



## The history of Jews from Dobra

The history of Jewish community in Dobra dates back to XVI century, precisely 1521 (the other version says it is 1629). In 1639 Jews received permission to build the first synagogue in town. In 1728 a prohibition was introduced in town. During the holy masses the inhabitants of Jewish Faith were obliged to close their shops and workshops. Moreover, when a priest was visiting an ill person with the Most Holy Sacrament Jews were supposed to close the door and shut the curtains. In the year of 1761, the synagogue was burnt down. Jewish people asked for permission of building another one, and they received it providing it would not be higher than the parish church. It led to an agreement between the Jewish borough and the bishop Władysław Lubiński, whereby the Jewish obligations toward the parish of Dobra were determined. The obligations (money) were given to the local parish priest. It was also set out that the priest was supposed to receive dried fruit and one pound of gunpowder every Easter and Christmas. This fixed sum of money was a compensation from the Jewish borough towards the parish for occupying the grounds which, because of that, could not be used by the Christians. Moreover, the Jews of Dobra supported the renovation of the local church giving 300 zlotys. The payment was not very high and the borough was not burdened financially. The sum of money was payable once a year.



It was 24 zlotys, and it was more or less the same amount of money what one tone of grain. The tax was paid until 1855 when it was aborted by the government. In 1765 there were 25 Jewish families in Dobra. The borough had already had his own rabbi. The community grew. In 1779 the Jews lived around the town hall what means they had the most attractive allotments. They lived in 50 houses. In 1790 there were 206 Jews in town (86 men and 76 women). Since 1803 the obligations toward the Dobra parish have grown, and the Jews had to also pay by goods. They were obliged to pay two times a year: 5 pounds of sugar, one pound of pepper, ginger and raisins, an ounce of saffron and cloves, and a quire of paper. Moreover, they were supposed to deliver 6,5 kg of sute for lamps. For all these years the relationship between Polish and Jewish people are correct. We know that in 1811 there was bet ha-sefer (*Dom księgi*) – which is relevant to Primary School. Therefore there were Jewish teachers in town. It is said that in the year 1860 there were 7 Jewish teachers. Dobra became a multicultural town. There were also other nations in town. Not for long, but there were 81 Germans in town living. In 1865 there were only 54 of them left. The bloom of Jewish community was in 1880. There were 2526 Jews in Dobra at that time (although the percentage rate shows that 1860 is the year of the greatest number of this nation in Dobra what is shown in the table below). In the interwar period beside Jews there are also 45 Germans and 2 Russians. The Jews living in Dobra pre-war are extensively described by priest Roman Kmiecik in his piece of work “Kalendarz”. He writes for example that in 1926 there were 1350 Jews (including 714 women). It was 46% of the population of Dobra. The Jewish families lived then on Warcka, Uniejowska, Składkowskiego, Piłsudskiego, Narutowicza and Kościuszki streets. The poor live on the so called Tyły (the back). A lof of Jews were members of the Town Council. It was Sine Szkop, Mendel Sieradzki, Herszt Cytner, Salomon Witkowski, Josek Weinstein i Dawid

Justman. The Jews dealt with craft and trade. Once a week on Wednesdays and on the first Monday of the month there were mass trade fairs. People from neighbouring villages came to those trade fairs in order to buy products and to sell their goods. An important person in Dobra was Szmul Rozenblit, *the mohel*, who circumcised boys. The Jewish children, together with their polish peers, attended to the local school. There were 177 Jewish students in 1928 but they were persecuted because of their roots. The dweller Benjamin Jacobs recalls that harassments were common and severe. There was not even one Jewish teacher at the school so the children did not have any protectors. Over the years the apparent resentment of the Jews began to appear. In June 1937 there was an outbreak against the Jewish merchants. Anti-Semitic local fights led to demolishing Jewish shops, and the members of the Anti-Semitic community exhorted to not to buy from Jews. In this situation some of the Jews decided to leave the town. Until 1939 there were below 900 Jews in Dobra. It has been estimated that before the war 364 Jews left Dobra. The Jewish population migrated a lot at that time. Mainly, they moved to Łódź (118 Jews) and to Kalisz (137), but new Jewish people arrived to Dobra, they came from Warta, Kalisz and also from Łódź, Konin, Koźmin and other towns. Not long after the World War II broke out a few Jewish families were trying to escape to the east (the area occupied later by the Soviets). The laager did not last long and after a few days they were forced to come back. It was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of September and it ended up somewhere around Uniejów where they got under fire of the German planes. The Germans occupied the city without a fight on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1939. Shortly after that, since the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1939, the German administration was introduced and Willi Krüger became the mayor of the town. The wealthy Jews were displaced and their homes were given to the Germans and the local volksdeutsche. At first the occupants did not use any greater acts of repression towards the

inhabitants of the city but in December during the Hanukkah festival they set fire to the synagogue and two neighboring houses of prayer. As witnesses say - the ceiling of the synagogue was decorated with paintings of Hasidic themes. It was one of the most beautiful synagogues in the area and was the envy of other Jewish communities. The building itself served the Germans as a casino for the rest of the war and was dismantled by the Poles only after the end of the war. Then it gradually fell into ruin. There is a marketplace in this place right now. The curfew was also introduced in the city and the Jewish people were forbidden to come out of the streets between 7 o'clock in the evening and 8.00 o'clock in the morning. Some of them who broke the order were shot. Soon all the Jews over six years of age had to wear a yellow, six-pointed Star of David on their right breast and the left shoulder. The same star had to be painted on Jewish houses. In 1940, as a part of restrictions, the Germans reduced the number of male members (from ten to six) of the Funeral Brotherhood. It was the group of men which was very important for the Jewish community. In Jewish tradition at least ten men (over thirteen years of age) is needed for the recitation of *Kadish* prayer. The precious valuables were also seized and the bank accounts blocked. The Jewish companies and shops were taken over by the Germans. At the end of September 1939 the occupiers developed a plan of displacement. At the turn of the year 1939/40 the Jewish people had to leave their homes. The harassment grew even more. The remaining Jews were crowded into the local houses of the poor in the area of Składkowskiego street and Tyły (the Back) where the ghetto was created. The Jews who lived there could keep one room for themselves, the remaining rooms had to be given to other families. Since the food rations were small, getting food was the biggest problem. The Council of Elders was established and Moris (Mordechaj) Francus became its chairman. The council gained a very bad

reputation because its members looked after the interests of their own families with no regard for their compatriots. The Nazi occupiers devastated also the Jewish cemetery and the gravestones (matzevots) were used for the construction of roads and fences. The Jewish men were humiliated by having their beards cut in public. It was done in a cruel and painful way. The Jews were also forbidden to walk on the sidewalks of the city. They could only walk in the gutters. Whenever they were called by a German soldier they had to approach within the distance of two meters, take off the cap and humbly bow the head. The Jews were forced to work in the gravel pit and at the construction of the road to Kowale Pańskie. Their tasks included, for example stone crushing and delivering the gravel. They also worked in German barracks. The ghetto in Dobra existed until the "Czachulec" ghetto was established, therefore a year.

There was widespread starvation in the ghetto and soon secret food trading with Polish people began. For the purposes of maintaining order in the ghetto and to support the occupation authorities the Jewish police was established. A very negative person of this period was Chaim Trzan, a butcher by profession. He obviously considered his police service as a form of his family protection, at the expense of other Jews. He followed zealously occupant's orders. Markowicz belonged to the police too.



At 9 o'clock in the morning of May the 5<sup>th</sup> 1941, one hundred and sixty-seven Jews from Dobra were transported in three German trucks to the labour camps. All of them were in the prime of their life - from sixteen to sixty years old. They were healthy and capable of hard physical work. It was mentioned Morris Frenchman who selected them. The transport was supervised by SS troops. A large part of the Jews from the transport was probably transported to Bochnia, the others to Auschwitz. When a collective ghetto "Czachulec" was established, the ghetto in Dobra ceased to exist. It was on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1941. All inhabitants were transported to "Czachulec". The chairman of mentioned *Judenrad* in Nowy Czachulec was Herszel Zimnawoda. His deputies were Haim Leib Elias and Mordechaj Bukowski. Elias was the owner of manufacture making linen for aprons and shirts before the war. There is a lack of precise details about Bukowski. Zimnawoda was a rich merchant from Turek. He had previously performed the same function in ghetto in Turek. From the very beginning he had to face an extremely difficult moral situation. On the one hand, he tried to take actions that would help the Jewish people survive in extremely difficult conditions and on the other hand, he was forced to follow orders of the Germans, what practically dished his efforts. The choices he had to make were often dreadful. He decided who would work or go to the camp, and who would live. Before making a decision, he tried to seek his assistants' advice and discussed particularly difficult issues with the rabbis. In addition, there was starvation and lack of firewood and medicines in the ghetto, what resulted in significant mortality rate. However, until the end of holding his post Zimnawoda tried to help his compatriots and to win for them various discounts at the occupation authorities. The ghetto was closed down on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1942. After the war two Jews returned to the town.

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