Shaul Stampfer

Settling down in Eastern Europe

There is no question that knowledge about the history and stages of early Jewish settlement in East Central Europe, and about the number of Jews in the region at various times, is important for many reasons. While these topics have not been neglected, new data, and novel (as well as not so novel) methodologies, can add to our knowledge. Certainly, additional sources, when found, will make it possible to refine the historical picture – but there is already enough information to provide a reasonably clear outline.[1]

The Origins of East European Jewry

Communities do not appear by accident. Historians of the Jewish community of Poland-Lithuania have always been aware of this – and have tried to uncover the origins and the reasons for the establishment of this community. Among the various explanations for Jewish settlement in the region, three are most popular. One, that can be quickly dismissed, is that the early Jewish settlers were descended from Khazar converts who fled from their homeland near the Caspian Sea after a military defeat. It seems unlikely that there was a Khazar conversion

1 I am grateful to Hanna Zaremska, Jürgen Heyde, Tomasz Jankowski, Adam Teller, Ted Fram, Gershon Bacon, Agnieszka Jagodzinska, Yannay Spitzer, Sergio Della Pergola, Mark Tolts, Scott Ury, Menachem Butler and Gershon Hundert for their assistance in the course of the preparation of this paper. The research was carried out with the support of the Israel Science Foundation grant 1671/12. Many have written on this topic and I have not tried in any way to give a comprehensive guide to the literature on the topic. Much of what I am writing is far from their views. It is good to remember that the only reason we can argue with our predecessors is because we have learned so much from them – and that the first thing the next generation of researchers will do is to start revising what we have claimed. A good starting point for a bibliographical survey is Zaremska's recent book (see note 5) and articles by Jürgen Heyde. See Jürgen Heyde, "Jüdische Siedlung und Gemeindebildung im mittelalterlichen Polen," in *Jüdische Gemeinden und ihr christlicher Kontext in kulturräumlich vergleichender Betrachtung. Von der Spätantike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, Christoph Cluse, Alfred Haverkamp, and Israel J. Yuval (eds.) (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2003); Jürgen Heyde, "Die Juden im frühneuzeitlichen Polen-Litauen," in *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte. Ein Handbuch*, Michael G. Müller (ed.), vol. 2, *Frühe Neuzeit*, Lieferung 9/10, Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg (ed.) (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110492484-001

at all,[2] and, in any case, the genetics of East European Jewry show no indication of Central Asian ancestry.[3] In addition, the dates when Jewish communities were founded or first documented reflect a settlement pattern over time from West to East. The earliest communities developed in the twelfth century in Silesia – which is to the west of Central Poland.[4] A recent map of the chronology of establishment of Jewish communities shows that these Jewish communities, dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were generally to the west, while those founded in the fifteenth century were further to the East.[5] This of course fits a pattern of migration from the West – and not from the Khazar lands.

There is a more reasonable alternative explanation for the presence of Jews in Eastern Europe: that the early Jewish settlers were refugees from violent persecution in the German speaking lands. This description fits in with a common trope of Jewish history that sees persecution and flight as a common and recurring phenomenon – and it explains why the early Jewish settlers in the region would take such an extreme step and move to a relatively underdeveloped "frontier" region. However, the cultural characteristics of the early Jewish residents of the Polish-Lithuanian lands do not fit those of the Jewish populations of Central Europe that were most affected by persecution and much of the migration does not seem to have taken place in the immediate wake of persecutions.[6]

---

2 I have expressed this opinion at length elsewhere. See Shaul Stampfer, "Did the Khazars Convert to Judaism?" *Jewish Social Studies* 19 no. 3 (2013): 1–72.

3 See Doron M. Behar et al, "No evidence from genome-wide data of a Khazar origin for the Ashkenazi Jews," *Human biology* 85 no. 6 (2013): 859–900. It would not be necessary to make a point of this were it not for bizarre theories about the origin of East European Jewry that are floated every once and a while.

4 Przemysław Wiszewski, "The multi-ethnic character of medieval Silesian society and its influence on the region's cohesion (12th–15th centuries)," in *Cuius Regio? Ideological and Territorial Cohesion of the Historical Region of Silesia (c. 1000–2000)*, vol. 1, *The long formation of the Region Silesia (c. 1000–1526)*, Lucyna Harc, Przemysław Wiszewski, and Rościsław Żerelik (eds.) (Wroclaw: Publishing House eBooki.com.pl, 2013). View Wiszewski's citations on the matter.

5 For maps, see Hanna Zaremska, *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Polsce. Gmina krakowska* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2011), 245f; For the German edition, see Hanna Zaremska, *Juden im Mittelalterlichen Polen Und Die Krakauer Judengemeinde*, Heidemarie Petersen (trans.) (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013), 240–243.

6 I discuss this at greater length in a previous work. See Shaul Stampfer, "Violence and the migration of Ashkenazi Jews to Eastern Europe," in *Jews in the East European Borderlands: Essays in Honor of John Doyle Klier*. Eugene M. Avrutin and Harriet Murav (eds.) (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012). My understanding of developments differs somewhat from that of Jacek Wijaczka, "Die Einwanderung der Juden und antijüdische Exzesse in Polen im späten Mittelalter," in *Judenvertreibungen in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Friedhelm Burgard (ed.) (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1999), 241–258.

Yet another explanation connects the Jewish settlement with the large scale medieval *Ostsiedlung*, or organized migration/settlement in the Slavic speaking lands by Germans (and other nations).[7] This is a tempting explanation because it links Jewish behavior to a broader phenomenon. However, the settlement process of agricultural migrants did not include Jews. They were not invited to participate because they were not experienced in farming and they had no advantages over the land-hungry and experienced farmers from the West. The Jews were also not indispensable for some of the fastest growing elements and most remunerative fields of the commercial life of the Polish lands – grain export to the West and the import of luxury goods. The Germans, Italians, and later Scots filled most of these needs. In other words, the Jews were not uniquely qualified to fill any specific niches in these lands. Therefore, it is not surprising that the appearance of Jewish settlements, the clearest evidence for the timing of Jewish migration, did not coincide with the settlement of non-Jewish migrants. The *Ostsiedlung* phenomenon, which had been a consequence of overpopulation in the West, ended in the wake of the Black Death – which had effectively resolved the issue of overpopulation for several generations. However, the bulk of Jewish migration appears to have taken place later, and it continued even after in-migration of non-Jews stopped being significant.

There may have been a link between another development in the German lands and Jewish settlement in Poland-Lithuania. In the late middle ages and early modern period, the overland trade route from Nuremberg to Poland developed as did the route from Prague to Kraków. This served as an alternative to the maritime route of the Hanseatic League for East –West trade and thus opened possibilities for Jewish traders.[8] However, though important, the development of this route is hardly a sufficient reason to explain all of the migration of Jews Eastward.

---

7 Bernard Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), 24–25. To be sure, he carefully notes that there were many Jewish immigrants who were not part of this movement.
8 Johannes Müller, "Der Umfang und die Hauptrouten des Nürnberger Handelsgebietes im Mittelalter," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 6. Bd., H. 1 (1908), 1–38. See especially, 22–29 on routes from Nürnberg to the East; The most useful discussion in English on trade routes to Kraków is in F.W. (Francis William) Carter, *Trade and Urban Development in Poland: An Economic Geography of Cracow, from its Origins to 1795* (Cambridge, Cambridge; University Press, 1994). See esp. "land and river routes," 93–98; For a broad overview of some of these issues see Pierre Jeannin, "The Sea-borne and the Overland Trade Routes of Northern Europe in the XVIth and XVIIth Centuries," *Journal of European Economic History* 11 no. 1 (1982): 5–59; For an even broader perspective, see Zsigmond Pál Pach, "The Shifting of International Trade Routes in the 15th-17th Centuries," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* vol. 14, no. 3/4 (1968): 287–321.

All of the above explanations for the background of migration of Jews to the Polish-Lithuanian lands are reasonable (except for the first) and offer a migration narrative – but do not fit the facts that we know about the migrants. In light of this, it seems the best explanation is that the migrants who were the core of the later Jewish population of the region were largely descended from the Jewish population of nearby regions such as Bohemia, Moravia, and Southern Austria, for whom the move Eastward was not to an unfamiliar land and not necessarily a long distance migration.[9] This explanation offers no drama or links to major events, but it is more reasonable, and it fits the facts. According to this interpretation, the Jewish migrants moved mainly because of economic and demographic pressures and generally came to the East individually or in small groups. There were, of course, exceptions. There were some individual Jews who migrated from the Rhineland, and there were very possibly small waves of migration, albeit limited in number and size, which were precipitated by anti-Jewish violence. However, it seems that, for most migrants, moving East represented individual solutions to individual problems.

What little we know about early rabbis in the region fits the hypothesis that the bulk of the migrants came across rather short distances. Bernard Weinryb identified the following rabbis who came to Poland before 1500[10]:

~1400 two rabbis from Schweidnitz (Silesia)
1420 r. Lipman Milnausen to Kraków from Prague
~1450 r. Moses Muriel to Poznań from Halle and r. Pinchas from Wiener Neustadt
1474 r. Moses Mintz to Poznań from Nuremberg
~1475 r. David Shprinz and r. David Frank to Kraków from Nuremberg
~1490 parents of r. Moses Isserles from "Germany" to Kraków and r. Jacob Polak from Prague

Looking at this list, is seems that almost all of the rabbis came from the same regions – the Czech lands, Bavaria, Austria, or from a city (Nuremberg) that had strong trade ties with Kraków – but not from the Rhineland. This is not conclusive proof that the non-rabbinic Jewish migrants came from these regions, but it is suggestive.

9 Stampfer, "Violence and the migration."
10 Weinryb, *The Jews of Poland*, 30–13.

The Dynamics of Migration

Migration – whether international or internal, is rarely simple or easy. It is a product of "push" and "pull" factors. Most people prefer to stay in a familiar place and near to family and friends, and seek to move only when it is difficult to remain where they were living. The decision to move is strongly influenced by knowledge and by impressions about opportunities in other places. The more enticing these possibilities appear, the more likely a person will decide to move. In the decision-making process, information is a key factor. The more a person knows about conditions in a potential place of settlement, the more likely they are to feel secure in making a move. On the other hand, if there are very attractive opportunities in a possible destination but an individual knows nothing about them, these will of course have no impact on the decision. Of course, there is usually more information about nearby locations than distant ones. Ernst Ravenstein pointed out, in his seminal study of migration, a number of "laws" of migration – or what we can perhaps refer to as typical patterns.[11] His research on migration focused on England in the pre-modern period, but his findings are extremely applicable to the migration of Jews to Eastern Europe. Among his conclusions were the following:

- The majority of migrants go only a short distance.
- Migrants going long distances generally go by preference to one of the great centers of commerce or industry.
- Migration increases in volume as industries and commerce develop and transport improve.
- The major causes of migration are economic.
- Large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase.

The first three of the "laws" cited here are governed by the issue of information. There is more information on nearby locations than far away ones, and this lowers the risk sensed in migration. There is also more information about well-known centers that are far away than about small and distant locations – hence the preference for migration to centers. Subsequent migration, in the wake of more information on opportunities within the region, is more likely to be from larger centers to smaller ones.

11 I still find Ravenstein's laws of migration to be a very level-headed introduction to the topic. For a concise, clear and convenient picture of Ravenstein's views, see David B. Grigg, "EG Ravenstein and the 'laws of migration,'" *Journal of Historical geography* 3 no. 1 (1977): 41–54.

One can add to this that individuals who flee violence often (if not usually) feel that the violence will pass and tend to seek a safe haven, from which they can return to their homes and occupations when the danger has passed. It takes time for refugees to conclude that violence in their previous place of residence will be permanent, and that they have to seek a permanent place of residence elsewhere.

It appears reasonable that the growth of the Jewish population in Bohemia, Moravia, and perhaps also the region around Vienna, contributed to the subsequent migration of Jews. In these areas, the Jews, as in many other places, were mainly tradesmen and, to some degree, craftsmen. The growth of the Jewish population there was apparently faster than that of the general population. As a result, the number of clients did not grow at the same pace as the Jewish population, and this in turn led to economic pressure.[12] In other words, faster population growth among Jews created congestion effects within the Jewish occupational niches and led some individuals to seek a better lot further East from where they were living. There does not seem to have been a strong pull factor, in the sense that it was relative deterioration in the places of origin that prompted the move, rather than events in the destinations that would have made them more attractive.[13] The Jews did not have unique skills, a great amount of capital, nor did they have exceptional trade contacts that were not equaled by other groups. Thus, the migration of Jews to the Slavic lands seems to have been largely the migration of single people or family groups who identified opportunities. Judging from patterns of migration in other societies, these migrants were probably younger, less established, and less conservative in their personalities then peers in their home towns.

Pace of Jewish Settlement and the Rise of Population Centers before the Sixteenth Century

It is not easy to reconstruct the pace of Jewish settlement in the Polish-Lithuanian lands or to describe with any precision the economic activities of the migrants.

12 Stampfer, "Violence and the Migration."

13 The large-scale migration to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century was quite different in nature. It was the product of a combination of push and pull and that is why it was so massive. The standard study is Simon Kuznets, *Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: background and structure* (Cambridge: Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, 1975), 35–124. See also the very important recent study of Yannay Spitzer, *Pogroms, Networks, and Migration: The Jewish Migration from the Russian Empire to the United States, 1881–1914*. Working Paper, 2015.

We have no documents or memoirs from them that would allow us to reconstruct their motivations and characteristics. We know for example that in 1264 Jews were given a "privilege" and recognized legal status in Kalisz, and Lwów in 1356.[14] It is highly unlikely that privileges were granted in a vacuum. Someone was urging, and probably paying off, the granter to take such a step. When privileges were granted to Jews, the initiator was probably Jewish and probably already present in the town. Thus, we can safely assume that Jews were in Eastern Europe even before the mid thirteenth century – but how much earlier, how many, and in what professions cannot be determined from the fact that a "privilege" was granted. In the absence of such materials, one of the more promising options is to look at some of the characteristics of the Jewish population at the beginning of the sixteenth century, to consider how it came into being, and then to follow some of the changes in the years following 1500. A recent study of medieval and early modern Polish Jewry, by Hanna Zaremska, makes this possible. It provides a comprehensive and coherent picture of this period because it focuses on the dynamics of migration and settlement of the Jews.[15]

How many Jews were there in the Polish lands in 1500, and where did they live? Various estimates have been made by researchers of the size of this population, but these estimates were not based on a clear and reproducible methodology. It appears that these estimates were based on a "sense" as to what was possible, or on instinct. Hanna Zaremska carefully, systematically, (and convincingly) analyzed the data on Jewish population and on taxes. We have evidence for the size of the Jewish population in some central cities, and there are some tax lists indicating the amount of taxes paid by the Jews in the Polish lands in 1507 – with a partial breakdown that specifies the amounts to be paid by the Jewish populations of some central cities and in other locations. These taxes apparently reflect the size of the Jewish population. Since well-founded estimates exist for the number of Jews in some of these cities, based on other sources, Zaremska was able to determine what appears to be a good estimate of the total Jewish population. Her conclusion: that the total Jewish population of Poland (not including Lithuania) around the year 1500 was a bit less than 6000.[16]

14 Jacob Goldberg, *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth* (Jerusalem, Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1985–2001).

15 Zaremska, Polsce/Polen.

16 Zaremska, *Polsce/Polen*, 263 (in the Polish edition), 258 (in the German translation). In the Polish, the estimate is given as "około 5000" and in the German it is "etwas unter 6000." The difference in formulation is not significant.

A good estimate of population size has to fit what we know about the population in the period to which it refers, and also to fit what is known about the history and subsequent development of the community. Zaremska's estimate passes such scrutiny. Higher estimates, and there are such estimates, are problematic because it is difficult to explain where the "additional" population could have been located. For example, if we consider Baron's estimate of a population of nearly 30,000,[17] this requirement is a challenging one. If we assume that the Jewish population in the large cities was substantially larger than Zaremska's estimate, one consequence would be that the percentage of the Jews out of the total population of those cities would be elevated – yet this does not fit what we know about the role of Jews in those cities. If the Jewish population had been a significant percentage of an urban population, it would have attracted attention and it would have been discussed – but this was not a topic that came up in descriptions of fifteenth and sixteenth century Polish and Lithuanian cities. If, of the other hand, we assume that the additional Jewish population was living in urban centers that Zaremska had not mentioned, one has to ask: where were they and why do we know nothing about them? If we explore yet another option and assume that the additional Jewish population was living in rural areas and made up a large, non-urban, population, similar problems arise. In what fields were they economically active and why is there no mention of such a large population? Had there been many more Jews in 1500, it is difficult to understand why such a large community did not play an important role in the arena of European Jewry. Therefore, Zaremska's cautious estimate sits well with what we know about the Jews in Eastern Europe before and after 1500.

The picture Zaremska presents of the Polish-Lithuanian Jewish communities in 1500 is enlightening. There were over 100 towns with documented Jewish communities at that time.[18] The 1507 tax list of Polish Jews was for a total of 1391 gulden or florins. Of this amount, Lwów paid 300, as did Kraków, together with Tarnów, while Poznań paid 200. In other words, over half of the total amount was paid by three communities. There were 18 communities that paid between 10 and 75 (a total of 475), and what remained (216 gulden/florin)

17 Salo Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2nd ed., vol. 16 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976). Baron wrote, (on page 207): "As mentioned above, in 1500 the Jewish population in the dual Commonwealth did not exceed 30,000." I could not find the previous statement to which he was referring. I understand his statement to mean that the Jewish population was close to 30,000 but not more than that.

18 Zenon Guldon, "Skupiska żydowskie w miastach polskich w XV-XVI wieku," in *Żydzi i judaizm we współczesnych badaniach*, vol. 2, Krzysztof Pilarczyk and Stefan Gąsiorowski (eds.) (Kraków: Księg. Akademicka, 2000), 13–25. For the number of communities, see Table 1 on pages 16–17.

was paid by about 85 small communities. In other words, there were a few very large Jewish communities and a great number of very small communities – some of which no doubt consisted of only a few families or perhaps even only one.[19] Zaremska suggests that the larger communities had about 600 Jewish residents.[20] If Lwów had a population of more or less 600, it would fit what we know about Przemysl – the second largest community in the region. This community had about 100 Jewish residents at the time.[21] It is also possible that these large communities were even smaller than Zaremska's cautious estimates.[22] These figures are not surprising when seen in context. The Jewish population of Prague in 1500, regarded as a central community, was probably no more than 500.[23]

The distribution of urban centers was not what would be anticipated from a population that had formed a mature commercial network. There were many towns and cities in Poland without Jewish residents and some important regional population centers did not necessarily have correspondingly sized Jewish communities. However, the distribution of the Jewish population fits a pattern of long distance migration to known communities and a partially completed process of migration to lesser known and smaller population centers. Over the course of the sixteenth century, the number of Jewish communities grew and the basis for a true commercial network began to be established with a network of large central cities, regional centers, and smaller communities.[24]

What is noteworthy is the size of the Jewish communities of Lwów and of Lublin in 1500. The size of the general population of Lwów, Poznań, and Kraków was quite similar. There were about 10,000 in Lwów, and a slightly larger

19 See Zaremska, *Polsce/Polen*, 241–245 (in the Polish edition), 238–245 (in the German edition). The largest of these smaller communities was Lublin that paid 75 gulden or florins.

20 Ibid., 263 (in the Polish edition), 258 (in the German edition).

21 See Hanna Wegrzynek, "On the history of the Jews of Przemysl in the fifteenth century," *Gal-Ed* 12 (1991): 13–35. Especially, see page 16. Dr. Wegrzynek does not state the figure of one hundred explicitly. This is my extrapolation.

22 Мирон Капраль [Myron Kapral], "Демографія Львова XV–першої половини XVI ст Ль" in Історичні нариси Упоря. Я. Ісаєвич, Ф. Стеблій, М. Литвин (ed.) (1996): 67–81, 72. Kapral implies that the Jewish population of Lwów/Lviv in 1500 was about 400

23 See Marie Buňatová, "Commercial Relations between the Jews of Prague and Kraków in the Period before the Battle of White Mountain," *Judaica Bohemiae* 47 no. 2 (2012): 5–33. The information on the population is on page 8.

24 For a discussion (and critique) of "central place theory" which underlies my comments, see Paul Krugman, "On the number and location of cities," *European Economic Review* 37 no. 3 (1993): 293–298.

population in Poznań.[25] The general population of Lublin was about 5,000. Judging from the tax payments, the Jewish community of Lwów was disproportionally large, and that of Lublin, small. Lwów differed from both Poznań and Kraków in that the share of the German and Italian population was lower. The city had a more mixed ethnic population than Kraków. There was a large Armenian population in Lwów, and, in the late sixteenth century, the richest person in Lwów was a Moldavian merchant.[26] It may be that this demographic make-up was more congenial to Jewish settlement than Kraków or Lublin, even though Lwów was further to the East.[27]

The presence of Jews in both large and small communities may have had long term consequences. Urban centers at the time were usually regarded as "importers" of population and not "exporters," because they had negative natural population growth. This was largely because of health conditions such as poor sanitation in cities. While we do not have any statistical data on life expectancy of Jews in this period, it seems quite possible that the Jews were no exception. If so, the large population that was not urban may well have served as the motor for demographic growth.

The location of the major Jewish communities in the early sixteenth century was not a random distribution. Both Poznań and Kraków were major commercial entrepôts in Western Poland. Kraków was the largest city in the Polish Lands and on a number of important trade routes from East to West. Poznań was more to the north and had a similar role. One may anticipate a large Jewish community in Wroclaw, but this was not the case. In 1300, it had the largest Jewish community in the Polish lands, but in 1453 the city had been granted the "right" not to tolerate a Jewish settlement. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, there was no significant Jewish community there. Lwów was the major commercial center in the Eastern Polish lands and was similar to Kraków in many respects, hence its large Jewish community could have been anticipated. Lublin was at the intersection of the Lwów-Wrocław trade route and the Kraków-Brzesc trade route but not directly on the East-West route. This explains its size. Another community that was smaller than may have been anticipated was Brzesc. It had been a major center, but at the end of the fifteenth century the Jews had been expelled from Lithuania (including Brzesc). While they were allowed to return in 1503, the Jewish community of Brzesc was still recovering at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

25 Cezary Kuklo, *Demografia Rzeczypospolitej przedrozbiorowej* (Warszawa: Wydawn. DiG, 2009), 233 table 42.

26 Konstanty Korniakt (~1517 – 1603), a Moldavian merchant of Greek descent.

27 See Andrzej Janeczek, "Ethnische Gruppenbildungen im spätmittelalterlichen Polen," in *Das Reich und Polen*, Thomas Wünsch (ed.) (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2003), 411, 424–425.

Economic Activities of the Jewish Residents of Early Modern Poland – Lithuania

What were the economic activities of these early Jewish settlers?[28] Coming from the regions near Poland-Lithuania, most did not have the connections needed for international and transcontinental trade, nor did they bring exceptional skills. Whatever the role Jews may once have had in the slave trade, this was a thing of the past by the fourteenth century, so this was also not an option.[29] Most of the Jewish settlers also did not have significant capital at their disposal. As noted above, they migrated because of growing economic pressures in their places of origin relative to the destinations, and not necessarily because of outstanding opportunities that emerged in those destinations. There were lucrative opportunities in early modern Poland, but the avenues to major economic success were closed to most Jews. The large-scale export of grain was controlled by German and Dutch merchants. The grain went by sea through the Baltic ports, and the Jews were excluded from this transit trade. The Jews did not have an effective trade network in the West for the long-distance import of luxury items or for export. They had no working network at all for overland import (or export) to the East. Such trade was the monopoly of a very effective Armenian diaspora. In the cities, craft guilds were quite aggressive in defending their livelihoods and were not eager to have to deal with Jewish competitors.

What was left was small-scale trade and services. The pattern of wide dispersal in small communities also fits an economic reality in which Jews worked mainly in these fields. It seems that at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jews in the Polish speaking lands had not yet entered crafts in large numbers and did not have any special functions in rural communities. In Lwów of 1500, Jews (and Armenians) were, at least officially, totally excluded from crafts.[30] This

28 On the economic activity of the Jews see the very important study of Jürgen Heyde, *Transkulturelle Kommunikation und Verflechtung. Die jüdischen Wirtschaftseliten in Polen vom 14. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2014). Heyde's focus is on the Jewish elite. The economic patterns of the non-elite Jews were of course different.

29 See Hanna Zaremska, *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Europie środkowej: w Czechach, Polsce i na Węgrzech* (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2005), 23–27. For a more detailed discussion, see Zofia Kowalska, "Handel niewolnikami prowadzony przez Żydów w IX-XI wieku w Europie," in *Niewolnictwo i niewolnicy w Europie od starożytności po czasy nowożytne: pokłosie sesji zorganizowanej przez Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie, w dniach 18–19 grudnia 1997 roku*, Danuty Quirini–Popławskiej (ed.) (Kraków: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1998), 81–91. See especially page 90. I wish to thank Dr. Agnieszka Jagodzinska for providing me a scan of this article.

30 Капраль [Kapral], Демографія Львова XV, 72

reality is also suggested by the privileges given Jews. The earlier privileges, before the eighteenth century, emphasize trade rights more than any other area of economic activity. Of course, it is quite possible that traders were more involved in the process of negotiating for the privilege than were craftsmen, so it is important to be cautious before jumping to conclusions. Jews were concentrated in commerce, but they did not have any special roles that would give them an advantage as a group over non-Jewish competitors. One area in which Jews apparently played a prominent role was that of fencing, or dealing, in stolen goods.[31] This was not a typical profession for Jews, but of the male 'fences' a large proportion were Jews. This is a risky business which offers high profits but exposes the dealer to constant danger. It also offers only limited opportunities for advancement and expansion of business. Fencing works best when the dealer has a regular business that can serve as a cover and connections with potential clients. It depends on a system of trust on the part of suppliers as well as clients. For individuals who had few alternatives, the potential for gain outweighed the risks. This was a reasonable alternative for migrants with limited options.

Money lending also does not appear to have been a central source of income for most Jews around the year 1500.[32] Of course, any merchant may find that he has cash on hand that can be invested, at times, more profitably in lending than in his business. He may also find that to succeed in business it is often necessary to give credit – and credit is a type of a loan. For that matter, large loans were on occasion paid off by granting the person who gave the loan the income from taxes, or from a monopoly, for a certain period of time. In such cases, the loan can be regarded as payment in advance for an income. However, money lending as the primary basis of a livelihood is something different. Such an occupation

31 Zaremska, *Polsce/Polen*, 231 (in the Polish edition), 227 in the German edition). For example, see Paul F. Cromwell, James N. Olson, and D'Aunn W. Avary, "Who Buys Stolen Property? A New Look at Criminal Receiving," *Journal of Crime and Justice* 16 no.1 (1993): 75–95; Ted Roselius and Douglas Benton, "Marketing theory and the fencing of stolen goods," *Denv. LJ* 50 (1973): 177–205; Tracy Johns and Read Hayes, "Behind the Fence: Buying and Selling Stolen Merchandise," *Security Journal* 16 no. 4 (2003): 29–44.

32 Heyde, "Die Juden im frühneuzeitlichen Polen-Litauen," in *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte. Ein Handbuch*, hrsg. von Michael G. Müller in Verbindung mit Christian Lübke u.a., Bd. 2: Frühe Neuzeit, hrsg. von Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, Lieferung 9/10 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2016), 741–790. See also Adam Rutkowski, "Kredyt żydowski na rynku lokalnym Warszawy w pierwszej połowie XV wieku," *Przegląd Historyczny: dwumiesięcznik naukowy* 70 no. 2 (1979): 267–284. See also Marjan Ungeheuer, *Stosunki kredytowe w ziemi przemyskiej w polowie XV wieku* (Lwów: Institut Popierania Polskiej Tworczosci Naukowej, 1929). I am very grateful to Dr. Jürgen Heyde for this reference; Also see Darius Sakalauskas, "Jews as Creditors and Debtors: A Comparative Study Between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Poland in the 17th-18th Centuries," *Lietuvos istorijos studijos (Mokslo darbai)* 34 (2014): 23–47.

requires capital for investment – and a sufficiently large body of potential borrowers. These conditions did not apply for most of early modern Poland-Lithuania. It should also be remembered that there were probably regional variations in the demand for loans – variations that today are difficult or impossible to document.

It seems, then, that the bulk of the Jewish population of the Polish-Lithuanian lands around the year 1500 was involved in small scale trade. However, this changed in the sixteenth century. With growing familiarity with the East European markets and larger communities and networks, Jews began to play a growing role in trade. In Lwów, which was home to what was probably the largest Jewish community, this shift was dramatic. Eleonora Nadel-Golobic noted: "In the late sixteenth century the Armenians lost their dominant position in international trade to Jewish merchants who became prevalent in Lwów's oriental commerce."[33]

One development that ultimately had a major impact on patterns of Jewish residence was a growing desire of landowners to maximize their income by developing – and taxing, the production and sale of alcoholic beverages to peasants on their domains. The economic developments of the sixteenth century, and the precipitous decline in the export market for grain in the seventeenth century, accelerated this development.[34] This created a need for inn keepers, and tax collectors, and over time the *arenda* system came into being. In this framework, landowners would lease the rights to collect fees for the use of facilities and a monopoly on the local sale of alcoholic beverages. The lessees were usually Jews, who then resided in villages and attempted to cover their investment. This created a large rural Jewish population who were not generally farmers, but who lived in relative isolation from population centers.

Settlement Options and their Demographic Impact

In the early modern period, there was a growing tendency among the urban population to deal with increasing competition with Jews in trade – and in the course of time in crafts as well, by prohibiting Jewish residence in cities. This usually had a limited impact. In some cases, Jews simply moved to city neighborhoods that were

33 Eleonora Nadel-Golobič, "Armenians and Jews in Medieval Lvov. Their Role in Oriental Trade 1400–1600," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* (1979): 345–388, 365.

34 Krzysztof Olszewski, "The Rise and Decline of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth due to Grain Trade," University Library of Munich, Online at https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/68805/; Andrzej Wyczanski, "The Adjustment of the Polish Economy to Economic Checks in the XVIIth Century," *Journal of European Economic History* 10 no. 1 (1981): 210.

under noble rule and thus immune from the ordinances of the city citizens. In other cases, Jews moved outside the city walls (and outside of urban authority) but in close proximity to their customers. However, this policy also encouraged Jews to move to new towns founded by nobles and to smaller towns that did not exclude Jews.

Both the growth of the *arenda* system, and the interest of city dwellers to expel Jews from towns, have long been central themes in Jewish history. However, less attention has been given to the demographic impact of these developments. As noted above, pre-modern urban centers were generally characterized by negative population growth and depended on constant immigration to maintain and expand their population. In the pre-modern world, it was the rural population that was the engine of population growth. There are good grounds to think that rural population growth was even higher in the case of Jews. In peasant societies, high infant mortality, due in part to the fact that peasant women who helped in fields were not able to nurse for extended periods, and periodic food shortages that had severe impacts on non-mobile populations, served as checks on population growth. Jewish women tended to nurse for longer periods than their non-Jewish neighbors, and Jews in general, who were not tied to the lands, were less subject to natural checks on population growth. In such a demographic regime, the movement of Jews from cities to towns and villages may, in the long run, have amplified their demographic advantage over non-Jews. Water in cities was often polluted and contributed to the spread of disease, which also gave a demographic advantage to non-urban populations.

Continued Jewish Migration to Poland in the Sixteenth Century

As noted above, Jewish migration to Poland continued in the sixteenth century. The growth of Jewish communities made migration to Poland a more attractive option, and the general urban growth offered more economic opportunities than previously. It seems that more migrants came from farther away than previously, but it appears that the great bulk of migrants were still from the nearby German speaking regions – as previously.[35] A look at the leading rabbis of the sixteenth century offers striking evidence of the close ties between Prague and the Polish lands – and the absence of strong ties between Polish Jewry and German Jewry during this period.

35 Louis Lewin, "Deutsche Einwanderungen in polnische Ghetti," *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft* (1907): 75–154.

It seems, then, that the in-migration of the sixteenth century was a continuation of the earlier migration from the Czech lands and from nearby regions.

These were some of the leading Polish rabbis of the sixteenth century:

Name	Year of Death	Place of Origin
Jacob Pollack	After 1532	Prague
Shalom Shakhna	1558	Lwów
Moses Isserles	1572	Kraków
Shlomo Luria	1573	Poznań
Mordechai Jaffe	1612	Prague
Me'ir ben Gedalyah (Maharam)	1616	Lublin
Shemu'el Eli'ezer Edels (Maharsha)	1631	Kraków (mother from Prague)
Nathan Spira	1633	Grodno
Joel Sirkes	1640	Lublin
Yom tov Lipman Heller	1654	Wallerstein (Swabia) Studied/ lived in Prague

It is reasonable to ask: why did the Polish rabbinate begin to play a major role in European Jewish intellectual life only in the sixteenth century, and not earlier? Here, the size of the cities cannot be overlooked. There is a correlation between important rabbis and urban growth. Important rabbis are attracted to large cities that can offer generous salaries and can support enough students to build a major yeshiva. A community of 30 families cannot really attract a major rabbi. A community of 100 families can. Before 1500, even the central communities were not large enough to attract serious scholars. However, once several communities had reached the minimal size, there was rapid increase in rabbinic scholarship in Poland.

Unfortunately, while there is information on individual scholars, the occasional rich Jew – or an unfortunate Jew who ran into trouble with the law, there does not seem to be any source that will allow for a direct calculation of the number of migrants in the sixteenth century, their geographic origin, or their precise motives for leaving their original places of residence. The only clear thing is that there was apparently significant migration and that it was probably from the same nearby regions as earlier migration.

The Rapid Jewish Population Growth

The picture presented here, of small numbers of migrants from a reasonably restricted area, not only suggests – but depends – on an assumption that rapid

population growth by the descendants of these migrants was the "engine" that created the very large Jewish population of later centuries. In other words, it was not a large base of migrants that made this population possible. In later periods, we have documentation for rapid population growth, but there is no solid proof that the Jewish population was already growing quickly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is, however, indirect genetic evidence for a rather narrow population base from which East European Jews stemmed, provided in part by the prevalence of common genetic diseases.

A recent study of the genetics of Jews concluded that[36] "Reconstruction of recent AJ [Ashkenazic Jewish] history from such [descent] segments confirms a recent bottleneck[37] of merely ~350 individuals." In other words, the population of Ashkenazi Jews originates from a group of 500 individuals or less. This is not necessarily the number of migrants. If three brothers migrated, they would be carrying the genetic material from their two common parents. However, the genetic data certainly fits well with the claim that most migrants came from the same region and in limited numbers. There is still much more research that needs to be carried out on Ashkenazi Jewish genetics. In particular, researchers have tended not to distinguish between Jews of Western Ashkenazi origin and Jews whose ancestors were East European Ashkenazi Jews. They have also not paid careful attention to sub regions in Eastern Europe. This does not contribute to the precision of their findings. It may be that future studies based on larger samples will provide refined conclusions or will show that the bottleneck was somewhat larger. However, it is highly unlikely that the existence of a bottleneck or a small starting population can or will be dismissed.

Genetic studies also illuminate a significant development in population movements among Jews in Eastern Europe. It has long been noted that the East European Jewish community was divided into sub-groups that can be roughly termed: Lithuanian Jews, Polish Jews, and Ukrainian Jews. These groups were characterized by clear dialectical differences in the Yiddish that they spoke and by less clear differences in their folk culture. In addition to these markers, different subgroups were also characterized by genetic diseases that were often

36 Carmi S et al, "Sequencing an Ashkenazi reference panel supports population-targeted personal genomics and illuminates Jewish and European Origins," *Nature Communications* 5: 4835 (2014).

37 A bottleneck assumes that there was at some point a population whose numbers were sharply cut for one reason or another and later rebounded in numbers – but without the introduction of new genetic material. In the context of Jewish history, this would mean that a large Jewish population was succeeded by a large Jewish population but that only a small proportion of the founder population were the ancestors of the later population.

concentrated in one region or another. The following list presents some of the best known[38]:

- Factor XI (FXI) deficiency, Ukrainian/Romanian that originated 600 years ago[39]
- Bloom Syndrome, Poland and Ukraine[40]
- Lucotte syndrome, Lithuania and decreasing as moving away[41]
- Familial Hypercholesterolemia, Lithuania[42]
- Tay Sachs, Lithuania[43]

The phenomenon of regional genetic diseases fits the pattern of a limited early population as well as limited inter-regional migration.

At this point, it is possible to ask: from how many Jews alive in 1500 were subsequent generations of the East European Jewish community descended? Certainly not all of them were descended from the 5000–6000 Jews who were in Poland in 1500. First of all, there was already a significant Jewish community in Lithuania in 1500 though we do not have hard data on its size.[44] However, it was certainly a few thousand. Moreover, Jewish migration into Poland did not stop in 1500. We do know that there was continued and substantial immigration into Poland after this date. This appears to also have been from nearby regions – notably the Czech lands. Balaban, and after him Elchanan Reiner, discuss the immigration of Jews in the sixteenth century – especially richer and more

38 On this topic, see Neil Risch, Hua Tang H, Howard Katzenstein, and Josef Ekstein, "Geographic Distribution of Disease Mutations in the Ashkenazi Jewish Population Supports Genetic Drift over Selection," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 72 no. 4 (2003): 812–822.

39 H. Peretz et al, "Type I mutation in the F11 gene is a third ancestral mutation which causes factor XI deficiency in Ashkenazi Jews," *Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis* 11 no. 4 (2013): 724–730.

40 Shahrabani-Gargir et al, "High frequency of a common Bloom syndrome Ashkenazi mutation among Jews of Polish origin," *Genetic testing* 2 no. 4 (1998): 293–296.

41 G. Lucotte and P. Smets, "CCR5-Δ32 allele frequencies in Ashkenazi Jews," *Genetic Testing* 7 no. 4 (2003): 333–337.

42 V. Meiner et al, "A common Lithuanian mutation causing familial hypercholesterolemia in Ashkenazi Jews," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 49 no. 2 (1991): 443–449, 443.

43 Neil Risch et al, "Geographic distribution of disease mutations."

44 See Zenon Guldon and Jacek Wijaczka, "Die zahlenmäßige Stärke der Juden in Polen-Litauen im 16.-18. Jahrhundert," *Trumah* 4 (1994): 91–100, 95. Guldon and Wijaczka estimate the population in mid-sixteenth century Lithuania as about 10,000–12,000, basing this on a study of Bershadsky (*Litovskie Evrei*, St. Petersburg, 1883, 409). This page number reference appears in additional publications of Guldon but the page reference is incorrect. It should be 334–335. I thank Mark Kupovetsky for his assistance in finding the correct page number. This roughly fits the estimate for 1500.

scholarly Jews.[45] While there was an influence on the "veteran" Jewish population, this migration did not inundate them. One can roughly estimate that there were several thousand migrants during the course of the sixteenth century. During this time, the population that was already in Poland-Lithuania in 1500 continued to grow. If all of the above is taken into account, the total of the Polish-Lithuanian Jewish population in 1500 together with ancestors of future migrants would come to about around 13,000. This very rough estimate is a compound number of the forbears of the subsequent community.

Gershon Hundert estimates the population of Jews in Poland-Lithuania in 1660 as about 150,000 – but did not deal with earlier periods.[46] This date is, of course, after the upheavals of the mid-century. How does this estimate for 1660 fit with Zaremska's estimate for 1500, taking into account later immigration and the Jewish population of Lithuania? A population of 13,000 starting in 1500 and growing at 1.2% annually would have reached about 90,000 in 1660 and if it grew at 1.6% it would have reached 165,000. Hundert assumes a growth rate of 1.6% – and the application of this rate, and our estimate for migration, yields almost exactly his estimate for the population in 1660.[47] It cannot be over-emphasized that these are all estimates. The population in 1660 had undergone substantial population losses in the mid-century, that are difficult to take into account, and this might require a revised estimate. The point is that Zaremska's estimate is well within the realm of the reasonable – while other, higher, estimates make it difficult to explain later developments.

Trade Routes and Patterns of Settlement

The existence of regional Yiddish dialects and of genetic diseases that are characteristic for specific regions, together with what we know about the history of trade routes and economic developments, make it possible to reconstruct the patterns of Jewish migration and settlement in Poland-Lithuania up until the

45 See Elchanan Reiner, "The Jewish Community of Cracow, Documents and Introductions," in *Kroke–Kazimierz–Cracow, Studies in the History of Cracow Jewry*, Elchanan Reiner (ed.) (Tel Aviv: The Center for the History of Polish Jewry: The Diaspora Research Institute Tel Aviv University, 2001). See his references to Balaban.

46 Gershon Hundert, Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 22.

47 Believe it or not, I made the estimate of 13,000 *before* I checked the "fit" to Hundert's estimate. Needless to say, I was quite happy with the results.

mid-seventeenth century with a fair degree of certainty. Dialects and genetic singularity are characteristic of a common phenomenon: limited interregional migration. Dialects are maintained in isolation. If there is significant population exchange, they lose their distinctive characteristics. Similarly, if there is substantial migration, the genetic diseases that may have developed in one location migrate elsewhere along with the carriers. If they remain characteristic of a limited population one can assume there was little out-migration. Thus, both phenomenon suggest that while the Jewish migrants to Eastern Europe may have come from common or shared regions in East Central Europe, after they settled into different regions of Poland-Lithuania, they and their descendants tended to stay within the same regions.

The pattern of limited Jewish interregional migration in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is quite reasonable. There were two main options for East-West trade. One option was the maritime routes controlled by the Hanseatic League. Transport by sea was less expensive than overland transport, and for bulk products, such as grain, was the only reasonable option. Thus, the prominent position of Baltic seaports in the Polish-Lithuanian export trade is not difficult to explain. However, this route offered few opportunities for Jews. The Hansa cities did not allow Jews to take an active role in commerce in these cities, and often Jewish residence in these cities was prohibited.[48]

The only practical option for most Jews who wanted to trade with Poland-Lithuania, or to migrate there, was overland. A glance at a map of the trade routes in early modern Poland makes it clear how this could have happened. The main route, from West to East, went to Kraków and then branched out – north to

48 The general phenomenon of relations between Hansa cities and the Jews has not been treated at length though it is widely recognized. The only study I know of is Jan Lokers, "Men bedervet erer ok nicht?: Juden in Hansestädten; Probleme und Perspektiven der Forschung," in *Hansische Studien Band 22: Am Rande der Hanse*, Klaus Krüger, Andreas Ranft and Stephan Selzer (eds.) (Trier: Porta Alba Verlag 2012), 105–133. This is the best starting point for studying the topic, but the author notes, on p. 4, "Ich spare aus arbeitsökonomischen Gründen die holländischen Hansestädte an Ijssel- und Zuiderzee, Hinterpommern, Preußen, Schlesien, Polen sowie Livland aus." which is very unfortunate for my purposes. The Hansa policies to Jews were not without consequences. See also Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, "Networks of the Hanseatic League" in *European History Online (EGO)* (Mainz: Institute of European History (IEG), 2012). Beerbühl notes in her fascinating description: "The xenophobic attitudes of Lübeck and Danzig were another important reason for their decline"; On the difficulties Jews encountered when they wanted to own ships see Benjamin Arbel, "Shipping and toleration: The emergence of Jewish shipowners in the early modern period," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 15 no. 1 (2000): 56–71.

Lithuania via Brzesc, and to the East via Lwów.[49] Not surprisingly, Brzesc was the largest Jewish community in Lithuania before being overtaken by Grodno and later Vilnius. Neither of these two routes offered options to advance further on the route. The northern route that continued to Hanseatic ports were generally not hospitable to Jews. The route to the East offered few attractive points of settlement beyond Lwów, and the distance trading on this route had long been in the hands of Armenians. However, in all of the regions where Jews had settled, the descendants of migrants were apparently able to sustain themselves by finding opportunities in smaller or new communities. When the transition from trade to tavern-keeping and rural settlement took place, many more opportunities were created for Jews. At the same time, the absence of significant interregional trade cut down on the amount of information exchanged between regions, and also made distance migration more challenging. Thus, as the Jewish populations in each region grew, individuals sought out new opportunities within the region. The search for opportunities outside the region was the last alternative.

Conclusion

By 1600, the picture of Polish-Lithuanian Jewry had been transformed from that of previous centuries. There were major communities spread out in the area and formed, in effect, a network. These communities were organized in regional councils – the Council of the Lands and the Council of Lithuania. Poland-Lithuania had become a center for Jewish intellectual creativity. The Jews had increasingly important economic roles – especially in rural areas and in the noble economy. With the decline of the export trade for grain, and the subsequent departure (or assimilation) of non-local population groups such as Germans, Italians, Scots etc. – the Jews became the most prominent religious-ethnic minority. All of this was directly related to, and built upon, the demographic growth of Polish Jewry in the previous century.

49 A very useful introduction to this topic is Nina Antonovna Gusakova, "Die wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen den Städten Belorußlands und den Städten Polens und Böhmens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena*: *Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche* Reihe (1977): 323–335. I am very grateful to Dr. Daniel Mahla for obtaining a copy of it for me; Another useful study is Leon Koczy, "Handel Litwy przed połową XVII wieku," *Pamiętnik VI Powszechnego Zjazdu Historyków* Lwów (1935): 272–278; Another very useful study, that includes an excellent map, is Alina Wawrzyńczyk, *Studia z dziejów handlu Polski z Wielkim Księstwem Litewskim i Rosją w XVI wieku* (Warszawa, 1956).