ALEXANDER WATSON

'Brilliant, vividly written,
a masterpiece.
It deserves to become a classic'
THE TIMES

THE FORTRESS

THE GREAT SIEGE OF PRZEMYSL

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THE FORTRESS

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'The vividly written and well-researched *The Fortress* is a masterpiece. It deserves to become a classic of military history . . . the bitter fight for Przemyśl deserves to be better known' Lawrence James, *The Times*

'Watson's splendid book combines great evocative power (and flashes of sharp humour) with the ethical authority of the best history writing . . . Watson uses the fortress city like a jeweller's glass to show how war distorted and transformed the pre-war civilian world . . . It recalls instead a war that never really ended, but rather spilled out into cascades of further violence whose toxic effects are still with us today' Christopher Clark, *Guardian*

'The Battle of Przemyśl, the subject of Alexander Watson's excellent new book, *The Fortress*, was one of the major military clashes of the Great War, but it is largely forgotten today. It was the longest siege of the entire war and had a significant influence on the course of the conflict. The fortress blocked the Russians' path, denying them an early victory over Austria-Hungary and significantly prolonging the war. Watson tells the story of wartime Przemyśl and the impact of the conflict on its inhabitants with great empathy and an impressive eye for detail . . . It should be read by anyone wishing to understand how the First World War created a terrible legacy of violence that shaped the twentieth century' Robert Gerwarth, *Washington Examiner*

'Alexander Watson tells this story beautifully, giving the reader a vivid sense of the city . . . His exposure of the breathtaking incompetence of the Austrian high command is both shocking and hilarious; his wit and keen sense of the ridiculous alternate with his evident compassion in describing this black farce' Adam Zamoyski, *Literary Review*

'Reading Watson's book, I realised how much I would love to watch a film version of it, directed by Werner Herzog or Francis Ford Coppola: a salutary onscreen ballet of destruction, a Fitzcarraldian megalomaniac folly which the word *epic* would entirely undersell' Julian Evans, *Daily Telegraph*

'I had thought I knew a lot about the First World War. Until I read this book. Then I discovered a yawning gap in knowledge and understanding. What I was not prepared for was Alexander Watson's revelation of the moral depravity of both the Habsburg and Romanov regimes during the First World War . . . Watson, a master of the

contemporary foreign-language sources, provides fascinating insight into all aspects of the siege – not just the military operations, but the privation, hunger, exposure, sickness, and despair. Watson's writing is fresh, vivid, and informed by a great breadth of scholarship and depth of understanding' Neil Faulkner, *Military History Matters*

'This book reveals just how tawdry the Austro-Hungarian Empire's end was, full of bitterness, ethnic violence, rivalry, incompetence and decadence . . . And what Watson teases out . . . is that the terrible horrors during the 1930s and 1940s and the Second World War have their blueprint in this moment of the breakup of this single empire . . . Watson absolutely brings this all to life – and death . . . He paints it with the most vivid colours . . . It's an incredibly well-written and vivid book about a terrible episode in modern European history' Paul Lay, Editor of *History Today*

'*The Fortress* is based on extraordinarily impressive research, yet is also vivid, imaginative, and humane. It recaptures one of the most terrible episodes in a terrible war, which – as Watson rightly argues – presaged even greater horrors to come' David Stevenson, London School of Economics and Political Science

'Przemyśl, Habsburg Austria's easternmost fortress, lay in Galicia, a flat borderland between the turbulent German, Austrian, and Russian empires. Watson reconstructs the Russian siege in engrossing detail, and also proves that the eastern "bloodlands" later ravaged by the Nazis and Soviets had already been desolated once before' Geoffrey Wawro, author of *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire*

'Przemyśl is best known for its challenges to orthography and pronunciation. But Watson contextualizes the history of this remote Habsburg fortress-city from its beginnings as a strategic pivot to its development as a focal point for overlapping imperial and nationalist aspirations. The defining event was the great siege of 1914, whose everyday routines and long-term consequences Watson presents with a verve and clarity making this a must read for students of the Great War in the East' Dennis Showalter, professor emeritus, Colorado College

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexander Watson is the author of the prize-winning history of the Central Powers in the First World War, *Ring of Steel*. He is Professor of History at Goldsmiths, University of London.

ALEXANDER WATSON

The Fortress

The Great Siege of Przemyśl

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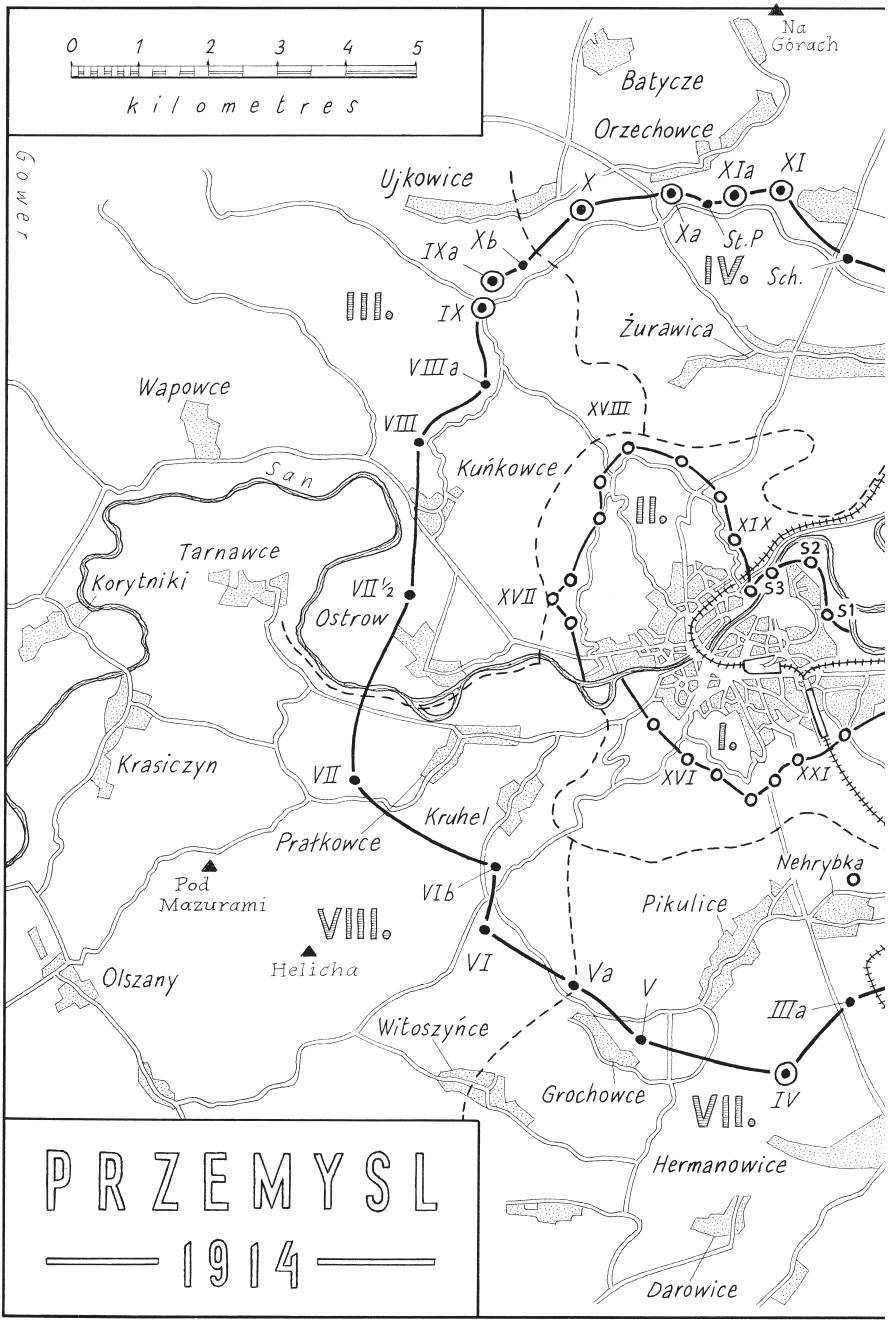

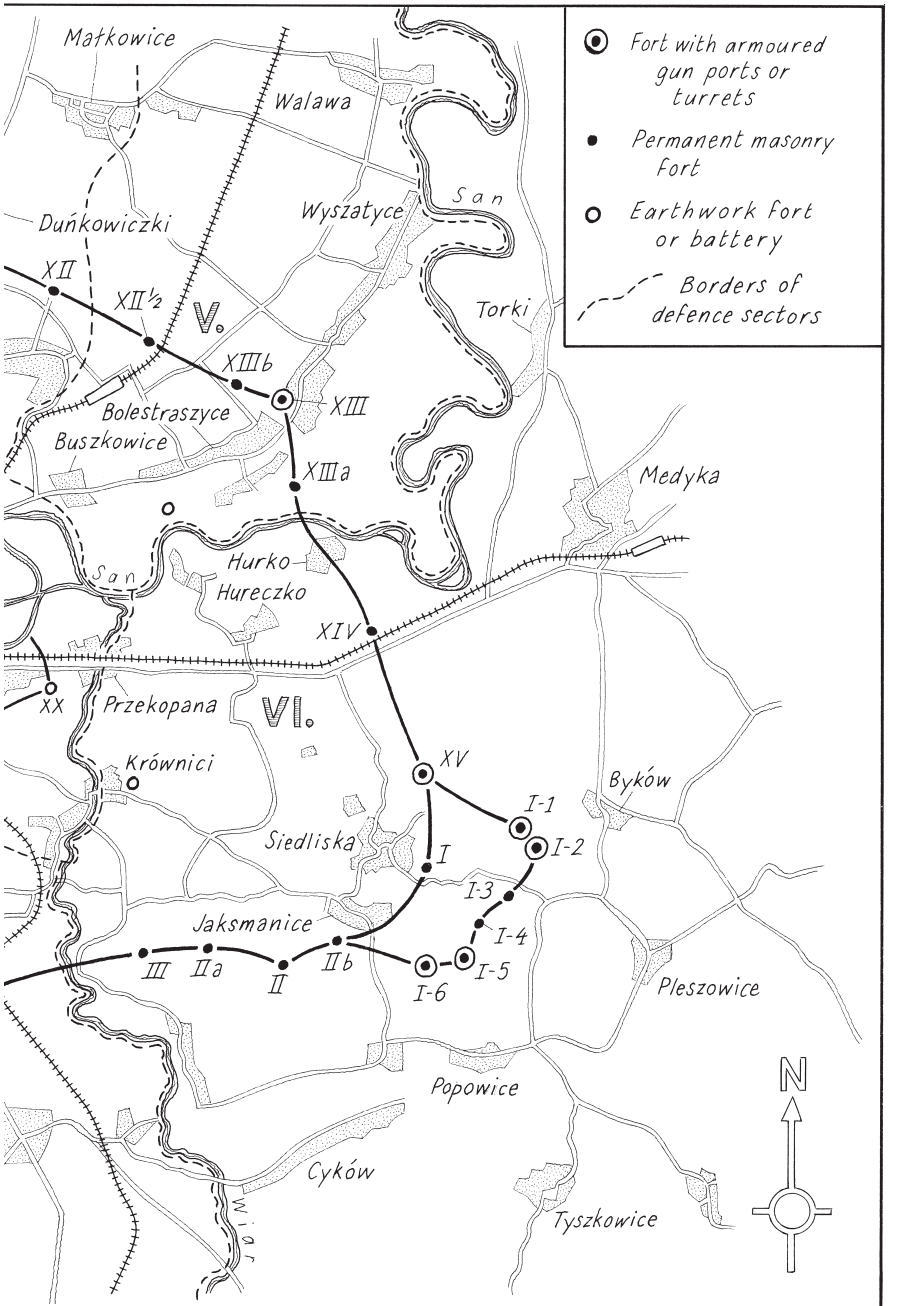

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papers of Lieutenant-Colonel Elek Molnár, commander of Honvéd Infantry Regiment 8. At the end of Przemyśl's siege in March 1915, Molnár defied orders to burn all documentation and instead hid military notes, orders, a diary and some unique Habsburg trench newspapers with jokes and cartoons under the floorboards of his billet, where they were eventually discovered in 1966. I also want to acknowledge Dr Szopa's particular kindness in sharing with me a section of his own grandfather's memoir, recounting the siege of Przemyśl. In addition, I am very grateful to the Historical Section's current director, Dr Lucjan Fac, for his generosity in seeking out and sending me photographs from the museum's collection. Some of these appear with the museum's permission in this book. Lastly, my thanks to Karol Kicman, who as a guide for the Przemyśl branch of the Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze (the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society), along with his father-in-law, took me on a fantastic tour around the ruins of Przemyśl's forts. I learned a lot, and caught their enthusiasm for the place's history.

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Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych in Warsaw, the Archiwum Państwowe in Przemyśl, the archive of the Muzeum Narodowe Ziemi Przemyskiej, the Archiwum Narodowe in Cracow, the Hadtörténelmi Levéltár in Budapest, the Kriegsarchiv and Allgemeines Verwaltungsarchiv in Vienna, the Central Archives for the History of Jewish People in Jerusalem, the Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi istorychnyi arkhiv Ukrainy u L'vovi in Lviv and the National Archives in London – as well as in the Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw, the Biblioteka Jagiellońska in Cracow, the British Library in London and the University Library in Cambridge. I am enormously grateful to them all. I also received much help from collections remotely. In particular, I should mention Director Josef Žikeš and Viera Žižková of the Central Military Archives – Military Historical Archives in Prague (Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv Praha) and Marek Król in Przemyśl. My thanks to both for permitting me to use their photographs. Special thanks also to the staff of the Kriegsarchiv in Vienna and the Archiwum Państwowe in Przemyśl, both for all the assistance I received while researching there and for the speed and efficiency with which they provided images from Przemyśl's siege. Again, I am grateful for permission to publish.

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My final, most heartfelt thanks are to my family. My father-in-law, Alfred, and I had the idea for this book during a walk in an Upper Silesian forest, and I am grateful to him for the inspiration. My own father, Henry, whom I miss every day, and my mother, Susan, have always been models to follow and pillars of strength, wisdom and

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This book is dedicated to my wonderful brother Tim, in deep admiration, and with all my love.

Introduction

Sometimes, things we assume to be certain, that we take as solid, stable and lasting, can collapse with shocking suddenness. In the summer of 1914, war broke out all over Europe. Everybody had seen the storm clouds gather. Barely anyone, however, had truly believed that the cataclysm of Great Power conflict could happen. 'Progress' was the buzzword of the age. The last truly great war was a hundred years past. Though armies prepared assiduously, some experts declared that in the present age, richer, freer, better educated and more technologically advanced than ever before, war was impossible. Europe's states had become too interdependent, and modern weaponry too destructive. Any conflict, the experts warned, would be 'ruinous for conqueror and for conquered' alike, and would end 'in general anarchy, or reduce the people to the most lamentable condition'. In the continent's towns and villages, people lived as if Armageddon would never come. They worked, built careers and businesses, fell in love, raised children. Yet in 1914, all would be swept up in the maelstrom. The old civilization would be ripped apart, dreams destroyed and lives cut short.[1]

This book tells the story of one fortress-city that was pitched into the calamity and on which, for a few months early in the First World War, the fate of all Eastern and Central Europe rested. The city was called Przemyśl. Today, it lies in Poland's sleepy southeastern corner, on the modern border with Ukraine. At the start of the twentieth century, however, it belonged to the Habsburg Empire, a sprawling dynastic state which for centuries had ruled over an amazingly diverse and colourful population in the centre of Europe. Fortified, multi-ethnic Przemyśl, home to 46,000 Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish

citizens and a large garrison, was the empire's most important defensive bulwark in the east.[2]

In September 1914, suddenly Przemyśl stood at the flashpoint of a military disaster. Though war had raged barely a month, already a huge Russian force had invaded the Habsburg Empire and routed its army. Broken troops, defeated, diseased and out of control, flooded through the city. The Russians followed close behind, determined to seal their victory. The Tsar wished to impose his rule on the surrounding region and subjugate a Slavic population whom he regarded as 'little Russians'. Only the Fortress of Przemyśl barred his force's way. Its ragtag garrison was composed of middle-aged reservists from every corner of Central Europe – Austrian Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs, Slovaks, Czechs, Italians, Poles and Ukrainians. In the service of a military famous for incompetence, armed with obsolete weaponry and scarcely able to communicate among themselves, these vintage soldiers entered a desperate struggle to halt the world's most powerful army.

The siege of Przemyśl in 1914–15 changed the entire course of the First World War. In the autumn of 1914, when in east and west the alliance of Austria-Hungary and Germany suffered severe defeats, the fortress-city and its 130,000-strong garrison played a crucial role in preventing a Russian invasion of Central Europe. During the pivotal months of September and October, the Fortress blocked the Russians' path, denying them the use of the main rail and road connections into the heart of the Habsburg Empire. The steadfast defence saved the empire and its army by decisively slowing down the enemy advance. The time won by the Fortress was critical in permitting the broken Habsburg army to regenerate and return to the battle. Though the Russians would renew the siege in November, they had lost their best chance of an early victory.

Przemyśl's subsequent bitter resistance through the winter of 1914–15 – its siege was the longest of the First World War – although ending in defeat, was no less momentous. As the Hungarian war correspondent Ferenc Molnár observed acutely, 'Przemyśl was a symbolic point for the monarchy. Nearly all the nationalities of Austria and Hungary defended it.'[3] The eventual capitulation of the Fortress in March 1915 inflicted a hammer blow to the prestige of the Habsburg Empire, damaging it in the eyes of its peoples and emboldening neutral powers to

join its enemies. Vain and bloody offensives to relieve the fortress-city had hollowed out the Habsburg army. Some 800,000 soldiers were lost. In the aftermath of Przemyśl's fall, the monarchy's German ally concluded that both its army and state were thoroughly 'rotten and decayed'. 'This land,' warned the German army's plenipotentiary at Habsburg military headquarters, 'can no longer be helped.'[4]

Przemyśl's story also has a wider significance, stretching beyond the First World War. The city was a weathervane for the harsh winds of the twentieth century. The lands to which it belonged – the province of Galicia and, more broadly, East-Central Europe – were always a crossroad of cultures. In the modern era, they also became a place of conflict; the point at which rival nationalist and imperial projects collided. Habsburgs and Romanovs, Poles, Ukrainians and Russian nationalists all laid claim to the land. After 1918, these territories – 'shatterzones', as some historians have called them – would be racked first by vicious local ethnic violence and then by the murderous actions of totalitarian states. Two decades after the First World War, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union (two entities completely unimaginable in 1914) would together transform the region into an immense battlefield, a site of ethnic cleansing and a centre of genocide.[5]

To some historians, the barbarity which changed the face of East-Central Europe, that annihilated its Jews and prised apart Poles, Ukrainians and other peoples with horrifying bloodshed, is a tale of evil, interlocked totalitarian projects which starts with Stalin and Hitler. Others have cast back further to 1917–23 and the revolutionary struggles in collapsing empires. Przemyśl points to earlier roots, however. There and all around, the outbreak of the First World War unleashed radical violence with stunning immediacy. Brutal combat, lethal epidemics, aerial bombing, strategies of starvation and vicious persecutions motivated by racial prejudice were all integral to the fortress-city's early war experience. Most ominously, around and later in the city the Russian army perpetrated the first ambitious programme of ethnic cleansing to befall East-Central Europe. Przemyśl is important because it reveals in microcosm a forgotten pre-history to the later, better-remembered totalitarian horrors. To understand what went wrong in the twentieth century's most ravaged region, it is not enough to start in 1928 and 1933, with the rise of the dictators,

nor even with the First World War's revolutionary aftermath. As Przemyśl's ordeal disturbingly shows, the story of East-Central Europe's 'Bloodlands' rightly begins in 1914.[6]

Przemyśl had always been a fortress. The very first reference to the town, by the chronicler-monk Nestor (1050–1116), are words of war: 'in the year AD 981 Vladimir [of Kiev] marched against the Lyakhs and took their strongholds Peremÿshl', Cherven and others'.[7] The following turbulent centuries saw an assortment of exotic rulers lord it over the town. For more than 300 years until 1340, Przemyśl lay under Kievan Rus' and its successor Ruthenian principalities. It passed briefly to King Lajos of Hungary and Poland, and subsequently, in 1387, was firmly taken into the Polish Kingdom. Even after this date, violence was never far off. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, terrifying enemies arrived with frightening regularity from all points of the compass. Tartars, Transylvanians, Vlachs, Hungarians, Cossacks and Swedes all laid siege and at times ravaged Przemyśl.[8]

The town was a place where east met west. An important Christian centre, it was the seat of two bishoprics. The Eastern Church, which looked to Constantinople for leadership, established its bishop first, in 1218. A Roman Catholic bishop was nominated in 1340. A new wave of religious building was sponsored by the seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation, and by the end of the century Przemyśl's skyline was dominated by seventeen Roman and Greek Catholic churches and no fewer than ten monasteries, as well as the strong city walls, Renaissance town hall and, on a hill above, a castle. Polish- and Ukrainian-speakers and German artisans all mixed in the medieval town.[9] So too from the second half of the fourteenth century did Jews. Attracted by booming trade, a consequence of the town's position as an intersection linking Hungary and the Baltic with the main commercial route between the Black Sea and Western Europe, a Jewish community grew up in the northeast of the old city. By 1600, Jews composed one-twelfth of Przemyśl's citizens. A stone synagogue signified that they were there to stay.[10]

Przemyśl's modern history, and the tale of how it became the Fortress – the Habsburg Empire's bulwark in the east – begins in

1772. In that year, during the First Partition of Poland, the Habsburgs annexed Galicia, and with it the city. The new province was enormous, covering 68,000 square kilometres, and extremely difficult to defend. Its long frontier with Russia lacked natural obstacles. Exacerbating the challenge, the only route suitable for military use from the Austrian interior into Galicia at this time ran from west to east. The Carpathian Mountains blocked the way north from the Habsburgs' Hungarian territories. Tasked with finding a solution, shortly after 1800 the empire's top soldiers began to consider Przemyśl as a promising site for fortification. The city was defensible, situated as it was in the foothills of the Carpathians, and it was a key crossing point over the broad San River. Its position right at the centre of the province was also seen as an advantage. The soldiers agreed that Galicia could never be defended at its borders. The only viable strategy were the province threatened was to concentrate troops at a safe, fortified base and then launch an offensive.[11]

For decades nothing was done. Przemyśl was not the only site under consideration by the army. Defensive schemes involving other towns, namely Jasło, Stryj, Lwów and, later, Jarosław – the San River crossing to the north of Przemyśl – were all put forward. The state's coffers were empty. Furthermore, big expensive fortifications in the middle of Galicia made little sense without control of Cracow. This Free City, 206 kilometres to Przemyśl's west, was a main crossing over the Vistula River. Until it was annexed by the Habsburg Empire in 1846, an invader could attack here and instantly cut the main supply route into Galicia. Thus, only in mid-century was work on the Fortress briefly begun. The immediate impulse was the Crimean War. The Habsburg emperor Franz Joseph supported, with rather more than benevolent neutrality, the Anglo-French-Ottoman coalition arrayed against Russia. The Habsburg army was sent to the Galician frontier to pin Tsarist troops there and stop them being transferred to Crimea. Though fortified Cracow was at this time regarded as the mainstay of Galicia's defence, in 1854–5 barracks and fortifications, the latter mostly of earth and only half completed, were hastily built in and around Przemyśl.

Only in 1871 was the final decision reached to turn Przemyśl into a first-rate fortress. Relations with Russia had warmed after the Crimean War, making Galician defence less urgent, and conflicts at the end of

the 1850s in Italy and in the mid-1860s with Denmark and Prussia distracted attention away. However, in 1868, an Imperial Fortification Commission looked again at Galicia. Most of its members favoured fortifying Przemyśl, though some preferred Jarosław as a cheaper but less defensible alternative. The Emperor himself adjudicated, ruling on Przemyśl as the priority. The city was selected because of its strategic position. First, it stood on the last high ground before the border with Russia, 70 kilometres to the north. Second, it blocked the approaches over the Carpathian Mountains to Habsburg Hungary, the Łupków and Dukla Passes. Both had been developed by this point so as to be suitable for military traffic. Lastly, and crucially, Przemyśl had become a major rail hub. The main line from Vienna reached Przemyśl in 1859, and two years later ran through it all the way to the provincial capital Lwów, 90 kilometres further east. Another railway, running over the Łupków Pass from Hungary, was completed in 1872, ending at Przemyśl. The city thus controlled both Galicia's rail link to the south and its main east–west transportation route.[12]

The fortification work began intensively in 1878. The main factor influencing progress was, as earlier, the relationship with Russia. This was still cordial in the early 1870s; indeed, an alliance between the Habsburgs, Germany and Russia, known as the Three Emperors' League, was signed in 1873. Przemyśl's fortification was therefore still not seen as pressing. Hungarian politicians' objections to the high costs impeded the works. So too did manifold technical challenges, most oddly, the introduction into the empire in 1872 of the metric system which necessitated the redrafting of all existing plans.[13] Nevertheless, relations with the great eastern neighbour soon soured, the result of a foreboding imperial competition in the Balkans. First Russia's successful war with the Ottoman Empire in 1877–8 and then the Habsburg occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878 raised tensions. The Habsburgs drew closer to Germany, sealing a defensive alliance against Russia in 1879 which was still in force in 1914. The military works around Przemyśl were also taken up again, ending a three-year hiatus. This time, there would be no hesitation. Through the 1880s and 1890s, Przemyśl was transformed into a modern fortress.[14]

The Fortress of Przemyśl was an immense, complex military organism. The strong outer perimeter of permanent forts was its most visually

impressive element. In 1914, after three decades of building and many revisions to the original plans, the Fortress comprised a chain of seventeen main and eighteen subsidiary forts arranged in a rough ellipse 48 kilometres in circumference around the city.[15] Behind the fortified perimeter, along with a much weaker inner defensive line, was an equally intricate and important network of support services and logistical and communications links all essential for sustaining the forts. Roads were laid and telephone lines installed. The city itself became a military base. By 1910, in and around it were seven barracks, a military railyard, warehouses, artillery parks, munitions and food magazines and a garrison hospital.[16] This infrastructure was intended not only to serve the defensive garrison, whose wartime strength was set at 85,000 soldiers and 3,700 horses. Przemyśl always had an offensive mission. From the very beginning, the Fortress was designed to support the Habsburg field army, and provide it with a secure storage area and a safe concentration zone from which it could launch operations against Russia.[17]

Great thought, careful planning and much imagination were all invested in the Fortress. So too was a huge quantity of money: by 1914, the Habsburg state had spent a grand total of 32 million crowns (158 million pounds sterling or 208 million US dollars in today's money) on Przemyśl's forts and barracks.[18] Despite all this, the Fortress's designers were unlucky. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw a revolution in artillery technology. From the end of the 1880s, the introduction of smokeless propellants, steel shells and high-explosive bursting charges made artillery projectiles swifter, heavier and effective at longer ranges. From around 1900, the universal adoption of recoilless artillery – guns which did not have to be repositioned and aimed after each shot – increased rates of fire to hitherto unimaginable levels.[19] These innovations quickly rendered all existing fortifications obsolete. A simulated attack conducted at Przemyśl in 1896 against one of the forts built a decade earlier alarmingly exposed the problem. When the fort was placed under live fire during the exercise, parts of it threatened to collapse. Adjudicators agreed that had any gun crews been in the fort's open rooftop emplacements they would have been wiped out to a man.[20]

The Fortress's architects and engineers tried to keep pace. The forts of the 1890s featured new designs with more stone and

concrete. Revolving armoured gun cupolas were mounted. Some older forts were upgraded. Yet the technology moved so fast it was impossible to keep up. The defensive concepts on which the Fortress had been laid out were already outmoded by the turn of the century. The obsolescence was exacerbated by neglect in the last decade before the First World War. Unlike his long-serving predecessor, Friedrich Count Beck-Rzikowsky, who had held the powerful position for a quarter of a century, the chief of the Habsburg general staff appointed in 1906, General Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, saw little use for the two Galician fortresses, Cracow and Przemyśl. The funds he requested for fortification from the cash-strapped Habsburg state went to defences on the mountainous border with Italy. Conrad's strategy for the defence of the empire's flatter northeastern frontier rested on manoeuvre. In his view, Przemyśl was an enormous concrete white elephant; useful only as a glorified warehouse for the field army. Modernization works were halted. When the First World War broke out in 1914, it found the Fortress unprepared and antiquated.[21]

The city of Przemyśl was transformed by the Habsburg military's decision to construct the Fortress. In 1870, it had been a fairly small provincial town of 15,185 people. Over the following decades, as workers and tradesmen poured in to meet military demand for labour, and also because the city became the permanent base of the Habsburg army's X Corps in 1889, Przemyśl's population exploded. By 1890, it already numbered 35,209. On the eve of the First World War, more than 54,000 people lived in Przemyśl, including a peacetime garrison of some 8,500 soldiers. The city was extremely ethnically diverse. At that time, Poles formed no absolute majority. According to the 1910 census, Roman Catholics, the majority of whom would have been of Polish tongue, totalled 25,306 and formed 46.8 per cent of the city's population. There were 12,018 Greek Catholics (22.2 per cent of the populace); the faith associated most strongly with the city's Ukrainian-speakers. Jews numbered 16,062, and composed 29.7 per cent of Przemyśl's citizens.[22]

To wander through Przemyśl on the eve of the cataclysm was to find a place transitioning rapidly into the modern world. Of course, the medieval past was still prominent. At the top of the hill to the

southwest, the castle built by the Polish king Kazimierz the Great loomed over the old city. Below it, but still on high ground, towered the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic cathedral and, only a little to the east, the seventeenth-century domed Greek cathedral. Churches, monasteries and seminaries of both faiths were dotted around Przemyśl. As two centuries earlier, spires and domes, and behind them hills, dominated the city skyline.

If one walked down from the Roman Catholic cathedral and through the marketplace with its rather nondescript contemporary town hall, between the market and the broad River San one quickly came to Przemyśl's old Jewish quarter. Here, it could feel as if one actually had stepped back into the Middle Ages. Ilka Künigl-Ehrenburg, an inquisitive Styrian countess who served through the siege of 1914–15 as an auxiliary nurse, was fascinated by this poorest part of the town, with its gloomy narrow alleys and old, high wooden houses. From out of the shops in their vaulted basements, she observed, 'pale Jewish faces shine otherworldly'. Usually, a courtyard lay behind, with an open staircase giving access to all floors. From the balconies here, the residents threw down their slop and waste. This was a place one smelled and heard before one saw. In the day, a ceaseless, lively, noisy trade roared. Christian peasant women scrutinized the wares for sale, criticized and bargained, 'and the Jew,' wrote the countess excitedly, 'praises his goods, quibbles and haggles with all the tenacity and virtuosity of which only a Jew is capable'.[23]

Nevertheless, from other angles Przemyśl was quite obviously a modern imperial city of some importance. The Habsburg military had made its mark. There were more than sixty army facilities in and around the city, from barracks and powder magazines to a swimming school and a fine officers' club. The most significant, the X Corps Headquarters, the Fortress Command and the Fortress Engineering Directorate, were all situated on the splendid thoroughfare in the city's east, Mickiewicz Street. Here too stood the main post office and a branch of the Austro-Hungarian state bank. Schönbrunn yellow, the colour of imperial officialdom, was also to be found on buildings in other localities, for Przemyśl hosted civil state offices too, including a district office, a tax office and regional and district courthouses. The elegant main state railway station, renovated and

refaced in a neo-baroque style in 1895, and, behind it, the iron lattice railway bridge across the San offered everyday reminders to residents of their literal connections to one of Europe's greatest empires.[24]

The Przemyśl municipal authorities were keen to emphasize the Polish credentials of their city. This too was a mark of modernity, for nationalism was the new, exciting and inspirational ideology of the late nineteenth century, promising the renewal of real and imagined past glories and a better, more efficient future. The reforms of the 1860s had placed Galicia in the hands of Polish conservatives and granted considerable powers of self-government to Austria's municipalities. As in other Galician cities, Polish Democrats – more liberal and elite than their name might today imply – ran Przemyśl in the decades before 1914.[25] Under mayors Aleksander Dworski (1882–1901) and Franciszek Doliński (1901–14), the expanding city not only improved its infrastructure, building wells and drains, a municipal slaughterhouse, a hospital and an electrical power station, but also asserted the Polishness of its public spaces. The most impressive new or rebuilt main streets were named after the most revered Polish poets, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński, or landmark events in Poland's history, such as the 3 May 1791 Constitution or the medieval victory of Grunwald over the Teutonic Knights. Statues of Mickiewicz and the Polish warrior-king Jan Sobieski III, funded by popular subscription, were raised by the old Market Square.[26]

Przemyśl's other ethnic groups were also caught by the new spirit of the late nineteenth century. The Greek Catholic minority generally had little opportunity to make much mark on the city in brick or stone beyond its historic churches. There was, however, one important exception: schools. Language issues, and the right to teach children in one's mother tongue, were becoming central to identity and political disputes across the Habsburg Empire, and Ukrainian-speakers – or Ruthenes, as they were known in this period – were no exception. In the late nineteenth century, elite boys' and girls' secondary schools teaching in Ukrainian were founded, augmenting existing primary provision and attracting pupils from far beyond the city limits.[27] Ruthenes were deeply divided in their identity, and the fractures were reflected in their associations and press. 'Ukrainian' at this time denoted a political stance; a conviction that Ukrainian-speakers were

a distinct nation. The majority of the small clerical and intellectual elite adhered to this view. A lesser group, the so-called Russophiles, disagreed, regarding themselves culturally, and sometimes also politically, as a branch of the Russian nation. Though difficult to enumerate, a fairly large section of lower-class Ruthenes was mostly indifferent to the novel idea of the nation, and persisted in prioritizing the Greek Catholic faith as the foundation of their identity.[28]

Przemyśl's Jewish community displayed some similar divisions. Orthodox Jewry had long predominated, and though this was still true in the early twentieth century, the modern era had brought schism and change. There were four synagogues in Przemyśl by 1914. The oldest, situated in the Jewish quarter, and eight other smaller prayer houses, were frequented by the traditionalist, Yiddish-speaking Hasidic Jews who so fascinated Ilka Künigl-Ehrenburg. They were instantly recognizable, especially the men with their curly sidelocks, beards, black hats and black kaftans. To attend synagogue with them was a profoundly spiritual experience. Künigl-Ehrenburg ducked under the low doorway of the Old Synagogue one Sabbath and climbed up to the women's gallery to watch. The faithful filled every inch of space. Some sat, others stood, all pressed tightly together. From above, a stream of light pierced the darkness and shone onto the silver-edged Torah scroll displayed by the altar. Wrapped in their white striped prayer shawls, the believers rocked back and forth murmuring their sacred incantations. To the Styrian countess, it was strange, 'oriental' but very moving. 'Everything was full of atmosphere, harmonious.'[29]

Times were shifting, however. Beginning in 1901, the *kehilah*, Przemyśl's Jewish communal council, dropped Yiddish and instead conducted its meetings in Polish. The city's three other synagogues had all been built since the 1880s and catered for wealthy, educated Jews. Jews – some of them – had particularly prospered from Przemyśl's rapid expansion; a fact that had not gone unnoticed by their Christian neighbours. The town's credit institutions were nearly all in Jewish hands. So too were the majority of new manufacturing concerns and almost all trading and services. The most intense civic development in the final thirty years of peace had taken place to the east of the old town and in the suburb of Zasanie, north of the San River. In these districts, the housing stock had more than doubled,

and it was to here that well-off Jews had moved. They had bought up property on the smartest strips; it was a mild irony that on Mickiewicz Street, named for Poland's national poet, no fewer than 74 of the 139 buildings were Jewish-owned.[30] The synagogues serving these communities, like the people who attended them, took inspiration from modern liberalism and nationalism. The 'Tempel' in the old city was home to the Jewish progressives keen to integrate into Polish culture. Faced with red brick, like synagogues in the west of the empire, it celebrated Polish holidays and had sermons and prayers in the Polish language. The Zasanie synagogue was popular with Zionist youth.[31]

By 1914, Przemyśl was the third-largest city in Galicia, and around the twentieth most populous in the Habsburg Empire. It was significant enough to warrant an entry in the travellers' bible, *The Baedeker Guide*. A visitor from snooty Vienna could be, if not impressed, then at least satisfied and comfortable. The city offered five upmarket hotels. Hotel City, the most expensive, boasted central heating, warm and cold water in every room, electric lighting and – that pre-eminent mark of rising European civilization – an elevator. Of course, there were eastern peculiarities. The absence of a modern waterworks – the city had placed orders for pumps and begun the building of a plant only in 1914 – meant that hygiene could be rather primitive. If one arrived on a Friday evening or a Saturday, one would have to carry one's own luggage to the hotel, because the horse-drawn cabs which waited at the rail station were driven by Jews, who all observed the Sabbath.[32]

Nevertheless, once the visitor was settled there was plenty to see and do. A pleasant way to spend a sunny morning was to stroll through the old town, visit the historic churches and Polish monuments, and then climb up to the pretty landscaped castle park, which offered an excellent panorama over the city and across to the green hills all around. For the less energetic, a leisurely riverside walk along the Franz Joseph Embankment might instead be just the ticket, with a pause to watch the bathers splashing at the shallow edges of the San. From there one could cross for lunch to Zasanie over the 3rd May Bridge. Three city bridges, one rail and two road, spanned the San, but for residents this one was the most important. Renewed just twenty years earlier and of modern iron girder construction, the 3rd

May Bridge was Przemyśl's artery, joining the old town to its most important suburb. For sightseers, it was well worth lingering on it to enjoy fine views of the city.[33]

After an early lunch, one might visit the famous local landmark, the Tartar's Barrow. The visitor would cross the river again and ramble south down modern Słowacki Street, passing the new Scheinbach synagogue and the garrison hospital, and then along unsurfaced roads winding up to the barrow, a mound on a hill 350 metres above sea level. One legend claimed the barrow was the resting place of the city's mythic seventh-century warrior-founder, Prince Przemysław. Others said that it had been built for a Tartar khan, slaughtered in one of Przemyśl's medieval sieges. To a visitor gazing over the peaceful early twentieth-century landscape, that past violence must have seemed very, very remote.[34]

There was lots to do in the evenings too. For a tourist feeling homesick, a walk along the main streets of the recently built districts, Lwowskie or Zasanie, would have been a cure, for with their two- or three-storey neo-baroque buildings they could have belonged to almost any city in any part of the Habsburg Empire.[35] Thanks to the army, a modern entertainments industry had grown up in Przemyśl. The best restaurants and Viennese-style cafés were clustered around Mickiewicz Street, by the rail station and the fortress and corps commands. Here, officers from the garrison, resplendent in blue, grey or chocolate brown, could be seen relaxing or in earnest debate about some military matter. The very best establishment, Grand Café Stieber, offered live music. Naturally, the waiters all spoke German. Visitors willing to test their Polish might attend one of the summer theatrical performances held up at the castle. Three cinemas entertained the city. For Przemyśl's apprentices and for the thousands of soldiers in the garrison, mostly men from the surrounding region undertaking their obligatory two years of peacetime training, there was beer, beer, beer. Half of Przemyśl's municipal budget was funded by alcohol taxation.[36]

For sure, Przemyśl had its problems, conflicts and jealousies. The nationality struggles which dominated the politics of the late Habsburg Empire were ever present. The empire had undergone a fundamental political restructuring in 1867. Emperor (or, as he became

known in Hungary, King) Franz Joseph still presided over the realm and retained an imperial foreign minister, war minister and finance minister, but Hungary had been separated from Austria, and each had been granted its own government and parliament with substantial powers in state affairs. In the following years, within Austria, Galicia had also attained autonomy. Although significant constitutional freedoms had been granted to all Franz Joseph's subjects, including equality of rights of languages in schools, administration and public life, among the nationalities there had been winners and losers, and Ruthenes clearly fell into the latter group.[37]

Ruthenes complained justly that the Polish elites who ran Galicia's administration disenfranchised them and deliberately underfunded their education. In Przemyśl, tensions peaked in April 1908, when in Lwów a former pupil at Przemyśl's Ukrainian-language secondary school, Miroslav Sichynsky, sensationally shot dead Galicia's governor, Count Andrzej Potocki.[38] Arrests of young Ruthenian radicals in the city immediately followed. Endemic anti-Semitism too was a problem. In May 1898, a time of anti-Semitic disturbances right across the west of Galicia, there had been a riot and looting of Jews' shops. Smaller-scale disorder had followed in 1903, and in later years some Polish clergy and Ruthenian newspapers had called for boycotts of Jewish traders.[39]

Nevertheless, before the First World War the horrors that would ravage Przemyśl in coming decades were scarcely imaginable. For sure, the boundaries between citizens were becoming institutionalized. Poles, Ruthenes and Jews each had their own libraries, theatre groups, even sports clubs.[40] Yet Christians of different churches still frequently intermarried.[41] Citizens of all faiths and tongues could cooperate. In the 1907 election, the first held on the basis of equal male suffrage, Ruthenes, Jews and Polish apprentices united to reject a nationalist Pole and voted a Polish-speaking Jewish socialist into the city's seat in the Austrian parliament. It was a reminder that, even in a city without industry like Przemyśl, modern categories of class, as well as older loyalties to church and Emperor, could compete with nation in shaping people's identities and allegiances.[42]

The real threat to Przemyśl was never internal but international conflict. For decades, the empire enjoyed peace. Its army's last conflict