



KUTNO JEWISH CEMETERY

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<http://www.kirkuty.xip.pl/kutno.htm>

Translated from Polish by Malcolm Katz

The first mention of Jews in Kutno came from 1513, specifically Moses, Solomon and Lewek. But certainly Jews had already been living here. In 1753, a fire destroyed the town including all documents of the Jewish community. Therefore, not much is known of the history of Jewish community of Kutno until mid-18th century. What is known is that the Jews were established in commercial activity, extending all the way to Germany and the Netherlands. Well-known researcher of Jews from the Mazovia region, Mr Pawel Fijalkowski states in his essay "Jews in the region of Kutno and Łęczycza and Sochaczew from 15th to 18th century" that they traded mainly in livestock and leather products derived from them, wool, shoes, hides; etc. They also specialised in the hides of wild animals, wolf, fox and hares. Many others were specialised in the trades of tailoring and as furriers. Many others were also involved in subsistence farming of horses and cattle. Fijalkowski mentions that, in Kutno, 29% of animals belonged to Jews. In 1765, 928 Jews were living in Kutno.

The 19th century saw the boisterous development of the Jewish community of Kutno. The construction of a railway line allowed goods to be transported to and from Lodz. At this time, the size of the Jewish population grew. If in 1800 there were 1376 Jews, amounting to 70.2% of the town population, in 1908 there were 8978 Jews with many organisations and a brick built Synagogue. **At this time came, one of the most famous rabbinical figures in Poland, the Rabbi Jehoszua Trunk.** In 1861, he left Pułtusk, where he was accused of bad management and negligence of religious duties, to come to Kutno, where he lived for 30 years. He was the author of numerous rabbinical edicts and knew the Torah by heart. His family spawned a dynasty within Kutno, with his grandson the American historian and writer Yechiel Yeshayahu Trunk. With this family, Kutno became a centre of Jewish study and enlightenment.

Kutno was also the home town of Szalom Asz, the outstanding Yiddish author. Famous works include 'God's revenge,' 'A man of Nazareth,' 'Apostle' and 'Mary'. More information on the popular writer can be found in Wikipedia. Since 1993, the *S. Żeromski Kutno District Public Library* organises in Kutno cultural events dedicated to Szalom Asz. A street within the town is named after him.

The 20th century brought a decline in numbers of Jews in Kutno due to immigration to Lodz and America and the war in 1914-18. The census of 1921 lists 6784 Jews in Kutno.

At the outbreak of World War II, Kutno Jews were subjected to numerous repressions. Shortly after the occupation, the Synagogue was set on fire by the Nazis and Jewish-owned property seized by ethnic German Poles. In June 1940, a ghetto was created in the old 'Konstancja' factory, in which were imprisoned around 7000 Jews, including some deported from nearby towns. For all these people, the ghetto had only 3 toilets and one standpipe for water. Under these terrible sanitary conditions, an outbreak of Typhus soon broke out, killing at least 300 prisoners. **In the spring of 1942, the ghetto Jews were deported to Chelmo extermination camp,** where all were murdered in trucks converted into gas vans.

The Jewish cemetery is located on a hill between the Sobieskiego, Zdrojowa and Tarnowskiego streets. The necropolis was established in the 18th century. It is hard to establish the amount of tombs but eldest Kutno residents remember that there were hundreds, perhaps 1000 headstones, dating back to the 17th century in total. One used the terms 'a forest of matzevot.' Assuming that, at the end of the 19th century, 9000 Jews were living in Kutno, one could certainly say that it was a large cemetery. Among the graves identified was the Ohel of the famous Rabbi Trunk. His tomb was a pilgrimage spot for Jewish people making requests for health and personal blessings.