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## Organization of the Religious Life of Lublin Jews in the Years 1944–1989

*Organizacja życia religijnego lubelskich Żydów w latach 1944–1989*

### ABSTRACT

The article has a microhistorical character and analyzes the organization of Jewish religious life in Lublin from 1944 to 1989. It presents the activities of Jewish religious organizations (the Jewish Religious Congregation and later the Religious Association of the Mosaic Faith in Poland) within the context of broader state policies, distinguishing three stages: the period of revival (1944–1949), a time of strict state control (1949–1968), and a decade of gradual decline (1968–1989). Documents created by or originating from the Lublin religious congregation have not survived in archives, so the attempt to reconstruct this issue primarily relied on existing documents from other Jewish organizations (CKŻP and TSKŻ) and correspondence with public administration authorities. The considerations

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were also supplemented with oral histories from the resources of the Grodzka Gate Centre and memoirs published in the magazine "Kol Lublin".

**Key words:** Jews in Lublin, Jews in the People's Republic of Poland, ZRWM, Jews after World War II

#### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł ma charakter mikrohistoryczny i analizuje organizację życia religijnego Żydów w Lublinie w latach 1944–1989. Przedstawia działalność żydowskich organizacji wyznaniowych (Żydowskiej Kongregacji Wyznaniowej, a następnie Związku Religijnego Wyznania Mojżeszowego) w kontekście szerszej polityki państowej, wyróżniając trzy etapy: okres odrodzenia (1944–1949), czas ścisłej kontroli państowej (1949–1968) oraz dekady stopniowego zaniku (1968–1989). Dokumenty wytworzone przez lubelską kongregację wyznaniową nie zachowały się w archiwach, dlatego próbę rekonstrukcji omawianego zagadnienia podjęto przede wszystkim w oparciu o istniejące dokumenty innych organizacji żydowskich (CKŻP i TSKŻ) oraz korespondencję z organami administracji publicznej. Rozważania uzupełniono także o historie mówione z zasobów Ośrodka "Brama Grodzka Teatr NN" i wspomnienia opublikowane w magazynie "Kol Lublin".

**Słowa kluczowe:** Żydzi w Lublinie, Żydzi w PRL, ZRWM, Żydzi po II wojnie światowej

Religious life encompasses practices, beliefs, values, rituals, and behaviors associated with a connection to the divine or a higher reality. Beyond serving as an expression of spirituality and a personal relationship with the sacred, it represents a cornerstone of both individual and communal identity. In the aftermath of World War II, Jewish religious practices in Poland underwent profound transformations. These changes were directly linked to the devastating impact of the war and the Holocaust – marked by immense population losses, the decimation of communities, the destruction of places of worship, and a break in the continuity of religious institutions. As a result, over time, the Jewish community saw a gradual erosion of traditional religious practices. Regular synagogue prayers, strict observance of Shabbat, adherence to kashrut laws, and the organization of key lifecycle events such as weddings, circumcisions, and bar mitzvahs all experienced significant decline.

Although the post-war Polish authorities declared equal rights for all religions and granted legal status to various communities, their underlying aim was to secularize society by reducing the influence of religion on the state and minimizing affiliations based on religious and ethnic identities. This approach proved particularly challenging for Jewish identity. The reconstruction of Jewish religiosity after the war had to take place in a completely new environment and quickly became an element of broader state policy. In this context, Jewish religious organizations were frequently co-opted as instruments for achieving political and ideological

objectives. The authorities strongly favored secular institutions, promoting Jewishness as a primarily cultural element. At the same time, the sphere of religious life became the source of a dispute over competences within the newly established Jewish organizations.

### THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Research into the religious life of the Jewish community in post-war Poland remains underdeveloped. Although several articles describe, in broad context, the situation of Judaism in the Polish People's Republic<sup>1</sup>, and a couple of studies focus specifically on the Jewish religious congregation in Legnica<sup>2</sup>, comprehensive scholarly work is scarce.

The subject is touched upon indirectly in the studies by Kazimierz Urban and Małgorzata Bednarek<sup>3</sup>. To date, the only monograph devoted to the activities of the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith is a publication that examines the Lower Silesian structures of this organization<sup>4</sup>. In broader regional analyses of the fate of the Jewish community – as noted by Marek Szajda<sup>5</sup> – the primary focus has been on secular Jewish organizations, including the early Jewish committees and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, and, after 1950, the Social and Cultural

<sup>1</sup> K. Urban, *Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce w latach 1965–1985 (zarys problematyki)*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie" 2007, 749, pp. 57–74; idem, *Wyznanie mojżeszowe w Polsce 1945–1961 (zarys działalności)*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie" 2006, 706, pp. 61–80; A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *Życie religijne społeczności żydowskiej*, in: *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, eds. F. Tych, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin 2012, pp. 215–244; A. Grabski, *Współczesne życie religijne Żydów w Polsce*, in: *Studia z dziejów i kultury Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1997, pp. 143–202. E. Pogorzała, *Działalność oświatowo-wychowawcza żydowskich kongregacji wyznaniowych w Polsce w drugiej połowie lat 40-tych XX w.*, "Facta Simonidis" 2008, 1 (1), pp. 175–190.

<sup>2</sup> M. Szajda, *Żydowskie życie religijne w Legnicy w okresie PRL. Cz. 1, Żydowska Kongregacja Wyznaniowa (1946–1949)*, "Legnicki Almanach" 2023, 5, pp. 181–199; idem, *Żydowskie życie religijne w Legnicy w okresie PRL. Cz. 2, Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego (1949–1989)*, "Legnicki Almanach" 2024, 6, pp. 135–158.

<sup>3</sup> M. Bednarek, *Sytuacja prawa cmentarzy żydowskich w Polsce 1944–2019*, Kraków–Budapest–Syrakuzy 2020; K. Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie, synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce w latach 1944–1966 (wybór materiałów)*, Kraków 2006.

<sup>4</sup> E. Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945–1968*, Wrocław 1999.

<sup>5</sup> M. Szajda, *Żydowskie cz. 2*, p. 135.

Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ). Research on the specific activities of the Religious Association of the Mosaic Faith remains notably sparse.

The purpose of these considerations is to present an account of the activities of the local structures of the Jewish religious congregation in Lublin, Poland, during the years 1944–1989, as well as to assess the impact of state policy on the lives of religious Jews in the city. Lublin itself emerged as a hub for the revival of Jewish life immediately after the war; however, over time the city's importance waned, leaving the local community in an increasingly precarious situation. Adopting a micro-historical perspective, this article addresses the challenges faced by a marginalized Jewish religious community on the peripheries of Jewish life in post-war Poland.

The organization of the religious life of Lublin Jews is presented chronologically, divided into three periods: from the end of the war until the establishment of the Jewish Religious Congregations (August 1944–February 1945), the operational period of the congregation in Lublin (1945–1949), and the era following the establishment of the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (1949–1989).

Due to the peripheral and marginal nature of the environment under discussion, the available source material is limited. The documents produced by the Lublin religious congregation have not been preserved in archives; therefore, reconstruction of this history has relied primarily on extant documents from other Jewish organizations (Central Committee of Jews in Poland, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland) and correspondence with public administration bodies (Lublin Voivodeship Office, Ministry of Public Administration) preserved in the resources of the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Central Archive of Modern Records and the State Archives in Lublin. The considerations were also supplemented with memories published in the "Kol Lublin" magazine run by the Lublin hometown association and with oral histories from the resources of the "Brama Grodzka Teatr NN" Center in Lublin.

### FIRST ATTEMPTS TO REBUILD JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE IN LUBLIN (AUGUST 1944–FEBRUARY 1945)

The fighting in Lublin ended in July 1944, and the city soon became a hub for the revival of social and political life. As early as August 1944, a Jewish committee was formed to oversee charitable and cultural activities and to lay the foundation for a broader political representation of the community. In October 1944, this effort led to the establishment of the

Provisional Central Committee of Polish Jews, which was soon followed by the creation of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP). When the state administration moved to Warsaw in 1945, CKŻP relocated its headquarters there, while a regional Provincial Jewish Committee continued to operate in Lublin.

CKŻP served as a representative body for a diverse array of Jewish circles and political fractions. Nonetheless, the organization was fundamentally secular, and its local committees were predominantly led by activists who opposed the dominance of Conservative Judaism – even to the extent of espousing anti-religious positions<sup>6</sup>. This provoked opposition from the religious segment of the Jewish community, which viewed CKŻP as a secularized institution<sup>7</sup>.

However, in the early weeks following the end of hostilities, ideological disputes over religious attitudes receded into the background. The organizing community's primary focus was on addressing the immediate needs of the newly arrived Jews by ensuring access to shelter, food, and safety. Nonetheless, the Jewish Committee in Lublin, established in August 1944, also turned its attention to the issue of religious practices. At its meeting on September 14, 1944, the committee considered various proposals for the location of a Jewish prayer house, including the synagogue on Bychawska Street (now Władysław Kunicki Street), the committee's premises at 8 Rybna Street, and the Peretz House at 4a Czwartek Street (currently Szkolna Street)<sup>8</sup>. It was this last proposal, supported by the influential Bund activist, Szloma Herszenhorn, that was implemented. This is evidenced by the memoirs of Marek Bitter published in the newspaper "Kol Lublin" run by the Lublin hometown association:

"The Jewish Committee in Lublin adapted the ruined Peretz House as a meeting place. The community, still shattered by the occupation and unaccustomed to normal life, cleared debris with their bare hands; they patched shrapnel-ridden wall holes with paper, constructed a makeshift platform from boards, and set up the Aron Kodesh. Hidden candlesticks were also recovered from the ground, all in preparation for celebrating the first Rosh Hashanah following the Holocaust. I will never forget that

<sup>6</sup> A. Grabski, *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950). Historia polityczna*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 109–110.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, p. 429; A. Grabski, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego [hereinafter: AŻIH], Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce [hereinafter: CKŻP], Wydział Organizacji [hereinafter: WO], ref. no. 3, p. 49, after: A. Kopciowski, *Żydzi w Lublinie w latach 1944–1949*, Lublin 1998 [typescript of master's thesis], p. 236.

night, the eve of Rosh Hashanah. I remember how the streets calmed down and the city took on a new look. Hundreds of Jews who came from various places to the improvised synagogue changed the everyday image of Lublin. Who could understand the Jew who was going to the synagogue at that time, who could understand what he was thinking? He was probably once a father of children, he once led a Moshele or Shlomele to Rosh Hashanah by the hand, dressed in new clothes and new shoes, with his head washed for the holiday, with his wife by his side, with a prayer book wrapped in a scarf. With slightly red eyes, he wished his neighbors a happy and worry-free New Year. And, as always, he continued walking to the synagogue with his family. And today? And today he is alone, alone, with idle hands because no one takes them anymore. His children are gone, they died in the crematoria, together with their mothers. In the gas chambers, they cried out to their father for help for the last time, but he, in his despair, was unable to help them. Today he walks with frozen eyes that can no longer cry because they have already cried all their tears. Lying in a bunker or in the forest, he dreamed that maybe he would see someone alive again. But today he knows perfectly well that everything is gone. A Polish neighbor told him about his misfortune, with the exact dates when it happened, and he knows that there is nothing he can count on anymore. He is stuck alone in the synagogue. And when he covers his head with a tallit, he closes his frozen eyes and gives himself over to dreams of his loved ones who died with the last word 'daddy' on their lips. [...]. He goes to the synagogue, looking for comfort there, wanting to share stories about difficult years, maybe exchanging greetings, maybe meeting someone from his town. Maybe someone else survived? This 'maybe' does not give him peace, it keeps circulating in his head, not allowing for a moment of respite. [...]. No artist would be able to fully convey the atmosphere that prevailed during the first Rosh Hashanah in Lublin after the liberation in 1944. It was not an ordinary gathering of several hundred Jews in a makeshift synagogue in the Peretz House. The hall was permeated with the entire tragedy of our nation. The souls of the innocently murdered were floating in the air. From torn hearts flowed a great cry of pain addressed to the entire civilized world: »Why? Why were you silent while we were being burned?« The living closed their eyes and wept, while an elderly Jew standing at the lectern, unable to pray, wailed loudly<sup>9</sup>.

Rosh Hashanah in 1944 fell on September 17, almost exactly five years after the German occupation of Lublin. The above-quoted recollection by Marek Bitter – an activist of the Jewish Fraction of the Polish

<sup>9</sup> "Kol Lublin" 1984, no. 19, p. 20.

Workers' Party, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, and the Jewish Historical Commission—constitutes the earliest known account of post-war religious activity among Jews in Lublin. His memory captures the profound emotions and experiences of survivors arriving in the liberated city: despair, loneliness, guilt, and the desperate need to rebuild a sense of community while preserving religious traditions and practices.

According to Bitter, the Rosh Hashanah celebration took place in an improvised synagogue within the Peretz House. Originally, this building was intended as a center for secular Jewish culture, meant to host a school and theater. Although its construction was completed in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II, it never fulfilled its pre-war function. In the early post-war years, however, it played a vital role – taken over by the Jewish Committee and repurposed as a shelter and infirmary. In those first days, it unexpectedly became a sacred space.

This episode not only underscores the extent of destruction suffered by Jewish religious buildings but also reflects the revived community's inability to reclaim and use surviving pre-war synagogues – such as those within the Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin – for religious purposes.

At that time, no separate religious organization operated in Lublin. In October 1944, a religious section was established at the Jewish Committee. It was headed by Lejb Aronzon (born 1911 in Lublin), a member of the Lublin Judenrat and an activist of the Jewish committee in that city<sup>10</sup>, followed by Mordachaj Zonszajn, associated with Ichud, and Dr. Mojżesz Mazur (also members of the Jewish committee)<sup>11</sup>. In October 1944, the Jewish Committee in Lublin sent a letter to the department of religious denominations of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) regarding the appointment of the Chief Rabbi<sup>12</sup>. Although this function was ultimately entrusted to Rabbi Safrin Feldszuh, the response from the department suggests the authorities' desire to separate secular and religious functions in the Jewish Committee: 'the rabbinical factor is to be eliminated from the commune, which has the character of a secular self-government'<sup>13</sup>. The document also highlights the need to es-

<sup>10</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Lublinie [hereinafter: APL], Rada Żydowska w Lublinie 1939–1942 [hereinafter: RŻL], ref. no. 36, sheets 18–21, after: Ośrodek "Brama Grodzka–Teatr NN", Lublin 43 tysiące, <https://teatrnn.pl/ludzie/osoby/id/I00055806/> [access: 8.01.2025].

<sup>11</sup> AŽIH, Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski w Lublinie [hereinafter: WKŻ], ref. no. 355/3, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Archiwum Akta Nowych [hereinafter: AAN], Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej [hereinafter: MAP], Departament Wyznaniowy [hereinafter: DW], ref. no. 79, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from the Jewish Committee of October 8, 1944 to the Ministry of Religious Denominations of the PKWN: 'Report on the application of the Jewish Committee...' to the Legal Office of the Presidium of the PKWN of November 16, 1944 to the chairman of

tablish independent religious associations, as differences in worldview began to play an increasingly significant role among the Jews remaining in Lublin, especially as post-war chaos gradually gave way to a more stable reality. At the same time, however, the authorities sought to assign the responsibility for addressing the religious needs of the Jewish population to the committee itself—an approach reflected in the statute of the CKŻP.

Despite the unclear formal situation in matters of worship, the Lublin community was already using the Jewish cemetery at Unicka St. As reported by the "Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency", the first post-war burial took place there on November 23, 1944. The information concerned the funeral of Dr. Zygfryd Wiener, assistant professor at UMCS, who died in a traffic accident. The note emphasized that it was the first Jewish funeral in liberated Lublin, and was attended by government representatives, Rabbi Dr. Safrin Feldszuh and Rector Henryk Raabe from UMCS<sup>14</sup>. However, according to the account of Ewa Eisenkeit, the first burial in 1944 was actually that of a Jewish soldier of the Polish Army, whose body was discovered in a basement on Świętoduska Street. A large group of survivors from various parts of Poland reportedly took part in the ceremony, which was led by an unidentified rabbi then residing at 18 Lubartowska Street<sup>15</sup>.

In the same issue, the "Bulletin" also reported on material support received by the Jewish community in the form of religious items recovered from the Majdanek camp. These included, among other things, tallits and Torah ornaments, which were to be 'distributed among religious Jews'<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, there clearly existed a community interested in reviving religious practices; however, at that time, their organization and implementation remained under the jurisdiction of the Jewish Committee. In December 1944, a Hanukkah gathering was held at the committee's premises<sup>17</sup>, and during the reorganization of this structure on December 12, 1944, a discussion arose concerning the work of the religious department, reflecting support for the principle of the separation of state

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the PKWN, AAN, MAP, DW, ref. no. 1099, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, pp. 63–67. In the minutes of the meeting of the Management Board of the Jewish Committee in Lublin there is a mention of sending a letter regarding the appointment of a 'provincial rabbi', AŻIH, WKŻ, ref. no. 355/3, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> AŻIH, Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej 1944–1949 [hereinafter: BŻAP], ref. no. 354, no. 3, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> E. Minars, *A Lublin survivor. Life is like a dream*, [Brighton] 2018, p. 337.

<sup>16</sup> AŻIH, BŻAP, ref. no. 354, no. 3 [November 23, 1944], pp. 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> AŻIH, BŻAP, ref. no. 354, no. 7 [December 16, 1944], p. 3.

and religion. Szloma Herszenhorn spoke on this matter: 'In the Central Committee, as well as in the City Committee, religious matters and the religious ministry are separated from the committee. All religious needs are a private matter and as such should exist as an independent entity, having nothing to do with the Jewish Committee. However, as in the Central Committee, also in the Lublin Committee, there are funds for religious needs and are available at any time'<sup>18</sup>.

The activities of the Jewish Committee addressed, to some extent, the needs of religious communities; however, in light of the overwhelming challenges and the scale of humanitarian assistance required, religious practices were largely treated as secondary. Support for religious life was minimal, with most efforts focused on cultural and integrative initiatives. Ultimately, during the committee's reorganization, no Religious Department was established. As a result, matters of religious worship remained in the state of limbo until February 1945, when the Ministry of Public Administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, MAP) formally established the Jewish Religious Associations.

#### JEWISH RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION AND JEWISH RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION IN LUBLIN (1945–1949)

Since 1945, the Religious Department has operated within the structure of the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP), handling matters related to non-Roman Catholic denominations, including the Mosaic faith. Amid growing tensions between the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP) and religious Jews affiliated with the Aguda and Mizrachi parties, MAP issued a circular on February 6, 1945, introducing a temporary framework for regulating the religious affairs of the Jewish population<sup>19</sup>. The document stated that the creation of Israelite Religious Communities, with the scope of authority defined in the 1927 regulation, was not anticipated. However, it allowed for the formation of Jewish Religious Associations (Żydowskie Zrzeszenia Religijne – ŽZR) with at least ten members, entrusted with organizing and carrying out the practices and rituals of 'Jewish worship'<sup>20</sup>. The main tasks of this new religious organization, apart from matters of worship, included: running ritual canteens, providing kosher meat, distributing matzah, organizing religious

<sup>18</sup> AŻIH, WKŻ, ref. no. 355/4, pp. 1–3.

<sup>19</sup> E. Waszkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> AAN, MAP, DW, ref. no. 1099, sheets 7–8, after: J. Adelson, *W Polsce zwanej ludową*, in: *Najnowsze*, pp. 429–430.

education, providing charitable assistance, taking care of cemeteries and ransoming Jewish children.

The body representing religious Jews was the ŻZR Organizational Committee, the first meeting of which took place on November 27, 1945, and the first meeting of local organizations in February 1946. At that time, the name of the organization was changed to Jewish Religious Congregations (Żydowskie Kongregacje Wyznaniowe – ŻKW). An important role in this organization was played by representatives of the general party of Zionists Ichud, Orthodox Zionists Mizrachi, and the illegally functioning Agudah. At the end of 1946, there were 80 local branches operating<sup>21</sup>. Congregations sought to separate the competences related to meeting religious needs from the CKŻP, so in May 1946 they protested against the provision doubling these powers in the CKŻP statute. The main axis of the dispute between the committees and the discussed religious associations were the issues of language and religious education and the problem of days off from work on Jewish holidays<sup>22</sup>. There was no agreement between the above-mentioned parties forming ŻKW as to the scope and nature of cooperation with Jewish committees. The Jewish Religious Associations (ŻKW) enjoyed a degree of autonomy in their operations, as their structures did not include representatives of the Bund or the communist party. They also had relatively greater freedom in maintaining contacts with foreign organizations. Nevertheless, their activities remained under strict supervision of the Ministry of Public Administration (MAP).

The Polish state's religious policy during this period pursued a dual approach: on the one hand, it sought to limit the role of religious organizations strictly to matters of worship; on the other, it aimed to exploit their activities for propaganda purposes. From the late 1940s onward, a series of administrative and repressive measures were introduced, including increased oversight, interference in personnel decisions, and the appropriation of property<sup>23</sup>. The lack of an approved ŻKW statute led to chaos and internal conflicts<sup>24</sup>, which were used in negotiations regarding the inclusion of ŻKW in the structures of CKŻP<sup>25</sup>. The unification took place on June 1, 1948, shortly before the dissolution of the CKŻP in 1950 and the end of the so-called autonomy of Jewish organizations. In 1949, the

<sup>21</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> E. Pogorzała, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. K. Urban, *Mniejszości religijne w Polsce 1945–1991 (zarys statystyczny)*, Kraków 1994, pp. 10–29; R. Michalak, *Polityka wyznaniowa państwa polskiego wobec mniejszości religijnych w latach 1945–1989*, Zielona Góra 2014, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, pp. 27–30.

<sup>25</sup> J. Adelson, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in Poland (ZRWM) was established to replace the former congregational structures<sup>26</sup>. The Lublin branch of this organization also participated in the above-mentioned changes.

In Lublin, just a few days after the issuance of the aforementioned circular, the Jewish Religious Association was established on February 11, 1945<sup>27</sup>. On February 14, an eleven-person Management Board was elected, headed by Lejb Aronzon (also an activist of CKŻP). Initially, Wadia Farbiarz was elected rabbi of the city of Lublin, but he was not approved for this position due to the intervention of Rabbi Dawid Kahane, who accused him of lacking appropriate qualifications<sup>28</sup>. The function of rabbi of the city of Lublin was entrusted to Josef Sztajnberg, whose deputy was Wadia Farbiarz<sup>29</sup>.

The seat of the Jewish Religious Association in Lublin was located in a tenement house at 8 Lubartowska Street, which also housed a kosher canteen and office space. The Association was additionally responsible for the Chewra Nosim prayer house, situated in the neighboring building at 10 Lubartowska Street<sup>30</sup>. Although the associations called for the introduction of proper entry in the documentation concerning the transfer of assets belonging to pre-war Jewish communities, these demands were never fully realized. In practice, property matters were often left to the discretion of the state administration, based on the March 8, 1946 decree on abandoned and deserted properties<sup>31</sup>. For this reason, the syna-

<sup>26</sup> J. Tomaszewski, A. Żbikowski, *Żydzi w Polsce. Dzieje i kultura. Leksykon*, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>27</sup> AAN, MAP, Departament polityczny. Wydział narodowościowy. Żydowskie Kongregacje Wyznaniowe [hereinafter: DP], ref. no. 794, sheet 31, after: L. Olejnik, *Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944 –1960*, Łódź 2003, p. 379. The records of the Lublin Religious Community have not been preserved in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute or the State Archives in Lublin. The primary sources documenting the community's activities consist of sporadic information found in the records of Lublin's Jewish committees affiliated with the *Central Jewish Committee in Poland* (*Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce*), housed in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Additionally, fragmentary documents from the *Chamber of Remembrance of Lublin Jews* (*Izba Pamięci Żydów Lubelskich*) at 10 Lubartowska Street in Lublin, made available to Adam Kopciowski for his master's thesis, provide further, albeit incomplete, insights.

<sup>28</sup> AAN, MAP, DW, ref. no. 1103, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> AAN, MAP, DW, ref. no. 79, p. 35; cf. AAN, MAP, ref. no. 1099, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Formally, the owner of ¾ of the shares in the tenement house was the State Treasury, the congregation was only the user of the premises. See: APL, Urząd Wojewódzki Lubelski [hereinafter: UWL], Wydział ds Wyznań [hereinafter: WdsW], ref. no. 354, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

gogue on Lubartowska Street was not owned by the congregation but was merely assigned to it for use.

Many of the responsibilities of the Jewish Religious Association overlapped with those of the Jewish Committee, and some individuals were members of both organizations simultaneously. The Jewish community in Lublin was relatively small, and despite the Association's formal independence, a certain degree of cooperation with the Committee was unavoidable. For instance, in April 1945, the Jewish Committee organized a seder dinner for 700 Jews – soldiers and officers of the local garrison. However, it is difficult to determine to what extent the event had a religious character and how much it served primarily as a social gathering<sup>32</sup>. Certain religious practices were also possible in shelters run by the committee, which was related to the temporary presence in Lublin of the chief rabbi of the Polish Army, Dawid Kahane, who led prayers there<sup>33</sup>.

The first mention of the Association's official activity in Lublin dates back to August 1945. As part of the "Majdanek Week" celebrations, in which the Provincial Jewish Committee in Lublin actively participated, its members asked the Association to perform a *hazkara* (commemorative prayer) for the Jews murdered in the camp<sup>34</sup>.

Regular services were held at the prayer house on Lubartowska Street. On September 17, 1945, the *Kol Nidre* prayer preceding *Yom Kippur* was conducted there, but the solemnity of the occasion was disrupted by alarming rumors of a planned pogrom. The following day, Wadia Farbiarz, a resident of the building above the synagogue, was attacked after false rumors of murdering a Christian girl by the Jews spread in the city. The dangerous situation was defused thanks to the intervention of Jewish officers. Although the pogrom did not ultimately occur (unlike in Kielce in 1946), the incident highlights the atmosphere of tension and violence in which Jewish life was being reestablished both in the region and across the country<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> A. Kopciowski, *Żydzi w Lublinie w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej. Struktura demograficzna*, "Scriptores" 2019, 46, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Archiwum Historii Mówionej Ośrodka Brama Grodzka Teatr NN [hereinafter: AHM OBGTNN]. Relacja Zipory Nahir, nagranie J. Jeremicz, T. Klimowicz, P. Nazaruk, 2017, Relacja Alicji Savir, nagranie T. Czajkowski, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> AŻIH, CKŻP, WO, ref. no. 3, no paginatium, Protokół plenarnego posiedzenia Komitetu Żydowskiego w Lublinie odbytego 31 VII 1945 r., after: A. Kopciowski, *Żydzi w Lublinie w latach*, p. 184.

<sup>35</sup> W. Farbiarz, *O.D. Farbiarz, Jomkiper in der chorewer Lublin*, (Reprinted from: "Algemajner Żurnal" [New York], October 9, 1981), transl. A. Kopciowski, "Kol Lublin", 1982, no. 17, pp. 13–16.

It is possible that in the autumn of that year, the agenda of the Jewish Religious Association (ŻZR) was transferred to Warsaw, as suggested by Ewa Waszkiewicz<sup>36</sup>, effectively transforming the Lublin Association into a local branch.

In 1946, the Lublin Association underwent the aforementioned name change to the Jewish Religious Congregation in Lublin. The branch retained its seat and the premises it had been using, and there were unsuccessful attempts to utilize the building of the rabbinical college of Yeshiva Chachmej Lublin (currently at 85 Lubartowska Street). However, a ritual bath was operating at 24 Lubartowska Street<sup>37</sup>.

Little is known about the congregation's activities during this period. In 1946, however, the congregation was involved in the funeral of Jews whose remains were exhumed from the Majdan Tatarski area<sup>38</sup>. In September 1947, the congregation played a role in organizing a congress of Lublin Jews, overseeing the funeral services. That same year, it took part in the so-called 'akcja macowa', a nationwide census of Jews. In 1948, through the efforts of the Lublin compatriots' association, the cemetery on Lubartowska Street, was partially fenced<sup>39</sup>.

As already mentioned, most of the documents produced by the congregation have not been preserved in the archives. The only known materials, made available to Adam Kopciowski, show that in the years 1947–1948 the position of chairman of the Lublin congregation was held by Hersz Zylbersztajn, who escaped from the camp in Trawniki and was saved by the Chom family in Ostrów Nadrybski near Łęczna, and he left for Israel probably in 1948<sup>40</sup>. The function of secretary was entrusted Joel Fuksman (resident: Lubartowska 40). At that time, the congregation's employees also included: bookkeeper Chaim Goldberg

<sup>36</sup> E. Waszkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 56. The author suggests that ŻZR, founded in Lublin, after being moved to Warsaw in the fall of 1945, became the foundation of the nationwide ŻKW Organizing Committee. Due to the lack of data on the composition of the ŻZR Lublin management board at the end of 1945, it is difficult to determine the continuity of the Lublin organization's operation. However, this would explain the lack of appropriate documentation regarding the Lublin branch in the mentioned period and the lack of further mentions of Lejb Aronzon's activities in Lublin.

<sup>37</sup> AŻIH, Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej przy CKŻP (1945–1950), ref. no. 324/1477, p. 43; AAN, MAP, DP, ref. no. 794, p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> "Gazeta Lubelska" 1946, no. 346 (655), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> I. Rajchensztajn, *Ziomek lubelski w Polsce*, in: *Księga pamięci żydowskiego Lublina*, ed. A. Kopciowski, Lublin 2011, p. 360.

<sup>40</sup> H. Zylbersztajn, *Sprawiedliwi wśród narodów świata. Lublin i Lubelszczyzna*, Ośrodek "Brama Grodzka –Teatr NN", <https://teatrnn.pl/sprawiedliwi-lubelszczyzna/zylbersztajn-hersz/> [access: 15.01.2025].

(residing at 18 Lubartowska Street), butcher Icek Borensztejn (residing at 8 Lubartowska Street), warehouseman Ber(l) Kawa, a pre-war cattle dealer (residing at 10 Lubartowska Street), intendant Izrael Zylbersztajn (residing at 19 Lubartowska Street), cook Cyrla Cukier (residing at Dom Perec), cook Fela Blank (residing at Peretz House) and Icek Fiszer (residing at Lubartowska 8), Jankiel Tenenbaum (residing at Staszica), Mordechaj Mendelsohn (residing at Lubartowska 40/20), Sura Leder (residing at Lubartowska 8), Abram Rozensztejn (residing at Lubartowska 8), Róża Arensztajn and M. Sztajgman. The congregation also employed people from outside the Jewish community as kitchen helpers: Maria Mac(z)-kowska and Krystyna Pawłowska<sup>41</sup>.

According to budget statements, in 1950 the Lublin congregation was responsible for two Jewish cemeteries (on Unicka Street and on Kalinowszczyzna Street), ran a ritual bath and employed two administrative employees<sup>42</sup>. Until around 1950, the congregation also organized a ritual kitchen (canteen)<sup>43</sup>.

#### ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS UNION OF MOSAIC FAITH (ZRWM) IN LUBLIN (1949–1989)

##### The beginnings of ZRWM (1949–1957)

By the late 1940s, there was a shift in the religious and minority policies of the Polish state. The CKŻP and all Jewish political parties were dissolved, and religious activities came under strict oversight of the Office for Religious Affairs. The state's policy towards religious minorities was inconsistent, aiming both to limit the influence of religion on society and maintaining the principles of religious freedom. In the 1950s, the Office for Religious Affairs responded relatively favorably to the basic religious needs of congregations, allocating wheat for matza production, permitting the import of prayer books, and even offering a course in ritual slaughter for mohels<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Documents of the Department of Provisions and Trade (Jewish Religious Congregation in Lublin), notebook in the collection of the Lublin *Chamber of Memory of the Jews of Lublin*, after: A. Kopciowski, *Żydzi w Lublinie w latach*, pp. 239–240.

<sup>42</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, pp. 224–225.

<sup>43</sup> *Kongregacje i ich agendy według stanu na 1 stycznia 1947 r.*, after: *ibidem*, pp. 166 and 233, Ritual cuisine in Lublin is no longer included in the list from 1950.

<sup>44</sup> E. Waszkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

On August 9–10, 1949, during the meeting of the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland, a separate religious organization was established due to the integration of the previous organization into the structures of the CKŻP (explained above). This new organization was named the Religious Union of Mosaic Denominations in Poland (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce – ZRWM), led by Rabbi Szulim Trejstman from Wrocław<sup>45</sup>. The governing bodies of the Association included the Union Congregational Congress, the Main Board, the Main Audit Committee, and the Arbitration Court. The statute granted the ZRWM legal personality, while local congregations were excluded from this status. Only male members of the Association were entitled to both active and passive voting rights<sup>46</sup>. The Union included local congregations with at least 25 members (regardless of gender or religion), and a higher level of organization was introduced through provincial congregations. ZRWM became the second major organization representing Polish Jews, alongside the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), which replaced CKŻP.

Membership in ZRWM provided access to material and financial support. The financial foundation for the congregation's operations came from subsidies provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) during the periods when this organization could operate freely in Poland (1949–1950, 1957–1967, and from 1981). These foreign funds were used to support the activities of ritual kitchens, cemetery maintenance, religious services, and charitable efforts. In remaining years, the activities of the organization were funded primarily through government subsidies and supplemented by modest internal resources<sup>47</sup>.

At the same time, ZRWM expressed full loyalty to state policy. This was evident in various resolutions that employed language typical of the era: 'If we do not want to relive unemployment and poverty, discrimination and pogroms, concentration camps and mass extermination, we must stand firmly shoulder to shoulder with those who are fighting for a new social order, for a world without exploiters, for social justice, for socialism [...]'<sup>48</sup>. The strict control over ZRWM also led to local structures shaping the ideological message, which was reflected in various appeals

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 433; L. Olejnik, *Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944–1960*, Łódź 2003, p. 380.

<sup>46</sup> E. Waszkiewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–103.

<sup>47</sup> N. Aleksiuń, *Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce (ZRWM)*, <https://delet.jhi.pl/pl/psj?articleId=15012> [access: 12.12.2024].

<sup>48</sup> AAN, Urząd ds Wyznań [hereinafter: UdsW], Wydział III, ref. no. 9/317, after: A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

that condemned the rearmament carried out by the West and the remilitarization of the Federal Republic of Germany<sup>49</sup>.

However, such declarations did not protect ZRWM from having its activities discontinued in the wake of political changes. Restricting their functioning was part of the general trend of eliminating pluralism in the Jewish community in the late 1940s that also resulted in dissolution of CKŻP. In 1949, there were still 62 congregations operating in the country, using 68 synagogues and 17 ritual baths<sup>50</sup>. However, following the cessation of financial support from the Joint in 1950, the logistical capabilities and membership of ZRWM significantly declined. By 1953, the number of congregations had dropped to just 23<sup>51</sup>, and after the liquidation action carried out a year later, to only 15<sup>52</sup>. Many religious Jews, including several rabbis, took advantage of the opportunity to emigrate to the newly established state of Israel. The beginning of the 1950s was therefore a difficult period for the congregation due to the continuing uncertain legal status (ZRWM was recognized as 'legally existing', but with an unapproved statute), as well as in connection with the above-mentioned interruption of the Joint's activities until 1956. During that period, ZRWM came under the strict supervision of the Office for Religious Affairs<sup>53</sup>.

#### Activities of the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith in Lublin in the early 1950s

The Religious Congregation in Lublin continued to function within the ZRWM and was registered on November 8, 1949<sup>54</sup>. In the following years, it continued to use the name and seal of the Jewish Religious Congregation in Lublin, although, formally, the local branches were referred to as Congregations of the Mosaic Faith. The members of the Management Board of the local branch at that time were: Józef Rozen – chairman, Hersz Zylbersztajn – vice-chairman, and members of the Management Board: Mordko Cymrang, Ber Kawa, Szloma Wajner, Moses Wajsbrot and Ber Zemel. Only limited information about the congregation's activists during this period has been preserved. Józef Rozen (born 1902) was a chemist and lived in Lublin before the war, survived the war in Zielonka near Warsaw, and then returned to the city<sup>55</sup>. Szloma Wajner (born 1893)

<sup>49</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 196.

<sup>51</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>52</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 29, 349.

<sup>54</sup> AAN, MAP, DP, ref. no. 794, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Dina Meytes, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2017.

came from Torczyn in the Łuck district, was a Hebrew teacher<sup>56</sup>. Moses Wajsbrojt (born 1915) came from Lublin and was a student of the Lublin yeshiva, he survived in the USSR and returned to the city as a repatriate<sup>57</sup>. Information about Mordka Cymrang and Ber Zemel could not be found.

The number of members was set at 25, as provided for in the regulations. The congregation's address was listed as 8 Lubartowska Street, where a prayer house, a ritual kitchen, and an apartment for a shochet were still located. A ritual bath was still situated at 24 Lubartowska Street, and the congregation managed the leases for Jewish cemeteries in Lublin. Additionally, the congregation organized Talmud-Torah religious courses<sup>58</sup>.

At that time, the Lublin congregation also employed cantor Icak Fiszer (born 1914) from Tarnogród in Biłgoraj County, who survived the camps in Budzyń, Majdanek and Oświęcim, and then settled in Lublin<sup>59</sup>.

In 1951, the Lublin congregation officially had 160 members. However, the existing data are unreliable because records of members were rarely kept, moreover the data from the beginning of 1953 show only 40 of them<sup>60</sup>.

According to preserved documents, in 1954, the Lublin ŻKW structure was supposed to be dissolved<sup>61</sup>. However, this likely referred to formal changes, as the Lublin branch continued to operate under the name Jewish Religious Congregation in Lublin<sup>62</sup>. Detailed information about the activities of the Lublin branch from 1949 to 1957 is scarce, with only a mention of Szulim Garen serving as the chairman of the congregation in 1955<sup>63</sup>.

#### The situation of the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith in Lublin in the second half of the 1950s

After the events of October 1956, which marked a political thaw in Poland, the authorities allowed the Joint (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) to resume operations in the country. However, these political changes, triggered by Khrushchev's report criticizing Stalin, were accompanied by a rise in anti-Semitic incidents. Anti-Jewish leaflets, dismissals of Jews from their jobs, and even physical assaults occurred across Poland,

<sup>56</sup> AAN, MAP, DP, ref. no. 794, p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 86–89.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>60</sup> AAN, Urząd ds Wyznań, ref. no. 13/433, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 358.

<sup>61</sup> AŽIH, TSKŻ, ref. no. 325/217, no pagination, the information comes from internal correspondence of TSKŻ.

<sup>62</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> AAN, UdsW, Wydział Wyznań Nierzymskokatolickich, ref. no. 131/13, p. 629.

leading to increased emigration. Simultaneously, a new wave of repatriates from the USSR began arriving in Poland.

In 1958, the dispute over the issue of ritual slaughter also returned, and congregations struggled with the problem of the lack of ritual workers (mohels, rabbis and cantors). Congregations still had the right to use places of worship, including synagogues, prayer houses and cemeteries. However, they were still not their formal owners. This situation was unclear for the administration authorities<sup>64</sup>, as well as for the representatives of the congregation themselves. As a result, local authorities often omitted religious organizations in consultations regarding the transformation of real estate<sup>65</sup>.

The activities of ZRWM in the late 1950s were treated with suspicion and were subject to administrative supervision and surveillance. The unfavorable attitude towards congregations in state bodies is illustrated by the letter from 1959 of the special Committee of Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) for national minorities, regarding the situation of the Jewish community: 'The Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in Poland and its local equivalents are a place where a large number of Jews gather, which is used for propaganda of emigration. [...]. They practice Zionist agitation, prevent the stabilization of Jews in Poland, inflame sentiments trips to Israel by exaggerating the manifestations of anti-Semitism existing in Poland'<sup>66</sup>. There were also cases of unfavorable actions towards religious activists<sup>67</sup> from TSKŻ representatives, accusing ZRWM activists of alleged Zionism and supporting the so-called private initiative<sup>68</sup>.

The situation was becoming more and more tense, and the authorities did not make any difficulties in obtaining emigration permits for religious activists, even allowing the export of some books and artifacts<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> This is evidenced, for example, by the letter of the Ministry of Municipal Economy to the Office for Religious Affairs from 1953 regarding the possibility of transferring the area of the Jewish cemetery in Janów Lubelski for the purposes of water and drainage works, in which the area was defined as 'the property of the Jewish religious community in Janów Lubelski'. AAN. UdsW, ref. no. 14/446, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 448.

<sup>65</sup> This problem also appeared in the 1980s, cf. AAN, UdsW, ref. no. 68/33, p. 148.

<sup>66</sup> Letter of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party for Nationality Affairs of May 22, 1959 on the situation of the Jewish population, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 376.

<sup>67</sup> AŻIH, BŻAP, ref. no. 354, no 3 (23 november 1944), p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>69</sup> G. Berendt, *Walka o dusze. Życie społeczne i religijne Żydów 1950–1968*, online lecture: <https://wsztechnica.org.pl/wyklad/walka-o-dusze-zycie-społeczne-i-religijne-zydow-1950-1968/> [access: 3.12.2024].

The atmosphere of unrest was also felt in Lublin, where Jews were harassed in the workplace, in neighborly relations, and even at the meeting of the Municipal National Council (Miejska Rada Narodowa)<sup>70</sup>. In June 1956, one of the Council members, in response to protests regarding the transformation of the old Jewish cemetery, spoke in a decidedly anti-Semitic tone: 'Who are we going to ask? These dozen or so Jews, kaftan-wearers (pol. chałaciarzy)? These Jojnis and Shmuels? We don't have to take them into account or talk to them at all!'. This case caused outrage among Lublin Jews, especially since this statement was not condemned, but was rather supported by the applause of the meeting participants<sup>71</sup>.

This favored emigration moods. The Jewish community in Lublin was systematically decreasing. There was a need to additionally appoint delegates to congresses, due to emigration and the deaths of members of the organization. Representative positions were usually held by people of advanced age, as young people rarely identified with the Jewish community, especially with its religious branch.

In 1957, the Management Board of the local branch included: Aron Nissenbaum – chairman, Szulim Garen – secretary and members of the Management Board, Rafał Ader and Chaim Eliasz Leder, and the total number of members was set at 110<sup>72</sup>. Aron Nissenbaum was an activist of the pre-war Bund, a councilor of the Lublin City Council and a journalist, editor and publisher of the "Lubliner Sztyme" newspaper, and after the war, chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee, he left Lublin in 1959 and settled in Toronto<sup>73</sup>. The biographies of the management board members require further research, but it is known that Szulim Garen (born 1906) was born in Kraśnik<sup>74</sup>, came to Lublin in 1946, was active in the Zionist Ichud party and worked in the Jewish committee, then from 1951 in the congregation, he also worked as an accountant in the "Jaskółka" cooperative<sup>75</sup>. Rafał Ader (born 1902) came from Frampol, then lived in Włodawa, served as a butcher in the post-war period and occasionally led prayers. After the war, he settled in Lublin with his

<sup>70</sup> AŽIH, TSKŻ, ref. no. 325/217, no pagination, document of June 14, 1956.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, no pagination, Letter of the TSKŻ management board of June 12, 1956; APL, Komitet Wojewódzki Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej, ref. no. 214, p. 163.

<sup>72</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 129.

<sup>73</sup> See: A. Kopciowski, *Wos hert sich in der provinces. Prasa żydowska na Lubelszczyźnie i jej największy dziennik „Lubliner Tugblat”*, Lublin 2015, pp. 66, 82, 348; cf. AHM OBGTNN, Report by Różka Doner, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> APL, UWL, ref. no. 353, p. 110.

<sup>75</sup> Oddziałowe Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Lublinie [hereinafter: OAIPNL], ref. no. Lu-015/272, pp. 41–48.

wife Sara, and then returned to Włodawa<sup>76</sup>. However, what is known about Chaim Eliasz Leder (born 1897) is that he came from Uchanie<sup>77</sup>.

In 1959, there were changes in the composition of the Management Board. Due to the departure of Aron Nissenbaum, the position of chairman was taken by Fajwel Fryd, and Icchak Kuperman was co-opted to the management board<sup>78</sup>. Fajwel Fryd was a bibliophile from Chełm, a translator and teacher at a post-war Jewish school, a post-war activist of the Poalej-Zion party and a collaborator of the Idish Buch publishing house<sup>79</sup>. Icchak Kuperman (born 1907) came from Puchaczew<sup>80</sup>.

The activists of the Lublin congregation were often not native to the city, reflecting the broader demographic reality in which a substantial portion of the Jewish community in Lublin was composed of postwar immigrants. Notably, there existed clear membership continuities between members of the congregation, the preexisting Jewish committees, and, subsequently, the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ). Nonetheless, tensions and conflicts emerged between these organizations. Evidence of such disputes can be found in the accusations directed by the TSKŻ against Chaim Dorfsman, the representative of ZRWM in Lublin<sup>81</sup>.

Like other local branches, the Lublin congregation at that time organized major Jewish celebrations (such as Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Simchat Torah). The congregation also employed a butcher (shochet) who, as Roman Litman recalls, slaughtered a chicken purchased at a nearby market over the sink in the prayer house at Lubartowska Street<sup>82</sup>. Last services were also provided to community members and cemetery caretakers were employed (it is known about a caretaker in Lublin and Międzyrzec Podlaski)<sup>83</sup>.

The congregation also organized commemorative events (e.g. the anniversary of the destruction of the Lublin ghetto), usually prepared in cooperation with the Lublin compatriots, and also participated in the exhumation of the bodies of those murdered by the Nazis<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Julian Grzesik, recording by T.Czajkowski, 2017.

<sup>77</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 110.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>79</sup> M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, *Fajwel Fryd*, in: *Sylwetki Żydów lubelskich. Leksykon*, Lublin 2019, pp. 95–97; cf. OAIPNL, ref. no. Lu-02/856, vol. 1.

<sup>80</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 110.

<sup>81</sup> AŽIH, TSKŻ, ref. no. 325/217, no pagination, document of December 18, 1953.

<sup>82</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Roman Litman, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> AŽIH, ZRWM, no pagination, Letter from Karol Staniszewski to ZRWM of April 30, 1962.

<sup>84</sup> APL, UWL, UdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 114.

The Lublin branch continued to use the active part of the Jewish cemetery at Unicka Street in Lublin, where burials and commemorations took place. In 1958, the ohel (a tent, a type of roof placed over graves, and in this case a small building) of the Eiger family, a dynasty of Hasidic leaders, was renovated<sup>85</sup>.

Despite this, even the functioning part of the Jewish cemetery in Lublin was subject to repeated devastation. In 1957, a fire broke out in the cemetery area, most likely started by children sneaking through the fence<sup>86</sup>. Due to the sense of threat and acts of vandalism, in 1958 the brother of Rabbi Majer Szapira transported the body of this great Talmudist and founder of the rabbinical school from Lublin to Jerusalem, where it was buried in the Har ha-Menuhot cemetery. His symbolic, empty ohel remains in Lublin to this day<sup>87</sup>. A member of the Nuchym Szyc congregation also participated in the exhumation of the bodies<sup>88</sup>. Concerns about the desecration of the famous Talmudist's grave were probably justified, considering that a communication artery was built through the cemetery in the late 1960s.

In 1957, the synagogue building in Hrubieszów was sold by a representative of a religious congregation in Lublin. The case was brought to the prosecutor's office because, in accordance with applicable regulations, the property of the pre-war religious communes was owned by the State Treasury (considered as the so-called abandoned property), and therefore could not be sold by representatives of the congregation to third parties. On the other hand, it was allowed to transfer objects of worship for other useful purposes, as in the case of the synagogue in Parczew, which was donated to a clothing factory, with representatives of any Jewish organization omitted from the decision-making process<sup>89</sup>. The state authorities only selectively accepted the protests of congregations in similar cases, as evidenced (in addition to the previously mentioned scandal related to the old Jewish cemetery) in the case of transferring the synagogue at Władysław Kunicki Street in Lublin for the Polish Catholic Church in 1959<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>85</sup> R. Kuwałek, *Szlakiem pamięci*, in: *Lublin. Jerozolima Królestwa Polskiego*, Lublin 2001, p. 122.

<sup>86</sup> "Kurier lubelski" 1960, no. 74, p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> S. Wajs, *Fakty i wydarzenia z życia lubelskich Żydów*, Lublin 1997, p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> T. Klimowicz, *Nowy cmentarz żydowski w Lublinie jako palimpsest pamięci*, "Studia Judaica" 2020, 2 (46), p. 329.

<sup>89</sup> AAN, UdsW, ref. no. 30/487 and ref. no. 25/695, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, pp. 424–429.

<sup>90</sup> AAN, UdsW, ref. no. 30/488, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, pp. 442–444.

### The Lublin congregation in the 1960s

In 1961, the Office for Religious Affairs officially registered the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith in Poland (ZRWM), granting it legal personality<sup>91</sup>. However, this status applied solely to the national-level organization, with local branches excluded from obtaining independent legal status. ZRWM remained under the close supervision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, and even certain activists from the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ)<sup>92</sup>. A persistent rivalry between TSKŻ and ZRWM also continued throughout this period.

In the same year, the Central Jewish Social Welfare Commission was established, composed of an equal number of representatives from both ZRWM and TSKŻ. Its purpose was to allocate financial resources provided by the Joint for initiatives such as school meal programs for children in Jewish schools, support for cooperative organizations, and assistance for repatriates, people with disabilities, and students. However, the involvement of foreign funding led to heightened scrutiny from state administrative bodies. ZRWM was accused of exceeding its strictly religious mandate and of engaging in politically motivated activities, allegedly influenced by its contacts with the Israeli legation<sup>93</sup>. In 1966, the statute was changed, increasing the control of the Main Board over local organizations, and supervision of the Office for Religious Affairs was sanctioned. At that time, the last rabbi, Uszer Zibes, also left the country<sup>94</sup>, and the activity of ZWRM decreased significantly. Until 1984, no national congresses of the Union were convened. The events of March 1968 – marked by a state-led anti-Semitic campaign following student protests and political unrest – led to the severance of ZRWM's foreign funding, primarily from Jewish organizations abroad. This significantly undermined the Union's operations and cast doubt on the viability of its continued existence.

The situation in Lublin mirrored the broader atmosphere in Poland of the time. During the 1960s, Jewish communal life in the city was primarily concentrated around the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), which also attracted members of the younger generation. Despite the generally adverse conditions, the Lublin branch of the

<sup>91</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 30.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 587.

<sup>93</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>94</sup> A. Rykala, *Przemiany sytuacji społeczno-politycznej mniejszości żydowskiej w Polsce po drugiej wojnie światowej*, Łódź 2007, p. 193; A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

Jewish Religious Congregation continued to function. Its activities are documented in official records from 1960, which indicate the presence of 40 members and three salaried employees<sup>95</sup>. A subsequent record from 1963 lists 120 registered members and notes the employment of a shochet<sup>96</sup>; however, this figure appears questionable given the limited activity of the branch<sup>97</sup>. Following the previously mentioned change in its formal legal status, the Lublin congregation was exempted from paying rent for its premises located at 8 Lubartowska Street.

Fajwel Fryd (chairman) acted on behalf of the congregation in Lublin in the mid-1960s<sup>98</sup>, together with Aron Nissenbaum<sup>99</sup> and Szulim Garen (secretary). The umbrella maker Nuchym Szyc and the tailor Zygmunt Lewandowski were also active in the authorities of the Lublin branch<sup>100</sup>.

The congregation fought primarily for the preservation of Jewish cemeteries. Szulim Garen protested against the transformation of the area of the old Jewish cemetery in Lublin into an open-air museum<sup>101</sup>. In 1965 – probably simultaneously with the action of fencing and cleaning closed cemeteries, carried out in the Lublin Voivodeship since 1964 by the Provincial Association of Municipal Utilities<sup>102</sup> – cleaning work began at the cemetery used by the congregation at Unicka Street. In the years 1964–65, Stanisław Trześniewski was employed as the caretaker of this cemetery<sup>103</sup>. The cemetery was also a source of small income for the Congregation thanks to the sale of hay from the necropolis<sup>104</sup>. Unfortunately, the preserved book of the Jewish cemetery in Lublin is incomplete and contains only 26 (probably retrospective) entries for the years 1956–1979 and 14 entries from the 1990s and 2000s<sup>105</sup>.

A significant event for the local Jewish community was the unveiling in 1963 of the Monument to the Extermination of the Jewish Population, commonly referred to as the Monument to the Victims of the Ghetto. However, it remains unclear whether the Jewish Religious Congregation

<sup>95</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 382.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 40–41; A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>98</sup> K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 731.

<sup>99</sup> AAN, UdsW, ref. no. 30/488, after: K. Urban, *Cmentarze*, p. 442.

<sup>100</sup> This likely refers to Zelik Lederman, <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/pl/historie-pomocy/historia-pomocy-rodzina-pawelcow> [access: 11.02.2025].

<sup>101</sup> AŽIH, ZRWM, no pagination, Statement by Szulim Garen addressed to the President of the Municipal National Council in Lublin dated May 14, 1962.

<sup>102</sup> APL, Wojewódzkie Zrzeszenie Gospodarki Komunalnej, ref. no. 314, p. 120.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 121.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.

<sup>105</sup> *Księga cmentarza żydowskiego w Lublinie*, Roman Litman Family Archive

formally participated in this initiative, which was spearheaded by the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) in collaboration with the Lublin Landsmanshaft. The only preserved reference to the congregation's activities during this period appears in a report covering the years 1959–1966 (to be discussed in more detail below).

The Lublin branch was deprived of personal representation on the ZRWM Main Board elected in 1966. This proves the marginal role and activity of the Lublin organization in the broader context<sup>106</sup>. Based on the preserved minutes of the election meeting of May 22, 1966, the actual number of members of the Lublin congregation at that time can be estimated at 35. 21 people took part in the meeting, including 19 men and 2 women (this small representation of women is not surprising, because women – as already mentioned – did not have the right to vote in the congregation).

The meeting was opened by Fajwel Fryd with the following speech:

Twenty-one years had passed since the end of the Second World War. The Nazi oppressor had been defeated. Jews returned from concentration camps and hiding places, as well as Jewish soldiers of the Soviet and Polish armies, who contributed to the reintegration of Poland's western and northern territories with the homeland. With the support and protection of the People's Government, Jewish life began to be reconstituted in Poland, and our Congregation of the Mosaic Faith was established. Celebrations of Hanukkah, Purim, and other religious holidays have become occasions during which we distribute gift packages to children and organize communal meals for adults. We have created a unified community and strive to foster an atmosphere of solidarity and mutual support<sup>107</sup>.

The tone of this address was likely influenced by the presence of 'a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MSW)' at the meeting, reflecting the extensive oversight exercised by state authorities over the activities of the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (ZRWM). Both the congregation and its leader, Fajwel Fryd, had been under surveillance by the security services since at least the 1950s.

As the report shows, the activities of the congregation in the years 1959–1966 consisted primarily in organizing *Friday evenings and ceremonial holidays*, led by Rafał Ader (still employed as a mohel), distributing

<sup>106</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>107</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 116.

matzah on Pesach (12 people benefited<sup>108</sup>), providing material support to members (in cooperation with TSKŻ). The report also addressed the issue of Jewish cemeteries, including the burial of bodies exhumed from mass grave sites located in the Lublin Voivodeship, as well as the organization of commemorative events marking the liquidation of the Lublin ghetto, held at the cemetery on Unicka Street (November 10). The document further emphasized the significance of renovation and maintenance work undertaken at the prayer house on Lubartowska Street. During the same reporting period, elections were held for a new management board, composed as follows: Szulim Garen – chairman, management board members: Icchak Kuperman, Chaim Eliasz Leder and Roman Wurtman (born 1909<sup>109</sup>). Chaim Dorfsman was elected to the Audit Committee, Henryk Górski and Mieczysław Nussbaum<sup>110</sup>. Chaim Dorfsman was a tailor from Lublin, he hid during the war in nearby villages, and after the war he was active in the Keren ha-Yesod organization<sup>111</sup>). The efforts to recreate the biographies of Mieczysław Nussbaum and Henryk Górski were not successful.

The limited activity of the organization is evidenced by the report of the Audit Commission from 1966, whose members: Mieczysław Nussbaum and Roman Wurtman, present the situation as follows: 'The Commission finds poor activity and efficiency of the entire Management Board of the Congregation, and from the point of view of the actual situation, the entire burden of responsibilities rests on the shoulders of one member of the Management Board [probably Szulim Garen – note], who, acting as secretary and accountant of the congregation, must also supervise the settlement of various administrative and economic matters, intervene with local authorities in matters relating to legal and public issues, and in this state of affairs, despite the exceptionally specific situation, we cannot speak of harmonious cooperation of the entire Management Board'<sup>112</sup>. A note from the Department for Religious Affairs describes the activities of this organization in a similar way: 'The Congregation of the Mosaic Faith in Lublin is a loyal religious group, but its activities are quite

<sup>108</sup> AŽIH, ZRWM, no pagination, List of people to whom ZRWM in Lublin issued matzah and matzo flour free of charge, 1966

<sup>109</sup> OAIPNL, ref. no. Lu 018/87 t. 3.

<sup>110</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 120.

<sup>111</sup> AŽIH, Zbiór relacji Żydów ocalałych z Zagładą, Chaim Dorfsman's account, ref. no. 301/4401; *Polish Roots in Israel: Miriam Arbus (Dorfsman) about Lublin*, <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/miejscowosci/l/264-lublin/104-teksty-i-wywiady/192129-polish-roots-israel-miriam-arbus-dorfsman-about-lublin> [access: 20.02.2025]; A. Kopciowski, *Żydzi w Lublinie w latach 1944–1949*, p. 298.

<sup>112</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, pp. 114–115.

limited. Most of the attendees are elderly, and the younger generation has mostly blended into Polish society. Some former members have distanced themselves from the congregation and often try to hide their Jewish background<sup>113</sup>. Therefore, the activities undertaken had little religious dimension, but rather included integration meetings and interventions in the management of the most important facilities: the prayer house at Lubartowska Street and Jewish cemeteries.

The Jewish community in Lublin was significantly affected by the anti-Semitic campaign of March 1968. Without delving into the well-documented details of these events, it is important to note that, as a consequence, 122 individuals left the Lublin Voivodeship between 1968 and 1972<sup>114</sup>. Two members of the Management Board of the Lublin congregation also left the country: Kuperman and Wurtman<sup>115</sup>.

After the anti-Semitic March campaign, it was mainly older people who decided to stay in Lublin, which, similarly to the rest of the country, threatened the disappearance of religious life with the departure of the older generation.

#### KWM in Lublin after the March events

In the 1970s, both the number of Jewish religious congregations and their membership declined significantly across the country. By 1974, only 16 congregations remained operational. The majority of their members were elderly men, with an average age of 67. During this period, there were no meetings of the ZRWM Main Board, nor was there a rabbi or organized religious education. Religious practices were primarily limited to basic services and funerals, while ceremonies such as circumcisions, bar mitzvahs, and weddings were not conducted. Moreover, adherence to the rules of kashrut was largely neglected<sup>116</sup>.

Despite a significant reduction in local congregations, the Lublin branch continued to exist. In 1973, 30 people paid the membership fee<sup>117</sup>. The local organization was – next to those in Bydgoszcz and Gdańsk – one of the least numerous, registering only 22 people in 1974<sup>118</sup>. The decline in activity of the Jewish community in Lublin can likely be attributed to the events of March 1968 and the subsequent wave of emigration.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 132.

<sup>114</sup> M. Choma-Jusińska, *Społeczność żydowska w Lublinie w latach 1967–1968*, "Scriptores" 2019, 46, p. 427.

<sup>115</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 152.

<sup>116</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–233.

<sup>117</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 152.

<sup>118</sup> K. Urban, *Związek*, p. 66; A. Rykała, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

Additionally, the death of Fajwel Fryd in 1972 further hindered the continuation of communal life. In his memory, the Lublin congregation erected a tombstone, funded by the sale of a portion of the extensive book collection he had accumulated<sup>119</sup>.

One of the few sources presenting the situation of the organization in question at that time is the recollection of the previously mentioned Aron Nissenbaum's visit to Lublin in 1975, published in the newspaper "Kol Lublin":

Currently, there are 50 Jews living in Lublin, forming both a cultural and religious community. They gather every Friday afternoon for prayers and shared meals, and also meet during Jewish holidays, including the High Holy Days (Yamim Noraim). During Sukkot, services are held both in the morning and evening, with 12 Jews attending prayers at the Beth Midrash Chevra Nosim. Ceremonial holiday meals are also celebrated there. The community is served by its own shochet (kosher butcher), while kosher kitchens are available in Warsaw, Łódź, and Wrocław.

However, maintaining Jewish cemeteries remains a significant challenge. While Jewish communities are officially responsible for managing cemeteries, they often lack the necessary funds to preserve sites where hundreds of thousands of Jews are buried. In Lublin, part of the cemetery on Unicka Street is well-maintained, but the entire cemetery cannot be properly cared for. The former cemetery also poses problems, as it houses several historical tombstones, including those of Rabbi Szalom Szachna and the Seer of Lublin. Although the cemetery is fenced, access to the graves is blocked by overgrown trees.

In my opinion, organizations representing former residents should mobilize efforts to collect the funds required to maintain these cemeteries. Additionally, the Beit Midrash in Lublin, which is at risk of falling into disrepair, should be preserved. For this purpose, an estimated amount of around one thousand dollars would suffice. I believe there are enough former residents who could contribute to this cause<sup>120</sup>.

The aforementioned memoir highlights the continuation of limited religious activity within the Jewish community in Lublin. Efforts were made to organize Friday prayers and festive holiday gatherings; however, there was no kosher canteen available. Nissenbaum primarily emphasizes the significant challenges faced by the small local community in maintaining their heritage, as well as the attention and support of foreign organizations concerning the situation in Poland.

<sup>119</sup> M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, *Fajwel*, p. 95.

<sup>120</sup> "Kol Lublin" 1976, no. 11, p. 14.

Furthermore, efforts to preserve the old Jewish cemetery in Lublin were ongoing; as mentioned above, it was to be handed over to the Museum of the Lublin Countryside and developed as part of the open-air museum<sup>121</sup>. The Lublin congregation worked to maintain order at the cemetery on Unicka Street, where annual commemorations were organized. It also intervened in matters concerning Jewish cemeteries in the Lublin region, including those in Hrubieszów and Józefów Biłgorajski. Additionally, the congregation participated in the exhumation of approximately one thousand bodies from the closed Jewish cemetery in Puławy, relocating them to the cemetery on Valiant Street. Efforts to secure funding for the renovation of the synagogue at 10 Lubartowska Street were also ongoing.

The Lublin congregation maintained connections with Lublin hometown associations, including those in Israel. For instance, containers with the ashes of Majdanek victims were sent to support the construction of memorials there. Members of the organization also occasionally served as intermediaries in genealogical research and showed foreign guests around Lublin's Jewish heritage, e.g. from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The next general meeting of the Lublin congregation was held on March 19, 1978, and Szulim Garen, Chaim Eliasz Leder and Matys Zoberman were elected to the board (see below). Mieczysław Nussbaum, Zygmunt Lewandowski and Rafał Ader were elected to the electoral commission<sup>122</sup>. It is important to note that, during this period, the Lublin branch still lacked separate legal personality, did not maintain independent accounting, and remained subordinated to the central structures in these matters. As a result, the Lublin branch was occasionally excluded from administrative decisions concerning cemeteries and synagogues in the region, with the central structure of ZRWM assuming responsibility for such affairs.

### Activities of the Lublin congregation in the 1980s

The socio-political changes of the 1980s, particularly the authorities' consent for the return of the Joint to Poland in 1981, led to an improvement in the situation both nationally and regionally<sup>123</sup>. Consequently, ZRWM significantly increased its activity. Simultaneously, discussions regarding the necessity of maintaining two separate Jewish organizations in the

<sup>121</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 153.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 169–178.

<sup>123</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

country resurfaced. This led to the establishment of a Communication Commission in 1981 to facilitate cooperation between TSKŻ and ZRWM.

In 1984, the first nationwide meeting of ZRWM was held. Moses Finkelstein was elected chairman. Religious practices, including circumcisions, weddings, and bar mitzvahs, were resumed, and the publication of the Jewish Calendar began. From 1989 onward, ZRWM once again had a rabbi, Menachem Joskowicz. During this period, various social initiatives focused on preserving the material heritage of Polish Jews emerged<sup>124</sup>.

Following the political changes of 1989, the organization's name was changed to the Association of Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland in 1992. The Lublin branch, however, did not play a prominent role at this time, and the region was not represented in the Association's governing bodies. Previous activities continued, and in 1981, the aforementioned Agreement Committee was established in Lublin, consisting of Zygmunt Lewandowski and Nuchym Szyc representing ZRWM, and Marian Adler and Edward Ungier representing TSKŻ<sup>125</sup>.

On December 11, 1983, a new board of the local branch was elected, consisting of: Matys Zoberman – chairman, members: Wolf Ferszman and Szloma Szmulewicz<sup>126</sup>. The latter came from Opole Lubelskie, escaped from the labor camp in Józefów on the Vistula River and survived thanks to the help of the Stankiewicz family. After the war, he ran a tailor's shop at Lubartowska Street, died in 2007<sup>127</sup>. No information about Wolf Ferszman could be found. Matys Zoberman was a shames and tailor from Lubartów, he was also a member of TSKŻ, he died in 1986<sup>128</sup>. He was one of Małgorzata Niezabitowska's interlocutors for a reportage created in 1982–1985, in which she talks about the religious activity of Lublin Jews at that time:

We gather here [at the synagogue on Lubartowska Street] for prayers only on the major holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Simchat Torah, Passover, Shavuot. [...]. Just a few years ago, we used to have twenty, thirty people for prayers. We came every Saturday. There was a kosher canteen, and Jews lived in the rooms next door.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. E. Bergman, J. Jagielski, *Ślady obecności. Synagogi i cmentarze*, in: *Następstwa*, p. 471.

<sup>125</sup> AŽIH, ZRWM, no pagination, Letter from TSKŻ and ZRWM regarding the composition of the subcommittee dated November 4, 1981.

<sup>126</sup> APL, UdsW, ref. no. 353, p. 275.

<sup>127</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Tadeusz Stankiewicz, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2008; M. Niezabitowska, T. Tomaszewski, *Ostatni. Współcześni Żydzi polscy*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 27–28.

<sup>128</sup> M. Danilkiewicz, *Żydzi z Lubartowa*, "Akcent" 2005, 99, p. 26.

Then they left or passed away. There were fewer and fewer of us... [...] On the big holidays, everyone comes together. People come from other towns: from Włodawa, Łuków, Siedlce. So, we somehow manage to gather a minyan<sup>129</sup>.

The Lublin branch was relatively small in size. Despite the improving situation of ZRWM during this period, the account emerging from this memory highlights the ongoing challenges in preserving religious traditions and practices, as well as a nostalgic sentiment for the past. The marginal status of the Lublin branch is further evidenced by its exclusion from the distribution of foreign food aid, an issue raised by Zoberman with the central office. Such aid was typically distributed through kosher canteens operating in other regions of the country, but no such facilities were available in Lublin at the time<sup>130</sup>. As a result, the Lublin community could only benefit from assistance in the form of funding for Saturday meals and a few allowances.

According to correspondence with administration authorities, the activities of the Lublin congregation in the 1980s focused on interventions regarding the protection of Jewish cemeteries in the Lublin region, often with the support of central structures. The devastation of cemeteries was intensifying, including the necropolis at Unicka Street. Manfred Frenkiel also started his activities in the field of protection of Jewish cemeteries in the region, and his foundation led to the restoration of the new Jewish cemetery in Lublin. Cleaning works at the Jewish cemetery in Lubartów were also supervised. During this period, the congregation struggled with administrative and renovation difficulties related to conflicts with the co-owners of the building housing the synagogue at 10 Lubartowska Street. The chairman of the Lublin congregation in the late 1980s was most likely Józef Honig from Piaski (1917–2003)<sup>131</sup>.

During this period, Symcha Wajs (1911–1999), a dentist from Piaski, became involved in the commemoration of various sites connected to the history of Lublin's Jewish community. His most notable initiative was the establishment of the Chamber of Remembrance of Lublin Jews in 1987, which was situated in the Chewra Nosim prayer house at 10 Lubartowska Street<sup>132</sup>. This space also served as the shared headquarters of both the Religious Union of Jewish Denominations in Poland

<sup>129</sup> M. Niezabitowska, T. Tomaszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–20.

<sup>130</sup> AŽIH, ZRWM, no pagination, Letter KWM in Lublin to ZRWM of November 10, 1981.

<sup>131</sup> APL, UWL, WdsW, ref. no. 354, p. 72 and next; cf. M. Szablowska-Zaremba, *Józef Honig*, in: *Sylwetki*, pp. 129–130.

<sup>132</sup> A. Kopciowski, S.J. Żurek, *Symcha Wajs*, in: *Sylwetki*, pp. 269–273.

(ZRWM) and the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) after the latter's relocation.

Although the Chamber of Remembrance housed a modest collection of Judaica, its establishment raises questions about the true priorities of the Lublin Jewish community at the time. Rather than engaging in spiritual needs, the community seemed to be increasingly concerned with maintaining its identity and commemorating its past. Thus, while the Chamber of Remembrance may have served a symbolic purpose, it also highlighted the community's deep struggle to sustain a Jewish presence in Lublin in any meaningful capacity. The fact that ZRWM and TSKŻ operated in tandem and the boundaries between the two organizations became almost imperceptible points to a broader erosion of the Lublin congregation's original religious mission.

#### RELIGIOSITY OF LUBLIN JEWS (1944–1989)

Between 1944 and 1989, the religiosity of Lublin's Jewish community underwent significant transformations. The devastation wrought by the Holocaust, compounded by successive waves of emigration during the 1940s, substantially diminished those segments of the population most deeply rooted in traditional Jewish religious observance. Although institutions such as the Jewish Religious Congregation (ŻKW) and subsequently the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (ZRWM) were formally established to revive religious life, their existence did not correspond to a full reinstatement of pre-war practices. Rather, the traditional model of Judaism gradually eroded in the post-war period. Processes of atheization accelerated, and from the late 1940s onward a considerable proportion of the community increasingly identified as non-believers<sup>133</sup>. A number of interrelated factors contributed to this state of affairs. Foremost among these were the harrowing war experiences, which not only inflicted profound personal loss, but also precipitated a widespread loss of faith among survivors. The dispersion of the Jewish community further fragmented communal life, while the disappearance of established worship centers deprived many of the traditional spaces necessary for sustaining religious practices. Moreover, processes of assimilation and a pervasive fear of 'disclosure' among the Christian majority prompted many to abandon established customs—ranging from Sabbath observance and the celebration of religious holidays to strict adherence to kashrut.

<sup>133</sup> I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *Żydzi polscy (1947–1950). Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej*, Warszawa 1996, p. 184.

As August Grabski and Albert Stanowski have observed, these dynamics can be understood as manifestations of 'post-Holocaust trauma and a lack of sense of security'<sup>134</sup>. These general tendencies were clearly reflected in the experiences of Jewish residents of Lublin. The harrowing conditions of the war often played a critical role in transforming individual worldviews. In particular, the profound trauma experienced by many led to a significant erosion of faith among older generations. Jakub Gorfinkel, for example, relates a personal account of how these traumatic events undermined religious belief within his family:

My father, although before the war he went to the synagogue and knew Jewish prayers, something happened to him, these war experiences changed him, he thought that God had abandoned us. Many people stopped believing then. This catastrophe that befell the Jews was such a great experience that many people simply stopped believing in God; my father included. And because of that, of course, I did too. Over time, however, my father began to go to the synagogue for the holidays<sup>135</sup>.

These changes in attitudes among the older generation also influenced the shaping of the views of younger generations and disrupted the continuity of cultural transmission. Zipora Nahir, a survivor of the Majdanek camp who later found refuge in a Jewish orphanage in Lublin, recounts her personal experience of losing her faith:

I stopped being religious after leaving Majdanek, when we were in the orphanage, at the very beginning. I remember that I had a few weeks in which I discussed with myself, struggled, thought, talked to myself and decided that there is no God, that I no longer believe. I will be a non-believer. No God, no religion. I remember those few weeks that... I was fourteen years old, and I was full of praise for myself. I don't know if I could find a way out for myself. Because no one, no faith, helped me simply I struggled with it for several weeks and decided: I'm not a believer<sup>136</sup>.

This candid testimony illustrates not only the personal turmoil triggered by the catastrophic experiences of the Holocaust, but also reflects a broader trend among the youth of that period. The process of grappling with existential questions and the subsequent renunciation of religious

<sup>134</sup> A. Grabski, A. Stankowski, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>135</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Jakub Gorfinkel, recording by W. Wejman, 2005.

<sup>136</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Zipora Nahir, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2017.

belief were emblematic of the profound psychological and spiritual dislocations that many survivors underwent.

Among those who remained within the Jewish community, a new form of religiosity gradually emerged – distinct from orthodox practice and inherently selective. This transformation was largely shaped by external constraints, such as limited access to kosher food, the inability to take time off for Jewish holidays, and the broader secularizing pressures of postwar Polish society. In particular, following the emigration wave of 1968, synagogue attendance often became less an expression of religious devotion than a means of preserving communal bonds.

The character of this new model of religious life is aptly illustrated in the testimony of Józef Kliger, born in Lublin in 1948:

Religious holidays were celebrated in the [Religious] Congregation. I went to the synagogue, because Simchat Torah [holiday] is related to the giving of the Torah, so they gave us some banners. Hanukkah was celebrated here and there [in TSKŻ], we were given some dreidels to spin, I don't know why it is related to this tradition. It was definitely celebrated. So, these connections with tradition and Jewish history were quite strong, at least for me. But I was unique in this, because I came from a home where yiddish was spoken and there was this connection with Jewish culture and so on. But we certainly ate pork every day, and we certainly ate bread on Pesach. We didn't know if it was kosher or not kosher. My father once turned to my brother, who was six years older than me, when he was still in elementary school: „Listen, today is Yom Kippur, maybe you shouldn't go to school?” That was the only time, the first and last, that he even brought it up. So [religious tradition] was completely foreign to [us]. Some people knew what it was about, but almost no one at our age did<sup>137</sup>.

Kliger's recollections reflect a broader tendency toward the cultural retention of Jewish identity in the absence of consistent ritual observance. While symbolic practices and holiday celebrations retained their significance, they were often detached from strict religious frameworks and recontextualized within a primarily social or cultural dimension.

The above testimony reflects attempts – albeit limited and often improvised – to preserve elements of Jewish tradition and convey cultural heritage to the postwar generation. However, this task proved exceptionally challenging. Children and adolescents born after the Holocaust were largely disconnected from the religious life their parents had known: they lacked not only direct experience, but also the social environment, familial

<sup>137</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Josef Kliger, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2009.

upbringing, and institutional frameworks that would have fostered traditional Jewish observance. In the absence of a supportive community or broader societal understanding, religious practices were heavily adapted to the secular and often repressive context of communist Poland. Even in their modified form, such practices appeared unfamiliar—if not altogether alien—to many members of the younger generation.

This dynamic is vividly illustrated in a recollection by Józef Kliger, who highlights the cultural distance between his generation and traditional religious life:

[...] I went to the synagogue before Pesach to take matza, there was a division of matza. That was more or less my relationship with Jews, more or less. When my friend told me, when we were thirteen, that they were going to give him a bar mitzvah, it is a religious rite, I looked at him as [at] the man in the moon, because I thought that these things had already passed among the Jews, that we had stopped believing in God and stopped dealing with religion, that we are people who deal only with things that are logical, not with faith in God. I looked at him terribly strangely. I even remember when exactly [it was], this part of Lubartowska Street, when he told me, it was so strange to me. The whole connection with Jews, with religion in general, was [minimal], we were children of either former communists, or current communists, or people who were completely from the left and ostentatiously broke off the relationship with religion. In our generation there were almost no religious parents, surely not children. There was one boy, Asher, older than us, already a student, who was very religious and went around with a kippah. And this friend of mine, my age, told me that they were going to have a bar mitzvah for him<sup>138</sup>.

Kliger's words underscore the extent to which secularization and ideological shifts had redefined Jewish identity in postwar Lublin. For many, particularly those raised in leftist or atheist households, religion had ceased to function as a meaningful framework for communal or personal life. In this context, even rudimentary religious rites could seem anachronistic or incomprehensible.

This ambivalent attitude toward Judaism and religion in general characterized of the Jewish community in postwar Lublin. Even fundamental rites such as the bar mitzvah were often perceived as outdated or even eccentric. Concurrently, the rise in mixed marriages across Poland contributed to the growing prominence of Christian holiday observance within

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem.*

Jewish households, often at the expense of Jewish traditions<sup>139</sup>. This shift was particularly evident among families that had settled in Lublin during the 1950s. Miriam Kuperman, whose family moved to Lublin during that period, recalls:

My parents were complete atheists. I had nothing to do [with religion]. But, for example, my husband's family was more traditional. They celebrated holidays and I know that his father went to that synagogue [on Lubartowska Street]. I may have been there once. They gave some parcels on Purim or something. [...]. We didn't celebrate the most important holidays, such as New Year's Day or Rosh Hashanah, which I don't understand today, but we were no exception. Because I know it was the same in my friends' homes. They were completely secular, with no tradition. For example, we had a Christmas tree [in Lublin]. And that was it. There were no holidays<sup>140</sup>.

Kuperman's account underscores the extent to which secularization and assimilation had permeated Jewish life in Lublin. For many, religious observance had diminished to the point where Christian customs, such as the Christmas tree, were adopted, while Jewish holidays were neglected. This phenomenon reflects broader trends in postwar Poland, where the combination of Holocaust trauma, communist secular policies, and the integration of mixed families led to a significant transformation in Jewish cultural and religious identity.

Also, the intergenerational transmission of Jewish religious traditions in Lublin after World War II was markedly deficient. In the immediate post-war years, the difficulties associated with maintaining religious practices served as a significant impetus for emigration; however, in later periods, these factors were overshadowed by a range of political and psychological influences. Ryszard Weiler, affiliated with the Lublin branch of TSKŻ and having left Poland in the wake of the March 1968 events, provides an illustrative account:

Of my friends in Lublin, from my generation, I don't know a single one who went to a synagogue. There was a synagogue in Lublin, but I don't know a single person who went there. Do I know if it was a synagogue? Probably not, there were two rooms, it looked quite miserable. I went there once a year on Pesach, because you got matzo there. I don't know how it got there, whether they bought it or got it somehow, not in Lublin, but it didn't cost us anything, and I think

<sup>139</sup> I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 113–114.

<sup>140</sup> AHM OBGTNN, Report by Miriam Kuperman, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2010.

it was two kilograms per family or per head of the family. When my parents died, they were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, not in Lublin, but without any religious ceremony. I myself grew up completely, you could say, without religion. I knew almost nothing about Jewish holidays. I remember when I was leaving, just before I left, I met one professor who treated my father, a very elderly man. It was September and he tells me as we said goodbye: – All the best to you for the New Year. Well, I think the old man has got it all wrong. What does he tell me about the New Year? After all, it's September now. Only later, when I was here, did I realize that he meant the Jewish New Year. Well, I just didn't know. When people often tell me that people came here because of religion, I say that it's not necessarily true. I only came for one reason, not to be different from everyone else. This is just this one reason; it has nothing to do with religion<sup>141</sup>.

Weiler's recollections vividly illustrate the profound erosion of religious practice within his generation. His testimony reveals that even minimal engagement with traditional rituals – such as periodic synagogue attendance on major holidays – was largely absent among his peers. Moreover, the casual indifference toward religious observance underscored a broader crisis: the failure to transmit essential aspects of Jewish identity and tradition across generations. This phenomenon, set against the backdrop of political upheaval and post-war disillusionment, contributed significantly to the gradual secularization of the community in Lublin.

The religiosity of the Jews who remained in Lublin exhibited a systematic decline, a trend that was particularly pronounced among those born during or after World War II. A marked deficiency in religious education contributed substantially to this decrease in religious observance. The religious practices, implemented to a limited extent by the relevant organizations, failed to exert a significant influence on the lifestyle or worldview of these individuals. For many Lublin Jews, merely attending organized gatherings and partaking in the distribution of matzah sufficed to maintain a nominal connection with Judaism, which over time transformed into a cultural reference point or form of folklore—one element among many in a multifaceted identity.

It is, however, important to note that the depiction emerging from the available accounts may be biased. These narratives are necessarily based on the memories of the post-war generation, who were not directly involved in the active religious community, given that the testimonies of the committed activists from the Lublin religious congregation have not been preserved.

<sup>141</sup> AHM OBGTN, Report by Ryszard Weiler, recording by T. Czajkowski, 2006.

## CONCLUSION

The religious life of Polish Jews after 1944 was shaped both by the legacy of the Holocaust and by the new political reality under communist rule, which systematically marginalized religious practice. In Lublin – once a major center of Jewish life – the revival of pre-war religious dynamics proved elusive, with Jewish practice largely reduced to basic cultic observances and symbolic acts of remembrance.

In the immediate post-war period, Lublin played a crucial role in the efforts to rebuild Jewish life. A handful of survivors attempted to restore religious practice, as symbolized by the first post-war Rosh Hashanah celebrated in a makeshift synagogue within the Peretz House. However, hopes for a full restoration of the pre-war religious order were quickly dashed. Disputes over attitudes toward religion soon emerged between Jewish institutions, reflecting a dualistic representation of Polish Jews: one camp advocated a secular reconstruction of Jewish life while the other sought to preserve its religious heritage. From the outset, religious organizations were overshadowed by secular bodies such as the Central Jewish Committee (CKŻP) and its successor, the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ), a situation reinforced by state policies that emphasized the separation of church and state and promoted the establishment of a uniform identity. In this context, Zionist and Orthodox circles – historically central to the preservation of Jewish religious life – were gradually sidelined. Furthermore, congregations were subject to strict state control and were frequently mobilized to disseminate propaganda consistent with domestic and foreign policy objectives, leading, over time, to the closure of many local branches.

Despite these overarching trends, the Lublin congregation managed to persist throughout the period in question. Although it never succeeded in reclaiming pre-war sites of worship (such as the building of the Chachmei Lublin Yeshiva or the preserved synagogue at Kunickiego Street), the community maintained its presence through the use of a synagogue on Lubartowska Street, the operation of a Jewish cemetery and a ritual bath, and the employment of a shohet. However, the viability of the congregation gradually diminished. The chronic absence of rabbis and cantors forced community members to self-organize religious celebrations, while the dearth of religious education and Hebrew language proficiency hindered the formation of new religious elites. Those who decided to remain in Poland and Lublin had to adapt to the new conditions, maintaining at least a declarative obedience to the authorities. Perhaps one way to limit control over the organization was a less-than-reliable registration of members, which probably made it more difficult to surveil

individual activists. Among the members of the Lublin congregation, only Fajwel Fryd was subjected to detailed observation. The decline in religious activity in Lublin was primarily attributable to demographic changes – most notably, the outflow of Jewish residents, the departure of older individuals, and the minimal replacement by younger generations – as well as to the inexorable process of secularization. Membership in the congregation increasingly came to signify not a commitment to religious practice but rather a sense of communal belonging, with its basic functions shifting towards the distribution of social support and the preservation of Jewish heritage in the region. Consequently, the ideological distinctions between the local branches of ZRWM and TSKŻ gradually diminished; in the context of a dwindling community, membership in both organizations was often overlapping, and from the 1980s onward, both institutions operated out of a shared headquarters on Lubartowska Street. Programmatic differences assumed little significance at the local level, as the small Jewish community in Lublin, irrespective of individual religious convictions, consolidated its efforts to safeguard at least fragments of its identity.

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In 1992, ZRWM was transformed into the Association of Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland. Presently, the Jewish community in Lublin functions as a branch of the Warsaw Jewish Religious Community, with its headquarters located in the building of the Yeshiva of the Sages of Lublin, a facility recovered under the Act on the State's Relationship with Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland. Notably, the legal status of the Chewra Nosim prayer house and the premises at 10 Lubartowska Street remains unresolved.

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