

INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND THE FUNCTIONING
OF MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES

EARLY EUROPEAN RESEARCH

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Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Functioning of Multi-Ethnic Societies

*Cohesion in Multi-Ethnic Societies in Europe
from c. 1000 to the Present, II*

Edited by

PRZEMYSŁAW WISZEWSKI

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Inter-Ethnic Relations within Multi-Ethnic Societies Przemysław Wiszewski	9
Organizing Violence: Peace and War in Twelfth-Century Catalonia Maria Bonet DONATO	27
The Andalusian Urban Elites and the Almoravids in the Upper Border of al-Andalus during the Twelfth Century: An Example of Multi-Ethnic Coexistence Jesús BRUFAL-SUCARRAT	57
Shaping Identities in a Common Cultural Background: Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Portuguese Kingdom Maria Filomena LOPES DE BARROS	73
Ethnic and Religious Minorities and the Portuguese Military Orders as Recorded in the <i>Pontificia Corpora</i> (Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries) Paula PINTO COSTA and Joana LENCART	97
Social and Economic Relations between Sardinians and Aragonese in the Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries Luciano GALLINARI	115
How to Live Together? Germans and Poles in Silesia in the Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries Przemysław WISZEWSKI	141
Between Coexistence and Persecution: Economic Activity and the Cohesion of Multi-Ethnic Societies in Cities of the Polish Territories (between the Thirteenth and the First Part of the Sixteenth Century) Grzegorz MYŚLIWSKI	159

Ethnic-Economic Relations within the Cities of Lublin, Zamość, and Lviv in the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries Andrzej Pleszczyński	209
Economic and Social Aspects of Multi-Ethnic Transylvania during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries Cosmin POPA-GORJANU	227
The Dracula and the Others: The Multi-Ethnic Character of the Hungarian Political Elite until the Fifteenth Century Daniel BAGI	249
The Medical Marketplace as a Way of Communicating beyond Religion: Non-Christian Medical Practitioners in the Society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Monika RAMONAITĖ	263
Towns as Areas of Ethnic Communication and Competition: The Case of Karaites in Trakai/Troki and Vilnius/Wilno/Vilna in the Seventeenth to Twentieth Centuries Dovilė TROSKOVAITĖ	291
A Gift or 'Poklon dla Pana' as One of the Ways of Building Social Cohesion: The Case of the Vilnius Jewish Community in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century Jurgita ŠIAUČIŪNAITĖ-VERBICKIENĖ	309
Façades of a Multi-Ethnic Empire: Presenting and Publicizing the Coronation of the 'All-Russian Emperor', Alexander III (1883) Endre SASHALMI	321
Polish American Parishes of the Nineteenth to Twenty-First Centuries and their Role in Shaping Polish American Identity and Status Joanna WOJDON	339
Concluding Remarks: Inter-Ethnic Cooperation — Fluid Networks of Everyday Practices Przemysław WISZEWSKI	357
Index	363

List of Illustrations

Figures

Figure 2.1.	The Almoravid Empire and its expansion. Image by the author.	59
Figure 2.2.	The Almoravid Empire in al-Andalus. Image by the author.	60
Figure 2.3.	NDVI image of Huahbala's <i>almúnya</i> . Source: Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya.	68
Figure 2.5.	Detail of Muslim ashlar in Sant Ruf Absis. Image by the author.	69
Figure 2.4.	Absis of Sant Ruf, and Muslim ashlar on the bottom of the wall. Image by the author.	69
Figure 10.1.	First page of Vienna Illuminated Chronicle / <i>Chronicon Pictum Vindobonense</i> / <i>Képes Krónika</i> . Source: Wikimedia Commons, < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:K%C3%A9pes_Kr%C3%B3nika_1360.jpg >. Image in the public domain.	253
Figure 15.1.	Immaculate Conception Church in Panna Maria, Texas. Photo by Krzysztof Wojdon (2018).	340
Figure 15.2.	Holy Trinity Church in Chicago. Photo by Krzysztof Wojdon (2014).	347

Maps and Charts

Map 1.1.	The Iberian Peninsula in 1195. Source: < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P%C3%A9ninsule_ib%C3%A9rique_en_1195.png >. Elryck, CC BY-SA 4.0.	28
Map 2.1.	The Iberian Peninsula between 1037 and 1065. Source: < https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P%C3%A9ninsule_ib%C3%A9rique_en_1065.png >. Elryck, CC BY-SA 4.0.	58
Map 3.1.	Muslims in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Source: Maria Filomena Lopes de Barros, <i>Tempos e Espaços de Mouros: A Minoria Muçulmana no Reino Português (Séculos XII a XV)</i> (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, 2007), pp. 138, 142, and 145.	75
Map 4.1.	The Iberian Five Kingdoms (14 th century). Source: Julio López-Davalillo Larrea, <i>Atlas Histórico de España y Portugal desde el Paleolítico hasta el siglo XX</i> (Madrid: Ed. Síntesis, 1999), p. 117.	98
Chart 4.1.	The chronological distribution of the <i>pontificia corpora</i> through the centuries.	101

- Map 5.1. Kingdom of Aragon: Mediterranean Expansion. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reiaume_d%27Aragon_-_Expansion_en_Mediterran%C3%A8a.png>. Nicolas Eynaud, CC BY-SA 3.0. 116
- Map 5.2. Crown of Aragon and Kingdom of Sardinia. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reino_de_Cerdenya_en_a_Corona_d%27Arag%C3%B3n.svg>. Willtron, CC BY-SA 3.0. 116
- Map 6.1. Silesia 1294–1296. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Silesia_1294-1296.svg>. CC BY-SA 2.5. 142
- Map 7.1. Poland, Lithuania, and the Teutonic state at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Poland,_Lithuania_and_Teutonic_state_at_the_beginning_of_the_XV_es.svg>. derivative work: Rowanwindwhistler, CC BY-SA 3.0. 160
- Map 8.1. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1764. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Polish-Lithuanian_Commonwealth_in_1764.PNG>. Mathiasrex, Maciej Szczepańczyk, based on layers of Halibutt, CC BY-SA 3.0. 210
- Map 9.1. Administrative division of Transylvania, c. 1111–1867. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Siebenb%C3%BCrgen_1300-1867.jpg. DietG, CC BY-SA 3.0. 228
- Map 10.1. Hungary 1490. Source: <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hungary_1490_\(PL2018\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hungary_1490_(PL2018).png)>. CC BY-SA 4.0. 250
- Map 11.1. The Lithuanian State in the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries. Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lithuanian_state_in_13-15th_centuries.png>. CC BY-SA 2.5. 264
- Map 14.1. Subdivisions of the Russian Empire in 1897. Source: <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subdivisions_of_the_Russian_Empire_in_1897_\(governorate_level,_uyezd_level_and_localities\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Subdivisions_of_the_Russian_Empire_in_1897_(governorate_level,_uyezd_level_and_localities).svg)>. CC BY-SA 4.0. 322

A Gift or 'Poklon dla Pana' as One of the Ways of Building Social Cohesion

The Case of the Vilnius Jewish Community in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

The strategies for shaping relations between minorities analysed in the previous chapter indicated the desire to use ties with the dominant ethnic group in order to ensure a safe position in a multi-ethnic society, also in opposition to other minorities. Obtaining favourable relations with the dominant ethnic group in the political community, especially its elite, was of key importance for the minorities living in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL). Therefore, in this chapter, I would like to present one of the communication mechanisms for establishing and strengthening this type of relationship between the Jewish community and the Christian elite in the GDL.

Introduction

In this chapter, I would like to deal with communication between social groups understood primarily not as information transfer but as bonding and persuading practice with strong pragmatic character. No matter which historical period is discussed, gifts — which are the main object of analysis here — always have a pleasant and favourable effect on the ones who receive them. In the social structure of the eighteenth century and earlier, pleasant, favourably disposing, or loyalty-showing gifts were a common way of maintaining good relationships and communication that also facilitated the overcoming of some everyday issues. In this chapter based on the case of the Vilnius Jewish community, I would like to draw attention to the symbolic and social meaning of practices which have not been widely explored, but which were very common in early modern societies. The subject of analysis is the giving of gifts as an act of communication which bridged the gaps between specific social groups in the GDL and in the same moment was also a means of building cohesion within

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its multi-ethnic society. The main source for this research is an archival manuscript in Polish — an account and description of the revenue and expenditure of the Vilnius kahal, which contains records from 23 June 1787 to 17 March 1788. The main questions discussed below concern communication strategies and the pragmatic ends of these acts performed by the Vilnius Jewish elite: What kind of gifts did the Jewish community give, and what circle of recipients was this practice intended for? What strategies did the Vilnius kahal use in the planning of gift giving, and which aims in context of building cohesion were meant to be achieved?

Historical Context

Due to the fundamental state-initiated changes in community administration, the period following the year 1764 when the convocation Sejm of Warsaw adopted the constitution 'Jewish poll tax' (Pol. *Pogłowne Żydowskie*)¹ was important in the lives of the Jews of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. I have in mind the liquidation or limitation of functions of the Vaads of Poland (formed as a joint Polish Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania self-government institution of Jews in 1583) and Lithuania (as a separate body operating from 1623, Heb. *Vaad Medinat Lita*),² the reform of taxation of the Jews, the first general census of the Jews (which took place in 1764–1765), as well as the process of accounting and the repayment of the debts of the bankrupt community.

In the historiography, the beginning of the indebtedness of the Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is linked to the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth century or the early seventeenth century.³ These processes were the result of social and economic causes, as a result of which the Jewish communities,⁴ who traditionally were lenders, became not only borrowers but also incurred heavy debts. The accurate date of this fundamental turning point that reduced the Jews into an insolvent community cannot be determined due to an absence of sources. It is very likely these were parallel processes in both the GDL and Poland.⁵ The financial situation of the Jewish community and its potential lenders was further complicated by the period of intensive wars and hardship that has left its mark in the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the name of the *Deluge*. Sigismund III Vasa, king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from 1587 to 1632, had claims to the Swedish throne after his father's death and involved the commonwealth in a prolonged war against Sweden to gain control over the province of Livonia. Soon a

1 Constitution for Grand Duchy of Lithuania: *Volumina Legum*, pp. 26–29.

2 Changes in the organization of the Jewish self-government after the dissolution of the Vaads are discussed by Michałowska-Mycielska, *Sejm Żydów Litewskich (1623–1764)*, pp. 289–96.

3 Leszczyński, *Sejm Żydów Korony, 1623–1764*, p. 143; Kalik, 'Patterns of Contacts', p. 103.

4 Private indebtedness is not the subject of this article and is in itself a separate fascinating topic for research.

5 For more about the Jewish debt situation in the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth, see Kalik, 'Patterns of Contacts'.

war against Moscow spread, during which the troops of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich of Moscow occupied Vilnius as the capital of the GDL (1655–1662). As if that was not enough, in 1657 Vilnius was ravaged by a devastating epidemic of plague. According to Israeli researcher Mordechai Nadav, the financial situation of the Lithuanian Jewish community markedly deteriorated around 1700 when it ran short of funds for debt repayments and taxes. In 1700, the community of Vilnius along with other chief communities was a defendant in a number of cases concerning overdue debts heard at the Lithuanian Tribunal (the highest appeal court in the Grand Duchy).⁶ The situation was aggravated by the Northern War (1700–1721): for at least a dozen years of the eighteenth century, communication between communities was disrupted and the connection between chief communities and smaller ones coordinated by them did not exist. It is natural that with increasing demands on the treasury during the war, an ever-rising poll tax was imposed on the Jews.⁷

The written sources originating from the GDL show that both the Jewish community of Vilnius and the Lithuanian Vaad found themselves in a rather complicated financial situation by the middle of the seventeenth century. Considerable amounts of money borrowed more than a hundred years prior from Wojciech Cieciszewski, rector of the Jesuit Vilnius Academy (1646–1649), were recognized as overdue debts of the Jews of Vilnius when their debts were calculated in the late eighteenth century.⁸ The Lithuanian Vaad was incapable of collecting the ever-rising poll tax, and in 1655 in Selcy its representatives were considering how to pay the increased poll tax and complained that there was nobody to borrow money from as they used to do earlier ('meanwhile [...] we have no one to borrow from like in earlier years, everything has to be covered by collecting [money] from the population').⁹ Roman Rybarski, who analysed the functioning of the treasury of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the seventeenth century, paid attention to the fact that in the second half of the century the Jews of the GDL used to delay paying the poll tax or paid it in instalments.¹⁰ The examination of the indebtedness of the Lithuanian Vaad until its liquidation in 1764 carried out by Anna Michałowska-Mycielska suggests that its financial situation was rather difficult in as early as the middle of the seventeenth century and was gradually becoming worse.¹¹ At that time, the lenders of the Lithuanian Vaad included individual Jewish communities, private individuals (Jews both from the GDL and from Poland; a large number of lenders came from the city of Lublin and

6 Nadav, *The Jews of Pinsk, 1506 to 1880*, p. 270.

7 Nadav, *The Jews of Pinsk, 1506 to 1880*, p. 271.

8 Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas (Lithuanian State Historical Archives; hereafter, LVIA), collection 11, index 1, file 1040, p. 27.

9 Dubnow, ed., *Pinkas ha-Medina*, no. 504.

10 Rybarski, *Skarb i pieniądz za Jana Kazimierza, Michala Korybuta i Jana III*, pp. 232–33. The author gives an example that illustrates the payment of the poll tax in 1677: when the Lithuanian Vaad paid to the treasury about 3000 *złoty* of the 20,000 *złoty* payable, a transfer for part of the money — about 10,000 *złoty* — was submitted. It is not known whether it was paid and how the remaining amount of that year's poll tax was paid.

11 Michałowska-Mycielska, *Sejm Żydów Litewskich (1623–1764)*, pp. 244–34.

its surroundings, which, according to the author, can be explained by loan contracts concluded at the time of the famous Lublin fairs), as well as the Christian nobles, religious orders, or individual clergymen.

The data discussed shows that at the level of Jewish self-government and its most influential communities, the situation was rather complex in the second half of the seventeenth century, and borrowing in order to pay the taxes imposed by the state had developed into something of a habit. It has been calculated that the poll tax made up about half of all the expenditure of the Polish Vaad,¹² and it is very likely that a similar proportion might have also been the case in the GDL.¹³ Before 1764, that is, the launch of the process of the calculation and clearance of Jewish debts supervised by the Treasury Commission, the state did not take any interest in the revenue and expenditure of kahals or Vaads and did not control it. The payment and management of state and community taxes was treated as a manifestation of the independence of Jewish self-government at both the local and the state levels. To the state, fiscal relations with a community centralized at the duchy level must have also been more convenient than dealing with separate regional and local groups. The state started taking some interest in the debts of the Jews only in the second half of the eighteenth century, when, according to the calculations of Ignacy Schiper, the debts of Polish and Lithuanian Vaads exceeded 2,450,000 *złoty*.¹⁴ The debts of the Jews of the GDL were not that huge:¹⁵ their overall indebtedness could have reached about 1,000,000 *złoty*.¹⁶

Despite the measures applied by the state, the repayment of Jewish debts to the clergy, fraternities of religious orders, and private individuals — mostly the nobles and magnates — was too slow. Twenty-eight years after the state had triggered steps to control and monitor not only the taxation of the Jews in the state but also the process of the repayment of the community debts, the Four Year Sejm returned to the consideration of the issue so relevant to the nobility and landowners with full force. The Sejm was looking for ways to stabilize the unmanageable situation, because

12 Leszczyński, *Sejm Zydów Korony, 1623–1764*, p. 137.

13 It should necessarily be borne in mind that in the context of communal revenue-expenditure the poll tax was just one regular type of expense, yet the money collected from various communal taxes was not sufficient to pay it.

14 Schiper, 'Wewnętrzna Organizacja Żydów w daw. Rzeczypospolitej', p. 107.

15 Anishchenko, *Cherta osiedlosti*, p. 19; Schiper, 'Zniesienie autonomji centralnej i ziemskiej w 1764 r.', p. 107.

16 On the basis of other authors and the document 'Uniwersal Komisji skarbowej' (1764) that he had seen himself, Ignacy Schiper claims that the debts of the kahals of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were as follows: Vilnius – 722,800 *złoty*, Brest – 222,720 *złoty*, Hrodna – 386,571 *złoty*, Pinsk – 309,140 *złoty*. Schiper does not provide any comment on whether the analysed document mentioned the debts of yet another influential community, that of Slutsk (see Schiper, 'Podatnoye oblozhenie evreev', p. 281). It should be noted that very likely Schiper resorted to a document that indicated approximate debts, because at least in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania decisions regarding the sizes of identified debts were adopted only in 1766. Mordechai Nadav mentions that a debt of the Pinsk community of the same amount was recorded in 1768 (Nadav, *The Jews of Pinsk, 1506 to 1880*, p. 272). The latter date seems to be the most credible.

the Jews' debts were being repaid to their creditors too slowly and the process of borrowing, although forbidden, did not stop.¹⁷

Before the Jewish census of 1764–1765 and the declaration of the insolvency and bankruptcy of the Jewish communities, the state did not interfere with the administration of revenue and expenditure or financial accounting in the Jewish communities. On the one hand, in this context the Treasury Commission implemented control of an internal documentation of the Jewish community. A period of indebtedness, when the incomes and outcomes of the Jewish communities were under the control of the Treasury Commission, is very specific for research on the social behaviour of the leaders of the Jewish communities. The main challenge was to concentrate all of the income of the Jewish communities into debt repayment. On the other hand, the Jews tried to find ways to survive in such a financially complicated situation and to create a circle of patrons. In this chapter I would like to focus on gifts as one of the solutions they tried to apply to strengthen their links with the surrounding society and secure resources for debt payments. There are not a lot of sources and examples for analysis of this sensitive topic, especially because it is quite difficult to separate bribes (as tools for receiving exceptional possibilities or benefits) from gifts for patrons. The latter were chosen mostly as ways to create long-lasting patronage or the support of influential people.

Sources for the Accounting of Revenue and Expenditure of the Vilnius Community

A number of important sources were produced against the backdrop of the above-mentioned complicated historical circumstances and found their way into the body of documents from the Treasury Commission of the GDL. Their content allows us to reconstruct the revenue and expenditure of the bankrupt kahal of Vilnius, the expediency of and expectations for their usage. Later in this chapter I would like to focus on the analysis of several financial accounting documents of the Vilnius kahal produced at the end of the eighteenth century. They were all in Polish as per the requirement of the state, in order for its officials to be able to control the financial flows of the Jewish communities. All of these documents except one had an identical structure: the content begins with the accounting of each month's revenue, which is followed by accounted expenditure. An identical principle for preparing accounting documents allows us to compare the data given in them. In two of the sources analysed, the kahal's revenue and expenditure information was partially duplicated. One of them is a detailed revenue account (report) of the income of thirteen months from 1 September 1790 to 1 October 1791,¹⁸ and the second is a ledger of the community's

17 Few projects to resolve the problem of the indebtedness were proposed during the Four Year Sejm, and the position and suggestions in this case were presented by both nobles and Jews as well: *Materiały do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, nos 10, 76, etc.

18 LVIA, Senieji aktai (Old acts; hereafter, SA), collection 3757.

costs and receipts covering the period from 1 March to 1 September 1791.¹⁹ The larger part of the community's receipts recorded in these accounting documents show various *korobka* (box) taxes and the minimal expenditure of just a few typical kinds:²⁰ for the *shtadlan* (a community's trustee in charge of managing affairs with state authorities, town administration, or individuals), for the maintenance of the hospital, and so-called *extra expensa* which are not set out in detail.

The kahal's revenue and expenditure report for the calendar year of 1790–1791 shows receipts from ten *korobka* taxes. In the majority of cases these are taxes on essential goods related to the traditional lifestyle that could not be bought outside the community: kosher food, ritual supplies, and original communal or family rituals. The official status of these accounting documents is verified by the signature of Antoni Kiersowski, who was the supervisor of the kahal's revenue, or, in Polish, *Dozorca prowentów kahalnych*. A comparison of the above-mentioned data with those from the chronologically earlier ledger of revenue and expenditure of the Vilnius community containing records from 23 June 1787 to 17 March 1788 will reveal obvious differences.²¹ It is this document that raises questions regarding its purpose and especially the nature of the accounted expenditure and the allocation of the funds of the indebted community. The balance of the kahal's revenue and expenditure accounted in this ledger is negative: the expenditure exceeded income by over 2000 *złoty*. Meanwhile, the revenue recorded in other official documents used to exceed expenditure, and there used to be a sufficient amount of cash in the communal money box. Another peculiarity of the third ledger was the absence of the signature of the supervisor of the kahal's revenue, an official appointed by the Treasury Commission. These circumstances and the extraordinary nature of the expenditure accounted in the ledger raise well-founded suspicions that this ledger might have been used for the accounting of the community's unofficial expenditure, despite the fact that, like the other two accounting documents, it was compiled at the time when the state was keeping a close eye on the expenditure of the Jewish community in order to optimize the process of debt repayment. A possible purpose of this ledger — recording the community's illegal expenditure — does not offer answers to two relevant questions: first, why this seemingly internal document was kept in Polish (if it was prepared for the kahal's use only, it would be more relevant to write it in Hebrew and not care about its translation), and, second, under what circumstances it found its way, along with official documents, to the archival fund of the Treasury Commission. Although in its content this ledger differs from other surviving accounting documents of the Vilnius kahal, it also bears similarities with other eighteenth-century accounting sources of kahals that are known to historians.

19 LVIA, SA, collection 3960.

20 *Korobka* are taxes collected inside the Jewish community and under community regulation from different goods and services; the closest match are excise taxes. The well-known name of this tax in the historiography is *koropka* as well. *Korobka* was established in the seventeenth century to assist individual communities to pay their debts.

21 LVIA, SA, collection 3757.

It should be noted that researchers have spotted only a few of them so far. Gershon Hundert analysed the documents of revenue and expenditure of the Jewish community of the private town of Opatów,²² which inconsistently recorded the kahal's monetary flows from 1728 to 1784. Jacob Goldberg and Adam Wein published expenditure accounts (1785–1789) recorded in the *Pinkasim* of the Działoczyn kahal.²³ These two documents of the communities of the Polish towns are chronologically close to the analysed sources of accounts of the Vilnius kahal. What links these documents is that a part of the accounted expenditure of the communities were allocated to gifts to influential or useful individuals. But in two of the three surviving accounting documents of the Vilnius kahal of the second half of the eighteenth century this item of expenditure was either attributed to *extra expensa* or not accounted at all.

Gifts and Social Cohesion Building

No matter which historical period is discussed, gifts always have a pleasant and favourable effect on those who receive them. In the social structure of the eighteenth century and earlier, pleasant, favourably disposing, or loyalty-showing gifts were a common way of maintaining good relationships and of facilitating ways to overcome everyday issues. On the other hand, a gift was also appreciated as a recognition of the power or influence of a particular individual. Therefore, gifts from a Jewish community as a means of making contact with the Christian part of society were not an exception. The phenomenon of gifts as the means of communication and as an instrument for influencing early modern society has not been a theme which has been widely addressed in the historiography. It is not even quite clear in what way the functions of a gift and its impact on the receiver differed from a bribe, which is a similar phenomenon but with negative connotations. The research presented based on the Vilnius kahal case allows us to suggest one possible difference. Gifts were not always expensive goods, but they were periodically given with the expectation of building long-lasting, good relations and confidence between the parties involved. Gifts helped to create and maintain a positive attitude on the part of the powerful individual towards the gift-giver which might be used by the latter when they needed assistance. And then this relationship was supplemented with bribes given in the expectation that they could change a complicated situation into a more favourable one for the giver. Gifts were not exceptional but fairly common instruments of social behaviour which helped to stabilize social order and cement ties between clients and mighty protectors or patrons.

The Jewish community used gifts to achieve their required goals or to win favours in earlier times, too, and this can be seen in the decisions of the Lithuanian Vaad.²⁴ It

22 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*.

23 Goldberg and Wein, 'Księga kahału w Działoczyźnie z drugiej połowy XVIII w.'

24 In the *Pinkas* of the Lithuanian Vaad there were decisions about the collecting of money for gifts and bribes, as well as the decisions concerning the amount of money dedicated for gifts in different situations and for members of different positions in society. See more in Dubnow, ed., *Pinkas ha-Medina*.

should be pointed out that kahals of both Vilnius and Działoczyn used to give only material gifts and did not try to achieve their aims with cash.²⁵ In the case of Opatów, this cannot be firmly confirmed due to the specific nature of the source, but the same trend seems to prevail there as well.²⁶

The meaning imparted onto the gift and its significance are quite accurately and subtly conveyed by the definition ‘a gift to the master/lord’, or *poklon dla pana* in Polish,²⁷ used in the sources. As can be seen from the gifts made by the Vilnius kahal, the objects considered to be gifts do not coincide with our understanding of what might be luxury objects (as we might expect such gifts to be) such as works of art, weapons, pedigree horses, or expensive household appliances. The gifts bestowed by the Vilnius kahal were very practical, for everyday use, without much variety, and in the majority of cases were easily accessible in the local market.

The nature of the gifts allows them to be divided into three groups. The largest group consisted of goods for everyday use — meat, fish, vodka, candles, or firewood.²⁸ Gifts in the second group were intended for a narrower circle of recipients and included luxury food products — lemons, coffee, and sugar.²⁹ Mentions of more refined gifts suggest conscious differentiation of them in connection with social position and stronger influence of their recipients. Such presents were most often received by representatives of the clergy:³⁰ the nuncio, Bishop Jerzy Tyszkiewicz of Vilnius, judicial priests, or Franciscan monks. As can be seen from late eighteenth-century accounting documents of the Vilnius Jewish community, only on rare occasions were these luxury foods given to laymen, as for example, to commissar or Mister Kruszensky,³¹ whose position remains unknown up until today. A similar trend can be observed in Opatów, where exotic fruits and coffee were given as gifts exclusively to the clergy and dignitaries.³² The third and the smallest group of gifts consisted of the coverage of travel and accommodation expenses for individuals who were influential or useful under certain circumstances.³³

The nature of the gifts suggests that the kahal of Vilnius made practical gifts that predominantly satisfied the routine daily needs of the recipients such as food and/or candles, or firewood during the cold seasons of the year. The most essential items such as candles and firewood were the gifts most frequently given to officials, private individuals, army officers, or for the needs of the Vilnius castle.³⁴ However, contrary to making a gift of food, in this case the seasonal nature of the gift is observed: during

25 Goldberg and Wein, ‘Księga kahału w Działoszynie z drugiej połowy XVIII w.’ and LVIA, SA, folder 3755.

26 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*, pp. 98–104.

27 For example, LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 12^v.

28 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 13, 15, 15^v, 18, 23^v, and others.

29 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 12^v, 13, and others.

30 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 13^v.

31 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 12^v.

32 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*, p. 101.

33 LVIA, SA, collection 3755. For example, the Vilnius kahal covered the travel expenses of *podstarosta* (p. 13^v) or paid transportation wain for commissars of the Treasury Commission (p. 13).

34 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 13, 14, 14^v, 15, and others.

the cold periods of the year candles were a popular gift, while the first records of expenditure incurred on firewood were made in autumn months.³⁵ In the accounting documents of the Vilnius kahal of the eight months of 1787 and 1788 covered, expenses for gifts are recorded in detail and tidily, with indications of gift recipients' surnames or their jobs. With the exception of several entries pointing to a set of expenses incurred due to the *sejmik* (local parliament of nobles), the welcoming of the voivode, or a wholesale purchase of food for gifts, these expenses were payments to Shlom *Kramnik* (salesman) for the coffee, lemons, and sugar supplied to the kahal;³⁶ acquisitions of large amounts of vodka were also intended 'na poklon dla panow'.

Hundert, who analysed the expenditures of the Opatów community, noticed that among the recipients of the kahal's gifts there was a group of individuals whose favour was sought every year and expenses were made to that effect. This group was quite numerous, about twenty-five people.³⁷ Such circumstances suggest that gifts used to be resorted to not only for the management of daily matters, but also for securing communal safety in a residential environment. Another trend singled out by Hundert was occasional gifts that were more extensively made on the eve of Easter and Christmas.³⁸

The documents of expenditure over nine months (June 1787–March 1788) of the Vilnius kahal do not reflect this trend of bestowing gifts by the Opatów community. There was no campaign of giving gifts before Christmas in Vilnius, and Easter was simply outside the accounting period. However, the ledger of revenue and expenditure of the Vilnius kahal shows the expenses that the community incurred due to the local parliament (*sejmik*) in 1788. Interestingly, the gifts bestowed during the *sejmik* did not differ from ordinary gifts.³⁹ The most popular gift was meat.⁴⁰ Expenses of the Vilnius community for gifts rose dramatically during the time of the *sejmik*: in one week they amounted to 45 per cent of the community's total expenses minus salaries regularly paid to the community's employees.⁴¹ In comparison, even during those weeks when expenses for gifts exceeded the ordinary amounts, they did not account for more than 20 per cent of the kahal's weekly expenditure. After the deduction of state taxes, the Opatów community used to spend between 8 and 15 per cent of its annual expenditure on average,⁴² but this data was true before 1769. The Vilnius community was functioning in a society laden with additional tensions caused by the prolonged debt repayment and the control of communal spending.

35 In sources the number of inscriptions about expenses for candles and firewood increase from the eleventh week of the calendar year, approximately from the end of June, and shows preparation for the beginning of the cold season.

36 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 13.

37 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*, pp. 100–103.

38 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*, p. 101.

39 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 24. This group of expenses was fixed on a separate line 'na expens czasu seimików' (expenses during the *sejmik*) and totalled 198 *złoty*.

40 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 22–24.

41 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, list of incurred costs in weeks 31–34 of the year.

42 Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town*, p. 100, data based on table 6.4.

The Vilnius community made gifts to influential public officials, army officers, bishops and other high officials of the Catholic Church, fraternities of religious orders, and certain individuals who were apparently useful for the kahal under certain circumstances. Regarding the frequency of gift-making, their recipients can be divided into three groups: (1) individuals who received gifts of about the same size every week, (2) individuals who received gifts periodically several times a year, and (3) individuals who received a gift once during the accounting period. Interestingly, the first group included public servants directly involved in the control of the Jewish community and its financial accounting. One of them was the sub-prefect (Pol. *podstarosta*). He not only received a salary from the Jewish community for the control of its financial flows, but also enjoyed, on a weekly basis, meat or fish for which the kahal would spend a set amount of money. Curiously, the accounting of expenditure of many weeks opens with the accounting of food intended for the sub-prefect: this item of expenditure was even entered as ‘the sub-prefect’s share’ (Pol. *porcij*).⁴³ The sub-prefect periodically received candles, and was gratified with luxurious exotic gifts of lemons and coffee. Every week gifts of products for daily consumption were made to the castle and the army garrison. Periodic gifts — on several occasions during the accounting period — were made to the Bishop of Vilnius, the vice-voivode, some officials of the court of law, the captain of Vilnius castle, and some private individuals. The positions of the above-mentioned individuals indicate that the community was not maintaining regular contacts with them, yet their favourable attitude and support for Jews were indispensable. Correspondingly, loyalty and recognition were demonstrated on a regular basis. There was no connection between the gifts and certain political events, shifts in the public mood, or religious feasts. Even bestowing of one-off gifts should be linked with strengthening communal interests during a specific period, like the *sejmik*. It should be noted that compared with periodical or regular gifts, these gifts were not allocated in sizeable amounts. It would be ‘some meat’ or *fliaha vodka* (a flask of vodka). Unfortunately, nothing is known of the purpose of 193 *złoty* that were entered in the documents as *sejmik* expenses.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The historical data discussed here shows that the Jewish communities in Vilnius and Opatów had a clear-cut gift-making strategy and were consistent in it. They sought to maintain regular contacts with influential and useful individuals directly involved with the community and to periodically gratify potentially useful or generally powerful members of the public. Gifts were given year after year to a defined group of useful individuals.

It seems that even the formation of the circle of recipients of relatively inexpensive gifts that satisfied the daily needs of the recipients had its own logic: the optimization

43 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 14, 14^v, 15, and others.

44 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, p. 24.

of expenditure needed for this sort of gift made it possible to regularly remind a useful person of a trusting community that recognized his influence. Apparently, this effect would not have been achieved with a one-off yet very expensive luxury gift of limited use. Aside from other reasons, such a choice might have been dictated by society's material well-being and the local tradition of gift-making. Another obvious pattern of gift-making of the Vilnius Jewish community was that gifts were given simultaneously to a noble or an influential official and to his environment. For instance, prior to the arrival of the voivode in Vilnius, gifts were given to the vice-voivode, the voivode's marshal, and the voivode's servants.⁴⁵ Upon arrival in the capital, the voivode would also be gratified with personal gifts. A similar strategy in gift-making is observed in the Vilnius community's relations with other individuals and their servants. Following such gift-making practice, a favourable opinion about this specific community was formed not only in an influential individual but also in his environment, which was capable of shaping the patron's opinion or decisions.

Gifts were a universal, time-tested instrument for the long-lasting building of social cohesion. It was suitable for overcoming religious and ethnic differences within society by strengthening the relationship of specific groups with state officials and influential private individuals. They were a way to improve relations with a society that was not always favourably disposed towards the Jews. Most important in the context of gift-making was the choice of the most appropriate tactic and strategic planning of the gift-giving process. At the end of the eighteenth century the indebted Vilnius Jewish community operated along the lines of measures that had proven their effect, thus closing the gap between the dominant, Christian, Lithuanian, Rus', and Polish part of society on the one hand and Jews on the other.

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45 LVIA, SA, collection 3755, pp. 22^v–23.

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