

TARNOW'S JEWISH CEMETERY

TARNÓW 2007

GUIDEBOOK

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JEWISH
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Adam Bartosz

Tarnow's Jewish Cemetery

Tarnow's Jewish cemetery, called '**kirchol**' by the locals, is one of the biggest and most interesting Jewish graveyards in Southern Poland. It is also one of the oldest, with great history and beautifully carved headstones. It covers over 3.20 ha (32,000 m²) surrounded by a brick wall and a metal fence from Sloneczna Street on the south.

The cemetery was devastated by the Germans during World War II and later by local hooligans for several years. In 1988 a Committee For The Protection Of Monuments Of Jewish Culture and its monuments was established in Tarnow. One of its major tasks is looking after the cemetery, which was over grown by a 40 year old forest, had no fence from the east and north and lots of head-

¹ Kirchol: (kierkov or kirkut) it is the commonly used name in Poland for the Jewish cemetery. The word origins from the German word Kirchhof which means the church yard where the dead were buried.

stones fallen down or destroyed. In the late 80s and early 90s many things happened: many trees and bushes were cut down, the old wall was repaired, some headstones were erected again and the funeral building was renovated. Now, the trees and greenery is looked after and a grave keeper's job was established.

Tarnow's Jewish Cemetery was probably founded in the second half of the 16th century or even earlier.² The first area for the graveyard was designated far away from the town, in the village called Pogwizdow. The oldest part of the cemetery is the area on the left side from the entrance along Szpitalna Street. Later the cemetery area was enlarged several times, the last in 1924. There are several thousand headstones in Tarnow's kirkut and all of them are situated in an east-west line.

The dead body is laid with his/her feet east so he/she could 'look at' Jerusalem and the Holy Land because on Judgment Day the dead would be going that way.

According to Jewish custom, the dead should be buried as soon as possible, preferably the same day. The body is laid on one's back and put straight into the ground. No jewellery or belongings are used and very simple coffins were introduced in the late 19th century because of sanitary laws.

Jews in biblical times who led a nomadic life used to bury the dead where they died. They looked for natural rocky caves and marked them with stones so the priests were warned about the graves. The law forbade the priests to touch or be present in graveyards. In time those simple stones became the more complicated forms of grave architecture and inscriptions we have now.

² It is said that the Jews were present in Tarnow from as early as 1445. The first privilege for Tarnow's Jews in 1581 guaranteed the safety of the existing Jewish graveyard.

*The oldest form of the headstone is the vertical flat plate – known as a **matzevah**³ which was placed at the head of the dead. The inscription is placed on its east face, but also on the west side. Another form is the stone grave or tomb (so called sarcophaguses).*

From the mid of the 19th century another form of headstone was in use which was more popular in Christian cemeteries. Columns, obelisks and pulpits were used with the wealthiest having the biggest headstone.

*The most peculiar characteristic of the cemetery are the ones that can be seen on the orthodox headstones.⁴ These are the **ohel**⁵, a type of a little chapel-house enclosing the graves of famous rabbis. In Tarnow's cemetery there are several examples of ohel which are reduced to a rather low concrete fence surrounding the graves of the rabbis.*

Some of the oldest headstones in Tarnow's cemetery were made of natural, and slightly polished, boards of sandstone or limestone. The most typical are rectangular with round tops. The engravings are in Hebrew and give the dead person's name, his/her father's name and the date of death in the Jewish calendar. You very rarely come across the surnames of the dead on headstones older than the 19th century.

A typical feature of the Jewish headstone art is its symbolism presented by the pictures of animals, plants and other objects. According to Jewish religious law it is forbidden to paint people and this refers to headstone art too. Those pictures you can find in Tarnow's cemetery, like

³ Macewa: a vertical plate adopted in Poland as the traditional Jewish form of headstone.

⁴ Orthodox Jews: a religious Jewish group originating from Baal Szem Tow (1700-1760). Their aim is the rebirth of the religious life of the Jews. The style of clothing and the orthodox appearance became known as typically Jewish, in a non-Jewish society.

⁵ Ohel: (Hebrew, tent) a small building or fence around the headstone usually made of bricks, built to distinguish the rabbi or scholar.



birds, deer, lions etc., are supposed to symbolise the name of the dead e.g. deer = Hirsh, or bird = Tziporah. The animals can also symbolize the powers of God.

The entrance to the cemetery is through an **iron gate**, made in 1990 (see the photo above) which is a copy of the original one from the 1820s. The original gate was given to the Memorial Holocaust Museum in Washington, where it is exhibited with the note that thousands of Jews went through it towards their death.

To the right of the entrance there is a pre-funeral house (the House of Cleaning) called **beith tahara** in Hebrew. It was built by the surviving Jews just after World War II to replace the one demolished in the war (1*).

Tarnow's bet tahara is equipped with a concrete table used to clean the corpse.⁶ It is a Jewish ritual to do so before

⁶ Chevra Kadisha: (Hebrew- good brotherhood) the members of this religious group are responsible for the funeral and looking after the dead body. Participation in Chevra Kadisha is considered by the Jewish to be a great honour.

*The numbers in brackets are as the plan shows the objects. Not all of them are presented as photos.



1

burying which symbolises the cleaning of the body of all sins. The beith tahara has two doors: one through which the body was brought in; and the other through which it was taken out. The building was restored in 1997 thanks to the sponsorship of one of Tarnow's Jews, Federico Jachimowicz who is living in Buenos Aires.

The tall column by the entrance is a monument to all victims of the Holocaust (2). It joins two symbols: the tragically broken lives and the last piece of Tarnow's Synagogue. The column was excavated from the ruins of the biggest of Tarnow's synagogues called the New or Jubilee.



2

*This synagogue had been built over a period of 50 years and was consecrated on 18th August 1908, Emperor Franz Joseph's birthday. It was given his name to celebrate his 60th anniversary on the throne and that's why it was also called **the Jubilee Synagogue**. Commonly, people used to call it **the New Synagogue** to distinguish it from the old one which was from the 16th century. All the synagogues were burnt down or blown up by the Germans on 9th November 1939.*

The monument was erected on 11th June 1946 by Tarnow's survivors of the Holocaust. It was to commemorate the 4th anniversary of "the first liquidation of the Jews". The sculptor was David Becker a young artist from Tarnow, who was Xawery Dunikowski's student and who later lived in Israel and died in 1991. The monument was renovated in 2004. At the top of the monument there is an inscription: "**And the sun was shining and it wasn't ashamed**", which is taken from the poem⁷ by Chaim Nachman Bialik, a Jewish poet, who wrote it after the pogrom in Kishinev in 1903. At the bottom of the monument there is another inscription in 3 languages: Hebrew, Yiddish and Polish dedicated to the victims of Nazis. It says:

***25 thousand Jews,
murdered by German thugs,
between 11 June 1942 and 5 September 1943,
are resting in this grave***

The given number of 25 thousand people is symbolic and it refers to the number of Jews living in Tarnow at that time. In 1940 the Germans established a Jewish quarter in Tarnow telling them to move away from the west part of the city to the eastern part where the majority of Jews lived. Nearly 40 thousand Jews were living there when more from local villages were transported. In June 1942

⁷ The poem is called 'Be-ir ha-harega' (Hebrew – In the town of slaughter).

the Germans started the liquidation of this area by weekly 'action' which was the killing of half of the Jewish population. From 11th to 18th June 1942 about 6 thousand Jews, mainly the old, the ill and children, were shot in Zbylitowska Gora in Buczyna forest. Thousands of others were taken to the concentration camp in Belzec. About three thousand of those left were taken to the cemetery, shot and buried in mass graves. The monument is standing on that spot.

To the left from the entrance there are several graves in which rest rabbis and other important Jews of the community (see the photo below).



*They are situated in a way so that they are visible from the gate to enable visiting rabbis to pray and allowing visual contact with the dead rabbis without walking around them. Jews descending from Aaron (**Kohen**⁸) are not allowed to have any contact with the dead or graves.*

There is a custom of dividing the graves separately for: rabbis; for descendents of Levi, those who were serving the rabbis in the synagogues; and for women. In Tarnow's cemetery you can clearly see that division especially

⁸ Kohen: (Hebrew – priests) Aaron's descendants, the first priest. Their headstones are decorated with hands in a gesture of blessing. They cannot come closer to the graves so they do not get dirty.

among the graves from the time between the wars where the women's graves are marked with a candlestick. The biggest group of them you can see next to Starodabrowska Street.

The graves situated just by the entrance are beautifully decorated and generally in good condition, however some inscriptions are in danger of disappearing due to time. This is visible among the four headstones which belong to the rabbis' graves.

The grave closest to the gate is **Rabbi Abraham Abele Rapaport's** grave (3). He was chairman of Tarnow's for 60 years and died in 1844. His headstone inscription is the most damaged and can soon disappear. His son, **Israel Rapaport** (1813-1881), is not far from the group of rabbis' graves (4) as he took over the position after his father's death.





Israel Rapaport was famous for being a commissioner of Jews in the Vienna parliament where he fought against a discrimination law from being enacted. In the end his work was a success as a new constitution was announced in 1867 for all members of the monarchy to be equal no matter of religion or nationality. Rabbi Israel gave his house at 5 Sheroka Street to the society of Bikur Cholim which was helping the sick.

The last of Tarnow's rabbis to be buried in this cemetery was **Meir Arak** (5) born in 1855. His grave is situated near the wall and he was a rabbi in the eastern part of Galicia, in Zloty Potok, Jazlowice and Buczacz. He was the leader in Tarnow only for 3 years and died in 1925.

The next group of beautiful headstones are the earliest of Tarnow's rabbis. Tarnow's Jews became an independent Jewish community only in the 17th century, when in 1673 **Samuel Szelke Horowitz** became



Tarnow's first rabbi. He was rabbi for the next 40 years (6) and died in 1713. His headstone is still very popular for orthodox Jews to visit and was renovated in 2004. Next to it is the headstone of Tarnow's second rabbi (7), **Iztchak Ajzyk**, who died in 1756 and was earlier a rabbi in Tarnogrod and, from 1724, in Tarnow.

Along from Szmelke Horowitz's grave, more to the south, is another **Tzadik**⁹ headstone, that of **Chaim Elizer Unger** from Zabno's Tzadikim dynasty (8). He was born in 1863, the grandson of Israel Elimelech from Zabno (1820-1867), and he was a rabbi in Radlow. From 1890 he lived in Tarnow where he died in 1907.



In the same group are two other headstones belonging to **Benjamin Wolf** (9) and his son **Jecheskiel Landau** (10). **Benjamin Wolf**, who died in 1737, was a delegate to the Council of Four Lands in 1724 and held a senior position to the county prince and was a tax collector for the king. His son was also a delegate to the Council of Four Lands in 1739 in Jazlowiec and died in 1773.

⁹ Tzadik: (Hebrew – the righteous one) the leader of the orthodox Jewish group or dynasty, cherished with great honour.





On the left side of the path from the main gate is a group of headstones placed close to each other. They were the stones used by the Germans to build pavements in the town and which were returned after the war to the cemetery, however not to their original places.

After the war, surviving Jews created symbolic graves remembering friends and families and these are mostly to be found along this path.

On the right hand side of the path leading from the gate, there is a headstone made of granite commemorating the martyrdom of the whole of the Simche family. The headstone also commemorates the destruction of **Dr Eliasz Simche's** grave (11). He was a well known advocate who fought for workers' rights and died in 1926. The inscription says that Tarnovians are sponsoring that headstone in 'memory of the late lamented faithful friend and fighter for workers'.



11

Approaching the main avenue on the north-south line we turn now to the left.

On the right hand side of the path the beautifully carved headstones catch the visitor's attention. They present engravings of flowers and birds.

We are approaching the main path going east, which used to be the northern border of the cemetery. The land to the north and east from here was bought by a wealthy local Jew, **Josef Maschler**, whose grave is on the edge of this new part (12). This headstone belongs to the couple **Josef**, 1840-1917, and **Ewa**, who died in 1911. Josef Maschler belonged to Tarnow's Jewish elite; was a Jewish leader between 1887 and 1913; and also a member of the town council. He was a businessman and the owner of a steam mill.

The Machlers' headstone is among other wealthy family headstones which are beautifully carved to show their status. Analyzing the inscriptions one can notice the trend that Tarnow's Jews wanted to adopt. The very first inscriptions were only in Hebrew, but from the second half of the 19th century they are also in German and the latter ones are also in Polish.



The last 25 years of the 19th century shaped the national conscience of the Jews. In this part of Galicia the trend was towards German or Polish culture. In the press this trend was jokingly called the 'Red and White' or 'Black and Yellow' assimilation following the colours of the Polish and Austrian flags.

A few headstones, next to the Maschlers family, are examples of that trend. On one of them there is only the date of death (12.11.1927) in Arabic under the Hebrew inscription. On the next one, belonging to Adele Menderer, we can read only the German inscription:

***Hier Ruht
Adele Menderer
Gutsbesitzerin von Zabłędza
Gestorben am 14 Juni 1911
Im 78. Lebensjahre
Friede ihrer Asche***

On another one, under the Hebrew, there is a Polish inscription:

Gizela Silberman
From the Herzbaums family
1/2/1834-17/8/1912

Even more Polish text can be seen on the next headstone:

Gizela Borgenichowa
Born on 3/12/1846
Died on 15/9/1920
Peace be with her

Not far these are the headstones of some well known Tarnovians like **Juliusz Silbiger** (1853-1921), a member of the city council from 1900 and city Mayor (1911-12). And next to his grave can be found his wife's. Not far from these graves there is another **Juliusz Silbiger** (1877-1933), who was sanitary assistant of the town (13).

Near this path is a small obelisk (14), which is the symbolic headstone of **Chaim Faber** who was killed in 1941. The Germans employed him as a carpenter in the Gestapo



building on Urszulanska Street, where he witnessed many murderers and finally became one of the victims. The writings on the headstone were renovated in 2000 from an old photo as the original was destroyed.



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Following the path to the north we come to the concrete fence of one macewa (15). It belongs to **Eleazar Horowitz** who was born in 1881, a son of Rabbi Abraham Chaim from Polaniec. After he got married he lived with his wife in her father's house in Bukowsko and became a rabbi in Grodzisko. He moved to Tarnow-Grabowka district during World War I and became a rabbi after his father's death in 1919. He took the title of Tzadik and now people still call him 'the Tzadik from Grodzisko'. During World War II he was hiding in a bunker in 10 Lwowska Street, but in September 1942 when the Germans liquidated the ghetto they found him and shot him. A description of his death survives and it says:

The Germans allowed him to put on his religious clothes and pray before his execution. He died with a shout ***Shma Israel***¹⁰. His orthodox congregation, who were burring the dead in mass graves, organized a proper Jewish funeral for him at night.

¹⁰ *Shma Izrael*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the is one Lord" Deuteronomy 6:4, a Jewish declaration of faith.



Continuing the visit and heading north we can see, on the left of the path, the headstone of Tarnow's **Rabbi Eleazar** who died in 1811 and was Icchak's son (16). Further on the path leads to the recently renovated headstone belonging to Tzadik **Jechiel Zwi Unger** also called Reb Herszele from Tarnow (17).



Turning east we pass the graves from the years just after World War II until the 1960s. Among them there is **Henryk Spielman's** grave who was a city council member and who tragically died on 16 January 1945 (18) a few hours before the Russians took over the city. Further there is the grave of **Aron Bergman** (19), a father of the famous photo-reporter Jerzy Bergman who emigrated to Denmark in 1968.



19

Going straight ahead from here to the east until the wall of Szpitalna Street, we past a few headstones among which there are two with interesting symbolic engravings. These are the socialist activists' graves. On one of them, that of Gabriel Grunstein who died in 1936 (20), shows a hand holding two arrows and on the next the two arrows are in a circle. These symbols indicate that those people belonged to the Bund.¹⁰

The first path going to the south will bring us (after 20 meters) to a high obelisk (to the left 21) which is **Ascher Schwanefeld's** headstone, who died in 1896. He was the owner of a famous vodka and liqueur production company. This headstone is situated at the edge of the

¹⁰ Bund: General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia; the most numerous Jewish organisation for the workers.



square of the most expensive headstones. Going east from here we get to the Brandstaetter Family headstone (on the left) whose member was the famous writer **Roman Brandstaetter** (1906-1928). His father's, **Josef Brandstaetter**, headstone has not survived. Only its base with the date of his death, 'Adar 5655' (1895), remains. Roman Brandstaetter's favourite granddad was **Mordechaj Dawid Brandstaetter** (1842-1928) and his headstone is probably nearby. Only photos show the inscription on this headstone. Mordechaj Dawid was a very educated man who as a young man published his literary texts in the New Hebrew language and is considered as the creator of the short story in New Hebrew literature. He also covered for a member of the city council and was a member of the Jewish council. He also had a tanning yard in Grabowka.

To the right of the path we can see the monumental headstones (some of them have fallen down) of the richest of Tarnow's industrialists. They are made of granite and are still here thanks to their weight, unlike the small ones which were stolen and left with empty spaces.

Among those fallen massive granite headstones are two standing up which belong to **Salomon** and **Herman Merz** (23). Salomon Merz (1846-1918) was an Appeal Court Adviser, according to the Polish inscription. It is



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worth noticing that there is an inscription about the other members of the family who died during the war and whose graves are unknown: *the judge, **Dr Joachim Merz**, who was murdered by the Gestapo in Warsaw on 25 February 1944 and engineer **Dorota Merz**, who died in Lvov in 1942.*

Herman Merz's grave (1818-1899) has a German inscription next to the Hebrew one. He was a great citizen as he went from rags to riches and became a wealthy man trading in grain and wood.

From 1869, for 25 years, he was the chairman of the Jewish community in Tarnow. It was a good time for trading and the economical development of the town and Mr Merz knew how to use this opportunity. Thanks to him a new Jewish hospital was founded and the baths of the Old Synagogue were renovated. It was also his idea to create and establish a Credit Company for Trade and Industry which two years later created the Credit Bank at 5 Zdrojowa Street (today Goldhamera Street). In the entrance hall of that building there is still a plaque to its creator. Being a member of the city council for nearly 20 years he developed a very good relationship between the Jewish community and the city council. On the plaque the special relationship between Merz and Tarnow's bishop Alojzy Pukalski is highlighted.

In the same line of headstones there are those of the Szancer Family. The oldest one is **Henryk Szancer's** (24), who was the oldest in the family and buried here in 1885. He was born in Zywiec in 1825, moved to Zabno and later to Tarnow where in 1859 built the first steam mill in Tarnow and another 6 years later. Those mills are still working on Kołtąta Street. He was a wealthy manufacturer and owned of several mills in Galicia. Also, Henryk was a respected philanthropist, a member of the city council and an honoured citizen. Emperor Franz Josef honoured him with a medal of order. The inscription on his grave is in Hebrew and Polish:



Henryk Szancer
Born on 12 July 1825
Died on 5 September 1885

It is probably the oldest inscription in Polish in this cemetery. This fact and also the Polish version of the surname show how close the family were to Polish culture.

Artur Szancer (1852-1908), Henryk's son, was also a miller, a member of trade union organisations, a city council member and a philanthropist. On his headstone (25) there are inscriptions in Hebrew, German and Polish.

Less impressive headstones are those of the other members of the **Szancer** family: **Gustaw** (died in 1918), **Emilia** (died in 1918), **Joseph** (died in 1922), and **Bruno**, a lawyer, (died in 1931).

In the same spot as the Szancer family there is the headstone of a famous Tarnovian doctor, **Herman Pilcer** (1861-1934). He was a commander of war hospitals during World War I, the main city doctor, and a city councillor

who was decorated with an order of the 10th Anniversary of the Republic of Poland.

The overturned stone (27) is the surviving one of **Aaron Dawid Salz's** grave (1853-1932), the brother to the famous Abraham (1864-1941) who was a delegate to the first Zionist Congress in Basel and a participant of the next eleven too. He was a valued partner to Teodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement which led to the creation of an independent Jewish nation. Abraham Salz died in Tarnow, but the place he was buried is unknown.

Taking a right turn behind the Szancer group of graves we come to the main path east-west which leads from the Meschler graves to the eastern border of the cemetery.

Over here are two Tzadikim graves which are easy to spot as they are surrounded with a low concrete fence. The first one next to the path (28) is **Arie Lejbusz Halbersztam's** grave (1865-1930). He was the son of a famous Tzadik, Jecheskiel Shraga, from Sieniawa and grandson to Chaim, the founder of the Halbersztam dynasty from Nowy Sacz. Arie came to Tarnów before World War I and was a respected citizen. Many Tzadikim and rabbis came for his funeral which was a big event. On the left hand side and a step behind his grave there is his wife's grave, which is very traditional and means that the wife



should always be a step behind her husband even when meeting God.

Next to them there is an ohel (29) surrounding Tzadik **Naftali Horowitz's** grave. He was from Pokrzywnica (died in 1931) and part of the Dzikow dynasty. His father's name was Jechiel Horowitz and his granddad was Meir from Dzikow. Naftali Horowitz is also buried together with his wife.



Both graves are distinguished by the rich engravings and especially the top of them showing the Torah's rolls on the open altar (Aaron Ha-kodesh) indicates the pious character of both Tzadikim.

In recent years those graves are often visited by orthodox Jews and decorated with candles and **kvitlech**¹².

Not far from the Tzadikim graves we can see a monument (30) on **Mosze Saul Rapaport's** grave (1858-

¹² Kwitlech: small pieces of paper including prayers and asking for help to communicate with God. They are laid on scholars and rabbis' headstones.

1933). He was a Talmudic scholar, a son of a rabbi from Dabrowa Tarnowska and a friend of Dawid M. Brandstaetter.

On the other side of the path next to the wall (31) there is **Israel Akiwa Bernstein's** grave who died in 1935. He was Rabbi Jakob's son and also a religious and well educated man as we can see from the engravings of an open wardrobe, altar and books. This grave is empty at present.

His relics were exhumed in July 1964 and moved to Jerusalem as we can read from the inscription.

Jewish law forbids moving human remains from the grave apart from special cases or exemptions which was in this case moving them to the Holy Land.

From the east wall we come back along the path towards the west. Turning into the second path on the left (to the south) we pass the graves from the inter war period.



Coming towards the end of that path on the left we can see some touching children's headstones. A broken column draws our attention (32) as it stands on a girl's grave. As we can see from the engravings: *here rests our lovable daughter Luska Osterweil 1922-1927*. Next to it is the grave of *Zygyz Kuchanski, 1921-1932*, which draws our attention (33).

Far behind those graves, going east, is a very interesting grave belonging to Tarnow's band leader (34). It is a kind of tomb with a lyre on its front and blessing hands (the symbol of the priests). The inscriptions of its sides are in Hebrew and Polish. The Polish reads:

Leon Kraemer
Kapelmistrz composer
65 years
Died on 22/9/1921



A little further is a similar grave with a lyre. Probably it is a musician's grave.

On the other side of the same path we can see 3 headstones from World War I. One is near Luska Osterweil's grave and the next two are nearer the fence of Sloneczna Street.

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Turning west from that path towards the gate we walk along a small path between graves and head to a group of soldiers' graves from World War I (see the photo below).



According to Austrian law from the end of 18th century all dead were buried in one cemetery. Jews were exempt from that law because of their different religion. Even during the wars when soldiers used to have their own soldier cemeteries Jewish soldiers were buried in Jewish cemeteries. In Zakliczyn a special Jewish cemetery for soldiers was created and in Tarnow's Jewish Cemetery soldiers were buried among other graves, mostly because the buried soldiers died from illnesses and injuries.

Tarnow was on the Austro-Russian front line for several months. The Russians took the city in autumn 1914 and were forced to leave after an Austrian attack in May 1915. The front line was on the Dunajec River and some heavy fighting took place in the area in December 1914 and May 1915.

There are 43 soldiers' graves in the cemetery, but only several have survived to today. The headstones are

of a simple classic style with Hebrew inscriptions which gives the soldier's name and the date of his death.

There is one interesting grave different from others. It is Commander **Josef Steiner's** grave (35) whose family probably commissioned it after the war. The inscription is in Polish, perhaps for Tarnow's people to know who is buried here. It says:

**It is the place of rest
Commander
Austro-Hungarian soldier
The victim of the World War
1914-1915
Born 22 V 1853 in IPOLY PASZTO
Died 7 X 1914 in Tarnow**



The Hebrew inscription says he was also a teacher or maybe a rabbi too. This Jewish Austrian soldier was born on Hungarian land and died on Polish land and had maybe a Hungarian, German or Czech family who wanted to pay tribute to him.

Walking through the main path from north to south we can see several graves from the last century. These are the last Jews from Tarnow.

After the war about 3 thousand Jews came back to Tarnow, mostly those who manage to run away in 1939 from the Soviet Union. Some of them managed to survive in Tarnow or the area in Christian families. For example in Antoni Dagnan's mill on Lwowska Street (demolished in 2002) 9 Jews were hiding. Those who survived did not have much to come back to. Their families had been murdered, houses demolished or taken by Christians. The ghetto district was gradually being demolished by Tarnow's citizens who were looking for precious possessions or just building materials. Other houses were taken by Poles who had run away from the east or those who just lost their houses during the war.

A new Jewish community began forming in houses on Goldhammera and Walowa Street. A new prayer house was established at 3 Goldhammera Street which used to be Soldinger's Hotel. These Jews didn't see their future as reconstructing the Jewish community in Tarnow and started emigrate to Silesia and the western part of Poland or Palestine. At the beginning of the 1950s there were several hundred Jews and after 1968 only a few families.

The Jews who died after World War II were buried in the far part of the cemetery. Over the years it became overgrown with bushes and trees and was vandalised by local hooligans, so the decision was taken to bury people closer to the entrance. Not being certain where there was free space to do so they started burying bodies on the path where certainly there were no graves. Among these graves

is **Abraham Ladner's** (1904-1993), who was called in Tarnow 'the last guard of the Torah'. He used to live in the last house of prayer (a small synagogue) set up in the 1960s on the first floor at 1 Goldhammera Street. After his death the Torah and the candles were taken over by Krakow's Jewish congregation and the rest of his possessions were given to Tarnow's museum.



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Janusz Koziół

Bas-Relief Symbols in Tarnow's Jewish Cemetery

The symbolism on the headstones in Tarnow's Jewish Cemetery is also the history of the struggle of the artists as the bible forbade the depiction of iconic images (Deuteronomy 4:16-18; Exodus 20:4). Walking through the Jewish cemetery allows us to understand that the decoration of the headstones represents a change of Jewish thought. The oldest are the least decorated, then there are those with simple Hebrew texts and those from the 20th century are often made of marble with Hebrew, Polish or German inscriptions. We have the graves of orthodox Jews next to the graves of Jews who wished to assimilate in Tarnow's cultural life. And we also have the graves of those who were involved in Zionism or political groups, such as Bund. The comparison of the symbolism on these headstones demonstrates the development of thought in Jewish Tarnow.

There are four thousand headstones in differing states of repair in Tarnow's cemetery. Of course, the most destroyed are the oldest that are made of sandstone. Unfortunately, the marble headstones were destroyed by the Nazis and after the war they became desirable for thieves.

The symbolism on Jewish headstones has a strict relationship to the engraved text which you can only fully understand after reading the whole text. As Hebrew is

a difficult language what follows are some explanations of some of the symbols you can see as you walk through the cemetery. This will help you understand the sex, character, position and profession of the dead person and also sometimes gives light to the circumstances of their life or their death.

Blessing Hands

The hands are shown with touching thumbs and first finger which shows that the dead person was a descendent of Aaron. These Kohenim performed special duties in the sanctuary that carried on the role of the ancestors from their



original duties performed on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Kohenim cannot get closer than two metres to the headstone so as not to get ritually dirty.

Jug and a Bowl

Both symbols are usually presented together or sometimes as a tipped jug with water flowing into the bowl. This symbol means the dead person belonged to Levi's tribe. These people held the sacrificial functions in the temple. It was their duty to wash the priests' hands before the blessing and this is where they get their symbol from.

Out of all the symbols in the cemetery the jug and a bowl is uniquely linked to this duty.



Candlesticks

Usually candlesticks decorate women's headstones because lighting them and blessing the light on the Shabbat was their duty and privilege. There are many different ways to present candlesticks from a solitary candle to many. The many armed candlestick is known as the menorah which was first used in the Tabernacle and later on in the Temple in Jerusalem. Although this is considered as a symbol for women, you may also find it on the graves of men.



The Star of David

This is the second symbol of Judaism after the menorah. For many centuries it was used as a magical symbol and only in the 19th and 20th century did it become seen as a symbol belonging to the Jewish nation. Both classical stars and stars with a hammer inside, which is a youth organisation symbol, can be found in Tarnow's cemetery. The star today is the symbol of Zionism.



The Decalogue

This symbolises the alliance with God on Mount Sinai. It is very rarely seen on headstones and represents teachers or rabbis.

The Books

This symbol is very often found in Jewish cemeteries in Poland, but hardly ever in Tarnow. The Books symbolise religious learning.

The Torah

This symbol is even less popular in Tarnow than the books. It suggests the deep faith and religious knowledge of the dead person and is found on the graves of rabbis or Tzadikim.



A Crown

This usually symbolises the Torah and a great knowledge of religious texts, learning and religious faith. According to a rabbi's story the crown is the pinnacle of the priesthood. That's why it is often connected with the symbol of blessing hands. In Tarnow, there are a few with this symbol and the inscription "כתר שם טוב" (keter shem tow) meaning Crown of a Good Name.



Architectural Elements

Not only inscription or bas relief can be symbolic on headstones. Sometimes just the form of the headstone can refer to well-known biblical motifs. In the cemetery a very popular symbol are columns between which there is an inscription. These columns represent the pillars of Boaz and Jachin which stood in the Temple in Jerusalem.¹



A Broken Tree (branch, candlestick and column)

This is a frequently seen symbol referring to a sudden and tragic death of a young person and can be seen in the headstone carved by David Becker.

¹ 1 Kings 7;15-22.



Plants

The world of plants on Jewish headstones mostly represents the fruits of Israel's soil which are offered in the Temple or used in religious customs. You can frequently see palm trees on the headstones and this can also refer to the justness of the dead person (Psalm 92:12 "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree"). Other motifs are the regional plants of Israel and twigs, wreaths and garlands have no particular meaning.





Animals

Just like plants, animals are among the more popular headstone symbols and hold many meanings. Sometimes they are used as a symbol and sometimes they are simply a decorative picture.

The lion is a commonly used symbol and it refers to the Tribe of Judah, but can also mean the dead person's name, Yehudah, Arieih or Leib. In Tarnow there are two ways of presenting the lion; it is shown individually or facing another.



The deer symbolises the Tribe of Naphtali or suggests the name of the dead person, Tzvi or Hirsh. Sometimes it can symbolise the desire to meet God according to



Psalm 42:2 “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”

Rarely in Tarnow can you see a picture of a **wolf** which refers to the name Zeev. This can also suggest the Tribe of Benjamin² or the name Dov or **Ber**, which means bear in Yiddish.

Birds shown on headstones represent the soul; mostly they are to be found on women’s headstones. A **dove** suggests the name Jonah. An **eagle** refers to the biblical image of power³ and sometimes to the name Adler. In Galicia’s cemeteries a two headed eagle is also found, which was the symbol of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.



² Genesis 49, 27.

³ Exodus 19, 4, Deuteronomy 32, 11.

Worth Knowing

All the headstones belong to a grave of Jewish burial. That is as long as the headstone was not returned after World War II. It is worth noticing that at the top of each headstone there are characteristic signs, such as:

פנ or **פט**

They mean 'po nikman' or 'po tamun' which can be translated as 'hidden here' or 'buried here'.

All the inscriptions in Hebrew finish with:

תנצבה

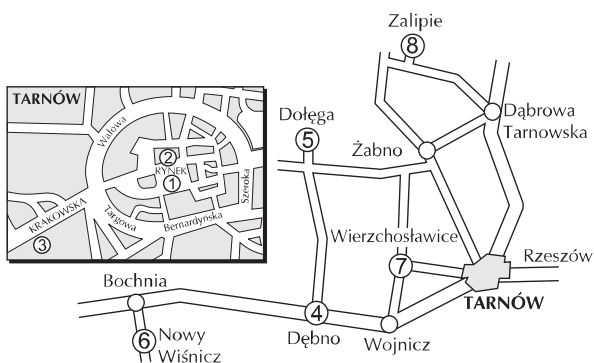
This refers to 1 Samuel 25:29 "but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God".

This information can be useful for those who can't speak Hebrew but have an artist nature and can make understanding Jewish burial traditions easier.

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