cooperation with other organizations and private donors we saved from destruction, fenced and commemorated several of them (e.g. in Zakopane, Kozienice, Mszczonów, Kłodzko, Iwaniska, Strzegowo, Dubienka, Kolno, Iłża, Wysokie Mazowieckie). The actions of our Foundation cover also the revitalization of particularly important and valuable landmarks of Jewish heritage, e.g. the synagogues in Zamość, Rymanów and Kraśnik.

We do not limit our heritage preservation activities only to the protection of objects. It is equally important for us to broaden the public's knowledge about the history of Jews who for centuries contributed to cultural heritage of Poland.

One of the most important educational activities of our Foundation is the "To Bring Memory Back" program ([www.pamiec.fodz.pl](http://www.pamiec.fodz.pl)) directed to students, with over 130 schools from all around Poland participating in it, and the multimedia Internet portal POLIN – Polish Jews Heritage ([www.polin.org.pl](http://www.polin.org.pl)), meant to present the history of the Jewish communities from 1,200 places in the country.

One of the major undertakings by the Foundation is the Chassidic Route project.

More information about the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland:

[www.fodz.pl](http://www.fodz.pl)

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[www.polin.org.pl](http://www.polin.org.pl)

Dear Sirs,

This publication is dedicated to the history of the Jewish community of **Ropczyce**, and is a part of a series of pamphlets presenting history of Jews in the localities participating in the Chassidic Route project, run by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland since 2005.

The Chassidic Route is a tourist route which follows the traces of Jews from southeastern Poland and, soon, from western Ukraine. 20 localities, which have already joined the project and where the priceless traces of the centuries-old Jewish presence have survived, are: Baligród, Biłgoraj, Chełm, Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Jarosław, Kraśnik, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemyśl, Ropczyce, Rymanów, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, Ustrzyki Dolne, Wielkie Oczy, Włodawa and Zamość.

The Chassidic Route runs through picturesque areas of southeastern Poland, like the Roztocze Hills and the Bieszczady Mountains, and joins localities, where one can find imposing synagogues and Jewish cemeteries with gravestones dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> or even 16<sup>th</sup> c. Many of those cemeteries have still been visited by the Chassidim from all over the world.

Within the frames of the Chassidic Route project, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland supports local authorities and non-governmental organizations to protect and promote multicultural heritage of their communities. It also stimulates establishing firm partnership between sectors in favor of the development of profiled tourism, based on Jewish cultural heritage.

The Chassidic Route gives many places the opportunity to appear on the map of tourist attractions of Poland; apart from well-known Zamość, placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, there are many places on the Route, which are often omitted by tourists, unaware of their attractions.

We cordially invite you to join us on the Chassidic Route!

**Monika Krawczyk** | CEO





## Why the “Chassidic Route”?

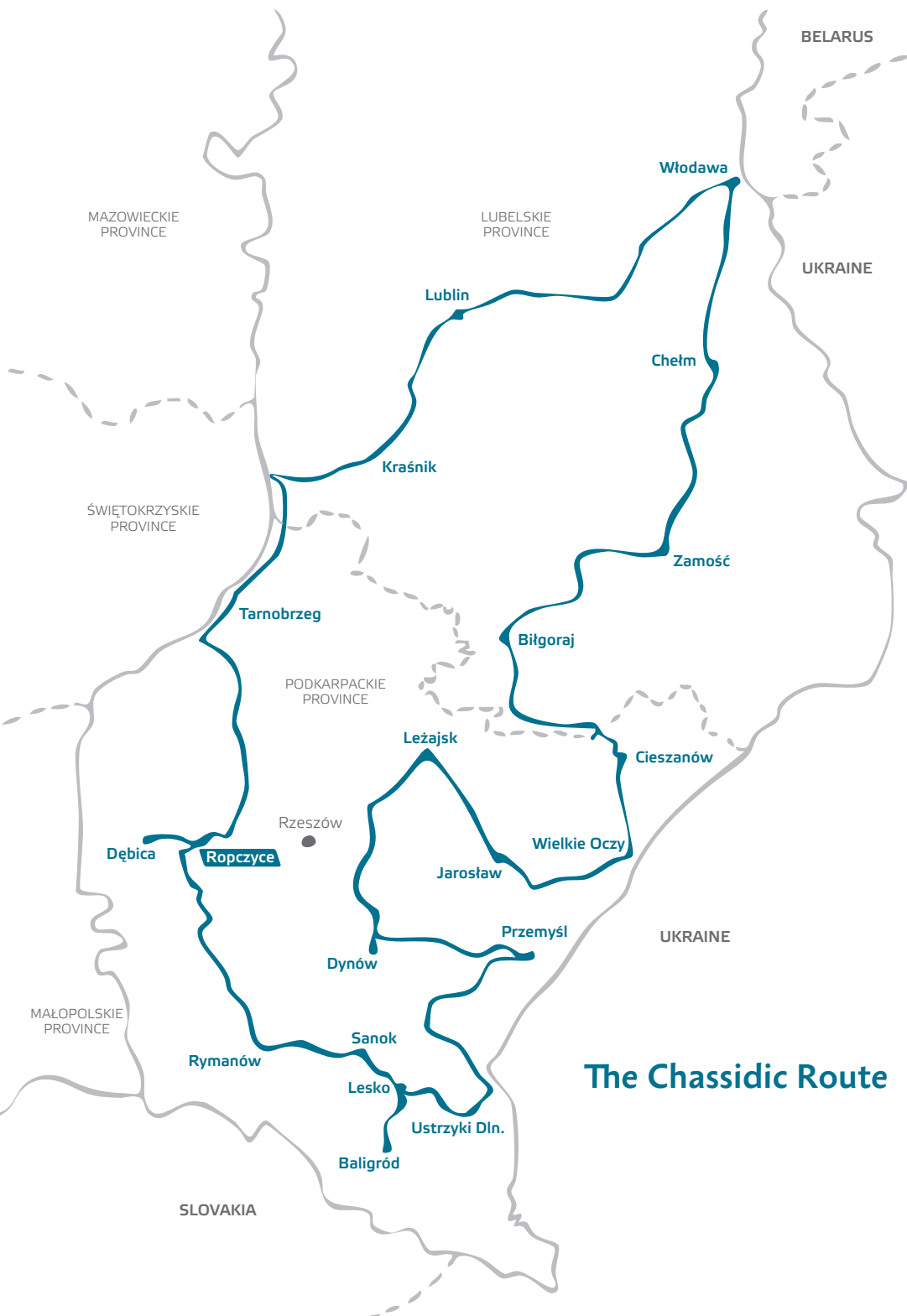
For centuries Poland used to be the homeland to many generations of Jews. An unprecedented development of Jewish culture, as well as religious thought and writing, took place in this country. Here in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. emerged Chassidism, one of the most important currents in Judaism ever. It gained particularly many supporters in eastern Poland, among others on the territories through which the Chassidic Route runs today.

It is traditionally believed that the creator of Chassidism (*chassid* stands in Hebrew for “pious”) was Israel Ben Eliezer of Międzybóż (Medzhybizh) in the Podolia region (today in Ukraine), known as the Baal Shem Tov. The Chassidim believed that religiousness could not be limited only to strict observing of orders and bans of Judaism, and even that obeying of them in a too restrictive way could distance the man from God. Therefore they strongly emphasized the spiritual dimension of religion and the emotional experience of faith.

The Chassidim gathered around the tzadikim (*tzadik* stands in Hebrew for “righteous”), charismatic spiritual leaders, each of whom proposed a special way of coming closer to God, concrete methods of studying of the Torah and other religious writings, as well as celebrating of rituals. In the 19<sup>th</sup> c. the rank of a tzadik became hereditary, which led to establishing entire dynasties of the tzadikim, taking their names from the towns, where their courts were located.

On an anniversary of death of a tzadik (*yortzait*), the Chassidim gather around his grave with belief that on such a day the soul the tzadik visits the place. They pray and leave at the grave *kvitlech*, small pieces of paper with written requests. This tradition is still vivid and the Chassidim from all around the world still come to the graves of tzadikim in Lizhensk, Lublin, Dynów, Ropczyce or Rymanów.

There were courts of tzadikim in Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemyśl, Ropczyce, Rymanów and Tarnobrzeg (or, more precisely, in nearby Dzików). The most important center of Chassidism in Poland was Lizhensk, where the famous Tzadik Elimelech lived. In other localities of the Route only small groups of the Chassidim, affiliated to tzadikim from other towns and villages, used to live. This, however, does not downgrade the appeal of the relics of Jewish heritage located there.



## The Chassidic Route

### The Chassidic Route – Places of Interest:

**BALIGRÓD** – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**BIŁGORAJ** – a cemetery established in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

**CHEŁM** – a so called “new synagogue” from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.; a cemetery established in the 15<sup>th</sup> c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

**CIESZANÓW** – a synagogue from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.; a cemetery established in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

**DĘBICA** – a synagogue erected probably at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.; a cemetery established at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**DYNÓW** – a cemetery from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. with the grave of Tzadik Zvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dynów (1785–1841).

**JAROSŁAW** – two synagogues from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**KRAŚNIK** – a complex of two synagogues from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c.; a so called “new cemetery” established around 1850.

**LESKO** – a synagogue erected in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. and a cemetery from the 16<sup>th</sup> c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

**LEŻAJSK (LIZHENSK)** – a cemetery established in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. with the grave of Tzadik Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717–1787), a place of pilgrimages of the Chassidim from all over the world.

**LUBLIN** – the *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin* (the School of the Wise Men of Lublin) erected in 1930 as the biggest Jewish religious school in the world; a so called “old cemetery” established in the 16<sup>th</sup> c., with the grave of Tzadik Jacob Isaac Horovitz, called “The Seer of Lublin” (1745–1815); a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

**PRZEMYŚL** – a so called “new synagogue” erected at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.; a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the biggest Jewish cemetery in Podkarpackie province.

**ROP CZYCE** – a cemetery established in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**RYMANÓW** – a Baroque synagogue and a cemetery with the grave of Tzadik Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (1745–1815).

**SANOK** – a synagogue of the *Yad Charuzim* society, build in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.; a synagogue erected in the 1920's; a so called “new cemetery” established in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

**TARNOBZEG** – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. with the grave of Tzadik Eliezer Horovitz of Dzików.

**USTRYKI DOLNE** – a cemetery established in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**WIELKIE OCZY** – a synagogue from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.; a cemetery established in the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**WŁODAWA** – a Baroque synagogue complex from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

**ZAMOŚĆ** – a famous Renaissance synagogue erected at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> c.; a so called “new cemetery” established in 1907.







*The monument on the cemetery in Ropczyce*



*The cemetery in Ropczyce with the ohel in the background*



*The ohel on the cemetery in Ropczyce*

Ropczyce is a town located in Podkarpackie (Subcarpathian) province (30 km west of Rzeszów), on the Wielopolka River (a tributary of the Wisłoka River), and is inhabited by over 16,000 people.

The first reference to Ropczyce comes from a document of 1252, which confirmed the donation of the land by brothers Klemens and Marek Gryf to a Cistercian monastery in Szczyrzyc near Limanowa. The town was granted with Magdeburg right in 1362. It could develop thanks to a favorable location on a trade route from Silesia and Lesser Poland to Ruthenia. Ropczyce was severely damaged during a Tatar raid in 1504.

### **The First Jews in Ropczyce**

The earliest information about Jews settling in Ropczyce dates back to 1564. It was noted then that four Jewish families, i.e. about 30 people, lived on the farm of the Gryf family. Complaints of the Ropczyce townsmen against the Jewish merchants' competition have remained from that time as well. The first Jewish dweller was presumably a leaseholder of a local customs office.

### **The Troublesome 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

From 1601, Szymon Mankowicz, a Jew, was mentioned in yearly registers of 1601–1605 and 1615–1619 as the only person of Jewish origin among Ropczyce citizens who had commercial relationships with Cracow. In 1604, King Sigismund III Vasa granted Ropczyce with a law, following which only two Jewish families (of a district's leaseholder and of a tax collector) were allowed to live in the town, however, they were strictly forbidden to do businesses and produce alcohol.

The 17<sup>th</sup> c. was the time of the town's stagnation and downfall. Ropczyce was plundered by the Swedish troops in 1655 and conclusively devastated in 1657 by the army of George II Rákóczi, the Prince of Transylvania. Many houses in the town were deserted and ruined after the wars. As nobody paid for them, the local authorities tried to occupy the houses with new inhabitants. However, Polish townsmen were not interested in it, and so Jews were the buyers, despite the fact that the ban on their settling in the town was still in effect. The law was broken for the first time in 1675, when the Town Council allowed Józef Szmul, a Jew, to acquire a house at the Market Square under condition of renovating the building. In exchange for that, he was exempted from paying taxes for two years.

In 1664, the burghers of Ropczyce filed a complaint against a local Jewish leaseholder who broke the law by *making booze and beer as well as mead*. As of 1676, only 10 Jews paid the general poll tax, which is a proof that the Jewish community in the town was still small at the time.

### **The Development of the Community**

The number of Jews in Ropczyce started to grow rapidly in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and it was probably then that a kehilla (a Jewish religious community) was established in the town. The exact date of that is unknown, but there is information that the Jewish community existed in Ropczyce already in 1734 and paid the Jewish poll tax quarterly in the amount of 316 zlotys and 20 groschen, and 333 zlotys two years later. This means that at the time, at least several dozen believers of Judaism must have lived in the town. According to the surviving documents, already 663 Jews resided in Ropczyce in 1765.





A fragment of the exhibition in the District and Municipal Public Library in Ropczyce



The ohel of Tzadik Zvi Naftali Horowitz of Ropczyce on the cemetery in Łańcut



The ohel of Tzadik Zvi Naftali Horowitz of Ropczyce on the cemetery in Łańcut

The legal barriers halting a faster development of the Jewish settling were not lifted until the half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. At the time, the Jewish merchants of Ropczyce started to appear more often in customs registers. In 1750, a trader from Ropczyce named Pinkas Lewkowicz was mentioned in the records of Cracow; he bought there a case of scythes. In 1753, three other Jewish merchants from Ropczyce appeared in the Cracow register: Hersz Mankowicz and Jakub Lewkowicz, who delivered to the city a large amount of honey, raisins and figs on three carts and seven horses, and Szaja Jakubowicz who bought a certain number of scythes. In 1765, Pinkas Jakubowicz from Ropczyce, who transported 30 tubs of prunes and 32 three-scores of rough canvas on four horse-drawn carts, paid tax in a customs office in Kozienice on his way to Warsaw.

While the state and the local administration in Ropczyce were dominated mainly by Poles, crafts and trade remained mostly in the Jewish hands. Weavers made a large part of the Ropczyce craftsmen. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., two Jews, Koppel Józkowicz and Lejzor Fischel, began transformation of the weaving industry from a less efficient guild system into the out-work: they used to transfer materials to weavers and then buy ready-made fabrics from them. In 1788, Józkowicz and Fischel signed a contract with a manufacture in Łódź for delivery of canvas of a large value.

### Chassidism

In the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., Ropczyce became a significant center of Chassidism after the famous Tzadik Zvi Naftali Horowitz (1760–1827) settled in the town. He was the son of Menachem Mendel, the rabbi of Lesko and a follower of two great tzadikim: Elimelech of Leżajsk (Lizhensk) and Menachem

Mendel of Rymanów. Zvi Naftali Horowitz was the author of, among others, *Zera Kodesh* (a collection of comments to the *Torah*, published in 1868), and *Ohel Naftali* (a collection of sayings, published in 1911). In the end of his life, he left Ropczyce and settled in Łańcut where he died and where he was buried. Asher of Ropczyce was the next tzadik of the town. The sons of Zvi Naftali Horowitz also became tzadikim: Eliezer Horowitz – in Dzików near Tarnobrzeg, and Jakub (named The Small Baal Shem Tov due to numerous miracles that he made) – in Kolbuszowa and later in Mielec.

### Under Partitions

After the first partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772, Ropczyce was incorporated into the Austrian Empire. As of 1861, there were 3,029 residents in the town, among whom 1,999 were Catholics and 1,030 were Jews. Ten years later, Ropczyce had 3,971 inhabitants: 2,530 Catholics, 8 Greek Catholics, and 1,433 Jews. As of 1882, the town had 3,676 people, including 2,341 Catholics, 2 Uniates, and 1,333 Jews. In 1891, Ropczyce was inhabited by 3,644 people: 2,571 Catholics, 2 Uniates, and 1,071 Jews (the registered number of Jews diminished probably due to a large scale of emigration). The census of 1912 showed that Ropczyce had 3,339 residents, out of whom there were 2,258 Poles, 10 Ukrainians, 2 Armenians, and 1,069 Jews. Despite all those changes, Jews constantly made about one third of the Ropczyce population throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.

The Ropczyce Municipal Council consisted of two executive powers: the Christian Communal Council and the Israelite Communal Council. At the religious councils' meetings, the representatives of both groups used to settle unanimous voting score to be executed during the sessions of the

Municipal Council. In 1867, Wojciech Siekirski was elected mayor and head of the Municipal Council, and Jakub Strzek was his deputy. The former presided over the Christian Communal Council, and the latter – over the Israelite one.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the Jewish community of Ropczyce owned three synagogues, a cemetery and two schools. There were two charity organizations active in the town as well. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., the community had a hospital too.

According to the law introduced in 1869, the popular school became accessible to the believers of all religions. It was a major profit especially for the Jewish children who attended the Ropczyce school since then, along with the Catholic and the Greek Catholic pupils. In the 1905/1906 school year, Jews made about 21% of students in the school for boys, and a year later – 23%. The percentage was much higher in the local school for girls as the Jewish female students made almost one third of the pupils.

There were no serious religious conflicts in Ropczyce until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. Only one crisis occurred in 1882, when the teachers in the school for boys told Jews to take kippot (small round skullcaps worn by religious Jews) off their heads during classes. The Ropczyce Jews appealed against that decision to the district school council in Pilzno. The council, unwilling to fuel the conflict, warned the teachers against using pressure in that case, and suggested patient instructing, which would lead to the desirable effect. In 1898, anti-Semitic riots, during which peasants robbed Jewish shops, took place in Ropczyce and in nearby villages. Nine peasants were killed at the intervention of the army.

In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., numerous Jewish religious organizations were active in Ropczyce, aiming above all to take care of poor and ill members of the community. One of the oldest organizations was the funeral fraternity *Chevra Kadisha*, the task of which was to prepare the dead to funerals and to lead the bodies to the cemetery. The members of the organization were the most important and highly regarded residents of the town. Later, *Chevra Kadisha* was active in charity as well. Additionally, the lay Jewish Account and Savings Society and the Mutual Credit Society were present in Ropczyce before World War I. The Jewish artisans were united in the Jewish Craftsmen's Society *Yad Charuzim*.

As of 1912, there were four independent Jewish communities in Ropczyce district: Izaak Mariles was the rabbi in Ropczyce, Samuel Horowitz in Dębica, Tobiasz Horowitz in Sędziszów, Izaak Lipschutz in Wielopole Skrzyńskie. All those localities had their synagogues with cheders (religious primary schools for boys).

Before World War I, in 1910, there were 3,339 people inhabiting Ropczyce, including 1,069 Jews (32% of all the residents). The war ruined the town and caused death of many inhabitants. During the military actions, the Jewish population suffered heavy losses as well, due to severe persecutions by soldiers.

### The Interwar Period

According to the census of 1921, Ropczyce had 3,002 inhabitants, including 840 Jews (28% of the total).

During the interwar period (1918–1939), most of the crafts workshops in Ropczyce were run by Poles, while trade was generally a Jewish businessmen's domain. As of 1933, there were as many as 120 big

and small shops in the town. Jews worked also as trade agents: they used to buy food from farmers and later sell it in nearby towns. The Merchants' Association of Ropczyce was totally dominated by Jews; its chairmen were the richest local traders: Leib Pomstein, Mendel Fruhman, Szymon Isler, Rafael Franzblau, and Mojżesz Seiden.

The interwar period was the time of the Jewish religious and social life bloom. The Jewish institutions and associations, established before World War I, developed their activity, and new organizations were created. Educational societies took care of the readership progress, organized lectures and discussion meetings. There were many Jewish charity institutions in Ropczyce too.

Little information has remained about the political activity of the Jewish inhabitants of Ropczyce. It is known that the Zionists gained some political influence there during the interwar period. Although their party's branch, established in 1923, had only 11 members, the number of its supporters was much bigger. Eiser Susch was the Zionist leader. Following the kehilla authorities election in the early 1920's, out of eight seats, the Orthodox Jews won two and the Zionists six.

### World War II and the Holocaust

The outbreak of World War II ended the existence of the Ropczyce Jewish community. The German army entered the town on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1939; at the time, 1,054 Jews lived in Ropczyce. Germans burnt the synagogue and robbed many Jewish houses, and after that, they began organized persecutions of the Jewish population. One of their actions was a consistent devastation of the Jewish cemetery, out of which all the gravestones were taken away and used afterwards for paving roads.

In 1940, a ghetto was established in the town, to which Jews from nearby localities were resettled as well. Many of them were forced to build the camp in Pustków, where they were imprisoned in November 1940. About 400 Jews from Ropczyce and Wielopole Skrzyńskie were transported to the ghetto in Sędziszów Małopolski in the first half of 1942. Part of Jews was placed in the ghetto in Dębica, later they were taken away to the camp in Pustków, and ultimately to the death camp in Bełżec. In 1942, Izaak Libermann, the last rabbi of Ropczyce, was shot.

### Traces of Presence

Today, only a few traces remind of the centuries-old history of the Ropczyce Jews, as most of the buildings, which used to belong to the Jewish community, have not survived until the present.

The most important material memento of the Jewish community is the cemetery in Monte Cassino St. In 1988, a monument devoted to the victims of the Holocaust was erected on the necropolis. In the 1990's, the cemetery area was fenced, and the ohel (a small building traditionally erected on the graves of outstanding members of the Jewish community) was constructed over the grave of Rabbi Izaak Libermann.

| Sławomir Mańko



מספר  
למען הצלת נפש החיים וקברי שלום  
מוה"ר מנחם מנדל רייכבערג שליט"א  
נפ' ה'תש"ח  
הברוקלין ניו יארק  
מייסד יו"ר  
ישיבת שו"ת נתיבות חיים וארץ צדיקים בפולין  
ובניין החשובים שיהיה  
גם נחלתו ונחלתו של ידו הוציא חסד  
ועזר צדיקים וחסידים בכל ימיו  
שיתב חסידותו בעולם הזה והבא



## Activities for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage

Thanks to the successful partnership between the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Jewish organizations from abroad and the local authorities, the Jewish cemetery in Ropczyce is today in a relatively good condition. Hopefully, it will remind the future generations about the multicultural past of the town for many years.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland aims to involve the inhabitants of Ropczyce in taking care of the multicultural heritage of their town. We hope that soon the Ropczyce schools will join the “To Bring Memory Back” educational program, created and implemented by the Foundation, with 4,000 students from over 130 schools from entire Poland participating in it throughout the 2007/2008 school year. Within the frames of the program, youths discover the multicultural history of their town and the local Jews, Jewish tradition and culture and later they carry out public events, available for the inhabitants.

Local organizations, which have been promoting the memory about the Ropczyce Jews for many years now, include the Ropczyce Region Friends’ Society, the District and Municipal Public Library, and the Center of Culture. They publish cooperatively a series of booklets entitled “Biblioteka Ropczycka” (“The Ropczyce Library”), devoted to the life of the town’s prewar residents, including the Jewish community. In 2007, the exhibition “Jews in the History of Our Region” took place in Ropczyce within “The Ethnic Minorities of Poland” periodic event. The Ropczyce Region Friends’ Society and the Library together support students and young researchers in collecting information on the history of the Ropczyce Jewish community. The Society works in cooperation with the Regional Historical Monuments Conservation Office in Rzeszów for the preservation of the historic architecture in the former Jewish district (the area of the so-called Wola Gryfowa).

We hope that there will be further activities carried out in Ropczyce, meant to remind the inhabitants and tourists about the history of Jews, who for centuries co-created the social character of the town and contributed to its cultural and economic development. Soon, a new road to the Jewish cemetery in Ropczyce will be built along with the town’s beltway.

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Information and educational materials on the Jewish culture are available on the website of the “To Bring Memory Back” program [www.PAMIEC.FODZ.PL](http://www.PAMIEC.FODZ.PL) and on the Internet portal POLIN – Polish Jews Heritage [www.POLIN.ORG.PL](http://www.POLIN.ORG.PL)

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