



TARNÓW REGION

Jewish Heritage



Synagogue in Dąbrowa Tarnowska

Graveyards and places symbolizing the martyrdom of Jews are the most numerous traces of the presence of this nation in the region. Jewish cemeteries can be found in many locations, sometimes they are neglected and forgotten (Szczucin, Dębica) and sometimes are untypical (for instance the military cemetery in Zakliczyn).

In the places of the mass slaughter of Jews committed by the Nazis during WWII there are symbolic monuments. In the Buczyzna woods in Zbylitowska Góra there is a monument commemorating murder of 10 000 people including 800 children and 2000 Poles.



Mikvah – ritual bath house in Tarnów

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First Jewish immigrants settled in Tarnów region in the Middle Ages. Their presence in the town is mentioned in 1445 writings. From the very beginning their commercial activities focused on wine and grain trading which they imported from Hungary and Russia. Jewish entrepreneurship has been appreciated by Tarnów owners. In 1581 Konstanty Ostrogski issued special rights allowing Jews to trade in their houses, kiosks and in the market square. They were also granted right to brew and deal alcohol beverages. On the behalf of those rights Jews were incorporated into the castle's jurisdiction therefore were no longer under the laws of the city of Tarnów.

New regulations allowed tough punishment for any acts of vandalism against Jewish prayer houses or a cemetery. Jews were also allowed to settle 12 houses along Żydowska (Jewish) street. Substantial changes in law attracted numerous families to move to Tarnów region. The limitations regarding settlement of Jews within the city of Tarnów were lifted in early 18th century by duke Sanguszko.

Some of the Tarnów Jews belonged to the intellectual and cultural elite. Their professions were those of public trust and respect like attorneys, doctors, musicians or teachers. In the 18th century Synagogue in Tarnów covered nearly half of the city tax income, apart from the taxes paid by individuals.

Tarnów region with tens of synagogues and small prayer houses has been an important religious center. There were Jewish schools and printing houses operating in the city. Social and cultural life were blooming. Today however there is no Jewish society anywhere in Tarnów region. No public worship that requires minyan (10 adult men over 13) may be completed. But there are numerous traces left which document centuries-long Jewish presence in Tarnów region. Cemeteries are the most common monuments of Jewish history. Some are very well preserved and cared for, other forgotten and demolished. The original Jewish architecture, bath houses, schools, synagogues, as well as preserved archives can be found throughout Tarnów region. Some of the buildings are still in use today but serve other purposes than originally. Numerous places commemorate Jewish oppressions and Holocaust. Significant Judaica collections are stored in few museums. Of greatest value are the exhibitions in Tarnów Regional Museum and museums in Dąbrowa Tarnowska and Bochnia.

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Rynek 7, 33-100 Tarnów
tel.: +48 14 688 90 90,
fax: +48 14 688 90 92
mail: centrum@tarnow.travel
www.tarnow.travel
Translated by Paweł Rybak



www.tarnow.travel



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Tarnów. Jewish cemetery

Żydowska and Wekslarska streets outline the original Jewish quarter of the city. The **17th and 18th centuries buildings** preserved there represent the most common type of dense architecture with narrow passages between the houses and tiny backyards. Unique for the east part of the Old Town are narrow facades. The doorposts of some of the houses preserved **the traces of mezuzahs** (piece of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah) can still be found. In several houses iron window shutters of former Jewish shops and stores are still in place.

Through the gate on Żydowska (Jewish) Street one can enter the square, where up until the WWII stood the 17th century Synagogue, the oldest of city's prayer houses. It was burnt down by the Germans. Only the **Bimah** (elevated area from which the Torah is read) survived. In 1996 the Committee for Renovation of Jewish Monuments in Tarnów launched the first edition of Galician Jews Remembrance Days. Since then each year music concerts and various performances are held in the square. Plaque on a facade of the corner house of the Żydowska and Piekarska streets commemorates liquidation of Tarnów Ghetto. During the WWII **Tarnów's Old Town** witnessed mass-murder and martyrdom of local Jewish population. In the Regional Museum in Tarnów, there is an interesting collection of Judaica with some unique pieces, such as an original (1667) document granting the Jews new rights and liberties, three Torahs and records from the last prayer house in Tarnów.

Dr Eliaz Goldhammer's (vice-mayor) contribution to the development of Tarnów was awarded by giving his name to one of the most important Jewish streets in the city. Such a privilege, given to the Jewish citizen, was a precedent decision in Poland at that time. Both sides of the street outline houses of the elite of Tarnów Jews. In a house number 1 there used to be a prayer house, closed in 1993. The most prestigious of Tarnów hotels, Herman Soldingier's hotel, was located in a house number 3. The house number 5 was occupied by Tarnów Credit Union managed by Herman Merz. Plaques in the hallway commemorate two great Jewish citizens of Tarnów – Eliaz Goldhammer and Herman Merz.



Tarnów. Goldhammer Street

Opposite, at number 6, a restaurant was located. Fragments of bilingual Yiddish and Polish inscriptions advertising their menu survived on the front wall until today.

Steam semolina mill, established by Henryk Szancer in 1859, had an immense influence on modernization of mill trade in Galicia considerably through increasing its efficiency in a short time. Acting as a trading partnership Szancer and Freund launched second steam mill in Tarnów in 1865. In the 1880's, mill paid taxes eight times as high as other mills of Prussian Upper Silesia did. This fact indicates the immensity of enterprise of Tarnów's traders.

Mikvah – Jewish ritual bathhouse was erected in 1902 in Moorish style. It became infamous as a site of concentration of prisoners – the first to be relocated to KL Auschwitz.

Founded in 1581, **Jewish Cemetery in Tarnów** is one of the oldest and most interesting burial sites in southern Poland. It encompasses over four thousand graves. Devastated by the Germans during WWII, was a site of mass slaughter of Jews from the Ghetto in Tarnów executed between June 1942 and September 1943. Their death commemorates monument erected on site of the mass grave, in 1946. David Beker, author of the memorial, incorporated broken column of the destroyed New Synagogue in Tarnów and inscribed it with a verse in Hebrew: "And the sun shone and was not ashamed..."

Localities around Tarnów were considerable centers of Judaism. Small towns with little or no large-scale industry became the core of **Polish Hasidism**. Group of eminent tzadiks, including **David Unger**, founder of the famous Unger dynasty, and **Cwi Hirszem Rymanower**, tzadik of Rymanów, all came from Dąbrowa Tarnowska. The town was a site of congresses of the Jews of Malopolska. Today, the most prominent monument of Jewish heritage in Dąbrowa Tarnowska is recently renovated



Statue of Roman Brandstaetter

building of a synagogue. It hosts "Ośrodek Spotkania Kultur" – a municipal body promoting multicultural coexistence. It also shelters some memorabilia of Jewish existence in the town. The synagogue is also one of the seven in Poland that preserved complete paintings of the Zodiac symbols.

Bobowa can be described as another meaningful center of Hassidism and is well-known among orthodox Jews. That tiny village is mainly associated with the manufacture of block lace. The Jews from Bobowa relocated their seat to New York and are considered to be the largest and most active Hassidism group in the world. Rabbi Asche Scharf's funds allowed to open restored synagogue in Bobowa, in 2003. It houses an exhibition room containing Judaica and a museum of lace work. Especially noteworthy is the **frame of 1778 Torah Ark, or Aron Kodesh**, which is believed to be the most precious one in Poland. Staying in Bobowa, it is worth visiting the cemetery where the leaders of local Jews are buried.

Apart from Bobowa, **Żabno** once played an important role in Hassidism movement. The most famous of Żabno leaders was Shalom Dawid Unger, David Unger's from Dąbrowa Tarnowska son, the author of religious works. The cemetery, restored in 1992, with well preserved tombstones is the only mark of the presence of Jews in this town.

In **Bochnia** tourists can visit S.Fisher's museum displaying Judaica. Moreover, a synagogue that has once been adapted to banking is worth seeing together with a well preserved cemetery. Nearby **Brzesko** is known as the birthplace of **Mordechai David Brandtstaetter**, grandfather of the famous Polish writer, Roman Brandtstaetter. Among the few preserved relics of the past especially worth mentioning are former synagogue and a bath-house, adapted for cultural facility. A well-kept cemetery embracing several hundred matsevahs, ohels and gravestones should also be visited.