FASCICULI ARCHAEOLOGIAE HISTORICAE 36: 2023
ISSN 0860-0007, e-ISSN 2719-7069
DOI 10.23858/FAH36.2023.005

Wojciech Bis*, Wiesław Więckowski**

Archaeological Aspects of Jewish Burial Rite. History, Archaeological Excavation and Verification of Two Jewish Cemeteries – Warsaw's Bródno and Węgrów, Mazovia (Poland)

Abstract

Archaeological research in relation to Jewish cemeteries is rarely undertaken, which is why any excavations, often carried out on the occasion of investments, are extremely valuable. The excavations in the area of two Masovian cemeteries, in Bródno in Warsaw and in Węgrów, were also of a verification nature. In Bródno, an attempt was made to mark the southern border of the cemetery, and in Węgrów, an attempt was made to establish the existence of a cemetery, the extent of which is not visible in the field. In both cases, archaeological research was carried out in cooperation with the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries and in accordance with the guidelines considering the attitude of Judaism to human remains. Based on source and religious texts, a set of features has also been created that help in identifying burials (and cemeteries).

Received: 07.03.2023 **Revised:** 27.03.2023 **Accepted:** 15.05.2023

Citation: Bis W., Więckowski W. 2023. *Archaeological Aspects of Jewish Burial Rite. History, Archaeological Excavation and Verification of Two Jewish Cemeteries – Warsaw's Bródno and Węgrów, Mazovia (Poland)*. "Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae" 36, 99-117, DOI 10.23858/FAH36/2023.005

KEYWORDS
- Jewish cemetery
- excavations
- Judaism
- Bródno
- Węgrów

Introduction

In the 1990s, Jewish life in Poland was reactivated. The Association of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland was established, continuing the pre-war traditions of organising Jewish life. Its activities include, among others, the care of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. All works in their areas, including archaeological ones, must be supervised by a representative of the Commission for Cemeteries of the local Jewish community.

In the period before the 1990s, archaeological research on cemeteries was permitted due to the lack of conservation guidelines and knowledge of Jewish customs and regulations. However, such works were not often undertaken, and those that were carried out were usually of a salvage nature (e.g., at the Jewish cemetery in Wyszogród,[1] located on the edge of the Vistula escarpment, constantly washed away and destroyed by the river), or they were carried out on the margins of other archaeological research (such as in Lublin on the occasion of the search for relics of the oldest city in Lublin, or in Lutomiersk, where they were concentrated around the cemetery from the 11th century discovered below the early modern layers with Jewish burials).[2]

Most Jewish necropolises were destroyed during World War II, but significant damage was also done thereafter. Due to the unregulated legal

* Institute of Archeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences Warsaw; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1142-408X; wojtekbis@wp.pl

** Corresponding author; Faculty of Archaeology, University of Warsaw; https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1135-7112; w.c.wieckowski@uw.edu.pl

[1] Piotrowski 1987, 213-240.
[2] Fijałkowski 1989, 25-42.

status, Jewish cemeteries left without supervision and care were often intentionally destroyed, and as a result, their borders were blurred. In 1959, only one Jewish cemetery was present in the provincial registers of immovable monuments; in the next decade five other necropolises were registered, and in the 1970s, eight more. In 1975, the conservation services recognised 77 localisations as cemeteries of historic value. Their number gradually increased in the following decades, and in 2020, a total of 252 Jewish cemeteries were included in the voivodeship registers according to the inventory prepared by the National Heritage Board of Poland.[3]

An analysis of the state of archaeological research of Jewish cemeteries has been undertaken by Polish researchers several times.[4] The latest study by K. Skóra and M. Bis also covered the area of Central Europe outside of Poland.[5] On the basis of these findings, it is known that archaeological research was carried out on only a few sites, located in the following towns: Brześć Kujawski, Dobrzyń nad Wisłą, Gniezno, Oborniki, Płońsk, Rogoźno, Śrem, and Krasiczyn and probably Górsko. In most sites, the results of the excavations were not published, and the remains of Jewish graves were usually considered as a 'modern component'.[6]

Archaeological aspects of Jewish burial rites

The sources of rights and duties or rituals regarding death and burial in Judaism should be sought in the *Tanakh* – the Jewish canon of what the Christian world calls the Bible. Although a precise description of neither the rituals nor the burials themselves can be found anywhere in the texts, they provide a strong indication of the extraordinary importance of both death itself and ensuring a proper burial of the deceased. For example, the threat of leaving the body unburied was one of the worst things that could happen to the deceased and was often used in curses and visions of apocalyptic prophets (cf. Jer. 22:19 or Deut. 28:26, Ezek. 39:17-20 to cite a few).[7] Proper burial was therefore extremely important from the very beginning of Judaism, eventually becoming the most important duty of the living towards the dead. This importance is clearly reflected, for example, in Abraham's need to purchase a burial site (Gen. 23:4-19). The site, the Cave of Machpelah, quickly became the family tomb of the first patriarchs, who pressed hard to be buried there, along with their ancestors (Gen. 49:29-33; 50:25-26). Often, after a biographical description of the biblical character's achievements, there is a mention of death and burial place at the end (cf. Josh. 24:30-33, 1 Sam. 31:12-13; 21:12-14). The Book of Tobias, though apocryphal to the Jewish canon, also strongly indicates the importance of burial. Tobias was a righteous man whose merit was to bury the dead (Tob. 1:18–20; 2:3–8; 4:3-4; 6:15, 14:10-13). Providing burial for the dead became a deed comparable to such good deeds (*mitzvoth*) as sharing bread with the hungry or giving clothes to the naked (Tob. 1:17–18). There are also numerous biblical references to burial in another religious aspect, namely in relation to maintaining ritual purity. The deceased and everything that comes in contact with the body is ritually impure, because the dead cannot worship God and are separated from him (cf. Ps. 88:6-12). Therefore, the contact can cause a loss of purity (Num. 19:11-16). One should bury not only members of one's own community, but also sinners (Num. 11:33-34), criminals, convicts (Deut. 21:22-23), and enemies (1 Kings 11:15; Ezekiel 39:11-16). The burial of the dead was most often done by the family (cf. Gen. 23; Gen. 25:9).

Although there are no direct descriptions of the burials or graves themselves, some information on this subject can be obtained by analysing the text of the *Tanakh*. Firstly, efforts were made to bury the dead on the ground (in the area) where they were born, in the company of their ancestors. For example, Jacob wanted to be buried in the company of his ancestors (Gen. 49:29); in another example, Barzillai did not want to accompany King David on his raids, because he was afraid that if he died, he would not be buried in his own land (2 Sam. 19:38). The expressions used for death and burial are 'lie with my fathers' (Gen. 47:30) and 'he was gathered to his people' (Gen. 25:8). Therefore, graves belonged to family or kin. They were usually intentionally carved in the rock or natural caves adapted for this purpose. Generations of members of a given family were buried within the cave, just like the previously mentioned Cave of Machpelah. The poorer dead were also buried in poorer graves because there are references in the text to the graves of the 'common people' (2 Kings 23:6, or Jer. 26:23). Bodies were buried covered with clothes and shrouds (2 Sam. 3:31), soon after death, as can be inferred from the description in

[3] Bielawski 2020, 109.

[4] One of the first attempts were MA theses prepared by P. Fijałkowski 1988, and M. Hajduk 1993. Results of excavations were published by Piotrowski 1987; Fijałkowski 1989; Fijałkowski 2003; Fijałkowski 2014; Borowska-Strugińska 2005; Stawiarski 2010; Komski et al. 2014, Bis and Więckowski 2017, and recently Bielawski 2020.

[5] See also: Bis and Skóra 2023; Bis 2023.

[6] Hajduk 1993.

[7] The Bible 2001 – text available online: https://www.academic-bible.com.

Genesis 23 and 35. Coffins were acceptable – for example, Joseph's body was brought from Egypt embalmed and in a coffin (Gen. 50:26). The Christian New Testament, written by people familiar with Jewish traditions, adds some details about the shroud and the use of scented substances (John 19:40) and the burial process (Luke 7:11-17).

In Rabbinic Judaism, the approach to death and burial somewhat changes and varies. Of course, their extraordinary importance is maintained, additionally emphasising the statement that the deed of burying the dead (*met mitzvah*) is more important than the study of the *Torah*, circumcision, or even the Passover lamb sacrifice. In the codified commandments (a set of prohibitions and orders that became the source of later applicable laws and customs), the obligation to bury the dead is a *mitzvah* listed under 537 in the set of 613 commandments according to the Rambam.[8] Rabbinic Judaism placed great emphasis on the precise codification of religious principles and their application in everyday life, and thus describes everything related to death and the handling of the deceased's body quite precisely, including burial, construction of the grave, and the location of cemeteries. This information is scattered in various texts and commentaries, but most can be found in the treatise *Yoreh De'ah* (Teacher of Knowledge), which forms a part of the basic collection of Jewish *halakha* law, called *Shulchan Aruch* (Set Table), compiled in 1565 in Venice by Joseph Karo, one of the most eminent rabbis from Safed in Galilee.[9] The laws contained in *Shulchan Aruch* were supplemented by the laws in force in Ashkenazi communities (the treatise itself was written in the Sephardic environment) a little later by Moshe Isserles Remuh from Kraków in the form of commentaries called *Mapa* (*Tablecloth*). The final chapters (335 to 403) contain numerous guidelines on how to treat the deceased, how to prepare them for burial, how to organise a funeral, what mourning should look like, and much more. Among such indications we find the recommendation that the body of the deceased should lie on its back (362:2), wrapped in a shroud, tallit, and with the face covered (352:2; 351:2; 353:2), that it should not be equipped with any valuables (352:1), and should be buried directly in the ground or in an ordinary coffin (362:1; 363:4). Only one person should rest in one grave. The commentaries on *Bava Batra* (The Last Gate), the third treatise of the *Nezikin* (Injuries) order, allow us to understand the spatial organisation of cemeteries and the arrangement of graves within them. These recommendations result, among others, in the spatial organisation of Jewish necropolises, rows of burial pits, and a clear separation of individual pits. The grave should be about 6-8 *tefakhim* (a hand's breadth) deep and not connected to another, and about 6 *tefakhim* should be kept from the neighbouring grave. In other places of the *Mishnah*, one can find the sources of the rules regarding the timing of the organisation of the funeral, the preparation of the burial pit only after confirmation of death, the securing of the grave, and the very strict observance of the principle of the inviolability of the burial, i.e., the prohibition of exhumation. The principle of the inviolability of the grave means that a cemetery established by the Jewish community must belong exclusively to the Jewish community and its function cannot ever be changed. The cemetery cannot be liquidated or moved. If the area of the cemetery became too small for more burials, it had to be widened or at least partially covered with earth, so that there were at least 3-6 hands of earth between the burials vertically. The cemetery should be located away from buildings and surrounded by a clear boundary.[10] Other burial regulations are difficult to find in the text of the *Tanakh*, as they are rather established customs, written down as commentaries in various, quite dispersed places, and originated only in the Diaspora. Still, others are completely local cultural phenomena of undetermined origin or not fully understood meaning, such as a fragment of pottery placed on the eyelids or a padlock around the mouth.

In modern times, a special organisation called *Chevra Kadisha* (Holy Brotherhood) deals with the preparation of the deceased for the last journey. This is related to the belief that the human body as the vessel of the soul is sacred, but at the same time it is a source of ritual impurity (according to Numbers 19:11-16). The body of the deceased is purified during the *tahara* ceremony by washing it with water and purifying it; all jewellery is removed. After the ablution, the body is anointed with oils and spices. Then the body is wrapped in a shroud (*tachrichim)*. Originally it was a typical shroud, but later became a simple garment made of white linen fabric, not sewn together (only connected with basting). A *yarmulke* is put on the man's head and the body is covered with a *tallit* – a prayer shawl – all in accordance with the principles quoted earlier from *Yoreh De'ah*. Rules for all steps of the procedure from death to grave preparation in a cemetery can

[8] Tarjag Micwot. 2000.

[9] *Yoreh De'ah* is a part of *Halakhah,* of the code of Jewish law – *Shulchan Aruch*. *Bava Batra* is the third of the three Talmudic tractates in the order *Nezikin*. Their texts are available online: https://www.sefaria.org.

[10] Bleich 2002, 222; Goldstein 2006; Menachemson 2007, 5.

be found in many religious publications, with the local rabbi as the final authority to decide how a religious ceremony should proceed.[11]

Archaeological excavations

Archaeological research on two historical Jewish cemeteries, located in Warsaw's Bródno district and in Węgrów, undertaken in 2010 and 2012, was of a verification nature and its main purpose was to exclude or confirm the existence of cemeteries in the areas of interest. In the case of the Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw, it was necessary to reconstruct its historical southern borders due to the transportation investment project – reconstruction of Św. Wincentego Street. In the case of the necropolis in Węgrów, the direct reason for undertaking the verification research was the need to determine whether the industrial investment planned there, adjacent to the area reclaimed by the Jewish Community in Warsaw, was located within the historic borders of the cemetery or outside.[12]

When presenting the results of the research and excavations, in both cases, a short outline of the Jewish presence in the area, with particular emphasis on the history of the necropolis, will be discussed first. Then, the scope of the work carried out, and the degree of recognition of the cemeteries will be briefly presented and discussed. And, finally, at the end of this paper, the most important results of the research in relation to Jewish customs and tradition presented above will be outlined. Though the fate of both cemeteries and the communities by which they were used is only a small example of the history of Polish Jews in the 20th century, it is certainly worth recalling.

Information on the history of both necropolises contained in existing studies is modest and incomplete. This information allows us to determine only the most important facts about the time of operation, circumstances of establishment, size, and sometimes also intensity of use (including sometimes the number of deceased buried there). In this respect, we have much more data regarding the Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw than that in Węgrów. Excavations, due to their interventional and verification nature, covered only small fragments of both cemeteries. A total of 60 burials were uncovered. In both cases, it was necessary to obtain permission and full cooperation with the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries of the Jewish Religious Community in Warsaw to carry out the excavations. The research was also accompanied by constant supervision by a member of this Commission.[13]

Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw

The history of the Jewish community in Warsaw has been the subject of numerous studies.[14] The Jewish presence in Warsaw was noted as early as the beginning of the 15th century. They occupied an area limited by Piekarska, Piwna, Wąski Dunaj, and Rycerska Streets and along Żydowska Street within Warsaw's Old Town. This area was inhabited by about 120–150 Jews at that time.[15] Expelled from the city at the end of the 15th century, they started to settle in the suburbs, beginning no later than 1483. Between 1488 and 1527, the ban to settle was temporarily withdrawn, but a decision issued in 1527 by King Zygmunt Stary again prohibited their settling in the city, regardless of their social position and property.[16] The prohibition to settle in Warsaw probably influenced Jewish settlement development in other Mazovian centres, especially in private estates.[17] Praga, located on the right bank of the Vistula River, belonged in great part to the Bishop of Kamieniec, Michał Działyński, who received a location privilege from King Władysław IV on February 10, 1648, confirmed later by successive rulers. This privilege included a ban on Jews and dissidents settling in Warsaw and on their trade. The ban clause was repeated several times, which may indicate that the prohibition was not observed.[18] Despite these unfavourable conditions, the Jewish settlement in Praga slowly developed. Already before 1768, a Jewish community was formed here and the 'Assembly of Praga Jews' was brought to life. Formally, it was a branch (*przykahałek*) of the Jewish community (*kahal*) in Węgrów in Podlasie, because due to the still binding ban on settling Jews within a two-mile radius of Warsaw, the Jewish community could not obtain its own legal status. A clear improvement in relations with the Jewish population took place only after the Sejm in 1775, which passed a law allowing, inter alia, Jews to settle in the immediate vicinity of Warsaw.[19] As early as 1778, 543 Jewish residents were recorded in Golędzinów, Praga, and

[11] On archaeology and Jewish burial rites see also: Skóra forthcoming.

[12] See Bis and Więckowski 2017, 109-129.

[13] The Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich, issued a decision based on which the excavations were performed, while the supervision was provided by the member of the Rabbinical Commission, M. Dudek-Lewin.

[14] Nussbaum 1881; Ringelblum 1932; Bergman and Sienkiewicz 2000; Fuks 2008; Borzymińska 2014; Fijałkowski 2016.

[15] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 7; Fijałkowski 2016, 31.

[16] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 7.

[17] Fijałkowski 2016, 42 and 55.

[18] Fijałkowski 2016, 56.

[19] Fijałkowski 2016, 94, 98-99.

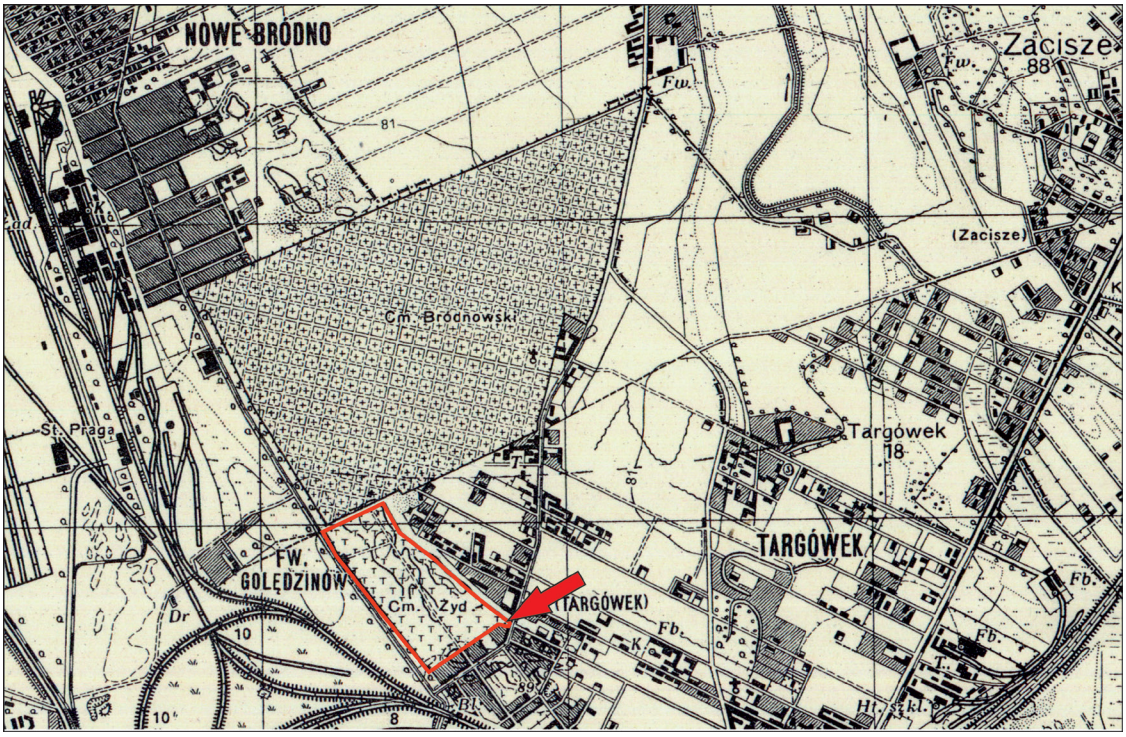


Fig. 1. Fragment of the topographic map of Warsaw – Praga published in 1931 with the location of the Jewish cemetery in Bródno. The red colour indicates the extent of the cemetery boundaries; the arrow indicates the archaeological research area from 2011. Scale 1:25000, Source: mapywig.org. Graphic design: W. Bis.

Skaryszew. They petitioned the king immediately for permission to establish their own necropolis. Lejzor Izaak Krotoszyński, a merchant and supplier of the Warsaw mint, was probably the first to turn in this matter to the king, but the Warsaw entrepreneur and court banker, Szmul Jakubowicz Zbytkower, turned out to be more effective in these efforts. Acting on behalf of 'all Jews in Warsaw and Praga', he asked Stanisław August to designate a place for a Jewish cemetery in the royal hereditary estates of Targówek.[20] From 1764, the king was the owner of Targówek, part of Golędzinów and Załęże, which he purchased for the sum of 9,000 Polish zlotys from Teodor Szydłowiecki. In 1780 he bought Grochów, Kamion, and Skaryszew from the Płock chapter.[21] On July 26, 1780, the king granted Szmul Jakubowicz Zbytkower, on emphyteutic rights (perpetual lease), a plot of land to establish a cemetery. The king established an annual rent of 400 Polish zlotys for the land use, and entrusted Zbytkower with the management of the necropolis. The Praga Jewish community was still a branch of the Węgrów *kahal*.[22] The ruler gave his consent to charge a fee in the amount of 1/3 of the funeral costs, which provoked objections from the Orthodox Jews, and some of them, trying to avoid fees, sought other resting places for their dead.[23] In addition, the monarch allowed the erection of a fence around the cemetery and the construction of a funeral home on its grounds. The privilege also stated that after the death of Jakubowicz Zbytkower, the authority over the cemetery would pass to persons 'appointed for this according to Jewish rites'.[24] Regardless of royal privilege, the functioning of the cemetery needed separate consent of the bishop of Płock, Prince Michał Jerzy Poniatowski, under whose control was the area on the right bank of the Vistula. The bishop agreed to the request but imposed certain conditions on it: Jews were obliged to fence the cemetery and burials were to take place 'without singing and public procession'. In addition, they were obliged to submit annually 10 tallow stones to the St. John the Baptist church in Skaryszewy.[25]

The area of the Praga cemetery was originally a sandy and elevated area, overgrown partly with a sparse pine grove (Fig. 1). First, the cemetery area was 150 cubits long and wide,[26] and later it was enlarged to 350 cubits in length.[27] Before the establishment of the cemetery, it was the site of sand and clay extraction and mining for a nearby brickyard. The area was far from the Golędzinów, Ząbkowskie, and Bródnowskie city tollgates.[28]

It is assumed that the cemetery was founded in 1780; however, the official establishment of the cemetery possibly legalised a burial ground that had already existed there for a few decades. Schiper, based

[20] Borzymińska 2014, 70.
[21] Berger 1969, 71-74.
[22] Schiper 1938,7; Fijałkowski 2016, 110.
[23] Michałowska 1992, 83.
[24] *Metryka*…, 296, 84v-85.
[25] Borzymińska 2014, 71.
[26] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 11-12.
[27] Berger 1969, 74.
[28] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 16-17.

on the records in the *pinkas* of the Prague funeral brotherhood, mentioning several people who died in the years 1743–1760, assumed that they were buried in the place of the later cemetery. However, Fijałkowski interprets this information differently, suggesting that the brotherhood could have taken care of the funerals of the mentioned people, but they were buried in cemeteries functioning in the nearby towns of Grodzisk, Nowy Dwór, Sochaczew, and Węgrów, as some of the deceased people originally came from those *kahals*.

Within four years, Szmul Zbytkower organised a new cemetery. In 1784, the area was surrounded by a brick fence founded by Szmul's wife Gilta, daughter of Jehuda Lejb Buka (this fence was destroyed during the storming of Praga in 1794). The first burial (of Elchanan, son of Jekusiel) took place in 1784, four years after the royal edict was issued, and the cemetery was officially opened. In 1785, the Holy Brotherhood, headed by Zbytkower, took care of the cemetery.[29] In the same year, the activities of the new funeral brotherhood were merged with the one functioning in Warsaw, and probably then the cemetery in Targówek also became a resting place for Warsaw Jews.[30] For many years, however, Jewish families did not want to use the local, empty cemetery and still preferred to transport their dead to Nowy Dwór and Węgrów. However, until the establishment of the second Jewish cemetery in 1799 on Okopowa Street in Warsaw, the Bródno cemetery was an official burial ground for Jews from Warsaw, Praga, and the surrounding areas.[31] In the first nearly fifteen years, a relatively small number of people were buried here. Only during the so-called 'slaughter of Praga' by the Russian army under the command of Suvorov in 1794 during the Kościuszko Uprising, 'the new cemetery in Praga suddenly filled up', and the dead were buried in a hurry, and in common graves.[32] Access to the cemetery was probably limited, as its area was included in the system of defensive fortifications, and, along with the so-called 'Zwierzyniec' (the zoo), was one of the corners of a triangular earth rampart.[33]

In 1801, after Szmul's death, his widow handed over the cemetery to the *Chevra Kadisha*, which remained in charge until 1870. At that time, in accordance with the decision of the Warsaw Magistrate in 1870, the authority over the cemetery was taken over by the Jewish Community.[34]

The cemetery was a burial ground for poor Jewish families predominantly. However, among the people buried there are the founder, Szmul Jakubowicz Zbytkower (d. 1801), and the creator of the 'counting machine', Abraham Jakub Stern (d. 1842).[35] Today, there are no tombstones *in situ*. However, even in the pre-war period, there were only a few 18th-century tombstones there, showing the features of good artistic craftsmanship and 'original art, full of Baroque and Oriental reminiscences'.[36] In 1881, the great-grandson of Zbytkower, the banker Ignacy Löwenstein, funded new tombstones on the graves of Szmul and his wife Judyta (Gitla) and their son-in-law Izaak Flatau, buried in adjacent graves located in the first section of the cemetery.[37]

There is a good possibility that the representation of the Jewish cemetery in Praga was depicted on one of the walls of the mausoleum of Ber Sonnenberg, son of Szmul Zbytkower (Fig. 2). It was built around 1822 (or 1831) and is located in the cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw. According to Schiper's findings, the northern wall shows the suburbs of Praga with the local cemetery and the estate of Zbytkower received from King Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1780. Nowadays, researchers suggest that this wall may actually show a panorama of Warsaw from the Praga side, with the location of the cemetery outside the boundaries of the city.[38]

Until the second half of the 19th century, the cemetery was neglected. There was little greenery, and the quicksand often covered the tombstones to such an extent that it was difficult to locate them. The status of the necropolis improved only towards the end of that century. In 1877, the construction of a new Funeral Home was completed, and a brick fence surrounded the eastern and southern edges of the cemetery. Preparations for this investment had already started three years earlier. Funds for this purpose came from the bequest of Jakub Flatau, the grandson of Szmul Zbytkower, a total of about 15,000 rubles.[39] In April 1877, the press reported that the fence was in bad condition ('broken') and

[29] Schiper 1938, 6.
[30] Fijałkowski 2014, 31.
[31] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 17.
[32] Borzymińska 2014, 80.
[33] Wójtowicz 1936, 40-41.
[34] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 17.
[35] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 16.
[36] Przysuskier 1936, 70, 72.
[37] Flowery inscriptions in Hebrew and Polish were placed on tombstones, praising the merits and generosity of the ancestors of the Bersohn family. An epitaph on Szmul's grave stated that he was 'a brave man of great deeds, a noble and respectable man of the Sejm of Four Lands', cf. Schiper 1938, 162.
[38] Schiper 1932, 331; Nowogórski and Kowalska 2000, 287; Majewski and Urzykowski 2010, 98-99.
[39] Schiper 1938, 161.

Fig. 2. Bas-relief probably depicting the cemetery in Bródno. Tombstone of Ber Sonnenberg at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, Okopowa Street. Photo: M. Bis.

the journalist asked how the aforementioned sum donated by Flatau had been used.[40]

Positive changes took place in 1884 with the opening of the Catholic cemetery in Bródno, and following the incorporation of the Bródno district into Warsaw, along with the construction of a beaten road (today's Św. Wincentego Street).[41] In December 1882, *Kurier Warszawski* informed that the board of the Jewish community decided to expand the local cemetery and for this purpose bought 84,459 square cubits of land from the owner of the Targówek estate, Mr. Żyznowski, for the sum of 9,290 rubles and 49 kopecks. The terms of the purchase contract were submitted for approval to the High Council.[42] In January 1885 Kurier published an article about a new Jewish cemetery operating next to the Catholic one, which 'recently expanded by purchasing a large piece of land [...]', and the information that from the beginning of March, all burials would be free of charge, their cost covered by the community. This was to prevent the rapid filling of the cemetery on Okopowa Street.[43]

Based on the register of burial fees, in 1855 the cost of burial at the Praga cemetery was 75% lower than at Okopowa Street, and free funerals were often held here.[44] In the years 1891–1892, a total of almost 4,000 people were buried in the Praga cemetery, two-thirds of them free of charge. For comparison, at the same time, a similar number of deceased were buried in the Warsaw cemetery, although almost 70% were paid burials.[45]

From the beginning of the 20th century, there is a sketch showing the 'Situational plan of the Jewish cemetery in Praga in 1906'. This schematic drawing shows the location of individual parts of the necropolis, including the 'purchased square'. It was a part, acquired at the end of the 19th century, and presumably located (as the sketch is not oriented towards the cardinal directions), in the northeast corner of the cemetery. By 1905, this plot of land was completely filled with 1,130 graves. In 1906, the Praga cemetery had a total area of almost 140,000 square cubits, where only one-third of the area was where the graves were present. The number of dead buried there during the first decade of the 20th century was close to the average known from the end of the previous period. In the years 1901–1907, a total of 23,066 people were buried at the cemetery.[46]

The condition of the Jewish cemetery in Praga deteriorated significantly during World War I. In 1914, the wooden fence of the cemetery was destroyed by the Russian soldiers stationed nearby. They used it for firewood, and after the supply of wood was exhausted, they dismantled the wooden markings of the graves and took a supply of wooden chests used for burying corpses. According to the then reports of the community board, 'this area represented a terribly devastated space, chaotically cut by hills and valleys; monuments and graves covered with sand'.[47] Holes in the brick fence

[40] Kurier… 1887, No 80, 3.
[41] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 17.
[42] Kurier… 1882, No 291, 3.
[43] Kurier… 1885, No 21b, 3-4.
[44] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 16.
[45] Schiper 1938, 161.
[46] Schiper 1938, 191-194.
[47] Schiper 1938, 194.

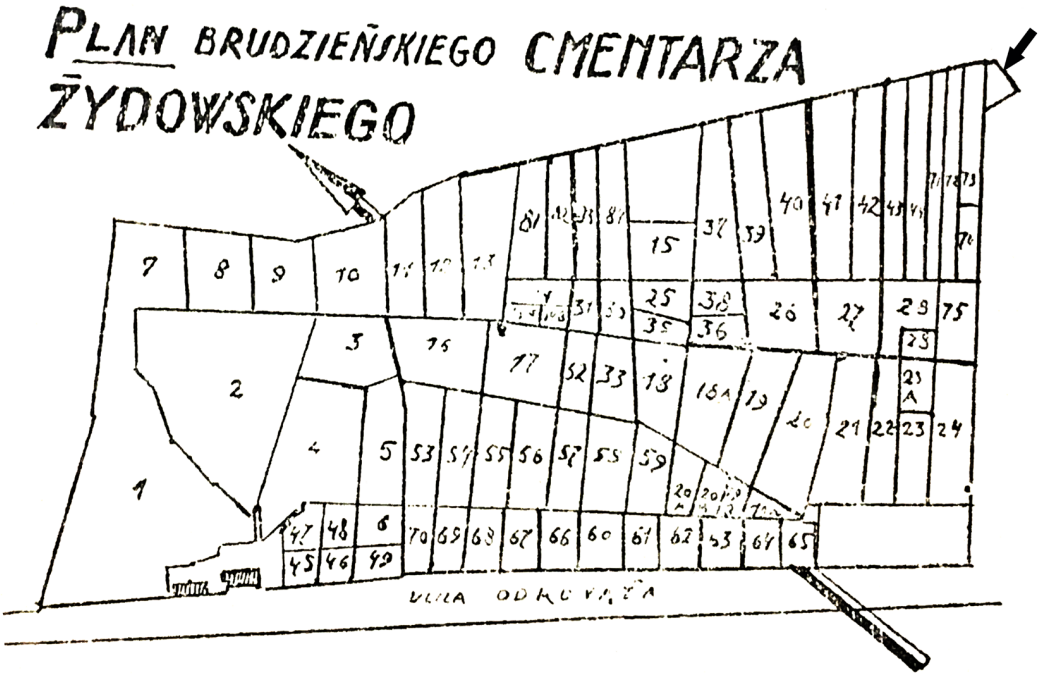


Fig. 3. Plan of the Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw from 1936. Numbers indicate the numbering of cemetery plots. The arrow indicates the area of archaeological research.
Source: Przysuskier 1936, 68.

caused masses of sand to move and to cover tombstones. The thieves arranged hiding places for their loot there. Cattle and goats often grazed here, and grave markers and monuments were destroyed.[48] In the weekly *Echo Pragi* published on May 20, 1916, it was noted that the cemetery was neglected and the fence was overturned in some places.[49] In the same year, the Warsaw Jewish community carried out a thorough reconstruction of the funeral home, spending a sum of 6,000 rubles, and installed gas lighting, but the condition of the cemetery still aroused dissatisfaction among its users.

Positive changes in the appearance of the cemetery took place as a result of the reconstruction work carried out in the 1920s. About six thousand tombstones were placed upright again, and the sand hills and dunes were levelled. Several hundred trees were planted to counteract the quicksand's activity, and a wall was erected around the entire area.[50] Over 15,000 zlotys were spent for this purpose.[51] The wall was 325 meters long and was probably 3 meters high.[52] Thanks to these investments, burial at the Bródno cemetery was no longer considered less dignified than burial at the Jewish cemetery at Okopowa Street.[53]

Another plan of the necropolis comes from 1936 – 'Plan of the Brudzieński Jewish Cemetery' (Fig. 3). At this time, the cemetery had a quadrangular shape and was located along Odrowąża Street. It was divided into 75 plots of various sizes and shapes.[54] During World War II, the cemetery was gradually devastated, especially after the Jewish population of Warsaw was resettled to the ghetto. Initially, the Germans agreed to continue burials at the local cemetery if they were made surreptitiously, without ritual rites. In 1941, however, they decided to liquidate the cemetery, dismantling the fence and desecrating about four thousand stone tombstones.[55]

During August and September 1944, executions of Warsaw residents were carried out in this cemetery. The victims were shot and buried in previously prepared pits. In the post-war period, exhumations were carried out and a large number of the murdered people were relocated to parish and municipal cemeteries.[56] There was only one funeral ceremony of a symbolic nature held at the cemetery after the war: in 1947, the remains of Jews found in Warsaw were ceremoniously buried in the 'brotherly grave'.[57] Some cleaning and reconstruction

[48] In 1917, the criminals dismantled two funerary buildings, and in the summer of 1919, the remains of many people dug up from the graves were found in the cemetery, cf. Schiper 1938, 194-195.

[49] In addition, it was noted that twelve years earlier, 'the gravediggers set up a railway track in this cemetery, along which they transported the dead in iron carts from the gate to the grave. Later it broke down, and since the hearse does not enter the cemetery, wooden stretchers were used to carry the corpses, buried with Jews, as we know, without coffins'. See: Żor-Żor 1916, 165.

[50] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 17-18.

[51] Schiper 1938, 200.

[52] Schiper 1938, 195.

[53] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 17-18.

[54] Przysuskier 1936, 68.

[55] Mórawski 2014, 19.

[56] Bielawski 2020, 49.

[57] Jagielski 1986, 46; Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 21-23.

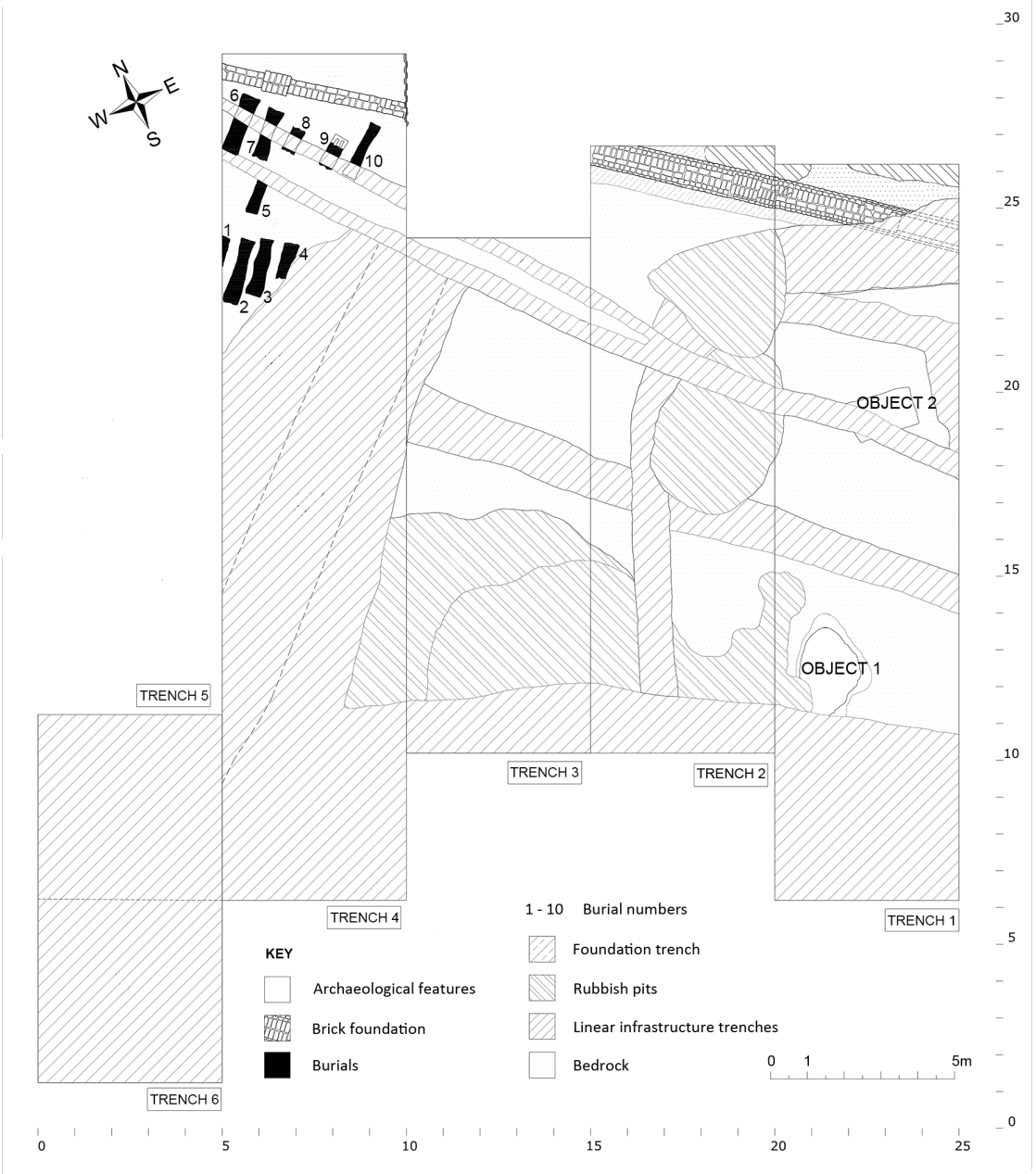


Fig. 4. Jewish cemetery in Bródno, plan of archaeological excavation trenches and location of burial pits. Graphic design: W. Bis and W. Małkowski.

works were carried out in 1950 when the idea of turning this area into a park appeared. In 1951 the ruins of the cemetery funeral house were demolished, thousands of tombstones were moved to one spot, and a forest of a rather irregular shape was planted.[58] Under a resolution issued by the Presidium of the National Council of the Capital City of Warsaw on July 27, 1960, the cemetery was considered closed.[59]

The Nissenbaum Family Foundation attempted to restore the memory of the former Bródno Jewish Cemetery at the end of the 20th century. Thanks to their activities, the area of the former Jewish cemetery was enclosed with an iron fence and the collecting of the remains of tombstones scattered all around Warsaw began.[60] In December 2012, the cemetery was recovered by the Jewish Community of Warsaw. The Community rebuilt the fence and erected pavilions with an exhibition devoted to the history of the monument.

Archaeological excavations were carried out in this area in 2011, due to the planned reconstruction of Św. Wincentego Street. The research aim was to identify a part of the area pertaining to the cemetery which was included in the state register of monuments. There was a high probability that there could have been burials in the area of the planned construction project. Previously conducted non-invasive GPR surveys did not give a clear answer if it was so (Fig. 4).

[58] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 21-22; Bielawski 2020, 79, 106.

[59] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 22.

[60] Paszkiewiczowie and Krajewska 1992, 21-23; Mórawski 2014.

Fig. 5. Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw, archaeological excavations: a – trench 2, foundation of brick cemetery wall, view from the east; b – trench 2, location of waste pits and excavated fragments of *matzevot*; c – trench 4, location of burial pits nos. 6–10; c – trench 4, location of burial pits nos. 1–5 and foundation of the cemetery wall. Photo: W. Bis.

There were six excavation trenches opened, covering a total area of over 4 ares. During the excavations, it became clear that the stratification in most of the study area was destroyed as a result of many earthworks carried out to date and related to the construction of underground city installations. Most of the damage was caused during the construction of the sewage system, where wide trenches were dug in a large part of the study area. Numerous disturbances were also associated with the construction of two telephone lines and laying electric wires. In addition, part of the site was used as a garbage dump. A very large amount of modern leather waste from leathercraft production was buried in three large dump pits sunk in the sand forming the bedrock in the area (Fig. 5).

From the fill of two trenches numerous human bones were excavated along with fragments of tombstones (*matzevot*) (Fig. 5:b). In the north-western corner of the trench no. IV, undisturbed burial pits outlines were found. A total of 10 graves in various states of preservation were unearthed. Only three of them (marked with numbers 2, 3, and 6) have been preserved in their entirety. The pits were about 1.60 m to 1.80 m long and 50-55 cm wide. One grave was discovered only partially, as the excavations were limited by the western edge of the trench. Six other graves (nos. 4, 5, 7-10) were damaged during various modern earthworks (Fig. 5:c and 5:d).

The burials were arranged in two rows. There were four graves in the first row, and five in the second; one burial was between the rows. The rows were parallel to each other and located at a similar distance (30–35 cm). All of them were oriented in a north-south direction, with the heads of the deceased pointing toward the south. The depth of the burials was also around 30-35 cm. The analogous and regular arrangement of the graves and their placement at a similar level indicate the planned development of the researched part of the cemetery. The remains of the deceased were placed in wooden coffins, from which only outlines in the form of very decayed wood remained. Due to the disintegration of the wooden planks, the coffins collapsed inwards, becoming slightly deformed. In accordance with the recommendations of the Rabbinical Commission, the burials were uncovered only up to the level of the coffin tops, without exploring the interior containing human remains, and after archaeological documentation was finished, they were secured and re-buried.

The unearthed burials were probably located on the north-eastern edge of the original cemetery area, called the ‘purchased square’. Based on the pre-war plan mentioned earlier, it formed a part of plot no. 73 (Fig. 3). The anthropological analysis of human remains found during the excavations in the area of the destroyed original layers showed that all identified bones belonged to female individuals. This may indicate the existence of a cemetery plot where only women were buried.

During the excavations, a brick foundation was also discovered. Most probably it was the remains

Fig. 6. Bródno Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw, fragments of excavated *matzevot*: a, c – from trench no. 4; b, d – from trench no. 2; e – from trench no. 3. Photo: W. Bis.

of a cemetery fence wall from the beginning of the 20th century. The width of the top of the wall was about 40 cm along its entire length. The foundation was built of well-fired bricks, made of ferruginous clays bonded with lime mortar. They were probably produced in brickyards located in Marki near Warsaw, since on some of the bricks the manufacturer's signatures were still legible – 'Marki' or 'O Marki'.

The foundation of the fence wall was preserved up to the height of 8 rows of bricks and had two offsets. It was found that it was destroyed in two sections. Probably originally the wall turned to the south and ran further along the axis of Św. Wincentego Street, in the north-south direction, reaching the nearest buildings from the south. In trench no. III, the wall was destroyed during the construction of the modern sewage system. In three places, along the entire length of the discovered outline of the wall, widening of the foundation trench was found, constituting the basis for the construction of brick pillars – elements of the fencing spans. An analogous structure can be seen on the wall surrounding the Bródno Jewish Cemetery today.

The described foundation marks the historical northern border of the Bródno Jewish Cemetery. The location of this part of the necropolis now-closed for burial is confirmed by the plan of the cemetery published in 1936. The area was shaped like a triangle. However, back then it was not marked with a burial plot number. Most likely, it was not yet a burial place, but it may have served as a cemetery facility or a storage place.

During the excavations, it was impossible to determine the cemetery's eastern border. It was probably located in the place of modern, extensive sewage trenches. To the east of these trenches, in excavation trenches nos. I, II, and III, no burial pits were recorded. During the excavations, a total of 13 fragments of *matzevot*, probably from 6 individual tombstones, were found in the modern construction pits (Fig. 6). All preserved inscriptions refer to female burials, using the phrases like:

'modest old woman', 'honest in her actions', and 'important woman'. In one case it was possible to identify a tombstone as belonging to Yuta Mala, the daughter of Rav Israel, wife of Ya'aqov Zerat Ha-Levi Slomke, who died in the month of Tevet of the year 5697 (Fig. 6:a); another tombstone was identified as that of Henna(?) Dvorah, possibly the daughter of Yitzchak son of Ya'aqov (Fig. 6:d). The two dates were possible to identify on the tombstones (one noted in Hebrew letters – Fig. 6:a, and one using numbers – Fig. 6:c), and both dated the use of this part of the cemetery to the 1930s (1936/37).

At the time of excavations, a small collection of artifacts was obtained. All of them came from mixed layers most often constituting the backfill of trenches created while constructing modern technical infrastructure. These artifacts are mostly fragments of utilitarian objects from the second half of the 20th century, including various metal products (nails, fragments of metal sheets, wires, hinges, etc.), glass cullet, as well as fragments of ceramics (dishes, stove tiles, floor, and wall tiles) and several clusters of leftovers from leathercraft production. There were only a few older artifacts, dating from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century: a total of 22 fragments of clay products – vessels of various types (7 pieces), tiles (2 pieces), and 1 part of a pipe; as well as glass vessels (12 pieces) – pharmacy bottles, beer bottles, and a polygonal siphon bottle. Most of the glass was probably of local production from the area of Targówek, where there were several glassworks producing a wide range of ware. For example, in the Wenda industrial plants, operating in the years 1920–1937/1938, 'pharmacy glass' and hospital glass (including basins and siphons) were produced.[61]

Węgrów Cemetery

Węgrów nowadays is a small town in the north-eastern part of the Masovian Voivodeship. With origins dating back to the 15th century, it used to be located on the border of the Mazovia province.[62] The era of most intensive development took place during the 16th and 17th centuries. From 1451 Węgrów was a private town. Its owners were, successively, the Uhrowski (Węgrowski) family, the Kostewicz family, the Radziwiłł family, and the Kiszka family.[63] The city's prosperity was facilitated by its convenient geographical location, especially its proximity to navigable rivers and the intersection of two trade routes: the Lithuanian route to Warsaw and the Gdańsk route to Łuków.[64] A trading post was established here in the 17th century.[65]

The successive owners of the town brought settlers from various parts of Europe to Węgrów. Thanks to the efforts of Anna Kiszkowa née Radziwiłł, there was an influx of Protestants, and the city became an important centre of the Reformation. An Arian community functioned here in the second half of the 16th century. From the 17th century, Węgrów became an important centre of the Evangelical-Augsburg confession; a Lutheran parish from Warsaw was moved there.[66] In 1650, Bogusław Radziwiłł granted the town a special privilege for foreigners. He also brought Scottish colonists engaged in cloth making to Węgrów, whose settlement survived until the end of the 18th century.[67] There were three districts in the city – the Old Town, the New Town, and a quarter shared by the Ruthenian and the Jewish communities.[68] The Swedish Deluge caused a lot of destruction and started the slow decline of the town. In 1664, Radziwiłł sold Węgrów to a Catholic, Jan Kazimierz Krasiński. This started a period of persecution of Protestants. During the Northern War, the city was further destroyed. Only thanks to the efforts of Jan Dobrogost Krasiński was the ruined Węgrów rebuilt and for a short time regained its importance in the region. From 1782, the owners of the town were the Ossolińscy, then Stanisław Klicki, and then, as the last private owner, until 1869, the Łubieński family.

It is assumed that the Jewish community in Węgrów was established at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1621, the Jews already had an organised district in the southern part of the city, around Żydowska and Kozia Streets. At that time, they constituted about 20% of the town's population. There were 113 Jewish houses, a synagogue, a school, butcher shops (places of ritual slaughter), and 20 distillery boilers that belonged to Jews.[69] In 1690, a second synagogue and another school were built,[70] related to the significant increase in

[61] Więcek 2016, 22.

[62] Kazimierski 1970, 267.

[63] Kazimierski 1970, 269.

[64] Baliński and Lipiński 1886, 413; Słucki 1961, 8.

[65] Gdańsk merchants functioned in the city, and one of the most important streets of the city was called Gdańska. In addition, representatives of the administration of the owner of the city (Kiszka family) and the mayor organised floats of grain to Gdańsk. See: Kazimirski 1970, 270.

[66] Swat 1991, 40-41.

[67] After Kazimierski 1970, 275. Many historians attribute the arrival of the Scots to Bogusław Radziwiłł. However, the inventory of the Węgrów estate includes information about the functioning of a fuller in the city and mentions one weaver as early as 1621. See: Swat 1991, 35-36.

[68] Swat 1991, 28.

[69] Swat 1991, 28.

[70] Kazimierski 1970, 279.

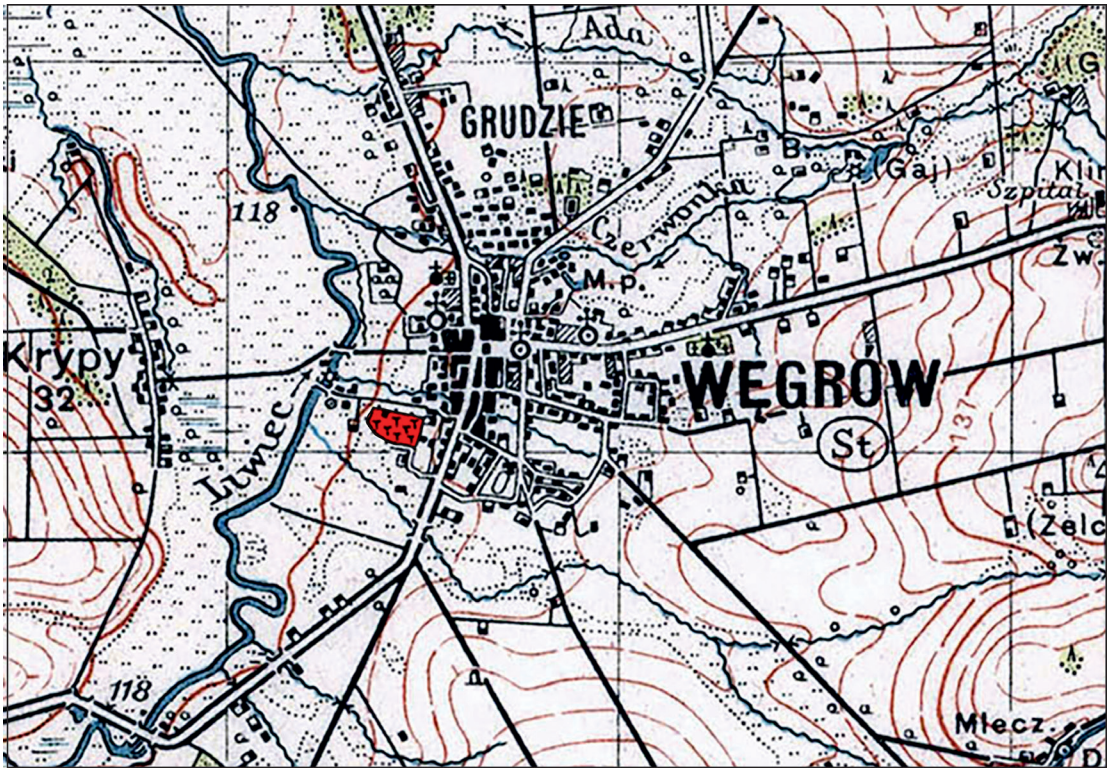


Fig. 7. Town of Węgrów, fragment of topographic map with the location of the Jewish cemetery (red colour). Scale 1:100 000. Source: mapywig.org. Graphic design: W. Bis.

the number of the Jewish community in Węgrów in the second half of the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century. Jewish settlers flocked to the city in place of Evangelicals, many of whom left the town due to religious persecution. In the city privilege of 1665, the then-owner, Krasiński, confirmed, among other things, all the rights granted to the Jews by Radziwiłł. The document stated that Jews were obliged to make a one-time payment of 6 Polish zlotys for the right to settle; they were to contribute 2 zlotys per house per year; and for living in other people's houses as tenants – 24 groschen. In return, they were able to expect full protection of life and property from the owner. The owner of the town appointed people responsible for their protection, and in the event of failure to aid, the town mayor was financially responsible for compensating for the damage. In addition, religious institutions and the hospital 'where they support their poor' were exempt from paying all taxes. They were guaranteed legal autonomy (they were not subject to the city court, apart from the court held by the city owner), freedom in trade and crafts, and they paid the same taxes on business as other townspeople (e.g., they were to pay 20 groschen per vat for the production of beer).[71] In 1827, almost 1,500 Jews lived in the town, constituting almost half of the town's population, and by the second half of the 19th century, they already constituted 62% of the total population.[72]

The local Jewish community established its own cemetery at the beginning of the 17th century. The Jewish cemetery was located in the southwestern part of the city, 'towards the Liw River',[73] within the current streets of Bohaterów Warszawy, Przemysłowa, and Berka Joselewicza (formerly Wróblewskiego).[74] It is said that Warsaw Jews were buried here until the construction of a cemetery in Warsaw's Bródno district in 1780. In 1834, some in the Jewish community proposed fencing the cemetery with a wall made of fieldstones and bricks, but the idea was not accepted because the local Jewish community did not want to incur high construction costs. Finally, the cemetery was fenced with a wooden fence (Fig. 7).[75]

The location of the necropolis and its approximate size is shown on a quartermaster's map from 1840. The area occupied by the cemetery was nearly square and was marked as 'Mog. Żydów' (Jewish Graveyard). A military map from 1944 shows that the area of the cemetery increased by extending to the west. The shape of the cemetery area became more rectangular, with a slight bend on the southwestern side. The area was approximately 40,000 m^2. The map in question shows an access road to the necropolis from the east. A different

[71] Słucki 1961, 9-19.

[72] Burchard 1990, 75.

[73] Swat 1991, 29.

[74] The names of the streets underwent numerous changes – the current street of Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego was called Berka Joselewicza in the interwar period, while the current street of Bohaterów Warszawy was called Błonie Chrześcijańskie.

[75] Kołodziejczyk 1991, 145-146.

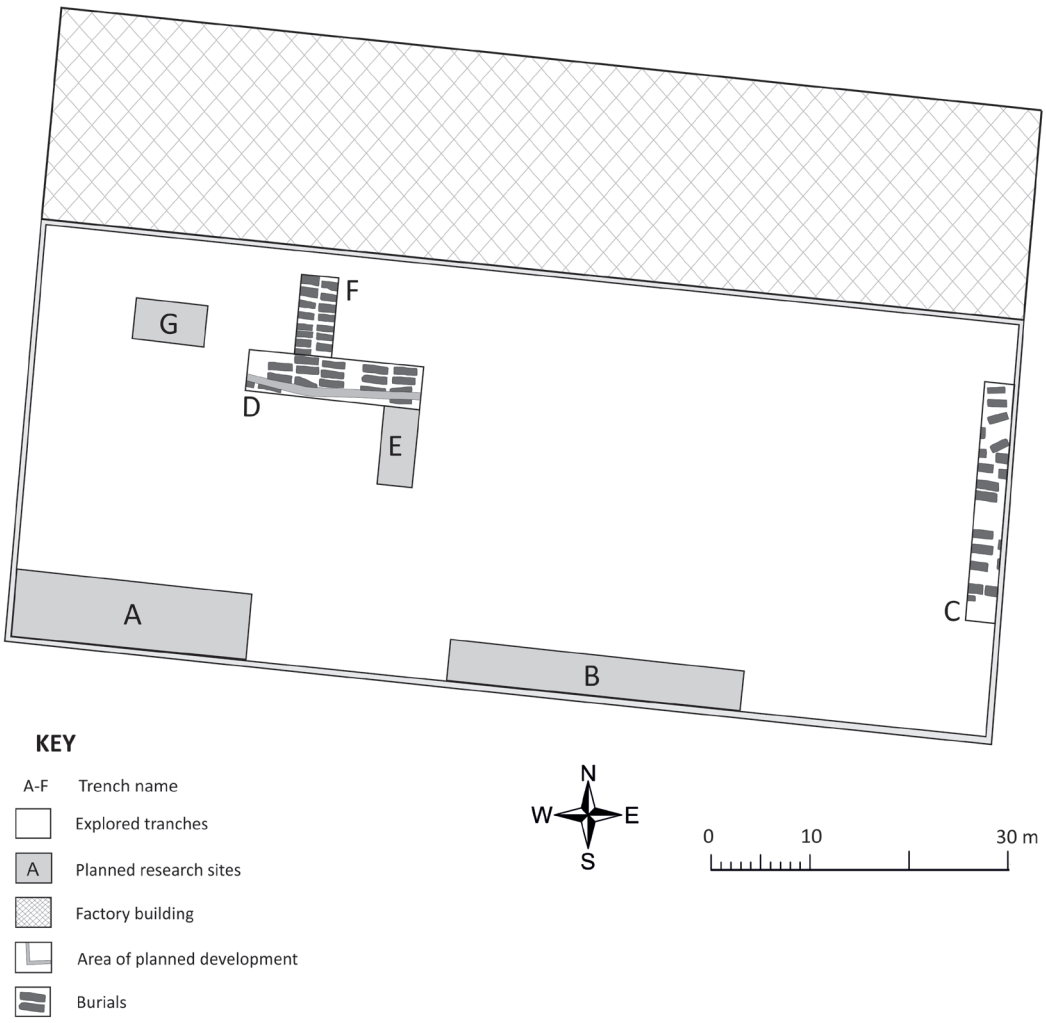


Fig. 8. Węgrów, location of archaeological trenches from the 2012 excavations in the area of planned building investment. Prepared by W. Bis and W. Małkowski.

location of the access road – from the north – was proposed by historians reconstructing the spatial layout of the modern city. According to Kazimirski, in 1620 the cemetery was square in shape, with a slight indentation in the northeastern corner, and the entrance was located in the north.[76] On the other hand, Słucki, on an undated plan of the former town buildings, marked only the location of the Jewish cemetery, without specifying its area.[77]

There are a few photographs of the tombstones from the local necropolis from the interwar period. They show *matzevo*t made probably of sandstone and decorated with religious symbols, typical for this context (Fig. 8). These photos show most probably the part of the cemetery intended for the more affluent population, as the cemetery chapel or *ohel* is visible in the background.[78] According to the plan of the town of Węgrów prepared by Ratajski in the interwar period, the Jewish cemetery occupied about 55,000 m^2 (i.e., 5.5 ha).

The cemetery in Węgrów functioned until the German occupation. It was destroyed in 1942. The Nazis executed members of the local Jewish population there.[79] After the war, the area of the cemetery was designated for industrial development, and numerous production plants were constructed here. Photographs documenting the condition of the cemetery at that time still show single tombstones, made of erratic boulders, with only one dressed surface. They probably belonged to the poorest families (see: Fig. 8:c). Currently, the former cemetery, reclaimed by the Jewish community, houses a lapidarium founded in 1982 on the initiative of the Social Committee for the Protection of Cemeteries. It consists of surviving *matzevot*, of which about 400 have been preserved, the oldest of which comes from 1789.

Archaeological excavations were conducted in Węgrów in 2012 and their results were published

[76] Kazimierski 1970.

[77] Słucki 1961, 8.

[78] *Ohel* (from Hebrew, 'tent') – a small building protecting the grave of a person of merit for the Jewish community. *Ohalim* were placed over the graves of *rabbanim* and *tzaddikim*. The photos are in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

[79] Okulus n.d., 5-6; Grabowski 2018, 447-448.

Fig. 9. Jewish cemetery in Węgrów: a – photo from 1939 by M. Szuwaks. Source: *Węgrów. Book of Memory*, 1961, 251; b – photo from around 1917. Source: Wiśniewski 2009, 44; c – photo from 1961 by J. Jagielski. Source: Archive of the Department of Documentation and Monuments, Jewish Historical Institute); d – photo from 2012, before archaeological research. Photo: W. Bis.

in a local journal.[80] Research work was undertaken to exclude or confirm the existence of a Jewish cemetery on plots intended for new industrial development. The original boundaries of the Jewish cemetery are no longer visible in the field (see Fig. 8:d). Based on earlier, non-invasive GPR surveys, it was found that there were objects identified as burial pits in the area intended for the investment. Three excavation trenches were open, a total area of 108 m^2, covering only a small section of the original size of the cemetery (Fig. 9).

50 burials, in various states of preservation, were uncovered: 19 within trench C, and 31 in trenches D and F (see Fig. 10 and 11). They were all oriented roughly east-west, with the heads pointing to the west. Several burial pits were oriented slightly differently. Three of them were exposed in trench C (nos. 1, 3, and 4), and one (object 34) in trenches D and F. All were visibly tilted and oriented southeast-northwest (Fig. 11:b). Two others (features 21 and 24 in trenches D and F) were oriented along a line close to northeast-southwest. In a few cases (skeletons from objects 1, 4, 12, 17, 21, 24, and 31) it was found with certainty that the dead were placed in the supine position. Their arms were placed along their torso (graves 12, 31). All burial pits had a clear outline and did not overlap. They had a relatively shallow depth of 75-100 cm. The original level of the cemetery was therefore much lower than the current ground level. Almost all burials (49 out of 50 exposed) were single interments. Only in object 17, apart from the lower part of an adult, a child's skull was discovered (see Fig. 11:c). The grave pits were arranged in clear rows, slightly disturbed in the southern part of trench C by the different orientation of graves 3 and 4 (Fig. 11:b and Fig. 10). A basic anthropological analysis of the exposed burials showed that there were the remains of at least six children (in trench C, objects 1, 2, 3, 12, 19 , and a skull in grave 17) and most probably a few women (skulls in pits 13 and 18; the lower part of the skeleton from object 17) and men (most of the bones discovered in excavations D and F – the skeleton from graves 31 and from graves 23, 24, 27, 30, 32, 33, 36, 39, and 42) buried there. Taking that into account, it can be assumed that at the Węgrów necropolis, the dead were most likely buried in quarters (rows?) depending on sex, or sex and age. Many graves have traces of wooden planks used either as guards or coffins (objects 2, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, and 36). The graves generally lack any grave goods, except for burial 31, where two cattle teeth were discovered to the left of the skull (Fig. 10).

It can be assumed that the area of the cemetery in Węgrów was originally several times larger than the present area reclaimed by the Jewish community. This has been confirmed by both historical city plans and written sources analyses. Most likely, the necropolis once extended up to today's Przemysłowa, Berek Joselewicz, and Bohaterów Warszawy streets.

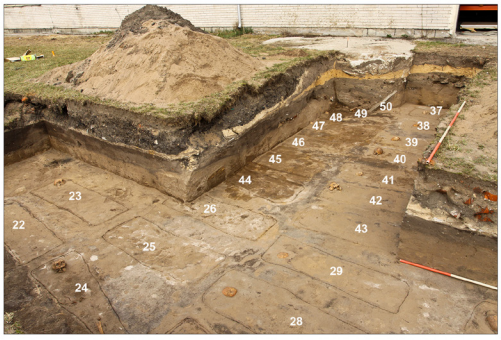
Due to the fact that in three trenches opened (out of seven planned) remnants of burial pits and

[80] Bis and Więckowski 2017.

a

b

Fig. 10. Jewish cemetery in Węgrów, archaeological excavations in 2012: a – trench D, burial pits, view from the east; b – trench D, burial arrangement in the central part of the trench, red arrow indicates location of bovine teeth. Photo: W. Bis.



a

b

c

Fig. 11. Jewish cemetery in Węgrów, arrangement of graves revealed in trenches D and F, view from the south. Photo: W. Bis.

human remains in anatomical arrangement were found, the Commission for Cemeteries of the Jewish Religious Community in Warsaw suspended the continuation of the work, ordered the burials to be secured and the excavations to be backfilled after the necessary documentation.

Summary – elements of Jewish burial rite from the archaeological point of view

Excavations and archaeological and anthropological analysis, although necessarily quite limited (as the guidelines of the Commission for Cemeteries explicitly prohibited interfering with burials, allowing only their exposure until it was clear they contained human remains), provided a lot of interesting information about the funeral customs of the Jewish population, especially in relation to the ritually induced rules presented at the beginning of this paper, collected from the most important Jewish texts regarding funerary customs. The arrangement of the bodies and the orientation of the dead relative to the cardinal directions found during archaeological research in the Bródno and Węgrów cemeteries are characteristic of the Jewish tradition, according to which the deceased at the time of resurrection is to rise with his face facing east.[81] The different orientation of some graves (nos. 1, 3, 4, 21, 24, 34) may be justified by the time of year when the burials were created – in winter the sun rises in the southeast, and in summer closer to the northeast. All the dead were placed in the graves in an extended, supine position, with the arms usually along the body. In the case of both cemeteries, separate quarters for men and women were observed (see Figs. 10 and 11). Such planning of cemeteries is not required for the Jewish community, but it was quite widespread among Orthodox groups living in Eastern Europe.[82]

According to the Jewish tradition, the recommended depth of a burial pit is 6–8 times the width of a hand, i.e., about 70–100 cm, while to cover the grave from the ceiling of the coffin or the wooden planks, 3 times the width of the hand, i.e. slightly more than 30–40 cm, is sufficient.[83] Therefore, the graves uncovered in both necropolises were of the required depth. There was, of course, considerable variation in this matter; however, there was no disturbance of the burial pits by any excavations apart from those of modern origin. Though Judaism did not require the use of a coffin to bury the deceased, the use of boards for boarding the burial pit or coffins is attested in many Jewish cemeteries, for example in Wyszogród, Maków Mazowiecki, and Krasiczyn.[84] It seems that the custom of using coffins for Jewish burials became mainstream in Poland only in the 19th century, perhaps as a result of pressure from the civil administration.[85]

According to tradition, the dead were not allowed to be equipped with any items other than funeral clothes, a shroud, and, in the case of men,

[81] Hajduk 1993; Fijałkowski 2003.
[82] Goldstein 2006.
[83] Bleich 2002, 222; Goldstein 2006; Menachemson 2007, 5. See also: *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 262:4.
[84] Hajduk 1993, 41-42; Fijałkowski 2003.
[85] Potocki 2002; Hońdo 2006.

a *tallit*. The discovery of two cattle teeth in burial 31 in the cemetery in Węgrów is therefore difficult to explain unequivocally. They were certainly deposited in the grave with the deceased; they were found near the head, on the left side of the face. The available literature mentions sporadic cases of equipping dead Jews with some objects, e.g., fragments of ceramic vessels in Wyszogród, Dobrzyń nad Wisłą, Krasiczyn, Lublin, and Połaniec; padlocks[86] or coins from Dobrzyń nad Wisłą, Lublin, Lutomiersk, Połaniec, and Śrem.[87] It is possible that the man buried with the cattle teeth was engaged in the ritual slaughter of animals.[88] There is also a piece of information from the Jewish cemetery in Sevilla, Spain, that while generally the interments were lacking any kind of grave goods, among those equipped with some were burials where below the layer with bones or remains of the coffin, a single ovicaprid incisor was found that was deposited there first. However, no association with sex or age at death of the individuals with the presence of the animal tooth was identified, and the reason for this practice remains obscure.[89]

Judaism provides clear recommendations that only one person should rest in one grave. Almost all the burials in the cemeteries in Bródno and Węgrów follow that rule. However, double burials are known from cemeteries in Krasiczyn and Maków Mazowiecki.[90] In the case of Węgrów, there was only one grave (no. 17), in which, apart from the remains of a woman, most likely, the remains of a small child were discovered (see: Fig. 11:c). That fact indicates that in the diaspora some rules were accommodated to the needs of the local communities.

It is clearly seen and proven by the archaeological excavations that Jewish communities in Poland did follow the rules of the funeral rite as interpreted by the orthodox point of view. However, there were also some variations on the interpretation of them (orientation of the body, some artifacts associated with the dead, number of individuals buried in a single pit), that were not that common, but could have been introduced by the diaspora. Nevertheless, in the case of both Bródno and Węgrów cemeteries, the excavations have shown rather conservatively followed rules, with minor exceptions still falling within the Jewish law.

In the end, we can state that one of the most fascinating elements of research on Jewish burials is the encounter with stereotypes about them that still function in society. One of the most widespread, at least in Poland, is the belief that Jews bury their dead sitting down. This belief was recorded as early as the 16th century,[91] and apparently still exists in the modern times.[92] It is shocking that after almost a thousand years of coexistence, such stereotypes still persist.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Sources

Metryka… – Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych. *Metryka Koronna. Księga wpisów*, 296, fol. 84v-85.

Bielski M. (Marcin Wolski herbu Prawdzic) 1564. *Kronika. tho iesth, Historya Swiata na sześc wiekow, a cżterzy Monarchie, rozdźielona z rozmaitych Historykow, tak w swiętym pismie Krześćijańskim Zydowskim, iako y Pogańskim, wybierana y na Polski ięzyk wypisana dosthatheczniey niż pierwey, s przydanim wiele rzeczy nowych: Od początku Swiata, aż do tego roku, ktory sie pisze 1564. s Figurami ochędożnymi y własnymi*. Digitized version available on-line: http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/

References

Baliński M., Lipiński T. 1886. *Starożytna Polska pod względem historycznym, jeograficznym i statystycznym opisana* 3. Warszawa.

Berger J. 1969. *Z dziejów Targówka*. "Rocznik Warszawski" 9, 61-85.

[86] Hajduk 1993, 43-44; Fijałkowski 2003, 364-365.

[87] Hajduk 1993, 46-47.

[88] Verbal information from M. Dudek-Lewin.

[89] Santana Falcon and Mantero Tocino 1995, 101.

[90] Fijałkowski 2003, 367.

[91] Marcin Bielski, in his work *Chronicle, this is the history of the world for six centuries and four monarchies written [...]*, writes, 'and they do not bury the dead in the Church, but in the field, and sitting in the grave they will lay the dead'.

[92] Such a belief is expressed, for example, on the website of the Archdiocese of Gniezno, by the author of a text on the funeral customs of Jews, published in 2011 [sic!] – Białkowska 2011.

Bergman E., Sienkiewicz O. (eds.) 2000. *Żydzi Warszawy. Materiały konferencji w Żydowskim Instytucie Historycznym w 100 rocznicę urodzin Emanuela Ringelbluma.* Warszawa.

Bielawski K. 2020. *Zagłada cmentarzy żydowskich*. Biblioteka „Więzi" 359. Warszawa.

Bis M. 2023. *The State of Archaeological Research on Jewish Cemeteries in Central Europe. New Approach*. "Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae" 36, 29-62.

Bis M., Skóra K. 2023. *Perspectives archéologiques sur les cimetières juifs d'Europe centrale.* In: P. Salmona, Ph. Blanchard, E. Sagasser (eds.), *Archéologie du judaïsme en Europe*. Paris, 309-326.

Bis W., Więckowski W. 2017. *Cmentarz żydowski w Węgrowie w świetle sondażowych badań archeologicznych*. "Rocznik Liwski" 11, 109-129.

Bleich J. D. 2002. *Judaism and Healing: Halakhic Perspectives*. Jersey City.

Borowska-Strugińska B. 2005. *Uwagi na temat niektórych elementów obrządku pogrzebowego ludności żydowskiej pochowanej na cmentarzysku w Brześciu Kujawskim*. In: W. Dzieduszycki, J. Wrzesiński (eds.), *Do, ut des – dar, pochówek, tradycja*. Funeralia Lednickie 7. Poznań, 233-237.

Borzymińska Z. 2014. *Szmul Zbytkower i jego Chewra Kadisza (Święte Bractwo)*. In: Z. Borzymińska (ed.), *Odkrywanie żydowskiej Pragi. Studia i materiały*. Warszawa.

Burchard P. 1990. *Pamiątki i zabytki kultury żydowskiej w Polsce*. Warszawa.

Fijałkowski P. 1988. *Obrządek pogrzebowy Żydów Polski w okresie nowożytnym w świetle badań archeologicznych*. Warszawa. Unpublished MA thesis deposited in the Archive of the Faculty of Archaeology UW.

Fijałkowski P. 1989. *Obrządek pogrzebowy Żydów Polskich w świetle badań archeologicznych. O potrzebie badań archeologicznych nad historią i kulturą Żydów w Polsce.* "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego" 1989(3)(151), 25-42.

Fijałkowski P. 2003. *Obrzędy pogrzebowe Żydów Polskich w XVI-XIX w. w świetle badań archeologicznych*. In: W. Dzieduszycki, J. Wrzesiński (eds.), *Kobieta – Śmierć – Mężczyzna*. Funeralia Lednickie 5. Poznań, 361-373.

Fijałkowski P. 2014. *Uchwytne archeologicznie elementy żydowskiego obrządku pogrzebowego na ziemiach polskich w XVI-XIX w. Konfrontacja ze źródłami historycznymi i etnograficznymi*. "Kwartalnik Historii Żydów" 2014(1), 60-98.

Fijałkowski P. 2016. *Warszawska społeczność żydowska w okresie stanisławowskim 1764-1795. Rozwój w dobie wielkich zmian.* Warszawa.

Fuks M. 2008. *Żydzi w Warszawie*. Warszawa.

Goldstein Z. 2006. *The Jewish Mourner's Companion: Guidance, Comfort, Liturgy*. North Miami, Florida.

Grabowski J. 2018. *Powiat węgrowski*. In: B. Engelking, J. Grabowski (eds.), *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* 1. Warszawa, 383-546.

Hajduk M. 1993. *Cmentarze żydowskie w badaniach archeologicznych. Podsumowanie dotychczasowego stanu badań*. Warszawa. Unpublished MA thesis deposited in Archiwum Wydziału Archeologii UW.

Hońdo L. 2006. *Nowy cmentarz żydowski w Krakowie*. Kraków.

Jagielski J. 1986. *Ratunek dla cmentarza*. "Spotkania z Zabytkami" 1986(5) (27), 46.

Kazimierski J. 1970. *Z dziejów Węgrowa w XV-XVII wieku.* "Rocznik Mazowiecki" 3, 267-282.

Kołodziejczyk A. 1991. *Między powstaniami*. In: A. Kołodziejczyk, T. Swat (eds.), *Węgrów. Dzieje miasta i okolic w latach 1441-1944*. Węgrów, 126-148.

Komski A., Kurasiński T., Skóra K. 2014. *Kłódki ze zniszczonego cmentarza sanockiego. Przyczynek do badań nad żydowską obrzędowością pogrzebową w przeszłości*. "Rocznik Sanocki" 11, 49-62.

Kurier… 1877. "Kurier Warszawski" 1877, W. Szymanowski (ed.), No 80, 3.

Kurier… 1882. "Kurier Warszawski" 1882, W. Szymanowski (ed.), No 291, 3.

Kurier… 1885. "Kurier Warszawski" 1885, W. Szymanowski (ed.), No 21b, 3-4.

Majewski J. S., Urzykowski T. 2010. *Spacerownik po warszawskich cmentarzach*. Warszawa.

Menachemson N. 2007. *A Practical Guide to Jewish Cemeteries*. Bergerfield, New Jersey.

Michałowska 1992. *Szmul Jakubowicz Zbytkower*. "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego" 1992(2-3) (162-163), 79-90.

Mórawski K. 2014. *Judaica warszawskie*. Warszawa.

Nowogórski P., Kowalska J. 2000. *Mauzoleum Bera Sonenberga na cmentarzu żydowskim w Warszawie (cz. 1)*. "Studia Judaica" 3(2), 277-288.

Nussbaum H. 1881. *Szkice historyczne z życia Żydów w Warszawie od pierwszych śladów ich pobytu w tem mieście do chwili obecnej.* Warszawa.

Okulus W. (n.d.). *Największa tragedia w dziejach Węgrowa*. In: *Relacje. Zeznania ocalałych*. Sygn. 301/6043. Typescript of the account kept in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

Paszkiewiczowie H. and P., Krajewska M. 1992. *Cmentarze żydowskie w Warszawie*. Warszawa.

Piotrowski M. 1987. *Próba interpretacji obrządku pogrzebowego ludności żydowskiej na podstawie badań archeologicznych w Wyszogrodzie*. "Rocznik Mazowiecki" 9, 213-240.

Potocki A. 2002. *Żydzi rymanowscy*. Krosno.

Przysuskier L. 1936. *Cmentarze żydowskie w Warszawie. Przewodnik ilustrowany.* Warszawa.

Ringelblum E. 1932. *Żydzi w Warszawie. Część pierwsza. Od czasów najdawniejszych do ostatniego wygnania w r. 1527*. Warszawa.

Santana Falcon I., Mantero Tocino A. 1995. *La muerte en la aljama Judía de Sevilla*. In: I. Santana Falcon (ed.), *De la muerte en sefarad. La excavación arqueológica en la nueva sede*. Sevilla, 81-108.

Schiper I. 1932. *Sztuka plastyczna u Żydów dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*. In: I. Schipfer, A. Tartakower, A. Hafftka (eds.), *Żydzi w Polsce odrodzonej: działalność społeczna, gospodarcza, oświatowa i kulturalna* 1. Warszawa, 308-336.

Schiper I. 1938. *Cmentarze żydowskie w Warszawie*. Warszawa.

Skóra K. 2023. *"Houses of Graves" of Central Europe: Archaeology on Jewish Burial Rituals.* "Fasciculi Archaeologiae Historicae" 36, 63-97.

Słucki N. 1961. *Dzieje osadnictwa żydowskiego w Węgrowie*. In: M. Tamir (ed.), *Węgrów. Księga Pamięci*. Tel Awiw.

Stawiarski B. 2010. *Cmentarze Żydów aszkenazyjskich w średniowieczu. Przykład Wrocławia*. In: K. Wachowski (ed.), *Średniowieczne i nowożytne nekropolie Wrocławia*, *cz. 1*. Wratislavia Antiqua 12. Wrocław, 261-290.

Swat T. 1991. *Węgrów za Radziwiłłów (1593-1664)*. In: A. Kołodziejczyk, T. Swat (eds.), *Węgrów. Dzieje miasta i okolic w latach 1441-1944*. Węgrów, 26-43.

Tarjag Micwot 2000 – *Tarjag Micwot. 613 przykazań judaizmu*. Kraków.

Wiśniewski T. 2009. *Nieistniejące mniejsze cmentarze żydowskie. Rekonstrukcja Atlantydy*. Warszawa.

Więcek M. 2016. *Lokalizacja hut szkła na (pod)warszawskim Targówku*. "Szkło i Ceramika" 3, 19-22.

Wójtowicz W. J. 1936. *Dzieje Pragi warszawskiej od czasów najdawniejszych do obecnych*. Warszawa.

Żor-Żor 1916. *Żydzi na Pradze (od r. 1776 do chwili obecnej)*. "Echo Pragi" 20, 165.

Cartographic sources

Mapa Taktyczna Polski, Wojskowy Instytut Geograficzny, pas 39, słup 34, skala 1:100 000, Warszawa 1937.

Mapa Taktyczna Polski, Wojskowy Instytut Geograficzny, pas 39, słup 32H, skala 1:25 000, Warszawa 1931. Reprodukcja bez zmian Zakłady Kartograficzne Sztabu Generalnego w 1951.

Web Sources

Białkowska M. 2011. *Śladami starszych braci: kirkuty* – "Przewodnik Katolicki" 2011(4). Available on-line: https://www.przewodnik-katolicki.pl/Archiwum/2011/Przewodnik-Katolicki-4-2011/Archidiecezja-Gnieznienska/Sladami-starszych-braci-kirkuty

Bava Batra. Talmud. Nezikim. Available on-line: https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Batra?tab=contents

The Bible – *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version 2001. Available on-line: https://www.academic-bible.com

Yoreh De'ah. Halakha. Shulchan Aruch – Available on-line: https://www.sefaria.org/Shulchan_Arukh,_Yoreh_De'ah?tab=contents