

Dubno

Ukr. Дубно, Yid. דובנע

This is one of our most lively towns, bustling with trade, in some seasons of the year.

J.I. Kraszewski, *Volhynian Evenings*, 1859

Contracts ¶ Dubno is one of the oldest towns in Rivne Oblast. The first written mention of it dates back to 1100. Since the late 14th century, the rural settlement of Dubno belonged to the Ostrogski princely family. In 1498, at the request of Prince Konstanty Ostrogski, the owner of Dubno, Grand Duke Aleksander of Lithuania granted the town free settlement privileges. At that time, the castle was modernised and its wooden structure was replaced by a masonry one. According to the 1616 register, the castle had the largest treasury in the entire estate of the Ostrogski princes – an irresistible lure for enemy armies. In the first half of the 16th century, Dubno was circumscribed by walls and ramparts and thus transformed into a fortress-town. Thanks to

these fortifications, it has gone down in history as a town that was never seized during Tatar or Cossacks raids. Even Jews of Dubno called the town *Dubna rabbati* – the great and mighty Dubno. ¶ In 1774, Dubno became an important trade centre thanks to the establishment of wholesale contract fairs, which were held until 1795. After this date, it had the biggest Jewish community in Volhynia. Profits generated by contracts allowed the owners of the town – Princes Lubomirski – to develop the municipal infrastructure. The town streets were paved, and many stone buildings were erected. The increasing significance of Dubno as a trade and cultural centre made it the largest city in Volhynia in the late 18th and at the beginning of the 19th centuries.

”” *We, who need fixed times during the year to remind us that we need to think of ourselves, come here to the so-called contract fairs. The Dubno fairs used to compete with those of Lviv, and now they are threatened by the more and more frequently attended fairs of Kyiv [...]. In addition to the entrance gate from the direction of Murawica, known as the Lutsk gate, where a Masonic lodge met in the early years of our century, a nearby church and a former Bernardine monastery, a newer parish church, one convent, the so-called town hall in the middle of the market square and housing a contract hall and shops, Dubno has only a few brick houses, and no sign of new buildings emerging are to be seen for some years now.* ¶ J.I. Kraszewski, *The Volhynian Evenings*, 1859

When the wholesale contract fairs were moved to other towns, the economic life of Dubno went into decline. From the second half of the 18th century, it gradually acquired features of a military town due to the 41st Selenginsk Infantry Regiment and the 11th Chuguev Uhlan Regiment that were quartered there. In the late 19th century, a fort was built near Dubno, which became a strategically important Russian military facility on the border with Austria-Hungary.

The Jews of Dubno ¶ The first mention of Jews in Dubno is dated to 1532 and states that local Jews possessed 300 oxen. In the 16th century, Jews from Spain and Orleans, France, came to Dubno, but the large-scale Jewish settlement in the town did not begin until after the 1569 Union of Lublin which brought Poland and

A unique find connected with the Jewish community of Dubno is a mysterious object made of marl. It has a distinctive, flattened, roughly square-shaped base. Its upper part is elongated, with a widened shield bearing carved symbols, divided by a horizontal line. The escutcheon bears vivid images of two hands and, above them, three letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Dimensions: height – 2.3 cm, length – 2 cm; dimensions of the escutcheon: 1.6 × 1.8 cm. The inscription on the artefact can be translated as follows: "For the priestly (kohens') blessing." It is possible that the object was used as a stamp or a matrix for casting a stamp. Perhaps it was also used as a lid or a decorative element of some tool or vessel. Discovered near the synagogue in Dubno, the object is dated to the 16th century. At present, it is the oldest object connected with the history of Dubno's Jewish community and is kept at the Historical and Cultural Reserve in Dubno.

Dubno Castle was not captured by the Cossacks during the Cossack wars in the mid-17th century. When Cossack troops approached the town, the town elder voivode, along with 80 Polish soldiers, locked himself in the castle, but Jews were barred from entering the fortress.



Lithuania into a single Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

[A] Gate building of Dubno Castle, 2014. Photo by Robert Miedziocha, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

[B] Lutsk Gate in Dubno, 2014. Photo by Yuriy Pshenichnyi

As a result, between 1,100 and 1,500 Jews were murdered by the Cossacks just in front of the castle. The Jewish community was reborn after this tragedy. Already, a map of the town drawn in 1671 shows a synagogue and a Jewish quarter.



A Dubno, a view of the town, 1925. Photo by Henryk Poddebski, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

B Residents of Dubno near the synagogue, circa 1914, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



“One valuable ritual object in the great synagogue was a golden menorah (110 cm high and 100 cm wide). It is [said]: this menorah was stolen by a non-Jew who used to put out the candles on Friday nights. After he broke it he put its shafts and its parts in a sack and brought it to one of his associates to sell. One man saw it, and alerted the people of the community. The thief was sent to prison and the menorah was returned to the synagogue. ¶ *Dubno: A Memorial Book of the Jewish Community of Dubno, Wolyn (Dubno: Sefer zikkaron)*, trans. by Sara Mages, Tel Aviv 1966, retrieved from www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor

In 1716, a girl who had converted from Christianity to Judaism so that she could marry a Jew was brought before the local court. The court decided to burn the bride alive for her crime against the Sacraments. The *kahal* that had allowed this wedding to take place was punished with a hefty fine. The 18th century was marked with a belated Polish reaction to Counter-Reformation. It was the period when Jews were prohibited from employing Christian servants and when conflicts between the Jewish community and monasteries were not infrequent. Documents from the late 16th and early 17th centuries attest to regular arguments over ponds, breweries, and an inn, but later 18th-century conflicts include disputations on matters of theology and direct anti-Judaic invectives. ¶

In 1794, a Jewish printing house opened in the town, which functioned for 40 years. In 1857, there were 15 synagogues and prayer houses and 22 *heydorim* (elementary schools) in Dubno. In 1861, Dubno had a population of 7,922, including 6,258 Jews. In 1897, 7,018 out of the town's 14,257 residents was Jewish.

The Maggid of Dubno and others

¶ One of the most famous 18th-century Jewish preachers, Jacob ben Wolf Kranz (known as the Maggid of Dubno), resided in Dubno. The town was also the birthplace of the translator of the Pentateuch, Salomon ben Joel, and the writer Haim Zvi Lerner. ¶ **Jacob ben Wolf Kranz** (1740–1804) lived in Dubno for 18 years and was also a preacher in Międzyrzec

Podlaski (Mezrichh), Żółkiew (Zhovkva), Włodawa, Kalisz, and Zamość. He enjoyed immense popularity and also visited various German lands, where he delivered sermons in major Jewish communities. In Berlin, he met the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, the founder and spiritual leader of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment). Mendelssohn called Kranz “the Jewish Aesop” because of his brilliance and love of parables: Kranz wrote a multi-volume Hebrew commentary on the Torah adding to his meticulous exegesis various parables, folk legends, and real life examples making his commentary into a Musar (ethical) text. His jokes about Hasidim (of whom Kranz was quite critical) were rich in folk humour. His disciples published his commentaries together with the text of the Pentateuch and later in the 19th century, the parables from the commentaries were extrapolated from the text, translated



Aron Kodesh in the synagogue in Dubno, 1930s, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

back into Yiddish (the language in which Jacob Krantz preached), and published in two volumes entitled *Ale masholim fun Dubiner Maggid* (All Parables of the Maggid of Dubno).

“Once the Gaon of Vilna, undoubtedly the most influential legal authority among eighteenth-century Jews, asked [Yakov Kranz]: why was he so keen on parables and fables? Would it not be better to make a direct statement in a sermon? Tell Jews the truth – directly, to their face! Well, said the Maggid of Dubno, let me answer this question with a parable. ¶ Once the naked Truth was walking through the streets of the shtetl, seeking alms. Nobody wanted to greet her, nobody let her in, and nobody wanted to recognize her. She was desperate and depressed, and her life was miserable. Once a Parable met her and asked: why, what’s going on with you, sister? The Truth complained and cried bitterly. Well, said the Parable, let’s do this: I will lend you my clothes and you will walk around in them seeking support and exposure – deal? The Truth agreed. Once she put on the Parable’s clothes, everybody began turning to her, everybody was seeking her; they welcomed her and rejoiced in and were uplifted by her presence. ¶ Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *A Tale of Two Towns*, 2015, www.shtetlroutes.eu

Solomon (Shlomo) ben Joel Dubno (1738–1813) was a translator of the Pentateuch, a philologist, and a poet. From 1767, he lived in Amsterdam and Berlin. He taught the son of Moses

Mendelssohn, who – holding Dubno’s knowledge in high esteem – became his patron and friend. It was Dubno who insisted on publishing the German translation of the Pentateuch that



Entrance to the synagogue in Dubno. An inscription in Hebrew is visible over the entrance, reading: "In the house of God we walked with the crowd," meaning the Jewish year 5553 (1792–93), before 1914, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN)

Mendelssohn had made for his son; he also wrote a commentary on the text. He died in Amsterdam. ¶ **Haim Zvi Lerner** (1815–1889) was a Jewish scholar, writer, and columnist, born in Dubno. Thanks to the support of Jewish educational activists, he attended the Bezalel Stern Jewish school in Odessa, one of the first modern-type enlightened Jewish schools in the Russian Empire with German as the language of instruction. He taught at a Jewish school in Berdychiv and, from 1851, at the rabbinic seminary in Zhytomyr. He published a Hebrew-language grammar textbook *More ha-lashon* (The Language Mentor), that was reissued six times during his lifetime and several times after his death. The textbook owed its popularity to the way it explained grammar, which resembled the system used for teaching European languages. It enabled learners to study individual

topics more effectively compared to former textbooks. ¶ **Avrom Ber Gottlober** (1810–1899) was a Jewish poet, historian, writer, and journalist, and a Haskalah activist. He was born in Starokostiantyniv. In his youth, he studied the Bible and the Talmud and was fascinated by Kabbalah. In 1828, when he met the Jewish educational activist and *maskil* Josef Perl in Ternopil, he devoted himself zealously to studying secular sciences. Gottlober's acquaintance with the Jewish Haskalah activists Menahem Mendel Lefin and Isaac Ber Levinsohn had a major impact on his worldview. Gottlober became one of the most active and prolific *maskilim* (enlightened Jews) in the Russian Empire. In his poems and prose narrative, he fought for reforms in Jewish education, welcomed the reform of the school system undertaken by the government, and criticised Orthodox Jews for bigotry, backwardness, and obscurantism. He worked at public schools for Jewish boys in Kamianets-Podilskyi and Starokostiantyniv. From 1866, he taught Talmudic texts at the rabbinic seminary in Zhytomyr. After the school was closed down in 1873, he settled in Dubno and, in 1876, started publishing a magazine *Ha-boker Or* (Heb.: Morning Light). Gottlober's memoirs and autobiography are a precious source of knowledge about the history of European Jews in the first half of the 19th century. The poet, by then blind, spent the last years of his life in Białystok. ¶ **Salomon Mandelkern** (1846–1902) was a Jewish writer, lexicographer, and translator. He was born into a Hasidic family in Mlyniv, in Dubno County. After moving to Dubno at the age of 16, he continued his religious education studying

with local rabbis but also mastered European languages. He graduated from the Department of Oriental Languages at the St Petersburg University from the Department of Law at Odessa University. In 1873–1880, he worked as a rabbi's assistant in Odessa. He wrote a 3-volume history of Russia and Poland in Hebrew and published the first translation into Russian of Nathan Hannover's chronicle *Yeven Metsulah* (The Abyss of Despair) on Jews in the midst of the Cossack Revolution of 1648–1649. ¶ In 1880, he moved to Leipzig, where he became fascinated with Zionism. He published two volumes of his own poems and was one of the first Hebrew poets who composed ballads. He translated the works of Goethe, Heine, Byron, Pushkin, and Lermontov into Hebrew as well as Vladimir Korolenko's stories into German. Mandelkern's *magnum opus*, which brought him fame around the world, was the Jewish-Aramaic Concordance, published in 1896 (the last edition – 1967).

The Jewish quarter ¶ When Jews settled in Dubno, the southern part of the town, on the swampy banks of the Ikva River, was allocated to them, and this is where the Jewish quarter developed. The increasing Jewish population



Jewish gymnasium (secondary school), 1928, collection of the Dubno Historical and Cultural Reserve

led to high-density urban housing with many small streets and lanes. Parts of this urban layout have survived until today. In 1782–1795, a wooden *shul* was replaced with a grand stone synagogue, which still stands. The construction was founded by the *kahal* with the financial support of Prince Michał Lubomirski. That is why there is a plaque above the entrance with the coat of arms of the Lubomirski family with the prince's initials and an inscription below the coat of arms, reading: “We shall go to the House of God, heedless of the lightning, thunder, rain, and snow,” as well as the date according to the Jewish calendar: 5554 (1794/1795). The synagogues in this region mentioned the name of the generous prince in their prayers.

” *The synagogue in the city of Dubno is a very beautiful stone building, its height is about 30 cubits (21 meters), and its dome rests on sixteen pillars that were built in four rows. Its construction lasted approximately twelve years, from 5543 to 5554, when – as it [was] written in the community ledger – they started to pray there. [...] Twenty-five years have passed since a reliable man, an old man of about seventy years, told me that he had heard in his youth from his father, who was eighty years old at that time that he was there when the cornerstone was laid for the synagogue's building. He saw with his own eyes how the townspeople, their chiefs and notable persons sat around the tables, which were made of wooden planks that were placed on top of empty wine and brandy barrels, and [a] glass of brandy and honey cakes before them, and in their company was also this prince,*

a great respected minister of the Polish Kingdom and one of the military leaders, who drank a glass with them after he [had] told them a few things and after he blessed them: That they'll finish successfully what they have started to build, and they'll pray in this synagogue to God who created the heavens and the earth, and all living things upon the earth.

¶ Based on: *Dubno Rabbati* (Hebr.: *Dubno the Great*) by Rabbi Haim Zeev Margaliyot, Warsaw 1910, as cited in: *Dubno. A Memorial to the Jewish Community of Dubno, Wolyn* (Hebr.: *Dubno: Sefer zikkaron*), trans. by Sara Mages, Tel Aviv 1966, www.jewishgen.org

World War I and its aftermath ¶

During World War I, the town's economic situation deteriorated sharply. Dubno was essentially destroyed and abandoned. In addition, it was struck by epidemics of pox and typhoid. The troops stationed here began to take advantage of every opportunity to rob the local population. They did so by imposing

numerous "forced contributions" as well as by outright robbery and holding people for ransom. In July 1919, the Jews of Dubno had to face another challenge – Soviet authorities ordered the liquidation of the *kahal*, the so-far officially recognized Jewish communal umbrella organization.

Isaac Babel (1894–1940), a Russian Jewish writer of international renown and formidable artistic influence. In 1920, as a war correspondent with the Commander Budyonny's First Cavalry Army, he stayed in various towns of the Rivne Oblast; his observations were reflected in the pages of his later works, first and foremost, *The Red Cavalry*. Using the events in Dubno as an example, he gave a detailed description of the "liberation mission" of the Bolsheviks. Russian military authorities including Commander Budyonny considered his description of the Red Army an anti-patriotic lampoon.

“Dubno synagogues. Everything destroyed. Two little vestibules left, centuries, two tiny rooms, everything full of memories, four synagogues, close together, then pasture, plowed fields, the setting sun. The synagogues are ancient buildings, squat, green and blue, the Hasidic synagogue, inside, nondescript architecture. I go into the Hasidic synagogue. It's Friday. Such misshapen little figures, such worn faces, it all came alive for me, what it was like three hundred years ago, the old men running about the synagogue, no wailing, for some reason they keep moving from corner to corner, their worship could not be less formal. [...] A quiet evening in the synagogue, that always has an irresistible effect on me, four synagogues in a row. [...] Can it be that ours is the century in which they perish? ¶ Isaac Babel, *Dnevnik 1920* (1920 Diary), trans. by H.T. Willetts, 1990.

In 1921–1922, the Jewish community began to gradually rebuild its institutions, including the social relief organizations. The funds were limited, so they appealed to Jews from abroad for help.

First, a hospital was established. But in the first few years it had no surgeon, which meant that patients requiring an operation had to go to Lwów – and they did not always make it. It was not until

1925 that the Rojtmans – a surgeon couple – came to live in Dubno. They had at their disposal a spacious operating theatre and X-ray equipment.

Jewish education ¶ As in other shtetls, Jewish education in Dubno was based exclusively on religious upbringing. The situation changed in the mid-19th century. The first Jewish private school was established in 1876, and another one was opened in 1890, both with elements of German-oriented and Enlightenment-inspired education. When Countess Shuvalova founded a modern secondary school for women in the town in 1907, Jewish girls were among its students, and two Jews became members of the School Welfare Committee. The same year, a boys' secondary school was opened, in which 230 out of 310 students were Jewish. The curriculum of the School of Trade in Dubno – apart from mathematics, economics, and science of commodities – included such cutting-edge matters as advertising and Esperanto. There was also a local Tarbut Hebrew school. Jews who planned *aliyah* to the land of Israel (Ottoman, later British Palestine) gained practical skills in workshops and learnt agriculture by working at a *hakhsharah* (training farm) located in a nature reserve called "Palestine." Some Jewish young people belonged to Hashomer Hatzair Zionist youth organization. There was also a local sports club, "Maccabee," named after the leaders of the anti-Hellenizers movement of the early 2nd century b.c.e.

World War II and the Holocaust ¶ In September 1939, Dubno was incorporated into the USSR. On



June 25, 1941, German troops entered the town. They began persecuting and murdering local Jews, who at that time constituted a 12,000-wise community. In April 1942, a ghetto was established (in addition to Jews, Roma Gypsies also were confined there). On May 27, 1942, the *Einsatzgruppen* executed approx. 3,800 Jews at the old airport outside the town. The last residents of the ghetto were murdered in October 1942. Only a few dozen Jews from Dubno survived the Holocaust.

Traces of Jewish presence ¶ Today, Dubno has around 38,000 residents. There is no registered Jewish community here, but the architecture of the former Jewish quarter has been preserved. South of the market place there stands the abandoned building of the former synagogue, and behind the bus station, there is a destroyed 16th-century Jewish graveyard. Only fragments of matzevot have survived, but there is also a monument and plaque reminding all who visit about the history of this place. The museum in Dubno Castle is one of the region's major tourist attractions – a part of the exhibition is devoted to the history of the Jewish community in the town.

Dubno, Kyryla i Mefodiya Street, with the synagogue building visible in the background, 2014. Photo by Emil Majuk, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

Worth seeing

Former **synagogue** (16th c.), 23 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **☪ Ostrogski Castle**: the complex comprises the buildings of the 16th-century castle of Princes Ostrogski, plus the castle wing over the gate from the 16th–17th c. and the 18th-century Lubomirski Castle, 7a Zamkova St, tel. +380365643568. **☪ Bernardine Monastery** (1629), 28 Danyla Halytskoho St. **☪ Lutsk Gate** (1623), 32 Danyla Halytskoho St. **☪ Orthodox Church of St. George and bell tower** (1700), 10 Sadova St. **☪ Carmelite Church and Convent** (1630–1742), 51 Tarasa Shevchenka St. **☪ Dąbrowski's house** (19th c.), 156 Mykhaila Hrushevskoho St. **☪ St. Elias Orthodox Cathedral** (1908), 13 Danyla Halytskoho St. **☪ Merchant houses** (19th c.) 6, 10 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **☪ Elbert's house** (19th c.), 4 Tarasa Bulby St. **☪ Grynberg's House** (18th c.), 1 Svobody St. **☪ Parish church** (1830), 18 Ostrozko St. **☪ Commercial and residential houses** (19th c.), 8–18 Svobody St.; 1 Mykhaila Drahomanova St.; 12 Kyryla i Mefodiya St. **☪ Hop manufacture** (19th c.), 48 Svobody St. **☪ Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration** (Spaso-Preobrazhenska) (16th c.), 30 Ivana Franka St. **☪ Countess Shuvalova's Manor** (19th c.), 104 Mykhaila Hrushevskoho St.

Surrounding area

Tarakaniv (6 km): defensive fort (19th c.). **☪ Mlyniv** (20 km): a Jewish cemetery (18th c.); a palace (1791), currently a museum; the Orthodox Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God (1840). **☪ Mizoch** (30 km): a Jewish cemetery (18th c.); the Church of St. John of Nepomuk (1795). **☪ Zdolbuniv** (42 km): a Jewish cemetery (18th c.); more than 100 matzevot; the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul (1908). **☪ Rivne** (45 km): the main city of the region; a Jewish cemetery (16th c.); two synagogues (19th c., Shkilna St.); the Local History Museum; Catholic and Orthodox churches; parks, theatres. **☪ Klevan** (64 km): a Jewish cemetery (18th c.); a former synagogue (19th c.); Czartoryski Castle (15th c.); the Church of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1630); the Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Mother of God (1777); the green railway “tunnel of love.”

