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THE RABBINATE OF POZNAŃ IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

Abstract

It is only fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources that help build an image of the functioning of the rabbinate in Jewish religious communities of medieval Poland. Latin Christian sources dating to the period mention individuals described as *doctor scholae*, *senior scholae*, or *episcopus Iudaeorum* (standing for the rabbi or the major senior). However, mentions referring to such persons usually only deal with their lending activities. Still, we can learn more about the rabbis active in Poznań in the middle of the fifteenth century thanks to the correspondence (*responsa*) of Israel Isserlein, Israel Bruna, and Moses Minz, all of whom were scholars active in the Empire.

Keywords: Jews, medieval Poznań, rabbinate, rabbinical *responsa*/responses

Requested by the elders of the Lwów kahal to give advice on what should be the most appropriate punishment for someone who took part in a brawl that led to a killing, Israel Bruna,¹ one of the most famous scholars in the Ashkenazic diaspora, recommended that anathema and long-time penance be imposed upon the perpetrator, the victim's family to be compensated financially. In conclusion of his response, the Regensburg rabbi wrote, "And if you are willing to worsen his situation, then do send him far away from Poznań, and he shall have to do everything that they tell him to do there, and it is only then that he would have a chance to go to heaven".² Based on this response given to the elders of Lwów, it can be concluded that a centre of Jewish halakhic studies existed in Poznań around the middle of the fifteenth century.

¹ Born c. 1400 in Brno, Israel Bruna served as a rabbi in Brno and Regensburg. Cf. Hanna Zaremska, 'Rabin Izrael MiBruna i jego relacje z żydowskimi gminami w Polsce', in Wojciech Brojer (ed.), *Lustro. Teksty o kulturze średniowiecza ofiarowane Halinie Manikowskiej* (Warszawa, 2013), 137–53.

² Bruna, *Responsa*, nos. 264 and 265.

The history of the Jews inhabiting the late medieval Poznań has been studied by historians since the nineteenth century – among whom dissertations by Joseph Perles, Tadeusz Nożyński, and Leon Koczy³ need being mentioned in the first place. Their findings are not most recent, and need being corrected to a considerable extent. The article by Jolanta Rudzińska,⁴ based on extensive query, is one such supplementation. This article, in turn, refers to a short period in the history of the Poznań rabbinate, and there are two reasons for why it was a period of importance. First, it brings us closer to answering the question about the knowledge of the Law and its actual observance among the Jews in late medieval Poland. It is commonly believed that the country housed no Israelite tertiary schools and no original authors of halakhic literature. Second, the related sources are contained in the correspondence of three fifteenth-century rabbis – Israel Isserlein, Israel Bruna, and Moses Minz – who were active in the western part of the diaspora: these historic documents being rarely made use of by scholars researching in Polish Jewry.⁵ Let us add that rabbi Minz resided for some time in Poznań, the capital town of the Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) region.

The Jewish settlement of Poznań appears in the sources only in the second half of the fourteenth century. According to the nineteenth-century tradition, the first synagogue in the area was built in 1367. It is assumed that the synagogue was erected in the north-eastern part of the town, within its walls. Jews of Poznań are not mentioned by early medieval travellers and chroniclers. As opposed to the nearby towns of Gniezno and Kalisz, where bracteates with Hebrew inscriptions were minted in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, no minters

³ Joseph Perles, 'Geschichte der Juden in Posen', *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 13 (1864), 281–373; Tadeusz Nożyński, 'Żydzi poznańscy w XV wieku', *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, x (1932), 1, 86–99; 2/3, 261–3; Leon Koczy, 'Studia nad dziejami gospodarczymi Żydów przed połową wieku XVII', *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, xii (1934), 3, 257–99; 4, 333–62; xiii (1935), 1, 47–63, 2/3, 171–231.

⁴ Jolanta Rudzińska, 'Żydzi w późnośredniowiecznym Poznaniu', in Zofia Kurnatowska and Tomasz Jurek (eds.), *Civitas Posnaniensis. Studia z dziejów średniowiecznego Poznania* (Poznań, 2005), 345–60.

⁵ Hanna Zaremska, 'Responsy Izraela Isserleina, Izraela Bruny i Mojżesza Minca. Źródło do badań nad historią Żydów w średniowiecznej Polsce', in Adam Kaźmierczyk and Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska (eds.), *Żydzi polscy w oczach historyka. Tom dedykowany pamięci profesora Józefa A. Gierowskiego* (Kraków, 2018), 157–71.

apparently resided in Poznań. The town was located beside the routes along which caravans of Jewish slave traders moved.

In early Middle Ages, Poznań basically participated in the commercial exchange along the North-East axis.⁶ In the fourteenth century, after Poland was reunited (following the internal fragmentation period), under the rule of Ladislas I the Elbow-High (Władysław Łokietek) and Casimir III the Great (Kazimierz Wielki), the town was a peripheral hub. The trade route that linked Silesia and Prussia led through Kalisz, whereas the main international artery led from Germany via Cracow, far from Poznań. A rearrangement followed from the union between Poland and Lithuania and the opening of a land road that went through the Greater Poland's capital, which connected Leipzig, as well as Breslau, with Lithuania and Ruthenia. The enlivenment of trade between Silesia and Royal Prussia provided additional impulse for the development of Poznań. From the late fourteenth century onwards, Jews were numerously represented in court registers, chiefly as usurers and merchants.

The early medieval Poznań stronghold-city at the isle of Ostrów Tumski, the bishopric residence and, since the mid-twelfth century, the capital of a dukedom, was populated until the mid-thirteenth century by members of higher social strata, both the clergy and the lay people. As the hub had important economic, administrative, military, and religious functions, numerous settlements emerged in its surrounding area. The most important among them – St Adalbert's, St Gothard's, and St Martin's – in the early years of the latter half of the thirteenth century became the nucleus of a chartered town on the left bank of the Warta River.⁷ The area of the new hub was first surrounded by a moat and a wooden stockade; ramparts began emerging in the late thirteenth century.

The regular layout of chartered town, with streets intersecting perpendicularly and with a centrally situated marketplace, was disturbed at two points: on the Warta valley escarpment, where Kozia Street, once leading to St Martin's Church, was set diagonally, and where St Gothard's settlement was once located. The latter was supposedly not regulated during the town foundation process; the area was situated not far from the Blackfriars' Church and a street which in the fifteenth

⁶ Maciej Przybył, 'Poznań na tle szlaków komunikacyjnych od X do XIII wieku', in *Civitas Posnaniensis*, 11–25.

⁷ Hanna Kóčka-Krenz, 'Najstarszy Poznań', in *Civitas Posnaniensis*, 34–5; Tomasz Jurek, 'Przebieg lokacji Poznania', *ibid.*, 173–91.

century was named Żydowska ('Jewish').⁸ It can be guessed that the Duke resolved to have the Israelites subjected to his jurisdiction settled there (or, let them stay where they had initially settled) and grant them the title to the land, even if not full.⁹ When Poznań was surrounded with walls in the second half of the thirteenth century, the thus-formed Jewish cluster was contained within the ramparts. Likewise, the local Jewish populations were resettled within the city limits, whose range partly covered the previous agglomeration, like in Gniezno, which was chartered ca. 1239 by Duke Ladislas Odonic.¹⁰

Poznań Jews resided, at least between the fourteenth and mid-fifteenth century, at the frontage, situated by the ramparts, of the left section of the *Platea Iudaeorum* that stretched from the north-eastern corner of the Marketplace. Every fourth house in Żydowska St was owned by a Jew, at maximum.¹¹ In the middle of the fifteenth century, before the fire of 1464, they were replaced by clothiers, and only a few buildings located near the synagogue remained in Israelite hands. Ever since, the Jewish life of Poznań gathered around the nearby Mała Żydowska ('Small Jewish') Street. In this alleyway, they again neighboured on Christians, above all with noblemen (houses owned by men connected with local nobility courts stood in the area).¹² The street was flanked by manors of the patrician families of Ostroróg and Szamotulski. As calculated by Jacek Wiesiołowski, the district was home to some forty houses inhabited by Jews.¹³ The statistics for Breslau, Regensburg, and Nuremberg¹⁴ indicate that approximately

⁸ Cf. Jacek Wiesiołowski, 'Bolesław i Jolanta, czyli początki polskiej tolerancji. Przywilej kaliski księcia wielkopolskiego Bolesława Pobożnego', *Kronika Miasta Poznania*, 3 (2006), 7–13.

⁹ In Cracow, some of the houses belonging to Jews stood within first Jewish district on allotments owned by the monarch since the foundation or acquired afterwards. Jews became their usufructuaries on the basis of a 'perpetual leasehold' up to the second generation. Cf. Hanna Zaremska, *Juden im mittelalterlichen Polen und Krakauer Judengemeinde*, trans. Heidemarie Petersen (Osnabrück, 2013), 327–49.

¹⁰ Wiesiołowski, 'Bolesław i Jolanta', 13.

¹¹ *Id.*, *Socjotopografia późnośredniowiecznego Poznania* (Poznań, 1982), 181–4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 179–81. The fires of 1447 and 1464 caused that the nobility, save for the families Ostroróg and Szamotulski, were pushed out of the city, and their estates were taken over by Jews.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 179–84.

¹⁴ Mateusz Goliński, *Wrocławskie spisy zastawów długów i mienia żydowskiego z 1453 roku. Studium z historii kredytu i kultury materialnej* (Wrocław, 2006), 135–6; Alfred

twenty people lived in an average Jewish house – normally, a multi-generational family and a number of workers. If such data is useful for a calculation regarding Poznań, a community of some 800 residents would have been the case; this result would need to be verified.

For a period when no censuses functioned, only tax-related sources could be more certain as regards population statistics. There is no list of local Jewish taxpayers that we would be aware of.¹⁵ We are forced to rely on single and quite random pieces of information on sums paid to the royal treasury by a handful of Israelite communities. What is more, statistics concerning the fixed tax called the royal rent (*census regalis*), paid by individual communities, date to various years. The figures for the most important communities are as follows: Cracow (Kazimierz), the years 1504 and 1506: 70 Marks (100 florins); Lwów: the years 1466 and 1506: 140 Marks (200 florins); Poznań, before 1493: 140 Marks (200 florins).¹⁶

The lump-sum model of charging the Israelite communities with *szoss* (Pol. *szos*, name of the tax applied, derived from the German *Schoß*) implies that its amount only tells us about the wealth of individual communities, rather than the number of their members. It can however be assumed that the number of houses forming a cluster was the major element in the calculation of the tax, and thus its amount informs us about the group of the houses' owners.

The only list of Jewish aggregations in Poland, which can be referred to the medieval period, is the so-called Coronation Tariff (Pol. *taksa koronacyjna*) dated 1507.¹⁷ Specifications of the amounts contributed to the treasury by each of the communities covered by the Tariff say

Haverkamp, 'The Jewish Quarters in German Towns during the Late Middle Ages', in Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Hertmut Lehmann (eds.), *In and Out of the Ghetto. Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Washington, D.C., Cambridge, and New York, 1995), 19; Michael Toch, 'Die soziale und demographische Struktur der jüdischen Gemeinde Nürnbergs im Jahre 1489', in Jürgen Schneider (ed.), *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftswege. Festschrift Harman Kellenbenz*, v (Stuttgart, 1981), 80, 82–3.

¹⁵ For the fourteenth century, such documentation, taking account of the Jewish population, is extant only for Silesia – the province which was no more part of Poland since the mid-fourteenth c. For the subsequent century, we only have a list of taxpayers from two communities situated in the region of Masovia.

¹⁶ For the complete statistics, see Zaremska, *Juden im mittelalterlichen Polen*, 255.

¹⁷ Maurycy Horn, 'Najstarszy rejestr osiedli żydowskich w Polsce z 1507 r.', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, iii, 9 (1974), 11–15. The Tariff only

nothing of the number of their members; yet, they do provide data that enable to be better versed in this matter. The community of Lwów was the richest, though most probably not the largest: in any case, it paid 300 florins. The Cracow community, which had very recently been moved to the district of Kazimierz, proved less affluent: although it paid 300 florins as well, the amount was shared with the community of Tarnów. With a tax of 200 florins, the community of Poznań came third.

The second half of the fifteenth century saw the amount of Jewish tax in Masovia stabilised at 2 florins per head-of-household.¹⁸ Casual mentions tell us that a Jewish resident in Płock and another one in Bielsk paid 16 and 7 florins, for two and one family residing, respectively.¹⁹ It can be presumed on this basis that the Jewish district in Poznań included some thirty-seven or thirty-eight houses.

An incomplete register of the coronation tax paid in 1507 by the Kingdom's towns, analogous to the Jewish Tariff of the same year, recorded proceeds from Poznań, totalling 600 florins. Together with a 200 florins tax paid by the Jews, the total amount was 800 florins. The area of Poznań within the walls had a population of some 8,000 in the fifteenth century. Thus, the town's Jews amounted to approx. 10 per cent of the total population, contributing 25 per cent of the tax received by the monarchical treasury.²⁰

With the paucity of Jewish sources at the disposal of researchers in the history of Jews inhabiting medieval Poland – with no surviving kahal statutes or *pinkases* (community registers), and scarce records²¹ – the organisation of Israelite communities, the board, and the tax system can only be reconstructed fragmentarily.²² How the rabbinate actually functioned can only be seen based on late medieval sources.

refers to settlements located in Greater Poland (Wielkopolska), Lesser Poland (Małopolska), and Masovia (but not all of them, again).

¹⁸ Jerzy Senkowski, *Skarbowość Mazowsza od końca XIV wieku do 1526 roku* (Warszawa, 1965), 104, ft. 393.

¹⁹ *Id.* (ed.), 'Księga skarbowa Janusza II księcia mazowieckiego z lat 1477-1490', *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej*, vii, 3 (1959), no. 927.

²⁰ Taxes only slightly contributed to the State's income.

²¹ Rafał Witkowski, 'Jews in Medieval Poland. Culture, Religion and Language as Reflected in Sources', *Studia Historica Slavo-Germanica*, 28 (2008-2009), [ed. 2011], 87-139.

²² Cf. Zaremska, *Juden im mittelalterlichen Polin*, ii, 3.

Latin Christian records, which account for a vast majority of sources shedding light on the medieval history of Polish Jewry, sporadically mention individuals described as *doctor scholae*, *senior scholae* and (somewhat ambiguously) *episcopus Iudaeorum*²³ since the second half of the fourteenth century, mostly accompanying the lending contracts entered into.

Among the individuals covered by the safe-conduct issued in 1370 by the Cracow council, on order of King Casimir the Great, to Lewko, a Jewish banker, a bishop (*episcopus*) named Kasym appears alongside members of Lewko's family.²⁴ Not long afterwards, with lending deals, a certain Smoyl appears twice as a 'Jewish bishop': the name probably referred to Samuel, father of Smerlin, an affluent usurer.²⁵ The confirmation of the aforementioned safe-conduct, obtained by Lewko's sons in 1407, referred also to an individual termed 'bishop' (without mentioning his name):²⁶ this is the last time a Cracow document mentions the title. However, in Poznań it appeared in the late 1380s and 1390s.²⁷ In 1392, an usurer named Pechno acted in this capacity.²⁸ A moneylender named Michał is mentioned as a 'Jewish bishop' for Kalisz in the years 1427–8.²⁹

The term is not completely clear. In the German territories, it most frequently (though not exclusively) appears in the documentation of episcopal towns with Jewish communities and refers to a member of the *Judenrat* who exercised the function of the first among the seniors in perpetuity.³⁰ Fourteenth-century Silesian sources³¹ as well

²³ *Ibid.*, 381–7.

²⁴ Bożena Wyrozumska (ed.), *Żydzi w średniowiecznym Krakowie. Wypisy źródłowe z ksiąg miejskich krakowskich/The Jews in Medieval Cracow. Selected records from Cracow Municipal Books* (Kraków, 1995), no. 54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, nos. 66, 67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 177.

²⁷ Józef von Lekszycki (ed.), *Die ältesten grosspolnischen Grodbücher*, i (Leipzig, 1887), nos. 701, 1109, 1130.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 1341.

²⁹ Tomasz Jurek, 'Żydzi w późnośredniowiecznym Kaliszu', *Rocznik Kaliski*, xxiv (1992/1993) [1994], 30.

³⁰ Georg Caro, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, ii (Leipzig, 1920), 172 ff.

³¹ Ludwig Oelsner, 'Schlesische Urkunden zur Geschichte der Juden im Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kunde österreichischer Geschichts-Quellen*, 31 (Wien, 1864), 32 (1865).

as the aforesaid mention of Michał from Kalisz³² see the bishop not as a member of the elders but as a rabbi.

The documentation of the forensic practice, the municipal and district records of Cracow, Lwów, and Warsaw, as well as the town records repeatedly contain the phrase *doctor Iudaeorum*. This stands for a rabbi or assessors of the Jewish kahal court, who were called *dayanim*.

The *senior scholae* ('senior of the school') is mentioned in an article of a charter issued in 1453 by King Casimir IV Jagiellon (Kazimierz Jagiellończyk) on request of the Jews of Poznań, and probably drafted by them.³³ The said article provided that a Christian who had an object stolen and, as he supposes, pawned to a Jew, should request the *senior scholae* to help him regain his property, whereas the senior's role would be to interrogate Jews at synagogue about the lien in question.

These laconic and enigmatic pieces of information point to two facts. First, on the peripheries of the diaspora, in Israelite aggregations in Poland, the position of individual knowledgeable of the Law and well-versed in ritual acts became widespread. However, we know hardly anything about the status or education of such men. This also refers to the Jewish community of Cracow where the teaching of the Law became animated only after Jacob Polak, a comer from Bohemia, settled down in the town in the late fifteenth century;³⁴ the same is true about the community of Lwów. In both communities, we come across figures termed with use of the aforementioned Latin phrases. Those men performed tasks customarily entrusted to rabbis, such as anathemising or issuing divorce certificates, and were entitled to perform ritual slaughter.³⁵

Rabbis from the Empire began joining the community of Poznań in the middle of the fifteenth century. Following the time of bloody attacks on the Jewish people during the Black Death and ritual murder and host desecration trials, with verdicts that held collectively responsible all the residents of the persecuted Israelite communities, the German lands saw in the fifteenth century a switch in the strategy of anti-Jewish

³² Michał is not mentioned among the elders of the local community in a written record dated 1428, where he is described as an *episcopus Iudaeorum*.

³³ Bolesław Ulanowski, 'Najdawniejszy układ systematyczny prawa polskiego w XV wieku', in *Archiwum Komisji Prawniczej PAU*, v (Kraków, 1897), 99–112, art. 17.

³⁴ Elhanan Reiner, 'Pollak Ya'kov Ben Josef', in Gershon D. Hundert (ed.), *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ii (Yale, 2008), 1420–1.

³⁵ Zaremska, *Juden im mittelalterlichen Polen*, 381–7.

actions. Ever since, the policy of expulsions from towns, bishoprics and principalities, combined with partial property requisitions, became predominant.³⁶ Where no expulsion took place or the expulsion was temporary, the Jewish inhabitants were got rid of through refusing to extend the protection letters (*Schutzbriefe*) for them, which otherwise let the Israelites reside in a given town for a determined number of years. The banishments (not final, in some cases) extended in the fifteenth century to Cologne and Freiberg (1424–5), Saxony (1432), Speyer and Zurich (1435), Mainz (1438), Augsburg (1439), Bavaria (1450), the Bishopric of Würzburg (1454), Breslau (1455), Brno and Olomouc (1456), Schweidnitz (1457), Erfurt (1458), Neisse (1499), the Bishopric of Mainz (1499), Regensburg (1475), Bamberg (1478), Ulm (1499), and Nuremberg (1499), among other localities or areas.

German Jews lived out of a suitcase; anxiety and lack of a sense of stability must have been omnipresent. This held true also for the milieu of scholars, although mobility, moving from one town to another, was actually nothing new for them.

Learned persons who were getting settled in Greater Poland's capital town, educated in German yeshivas and at home with the Law and Jewish self-government practice, applied in the kahals of the western part of the diaspora and supposedly initiated the process of formation in Poland of a rabbinate modelled after that known in where they came from.³⁷ This encouraged conflicts with their colleagues who had been active in those places. Letters were exchanged between Poznań and German kahals; the disputes going on in the Greater Poland's community were known in Regensburg, Erfurt, Brno, and Wiener Neustadt.

Moses of Halle³⁸ arrived in Poznań from Germany in the late 1450s. Forced to leave his hometown, he set off eastwards. Once, he settled in Pyzdry – not for long, however, as he soon had to leave the town owing to an *ones* (threat, oppression, given the context, in Hebrew) situation. As he rejected the opportunity to stay for good in Kalisz,

³⁶ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, xi (New York and London, 1967), 275.

³⁷ Cf. Adam Teller, 'Rabbinate', in *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews*, 1469.

³⁸ Marcus Brann, 'Wer war R. Mose Mariel?', *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 11 (1903), 569–72; Zaremska, 'Rabin Izrael MiBruna', 135–54.

he eventually chose Poznań as the only place fit “for living, for himself and for his sons”.³⁹

In the responses authored by Israel Isserlein, residing in Wiener Neustadt, and Israel Bruna, Moses appears holding the title of *morenu*, which denoted a scholar with high religious education.

Settling down in a new place required permission and consent from the local kahal, which not always was a void formality. When rabbi Salomon made an attempt at imposing his authority on the community of Breslau, the local kahal protested, stating that “he is not welcome [t]here, whether as a leader or as a judge”.⁴⁰

Moses took endeavours to legalise his stay and position in the Jewish community of Poznań. As a result, he signed a contract with two representatives of the local community, of whom one was a rabbi (*rav*) named Joshua, and was described in Israel Isserlein’s response as *nehbad* – ‘the venerable’.⁴¹ The contract, reinforced with *herem*, admitted Moses to reside in Poznań whereas the kahal retained the right to have him removed from the town (this thread will be resumed). As he regretted having signed such an agreement, Moses took efforts to have it cancelled. To his mind, the annulment should have been based on several arguments, the one of importance to us being the fact that he had signed it under pressure, as Poznań was the only town in which he could stay. Joshua rejected Moses’ endeavours, though. The case was thrown on Isserlein’s table, as Joshua (assumedly, it was he who wrote) requested him for opinion. Moses sought support from Isserlein, too. Israel Bruna quotes a detail from the reply he received: “you are claiming your rights and arguing that your rights and your authority in the town and in the district have been breached, which, to our mind, is neither right nor fair ... you had no legal empowerment ... to remove Morenu David and Morenu Kissara from fulfilling their authority and the function of rabbinate in your town and in your district ... there are numerous places that we see in our generation where there are two rabbis and we have never heard that one of them

³⁹ Isserlein, *Responsa*, no. 73.

⁴⁰ Weil, *Responsa*, no.146. On Jakob Weil, cf. Bernard Rosensweig, *Ashkenazic Jewry in Transition* (Waterloo and Ontario, 1975).

⁴¹ On Israel Isserlein, cf. Shlomo Eidelberg, *Jewish Life in Austria in the Fifteenth Century as Reflected in the Legal Writings of Rabbi Israel Isserlein and His Contemporaries* (Philadelphia, 1962).

would have had a higher right than the other”.⁴² Isserlein’s letter was addressed to Morenu ha-rav Moshe (i.e. Moses of Halle), ha-rav Joshua, and ha-rav Pinkas.

In the fifteenth century, in many a town in the western part of the Ashkenazic diaspora, a few rabbis were active at a time. Giving a number of such examples, Jacob Weil finds, similarly as Isserlein, that “We have seen in our generation a certain number of localities wherein there were two rabbis, and we have never heard that one might have had a grudge against the other”.⁴³ Meanwhile, conflicts between rabbis who had long been residing in the town and the new-coming scholars were nothing special, actually; similar occurrences were seen at the time in Nuremberg, Regensburg, as well as Prague.⁴⁴ Consulted in this respect, authors of responses recommended to find a compromise, and tried at times to encourage one of the protagonists to recede, and leave the town.

The titles attached to Moses, David, and Kissaria – the scholars mentioned in Isserlein’s response quoted by Bruna – indicates that they were equal to one another. The title *morenu*⁴⁵ gave them the right to manage the school, make decisions regarding the *halakha*, participate in dispute-resolving court proceedings, casting curse on those community members who did not respect the Law, issue divorce decisions, and participate in wedding ceremonies. Their status was different from that of rabbis who were titled *rav* – as was the case with Joshua and Pinkas. The title was received from teachers after they completed studies under their guidance, and was not conferred on ‘rabbis by profession’. In German communities, they were entrusted with less demanding functions, such as issuing decisions on the kosher quality of meals and some responsibilities related to the functioning of synagogues. Such rabbis could be met in the fifteenth century in Rhineland towns, in the kahals of Regensburg and Nuremberg, as well as in smaller communities, such as the one of Ulm. It can be presumed that it is them who are referred to in medieval Polish sources as *doctors* and, perhaps, *episcopi Iudaeorum*.

⁴² Bruna, *Responsa*, no. 254.

⁴³ Weil, *Responsa*, no. 151.

⁴⁴ Israel Yuval, *Hakhamim bedoram: Hamanhigut haruhanit shel Yehudei Germania beshalhei yomei hebeynayim* (Jerusalem, 1989), 377–84.

⁴⁵ Rosenzweig, *Ashkenazic Jewry in Transition*, 111.

The subject of Moses' conflict with *morenu* Kissaria and *morenu* David is quite clear: Moses demanded broader prerogatives than those provided for by the contract. While its exact wording is unknown, we know that the contract confirmed Moses' right to reside in Poznań whilst also stating that either of the signatories representing the community could require him to leave the city. Another, surviving, contract suggests what the document determining the conditions of the consent for Moses to stay in the town might have looked like.

At the same time, in the middle of the fifteenth century, Leisor/Elieser from Passau in Bavaria, a student of Jacob Weil's, arrived in Prague.⁴⁶ There was another scholar who had settled in the city, named Elijahu. The conflict split the community. An arrangement was brought about, signed by both antagonists and guaranteed with *herem*. Elijahu consented to Elieser's stay in the town as long as the latter would not interfere in any 'rabbinate-related' matters. In specific, he would refrain from making decisions regarding the halakhic business, resolving disputes, participating in marriage ceremonies; likewise, he was not supposed to be in charge of the ritual slaughterhouses or open a yeshiva of his own. He was expected to study at Elijahu's school, and himself could teach a certain number of students at his home.

We can learn a little about Kissaria from Israel Bruna's letter to him. Bruna lauds his younger colleague and student for having timely resolved to go to Poland. Bruna planned to arrive at the capital of Greater Poland himself. However, he considered the option too long and did not make it on time: his plan was thwarted by his apprehension.⁴⁷

Moreover, Bruna struggled with the difficulties appearing in the time when the rabbinate underwent a change.⁴⁸ Soon after his return to Brno, he fell afoul of Goddel, a scholar (most probably) from Sopron in Hungary, who had settled in the town some time before. The conflict lasted for years; Bruna had become a famous scholar by then.

⁴⁶ Bruna, *Responsa*, no. 277, cf. Eric Zimmer, *Harmony and Discord, an Analysis of the Decline of Jewish Self-Government in 15th-Century Europe* (New York, 1970), 126.

⁴⁷ Historiographers date Bruna's detention at 1456, in connection with a long-lasting conflict around the collection of a tax imposed on the Jews in 1452 on the occasion of the coronation of Emperor Frederick III Habsburg; cf. Zaremska, *Rabin Izrael MiBruna*, 142. In *Hakhamim bedoram*, Yuval suggests that the accusation concerned Bruna only, possibly in connection with his plan to leave the country, and believes it happened in 1454, the year Kissaria arrived in Poznań.

⁴⁸ Weil, *Responsa*, no. 151, Minz, *Responsa*, no. 76. Cf. also Zimmer, *Harmony*, 124–5.

Jacob Weil and Israel Isserlein were among those who took his side.⁴⁹ They stood up for their student and stated in concord that no rabbi has the right of monopoly in respect of the community. Moreover, acting as a rabbi does not yield proceeds comparable to those earnable on trade or money-lending, and hence the one performing this function does not have to have a permit for settlement. As Israel Isserlein resolutely said, “the Crown of the Torah and its authority are known to everyone whoever be willing to accept it”.⁵⁰ Isserlein, who was active in Wiener Neustadt, expressed his opinion on this matter also in a response, quoted by Bruna, concerning the conflict between David and Moses:

I have to share with you, Mister Moses, my embitterment with your having for so long a time spending much money on popularisation of knowledge and holding the Crown of Torah free-of-charge, or even to his detriment, and now you [find yourself] request[ing] your rights and righteousness, and demonstrate that your rights and your knowledge have been infringed in the town and thereabouts, which, to our mind, is neither right nor fair, as I shall briefly explain it ... and now, for all these reasons, it seems that you had no [legal] power, Mister Moses, to remove and prevent Mister David and Mister Kassaria from exercising the authority and the function of rabbi at your town and in your district.⁵¹

In the seventies, Moses Minz joined the group of foreign scholars settled in the capital town of Greater Poland.⁵² He was a figure very well known to Jewish intellectual circles. He partly owed his fame to his active participation in actions for renewal of the German part of the diaspora, which was immersed in crisis since the Black Death years.⁵³

⁴⁹ Weil, *Responsa*, no. 151, Isserlein, *Responsa*, no. 126–8.

⁵⁰ Isserlein, *Responsa*, no. 128.

⁵¹ Bruna, *Responsa*, no. 253.

⁵² Hanna Zaremska, ‘Rabin Mojżesz Minz i jego działalność w poznańskiej gminie żydowskiej’, in Krzysztof Bracha and Wojciech Brojer (eds.), *Ambona. Teksty o kulturze średniowiecznej ofiarowane Stanisławowi Bylinie* (Warszawa, 2016), 279–95.

⁵³ The fifteenth century saw attempts made by the rabbinical milieu (which underwent remodelling at the time) at pulling Jewish communities in the Empire out of fall. Moses Minz took an active part in the debate, which went on during his stay in Würzburg, between representatives of Franconian communities concerning the communities’ right to independently decide their fate. He also led an action targeted against the initiators of a Jewish synod in Bingen in 1453, who tried to force all the kahals to accept the decisions made without their contribution. He supportively defended the authority of his colleagues, learned in the Torah.

The texts comprised in his collection of *responsa*⁵⁴ provide a wealth of information on the period in his life before he left his native country, and shed some light on his sojourn in Poznań. Based on this source, we can try and better understand the episode in the history of Polish rabbinate connected to this city.

The collection contains texts which are diverse as to form. Apart from *responsa*, being Minz's replies to letters to queries regarding various halakhic issues, there are *takkanot* – community statutes compiled on request of the authorities of the kahals where he acted as a rabbi, and remarks on the customs of inhabitants of the towns where he was in office as rabbi.

Minz had his first autonomous job in Würzburg. In 1453, when the Jews had to leave the city, he returned to his native Mainz. After the expulsion of local Israelites in 1462, he wandered to Landau where he spent some two years; the subsequent five years he spent in Ulm. Then, in 1469, he settled in Bamberg. Four years later he moved to Nuremberg, which he eventually left as he moved to Poznań.

Moses Minz's participation in the Jewish synod in Bingen in 1453 came as part of his actions to the benefit of the entire Jewish community in the Empire.⁵⁵ He moreover got involved in reforming certain individual communities.

What was the driving force behind his decision to leave 'his country' (when writing on Ashkenaz, he would use the phrase 'at our place') and choosing Poznań as the settlement place? He might possibly have been invited there. The statute of the Poznań community, which dated to the modern era, forbade entrustment of rabbinate dignity to permanent inhabitants of the city, which – with slight exceptions – was observed until the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁶

Minz's sojourn in Poznań is described twice in his *responsa*. The first description begins thus:

It so happened, when I resided in Poznań in the year 234 of minor era [i.e. 534/1474]. ... Our teacher, rabbi [*morenu ha-rav*] Margulies from the town of Łuków drew up a deed of divorce at his town wherein the male

⁵⁴ Moses' *responsa* appeared in print in Cracow in 1635, their last edition was issued in Jerusalem in 1991.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 6.

⁵⁶ Lech Muszyński and Bronek Bergman, 'Sylwetki poznańskich rabinów', *Kronika Miasta Poznania* (2006), 3, 16.

spouse lived as well, and he dispatched a messenger who was tasked with delivering the divorce deed to the wife, and the wife lived with us in Poznań. When the messenger brought an act of consent to the divorce, we examined it thoroughly and noticed that the [phrase] 'And thy lips like my lips', it instead being [written] 'may thy hand be like my hand, and thy fulfilment like my fulfilment' ... we sent the messenger back empty-handed, without the *ghet* [letter of divorce]. And later on, the husband himself arrived. And he received the deed of divorce for his wife from hand to hand.⁵⁷

This rather banal text – as *responsa* concerning *ghets* are common in such collections – contains the first known mention about Jews in the locality of Łuków (in all probability, in Greater Poland; the namesake locality in Lesser Poland is a rather dubious option). We can moreover learn that a rabbi resided there, named Margulies. As Minz titles him *morenu ha-rav*, which implies that Margulies had the right to compile a *ghet*. Granting divorces, verifying matrimonial contracts, and issuing kosher certifications required qualified men, so Jewish communities sought scholars capable of meeting such particular needs.

Let us now take a look at the other response by Minz regarding the community of Poznań.⁵⁸ It is a passage in an extensive response which bears traces of (re)editing and is partly written in the third person singular and partly in the first. It is composed of several separate statements or opinions on various subjects, primarily connected to the problem of phrasing and editing matrimonial contracts and divorce documents (*shtar halizah*). The author dwells extensively on the spelling of numerals in the notation of dates, emphasises the need to precisely determine where exactly the contracting parties come from, and to mark whether they had resided in an urban or rural environment (village being a settlement surrounded with walls, to his mind). The instructions in the opening section of the text are generic and do not refer to a specific community; however, they apparently refer to Minz's activity in Bamberg. As opposed to the remainder of the response, the paragraph concerning Poznań, which we find in the middle section, bears no trace of (re)editing:

I have determined the below-following order, practice [*nisayon*], and custom [*minhag*] of *ketubah* at the time I was in Ashkenaz, in the holy community of Bamberg; later on, I travelled to the Polish state, to the holy community

⁵⁷ Minz, *Responsa*, no. 54

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 109.

of Poznań, [and] noticed the differences and contrary views in regard of *ketubahs*, which were not customary in our country [i.e. in Ashkenaz]. ... So, certain different habits are there [i.e. Poznań] that are not to be encountered in our country, namely: the *kinyan* [the custom, accompanying the act of sale, of grabbing by both transacting parties of an object, most frequently a piece of clothing or a kerchief (HZ's note)] is received before [the bridegroom] is led under the canopy; or, there is no custom of leading the betrothed unto the synagogue's yard so that they dance the *mein* [the groom's dance performed before the wedding ceremony, popular among German Jews (HZ's note)] there. Also, a custom is there consisting in the bridegroom going to the baths, on Friday, together with the guests; the [nuptial] blessing is said by them in the evening, before the Sabbath is greeted, and right after the blessing do they go to the synagogue; they sing whilst leading the groom and the bride under the canopy ... and subsequently the one who says the blessing reads the *ketubah*, together with the two witnesses being its signatories, who read the text in silence ... after the nuptial has been blessed, the calyx of the blessing of the nuptial is handed to the groom and he throws it in front of himself and steps on it with his foot and crushes it; the wine is poured out of the calyx before it is handed to the groom; they also have a habit of throwing a rooster and a hen above the heads of the groom and the bride, behind the canopy⁵⁹

Fifteenth-century rabbis were interested in local customs and noticed differences between them, usually refraining from condemning them, often opting for respecting them – if not overtly contrary to the Torah or the Talmud. Yet, they opposed introducing new customs. The topic reappears in Jewish literature of the time; codifications of *minhagim* were proposed.⁶⁰ Local milieus stood up in defence of their practices, striving for their sanctioning. Hence, rabbis were requested for their opinions as far as the ceremony or ritual of nuptials, the wording of divorce letters, dates of holiday feasts, rules of lighting Chanukah candles (right to left, or conversely), or the method of wearing the *tefflim* were concerned. The emergence of *minhagim* was an element of the development of the *galuth* culture, a trace of disappearance of shared authorities in crisis periods, scarcity of spiritual care in lands distant from Jewish life. A rabbi who was new to the community, whether asked to do so or not, would often commence his activity with studying the local customs and habits. This is what

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Cf. entry: 'coutume' in *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du judaïsme* (Paris, 1989), 280–1.

Jacob Weil⁶¹ did after he settled in Erfurt; and, this is what Minz did when in Bamberg and, subsequently, in Poznań.

During his stay in Poznań, the rabbi, not in his youngest years anymore, decided to continue travelling: he desired to end his days in Palestine. Moses Minz, for a change, did not go to the Holy Land: he gave up the plan, though he had made the necessary preparation.⁶²

The presence in Poznań of the rabbis who arrived from German towns since the 1450s and 1460s implied the appearance in the local kahal of conflicts characteristic of communities in the western part of the diaspora. Confronted with the rivals flowing into the town one after another, the newcomers started demanding monopoly for running the yeshivas, proceeds related to chairing court sessions, profits from participation in wedding ceremonies or compiling divorce documents. Such occurrences were territorially limited. Until the end of the fifteenth century, no other Jewish hub within the country revealed a trace of any like conflict. Records testify to a delay in the development of rabbinate even in the largest Israelite aggregations. This is evidenced by a response by Israel Bruna in which he refers to a query that reached him from Cracow and to which he did not respond for he thought that the local Jews would not understand his letter.⁶³ At the same time, a community in the east of the country, seeking advice on a matter that required familiarity with the Law, took advantage of the correspondence with Bruna who resided permanently within the Empire. The famous rabbi offered his instruction and suggested that more in that respect could be obtained from Poznań.⁶⁴ The local community seems to have been part of the Western diaspora to a larger extent than its peers at the time.

trans. Tristan Korecki

⁶¹ Weil, *Responsa*, no. 11.

⁶² Minz, *Responsa*, no. 107.

⁶³ Bruna, *Responsa*, no. 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, nos. 264 and 265.

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