

Zhovkva

Pol. Żółkiew, Ukr. Жовква, Yid. זשאָלקױע

*I was proud of my Zolkiev.
No other city has such monuments as ours,
I thought to myself.*

Shimon Samet, *A Tour of Zolkiev*, in: *Sefer Zolkiev* (Hebr.: Memorial Book of Zolkiev),
Jerusalem 1969

A perfect city ¶ Established towards the end of the 16th century as a Renaissance “perfect city,” Zhovkva (then Żółkiew) was named in honour of Stanisław Żółkiewski, its founder. The earliest historical reference to the village of Vynnyky (Winniki), around which Zhovkva was subsequently established, dates back to 1368. In 1597, the Crown Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski began the construction of Zhovkva near Vynnyky, and in 1603, due to a privilege issued by King Sigismund III Vasa, the emerging urban center was granted municipal rights as a private Polish town. The crown privilege gave a powerful boost to the economic life of the town and its vicinity and promoted rapid development of diversified crafts and trade. In the first half of the 17th century, Zhovkva was transformed into a fortified town circumscribed by pompous stone ramparts. The market square located in front of the castle was lined by trading houses on the northern and eastern sides that formed a gallery of stores, known as arcades. The entire town was designed by the famous Italian architect and theorist Pietro di Giacomo Cataneo. The town plan followed the successful experiment

of another “perfect” Renaissance town of Zamość, located 100 km north west of Zhovkva and established several years before. Since in the Renaissance art was somatic and anthropocentric, the general town plan and the plans of its environs, including the plots of neighboring lands and houses, reflected in its minute details the system of proportionally interrelated measurements of human anatomy. The famous Italian architects Paolo de Ducato Clemenci (also known as Paweł Szczęśliwy, Ukr. Pavlo Schaslyvyyi) and Paolo Dominici (known as Paweł Rzymianin, Ukr. Pavlo Rymlianyn) contributed to the creation of the town. ¶ In 1620, Zhovkva became the property of the Daniłowicz noble family, and later became the possession of John III Sobieski (1629–1696), King of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, who inherited it from his mother, Zofia Teofila. It was during John III Sobieski’s reign that Zhovkva (Żółkiew) saw its heyday. The king transformed the town into a major centre of political and economic life of the 17th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At his Żółkiew residence, he received diplomatic envoys of King Louis XIV of France and King Charles



II of Spain. After the victorious battle near Vienna on September 12, 1683, in which the troops of Habsburg Monarchy, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the Holy Roman Empire under the command of King John III Sobieski destroyed the army of the Ottomans and their vassal and tributary states, the papal nuncio arrived in Zhovkva and granted the king with a sword blessed by the pope. In the early 17th century, Zhovkva was home for young Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1595–1657), the future leader of the Cossack revolution, whose father served at Hetman Żółkiewski's court. The Cossack leader hetman Ivan Mazepa (1639–1709) visited Zovkva too. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), from December, 1706, to April, 1707, the Zhovkva Castle served as the temporary headquarters of the Russian Tsar Peter I (the Great). ¶ Towards the end of the 18th century, with the partition of Poland between Austria, Prussia, and Russia, Zovkva, together with the entire new province of Galicia, became part of the Austrian domain. The Habsburg authorities began demolishing the town fortifications and reconstructing various

centrally-located buildings for administrative purposes. The entire sections of the defensive walls, including the Lwowska (L'viv) and Żydowska (Jewish) Gates were demolished; the castle palace was converted into a prison; plans were underway to rebuild the town hall too. Only in the 19th century did the authorities began the renovation. For example, the Zwierzyniecka Gate was restored, and so were some of the castle walls. Yet in the 19th century, the castle as well as the entire town went into decline. ¶ In September, 1914, as World War I broke out, Zhovkva was captured by the Russian army. In June, 1915, the Austrians recaptured it. From November, 31, 1918, until May 16, 1919, the Lemberg (L'viv) county was under the administration of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), and then it was under temporary Polish administration until 1923, when the international community at the Conference of Ambassadors recognised Poland's sovereignty over Eastern Galicia.

In Żydowska Street ¶ The first Jews settled in Zhovkva as early as the 1590s, immediately after the foundation of the

Panorama of Zhovkva. A general bird's eye view of the town, 1918–1933, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland



A A view of the market square with arcaded houses; the Basilian monastery is visible in the background, 1918–1939. Photo by Marek Munz, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland



B Synagogue in Zhovkva, 1918–1939, collection of the National Digital Archives, Poland

town. In 1600, Stanisław Żółkiewski, the Voivode of Ruthenia, allowed Jews to establish their first prayer house. At that time, the local Jewish community was subordinated to Lviv kahal, but in 1620, it became independent and established its own communal authority. The Jews were granted a privilege of building their residences in a street subsequently called Żydowska (Jewish) Street, which led to the Jewish Gate, one of the town four main gates. The king granted Zhovkva the autonomy according to the Magdeburg law and also exempted it from custom duties and other special taxes. These privileges enabled merchants and craftsmen from other towns to trade freely in Zhovkva. The town also received a privilege of hosting a major trade fair (*Jahrmark*) four times a year and to have two market days each week. 17th-century Zhovkva was home to more than a hundred Jewish craftsmen, including furriers, silver- and goldsmiths, jewellers, tanners, pharmacists, and tailors. Several dozen Jews received special privileges including the lease of the customs house, of tax collecting, and of *propinacja* (producing and selling alcoholic beverages). They were also running inns, managing fish ponds, running lumber mills, and freighting

timber. ¶ In 1624, a wooden synagogue was opened next to Aron Moshkovich's house, and in 1626, the kahal appointed first communal rabbi Ezekiel Issachar (d. 1637). In addition to the synagogue, the Jewish quarter enjoyed the operation of all other communal institutions, including a mikveh (ritual bath), a slaughterhouse, the rabbi's house, a beth midrash (study house for adult Jews), and a *hekdesch* (shelter for the poor and for the vagabond alms-seekers). In 1640, the town owners allowed the Jews to open a yeshivah. The town's Jewish community gradually grew and acquired importance. In 1628, 21 houses in Zhovkva were Jewish, and in 1680, 88 houses. When in 1648, the Cossack troops under Bohdan Khmelnytsky approached Zhovkva, thousands of Jewish refugees found safe haven in town and took part in defending the town against the Cossacks along the Polish garrison. In 1765, the Jewish community of Zhovkva boasted more than 1,500 members and possessed more than 270 buildings. Jews owned nearly all the buildings around the market square, which formed a lined-up gallery where most of trade took place. The street leading from the market square to the synagogue also had a commercial importance and was known as the Jewish Market.

” Built by Italians. [...] The old synagogue with its towering façade, buttresses, stone shells, cornices, attic acroteria [architectural ornaments], with its walls which turned golden as the time passed, with its vaults, ceiling coffers, and lunettes. ¶ Translated from: Z. Haupt, *Lutnia, albo przewodnik po Żółkwi i jej pamiątkach* (Lute, or a Guide to Zhovkva and its Memorials), in the same author’s *Szpica: opowiadania, warianty, szkice* (The Picket: Short Stories, Variants, Sketches), Paris 1989

Sobieski’s synagogue ¶ As early as 1635, the Jews of Zhovkva were granted the privilege to build a stone synagogue, but it was not built until towards the end of the century. Also known as the Sobieski Shul, it became one of Europe’s most notable Jewish monuments.

There were many distinguished Jews among King John III Sobieski’s close associates. One of them was the royal court purveyor (factor) **Jacob ben Nathan** (?–1696), the Steward of the Royal Chamber of Sambor, who was in the 1670s the leaseholder of all the custom houses of Red Ruthenia and Podolia. In 1685, he moved to Zhovkva, where he lived in the Sobieski’s palace. In 1689, he was elected the head of the Zhovkva kahal. A few years later, at the Sejm of Grodno (regular decision-making meeting of the Polish nobility), the nobility accused him of corruption and blasphemy against the Christian religion. The accusation led to his removal from the steward’s office. He was imprisoned for a short time and died shortly after his release. Another Jew closely associated with John III Sobieski was **Emanuel de Jona** from Lviv (?–1702), an outstanding court physician of Sephardic origin and a Marshal of the Council of Four Lands (Jewish parliament in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

The synagogue was called royal not only because of its pompous size and beautiful decorations and ornaments, but also because of 6,000 zlotys that the king lent the Jewish community toward its construction. Built of stone, the synagogue was erected in lieu of the old wooden one, next to the northern ramparts of the town, close to the Jewish Gate. By 1700, the construction was completed under the guidance of the crown architect Piotr Beber. The main nine-bay prayer hall measured 21 to 20 meters, and its height reached 14.5 meters at the highest point of the dome. The interior was lavishly decorated with stuccoes and frescoes. On the western and southern sides, the main

hall was adjoined by a vestibule and women’s galleries. The synagogue roof was hidden behind an attic with special decorative visors, which made many believe that the building also allegedly served as part of the town fortifications. The Renaissance-style building (with some manierist elements) looked so elegant that the Catholic clergy forbade painting it in white so that it would not eclipse Zhovkva churches with its radiating beauty. ¶ In the first days of German occupation in 1941, the Nazis tried to demolish the synagogue. Attempts to blow it up totally destroyed the southern women’s gallery; the western part of the building lost its roof and a gallery vault,

and in the main prayer hall the dynamite explosion destroyed three sections of the vault, the central columns, and parts of the roof. ¶ In 1963, the synagogue was partially renovated and catalogued in the National Register of Architectural Monuments of the Soviet Ukraine. Despite its state-protected status, the building was used as a warehouse. From the early 1990s, various plans were underway for conservation and restoration purposes, but the lack of adequate financial resources and the complete absence of the local Jewish community made any comprehensive renovation impossible. ¶ In the mid-1990s, the “fortress” synagogue of Zhovkva was listed by the New York-based World Monuments Fund as one of the “100 most endangered heritage sites in the world.” Thanks to this alert, renovation was begun in 2000. However, it was subsequently suspended as the supervising authorities discovered cases of embezzlement and inappropriate use of funds allocated for restoration of the monument. In 2007, the roof of the synagogue was covered with protective copper tiles yet the building has remained in perilous condition. ¶ In 2012, the National Bank of Ukraine introduced memorial coins worth 5 and 10 hryvnias with the images of the Zhovkva synagogue as part of the Architectural Monuments of Ukraine series.

The printing press ¶ In 1690, King John III Sobieski granted Uri Faivush ben Aaron ha-Levi (1625–1715) from Amsterdam with a crown privilege to establish a Jewish printing press in

Zhovkva. Uri Faivush had exported books to Poland-Lithuania for many years and was one of the three main Amsterdam book printers. He had also been known as the publisher of one of the first newspapers in Yiddish, *Dienstagishe un Freitagishe Kurant* (A Thursday and Friday Carillon). In 1692, Uri Faivush brought his unique Amsterdam type to Zhovkva and published his first Zhovkva printing-press book. In 1705, he returned to Amsterdam while the printing press was continued to be run by his grandsons, two outstanding printers Aharon and Gershon. Due to its excellent layouts and the clarity of its print and despite the restrictive decisions of the Council of Four Lands, Zhovkva printing press suppressed the two other printing presses operating in Poland at that time – Lublin and Krakow – and for almost 80 years remained a monopolist, the only Jewish printing centre in the entire Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This exclusive position of Zhovkva in the printing market changed only after the 1764 dissolution of the Council of Four Lands. Zhovkva printing press published classical works of religious literature and also rabbinic treatises submitted for print by rabbinic scholars from various countries. The descendants of Uri Faivush (under various family names such as Madfes, Mann, Letteris, and Meirhoffer) owned the Zhovkva printing house until the end of the 18th century. The house of Uri Faivush, in which the printing house functioned, is located in the market square at 7 Vicheva Sq.

THE HASKALAH ¶ In the late 18th century, Zhovkva became an important centre of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) movement, particularly when **Nachman**

Krochmal (1785–1840), one of the leading *maskilim* (enlightened thinkers) in Eastern Europe lived in town. Krochmal was a religious thinker, historian, theologian, and writer. Born in the town of Brody, he spent a considerable part of his life in Zhovkva, making it one of the centres of the Haskalah. Other *maskilim*, members of the Haskalah movement such as Salomon Judah Leib Rappaport, Isaac Erter, Halevi Bloch, and others were closely connected to the circle of Krochmal in Zhovkva. After the death of his wife in 1836, Krochmal returned to Brody and two years later settled in Ternopil. Through consistent independent study, Krochmal mastered various fields, especially history and philosophy. He was one of the first thinkers to turn to the study of Jewish history “for a better knowledge of our essence and our nature.” He penned a renowned philosophical treatise entitled *More nevukey ha-zman* (Heb.: A Guide for the Perplexed of Our Times, 1839, published in Lviv in 1851). The title alluded to Maimonidean *More nevukeym* (Heb.: The Guide for the Perplexed), while the work used categories of rationalist philosophy and elements of German romantic thought with which Krochmal sought to construct paradigms of Jewish historical destiny. He wrote in a renovated Hebrew, enriching it with scientific and scholarly terminology of his own making thus considerably contributing to the development of contemporary Hebrew literature. He died in 1840 in Ternopil. His son Abraham Krochmal (b. 1820 in Zhovkva, d. 1888 in Frankfurt am Main) took after his father as a writer, thinker, and journalist in his own right. His hallmark was a rationalist approach to Judaism, which he treated mainly as an ethical system. As all *maskilim* of his generation with their aversion to pietistic trends in Judaism, including Kabbalistic thought, he vehemently rejected Hasidism.



The interior of the synagogue in Zhovkva, 2014. Photo by Agnieszka Karczewska, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (www.teatrn.pl)

A Galician town ¶ In the mid-19th century, Zhovkva turned into a hub of the fur industry providing employment to hundreds of Jewish workers. Towards the end of the 1890s, 3,783 of the 7,143 residents of Zhovkva, or about 53 percent, were members of the Jewish community. After World War I, according to the 1921 census, the Jewish community numbered 3,718 people (47 percent of the town population). In the interwar

period, the population of Zhovkva grew, but by 1939, the percentage of Jews had decreased to about 40 percent (4,270 people) of the 11,100 town inhabitants. The town population also included Poles (approx. 35 percent) and Ukrainians (approx. 25 percent). ¶ The Great Synagogue was the centre of town religious life; the community of Zhovkva also maintained a Talmud Torah elementary religious school for poor children,

Castle in Zhovkva, 2014; at present, some of the castle's chambers house a museum. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)



a Tarbut Hebrew-language school with its robust Zionist agenda, an orphanage, and other educational and charity institutions, including modern Polish-, German- and Hebrew-oriented cultural

societies and a football team “Hasmo-nea,” established according to the vision of the “Jew of muscle,” a new type of a modernized secular Jew.

“ **A tour of Zhovkva with Shimon Samet** ¶ *The market square was the centre of the town: The square was broad and large, and in the middle of it there was a well with spring water, which the water carriers, and sometimes even the housewives, drew and carried around. It was the well around which the entire world revolved. On the one side of the square there was an old fortress building in the backyard, housing the John III Sobieski municipal gymnasium [secondary school] and the court; on the other side, there was a parking area for carts and wagons belonging to the peasants who arrived from the countryside with goods for sale. It was right here that the world of the Zhovkva trade flourished manifesting itself in a medley of Polish and Ukrainian languages. ¶ In the arcades of the buildings around the square there were stores and residential houses. The square was the heart of the town, with streets leading from it in all directions. There was also a church in the square, and inside it (they said) there were precious paintings and ancient works of art covered with gold and diamonds. The road led through a gate to Glińska Street, and then proceeded across the bridge over the Świna River and towards the park or returned to Piekarska Street, where there was Belzer Hoyz, the house of Hasidim from Belz. At the end of the street there was a bakery: the aromas of various baked products tickled the nostrils of local residents. In Piekarska (Baker) Street, we celebrated Simchat Torah (The holiday on which the annual cycle of Torah reading was completed – and restarted), Hasidic songs shook the walls. ¶ At the end of Piekarska Street there stood the enormous building of the Great Synagogue, a very special architectural artwork attracting observant Jews from the entire region. Anyone who wanted to cleave to God in deep silence amid a solemn and profoundly personal atmosphere, surrounded by beautiful*

architectural ornaments, should step in under the abode of the Great Synagogue: he or she would immediately leave the realm of the mundane and enter the realm of the sublime. ¶ Opposite the Great Synagogue there stood the bet midrash. Next to it, there was a small store selling soda water, sweets, and cigarettes. This was an important meeting place of the Zionist-minded young people, particularly of the members of the the local branch of Hashomer Hatzair (Heb.: The Young Guard, a boy scout Jewish youth organization). Next to the store there was also the house of the Zimmerman family, an important meeting place of the educated and young people who sought cultural and scientific knowledge. A little further up the same street there lived the Szpigel brothers, profoundly assimilated Jews. We used to spend hours playing in their large backyard. Still further, in Sobieski Street, there was our house which hosted a watchmaker's shop belonging to my father. We moved from there to Szpitalna



(Hospital) Street. ¶ A hostel with guest rooms, called “Ajnfarhojz,” was located in Szpitalna Street, in which mainly visiting Hasidim stayed as they needed kosher cuisine. Even the tzadik of Belz stayed as a guest there. ¶ Sobieski Street takes us from the market square with its wagons, carriages, and a well-pump, toward the butcher store on one side and the river on the other, and from there – as far as Turyniecka Street. Down that street, which started from Hochner’s timber storehouse, one could go as far as the villages of Turynka and Mosty Wielkie, and further up toward a beautiful quarter of small houses. A large church stood there. ¶ If one turned right and walked a short distance, one would find oneself in the busy, centrally located Lwowska Street. It had two side streets: one of them led from the Great Synagogue and the town hall to the prayer house called Kadeten-Shul. It was called that way because the so-called Progressive Jews [most likely associated with the patriotic-minded cadet corps] prayed in it. This shul served as the centre of the Zionist movement; politics was discussed there, as well as municipal council and Jewish communal election campaigns, and even the Zionist Congresses elections. The Jews who prayed here, including my father, were the opponents of the Belzer Hasidim. At the end of the street there was a mikveh and a bath. ¶ A location in the market square worth mentioning – a stationery shop run by the Ecker brothers. Jewish students would sometimes gather here. The main meeting place of those young people was the Wilder sisters’ café. ¶ In the town hall building there was a cultural centre, the Kulturvereign. Its leading figures enlisted the key members of local intelligentsia: Dr. Szloser, Dr. Sobel, Dr. Zimerman, and Dr. Sztern, and its administrator was Samson Lifszyc. This cultural center hosted lectures and talks, here one could

The place outside the town that was the scene of mass executions of Zhovkva’s Jews, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

play chess and cards, and participate in Purim carnival. ¶ On the road from Zhovkva to Lviv, there was a garden known as *The Old Wall*, with a small store on the right hand-side. Our mothers would stroll here on Saturdays and engage in gossip about everything and everyone: one could find out who had gone to see the tzadik of Belz to obtain blessing for one's commercial endeavors, who had sent his son to Lviv to look for a job, who was planning to leave for Palestine, who was getting married, and the like. After leaving the garden, you could go out to the opposite side, where the inn was located, in which Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews drank surrounded by clouds of cigarette smoke and a medley of conversations peppered with curses. ¶ Translated from: Shimon Samet, *Spacer po Żółkwi* (Pol.: *A Tour of Zolkiev*), ed. by Yaron Karol Becker, based on *Sefer zikaron Zolkiew* (Heb.: *Memorial Book of Zolkiew*), Jerusalem 1969

World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In September 1939, the town was captured by the Red Army. Monuments to King John III Sobieski and Stanisław Żółkiewski were demolished. On June 29, 1941, German troops entered Zhovkva. Before they arrived, the retreating Soviet security police murdered at least 29 Ukrainian and Polish political prisoners in the local NKVD (Soviet secret police) prison located in the castle. The victims were the participants of various national resistance movements, some of them were just cultural figures with national-democratic proclivities. The persecution of the Jews started immediately after the Nazi invasion. The synagogues were leveled. On July, 22, the Germans established Jewish auxiliary police and a Judenrat, a Jewish communal council reporting to the Nazi authorities. Then, in November 1942, the Nazis established a ghetto, stretching from the square in front of the Dominican convent and through Turyniecka Street. Approximately 6,000 people were confined there. The liquidation of the ghetto took place a year later, on November, 25, 1943. More than 4,000 Jews were shot during mass executions in the Bór forest; others were transported to the Janowski

concentration camp near Lviv and to the labor camp in Rava-Ruska, where they were subsequently murdered. ¶ After the war, a memorial was erected at the site of the mass grave in the Bór forest. Another memorial was established at the municipal cemetery, at the gravesite where the exhumed remains of the victims of the Zhovkva ghetto were re-buried.

The Jewish cemetery ¶ The Nazis destroyed the old Jewish cemetery, established at the beginning of the 17th century. The oldest matzeva (tomb-stone), which was known to have been there before the war bore the name of certain Yitzhak, son of Abraham (d. 1610). The last burials took place in 1943. During the German occupation, tombstones were used to build roads. The Jewish cemetery was eventually destroyed in 1970, when the communist authorities demolished dozens of Jewish cemeteries across the USSR, particularly in Ukraine. The tombstones were removed and a large marketplace was established on the former site of the cemetery. The original Baroque cemetery wall survived partially, and in the south-eastern part, next to the entrance to the marketplace, there is an ohel over the grave of the local

Surrounding
area

Krekhiv (12 km): fortified St. Nicholas Monastery (1612), the Church of St. Paraskeva (17th c.). ¶ **Lviv** (25 km): the largest metropolis of Galicia. Numerous architectural monuments, including many surviving monuments of Jewish heritage, such as Jacob Glanzer's Hasidic synagogue at 3 Vuhilna St.; houses with traces of *mezuzot* and the place where the "Golden Rose" synagogue was situated in Staroyevreyska (Old Jewish) St. – now a memorial and educational site called the Space of Synagogues; the still-active synagogue in Brativ Michnovskich St.; the building at 12 Sholema Aylehema St. that housed the first Jewish museum in Lviv; Maurice Lazarus's hospital in Rappaport St.; memorials to Holocaust victims, a memorial plaque in Shevchenka Street, where the Janowski concentration camp was located; a memorial to Holocaust victims in Chornovola St. ¶ **Velyki Mosty** (25 km): ruins of a synagogue (early 20th c.). ¶ **Mageriv** (25 km): a former synagogue (19th c.). ¶ **Rava-Ruska** (35 km): a Jewish cemetery (17th c.), approx. 100 matzevot. ¶ **Stradch** (38 km): a cave monastery (11th c.). ¶ **Sokal** (50 km): a ruined former synagogue (18th c.). ¶ **Nemyriv** (50 km): a Jewish cemetery, with several hundred 19th- and 20th-c. matzevot. ¶ **The Yavoriv National Park**

Worth
seeing

Synagogue (1692–1700), 14 Zaporizka St. ¶ **Zhovkva Castle** (1594–1606) founded by Stanisław Żółkiewski, built by Paweł Szczęśliwy, housing the Zhovkva Castle Museum with an exhibition devoted to the history of Zhovkva from its foundation to the present day (2 Vicheva Sq., tel. +38 067 996 96 68). ¶ **The Roman Catholic Church of St. Lazarus** (1606–1618), the Żółkiewski family mausoleum, 21 Lvivska St. ¶ **The Basilian monastery complex** (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church) (1612), the Basilian printing house as part of the monastery complex, still functioning today, at 4 Bazylyanska St. ¶ **Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity** (1720), included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2003, 1 Sviatoi Triitsi St. ¶ **Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos** (1705), Ivana Franka St. ¶ **The former Dominican monastery complex** (17th c.), currently a Greek Catholic church, 7 Lvivska St. ¶ **Town hall** (1932), 1 Vicheva Sq. ¶ **City gates and fortifications** (17th c.). ¶ **Arcaded houses** (17th c.).