

FOUNDATION FOR  
THE PRESERVATION  
OF JEWISH HERITAGE  
IN POLAND



FUNDACJA  
OCHRONY  
DZIEDZICTWA  
ŻYDOWSKIEGO

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# Leżajsk

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)

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

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

Dear Sirs,

This publication is dedicated to the history of the Jewish community of **Leżajsk (Lizhensk)**, 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, Przemysł, 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”?

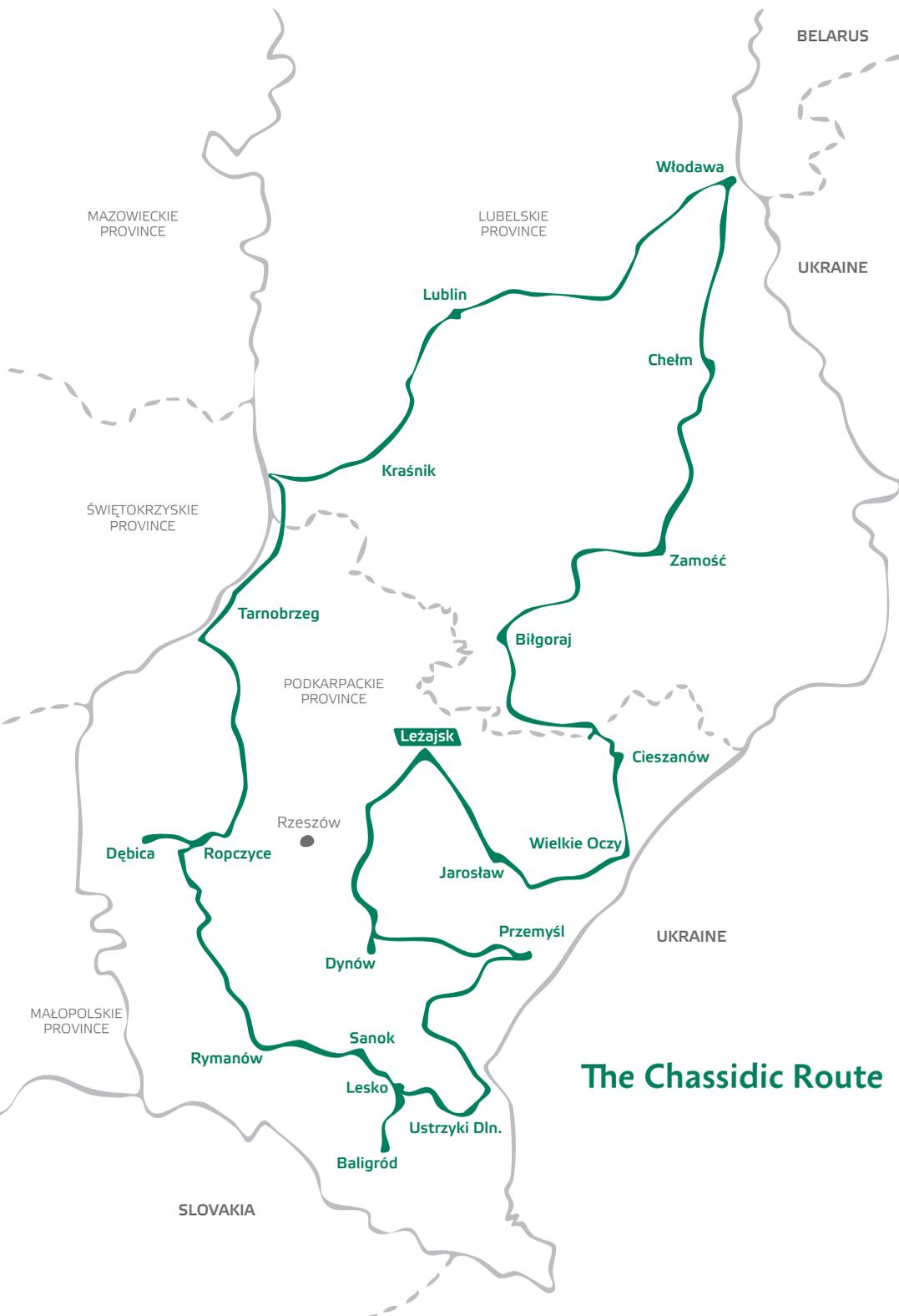
For centuries Poland used to be the homeland to many generations of Jews. An unprecedented development of Jewish culture, as well as religious thought and writing, took place in this country. Here in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. emerged Chassidism, one of the most important currents in Judaism ever. It gained 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 Międzybóž (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* (*yortzeit*), 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.

**CHELM** – 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.

**USTRZYKI 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 cemetery with the ohel in the background



The ohel during the yortzait of Tzadik Elimelech



The ohel, the grave of Tzadik Elimelech

Leżajsk (Lizhensk) is a town in Podkarpackie (Subcarpathian) province, located on the edge of the San River valley, at the eastern base of the Kolbuszowa Plateau. It is currently inhabited by 15,000 people.

### The Beginning of the Town

The first reference about the village of Leżajsk dates back to 1354. King Władysław Jagiełło granted the settlement with the town rights in 1397. In 1424, the importance of Leżajsk enhanced as it became the seat of a local authority.

The town, owned by the King, could not develop because of rides of Tatars. In 1524, after they had destroyed Leżajsk again and captured its inhabitants, King Sigismund I the Old moved the town from the San valley into its present, safer location. It was then that a rapid development of Leżajsk began. The town became a major center of cloth production and trade of crops, furs and other goods, which were floated down the San into the Vistula River and further to Gdańsk. The inhabitants of the town were mostly Poles and Ruthenians.

### The Beginning of the Jewish Community

Jews started to settle in Leżajsk in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. The first reference about them dates back to 1521. In 1538, there were seven Jewish taxpayers registered in the town, which means that the Jewish community consisted probably of about 40 people (usually a registered taxpayer was a man who was the head of the family). The community grew rapidly. As of 1563, there were 20 Jewish families living in the town, which made the total of about 120 people. An organized religious community,

called kehilla, emerged in Leżajsk in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. The synagogue was first mentioned in 1626 and 1630, and the Jewish cemetery, which had already existed *a long time before* – in 1635.

The Leżajsk Jews earned their living mainly as merchants, as well as beer and mead producers and sellers. King Władysław IV Vasa allowed them in 1635 to *produce and sell malt as well as (...) brew and sell (...) beer and mead*. The local merchants traded in fish, cattle and leather. Documents mention also Jewish craftsmen: butchers, carpenters, woodworkers. A Jewish doctor called Mojżesz from Volodymyr is mentioned in sources between 1630 and 1634. Houses owned by Jews were concentrated in the then Żydowska St. ("Żydowska" stands in Polish for "Jewish").

The town suffered great losses during the wars that struck Poland in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. It was destroyed by the Swedish army in 1655 and 1656, as well as by the troops of the Hungarian Prince George II Rákóczi allied with Swedes in 1657. Nonetheless, the Leżajsk Jewish community had 118 taxpayers in 1662. Epidemics, which often attacked Leżajsk in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., curbed the development of the community and the town. It was not until the half of that century that the number of inhabitants started to grow. In 1764, the Leżajsk kehilla had 909 taxpayers. It owned not only a synagogue, but also a mikvah (a ritual bath) and a hospital with an asylum.

### The Center of Chassidism

After the first partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772, the town was incorporated into the Austrian Empire. The seat of the local authority moved to Łańcut, which led to a gradual downfall of Leżajsk. At the same time, however, the importance of the Leżajsk Jewish community



The ohel, the grave of Tzadik Elimelech



The ohel, the matzeva of Tzadik Eleazar



The commemorative plaque on the cemetery

soared thanks to Tzadik Elimelech ben Eleazar Lippman (1717–1787), a follower of Dov Ber of Mezeritch. Elimelech settled in Leżajsk in 1772 and from 1775 was a rabbi there. He expressed his views on the role of a tzadik in his books, among others in a commentary to the *Torah* entitled *Noam Elimelech* (in Hebrew: *The Pleasantness of Elimelech*, published in Lviv in 1787). The Tzadik believed that his duty was to decide in every sphere of worshippers' lives and to long to the religious excellence through falls and the spiritual transformation of evil into sanctity. It was thanks to Elimelech, followed by his son Eleazar (died in 1806) and grandson Naftali (died in 1838 or 1844), that Leżajsk became the most important center of Chassidism in Galicia (the historical region in southeastern Poland and western Ukraine).

### Under Partitions

In 1785, there were 756 Jews living in Leżajsk, which made 24.6% of all the town inhabitants. As of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., Leżajsk became a small provincial town of an economy dominated by crafts and small businesses. After the fire of 1811, the Leżajsk Jewish community shrank to 583 people (29% of all the inhabitants) in 1815. In 1831, 1846 and 1873, epidemics of cholera ravaged Leżajsk. They were connected with crop failures and caused deaths of many inhabitants weakened by hunger. In 1903 and 1906, fires devastated the town again. Nonetheless, the number of people living in Leżajsk grew, especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. In 1863, there were 1,516 believers of Judaism registered in the town (36.7% of the inhabitants), and in 1913 – 2,592, the highest number ever, making almost half of the residents (48,9%). In 1900, the Leżajsk community, to which Jews from nearby places also belonged, had 3,162 members.

Jews and Christians in Leżajsk not always got on well with each other. The main reason for the conflicts was the economic rivalry. In 1898, the situation was so serious, that people feared anti-Jewish unrests.

### The Interwar Period

During the interwar period (1918–1939), the number of Jews remained on almost the same level, i.e. 1,575 people in 1921 (31.7% of all the inhabitants) and 1,896 people before 1939. Jews still played a leading role in the economic life of the town, especially in trade. As of 1932, they were owners of 174 shops (which made 92.6% of the total). Organizations like the Jewish Economic Union, the Traders' Association, and the Trade and Craft Bank were active in the town. Just before the outbreak of World War II, there were three Jewish religious schools and a library in Leżajsk.

### World War II and the Holocaust

In September 1939, after the outbreak of World War II, Germans took over Leżajsk, burnt its synagogue and drove out most of Jews over the San River to the Soviet occupation zone. The rest of them, 350 people, were imprisoned in a ghetto established in 1941. Additional 500 Jewish refugees from Kalisz were settled there as well. In 1942, most of the ghetto inhabitants were taken away to the camps in Rozwadów and Pełkinie, and to the ghetto in Rzeszów. The rest of them were executed on the spot.

After the liberation of Leżajsk by the Soviet army, the few surviving Jews came back to the town. In October 1944, it was inhabited by 33 Jews. However, the revival of the Jewish community was short-



The lapidarium erected on the cemetery by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland



The lapidarium erected on the cemetery by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland



The cemetery

lived. In February 1945, a troop of the National Military Organization attacked three Jewish houses and killed 11 inhabitants. After that incident, most of Jews left the town.

### The Traces of Presence

During World War II, Germans not only deported or killed the vast majority of the Leżajsk Jews, but also destroyed most of the evidences of their centuries-long presence in the town. The ruins of the burnt synagogue were used after the war for building of a mill and currently there is a shop on the site of the synagogue. In the place where the court of Tzadik Elimelech (in Yiddish: *Elimelechkløjz*) used to stand there is a bank now.

The Jewish cemetery in Gónna St. survived the war. It was established probably in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., and was expanded many times; currently it covers the area of 2.06 ha. The Nazis broke most of the gravestones (which they used for paving the Leżajsk Market Square) and the wooden ohel (grave) of Tzadik Elimelech. In 1940, it was destroyed in search of an alleged treasure hidden inside.

In 1962, Rabbi Friedman from Vienna in cooperation with Rabbi Mendel Reichberg took the initiative to erect a new brick ohel, which was expanded in 1988 during a partial fencing of the cemetery by the Nissenbaum Family Foundation. Currently, its interior is divided into three sections: the hall with epitaphs and two separate rooms of prayers for men and women. It contains not only the reconstructed grave of Elimelech, but also a fragment of the original matzeva of his son Eleazar from 1806 (which is the oldest surviving grave of a tzadik in Poland) and epitaphs of other sons of Elimelech (Eliezer, died in 1813, and Menachem Isachar, died in 1814) as well as his distant relatives.

During the restoration works, several dozen gravestones were removed from the surface of the Leżajsk Market Square and moved back to the cemetery. Today, there are about 100 matzevot there, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. However, only a few of them stand in their original place. Still, from time to time, gravestones from different parts of the town return to the necropolis. The cemetery is currently owned by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland.

Although there is no Jewish community in Leżajsk anymore, the worshippers of Judaism and the cultural heritage of Polish Jews still matter in the life of the town. Each year, on the death anniversary of Tzadik Elimelech (on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of Adar, i.e. in February or March), numerous Chassidic pilgrimages come to Leżajsk from the entire world, mainly from the USA and Israel. Recently, the number of Jewish visitors has risen to 10,000. They leave at the grave of the Tzadik small pieces of paper with requests written on them (in Yiddish: *kvitlech*), which, according to the Chassidim, reach God through the mediation of Elimelech.

In 1997 and 1998, the Foundation of Chassidim under the supervision of Rabbi Simcha Krakowski transformed the building of the former mikvah for the needs of numerous visitors into a room of prayers and a hotel as well as a new ritual bath.

| Paweł Fijałkowski



The cemetery



The cemetery



The cemetery

## Tzadik Elimelech and the Chassidim in Leżajsk

Tzadik Elimelech ben Eleazar Lippman (1717–1787), known as Elimelech of Leżajsk, was one of the most outstanding personalities in the history of Chassidism; it was thanks to him that Leżajsk became one of the most important centers of Chassidism in Poland in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c.

Elimelech originated from the area of Tykocin in the region of Podlasie (northeastern part of Poland), and was a follower of Shmelke Horowitz of Tykocin and the famous Dov Ber of Mezeritch in Volhynia, the main ideologist and leader of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Chassidism. Before he had arrived in Subcarpathia, he wandered for many years through Poland, preaching in different Jewish communities. He settled in Leżajsk in 1772, where he remained until the end of his life and where he was buried.

Elimelech is often called the father of Chassidism in Poland because of an immense influence of his thought on the developing Chassidic movement. He is also considered as the first tzadik in Poland. It was he who created the theory of the religious and social role of a tzadik as a spiritual leader of Chassidim. The seat of Elimelech in Leżajsk is said to be the first Chassidic court in Poland, although it was different from typical courts created in the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

Elimelech was also a master and a teacher of many outstanding tzadikim, and his followers include such Chassidic leaders like Yaakov Isaac Horowitz, called “The Seer of Lublin” (1745–1815), Levi Izaak ben Meir of Berdyczów (1740–1810), Abraham Yehoshua Heschel of Opatów (1748 or 1755–1825), Israel Isaac Hofstein of Kozienice (1733–1814), David ben Shlomo of Lelów (1746–1813 or 1814), Zvi Naftali Horowitz of Ropczyce (1760–1827), Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (1745–1815). Until today, all of them, along with Elimelech, are regarded as the most significant Chassidic leaders.

Elimelech used to say in his teaching that a tzadik was an intermediary between men and God and was a *friend to God*. A tzadik should be not only a religious leader and a spiritual teacher for the Chassidim, but also act as a social leader, chairing his community like a rabbi of a traditional kehilla. Elimelech of Leżajsk presented the theory of Tzadikism in his text entitled *Noam Elimelech* (in Hebrew: *The Pleasantness of Elimelech*), a commentary to the *Torah*, published by his son in the year of the Tzadik’s death. The text met criticism of the opponents of Chassidism, who accused the Chassidim of the attempts to dominate the entire Jewish community. It also became one of the reasons for permanent conflicts between the Chassidim and the supporters of traditional Judaism, occurring in Jewish communities.

Elimelech of Leżajsk was famous not only for his great piety and knowledge, but also for miracles that he was said to make. The tales on the latter became also known among Christians who often used to come to the Tzadik and ask him for advice or help. Even today many legends are told about Elimelech and his miracles; according to them, he could heal people from incurable diseases and talk with animals.

After Elimelech’s death, his son Eleazar (died in 1806) took over the leadership of the Leżajsk Chassidim. All the texts by Elimelech were published thanks to him and soon became the basis for the Chassidic literature. The younger sons of the great Tzadik established their own courts in Chmielnik and Mogielnica, however, they did not gain as much fame as their father. The last tzadik of the Elimelech’s dynasty, who was the Leżajsk Chassidim leader, was his grandson Naftali (died in 1838 or 1844). Despite the fact that Naftali’s death ended the dynasty of the Leżajsk tzadikim, the town remained a major Chassidic center until World War II. Strong groups of supporters of the Galician tzadikim, among others from Bełz, Sieniawa and Rozwadów, were active in Leżajsk.

Over Elimelech's grave an *ohel* (in Hebrew: *a tent*) was built; an *ohel* is a small construction that is erected on Jewish cemeteries over the graves of distinguished personalities. The Chassidim believe that on the anniversary of the death of a *tzadik* (*yortzait*), his soul comes back to Earth and may listen to requests of the living in order to take them before Supreme God. Among the Chassidim, the *yortzait*s of charismatic spiritual leaders assume the proportions of feast. Chassidim go on pilgrimages to the graves of their *tzadik*im, they joyfully celebrate the anniversary of joining of the dead's soul with the spiritual world, they pray for intercession, light candles and fires. There is also a tradition of writing requests to the *tzadik* on small pieces of paper (in Yiddish: *kvitlech*) and putting them at a grave.

Until World War II, thousands of Chassidim visited Leżajsk on Elimelech's death anniversary, falling on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month of Adar. They believed that on that very day, all the problems were solvable: marriages used to be miraculously contracted, friends not seen for a long time used to meet, and religious disputes used to end happily.

Crowds of the Chassidim coming each year to the grave of their spiritual leader in Leżajsk became in a short time an important source of income for many inhabitants of the town, Jews as well as Poles. Lodging places and eating-houses used to be created especially for the Chassidim visiting Leżajsk. The Jewish community of Leżajsk was officially involved in pilgrimage service as well, and it was thanks to the *kehilla* and its funds that an inn was built. The community tried to control beggars, crowds of which used to arrive with pilgrims. Before the 21<sup>st</sup> of Adar, the communal officials collected alms among the Jewish residents so as not to provoke irritations and make the tramps less impudent. In exchange for the alms, beggars were meant to pray at the grave of the *Tzadik* for the happiness of their patrons.

It is worth noticing that not only Jews but also Christians believed in Elimelech's miracles, thanks to which the grave of the *Tzadik* was surrounded by common respect. There is a significant story saying that after some vandals had profaned the *ohel* of the *Tzadik* during the interwar period, some of them became ill, which was considered by both Jews and Poles as an act made by the *Tzadik*'s spirit, signifying that the his grave should be looked after by everybody.

During World War II, in 1940, Germans devastated and profaned the Jewish cemetery in Leżajsk, paying special attention to the *ohel* of Elimelech, which they penetrated in search of treasures hidden in it. According to a legend, told by Christians too, in the moment of the grave's disclosing, the *Tzadik* opened his eyes and looked sadly at the vandals, which made Germans stop plundering the cemetery. Jews, who still remained in the town, buried again the remains of Elimelech a few days later.

After the war, the cemetery was cleaned up and the *ohel* was rebuilt. Today, the town is again the destination of thousands of Chassidic pilgrims from the entire world, who come each year to Leżajsk to commemorate their leader and pray to his soul for intercession.

| Robert Kuwałek



→ The cemetery

## Activities for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage

Thanks to the successful cooperation between the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Jewish organizations from Poland and abroad as well as the local authorities, the monuments of Jewish culture in Leżajsk, which survived the war, are today in a relatively good condition. Hopefully, the remaining traces of the Jewish community will remind the future generations about the multicultural past of the town for a long time.

In Leżajsk the activities of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland focus on the cemetery. Thanks to the Foundation, a lapidarium was erected on the cemetery in October 2007; fragments of matzevot broken by Germans were set in the construction to protect them from damage or stealing. Erecting of the lapidarium was carried out thanks to the support of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. In January 2008, the Foundation financed carving and installation of a plaque commemorating the Jewish community of Leżajsk; the tablet with the inscription carved in three languages: Polish, English and Hebrew was placed on a pillar of the cemetery fence.

The Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland also aims to involve the inhabitants of Leżajsk in taking care of the multicultural heritage of their town. In 2006 and 2007, the Foundation organized special trainings for the teachers from the local schools, devoted to the Jewish culture. We hope that the schools of Leżajsk will join soon the "To Bring Memory Back" educational program, created and implemented by the Foundation, in which in the school year 2007/2008 over 4,000 students from over 130 schools from the entire Poland take part. Within the framework of the program, young people discover the multicultural history of their town, learn about the fates of the Leżajsk Jews, the Jewish culture and tradition. They also prepare public events, thanks to which the results of their work become available for the town inhabitants.

The unique multicultural heritage of Leżajsk is also a leitmotiv of "The Meetings of Three Cultures", a periodic event organized by the Municipal Cultural Center since 2004 and devoted to the centuries-long co-existence of the Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish populations. Within the "Meetings", one may take part in popular scientific lectures, concerts, performances and tasting of the traditional cuisine.

Unfortunately, in March 2008, the ohel of Tzadik Elimelech was profaned and covered with anti-Semitic graffiti, which happened for the first time in the after-war history of Leżajsk. However, we hope that such incidents will not happen again and that soon there will be new positive activities carried out in Leżajsk, aiming to remind the locals and tourists about the history of Jews who co-created for centuries the social character of the town and contributed to its cultural and economic development.

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**Text: Paweł Fijałkowski, Robert Kuwałek, Weronika Litwin**

Translation: Maciej Gugala

Editor: Weronika Litwin

Design: RZECZYOBRAZKOWE.PL

Photo: Łukasz Giersz, Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland

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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Warsaw 2008

ISBN 978-83-61306-32-0

ISBN 978-83-61306-32-0



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