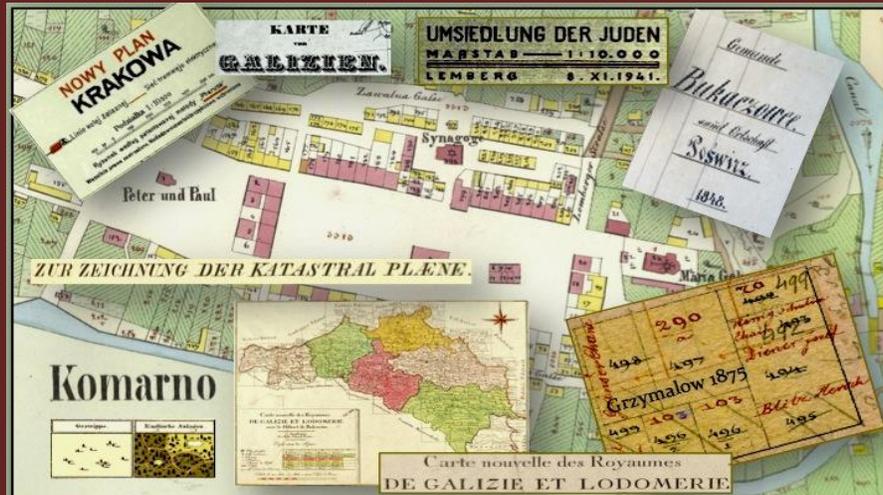


# THE GALITZIANER

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# Brody: Physical Places of Memory

by Börries Kuzmany, Ph.D.  
Austrian Academy of Sciences  
Institute for Modern and  
Contemporary Historical Research

**THE SECOND PART** of this series of articles about Brody revisits two major places of memory that can still be visited in Brody today.

## The Great Synagogue

The first and most important place of memory is the ruins of Brody's Great Synagogue. Memory books, travel accounts of all times, paintings and belletrist snapshots associate several things with this building; the city's scholarly importance, the splendor of the architecture, Brody as a hotspot of the *Haskalah* and the centrality of religion for the Eastern European Jewish daily life.

The synagogue was built after the devastating fire of 1742 with a loan from the city owner Józef Potocki. For the following two centuries this fortress style synagogue dominated the city, and even today its remnants still occupy an impressive place in Brody's cityscape. The building is sometimes also referred to as Old Synagogue, which is misleading, because the once neighboring New Synagogue was most likely built earlier. The latter happened to be renovated in 1804 and thus maybe seemed younger to the inhabitants in later years.

During the Battle of Brody between the *Wehrmacht* and the Red Army in 1944, the New Synagogue was completely destroyed, whereas at least the outer walls of the Great Synagogue

survived. After the war, the building was provisionally restored and was officially listed as a historical monument. Since the 1960s it has been put to use as a storage facility. When the roof started to leak, the building was abandoned and has slowly fallen into disrepair ever since. In 1988, the western wall collapsed and in 2006 parts of the provisional roof fell in. The idea of Brody's municipal administration in 1991 to turn the remnants into a picture gallery aborted because of funding problems and the preference to restore first of all Ukrainian national sites of memory. Only recently, an initiative by Brody's twin city in Germany, Wolfrathshausen, has decided to finance at least the stabilization of the existing walls. However, it is not clear when these works will be started and the problem of a complete restoration remains unsolved, not least because there are no precise plans of what to do with the building in the long run.



*Remaining traces of the Great Synagogue in Brody*

The Great Synagogue has always been an important landmark of Brody's physical and mental cityscape for more than two centuries. Many travel accounts dating from the Habsburg period prominently mention this place. Emperor Joseph II stated in his rather jejune notes of his 1773 inspection tour to Galicia, "The synagogue is very beautiful and large."

In 1839, two missionaries from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland also marveled at Brody's Jewish prayer house: "We visited one of their finest synagogues. It is like an ancient Gothic church: the roof very elevated and supported by four immense pillars in the massy gothic style. Brass lustres in great profusion were suspended from the roof, especially in front of the ark, all handsome and brightly polished." Christian travelers were impressed by the size and splendid architecture, even if some of them hardly found a friendly word to say on the city's Jewish inhabitants. (Below: A photograph circa 1900.)

The Yiddish writer S. Ansky, on the other hand, reflected on the long-standing cultural importance of the Brody synagogue. He visited Galicia twice as an emissary of the Russian Red Cross, at the end of 1914 and during the summer of 1916, after the Russian Army had conquered the province. In his travel recordings he noted, "I visited the old synagogue, which had played a major role in earlier Jewish cultural life. [...] A whole era

of Jewish life was bound up with Brody and its synagogue. The old building had a very splendid interior." (S. Ansky. *The Enemy at His Pleasure*. Metropolitan Books, New York, 2008). Thus, whereas Christian travelers remarked on Brody's Great Synagogue as an important monument, Ansky and other Jewish visitors like the painter Isidor Kaufmann refer to it as a place of Ashkenazi religious, cultural, and intellectual history.

After the presence of Jews in Brody ended in the 1940s, the Brody synagogue has continued to be the city's most important Jewish place of memory. The Great Synagogue stands for both important religious currents in the city, the traditional Talmudic scholarship often associated with the so-called *Broder kloyz* (study house) as well as the *Haskalah*. This legacy of Brody as an important center of Jewish learning in Eastern Europe still echoes in the earlier Yiddish *Yizker* books from the first two decades after the WWII. In addition, the 1994 published memory book on Brody, *Ner*



*Tamid*, deals at length with rabbis, halakhic judges, and other scholars connected to the Great Synagogue.

The few tourists visiting Brody today, be they from Western Europe, North America or Israel, pay large attention to the ruins of the synagogue. The head of Brody's Regional Museum repeatedly indicated to me that these "Westerners" have different priorities when coming to Brody from visitors from Poland or Ukraine. However, in the traveler's eye today, the synagogue recalls not only a place of former Jewish scholarship but is foremost a symbol of the rupture caused by the WWII and of Eastern Europe's lost Jewish world.

## The Jewish Cemetery

A similarly strong symbol for the demise of Jewish Brody would be the still existing vast Jewish cemetery in the outskirts of the present city. The cemetery was established during the cholera epidemic of 1831 when the old cemetery reached its limits. The above mentioned Presbyterian Scottish missionaries, who visited Brody in 1839, were impressed by the width of the city's new cemetery and the magnificence of many of the tombstones.



*Pre-war picture of the old Jewish cemetery in Brody*

Whereas the old Jewish cemetery was severely damaged during WWII and eventually dismantled by the Soviets in the 1950s to turn this place into a stadium, the "new" cemetery remains in existence until now. During the Soviet period it was continuously falling into disrepair because those few Jews, who resettled in Brody after the Holocaust, came here from other parts of the USSR and therefore did not have any ancestors buried in Brody. Eventually, even those Jews left the city in the 1990s; today, there are no Jewish inhabitants left in town.



*Picture of the "new" Jewish cemetery in Brody*

Only after the collapse of the USSR was the cemetery "rediscovered" by travelers from America, Israel, and Western Europe. Some of them were in search of tombstones of family members; most of them, however, came to gaze at Brody's ample graveyard with more than 5,500 grave-

stones remaining intact. Two of the earliest visitors, in 1989, were the German journalist Verena Dohrn and the photographer Guido Baselgia. Some 15 years later, the Israeli journalist Ruhama Elbag also marveled at the huge dimensions of this place and complained that local villagers used the space for planting cabbage, sunflowers or corn. She concluded that it might be one of the most impressive Jewish cemeteries left in Eastern Europe.

At the western edge of the cemetery a memorial was erected in 1994 (*see photograph below*). The Hebrew, Ukrainian, and English texts honor the Jews murdered under German occupation between summer 1941 and summer 1944. The memorial is situated on the spot where the Nazis murdered about 250 prominent Jewish residents of Brody during the first weeks after their invasion.



Not surprisingly, the Holocaust dominates the Jewish memory book *Ner tamid* as well as virtual memory on the internet. However, an American project initiated in 1996 successfully photographed each gravestone and transcribed all legible epitaphs, engraved mostly in German and Polish, besides of course liturgical texts written in Hebrew. For the Brody Cemetery Project see:

[http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGenerosity/projectdesc/cp\\_brody.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGenerosity/projectdesc/cp_brody.html).

These two physical memory places, the Great Synagogue and the Jewish cemetery, are crucial to those who actually travel to Brody. These objects are visibly Jewish and their state of decomposition clearly demonstrates the abrupt end of the Jewish presence in this part of the world. What Michael Meng stated for Jewish ruins in Poland and Germany fits for Ukraine as well, “They can be touched, experienced, discovered, and photographed, and they are the last tangible traces of a fading past.” (M. Meng, *Shattered Spaces*. Harvard University Press, 2011). Jewish tourists, be they religious or not, identify with these places as a manifestation of their own Jewish heritage. They try to relocate themselves on the mental maps of their ancestors.

Nevertheless, these places also matter to non-Jewish travelers. Many, especially those from Germany or Austria, come to Galicia with a longing for a past that supposedly was more colorful and peaceful. By retrieving this former multi-cultural world, especially the references to Jewish life, some of these *spurensuchers* might wish to atone in an intellectual way for their fathers’ or grandfathers’ involvement in WWII. Brody turns out to be the perfect place for such nostalgia, not only because of the city’s rich Jewish history, but also because the remnants of the huge synagogue and the vast Jewish cemetery so impressively demonstrate the violent end of a long story.

**Editor's note:** *The previous article 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: "Images and perceptions of Jewish Brody" will be published in the March 2017 issue of the Galitzianer.*

## FACES of GALICIA



*Bila Neger (née Haber) was born circa 1879 and perished in 1939. The photograph taken about 1910 in the photo studio in Dynów (courtesy of Nina Talbot, Gesher Galicia member).*

## The Josephine and Franciscan Surveys Project Update

In 2016, Gesher Galicia initiated an ambitious collection of records from the early population cadastral surveys.

We focused on 17 towns:

BOHORODCZANY, DELATYN,  
GWOŹDZIEC, KOŁOMYJA, KOSÓW,  
KUTY, NADWÓRNA, OBERTYN,  
ŚNIATYN, SOŁOTWINA, STANISŁAWÓW,  
TŁUMACZ, TREMBOWLA, TYŚMIENICA,  
ZABŁOTÓW, ZBARAŻ, ŻURAWNO.

Because of your support, we added **over 18,000 names** to the All Galicia Database.  
**Thank you!**

### Plans for 2017

In 2017, we plan to research small shtetls and large Jewish centers (in bold):

**BRODY**, CHYRÓW, CZORTKÓW,  
FRYSZTAK, HORODENKA, HUSIATYN,  
KOPYCZYŃCE, **LWÓW (LEMBERG)**,  
MIELNICA, **PRZEMYŚL**, ROZDÓŁ, TŁUSTE,  
ZALESZCZYKI.

**We ask for your generous support to initiate acquisition of these records.**

Please make your contribution today:

<http://www.geshergalicia.org/support-the-josephine-franciscan-project/>

Read more about the Josephine and Franciscan Surveys Project on our website:

<http://www.geshergalicia.org/projects/josephine-and-franciscan-surveys-project/>