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Support for Jewish matters. The Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith in Przemyśl in the Second Polish Republic

Abstract

Przemyśl, in 1931 inhabited by 17,326 followers of Judaism accounting for 34% of its total population, was a medium-sized Polish town, where a major role was played by Jewish elites, including lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, teachers etc., supporters of the Zionist movement. The Jewish elites of Przemyśl were associated with the Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith founded in 1924, as a part of the larger and highly recognised international organization B'nei B'rith. The Society is noteworthy for a number of reasons. It was one of the most active B'nei B'rith organisations operating in the Second Polish Republic. Joined by and integrating the local Jewish elites, the Society provided a platform for activities of local, regional and, at times, international importance in support for the Jewish community. In Przemyśl the Society was involved in charitable activities, mainly aimed to benefit orphans and the poor, and it conducted a variety of cultural and educational activities. Particularly worthy of notice is the fact that, as an opponent of antisemitism, Humanitas played a very important role within the local Jewish community of Przemyśl.

Key words: B'nei B'rith, Przemyśl, elite, charity, cultural and educational activities, antisemitism

Introduction

Activities undertaken by the Jewish elite in Przemyśl first became highly visible even before the First World War, and that was a consequence of the growing demographic and economic strength of the local

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Jewish community. At that time the city stood out among Galician towns because of its dynamic growth, which also promoted the development of modern society. In fact, the event which most significantly contributed to the development of Przemyśl was the construction of the military fortress. The Jewish elite, which was becoming stronger and more important, consisted of both university-educated intelligentsia and affluent representatives of the local business community (Wierzbieniec 2022: 13, 15, 20–21). With their well-established high social status, during the Second Polish Republic these individuals continued to hold prominent positions within the Jewish community. Other individuals gaining high social status also joined that group at that time.

It is difficult to determine precisely how many people were part of the Jewish elite in Przemyśl during the Second Polish Republic. It is only possible to say that these people were highly active within the Jewish community. According to the 1931 Census, the town was home to 17,326 Jewish people who accounted for 34% of its total population (Statystyka... 1938: 39). This article aims to answer the question concerning the role and significance of the Jewish elite associated with the Zionist movement (representatives of the liberal professions, industrialists, affluent merchants, gymnasium professors, etc.), affiliated to the B'nei B'rith society, in Przemyśl, which in the inter-war period was a medium-sized city.

The lodges of the Order of B'nei B'rith, an organisation founded in 1843 (as a result of a secession from regular Freemasonry) with the headquarters in Cincinnati, USA, were first introduced to Polish cities prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Organisations established in the area under Austrian jurisdiction included the lodges *Solidarność* [Solidarity] in Krakow, and *Leopolis* in Lvov. During the Second Polish Republic more lodges were founded, including those in Przemyśl, and then in Stanyslaviv, which were established thanks to the significant support from *Leopolis* in Lvov. The specific lodges operated within the structure of the Grand Lodge of the 13th District of the Independent Order B'nei B'rith with a seat in Kraków, encompassing all the lodges in the Second Polish Republic (Czajeczka 1994: 12; Ciwkacz 2017: 337; Kargol 2008: 249; Kargol 2013: 98–100; Sroka 2016: 45–46).

Like other B'nei B'rith lodges, the lodge in Przemyśl applied certain symbols and ranks, as well as procedures in conducting the debates, borrowed from the Masonic movement (Grusd 1966: 30–31, 46, 64). The term lodge applied to the specific B'nei B'rith organisations, the term installation of the lodge referred to its ceremonial opening, whereas installation of officers related to a ceremony during which the new board

assumed its authority. Members of the lodge were referred to as Brethren. However, as it was aptly pointed out by Łukasz Tomasz Sroka, "B'nei B'rith never met the standards of a regular Masonic formation (for the simple reason that it could be joined by Jews exclusively). At its outset, the order could be referred to as a semi-Masonic formation. However, it lost this quality rather quickly, evolving into a typical humanitarian, charitable and educational organisation" (Sroka 2016: 46). Even though they had no formal links to Freemasonry, all the B'nei B'rith lodges, including the one in Przemyśl, had to discontinue their operations by virtue of the decree on the dissolution of Masonic associations dated 22 November 1938, issued by the President of the Republic of Poland (Kargol 2010: 172–174; Wójtowicz 2007: 154–155). The organisations dissolved pursuant to that decree included both Freemasonry organisations and entities sharing the same ideas but more aptly described as "semi-Masonic" formations, such as the Order of B'nei B'rith and Schlaraffia (Hass 1993: 99, 102; Koredczuk 2016: 191, 196).

The objectives of B'nei B'rith Order, which mainly focused on charity and philanthropy, were briefly described by Prof. Mojżesz Schorr, one of the leading activists in Poland. "B'nei B'rith as a worldwide organisation (...) is defined by two fundamental characteristics: the idea of solidarity of all Jews throughout the world (...), the idea of the universalism of humanity, the brotherhood of all people and nations" (Czajeczka 1994: 10).

One of the most active in Poland, the lodge in Przemyśl brought together the elite of local Jews, giving them an opportunity to become involved in issues of importance for Jews, at a local, regional and international level. In Przemyśl, it was known for its dynamic operations, mainly charitable, cultural and educational activities. Particularly notable was also the attitude of the lodge towards Palestine and Zionism, as well as its active opposition to antisemitism.

Genesis and organisational issues

The Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith (Humanitas Lodge) was established following the initiative of and with a considerable support from the eminent historian Mojżesz Schorr, who was born in 1874 in Przemyśl where he also graduated from the gymnasium in 1893 (Chonigsman, Wierzbieniec 2004: 219, 222–223). A member of B'nei B'rith lodge in Lvov, and from 1923 in Warsaw as well, Mojżesz Schorr maintained ties with his hometown through his numerous social contacts and academic pursuits. As it was pointed out in the concise *Historia loży*

„*Humanitas*” [History of Humanitas lodge] written in 1929, “As a person from Przemyśl, Brother Mojżesz Schorr wished that his hometown had a branch of the Society whose ideals he was so committed to. He pointed out the meaning, aims, ideas and key principles of the Society, and suggested the path which we should follow” (Związek..., sygn. 91: 45).

The establishment of the lodge in Przemyśl was preceded with two years of preparations. Those initially won over by Mojżesz Schorr for the idea of establishing B’nei B’rith lodge in Przemyśl included: merchant Maurycy Schatzker and two lawyers, Dr. Leon Probststein and Dr. Dawid Maksymilian. However, the group of people willing to get involved soon began to grow. In February 1922, Mojżesz Schorr organised a meeting for those who were interested in activities of B’nei B’rith. Following Mojżesz Schorr's suggestion, it was decided that, to ensure they would be able to effectively handle the task, the persons who in the future were to establish the lodge in Przemyśl should first join Leopoldis in nearby Lvov. Twenty two persons declared their desire to join the lodge in Lvov, although some of them were not accepted. During a ceremony held on 4 June 1922 in Lvov, twenty members were introduced to Leopoldis, while initiation of one further new member took place later.

As the next stage in their efforts to establish a separate, independent lodge in Przemyśl, the twenty one Leopoldis members connected to Przemyśl made a request to the Provincial Office in Lvov in February 1923 to get the Humanitas Society registered. They did not wait long for a decision; on 20 March 1923 the Provincial Office agreed to register the Society (Związek... sygn. 91: 46; Chajn 1975: 569; Sroka 2016: 66). Despite the valid legal basis for its operation in Przemyśl, the new lodge, which was to function within the structure of B’nei B’rith organisation, took almost a year to establish. The Humanitas Society in its explanations concerning the lack of operations and the delay of the decision to install the lodge, addressed to the authorities of the Federation of Humanitarian Societies B’nei B’rith Poland in Kraków, reported "*various obstacles*" (without specifying the details), and most importantly the fact that it did not have its own adequate facility (Związek ... sygn. 370: 27). Yet, these arguments were not convincing for the authorities of the Federation of the Humanitarian Societies B’nei B’rith, which also included Mojżesz Schorr. This was because they were committed to have a new lodge established in Przemyśl. Due to this, Dr. Leon Ader acting on behalf of the Federation of the Humanitarian Societies, sent a letter, dated 9 October 1923, addressing members of Humanitas Society in Przemyśl, which was to motivate them to install the lodge. "If the lack of a facility is the only obstacle to the installation of the Lodge, then I would like to

draw your attention to the precedent of the Braterstwo [Brotherhood] Lodge in Warsaw, which was installed in June 1922, but its facility is to be furnished and available not earlier than the end of 1923. The installation took place at the premises of one of the Brethren, and then the meetings were held in their homes or in separately rented locations. I would ask you to reconsider this matter and to give us definitive information” (Związek... sygn. 370: 31). These arguments had a positive effect; during the general meeting of Humanitas Society, held as soon as 20 October 1923, it was decided that preparations should be made for the installation of the lodge in Przemyśl, despite the fact that no suitable location for its headquarters was yet available.

Dr. Leon Ader, President of the Grand Lodge of the 13th District of the Independent Order B'nei B'rith appointed the installing officer for the Lodge in Przemyśl, Dr. Józef Parnas, a long-time member of Leopolis Lodge in Lvov, its former president of the board. It was also decided the new entity would function as Lodge No. 977 (Związek... sygn. 370: 33–38, 41).

The ceremonial installation of the Humanitas Lodge in Przemyśl, performed by Dr. Józef Parnas, and witnessed by representatives of Leopolis Lodge from Lvov, was held on 18 March 1924, and followed the scenario prepared earlier for this purpose, comprising the rituals used by B'nei B'rith (Związek... sygn. 371: 7–8; Sroka 2016: 66). After Dr. Józef Parnas made the speech and declared that the Lodge was open, thirteen persons were accepted as new members of Humanitas, in addition to the persons from Przemyśl previously with membership in Leopolis. As a result, at that point the Lodge had 33 members (Związek... sygn. 91: 46; Związek... sygn. 370: 43–44; Związek... sygn. 371: 7–8; *Książka...* 1926: 76–75; Czajeczka 1994: 41). Making it clear he was pleased about the opening of the new lodge, Dr. Józef Parnas notified Dr. Leon Ader, President of B'nei B'rith Order about this event. "The hall was beautifully decorated, the mood solemn, so that we have every reason to be pleased with this acquisition. – The meeting was followed by a short declamatory and vocal performance and a fine banquet” (Związek... sygn. 370: 54).

Initially, Humanitas B'nei B'rith was seated in the premises of Bank Kupiecki [Merchant Bank] at 5 Dworskiego Street; the facility was rented owing to the efforts of its director, lawyer Dr. Józef Scheinbach, a member of B'nei B'rith. The meetings of the lodge members were held on the second and fourth Saturday of each month. They started relatively late, at 8:30 p.m.. On the other hand, more formal meetings were held in the great hall of the Social Club or in the Jewish community hall. Yet,

despite the financial difficulties, from the time it was established, Humanitas sought to have its own facility.

It was only two years later, owing to significant efforts by physician Dr. Samuel Natan Kutna presiding over the lodge at that time, that the grand opening of the lodge headquarters at 6 Grodzka Street was held on 22 May 1926, with many guests from Leopoli in Lvov in attendance. The place was refurbished and appointed to match the needs of the lodge. The facility comprised a large meeting room, three smaller rooms used for social gatherings, and small servant's quarters. The meeting room was furnished and decorated in a style according to a design by a lodge member, painter Adolf Bienenstock, a professor and art teacher at a gymnasium in Przemyśl. Located centrally, there was a large menorah. During each meeting its lamps were lit in a ceremonial and symbolic manner on a sign given by the president. Being a Judaic feature, it symbolised the mission of Israel. On the wall there was a portrait of the venerable Dr. Jakub Glanz, the first president of the lodge. In the premises there was also a library with a periodicals reading-room. The members had access to a few newspapers as well as literary and art magazines to which the lodge subscribed. The costs of adaptation and furnishing of the facility were rather high, amounting to approximately 14,000 zlotys, and were almost completely covered by the lodge members. A contribution of 600 zlotys was designated for this purpose by members of Leopoli from Lvov (*Związek...* sygn. 376: 29–30, 36–37; *Książka...* 1926: 74–75; Sroka 2016: 66).

Like in the previous years, and throughout the time Humanitas continued its operation, the meetings were held here on the second and fourth Saturday of the month and started at 8.30 pm. On the other hand, social gatherings as a rule were held on Wednesdays at 8.30 pm. Possible largely because of the existing facility, the Association of the Sisters of B'nei B'rith was started in 1927; it mainly consisted of the wives of Humanitas Lodge members, and was headquartered at the same location (*Związek...* sygn. 85: 1–7; *Związek...* sygn. 373: 323; *Książka...* 1926: 74; *Książka...* 1928: 85; *Książka...* 1932: 93; *Książka...* 1937: 117; Czajacka 1994: 25). In their interactions within the organisation, its members referred to each other as Sisters.

Those seeking to join the lodge were carefully selected. Membership in the organisation in a way elevated and was an acknowledgement of the person's high social status in the Jewish community in Przemyśl. It was also associated with rather large expenses, which could be afforded by those relatively well-off. During 1924–1925 the lodge members were required to pay an annual fee of 12 zlotys. Monthly fees were introduced

in 1926, and their amount subsequently increased. As a result, starting from 1 April 1927 the monthly fee amounted to 14 zlotys. Apart from that, the members generously contributed to various projects carried out by the lodge, mainly including charitable activities. At times, providing additional financial support to the organisation was a way of marking an extraordinary event in a lodge member's life. In 1926, the industrialist Joachim Klagsbald, owner of the largest industrial plant in Przemyśl, the Polna iron foundry and agricultural machinery factory, donated \$75 to the Relief Committee of the lodge, to celebrate his daughter's engagement and wedding (Związek... sygn. 376: 37; Wierzbieniec 1996: 23).

To make ongoing activities more effective and to engage all the members as much as possible, the aforementioned Relief Committee and the Educational Committee were formed and met separately several times a year. The former defined the amount of funds to be allocated for specific charitable causes and mutual aid related purposes, whereas the latter planned and carried out cultural and educational activities. Additionally, the Fund for Widows and Orphans was set up to provide aid to families of deceased members of the lodge.

In view of the emerging problems related to the affiliation of members with lodges operating in towns other than the person's place of residence, in May 1928 the Executive Committee of the Federation of the Humanitarian Societies B'nei B'rith Poland adopted a resolution on the territorial boundaries of the specific lodges. In line with this resolution, the territory specified for Humanitas comprised the area east of the line between Dębica and Jasło up to the line of four districts in the proximity of Przemyśl, i.e., Cieszanów, Mościska, Chyrów, and Ustrzyki (Związek... sygn. 370: 155; Związek... sygn. 372: passim; Związek... sygn. 376: 40–41; Czajeczka 1994: 45).

As in other lodges, the activities of the Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith in Przemyśl were managed by a Committee of Officers (equivalent of the executive board), elected each year. It was headed by the president, and the Committee of Officers also included the vice-president, financial secretary, minute clerk and a treasurer. The first president, appointed in 1924, was the aforementioned Dr. Jakub Glanz, a lawyer, and long-time member of the City Council of Przemyśl; he also held the position in 1925. The Committee of Officers as a rule was constituted (installed), in a ceremonial manner, by one of the former presidents (ex-president). At the beginning of 1926 the ceremony was to be executed by Dr. Jakub Glanz, yet due to his illness, the function of the installing officer was performed by Dr. Rubin Sokal, ex-president of Leopoli, who came from Lvov. At that point Humanitas did not have its

own facility, due to which installation of the Committee of Officers was to be held in the Social Club, but then the decision was changed and the ceremony ultimately took place in the Jewish community hall.

In subsequent years the installation of the Committee of Officers was held in the premises at 6 Grodzka Street. These ceremonies were frequently attended by Rabbi Dr. Lewi Freund from Lvov, the overseer of the Lodge in Przemyśl, acting on behalf of the Grand Lodge (Związek... sygn. 373: 3, 119). He had a high social standing and was greatly respected. He supported the activities of many Jewish organisations and opposed attacks on Jews and Judaism. Defending Judaism, in 1922 he published in Kraków a brochure entitled *O etyce Talmudu. Odpowiedź „żydoznawcom”* [About the ethics of Talmud. A response to "experts in Jewishness"]. Overseers were also appointed to other lodges. In the case of Leopolis Lodge in Lvov, this function was played by Professor Schorr, who moved from the latter city to Warsaw, as was previously mentioned.

The consecutive presidents of Humanitas Lodge, following Dr. Jakub Glanz (1924 and 1925), were: physician Dr. Samuel Kutna (1926 and 1927), lawyer Dr. Daniel Haas (1928), lawyer Dr. Joachim Goldfarb (1929), gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich (1930), lawyer Dr. Jakub Glanz (1931), lawyer Dr. Daniel Haas (1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936), and lawyer Dr. Oswald Bethauer (1937 and 1938) (Związek... sygn. 370: 157-161, 433, 449, 535, 777; Związek... sygn. 373: 333; Związek... sygn. 375: 127, 191, 251, 290).

The members of the Humanitas Society in Przemyśl had a high social status. They constituted an elite group of people sharing a common set of values, emphasised by the Order of B'nei B'rith. They were actively involved in the public life of Przemyśl, they were well-known in the local Jewish community and were linked to one another by social ties. Like in other lodges existing in the Second Polish Republic, the majority of members had higher education or represented liberal professions (Kargol 2013: 177; Sroka 2011: 161–164; Sroka 2014: 104). The thirty three founding members of the lodge included 18 lawyers, 4 physicians, 4 merchants, 4 gymnasium professors, one judge, one bank director and one writer.

In 1926, B'nei B'rith lodges operating in Poland had a total of 822 members. With its 213 members, Leopolis was the largest lodge. On the other hand, the Przemyśl lodge, with its 41 members (4.9% of the total), ranked seventh in Poland, and in terms of size was preceded by the lodges in Lvov, Kraków, Katowice, Bielsko, Warsaw, and Królewska Huta. In the following two years the number of Humanitas Lodge members

slightly increased – to 53 in 1928. Then in 1932, it had 51 members, and in 1937 there were 50 members. These changes occurring in the subsequent years can be attributed to a number of factors. For one thing, some members failed to meet their basic obligations, such as attendance of the meetings and payment of fees, due to which their membership was discontinued. Some members moved to larger cities. However, the most serious loss was caused by the death of the members. As many as eleven Humanitas Lodge members died by 1937; these were Dr. Jakub Glanz, Dr. Joachim Goldfarb, Józef Izaak, Dr. Jakub Katz, Dr. Dawid Maksymilian, Dr. Jakub Meisels, Dr. Jakub Mester, Dr. Paweł Necheles, Otto Sandauer M.Sc., Dr. Leon Schmeidler, and Leopold Susswein.

Members of the Humanitas Society also included individuals from outside Przemyśl. Approximately 20% of its members were residents of Jarosław, and some lived in other places. For example, in 1925 the lodge was joined by three men from Jarosław, lawyer Dr. Ludwik Blumenfeld, lawyer Dr. Maurycy Ettinger and gymnasium professor Berisch Streifer, as well as a resident of Lubaczów, lawyer Dr. Józef Ostermann. In 1934 the lodge was joined by Emil Safrin M.Sc., owner of the chemist's shop in Drohobych. Throughout the lifetime of the lodge, there was a problem with attendance at the meetings of the Brethren who lived away from Przemyśl as they rarely came to these events.

As in Lvov, the lodge in Przemyśl was joined mainly by individuals supporting the Zionist movement who were in a significant majority among its members. Many members also played an important role in local government, in the Jewish community authorities and in various Jewish organisations, mainly charitable as well as cultural and educational associations (Związek... sygn. 370: 382; Związek... sygn. 374: passim; Związek... sygn. 376: 23, 127; *Książka...* 1937: passim; Chajn 1975: 569). Arguably, they constituted a local Jewish elite in Przemyśl.

Mutual aid and charitable activities

Charitable activity was its main purpose, and for that Humanitas and its specific members stood out in the Jewish community of Przemyśl. As early as 1922, individuals from Przemyśl who joined Leopoldis, collected a significant amount of money for destitute Jews in Soviet Ukraine; they transferred the funds to Lvov in August of that year.

After the lodge was installed in early 1924, the Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith joined the Society of the Supporters of the Jewish Hospital as a founding member. The function of the first presi-

dent of the latter society was held by gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich, member of B'nei B'rith. Acting in a similar way, as a founding member, in the same year Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith also joined the Association for the Support of Jewish Orphans, the reopened Public Kitchen, Mutual Aid Group for the Support of Jewish University Students and the Society for the Shelter of Jewish Orphans, which was headed by lawyer Dr. Joachim Goldfarb, member of B'nei B'rith. Considerable amounts of money were also contributed for the operations of these organisations. Furthermore, two representatives, lawyers Dr. Meichel Kalman and Dr. Michał Schwarz, were designated to the Committee for the Support of Poor Russian Jews, in order to focus on this matter. In addition, the Relief Committee created at that time within the Lodge was planning to organise summer camps for secondary school students and to provide financial assistance for the health resort in Dębina. However, due to the lack of sufficient resources, in 1924 these plans were not carried through (Związek... sygn. 376: 4–6).

The first mutual aid related initiative of Humanitas involved organisation of support for the widow of lawyer Dawid Maksymilian from Przemyśl, member of B'nei B'rith who passed on 20 March 1924 (two days after the installation of the lodge); after her husband's sudden death she was left with no means of support (Związek... sygn. 370: 67). Initially, no resources were available for this purpose. It was only at the end of 1925 that the Relief Committee decided that the widow would receive all the interest accrued from the Widows' and Orphans' Fund set up after the installation of the lodge, and a special fund would be established to provide means of support for her (Związek... sygn. 370: 147–148).

Although the lodge did not have its own facility, efforts were made to increase charitable activities. In 1925 the Relief Committee managed to make contributions of approximately 500 zlotys to various charitable causes. A donation of 100 zlotys was given to the health resort in Dębina, which also was to receive 1 zloty per month from each lodge member. Likewise, the Health Resort Nadzieja [Hope] in Rytro, run by the Society for the Support of Secondary School Students with Lung Diseases, received 100 zlotys. The Institute for the Deaf in Vienna received 0.5 zloty per month from each member. The Facility for the Blind in Wojnarowa received 100 zlotys. A donation of 50 zlotys was given to a dormitory in Jerusalem. A poor woman in Przemyśl received a loan of 100 zlotys. Free room was also arranged in a manorial estate near Przemyśl for five poor children to spend summer vacation there. Moreover, the Committee for the Aid of Children in Russia was created and endeavours were initiated to centralise charitable activities in Przemyśl; for

this purpose a special committee was formed, the goal however was achieved only in the final years of the interwar period.

One significant achievement of the Relief Committee, headed by Dr. Juliusz Susswein, the Milk Station was created in May 1926 for poor Jewish children to provide them with nutritious dairy meals. It was operated by the lodge members' wives. By the end of December 1926, contributions amounting to 2,246 zlotys were collected in the Jewish community of Przemyśl for furnishing and operation of the facility. The Milk Station was open throughout the year, except on Jewish holidays. Its importance for the community and the need for this type of activity was reflected by the number of meals provided by the facility. In 1928 on average 96 breakfasts were provided daily. Such breakfast consisted of ¼ litre of milk, one bread roll and two cubes of sugar.

To make mutual aid operations more effective, the Relief Fund and the Fund for Widows and Orphans were created in 1928, and special regulations were drafted for them. It was also declared that certain charitable initiatives required continuous support, which should be provided by Humanitas each year. It was also decided that fixed annual donations would be contributed for the following purposes:

- Milk Station in Przemyśl – 180 zlotys
- Health resort for ill orphans in Dębina – 360 zlotys
- Shelter for Jewish Orphans – 360 zlotys
- Mutual Aid Academic Association – 120 zlotys
- Association for the Support of Jewish Students in Poland Auxilium Judaicum – 100 zlotys (Związek... sygn. 376: 21, 36, 69–70, 73, 97)

In its charitable activities, Humanitas was also regularly involved in various campaigns benefitting underprivileged Jewish population of Przemyśl. These included campaigns for the support of summer camps and Orphan Week. It was not only their own resources that they contributed for these purposes. Some Brethren personally visited the more prosperous individuals and encouraged them to make contributions; in this way they raised considerable funds (Związek... sygn. 376: 97–98; Związek... sygn.. 377: 41–42).

The extremely cold weather in January 1929 particularly affected the disadvantaged Jewish people living in Przemyśl. Because of this, members of Humanitas got involved in the campaign to provide emergency aid to the victims of the freezing temperatures. Being aware of the challenges presented by extremely cold winter, and having some experience in dealing with the negative effects, in December of that year they initiated a campaign aimed to provide clothing to poor Jews.

An event which greatly mobilised Humanitas for involvement in aid activities was the fire of Przeworsk on the night of 25 April 1930 that mainly affected houses occupied by Jewish people. Some victims of the fire were related to people from Przemyśl, not far away. As a result of swift action, Humanitas contributed 500 zlotys and collected clothes which they gave to the victims of fire. As a sign of solidarity, support was also provided to the Jewish victims of a heavy flood that affected Bochnia, Dębica, Limanowa, Nowy Sącz, Rzeszów, Tarnów and other smaller towns in Małopolska in 1934. In addition to money, the flood victims also received clothes collected by the Sisters during a specially organised campaign (Związek... sygn. 375: 149; Związek... sygn. 376: 96, 110, 115).

In the second half of the 1930s, due to the deteriorating situation of Jews in Germany and growing antisemitism, charitable activities were also organised to provide assistance for Jews in Germany and victims of the anti-Jewish pogrom in Poland in Brest-on-the-Bug (Hass 1987: 90–91). In 1936, Humanitas joined a campaign to provide support for summer camps for children in Germany, and contributed 150 zlotys to the cause. Then in 1937, it made a contribution of 150 zlotys to the campaign aimed to provide support to the victims of the aforementioned pogrom (Związek... sygn. 375: 282).

Increasing focus to providing aid for German Jews did not negatively affect charitable activities aimed to support poor Jews living in Przemyśl. In order to more effectively ensure tangible help to this population in the winter, when it was most needed, in 1937 the lodge members established the Winter Aid Committee which was widely supported by affluent sections of the Jewish community. Since it was also recognised by individuals who were not members of the lodge, the Committee was transformed into the Municipal Committee for Winter Aid to Jews, which was assigned wider terms of reference. It was headed by lawyer Dr. Oswald Bethauer, who was also the president of B'nei B'rith Society at that time.

Because of the deteriorating material situation of many people resulting from the economic crisis of 1929–1935, and leading to impoverishment of the Jews, which could not be alleviated by the aid provided by the Jewish community, the lodge members, concerned about the fate of their fellow Jews, were forced to look for other ways to overcome this difficult situation. In 1937 it was determined that, by coordinating the activities of all the Jewish charitable organisations in Przemyśl, it would be possible to ensure more comprehensive and effective support. On behalf of Humanitas, coordination of these activities was supervised by physician Dr. Juliusz Susswein (Związek... sygn. 375: 234, 281–282).

Cultural and educational activity

Initiatives regularly conducted by Humanitas also included cultural and educational activities (Wierzbieniec 1996: 246). This was a good way for society members and their families to spend time together and to integrate; these activities promoted greater appreciation of music and art, contributed to people's knowledge of literature, philosophy and history, as well as awareness of issues relating to Jewish history and culture. In 1924, which was the first year of its operation, members of Humanitas hosted nine lectures covering diverse subject matter. The speakers and the themes included: Mateusz Mieses – "Where did Jews come from", "Our culture", "Jewish ethics", and "Fundamentals of psychology"; Dr. Leib Landau – "Works by Perec"; gymnasium professor Adolf Bienenstock – "Industrial objects"; Gabryel Teich – "Objectives and goals of B'nei B'rith"; Dr. Joachim Goldfarb – "History and the current condition of the charitable organisations in Przemyśl"; Dr. Natan Kutna – "The work by Ziegler entitled *Die sietliche Welt des Judentums*". In the following years, some lectures were also presented by women, members of the Association of the Sisters. These included the lectures "About the importance of Mother's Day" by Sister Sussweinowa presented in 1929, "Serenity in contemporary times" by Sister Dr. Mieses-Reifowa in 1932, "Work versus man" and "What does history teach us" by Sister Dr. Mieses-Reifowa in 1933, and "The role of woman in Jewish literature" by Sister Osternowa in 1934.

The aforementioned Educational Committee was created in 1925, in order to expand cultural and educational activities; it was headed by gymnasium professor Adolf Bienenstock. Being the first initiative of the Educational Committee, a library was started with a collection comprising a few dozen books discussing the objectives and goals of B'nei B'rith. It was also within the competences of the Educational Committee to schedule lectures to be presented in each calendar year, and to organise various events connected with important anniversaries of the B'nei B'rith Order, Jewish holidays, anniversaries related to the history of the Jewish people, as well as social gatherings. In 1925, festivities were organised to celebrate the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The Society of Friends of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was also established in Przemyśl. (Związek... sygn. 375: 73,149; Związek... sygn. 376: 6, 98). However, after a few meetings, the society discontinued its operations and was removed from the register of associations (Wierzbieniec 1996: 257).

As a rule, during the whole time Humanitas operated in Przemyśl, some lectures presented each year focused on B'nei B'rith and Palestine.

As an example in 1925, these were lectures by gymnasium professor Adolf Bienenstock "B'nei B'rith Order and art", "What educational operations should be conducted in B'nei B'rith", "History of the reconstruction of Palestine", and by lawyer Dr. Efroim Schutzman "Crimea versus Palestine". In 1937 there were presentations by lawyer Dr. Ferdynant Brandstatter "On the side-lines of the migration problem", lawyer Dr. Efroim Schutzman "On B'rith works", merchant Wilhelm Haspel "Zionism and territorialism", writer Mateusz Mieses "Various attempts to establish a home for the nation in Palestine", and Lejb Jaffe – organiser and activist of Keren Hayesod Foundation from Jerusalem – "Contemporary Jerusalem".

These lectures were given in order to improve the members' knowledge of B'nei B'rith, that is to realise the formation-related purpose of the lodge and to strengthen the ties with Palestine, which directly corresponded to the objectives of the Zionist movement (Związek..., sygn. 375: 282; Związek..., sygn. 376: 22–23). These lectures were also heard by wives and daughters of the lodge members, who referred to them as Sisters even before the Association of the Sisters of B'nei B'rith was established.

Cultural and educational activities received a considerable boost once the lodge acquired its own facility, which was eagerly visited by lodge members and their families. Special celebrations referred to as "akademia", dedicated to various anniversaries and events were especially popular, reflecting the broad interests of the lodge members. In 1927, the 250th anniversary of the death of philosopher Baruch Spinoza was honoured with an *akademia* during which the lodge member, gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich, delivered a speech related to the occasion. During a special event held in honour of Ludwig van Beethoven, on the 100th anniversary of his death, the lodge member Dr. Joachim Goldfarb delivered a presentation discussing the composer's work. In 1929 an *akademia* was organised to honour 200th anniversary of the birth of Moses Mendelssohn, a philosopher and advocate of equal rights for Jews and non-Jews (Związek... sygn. 376: 46, 98). In 1935, an evening event was held to honour the 800th anniversary of the birth of philosopher Maimonides, the author of the most important Medieval commentary to Talmud; during the event a lecture "About Maimonides" was delivered by gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich (Związek... sygn. 375: 187).

Like in other B'nei B'rith lodges, Jewish festivals were a good occasion for regularly held meetings. In 1927, a special soiree was held in connection with Hanukkah festival and the tradition of such events continued in the following years. On the occasion of Pesach, each year

a solemn Seder evening was organised. It was also a tradition that each plenary session of the lodge was followed by a social gathering, with Sisters participating; these events were accompanied by instrumental and vocal performances, which were also referred to as *akademia*. To ensure the supreme quality of these performances, a grand piano was acquired for the facility. The instrument was rented at an initial annual rental fee of 250 zlotys, and later 220 zlotys. An example representing this type of activity was an *akademia* held after a ceremonial meeting of Humanitas on 26 February 1938 during which the new board (group of officers) was installed for the year 1938. This specific *akademia* featured a singing recital of Gizela Kutna-Hessel, a member of the Association of the Sisters. The program included the following songs: 1. Haydn – *Moja mateńka* [My dear mother], 2. Rossini – *Cyrulik Sewilski, Aria* [The Barber of Seville, aria], 3. Curtis – *Nie zapomnij mnie* [Do not forget me], Taubert - *Ptaszek w lesie* [Bird in the wood]. The piano was played by Bruno Hessel.

Moreover, having its own facility, Humanitas was able to organise art exhibitions which were highly esteemed by art connoisseurs. The first initiative of this type was the exposition of works by painter Efraim Mandelbaum from Paris, held in April 1927 (Związek... sygn. 375: 287; Związek... sygn. 376: 46, 49, 73, 98, 145).

The library grew constantly. It mainly contained publications related to philosophy and psychology. There were also many books about the history and culture of Jews and Palestine. The library holdings included *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Dubnow's *Jewish History*, and the jubilee edition of works by Mendelssohn. In 1937 the library collection consisted of 374 volumes. Newspapers and periodicals available at the library were also popular among the lodge members and their families. The total subscription fee paid in 1929 amounted to 143 zlotys.

Activities of the lodge emphasised the affiliation to and respect for Poland and its history, as well as the contribution of Jews to the development of the Polish state. On various occasions it was pointed out that Jews took part in the struggle for Polish independence. Discussions related to this matter were mainly initiated by lawyer Dr. Ferdynand Brandstatter, president of the Przemyśl branch of the Union of Jews Participants of Combat for Polish Independence (Związek... sygn. 375: 74, 283; Związek... sygn. 376: 89, 98; Wierzbieniec 2019: 43–44). Their patriotism and devotion to Poland were reflected by the ceremonial meeting of the lodge members held in 1928, on the 10th anniversary of Polish independence. During this meeting gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich presented a lecture "Revival of Poland as a rectification of histori-

cal injustice". Anniversaries of the Constitution of the 3 May were also celebrated. In 1930 a special lecture on this occasion was presented by gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich. On 18 May 1935, members of the lodge emphatically manifested their respect for the Polish state and Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the leading figure of political life at the time, who was also highly esteemed by Jewish communities. A special meeting was held after Marshal Piłsudski died; a speech on this occasion was delivered by the president of the lodge, physician Dr. Samuel Kutna.

The celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the Lodge in Przemyśl, held on 2 February 1934, provided an ideal opportunity to recapitulate its accomplishments, and to acknowledge its position among other lodges existing in Poland. The event reflected the significant emotional connection of the lodge members with B'nei B'rith Order. During the celebrations, gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich delivered a speech related to the anniversary, containing many personal references. His wife, Sister Teichowa recited a poem written for this specific occasion, and that was followed by vocal and instrumental performance by Sisters Malzowa and Giza Kutnianka. The jubilee event was also attended by members of Leopold Lodge from Lvov, vice-president of that city Wiktor Chajes, also representing the Grand Lodge, as well as Rabbi Dr. Lewi Freund, overseer of the lodge in Przemyśl (Związek... sygn. 375: 69, 71, 110, 150, 187).

In the 1930s, the facility of Humanitas was increasingly used as a culture centre, attended also by people who were not related to the lodge as an organisation. This was a consequence of a new type of activity, i.e. evening literary events called *wieczorynka*. Those in attendance would read and recite poetry, including their own poems, and they would discuss books which they had read. On some occasions, the evening events were accompanied with a fundraiser whereby the participants could make donations to specific Jewish causes. As an example, the event held in April 1934 was mainly intended as a meeting with Rachela Korn, a well-known Jewish poet and short story writer living in Przemyśl. On that occasion, a fundraiser for the Health Care Society was also held. A unique artistic event in the Jewish community of Przemyśl was organised by the Association of the Sisters, at the Lodge premises on 10 December 1937. This was a cabaret performance based on texts by Fritz Grünbaum, a well-known Jewish author of cabaret songs and a cabaret artist, living in Vienna. His texts were translated from German to Polish by gymnasium professor Gabriel Teich, the prologue and epilogue for the script were written by Sister Lidia Teichowa, and the performance was directed by lawyer Dr. Józef Axer, also a member of the lodge (Związek... sygn. 375: 150, 283).

The lectures presented at the Humanitas Lodge from the second half of the 1930s also discussed the dangers posed by fascism and growing antisemitism. In 1935, writer Mateusz Mises delivered a lecture "Non-Arian factor in European culture", and physician Dr. Samuel Kutna talked about "Combating antisemitism". In 1936, a lecture "About antisemitism" was presented by lawyer Dr. Ferdynand Brandstatter (Związek... sygn. 375: 186, 235).

An undertaking with a wider social and intellectual impact was the publication in 1928, with the financial support of the lodge, of a book by the writer Mateusz Mises, 'Hellenism and Judaism', being a response to Tadeusz Zieliński's book with the same title (Związek... sygn. 376: 70).

As an alternative to the social life normally taking place at the Humanitas facility, on some occasions trips were made to Jarosław, at the invitation of the Brethren and Sisters who lived there. In 1933, such a trip was taken from Przemyśl by a few Brethren and their families "who experienced a warm and hospitable welcome from the host Brethren and their families" (Związek... sygn. 376: 162).

The involvement of the lodge members who prepared presentations and lectures discussing various issues was particularly noteworthy. This was not only a way to contribute to the education and artistic sensibility of those attending such meetings, but such engagement also to a large extent promoted self-education.

Other forms and areas of activity

Other notable forms and areas of activity of the Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith include initiatives related to Palestine and Zionism, as well as university education for young Jews. Attention was also paid to the negative phenomena associated with the economic crisis and antisemitism in Germany and Poland.

As mentioned before, during the entire period of its operation, the lodge took particular notice of issues related to Palestine. In 1925 two lodge meetings focused on matters concerning Keren Hayesod (The Foundation Fund), an organisation collecting resources for establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine. They ended with a resolution declaring strong moral and financial support for this fundraising organisation (Związek... sygn. 376: 23). The support for efforts to establish Jewish homeland was also reflected by the fact that the Jubilee Committee, headed by Dr. Józef Rawicz, was set up in 1937, in order to collect funds

for the purchase of land in Palestine, as a way to honour the centenary of B'nei B'rith Order (Związek... sygn. 375: 281).

Like other B'nei B'rith societies in the Second Polish Republic, Humanitas attached great importance to the university education of young Jews, and provided considerable support for the Institute of Judaic Studies in Warsaw. In 1927 the Society made a pledge it would annually donate 1,200 zlotys for the Institute. Support was also awarded regularly, each year, to young Jews studying abroad. In 1929, despite the deteriorating economic situation caused by the crisis, an annual scholarship of 1,200 zlotys was awarded to a very talented graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts, to enable him to continue his studies abroad. Support for Jewish university students was also reflected by fundraisers organised for the benefit of the Home for Well-being of Jewish Academics in Vorokhta.

The public attention was drawn by visits of well-known guests from Poland and abroad, affiliated with B'nei B'rith. Of great significance was the visit of the eminent historian, Prof. Majer Bałaban, strongly associated with the Institute of Judaic Studies, who was appointed by the Grand Lodge to install the new board of Humanitas Lodge on 10 February 1929. Another momentous event was the visit of Mordecai Ehrenpreis, Rabbi of Stockholm and a well-known writer, publisher and Zionist activist, who was a guest of the Przemyśl lodge on 15 June 1930 (Związek... sygn. 376: 50, 95, 97, 109–110, 115).

An important issue that garnered attention was the economic crisis that intensified from the late 1920s leading to pauperisation of the Jewish population. It should be emphasised that the economic crisis adversely affected the entire society of the Second Polish Republic, not only its Jewish population. The impact of the economic crisis on the operations of the lodge and the material condition of the Jewish community in Przemyśl was regularly discussed during the meetings and social gatherings. The 1929 report said: "The Lodge cannot show the abundance of activity that one would wish for, given the aims of the Order and the prevailing relations among Jewish society in Poland. (...) In view of the alarming degree of pauperisation of the Jewish society, especially in the areas away from large cities, and in view of the substantial public obligations incumbent otherwise on the society which must rely almost entirely on its own strength, the demands imposed on the members of this society are enormous. And here is an interesting observation. These obligations time and time again are satisfied by the same individuals, the intelligentsia representing the liberal professions and merchants, i.e., mostly members of the Lodge. Regrettably, it must be pointed out and emphasised, that only few individuals other than the Brethren feel, to a greater extent,

that it is their duty to fulfil the obligations which nowadays are incumbent on every socially aware Jew." (Związek... sygn. 376: 95–96).

Looking for ways out from the situation adversely impacting the material status of Jews, it was determined that there was a need for altering the social stratification of the Jewish population by moving working people from trade to so-called productive jobs. As a result, in 1930 the main efforts focused on completing the building for the Jewish Vocational School for Girls in Przemyśl, and on providing support for its activities. To be able to effectively realise the goal, Brethren and Sisters joined the Society for Training of Jewish Youth in Handicrafts which was running the school. Construction of the school building, however, was only completed in 1937 (Związek... sygn. 376: 109–110; Wierzbieniec 1996: 238).

Despite the economic crisis and the related challenges, efforts were made to look to the future with optimism, with a belief that through consolidation, cooperation and hard work, and by following the principles of the Order of B'nei B'rith, it would be possible to more easily overcome the crisis. This will to find the inner strength, and the hope for a better future were reflected in the 1931 report of the Lodge in Przemyśl, "we must not forget about the world crisis in the midst of which we are living and to which we often succumb. We shall not be bent or broken, being invigorated by the hope that the ideals of brotherhood, harmony and neighbourly love will in the world of tomorrow be more widely understood and applied than today" (Związek... sygn. 376: 129).

After Adolf Hitler came to power, the lodge continued to pay attention to the deteriorating situation of the Jewish population in Germany and to the issue of antisemitism. The 1933 report says: "We dedicated a considerable part of our work to issues connected with the hardships that had befallen our Brothers in Germany; our concern was to think out and find the means, and to carry out the work plan. A number of our meetings and debates focused on the problem of antisemitism and the fight against this movement" (Związek... sygn. 375: 72). Seeking to provide aid to a wave of refugees from Germany, the lodge set up the Relief Committee for German Refugees, headed by lawyer Dr. Daniel Haas (Związek... sygn. 375: 73).

It was acknowledged that there was a close relationship between anti-Jewish policies in Germany and the rising tide of antisemitism in other countries, including Poland. At the same time, opportunities and ways to oppose and resist antisemitism were sought, in line with the recommendations of the Grand Lodge. In its conclusion, the 1935 report says: "Incited by Hitlerism, antisemitic agitation has been spreading in a number of countries, and unfortunately also in Poland. By using ruthless meth-

ods, it appeals to the lowest instincts, uses falsehood and slander, and has become a factor threatening the peaceful coexistence of nations in these countries. The response of Jewry in these conditions is necessary and natural, because what is at stake is the existence and honour of Jewish people who must defend their right to live and resist the hostile attacks of the enemy. When, acknowledging the critical situation of Jews, our Order started the struggle against antisemitism in Poland by establishing the Committee for Combating Antisemitism headed by br. [Brother] ex-pres. [ex-president] Dr. Ringel, in our Lodge in Przemyśl we also created such a committee, headed by Brother Mentor Dr. Kutna, to fight any signs of antisemitism at the local level" (Związek... sygn. 375: 186).

In the latter half of the 1930s, the challenges faced by Humanitas also included increasing unemployment among young Jewish people. Taking action to help them find work, a special Information and Intermediary Committee was created in May 1936 to deal with this issue. It consisted of: owner of Bajer chemist's shop Anastazy Groten M.Sc., who was the chairman, as well as industrialist Leopold Gotz, Eng., merchant Wilhelm Haspel, and physician Dr. Abraham Rinde (Związek... sygn. 375: 207).

Humanitas continued to pay particular attention to the problem of antisemitism. All the more so, because its manifestations were to be increasingly be encountered in Przemyśl as well (Związek... sygn. 377: 42). Any incidents of this type occurring in the public sphere were met with a swift response from the Committee for Combating Antisemitism set up by Humanitas Lodge and headed by physician Dr. Samuel Kutna. Following the initiative of the Committee, in 1936 a mission led by a lodge member, lawyer Dr. Józef Rawicz – president of the Jewish community – successfully intervened with the *Starost* of Przemyśl about antisemitic acts. The Committee also made an effort to influence the periodicals published in Przemyśl so that they did not incite discrimination against Jews (Związek... sygn. 375: 234). In spite of these activities, antisemitic attitudes continued to be manifested by some residents of Przemyśl. The local press associated with the National Party also continued to refer to Jews in negative terms (Wierzbieniec 1996: 279–281).

Conclusions

The activity of Humanitas members was appreciated by the authorities of the Federation of Humanitarian Societies B'nei B'rith in Kraków. Their letter concerning this matter, addressed to the Society on 2 August

1931 said: "Humanitas is one of the most active and most efficiently managed lodges in our District" (Związek... sygn. 370: 526).

During the entire, relatively long period of its operation from 1924 to 1938, the Humanitarian Society Humanitas B'nei B'rith, in line with its goals, mainly focused on philanthropy and educational activities, and on issues related specifically to the life of the Jewish society. It was an elite association of individuals enjoying a high social status, representatives of liberal professions – lawyers, physicians, as well as gymnasium teachers and entrepreneurs. They were also rather affluent, which allowed them to donate generously to various projects. These were mainly charitable activities, producing significant effects for society by reducing the impact of poverty, which was a problem faced by a significant proportion of the Jewish population of Przemyśl. The aid activities benefited those in difficult material conditions, the poor, the sick, the old, as well as orphans.

Membership in the lodge provided opportunities for initiating joint projects, for sharing thoughts with each other and broadening one's intellectual horizons. As a result Humanitas, for its members and their families, was a means of satisfying their need of culture and of socialising. They were interested in the Jewish history and culture as well as various aspects of literature and psychology. Other areas of significant interest included current social and political affairs, most importantly the situation of Jews in Poland and other countries, particularly including the problem of the growing antisemitism. Integration of those affiliated to the lodge was fostered by the regularly organised special events and parties, the latter mainly on the occasion of Pesach and Hanukkah festivals.

It should be emphasised that the lodge provided a solid platform for the integration of the Jewish elites in Przemyśl; as a result of the consolidation, the elites beneficially impacted various spheres of the Jewish population's life. They were able to act more efficiently and effectively for the Jewish residents of Przemyśl and to support, together with the other B'nei B'rith lodges, the Jewish objectives pursued elsewhere.

It is also important that, being part of B'nei B'rith Order, the Humanitas Humanitarian Society was an organisation that went beyond the local borders. It enabled the Jewish elite of Przemyśl to be part of an influential and increasingly important organisational structure which operated worldwide. It empowered the Jewish community of Przemyśl at a national and international level. It emphasised the high position of this community.

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W trosce o sprawy żydowskie. Przemyskie Stowarzyszenie Humanitarne "Humanitas" B'nei B'rith w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej

Streszczenie

Przemysł, w którym w 1931 r. mieszkało 17 326 osób wyznających judaizm (stanowili oni 34% ogółu mieszkańców), zaliczał się do miast średniej wielkości II Rzeczypospolitej, w których dużą rolę odgrywały elity żydowskie związane z ruchem syjonistycznym – adwokaci, lekarze, przedsiębiorcy, nauczyciele itd. Elity przemyskich Żydów skupiało założone w 1924 r. Stowarzyszenie Humanitarne „Humanitas” B'nei B'rith, będące oddziałem ważnej i liczącej się w skali międzynarodowej organizacji B'nei B'rith. Stowarzyszenie to zasługuje na szczególną uwagę przynajmniej z kilku względów. Wśród Stowarzyszeń Humanitarnych B'nei B'rith zaliczało się do najbardziej aktywnych w II Rzeczypospolitej. Skupiając oraz integrując elity miejscowych Żydów, stwarzało możliwość lokalnej i ponadlokalnej (w tym także o charakterze międzynarodowym) aktywności i troski o sprawy żydowskie. W Przemysłu wyróżniało się działalnością charytatywną (przede wszystkim na rzecz sierot i ubogich), a także działalnością kulturalno-oświatową. Na podkreślenie zasługuje również jego szczególna rola w lokalnej społeczności żydowskiej Przemysłu, która polegała na przeciwstawianiu się antysemityzmowi.

Słowa kluczowe: B'nei B'rith, Przemysł, elity, działalność charytatywna, działalność kulturalno-oświatowa, antysemityzm