

Międzyrzecz << **YIVO** article, “Mezhyrichi”

[Międzyrzecz was the birthplace of Issac Fischleiber, the father of Sigmund Fischler. On one of the postcards that Sigmund Fischler received we learn that some members of the family---whom the Nazis had expelled from Leipzig into Poland in November 1938---were going to try and return to Międzyrzecz.]

Village on the Stava River (Pripiat' basin) in Ukraine's Rivne (Rovno) region. Mezhyrichi, known as Mezhirech in Russian and **Międzyrzecz** in Polish, was called Mezhirich Gadol by Jews; currently known as Velikie Mezhyrichi (Great Mezhyrichi), it has also been referred to as Mezhyrichi Koretskie. From 1569 it was in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and from 1793 in the Korets district of the Russian Empire's Volhynia province. Between 1921 and 1939 the town belonged to independent Poland.

Noblemen owned the town until 1831. The first references to Jews date back to 1569 and 1577. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, a local Jew leased the principal revenues of the town. The Jewish community suffered from Cossack attacks in 1648-1649, and in 1652 a tax was paid for only eight Jewish dwellings. In 1662, poll tax records listed 28 Jews, and in 1674, there were 35.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Międzyrzecz's owners, the Lubomirski family, confirmed the Jews' "privileges that they have possessed from ancient times," including communal and juridical autonomy. As the community prospered, its proportion of royal tax payments collected from the Jewish communities of Volhynia increased significantly. By 1726, the Międzyrzecz community had achieved independent representation in the regional Jewish council. However, it seems that by 1739-1740, Międzyrzecz lost this status and was again subordinated to the Ostróg community.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, the kabbalist Ya'akov Kopel Lifshits (d. 1740?), author of *Sha'are Gan ha-'Eden* (1803) and other kabbalistic works, lived in Międzyrzecz and attracted a number of students of Jewish mysticism to the town. At the beginning of the 1760s, the Besht's associate, Dov Ber (1704-1772), became magid (preacher) there. He attracted numerous disciples from all over Poland to his bet midrash.

According to the 1765 census, 706 Jews lived there in 169 dwellings, and another 184 in neighboring villages and the townlet of Nevirkov. When Dov Ber moved to Rovno in 1771-1772, Międzyrzecz ceased playing a significant role in the formation of Hasidism. The 1784 census registered only 295 Jews in the town.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews constituted about half of Mezhirech's population. In 1808 a Jewish press began operating, and by 1847 there were 1,808 Jews in the town. The community retained a largely Hasidic character. There were 2,107 Jews in Mezhirech (67% of the population) in 1897. In 1908, an "improved heder" (heder metukan) was opened in which the teaching

was conducted in Hebrew, and a Tarbut school opened in 1926. In 1921, there were 1,743 Jews living in the town (73% of the population).

After the outbreak of World War II and the town's absorption into the USSR, numerous refugees settled in Mezhirech, doubling the Jewish population. The German army occupied the town on 6 July 1941, organizing a Judenrat and conscripting Jews into forced labor. Nazis carried out large-scale massacres during Sukkot 1941 and Shavu'ot 1942. The approximately 1,000 surviving Jews were forced into a ghetto and murdered on 26 September 1942; very few managed to escape. After the war, no Jews remained in the town. In September 1992, a memorial monument was dedicated at the Tsegel'ny ravine, where about 3,000 Jews had been murdered.

Suggested Reading

Benzion H. Ayalon, *Mez'iritsh gadol be-vinyanah uve-ḥurbanah* (Tel Aviv, 1955); Dina Korets-Ianai, "Mez'iritsh Gadol," *Yalkut Vohlin* 55-56 (1998): 24-26; Mordekhai Matsman, "'Al Mez'iritsh she-neḥerevah," *Yalkut Vohlin* 4 (1946): 27-28; "Mezhiritsh (Gadol, de-Korits) / Międzyrzecz Korecki," in *Pinkas ha-kehilot: Polin*, vol. 5, *Vohlin ve-Polesieh*, ed. by Shmuel Spector, pp. 127-130 (Jerusalem, 1990); Israel Ticher, "Mez'iritsh (le-yad Korets)," *Yalkut Vohlin* 5 (1946): 20-21; Shmuel Spector, "Mez'iritsh neged Ostra," *Yalkut Vohlin* 44 (1988): 13-14; Israel Zinman, "Gal'ed li-kedushe Mez'iritsh gadol voha-sevivah," *Yalkut Vohlin* 50 (1993): 31-32.

YIVO Archival Resources

RG 116, Territorial Collection: Poland 2, , 1939-1945 (finding aid); RG 1292, Jacob Blank, Papers, 1980-1986; RG 87, Simon Dubnow, Papers, 1632-1938.

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