

The Rabbis of Gąbin in the 20th Century (Karczewska, 2004, p35)

[In the 2nd Republic] The rules for the appointment of rabbis were established by the Religious Council and approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education. The Ministry oversaw the election and appointment of rabbis, who held their positions for life. Their main obligation was to preach on Sabbaths and holidays, and they were responsible for “overseeing religious services, the work of teachers in Jewish religious schools, the work of ritual butchers, and other religious matters”.

In Gąbin, the first rabbi after the recovery of Polish independence was **Yehuda Lejb Złotnik**, a social leader and speaker, co-founder of the *Mizrachi* movement and the General Zionist Organization of Poland. He was also known by the pseudonym Yehuda Elzet (formed from the initials of his name Leib Zlotnik). The choice of Złotnik as rabbi of Gąbin was marked by controversy because, as a supporter of Zionism, he was resisted by the local *Hasidim*. Złotnik was elected by a large majority, but the *Hasidim* appealed to the magistrate of Gostynin arguing that the elections had been rigged. Another election was held in the presence of a government observer, with the same result. Złotnik was rabbi of Gąbin for about ten years, until November 1919, when he left for Canada. After serving as secretary general of the Canadian Zionist organization, he emigrated to South Africa, and then to Israel, where he published in the magazine *Yeda Haam* (People’s Knowledge) and sometimes in the newspaper *Hatzofe* (Observer). He authored several books including *The Wonderful Treasure of the Yiddish Language*, *Jewish Traditions*, *Reshumot*, and *The Beginning of the Hebrew Rhetorical Language*.

The next rabbi of Gąbin, **Natan Nuta Nutkiewicz**, was also supported by a large majority in the elections of November 1919. After the vote, however, a group represented by I. Siekierka, A. Brzeziński and Gieber Wojdesłowski wrote a letter to the municipal authorities requesting a new election, arguing that such a serious position could not be invested “in an insignificant person who lacks the necessary intelligence to properly represent the Jewish Community of Gąbin”. Since the local magistrate overruled the objection, the dispute went to the Gostynin magistrate. The matter ended in July 1920, when the Ministry of Religious Affairs, responding to a letter from the *Kehila* board, confirmed Nutkiewicz as new rabbi of Gąbin.

Figure 6. Yehuda Lejb Złotnik.



Source: <http://www.zchor.org>

Figure 7. Natan Nuta Nutkiewicz.



Source: <http://www.zchor.org>

Rabbi Nutkiewicz served until 1933, when he left Gąbin to become the rabbi of Rypin. A document from the "Ringelblum Archive" describes his death in Warsaw, shot by a Ukrainian guard after jumping off the train wagon that was taking him to Treblinka.

The successor of Rabbi Nutkiewicz was **Rabbi Zalman Unger**, son of the famous teacher Uriah Unger from Włocławek. Except for the fact that he was the last rabbi of Gąbin, there is no archival or documentary information about him. He was murdered by the Germans shortly after the occupation of the town in 1939.

In the first years after the recovery of independence, the *Kehila* of Gąbin was managed by the board elected in 1918, which included 22 members. Initially, it was headed by Mosze Żychliński, but in 1920 the chairman was Rabbi Nutkiewicz. Eljasz Grynberg and Jakub Lessman served as deputy chairman and secretary. The personal composition of the first board is also known. However, there is no information about the subsequent boards of the *Kehila*. It is only known that, after the 1931 elections, the board included four artisans, three Zionists and a member of *Agudat Israel*.