

The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa

Albert Kaganovitch. and Albert Kaganovich. The Long Life and Swift Death of Jewish Rechitsa: A Community in Belarus, 1625–2000. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. Project MUSE. Web. 9 Oct. 2013.

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Discussion

This book is a proxy for Yurevichi, which was part of the Rechitsa district.

Introduction

- *mestechko* in Russian (*miasteczko* in Polish) was a Jewish shtetl that was between a town and village in size
 - Privileges during Russian period: holding of markets at least twice a month
 - Russian requirements for designation: presence of an Orthodox church, markets (held at least once a week) and presence of a Jewish population
 - Catherine II policy forced settlement of Jews from villages into towns and mestechkos; Jews became a significant part of the population
- Geographic territory known as Belaia Rus' (White Russia)
 - "Local people" were regarded as part of the Russian population
 - Local Russians were Orthodox; Poles were Catholic
- Litvins were subjects of the duchy
 - Jews of Rechitsa were known as Litvaks (Litvakes in Yiddish)
 - Grand Principality of Lithuania had tolerant attitudes towards Jews
 - with the exception of a few "aggravations" interethnic relations in Rechitsa were tolerant
 - economic relations in several sectors were symbiotic

Chapter 1 - Jews under Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

- Vitautas of grand duchy in Vilna tolerant of Jews; Judicial rules protected life and property of all inhabitants, including Jews

- grants Jewish communities in Brest, Grodno, Toki privileges to develop the backward economy
- imposed death penalty and confiscation of property as punishment for killing a Jew
- collected fine and awarded the same amount to Jew who was a victim of a beating or injury
- Jews given guarantee of the inviolability of their property
- punishments imposed for disrupting Jewish religious services or vandalizing Jewish cemeteries
- Vitautas offered Jews the same rights as Christians in commerce and banking
- allowed Jews to engage in trade and farming
- Jews formed joint ventures to pool resources
- Alexander I Jagiellon expelled Jews in 1495, but brought them back 6 years later because of the duchy's economic decline and drop in tax revenue.
- Forms of taxation
 - Principal income of Rechitsa governors came from the collection of wild honey. Honey gathering was most important occupation (and traditional Slavic occupation)
 - Reform of 1560 replaced 'taxes in kind' with monetary taxes, promoting trade and ability of peasants and craftsmen to sell their services
- Jewish population
 - Existed sometime in 1625-1650
 - Jewish quarters appeared during the same time in Bykhov, Gomel, Mozyr, Chausy and Shklov
 - Jews came from the populated west of duchy
 - Christians made same migration to vacant eastern lands (ravaged by raids of Tartars, Cossacks and Muscovites) between 1550-1600
 - Jews developed the eastern territories, moving from western to eastern, Belorussia.
 - Jews mostly engaged in small-scale retailing, selling alcohol (tavern owners) and brokerage. Lesser Litvin landowners took on trade, farming and credit and saw Jews as competition. Magistrates defended the rights of Christians, impeding Jews. Few large entrepreneurs in the southeastern Belorus engaged in wholesale trade and leasing.

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