

Demographic Structure of the Jewish Population of Zamosc in the Light of Judenrat and other Documents

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At the time of the Nazi invasion of Poland, the Polish city of **Zamosc** was inhabited by some 12,500 Jews. With the onset of war, the numerical structure of the Jewish community changed abruptly and without precedent. The change was brought about by war-induced migration, the departure of a significant number of Jews for Soviet Russia, the influx of refugees from northern Poland, the disruption of natural demographic patterns and, last but not least, the gradual extermination. Official German and Jewish documents, however, hardly mention the extermination period, the ongoing deportations and the scope, dates and duration of the latter.

More information does exist on the first stage of the Nazi occupation. Several German documents, as well as a substantial number of records produced by the Judenrat (the Jewish community leadership under the Germans), report on the years 1940-41. One highly valuable source of information on this period is a census of all the Jews living in **Zamosc**, which probably dates back to mid-1940.

Jewish population suffered its first losses as a result of the German bombing of the city in the early days of the war (**September 3, 9 and 12, 1939**). Though an exact casualty count is unavailable, the figure was certainly not the 500 quoted by the Chairman of the Zamość Judenrat, Mr. **Mieczyslaw Garfinkiel**; 100 casualties would seem closer to the truth.

Zamosc's

The Germans first entered **Zamosc** on Wednesday, **September 13, 1939**, and remained in the city for about two weeks. **On September 26**, they left and, the next day, **Zamosc** was occupied by Soviet troops. Then, on **October 5**, the Red Army withdrew because of adjustments in the demarcation line between the German and Soviet conquered zones. The evacuation continued into the following day. Numerous Jews left the city along with the retreating Soviet troops.

The departure of several thousand Zamosc Jews for Soviet Russia was unprecedented in the history of the city's Jewish community. The refugees, most of whom hoped that the fortunes of war in the west would make it possible for them to soon return to their native city, settled near the Bug River. The majority took refuge in the city of **Włodzimierz Wołyński**, approximately 70 kilometers from Zamosc. Others settled in the cities of **Lwów, Brody, Luck, Kowel** and even **Białystok**.

A small percentage of refugees already returned to **Zamosc** during the initial period (their numbers increased upon the outbreak of war with the USSR). Among those who came back were people who, for fear of German bombing, had left the city temporarily for the towns and villages around **Zamosc**. During this period, there was also an influx to **Zamosc** of displaced persons, whether by choice or compulsion. A transport of displaced Jews from the cities of **Włocławek**(556 persons), **Kolo**(175 persons) and **Łódź** arrived in Zamosc as early as December 19, 1939. All the men from this transport were held under SS guard in the Old City Synagogue for about four weeks (until January 15, 1940). They were then released and ordered to settle in **Szczebrzeszyn**. Most of them, however, soon ran the risk of returning to their families in **Zamosc**.

Reporting on the situation at the beginning of 1940, the Chairman of the Judenrat writes:

‘The city's Jewish population quickly increased during this time as a consequence of the massive influx of Jews from surrounding towns and villages, where the situation was much worse. Even then, before the establishment of central ghettos, every larger or more important Jewish city, like a lodestone attracted Jews from the vicinity.’

In the first days of September, an unknown number of draftees left **Zamosc**. Only a small portion of them subsequently returned to the city.

The flight of Jews from **Zamosc** on such a tremendous scale (60-70% of the pre-war population) was not unusual when compared to other cities in the region. An even larger population decrease (some 75%) occurred in the city of **Tomaszów Lubelski** between September, 1939 (some 6,000 Jews) and mid-1940 (1,455 Jews). Out of

approximately 7,500 Jews who lived in **Hrubieszów** before the outbreak of the war, less than 5000 (4,978) remained in 1940 - that is, two thirds of the pre-war population. In **Krasnobród**, based on a count that goes back to 1921, only half of the Jewish population of remained by 1940.

Zamosc, on the other hand, by **March 15, 1940**, was characterized by a constant growth in the Jewish population. According to a count dated **March 15, 1940**, the city had a total of 1,490 refugees, mostly from the cities of **Włocławek, Koło, Łódź, Wiedeń, Krasnobród, Janów, Bilgoraj and Frampole**.

Significant, though seasonal, fluctuations in the number of Zamosc Jews occurred in 1940 due to the dispatch of workers to out-of-town labour camps. The largest number of workers was placed at the **Bortatyczedrainage camp, which had been designed back in February for 550 inmates. In June, some 550-600 men were marched from Zamość to the camp, and made to work there well into late autumn. Many died because of the horrendous conditions; others were released. On October 17, there were still about 300 people in the camp. It was liquidated in November, 1940, and the survivors were allowed to return to Zamosc. A few weeks after the deportation to Bortatycze, around 300 people were sent from Zamosc to the Bełżec labour camp. In mid-August another 26 people, caught in a round up by Police Battalion 104, were also sent there. A total of 500 Jews from Zamosc and its environs were held there.**

In **April 1940**, apparently, the Judenrat, on its own initiative, began to record all the Jews living in the city, thereby creating an invaluable, and fairly accurate, document on the Jewish population of **Zamosc** at the start of the occupation. The census gave the following personal details: name, surname, occupation, date and place of birth, and address. It recorded 10,086 men, women and children. Rather than a single list from “A” to “Z” in sequence, there are three lists. The first comprises 8,000 persons and, evidently, covers the first two-three months of the census - that is, from **April to June 1940**. The other two were produced somewhat later. The closing date is difficult to establish, though it was very likely prior to **May 1941**.

Included in the list are also names of people who had either died or left the city. In 1940-41 many refugees from the early occupation period returned to **Zamosc**. These included draftees, people who had fled to the countryside, and even some from the Soviet occupation zone. Moreover, in the second half of 1940, when closed ghettos began to be established in major cities, numerous people began heading for the provinces. This lengthy process was prompted by a preference for small, open and “safe” locations. As a result, a significant number of people arrived in **Zamosc** from such major cities as **Warsaw, Łódź, Lublin** etc. Some of these were simply returning to their native city. Attesting to the scope of this migration are the protests of the Chairman of the Zamosc Judenrat to the Judenrats of **Lublin** and **Warsaw**, asking that the trend be stopped.

, Kraśniczyn, Płoskie, Puławy, Annapole, Dubienka, Sitno and Siedlce.

On the basis of the place of birth specified in the census, apart from **Zamosc**, most of the Jews hailed from **Izbica, Krasnobród, Komarów, Tomaszów Lubelski, Szczebrzeszyn, Bilgoraj, Grabowiec, Hrubieszów, Krasnystaw, Tyszowiec, Chelmno, Warszawa, Wojślawice, Tarnogród, Łaszczów, Skierbieszów, Józefów, Frampole, Turobin, Łódź, Piaski, Janów, Krzeszów, Rajowiec, Łabun, Włodzimierz Wołyński, Włodawa, Gorzków, Chomęciski, Żółkiewka**

On the whole, the area inhabited by Zamosc Jews during the war comprised three neighbourhoods: the **Old City**, and the suburbs of **Nowa Osada** and **Lubelskie Przedmieście**, with their main roads (**Lwowska** and **Piłsudskiego**) and adjoining streets.

Almost half the Jews at the time lived in **Nowa Osada** - **49.4%**, slightly less in the **Old City** - **40.9 %** - and the remaining **9.6%** in the suburb of **Lubelskie Przedmieście**.

In the years 1940-41, more than half the Jewish population (51.2%) was under the age of 29. This was a far smaller percentage than in 1921 (66.2%). The decrease pertained primarily to the youngest age brackets, with the under-49 category remaining fairly stable for 20 years (87.1% in 1921 and 80.4% in 1940). This development was caused

by a disruption of demographic patterns as a consequence of occupation, by a drop in the birth rate and a rise in mortality among the youngest age bracket.

In early **April 1940**, the Germans posted public instructions ordering all Jews living in the **Old City** and in **Lubelskie Przedmieście** to leave their homes by **May 1** and move into the New City. **Most of the Jews complied. The expulsion was managed mainly by the Judenrat, whose Chairman recorded the following in his memoirs of the period:**

‘**Nowa Osada**, to which the Jews moved, is a Zamosc suburb some two km. away, on the road to **Lwów**. In area, it is far larger than the city, itself, and had small, wooden houses with gardens (...). At the time of the move, Poles inhabited the better houses. We had to make do with the run-down houses and worst shacks abandoned by the poorest Jewish population that left Zamosc in 1939 along with the Red Army. Given that these homes had belonged to the most impoverished Jews, who up to 1939 had also lived in the worst possible housing and sanitary conditions, one can understand how difficult it was to accommodate the Jews there (...) People had to be put up in shops and industrial halls. There was no water-and-sewage system, and public wells were used instead. The situation became slightly more tolerable when part of the Polish population moved from **Nowa Osada** to Zamosc and took over the apartments evacuated by Jews’.

On **May 1, 1941**, German Military Police units, the Polish “Grey” police, the Polish Fire Brigade and city employees specially recruited for the task under a representative of the Zamosc Region Governor’s Office, Mr. Karol Voss, began to comb the **Old City** for Jews who had not complied with the evacuation orders. The daylong search resulted in the capture of 250 people. They were escorted under guard to the former office of the Farmers’ Association (61 Lwowska Street) and subsequently deported to **Komarów**. In a matter of days, a few hundred Jews were expelled from the New City to **Krasnobród**.

After the transfer to **Nowa Osada**, **Jews remained at only two locations within the Old City. Craftsmen, who were employed by the Germans (mostly tailors and shoemakers) lived in a building on Zamenhof St.; while several dozen young**

people, who provided personal services to the Gestapo, the Schutzpolizei and the Ortskommandantur, lived at the former Victoria Hotel between Kollataj and Perec Streets. A number of Jews who had been expelled continued to work in the city (e.g., at Zipper's carpentry, located in the synagogue building), making their way every day from **Nowa Osada** to the Old City.

The ghetto in the **Old City** was not closed off. It had no definite borders, nor was it fenced off from the rest of the city. Until **September 1, 1942**, both Poles and Jews lived in the area. However, whereas Jews living in **Nowa Osada** were not allowed to leave, Poles could come and go as they pleased.

After the relocation of the Jews in **May 1941**, 78 deportees from **Częstochowa** arrived in **Zamosc**. From the start of **June 1941**, refugees of 1939, who until then had lived in the Soviet occupation zone, began to find their way back to **Zamosc** illegally.

On the eve of Passover, 1942, on **Saturday, April 11**, at 2 p.m., Polish Police and German Military Police surrounded the **Nowa Osada** neighbourhood. The first deportation - Aktion - had started. The Gestapo in **Zamosc** arrived at the office of the Judenrat and demanded that 2,500 people be rounded up for deportation at the **Nowa Osada** market square, by 4 o'clock. By 5 p.m., the quota was achieved, but the action continued until about 8 p.m. Initially, Jewish orderlies and some members of the Judenrat took part in the round up; later in the afternoon, they were joined by German Military Police and Gestapo. At approximately 9 p.m., a 21-car train appeared at the platform between Powiakow and Orlicz-Dreszer Streets. At the same time, the Jews, under heavy guard, were made to run in formations of fives along Lwowska Street to the platform; those unable to keep up were killed on the spot. After the cars were loaded, the train, packed with deportees, remained at the platform until late in the night. Only around midnight did it depart for **Belżec**, where it arrived early the next morning.

It is difficult to establish the exact number of victims of this first German deportation (and the same applies to the next four). Estimates, based on different narratives, vary from 2,500 to 3,000 dead or deported. The first account, recorded "in real time" by an

anonymous writer, sets the figure at “more than 2,600” deportees and 520 dead. Later reports assess the total losses at 3,000 men, women and children. **Mieczysław Garfinkiel**, who based his information on a new census of the ghetto residents taken by the Judenrat during the first few days after the Aktion, provides more accurate data. According to this source, the Aktion lost the Jewish community of **Zamosc** 3,150 dead and deported. About 150 people were murdered on route from the **Nowa Osada** market square to the train platform (some of the corpses were later loaded onto the train cars together with the passengers, whereas the rest were collected at night by special squads of porters from **Chewro Nosim** and buried in the cemetery). **The next day, Sunday, 89 people were found murdered by Germans in private apartments. The only official document on the deportation of April 11 dates from May 9, 1942, and consists of correspondence between the Jewish Mutual Aid Society in Zamosc (Mr. Garfinkiel) and the Counselor of the Jewish Mutual Aid Society at the Lublin Region Governor’s Office. According to this document, after the deportation, 4,056 Jews remained in Zamosc.**

Recalling the first Aktion, the Chairman of the Judenrat writes:

‘After the second census, it was established that the Aktion encompassed more than 3,000 people. The majority of the victims were women. There were 700 casualties among children up to the age of 14, and the rest were men. This was because most of the men were away in labour camps at the time of the Aktion’.

The decrease in the Jewish population of **Zamosc**, comparable to that of 1939, was soon offset by a massive influx of Jews from the Protectorate and the Reich itself. On **April 30**, and **May 1** and **2**, transports of Czech Jews arrived from the **Theresienstadt** ghetto. Each of the transports numbered 1,000 people. Most of the deportees were Jews of **Prague**. On **May 1**, a transport of 800 German Jews from **Dusseldorf** in Westphalia left for **Zamosc**. Czech and German Jews constituted the majority of deportees in the subsequent Actions. Only five persons survived the first Czech transport - 0.5 % of the total number of deportees.

On **April 28**, in **Zamosc** as in the other cities of occupied Poland, the Germans carried out a round up of the Communists. From a pre-war list of 30 Communists,

only a few were captured. In place of the rest, other people were rounded up - fathers, brothers, and even total strangers with similar names.

The second deportation took place during Pentecost (Shavuot), on Sunday, **May 24, 1942**. Most of the deportees were Czech and German Jews (approximately 1,000 people), while the rest were native Zamosc Jews - elderly people, those unable to work, and women and children (some 400-500 people). They were assembled in the barracks next to the train station, and detained for about two days. In the meantime, Jews were rounded up in neighbouring localities (mainly **Komarów and Tyszowiec**), **brought in on horse-drawn wagons and held together with the Zamość Jews. Eventually, on May 26, they were divided into three groups and sent off to Sobibor.**

The third Action took place on **August 11** and was carried out by the Lublin Gestapo. The Germans surrounded the neighbourhood somewhat tardily, enabling most of the Jews to go into hiding. Thus, for the first time, scores of labour-camp inmates from the city camps, some members of the Judenrat, as well as a number of Judenrat employees, along with their families, were deported. The deportees that day included a large number of children. The Germans succeeded in capturing 'only some 350 Jews,' who were sent to **Majdanek**, where most of them were murdered over a period of several months. As in the case of the first Action, but unlike the second, in the third Action a large number of people were killed on the spot.

The failure of the third Action, on **September 1**, may have been responsible for the fact that the Jews were now confined to a specific section of **Nowa Osada, and the Polish population was ordered to leave. The concentration of more than 4,000 people in so small an area facilitated the German task in each of the subsequent Actions. It also caused an unprecedented population density and extremely cramped living conditions.**

The area of the ghetto was not fenced off until the final deportation. Actually, in mid-September, the Judenrat initiated efforts to transform the ghetto into a closed labour camp, but to no avail.

The fourth deportation took place at the beginning of September. It was small in scope, with only 400 people being sent to **Belżec**.

The final liquidation of the Zamosc ghetto took place more than a month after the fourth deportation. The Judenrat Chairman writes:

‘This time - suddenly, on October 16, 1942, at 5 a.m., our neighbourhood, which meanwhile had shrunk in size and was inhabited only by Jews, was surrounded by a thick cordon of German Police, Military Police and Gestapo (...) All the residents of the neighbourhood were rounded up, assembled at the square (...) and, in rows of fives, forced to march 21 kilometres to the town of Izbica.’

Some 100-180 people were murdered on the march to **Izbica**, and buried by the wayside. The deportees arrived in **Izbica** during the night between Friday and Saturday. At the same time, the remaining Jews of **Krasnystaw, Turobin, Żółkiewka** and **Szczebrzeszyn** were also deported to **Izbica**.

For lack of space, most of the deportees from **Zamosc** and other localities were not given shelter, but left under the open sky at the **Izbica** market square until Monday. All were victims of the great deportation of Monday, October 19, when around 5,000 Jews were deported from **Izbica** to **Belżec** and **Sobibor**.

The next and last deportation in 1942 was carried out two weeks later, also on a Monday, November 2. All the Jews who lived in **Izbica** at the time, except for those who managed to hide in the city or flee to the nearby forests and fields, were sent to **Belżec, Sobibor** and **Majdanek**. The transport to **Belżec** on November 2 contained the remainder of the Zamosc Judenrat, including Vice-Chairman **Azriel Szeps**. Throughout November, after the deportation, Jews in hiding were ferreted out and captured, assembled at the cinema building, and then led off in dozens to the Jewish cemetery and shot to death. On November 30, **Izbica** was declared ‘Judenrein’. Shortly afterwards, however, a so-called ‘secondary’ ghetto was sprang up there, to which several hundred Jews returned from the forests and other hiding places. The ‘secondary’ **Izbica** ghetto was finally liquidated in April 1943.

After the dissolution of the **Zamosc** Ghetto, there were still some Jews employed at a few limited places of work, scattered over the city and at four labour camps. On **November 20, 1942**, some 200 Jewish craftsmen were executed by gunfire at the **Rotunda**. Some, however, continued to live in the building on Perec Street (the former Victoria Hotel) until 1943. Originally, the **Zamosc** labour camps contained few Jews, but their ranks soon swelled as the approach of winter drove many Jews to seek shelter.

The extreme conditions, gruelling work and frequent executions of inmates considered 'unfit for work' took a very heavy toll. In the space of a few weeks, 40 % of the inmates of the Luftwaffe camp lost their lives. In **mid-March, 1943**, all the remaining Zamosc Jews were brought to the Luftwaffe camp. It was the last Jewish labour camp in **Zamosc**, made up not only of Zamość Jews, but also of Jews from the neighbouring cities of **Komarów, Tomaszów, Krasnobród**, as well as a rather large group of Czech Jews.

The Luftwaffe camp was liquidated on the eve of Pentecost, on **May 31, 1943**. Approximately 400 inmates (including 53 women) were loaded onto a convoy of trucks and deported to the **Majdanek concentration camp**. **This date - May 31, 1943 - seals the history of Zamosc Jewry.**

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