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## JEWES BEFORE THE DANZIG COURT IN THE MID-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The cases of people who were detained in Danzig for breaking the local administrative law were judged by the collegial judicial institution called the “Veta” or “the Veta Court” (Germ.: *Wettgericht*). In the Danzig National Archive quite detailed protocols of this court have been preserved, which date from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, the court products, i.e. annexes to cases have not survived, nevertheless, the number of sources which so far have aroused very little scientific interest still remains more than satisfactory. The period of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century indicated in the title covers more than two decades from 1741 until the mid-1760s<sup>1</sup>. The choice is not accidental since in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and more precisely between 1749 and 1751, a serious scuffle took place between the representatives of the urban middle strata opposition, i.e. the Third Order, and the official and financial elite in town, represented by the Councillors and Benchers (i.e. the First and Second Orders). The royal court meddled quite successfully in the conflict, showing its support for the urban middle strata. Among the reasons for the scuffle were, apart from the power

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<sup>1</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku (The National Archive in Danzig), (quoted below as: AP Gd.) 300, 58/22 (1738–1742); 300, 58/23 (1742–1746); 300, 58/24 (1746–1750); 300, 58/25 (1750–1754); 300, 58/26 (1754–1760); 300, 58/27 (1760–1765); 300, 58/78 (1739–1755), for comparative reasons I reached for the protocols of the 1770s and 1780s (300, 58/29–31) and the audience books of the “Veta Court” : 300, 58/39–40 (1747–1756, 1772–1787).

struggle within the town's authorities, also questions regarding lack of transparency in imposing trade and production bans on the Mennonites and Jews. In general, the representatives of the Third Order suspected the ruling élite to maintain close economic relations with the representatives of those denominations, and were covering up for their illegal activities which were harmful to the economically weaker groups of townspeople. The pressure from the lawmakers resulted in an increased activity of the courts of justice, especially as regards the control over the Jews and Mennonites active in Gdańsk.

I have already discussed the Mennonite questions years ago<sup>2</sup>, and the background of the Danzig conflict was also the subject of research conducted by Edmund Cieślak<sup>3</sup>. The current study refers to my essay recently published in "Kwartalnik Historii Żydów" ["The Quarterly of the History of Jews"]<sup>4</sup>, and undoubtedly, the protocols of the "Veta Court" allow me to significantly complement my argument as well as provide it with more particulars.

Before beginning to analyze the subject, I should like to discuss a few details concerning the way the "Veta Court" was organized; the subject which was already taken up by Teresa Węsierska-Biernatowa<sup>5</sup>, Tadeusz Maciejewski<sup>6</sup> and

<sup>2</sup> More on the subject of this community see: E. Kizik, *A Radical Attempt to Resolve the Mennonite Question in Danzig in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century*, "The Mennonite Quarterly Review", vol. 66, 1992, 2, pp. 127-151.

<sup>3</sup> E. Cieślak, *Konflikty polityczne i społeczne w Gdańsku w połowie XVIII wieku (Political and Social Conflicts in Danzig in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century)*, Wrocław 1972.

<sup>4</sup> E. Kizik, *Mieszczanstwo gdańskie wobec Żydów w XVII-XVIII wieku (The Danzig Townspeople towards the Jews in 17th-18th Centuries)*, "Kwartalnik Historii Żydów", vol. 3, 2003, pp. 416-434.

<sup>5</sup> See: T. Węsierska-Biernatowa, *Gdański Urząd Wetowy (The Danzig Veta Office)*, "Archeion", vol. 34, 1961, pp. 105-122.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Process Ordnung nach welcher sich hinführo die Parte bey der E. Wette werden zu richten haben 1654*, APGd, 300, 58/109, p. 3. Cf. T. Maciejewski, *Prawo sądowe w ustawodawstwie miasta Gdańska w XVIII wieku (The Court Law in the Legislation of Danzig in 18th Century)*, Wrocław 1984, p. 66-and next, by the same author, *Ostatnia reforma Sądu Wetowego Gdańska z 1761 r. (The Last Reform of the Danzig Veta Court of 1761)*, in: *Miscellanea Iuridico-Historica Gedanensia, Księga Pamiątkowa z okazji 35-lecia pracy naukowej Prof. E. Rozenkranza (Miscellanea Iuridico-Historica Gedanensia, Commemorative Book of the 35th Anniversary of Professor E. Rozenkranz's Scientific Research)*, Koszalin 1987, pp. 289-311.

Edmund Kizik<sup>7</sup>. Among the duties of the “Veta” judges was to daily monitor whether the towns’ trade regulations were abided by (e.g. questions regarding honesty in brokerage, the quality of goods, smuggling of food into town) and whether other economic and disciplinary regulations were not breached (e.g. breaking the night’s curfew, unlawful Sunday retail of alcoholic beverages, or unlawful trading during church services) — all of which stemmed from the municipal law written in the form of the urban ordinances — so called *Willkühr*, as well as other regulations and edicts passed by the Orders. The “Veta” judges also supervised the *Judengeleit* — passes for the Jews, and monitored whether the latter ones abided by the rules which regulated their temporary stay in Danzig.

The court was controlled by the Orders through the agency of their eight elected representatives, that is: two Councillors, two Benchers and four members of the Third Order, each one from a respective town quarter. The court employed its own officials. In addition to the court secretary, there were two or three instigators (*E. E. Wette Instigator*), whose duties involved running investigations and prosecuting; they also represented the Orders as public attorneys in cases regarding breaking the trade and administrative law. An instigator, on the basis of the evidence submitted by the usher (a private complaint — lodged by the aggrieved party, or those who suspected somebody’s intent to commit an act detrimental to them), drew up an indictment and notified the Chairman of the Court. It was the importance of the case which determined the decision whether to arrest the suspect; however, the usual procedure was to seize the incriminating goods or other evidence of crime or its intent. Among the lower rank court officials there were between three and four sworn ushers (Germ.: *Aufseher*). Usually, these were the townspeople who possessed significant knowledge of goods,

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<sup>7</sup> E. Kizik, *Sprawy o łamanie ordynacji weselnych, chrzestnych i pogrzebowych przed gdańskim Sądem Wetowym (Cases for Breaking Wedding, Baptism and Funeral Regulations before the Danzig “Veta Court”)*, in: *Wesela, chrzciny i pogrzeby w XVI-XVIII wieku. Kultura życia i śmierci (Weddings, Baptisms, and Funerals in 16th and 18th Centuries. The Culture of Life and Death)*, ed. H. Suchojad, Warszawa 2001, p. 43–64; by the same author: *Übertretungen der Hochzeits-, Tauf- und Begräbnisordnungen vor dem Danziger Wettegericht im XVII. und XVIII. Jh. “Acta Poloniae Historica”, vol. 85, 2002, pp. 129–166.*

but when necessary, experts were also summonsed to examine the questioned merchandise.

In the majority of its verdicts the Court imposed fines, expelled from the town, meted out a lashing, while the imprisonment was adjudged only sporadically. The “Veta” judges maintained the right of extraordinary commutation of the sentence, following the behaviour of the defendant (showing repentance, plea for mercy, the excuse that the offence stemmed from the incomprehension of respective regulations), guarantee or intercession by respectable citizens. The adjudged fines went to the town’s budget, to the fund of extraordinary receipts. Some of this money was divided, according to a constant ratio 7/12 for the “Veta” judges, 1/12 for the secretary and 4/12 for the instigator. The defendant possessed the right to appeal to the Town Council or (from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century) to all the Orders as the law making bodies.

The “Veta” Court had very large competences, its jurisdiction extended over all Gdańsk inhabitants as well as persons staying in the city only temporarily. Among them were rich merchants trespassing the rules of the honest business competition, burghers breaking the laws against luxury consumption during weddings and funerals, servants dressed in prohibited garments, Polish nobles neglecting to keep their contracts, all sorts of smugglers, etc. In this context the cases against Jews were not numerous, they appeared, however, before the “Veta” Court regularly.

The allegations made against Jewish merchants in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century came down to the four major issues:

1. The legality of their temporary stay in Danzig (which was normalized by the regulations of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1752)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The regulations normalized issues regarding the amount of payments, a decision was also taken to licence the stay of four Jewish cooks (for a quarterly payment of 5 fl.), as well as a Jewish goldsmith Izrael Abraham; the regulations also regarded a privileged Jew Joël Lewin, a diamond cutter (he had been staying in the town since 1745), *Verordnung wegen der Juden-Geleit aus Schluß sämtlicher Ordnungen der Stadt Dantzig beliebt und publiciret den 23 Juni Ao 1752*, (entry № 12), printed in: APGd. 300, R/Q, 5, f. 27–30v; E. Cieślak, *Konflikty polityczne i społeczne w Gdańsku (Political and Social Conflicts in Danzig)*, p. 268.

2. The infringement of bans on illegal brokerage in wholesale trade (in breach of the edict of 9<sup>th</sup> April 1745)<sup>9</sup>. It should be mentioned that the citizens of Danzig possessed exclusive rights for brokerage between the Polish merchants and foreigners, and wanted this monopoly to be strictly observed.
3. Monetary and noble metal speculation; against the background of the unrests caused by the monetary policy of King August III and massive forgeries by the Prussian government (Danzig defended its coin and prohibited illegal exchange transactions following the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1746<sup>10</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> January 1757<sup>11</sup> edicts).
4. Allegations of dishonest trading to the detriment of Danzig merchants and others, including Jewish contracting parties (concealing hidden flaws of goods, issuing goods different from the previously presented samples, etc.)

Allegations of huckstering can be traced in sources on a smaller scale. Apart from the cases concerning illegal stay in town, which due to the town law were limited only to the Jews, all other legal actions were not connected with the regulations that incriminated this religious group.

Naturally, Jewish merchants appeared in the “Veta” not only as defendants but also as victims or plaintiffs, bringing legal action both against dishonest fellows and Danzig merchants. They were often summonsed as witnesses in the trials of the third party, or, as respectable persons, they vouched for a Jew who was condemned, postulating the commutation of the sentence, or conversion of an imprisonment or expulsion sentence into a fine.

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<sup>9</sup> Additionally, all non citizens (foreigners — in sources *Fremder*) were forbidden to trade among each other, speculate in commodities, that is resell in Danzig the merchandise previously purchased within the town's borders, see: the regulations of 1761 which replicate previous directions: *Neu-revidirte Willkühr der Stadt Danzig, aus Schluß Sämtlicher Ordnungen publiciret 1761*, Danzig 1783, p. 132 (part 3, chapter. 3, art.1 and 3).

<sup>10</sup> *Edikt des Rats von Danzig gegen Verbreitung falscher Münzen*, 14 X 1746, Biblioteka Gdańska PAN (The Danzig Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences quoted below as: Bibl. Gd. PAN), catalogue no.: Od. 5710 8° adl. 67. cf. *Neu-revidirte Willkühr, 1761*, p. 134–135 (part. 3, chapter 3, art. 7).

<sup>11</sup> *Edikt des Rats von Danzig gegen Einführung und Verbreitung falscher Münzsorten*, 24th Jan. 1755, Bibl. Gd. PAN, sygn. Od. 5711 8° adl. 77; the edict was edited also in 1757–1759, see: Bibl. Gd. PAN, cat.no.: Od. 5711 8° adl. 90; Od. 5711 8° adl. 1205, Od.5711 8° adl. 121.

Individual, even relatively commonplace cases, are profusely documented in sources and therefore, due to the lack of room in this study, I shall only concentrate on a couple of selected trials.

Generally, Jews were forbidden to settle legally in Danzig, they were only given licences to temporarily stay there on trading business. According to the 1764/1765 register, quoted already by Ignacy Schiper<sup>12</sup>, in places near Danzig, which were not under the Town Council's jurisdiction but in reality belonged to the urban economic area, more than a thousand people of Jewish origin stayed. The extant registers for Danzig only let us rate the members of this unstable group, including their families as well as travelling persons, at 150–200 people. In the town lived a few Jews who possessed personal licences issued by the Council. Those were, first of all, the Jews engaged in organizing the religious life of the Jewish community, two rabbis, four cooks — however, the sources soon list already 8 cooks and butchers<sup>13</sup> — yet they also had to pay for their stay in town on a quarterly basis and they had to stay in inns. Other Jews, except for the Dominican Fair period (the participation was possible on the basis of ordinary market Jewish safe-conducts issued off-hand), exercised their right to stay only on the grounds of special passes — *Judengeleit*. They were often issued on petition made by a Danzig contracting party (e.i. a citizen — merchant), who confirmed maintaining trading contacts with a given Jew, alternatively after the imported goods were shown. In theory, a safe-conduct made it possible for a Jew to stay in the town up to a few weeks<sup>14</sup>. In practice, however, some individuals had been living in Danzig for many years<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> I. Schiper, *Dzieje handlu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich (The History of the Jewish Commercial Activity on the Polish Territory)*, Warszawa 1937, p. 240. Cf. Also J. Kalik, *Suburban Story: Structure of Jewish Communities in Largest Royal Cities of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Crown Poland*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny", 2006, No 2, pp. 47–74.

<sup>13</sup> See: APGd. 300, 58/25, 232, 235v; cf. also APGd. 300, 58/29, p. 275.

<sup>14</sup> See the names of the Jews in the audience book of the "Veta Court" of 1747–1756: APGd. 300, 58/39, e.g. pp. 94–95, 185–186, 203.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Rabbi Chaim Psacha asked the town authorities on behalf of the Polish Jews to turn over to the community the drowned body of a suicide Jochem Benjamin of Ciechanow. Benjamin, who had rented a room in an inn

One example is the case of 20<sup>th</sup> February 1748 when, following the petition of a local merchant, Constantine Reinhold Neander, a safe-conduct was granted to Jacob from Słuck (von Slucke), who arrived in town with his commodity<sup>16</sup>; also, Abesz Lewkowicz of Opatow and Moses Levin of Rzeszow were officially recognized as ‘real merchants’ arriving with their goods (*als würrckliche Kautfleute mit ihrem Wahren anhero gekommen*), and were granted safe-conducts for a couple of days (21<sup>st</sup> May 1746)<sup>17</sup>.

A petition was also filed by a Prussian Resident Reimer for issuing a residence permit in Danzig for Salomon Levin, as the latter *ein Schutz-Jude Ihr Maytt, wäre* (3<sup>rd</sup> August 1751)<sup>18</sup>. The permission was granted on condition that the safe-conduct did not entitle the holder to deal in brokerage; another petition, submitted by the Polish Great Crown Chancellor on behalf of Michael Hirsch of Jarosław (29 February 1752)<sup>19</sup>, was also accepted. Likewise, the Jewish merchants known in Danzig for their previous commercial activities, applied to the “Veta” for issuing passes to their Jewish trading partners. For example, Wulff Abraham from Meseritz confirmed that Abraham Lejbel from Międzyrzec (Meseritz), was accompanying him as his business partner in the transportation of wax and pig bristles. In June 1746 Lejbel was granted a safe-conduct together with a harsh warning saying that if he was caught on brokerage he would face an imprisonment sentence (*fals er sich der Mäcklerey bedienen und derselben überführet würde, er mit dem Hause Zucht bestraffet wurde*)<sup>20</sup>.

It often happened that for numerous reasons an original stay required to be prolonged for further weeks. And as a rule overdue payments were given as the reason to accompany the applications, which were to be settled after the Jewish goods would arrive, being at that time just on their way to the town. For

in the Gdańsk suburb, and traded in second hand commodities imported from England, had lived in Danzig for 15 years, APGd. 300, 5/185<sup>2</sup>, pp. 153–154.

<sup>16</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 139.

<sup>17</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 11v. Levin was on the list of the unwelcome in Danzig.

<sup>18</sup> APGd. 300, 58/25, p. 134r.

<sup>19</sup> APGd. 300, 58/25, p. 177r–177v; other examples reflecting problems with legal entering Danzig: 300, 58/79, p. 45 (1748).

<sup>20</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 24.

example, a Danzig citizen Heinrich Schmidt vouched for Wulff Abraham from Meseritz, a local merchant Botert — for Benjamin Jacob from Stuck, another Danzig citizen — for two Jews called Isaak and Jacob and the source says: *weil diese Juden ihnen zum Theil schuldig, Landwerts aber ihre Waaren, woraus sie ihnen bezahlen würden zu erwarten hätten* (20th October 1747)<sup>21</sup>. Likewise, a citizen Frantz Michel applied for a safe-conduct for Meyer from Ilanow, who swore that a shipment of timber (*Piepenstäbe*) was to arrive in Danzig<sup>22</sup>. On 8<sup>th</sup> January 1747 Christoph Boyert endorsed the application for issuing a safe-conduct to Israel Joseph from Dünhow, who traded in Turkish saffian and linen<sup>23</sup>, while an inn-keeper, Kornell Rohloff asked for the pass for Kalmen Meyer, who owed him 342 fl.; the petition was confirmed with the bill<sup>24</sup>. The same names keep appearing in records later. On 27<sup>th</sup> September of the following year Wulff Abraham, this time with another trading partner with the same name, Abraham Wulff from Dąbrowa applied for the prolongation of their passes on the grounds that they still had to wait for the ships with goods. And in this case the petition was approved<sup>25</sup>. The same happened on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1748 when, following a Gdańsk merchant Johann Friedrich Lösekann's petition, who was the creditor of Joseph Abraham from Meseritz (the debt amounted to 250 fl.), the latter's safe-conduct was prolonged. The Jewish merchant, accompanied by his business partner and an apprentice were awaiting five ships with wool<sup>26</sup>.

The ability to display the goods imported to Danzig or to prove that they were on their way was a guarantee for the authorities that the applicant for stay in the town traded in his own commodity, possessed sufficient resources to cover the costs of living and would not try to deal with illegal brokerage. For example, on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1748 a register of 16 Jews was submitted<sup>27</sup>,

<sup>21</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, pp. 28–29.

<sup>22</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, pp. 77v–78r.

<sup>23</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 906; other examples of 5th September, 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October 1747, *ibidem*, pp. 116v–117r.

<sup>24</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 138v.

<sup>25</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, pp. 139r–139v.

<sup>27</sup> The following names appear on the list: “Michael Hirsch von Majerov, Wulff Baruch von Niemerov, Jodder Isaac von Sieniawa, Nachem Hirsch von Sienia-



who were suspected of not living on commerce but on brokerage in foreign commodities. Of a similar, supervisory character was also the register of the Jews who were staying in Danzig (January 1749), which was published in one of my articles<sup>28</sup>.

The “Veta” judges sometimes summonsed the Jews possessing valid safe-conducts in order that they should document what sort of transactions with the Danzig merchants they had been recently engaged in. For example, Hirsch Michel from Jarosław, summonsed in August 1754, testified that he had purchased 8 barrels of wine (206 litres each) from a tradesman Blech, while Jacob Lejbel explained that he had purchased some spices worth 217 fl. from Christoph Maukisch, and Ruben Scheffel and Mendel Issac even brought the receipt as proof of their transactions — for the considerable amount of 1300 fl. — made with a certain “young Schumacher”<sup>29</sup>. Such examples can be multiplied<sup>30</sup>. In the case of the Jews who were found guilty of breaking the law and deported from Danzig, their names were registered in the toll chamber at the town gates, where people and commodities underwent customs examination.

Another procedure which aimed at giving the authorities control over the Jewish visitors to the town was summonsing the inn-keepers from the Gdańsk suburbs Long Gardens and Barns (Matenbuden), where Jews used to stay. The “Veta” judg-

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wa, Michel Wulff von Sieniawa, Lewin Jochem von Lipsk, Judke Hosias von Sienawa, Sunde Aaron von Siniawa, Sunde Feybus von Sieniawa, Nissen Littmann von Kreszow, Wulff Isaac von Kreszow, Michel Jutke von Roatin, Wulff Jacob von Tarnow, Marek Michel von Tarnogrod, Friedmann Abraham von Kreßow, Hirsch Michel von Jeryschow”, APGd. 300, 58/24, pp. 159r-160r. See the register of 32 Jews of 1745, APGd 300, 58/78, pp. 11-17.

<sup>28</sup> E. Kizik, *Mieszkaństwo gdańskie wobec Żydów w XVII — XVIII wieku (The Danzig Townspeople towards the Jews in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, “Kwartalnik Historii Żydów”, vol.3, 2003, pp. 416-434.

<sup>29</sup> An instigator N. Hündeberg accused the above mentioned Jews of an illegal, many months’s stay in the town and illegal brokerage, which was in breach of the 1745 edict: *in welchen das geklagte bey sehr schwerer Straffe den Juden verbotthen gehandelt, es werden dieselbe wegen ihres unbefugten langen Auffenthalts und dabey getriebene Mäcklerey nachdrücklich zu bestraffen seyn*. The suspects refuted the allegations, APGd. 300, 58/26, pp. 34r-35v.

<sup>30</sup> For example, on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1746 Abesz Lewkowicz and Moses Levin of Opatow appeared in court with their petition to issue them passes, and they *als würckliche Kaufleute mit ihrem Wahren anhero gekommen (sind); — Geleit auf einige Tage zugestanden*. APGd. 300, 58/4, p. 11v.

es warned those inn-keepers of the 50 thalers penalty fine in case they failed to register the visitors, which resulted from the 9<sup>th</sup> April edict of 1745<sup>31</sup>. For example, in May 1751 twenty inn-keepers were summonsed to give a statement how many and what sort of Jews had recently been staying in their inns<sup>32</sup>. Let us remember that at that time serious commotions were taking place in Gdańsk because of the royal ordinance of 20 July 1750 which meant the limitation of the town authorities. The efforts to control the Jewish merchants' stay in the city were made under pressure from the Third Order<sup>33</sup>. The Jews were regarded as the competitors for the Gdańsk inhabitants, especially for petty merchants.

The inn-keepers, mentioned by their names, attested under oath who and when had been staying in their inns. Those who had failed to inspect the safe-conduct of their lodgers were fined; the inability to read did not make mitigating circumstances and a certain female Ann Marie Neumansche, the illiterate landlady of a certain Jew (*bezeugt jedoch nicht nach desen Geleit gesehen zu haben, weil sie es nicht verstunden*) was fined and given a warning for the future. Sometimes, for different reasons, the departure of a Jewish family from Danzig was — with the consent of the authorities — postponed many times. For example, Janckel Raphael, who was staying in the town together with his wife and two children, applied on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1777 for the prolongation of their stay because of the severe frost<sup>34</sup>. The "Veta" judges gave their permission and the pass was prolonged for another two weeks. On 4<sup>th</sup> March, however, Raphael submitted a petition to postpone his departure again, this time due to his wife's illness<sup>35</sup>. He was given the permit with the remark *zum alle letzen mahl*. And, as was announced on 10<sup>th</sup> April the instigator threatened the applicant with the arrest, unless he

<sup>31</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, pp. 138r, 140r (14<sup>th</sup> March 1748).

<sup>32</sup> APGd. 300, 58/25, pp. 106r–110r. Nevertheless, the control was not satisfactory, see: E. Cieślak, *Konflikty polityczne i społeczne (Political and Social Conflicts)*, p. 268 and footnote 89.

<sup>33</sup> See: E. Cieślak, *Konflikty polityczne i społeczne w Gdańsku (Political and Social Conflicts)*, p. 228 and next.

<sup>34</sup> APGd. 300, 58/29, p. 78r.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85r.

left the town within the three weeks' time<sup>36</sup>. Finally, on 13<sup>th</sup> May Raphael was ordered to leave the town immediately<sup>37</sup>. It seems that sometimes it was difficult to expel a Jew because he enjoyed either the protection of a Polish magnate or noble, or the protection of the Prussian government.

The protocols provide us with lots of information concerning the Jews who dealt with illegal brokerage to the detriment of Gdańsk citizens. Among habitual offenders of this sort was mentioned Moses Abraham from Kazimierz. The complaint concerning his activity was lodged by Abraham Judas from Markuszowa on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1757, who claimed that Moses, being in collusion with a certain trade apprentice, had cheated on him while mediating the purchase of some merchandise: *durch seine Mäckely zum Handel persvadiret und sie zu dem Gesellen des E. Römers auf den Mattenbuden geführt von welchen sie auf hälffte betrogen und hintergangen wären*<sup>38</sup>.

The record of the interrogation of the parties and witnesses allow us to carry out a detailed reconstruction of the events. It turned out that Moses from Kazimierz, who was Abraham Judas' brother-in-law, proposed to his father-in-law, who for the first time arrived in Danzig, his assistance in purchasing 12 barrels of wine (2,880 litres) at a bargain price and on favourable conditions, i.e. partially credited<sup>39</sup>. Judas, despite suspecting his brother-in-law of stealing 30 ducats, yielded to his suggestions and asked for the samples. Moses, however, explained, that there was not such a habit in Danzig and commodities were taken straight after a merchant gave his word for them: *hier in Dantzig ist nicht der Gebrauch Proben zu nehmen. Man muß die Waaren auf des Kaufmanns Wort nehmen*. His father-in-law consented to the suggestions and bought the merchandise<sup>40</sup>. What is more,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89r.-98v.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92v.

<sup>38</sup> APGd. 300, 58/26, p. 179v.

<sup>39</sup> Moses induced him to (...) *einen handel zu machen (...), mit Versprechen wenn er 2/3tel Baar bezahlte er ihm 1/3tel Credit schaffen wollte*, *ibidem*, p. 180r.

<sup>40</sup> The transaction must have amounted to a large sum, for according to the prices of 1757, one sztof (capacity unit — transl. note) of cheap French wine cost 30 grosses, that is 12 oksefts (Germ. *Oxhoft* — transl. note) (1 okseft = 165 sztofs) should cost 1980 fl.; T. Furtak, *Ceny w Gdańsku w latach 1701-1815 (Prices in Danzig in 1701-1815)*, Lwów 1935, p. 156, table 47.

following the advice of his relative, he also purchased spices worth 1,100 fl. (400 fl. were credited). It turned out that instead of five stones of pepper he only got two and a half stones, and instead of four stones of raisins — three chests, he did not get saffron and clove, as he had ordered, but orange skins, which he did not need at all. Moses, however, persuaded his simple-minded father-in-law to take the commodity and rushed him to leave the town promptly — most likely making him believe how profitable, yet not fully fair, deal he had made. Indeed, Abraham Judas left the town with his purchases but, having bad feelings, returned to Danzig and lodged a complaint. In spite of the witnesses' aggravating testimony<sup>41</sup> and ten months in custody, Moses did not plead guilty. Finally, on 20<sup>th</sup> September a decision was taken to deport him from the town<sup>42</sup>. The following spring, with the intercession of local merchants, who were benefiting from his services, Moses was awarded the privilege to stay in the town. Soon after that, however, his activity caused complaints and the new arrest. The "Veta" judges decided to sentence him to imprisonment, but after his humble call for mercy the sentence was changed into a lashing and life expulsion from Danzig<sup>43</sup>.

Difficult to deal with were the cases concerning speculation on the local monetary market due to a large scale of transactions as well as commercial and personal links, which sometimes reached diplomatic circles. Danzig, which since the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was not linked with a monetary union with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and defended the value of its own coin, required that larger amounts of money brought into the town were reported to the Reserve Office in order to estimate their value<sup>44</sup>. Also, the activities of currency exchange offices required an appropriate concession from the

<sup>41</sup> APGd. 300, 58/26, 180v–183v., 185v, 192r–195r.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p.199r.

<sup>43</sup> The culprit was brought *unterm Rathause aber ad beneplectum des H. Praesidius (...) gezuchtiget, aus der Stadt verwiesen und kunfftig sich niemahlen bey unausbleiblicher Haft des Zuchthauses in der Stadt betreten laßen*, APGd. 300, 58/26, p. 260v.

<sup>44</sup> APGd. 300, 58/26, pp. 190v–191r. It is possible that Levin was an agent of the Ephraim-Itzig bankers' company, which minted forged Polish coins for the benefit of King Frederic II's budget. In Königsberg worked a mint which dealt with forgeries.

Town Council. The practice of money dealing, however, was difficult to control.

Of serious nature was the case against Samuel Levin from Königsberg (this is the above mentioned Prussian *Schutzjude* — a Jew under the patronage of Prussian authorities). He was indicted for bringing on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1757 into Gdańsk 9,000 fl., which he did not declare in the Reserve Office to control their quality. The files of the witnesses' interrogation are interesting reading — during the night of 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> August the money was taken out, allegedly in buckets (*die Gelder in Eymer bey Abend-Zeit weggetragen worden*), of the house of a shoemaker Leopold, where Levin was staying. The Jewish merchant was arrested and it turned out during the investigation that the money was intended to be handed over to the Prussian Resident in Danzig (!). In such situation, the case was closed; a fine of the original amount of 1/10 of the incriminating sum was however imposed on the culprit, but was finally reduced to 300 fl. After the money was paid up, Levin was released from custody<sup>45</sup>. A certain David Marcus allegedly co-operated with Levin. He exchanged in Danzig the illegally brought coins that amounted 1,700 fl., for which offence a fine of 60 fl. was imposed on him as well as the order to leave the good quality money in the town (the sentence of 1<sup>st</sup> September 1757)<sup>46</sup>. On the same day another sentence was passed in the case of a Jew Wulff living in Gdańsk suburb named Szkoty (Scotland), who was detained on suspicion of illegally purchasing a shipment of coffee from a Dutch vessel (the offence of trading between "foreigners" without the required intermediary of Danzig). During the search conducted in his chamber old Polish coins valued at 10 Thalers, were

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196r. Also in 1759 in Danzig a certain David Salomon was detained, who had been carrying 6 thousands of Thalers in old Polish coins, dating from the issue of 1753 and 1755. The coins contained 23 1/2 per cent silver less than the mint regulations required. Reimer, the Prussian Resident in Danzig was also involved in the case. In response to the enquiry the Town Council submitted a letter on this issue to the Ministry in Berlin (30<sup>th</sup> May 1759) with a detailed explanation concerning the proceedings in this case, APGd. 300, 27/122, pp. 449–454. Another exchange of letters in connection with monetary speculation in Danzig by the Königsberg Jews was discussed by E. Cieślak (*Konflikty polityczne i społeczne w Gdańsku (Political and Social Conflicts in Danzig)*, p. 267, footnote 84).

<sup>46</sup> APGd. 300, 58/26, p. 190v.

found. The “Veta” judges imposed a penalty of 24 fl. for this really small offence<sup>47</sup>.

Quite a few details are known of the case of April 1760 against Joël Meyer, who was staying in the “Under Two Negroes” inn and working as an agent representing Alexander Moses, the banker living in the suburb of Stare Szkoty (Old Scotland)<sup>48</sup>. This suburb of Danzig did not belong to the city but was the property of the bishop of Włocławek and was the place where numerous craftsmen of different specializations lived and worked, and whose competitive business activity significantly troubled the town guilds. For his work Meyer was paid a yearly salary of 200 fl. His job was to organize a network of smugglers to illegally run money across the town’s border. That took place through the agency of some hired women who lived in the neighbourhood of the town: *durch 2 Weiber [...] heimlich durch die Thoren, ohne sie zuvor auf Vorraths-Kammer zur Revision zu bringen*<sup>49</sup>. The Jewish agent was arrested and the files of the interrogation of the defendant and witnesses reveal some interesting details how the monetary speculation was organised as well as the scale of the profits from such financial operations. What is, perhaps, even more intriguing is the fact that a meticulous investigation revealed that the forged money was brought to the Prussian Resident Heinrich Soermann, who by the agency of those women and Joël handed over considerable amounts to Alexander Moses<sup>50</sup>.

During the interrogation Joël admitted that in addition to the money which had been confiscated in his chamber he had also hidden a pouch with coins in the basement of a house in Broad Street (Breite Gaße). In turn, Johann Gottlieb Fischer<sup>51</sup>, the owner of the inn confessed that Joël had been visited “three

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 191v.

<sup>48</sup> Probably this person is identical with Alexander Moses, whose large consignment of merchandise, valued at 6,410 fl., was confiscated on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1760, APGd. 300, 58/27, p. 60. With regard to Moses’s activity the Danzig authorities lodged a protest to the Abbot of Pelplin and required his expulsion from the suburb, see: a letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1760. APGd. 300, 27/123, pp. 126–128.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5v.

<sup>50</sup> The investigation revealed that Soermann had consecutively sent the sums of 1,522, 1,422 i 2,907 fl., *Ibidem*, p. 16v.

<sup>51</sup> It might be the person identical with the instigator whose activity was known from the last quarter of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

or four times by a certain wicked woman in a red dress”, each time bringing pouches hidden under her clothes (*Beutel mit Geld mit einem Mantel Rock bedekt gebracht*). Another woman brought in money hidden under her arms (*unter beyden Armen Geld gebracht*). The witness even estimated the possible value of the hidden money at 1,000 fl. The inn-keeper’s daughter too, was engaged in spying on the guest<sup>52</sup>. During the search carried out in Joël’s chamber some instructions in Yiddish how to exchange money were found (the notes were translated into German by a local convert, Paul Marx)<sup>53</sup>. For obvious political reasons Prussian Resident Heinrich Soermann was not even asked to give any explanations, whereas for the Jewish defendant the trial, which ended in October 1760, meant the loss of questioned money (813 fl. and 3 grosses) and 400 fl. in fine to be replaced with a four year imprisonment. Additionally, a life ban on entering Gdańsk was imposed on him and he was obliged to cover the trial expenses<sup>54</sup>. The negotiations with the town’s authorities, assumed by two local rabbis who suggested closing the case after the payment of 200 fl., were rejected by the court<sup>55</sup>.

Chaim Schmul was among the rabbis who were pleading Joël’s cause, and in 1763 he himself was charged with running illegal banking activity<sup>56</sup>. Chaim was staying in an inn in the Long Garden suburb, paying a weekly rent of 3 fl. Formally, being a rabbi he exercised the right to temporarily stay in the town<sup>57</sup>. Unfortunately, this side of his activity is not reflected in the sources, yet they report only on his actions forbidden by the Danzig law. Precisely, he engaged himself in establishing a currency exchange office and lending money through vouchers. The character of his occupation appeared to be quite legal, and

<sup>52</sup> APGd. 300, 58/27, p. 6r–6v.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8v–10v. See: the evidence of Joel given on 1<sup>st</sup> May *theils Ermahnungs, theils Bedrohungs weise*, *Ibidem*, p. 13v.

<sup>54</sup> *dadurch denen vielfältigen boßhaftigen Unternehmungen des Alexander Moses hülfliche Hand geleistet*, APGd. 300, 58/27, pp. 94r–94v.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*. See: the insert which contains translations of letters including financial transactions’ orders, labelled as ‘94b’.

<sup>56</sup> APGd. 300, 58/27, p. 260r.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps identical with Chaim Jochem, who on 16th October 1752 appealed to the Court to be granted, as a rabbi, a residence permit in Danzig, see: APGd. 300, 58/25, p. 235v.

Chaim himself did not hide what he was doing. The witnesses testified that he had been visited by clients everyday, as if he was a representative of the biggest bank: *ein solches häufiges ab- und zugehen sey, wie bey dem größten Banquier alhier*<sup>58</sup>.

In the rabbi's chamber a search was carried out and mint scales to weigh up to 32 marcs were discovered, while in the counter's drawers (a typical piece of furniture used in banks is mentioned) numerous different coins: for example in the first one were Bavarian "Düttchen", in the fourth Prussian "Tymphs", in the fifth Saxon "Tymphs"... and in the 23<sup>rd</sup> drawer were samples of precious metals from dissected coins.

The inn-keeper, being interrogated as a witness, testified that different people had been bringing money: *Christen, Polen, Juden wie auch Kaufgesellen und Laufburschen*. Finally, on 18<sup>th</sup> August, Chaim was indicted with several charges: 1. the exchange of money (in the source: *Geld negotium*, 5 barrels of coins are mentioned), 2. brokering, 3. trading with wine and timber, 4. bringing 'young and old' fellow believers to the town, 5. renting out a chamber for exchanging money<sup>59</sup>.

The defendant refuted the charges claiming that his activity entailed collecting bad coins from the market in order to remelt them, which should be regarded more as an activity for the benefit of the town rather than an offence. However, the excerpts from the defendant's accounts contradicted the defence's argument, because they showed that for 444,221 fl. in good coin he bought bad coins according to the interest rate which suggested that his aim was monetary speculation.

Conclusively, despite very serious charges, the whole case ended with a relatively mild verdict, for Chaim was sentenced to banishment from the town (he was obliged to leave together with his family members within 8 days) with no right to return. Nevertheless, Danzig merchants vouched for the defendant with the petition to replace the banishment with a 50 ducats fine and a harsh warning (12<sup>th</sup> September 1763). The authorities granted this request and the fine was reduced (22<sup>nd</sup> September). The case was closed; on 13<sup>th</sup> October the sum of 300 fl. was paid, which was half of the adjudicated penalty.

<sup>58</sup> APGd. 300, 58/27, p. 260r.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 263v-266v.



The fines did not deter other Jews from running illegal money exchange activity, which was proven by the trials in the years to follow<sup>60</sup>.

It also frequently happened that Jews sued dishonest Danzig merchants. For example, a wine trader Gottlieb Nowack sold 7 barrels of wine to Szmul from Przemyśl<sup>61</sup>, and 4 barrels to Lejb from Krzeszów (31<sup>st</sup> August 1763). However, instead of decent quality wine, which had been contracted and bought based on the samples, Nowack delivered vulgarly forged one (4 barrels of water had been added to 7 barrels of wine), and his Jewish business partners, after sampling the consignment, declined to take it. According to the given evidence, Nowack promised to replace the wine on condition to keep the whole thing secret (*[und] gebeten, nur ruhig zu seyn, damit die Wette nichts davon erfahre*)<sup>62</sup>. For Nowack, who had already been facing serious financial problems, this case caused his bankruptcy and the seizure of his property (13<sup>th</sup> October 1763).

The "Veta" judges closely watched whether the ban on trading on Sunday was abided by<sup>63</sup>. For instance, on 27<sup>th</sup> August the judges reacted to alleged reports that during a church service the whole of Broad Street (Breite GaÙe) was full of trading Jews: *unter und nach Predigt die Breite GaÙe gantz angefüllt von Juden stehen und von demselben allerhand Waaren feil gebethen*<sup>64</sup>. The judges ordered to carry out the inspection the following Sunday, arrest the traders and confiscate their property. A similar court warrant was issued the following year<sup>65</sup>; however, to be exact,

<sup>60</sup> See: the case of a cook Moses Jacob of 1776.: APGd. 300, 58/29, p. 57v–58r, 59v–62, 67r–68v., 78r–78v. Jacob was sentenced to pay a 100 fl. fine.

<sup>61</sup> Okseft = 230 litres.

<sup>62</sup> APGd. 300, 58/27, pp. 268–269r; see: pp. 270, 271, 272, 274v, 276r, 277v, 278r.

<sup>63</sup> See: E. Kizik, *Dekalog III. Niedziela w miastach hanzeatyckich w XVI–XVIII wieku (The Decalogue III. Sunday in Hanzeatic Towns in 16th and 18th Centuries)*, in: *Między wschodem a zachodem. Studia z dziejów Rzeczypospolitej w epoce nowożytnej (Between the East and the West. Studies on the History of the Commonwealth in Modern Times)*, ed. J. Staszewski, K. Mikulski i J. Dumanowski, Toruń 2002, pp. 160–174.

<sup>64</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 180r.

<sup>65</sup> (*Juden*) in der Breiten GaÙe treibende Handlungen und Schachereyen, APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 276v (12th August 1749).

I did not manage to find the cases of catching Jewish peddlers who broke this law.

At times, we can encounter in sources an indictment for attempts to trade in huckster's goods. For example, the hucksters of the Main Town sued the 14 Jews, in their majority coming from Poznań<sup>66</sup>, engaged in transportation of different commodities. The cargo was brought in from Elbląg (Germ.: Elbing) and included a number of second-hand items, e.g. garments intended to be sold in Poznań (Hirsch Salomon, John Abraham, Simon Isaac, Michael Hirsch). Separate court proceedings were run against each of the defendants, and as a rule, the explanations submitted by the incriminated merchants were allowed for. The court had more reservations about Salomon Abraham living near Danzig. The defendant admitted possessing some quantities of huckster's commodities (the so called: Nürnberg goods), which was valued at 100 fl. He was ordered to pay a fine in the amount of 1/4 of the value of the merchandise. Abraham did not possess any cash on him, so the commodity was seized till the penalty was paid. Another example is that of David Abraham from Gdańsk suburb, who was caught with a bag full of cheap huckster's trash (mirrors) and was ordered to pay a 4 fl. fine, after which his merchandise was given back to him. The men were accompanied by three women, Rachel, a certain Joseph Alexander from Weinberg's wife, who hired herself as a cook for the fellow believers travelling to Elbląg to attend the local fair (she kept with herself some fat for cooking) and her helper Freude, without any permanent residence.

It would be premature to unambiguously assess the presented material. In the light of the files, the "Veta" judges cannot be blamed for being biased in judging respective cases where the Jews were put on trial. The defendants and the witnesses of both parties underwent meticulous interrogation, and those found guilty were punished irrespective of their religious beliefs or legal standing. No doubt, these comprehensive protocols of the Danzig "Veta" should be compared with numerous sources included in the books of the two other local institutions which dealt with economic matters (the offices of vice-presiding and presiding Mayor). It would be also of significant meaning

<sup>66</sup> APGd. 300, 58/24, p. 233v-236r.

to reach for the information from the Vistula customs houses. Surely, those materials would facilitate the possible estimates of the degree of a Jewish intermediary between Danzig and Poland and would shed some more light on binding commercial practices. And may this also be the plea for a return to fundamental research on the legal and economic history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Without clarifying the question of money flow — and generally — examining commercial businesses, the explication of numerous significant social processes in old Danzig and in Poland is doomed to failure.

*(Translated by Robert Bubczyk)*