

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

- Medieval history, page 20. Rechitsa part of Duchy of Pinsk-Turov in 1150s
- 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.
- 1662-1665: Muscovite and Cossacks overrun Belarus, capturing most of the area. Jews massacred or forced to convert. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth recaptures Belarus in early 1660s. Belarus population losses from war amount to 53 percent
 - War weakens Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Many towns and estates in Grand Duchy of Lithuania transfer to Polish nobility after previous owners perish during war.
- 1765
 - poll tax replaces Kahal; census of Jewish taxpayers
- Jews lighting candles may explain source of town fires and population's belief that Jews were responsible. Towns in 1600s sought to confine Jews in a particular section, which may have given rise to ghettos.
- 1750-1800: Jews lived in private mestchkos
 - owners of mestchkos attracted Jews to develop local economy
 - Principal occupation of Jews: distilling alcohol, selling vodka, leasing various sectors of noble's estates
 - lightly populated and impoverished towns could not guarantee living for Jews in towns
 - Jews paid taxes and gave "gifts" to owners, churches, etc. paid property taxes
- Taxation of Jewish community, as a whole.
 - Not individual or family, but the whole community
 - Fiscal system that existed until 1764
- Litvaks - Lithuanian-Belorussian Jews
 - By end of 1700s: speaking own dialect, dressed differently (did not wear the long-skirted

- garment) and cut hair differently (no sidelocks)
- Mentality (which set them apart from Ukrainian and Polish Jewss): rationalism in behaviour, thirst for learning, businesslike approach to work, purposefulness, restraint in expressing their feelings; asceticism in food/life
- Litvak families: man consults with wife on important matters, particularly those relating to trade; role of women in Litvak families.
- thirst for knowledge: secular sciences
- One branch called Mitnagdim (those who oppose/object; name given to opponents by Hasidim.
- Habad: combined hasidism with rabbinical scholarship and rationalism
- Antagonism existed between Litvaks and Polish/Ukrainian Jews.
- differences: behavior and external appearance, language, culinary preferences, temperament
- Litvak traditions in Rechitsa exist even though Rechitsa close to Ukraine. Practically no migration to Rechitsa from the south; Jews migrated from Belorussian mestechkos and towns frequently.
- Litvaks evolved into "Russian Jewry" by the 1860s
- * Last third of 1700s, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth suffered economic decline; implications for Jews
 - Economy impoverished. Christian population creates laws to restrict competition from Jews. Jews had to seek new ways to earn a living. They became extremely active in commerce, competing with Christians and one another. Economic activity in 1600-1650; political and social decline until end of 1700s. economic and social status of Jews deteriorated likewise.

Chapter 2 - Under Russian Rule

- Yurevichi name: Iurovichi
- Rechitsa "Powiat" now called Rechitsa "Uezd".
 - Addition of the northern part of the Kiev Voivodship.
 - 1797: Uezd becomes part of Minsk Province.
- Catherine II preserves all rights and freedoms of "Polish szlachta" in an attempt to enlist their support.
 - I Vishchinsky, Rechitsa deputy, asked CathII to revoke part of tax assessments until 1795.
 - CathII
- Polish language was viewed as language of elite (landowners); Belarus language considered "countrified". Russian language seen as foreign.
- Attempts to convert new lands to Orthodoxy, but Catholicism, Uniate Church and Lithuanian-Polish culture deeply rooted in the east Slavic population
- 1830-1831 Polish uprising
 - Russification after 1831: Russian-language primary schools. By 1850s, all language in primary schools changed from Polish to Russian.
 - 1830s start of closing of Catholic monasteries
 - "Northwest Region" replaces previous names of Belarus or Lithuania
 - attempts to neutralize influence of Polish culture and Jewish economic power. Met with suspicion from the Belorussian peasants.(page 58).
- Taxes: Jews in Pale of Settlement were paying more than half of the town's taxes and fees. consisting of property taxes and dues for engaging in commerce and trades. Officials "tax" Jews by illegally collecting and appropriating money from Jews.

- Rechitsa town finances
 - Drinking establishments provide largest source of income. 45% of Rechitsa income in 1820s.
 - Profits from town property 30%
 - Taxes on residents 20%
 - Expense: payment for repair, construction, lighting, heating of public buildings, salaries of town officials
 - Police budget 21%
 - schools 18%
 - fire department 15% (all town buildings were wooden)
- Commerce
 - Jews own hotels and inns
- Homesteads
 - Orchards attached to houses (of nobility and functionaries)
 - 90% had vegetable patches or gardens
 - wooden homes (wooden, half-collapsed hovels) (pg 66). construction lumber cheap. wooden shingle roofs.
 - avg of seven people lived in each house. about 15 per house in Minsk. in 1904.
- Conscription in 1827
 - children taken away from parents and placed in army at age of 8. sent to military schools, "cantons" until age of 18. young boys forced to accept baptism by promises of privileges and psychological pressure.
 - 25 year service, beginning at age of maturity.
 - 1867: Jews who finished their 25 years allowed to live anywhere in Russia.
- October 1907 strike. Forces Nicholas II to issue "manifesto of October 17, 1905". offers several freedoms to the population, including Jews. Encouraged even greater protests. Jews participated in demonstrations against monarchy. Pro-monarchy supporters viewed Jewish participation as a Jewish victory against the tsars and organized pogroms.

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Chapter 5

- P182: Kosher meat tax: initial use to support Jewish community. 1825 law. Under Russian authority, used to support city. Results in increase in meat prices, decrease in consumption and undernourishment. Role of factoring continues: right to collect tax for 4 years, at a discount. Collection in Rechitsa and Iurovichi indicates that the tax revenue was high enough to support this factoring. Iurovichi must have been a substantial mestochko. 1840-1843: Nison/Leiba Feigin collect tax. (grandson of well-known tsadik Shender of Iurovichi, son of social activist, rabbi and merchant Litman (Motel) Feigin). (P.182.) Nison Feigin unable to collect; property auctioned

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