The City of Kamyanets-Podilskyy (Kamenets)

These pages are an introduction to the ancient Ukrainian city of Kamyanets-Podilskyy (Kamenets)*, and to the Jewish community that lived there. Kamenets was an ancient and important centre of Jewish life but its unique history is overwhelmed by the terrible fact that in the forests outside Kamenets was the location of the first recorded mass murder of Jewish people in the Second World War.

The earliest mention of the city was in an Armenian chronicle of the 11th century but recent archaeological research suggests that its history goes back many thousands of years. It was always of strategic and trading importance, being located approximately 10 miles away from the River Dniester, which separates Podolia and the Ukraine from Moldova, and being also close to the traditional border with Eastern Galicia.

The city’s ‘old town’ sits on a high plateau (part of the Carpathian mountains) within a loop formed by the River Smotrych. It had six suburbs, which were built on and below the cliffs that surrounded the plateau, and these were connected by three bridges.

Located there are centuries-old narrow, winding streets and ancient buildings, the Turkish fort (which was separated from the rest of the town by a deep ravine and controlled access to the old town), remnants of the city walls, several towers, and the fortified Russian and Polish gates.

The Jewish Shtetl of Kamenets
To the Jewish people, who at times constituted 50% of the population, the city was known as Kamenets, a bustling, large market place and regional trade centre, a cradle of Chassidic Judaism, and a regional centre for the development of Jewish culture and Jewish politics of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Although the Jewish community was substantially destroyed in the Shoah, there are remnants of the Jewish presence, including the restored façades of the Great Tailors Synagogue (Реміснича синагога/Remisnycha Synagogue) and the Honchar (Potter’s) Tower and many houses and shops in which Jewish families lived and worked. There is also a reported small Jewish community (said to be about 500 individuals) still within the city but recent efforts to make contact with them have been unsuccessful.

Jewish inhabitants were first noted in 1447 [1]. In 1598, after first granting Jews freedoms and rights, the Polish King Sigismund III prohibited Jews from settling in the town and suburbs and from engaging in trade there. Jewish residents were forced to live in outlying villages and their visits to their home-town were theoretically restricted to three days duration.

Over the centuries this uneasy relationship between the authorities and its Jewish community was maintained. Very often there was opposition to the Jewish community caused by some external commercial, political or religious issue; which prompted a prohibition or restriction on the Jewish community and, at its worst, pogroms.

Kamenets Place in the Jewish World

Research suggests that Kamenets was the centre of Jewish population from where Jews spread north through the Russian Empire [2]. A jumping off point for a form of Judaism introduced from the east, via the Turkish Ottoman empire. The Jewish community of Kamenets was influenced by this in religious practice and this was most obvious in the Sephardic liturgy used by most ‘Kamenetsers’ in their daily prayers [3]. This in turn is thought to have been an influence on the development of the Chassidic liturgy (the foundations of which can be attributed to the Jewish community of Podolia (being the birth place of the Baal Shem Tov) [4].

So, for the Jews of Kamenets, where east met west, distinctions between Sephardi, Ashkenazi and Mizrachi Jews had little relevance; unless, of course, you attended the small Ashkenazi synagogue. Jewish life was about family and community affiliation - the family being your extended family network and the community affiliation could be the area of Kamenets that you lived in - the Old Karavansary, the town or one of the suburbs - the synagogue you were a member of, the rabbi you followed, your trade or profession or, in later years, your political party.
To quote from a translation of Gedalia Bernstein’s introduction to the Sefer Va’ad Hakhamim (published in Warsaw in 1900).

Kamenets, a splendid community, mother city of Jewish people who are G-d fearing and esteem His name, pursue righteousness and perform acts of loving kindness; they are noble leaders and rulers dispensing food to the poor, walking in the path of righteousness and pursuing G-d’s justness. [5]

Kamenets circa 1910

* The city is know by a number of names - as can be seen in the facts section of this page. Throughout this site the name given is the Jewish names for the city; that is either Kamenets or Kamenets-Podolsk.

[4] An alternative explanation is that the Kabbalistic tradition of Isaac Luria was more easily integrated into the Chasidic
practice through the adoption of Sephardi liturgy.

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The Growth of Jewish Education and Cultural Life

In 1851, with the support of local maskilim (those committed to the Jewish Enlightenment or Haskalah), two Jewish schools were established, where, among others, Avraham Gottlober and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher-Sforim) served as teachers. In the 1860s a private women's school (the Blovstein Girls School) and Talmud Torah were opened. The local non-Jewish men's high school had 25 Jewish pupils in 1871 (6% of the total student body), while the women's had 60 Jewish pupils in 1899 (15%). Jewish youth also studied in other public schools within the limits of a restriction on numbers of Jews allowed admission. The Kamenets Jewish community also maintained a hospital with an almshouse and a soup kitchen (see shelter for the poor) [1].

The Jewish community grew as Kamenets grew in its importance as a regional centre. The 1897 census of the Podolian Governate showed that the Jewish adult population numbered 16,211 (40% of the total for the city). By 1910 it had grown to 22,279 Jews (approximately 47% of the population). Four private schools and 'modernized' hadarim (Jewish elementary schools) were operating, and later also two Hebrew schools and a library.

In the mid-1880s, a Hoveve Zion movement was formed, and by the end of the nineteenth century Kamenets had become the centre of the Zionist movement in the region, hosting the first regional conference in 1902. The head of the movement in Kamenets was David Schleifer, a local lawyer, his influence across the whole Jewish community of Kamenets was considerable and as well as being the main spokesman for the Zionist movement he was spokesman on behalf of the broader Jewish community during this period.

The New Politics

In 1905 Czar Nicholas II issued a manifesto proclaiming a new constitution. Soon after this, riots and pogroms erupted which were organised by the secret anti Jewish nationalist movement of the Black Hundreds. In Kamenets there was a mobilization of rioters among peasants from outlying villages. Although the riot in Kamenets resulted in broken window panes and general disruption there were no casualties [2].

At this time, the Jewish socialist parties, which had been operating...
At this time, the Jewish socialist parties, which had been operating secretly, came out into the open and started spreading written and oral propaganda in the city. The 'party propagandists cornered workers' on their way home from work and also held political meetings to propagate their ideals - active parties included the Social Democrats, Socialist Revolutionaries, Anarchists and the Poale Zion. Each of the parties had its own meeting place in one of the four streets of the city’s central square [2].

In the last years of the First World War, the struggle between the various Jewish political and intellectual factions (Jewish Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Social Democrats and Zionists) grew and papers, pamphlets, recruitment to groups and the publication of opposing local Jewish newspapers became very much part of daily life in Kamenets.

However, some of the age old antagonisms continued and authorities in Kamenets succeeded in quashing pogroms in 1914, but during the Civil War (1919–1920), approximately 100 Jews were killed in pogroms in the area.

The Kamenets Jewish Community and Symon Petlyura’s Directorate

During the First World War the city was occupied by Austria-Hungary. In 1917, with the collapse of Imperial Russia, the city was briefly incorporated into several short-lived Ukrainian states: the Ukrainian People’s Republic, the Hetmanate, and the Directorate (Directoriya) government. After 1918, during the civil war, the Jews in Kamenets-Podolski suffered severely and in July 1919, 200 Jews were killed in pogroms carried out by uncontrolled elements within Symon Petlyura’s army. From June to November 1919, Kamenets served as the capital of the Ukrainian People’s Republic after the Russian Communist forces occupied Kiev.

On 17 July a formal Jewish delegation from the town were received by the commander-in-chief Petlyura. The delegation included Dr. Meyer Kleiderman, the representative of the Kamenets Jewish community; a representative of the Zionist organization; a representative of the rabbis of the town; a representative of artisans; and a representative of the Poale Zion Party.

After expressing support for the ruling directorate, they called on president Petlyura, to take firm measures against pogroms. He in turn addressed the delegation with a short speech in which he declared that he himself as well as the government were always standing on the side of the Jewish people, and were waging war against those elements who incited the unenlightened masses to various excesses against Jews. The Commander-in-Chief invited the representatives of the Jewish people to a closer cooperation of both peoples for the good of the Ukrainian State, for, only with united forces would it be possible to look after the interests of both peoples, which had always been identical.

Communist Suppression of Jewish Life
“...It was impossible to crowd into the synagogue. The courtyard was full and many people stood in the neighbouring streets with the hope that they could hear the service.”

By the end of 1920, the Soviet government had taken over Kamenets but Jewish life in the city continued. From 1923, with support from the Jewish Public Committee to Aid Victims of the War and Pogroms and other charitable organisations, three Jewish schools were established and according to Ben-Zion Fendler “…All synagogues were open until 1936, many of them bustling with multitudes of worshippers [3].

However, the Jewish population was decreasing as families and individuals either went to other parts of the country. By 1926 only 12,774 Jews remained (in the 1920s it is known that 76 families left to settle in Crimea, and 80 to settle in Birobidzhan) [1].

Ben-Zion Fendler further wrote that the Kamenets Yevekteiya (the Jewish anti-religious organisation within the Bolshevik Party) tolerated the Jewish community’s activities and did not persecute or terrorise the religious Jews - as was the case elsewhere. Apparently the head of the Yevekteiya for the city , although an ardent communist, showed benevolence toward the religious community. However, in 1936 there was a clamp-down and all the synagogues with the exception of the Gedalia Heller synagogue were closed and all religious items (apart from 30 Torah scrolls which were hidden by synagogue officials) were confiscated and are today part of the Collection of Judaica in the Museum of Historical Treasures of the Ukraine in Kiev.

From this time on religious Jews went to the Gedalia “…It was impossible to crowd into the synagogue. The courtyard was full and many people stood in the neighbouring streets with the hope that they could hear the service” [3]. Additionally, all Jewish schools were closed, as was the House of Jewish Culture, with its drama studio.

Post World War 2

A small number of Jews who returned to Kamenets after the war tried to organize a community in 1946–1947. However, the authorities turned down their application to restore the Tailor's Synagogue, they y were also banned from gathering for prayers in private premises, and they were refused legalisation of a community organization. The Jews did manage to erect monuments at the mass murder sites. In 1959 there were 2,400 Jews in the town (6% of the total population), a number that dwindled to 1,800 by 1979.

In 1992, the Shalom Jewish Cultural Club was organized with more than 1,000 members. A Sunday school began operating in 1994 with about 30 pupils. From 1995 to 1999, a monthly regional Jewish newspaper, Shalom Aleikhem, appeared. The Jewish Agency opened an office in the town and in 1999 the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee organized a local branch, which performed social services for about 500 Jews and their families and became the central Jewish cultural and educational institution of Kamenets [1].


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The Ancient Community of Ukrainian Jews

Jews first settled in the Ukraine in the 4th century BC; in the Crimea and among the Greek colonies on the north east coast of the Black Sea. From there they migrated to the valleys of the three major rivers—the Volga River, Don River, and Dnieper River—where it is known that they maintained active economic and diplomatic relations with Persia, Byzantium and the Khazar kaganate. [1].

Throughout the 11th and 12th centuries Jews steadily migrated northwards. In the Ukraine the Jewish population developed a distinct presence. In Kiev they established their own quarter—called Zhydove— the entrance to which was called the Zhdivski vorota (Jewish gate). Jews fleeing the Crusaders came to the Ukraine as well, and the first western-European Jews began to arrive from Germany, probably in the 11th century [2].

The Kievan princes Iziaslav Mstyslavych and Sviatopolk II Iziaslavych, Prince Danylo Romanovych of Galicia-Volhynia, and the Volhynian prince Volodymyr Vasylkovych were well disposed to their Jewish subjects and assisted their activities in trade and finance. Jews were also appointed to administrative and financial posts. However, as in other parts of Europe, this benevolent treatment was not consistent.

During the Kiev Uprising in 1113 the Zhydove district was ransacked, and during the rule of Volodymyr Monomakh, Jews were expelled from the city. The Mongol conquest of the Crimea and of the Kievan Rus strengthened commercial relations, and brought peace and prosperity to the Jewish community up to the time of the Tatar-Lithuanian War (1396-99) [3].

It is now difficult to unpick the distinct nature of the early Jewish community in the Ukraine. However, it was, at least partly, a Judeo-Slavic culture and had its own distinct language (Khnannic also called Cangaanic, Leshon, Knaan or Judeo-Slavic) and, by inference, many of its secular customs, practices and mythology were closely linked to its Slavic homeland. Even up to recent times there continued to be differences; with the Jewish community of Podolia and Bessarabia speaking a sub dialect of south eastern or Ukrainian Yiddish termed ‘Podolyer Yiddish’ and with a liturgy that owed more to a Sephardi than to an Ashkenazi tradition.

The Early Jewish Community of Kamenets

Early History
Kamenets was first mentioned, as a town of the Kievan Rus state, in an Armenian chronicle of 1062 as a town of the Kievan Rus state. In 1241, it was destroyed by the Mongol Tatar invaders. Being an important defensive and commercial site it was gradually rebuilt and in 1352, it was annexed by the Polish King Casimir the Great. Almost immediately it was granted city status with the town and civic rights of the Magdeburg laws, which were beneficial to all resident minorities.

Jewish people resident in Kamenets would have been granted equalities and freedoms. The first mention of Jews in Kamenets was in the year 1447 when it was recorded that the Mayor of the town prohibited Jews from staying there for more than three days[7]. This use of the application of the banning of Jewish people (De non tolerandis Judaeis) a local historian [8] has concluded that "...the issuing of such a declaration is proof that, despite the ban, Jews not only lived in the city, but even had their own homes and other real estate" within the city walls [8].

Legends also existed about ancient settlements of Jews in the area. For example, a large mound in the town of Felshtin, near Proskurov, was believed to be a mass grave for Jews who died in the Black Death plague of the 1200s. Local peasants believed in the power of the mound and refused to touch it.

In 1463, Kamenets became the capital of Podilia voivodeship (region) and the seat of local civil and military administration. The union of Poland (1569) with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in 1569 again brought the town effectively under the control of Poland. In 1589, city councillors formally accepted the application of citizenship for the city's Jews and this agreement was confirmed by the Polish King Zygmunt III [8]. However, in 1598, the same king prohibited Jews from settling in the city and suburbs and from engaging in trade there; their visits were again restricted to three days. Whether this applied to resident Jews or to those intending to settle there in the future is unclear. However, from that period there seems to have been a significant Jewish presence in the city and its surrounding districts which continued until the Shoah.

Khmelnytsky Uprising and Turkish Rule

During the Khmelnytsky (Chmielnicki) Uprising, many Jews sought refuge in the fortified city which withstood attacks by the Cossacks in 1648, 1651 and 1655. Subsequently King John II Casimir of Poland permitted Jews to reside there, and they apparently continued to live in Kamenets despite repeated prohibitions in 1654, 1665, and 1670.

In 1672 the city was captured by Cossack Hetman Petro Doroshenko and his Turkish allies. As a result of the treaty of Buczacz of 1672 until 1699, the town was controlled by the Ottoman Turks. During the Ottoman rule Jewish settlement was permitted and grew to a considerable size.

In 1699, the city was given back to Poland under King Augustus II the Strong according to the Treaty of Karlowitz.

The Jewish Community and Fight Against Ghettoisation

After the city's return to Poland in 1699, the some citizens resumed their opposition to Jewish settlement. However, the Jewish community continued to be present within the city and probably in recognition of the
However, the Jewish community continued to be present within the city and probably in recognition of the importance of the community, the Council of Four Lands met in Kamenets in 1725 [7].

In 1737 the city council submitted a request to the state and church authorities to banish the Jews from the city, maintaining that they had no right to settle there, and were competing with the Christian inhabitants and impoverishing them. King Augustus III expelled the Jews from Kamenets in 1750. Their houses passed to the town council and the synagogue was demolished.

The expelled Jews settled in the suburbs (such as the Karavansary district below the fortress which was then an independent township). They also settled in nearby villages, which were under jurisdiction of Polish noblemen, and developed extensive trading activity there which led to additional opposition on the part of the Kamenets complainants.

In 1757 a public disputation was held by the in the old town – convened by the local bishop – between the representatives of Podolian Jewry and Jacob Frank and his supporters. After it took place copies of the Talmud was publicly burned in the city on the bishop's orders.

**Rights of Kamenets Jews Confirmed**

After Kamenets passed to Russia, Czar Paul I confirmed in 1797 the right of Jews to reside there. At that time 24 Jews belonging to merchant guilds and 1,367 Jewish inhabitants were registered in the tax-assessment books of the city. Two years later, in 1799, 29 merchants and 2,617 Jewish inhabitants were registered.

In 1832 the Catholic authorities in Kamenets petitioned the government to expel the Jews from the city, basing the application on ‘ancient privileges’. The petition was rejected but in 1833 the government restricted the right of the Jews to build shops and build or acquire new houses in order to prevent them from residing in the city centre itself [1]. The restriction was rescinded in 1859.

By 1847 the Jewish community numbered 4,629 and they were active in small industry, trade, and artisanship.

By 1870 the Jewish community numbered 5,136 and they were active in small industry, trade, and artisanship.

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[2] Jewish Documents in the Kamenets Podol'sk Archive by SA Borisevich and ZM Klimishina
[4] An alternative explanation is that the Kabbalistic tradition of Isaac Luria was more easily integrated into the Chasidic practice through the adoption of Sephardi liturgy.

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The Nazi Invasion of Kamianets

The Germans entered the town on July 11, 1941 and immediately placed formal restrictions on the Jews of the area. A ghetto was established on July 20 and local Kamianets-Podilskyi Jews, 11,000 Hungarian Jews plus others from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Holland were by then resident in the area, having been deported from their home countries.

Initially, the large number of Hungarian Jewish people were spread out among the Jews of Kamianets-Podilskyi and the nearby towns. As the few survivors relate, the Hungarian Jews were received with open arms and the local Jews shared their meagre rations and their living-quarters with them. The public buildings including the synagogues and schools were made available to the deportees by the local Jews [1]. A ghetto was erected in the summer of 1941 and when it was established, tens of thousands of Jews from the city and the entire area (including the Hungarian Jews) were concentrated there.

A Hungarian military unit travelling through Kamianets Podilskyi on 18-19 August 1941 recorded the terrible situation of the deportees:

"There are several Jews here, especially women, they are in rags, but they ask for bread wearing jewellery and with lips painted red. They would give any money for it. Some count their steps with the desperation shown on their faces, others are crawling on the road collapsed from exhaustion and hunger. Some others bandage the wounds on their feet with rags torn from their clothes ... The Jewish quarter of the city is full of Jews, there are many from Budapest among them: they live in unspeakable and indescribable dirt, they come and go in scanty attire, the streets stink, unburied dead bodies are lying in some houses. The water of the Dneister is infected, here and there corpses are washed out to the bank."[2]

The First Nazi Mass Murder

The overwhelming majority of the Jews of the ghetto were murdered at the end of August, 1941. This was done slyly. They were told that it was decided to remove the Jews from Kamianets Podilskyi and that they have to be taken elsewhere. Surrounded by Hungarian soldiers from the pioneer unit, German S.S. men, and Ukrainian conscripts, they were led 15 kilometres on foot over an area strewn with bomb-craters. They were commanded to undress and group by
group were placed into the cross-fire of machine-guns. Many were buried alive.

The first and biggest mass-murder of the Shoah (Holocaust) was carried out on 27-28 August, 1941 (4-5 Elul 5701), in a forest clearing near Kamenets. In those two days, 23,600 men, women and children were murdered. Eye-witnesses reported that the perpetrators made no effort to hide their actions from the local population.

The massacre was begun on 27 August by the SS mobile extermination units of Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln, Higher SS and Police Leader (Höhere SS - und Polizeiführer) of the region.

According to official Soviet Russian data, the Nazis murdered a total of more than 40,000 Jews at Kamenets Podolsk.

From an article by Benyamin Lukin

During the operation, a Hungarian military convoy rode through the city. Most of the drivers were Jewish. One of them, Gábor Mermelstein, heard gunshots. When he was informed about the massacre from weeping local women, he drove further towards the forest near the city:

"We saw hundreds of people undressing there ... we were passing a row of maple trees-practically over the mess of naked corpses ... suddenly we glanced at a square-shaped ditch, at all four sides of which people were standing. Hundreds of innocent people were machine-gunned down. I'll never forget what I saw and felt: the scared faces, the men, women and children marching into their own graves without resistance. I felt fear, outrage and pain simultaneously."

The Jewish drivers watched the massacre crying. A German officer tried to calm them down as follows: "Don't worry, there are enough Jews left in the world."

Jeckeln's soldiers murdered 23,600 men, women and children, of which 10,000-15,000 Jews had been deported from Hungary.
The Final Murders

After the procedural murder of the majority of the Jewish people living in Kamenets, the remaining Jews with specified skills, from the town and from neighbouring settlements, were concentrated in a labour camp within the ghetto. In January 1942, a further 4,000 people were murdered and sometime later 500 children (aged 4–8) were murdered; in January 1943 another group of 2,500 people were executed and the final group of 2,000 Jewish people were killed in February 1943.

“The most tragic page in the history of the Kamenets Jews came with World War II. The Kamenetskoy Commission, [established after 1945] to investigate crimes of the Nazi invaders, discovered seven mass graves for the Jews [in the area], including a grave with the bodies of 500 children” [4].

Resources and References

The Holocaust by Bullets - Shoah Memorial
Memorial de la Shoah
The Holocaust of Jewish Marmaros Translated by Moshe A. Davis
The German Gendarmerie, the Ukrainian Schutzmannschaft and the ‘Second Wave’ of Jewish Killings in Occupied Ukraine: German Police at the Local Level in the Zhitomir Region, 1941-1944. Martin C Dean (Metropolitan Police War Crimes Unit, Scotland Yard). In German History Volume 14 Issue 2. Published by Oxford Journals (Oxford University Press).


Early Jewish Practice

It is difficult to know exactly what was the exact religious practices (procedural, liturgical etc.) of the Jewish community of Kamenets prior to the 18th century. As mentioned on the Home page, Jewish inhabitants were first noted in 1447 and in 1598, after first granting Jews freedoms and rights, the Polish King Sigismund III prohibited Jews from settling in the town and suburbs and from engaging in trade there. Whether those practices were most likely of the Sephardic tradition, modified by time and location. By the start of the Cossack Uprising, the Jewish community of Kamenets was clearly strong and well established as it was seen as a refuge for the more isolated Jewish communities which came under threat of extermination from the Cossacks.

It is suggested that as a result of the terror, atrocities and the fear of imminent death during the period of the Cossack uprising, a fertile ground was provided for the development of superstitions and belief in miracles which encouraged the belief in Shabbetai Zevi (the false messiah) to take hold. From the late 1600’s, this powerful messianic movement embedded itself in Podolia and a significant Sabbatean movement continued to exist into the 1700’s [1].

Shabbetai Zevi (the False Messiah) and Jacob Frank

The Sabbatean movement was exploited by Jacob Frank (1726-1791), who was born in Podolia as Yacov ben Jehuda Leib. He founded the movement that became known as the Frankists; a heretical Jewish sect that was an anti-Talmudic outgrowth of the mysticism of the false Messiah Sabbatai Zevi. In the early 1750s, Frank became close to the leaders of the Sabbateans. Two followers of Osman Baba (the leading Sabbatean of the period) were witnesses at Frank’s wedding in 1752. After traveling in Turkey, where he changed his name to Frank, and where he joined the Sabbatean sect, he returned to Podolia (c.1755). Posing as a messiah, he gathered a following, by whom he was addressed as "holy master."

Frank began to preach the "revelations" which were communicated to him by the Muslim Zevists in Turkey. However, he was forced to leave Podolia, while his followers were denounced to the local authorities by the rabbis (1756). A congress of rabbis in Brody proclaimed a universal Cherem (excommunication) against all "impenitent heretics", and made it obligatory upon every pious Jew to seek them out and expose them.

Mid 19th century Torah Crown from Kamenets - now in the Museum of Historical Treasures
The Sabbateans informed Bishop Dembowski, the Catholic Bishop of Kamenetz-Podolsk, that they rejected the Talmud and recognized only the sacred book of Kabbalah, the Zohar, which did not contradict the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. They stated that they regarded the Messiah-Deliverer as one of the embodiments of the Holy Trinity.

Bishop Dembowski took the "Anti-Talmudists," or "Zoharists," under his protection and in 1757 arranged a religious debate in Kamenets between them and the rabbis (there is no mention of the Kamenets rabbi who may have taken part). The bishop decided that the Talmudists had lost the argument, and ordered them to pay a fine to their opponents and ordered his functionaries to burn all 1000 copies of the Talmud, which had been previously gathered, in the the town hall square.

**Chassidic Movement and the Misnaggedim**

At around the same time as the Frankist debate, the Chassidic movement was developing. This movement, founded by Israel Baal Shem Tov “originated almost within the gates of [Kamenets] city” [3] and had many followers in Kamenets.

In fact the burning of the Talmud in Kamenets became an allegorical story, incorporated by the emergent Chassidic movement into their own traditions of the triumph of Rabbi Israel the Baal Shem Tov over Satan:

“Then the Enemy (Satan), tormented as he saw Rabbi Israel doing good on earth, schemed to overcome the Master.....then Satan went to G-d and said 'Take away the Torah from your Jews'.....The Bishop of Kamenitz-Podolsky was the most zealous to follow the commands of the Archbishop [who had required his bishops to burn the Talmuds]...The Bishop of Kamenitz-Podolsk took a tractate of the Talmud and hurled it into the flames...” [2]

The majority of the population however remained traditionally observant Jews (Misnaggedim) who followed their own rebbes. The liturgy was according to the Sephardic formulation “...because of the influence of the Spanish Jews” who had migrated to the area [3] pp13

**Jewish Life in Kamenets in the late 19th/early 20th century**

The substantial Jewish community of Kamenets had a full and rich cultural and religious life. There were numerous avenues down which an observant (or non observant) Jew could go which enabled the community as a whole to retain a vibrancy and unique pattern and way of life up until the absolute restriction of that way of life by the Communist dictatorship of the 1920’s.

By the early 19th century it is known that the rabbinical seat was occupied by Rabbi Yitzhak Meizlisch and by the mid 1800's a series of rabbis - including Rabbi Zalman Lerner and Pinkhas of Koretz, Rabbi Dov Berish Eliash are recorded. The seat of the rabbinate was held for a long time by the author of Da’at Kedoshim - a Chassidic rabbi Rabbi Abraham David Wahrmann.

By implication however, the large range of Jewish houses of worship suggests a very vibrant religious environment. In 1882, according to statistical data compiled by NA Ostroverhova quoted in his book ‘Kamenets: history and economy of the city’, there were two synagogues and 21 prayer halls in the old town. By 1884 , the number of prayer halls had increased to 24 and at the beginning of 20th century there were 31 prayer hall recorded. This did not include those in the Kamenets districts of Karvansary, Podzamche, and
According to Y Bernstein [3], the largest centre of houses of study and small synagogues (prayer halls) was located in Dulgaya Street (in Yiddish, the ‘Yotkegas’) and the street of the butchers (near the Shulgas). There was the Sadgura kloyz, the kloyz of Gedallah Heller (Zinkover kloyz), the kloyz of Reb Yitzhak the blacksmith, the kloyz of Reb Moshe Yoine Rubinstein (Boyancer kloyz), the Stambulski Synagogue, the Bet Midrash of Reb Naftali Rabinovitch, the Axelrod synagogue, the Pallbearers synagogue, the Askenazi synagogue (the only one to use the Askenazi liturgy), and the Blacksmith’s synagogue. On the other side of the street were the, Hasyatim Chassidim, the Chortkov Chassidim, the Vaislovitch Synagogue and the Marmelstein Synagogue plus the Rabinovits and Sheindlis synagogues in other parts of the old town.

However, in the years before the First World War the traditional observances were starting to erode. There was a noted decrease in the number of one room religious schools and the number of young people attending a kloyz decreased. Many of the more wealthy Jewish parents sent their sons and daughters to the public schools. This was the beginnings of a movement toward secularism, with the development of scouting groups, Zionist clubs and youth groups and secular political activity.

This gradual change continued from 1900 until the chaos of the First World War - see History post 1850. In 1921 the city was ceded to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) under the Treaty of Riga, as part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. From then all public religious life was restricted and came to an abrupt halt in 1926. The authorities conducted a policy of enforced atheism and this meant that in Kamenets prayer houses and synagogues were closed and religious artefact (synagogue decorations, Torah dressings etc. were confiscated). This by the advent of the Second World War, according recent research conducted by the Kamenets Authorities, the religious buildings had already remained unoccupied and inaccessible for several years prior to their destruction. Their destruction probably occurred during the fighting to recapture the city from the Nazis in March 1944 [1].


Reference
The Jewish Encyclopaedia - Jacob Frank

The blessing of the foundation stone of the new Yeshiva of Kamenets (Tiferet Yisra’el) circa 1909 - courtesy of the YIVO Institute
Kamenets' Jerusalem "Кам'янецький Ієрусалим"

Little remains of the once large and bustling Jewish centre of religious life in Kamenets (locally called by non Jews Kamenets' Jerusalem). At one time Synagogue Street in Kamenets was the heart of a substantial religious and communal centre; with its synagogues, Batei Midrash and community space; catering both for the religious and physical needs of Jewish people within the city and those, with their own local satellite prayer halls, in the suburbs and townships adjacent to the old city.

The first mention of a synagogue in the old town of Kamenets suggests it was built in the late 1600's during the Turkish occupation. It is likely that this was on or near the site of the Old Great Synagogue - see 'Smotrych Beth Midrash' below [1]. Today there are very few remains of the synagogue complex other than the Tailors Synagogue exterior and boundary roads.

**Gros Snayders Shul (Great Tailors' Synagogue)**

The Great Tailors' Synagogue (Реміснича [Remisnycha] синагога), located on Purlasky Street, was built in the second half of the 19th century and was first mentioned in the Kamenets town plan of 1872. The synagogue is described as having been built in an eclectic style, which was popular at the time, with a combination of Renaissance and Baroque elements. It was described as ‘the most beautiful synagogue of the city’ [2].

**The Gros Alter Shul (Great Old Synagogue)**

This synagogue, which could accommodate for 300 worshippers, was built in the baroque style and appears on the ‘Kamenets-Podolsk’ city plan of 1808, having been constructed of stone in the second half of the 18th century. In 1886 this synagogue was enlarged. Research suggest that it is likely that simultaneously with the construction of Great Synagogue a mikva was built in the river valley below. The architecture of both buildings took a similar form.

**Smotrych Beth Midrash**

On the west side near the Great Old Synagogue was the Smotrych Beth Midrash (study hall) and shelter. It was a stone building with an additional wooden mezzanine floor. It is suggested that from the from the ancient construction and, by the late 19th century, the dilapidation of the building it is assumed that this was the oldest synagogue, built in the city after 1672.

**Synagogue of the Covenant and Zinkovskaya Synagogue**

North of the Alter Shul was the two-storey stone building Sandehurskoyi Synagogue built in the mid 19th century for 500 worshippers with adjacent school buildings. It was known as the Synagogue of the Covenant (Сандейюнка Holohorskoho). Nearby and to the south of the Great Old Synagogue was the Shoemakers' Synagogue. A characteristic feature of the construction was a door opening onto a footpath (known as the Jewish Path) within the city fortifications, which led to a house on the river bank where the Beth Midrash of the Kovva itim le-Torah (that is regular study of the Torah) was located.

The Shulgas Area "Кам'янецький Ієрусалим"

INSERT MAP OR DIAGRAM
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1 - Honchar (Potter’s) Tower.
2 - Tailors’ or Artisans (Remisnycha) Synagogue
3 - Alter Shul
4 - Smotrych Bet Midrash
5 - Shelter for the Poor

Honchar Tower, and site of Shulgas
(Synagogue Street)

French Map of 1691

**Kalvarija**, presently a small city in the District of Marionpole, Lithuania, was built in the 17th century on the site of the small village Trabi on both sides of the river Sheshupe. By 1678 King August II recognized it as a city and gave it city rights. From the years 1795-1807 the city was part of Prussia. In 1815 it was conquered by the Russians and was included in the Gubernia of Suwalk.

Kalvarija's fast development was mainly due to the fact that it was along side of the road to St. Petersburg and Warsaw. By 1827 there were 501 buildings, in 1867 it became central city of the district which included a courthouse, post office, telegraph agent, a hospital of 25 beds and 3 doctors. There was also army doctors in the 2 army units in the barracks there. Kalvarija had a large jail, several factories for the production of medicinal alcohol, and a large market. Russian control continued to 1915. During WW2 the Germans overthrew the city and surrounding areas. Half of the city was burnt around 900 buildings. In 1919, with the evacuation of the Germans, Kalvarija became part of the District of Marionpole in independent Lithuania. In 1921 Kalvarija was connected to the Lithuanian railroad. In 1926 a hospital, 500 beds, for the mentally ill was moved into what where once the army barracks. It was one of largest of Lithuanian medical institutions. During WW2 many buildings were destroyed.

**Jewish Settlement up WWI**

There is a good possibility that there was a Jewish presence in the village of Trabi that was in the weaving trade. As early as 1713 the Jews received permission from King August II to build a synagogue under the condition that it would not be higher than the church. Jewish craftsmen also received permission to work without becoming members of the guilds. Jews were mainly engaged in trade, crafts, and agriculture and in a small part industry. Jews owned more then 80% of the stores (60 of 72). Grain trade was also in the hands of Jewish merchants exporting mainly to Germany. There was also a pig's bristles processing factory for brushes where many Jews were employed. The workers of this factory organized, under the influence of the "Bund" during the years 1893-1897. They organized strikes in order to improve their working conditions to just 10 hours a day, and to improve their salary which was at a starvation level.

The achievements of the German Jewish community in the areas of Science and culture made a big impression on the Jewish community of Kalvarija and several of the sons of the rich began to study, along with their religious studies, Russian and German. They "Germanized" their Yiddish, which was known as "Kalvaricha Deuth", which was well known in Lithuania. The German example (culture) on one hand, and the poverty on the other hand where led to the emigration of many. Hundreds of the young and young families left the city in the 80's of the 19th century, mainly to the U S, South Africa and Eretz Israel. In Kalvarija there were several "specialists " who made their living by smuggling emigrants through Germany, as this was cheaper and less complicated.

Most of the Jewish children studied in the "Heder", in a few of these Hebrew and grammar were taught as well. There was also an institution for 150 poor children for the study of Talmud-Torah. 1858-59 with the permission of the local authorities a general school was created where 80 - 100 young boys and girls studied. Many continued their studies in the Russian Gymnasium in Suwalk or Marionpole. In 1871 15 Kalvarija youth studied in these institutions. In 1899 a school for the poor was formed by some of the richer families to
enable them to continue studies after the "Heder". In 1803 a new synagogue was built with heavy walls of large stones. The Bima and Tora case was decorated by an artisan and the walls were also decorated by paintings of animals. In the courtyard a

Beit Midrash was built.

Social work in Kalvarija. Active charity organizations (Gimilot Hasidim) gave loans with small weekly return payments. A sick charity (Bikor Cholim) gave health services and medicines and a group of women and young girls gave aid to the sick.

By the end of the 19th century many were learned in Hebrew and subscribed to the Hebrew press Hamalitz, Hamagid and Hasharchar.

There is early evidence to aliya to Eretz Israel as there are 9 tombstones of former Kalvarijan residents on Mt Olive cemetery in Jerusalem. In the early 80's youth joined the "Yesod Hamala" organization with the purpose of Aliya to Eretz Israel. In 1890 the Zionist movement Hovavei Zion gathered signatures to send protest to Baron Hirsh in order to convince him to help resettling Eretz Israel instead of Argentina. In 1894 the organization "Shcarei Toushia" was formed in order to educate toward Aliya. In a donor list for Eretz Israel, in 1909, 120 names from Kalvarija residents.

Autumn 1914 with the beginning of W.W.I Jews were ordered to hard labor on roads as punishment for their German support. In the battles in the area in and around Kalvarija there were 220 casualties to the Jewish community. Half the city was burnt including the old wooden synagogue. Most of the Jewish residents were forced to leave their homes and scattered to other towns in Russia.

At the end of the German occupation many returned and were in the need of aid.

**Kalvarija during Lithuanian Independence**

With the formation of Independent Lithuania on the 16th February 1918 and the evacuation of the German army at the beginning of 1919, many of the former resident began to return. With the announcement of Jewish Autonomy an 11 man committee was formed. This committee was active in most of the Jewish life during the years 1921-25. Since most knew Hebrew as well as Yiddish the protocols were written in both languages page opposite page. In the local council there was also representation from the Jewish community. In the election of 1924 a Jew was elected as Vice Mayor. In 1934 there were three Jews in the council of nine.

The Jewish community began to rebuild their houses that were destroyed and many returned
to their former occupations. The economic situation was bad and the store owners suffered most. Grain trade also suffered because of the new laws limiting trade. The situation was so bad that in 1923 a committee sent a letter to the main national Jewish committee with requests for aid for 97 men women and children (listed by name) that need clothing.

From a survey conducted by the Lithuanian government in 1931 there were 72 stores in Kalvarija 60 of which were owned by Jews. On that same survey there were 16 factories and small crafts shops in the hands of Jews. In 1937 there were only 32 in the hands of Jews. The psychiatric hospital, the largest in Lithuania, offered livelihood to Jewish contractors and suppliers.

The scenery and pure air that surrounded the city, the river Sheshupe and the forests beside it drew many Jewish vacationers, which also added to the resident's livelihood.

The Lithuanian Organization of Merchants was against buying from Jews and as a result there was a boycott against Jewish stores and craftsmen. The Lithuanian co-operative took in their hands the agriculture industry exports and the imports of agricultural tools, seeds, fertilizers etc. and in this many lost their livelihood. In 1939 the National Lithuanian Party in Kalvarija proclaimed that the market day be on the "Shabbat" (Saturday). These were the main causes of emigration.

In the Jewish school Yavne there were 135 students, in the Yiddish school 130 students. There was a high school of eight classes. This institution was in operation till 1935 and was closed because of lack of students. A Hebrew kindergarten was active, a library of 2000 books in Hebrew and Yiddish.

From time to time theatre groups would come to Kalvarija to perform and the local residents also had amateur performances with the income for Keren Ha Kayemeth, Keren Ha Yesod, Wizo and Keren Tel Chai.

Zionist groups were active in Kalvarija. There was a Kibbutz run by "Ha Halutz" for preparing youth for their aliya. The youth received Zionist education in the Hebrew schools and the youth movements and many did reach Eretz Israel. Sport activity was centered mainly in the local branch of "Maccabi".

There were also volunteers in the local fire brigade. One member received an award in 1937.

**Kalvarija during WWII and after**

In 1939 the Germans deported 2,400 Jews from the Suwalk province of Poland to the border of Lithuania and 800 of these were absorbed and taken care of by the residents of Kalvarija.

When Lithuania became part of the Soviet republic in June 1940 factories in the hands of Jews were taken over and put in the hands of Komisars. Supplies were limited and prices rose. The middle class which was mostly Jewish was the hardest hit. Jewish youth movements were abolished and the Communist youth movement made great efforts in enlisting youth. Hebrew educational institutes were closed.

On 22 June 1941, the first day of the war between Germany and Soviet Russia, the Germans entered Kalvarija. On the 1st of July the Lithuanian police proclaimed that all Jews were obligated to wear the Yellow Star patch, and that they were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks. Jews were taken to work at hard labor and on the way to work and back they were humiliated while the Lithuanian population watched. At the beginning of July 90 people...
nominated while the Lithuanian population watched. At the beginning of July 90 people, Lithuanian communists, Jewish intellectuals, and others were brought in to the hotel "Zdarovitz". There they were beaten, tortured for several days. On the 5th of July they were brought to the banks of lake Orios, about 2 km from the city, where they were shot and buried.

On Shabbat 30th of August all the remaining Jews who evacuated to the barracks in Marionpole, under the pretense of being sent to the ghetto there. All their belongings where left at the Synagogue and in their empty carts the Jews were transported. All in all there were 8600 Jews in the Barracks.

On 1st of Sept. 1941 they were all brought to the banks of river Sheshupe and there near pre-dug pits they were shot and buried. The Lithuanian police and shot later caught some that managed to escape. After they had rid themselves of the Jews the locals, at the head the Priest proceeded in destroying all the Jewish shops that were in the vicinity of the church and with their bricks built a wall around it.

During WW2 the city was destroyed. Nothing was left of the old Jewish cemetery. Beit Ha Midrash remained whole is used as a granary.

After the war only one Jewish family returned and lived in their home for about 1/2 yr. In the years 1989-70 there was but one Jew living in Kalvarija.

In the 1990's the old cemetery was partially restored.

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Origins of the Karvansary District

The Karvansary district derives its name from the original trading or Caravan destination that existed in the area below the Turkish castle from at least the late 1600's. It was a main location, under the protection of the castle keepers, for both commerce and inns and was originally its own independent township - being outside the city walls of Kamenets.

Some sources suggest that this was one of the first areas to be settled by Jewish people - although there is no doubt that Jewish residents had been living within the old town from at least the middle of the 1400's. Undoubtedly, by the time of the Turkish conquest of the city, the area had become an area in which Jewish residents lived close to the old town of Kamenets and perhaps this had become a location for the refugees from the smaller towns that had originally sought protection (see early history).

A Centre of Kamenets Jewish Life

In the 18th century the Karvansary developed into a Jewish district and subsequently became a ghetto or confinement area for any Jews who were visiting the city and needed to remain overnight.

As can be seen from the various depictions of the area, although the Karvansary was 'picturesque' it was on the flood plain of the river and at least in part at the mercy of the elements, especially during the time of the spring floods. To partially combat this the ground floors of the buildings were raised above ground level.

In common with other aspects of Jewish life in Kamenets, there is little that is written about the actual day to day characteristics of life in the Karvansary. There was a synagogue or prayer hall located there - the existence of which is recorded from the second half of the 18th century. In the memoirs of Major Ptashynskoho, it was noted that in this synagogue the Jewish community of Kamenets swore allegiance to the Russian Empress Catherine II [1].

A Ghetto or a Refuge?

At times during attempted expulsions of Jewish people from the old town, the Karvansary became the home town of Jewish Kamenets, probably as it was for a considerable period an independent town and thus not actually under the direct control of Kamenets anti Jewish authorities. So it seems to have performed a dual function - at times a refuge and at times a ghetto.

By 1923 the Karvansary had 150 households and 1566 residents.

On 25 May 1923 by order of the Communist district executive committee Kamenets Karvansary was incorporated into the Kubachivskoyi Dovzhotskoho village area and in March 1926 the Karvansary finally and permanently lost its independence and became part of Kamenets - Podolak (being simply designated as a street in the suburban area of the town).

Today there is very little left of the old Karvansary township - a few houses and the central road seem to be all that remains of this once important and independent Jewish village.


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