

LEGAL NORMS AND POLITICAL ACTION IN MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES

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Legal Norms and Political Action in Multi-Ethnic Societies

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

Edited by

PRZEMYSŁAW WISZEWSKI

BREPOLS

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Economic Competition between Christian Burghers and Jews

The Modelling of Jewish Economic Activity through the Restrictions on Jewish Merchants and Craftspeople in the Towns of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The case of the legal regulation of relations between ethnic groups who professed different religions described in the previous chapter should be supplemented by looking at how the Jews functioned among the Christians in east-central Europe. The Jews were the most numerous group of non-Christian denominations inhabiting the region. Despite the religiously motivated aversion of Christians towards them, they played an important role throughout the Middle Ages and the modern period in the economic and social life of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. How was it possible to reconcile these two tendencies — official hostility and practical cooperation — for hundreds of years in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania?

Introduction

The settlement of Jews in the towns of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) increased after 1503 when Grand Duke Alexander (1461–1506, Grand Duke from 1492, and King of Poland from 1501) allowed the Jews, whom he himself had expelled, to return to the towns. The Jews returned to the towns after eight years in exile; some of the towns had become self-governing as a result of the granting of the Magdeburg law. The processes of Jewish people returning to the GDL and the spread of the Magdeburg Law more or less coincided. Intensive and diverse Jewish activities in towns and small towns in the GDL has not been examined. It is known that the Jews were involved in many areas of activity in towns and more widely throughout the state, that competition between burghers and Jews had become more acute, that the latter had not been admitted to Christian craftspeople's workshops, and that, as a result, Jewish craft guilds were formed.

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Map 6.1. Grand Duchy of Lithuania within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

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Despite the direction and intensity of Jewish economic activity, in this essay we will limit ourselves to the statement that the Jews in the GDL had achieved full economic integration and taken the opportunities provided by the local and state market and often internationally too. In addition to towns that pursued a policy of non-admission of Jews (mostly in the territory of contemporary Lithuania) or allowed Jews to settle with a strong prohibition of any economic activities, many towns in the GDL chose to coexist with the Jews, but constantly introduced and improved restrictions on their economic activities.

This essay aims to identify the different forms of restrictions on Jewish economic activities which were applied in urban environments and to discuss their possible impact on the dynamics of Jewish business and the development of new directions for their economic activities. The study raises the following key questions: first, how did Jews in the urban economy behave in adapting to the constraints on their activities in towns; second, how did their businesses (including trade and crafts) adapt and what changes did they make in response to the constraints imposed by burghers? The study is based on sources which reveal various aspects of economic life and the

coexistence of townspeople and Jews. Several groups of sources can be named such as privileges for towns, agreements between Christian and Jewish artisans, agreements between Magdeburg towns and Jewish communities (so-called *Pacta* in Latin),¹ and other documents governing the relationship between the towns and the Jewish community. This study purposefully dissociates itself from the general privileges granted periodically for the Jews of the GDL, as for the context of this study they are more like declarations or aspirations rather than the reality of everyday relationships. For this reason, general privileges also do not provide information about the reaction of Jewish businesses to the restrictions imposed.

The general privileges granted to the Jews of the GDL in the sixteenth century — the 1503 privilege by Alexander and the 1514 privilege by Sigismund the Old (1467–1548, Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland from 1506)² — legally established the possibility of Jews engaging in handicrafts and trade without any restrictions, and the obligatory payment of customs duty when crossing the state border with goods as provided for in the privilege granted by Vytautas (Witold) the Great for the Brest community (in 1388, the same privilege as the general was confirmed in 1507).³ In the general privileges granted to the Jews in the GDL until the middle of the seventeenth century, the possibilities of Jewish craftspeople and merchants were not regulated. Jewish businesses began to be curtailed in towns, with no unified legal restrictions of this kind anywhere in the state. In the inclusion in the general privilege (1629) Jews were allowed to engage in crafts outside of Christian corporations — guilds (in Polish, *cech*). This was a response already to urban restrictions in the areas they could operate in: some Jewish craftspeople were permitted to work in their respective craft workshops. Unlimited declarations of Jewish economic activity (permitted to sell wholesale,⁴ alcohol brewing, bottling,⁵ and sale, all sorts of crafts⁶) changed from the general to the local privileges for the Jewish communities operating in specific towns.

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- 1 The documents of this group are examined in the historiography in the cases of the cities of the Kingdom of Poland and the Jewish communities operating in them: Węgrzynek, 'Agreements between Towns and Kahals'; Szczygieł, 'Uгода Żydów lubelskich z gminą miejską'; Węgrzynek, 'Jewish-Christian Agreements'; Guesnet, 'Agreements between Neighbours'.
 - 2 *Rusko-evreiskii arhiv*, ed. by Bershadskii, no. 40 and no. 62, respectively.
 - 3 Excerpts of the privileges in Latin, Old Polish, and Ruthenian, textological analysis, and a translation of the privilege into English are in Lazutka and Gudavičius, *Privilegia evreiam*.
 - 4 For example, in 1633 while passing privileges for the Pinsk Jewish community, they were allowed to be craftspeople, they were allowed crafts outside the workshops, and trade 'not only in Pinsk, but in the whole of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania' (Vilnius, Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas, *Lithuanian Metric*, book no. 136, p. 221). In 1679 the possibility of free trade was granted to Vilkauskis community as well (Goldberg, *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth*, 1, no. 58).
 - 5 The privilege for Jews to settle in Jurbarkas in *Lietuvos magdeburginių miestų privilegijos ir aktai*, ed. by Tyla, pp. 235–36.
 - 6 In the 1679 confirmation of the privileges of the Minsk Jewish community, allowing the Jews to engage in handicrafts without paying contributions to the Christian workshops, the following crafts were mentioned: a manufacturer of saddles, fur trimmer, beard trimmer, hairdresser, turner, glass, goldsmith, foundry, and edging, *Sobranie drevnich gramot i aktov gorodov Minskoj gubernii*, no. 158.

To Beat a Competitor: Forms of Restriction of Economic Activity

In this essay, the large-scale economic restrictions, which were implemented locally depending on the specific circumstances, will not be discussed here because they were the result of a large number of reasons, but I would like to draw attention to a few noticeable trends. Once it was clear that Jews were the main competitors, towns began to try to find ways for the burghers and Jews to coexist, and for ways to regulate mutual relations and interests. One area directly connected with economic competition was the control of Jewish living spaces — the limiting of the Jewish quarters in towns, which, from the official point of view, made their life in towns legal. At the same time, it was one of the ways in which the size of the Jewish population was regulated in the specific place. These restrictions were not effective in most towns, principally because the town administrations were not consistent in the implementation of these kinds of restrictions.⁷ On the other hand, there were towns which chose rather radical ways to exile Jews, thus regulating the economic competition issues between them.⁸

The burghers' discontent was triggered not so much by the allotted quarter consisting of a number of streets, as by the desire of the Jews to live beyond its borders and to settle in the commercially attractive streets. Limited living space was also understood by the burghers as a way of controlling the number of potential competitors. For the burghers, the limitation on the spread of Jews in towns (especially in the grand dukes' towns) that was the most difficult to manage was the *jurydyka* (the parts of the town which did not lie under the Magdeburg town jurisdiction and did not have any fiscal obligation to the town) of the nobility and the clergy, and the suburbs of the larger towns. Examples of the settlement of Jews in towns show that *jurydyka* (and the rental of living areas within them) were the most straightforward way for Jews to settle without permission. The *jurydykas* were a reason why the numbers of Jews increased in towns; it is also very important to stress that the economic restrictions were enforceable neither in *jurydykas* nor in the Jewish quarters which lay in the *jurydyka*.

As discussed, the definition of urban living space was one of the indirect forms of restrictions on Jewish activity that originated and was legitimized by the town owner: the grand duke in the state towns and the magnates or nobles in the private towns. In towns, different restrictions on Jewish economic activities emerged at the initiative of the magistrates and the craft guilds. In them, prohibitions that were characteristic of several towns were entwined with local restrictions that depended on a variety of factors: the burghers' preferred areas of activity, trends in commerce, the size of the Jewish community, the strength of a particular town and its geographical

7 About the regulation of the living space of Jews in the towns of the GDL, see Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, 'The Jewish Living Space in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania'.

8 For analysis of a few cases of the expulsion of Jews from towns of the GDL, see Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, 'Cases of the Expulsion of the Jews from the Towns'.

location, and the conditions for the use of natural resources. A complex example of the restriction of Jewish economic activity is the *Ordinatio* (Order), which regulated the activities of Vilnius citizens and Jews in the town market for ten years, that came into force in 1633. The source of its compilation was the statutes of the workshops operating in the town. In this way, the needs of corporate burghers' structures were raised to a broader level — the town level. The *Ordinatio* records compromises that convey the interests of Jews and townspeople and the ways to implement the aspirations of the townspeople to restrict or even exclude the Jews from economic activities in the town, and the patterns observed in Vilnius were repeated in the towns of the GDL. In the *Ordinatio* of 1633, a number of restrictions on Jewish economic activities were legalized:

1. Specifying the Jews' potential customers;
2. A fixed or limited number of trading stalls;
3. Singling out forms of trade or prohibited commodities, and singling out restricted or forbidden economic activity or crafts;
4. Limiting the range of crafts and other economic activities.

The experience of other towns, and especially the guilds' statutes, suggested another restriction on Jewish business — a ban on Christian urban craftspeople and merchants cooperating with Jews.⁹ This provision restricted the trade of Christians in goods produced, imported, or resold on the domestic market by the Jews, as well as the opportunity to enter into business transactions or for Jews and Christians to be business associates. Gradually, in response to Jewish initiatives to find more effective ways of doing things and to remain visible to potential customers in cities despite restrictions, towns began to introduce prohibitions against Jewish craftspeople displaying informative or distinctive workshop signs.¹⁰ As we can see from the sources, the Jewish community tried to ensure that its members could post signs and information in public places about their activities and thus mark the location of a trade or craft workshop.¹¹ The Christian workshops, meanwhile, sought to prevent potential customers from viewing signs indicating the location of Jewish workshops.¹² The ban on information about the services provided or the place where they were provided can also be classified as a form of restriction on economic activity in towns.

Another form of restriction on Jewish economic activity in the towns of the GDL, which was quite influential and stemmed from the rhythm of Christian life, was the prohibition against Jews working during Christian holidays and Sunday Masses. For example, the Jews of Bychow had to stop brewing 'during Easter, Christmas,

9 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 95, 437 ff.

10 On the complexity of restrictions on Jewish economic activity in towns, see Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, *Žydai Lietuvos Didžiosios*, pp. 152–75.

11 In the privilege granted to the Minsk Jews (1679), they were allowed to use signs and constructed signs to mark their places of business. See *Sobranie drevnich gramot i aktov gorodov Minskoj gubernii*, no. 158.

12 For example, the 1742 transaction between the Vilnius town citizens and local kahal in Dubiński, *Zbiór praw i przywilejów*, pp. 285–89.

Pentecost, the Body of God, and the other days of Our Lady Mary'.¹³ Restrictions on the Jewish trade in meat (only for *their Jews*) during Christian fasting was a similar issue. Enforced breaks on the days of Christian holidays or fasting was an aggravating circumstance for Jewish businesses. Due to the extremely short time for work or the provision of services, Jews also started working during the Shabbat, distancing themselves from the confessional restrictions and traditions that were important to them. The descriptions of foreigners' travels around the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contain more than one ironic story about Jewish work during Shabbat.¹⁴

The confessional principle of forming guilds for craftspeople and merchants determined the attitude of these corporations in society. The social and legal status of the non-Christians (Jews and Tatars) prevented them from belonging to the guilds (confessional principle), but also led to the consequent restrictions on economic activity, although there is a well-established view in the historiography that Jews were subjected to restrictions on crafts without excluding them from strangers who were not members of workshops.¹⁵ The analysis of the sources suggests that the position of the guilds with regard to the Jews was peculiar, and that the statutes of the guilds included articles which specifically restricted the Jews and their relationship with the workshops when the privileges guaranteed freedoms in crafts. The division of the economic space in the *Ordinatio* was established in Vilnius: Jews were not restricted (from serving Christians) and could only engage in those crafts for which guilds were not established in the town. Meanwhile, to meet the traditional needs of the Jewish community, they were allowed to have artisans in all fields, especially butchers and tailors.¹⁶ This principle of the division of areas of activity and clientele was common in practice. According to the statutes of the newly established crafts guild, at the same time the activities of Jewish craftspeople of the same specialism in the town were forbidden. The initiatives of the townspeople to divide potential consumers into Christians and Jews are connected with the widespread principle in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania that Jews could engage in all crafts, but only to serve members of their community. For example, in a guild of Christian tailors offering 'Christian Polish [fashion] clothes', Jewish tailors defended themselves by only 'wearing their Jewish clothes' (1633).¹⁷ The craftspeople of the artisan guilds regarded Jewish work for Christian customers as self-harm;¹⁸ thus the guilds managed to stop some of the potential orders.

Operating in a constrained economic environment, in order to remain in the local urban market and withstand constant competition from Christians, the Jews were often forced to optimize their economic activities, to seek new forms of expression,

13 Goldberg, *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth*, III, no. 3. During the most important religious holidays, it was not permitted to work in the Jewish bathhouse in Vilkaiviškis (Goldberg, *Jewish Privileges in the Polish Commonwealth*, III, no. 58).

14 *Polska Stanisławowska w oczach cudzoziemców*, ed. by Zawadzki.

15 Morzy, 'Geneza i rozwój cechów Wileńskich', p. 83.

16 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 187.

17 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 176.

18 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 176.

and to find customer service through competition. The totality of these circumstances undoubtedly influenced the flexibility of business, the adaptation of new and, as yet, unusual forms of activity, which are therefore not constrained in towns.

The sources of the GDL demonstrate that the burghers quite early on identified the Jews as their main competitors, who 'deprive poor Christian burghers of their bread and sustenance';¹⁹ consequently the burghers explored ways to reduce the economic influence of the Jews in towns. One extreme way of prevailing over rivals were violent attacks against Jewish business people who were influential or known in the urban milieu, and the destruction of their property, tools, or commodities. It should be noted that the statutes of many Christian craft guilds allowed the use of violence against unaffiliated Jewish craftspeople, damaging their work tools and destroying their products.²⁰

One interesting point is that the constraints on Jewish economic activity were dynamic not only from the point of view of the enforcement of new restrictions, but also in the search for compromise: gradually, from the restrictions imposed by the burghers, progress was made to get agreement between burghers and Jews residing in towns about economic activity; that is, both sides began to make concessions, or demand additional guarantees. The *Ordinatio* between the Vilnius burghers and the Jewish community was an agreement of this type. Compromises on restrictions for the Jews were included in this document. These circumstances show that Jews accepted economic restrictions as possible and necessary for coexistence in the town.

The burghers restricted Jewish economic activity in an integrated way, by introducing several restrictions simultaneously: these restrictions were to ensure the corporate interests of craftspeople and merchants. The limitations, which were not incidental, were frequently based on the statutes of the guilds, which prohibited the Jews or unaffiliated craftspeople from engaging in one or another activity. It should be admitted, though, that the enforcement of restrictions on Jewish business was strongly influenced by lateral non-economic factors: a biased image of sharp practices by the Jews (for example, reducing the prices of precious metals,²¹ selling the meat of sick animals, and so on), or a fear of the harm inflicted by the Jews, which had some impact on the public.

Competition for the users of services or the consumers of goods was one of the key features of an urban market. The burghers, who took the initiative to specify who the Jews' potential customers might be, reduced their opportunities for providing legitimate services to their Christian customers, and only in rare instances did they afford an opportunity to provide services or supply goods to both. In the GDL, a tradition existed according to which Jewish craftspeople and traders could supply people of the same faith without restrictions, and this might have been a pretext for limiting the circle of their

19 *Archeograficheskii sbornik dokumentov*, no. 50.

20 Competition between Christian and Jewish craftsmen has been discussed by Vishnitsker, 'Evrei-remeslenniki i tsekhovaya organizatsiya ikh', pp. 288–90; Ptaśnik, *Miasta i mieszczaństwo*; Morzy, 'Geneza i rozwój cechów Wileńskich'; Bershadskii, 'Istoriya vilenskoï evreiskoi obshchiny'.

21 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 437.

customers. However, when seeking a monopoly on certain crafts or kinds of activities, and attempting to preserve their exclusive right to supply raw materials or products, the burghers did not always heed this rule. There were cases when stronger guilds secured a ban which made the Jews buy some materials or products exclusively from the craft guilds. The output came to be distinguished by the religion of the consumer and the producer: there was 'Christian' production, intended for everybody (including Jews), and 'Jewish' production, intended for Jews only. Orders that Jews completed for Christians were considered by the burghers as damage arising from service to their potential customers.

The need for raw materials and the burghers' attempts to monopolize wholesale trade encouraged the specification of goods that Jews were forbidden or allowed to deal in, and even the regulation of the transport of these goods. Inefficient transport boosted the prices of goods and lowered competitive opportunities. Depending on the geographical location of the town, the Jews were often forbidden to take their goods on the rivers, a popular form of transport with the burghers. For example, in the early seventeenth century, the burghers of Hrodna forbade the Jews of the town to transport their goods on the River Nemunas (Neman); this restriction was based on the decision of Assessors court:

to sail down the Nemunas themselves [Jews] or through an associated person is prohibited. It is not possible to transport salt and herring up the Nemunas or ice, and also to sell [wholesale] units in Grodno only.²²

There is now doubt that such economic restrictions influenced Jewish possibilities in trade, because this trade line for them was a very convenient export route for grain to Poland via Kaunas (Kowno) and for bringing back salt on the return journey.

By applying these restrictions, the burghers shaped the place of the Jews in the town market, with the aim of making them sell their goods. They were allowed to buy local goods (including agricultural produce) and to export them, but they were forbidden to import marketable goods and sell them on the local market, although retail trade in goods imported by the burghers was encouraged. Stronger towns, and the emergence of corporate structures and the control mechanisms that they implemented, crystallized the function of the dealer attributed to the Jews. The involvement of the Jews in the realization of produce was also adopted by the owners of private towns,²³ nobles who committed the Jews in their towns and small towns to buying products and goods from estates, which they could then resell in other suitable places, and in different forms and ways of selling.

Unfortunately, due to insufficient research, it is not clear whether Jews were completely excluded from the import business,²⁴ or whether they were allowed to

22 *Akty, izdavaemye Vilenskoiu Archeograficheskoiu kommissieiu*, 1, no 22.

23 In this context, questions about joint economic activity between Jews and nobles are raised, though most of the cases analysed are based on the situation in the Polish Kingdom. This topic has been analysed by Rosman, *Magnate-Jewish Relations*; Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania*; Braudo and others, eds, *Istoria evreev v Rossii*; Teller, *Money, Power, and Influence*.

24 Tadeusz Czacki was one of the leading individuals in the Jewish reforms (in Polish, *Reforma Żydów*) initiated during the Four Year Sejm. He presents some calculations concerning the proportion of involving of Jews in the trade of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to the data

import only some of the most marketable and therefore easily realizable goods. In this respect, it is possible to discern a tendency to specify wholesale trade goods that the Jews were allowed or forbidden to handle. Following an agreement made between the Jews and the burghers of Vilnius on 26 July 1633, the Jews were forbidden to trade in wheat, herring, salt, flax, and hemp, but were allowed to sell wax, suet, hides, and honey in markets and guest houses.²⁵ In towns, alcoholic drinks were included in the list of goods, and sometimes economic activities, that were restricted for Jews. These restrictions differed in the context of *propination*, licences to produce and sell alcohol, because the division of revenue from the right of propination between the Jews and the burghers was linked to the distribution of town taxes. One of the most frequent restrictions of this kind was the ban on the retail sale of alcohol²⁶ (in vessels containing less than half a *garniec*, or about 3.75 litres) when the buyer was a Christian; however, the Jews were allowed to measure drinks and sell them to members of their own community.

When the Jews in towns were allowed to engage in the retail trade in alcohol and other goods, the number of trading stalls, or the parts of town where Jews could sell their goods, was limited, and as a rule, they conducted their business inside the Jewish quarter. The earliest restrictions in the GDL on the number of trading stalls were applied to butchers, who were entitled to engage in retail trade due to the nature of their trade. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the burghers made efforts to constrict the butcher's trade within the Jewish quarter or the yards of synagogues. The synagogue yard, as a designated site for selling meat, was applied almost universally: in this way, opportunities for butchers to sell their products outside the quarter were limited, and the trading place was made less attractive to Christian customers. The principle of concentrating Jewish butcher's shops in the synagogue yard,²⁷ and, basically, in the Jewish quarter, was later applied in the regulation of the retail trade in other, 'non-Jewish' goods, and at times a specific number of trading stalls was privileged. The burghers did not regulate the Jews' 'public' trade in the market where a division between goods allowed and forbidden to Jews was observed. At least officially, the market was the main place for Jewish traders to sell their products.

provided by him, Jewish merchants accounted for 3/4 of total exports, and their share in the import of goods was much smaller — only 1/10 of total Polish-Lithuanian imports. The high export figures attributed to the Jews by Czacki raise the question of to what extent and whether they reflect independently working Jewish merchants or whether this data includes Jews who worked as hired sellers of the products and goods from noble estates. See Czacki, *Rozprawa o Żydach i Karaitach*, p. 219.

25 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 187.

26 *Akty, izdavaemye Vilenskoju Archeograficheskoiu kommissieiu*, XXIX, no. 223.

27 The Statute of the Mogiliov butchers' guild (1621) was an exception: in this regulation the Jewish butchers were given a place in the market. They were allowed to trade in stalls other than those of the members of the workshop, and in rows in front of Jewish butchers, butchers from *jurydyka* were also allowed to trade. *Istoriko — iuridicheskie materiali*, pp. 370–73.

Responding to the Constraints: Jewish Business Change

The second and the most important question analysed in this essay is how the Jews reacted to the restriction of their economic activity and how these restrictions changed Jewish economic behaviour in the towns of the GDL. Before starting the analysis, it is necessary to stress the point that was presented in the previous chapter — the distribution of power and therefore of possibilities was unequal: the burghers initiated the restrictions, based on their own interests, and in all cases the Jews reacted to the prohibitions.

The most effective means of regulating Jewish crafts was the appearance of mixed Christian and Jewish craft guilds, which unified the business environment, even if, from the point of view of the expansion of activity, guild crafts were extensive. With regard to the privileges of the Jews and their engagement in economic activity, this was a restrictive measure. Jewish craftspeople agreed to be bound to the guilds (the main aspect of this was a financial contribution), in exchange for the legal widening of their circle of customers. Although only partial — not like guild brothers, but in the position of ‘cousin’ of the guild (Polish: *pólbrat*²⁸) — the annexation of Jews to the craft guilds legalized the activities of a limited number of craftspeople of Jewish origin in relation to the corporation. Jewish craftspeople who paid contributions to the guild (or sacrificed at its altar in the church) were required to follow a common order of mutual relations within the workshop, such as uniform labour rules and regulations for the purchase of raw materials, and Jewish craftspeople were even allowed to have Christian apprentices.

It is a compromise form of change in the Jewish business that allowed for a broadening of the clientele served by Jewish artisans, but at the same time limited Jewish artisans. They were forced to adhere to the standards of activity and sourcing of raw materials set by the Christian artisan guilds. Thus, on the one hand, these decisions show signs of constraints; on the other hand, they touched and applied not to everyone, but only to some Jewish craftspeople. They could also be considered a response to the existing constraints, the search for new niches of economic activity. The onset of regroupings (even if mostly in private towns) in the sphere of crafts also influenced the emergence of Jewish artisan fraternities that brought together Jewish craftspeople and represented their interests.²⁹ The subordination of the Jews to the guild changed many restrictions on Jewish economic activity that were applied by the towns, but the unification of business conditions did not eliminate competition from the town market, which, in its turn, encouraged the implementation of new restrictions, this time on the affiliated members of different religions.

Restrictions on Jewish economic activity in towns became a business challenge which demanded a new business strategy for managing the restrictions and the

28 Anatolij Grickievich presented a few examples of joint Christian and Jewish craftsmen’s guilds; some of them were established in the private towns that belonged to the Radziwiłł family (Nieśwież, Słuck, Kolył) or Szklow — a property of Chodkiewicz Family (Grickievich, *Chastnovladelcheskie goroda Belorusii*, p. 119).

29 Horn, *Żydowskie bractwa rzemieślnicze*.

implementation of more effective forms of entrepreneurship. Historians have pointed out that the Polish Jews adopted several new methods of commerce to optimize their restricted business: advertising, direct purchase from the producer, and the provision of goods or services directly to the customer, quite often in a customer's home.³⁰ Of these, the earliest was door-to-door selling, which appeared in the GDL as early as the second half of the sixteenth century. The pedlars, who 'carried the goods they sold on themselves',³¹ can be singled out as a separate group of Jewish traders. As a form of retail trade, door-to-door selling was probably successful and very popular among the Jews (both men and women), because the burghers soon began to look for ways to restrict it. It seems that the Jews applied new forms of trade quite quickly and efficiently: already in 1644 the Jews of Vilnius were forbidden to communicate clothes, fabrics, furs, and other goods 'after markets, streets, suburbs, monasteries, palaces, brick houses, houses, and manors'.³² Despite these prohibitions, the hard-to-control takeaway business remained popular among Jews, and the nobility intended to raise the issue of its restriction in the families as well. In the instruction of the Vilnius Magistrate in 1729, the representatives of the Sejm had already complained 'that Jews and Jewesses carry goods around the house'.³³ This type of trading spread in the towns as a substitute for the restricted retail trade in one's own goods, and as an opportunity to realize the goods imported by the burghers on a larger scale and with more convenience for the customer. It was probably from the towns that, at about the same time or slightly later, Jewish pedlars and herring-sellers flooded towns and villages. Small-scale trading was encouraged by the sale of credit when the Jews withdrew from large-scale money lending. Compared to the situation that prevailed until the mid-sixteenth century, when the Jews mastered the export and import trade, the fact that Jews were pushed out of the import of goods and drawn into the realization of local or already imported commodities meant a radical shift in their activity. Unfortunately, there is no more detailed research, and there is a lack of sources to substantiate such findings when considering whether Jewish artisans, like merchants, reoriented and began providing their services — even if a limited range of crafts, say, tailor, shoemaker, furrier — at the client's home. This brings the service closer to the customer.

For a long time, prohibitions on signs informing about craft workshops or places of service remained and were ignored. Some Jews tried to circumvent these prohibitions, and the townspeople seemed to control this behaviour. To the Jews of Minsk, the members of the goldsmith's workshop expressed their dissatisfaction that the Jews (and by extension, the Tatars), who were engaged in the trade illegally, had 'clear [craft] signs' in their windows (1664).³⁴ In Vilnius at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jewish tailors were forbidden to hang signs in the windows, streets,

30 Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė, *Žydai Lietuvos Didžiosios*, pp. 152–75.

31 *Akty, odnosiaschiesia k istorii Zapadnoi Rossii*, no. 68.

32 Dubiński, *Zbiór praw i przywilejów*, pp. 285–89.

33 *Akty, izdavaemye Vilenskoiu Archeograficheskoiu kommissieiu*, II, no. 633.

34 *Akty cechów wileńskich 1495–1759*, ed. by Łowmiański, no. 288.

or shops in houses; they were only permitted to mark the workplace with a sign.³⁵ In the seventeenth century, new actions of Jewish craftspeople attracted clientele and thus attracted the town's attention. The towns had banned Jews from 'luring people who buy from Christian townships and leading them to Jews' (1644).³⁶

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be argued that the forms and directions of Jewish economic activity were shaped by the constraints of their economic expression and the changing needs of society and consumers and the regrouping of economic forces in the local market. Restrictions imposed by the townspeople to eliminate rival Jews from crafts and trade were not effective. The actions to eliminate Jewish competition were ineffective for the following reasons: first, some of the restrictions imposed by the burghers were difficult to implement in a consistent and long-term manner in practice; secondly, Jewish artisans or tradesmen, who were entrepreneurial and lacked many alternatives to urban cultivated businesses, were looking for new niches and opportunities to remain in activities that they had mastered. For example, in response to retail restrictions in towns, Jews intensified and expanded door-to-door sales, thus compensating for the restriction of outlets/areas in towns. Under the conditions of restricted economic activity, Jewish businesses, in particular small businesses, remained strong, thanks to their flexibility and entrepreneurship, while the burghers often blamed the Jews for the fierce competition and business failures.

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