WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE LITVAK? THE LEGACY OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA

Antony Polonsky

By the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of the „Litvak" had become well-established in the Jewish world. Let me give a few literary examples. I will begin with two by non-Litvaks. In one of his „hasidic tales", „Tsvishn tsvay berg" (Between Two Mountains), Yitshak Leibush Peretz describes the conflict between the hasidim and their mitnagdic opponents. He gives both sides their voice but clearly comes down on the side of the former. The story recounts the clash between the Brisker *rov* and his best pupil, who has left him to found a hasidic court. He explains why:

> *Your Torah, Rabbi, is nothing but law. It is without pity. Your Torah contains not a spark of compassion. And that is why it is without joy, without air to breathe. It is nothing but steel and iron–iron commandments, copper laws. It is a very refined Torah, suitable for scholars, for the select few.*
> *The Brisker rov was silent, so the rebbe continued: „Tell me, Rabbi, what have you got for ordinary people? For the woodchopper, the butcher, the tradesman, the simple man? And, most especially for the sinful man? What do you have to offer those who are not scholars?...".*

To convince the Brisker *rov*, the Bialer *rebbe* takes him to see his followers on *Simkhat torah* when they are transformed by the festival. This does not convince the Brisker *rov*.

> *„We must say the afternoon prayer," the Brisker rov suddenly announced in his harsh voice–and everything vanished.*
> *Silence fell. The curtain closed again before my eyes. Above me, an ordinary sky, and below, ordinary pasture; ordinary hasidim in torn caftans murmuring old tattered fragments of song. The flames were extinguished. I looked at the rebbe. His face too was somber.*
> *They did not reach an understanding. The Brisker rov remained a misnaged, just as before. And that was how he left Biala.*
> *Yet their meeting did have some effect. The rov never again persecuted Hasidim.*

The Hebrew poet Shaul Tchernichovsky in his late-nineteenth century account of a circumcision in a Jewish agricultural colony near the Black Sea has a mock-heroic description of a verbal duel between a Polish and a Lithuanian Jew. When they are served Carmel wine the Litvak objects:

> *Shmerel, then, the melamed, raised his loud voice, saying*
> *(being Lithuanian, he was learned in Torah, though also a radical):*
> *– „Listen, my friends, to the words of a Lithuanian melamed!"*

Thus did Shmerel begin, and then gave a brief review
of proletarian hardships as revealed in history:
straits and famine and bitterness of hopeless oppression, the workers
harder than rock, however, their many trials surviving;
looking for help to the people, all „Israel" everywhere
– „This red wine, what is it, if not the blood of our workers,
shed – being shed! – in the fields of Zion and hills of Judea?
On your heads be their blood, if you should still keep silent
before the ICA oppression, which is bringing all to destruction…

„Well, I swear" – said Shébsili, stroking his beard as he spoke
(he had just come from Poland – they called him „the Polish night hawk",
since they called every Pole a night hawk, that is, a thief):
„Well, I swear, this Shmerel – he might be a man, if he weren't
a Litvak. Pretty sharp customer. Are they Jews? I doubt it".
Everyone heard, and they looked at Shmerel, to hear his answer,
waiting to hear, for they knew he was clever, though a melamed.
Shmerel shut his eyes, then, asking an „innocent" question:
„Wasn't our Father Abraham a Lithuanian, Reb Shebsil?"
– „What?!" – the latter answered – How come? Father Abraham!"
Answered Shmerel: – „It's written: And he called to Abraham sheynis[1].
If he had not been Lithuanian he'd have said Shayndel's and not Shayne's".
The gathered guests all enjoyed these words, and their laughter
rang, as they relished the wisdom of the Lithuanian…

Now let me give two Litvak accounts. The first is from Moshe Kulbak's poem „Vilna" written in the 1920s. In it he gives a striking description of what Vilna meant in his eyes for the Litvak. The Vilna he loved was not a modern city, the home of such important Jewish cultural institutions as YIVO, the Strashun library the Yiddish Teachers' Training College or the Tarbut gymnasium. Instead he evoked a city of the night, of mysticism and of poverty.

… You are a psalm, spelled in clay and in iron.
Each stone a prayer; a hymn every wall,
As the moon, rippling into ancient lanes,
Glints in a naked and ugly-cold splendour.
Your joy is sadness – joy of deep basses
In chorus. The feasts are funerals.
Your consolation is poverty: clear, translucent
Like summer mist on the edges of the city.
You are a dark amulet set in Lithuania.
Old gray writing – mossy, peeling.
Each stone a book; parchment every wall.

1 That is, a „second time", but also colloquially „the son of Sheyne". Shmerel as a Lithuanian takes a Hebrew word and plays on the fact that in Yiddish there were marked differences in pronunciation among Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian Jews.

He describes the poverty and piety of the city's inhabitants:

Stiff men are like sticks; women, like loaves of bread.
The shoulders pressed. Cold, secretive beards.
Long eyes that rock, like rowboats on a lake –
At night, late, over a silver herring,
They beat their breasts. „God, we are sinful... sinful".

The city is the home of mystics:

No sound. Houses are rigid – bales of rag.
A tallow candle flutters, dripping,
Where a cabbalist sits, tangled into his garret,
Like a spider, drawing the gray thread of his life.
„Is there anyone in the cold emptiness?..."
O city! You are the dream of a cabbalist,
Gray, drifting in the universe-cobweb in the early autumn.

A key element of Jewish Vilna is its love of Yiddish, which is shared by the poet:

Yiddish is the homely crown of the oak leaf
Over the gates, sacred and profane, into the city.
Grey Yiddish is the light that twinkles in the window.
Like a wayfarer who breaks his journey beside an old well,
I sit and listen to the rough voice of Yiddish.
Is that the reason why my blood is so turbulent?

A very different view of what it was to be a Litvak is given by the Israeli writer, Amos Oz in his recent autobiography. His father was for most of his life an unreconstructed rationalist:

My father had a distinctly „Lithuanian temperament"…He was a sentimental enthusiastic man, but for most of his life he loathed all forms of mysticism and magic. He considered the supernatural to be the domain of charlatans and tricksters. He thought the tales of the Hasidim to be mere folklore, a word which he always pronounced with the same grimace that accompanied his use of such words as „jargon", „ecstasy", „hashish" or „intuition".

A number of different concepts are to be found here. The Litvak as a rigorous opponent of mysticism (although Kulbak takes a different position), a rationalist, a radical, an exponent of Yiddish, a person who spoke Yiddish in a specific way and the inhabitant of a cold, northern, impoverished country. George Orwell said that a cliché was the easiest way to convey complex information in a condensed manner. In this sense, all these characterizations, however clichéd, do have an element of reality. When did they emerge and how did they become established?

Was the Situation of the Jews different in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from that in the Kingdom of Poland?

The fact that the Grand Duchy retained many specific legal and constitutional features after the Union of Lublin in 1569 is now well-established in historical study. What is less clear is whether the position of the Jews in the Grand Duchy differed significantly from that in the *Korona.* Certainly if we look at the legal position of the Jews and the nature of Jewish autonomous institutions we see very similar situations prevailing in the two areas.

This is apparent, firstly, in the general charters granted to the Jews. Of these the most important was that granted by Bolesław the Pious in Kalisz in 1264. It was modelled on the Austrian charter of 1240 and formed the basis for many subsequent enumerations of Jewish rights[2]. It was confirmed in a slightly altered form by Kazimierz the Great (reigned 1333–1370) and extended to cover the whole of Poland. It was again confirmed in 1453 by Kazimierz IV (reigned 1446–1492), son of the first Jagiellonian king of Poland, and it became part of the legal statutes prepared for King Aleksander Jagiellończyk (reigned 1501–1506) by his chancellor Jan Łaski in 1506, which, although they were never formally adopted, were applied as if they had been. It also also formed the basis for the charter issued in 1388 to the Jews of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by Grand Duke Vytautas, the cousin of Jogaila which was confirmed in 1507 by Zygmunt I in his capacity of grand duke. In this sense, the legal situation of the Jews in the two parts of the Commonwealth was extremely similar[3].

A similar situation can be found in relation to Jewish autonomous institutions. At the centre of the rights which the Jews enjoyed was that to administer their communities themselves. In Poland-Lithuania there was a three-tier structure of Jewish

2 The charter of 1264 has not been preserved. But the introduction to the privilege granted by Kazimierz the Great in 1334 states that it is a confirmation of the earlier document: *Weinryb B.* Jews of Poland: A Social and Economic History of the Jewish Community in Poland from 1100 to 1800. Philadelphia, 1976, p. 339, n. 1. The privileges were collected by the Polish Chancellor Jan Laski in 1506. For these general charters, see *Schorr M.* Krakovskii svod statutov i privilegii // Evreiskaya starina, volume 1 (1909), no. 1, pp. 247–264; no. 3, pp. 76–100; no. 4, pp. 223–245; id., Zasadnicze prawa Żydów w Polsce przedrozbiorowej // *Schiper I., Tartakower A., Haffika A.* (eds) Żydzi w Polsce odrodzonej, 2 vol. Warsaw, 1932–1933, s. 191–199; *Bałaban M.* Pravovoi stroi Evreev v Polshe v srednie i novye veka // Evreiskaya starina, vol. 3 (1910), no. 1, c. 39–69; no 2, c. 161–191; no 3, c. 324–345 and 4 (1911), no. 1, c. 40–54; no. 2, c. 180–196; *Gumplowicz L.* Prawodawstwo polskie względem Żydów. Kraków, 1867; *Bloch P.* Die General-Privilegien der polnischen Judenschaft. Poznań, 1892.

3 For this, see *Lazutka S., Gudavičius E.* Privilege to Jews Granted by Vytautas the Great in 1388. Moscow, 1993.

self-government. The basic unit was the local community, the *kehilah* (Hebrew for a communal corporate body). The individual *kehilot* sent representatives to regional councils in the different parts of Poland and Lithuania. Above the regional councils were two national councils, the Council of the Lands in the Kingdom of Poland and the Council of Lithuania in the Grand Duchy.

The key unit in this structure was the local *kehilah*. Its significance in Jewish history has been well described by Lionel Kochan:

> *It is the institution of the kehillah ... that to each of these scattered settlements gives a degree of coherence and unity, over centuries of dispersion and migration. As an historical agent in its own right and as a sovereign power, the kehillah fulfils, relative to time and place, the Biblical promise that 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet' (Genesis 49: 10). In all its multiple guises it originated in Talmudic times as a vehicle of self-government during the dispersion to Babylon and elsewhere and in this capacity evolved into the basic unit of Jewish history. It groups together the Jews of a specific locality. Amidst expulsion, migration and resettlement in Europe and the Americas, the kehillah strove to uphold some semblance of self-government*[4].

The kehilla was responsible for a whole range of both secular and religious functions. A comparison of the organization of the Kraków *kehilah* with that in Vilna (Vilnius) does not reveal any significant differences between the way they functioned. Above the kehillot were the provincial and national councils, which were initially established to apportion tax between different *kehilot*, while their other functions were added subsequently. We have good accounts of the two provincial councils, the Council of Wielkopolska and that of the Land of Russia (*va'ad medinat rusyah*)[5]. Here too what is remarkable is the similarity in the way the two bodies functioned.

The national councils, the Council of the Lands for the *Korona* and the Council of Lithuania for the Grand Duchy, emerged in the late sixteenth century, the first recorded meeting of the Council of the Lands occurring in 1580 and that of the Council of Lithuania in 1623[6]. Originally there was one national council for

4 *Kochan L.* The Making of Western Jewry, 1600–1819. Basingstoke, 2004, 1.

5 On this, see The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York, 1905–1916, X, p. 141; *Fishman D.* Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov. New York, 1995, pp. 2–3; *Trunk I.* The Council of the Lands of Russia (Yid.) // YIVO bleter, 40 (1956), pp. 63–85; *Mstislavsky [Dubnow]* Oblastnye kagal'nye seimy v voevodstve volynskom i v Belorussii (1666–1764) // Voskhod, 14 (1894), no. 4, c. 24–42; *Dubnov S.* (ed.) The Minute Book of the Council of Lithuania [Heb.]. Berlin, 1925.

6 For the minutes of the Council of the Four Lands, see *Halpern I.* The Minute Book of the Council of the Four Lands: Compilation of Regulations, Notes and Resolutions [Heb.]; 2nd rev. edn, ed. Israel Bartal. Jerusalem, 1990. In addition, see *Rosman M.* A Minority Views the Majority: Jewish Attitudes towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Interaction with Poles // Polin, 4 (1989), pp. 31–41; *Goldberg J.* The Jewish Sejm: Its Origins and Functions // *Polonsky A., Basista J., Link-Lenczowski A.* (eds) The Jews in Old Poland. London, 1993, pp. 147–164.

the whole of the Commonwealth and it is originally described as the Council of the Three Lands (Va'ad Shalosh Aratsot) – Poland, Rus, and Lithuania – or, more rarely, as the Council of the Five Lands – Wielkopolska, Małopolska, Rus, Lithuania and Volhynia. In Polish documents it is sometimes referred to as 'Congressus Judaeorum' (the Council of Jews). In 1613 Zymunt III Vasa (ruled 1587–1632) established separate tax assessments for the Jews of the *Korona* and those of the Grand Duchy, which led in 1623 to the establishment of a separate Council for the State of Lithuania (*Va'ad Medinat Lita*). This council was also sometimes referred to as the Council of the Three [Four or Five] Main Districts of Lithuania (*Va'ad Shalosh [Arba* or *Hamesh] Medinot Rashiyot Delita*)—Brest, Grodno, Pinsk, Vilna, and Slutsk.

The relationship between the two councils is not entirely clear. Before the formal establishment of the Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian delegates usually held preliminary meetings at Brest before taking part in the deliberations of the Council of the Lands, but the decisions taken there may not have been binding. There are also cases where the Lithuanian delegates did not feel themselves bound by the decisions of the Council of the Lands. After 1623 the Council of Lithuania soon established its full independence but also seems to have accepted a subordinate position to the Council of the Four Lands and where differences occurred the authority of the latter seems to have prevailed. Thus, it was decided to place Tykocin, a town on the border of the *Korona* and the Grand Duchy, under the jurisdiction of the Council of the Four Lands, although formerly it had been regarded as part of Lithuania. Similarly, in a dispute between Tykocin and Grodno concerning the smaller neighbouring communities of Zabłudów, Gródek and Choroszcz, these were assigned by the Council of the Four Lands to Tykocin. In this case, however, the decision was not accepted as final by the Council of Lithuania[7]. However, there seems to be very little difference in way the two councils functioned as is evident from their minute books – that of the Council of Lithuania survived into the modern period and that of the *Korona* has been reconstructed by Israel Halpern and Israel Bartal.

There is also considerable similarity in the locations of Jewish life in the two areas. In Poland-Lithuania Jews lived in four types of location. Firstly, there were royal towns like Kraków, Vilna, Poznań, and Lviv, which were under the jurisdiction of the king or his governor and, in smaller towns, the *starosta*. Then there were the „suburbs" (areas outside the town walls not formally under the jurisdiction of the municipality) and the *jurydyki* or *libertacje* (noble or clerical enclaves) of royal towns. Thirdly, there were the many towns established on the estates of the nobility; and finally there were the villages.

7 On these disputes, see *Dubnow S.* (ed.) The Minute Book of the Council of Lithuania [Heb.]. Berlin, 1925, pp. 278–289.

There seems to be little difference in the history of the Jews in the different royal towns in Poland-Lithuania. The long-drawn out conflict between the Jews and the burghers in Vilna, which was only finally resolved in 1783, in the last days of the Commonwealth, by a decision of the grand ducal court was paralled by the similar conflicts in Kraków, Lviv and Poznań. In all these towns the situation of the Jews was dependent on the complicated balance of power between the king and nobles, on the one side, who by and large supported the right of the Jews to establish themselves and to trade, and, on the other, the burghers and the Church, who were basically hostile to them. Nevertheless, the Jews succeeded in establishing permanent settlements in these towns, which, although small by modern standards, were the scene of intense religious and cultural activity.

Royal towns were adversely affected by the growing economic and social dominance of the nobility in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 1580s. The movement of Jews from royal to noble towns had already begun in the late sixteenth century so that, in the words of the Polish economic historian Andrzej Wyrobisz, the seventeenth century in Poland-Lithuania was „an age of small towns", by which he meant noble towns[8]. In addition, economic decline began in Poland-Lithuania in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, well before the Khmelnytsky Uprising in 1648. There was a minor recovery during the reign of Jan Sobieski (1676–1696), but the nadir was reached in the first decades of the eighteenth century. From around 1720 a slow economic recovery began, which continued until the partitions.

Jews also settled in special enclaves or suburbs in those towns like Danzig, Lublin, and Warsaw, as well as many lesser commercial centres like Jarosław, which did not officially tolerate Jewish settlement within their town walls, having been granted by the king the right *de non tolerandis Judaeis*[9]. However, although they may

8 For his views, see *Wyrobisz A.* Materiały do dziejów handlu w miasteczkach polskich na początku XVIII wieku // Przegląd Historyczny, 62 (1971), s. 703–716; id, Rola miast prywatnych w Polsce w XVI i XVII wieku // Przegląd Historyczny, 65 (1974), s. 19–45; Small Towns in 16th and 17th Century Poland // Acta Poloniae Historica, 34 (1976), pp. 153–163; and Functional Types of Polish Towns in the 16th–18th Centuries // Journal of European Economic History, 12/1 (1983), pp. 69–103. On the history of Polish towns, see also Bogucka M. Polish Towns between the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries // J. K. Fedorowicz (ed.), A Republic of Nobles: Studies in Polish History to 1864. Cambridge, 1982, pp. 135–152; *Bogucka M., Samsonowicz H.* Dzieje miast i mieszczaństwa w Polsce przedrozbiorowej. Wrocław, 1986; *Gierszewski S.* Struktura gospodarcza i funkcje rynkowe mniejszych miast województwa pomorskiego w XVI i XVII w. Gdańsk, 1966.

9 On this, see *Schiper I.* Dzieje handlu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich (1937, repr.). Kraków, 1990, s. 26–27, and *Goldberg J.* De non tolerandis Iudaeis // *Yeivin S.* (ed.) Studies in Jewish History Presented to Professor Raphael Mahler on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday. Merhavia, 1974, pp. 39–52. The issue is also discussed in *Hundert G.* The Role of the Jews in Commerce in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania // Journal of European Economic History, 16 (Fall 1987), pp. 253–254 and n. 18.

have been banned from establishing themselves within these towns, Jews were frequently allowed into them to trade and participate in fairs. In order to take advantage of this situation Jewish settlements developed in areas beyond the town walls (*sub urbe*). In addition, Jews settled in *jurydyki*, areas of the towns not under the jurisdiction of the municipality. Smaller enclaves were created in Antokol (today Antakalnis) and Shnipishok (today Šnipiškės) outside the walls of Vilnius, and on the outskirts of Kiev and Kamenets-Podolsky. Again the situation in the Grand Duchy and the *Korona* seems very similar

The principal locations of Jewish life in Poland-Lithuania from the mid-sixteenth century was in the „noble" town. In 1539 Zygmunt I withdrew his judicial authority over the Jews living in towns owned by nobles; however, he still collected taxes from the Jews on private estates and offered Jews some measure of legal protection[10]. From 1563 he lost all control over lands owned by members of the nobility. Nobles were able to make their own laws, set up their own courts, and dictate the conditions of settlement for anyone who lived on their property. By the end of the sixteenth century, with the development of the manorial system, towns under private jurisdiction accounted for more than 60 per cent of all the towns in Wielkopolska and Małopolska[11]. The Jews began to move to private towns, particularly in Ukraine from the late sixteenth century. By the mid-seventeenth century probably three-quarters of the Jewish population lived in towns and villages owned by nobles[12].

These became the *shtetls* (small towns) of Jewish popular memory. In both the *Korona* and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania they were product the 'marriage of convenience" between the nobility and the Jews which developed from the mid-seventeenth century in pre-partition Poland-Lithuania. Jews began to manage the estates of the nobility through the arenda system of leasing and became the indispensable traders and craftsmen of the rural economy, locating themselves in the small towns and villages of the noble estates. By the middle of the eighteenth

10 Volumina Legum, i. 550–551; *Halpern I.* Jews and Jewry in Eastern Europe: Studies in their History [Heb.]. Jerusalem, 1968, pp. 25–26.

11 The reasons for the development of the manorial system have been the topic of much historical debate; see *Topolski J.* Sixteenth-Century Poland and the Turning Point in European Economic Development // *Fedorowicz J. K.* (ed. and trans.) A Republic of Nobles. Cambridge, 1982, pp. 74–90. For a more complete breakdown of the percentage of royal *Wyrobisz A.* Rola miast prywatnych w Polsce w XVI i XVII wieku // Przegląd Historyczny, 65 (1974), s. 19–24.

12 *Manikowski A.* Zmiany czy stagnacja? Z problematyki handlu polskiego w drugiej połowie XVII wieku // Przegląd Historyczny, 64 (1973), s. 787, and *Hundert G.* Security and Dependence: Perspectives on Seventeenth-Century Polish-Jewish Society Gained through a Study of Jewish Merchants in Little Poland', Ph.D. thesis. Columbia University, 1978, pp. 1–5.

century less than a quarter of the 750,000 Jews in Poland-Lithuania lived in towns under royal authority. Nearly three-quarters lived in towns and villages controlled by the local nobleman. The work of Adam Teller on the towns of the Radziwiłł estate has demonstrated that the situation of the Jews in the Grand Duchy was very similar to that on the Czartoryski entail, mostly in the *Korona,* as examined by Gershon Hundert and Moshe Rosman[13].

We have a less complete picture of the situation of Jews in villages in this period. According to the not wholly reliable census of 1764, nearly 27 per cent of the Jewish population lived in villages. Of these a significant proportion either maintained a house in a town or returned there when the lease they were administering ran out. Generally only one or two Jewish families were found in a village, and many villages in the western part of the country had no Jewish inhabitants. There seem to have been more rural Jews in Ukraine and in the Grand Duchy, but this still needs more examination.

Finally there was little difference in the relations between Jews and non-Jews over the Commonwealth as a whole. In Poland and Lithuania, Jews, as they were everywhere in western Christendom, were tolerated in an inferior position in order to confirm the truth of Christianity. At the same time, they constituted here a separate estate with guaranteed rights and performed specific economic functions which gave them an assured and fairly secure position. After 1648, their situation deteriorated in both the *Korona* and the Grand Duchy as the Commonwealth was prey to increasing domestic unrest, foreign violence and the growth of religious intolerance. The situation in the Grand Duchy was not, in this respect, different from that in the *Korona*. The sense of being under pressure here gave rise to the legend of the convert Walentyn Potocki, or Graf Potocki, of Vilna[14]. He is supposed to have converted to Judaism along with a noble friend, Zaremba, in Amsterdam. He eventually returned to Poland, where he was ultimately recognized and arrested. He refused to renounce Judaism, and in 1749, on the second day of Shavuot, was burned at the stake after his tongue had been ripped out, and his ashes were scat-

13 *Teller A.* Radziwiłł, Rabinowicz and the Rabbi of Świerz: The Magnates. Attitude towards Jewish Regional Autonomy in 18th Century Poland-Lithuania // Studies in the history of the Jews in old Poland: in honor of Jacob Goldberg ed. Adam Teller (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 246–276; *id* The Legal Status of the Jews on the Magnate Estates of Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century // Gal-Ed, 15–16 (2000), pp. 41–63; *id* General Arenda and the General Arendarz in Eighteenth Century Lithuania // *Aharonsohn R., Stampfer S.* (ed.) Jewish Entrepreneurship in Modern Times: Eastern Europe and Erets Yisrael [Heb.]. Jerusalem, 2000, pp. 48–78; *Rosman M.* The Lords' Jews: Magnate–Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge, Mass., 1990; *Hundert G.* The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century. Baltimore, 1992.

14 On this see *Teter M.* The Legend of Ger Zedek of Wilno as Polemic and Reassurance // AJS Review, 29/2 (2005), pp. 237–263.

tered in the area. Those who took part in his execution were said to have suffered divine punishment and Potocki was received into heaven by angels, Abraham, and the righteous. His „remains" were re-interred in the mausoleum of the Vilna Gaon in the new Jewish cemetery in Šeškinė when his grave was among those destroyed by the closing of the old Jewish cemetery in Shnipishok (today Šnipiškės) in 1948–1950. There is no historical basis for the story, although it does echo the actual persecution of several converts to Judaism, most notably the burning of Rafal Sentimani for apostasy in 1753. What it does reflect is increased Jewish insecurity in the face of the intensified Catholic conversionary effort which occurred in the eighteenth century. It does not suggest significant differences with the rest of the Commonwealth.

Religious Differences Between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the rest of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

What really led to the emergence of a specific and of a specific and distinctive „Litvak" identity were the religious conflicts engendered by the rise of hasidism. On his death in 1760 the Ba'al Shem Tov (Israel ben Eliezer) left behind what was not yet a movement but rather a circle of devoted followers. The Besht (the name is an acronym of Ba'al Shem Tov) was one of a number of charismatic mystics who emerged in Poland-Lithuania in the first half of the eighteenth century, but he differed from them in several ways. Although he was not solely responsible for the process by which the tsadik was transformed from a pious and God-fearing Jew into the leader of his community and an intermediary between the human and divine realms, he certainly played a major role in this development. There was a long tradition of mystics „ascending into heaven". What was new about the Besht was that he did not do so primarily to contemplate the divine or receive celestial instruction but in order to intervene on behalf of his followers. Unlike other *ba'alei shem* he did this not through the use of spells, but by prayer and his ability to achieve union with the Divine (*devekut)*.

In sharp contrast to the pessimistic and sin-laden atmosphere which characterized the religious culture of eighteenth-century Polish Jewry, the Besht's message was resolutely optimistic. The path to repentance was always open, and even evil impulses carried within them the potential for good. The reform of the individual could be achieved through prayer. The goal was union with the Divine achieved through ecstatic enthusiasm (hitlahavut); what was important was intensity of

feeling rather than learning. This stress on the ability of any individual to achieve union with God was linked with another novelty of the Besht's teaching, his emphasis on the fact that, unlike other mystics who were only concerned with their own salvation and that of their small circle, he wished to act on behalf of all Israel. Both of these concepts also contrasted strikingly with the elitist character of traditional rabbinic Judaism. In addition, the Besht created around himself a circle composed of his family and close disciples which can be seen as the prototype of a hasidic court, something which was later to be such a characteristic feature of the movement.

Immediately after the death of the Besht, his disciple Dov Baer of Mezhirech assumed the leadership of the movement and began its institutionalization. Hasidism now became „a typical revival or revitalization movement, marked primarily by its charismatic leadership", similar in character to the Great Awakening, Methodism, and southern United States revivalism after Reconstruction[15]. The disciples of Dov Baer spread out all over Poland-Lithuania, diffusing the message of the movement. They did so above all through preaching and, using the vernacular Yiddish, attracted significant audiences.

As a consequence, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century hasidism expanded rapidly into the rest of Ukraine and, more slowly into Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland. Its expansion was clearly the result of a combination of two factors: the attractiveness of the message contained in the movement and its success in establishing the tsadik as a charismatic leader capable of acting as the intermediary between his followers and the Divine, and the way the hasidim were able to take over the communal leadership or move into important positions in the *kahal*s in individual communities. In the course of this process, the hasidic movement was transformed from a small number of elitist and self-sufficient mystical circles into a movement with a mass following and one which was much more in tune with traditional rabbinic Judaism.

It proved somewhat difficult to establish hasidism in Lithuania, where resistance to the movement was more effective than in the other areas of the former Polish-Lithuanian-Commonwealth with the exception of Wielkopolska. The conflicts caused by the attempts to establish hasidism in Lithuania had two consequences. The first of these was the emergence of a specifically Lithuanian version of hasidism and the second the establishment among those who resisted the expansion of hasidism and who were known as *misnagdim* (opposers) of a new form of Jewish religiosity.

15 Green A. Early Hasidism: Some Old/New Questions // *Rapoport-Albert A.* (ed.) Hasidism Reappraised. London, 1996, pp. 443.

Centres of hasidism were quickly established in the Vitebsk, Korets, Karlin, Pinsk, Amdur (Indura, near Grodno), Vilna and Shklov.These, and particularly that in Shklov, were marked by their extremism. The activities of its adherents were described by Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745–1813), another disciple of the Maggid's, later to be the founder of Habad (Lubavitch) hasidism, and in a letter to Avraham Kalisker written in 1805:

> *My eyes saw and my ears heard how [the Maggid of Mezhirech] spoke sternly to you concerning your poor leadership of our people in the land of Russia [the provinces of Mogilev, Mstislavl, and Vitebsk]... Their daily speech was full of wildness and buffoonery, scoffing at the scholars and scorning them, throwing off the yoke [of the Torah], and engaging in great levity. They also constantly performed somersaults (which are called kulyen zikh) in the market-places and streets, and the name of God was desecrated in the eyes of the gentiles... .*[16]

This led to their bitter condemnation by rabbinic Jews, who pronounced them'total heretics' were able to enlist the support of Vilna Gaon, Elijah b. Shlomo Zalman (1720-96) and of the communal authorities in Vilna[17]. In May 1772 the Vilna authorities also persuaded the kehilah of Brody, the largest Jewish community in Poland-Lithuania, to excommunicate hasidim within its jurisdiction. In addition, a group of rabbis led by the Gaon organized the publication of a volume of all the denunciations of hasidism under the title *Zemir aritsim veharbot tsurim* (The Sounds of Oppression and Swords of Stone; Oleksiniec, 1772)[18].

The severe persecution to which they were subjected drove most hasidim in Lithuania underground, and Maimon's assertion that „only small traces of the society" remained is probably accurate[19]. The movement began to revive with the partitions of Poland-Lithuania. As a result of the first partition in 1772, the voivodeships of Mogilev, Mstislavl, and Vitebsk (Polotsk) came under tsarist rule. The new rulers not only recognized the authority of the *kehilot* but re-established provincial Jewish councils and confirmed the jurisdiction of Jewish courts over both religious and civil affairs. As a result in the province of Polotsk, an area where the hasidim were well established in 1772, Shneur Zalman of Lyady was persuaded to accept

16 *Shneur Zalman b. Barukh of Lyady …* The Letters of the Old Admor of Great Sanctity [Igerot kodesh kevod kedushat admor hazaken], ed. S. Duber (Brooklyn, NY, 1980), quoted in *Fishman D.* Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov. New York, 1995, pp. 7–8. The letter can also be found in a slightly different form in *Wilensky M.* Hasidim and mitnagdim: The History of the Conflict between them 1772–1815 [Heb.]. Jerusalem, 1970, 2 vols, i., 40, n. 24.

17 *Wilensky M.* Hasidim and mitnagdim: The History of the Conflict between them 1772–1815 [Heb.]. Jerusalem, 1970, 2 vols, i., 40, n. 24, i., pp. 63–64.

18 On these polemics, see *Wilensky M.* Hasidic–Mitnaggedic Polemics in the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe: The Hostile Phase // *Hundert* G. (ed.) Essential Papers on Hasidism. New York, 1991, pp. 244–271 and *id. Wilensky M.* Hasidim and mitnagdim: The History of the Conflict between them 1772–1815 [Heb.]. Jerusalem, 1970, 2 vols, i., 40 n. 24.

19 Salomon Maimon: An Autobiography, trans. J. Clark Murray. Paisley, 1888.

the leadership of the local hasidim and establish his court in Liozno in 1786. His form of hasidism was much moderate and he made a concerted if unsuccessful attempt to persuade the rabbinic establishment of his orthodoxy.

The hasidism of Shneur Zalman differed significantly from that of other hasidic leaders. It was based on respect for three principles—*hokhma* (wisdom), *binah* (understanding), and *deah* (knowledge)—and rested less on the tsadik as miracle-working intermediary and more on his role as leader and teacher, with a new respect for talmudic learning and the values of the rabbinic elite. The situation became still more favourable for the hasidim with the second and third partitions of Poland (1793 and 1795), which brought the whole of Lithuania under tsarist rule. The Russian authorities were now much less willing to uphold Jewish communal autonomy, and an imperial decree of 3 May 1795 laid down that the Jews were to be treated as an urban class, subordinate to the city magistrates. Provincial Jewish councils were „not authorized to deal with any matters other than religious rites and rituals" and were deprived of the right to issue binding decrees which could be enforced by the threat of excommunication[20].

Hasidism now began to spread in the province of Mogilev with the establishment of hasidic circles in Shklov, Orsha, Chausy, Dubrovno, and Kopys. In 1796 the hasidim of Karlin, now led by Asher, the son of Aaron, were able to establish their independence of the Pinsk *kahal*. The struggle continued in Vilna, where the mitnagdim enlisted the support of the now old and ill Gaon (he was to die in October 1797), who, in a letter of 22 June 1796, again called on all Jews to persecute and expel the hasidim because „in their breast lies sin and they (may their name be blotted out!) are like leprosy on the body of Israel"[21]. When the hasidim attempted to challenge the dominance of their mitnagdic opponents on the *kahal*, they responded in October 1797 by issuing a ban against them. The hasidim, provoked, reported this violation of Russian law to tsarist officials, who upheld their complaint, which de facto legitimized the hasidic presence in the town. This did not silence the mitnagdim, one of whom denounced Shneur Zalman in October 1798 for sending money to Turkey. After an investigation he was released, which encouraged the hasidim to try again to challenge their opponents' control of the *kahal*. The cycle of denunciation and counter-denunciation led to the imprisonment of both the members of the *kahal* and Shneur Zalman, who was finally released on 29 March 1801, after the accession of Alexander I, and allowed to return home[22].

20 PSZ 1/xxiii, no. 17327, cited in *Gessen Y.* K istorii religioznoi bor'by sredi russkikh evreev v kontse XVIII i v nachale XIX v.: (po arkhivnym dannym) // Voskhod, 22 (1902) no. 1 (Jan.), c. 116–135; no. 2 (Feb.), c. 59–90.

21 Quoted in *Cohen I.* Vilna. Philadelphia, 1943, p. 244.

22 On this conflict, see ibid, pp. 244–252.

Tension also remained high in the provinces of Polotsk and Mogilev and resulted in an uneasy truce between the two groups. In Shklov itself the division was so intense that, even after the establishment of hasidic prayer circles hasidim were still buried in a separate section of the communal cemetery[23]. The legal situation was definitively clarified by Alexander I's Statute Concerning the Organization of the Jews of 1804, which laid down that all Jewish communities were required to permit both hasidic and non-hasidic congregations to function, under the umbrella of a single, unified *kahal*. From now on Jewish religious life in Lithuania was to be divided between the adherents of the hasidim, and in particular of its habad branch, and those of their mitnagdic opponents.

The reasons for the mitnagdic opposition to hasidism are obvious. In the eyes of its critics, the similarities between the burgeoning hasidic movement and Shabateanism and Frankism were all too apparent. The practices to which they objected are also clear: the new emphasis on prayer, new methods of kosher slaughtering, somersaults during prayer, and neglect of Torah study. All of these must have seemed, in the eyes of the mitnagdim, to link the new movement with the radical religious manifestations in Jewish life in the last three generations whose remnants were still to be found. They also strongly objected to the movement's secessionist impulses, which involved separate prayer halls and the rejection of the communal slaughterer. In addition, some critics of the new movement attacked it for even worse excesses, and their propaganda resembles the demonization to which other revivalist movements have been subjected. Among its themes were the way in which the movement asserted the infallibility of the individual tsadik, its view of the role of sin in redemption, its aspiration to create a permanent schism in Jewish life, as well as its promotion of masturbation with ejaculation in prayer, wild and licentious gaiety, and its glorification of alcohol and tobacco[24].

Soon, however, it became apparent that it was not sufficient simply to oppose the new movement. The reasons for its attractiveness would have to be recognized and countered. The nineteenth century thus saw a very significant evolution in the character of the mitnagdic opponents of hasidism. In many respects this was a mirror image of the transformation of the hasidic movement. Whereas the hasidim moved away from the stress on the importance of the individual believer establishing a personal rapport with God through cleaving to Him and showed more concern for religious observance and talmudic argument, the later mitnagdim, par-

23 *Fishman D.* Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov. New York, 1995, p. 21.

24 On this, see *Wilensky* Hasidic-Mitnaggedic Polemics in the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe'; *id.* … Hasidim and mitnagdim (Heb.); and *Shochet E. J.* The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna. Northvale, NJ, 1994.

ticularly in the Musar movement began to stress moral attitudes and meditative techniques, while still insisting on the centrality of *halakhah*.

The mitnagdic tradition traces its roots to the Vilna Gaon[25]. He resisted the growth of the new movement, despite his interest in mysticism and kabbalah, because he believed its followers gave precedence to mystical understanding over *halakhah*. The adoption of the Sephardi prayer book, with its Lurianic additions, seemed to him a clear sign that the movement was in danger of degenerating into Shabateanism or Frankism, while its stress on union with the Divine and service of God in joy would, he felt, lead to contempt for Torah. He was not a hidebound conservative. His awareness of the different way in which many *halakhot* were cited in different parts of the Talmud led him to attempt to establish a definitive text by comparing different sources, although he refused to accept emendations for which no source could be found. He also rejected the casuistic hair-splitting of traditional talmudic study and wanted the straightforward methods of biblical exposition favoured by Rashi ((Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105) to be applied to talmudic study. At the same time he was a bitter opponent of the Haskalah, imposing a severe punishment on the preacher Abba of Glusk for favouring the methods of biblical exposition advocated by the Berlin maskilim.

In his personal life the Gaon stressed modesty and refused communal office, and his saintly detachment was made into a cult by his followers, in what was a conscious attempt to provide a counterweight to hasidic hagiography. Indeed, his combination of personal humility with rigorous and extensive scholarship was to be the model for later mitnagdim. Not only was his reputation the result of his position as perhaps the leading talmudic scholar of the eighteenth century, but it was also sedulously fostered by his two sons.

Torah study was now given priority even over the observance of the Commandments. This stress on Torah study enabled his sons to claim obliquely that he embodied in his teachings the best values of both hasidism and the Haskalah. Through his single-minded devotion to study the Gaon was able „always to worship God through joy [the hasidic ideal] ... [and] every day to strengthen true enlightenment (*haskalah amitit*) through his hands".

His most important disciple, Haim Ben Isaac Volozhiner (1749–1821), was much more of a practical organizer, and the yeshiva he founded in 1802 in Volozhin (today Valozhyn in Belarus), in spite of its use of the traditional name, was an institu-

25 On the Vilna Gaon, see *Etkes I.* The Gaon of Vilna: The Man and his Image, trans. J. M. Green. Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002; *Shochet* The Hasidic Movement and the Gaon of Vilna. On mitnagdism generally, see *Nadler* The Faith of the Mithnagdim: Rabbinic Responses to Hasidic Rapture. Baltimore, 1997.

tion of a new type which attempted to provide an institutional underpinning to mitnagdism. Indeed, Haim in his writings had criticized the decline of the traditional yeshiva, which was probably more the consequence of the loss of financial support caused by the abolition of the Council of the Four Lands and the Council of Lithuania than of the attractiveness of hasidism[26]. The Volozhin yeshiva, „the place where the soul of the nation was formed", to use Bialik's phrase[27], became the model for subsequent institutions of this type. It drew students from a wide geographical area, selection was rigorous, and collegial study, usually in pairs (*havruta*), was favoured over solitary learning. Textual criticism within the limits laid down by the Gaon was also favoured. The goal was not so much to train rabbis or investigate problems of *halakhah* as to create a new type of scholar devoted to abstract investigation of the problems thrown up by Torah study. Critical investigation was encouraged. At the same time there were strict limits on what could be investigated, and in the course of the nineteenth century the openness of the Volozhin yeshiva and similar institutions modelled on it diminished, while hostility to the study of secular subjects, which was widely seen as *bitul torah* (disrespect of Torah), increased.

The Volozhiner also developed the theology of the Gaon. Making use of kabbalistic as well as rabbinic sources, he further elevated the study of Torah to a goal in itself. This Torah was to be identified with the mystical *Eyn sof*, the ultimate essence of the Deity. The goal of Torah study was understanding rather than ecstatic communion, and it should be accompanied by punctilious observance of the Commandments. This clearly marked off mitnagdism from the hasidic movement, but in his dealings with its adherents, the Volozhiner sought to convince rather than persecute, refusing to sign any of the decrees of excommunication.

It was from the work of the Gaon and the Volozhiner that the Musar movement emerged (*musar* means „ethics", „instruction", as in Prov. 1: 8: „Hear my son the instruction (*musar*) of your father and do not forsake the teaching (*torah*) of your mother"). The Volozhiner's pupil Joseph Zundel b. Benjamin Benish Salant (1786–1866) did not remain long in Lithuania. He refused to accept a rabbinic position and moved to Jerusalem in 1837. Before he did so, he inspired his student Israel b. Ze'ev Wolf Lipkin (Salanter) (1810–1883), the founder of the Musar movement, with his ideals of humility and scholarship[28]. In this way he sowed the seeds for its further expansion and the strong position it established in Lithuania.

26 *Etkes* The Gaon of Vilna.

27 Quoted in *Biale D.* A Journey between Worlds: East European Jewish Culture from the Partitions of Poland to the Holocaust // *Biale* (ed.) Cultures of the Jews: A New History. New York, 2002, p. iii: Modern Encounters, 86.

28 On Salanter, see *Etkes* Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Musar Movement.

The Specific character of the Haskalah in Lithuania

A second factor which contributed to the development of the Litvak identity was the specific character of the Haskalah in Lithuania. Vilna remained a centre of traditional Jewish scholarship throughout the nineteenth century and it was at this time that it came to be described as the „Jerusalem of Lithuania„. The haskalah here was rather conservative and saw its goal as the reform of Jewish life through a modernized version of the Hebrew language. When the government created two rabbinical schools in the Tsarist Empire in 1844 in order to create a rabbinate capable of carrying out its agenda of „reforming" the Jewish community (a goal which these schools proved quite incapable of fulfilling), one was set up in Vilna. Like its counterpart in Zhitomir, it provided employment for the cream of the Russian Haskalah. The poet Abrarahm Dov Lebensohn taught Hebrew here; Wolf Tugendhold, who had also been associated with the Warsaw Rabbinic School, taught Jewish history; Samuel Joseph Fuenn and Judah Behak taught the Jewish religion; while Samuel b. Joseph Strashun (Zaskovitzer) and Hirsh Kliaczko taught Mishnah and Talmud. His son, Julian Klaczko, was to be one of the few exponents of a Polish orientation among the Jews of the area.

Abraham Dov Lebensohn (Adam Hakohen, 1794?–1878) was not the only Hebrw poet to establish himself in Vilna. It was also the home of his son Micah Joseph Lebensohn (1828–1852) a more significant talent and of the most important of the Hebrew poets of the Haskalah Judah Leib Gordon (1831–1892)[29]. The most important of the Hebrew novelists of this period, Abraham Mapu (1808–1867), also made his home in Vilna. The town was also the seat of one of the most important of the Hebrew weeklies established in the 1860s, *Hakarmel* (Mount Carmel), which appeared from 1860 and was edited by Samuel Joseph Fuenn. *Hakarmel* expressed in somewhat platitudinous language the principal ideas of the original Russian maskilim: the importance of education in the vernacular of the country, the value of secular culture, and the importance of moderate Jewish religious reform. The town was also the birthplace of the first major Russian-Jewish novelist, Lev Levanda, whose novel *Goryachee vremya* (Seething Times, 1871) describes the conflict between the Polish and Russian orientations among the local Jewish elite in Vilna and Minsk.

The moderate character of the haskalah meant that it was able to coexist with the dominant misnagdic religious culture without the bitter conflicts which were

[29] On Gordon, see *Stanislawski* For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry. New York, 1988.

found elsewhere. As a result, there was a large group of men in the area who had both some religious and secular education which is one of the factors which explains why so many Lithuanian emigrants worked as melamdim or religious functionaries

Emigration within and from the Tsarist Empire

Certainly emigration was a further factor in the establishment of the concept of the Litvak both within the Tsarist Empire and beyond. Before the nineteenth century apart from exceptional periods such as that the Khmelnystky uprising, the Jewish population of Poland-Lithuania was relatively stable with relatively little local or international emigration, as seems to be confirmed by the the persistence of regional dialects in Yiddish up to the twentieth century, as well as local customs and foods[30]. The nineteenth century was marked by large-scale migration of Jews both within the Empire and beyond its borders. Attention has been concentrated on the first which was certainly on a vast scale. Emigration was on an enormous scale. Between 1880 and 1930 a total of 1,749,000 Jews left Russia for the United States, while the total number of Jewish emigrants from the tsarist empire in this period reached nearly 2,285,000. As significant was internal migration within the Empire which began to expand greatly from the first half of the nineteenth century and led to the movement of tens of thousands of Jews to southern Ukraine, to benefit from the economic upswing there, or, on a much smaller scale, to participate in government schemes to settle them on the land. The number of Jews in the south-western provinces of the Empire increased from around 100,000 in the middle ofof the nineteenth century to nearly a million on the eve of the First World War and major Jewish settlements emerged here, above all in Odessa. As the industrial revolution began to take off in the Kingdom of Poland in the second half of the century, large numbers of Jews also moved to the rapidly growing industrial centres there, above all Warsaw and Łódź, both from the Kingdom of Poland and from the north-eastern provinces[31]. The areas which had been part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, in particular the provinces of Kovno, Vilna, Vitebsk, Mogilev

30 See *Herzog M.* (ed.) Language and Cultural Atlas of Ashkenazic Jewry. Tübingen, 1992; *Bavisker V.* et al. Yiddish Language in Northern Poland. The Hague, 1965; *Weinreich M.* History of Yiddish Language. Chicago, 1980, esp. pp. 15–20, pp. 578–579.

31 *Corrsin S.D.* Warsaw before the First World War. Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989; For more discussion and references on the 'Litvak invasion' see *Garncarska-Kadow B.* Helkam shel ha-yehudim be-hitpatbut ba-ta 'asia shel Varsba ba-shanim 1816/20–1914. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1985, p. 292; *Scott U.* The Łódź Jewish community (unpublished).

and Minsk saw relatively little industrial development in the nineteenth century and were one of the main sources both of internal and overseas emigration. This made the rest of the Jewish world much more conscious of the existence and characteristics of the Litvak.

The Impact of Tsarist Policy

The areas which had formerly been parts of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came under tsarist rule with the partitions of Poland and the Russian hold over this area was confirmed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The policies the tsarist authorities pursued in relation to their newly-acquired Jewish subjects were part of an attempt to transform the Empire into a „properly governed state", following the example of the enlightened autocracies of the eighteenth century, Austria and Prussia. Two main principles underlay the actions of the government. In the first place there was its belief that the Jews were a harmful element. They were unjustly blamed for disrupting relations between landlords and peasants in the sensitive Western provinces of the Empire, and it was felt that action needed to be taken in order to limit their deleterious influence. In their prejudiced view, Jews despised non-Jews and kept themselves separate from gentile society, feeling no loyalty to the country in which they lived or its sovereign. They disdained physical labour, which they felt should be performed by the inferior peasantry, and were concentrated in unproductive and parasitical occupations which depended on the exploitation of the surrounding society.

Yet at the same time Tsarist bureaucrats, for the most part men of the Enlightenment, shared the general European view that the faults of the Jews were not innate, but the consequence of their unfortunate history. Although the negative behavior of the Jews had to be curbed, Jewish society could be made over by reforms which would transform them into useful subjects though not citizens. These policies were most aggressively pursued during the reign of Nicholas I who intervened actively in Jewish life attempting to break up Jewish „separatism", conscripting the Jews and attempting to Russify them through special schools. Although in the 1860s these harsh measures had been rescinded, the promised abolition of the restrictions on Jewish civil rights had never been introduced. Only limited concessions were granted to the Jews during this period and the 1870s saw the widespread acceptance of Judeophobia among important sections of the bureaucracy.

These policies did lead to the emergence of a small Russian speaking Jewish elite, made up of both bankers and industrialists, on the one hand, and intellectuals, many the product of the Rabbinic schools on the other. In the north-western

provinces of the Empire, the administration was preoccupied with the developing conflict with Polish national aspirations which culminated in the significant support for the Polish uprisings of 1830–1831 and 1863–1864. Particularly after 1863, the authorities, above all Mikhail Muraviev took strong action against local Poles in the area, confiscating Polish landholdings and suppressing Polish cultural influence. There had been some limited Jewish support for the Polish insurrectionaries, but most Jews had attempted to remain neutral in the conflict and some had taken the Russian side, particularly in 1863. In the aftermath of this last uprising, there was some discussion within the tsarist bureaucracy as to whether the Jews could be used to advance the russification of the area, but by the 1870s this came to be regarded as undesirable.

This was at a time when, in the run-up to the 1863 uprising, the competition for the loyalty of the Jewish population between the Polish opposition which aimed to enlist them for the anti-tsarist insurrection they were planning and Alexander Wielopolski, the reforming head of the Civil Administration of the Kingdom and his Russian superiors, led to the introduction by Wielopolski on 4 June 1862 (O.S.) of effective legal equality for the Jews of the Kingdom. This legislation abolished all the main restrictions on Jewish activity and was not abrogated after the crushing of the insurrection. Indeed, Wielopolski's hope that by emancipating the Jews, they would become a significant element in an emerging Polish middle class, which could carry out the capitalist transformation of the Kingdom of Poland and give it a much more balanced and western social structure was shared Polish liberals. This group, which included Alexander Świętochowski and Eliza Orzeszkowa and who called themselves Positivists because of their admiration for the secular and pro-industrial ideas of Auguste Comte, were to dominate intellectual life in the Kingdom of Poland for much of the 1870s and 1880s.

Their views had little resonance among the Poles in the north-western provinces although the *Kurier Wileński* did give its support for Aleksander Wielopolski's establishment of legal equality for the Jews. After the 1863 uprising, support for a Polish orientation disappeared almost completely from the Jews of this area.

The Emergence of the New Jewish Politics and its consequences

A final factor in the emergence of the Litvak identity was the development of the „new Jewish politics". In the aftermath of the pogroms of 1881–1882, the Tsarist government came to the conclusion that these had been the result of „Jewish exploitation" and that the integration of the Jews was not a desirable goal. This caused

a crisis for the integrationist Jewish elite in the Empire. A number still hoped for a change in the Tsarist regime which would make the establishment of Jewish equal rights possible, but support a „national" solution of the Jewish question and for the belief that only the replacement of the capitalist system by socialism would make possible Jewish integration gained ground. These ideologies were particularly attractive in the north-western provinces, because this was an area where neither Poles nor Russians formed the majority of the population.

Table 1. Distribution of the population of Vilna in 1897 by language (000s)

	Number	%
Total	154,500	
Polish	47,600	30.8
Yiddish	61,800	40,0
Russian	30,900	20.0
Lithuanian	3,200	2.1
Belarusian	6,500	4.2
Other	4,500	2.9

Sources: Pervaya vseoobshchaya perepis' naselenia Rossiiskoi Imperii; *Eberhardt P.* Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie, s. 46, 49.

Table 2. Distribution of the population of Vilna in 1897 by religion (000s)

	Number	%
Total	154,500	
Roman Catholic	56,700	36.7
Russian Orthodox	28,600	18.5
Jewish	63,800	41.3
Other	5,400	3.5

Sources*:* Pervaya vseoobshchaya perepis' naselenia Rossiiskoi Imperii; *Eberhardt P.* Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie, s. 46, 49.

Table 3. Distribution of the population in the Vilenskaya gubernya in the boundaries of the present Lithuanian Republic by language (000s)

	Number	%
Total	738,900	
Polish	106,100	14.3
Yiddish	108,800	14.2
Russian	56,400	7.6
Lithuanian	252,300	34.1
Belarusian	207,600	28.1
Other	11,700	1.7

Sources*:* Pervaya vseoobshchaya perepis' naselenia Rossiiskoi Imperii; *Eberhardt P. Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie*, s. 46, 49.

Table 4. Distribution of the population in the Vilenskaya gubernya in the boundaries of the present Lithuanian Republic by religion (000s)

	Number	%
Total	738,900	
Roman Catholic	542,200	73.3
Russian Orthodox	62,700	18.5
Jewish	111,000	15.0
Other	23,000	3.2

Sources: Pervaya vseoobshchaya perepis' naselenia Rossiiskoi Imperii; *Eberhardt P.* Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie, s. 46, 49.

Table 5. Distribution of the population in the Kovenskaya gubernya by language (000s)

	Number	%
Total	1544,600	
Polish	139,600	9.0
Yiddish	211,900	13.7
Russian	73,000	4.7
Lithuanian	1,019,800	66.0
Belarusian	37,600	2.4
Other	62,700	4.2

Sources: *Pervaya vseoobshchaya perepis' naselenia Rossiiskoi Imperii*; Eberhardt P. *Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie*, s. 46, 49.

Table 6. Distribution of the population in the Kovenskaya gubernya in the boundaries of the present Lithuanian Republic by religion (000s)

	Number	%
Total	1,544,600	
Roman Catholic	1,180,400	76,4
Russian Orthodox	46,600	3.0
Jewish	213,000	13,8
Other	104,600	6,8

The new Jewish politics is usually described as based on the concept of „peoplehood" instead of „religion" as the marker for Jewish identity and and as involving a rejection of the old Jewish elite's claim to a political monopoly and the entry of new elements into political life, above all the intelligentsia. There is another element which should also be stressed. The new politics emerged at a time of the political mobilization in Tsarist Russia of previously passive political groups and, after 1905, to electoral politics, with the demagogy this seemed to entail. It also compelled the practitioners of the new politics to look for allies in the wider political scene. Certainly, the search for allies had been a feature of Jewish politics from the beginning of the process of Jewish integration (and probably before). The

Maskilim had looked to enlightened autocrats to aid them in their transformation of the Jews, while Jewish integrationists had sought liberal and democratic allies, seeing Jewish emancipation as part of the wider process of the establishment of constitutional government. The practitioners of the new Jewish politics rejected the liberals (or felt they were rejected by them). Herzl was even prepared to negotiate with the Tsarist Minister of the Interior, Vyacheslav Plehve and sought the support of reactionary governments to assist in the creation of the Jewish state. This was also, later, the policy of Jabotinsky. The more radical Zionist groups, particularly after the Helsingfors Conference in 1906, sought to ally themselves with groups in the Tsarist Empire struggling for constitutional rule or with the rising national groups in the western parts of the Empire, above all the Lithuanians. For the Bund, the only possible allies could be other revolutionary socialist parties.

The new Jewish stress on peoplehood led to bitter disillusionment among most Polish supporters of Jewish integration and the transformation of the Jews into „Poles of the Jewish Faith". When this concept began to make its impact in the Kingdom of Poland in the 1890s, Polish political life was in a state of flux. The Polish intelligentsia was divided between conservatives and positivist liberals, with a tiny group of socialists on the fringe of one side and radical anti-semites on the other. Antisemitism had already struck root in all parts of dismembered Poland, but had not yet gained respectability in the mainstream of Polish culture. The emergence of the new Jewish politics created a crisis for the Polish liberals. They believed their genuine offer of integration had been rejected by the Jews. In the words of one of their key spokesmen, Alexander Świętochowski in his memoirs, written somewhat later (in the 1920s):

> *I admit only to the name of evolutionist in philosophy and national humanist in sociology. Because of my views, I defended the Jews fifty years ago, when they wished to be Poles, and, because of the same views, I do not defend them today, when they wish to be Jews, enemies of the Poles*[32].

Not all Polish responses were as extreme as this. There were those who opposed the chauvinist tide. The most consistent opponent of the spreaders of racial hatred was Jan Baudouin De Courtenay who saw its roots in the national idea itself and who staunchly defended the inalienable right of every individual to choose his own way of life. The socialist ideologue, Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz had also somewhat earlier expressed his support for the Jewish national aspirations[33].

The emergence of a national concept of Jewish identity was much less threatening to the other nationalist movements in the former Commonwealth which were

32 *Świętochowski A.* Wspomnienia. Warszawa, 1966, s. 86.

33 *Snyder T.* Nationalism, Marxism, and Modern Central Europe: A Biography of Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz (1872–1905). Cambridge, MA, 1997.

challenging the hegemony of the Polish noble class and Polish cultural influence. The representatives of the emerging Ukrainian national movement in Galicia saw the emergence of autonomous Jewish politics as a tool to undermine Polish hegemony and sought after the establishment of universal male suffrage in the Habsburg Empire to ally themselves with Galician Zionists. This reaction was even more apparent in the north-western provinces, where the emerging Lithuanian national movement felt more threatened by Poles than by Jews and where a degree of cooperation developed in the Duma elections of 1906 and 1907.

The First World War fundamentally transformed the situation of the Jews in Eastern Europe. It was accompanied by appalling devastation and the worst anti-Jewish massacres since the Khmelnytsky uprising. It saw the emergence on the ruins of the Tsarist Empire a revolutionary state committed to a new and more extreme version of the policy articulated by Stanislaus de Clermont-Tonnerre in 1791 of giving the Jews everything as individuals and taking away from them all semblance of communal autonomy. At the same time, as a transitional step, to aid Jewish integration, a specific form of socialist Jewish autonomy, expressed through a sovietized Yiddish language was established. From today's perspective, we know how the Soviet Utopia turned out, both in general and in its specifically Jewish aspects. But in the 1920s, it exerted a considerable attraction to many in the Jewish world.

At the same time the collapse of the Tsarist, Austro-Hungarian and German states made possible the creation of Polish and Lithuanian national states. The peacemakers at Versailles were determined to safeguard the rights of the national minorities in these states, and these guarantees were not only inserted in the respective Polish and Lithuanian constitutions, but were guaranteed by the Allied and Associated Powers in the peace settlement. This also gave international underpinning to the British promises in the Balfour Declaration to establish a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine. The Jewish delegations at Versailles were an uneasy mix of old-style integrationionists like Lucien Wolf and Louis Marshall and proponents of the new politics. But the final settlement seemed to fulfill the highest dreams of those who thought in terms of Jewish peoplehood, both in underpinning Zionist aspirations and in the establishment of conditions for the creation of a system of non-territiorial national autonomy in Eastern Europe.

The autonomists focussed their highest hopes for the creation of such a system on Lithuania. According to Leo Motzkin, who represented the World Zionist Organization at the Second Jewish National Assembly in Lithuania held in Kaunas on 14 February 1922, „Fifteen million Jews are watching your experiment in the struggle for national rights". In response, Dr Max Soloveitchik, Minister for Jewish

Affairs in the Lithuanian Government affirmed that „Lithuania is the source from which will flow ideas which will form the basis for new forms of Jewish life"[34].

By now, as I have tried to show Lithuanian Jewry had a very specific character derived from the the misnagdic and musar tradition, the absence of much acculturation, whether of the Polish or the Russian variety, and the strength in the area of a Hebrew-based haskalah and of Zionism. It seemed the ideal soil on which to establish a system of Jewish autonomy. This also seemed to be in the interests of both Jews and Lithuanians. The two groups had co-operated before the war in elections to the Duma and the Lithuanians hoped that the Jews would support their claims to Vilna. The seemed to be no fundame ntal economic conflict between the emerging Lithuanian intelligentsia and Jews and the Lithuanian nationalists were more comfortable with specifically Jewish cultural manifestations than with Jewish acculturation to Russian, Polish or German culture. Given the mixed character of the area, Jewish national autonomy would also make the state more attractive to Belarussians and Germans who might be incorporated into it.

The origins of the autonomous system lay in period of the emergence of Lithuania. In Septmber 1918, as German rule in the area was collapsing, a Zionist Central Committee was established in Vilna which supported the Lithuanian claims to the town. Shortly afterwards, the German authorities set up a Lithuanian parliament *(taryba)* and called on it to respect minority rights.Three Jews represented the Jewish community in the new Lithuanian government, Dr Samson Rosenbaum, vice-minister for foreign affairs; Dr N. Rachmilevich, vice-minister for trade and industry and Dr Jacob Wygodzki, minister for Jewish affairs. This government was forced to move to Kaunas following the Polish capture of the city on 1 January 1919, to be followed five days later by the Bolsheviks, who were to be expelled by the Polish legionaries again on 19 April. Dr Max Soloveitchik replaced Wygodzki in the Lithuanian government.

What the Jews understood by autonomy was clearly set out in Point 5 of the memorandum submitted by the Committee of Jewish Delegations to the Paris Peace Conference, which demanded that the Jewish minority be recognised as an autonomous and independent organization with the right to direct its own religious, cultural, philanthropic and social institutions. In relation to Lithuania, the Jews asked for full rights for Jewis in the spheres of politics, economics and language, for representation in parliament, administrative bodies and courts to be

[34] Proceeding of the Second Congress on the Jewish Communities and the Jewish National Assembly. Stenographic Reports, Yidishe shtime, Kaunas, February 1922, quoted in *Gringauz S.* Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania (1918–1925) // Jewish Social Studies, 14, no. 3 (July 1952), pp. 225–246. See also *Liekis Š.* A state within a state?: Jewish autonomy in Lithuania 1918–1925. Vilnius, 2003.

based on the Jewish proportion of the population and for autonomy to be based on three sets of institutions; local *kehilot*, a National Jewish Council and a Ministry for Jewish Affairs[35].

As we know this experiment failed. The reasons are clear. The two sides had unrealistic expectations of each other. The Lithuanians believed that the Jews would aid them in acquiring Vilna and Memel and in attracting Belarussians to a multinational Lithuania. They had much less need of the Jews in the fairly homogeneous Lithuania which actually emerged, while it soon became clear that Jewish would not be a significant factor in acquiring Vilna. The Jews, for their part, took too seriously assurances made by the leading Lithuanian politicians. Their commitment to Jewish autonomy was always dependent on their larger goals. There were other reasons for the failure of the experiment. It fell prey to the Lithuanian party conflict and the degree of consensus necessary for its success was absent on the Jewish community. It may be, too, that there is an inherent contradiction between the basic principles of the liberal state and the guaranteeing of *group* rights.

Conclusion

What is left of the Litvak identity today? Most Jews seem to see it, above all, as a reflection of religious differences. When I asked a leading reform rabbi, who was born in Sosnowiec, what he understood by „Litvak", he replied, „I am a spiritual Litvak, because I believe in a rational approach to religious questions". Certainly the consciousness of the division between Litvak, Polak, Ukrainer and Galizianer in the Jewish world seems to have faded greatly. At the same time the need to subject this phenomenon to a scholarly investigation remains pressing. There have been a few studies of the history of the Litvaks but there are still many unanswered questions. It is my hope that people from all the religious and national groups which made up the Grand Duchy of Lithuania will take part in this process.

35 *Gringauz S.* Jewish National Autonomy in Lithuania (1918–1925), p. 234.