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JEWISH CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE DUKLA REGION

SUMMARY

Judaism is a culture and a religion that consists of experiences and events woven tightly together with nearly all other aspects of history. The article deals with the concepts of Jewish cultural heritage in the Dukla Region which is at present a part of the Podkarpackie Province. The region used to be home to a thriving Jewish culture that built and maintained community institutions and buildings for religious, cultural educational and charitable purposes. Additionally, there were a few Jewish cemeteries in the region. The article depicts historical places and events that constituted important aspects of Jewish cultural heritage in the region. Moreover, the article discusses the periods of greatest growth as well as the destruction of Jewish culture in the Dukla region.

Key words: *Jews, Jewish, culture, synagogues, cemetery, Dukla Region*

The area that is now called Podkarpackie Province has always been a multicultural area. Even today there are different minorities living in some parts of the region. In the past, there were even more. One of them was the Jewish minority. Jewish people are remembered in many towns and villages in the region. Jews constituted about 80 percent of population in some places in the Podkarpackie Province in the time gone by, especially in the period between the wars. Alas, most of them were exterminated by the Nazis in concentration camps or murdered in other ways. Wandering along the area of Podkarpackie, you can experience through the eyes of your imagination the lost world of Hassids, Tzaddiks and rabbis. One of the regions which has an impressive collection of Jewish heritage sites is the Dukla region. Here you can see old Jewish cemeteries and remains of synagogues as well as other reminders of that outstanding culture.

The oldest sources referring to Jews in the Podkarpackie Province date the middle of the XIV century and they are about Sanok. Then we can find dates for Jewish settlements in different places in the area: Krosno – 1434, Jasło – 1436, Lesko – 1542, Rymanów – 1567, Bircza – 1570 and Mrzygłód – 1570. In some places they had the privilege of *de non tolerandis Judaeis*, for example, Krosno from 1549 or Jasło from 1589. The Jews were also forbidden to build their dwellings in towns owned by the Catholic Bishopric in Przemyśl, for instance, Domaradz or Jaśliska, or possessed by the catholic monasteries. By contrast, there were towns where Jews were allowed to settle without obstacles¹. They must have been the towns which were mentioned in the Customs Registers of Cracow. According to these records, Jews from towns which presently belong to the Podkarpackie Province, passed by Cracow and they were registered by customs officers. Two Jews from Lesko passed through Cracow in 1593, a Jew from Żmigród in 1636, a Jew from Rymanów in 1681 and in 1751 Jewish people travelled through the city thirteen times. The records also show that in 1751 Jewish merchants delivered 63 barrels of honey from Żmigród. In this way the Customs Registers of Cracow provide evidence that those Jews were residents of the places mentioned above².

¹ Potocki A.: *Podkarpackie Judaica*, Brzozów 1993, p. 5.

² Małecki J.: *Jewish Trade in Cracow at the end of the XVI century and in the XVII, Selected Records from Cracow Customs Registers 1593-1683*, Krakow 1995, p. 284.

There are other clues that justify Jewish presence in the Podkarpackie Province. In the XVII century there were incidents of mugging which involved Israelis. In 1612 two Jews from Lesko were mugged and robbed in Wola Michałowa, then in 1654 a Jew was attacked in Radoszyce and finally in 1660 two Jewish stall-holders were robbed in Wołosate. There is also a list of payments concerning the dwellers of Trepcza village nearby Sanok. The list shows how much rent a Jewish inn holder in Trepcza paid annually³.

The population census made in 1764 presents the number of Jewish people in particular places. In the Region of Sanok there were six Israeli communes with 4646 Jews altogether and in the Przemyśl region there were thirty-six communes with 25 724 Jews⁴. The Jews in Podkarpackie Province made a living by dealing with trade and tenancy. In the XVIII century they controlled the production and sale of alcohol in the province. In the Eastern Galicia they ran the majority of inns and taverns where they sold alcohol. They also leased mills and sawmills and they made money selling farm products. Later, in the XIX century, they began to invest money in buying land. But most of them leased inns and after 1910 Jewish people were given the right to become inn owners.

The second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries witnessed the greatest growth of organized Jewish institutions and that is the period from which most surviving buildings date. These include synagogues and community buildings such as schools, hospitals, and old age homes. Some of these institutional buildings are the Jewish sites that have survived best because the facilities have been most easily adapted and reused by successor institutions, often providing services similar to the original.

At the turn of the XIX and XX centuries a great number of Jews from the Podkarpackie Province immigrated to the United States. One of the reasons was the overpopulation of towns and villages. Another factor contributing to the decline of Jewish population in the Podkarpackie area was the First World War when Russian troops removed Jews from their homes and moved them deep into Russian territories. The population census made after the war in 1921 revealed that at least 7 Podkarpackie districts had a few thousands Jews⁵.

In the period between the wars, the Jewish population in the area increased considerably by thirty percent. By contrast, the situation changed dramatically during the Second World War. As it is widely known, the German Nazi occupation of Poland with all its deliberate extermination politics and cruelty against local population represents totalitarian, nationalistic and racist ideology. The German Nazi Holocaust organized also on the lands of Podkarpackie the most extreme cases of genocide. Places connected with those events are in majority still here as silent witnesses of the past. The first thing that happened was that a great number of Jews were forced to move into the Russia-occupied territory. The Nazis organized ghettos and labour camps for Jews from the Podkarpackie area. They were forbidden to deal with trade and craft. A large number of Jewish people were transported to Concentration-Extermination Camps like Oświęcim and Bełżec. Furthermore, there were many mass executions of Jews in the Podkarpackie area in which thousands of Jews lost their lives⁶.

In the present times, Podkarpackie Province is not as rich in Jewish historical and cultural sites as it used to be. For this reason, all the remains of Jewish cultural heritage should be carefully preserved, as is the case with the Dukla region.

There are numerous sources which provide information about Jewish community in the region. One of them is the population census made in 1861 states that Jews constituted the third biggest group in the region⁷. Another available document which is *Opis powiatu*

³ Potocki A.: *Podkarpackie Judaica*, Brzozów 1993, p. 5.

⁴ Ibid, p. 6.

⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

⁶ Mendelowski S. (ed.), *Gmina Dukla*, Krosno 2006, p. 19.

⁷ Rapacki W.: *Ludność Galicji. Dane na podstawie spisu ludności z 1861*, Lwów 1874, p. 41.

krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym (Description of the Krosno district in terms of geographical and historical) made by Władysław Sarna, who was a priest in one of the villages in the area. He gives information about particular districts in the province, including also the Dukla region. Władysław Sarna published his work in 1898 and his based it on different documents, like for example, registrations files, public records, chronicles and manuscripts. The description of Dukla mentions the religions in the town and gives figures referring to particular groups. In 1898 there were only 520 Roman-Catholic people and as many as 2456 followers of Judaism (while there were 3006 residents of Dukla altogether). The writer also gives the figures for other places in the Dukla area in the year of 1898. The data covers the following places: Chyrowa – 5 Jews, Iwla 13 - Jews, Lipowica – 6 Jews, Mszana – 10 Jews, Teodorówka – 7 Jews, Trzciana – 6 Jews, Tylawa – 31 Jews, Zydranowa – 15 Jews and Zboiska – 6 Jews⁸.

In the next years there were more and more people of Jewish origin in the region. Some information concerning the subject can be found in church records which describe the number of Catholics and Israelis in the Parish of Dukla. In 1924 when the Parish of Dukla covered Dukla, Barwinek, Chyrowa, Iwla, Lipowica, Mszana, Nadole, Teodorówka, Trzciana, Tylawę, Zydranowa i Zboiska there were around 3100 Jews in the parish⁹. The next record dates 1939 when the parish covered the same area plus the village of Wilsznia, there were 1565 Israelis in this area¹⁰. Next, in the 1935 there were 1560 Jews in the parish which covered exactly the same are as in 1930¹¹. Finally, in 1939 the number was the same and the parish area as well¹².

The Dukla region is a part of the Podkarpackie Province. It is located in the Krosno District. Nowadays it comprises places like Czeremcha, Daliowa, Jaśliska, Lipowiec, Posada Jaśliska, Szklary, Wola Niżna i Wola Wyżna. But in the past different villages were within the boundaries of the Dukla region.

It is beyond any doubt that that Jews and their culture used to constitute an important element of life in Dukla. As Kazimierz Chłędowski, a writer and cultural historian, said in his memoirs: “Dukla, the nest for the sons of Juda, where there are four Bernardines”¹³, the town was inhabited by a great number of Jewish people. The statement by Kazimierze Chłędowski is ironic, but the author definitely meant that Jews were deeply incorporated into the life of the town¹⁴.

Jewish people probably began to settle there at the turn of the XVI and XVII centuries. In the middle of the XVIII century (1742) the Israeli commune in Dukla was independent and autonomous. In the end of the XVIII century (according to the population census made in 1795) there were 574 Jews living in Dukla. The number grew rapidly and in the year 1800 there were four times more Jewish people in the town – 2410 and it constituted over 80 percent of the population in the place. However, later the number declined because of a big fire that destroyed Dukla in 1884 and due to the warfare. Eventually, in 1921 there were 1509 Jews in Dukla out of 2082 of the total population. At that time the percentage distribution was the highest in the town of Dukla because as much as 72,4 percent of the population was of Jewish origin¹⁵. And the number of Israelis there was still growing.

⁸ Sarna W.: *Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym*, Przemyśl 1989, pp. 464-474 (*Description of the Krosno district in terms of geographical and historical*).

⁹ *Elenchus cleri Dioeceseos rit. lat. Premisliensis pro Anno Domini 1924*, Premisliae 1924, p. 26.

¹⁰ *Schematismus universi venerabilis cleri saecularis et regularis Dioecesis Premisliensis rit. lat pro Anno Domini 1930*, Premisliae 1930, p. 54.

¹¹ *Schematismus universi venerabilis cleri saecularis et regularis Dioecesis Premisliensis rit. lat pro Anno Domini 1935*, Premisliae 1935, p. 37.

¹² *Schematyzm Diecezji Przemyskiej ob. łac. na rok 1938*, Przemyśl 1938, p. 56.

¹³ The original quotation in Polish: “Dukla, gniazdo judy synów, a w nim cztere bernardynów”.

¹⁴ Chłędowski K.: *Pamiętniki. Tom I Galicja (1843-1880)*, Kraków 1957, p. 239.

¹⁵ Potocki A.: *Podkarpackie Judaica*, Brzozów 1993, p. 27.

As far as professions are concerned, Jewish people were occupied with various jobs and activities which let them earn their living. According to *Protokół wydanych certyfikatów przynależności* included in *Akta Miasta Dukli* Jews performed a great deal of jobs. The document gives information concerning the residents of Dukla born in the second half of the XIX century and specifically refers to the period of 1906-1927. It gives the dates of birth, marital status, family status and the occupation. There are numerous Jewish names in this document. It shows that many Jews in Dukla were tavern-keepers, manufacturers, tradesmen or tradesmen's assistants, printers, bakers, hairdressers, tailors, dressmakers or merchants. The document mentions not only male Jews, but also women who are described as widows, maids, merchants' wives or tradesmen' daughters. Representatives of the Jewish community were also involved in the decision-making process in the town council in Dukla. There are some minutes of Dukla Town Council meeting dating 1939 and they mention Jewish names¹⁶. Another source of knowledge about what professions Jews performed which is "Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego" which mentions one Jewish teacher of religion in the year 1898. The same source also talks about one Jewish distillery owner in the town¹⁷. Jewish people created a few associations in the town. The best known operated in the period between the wars. They were, for example, Jad Charuzim Jewish Craftsmen Association, Credit Union and Merchants Association¹⁸.

Prior to the Holocaust, the area that is present-day Dukla Region was home to a flourishing Jewish culture that built and maintained a great number of community buildings for religious, educational, and charitable purposes. Moreover, there were many Jewish cemeteries throughout the country serving Jewish communities.

In the beginning of the XX century there used to be three synagogues in Dukla, more than Catholic churches because there were only two of them¹⁹. The first synagogue in Dukla must have been erected earlier than 1758. This year is the date for building a brick synagogue in the place of an older wooden one. The temple was built in what is Cergowa Street at present²⁰. You can only see the ruins of the building which was burnt by the Nazis in 1940 and has never been restored. What we can see today are the walls of the main room of the synagogue and the ceilings but there is no roof. It can be observed that the synagogue was built in the form of a square. There are no remains of what used to be the atrium, the library and the prayer room for women. However, two other important parts of the temple have survived. These are the Aron ha-Kodesz and the Bimah. The first one is a raised platform on which Torah scroll was undressed and read. The place was visible from all parts of the temple and represented the altar in the synagogue. The other name means the Holy Ark of the Covenant. It is a kind of cupboard fixed to the wall of the synagogue and it used to contain the Torah scroll behind curtains and doors.

The other building connected with Jewish culture in Dukla is the school building. Its foundation is connected with Baron Maurice de Hirsch who was favourably disposed towards Jews. In the course of his life he became acquainted with the plight of Jewish people in different parts of Europe and one of his goals was to assist them as much as possible. One of his greatest undertakings was the Galician Foundation. The foundation developed several goals to aid Jewish communities. One of the purposes Hirsch wanted to achieve was to build schools and recreation grounds in Galicia. In this way, a primary school was established in

¹⁶ *Akta Miasta Dukli. Protokół wydanych certyfikatów przynależności od 11.01.1906-17.08.1927*, sygn. 1164/2. Zbiory Archiwum Państwowego w Rzeszowie Oddział w Sanoku (Collections of the State Archives in Rzeszów, Branch in Sanok).

¹⁷ Sarna W.: *Opis powiatu krośnieńskiego pod względem geograficzno-historycznym*, Przemyśl 1989, p. 462.

¹⁸ Potocki A.: *Żydzi w Podkarpackiem*, Rzeszów 2004, p. 48.

¹⁹ Mendelowski S. (ed.): *Gmina Dukla*, Krosno 2006, p. 17.

²⁰ Potocki A.: *Żydzi w Podkarpackiem*, Rzeszów 2004, p. 45.

Dukla in the end of the XIX century. The school building has survived many hardships and nowadays it is still a school premises²¹.

It can be stated that the Second World War marked the end of Jewish presence in Dukla. After the Nazis entered Dukla in the beginning of September 1941, life became extremely painful for the Jews. Even kids had to wear armbands with a symbol of Judaism – the Star of David. Not only did they have to perform heavy jobs, but they were also killed for any kind of misbehaviour, even for small offences. As the Nazis advocated the supremacy and purity of the Aryan race, they believed the Jews were the greatest threat to the Aryan race. For this reason, they meant to exterminate the Jewish race, the physically and mentally handicapped, the weak and the elderly in the first place. As early as in October 1939 they killed in Dukla 200 Jewish people categorized as weak and handicapped. As the war went on, Jews were murdered by the Nazis on different occasions. In 1942 the Nazis established a ghetto in the town. Later, most people from the ghetto were either shot or moved to concentration camps in Bełżec or Oświęcim where they were exterminated.

Jews also lived in other places in this region. Some of them were: Barwinek, Jaśliska, and Nowy Żmigród. Jaśliska is a place where Jewish people wanted to settle but they were not allowed to do so for a long time. Catholic Church authorities forbade Israelis to rent and build houses in the village. After the ban was lifted in the middle of the XIX century, each decade there were more Jewish people living there and at the turn of the century almost 300 Jews lived in Jaśliska. They had their own synagogue, a school, a bank and a cemetery. The Jews were mostly occupied with keeping shops, taverns and sawmills. As it is the case with Dukla, few Jewish people survived the II World War because they were either killed by the Nazis or sent to extermination camps²². Unlike Jaśliska, Jews were permitted to settle in Nowy Żmigród. They had their own synagogue as early as in at the beginning of the XVII century. The other one was erected in a century later. Jews in Nowy Żmigród were occupied with crafts, dress-making and trade, so they had similar jobs as Israelis in other places in the region. The number of Jews in this location was constantly growing and in the period in between the wars, Jews made about half of the population in Nowy Żmigród. Unfortunately, probably none of them survived. They were either murdered by the Nazis or sent to concentration camps in Płaszów or Bełżec. There is little trace of Jews in the place today. Almost all the Jewish remains were destroyed during world wars. The only Jewish relic of the past is the cemetery²³.

The cemeteries also can tell us a lot about the past. There are two Jewish graveyards in Dukla. The cemeteries are informally called the old one and the new one. The first one was probably established in the beginning of the XVIII century. It was situated on a hill heading south from Dukla. Today you can see that once it had a rectangular shape and there used to be a short wall and a gate but they have been ruined. Similarly, the tombstones have also been destroyed and the matzevot were by the Nazis for other purposes like, for example, to pave the castle yard in Dukla²⁴. Today the cemetery is covered with weeds and it is hard to read what is written on the tombstones. There are around two hundred tombstones in the cemetery but all of them have been so badly damaged that the inscriptions are unreadable. The other cemetery dates the late XIX century. It is located next to the former one. This rectangular shaped graveyard is surrounded by a wall which has been partially damaged. You can see here around 300 Jewish tombstones which have survived until today. Some of them are badly damaged but some can become the “witnesses of the past” telling us what kind of Jews lived in the area. Nevertheless, the cemetery is neglected and needs renovating, but it is still an important monument of the past. Jaśliska is another place where there used to be a Jewish

²¹ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>

²² Potocki A.: *Żydzi w Podkarpaciu*, Rzeszów 2004, p. 70.

²³ Potocki A.: *Podkarpackie Judaica*, Brzozów 1993, p. 55.

²⁴ Gosztyła M., Proksa M.: *Kirkuty Podkarpacia*, Przemyśl 2001, pp. 18-19.

cemetery. It was probably founded in the end of the XIX century. Unfortunately, the cemetery was destroyed by the Nazis and the tombstones were thrown into a nearby stream. There is nothing left of this cemetery and the tombstones are likely to be at the bottom of the stream until today²⁵. Barwinek has a Jewish cemetery but this is not a traditional one like in other locations. The cemetery was founded in the place where the Nazis murdered over 500 Jews in August 1942. In this graveyard you can see one big tombstone with inscriptions in both Polish and Hebrew commemorating the murder²⁶. Another location with remains of a Jewish cemetery is Nowy Żmigród. There are about 250 tombstones left, but most of them are badly damaged. However, some of them are in good condition and it is possible to read the inscriptions.

Few Jewish people survived the war in the region of Dukla. As it is stated in *Wykaz imienny Ukraińców, Starorusinów i Żydów zamieszkałych na terenie miasta Dukli 11.03.1945* (*The list of names of Ukrainians, Lemkos and Jews living in the city of Dukla 11.03.1945*) there were only 15 Jews in the town at that time. The document also mentions their occupations. They were tradesmen, a mill owner, a mill worker, a mill co-owner or a farmer with four morga of land (where "morga" was a unit of land measure)²⁷. Another document *Dane dotyczące mniejszości narodowych w powiecie krośnieńskim* (*Statistic data on national minorities in the District of Krosno*) states that within the years 1944-1950 there were about 70 Jews in the Krosno district and the document gives the number of 13 Jews in Dukla. There were probably some Jewish people in other places after the war, for example in Nowy Żmigród. At the cemetery mentioned above, there are two tombstones founded after the war. One of them states that Pinkas Wolmut died in 1955. The man is regarded to be the last Jew who lived in the village²⁸. [*Beskid Dukielski Przewodnik*]. The village of Zyndranowa also has its own history. Although it did not have a Jewish community, there probably lived three families²⁹. One of them is Samuel Oliner, a Holocaust survivor and sociologist and at the moment an emeritus professor at Humboldt State University. Samuel Oliner was born in Zyndranowa and in the early 1990s, thanks to the Internet, he renewed his relationship with his place of birth. In addition, there is an old Jewish hut in Zyndranowa³⁰. The hut used to belong to the Zalman family. At the moment it is a museum where there are some Jewish exhibits from the area and five old Jewish tombstones, rescued from a nearby stream, in front of the building.

Despite the fact, that some Jewish people survived the war in the Dukla region, they did not have any chances to restore their life and culture in that part of Poland. One of the reasons was the political situation and the Soviet influence. In addition, the destruction which took place during the Holocaust, when German occupiers destroyed many synagogues and other Jewish sites, was severe. Further destruction happened over time by neglect. Moreover, a lot of buildings were confiscated by the state and adapted to new uses. It is only in the past several years that efforts have begun to identify all these sites to preserve the memories which allow remember the Jewish presence in the Dukla region. These kinds of actions should be continued to help preserve the Jewish cultural heritage in the area.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁷ *Akta Miasta Dukli. Zarząd Miejski Dukla 1944/454. Wykaz imienny Ukraińców, Starorusinów i Żydów zamieszkałych na terenie miasta Dukli 11.3.1945*, sygn. 1188/21. Zbiory Archiwum Państwowego w Rzeszowie Oddział w Sanoku (Collections of the State Archives in Rzeszów, Branch in Sanok").

²⁸ Luboński P.: *Beskid Dukielski Przewodnik*, Pruszków 1999, p. 54

²⁹ www.beskid-niski.pl

³⁰ <http://www.graceproducts.com/fmnc/osamuel.htm>

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