

FOREWORD

translated from the Yiddish by Monique Charbonnel

My hand is shaking and my eyes fill with tears while writing this introduction to the "Book of Kutno and Surroundings". This book reflects hundreds of years of life in this important Jewish settlement, the town of the *Gaon* and *Tzadik* Reb Yehoshiele Kutner¹, and of the great writer Shalom Asz, a town full of piety, scholarship, schools, houses of study, oratories, where the Torah, wisdom and faith reigned; a place of intense social and cultural activity in the political parties' offices, in clubs, sports associations and professional unions. Altogether, Kutno represented the rich ferment of the intellectual life of a Jewish community, until the Nazi slaughterer undertook its annihilation, along with six million brothers and sisters.

For Jewish survivors of Kutno, it was clear that it was necessary to immortalize the martyrs and their homes, institutions and organizations, where so much faith and idealism had prevailed, and for this, the only appropriate memorial for the Jewish community of Kutno was a *Yizkor* Book that would remind the survivors of the past and would be an example for generations to come to think about. With the active collaboration of all their fellow citizens scattered around the world, the children of Kutno who now live in Israel, with a holy reverence, undertook the task of collecting photos and other documents to revive the city's joys and sorrows, to resurrect the Jewish life on the Jewish holidays as well as work days. They also wanted to mention the part played by the children of Kutno in the building the Jewish state, both as pioneers and as combatants on the various fronts of the Independence War. Throughout six years, stone after stone, they built this "monument": a memorial book of 600 pages, dozens of articles, hundreds of photos and documents that relate the birth, development and disappearance of the Jewish community of Kutno.

We know that this book, despite its thickness and the richness of its content in both text and illustrations, does not contain everything that constituted Jewish life in Kutno, does not show all of its elements as it should, that in such a book it is not possible to respect the relative importance of events, parties, organizations and personalities, that it is difficult to find one's way in the thematic dispersion of the material without jeopardizing the timeline, that it is not easy to share out appropriately the abundant pictures to match the articles, memories and descriptions to illustrate. Countless are the problems and difficulties which necessarily go with the publication of this kind of "miniature encyclopedia" in Yiddish and Hebrew, dedicated to the annihilation of a Jewish town in Poland. The committee and the editing staff have done everything in their power to ensure that our citizens submitted written contributions for this book, no input has been rejected, and if there is a lack or inadequacy of representation of an association, institution or individual, the fault lies with those who did not write. Similarly, if we write a little too much about a party, organization or personality, it is also the result of an excessive fondness for writing or ineradicable attachment to a party on the part of some former Kutners. But ultimately, our book was born thanks to them. The faithful and attentive reader will judge for himself whether the "Book of Kutno and Surroundings" has fulfilled the task that was set at its inception.

¹ Translator's Note (TN): Israel Yehoshua Trunk (Płock November 1820 – Kutno 9 July 1893), son of David and Dvora Lajzerowicz.

*

Our Yizkor Book also commemorates three other prominent Jewish towns neighboring Kutno: Łęczyca, Krośniewice and Dąbrowice. Their inhabitants suffered the same tragic fate as the Jews of the city of Kutno, their larger neighbor – disappearance; they also went through a tumultuous period of growth and development of intellectual life and association between the two world wars.

To keep a certain order and organize the articles and illustrations, which can be grouped either by date or by subject, we separated the "Book of Kutno and Surroundings" into nine parts:

- 1- From Distant and Recent Past
- 2- Daily Life, Memories, and Events
- 3- Institutions, Political Parties, Organizations, and Companies
- 4- Personalities, Fighters, Businessmen and Characters. This part was divided into four sub-parts: a) In Kutno and Outside, b) The Children of Kutno in the Building and the Wars of *Eretz Israel*, c) Independence War d) Six-Day War
- 5- The Holocaust and the Struggle (On the battlefield and in anti-Nazi underground).
- 6- After the Liberation
- 7- Surrounding Towns: Łęczyca, Krośniewice, Dąbrowice
- 8- Children of Kutno and Surroundings in Israel and the Diaspora.
- 9- Commemorative Pages.

These nine parts blend into a harmonious whole, overlap and complement each other to form a funerary monument, a literary memorial to perpetuate the memory of the Jewish towns in the Kutno district: Łęczyca, Krośniewice and Dąbrowice.

*

This feat was made possible thanks to the unwavering former residents of Kutno in Israel and the Diaspora, who have taken responsibility and did everything with their pens, their contributions and dedication for the publication of our Yizkor Book.

We express our gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the editor of the book, David Sztokfisz for his painstaking, precise and meticulous work. He gathered, selected, prepared all the documents and composed the book; to Abraham Knaani for his valuable contributions and translations into Hebrew; to our fellow historian Yeshayahu Trunk, from New York, for his tireless research work on Kutno, from its birth to its annihilation. We also want to thank the "Orly" printing company and its owner, Mr. Lerman, and its workers who contributed with all their experience and expertise to the quality and beauty of our book. And last, but not least, our thanks and appreciation to all the children of Kutno whose names are not mentioned here but have played a vital role in the creation of our book.

It remains for me to express a wish: that the "Book of Kutno and Surroundings" be read by all the former residents of Kutno and their children, to revitalize the city and its inhabitants, to unite them in remembering the martyrs, their childhood and youth, and that through the prism and regrets for the past, they will understand the present better and regard the future with more optimism and hope.

Yehoshua Elbaum
vice-president of the Society of Former
Residents of Kutno and Surroundings in Israel

Tel Aviv, May 1968
20th Anniversary of the State of Israel.