

# Busk

Ukr. Буськ, Yid. ביסק

*Their hands pointed at a gently sloping rock: It is here!*

Georges Clemenceau, *Busk*, in: *Au pied du Sinai* (Fr.: At the Foot of Mount Sinai), Paris 1898

**The Venice of Galicia** ¶ Busk is located at the place where the Poltva, Solotvyn, and Rokitna rivers flow into the Bug, dividing the town into several parts. In the past, the town was surrounded by ponds and bogs, and the numerous rivers and brooks contributed to the creation of a unique landscape. That is why, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Busk was often called the “Venice of Galicia”. Today, the town looks completely different. The brooks have dried up and the division of the town into separate parts has disappeared. Only the bridges and wooden footbridges connecting the banks of former riverbeds stand as a reminder of this characteristic feature. ¶ The medieval *Primary Chronicle* mentions Busk (Buzhesk) as a fortified town reporting to the counts of the Duchy of Kiev (Kievan Rus) as early as 1097. From 1100, Busk was the capital of an independent palatinate included in the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia; the palatinate and the principality were incorporated into the Polish Crown in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1411, Busk was granted the Magdeburg rights, which significantly boosted the development of town trades and crafts and the creation

of urban infrastructure. This was also strategically important due to the town location at the so-called Black Trail, an ancient trade route used by merchants travelling from Crimea to Lviv as well as by the Tatars during their raids. From 1540, the position of the head of the palatinate belonged to one of the Górkas, Polish Calvinist family. Thanks to the Górkas, Busk became one of the first centres of Calvinism in Ruthenia (Galicia). The town expanded significantly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century: in addition to the Old Market square, two more were established, the Central Market and the New Market. These new market places divided the town into three parts: old, new, and central. Paper mills were built in 1539–1541, they produced paper for printing presses in eastern Poland until 1788; the first printer of Slavic books, the famous Ivan Fedorov (Fedorowicz) printed his Ostrog Bible on Busk paper in 1581. This was the first complete edition of the Bible in Church Slavonic language. ¶ Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Józef Mier of Scottish origin became the town owner, and due to his mercantile interests and protectionist trade policies, the town began to develop dynamically



Market square in Busk, 1917, collection of the National Library, Poland ([www.polona.pl](http://www.polona.pl))

as the industrial centre. Mier ordered the establishment of sawmills and glass-works and invited Czech and German craftsmen to settle permanently in town. In 1810, his son Count Wojciech Mier built a palace which has survived till

this day. Busk remained in the hands of the Mier family until 1879, but the town experienced a devastating fire in 1849 and subsequently lost its economic significance. After the Mier family, Busk was ruled by the Badenis noblemen.

**Count Kasimir Felix Badeni (1846–1909)** became the Governor of Galicia in 1888, and in 1895–1897, he served as the Austro-Hungarian prime minister. After he retired, he settled in Busk, where he lived permanently until his sudden death on a train a few kilometres from Busk while returning from Karlsbad, the famous mineral waters spa west of Prague. He was buried in his family crypt in Busk, which was destroyed during the Soviet times. Ludwik Józef Badeni succeeded his father as the owner of the estate. The Badeni family was favourably disposed towards the Jews. Stories are told about Kasimir Badeni speaking to local Jews in Yiddish and supporting poor Jews by exempting them from taxes.

**The Jews of Busk** ¶ In 1454, Jews were first mentioned as living in Busk. In 1510, Jews were obliged to pay 20 gold florins to the Royal Treasury through the *kahal* of Lviv, which means that they were submitting to the authority of the Lviv Jewish community, as far as their financial relations with and obligations

before the Polish Crown were concerned. In 1518, the king exempted Jews from tax for one year due to a Tatar raid that devastated the town. Later, Jews had to pay their taxes in state-approved coins (30 *groszy* for one florin), not in gold. In 1564, King Sigismund Augustus confirmed the 1550 privilege granted to the Jews of Busk



[A] A view of Busk, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

[B] Jewish cemetery in Busk, 2013. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

and further expanded their privileges. He allowed Jews to purchase plots of land and construct houses anywhere in town, build new buildings, deal in real estate, and carry out business anywhere in Ruthenia (Galicia) and Podolia, including a privileged trade in meat. In short, Jews enjoyed all municipal and state privileges and exemptions on an equal footing with other Gentile residents. Nonetheless, in 1582, King Stefan Báthory declared Busk a free royal town which implied also that the town was granted *De non tolerandis Judaeis* privilege. The full consequences of this innovation are not exactly clear, since Jews continued to live within the town walls, in the New Town, as if the privilege stipulating the banishment of Jews was not enforced. ¶ From the legal standpoint, the Jewish community of Busk continued to be part of the *kahal* of

Lviv; still, it maintained its own independent communal institutions such as a cemetery and a synagogue. The rabbis serving in Busk included Rabbi Aaron (1540–1560) and Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham Hayes; the latter worked here in 1564–1568 and was then invited to become the Rabbi of Prague. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the rabbi of Busk was held by Tzvi Hirsch ben Moshe from Zhovkva (then Żółkiew). About 100 Jews died during the Cossack wars in 1648–1649, but by the late 1650s, the community revived afterwards and rebuilt itself.

**The Old Cemetery** ¶ The old Jewish cemetery in Busk is believed to be the oldest Ashkenazi cemetery in Ukraine and one of the oldest Jewish cemeteries in Central and East Europe. Located on several hills, it boasts the oldest surviving matzeva in the Shtetl Routes area, dated to 1520, with an epitaph reading: *A garland instead of ashes* (Isaiah 61:3). *Here lies an honest man, r. Yehuda son of r. Jacob, called Judah. He died on Tuesday, on the 5th day of Kislev in the year 5281 from the creation of the world (23.11.1520). May his soul be bound in the bond of life [together with the souls] of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all God-fearing people.*

### The Frankists and the Hasidim

¶ In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Busk turned into a centre of the Frankist movement that galvanized Podolia and Ruthenia and was led by the ambitious schismatic Jacob Frank. The leader of the movement considered himself a reincarnation of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century pseudo-Messiah Sabbetai Tsvi (who ended up converting into Islam) and preached salvation achieved through sexual orgies involving Jews and non-Jews and licentious behaviour that broke all the barriers of the Judaic commandments. This was the new avatar of the concept “redemption through sin” previously advanced by Sabbetai Tsvi. Frank based it on his perverse reading of the kabbalistic *Zohar* which he claimed allegedly supported the idea of Trinity. Several hundred Jews, even the then Rabbi Nachman Samuel ha-Levi of Busk joined the sectarians Jacob Frank. To ensure the sect has an upper hand in the larger Jewish community, Frank orchestrated a disputation between the traditional rabbinic Jews and himself, a new Jewish Messiah. The disputation took place in Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1757 under the supervision of Bishop Dembrowski and was attended by 19 Frankists, four of whom – led by rabbi Nachman – came from Busk. Having rejected the reasons and traditions of rabbinic Judaism in public, Jacob Frank brought his Jewish followers to Catholicism. Among those baptised after the second disputation that took place in Lviv two years later, there were 103 people from Busk, including the former

Rabbi Nachman, who took the name of Piotr Jakubowski. Due to the strong support Frank received from the Jews of Busk, King Augustus III recognised Busk as one of the Polish main towns inhabited by Frankists and designated it as a place where the adherents of the sect should settle. The Jews of Busk sometimes were referred to as *bisker szabsecwijnikes*, from the twisted name of Sabbetai Zevi, Jacob Frank’s pseudo-Messianic predecessor. ¶ Rabbi David Pinkhas of Brotchin (Bohorodchany) actively opposed Frank, whom he considered a traitor of Judaism, a schismatic, a charlatan, who exploited the gullibility of his Jewish followers not able to make sense of the sophisticated kabbalistic texts. Rabbi David Pinkhas represented traditional Judaism, defended rabbinic Jewish authorities, and emphasized the key role of Talmudic education. He participated in the defense of Judaism at the second disputation with the Frankists in Lviv in 1759, while Frank facing a growing opposition to his messianic craze preferred to stay in Busk. ¶ The conversion of the Frankists and a subsequent imprisonment of the leader of the movement made the converted Frankists move into central Poland. The remaining void was soon filled by the new movement of religious enthusiasm, Hasidism, and its adherents, Hasidim. The Hasidic movement enjoyed mass following in Busk which coexisted with the traditional (Lithuanian) Jews associated with *mitnagdim* (anti-Hasidic minded Jews).

**THE ALESK HASIDIC DYNASTY** (named after the town of Olesko, located 23 km from Busk) represents a branch of Busk Hasidism. The founder of the dynasty, Rabbi Hanoch Henikh Dov Majer (1800–1884) was also known under



Synagogue in Busk, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))

related to the Alesk dynasty, which after 1945 relocated to Brooklyn, NY (USA).

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the position of the town rabbi in Busk was held by members of the noted family of Babad: Rabbi Yaakov – son-in-law of Eliezer Ettinger of Zhovkva, his son Avrom (d. 1905), and his grandson Issachar Ber. These rabbinic authorities defended non-Hasidic traditions yet were much more tolerant toward the Hasidic-minded population, which enjoyed both charismatic Hasidic masters and the legal advice of the traditional rabbinic scholars.

**The synagogue** ¶ The stone synagogue, which has survived to this day, was built in 1842–1843 next to the market square, as most merchants were traditional Jews. Its construction was co-financed by Jacob Glazer, an influential merchant from Lviv. The synagogue rested on a rectangular foundation with a square-shaped prayer room. Built of hewn stone, the walls were plastered both inside and outside. The building was topped by a high attic decorated with brass spheres. The walls of the prayer room were decorated with a cornice, and the room received light through its two semi-circular

the title of his work *Lev sameach* (Heb.: *A Happy Heart*). He was a son-in-law of the tsaddik Rabbi Sholom Rokeakh, the founder of the Hasidic dynasty in Belz. As a child, Majer visited the Seer of Lublin and became a disciple of famous Hasidic rabbis such as Uri of Strelisk, Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz, and of his father-in-law Sholom Rokeakh. The leaders of the Hasidic dynasties such as Sassov, Kaliv, Stanislov, Trisk, Malin, and Radomishl were all

window-openings and one circular opening. The western podium was divided into two levels. In the part, in a small nave, the holy ark was placed, decorated with a two-level classicist portal topped with an archivolt. On both sides of the holy ark, there were two rows of columns with Corinthian capitals, imitating the entrance into the Holy of Holies of Jerusalem Temple. ¶ During World War II, parts of the interior of the synagogue's main room were used for building purposes. In Soviet times, the synagogue housed a gym, later a warehouse, and then one part of the synagogue was transformed into living quarters, and the other, into a garbage dump. The synagogue building was slowly but steadily falling into ruin. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to preserve this precious monument, a decision was made to transfer its uninhabited part to the community of Evangelical Christians, who partially renovated the building.

**Emigration** ¶ In 1884, some 5,297 people lived in Busk, including 2,001 Latin-rite Catholics (37.8 percent), 1,640



The Busk Branch of the Hatikva Society, 1931–1932, reproduction from *Sefer Busk*, ed. by Avraham Shairi, Haifa 1965

Greek Catholics (31 percent), 1,566 Jews (29.6 percent), and 86 Protestants (1.6 percent). In the early 1900s, the town experienced a big wave of emigration. Many Jewish craftsmen, traders, and

unemployed left for the USA. Most of them took to the road, making good use of the railway junction located in the nearby town of Krasne.

One of the famous people of Busk origin was the Austrian journalist and political activist **Morris Scheps** (1834–1902), the son of the physician Dr. Leo Scheps, the owner and publisher of the Viennese newspapers *Morgenpost* and *Wiener Tagblatt*. He was born in Busk in 1834, and attended a secondary school and the university in Lviv (then Lemberg). In 1854, he began his medical studies in Vienna but was captivated by journalism. Scheps was criticized by Vienna conservatives and xenophobes (who called themselves anti-Semites) for his pro-French liberal views. Scheps befriended many French writers and cultural figures including Georges Clemenceau, subsequently the French senator and prime minister, who even once accompanied Morris Scheps when he travelled back to Busk to visit his father's gravesite.

During World War I, from August 1914 until July 1915, Busk was occupied by Russian forces. Most Busk Jews fled to Vienna, Bohemia, or Hungary seeking to escape the Russian invasion, and most of them never returned to their hometown. In Boston, Massachusetts (USA), the Jews of Busk established a philanthropic diaspora *landsmanschaft* organisation (bringing together the émigrés from

their hometown) that helped new Jewish immigrants from and those Jews who remained in Busk; about 1,460 Jews lived in Busk in 1921. ¶ In November 1918, Busk was incorporated into the West Ukrainian People's Republic, which created an air force base there. In May 1919, Busk was captured by the Polish Army, and in August 1920, during Polish-Russian War, it was briefly occupied by the

Busk, a memorial to the Jews murdered in 1941–1944, 2014. Photo by Viktor Zagreba, digital collection of the “Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre” Centre ([www.teatrnn.pl](http://www.teatrnn.pl))



Cavalry Army under the command of Semion Budenny. Until 1939, Busk was part of the Republic of Poland.

### Education, culture, Zionism

¶ In the early 1900s, Busk had two elementary schools (Heb.: *hadarim*) for boys and girls, but there was no school for teenaged children. Wealthier parents sent their children to schools in Kamianka Strumilova, Brody, Zolochiv, or Lviv. Those who could not afford bed-and-board for their children taught them at home. Busk had no yeshiva, but any teenager eager to continue religious studies after finishing *cheder* could study in *hevruta* (peer-learning) at the local *beth midrash*. In 1908, a Hebrew school of the Zionist Tarbut school type for adult learners was established. Its first teacher was Israel Baruch, who later, when living in Haifa, wrote a memoir about the first Hebrew school in Busk. Many young people continued to learn Hebrew in Lviv (Lemberg) at the teacher training institutions and at other Jewish schools. ¶ In 1911, the Toynbee-Halle club appeared in Busk. It functioned as

a cultural and educational centre reaching out to the poorest members of the Jewish community. The club was named after Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), English economist and philanthropist, an ardent proponent of social reforms. The Zionist Hatikvah society, also established in Busk, ran cultural programs for the Jews of Busk, sponsoring a library, reading rooms, and a lecture room. A Jewish sports club “Bar-Kochba” enjoyed popularity among young people. Busk had a Jewish orphanage for 40 children, which was financially supported by the Boston-based *landsman-schaft* which also sponsored free meals for those in need during winter time. In 1921, there appeared in Busk a Hebrew school of the educational network “Safa Berura” (Heb.: Clear Language), indicating politization, secularization, and nationalist proclivities among local Jews. ¶ The Jews of Busk actively participated in various Zionist organisations. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a voluntary association Ahavat Zion (Heb.: Love of Zion) was established. There emerged branches of Zionist youth organisations such as Hashomer Hatzair, Gordonia, Betar, and some others. Political parties and groupings ranging from the Popular Zionists to Hitachdut to Poale Zionto Yad Harutsim were fighting for votes and followers with one another. Several *chalutzim* (agricultural pioneers-settlers in Palestine) from Busk joined the Third Aliyah to Palestine. One of them was Majer Dror (Schor), the founder of the Busk branch of Hashomer Hatsair, boy-scout Zionist youth organization.

### World War II and the Holocaust

¶ In 1939, some 8,000 people lived in

Busk, including 4,000 Poles, 2,500 Jews, and 1,500 Ukrainians. In September 1939, the town was captured by the Soviet army, which established a POW concentration camp in the stables of the Badeni Estate. About 1,000 Polish prisoners of war worked in Busk on the construction of the Lviv–Kyiv road. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the local NKVD unit killed 35 prisoners. ¶ In late June 1941, German troops entered the town. At that time, 1,900 Jews resided in Busk. On August 21, 1942, local Jews together with Jews from Kamianka Strumilova were transported to the Bełżec death camp. Then, on September 21, 1942, the Nazis killed 2,500 Jews from Busk and Kamianka in a single extermination action in a forest near Kamianka Strumilova. In late 1942, the Nazis established a ghetto and a forced labor camp for surviving Jews from Busk and nearby towns. In Spring, 1943, some 3,000 people – including people transported from liquidated ghettos – were confined there. In the first half of 1943, ghetto inmate Jacob Eisenberg organised the ghetto underground resistance movement. Its activists were able to amass firearms, but they were betrayed, caught and executed by the Nazis. Most of Jews remaining in Busk were killed on May 21, 1943. Only a small group of survivors were sent to the Janowska

concentration camp in Lviv. That summer, the Nazis discovered six large underground bunkers in town with 140 Jews hiding in them. The armed escapees tried to resist but without success.

**Memorial sites** ¶ During the German occupation, Busk was devastated. The occupying forces destroyed a mill and factories, the telegraph and the telephone office; they disrupted the operation of almost all industrial enterprises and demolished dozens of residential buildings. After the war, newly resettled people and the surviving Busk dwellers began gradually to rebuild the town. Busk became the district administrative centre. Today about 8,000 people live in town but there is no Jewish community. ¶ Near the old Jewish cemetery (between the cemetery and the floodplain of the Solotvyn River), there is a place where, according to residents' testimonies, mass executions of the Jewish population took place. The site and the cemetery are used today as a pasture. In 2004, representatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sokhnut) erected a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, and in the summer of 2006, excavation works were conducted near the cemetery, at the site of executions, where the remains of 1,750 victims with traces of violent murder were uncovered.

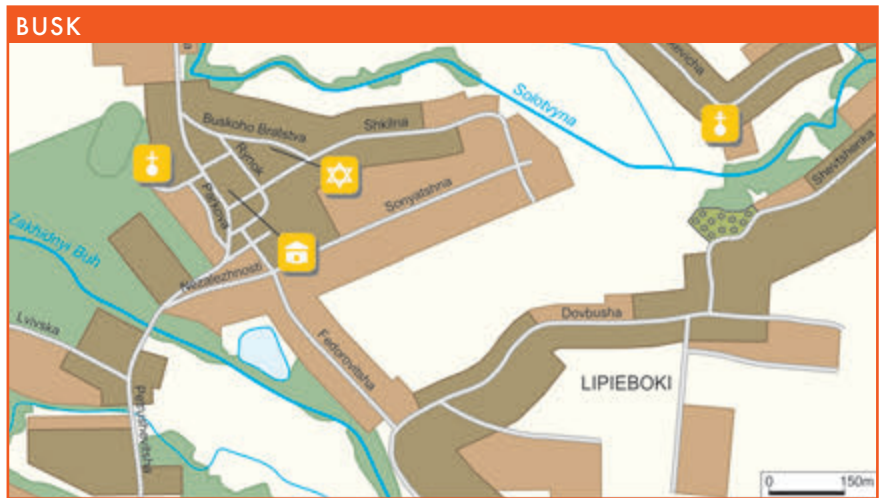
Father **Patrick Desbois**, the president of the “**Yahad-in Unum**” organization, initiated the search for the places of mass executions of the Jews who had been murdered during the Holocaust in East Europe. Father Desbois dedicated his life to fighting anti-Semitism and establishing religious reconciliation between Jews and Catholics. By today, his organization identified about 600 mass graves and recorded more than 1,900 testimonies of the witnesses of mass murders. Father Desbois crossed the breadth and width of Ukraine looking for the places of mass murders of the Holocaust victims. Before



*filling back the pits, – he explained in his book *The Guardian of Memories: the Blood Traces of the Holocaust – I leased a helicopter so that we would be able to make photos demonstrating the magnitude of the murder.**

Worth  
seeing

**Jewish cemetery** (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Shevchenka St. 🕒 **Former synagogue** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), Shkilna St. 🕒 **Wooden Church of St. Paraskeva** (1708), 56a M. Shashkevycha St. 🕒 **Wooden Orthodox Church of St. Onuphrius** (1758) and a chapel carved in the trunk of a millennial oak tree (1864), Khmelnytskoho St. 🕒 **Palace of Count Badeni** (19<sup>th</sup> c.), 12 J. Petrushevycha St. (not open to public). 🕒 **Church of St. Stanislaus** (1780), Parkova St.



Surrounding  
area

**Olesko** (22 km): Olesko Castle (16<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a branch of the Lviv National Art Gallery; ruins of the synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Church of the Holy Trinity (16<sup>th</sup> c.); the former Capuchin monastery (18<sup>th</sup> c.); a Jewish cemetery (with an ohel and several matzevot). 🕒 **Zolochiv** (33 km): a former synagogue (1724); a Jewish cemetery; a defense castle (17<sup>th</sup> c.), currently a museum. 🕒 **Pidhirtsi** (36 km): Pidhirtsi Castle (1635–1640); a Basilian monastery.