NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Village Jews in Imperial Russia's Nineteenth-Century Minsk Governorate Viewed through a Genealogical Lens

By Neville Lamdan, D.Phil.

Systematic use of sources favored by genealogists can answer questions about specific and understudied populations.

Throughout the nineteenth century, village Jews (*yeshuvnikes* in Yiddish) constituted a significant segment of the Jewish population in Russia's Pale of Settlement.[1] Their precise numbers are unknown. Estimates for the early 1800s range from a quarter to a third, if not more, of the region's Jewish population, with considerable variations across time and place.[2]

Scant research addresses these Jews, relative to the more abundant work on Jews in towns.[3] The reason is clear. Histories of Jewish populations in the Pale

© Neville Lamdan, D.Phil; International Institute for Jewish Genealogy; c/o National Library of Israel, Edmond J. Safra Campus, Givat Ram; Post Office Box 39105; Jerusalem, 91390, Israel; info@iijg.org. Dr. Lamdan, director of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy, is a former Israeli diplomat and well-known proponent of academic genealogy. This article is based on a paper delivered in July 2010 at the ninth congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies, in Ravenna, Italy. Websites referenced herein were accessed on 6 June 2011.

1. The Pale of Settlement was the area in Imperial Russia in which Jews were permitted to reside, as defined by Catherine II in 1794 (after the Second Partition of Poland) and maintained with minor modifications until April 1917, when it was abolished. After the Third Partition of Poland (1795) and throughout the nineteenth century, the Pale encompassed Russian Poland, Lithuania, Courland, Byelorussia, much of the Ukraine, the Crimea, and Bessarabia. See John Klier, "Pale of Settlement," in YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement).

2. For recent approximations of East European Jewish populations, see Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, Chaya Naor, transl. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 42. Bartal writes that at the end of 1700s, "nearly 30%" of East European Jews lived in villages and were linked to the estate economy. Also, Gershon David Hundert, in *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 29, writes that in 1764–65 almost 27 percent of Jews in Poland lived in rural areas, with sizeable variations in different provinces, citing Raphael Mahler, *Yidn in amolikn Poyln in likht fun tzifern* [Jews in early Poland in the light of numbers] (Warsaw: Yidish Bukh, 1958).

3. For terms and topics touched on in this study, see Gershon D. Hundert, ed., *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 3 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008); online edition, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/).

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deal mostly with large communities that left records and produced well-known religious and secular figures. Yeshuvnikes, in contrast, generally belonged to no rabbinical, intellectual, commercial, or communal elite. They lived in isolation, forming a scattered, largely anonymous mass. While residing in overwhelmingly non-Jewish environments and representing an ongoing focus of concern for Russian authorities, they seldom have drawn scholars' attention.[4]

Nonetheless, village Jews merit serious research addressing basic questions: What were their precise numbers? Because two or three yeshuvnik families lived among vastly larger, mostly Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Christian populations, how did they maintain a Jewish way of life? What languages did they speak? How did they relate to local nobility and landowners? How did they interact with the non-Jewish majority, largely serfs? How were they similar to, and different from, town Jews? How did urbanization, increased mobility, and mass migration affect them?

Systematic use of resources favored by genealogists can answer these and other questions. The sources include Polish-Lithuanian poll-tax lists and Russian *Revizskaya skazka* [census] records, *Metricheskie knigi* [vital records] (kept by rabbis from 1826 onwards), and *Posemeinye spiski* and *obyvatel'skie knigi* [family registers] (deposited with the municipality and updated every two years or whenever a Jew changed residence). These sources list identifiable village Jews in detail.[5] Scholarly genealogical research and critical examination of private letters, personal memoirs, and family lore can place individual Jewish lives into broader contexts. Careful scrutiny of such sources can throw light on the personality and predicament of the village Jew in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe and provide contrasting insight on the lives and lifestyles of urban Jews.

Five interrelated families of yeshuvnikes appear representative of village Jews.[6] Generalizations reported here resulted from genealogical studies of this

4. Literature surveys produce few extended studies of village Jews in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe. *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* often mentions village Jews but offers no article devoted to them. On the other hand, Eastern European villages and village Jews were popular motifs in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Yiddish and Hebrew literature, which often portrays them in nostalgic and romanticized ways.

5. For descriptions of these records, see Vladislav Soshnikov, "Jewish Genealogical Research in the Imperial Russian Empire," *Avotaynu* 16 (Summer 2000): 32–37. For the revision lists, see Harold Rhode, "What May be Learned from 19th-Century Czarist Jewish Birth Records and Revision Lists," *Avotaynu* 10 (Fall 1994): 3–7.

6. The families are: Abeliansky (first identified in the village of Varavichi—later moved to Vielke Luki); Khvedyuk-Mandel (from Khvedyuki—then spread to several villages in the *volost* [district] of Lechovich and beyond); Mlotok (from Ved'ma and other villages); Puzharik (from Gorodeja, a large village with a Jewish majority, near the town of Kletsk); and Strelovsky (whose name derives from the village of Strelovo, while family members appear first in Aikoche and later in Male Luki). Records often identify members of the group by given name(s), patronymic, and surname (for example, Shloima, son of Yankel, Mandel). To avoid confusion in this article's context, the patronymic is placed last (for example, Shloima Mandel, son of Yankel).

sample. From the end of the 1700s to the outbreak of World War I, and somewhat beyond, they lived within the orbit of the old shtetl of Lechovich.[7] Under the Jewish semi-autonomous Council of the Four Lands, Lechovich fell within the community of Brest. For most of the 1800s it was administratively part of Slutsk *Uyezd* [county] within Imperial Russia's Minsk *Gubernya* [governorate]. It lies roughly halfway between the cities of Minsk and Brest-Litovsk in today's Belarus.[8]

In 1784 ninety-eight villages lay within the future administrative district of Lechovich. Three hundred seventy-five Jews lived in these villages—more than the three hundred sixty Jewish residents in the town proper.[9]

For this study's purposes, a village comprises about four hundred inhabitants, usually fewer. Larger communities, with five hundred souls and more, are referred to as towns or *shtetlach* and the Jews living in them as *shtetl* Jews or urban Jews.[10]

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN VILLAGE AND URBAN JEWS

After the Third Partition of Poland, in 1795, the autocratic Czarist regime in St. Petersburg imposed highly discriminatory legislation on Jews in the Pale of Settlement. Particularly burdensome areas involved taxation, conscription, and limitations on residence and property ownership. Jews faced an ever-present, heavy-handed, and corrupt regional bureaucracy.[11] Villagers interacted with local Russian authorities primarily when they adopted surnames, registered residences, provided census information, served in the military, and paid taxes. In these situations rural Jews behaved like urban Jews, but usually with an observable village nuance.

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7. "Lechovich" is how the town's name was pronounced in Yiddish. In Belorussian, it is spelled "Lyakhovichi" and in Polish, "Lachowicze."

8. Most official Russian records for Lechovich during the period under consideration are housed in the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk (NHAB). These records contributed extensively to the present study. Other, less rewarding, records are found in the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Grodno, the State Archives of the Brest Region, in Brest, and in the Zonal State Archives, in Baranovichi.

9. Poll tax list (in Polish), 1784, file LVIA, FSA AP. – B3754L.643§, pp. 641–44v; NHAB. For digital images, an English translation, and a searchable database, see "Documents of Lyakhovichi History: The 1784 Grand Duchy of Lithuania Poll Tax," *Shtetl Links: Lyakhovichi* (http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/lyakhovichi/lyakhovichi.html).

10. Samuel Kassow, "Shtetl," in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shtetl).

11. Simon M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 3 vols., transl., I. Friedlander (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916). All standard histories of Jews in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century cover the subject of anti-Jewish legislation, usually in depth.

Last Names

A December 1804 statute required Russian Jews to adopt permanent last names.[12] Within about a decade the process was virtually complete for town and village Jews in the Lechovich area.[13] Perhaps for convenience village Jews at first tended to adopt toponymics after their home villages. For example, thirty-three last names of some fifty Jewish innkeepers in Lechovich-area villages in 1805 were toponyms.[14] In contrast, patronymic and matronymic last names were more prevalent in towns, presumably to differentiate people with the same given name. Gradually, village-based toponymics were changed—for the same reasons Jews frequently changed surnames, including attempts to avoid conscription and taxation. By 1816 and 1819 several of the 1805 innkeepers had changed their last names.[15]

Many Jewish surnames in towns reflected trades. Such names are less common in villages, where the range of occupations was limited. A few, however, appear in Lechovich in 1819: Kovel (Yiddish for *blacksmith*) and Mlotok (Russian for *hammer*). Inexplicably, surnames like Krechmer (*innkeeper*) and Milner (*miller*), both adopted by Jews in some villages, are not on early Lechovich lists.[16]

Classification and Registration

In 1794 virtually all Jews in Russia were classified as town dwellers.[17] That created a curious anomaly that continued throughout the 1800s—almost all village Jews were officially recorded as urban. Later, as the authorities became more efficient in identifying and enumerating Jews, supplementary

12. For the law, see Vitaly Osipovich Levanda, *Polnyi khronologicheskii sbornik zakonov i polozhenii kasaiushchikhsia Evreev: ot Ulozheniia Tsaria Aleksieia Mikhailovicha do nastoiashchago vremeni, ot 1649–1873 g.* [The complete chronological collection of laws and legal positions concerning the Jews: from the legal code of Czar Alexsei Mikailovich to the present time, 1649–1873] (St. Petersburg, 1874), law no. 59 (9 December 1804), "Vysochaishe utverzhdennoe Polozhenie. - O ustroistve Evreev" [Imperial statute concerning the organization of Jews]. For an image of the Russian text, see Anna Olswanger, "Czar Alexander I: Vysochaisheutverzhdennoe Polozhenie. - O ustroistve Evreev; Imperial Statute Concerning the Organization of Jews December 9, 1804," *Olswanger.com* (http://www.olswanger.com/article32.shtml). For a translation, see Vitaly Charny, "1804 Russian set of laws concerning Jews," *JewishGen: Belarus SIG* (http://www.jewishgen.org/belarus/1804_laws.htm).

13. The conclusion results from comparing 1816 and 1819 censuses. See Lechovich revision lists, file 333/9/220, pp. 1009–29 (1816) and 1024–45 (1819); NHAB.

14. List of Jewish innkeepers, file 333/9/184 (1805), pp. 157–65; NHAB.

15. Lechovich revision lists, file 333/9/220, pp. 1009–29 (1816) and 1024–45 (1819); NHAB. For Russian Jews' adoption of surnames, see Alexander Beider, *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames in the Russian Empire* (Bergenfield, N.J.: Avotaynu, 2008), 9–11. For discussion of name-taking, including patronymics, matronymics, and toponymics, see Alexander Beider, "Names and Naming," in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Names_and_Naming).

16. Lechovich revision lists, file 333/9/220, pp. 1009–29 (1816) and 1024–45 (1819); NHAB.

17. Bartal, *Jews of Eastern Europe*, 60. Classification as town dwellers was codified in the statute cited above.

lists for Jews who did not appear in the earlier lists differentiated the groups.[18] The supplementary forms usually indicated place of residence, identifying yeshuvnikes in their villages. Forms for village Jews could be witnessed by non-Jewish village elders, instead of functionaries of the *kahal* (the organized Jewish community), as was required for town Jews.[19]

Generally, a Jew's originally registered place of residence stuck throughout life.[20] Consequently, many town and village Jews, even those long removed from Lechovich, appear on Lechovich lists.[21]

Census

Between 1795 and 1858 Russian authorities conducted six censuses—recorded in *Reviska Skazka* [revision lists]—of Jews.[22] In 1874 they produced comprehensive lists of Jewish males in major towns, including Lechovich, and in 1897 an "All Russia" census.[23]

18. When originating in a place with a kahal, the early forms were signed by the Jew in question and witnessed by at least two representatives of the kahal, generally the communal rabbi (where there was one), a recognized leader of the community, or a functionary, like the community's tax collector. If signed in a place with no kahal framework (a village, for example), the forms were generally witnessed by one or two local Jews and countersigned by representatives of the nearest kahal, presumably acquainted with the main signatory and able to vouch for his registration with the kahal.

19. For example, Shloima Mandel, son of Yankel, resident of the village of Troyanovo, was witnessed by two non-Jews in the village and then countersigned by three other non-Jews on behalf of the official rabbi, the synagogue head, and the community tax collector. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874, household 806; NHAB. Two of Shloima's brothers, Meer and Benjamin, in the villages of Stanislovovo and Musichi, respectively, had their forms filled out in a slightly different manner—they were first witnessed by non-Jews in the village and then taken to town to be counter-signed by Jewish officials. For both, see ibid., households 184 and 885.

20. Registering a changed place of residence was officially required, but it entailed bureaucratic aggravation and was sometimes hazardous, if prior permission to relocate had not been obtained. Thus, many Jews did not respect the requirement.

21. For example Shmuilo Mandel (born 1825), son of Izroel, was listed in the 1834 revision list as a "town dweller" in Lechovich (even though he probably lived with his parents in a nearby village). See file 333/9/573, 1834, p. 969, entry 51; NHAB. In 1850 Shmuilo was still recorded as a "town dweller" in Lechovich. See file 333/9/491, 1850, p. 406, entry 6; NHAB, with a notation that he had moved to Odessa in that year. By 1874 he returned to the Lechovich area and lived in the nearby town of Male Siniavka. See file 330/1/114, 1874, p. 83; NHAB. Nonetheless he was still enumerated as a town dweller in Lechovich. See file 333/1/111, 1874, list of Jewish Males in Lechovich, household 855, entry 101; NHAB. In 1883 Shmuilo dutifully presented himself in Lechovich to pay his taxes. See "Russian Tax Lists in Lyakhovichi: The Lyakhovichi Tax Lists of 1883–1884," online translation and searchable database, *Shtetl Links: Lyakhovichi*.

22. Russian revision lists were prepared in 1795, 1811–12, 1816–19, 1834, 1850, and 1858.

23. Most of the 1897 census has been lost, but statistics have been preserved. See *Evrejskaâ ènciklopediâ* [Jewish encyclopedia], 16 vols. (St. Petersburg: Brockhaus-Efron, 1906–13), 10:451, showing 5,016 people in Lechovich and its villages, of whom 3,846 were Jews (about 77 percent).

Jews, averse to appearing on official rolls, avoided census takers, but gradually the system caught up with them. For example, only 565 Jews appear in the 1816–19 revision list (170 fewer than in the 1784 Polish-Lithuanian poll tax list), but just under sixty years later an 1874 list enumerates more than 3,050 Jewish males. Even allowing for the extraordinary population explosion among East European Jews in the 1800s, the later number—over ten times the 1816–19 figure when an equal number of females is assumed—reflects increasingly systematic and successful efforts to ferret out and record Jews.

Village Jews probably avoided being listed longer than others, because census takers worked in towns and did not go village to village. In any case, by 1874 authorities seem to have tracked most absentees and holdouts, including yeshuvnikes.[24] Furthermore, the Jews may have become more amenable to enumeration as they began to recognize disadvantages, even dangers, in not appearing in official records.[25]

Conscription

Jews tried hard to evade military conscription.[26] They regarded it—with good reason—as a calamity. Instituted in 1827, call-up was initially from age fourteen for a period of twenty-five years of service. Conditions were fearful and few Jews survived as Jews. Each kahal had a recruitment quota. Agents tended to press into service vulnerable youngsters—orphans, waifs, and strays—who had no protectors.[27] Apparently young Jewish males living with their parents in villages were more out of harm's way.[28] Nevertheless, some village Jews did not escape lengthy military service in mid-century.[29]

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24. For example, Meer Mandel, son of Yankel, registered himself in 1863 as a bachelor, even though he probably was married. See "Supplementary Revision List," file 333/3/903, 1863, p. 162v, entry dated 25 December, 1863; NHAB. A decade later his marital status was corrected. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874, entry 184; NHAB.

25. See ChaeRan Y. Freeze, "To Register or Not to Register: The Administrative Dimension of the Jewish Question in Russia," *Avotaynu* 13 (Summer 1997): 6–11.

26. In nineteenth-century revision lists, particularly earlier ones, the number of Jews under age twenty is patently deficient. For example, in the 1816 Lechovich revision list, just 39 children under age ten and 18 under age twenty appear in a total of 366 individuals. See Lechovich revision lists, file 333/9/220; NHAB. In subsequent revision lists, a significant number of teenage boys and men in their twenties are marked as absent from their parents homes or missing altogether.

27. Larry Domnitch, *The Cantonists: The Jewish Children's Army of the Tsar* (New York: Devora, 2003).

28. The contention could be documented by a careful analysis of lists of recruits in military conscription records (*posemeinyespiski* and *svidetelstva o voinskoi povinnosti*). Those for Lechovich are located in the voluminous series 622/1, 622/2, and 622/3; NHAB. For lists in the 1890s, see files 622/1/48 (1890–91), 622/3/12 (1895), 622/3/20 (1895), 622/3/21 (1895–96), and 633/3/28 (1896).

29. For example, in 1874 Gershen Mandel (born 1838), son of Movshe, was still in the army at age thirty-six. This implies that, if recruited at fourteen, he was in his twenty-second year of service. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874, household 650, entry 157; NHAB.

In 1874 the system changed. A form of national service for five years obligating town and village Jews alike was reflected in conscription lists frequently published in official gazettes.[30] Jews continued to avoid call-up, as regularly published lists of "draft dodgers" show.[31] Heavy fines fell on families when a conscript repeatedly failed to report for duty.[32] Jews, however, did not succeed in avoiding conscription altogether, and village and urban Jews served equally toward the century's end.[33]

Taxation

Taxes levied on Jews were particularly onerous.[34] Growing numbers of village Jews appeared in tax lists as the nineteenth century progressed.[35] This suggests village Jews might have been more liable for taxation than shtetl Jews.

30. Vilius Botyrius and Daniel Rozas, "Residents' Lists and the Russian Military Draft," *Avotaynu* 16 (Spring 2000): 20–22. The lists were published regularly in *Minskie Guberniskie Vedomosti* [Minsk province newspaper] (MGV), Minsk (city). The author thanks Vitaly Charny for his research in the MGV, which contributed to this paper.

31. The following, for example, were listed as draft dodgers: Israel Mayer Mandel (born 1871), son of Shmuilo Yosef Mandel, listed in file 308/2/1(1883), p. 37v, as recruit no. 271, NHAB; Gedalyo Mandel (b. ca. 1889), son of Aron, listed in MGV, 18 August 1910, issue 53; Aizek Mandel (b. ca.1880), son of Yokhel, in MGV, 30 March 1911, issue 25 (fine notice); Movshe Mandel (b. ca. 1880), son of Shmuilo Yosef, in MGV, 17 August 1902, recruit no. 407 (fine notice); Vulf Mandel (b. ca. 1890), son of Aron, in MGV, 18 August 1910, issue 53; Srol Mlotok (b. 1872), son of Yokhel Mikhel, in MGV, 19 August 1898, issue 62, recruit no. 121; Leiba Puzharik (b. ca. 1874), son of Movshe, in MGV, 9 March 1896, issue 19; Izroel Puzharik (b. 1909), son of Yankel Elya, in MGV, 1909, issue 7, recruit no. 46; Govsey Puzharik (b. about 1887), son of Movshe, in MGV, 1909, issue 7, recruit no. 46; and Yosef Movshe Strelovsky (b. 1892), son of Yokhel, in MVG, 1913, issue 99, no. 34.

32. Fines of three hundred rubles (the approximate cost of a small cottage) were imposed, for example, on the families of Shmuel Yosel Mandel, son of Srol, for his son Movshe's nonappearance for military service. See MGV, 17 August 1902, no. 407 on list (fine notice), and of Izroel Meer Mandel, son of Shmuel Yosel, for his son Beynish's nonappearance. See MGV, 1 August1907, issue 58. Both boys had departed Russia for the United States. A similar fine was imposed on the family of Aizek Mandel (b. ca.1880), son of Yokhel. See MGV, 30 March 1911, issue 25. The same fine was imposed on the family of Michel Mlotok, son of Rafal, for his son Srol's nonappearance. See MGV, 19 August, 1898, issue 62, no. 121 (254 rubles and 28 kopeks of fine outstanding). The unnamed son of Touva Mlotok, daughter of Yokhel Mikhel, and Itzko Lempert, also was fined. See Ida Richter, "The Entrepreneur/Raconteur" in *Jewish Grandmothers*, ed., Sydelle Kramer and Jenny Masur (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 128.

33. For example, Avram Mandel (b. ca. 1892), son of Meer (author's grandfather); interview notes in author's files. Also, Rafael Mlotok, son of Itsko. See MGV, 1912, announcement no. 2108-3-1, stating that before Rafal's leaving for America, various documents, including his military discharge papers (no. 36/8336), were stolen.

34. Generally, Jews paid double the taxes for their class, plus additional taxes imposed specifically on them as Jews or on the kahal, collectively.

35. For Lechovich taxpayers, see several files in series 359/1 and 359/2; NHAB, including 359/1/163 (1886–1908), 359/1/174 (1909), 359/2/1 (1877), 359/2/3 (1908), and 359/2/7 (1896–97). Tax records also are dispersed in other series. See, for example, series 299/2/8530 (1883–84).

Yeshuvnikes usually were gainfully employed in their villages, but destitute Jews—unable to make a living or pay taxes—tended to congregate in towns.[36]

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VILLAGE AND URBAN JEWS

The Czarist regime offered Jews little security.[37] The yeshuvnikes' predicament, however, was especially precarious. Russia repeatedly attempted to expel Jews from villages, starting with a 1795 edict calling for their transfer to towns. An 1804 statute envisaged expelling Jews from rural occupations, particularly the liquor trade (where most were employed), commencing in January 1808.[38] These and subsequent threats to village Jews' security continued until World War I but were never fully executed.[39]

Lechovich revision and residence lists show that no expulsion orders were implemented in the area, indicating stability among the rural Jewish populations. On the other hand, letters from yeshuvnikes at the turn of the century reveal their insecurities.[40] That was understandable, especially in the wake of the "May Laws" of 1882. Originally framed by interior minister Nicholas Ignatiev, the laws called for the wholesale expulsion of Jews from villages.[41]

Symbiosis with Landlords and Peasants

A second major difference between rural and urban Jews lies in the relationships that developed between yeshuvnikes and local landowners and peasants.[42] Ordinary Jews in towns probably had little contact with nobles and magnates. In rural areas, however, the reverse was true. Polish noblemen, gentry, and small landowners, who owned the villages and estates around Lechovich, were close to their properties and the people living on them.

Yeshuvnikes depended on the landowners' patronage, especially for leases, usually the legal basis for their presence in the villages. Because of this

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36. Comparing the number of Jews paying taxes with the number of Jews living in the tax area reveals the presence of many poor or destitute Jews in towns. For example, the 1883 list of taxpayers for Lechovich, file 299/2/8530; NHAB, shows 804 Jewish males paying taxes, out of 3,057 Jews appearing on the 1874 list of Jewish males. For the latter, see file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874; NHAB. Assuming that only half the adults were liable for tax (approximately 1,500 potential taxpayers), the 1883 list suggests almost 47 percent of them (about 700) paid no taxes. The composition of the poor and destitute Jews in Lechovich is unknown. If not elderly, some may have been yeshuvnikes who had recently moved into town, and others may have been vagrants from other towns.

37. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*.

38. Jacob Goldberg, "Tavernkeeping," in *YIVO Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Tavernkeeping).

39. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 2:35. Also, Bartal, *Jews of Eastern Europe*, 62.

40. Private Yiddish letters written by village Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, discussing the precariousness of their existence and deliberating where they should emigrate to, whether the United Kingdom, United States, or Argentina; author's files.

41. For the 1882 laws, see Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 2:309.

42. Bartal, *Jews of Eastern Europe*, 62.

dependency and because yeshuvnikes often managed the landowners' affairs, they interacted regularly. Indeed, some Jews resided on the landowner's manor in the village or on his estate.[43]

In towns, on the other hand, a critical mass of Jews could live and conduct their affairs almost entirely within their own communities. Aside from petty commerce, contact with non-Jews was limited. Many shtetl Jews only spoke Yiddish and were not fluent in local languages like Byelorussian, Polish, or Russian.[44]

In villages the situation was the reverse. Yeshuvnikes filled pivotal roles as managers of the landowners' estates. In running taverns, mills, smithies, and village stores, they came into daily contact with peasants. Thus, village Jews spoke local languages. Moreover, they probably dressed like the peasants and subsisted in similar ways, with a vegetable garden and a few fruit trees beside their wooden cottages and a cow nearby. Yeshuvnikes were likely aware of, and responsive to, Christian and agricultural calendars in ways shtetl Jews were not.

Yeshuvnik relations with Christian peasants apparently were reasonably amicable.[45] Their children grew up together, and Jews sometimes interceded with landowners on behalf of peasants by preparing petitions to the authorities on their behalf. A report of tensions in 1911 appears atypical, when villagers in Yamichno protested the presence of a newly married Jew who, as was customary, had moved into his in-laws' home. Complainants petitioned to expel him from the village. As official attitudes towards Jews had deteriorated and anti-Semitism increased, they won their case.[46]

Religious Practice, Education, and Marriage

Despite their distance from the kahal in the shtetl, yeshuvnikes maintained a traditional Jewish way of life.[47] They had to fend for themselves, however, in several areas of religious observance:

- To constitute a *minyan* (prayer quorum), primarily for Sabbath services, males from villages within walking distance of each other had to gather together.
- Many village Jews moved into nearby shtetls to celebrate major Jewish festivals.

43. In 1874 more than twenty Jewish families listed lived in a village manor. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874; NHAB.

44. Bartal, *Jews of Eastern Europe*, 40.

45. For example, Mendel Rafalov Mlotok resided with Stepan Babin, a farmer, in the village of Kazennye Gusaki. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874; NHAB. Reports of friendly relations between Jews and peasants—village children growing up together, exchanging Easter eggs and matzo, for example—are common in the Yizkor Bikher (memorial books) literature.

46. For a complete official account of the incident involving Elya Strelovsky, son of Yokhel, see file 1/18/1616, 1911, pp. 3–6; NHAB.

47. The speed at which some village Jews shed religiosity on arrival in Western Europe and the United States suggests religion as practiced in the villages was shallow, perhaps merely social conformism. That phenomenon, however, is outside the scope of this paper.

Sometimes yeshuvnikes brought Jews from town to conduct services in the village for a few cents.[48] At the turn of the century a well-known cantor in Lechovich, Reb Lippe, traveled to villages to officiate at marriages and other religious events.[49]

- Kosher meat was available only in towns, but many yeshuvnikes and their wives could ritually slaughter chickens and other fowl.[50]
- To give their sons a Jewish education yeshuvnikes had to rely mainly on itinerant tutors. In some cases, the tutors also taught girls—at least to write Yiddish and possibly read a little Hebrew.[51] Some village boys lodged with relatives in Lechovich, presumably to be educated at a *cheder* [traditional religious school for children]. Others lived with their grandparents after their parents emigrated abroad, apparently to continue their Jewish education and have a bar mitzvah.[52] Several young village men gained an advanced Jewish education.[53]
- Yeshuvnikes, like shtetl Jews, likely employed matchmakers to find suitable spouses for their children.[54] Some young yeshuvnikes, however, chose their wives—perhaps the girl next door or from the next village. In addition,

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48. For example, Elya Strelovsky, son of Yokhel, officiated for a pittance as a cantor on the Jewish high holy days in villages near Lechovichi and Baranovichi. See private letters; author's files.

49. See Chaim Friedstein, "Rabbi [no first name given] Lippe, the cantor," in Yisrael Rubin, ed., *Lachowicze; Sefer Zikaron* [memorial book of Lachowicze] (Tel Aviv: Igud yotse Lachovits [association of former residents of Lechovich], 1948–49), 257–58.

50. Private letters in author's files show that Frume Strelovsky continued to ritually slaughter chickens for her family's use long after they emigrated from the village of Male Luki to the Jewish colony of Las Palmeras in Argentina in 1902.

51. Many nineteenth-century Jewish girls in villages could read and write Yiddish fluently and correspond with relatives abroad in that language. See private letters; author's files.

52. Two pre-bar mitzvah boys—Vulf Puzharik-Mandelson, son of Yankel Elya, and Zeev Willensky, son of Bernat—provide examples. Both were left behind in Europe to complete their Jewish education. For Vulf, see Rita Gillis, notes, 5 August 1982; author's files. Ms. Gillis was Vulf's daughter. Zeev arrived in the United States by himself in 1896 at age fifteen or sixteen, seven years after his father's arrival, in 1889, and five years after his mother and sisters' arrival, in 1891. See 1920 U.S. census, Hudson Co., N.J., Bayonne City, ward 2, enumeration district 10, sheet 8A, dwelling 46, family 125, 459 West 20th St., William Willensky household; National Archives and Records Administration microfilm T625, roll 1041.

53. At least six young men within the sample group attended a yeshivah. Shmuilo Yosef Mandel, son of Srol, became Lechovich's official rabbi at the end of the nineteenth century. See George Mandel (Schmuilo's grandson) to author, notes of verbal communication, 1 May 1979; author's files. Movshe Puzharik, son of Yitschok Menachem, qualified as a rabbi but did not practice in the village of Gorodeya. See Jack Manson (Movshe's grandson) to author, letter, 5 April 1979; author's files. Yitzchok Abeliansky, son of Shmuilo, was a Talmudic scholar who ran a mill in the village of Male Luki. See Frieda Abeliansky-Kohan to author, letter, November 1979; author's files. The other three—Abraham Mandel, son of Meer; Vulf Pozharik-Mandelson, son of Jacob Elias; and Moshe Yosef Strelovsky, son of Yokhel—ended their yeshivah studies at a lower level. They are relatives of the author, who interviewed them. See notes; author's files.

54. For discussions of the matchmaker's role, see ChaeRan Freeze, "Family" and "Marriage," in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Family and http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Marriage, respectively). Also, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Weddings," in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Weddings).

occupational networks led children of innkeepers—or millers, blacksmiths, and others, as the case may be—to marry one another.[55]

Economic Situation and Property Ownership

Perhaps paradoxically, yeshuvnikes frequently fared better than shtetl Jews. Yeshuvnikes had a defined place in the village economy and worked for a living, albeit in a narrow range of occupations.[56] A significant number of village Jews owned property and lived in their own house or inn.[57] By contrast, most urban Jews, as in Lechovich, were renters and lodgers and thus not so fortunate.

External circumstances inevitably affected the yeshuvnikes' economic conditions. For example, their economic dependency on landlords was gravely compromised when Russian authorities moved to crush local Polish noblemen who had participated in the rebellion of 1860–61.[58] On the other hand, the emancipation of the serfs (also in 1861) enabled enterprising yeshuvnikes to acquire land in villages. Sometimes, however, they later had to fight landowners trying to dislodge them.[59]

Mobility

Yeshuvnikes were highly mobile in at least two ways distinct from shtetl Jews:

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55. For example, Mowsza [Khvedyuk], from the village of Khvedyuki, married Liya [no surname] from the hamlet of Golovachi, less than a kilometer away. See poll tax list, 1784, file LVIA, FSA AP. – B3754L.643§, pp. 641–44v; NHAB. Also, List of Jewish innkeepers, file 333/9/184 (1805), pp. 157–65; NHAB. Benjamin Abeliansky married Frume Strelovsky. Respectively, they were from Vielke Luki and Male Luki, two villages within a half-kilometre of each other. See Frieda Abeliansky-Kohan (the couple's granddaughter) to author, letter, November 1979. Touva Mlotok, daughter of a blacksmith in the village of Ved'ma, married Itzko Lempert, son of a blacksmith and a smith himself in the nearby town of Kletsk. See Richter, "The Entrepreneur/Raconteur," in *Jewish Grandmothers*, 122. For Touva's father, see MGV, 19 August 1898, issue 62.

56. According to the 1764–65 Polish-Lithuanian poll tax list, 80 percent of Jews living in villages were involved in occupations connected with the liquor trade on behalf of landowners, primarily as innkeepers and tavern proprieters. See Goldberg, "Tavernkeeping," transl. from Polish by Christina Manetti, in *YIVO Encyclopedia*. Other Jews were predominantly estate managers, tax collectors, blacksmiths, millers, and village shopkeepers.

57. For example, three Mandel brothers registered in Lechovich, each resident in a different village within a different volost [district]. Benjamin Mandel, son of Yankel, lived in his own house in Musichi, Grozov volost. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874, entry 885; NHAB. His brother Meer lived in his own house in Stanislovovo, Darevo volost. See ibid., entry 184. Their brother Shloima also lived in his own house, but in Troyanovo, Potseyki volost. See ibid., entry 806. Mlotok brothers lived in parallel circumstances. Fayba Mlotok, son of Rafal, lived in his own house in Stanislovovo, Darevo volost. See ibid., entry 182. His brother Mendel lived in his own house in Kazennye Gusaki, Kletsk volost. See ibid., entry 792.

58. David Assaf, ed., *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 349.

59. For threats of court action against Meer Mandel, son of Yankel, see MGV, 1877, issue 40, and December 1904, issue 99, announcement no. 9550.

1. Yeshuvnikes' sons often had to move out of the home village to seek a livelihood. They can be tracked as they moved to other villages, usually close by and generally within nineteen miles of Lechovich.[60]
2. As areas became urbanized in the 1800s many yeshuvnikes gravitated to towns.[61] In the century's first quarter they moved from villages into Lechovich proper; by mid-century (together with urban Jews) they spread out to larger towns nearby, like Nesvizh and Kletsk; and by century's end they looked farther afield to Baranovichi and beyond. [62]

Population explosion and economic factors, principally the paucity of village employment options, motivated most yeshuvnikes who moved into towns. Because town employment also was not readily available for many of them, the shtetlach became little more than a staging post for westward migration.[63]

CONCLUSION

This survey could expand beyond a overview of aspects of yeshuvnikes' lives, based on five families. The aim, however, was not to provide an exhaustive study, but to demonstrate that original sources and genealogical methodology can yield rewarding insights into a way of life of a significant segment of East European populations. Further research into village Jews—and other ethnic communities—could yield broader results and build similar interpretative models.

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60. The shuffling of yeshuvnikes and their sons from village to village occurred throughout the century. For example, in 1784 Leizer Khvedyuk, son of Girsh, lived in the village of Khvedyaki with his father. See "Documents of Lyakhovichi History: The 1784 Grand Duchy of Lithuania Poll Tax," *Shtetl Links*. By 1805 he had moved to Sakuny. See List of Jewish innkeepers, file 333/9/184 (1805), pp. 157–65; NHAB. Similarly, Sholom Khvedyuk, son of Leizer and originally of Sakuny, had by 1805 relocated to Khvedyaki. See ibid. Also, three sons of Yankel Mandel, son of Vulf, moved from an unknown parental village to three other villages—Benjamin to Musichi, Meer to Stanislovo, and Shloima to Troyanovo. See file 330/1/111, list of Jewish males in Lechovich, 1874; NHAB. Another son, Shmuilo, had left his village existence and relocated to the town of Novogrudok. See file 333/9/488, 1852 revision list, p. 90v, entry 4; NHAB. "Nineteen miles" is based on plotting village-to-village movements of the Jews in the sample group throughout the 1800s.

61. Kassow, "Shtetl," in *Yivo Encyclopedia*.

62. For example, Izroel Meer Mandel, son of Shmuel Yosel, moved from Lechovich to Nesvizh thence to Kletsk in the third quarter of the nineteenth century before he migrated to the United States in 1897. His brother Beinish took his place in Nesvizh in the last quarter of the century. See "Records of Real Estate Possessors, 1905–6: Nesvizh, Slutsk Uezd, Minsk Gubernia, Belarus, *JewishGen Belarus SIG* (http://www.jewishgen.org/belarus/nesvizh_property_owners.htm), entry for "Mandyel." Also, Abraham Mandel, son of Meer (author's grandfather), moved progressively from the village of Ved'ma to Lechovich and then to the growing town of Baranovichi, where he settled in 1900, before migrating to Glasgow, Scotland, in 1905. See interview notes; author's files.

63. Adam Teller, "Economic Life," in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Economic_Life). Also, Mark Kupovetsky, "Population and Migration before World War I," transl. from Russian by I. Michael Aronson, in *Yivo Encyclopedia* (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Population_and_Migration/Population_and_Migration_before_World_War_I).