

Maria Cieśla, *Kupcy, arendarze, rzemieślnicy: Różnorodność zawodowa Żydów w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVII i XVIII w.* [Merchants, Leaseholders and Craftsmen: Professional Diversity of Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries], Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2018, 323 pp.

This book is a welcome instalment in the larger project of distinguishing the history of the *Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie* (Grand Duchy of Lithuania) from that of the *Korona Królestwa Polskiego* (*Korona* — Crown Poland) when framing the narrative of the confederation between the two, the *Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów* (Commonwealth of the Two Nations or Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). In this case the subject is the economic history of the Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Maria Cieśla has admirably managed to craft a readable survey of a broad subject that has the detail and depth of a monograph. In five chapters she treats the legal framework of Jewish economic endeavour in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, leaseholding in its multiple forms, commerce at all levels, artisanry and secondary areas (service occupations, agriculture and moneylending). Cieśla draws on a plethora of material, beginning with the Lithuanian *Metrica* and a treasure

chest of royal decrees, privileges, legislation and other documents concerning the Jews; through magnate archives including correspondence, petitions, contracts, declarations, inventories, account books; and municipal acts from both royal (especially Vilna (Vilnius)) and private (especially Śluck (Slutsk)) towns. There is some reference to sources that originated from within the Jewish community, based, mainly, on secondary works. The emphasis is, however, on what Cieśła terms an *external* view which, in her expert hands, the non-Jewish documents yield. A thorough analysis of the Jewish sources, and their potential to shape the portrayal, remains a desideratum.

Cieśła skillfully integrates previous scholarship on the subject beginning with Bierszadzski in the nineteenth century and Mark Wischnitzer and Israel Sosis in the early twentieth, up to the most recent research from Israel, the USA, Germany, Poland and Lithuania. She often confirms and enriches what her predecessors had to say, but does not hesitate to challenge their conclusions when appropriate. For example, she reinforces Wischnitzer's observation that Jewish artisan guilds developed more slowly in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania than in the Crown (p. 236). However, Cieśła points out his error in believing there were Jewish tailors who specialized in serving Christian customers (p. 230). She finds Horn grossly underestimated the number of Jewish artisan guilds (p. 237), while she casts doubt on Judith Kalik's assertion that Jewish barbers functioned as village doctors (p. 225).

Cieśła's hunt for differences between Jewish economic activity in the Grand Duchy, as compared with the Crown, turns up less than might be expected. Conversely, she has made new discoveries that probably apply to the Crown no less than Lithuania. It is no surprise, for example, to read about the economic, political and social importance to both sides of the nexus between the Jews and the *szlachta*; and especially between the Jews and the magnates. This has been thoroughly documented for the Crown and Teller arrived at mostly parallel conclusions in his studies of the Radziwiłł estates in Lithuania. On this topic, Cieśła adds the important observation that these connections were not based exclusively on utilitarian considerations. Long-standing personal relationships with both lords and their administrators built up trust among the parties (pp. 98, 116, 146). This undoubtedly was as true in the Crown as it was in the Grand Duchy.

In terms of Jewry law, Cieśła makes an important contribution by clearly showing the opposing tendencies of privileges to Jewish communities granted by the King and magnates, as against the local agreements negotiated between Jews and the municipalities where they lived. The privileges were intended, *grosso modo*, to grant the Jews religious freedom and economic opportunity so that they might flourish and bring material benefit to the rulers. The local pacts were designed to restrict Jewish presence and economic activity so that the Jews impinged as minimally as possible on the lives of the other townspeople.

What Cieśła establishes in the first chapter is that the nature of the Jewry legislation, its enforcement and the actual situation of the Jews in any given town were all directly related to the power or weakness of the burgher class in that locality. This challenges the conventional wisdom that the Jews' circumstances

were determined by the type of ruler of the place they lived (King or noble) and, generally speaking, private towns were more salutary for them than royal ones. For Cieřła that distinction is overridden by the strength of the burghers on a scale ranging from docility to aggressiveness, which considerably affected the ruler's Jewish policies (pp. 54–57).

The next chapter sets out several assertions with regard to *arenda*, the leasing of concessions and incomes. Cieřła demonstrates that in Lithuania Jews dominated *arenda* leases of all types (except for the leasing of agricultural *latifundia*). In addition, leasing — from the general *arenda* of the incomes of an entire town down to the sub-lease on one tavern or one mill — was the most important economic enterprise for the Lithuanian Jewish community. Affluent arrendators enjoyed high social status and composed a significant component of the communal elite.

Cieřła shows that in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, at least, *arenda* leases typically stayed with the same lessee long-term and even might pass to his heirs. This, despite the Jewish community's attempts to prevent monopolization on her of leases, through the institution of *hazakah* (licensing of bidding on a lease).

It is in connection with *arenda* that one of the biggest differences between the Crown and the Grand Duchy is manifest. In Crown Poland Jews were prohibited from bidding on state incomes like sales and excise taxes, or customs duties (pp. 59–61). In Lithuania they held more of these state leases than Christians did (pp. 87, 124–32). Of course, the administration of *arenda* leases in the the Grand Duchy of Lithuania engendered conflict, no less than in Crown Poland. Potentially there could be conflict with those obligated to pay the arrendator money due from the tax, or the right or the income he was leasing; conflict with town authorities who resented not having control over these monies; conflict with royal or magnate officials; conflict with the Jewish community which sought to break monopolies and long-held concessions; or with other Jews who wanted to compete for some lease.

Commerce was the next most important Jewish economic pursuit. In fact, Cieřła stresses that Jews — from long-distance, large-scale merchants, to store-keepers, standholders, middlemen of all types and peddlers — dominated local commerce in Lithuanian cities, towns and villages (pp. 148, 151–52, 211). Jews made sure to travel to commercial fairs throughout Poland-Lithuania in search of low prices and a better selection of merchandise. In general, Jewish traders offered a wide variety of staple and luxury products to city and town populations, while Jewish peddlers kept villagers supplied with goods they could not produce themselves. Economic contraction in the eighteenth century meant that polarization of the commercial class sharpened, with the lower ranks of jobbers and simple traders swelling while the numbers of middle-scale merchants and storeowners declined (p. 156).

International and wholesale trade was controlled mainly by Christians. However, backed largely by loans and sponsorship (*protekcja*) of magnates,

Jews progressively made inroads and by the mid-eighteenth century Jews were responsible for some thirty per cent of the merchandise imported into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Large scale Jewish merchants participated in the international trade traveling as far west as Breslau (Wrocław) and Leipzig. They even managed occasionally to penetrate into *Judenrein* Russia under the cover of magnate *protekcja* or by employing non-Jewish agents (pp. 159–82).

In Chapter 4, Cieśla indicates that another significant difference between the Crown and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was in the sphere of crafts. To the west and south, a relatively large number of Jews engaged in a rather broad spectrum of crafts. In Lithuania Jewish artisans were proportionally fewer. They did practise a variety of crafts (although many fewer than Christians did), but they concentrated in three areas: butchering, tailoring and baking. All of these were connected to Jewish ritual requirements with respect to diet and clothing, which precluded Jews patronizing Christians who worked in these fields. Jewish barbers and goldsmiths were considered to be the elite of the Jewish artisan class (p. 228). They and tailors, artists and musicians were the most likely among Jews to have Christian customers, especially nobles (pp. 231–36).

Cieśla explores the Lithuanian development of Jewish craft guilds (occurring later and less intensively than in Crown Poland). There is plentiful detail about their organization, requirements and relationship to Christian guilds. Sometimes Jewish artisans were forced to make payments to Christian guilds even though they could not be members; or the Jewish guild might be a separate sub-group of the Christian one (pp. 245–47). Mostly, however, they were autonomous.

Some Jews were employed in what might be termed communal civil service jobs (rabbis and other religious functionaries, scribes, bailiffs, ritual slaughterers, bathhouse attendants, and so on); the most common of which was teacher (pp. 255–59). Another common Jewish occupation was wagoner (p. 260). Jews did engage in ancillary small-scale ‘agriculture’ (tending to small plots and a few domestic animals) (pp. 262–65).

By the mid-seventeenth century both Polish and Lithuanian Jews had long ago abandoned money-lending as a main occupation. Both the Jewish community as an entity and individuals within it were decidedly more debtors than creditors. However, petty money-lending on pawns continued as a sideline (p. 265).

Cieśla expends abundant energy investigating the degree of cooperation between Jews and Christians in the various economic spheres. Her implied conclusion: very little. *Arendas*, commercial businesses and workshops were predominantly family affairs with various family members working together as a team. Christians were employed in minor roles. While Jewish merchants had many Christian customers; they, and arrendators, rarely had Christian partners. It was only the international Jewish merchants who engaged with Christian merchants when doing business at fairs far from home. This disassociation laid the foundation for many rivalries and conflicts which Cieśla analyses with care.

Speaking of the family as an economic team, Cieśla pioneers in delineating Jewish women’s efforts as team members. In addition to domestic duties,

women specialized in running arenda taverns, ‘manning’ stores and stands, peddling, performing artisan tasks and lending money. Women often attended fairs with husbands, fathers or brothers; sometimes, like their brothers, so as to find a marriage match. It is noteworthy that Cieřła makes no mention of the custom of *eshet hayil*, a woman who served as the main breadwinner of her family so that her husband could be a full-time scholar. This omission reflects the reality that *eshet hayil* was actually a marginal practice in the period Cieřła portrays.

Overall, Cieřła asserts that the general success of Jewish economic activity in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was due to three facets of Jewish business behaviour: flexibility, multi-functionality and mobility. As a rule, Jews were not tied to any one occupation. Arenda leasing might be connected with both commercial pursuits and artisanry. Alternatively, an arrendator this year might become a merchant next year. Either husband or wife might be capable of operating the arenda, running the store or negotiating at the fair. Jews were apt to move to a new town or region for economic betterment and Jewish merchants tended to travel long distances to expand product lines and improve profit margins. This analysis dovetails with David. B. Ruderman’s characterization of what typified Jews throughout the world in the early modern period (*Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History*, Princeton, 2010).

Throughout her book, Cieřła notes over and over again that sources are lacking for detailing this or that topic she is about to tackle. One wonders how, then, she has managed to create such a well-rounded, seemingly comprehensive and — yes — detailed account of her subject. She has woven together myriad sources, analysed and interpreted them, to create a work of scholarship that should be standard reading for anyone engaged with Polish, Lithuanian, Jewish and, indeed, European history.

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