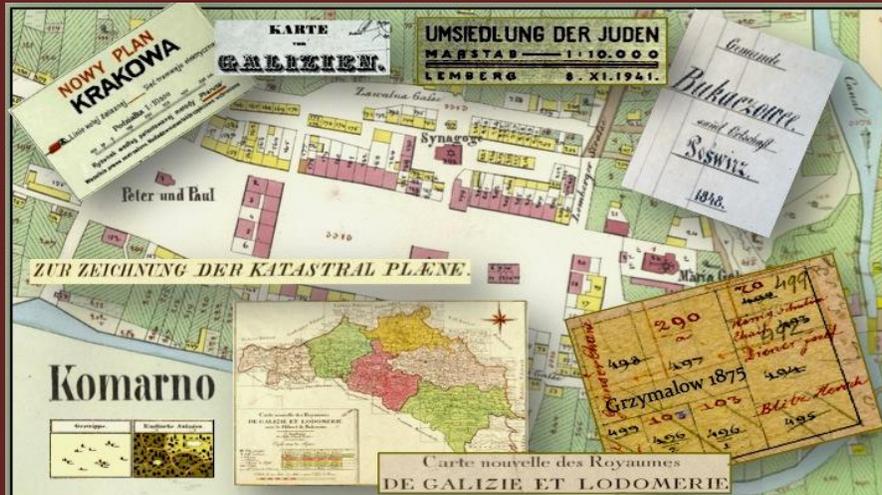


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Brody Always on My Mind

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TWO DECADES AFTER the end of the Second World War that had brought Jewish Brody to a brutal end, the Israeli scholar and native of Brody, Dov Sadan, stated, “It would be difficult to find a Jew—not only from that region but also from Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland and a good part of Germany—to whom Brody could be mentioned and who would not recall or associate at least something with this name.” Brody, in today’s Ukraine, is indeed well-known as a Jewish place through novels, family histories, pictures and surnames of its inhabitants. This series of articles touches this city’s history and legacy and looks for its traces in Ashkenazic mental landscapes.

Celebrated Past

The time frame of Brody’s Jewish history comprises a period of approximately 360 years. If historians disagree on whether the city’s Jewish history ends in 1943 or 1944, they all begin their story with the year 1584—the year Brody was granted the Magdeburg Rights. Even though the town was first mentioned in 1084 and Jews most

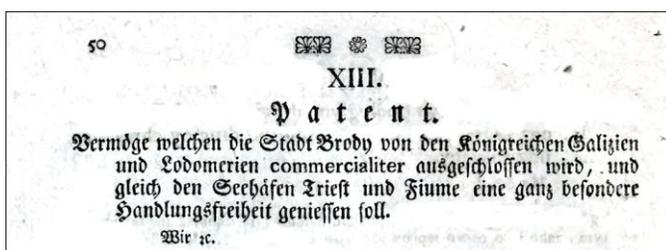
likely settled there earlier, continuous and reliable records start only with the year when Brody received its town charter.

The influx of Jewish merchant families began when the Polish nobleman, Stanisław Koniecpolski (1594-1646), bought Brody in 1629 and developed the city into an important trade junction in the region. Jews were under the direct protection of the noble city owners and could settle without any restrictions within the town and exercise any profession or commerce.

By the middle of the 18th century, **Brody had developed into the region’s most important hub for trans-European trade.** The statistics of the Leipzig fair, arguably the largest in the German lands, list the first merchants from Brody in 1728, and all of them Jews. As much as Leipzig was Brody’s main partner city in western Europe, Berdyczów’s long-established fairs (in today’s Berdychiv in Ukraine) were the counterpart in the east. Manufactured goods from the western countries found their way to consumers in the east via Brody, whereas raw materials from eastern and south-eastern Europe headed in the other direction.

When the Habsburg Monarchy annexed Galicia in 1772, Vienna quickly understood Brody’s importance in international trade. In 1779, Maria Theresa issued a privilege declaring Brody and its surroundings a free-trade zone. This allowed the city to continue its role as Eastern Europe’s main hub for goods in transit, reaching its peak during the years of Napoleon’s Continental System.

Left: Imperial decree (Patent) of 1779, declaring Brody a special tariff-free zone similar to trading commercial ports of the Habsburg Monarchy on the Adriatic Coast. Brody retained its unique status for the next 100 years (courtesy of Andrew Zalewski).



In those years, the trade axis Odessa-Brody was vital for the Napoleon-controlled Europe. As the British Navy blockaded French ports, desperately needed Ottoman cotton was mainly shipped to Odessa and then brought into continental Europe via Brody.

Brody's merchants had developed close relations with Odessa almost upon the founding of this port city in 1794. When Tsar Alexander I declared Odessa a free port in 1803, Jewish immigration sped up enormously, including a considerable influx of Jews from Galicia and Germany. Strikingly, the latter were collectively called "Brody Jews," even though many of them were not originally from that Austrian border town; however, they were the most prominent.

Below: Map illustrating strategic location of Brody along the trading routes connecting eastern and western Europe. Von Schlieben Map of Galicia was published in 1828 (see Gesher Galicia Map Room).

In the first decade of the 19th century, more than 300 wholesalers from Brody opened huge branch offices and held stocks in Odessa and assigned agents to do their business there.

In the long run, being squeezed between the Russian and the Austrian Empires, Brody could not maintain its formerly extraordinary commercial importance. New problems arose from the general worsening of the political relations between these two powers after the Congress of Vienna 1814–1815. Both countries pursued a protectionist economic policy and put spikes in the traders' wheels. After the middle of the century, finally, other Galician towns pushed Brody from its position as the province's third largest city (after Lwów and Kraków)—Brody was reduced to a medium-sized provincial city.

Before its economic decline in the second half of the 19th century, Brody, however, had for more than 200 years attracted Jews from all over the



region as a place to earn a living, as a place of shelter, and last but not least, as a place of Jewish learning. After 1772, Brody became the largest Jewish community in Galicia, numbering 7,000 souls. With regard to the proportion of Jews relative to the Christian population, Brody was and continued to be **Austria's most Jewish city, with Jews always counting for at least two thirds of all inhabitants** until 1914.

Center of Jewish Thought

As early as the first half of the 18th century, Brody developed into an important center of Jewish scholarship. Scholars educated in Brody were widely appreciated for their strict adherence to Jewish Orthodox traditions, their *halakhic* authority and their knowledge of the *Kabbalah*. Some even made their way to western Europe, as for instance Eliezer Rokeach (1649–1741), who became Amsterdam's chief rabbi in 1735, or Ezekiel ben Judah Landau (1713–1793), who was Prague's chief rabbi after 1755. Especially important was the study house attached to Brody's main synagogue, the so-called *Broder kloyz*. The town rabbis and judges were considered authorities in the whole world of Ashkenazim and attracted Jews from all over the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to study there or to settle their legal and *halakhic* problems at Brody's Jewish courts.

Brody's leading religious authorities had a clear orientation towards traditional Rabbinic-Talmudic Judaism and strongly disapproved of any non-Orthodox religious movements. At their insistence the city's *kahal* proclaimed as early as in 1756 a ban (*herem*) from the community on any adherents to the Frankist movement—although no Frankists were recorded in Brody at that time. The attitude of the local *misnagdim* towards the *Hasidic* movement was less radical, nevertheless they urged Brody's Jewish community twice, in

1772 and in 1781, to officially impose a ban on the city's *Hasidim*.

This time the issue was rather delicate because *Hasidism* had rapidly spread among Brody's lower classes. As a consequence, the *kahal's* officials had to tame their disapproval in the decades to come, as *Hasidim* soon outnumbered their opponents. Moreover, a new and common adversary loomed at the end of the 18th century, the *Haskalah* movement, which was hostile to both Jewish currents.



Galician Jews. Drawing of a Jewish couple from 1821 (courtesy of the Center of Documentation of the Borderland Cultures, Sejny, Poland).

When Brody's Jewish wholesalers visited the fairs in Leipzig, Breslau (today's Wrocław), and Frankfurt an der Oder, they got in touch with the *Haskalah* and carried the new ideas homewards.

Brody was the *Haskalah's* lynchpin on its way from western to eastern Europe and was deeply involved in the transformation and adaptation processes. In Brody, as well as in Tarnopol (today's Ternopil) and Lemberg (Lwów/Lviv), a specific Galician variant of the *Haskalah* developed, which took local circumstances into account. Even though Brody's *maskilim* strongly disagreed with the rabbinic Orthodoxy, they did not cut themselves off totally from the traditional institutions of learning (*kloyz*) and communal representation (*kahal*). In Brody for instance, they never founded a Reform synagogue (Temple), and the two old synagogues continued to be the center of the city's Jewish intellectual life.

Times of Upheavals

Even though Brody's importance for Jewish scholarship declined toward the end of the 19th century, the city continued to be crucial for Jewish history and memory. When anti-Jewish pogroms broke out in the Russian Empire in April 1881, Brody became a hotspot of international Jewish attention. Between summer 1881 and autumn 1882, the town was the center of an international relief action led by the French *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and supported by several Austrian, German, British, and American aid associations. Not all people fleeing to Brody came as refugees, many of them tried to seize the opportunity for a low-priced ship ticket for America. However, in the end almost two thirds of the approximately 20,000 refugees in Brody returned to their homes in Russia. Even after the pogroms had ended, Brody continued to be an important gateway for Jewish emigration until 1914 and was home to legal and illegal agents of several emigration agencies.

Brody suffered severely during the First World War, leaving large parts of the city destroyed, the main synagogue heavily damaged, and many

civilians dead. Collectively suspecting Ruthenians (Ukrainians) to be traitors and spies, the Austrian army deported many of them to the empire's inner provinces right at the beginning of the war; and thousands, in particular Jews, fled Brody upon the entrance of Russian forces in late August 1914. The first Russian occupation lasted for approximately one year and was renewed for another year after the Brusilov Offensive in summer 1916. The Russian imperial army also had its list of potential spies; however, former local public functionaries and judges could keep or were even encouraged to keep their positions, mainly Poles and Ruthenians but also some Jews.



Main street of Brody (in Polish: Ulica Złota; in German: Goldgasse; in Ukrainian: Vulycya Zolota) in the aftermath of World War I.

After the short intermezzo of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, from November 1918 to May 1919, and an even shorter Soviet occupation during the summer of 1920, Brody became part of the Second Polish Republic. As a result of the war, the city shrank to two thirds of its pre-war population of 18,000 inhabitants and had lost its role as a border town (the Polish-Soviet border was now 50 kilometers further east). Brody's economy started to slowly recover after 1922; however, after the Great Depression reached Europe in 1929–1930 local living conditions severely hardened. Brody's Jewish community never regained its pre-war numerical strength, but the Jewish population's occupational structure largely remained unchanged, with only a slight shift towards more blue-collar workers at the expense of petty traders. Yet, the political orientation of Brody's Jews turned away from acculturation towards various currents of Zionism.

In accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the **Red Army occupied Brody** at the beginning of the Second World War in 1939. After Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the **Wehrmacht entered Brody** within two weeks. The Nazis immediately killed more than 250 members of the city's Jewish elite. Before Brody's Jews were forced to move to the ghetto in autumn of 1942, several hundred Jews had been murdered on Brody's streets and more than 2,000 deported to the Bełzec extermination camp. After further mass executions in the nearby forest and the liquidation of the ghetto in May 1943, the remaining 3,000 Jews of Brody were deported to the Majdanek concentration camp.

When Brody was liberated in July 1944, the city was mostly deserted with only about 700 people still living there. A few tens of Jews survived the Nazi occupation hiding in or near Brody, but most of the approximately 150 surviving Jews were returnees, who were drafted into the Red

Army when the Soviets ruled Brody between 1939 and 1941. Most of the Jewish survivors, as well as the remaining Polish population, moved to Poland after the irrevocable installation of the Soviet regime, whereas Brody was resettled rather quickly by peasants from the surrounding villages.

Editor's note: *The above text was originally published by Börries Kuzmany as "Brody Always on My Mind: the Mental Mapping of a Jewish City." East European Jewish Affairs 2013, 43:162-189. Reprinted with permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd.*

The next installment entitled: "Brody: Physical Places of Memory," will be published in the December issue of the Galitzianer.

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