

An Attempt to Rethink the Karaites' Traditional Views on their (Im)migration to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Middle Ages

When thinking about the presence of Jews in medieval Europe, they are usually treated as one community. In fact, however, it was a community divided into several groups. One of these were Karaites who came into the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the south, from the areas occupied by the followers of Islam. Their contacts with the Rabbinite Jews were far from harmonious. Nevertheless, they managed to gain acceptance for their differences in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and to establish a place for themselves within the community. Therefore, the subject of this chapter will be the development of narratives which helped Karaites to regulate relations with the Christians in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Introduction: Karaite Views on Karaite Settlement in Lithuania

The Karaite migration and settlement in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) and especially in the town of Trakai (Pol. Troki) has always interested scholars. Most studies of the Karaite past often begin with a quotation about the legend of the Karaite arrival in the GDL. This is mainly because it is the most recognizable mark of their identity, accepted by the community and assigned to it by the dominant society from the first half of the twentieth century. However, there are at least three major problems with this story: first, the same story also belongs to the local Tatar community present from the fifteenth century and is well attested by the sources and fits with the general historical context of the country's foreign policy;¹ second,

1 My recent article on the topic: Troskovaitė, 'Myth as a Means of Coexistence'.

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Map 7.1. Grand Duchy of Lithuania within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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such sources are absent from the Karaite community; and third, the legend described the Karaite migrants mainly as warriors, which did not correspond to the general characteristics of the medieval Karaite communities. These problems mean that the process of Karaite migration to the GDL needs to be analysed by considering the other most likely routes for their arrival and settlement in the region.

The question of Karaite settlement in the GDL came to be important for the Karaites themselves as early as the nineteenth century. There were several stories written down by individuals earlier, but it was never an issue for the whole community until that time. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the first records of the legend explained that Grand Duke Vytautas (Pol. Witold) brought the Karaites to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth twice — in 1218/1219 and in 1242/1243. In the twentieth century,² probably after recognizing historical discrepancies with the dates of Vytautas' life, there was a chronological re-adjustment — a change in the

2 Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites'; Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, pp. 796, 815, 1022.

date of arrival indicated in the story. The date of 1397/1398 appeared in the Karaite historiography; it corresponded to the time of Tatar influx to the GDL, to whom the legend was attributed as early as in the fifteenth century by Jan Dlugosz.³

The early Karaite history in the GDL has been discussed by many authors: Jacob Mann thoroughly analysed the sources available to him to determine the earliest evidence about the Karaite existence in particular places.⁴ Mikhail Kizilov examined the sources that were employed by many authors to support the legendary narrative under discussion; he did not suggest an alternative solution to this problem but saw it as rather rational to think that the Karaites came to the GDL from Crimea, mainly at the time as indicated in the legend.⁵ However, the same author also drew attention to the existence of different legends about their arrival which were current in the Karaite communities and the fact that the story about the Karaites brought to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth by Duke Vytautas only became prevalent in the communities of Galicia in the nineteenth century.⁶

One of the most recent articles on the topic by Veronika Klimova draws attention to an important fact that though the earliest known Karaite sources date back to the late fifteenth century and describe the medieval life of the Karaites in Trakai, they do not record the arrival of the Karaites in Lithuania.⁷ The preserved correspondence with other communities was concerned with Halachic questions, rather than the establishment of their community in Trakai. Possibly, the arrival of the Karaites in Trakai was not an extraordinary event but rather a common practice among Diaspora communities, fitting into existing migration tendencies, which led to the fact that it was not widely discussed in communal correspondence. However, in the vast majority of the texts which deal with the Karaite arrival in the GDL the legend was repeatedly quoted when the beginning of the community was concerned,⁸ even though it cannot be established through reliable sources.

In the historiography which analyses the Karaite settlement in Trakai, two main tendencies can be identified: (1) It is considered to be a result of a political campaign of Grand Duke Witold against the Golden Horde, as the legend disseminated by the Karaite community states; often some parallels are drawn up between the settlement of the Karaites and Tatars in the GDL, arguing that the possible date of migration, the place of departure, and the vernacular used by those communities are very similar and therefore prove that their arrival to the GDL was similar. This approach meant

3 *Ioannis Dlugossii Annales*, lib. 10, p. 221. The reason for the establishment of this legend by, firstly and foremostly, the Karaite communal leaders and scholars will be shortly discussed below. The whole process of adoption of this legend, its cultural and social context, is discussed in Troskovaite, 'Myth as a Means of Coexistence'; Troskovaite, 'Lenkijos ir Lietuvos'.

4 Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*.

5 Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites'.

6 Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites', p. 31.

7 Klimova, 'Karaite Settlement in Medieval Lithuania', pp. 171–72.

8 Bezekavičienė, 'Jie saugojo Trakų pilį'; Harviainen, 'Lietuvos karaimai'; Kobeckaitė, *Lietuvos karaimai*; Sykała, 'Z państwa Chazarów na Wybrzeże Gdańskie'; Szyszman, 'Osadnictwo karaimskie i tatarskie'; Szyszman, *Osadnictwo karaimskie*; Tyszkiewicz, 'Karaimi litewscy w czasach Witolda'; Šaknys and Lapinskaitė, 'Lietuvos karaimai'; and many others.

that scholars tended to search for sources which showed the reliability of the legend, rather than critically assessing its probability. This approach came to dominate the historiography in the first half of the twentieth century and was mainly supported by Karaite scholars. It also fitted very well with the community's national narrative, which sought to strengthen their ethnic identity and foster their integration into the dominant Polish society. (2) The critics of the above-mentioned approach point out the fact that there is an absence of sources.⁹ However, this methodology is not that common; they principally seek to analyse the existing sources in order to prove that they are insufficient and to express criticism of the prevailing approaches to the historiography which supports the legend of the arrival of the Karaites, but they lack any alternative solutions for answering these questions.

In this essay I will argue that placing the process of Karaite migration within the context of Jewish migration to eastern Europe can help our understanding. To achieve this, I will examine Karaite migration and their settlement in Trakai, as well as in other main communities — Lutsk, Halicz (Ukr. Galič) — in parallel with the appearance of Jewish settlements in the same areas, and the formation of their legal and social status by the rulers of the GDL.

Critique of the Karaite Accounts

The communal tradition is an important source for historians to understand the historical past which the traditional sources did not record. But it would be misleading to assess it as something complete; on the contrary, it shows the attitudes of a particular group to its past rather than its history. The communal traditions also hold ideological meaning; they were a means of consolidating the members of the community. In the case of minority groups, an impact of the dominant society is also visible. It seems that Karaites in the GDL also had their own oral historical tradition, which existed even before the legend under discussion became widespread.

Jacob Mann in his study quoted several sources proving that in the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, the Lithuanian Karaites were convinced that the beginning of their settlement in Trakai dates back to the thirteenth century.¹⁰ Similarly, the communal traditions of Lutsk and Halycz seem to date the beginning of their history in those places back to the thirteenth century.¹¹ No matter the actual date of the establishment of these communities, it is clear that at least in the main Karaite settlements the thirteenth century prevails as the date of their settlement. The same can be said about the Poniewież (Lith. Panevėžys) community, which was often mentioned together with the settlement of Trakai in the legend of the Karaite arrival in the GDL. Such a coincidence may not be accidental; it serves as evidence of the existence of a common legend regarding the arrival of the Karaites (Jews?) in the

⁹ See Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites'.

¹⁰ Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, p. 557.

¹¹ Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, pp. 581, 586.

territory of the GDL, which was gradually changing during the years of its existence as an oral tradition. This would help to explain how the figure of Witold appeared in this unhistorical story mentioned above. It seems that the figure of the Lithuanian grand duke was artificially introduced in the oral history of the Karaites in the seventeenth century because of the growing respect for him in both Christian and non-Christian populations.¹² The first of such examples was the note of Ezra ben Nissan,¹³ a Karaite from Birze (Lith. Biržai),¹⁴ who explained that Karaites were brought to the GDL and settled in the present territory of Lithuania by Vytautas already in 1218 (*sic!*), and in 1242 (*sic!*) a few hundred people were resettled from Crimea to Halycz.¹⁵ Another similar example was an appeal of 1790–1792 by Lutsk Karaites to the delegates of the Four-Year Diet, the transcript of which was first published by Meyer Bałaban.¹⁶ The document claimed that ‘we [Karaites] were brought in by Witold to Lithuania, and by Jagiełło to Poland, and for a few centuries we in Volhynia, city of Łutsk, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Troki, Poniewież, and Nowemiaszto, reside’. Although the date is not indicated, the fact that the Poniewież community is mentioned brings us to the assumption that again the legend refers to the thirteenth century. It seems that the tradition remained unchanged in the first half of the nineteenth century, when Mordechai Sultański from Łutsk wrote that in 1218 (*sic!*) Witold brought 483 families from Solchat in Crimea to the GDL: 330 families were settled in Trakai, and 153 in Poniewież.¹⁷

In the legend under discussion, the communities of Halycz and Lutsk are also mentioned. However, in the communities themselves the oral traditions about their arrival and settlement in these places varied. If we presume that the legend told by Mordechai Sultański,¹⁸ who himself was from Lutsk, was familiar to most of the Karaites living there, the figure of Grand Duke Witold and his role in settling the Karaites in this town was well established. In this story, Grand Duke Vytautas brought the Karaites from Crimea in 1286 (*sic!*) and settled them in Trakai and Lutsk. It seems that the Trakai and Lutsk Karaites were already sharing the same tradition of their arrival in the GDL in the nineteenth century, though the dates, indicated in the legends, of the beginning of their settlements vary from 1218/1219 and 1242/1243 to 1286.¹⁹ The differences in dates, again, serve as proof that there was a certain legend, common at least to some of the Karaites in the GDL, to which the figure of Vytautas was added in later periods. However, in Halycz, though mentioned in many versions

12 For more about the formation of the image of Witold the Great in the Lithuanian society, see Mickūnaitė, *Vytautas Didysis*.

13 Kizilov, ‘Karaite Joseph Ezra Dubitskii and King John III Sobieski’.

14 The first Karaite settlement (around 1602) established in the beginning of the Karaite migration from Trakai.

15 Kizilov, ‘The Arrival of the Karaites’, p. 29; Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, pp. 796, 815, 1022.

16 Bałaban, ‘Karaici w Polsce’, pp. 337–39.

17 Sultański, from Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, p. 556. See also Bałaban, *Karaici w Polsce*, p. 5.

18 Sultański, *Zecher Caddikim*, pp. 108–10; Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, p. 581.

19 Kizilov, *Karaites of Galicia*, p. 36.

of the Karaite arrival legends, there was not a unified attitude to the beginning of their settlement: different chronologies and circumstances are mentioned. One states that the Karaites came to Halicz from the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, which brings us to a much later period of the community's establishment and another origin. The second one, written down by Halycz hazzan Samuel ben Moses in the eighteenth century, almost corresponds with the theory of Ezra ben Nisan, which states that Vytautas invaded Crimea for the first time in 1218–1219 and brought 483 Karaite families to Trakai, Nowemiasto, and Poniewież, whereas after the second invasion in 1242–1243, 380 Karaite families settled in Halycz.²⁰ The third version, presented by Abraham Levi Leonowicz, describes the beginning of the community with the peace treaty between Duke Daniel and the chan of the Golden Horde Batu, who allowed Daniel to settle eighty Karaites in his town.²¹

It must be noted that though until the nineteenth century there were different legends of the Karaite arrival in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, all of them maintain the same feature — it was claimed that Karaites were brought to a certain place by the ruler.²² In the case of the communities of Trakai, Lutsk, and, likely, Poniewież, Birże, and Nowemiasto, it is noticeable that the plot of the arrival legend to a large extent is similar except for the varying dates of establishment. However, all of the above-mentioned examples dated the establishment of the Karaite communities back to the thirteenth century. But there might be one important difference — the date of the inclusion of the figure of Vytautas in the story, which seems to appear later in Lutsk than in the communities residing in the GDL. Such delay may be determined by the fact that in the seventeenth century Lutsk was already part of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland (after Lublin Union, 1569) and the image of Vytautas may have been of secondary importance in that social and cultural context, while in the GDL he was perceived as an ideal ruler and the father of the state. However, these considerations require a broader analysis of more reliable sources to make general conclusions on this issue.

The Karaite and Rabbinate Migration Tendencies and their Settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Like other oriental groups, for example the Armenians and Tatars, the Karaites arrived in the GDL from the East, which was also a reason why many scholars researched the peculiarities of Karaite and Tatar migration to this region. However, small groups of Rabbinate Jews also came from the East, whereas most of them arrived from the West. The direction of their migration — which places they moved from — resulted in the peculiarities of these communities. The two communities had distinct reasons for migration; as S. Stampfer demonstrated for the Rabbinate communities, they migrated

20 Kizilov, *Karaites of Galicia*, p. 34.

21 Kizilov, *Karaites of Galicia*, p. 34.

22 Kizilov, 'The Arrival of the Karaites', p. 31.

after facing economic and demographic pressure, whereas the Karaites moved as a result of economic competition with the Rabbinite Jews, as the case of Lviv shows.²³ Despite this, the Karaites actually appeared in the GDL around the same time as the Rabbinite Jews. The Karaite communities in Trakai and Lutsk were established approximately at the same time in the early fifteenth century, whereas that of Halycz appeared later in the sixteenth century. The smaller communities like Nowemiasto and Birze appeared in the first half of the seventeenth century during the mass migration of the Karaites from Trakai. The primary Karaite communities settled in the towns of Trakai, Lutsk, and Halycz and proliferated from these places.²⁴ The north-easterly migration within the GDL also corresponds with the peculiarities of the foundation of new Jewish settlements in the GDL. Like the Rabbinite Jews, the Karaites were leaving the state-owned towns, for example, Trakai, in order to establish themselves in the private towns of the Lithuanian magnates. The best example is the case of the Radziwiłł (Lith. Radvilos) estates of Birze and Nowemiasto, where both Rabbinite and Karaite communities already existed at the beginning of the seventeenth century. These common patterns suggest that there are other possible forms of Karaite migration to be discussed than that recorded in the most popular legend.

There are several common features of the places where the main Karaite communities had settled in the GDL. First of all, it must be stressed that all these towns belonged to the grand dukes of Lithuania and were important seats of their estates in the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. Despite the fact that both Halycz and Lutsk were mentioned in the sources much earlier than Trakai, they did not become important until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when they became administrative centres of the GDL. The rulers built castles there and established places of residence; these towns were also granted the Magdeburg law: Halycz in 1367, Lutsk in 1432, and Trakai in 1409. At that time the latter, as well as Halycz, were established in the vicinity of earlier settlements, known as Old Halycz and Old Trakai. It seems that the granting of the Magdeburg law for Halycz and Trakai stimulated its social, economic, and cultural development and promoted the appearance of Jewish communities (whether Rabbinite or Karaite) there. The case of Trakai is especially eloquent — the granting of the Magdeburg law occurred at the same time as the construction of the island castle at the end of the fourteenth century, when an internal power struggle took place. The new castle not only became Grand Duke Vytautas'

23 Stampfer, 'Violence and the Migration of Ashkenazi Jews'.

24 By *primary communities*, I mean the first settlements of the Karaites that appeared in this region and remained important up to this day in eastern Europe. Of course, such description is rather conditional, because during the long period of Karaite settlement in eastern Europe, several more communities played an important role: the Nowemiasto Karaites were the largest and most influential community in the GDL during the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries but later became less significant; in the twentieth century the Vilnius community became important and remains so today. The exceptional case of Lviv must be mentioned — it seems that the community of Halicz had begun with the migrants from Lviv, when economic competition with the Rabbinite Jews drove them away from the city. Despite that, the communities of Trakai, Lutsk, and Halycz were the first Karaite settlements in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that remain up to this day. For more on the history of Galician Karaites, see Kizilov, *Karaites of Galicia*.

palace, but also helped to foster the development of the town's administrative and political power. It made it a centre of the Trakai voivodship, which was established in 1413, and it therefore accomplished in this way the main attributes which attracted newcomers: castle, administrative centre, and a Magdeburg town. For this reason, it seems rational to think that Karaites could establish a community in Trakai after 1409 and not earlier.²⁵ It is only Lutsk where the Rabbinite Jews seemed to settle before the Magdeburg law was granted for the Christian population. Despite that, the town retained some of the residential and political features from the time of their settlement. This scheme corresponds to the general tendency of the development of the towns in the GDL during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the Magdeburg law was granted to many towns which belonged to the grand duke and that became centres of Jewish immigration.²⁶ Jews were an important factor in the urbanization of the GDL: their engagement in trade, monetary operations, and crafts serviced the ruling elite, as well as the Catholic Church. The assumption that there were similar patterns in the establishment of the Karaite and Rabbinite communities may attest to the fact that the Karaites appeared in Halycz and, most probably, Lutsk about half a century later than the Rabbinite community, presumably under the same legal regulations and economic conditions. However, it is difficult to distinguish between those two communities, because in the Christian sources both were referred to as Jews.²⁷

One more important aspect of the Jewish settlements in the towns of the GDL is the nature and content of the Magdeburg law. Aivaras Poška's research has shown that in many cases the Magdeburg law, issued by the grand duke to a particular town, had chapters for the non-Christian population as well. This was the case in Kremenec, which gained a privilege in 1438, and it was granted to the local population of Christians, Tatars, and Jews. In the case of Lutsk, the Magdeburg privilege, granted by the Polish king and the grand duke of Lithuania Władysław II Jagiełło in 1432, stated that the local Armenians and Jews were to enjoy the same rights as those of Kraków and Lviv.²⁸ The case of the Trakai Karaites, on the one hand, fits this standard — to grant the Magdeburg law to a certain community(ies) as a form of self-government — but on the other hand, goes far beyond that: as long as the Magdeburg law for the Christian part of the town was already granted, the Karaites of Trakai received this law separately for their community and formed an independent town within the already existing one. This fact also serves as proof that the Karaites could have

25 Though the Trakai peninsula castle was built by Grand Duke Kęstutis as early as in 1382–1383, the settlement was only at the beginning of its development as a town. For more about the connection between the building of a castle and further development of its surrounding settlements into towns, see Volungevičius, *Pilies šešėlyje*.

26 About the dispersion of Jewish settlements in the GDL, see Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, *Žydai Lietuvos Didžiosios*, pp. 128–51.

27 Verbickienė, 'Ką rado Trakuose Žilberas de Lanua'.

28 Poška, 'Žydai xv–xvi a. LDK miestuose', p. 27: 'Iudaeis vero et armenis tale, quale habent iudaei et armeni, in civitatibus nostris Cracoviensi aut Leopoliensi degentes, damus, donamus et largimur gratiose, exceptis theloneis, solvi solitis, quae solitis, quae pro nobis et successoribus nostris reservamus.'

hardly formed a community before 1409, when the Magdeburg law was granted to the Christian population of Trakai, otherwise they would have been mentioned in it, as was the case with Kremenec.

However, there are some differences in the dispersal of Karaites in the territory of the GDL in comparison with the situation in the Rabbinite communities. The latter usually migrated from large, well-established economic centres to smaller nearby places after they experienced demographic and economic tension in their communities.²⁹ A case in point is the city of Vilnius (Pol. Wilno), from which members of the Jewish community, according to the first general Jewish census data of 1764–1765, were dispersed to small towns, even up to fifty kilometres away from the city such as Szumsk (Lith. Šumskas), Miedniki (Lith. Medininkai), Turgieli (Lith. Turgeliai), Soleczniki (Lith. Šalčininkai), Miejszagola (Lith. Maišiagala), Niemenczyn (Lith. Nemenčinė), etc. Moreover, the Jews who lived in these small towns that were prescribed to Vilnius kahal made around 75 per cent of the total population of the Vilnius community.³⁰ This is only one of many such examples in the GDL — this means of community development may be seen in many bigger towns, like Keydany (Lith. Kėdainiai), Jurbork (Lith. Jurbarkas), Kowno (Lith. Kaunas), etc. The Karaite migration in the GDL and the Polish Crown, however, was not always similar. It is true in the case of Ukr. Lviv, where the Karaites experienced competition with the Rabbinites and in the middle of the sixteenth century had probably moved to Halicz, which did not have that much Jewish settlement at that time.³¹ However, the case of Trakai is quite the opposite: the Trakai Karaites chose to move to the north, establishing communities in distant places, such as Nowemiasto (1658), Birże (1602), Poniewież (1676), and Poswol (1643), because of the deteriorating economic situation in Trakai, especially after its devastation during the war with Moscow (1654–1667), which led to a decline of the town and encouraged Karaites to migrate; in 1667 only seven Karaite households remained in Trakai.³²

We may argue that Karaite migration was fostered by two main factors: political instability that negatively impacted on the economic activities of the Karaites and encouraged their migration to the north of the country; and economic competition with the Rabbinite Jews, which they experienced in the newly inhabited places, such as Birże, later Nowemiasto, Poniewież.³³ It was external factors that fostered Karaite migration within the borders of the GDL rather than internal demographic or economic tensions, which were the case in the Rabbinite communities.³⁴

The pattern of Karaite migration, similar to the pattern of Rabbinite Jewish migration to eastern Europe, was closely related with the development of trade

29 Nadav, *The Jews of Pinsk*, p. 24; Stampfer, 'Violence and the Migration of Ashkenazi Jews'.

30 Rewizja of Vilnius Jewish community; see Vilnius, Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas, State Treasury Collection, file 3726, pp. 2–27.

31 Kizilov, *Karaites of Galicia*, pp. 38–43.

32 Baliulis, Miškinis, and Mikulionis, *Trakų miestas ir pilys*, pp. 100–102.

33 For more about Karaite and Rabbinite economic competition in these towns, see Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*.

34 Stampfer, 'Violence and the Migration of Ashkenazi Jews'.

routes in Europe.³⁵ I would like to draw attention to one of these routes, which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries went through Lviv and Brześć Litewski to Vilnius. Lviv and Brześć Litewski were well known trading and export centres in eastern Europe, where large Jewish communities operated.³⁶ The reason why the Karaites established themselves in Halycz and Lutsk may be their relative proximity to these market centres. As long as communities were small, and had to compete with both Rabbinite traders and Christian merchants, they might have found themselves in a position of intermediaries, taking goods from trade centres, which are relatively close but at the same time far enough for an ordinary peasant or townsmen to get there on an everyday basis, and distributing them in the area.³⁷ If this is true, the Trakai Karaites had found themselves in a favourable position because in the privilege, issued in 1441 by Casimir IV Jagiellon (1427–1492), the Karaites were allowed not to pay custom taxes when they entered the town. It meant fewer expenses — an important advantage in economic competition with the Rabbinites. This may have been a good reason to seek the extension of this privilege to all Karaites, which was achieved in 1646 when Władysław IV Vasa confirmed this Magdeburg privilege to all the Karaite communities in the GDL, and supported the establishment of new Karaite settlements: as well as the afore-mentioned ones, they settled in such small towns like Swiate Ozero (Lith. Šventežeris, 1660),³⁸ Szaty (Lith. Šėta, 1664),³⁹ and Krone (Lith. Kruonis, 1660). However, all of them vanished probably because of the devastating consequences of the Swedish invasion and occupation of the commonwealth during the Second Northern War (1655–1660), growing economic competition with the Rabbinites, and the demographic decline after the plague of 1710.⁴⁰

The Dynamics of the Size of a Community in Relation to its Establishment

The number of Karaite migrants to the GDL mentioned in the legend — more than three hundred families, which may come to around two thousand people — is meant to show the significance of their arrival and the large number of settlers. It is impossible to determine even the approximate number of Karaites in the fifteenth century, as the first reliable estimates only come from the middle of the eighteenth

35 On the relationships of trade routes and Jewish migration tendencies, see Stampfer, 'Violence and the Migration of Ashkenazi Jews'.

36 The first privilege in the GDL for Jews was granted for the Brześć community in 1388; it is the earliest Jewish settlement in this territory.

37 I came to this idea after the presentation of Shaul Stampfer at the 17th Congress of Jewish Studies in August 2017.

38 Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, p. 579.

39 Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, p. 579.

40 For more information on the situation of Jews and Karaims in Biržai, see Bardach, 'Żydzi w Birżach'; Karvelis, 'Radvilų Biržų'; Karvelis, 'Žydai, karaimai ir totoriai Radvilų Biržų'; Karvelis, 'Biržų miestas'.

century.⁴¹ Unfortunately the estimated number of nearly four hundred Karaites in the middle of the eighteenth century is not that useful to us because it reflects the size of the community after a devastating plague. However, we can at least imagine the size of the community by examining the settlements of the Rabbinite Jews in Polish towns in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

As the recent study on Jewish settlement in medieval Poland by Hanna Zaremska has shown, in the beginning of the sixteenth century the number of Jews in the crown was less than six thousand.⁴² The article by Shaul Stampfer suggests that the largest settlements in the Polish lands, such as Lwów or Kraków, had about six hundred residents, while the smallest consisted of only a few families or even less.⁴³ It is important to note that the above-mentioned cities were the places with the greatest concentration of Jews and differed dramatically in size from other Jewish communities in smaller towns, even though they were also important trading points in the state. This counting, even approximate, is very important in understanding the migration and settlement of minority groups in Poland and the GDL, the size of their settlements, and their growth and spread in the territory under discussion.

As was already discussed, there are many similarities between Karaite and Rabbinite migration to the GDL in the early fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The implied size of the early settlements of both groups and its dynamics in a later period (the eighteenth century) also attest to these similarities and, at the same time, contradict the legendary story of the Karaite arrival, which suggests to us that the primary community in Trakai consisted of about 380 families, which gives us an unrealistic number of close to 2000 people or even more.⁴⁴ This number corresponds neither to the general tendencies of Jewish migration to the region nor even to the later size of community.⁴⁵ We do not possess reliable data about the size of Karaite settlements in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania until 1764–1765, but occasional numbers suggest that Trakai, as well as other Karaite settlements, were always small in number. For example, from 1670 to 1694 Karaites paid 2 per cent of the general poll tax, assigned

41 The first general Jewish census of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was carried out in 1764–1765. The study of Karaite census: Troskovaitė, 'Social Characteristics of the Karaite Community'.

42 Zaremska, *Żydzi w średniowiecznej Polsce*, p. 263.

43 Stampfer, 'Settling Down in Eastern Europe'. I am grateful for the author for the possibility of reading a pre-print version of the article.

44 Even using cautious calculations (five people per family), it brings us to 1900 Karaites. According to the first general Jewish census (1764–1765), an average number of Karaites in the family was seven. In this case we have more than 2600 members in the community in the beginning of the fifteenth century, which is four times more than the already discussed largest Jewish settlements in the trade centres of Poland. Such numbers are also presented by the authors of the study on Trakai/Troki, by Baliulis, Miškinis, and Mikulionis, *Trakų miestas ir pilys*, p. 49. They also estimated that the population of the town in the fifteenth century must have been around 4000 inhabitants.

45 It should be noted that we do not possess any data about the general population of the town at the beginning of the fifteenth century. What is known is related to the taxation of the town. By these measures, Trakai was the third highest payer of the state-initiated taxes in the GDL, whereas after a hundred years, they were in the eighth position; see Baliulis, Miškinis, and Mikulionis, *Trakų miestas ir pilys*, p. 64.

to all Jews living in the GDL. Though this does not indicate the precise size of the Karaite community, it at least suggests to us the proportion of the Karaites and Rabbinites within the Jewish community. Taxation issues and the proportion of tax shared among Karaites and Rabbinites were discussed by J. Mann in his study, and even though it is difficult to relate it to the precise size of the Karaite communities, it can be assumed that the amount of the tax more or less corresponded to the size of the community. This was the case later, after the implementation of the general Jewish census of 1764–1765, when the poll tax sum was assigned according to the number of Jews in the community. The census indicated 117 Karaites older than a year living in Trakai in 1764.⁴⁶ Even taking into account the significant population loss during the plague of 1710, it is hardly possible that the community had ever reached the levels indicated in the legend. Instead, we should view the legend of the Karaite arrival as part of their historical narrative, where the number of people indicated implies the imagined size of the community at its golden age of existence, while the figure of Vytautas is a sign of the prestigious status of this group which in real terms was small and maintained limited possibilities of action in the dominant society.

Tatar Migration Tendencies and their Settlement in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The plot of the legend of Karaite arrival and settlement in the GDL is very similar to the one that prevails in the oral tradition of the local Tatars. This similarity arose because of the efforts of the Karaites to invent their secular history, which was based on the resemblance of the Turkic languages that were used by Karaites and Tatars, at least until the sixteenth century. Additionally, both communities arrived in the GDL at about the same time. These circumstances were intensively used by the Karaites in the 1920s and 1930s to argue that their ancestors were brought by Vytautas together with Tatars at the same time, to the same place, and for the same purpose. It is not a coincidence that the emerging Karaite studies in interwar Poland, which focused on an intensive study of the Turkic language used by the local Karaites, as well as on the anthropology and their origin, were mostly undertaken by scholars of Karaite origin.⁴⁷ This is how this legend appeared in academic discourse and the historiography.⁴⁸ However, it means it is necessary to briefly discuss the emergence of Tatar settlements in the GDL in comparison with those of the Karaites. The issue

46 The Karaite census data can be found in Vilnius, Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas, Old Manuscripts, Collection of Lithuanian Treasury Commission, file 3737 pp. 1–4^v, 24–28^v.

47 We can trace some similarities between the establishment of Karaite and Tatar communities in the GDL: it is more than likely that Karaites migrated from the same linguistic area as did the Tatars, which can be determined by certain similarities between their vernacular languages. The chronology of the peak of the influx of both communities, likewise the Jewish Rabbinites, also coincided.

48 One of many examples — an important study of Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na w Litwie i Polsce*, where the author bases his knowledge of Karaite settlement in the GDL on quotations of works by A. Zajączkowski and S. Szpalski, see the notes on pp. 149–50.

of Tatar migration has been widely discussed by many, starting from the studies of Michalo Lituanus (Lith. Mykolas Lietuvis) and Tadeusz Czacki to the most recent studies on Tatar history,⁴⁹ not to mention the first reference to Tatars in the GDL by the aforementioned Jan Długosz. Though there is not much to add to these studies, it is worth paying attention to some aspects of their migration to the GDL in the context of the general influx of non-Christians to this territory and especially to the already discussed Karaite migration patterns.

The period of Vytautas' reign (Grand Duke of Lithuania, 1392–1430) marked the active emergence of non-Christians in the territory of the GDL. Even before that period, in 1388 he granted a privilege for the Brest Jewish community and began a consistent policy of establishment of Jews and Tatars in the lands under his rule.⁵⁰ Evidently, the issuing of this privilege maintained a long-term strategy of attracting Jews to the GDL, which can be proved by the fact that it was expanded to all Jews of the country in 1507 by King Sigismund August (Lith. Žygimantas Augustas). It is also persuasive in the case of the Tatars, whose arrival corresponded to the active military campaigns carried out by Vytautas beginning from the last years of the fourteenth century until his death in 1430, even though Tatars, contrary to other non-Christians, did not obtain any privileges, given either as a general privilege to all Tatars of the GDL or to a particular local community.⁵¹ Such an undefined legal status seems to be atypical of the state's policy towards non-Christians. On the other hand, the state's (and the ruler's) relations were defined through the right to hold a certain land property, given to those Tatars who maintained military conscription, which was not the case for both Jews and Karaites. This unique way of regulating the community was related both to the means and reasons for the Tatar arrival in the GDL and the functions given to them. In comparison to the establishment of Jewish and Karaite communities in the territory of the GDL, the migration of the Tatars was intensive and lasted for a relatively short period of time — the apogee of which came at the end of the fourteenth century and ended soon after the death of Vytautas in 1430.⁵² From the middle of the fifteenth century, the number of Tatar settlements did not increase dramatically and was determined by the natural demographic development of the community and increasing assimilation into the dominant society of the GDL, contrary to the enlargement and the spread of Jewish and Karaite communities throughout the territory of the state. Besides, the Muslim Tatars were settled in several centres that were strategically, politically, and militarily important — the towns of Trakai, Nowogródek (Bel. Navahrudak), Grodno, and their vicinity. These places served as the points of military mobilization and as advanced posts in the state's defence system. The main function of the Tatars who lived there

49 Lietuvis, *Apie totorių*; Czacki, 'O Tatarach'; Konopacki, *Życie religijne*.

50 Lazutka and Gudavičius, *Privilegia evreiam*.

51 Kryczyński, *Tatarzy litewscy*, pp. 14–15.

52 Jan Tyszkiewicz identified two main waves of Tatar migration to the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania: the establishment of small settlements of traders in the eleventh–fourteenth centuries, and the second wave of Tatar prisoners of war in the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries. See Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na w Litwie i Polsce*, p. 201.

was to provide military service for the grand duke; they received landed property in return for their participation in military service.⁵³ It was this permission to exploit land which prevented the Tatars from migrating internally and establishing new communities in the territory of the GDL, which would be distant from already existing ones. It also determined occupational and social disparities within the community. Those who were able to cooperate with the grand dukes of Lithuania by undertaking military service (whether personally or by providing mercenaries) in exchange for a right to exploit a certain land estate formed a separate socially advanced group. They enjoyed social mobility and sometimes assimilated into Christian society through baptism and intermarriage with Christian partners, whereas other Tatars remained dependent on their wealthier Muslim fellows and were engaged in agriculture, mainly gardening, small crafts, or services. Members of this group sometimes established themselves in the suburbs of larger towns in search for better engagement in the labour market and remained outside the legal regulations of the state, except that of taxation.⁵⁴ It is likely that this social differentiation was the main reason why Tatars did not manage to organize themselves into an institutionalized community and gain privileges as did other non-Christians in the GDL.

As we see, the patterns of Jewish settlement in the GDL differ significantly from that of the Muslim Tatars, as did their role in the economics of the state. It was the state and the ruler who defined the legal status of non-Christians and determined the conditions for their settlement and residence in the country. In this aspect, the Karaites and Rabbinites had shared a common understanding as Jews, which led to the similarities in their legal status. The most vivid example of this is the sharing of privileges issued for the Karaite community in Trakai with the Vilnius Rabbinate kahal, who wanted to gain its confirmation for their own benefit. The subjugation of the Karaites to the Lithuanian Vaad (Vaad Medinat Lita, 1623–1764) also confirms their treatment in similar terms in taxation matters. All these circumstances are derived from sources relating to the historical practices of other communities, rather than directly those of the Karaite community.

Conclusions

After analysing the silent patterns of Karaite settlement in the GDL and their economic activities in the general context of Jewish migration and settlement in the region, it can be concluded that there are many similarities in these processes, though the direction of migration was different. The Rabbinic Jews mainly migrated from north-western Europe to the East to establish themselves in the territory of Poland and later the GDL, whereas the Karaites arrived from the south, together with other oriental communities like the Armenians and Tatars, as well as small groups of Rabbinate Jews. This is one of the many reasons why the Karaite arrival in the GDL was so easily

53 Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na w Litwie i Polsce*, pp. 144–70.

54 Tyszkiewicz, *Tatarzy na w Litwie i Polsce*, pp. 201–22.

compared to that of the Tatars, because of the parallels between their vernacular languages. However, the direction did not play a major role in the migration and the establishment of the Karaite communities in the GDL; it was the state's policy towards Jews, the establishment of their social and legal status, and the development of their economic activities that remain important in understanding the migration of the Karaites in the GDL and the establishment of their communities in particular places. The Karaites established themselves in the territory of the GDL on the same legal basis as the rest of the Jews — by gaining a privilege which permitted them to settle in certain places and a right to engage in economic activities and to maintain their religion and customs. The later development of the Karaite settlements after their migration from the communal centre in Trakai had common Jewish patterns as well — the main stimulus was the potential market for their economic activities, which was mainly small trade and the leasing of inns, even though the main reason for migration was not an inner competition among Karaites, but economic pressure from the Rabbinic Jews.

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