

PART I

Wartime Chaos and Its Resolution



THE INTERNALLY
DISPLACED IN
EASTERN EUROPE

The Khmelnytsky Uprising and the Jews

The Jews in Ukraine before the Uprising

The year 1648 started nervously for the Jews of Ukraine. Rumors abounded concerning the possibility of another Cossack rebellion. This was nothing new. The last one, headed by the Cossack Hetman Pavlo But (known as Pavliuk), had taken place only a decade or so earlier in 1637–38. At that time, the Cossack forces, established in order to protect the Commonwealth's southeastern border from enemy incursions, rebelled against their Polish masters, who had not only failed to pay their salary for a number of years but had broken their promise to improve the Cossacks' social status. This would probably not have concerned the Jews greatly had not a considerable number of the local peasantry joined the Cossacks in their fight against Poland-Lithuania. These serfs saw the Jews not only as the eternal enemy of Christendom but also as agents of the hated Polish-Lithuanian regime that had colonized Ukraine. Jews became a target of the uprising and it seems that many hundreds lost their lives.¹

On looking back at these events, the Jews of 1648 would also have found much to alleviate their fears. The violence had lasted only a few months. A resolute Polish response, divisions within the Cossack leadership, and an unpropitious international situation had led to the surrender and swift execution of the Cossack leaders one after another.² There was, on the surface at least, little reason to expect that if a rebellion did break out again it would not end the same way. Many Jews, who were indeed acting as agents of the Polish nobility in Ukraine on the ground, began to gather intelligence for their masters about the war preparations of both Cossacks and peasants.³ Though some seem to have felt sympathy for

their Ukrainian neighbors, most were aligned with the hegemonic Polish regime.⁴

While this was the logical and obvious choice, it would, in the context of 1648, have tragic consequences because the root causes of the uprising were largely to be found in Polish policy toward the people of the region. In terms of social and cultural development, the economy, religious status, military policy, and political and geopolitical orientations, the Polish nobility and sometimes the king too were acting in ways that were bound to bring tensions in Ukraine to a boiling point.

Ukraine had been ceded to the Polish Crown as part of Poland's unification with Lithuania in 1569 and, within a short time, moves were made to integrate it into the Polish polity. Initially, the local princely elite began to speak Polish and adopt Polish customs in order to become part of the Polish nobility, already a dominant force. Within a short time, they also converted to Roman Catholicism. Their intermarriage with Polish nobility, as well as a certain degree of land appropriation by Polish nobles, meant that the feudal lords of the region, whether or not their roots were in Ukraine, were now viewed as foreign by many of the local inhabitants.⁵ As the seventeenth century unfolded, the influx of Polish noblemen became much more visible.

The effects of this on the Jews were significant, if indirect. In order to make the fertile Ukrainian lands as profitable as possible, their noble owners began to implement the feudal system that had been so successful in Crown Poland. It worked like this: instead of paying money dues, peasants had labor duties on the estate farms. The grain that was grown was then sold—either for export or on local markets, or in the form of alcoholic beverages (beer and vodka) marketed to estate subjects through a monopoly held by the owner.⁶ Jews, who were very active in the urban markets, played key roles in this process, mostly through the sale of alcohol in taverns. In Ukraine, far distant from the river networks leading to the international markets in Gdańsk, grain export was not significant, which made the Jews' roles all the greater. The estate owners, appreciative of the income created by the Jews, began to encourage them to settle on their estates.⁷

In addition, Jews, whose economic prowess had already benefited the estate owners in the realm of trade, also began to find their way into estate management. This came about through the system of estate leasing that developed during the sixteenth century. Rather than devote time and energy to estate management, the noble owners—particularly of the huge estates known as *latifundia*—preferred to lease out their lands for three

years in return for a fixed payment made on signing the contract. This gave them a guaranteed income up front, while leaving the day-to-day administration in the hands of the leaseholder, who had a vested interest in efficient administration, since any income he made over and above the price of the lease formed his profit.⁸ For wealthy Jewish businessmen (individually or in consortia), whose economic skills were trusted by the estate owners, the high profits that these leases brought them proved extremely attractive. The problem was that profits were achieved through the slow but constant raising of the peasants' labor dues—a situation the serfs resented.

The advantage of the estate leases for the Jews was that the leaseholder could break them down into a series of subleases, each of which he could then give to another Jew. It soon became clear that living in Ukraine could bring great wealth, so many Jews moved there. The region's Jewish population seems to have grown from some 4,000 in 1569 to about 40,000 in 1648.⁹ What ratcheted up the tension was the fact that the Jewish leaseholders, called in Polish *arendarze*, found themselves running noble estates in place of the feudal lords. This gave them enormous power over their subjects. The local population, which consisted mostly of Orthodox Christians, found it demeaning enough to have to serve Roman Catholic lords. To be subservient to a Jewish master was felt a terrible humiliation—and a contradiction of the basic structure of a Christian society, in which Jews could be tolerated provided they held no positions of authority over Christians.

Nonetheless, for all the anger this caused, the Jews do not seem to have been the major problem for the Orthodox Christians. Their main complaints were against the Catholics, whose mistrust of the Orthodox led to a series of discriminatory policies. Even the 1596 creation of a Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church, which was meant to allow locals to retain their religious rites and practices while swearing allegiance to the pope in Rome, faltered due to continued Catholic suspicion of the Ukrainian population.¹⁰ Worse still, as the seventeenth century progressed, the attitude of the Polish nobility toward the peasantry of Ukraine, both Orthodox and Uniate, became increasingly harsh, even brutal.

On the Orthodox Ukrainian side, the first half of the seventeenth century saw the beginnings of a cultural florescence that would lead to the strengthening of their religious and ethnic identity as an independent group. Of particular importance was the reestablishment in 1620 of a church hierarchy (Metropolitanate) that was subordinate not to Moscow but to Constantinople. In addition, the foundation of the Kiev Collegium

by the Orthodox Metropolitan and theologian Pyotr Mogila in 1632, as well as his encouragement of local publishing, helped shape a new Ukrainian intellectual elite. Though these developments were not a direct cause of the uprising, they created an atmosphere that was receptive to the idea of independence from the Commonwealth.¹¹

In fact, the trigger for the uprising came from a different place entirely. The Cossack forces were also highly disaffected in 1648. Following the brutal crushing of the 1637–38 rebellion, the number of registered Cossacks, entitled to rights and privileges similar to those of the middling nobility, was reduced to just six thousand. There were many thousands of other Cossacks, not included in the register, who, though well-armed military men, lived more or less as outlaws in the unsettled region of Zaporizhia on the lower Dniepr. The registered Cossacks' requests to increase their number and improve their status met with favor from King Władysław IV, who was planning a new crusade against the Ottoman Turks. The nobles in the Sejm, suspicious of both the king and the Cossacks, nixed this idea in 1646, leaving the latter very resentful.¹²

The planned crusade also did little to improve the Commonwealth's relations with the Ottoman Empire. Still, the Sublime Porte did not face off with the Commonwealth directly but through an intermediary—the Crimean Tatars. To keep the peace, the Polish Crown was supposed to pay an annual tribute to their leader, the khan, though it had not done so for a number of years. Since relations between the Commonwealth, the Ottoman Empire, and the Crimean Tatars were never really stable, the Cossack Hetman (leader), Bogdan Khmelnytsky, identified in them a crucial diplomatic opening to exploit. Since he planned to put pressure on his sovereign lords in Poland to give him what he wanted, he put together a Cossack-Tatar alliance that would give him the military clout to back up his demands.¹³

This was an extremely bold and imaginative move. The Tatars, descendants of Ghengis Khan's Golden Horde, were a warlike group who made their living by attacking the regions around the Black Sea and capturing slaves whom they could sell for a profit in Istanbul.¹⁴ The Commonwealth was supposed to pay its annual tribute to reduce the threat of Tatar attacks on its territory. In addition, the Cossack units were in place to guard its southeastern border against such incursions, which could take many thousands of slaves each year. The Commonwealth's relative success in preventing these attacks was one of the causes of Ukraine's rapid development in

the years before 1648.¹⁵ For the Cossacks to join forces with the Tatars was to turn the accepted military situation on its head.

Khmelnysky himself, motivated personally perhaps by his bitter rivalry with the Polish nobleman Daniel Czapliński, entered into negotiations with the Tatar khan Islam Gerey III in February 1648. Within a short time, they had concluded an agreement ensuring Cossack-Tatar cooperation in military campaigns against the Commonwealth. The first of these was to take place in the spring of that year. Greatly strengthened by this crucial support for his struggle, Khmelnysky felt confident enough to begin the uprising. The Jews of Ukraine had much to be afraid of.¹⁶

The Jews' Experience of the War

The Khmelnysky uprising was not a single experience for the Jews. This was mostly because there were at least five military forces at work, each of which had a different attitude toward them. For the Cossack armies under Khmelnysky's leadership, the Jews, though a problem, were by no means always high on their list of priorities. The Cossacks' basic grievances were aimed at the Polish authorities—particularly the nobility in the Sejm—and concerned issues of money and status.¹⁷

As a result, though their treatment of Jews could be brutal, they were, sometimes at least, willing to accept money instead of putting them to the sword. However, it was impossible to know in advance what they would do. In the two most infamous massacres of Jewish communities during the initial phase of the uprising, the Cossacks led the attack on the Jews in Nemyriv in early June 1648 but not in Tul'chyn just a couple of weeks later. During the siege of Lviv in October of that year, when the town council refused to turn the Jews over to him, Khmelnysky agreed to accept a ransom of 200,000 red zlotys instead.¹⁸ He offered a similar deal to the town of Zamość in early November. These seem to have been cases of strategic thinking. Campaigns like those of the Cossacks were extremely costly, and negotiated settlements meant that the wealth of the victims was paid directly to the Cossack command and not taken as loot by individual soldiers.¹⁹ Attacking the Jewish population took second place.

The second force with which Ukrainian Jewry had to deal was the mass of Ukrainian peasants who joined the uprising once it began to prove successful. These were untrained and undisciplined bands that were very hard to control. As a contemporary observer put it, "peasant unruliness has reached such heights that it is like a second army for Khmelnysky.

They [i.e., the peasants] destroy the towns in which the nobility and the Jews make a stand, committing unheard of massacres.”²⁰ At the outset of hostilities, the peasants seem to have followed a Cossack leader called Maksym Kryvonis, a figure about whom little is known but who might have wanted to set himself up as a rival to Khmelnytsky. Though the peasants’ hostility was mostly aimed against Polish Catholics, they harbored enormous hatred of the Jews, whom they blamed for all their day-to-day problems. Death at the hands of the peasant masses could be very cruel as well as brutal.²¹

The testimony of one of the survivors of the Tul’chyn massacre, given to the rabbinical court in Lviv on August 6, 1648, is helpful in understanding the complexities of the situation. A man called Hanan, son of Mikhel from Tomaszów, gave the following deposition concerning the murder of one Leib from Krotnica,²² who had, together with his brother Melekh, taken up an *arenda* in a village called Komerhid,²³ near Tul’chyn:

About eight days before the massacre in Tul’chyn . . . there was fighting [in the region], but no-one wanted to let [the local population] get away. The noble lord forced them all to flee in great distress from Komerhid to Tul’chyn. So Leib and his brother Melekh came here, too. I was with them in the fortress. . . . Then the noble lord Shmetvitinsky²⁴ did a deal with the Cossacks to hand the Jews over to them; on the Thursday, these captives were taken away to Uman. On the Saturday, the peasants arrived, running into the courtyard outside the fortress . . . Leib and his brother Melekh were standing in a corner at the end of the courtyard; I was between them. Then I ran away with some other people and saw that the [peasants] immediately began to kill the people in that corner. I saw my grandmother and my stepmother killed with the others; escape was next to impossible. Next, thousands of peasants [broke] into the fortress, so [those who had] fled there were killed in that place.²⁵

This account clearly distinguishes between the different forces at work.²⁶ First, the Cossacks made the deal with Czetwertiński, owner of the town, for him to hand over the Jews not because they wanted to kill them or force them to convert. Their goal was to take them as captives and have them redeemed by local Jews. The prisoners were sent to Uman because that was the headquarters of the Cossack general in charge of the siege.²⁷ Most important here is the fact that the massacre itself was perpetrated not by the Cossacks but by the peasants, who stormed the fortress a few days later, once the siege had been successful.

The Tul'chyn story also points out another group with which the Jews had to contend. As we have seen, the Jews tended to see themselves as allied with their Polish lords and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish nobility, on the other hand, though they had enriched themselves through working with the Jews, do not seem to have felt any kind of group commitment to them. Some, like Jarema Wiśniowiecki, offered them protection, while others handed them over to their enemies without compunction. Such was the case in Tul'chyn. The Jews had agreed to participate in the urban militia against the enemy attacks in return for protection by the lord of the town, Czetwertiński. However, once the situation became desperate, Czetwertiński simply handed the local Jews over to the Cossack leader in an attempt to buy him off.

The problems faced by Ukrainian Jewry were no less complicated when it came to the townspeople. On the whole, this was a group that saw the Jews as economic competitors and opposed Jewish settlement in the towns. Little surprise, then, that in Nemyriv they betrayed the local community to the Cossacks. On the other hand, the exigencies of wartime could sometimes mitigate previous hostilities. In Lviv, the refusal of the municipal council to hand the Jews over to Khmelnytsky was explained by one of its members, Samuil Kushevich, in the following terms:

When Khmelnytsky saw the daring of the city and [how] we were all courageously ready to die, he wrote to us . . . desiring that we hand over all the Jews, as they were the cause of the war. . . . We gave the response that there were two reasons why we could not hand over the Jews. First, because they were not our subjects, but were subjects of the King and the Republic. Second, because they had borne all the expenditures and discomforts equally together with us and were ready to die, both alongside us and for us.²⁸

As if all this were not complicated enough, the Jews had to deal with yet another armed group during the uprising. This was the Tatar army, led by Islam Gerey III and his deputy, Tugay Bey. Since selling or ransoming slaves was the Tatars' major source of income, their alliance with Khmelnytsky and joint campaigns with him were really only a means of increasing the pool of potential slaves on which they could draw. For them, it was business as usual.²⁹

Jews had never figured prominently among the slaves taken by the Tatars, perhaps because for most of the period before the uprising few of them had lived in the villages of the border regions that the Tatars attacked. In fact, even during the 1648-49 Ukrainian campaigns themselves, the

Jews were a relatively unimportant group as far as they were concerned. This is certainly the impression received from the contemporary Tatar chronicle of Haj Mehmed Senai of Crimea,³⁰ which describes the campaigns of 1648 in detail but gives only one brief mention of Jews:

On Tuesday (the 17th of that month),³¹ the khan decided to halt close to a royal castle called Zhivotiv. Before he arrived, a certain colonel . . . of . . . hetman . . . Khmelnytsky had been there with his men and taken the castle. The population and inhabitants of that place were Jews, all of whom, together with their families, servants, children and all their goods and chattels, the Cossacks brought as a present to the khan. . . . On the spot, the khan divided the Jews up as gifts for all his . . . [commanders].³²

For their part, the Jewish chroniclers made great play of the Jews being taken into slavery by Tatars, with the most famous description to be found in Nathan Hanover's chronicle *Yavein metsulah*. Interestingly enough, Hanover also chose to focus his narrative on the experiences of the Jews of Zhyvotiv, a small town in central Ukraine. In his retelling, the Jews there surrendered to the Tatars, preferring to go into captivity in hope of being ransomed rather than being killed or forced to convert by the Ukrainian forces.³³ Zhivotiv was clearly, then, the site of a major take of Jewish slaves. It was not the only one, however. Hundreds of Jews were soon taken captive, the numbers rising with each new Tatar campaign. Of course, in reality, the choice of captivity or death was never as clear for the Jews of Ukraine as Hanover portrayed it. The Tatars preferred to take as captives only those whom they thought they could sell for profit in the slave markets of Istanbul—very often young women. All others they would either try to ransom to the local Jewish communities or simply kill on the spot.³⁴

In all the chaos of the uprising, the Jews of Ukraine seem to have understood that the different groups they faced threatened their lives in two major ways: through violent attack and through capture. Escape, too, was possible—through conversion to Christianity or flight. Conversion was not only an unpalatable choice for most but not always possible in the chaos of the conflict; nor was it a complete guarantee of survival. For all its many dangers, flight must have seemed a much better option. Thousands upon thousands of Jews chose it.

The Chaos of War

VIOLENCE AND FLIGHT

FLEEING FROM THE UPRISING could take many forms, depending on the circumstances. The uprising began in early 1648 with the fomenting of unrest in the Cossack heartland of Zaporizhia, particularly the region of the lower Dniepr river.¹ The trouble soon spread to more northerly regions of left-bank Ukraine,² causing panic among the Polish nobles settled there, who began to flee, calling for a military invasion to put an end to the unrest.³ This was not a very urbanized region, so formal Jewish communities were few and far between. Most of the Jews there lived as one- or two-family units in villages where they leased and ran taverns. As the violence began to take its toll, many of them decided to flee too, making for the larger and well-fortified towns to the west of the Dniepr river.⁴

It was a highly dangerous journey. The huge distances to be traveled and the sparse Jewish settlement meant that it was necessary to spend the nights with Christians. While much (probably the majority) of the local population did not harbor murderous feelings toward Jews, it was impossible to identify at the outset whom to trust. A deposition given to the rabbinical court in Ostroh on August 29, 1649, though dealing with slightly different circumstances, clearly expressed these problems:

We—that is, my husband, Avraham ben Yisra'el, and I—fled from the mob, [going] from village to village, until we came to one called Zviriv.⁵ There we came across a good peasant, who put us up for about three weeks. Then my husband said, “Why are we sitting here? Let’s go on. Maybe we will come to a Jew.” Then we came to a village called Preslovich where I got unwell.⁶ My husband sat beside me in the non-Jew’s

house. Then the hooligans came . . . and a villager . . . handed my husband over to them. They tied him hand and foot . . . and kept him overnight. . . . Early in the morning, they came to him and said, "What shall we do with you? Shoot you or behead you?" He asked to be shot. . . . Then I came and asked them to shoot me too. One hooligan said to another, "Cut off her head." The other answered, "She's sick. She'll die anyway." . . . Another hooligan shot him through the heart from behind and he fell. The hooligans left and I sat beside my husband. He remained alive for half an hour, not saying anything, just sleeping. Then his soul left him . . . I buried him with [the help of] the non-Jew [with whom we were staying]. Still sick, I remained with the non-Jew for three weeks after my husband's death.⁷

Nonetheless, despite all the difficulties, the refugees continued to make their way westward to areas with more dense Jewish settlement. The communities in the fortified towns of Ukraine, such as Nemyriv, Tul'chyn, Ostroh, Izyaslav, Polnoye, Vinnitsa, Starokostiantyniv, and Bar, soon became swollen with refugees from outlying areas far and near.

This situation continued until May, when matters took a terrible turn for the worse for the Polish nobility and the Jews. On the twenty-sixth, the Polish army under the joint command of Grand Hetman Mikołaj Potocki and Field Hetman Marcin Kalinowski was cut to pieces by the Cossack forces near Korsun. The defeat was total: not only were the maces and standards captured, the two generals themselves were taken prisoner.⁸

As if this was not bad enough, news then reached Ukraine that the Polish king had died.⁹ Since the monarchy was elective rather than dynastic, this meant that the Polish and Lithuanian nobility had to withdraw to the capital to begin the arduous process of choosing a new king. So, with the Polish army defeated and the high command in Warsaw effectively paralyzed, the field was open for Khmelnytsky and his Tatar allies to do as they wanted. Emboldened by this turn of events, the Ukrainian peasantry joined the uprising in the tens of thousands, turning it into a massive popular rebellion.

The fortified towns of Ukraine were no match for the enormous forces thus released and fell to the rebels, one after another. Nemyriv fell on June 10, Tul'chyn on June 21, Vinnitsa on July 1, Polnoye on July 22, Bar on July 25, and Starokostiantyniv on July 26. Ostroh and Izyaslav also fell in the last week of July.¹⁰ For the Jews, who either lived in these towns or had fled to them, this proved no less than disastrous. Part of the problem was that Khmelnytsky himself did not take part in the early summer

campaign, leaving it to his lieutenants, who led untrained Cossack bands and the inflamed peasant mob. As each town fell, its Polish noble and Jewish inhabitants (including refugees), as well as its Catholic and Uniate clergy, were cruelly put to the sword in a series of mass murders.¹¹

Once it became clear that the city walls and the existence of a castle or fortress were no guarantee of safety, Jews would flee from town to town hoping to stay ahead of the advancing armies; they were also joined by survivors of previous massacres, anxious to get as far away from the war zone as possible. The stream of Jewish refugees rapidly became a flood. This created an enormously chaotic situation in which hundreds or thousands of panic-stricken Jews found themselves on the roads desperate to find safety where they could.

Those who had more foresight or had cooler heads prepared for flight ahead of time either by hiding what wealth they possessed (often by burying it) or by giving it to a trusted non-Jewish neighbor for safekeeping.¹² In this way, they hoped to have something to return to at the war's end. The rest were forced to take with them as much of their movable property as they could. This could be problematic not just because it slowed them down but because it made them excellent targets for the dishonest and the unscrupulous—Jews and non-Jews alike. Hanover included a firsthand account of such a flight in his chronicle:

We were informed in the Holy Community of Izyaslav that the Tatars and Ukrainians were besieging Polnoye . . . [so] whoever was able to flee, fled. We abandoned our homes that were filled with all sorts of valuables. . . . We thought only of saving ourselves and our sons and daughters . . . I and my family . . . fled to the Holy Community of Mezhyrichi. . . . We intended to stay there for "Shabbat Hazon"¹³ so that we could be informed in the meantime what the situation was in Polnoye. . . . On the Sabbath eve, we were stunned by the evil tidings that reached us through the noble Wiszowaty, who was governor of Polnoye. He said, "Polnoye has been taken. All the nobles and Jews have been murdered and the enemy is now attacking Izyaslav. . . ." The mass of the people believed that the Commander [of the Polish army] had fled back to Poland.

The heads of the Ostroh community announced that no Jew should remain there or in [nearby] Mezhyrichi. . . . "We cannot trust the Ukrainian inhabitants of the city not to harm us." So, everyone fled. Anyone who had a horse and cart took that. Those who did not have one, even though they had enough money to buy one, would not wait

but took their wives and children by the hand and fled on foot, throwing away all their belongings. Those with horses and carts, but who were weighed down with possessions . . . would unload them at an inn and give them to the innkeeper so that they could travel light.

On that Shabbat Ḥazon, there was a column three horse and carts wide on the road, and for a stretch of seven miles—the entire distance between Ostroh and Dubno—the road was jammed with horses and carts one behind the other and a whole throng of pedestrians. Within two hours on that Shabbat Ḥazon, three mounted men—one Jew, called Moshe Tsoref, and two noblemen—chased after us, saying, “Why are you going so slowly? The enemy is close on our heels. They are now in Mezhyrichi; we barely escaped.” Immediately indescribable panic and confusion seized the Jews. Everyone threw silver, gold, utensils, books, pillows, and bed covers from their carts so they could get away more quickly. The field was cluttered with gold, silver, and clothes, but no Jew stopped to take them. . . . Some left everything behind, including the horse and cart, and fled for their lives into the woods with their wives and children. Many women and men who had taken their children by the hand let go of them in the panic. . . .

[The next day], we learned the truth. The Commander had not fled to Poland but traveled to the town of Kremenets. Things calmed down and from then on, the pace lessened. We walked from place to place through towns and villages, sleeping on the roads. And even then, we found no rest for our weary souls. We were robbed and crushed, despised and hated. . . . Every night that we spent in a Ukrainian inn, we were afraid that the innkeeper would kill us in the night, because they were all rebels. When we got up in the morning still alive, we would recite the blessing, “Blessed are You, who brings the Dead to Life.”¹⁴

This account of the kind of communal flight that accompanied the early phase of the 1648 campaign paints an astonishingly vivid picture of the uncertainty and fear that people felt as they fled. It also shows the chaos created when so many people were on the move at once. One or two other aspects of the experience are also seen in this description. The first concerns the transmission of information. It would seem that, though the news reported from one to another was not always accurate (a common occurrence in wartime), there was a considerable flow of information between Jews and non-Jews as everyone strove to understand what was going on around them. This text certainly gives no sense of the

Jewish communities as isolated in any way from their surroundings in this regard.¹⁵

Hanover also emphasizes the breakdown of social structures involved in flight. All the money owned by the socioeconomic elite would not be enough to hire a horse and cart if time did not permit it. Even families, though they might have tried to flee together, lost contact in the panic—parents lost children, wives husbands, and so on. The sense of impoverishment, particularly the loss of wealth and possessions, is very strong in this narrative. It is also tied in with a much greater loss, that of security. The refugees seem to have felt—and indeed to have been—very exposed and vulnerable. All the physical and psychological defenses built up over generations of living in the Jewish communities of various towns were stripped from them, and they were now seemingly alone and defenseless in a very threatening world.

Underlying this was the fear of violence and murder. If the Jews could expect little mercy from the Cossacks and the Tatars, they feared the most bestial treatment at the hands of the peasants. In Hanover's words:

Some [Jews] were skinned alive and their flesh thrown to the dogs; some had their hands and legs cut off, with their bodies thrown on the highway to be run over by wagons and trampled by horses; others were seriously, but not mortally wounded and thrown aside to die slowly, writhing in their own blood until their souls left them. Many were buried alive. The enemy slaughtered infants in their mothers' laps. Many children were torn into pieces like fish. They slashed the bellies of pregnant women, removed their fetuses and punched them in the face. They tore open the bellies of some of these women and put live cats in. They then sewed up their bellies and cut off their hands so that they would not be able to take the live cats out of their bellies. They hung infants on their mothers' breasts. They skewered some of the children, roasted them over a fire and then brought them to their mothers to eat. Sometimes they would use the bodies of Jewish children to make bridges to cross over.¹⁶

These are so unspeakably horrifying descriptions that it is hard to believe that such acts were perpetrated in reality. Prominent in the text is the bestial violence against women's bodies, particularly their reproductive organs. This suggests that in addition to the ubiquitous threat of rape, Jewish women in Ukraine lived in fear of something even worse: sadistic attacks on them as mothers, responsible for bringing a new generation into the world.

Ukrainian scholar Natalia Yakovenko, noting similar stories of attacks on Poles and Ukrainians in Polish and Ukrainian chronicles of the time, has suggested that the texts might be symbolic in nature. In her view, the extreme nature of the writing and the emphasis on excessive cruelty, as well as acts of martyrdom, might have been a way of expressing the idea that the overthrow of the accepted order should be followed by the purification of the land, which the authors of the chronicles understood to be the most profound meaning of the events.¹⁷ While this may have been the case, it remains impossible to determine whether it was the authors' depictions that were symbolic or whether the perpetrators did those particular things for their symbolic value. And of course, whatever might actually have happened, the Jewish refugees across Ukraine believed—and were terrified by—these horrific rumors.

The descriptions of these acts of what we would today call “ethnic cleansing” found in depositions given to the rabbinic and the Polish courts are considerably less extreme than those in the chronicles, though still very harrowing.¹⁸ Mistress Buna's testimony concerning the murder of her husband, which was reported to the rabbinical court of Istanbul in the late 1660s, is just one example:

About twenty years ago, the Cossacks came to Nemyriv and took about 150 Jewish householders from the town to a courtyard where they locked them in. They then dug a very big, deep pit in the courtyard and killed the Jews as they were standing at its edge. As he was killed, each one fell into that deep pit. The first to be killed was her husband, who fell straight in. Afterwards, they killed all the others who fell in to the pit on top of him. Then they covered them up with soil and put in so much that there was a great mound. She also testified that she was the only survivor, because a monk begged them not to kill her as he wanted to convert her and raise her as his daughter.¹⁹

Another aspect of the violence emphasized in the Hebrew chronicles is the attack not just on Jews but on Judaism itself. Stories are told of vellum Torah scrolls being ripped up and used as shoes, synagogues destroyed, and holy books ripped to shreds and scattered on the streets. On a more physical level, the chronicles tell of Jewish children murdered in a twisted parody of kosher slaughter and rabbis and mystics killed while at prayer, while the testimonies talk of Jews being put to death for refusing to eat non-kosher meat.²⁰

Of course, the basic motivation of the uprising had little to do with Christian-Jewish tensions. Catholic-Orthodox hostility was a much more

significant issue for the rebels. The Jews were targets of violence as a result of the economic services they gave the Catholic Polish nobility and the improved social standing that they had enjoyed as a result. Nonetheless, religious hatred was never far below the surface.²¹

The ultimate form of this kind of religious violence was, of course, when Jews were given the option of converting to Orthodox Christianity or being killed. Refusing to convert at the price of one's life was called "Sanctifying God's Name"—*Kiddush ha-shem*—and was held to be a pinnacle of faith. According to Jewish law, it is permissible to do whatever necessary to save one's life, except in three cases. These are when the alternative to death is engaging in idol worship, murder, or incest. Forced conversion was thus a situation that called for martyrdom.²²

All the Hebrew chronicles retell stories of Jewish men refusing to convert and thus being killed as an act of piety. The goal of the authors seems to have been to create a posthumous image of Polish Jewry as holy people. When the texts do refer to conversion, it is usually Jewish women who are blamed for taking the cowardly way out. This may be the reflection of a situation in which many more women than men were given the option of converting since they were more highly prized by their captors, though it is more likely simply to have been an expression of misogyny. In fact, the surviving records suggest that many Jews, men and women, chose to convert rather than be killed.

As time went on, the geographical range of the violence spread, too. Cossack forces moved north into Lithuania, taking Gomel, Chernihiv, Starodub, and Pinsk. The Lithuanian Hetman Janusz Radziwiłł organized a largely successful counterattack, but not before many thousands had died and there had been mass murders of Jews in most of these towns, the largest probably in Gomel. In the fall of 1648, Khmelnytsky himself took his armies first to Red Ruthenia (the region around Lviv) and then deeper into Crown Poland, reaching as far as Zamość. Although the larger communities, such as Lviv, Zhukva, and Zamość, survived the sieges and were able to ransom themselves, the scale of destruction in the smaller towns and villages was extensive.²³ The sources do not permit any kind of estimation of either the number of Jewish lives lost (during the campaigns themselves and in associated violence) or the dimensions of the Jews' flight to safety elsewhere.

This problem of numbers is not restricted to Red Ruthenia. There is no satisfactory way even to estimate the full extent of the mass murder, mass conversion, and particularly the mass flight of Jews during the Khmelnytsky uprising. Some of the Hebrew chronicles do give the numbers of

Jewish dead in various communities, but taking into account the fact that there was no way that the authors could have received accurate data, as well as the conventions of contemporary historical writing, which made no demand of accuracy, these figures should be treated with great caution.²⁴ Polish correspondence of the time sometimes also mentioned the killing of Jews in various places, often giving large numbers of dead. Here, too, it seems unlikely that the authors had accurate knowledge of what had taken place, making their remarks appear more like wartime horror stories than authorized accounts.

As far as conversion is concerned, even these kinds of quantitative sources are lacking. The first Hebrew chronicle to be published about the uprising, *Tzok ha-'itim*, which was written in rhyme, deals with the phenomenon in a single verse:

Many women betrayed the religious law and married Greek Orthodox men as they had chosen. Many Jewish [men also] broke the covenant and did not keep God's commandments. Those forced to convert were still careful but they did not surrender their souls. They were the only ones to survive.²⁵

This was typical in that it mentioned large numbers of converts, particularly women, but made no attempt to bring numbers. In the introduction to his uncle's book *Shivrei luhot*, Yitzhak Mokhiaḥ from Trembowla wrote, "And when the Jews do not want to repent and weep in the synagogues . . . then, for their sins, they are forced to weep in enemy hands under all kinds of torture . . . as we have heard from those who have returned from captivity and the tens of thousands of women and children who were defiled among the gentiles."²⁶ Though the figure of "tens of thousands" is given here, it is clearly typological and tells us only that conversion was very widespread. As far as the dimensions of Jewish flight are concerned, even this kind of figure is lacking.

Despite all the problems with the source base, Shaul Stampfer collected together every piece of information available dealing with the numbers of Jewish dead and refugees in the four regions that made up Ukraine in 1648. Through painstaking analysis, he reached the following conclusions. Of the 40,000 or so Jews he calculated to be living in the Ukrainian regions in 1648, some 18,000–20,000 perished during the uprising—a huge percentage of the population. This figure included not only those murdered but also those who died in the famines and plagues that followed the military campaigns. Stampfer went on to conclude that there must have been at least a further 6,000 Jews who left Ukraine as

refugees or captives (this does not include the internally displaced who fled from town to town without leaving the region). These figures, though undoubtedly speculative, seem to be the best approximation we can reach. Sadly, however, they say nothing about the numbers of dead and refugees in either Lithuania or Red Ruthenia and the rest of Crown Poland, which surely boosted both numbers significantly.²⁷

The issue of the refugees within Ukraine seems to have been a truly major problem, at least in the early stages of the uprising. The dangerous conditions on the roads meant that these people were desperate to find sanctuary within the walls of a town. In some cases, Jews were allowed to settle—at least temporarily—in places hitherto forbidden them. In 1649 there is evidence of Jewish refugees in Kiev, for example.²⁸ On the other hand, towns that already had a Jewish community were sometimes unwilling to allow additional Jews to settle within their boundaries. In 1649, the Sejmik (local noble council) of the Przemyśl region issued an order forbidding Jews and other refugees from settling in the town.²⁹ The fear of moving from place to place was so great that when Jews heard that General Jarema Wiśniowiecki had allowed a column of Jewish refugees the security of joining his camp followers, they made him a kind of folk hero.³⁰

Nonetheless, conditions were so difficult that many Jews decided to do all they could to leave the war zone and find security elsewhere. The refugee issue thus ceased to be a local matter and began to affect Polish-Lithuanian Jewry as a whole.

The Refugees outside Ukraine

IN THE INTRODUCTION to his book *Tif'eret Yisra'el*, Yisra'el ben Aharon, rabbi of Shklov in Belarus, included a short autobiographical vignette:

When I was eight or nine, I studied with a private teacher in Hlusk.¹ It was the beginning of the 1648 massacres and we had been driven out of our land. My father and teacher, the pious R. 'Aharon Yafeh had been a rabbi in the Uman community in Ukraine, and we had been driven out of there. Every day after the evening prayer, I used to go up on the roof with the volume of the Talmud I had for my studies, to practice reading. While I was up there, I would burst into floods of tears, pray to the Holy One Blessed Be He, and bang my head on the roof—all in prayer to the God of Israel that he would reveal to me the light of his Holy Torah.²

We can only guess at the kind of traumatic experiences the young Yisra'el ben Aharon must have undergone in his flight from Ukraine to Belarus that would have brought him to such an emotional extreme. We can also only wonder how many other refugees from the horrors of the uprising had similar responses—Yisra'el's text is extremely rare in its candor. What we do know is that the boy and his family were part of a flood of Jewish refugees who decided to leave the war zone of Ukraine to seek security further away.

There were two main directions of flight at this stage. One was westward, across the Vistula river, to the large settled communities of Little Poland and Great Poland. The other was northward into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In both places, the sudden influx of large numbers of refugees, most of whom were destitute, posed a series of problems to those bodies that administered Jewish life. The challenges that had to be met were dealt with on the regional and local levels. The first can be seen most

clearly in the responses of Lithuanian Jewry to the refugee issue, the second in those of the Kraków community. We will begin in Lithuania.

Regional Solutions: The Lithuanian Jewish Council and the Refugees

The first mentions of the Ukrainian Jews' flight to Lithuania can be found in the Hebrew chronicles.³ Clearly, the refugees either did not know or were beyond caring that there were Cossack units active in Lithuania until at least November 1648—the towns of Gomel, Pinsk, and Brest in the southern part of the Grand Duchy were all sacked.⁴ In fact, the Cossack forces reached as far north as Slutsk in the fall of 1648, though they failed to take the town. The Polish army under Janusz Radziwiłł then mounted a major counterattack, and though the uprising continued in Ukraine, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania does not seem to have suffered significant attacks again.⁵

Perhaps one thing that persuaded the refugees to make for Lithuania was the absence there of the massive popular uprising that had treated the Jews so cruelly in Ukraine. This is not to say that Jews were not killed in Lithuania, too. The town of Pinsk in Polesie was taken by the Cossacks on October 26, 1648; they held it for about two weeks. Though much of its Jewish population had fled beforehand, many of those who remained were massacred by the town's Orthodox inhabitants. On the basis of surviving court records, Mordechai Nadav has found the names of about fifty Jews killed during the attack. By mid-November, Janusz Radziwiłł had retaken the town, and its inhabitants began to return.⁶

The Ukrainian Jews were thus coming to a region dealing with the aftermath of the Cossack campaign that already had its own internal refugee issues. Little surprise, then, that the refugee question came up for discussion in the Lithuanian Jewish Council in its session of January 1649—the first since the outbreak of the uprising. The Council was a regional body comprised of lay and rabbinic leaders from Lithuania's three leading communities: Brest, Pinsk, and Grodno.⁷ It had existed for at least twenty-five years. On average, it met every two years to deal with the Jews' tax assessment for the state and to represent them before the non-Jewish authorities. It also made a series of rulings on issues, which it saw as important to Lithuanian Jewry as a whole, including communal organization and welfare systems.

In the 1649 meeting, the first problem on the agenda was the Jews held for ransom by enemy forces. In an attempt to keep prices down, the

amount to be paid as ransom for any individual was capped at 10 zlotys, with the money to be returned by the Council. Following this, the welfare of the other refugees had to be ensured. The Council confidently agreed to help defray the expenses incurred by each community that took in refugees.⁸ This was quite in keeping with previous Council policy, which had regulated concerted Jewish action in times of danger and had generally been prepared to help cover expenses.⁹

The problem, however, was only just beginning; the wave of refugees from Ukraine continued to grow. At the Council's next meeting in March 1650, much more attention was paid to the refugee question, with concern expressed for the welfare of the elderly, women, and young girls. Communities were expected to support a certain number of poor refugees according to their size and/or tax assessment. The idea was for them to include the foreign refugees within the recognized group of the local poor for whom they were responsible. The number of refugees was clearly beginning to concern the Council, which ignored its earlier promise to defray some of the costs involved in looking after them. Instead, it mooted sending guards to the communities on the Ukrainian border to ensure that no more refugees arrived to overburden Lithuanian Jewry's welfare system.¹⁰

The pressures continued to mount. The Sejm of the Commonwealth, desperate to find new sources of income to finance the war, and unable to hike the taxes paid by the Jews of Poland hard hit by the Khmelnytsky uprising, began to squeeze the relatively unaffected Jews of Lithuania. Their poll tax rose from 12,000 zlotys in 1647 to 24,000 zlotys in 1648. There were special imposts of 6,000 zlotys in January 1649 and 12,000 zlotys in January 1650. In 1652, the poll tax was raised to 30,000 zlotys and reached 40,000 only two years later. The *podymne* or hearth tax was reimposed at the level of 16,000 zlotys in 1650 and was raised to 20,000 only two years later.¹¹

This massive increase in their tax bill clearly affected the ability of the Council and the individual communities to deal with the refugees. In its meeting of December 1651, the Council announced that Lithuania would be willing to support 2,000 poor Jewish refugees over the following year.¹² One might assume that this meant that there were many more in the country, but even if 2,000 was an accurate assessment, it means that—in a conservative estimate—the refugees must have made up about 2 percent of the population.¹³ This was a huge burden, and under its pressure, communal organizations began to unravel. The communities could no longer support all the refugees from their budgets, so half were housed with

individuals who had to look after them at their own expense. Worse, the Council lost faith in the ability of the communities to pay their obligations, demanding that payments owed it by individual communities be underwritten by wealthy individuals.¹⁴ Some communities even closed down the local yeshiva to save money.¹⁵

Demands on Lithuanian Jewry from abroad also grew. The Council received letters from Jews in the Land of Israel, complaining that they were being reduced to penury because the annual support payments from Lithuania had stopped.¹⁶ In addition, the Jewish leaders of Istanbul also wrote, demanding that Lithuanian Jewry help cover the costs of redeeming the thousands of east European Jewish captives in the slave markets there. The Council agreed to the demand, requesting that the communities make special collections and send the money to the Lublin fair, whence it would be sent to Istanbul, presumably via Lviv.¹⁷

The next meeting of the Council was delayed until March 1655, by which time a Russian invasion was under way from the east. In the meantime, the situation had continued to deteriorate. In addition to the problems of the Ukrainian refugees, there was a whole new issue of local refugees: Belarussian Jews who had fled in the face of the Russian advance. Special monthly collections were instituted to help ransom captives.¹⁸ The refugees were to be allowed to settle wherever they could and to continue doing whatever business possible, just like the Ukrainian Jews.¹⁹ In order to preserve its income, the Council proposed that the refugees set up an organization to register themselves in their temporary homes so as to continue paying taxes.²⁰ The financial pressures were enormous: collecting money from the communities—especially that owed to the state as taxes—had become so difficult that the Council asked the non-Jewish authorities to help them collect it.²¹ Here, too, the refugee issue was significant. The communities were ordered to stop refugees leaving the country in search of a better home. If they left, tax revenues would drop.²²

At that point the Russian war overwhelmed the Jews of Lithuania and the Council ceased to function. It did not meet again for nearly seven years, until December 1661, when the Russian army was contained in eastern Belarus. At that meeting, the atmosphere was more relaxed, perhaps because in the meantime, Lithuanian Jewish leaders, acting independently, had persuaded the Sejm to reduce their tax burden to less than half of what they had been paying in 1654.²³ Reconstruction was at the top of the agenda: there were regulations about reestablishing the yeshivot, bringing to justice non-Jews who had murdered Jews, and rescheduling communal debts. Refugee issues were almost ignored: the only direct

reference was the regulation on ransoming captives, which set the communities' contribution at 50 zlotys, beyond which the Council would help. Finally, the Council ordered a new census of Lithuanian Jewry, presumably in order to reorganize tax collection.²⁴ These last two regulations suggest that many of the Ukrainian and Belarussian refugees had returned home, with the others successfully integrated into their new communities.

On the Communal Level: Refugees in Kraków

In the summer of 1648, Gavri'el Shussberg, an educated young man from the southern Polish community of Rzeszów, was one of the first to witness the flood of Jewish refugees fleeing war-torn Ukraine. He wrote:

Full of curiosity, I . . . stood at the highway by Rzeszów . . . the town closest to [the region where] all the Jewish victims [fell], and the main place where the refugees broke their journey. They would always come to us, telling their troubles to all and sundry, as would the injured and the wounded, and those few who had escaped being killed. . . . It was the very beginning of the flight.²⁵

Rzeszów lay on the main route connecting southeastern and southwestern Poland, so when the war broke out in Ukraine, refugees would often travel first to Lviv (or somewhere close by) and from there to Kraków, passing Shussberg's hometown on the way westward. The young man clearly listened closely to the refugee stories told and retold in Rzeszów and perhaps even wrote them down, for they formed the basis of his detailed historical chronicle.²⁶

As Shussberg's account suggests, Kraków was indeed one of the major centers for which refugees made. Its Jewish community was situated more or less in the shadow of the Royal Castle—the Wawel—which presumably made it seem one of the most secure places in the Commonwealth. For young people, its reputation as a center of Torah study also made it an attractive choice. The personal chronicle of Yehudah ben Nissan Katz from Zhukva makes this clear.

Katz had been sent to study at the famous yeshiva of Ostroh in 1648. Then the war broke out, and just after Yom Kippur (September 26, 1648), he was forced to flee.

I said [to myself] where should I run to, if not to a well-established and wealthy community. Once I had tasted the very dregs of that evil [time] and passed through destroyed and deserted [communities], facing the

sword by day and the ice by night . . . I said nothing would be better for me than to travel to the Kraków community, a major Jewish center. There my soul would find peace, I would be able to recover and to sit in the study halls to drink from the cup of all wisdom.²⁷

The journey was not an easy one. He seems to have returned first to his home in Zhukva, picked up his wife and son who lived there, and then set out for Kraków. In the chaos of the time, his parents-in-law either could not or would not join him, and he lost contact with them:

I did not know where they were because I had fled [from Ostroh] to Kraków and they could not travel with me due to the great panic. A man left his father and mother²⁸ and everything unraveled. No-one asked after his friend to find out where he was, everyone was afraid.²⁹

The journey took Yehudah and his wife about three weeks, and while they were on the road, their son, Nissim, died. Though the text of the chronicle is fragmentary at that point, it would seem that a Tatar soldier murdered him.³⁰ The young couple finally reached Kraków on Friday, October 16.³¹

Yehudah's description also points to a problem that would concern the leaders of Polish Jewry when they met in session as the Council of Four Lands. When families broke up during their flight, particularly if young children were separated from their parents, it could become very difficult to reunite them. The children themselves might not be able to say precisely who they (or their parents) were. Cases where young children were forced to convert in order to survive while their parents were killed, but the Jewish community was able eventually to claim them back, raised a similar issue.³² The problem was not just the immediate one of trying to return children to their families. The Jewish leaders were extremely concerned with preventing cases of inadvertent forbidden (i.e., incestuous) marriages later in life.

Their solution was to instruct Jewish fathers to write special tags to put around their children's necks with their family details.³³ It is not clear to what extent this was practical. Certainly, after the war was over, the Chief Rabbi of Poznań recommended that every Jewish man caught up in the chaos draw up a family tree to prove he was who he said he was.³⁴ In fact, as we will see, this was by no means the only time that a sudden influx of refugees forced Jewish leaders to reevaluate the ways in which they verified people's identity.

In his chronicle, Yehudah tells that, once he reached Kraków, he was given special treatment by the community leaders. The Chief Rabbi of

the community, the renowned Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, took time away from his teaching to question him closely on his experiences in Ukraine.³⁵ Yehudah was clearly one of the first refugees to come to Kraków and people were still very interested in hearing his story. Within a short time, however, the number of refugees swelled to hundreds, if not more. Most were indigent and many did not have the kind of education that Yehudah Katz had. Such refugees were not welcome guests with the social elite. The Kraków community had to boost its charity budget quite dramatically.³⁶

In wartime, this was no easy proposition. Like the Jews of Lithuania, Kraków Jewry was subjected to increased taxation demands in order to cover the costs of the war. The nobles who had invested money in the Jewish community demanded its return without delay. Church institutions, too, fueled by the belief that the Jews were responsible for the war, put their own forms of pressure on the community, to deal with which large sums had to be found as bribes.³⁷

Worse than that, wartime conditions meant that the Kraków Jews' income from trade fluctuated, sometimes wildly: in the first period of the uprising, from 1648 to 1649, it seems to have fallen dramatically (trade with the Lublin and Sandomierz regions, for example, dropped by over 50 percent). However, by 1650, it seems to have picked up again. There were probably two reasons for this: first, the uprising itself entered a period of quiet in 1650 and thereafter was increasingly limited to Ukraine, allowing other regions to recover; second, as conditions in central Europe improved following the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, trade with Silesia and other parts of the Holy Roman Empire—the German lands, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia—as well as Hungary and the Spisz region of Slovakia, grew rapidly. By 1651, the Kraków community's international trade had grown by over 20 percent from its 1648 levels.³⁸

Unfortunately, the upswing was rapidly followed by a catastrophic crash in 1652, when plague hit the town and its Jewish community. The outbreak seems to have started in Ukraine and quickly spread across southern Poland to Kraków, where the presence of large numbers of refugees in cramped and presumably unsanitary conditions in the Jewish quarter meant that it hit the community very hard.³⁹ All those who could—prominent among them the leaders of the Jewish community—fled the town, making a temporary home in the small and unaffected communities of the region, such as Olkusz and Zator.⁴⁰ In Kraków itself, conditions were extremely difficult, as the heads of the community explained in a letter of August 18, 1652.

Of the dead, more have died of starvation than of plague. They could not be buried because they did not have the necessities—linen for shrouds and wood for coffins. For that reason, many are laid on the ground until their bellies split, their bodies become distended, and worms and maggots begin to eat them. Last Friday, a hundred [Jews] were buried together, and all because there were no coffins. The gravediggers themselves have died. Until now, more than a thousand [Jews] have died—great students and pious leaders—the least of whom could have made a complete world. For our sins, those who survive are already weak and exhausted from starvation. Their situation is grave; they have run out of money—even after we made a special collection before we left Kraków. Now, at our committee [meeting] here in Olkusz, we have made another special collection⁴¹ for the poor, but that too will not be enough to cover [even] half of what they need.⁴²

This text formed part of a letter written for fundraising purposes, so it is possible that the descriptions were sensationalized, though we know from other sources that the situation was indeed desperate.⁴³ In fact, we have two such letters that the Kraków community wrote in the summer of 1652. Both were sent to the Jewish community in Vienna and both were attempts to raise money to help relieve the distress of the Kraków Jews and the refugees in the town.

In the first, dated July 24, 1652, the community was quite up-front.⁴⁴ It acknowledged that it was not asking for war relief (such requests were already being made by other communities) but for help in dealing with refugees in time of plague and starvation. The letter stressed that although the community had done its best to look after them, the financial situation in Kraków had got out of hand.

They requested the Jews of Vienna to spread the news of Kraków's distress to the communities both of Frankfurt a.M., as well as other German towns, and of Venice, as well as other Italian towns. Of course, the Kraków leaders also requested help from the Jews of Vienna themselves: "We are absolutely confident of Your Honors that as you are so willing to help distant [Jews] in distress, you will help [us]—all the more as we are related to you by blood and by marriage."⁴⁵ It is interesting that rather than relying on any religious imperative connected with charitable giving, the letter stressed the network of personal connections between the two communities as the major motivation for giving.⁴⁶ This notwithstanding, in order to encourage the flow of donations, the Kraków leaders also wrote

that they would send a representative with the letter, whose job it would be to travel to the various communities and talk to them in person.

The decision to write the letter, its authors added, had not been an easy one: “Woe is us that we have reached such a level of poverty that we have been forced to drop our mask [of shame] in order to keep this mass [of Jews] alive and save the poor survivors [of the massacres].”⁴⁷ The Kraków leaders were not engaging in some kind of fake humility. When the Poznań community began fundraising on its own behalf in August 1652, it had precisely the same reaction: “We have been forced to drop the mask of shame from our faces and to send [a representative] to Germany [to encourage them] to donate money.”⁴⁸ For a century or so until 1648, the large communities of Poznań and Kraków had been perhaps the wealthiest and most important centers of Jewish life and learning in Europe. To be suddenly reduced to begging for money must have been a terrible humiliation.

Less than a month after sending the letter, the Kraków leaders found themselves writing back to their counterparts in Vienna to thank them for their generosity.⁴⁹ A donation of some 90 red zlotys—worth about 450 regular zlotys—had been raised for them in Vienna (though there was a problem with one of the promissory notes, as the merchant on whom it was drawn had died in the plague). Like any good fundraisers, the authors of the letter added that the sum given was by no means enough and reiterated their request that the Viennese community let the other communities know of Kraków’s desperate need. Nonetheless, the Kraków leaders seem to have been so encouraged by their success in raising money by letter that they decided not to send out a representative to drum up donations, preferring instead to spend the money they saved directly on refugee relief.

Kraków was neither the first nor the only Polish Jewish community to ask the communities of central and western Europe for help in supporting refugees or ransoming captives taken during the uprising. The community of Bar had written to Amsterdam as early as the summer of 1648—even before the town fell to the Cossacks at the end of July—presumably to ask for help in dealing with the masses of local refugees thronging there.⁵⁰ The community of Ostroh received a donation from Amsterdam in the fall of 1650 and had a representative raising money in Venice in the summer of 1652.⁵¹ In the summer of 1651, Lviv, too, had representatives in Venice in search of financial support.⁵² They may have been responsible for the donation made to the Lviv community by the Jews of Amsterdam on December 13, 1650, and they may also have been the unnamed representatives from Poland recorded as collecting donations in Hamburg earlier in

the fall.⁵³ In addition, as we have seen, the community of Poznań sent its own representative to the Jewish communities of the Holy Roman Empire in the summer of 1652.

Communities writing or sending representatives to each other in different countries to request financial help was not an entirely new phenomenon. We know of one or two German communities during the Thirty Years' War who asked for help from Italy.⁵⁴ Still, the enormous suffering caused by the outbreak of the Khmelnytsky uprising seems to have made it much more common.

The community representatives were not the only Polish-Lithuanian Jews to leave the country. A considerable number of the refugees did, too. Some went on personal missions to collect money to ransom loved ones, but most were just looking for a secure place in which to settle.

Many simply crossed the border to Moravia or Silesia and made their homes there.⁵⁵ One such was Yehudah Katz. On the street in Kraków one day he met an acquaintance from the Silesian community of Ptaszków (in German, Vogelsdorf).⁵⁶ His acquaintance regaled him with stories of how good life was there and how easy it would be to set up in business. Katz was persuaded, packed up his family again, and left Kraków for Silesia, where, as his friend had promised, he did very well—at least until his wife died.⁵⁷

There is simply no way of telling how many of the refugees of the Khmelnytsky uprising left Poland in the late 1640s and early 1650s. Enough fragmentary evidence has survived to suggest that it was not a negligible number, but that is all that can be said. In fact, the sources make it clear that it was not until the later 1650s, when the uprising was over but the next round of wars (with Moscow and with Sweden) was its height, that really significant numbers of Jewish refugees reached central and western Europe.⁵⁸ Perhaps for most Ukrainian refugees, the long journey to western Poland was enough and they had neither the strength nor the resources to go any further.

In all, what happened in Kraków during the years of the uprising seems to have had much in common with what we saw in Lithuania. In both cases, communal resources were swiftly overwhelmed by the sheer number of refugees. In Lithuania, the Jewish regional council continued to function and devoted much thought to devising means of dealing with the issues and using resources from within the region to solve the problems. In the end, despite all the problems, it does seem to have been reasonably successful. The records from Kraków show that when the double blow of refugees and plague finally brought the community to its knees, its

leaders felt that they had no other option but to ask for help from Jewish communities outside the Commonwealth—particularly those with whom they had family ties. Other Polish communities had the same thought—but all seemed to have acted independently, and so in competition with each other. In practical terms, this was probably not effective policy.

Having said that, we do know that Polish Jewish leaders—both lay and rabbinic—were concerned to deal with problems arising from the uprising. The Council of Four Lands’ ruling on the issue of child identity is a case in point. It was just that the measures they devised had less to do with the day-to-day difficulties of dealing with masses of indigent refugees than with helping survivors face the spiritual—and thus psychological—issues that their terrible experiences raised for them. Over the long term, the decisions taken in this regard would prove extremely beneficial for the Jews of Poland (and Lithuania), helping put them back on their feet at war’s end.

Facing the Refugee Experience

Trauma

Toward the beginning of the uprising, a Jewish refugee from western Ukraine who had made his way to the community of Pinczów, about fifty miles northeast of Kraków, appeared before the rabbi, very distraught, though, according to the text, of sound mind. His name was Me'ir ben Asher Lemel and he said:

I have transgressed before the Lord God of Hosts in the sin of masturbation, through evil thoughts and touching a married woman though we did not sleep together as man and wife and I had no intercourse with her.¹ [At the time] I made a full and complete confession before two rabbis, who arranged a program of repentance for me, which I fulfilled. However, today it means nothing to me for I can see that God is taking out His anger on His people, Israel. I say [to myself] perhaps it is my sins that have caused all this. So, please be [even more] strict with me with [further] very harsh punishments.²

The rabbi of Pinczów made no comment on Me'ir's feelings of guilt and responsibility for the massacres of Jews in Ukraine. Instead, he checked to make sure that the story was true and that Me'ir had not committed adultery and then gave him a strict regimen of repentance for the sin of the flesh he had committed. The rabbi also appended a second ruling, which stated that once Me'ir had done his repentance, anyone who picked a fight with him or his family would be severely punished. Perhaps he was afraid that people would take Me'ir's assertion of guilt seriously and vent their anger on him for all the deaths in Ukraine.

Though the lack of detail makes it difficult to tell precisely what was going on, this strange story does suggest that those who had lost loved ones or been through the traumatic experience of fleeing for their lives could not but be marked psychologically. We have already seen Yisra'el ben Aharon from Uman, the boy alone on a roof in Hlusk in 1648, weeping uncontrollably and banging his head as he begged God to impart some of His Divine Light. In the case of Me'ir ben Asher Lemel, it is possible that he insisted on his guilt for the massacres because doing so allowed him to overcome his feelings of impotence in face of all the violence. Taking upon himself the responsibility for the horrors would have allowed him to feel that he had not just been passively swept up in events—his actions had had an effect on them. That would have made him a figure of importance in the world, not just another miserable refugee. So, in a strange and rather twisted fashion, his urgent desire to do further repentance might have been a way of helping him restore some sense of order and meaning to a life that had been brutally turned inside out.³

An even darker picture emerges from the chronicle of Yehudah ben Nissan Katz, who also suffered very traumatic experiences during the uprising. Apart from his flight from Ostroh and the terrible journey from there to Kraków, he lost his mother, presumably during the siege of Zhukva, his son on the road to Kraków, and his father during the plague there. More than that, just as he had been beginning to prosper in his new home of Vogelsdorf, his wife had a miscarriage and died. Of everything he had gone through, what seems to have affected him most was that in the chaos of his flight, he had not managed to say goodbye to his mother, who died before he could see her again.⁴

Though he did not write a great deal about his feelings or how he viewed his life, Yehudah Katz has left us a rare testimony as to his emotional state, for in his chronicle he gives a detailed account of a dream he had while a refugee in Kraków. Like many Jews in premodern times, Katz believed that dreams were of Divine provenance and could be prophetic in nature, so he wrote down all he remembered. This is how he described it:

I was walking in the house that belongs to my father-in-law . . . [going from] room to room, large and small, alcoves, balconies, and halls, and they were all open. Not a single one of them had an opening [in the wall], a door, or a window. Then I came to the large room—the *shtub*⁵—where we had always lived together, eating and drinking in contentment. I noticed that this room, too, was open, with no opening [in the wall], door, or window; there was no table, no chair, no bed, and

no lamp, just “the abode of God”⁶ in complete ruins. I was astonished by how it looked, with no-one sitting there. I was walking back and forth, worried and hurting, weeping and wailing from the sadness it caused me. And while I was walking, as I used to do from time to time, my face [full of] anger, I saw a dove fluttering at the top of the wall not making a sound. Sometimes it would fly [down] under the house’s benches and I would chase after it [trying] to catch it, but it would get away from me and I could not take it. Every time I would make a grab for its wings it would fly away from one to corner to another until I was tired and worn out from chasing it. . . . I said, “I will see what happens to it.” The dove did not find a resting place for its foot⁷ . . . and flew out through the window. I sat and waited in case it would come [back] in the evening.⁸

To understand what this text can tell us of Yehudah’s internal world—what the refugee experience had done to him—would require detailed psychological analysis. Since he has been dead some three hundred years that is clearly impossible. I therefore asked two contemporary experts in the field of psychoanalysis, Lewis Aron, professor of psychoanalysis at New York University, and Galit Atlas, a senior analyst working in New York, to read the text and tell me what they saw in it. This was their response:

A contemporary analyst would not be asking the patient what the dream means because to do that would be immediately to jump to conclusions and so intellectualize the process. Nor would the contemporary analyst interpret the dream based on symbols and narrative alone because that would mean operating from the therapist’s assumptions and framework of thought. Instead, a good contemporary analytic therapist would engage the patient in a process that would hope to see where the patient would and could go with this dream. It is very much an interactional or inter-subjective process.

Having said that, of course we would also use our own intuitions, theoretical framework, and subjective reactions. Since, in this case, the subject is no longer alive, those are all we have to go on. So, bearing in mind the limitations, this is how we would read the dream:

The main idea that we find in it is related to what we would call “self states” (versions and aspects of the self, some of which are dissociated from the conscious self-image) and to the house as depicting the subject’s own mind/soul. The dreamer here is destroyed, ruined. He has no boundaries to protect him, no windows to give him air or to escape through, and no-one to be with him. The dove can be seen as representing a part of himself that he is looking to catch. (Perhaps it is that part

of himself that will go outside to find out if it is safe, though, of course we cannot know what personal meanings a dove might have had for him. For example, “Dove” might have been a nickname of a beloved family member. We cannot know such details.)

The world into which Noah sent the dove was one of complete destruction. But the dream expresses the unconscious feelings, so the house is the unconscious self-state that was destroyed with trauma. No opening! No future! Everything is ruined. We would also think of his concern or focus on openings as expressing his own preoccupation with boundaries, borders, openings in his body and bodies around him—boundaries that were invaded, penetrated, destroyed—as well as his concern with protection, walls, geographical boundaries and borders.

We feel quite strongly that this is someone who has been psychologically destroyed, completely so.⁹

Of course, the account of the dream is a text written by a single individual, which means that in addition to the limitations of how we can read it, we cannot know how representative it is. Since each person had a different psychological makeup and experienced different things while fleeing, it is impossible to generalize on the effects of the refugee experience. As we have seen, for some, like Yehudah Katz, they were clearly extremely powerful. On the other hand, these phenomena are not fixed. Those who suffered in the wake of the events might have managed to overcome their problems with the passing of time.¹⁰ It is heartening to read, for example, that writing later in life, Yisra’el ben Aharon—the boy from Hlusk—showed no sign of continuing depression but rather expressed his happiness as rabbi of Shklov.¹¹

This should serve to remind us that any form of diagnosis is quite impossible—and the expressions of trauma we have seen here might not have amounted to PTSD in the view of a modern doctor. What does emerge quite clearly from these texts, however, is that the refugee experience was not something that could just be pushed to one side and forgotten. It was of huge significance in the lives of those who survived it and had to be dealt with in one way or another.

Coming to Terms Spiritually

The refugees were not the only ones who had to come to terms with the terrible events in Ukraine. Polish-Lithuanian Jewry as a whole was affected. They had enjoyed a century of growth, expansion, and enrichment—and though violence was a part of their daily lives, so it was for everyone in

that society. In relative terms, they felt safe and secure. It took just a few months in the summer and fall of 1648 to shatter that feeling. Jewish society was thrown into deep shock.

That feeling was made worse by the fact that members of the rabbinic elite, particularly those of a mystical bent, had prophesied that 1648—or to be precise, the Jewish year 5408, which had begun in the fall of 1647—was to be a messianic year. However, instead of the Messiah of the House of David and a miraculous return to the Land of Israel, Polish-Lithuanian Jewry had received Bogdan Khmelnytsky, Maksym Kryvonis, and a series of brutal massacres. As one observer put it, “[As if] it was not enough that we did not get the Resurrection of the Dead, tens of thousands more were killed instead.”¹²

For most Jews, the mass murder was a sign of God’s anger with His people Israel. As the refugee from Izyaslav and most famous chronicler of the uprising, Nathan Hanover, put it, “Behold, our iniquities testify against us. We have sinned, and the Lord has found out the iniquity of his servants. Would the Holy One, Blessed be He, dispense judgment without justice?”¹³ Of course, the question on everyone’s mind was: What were the sins that had caused this disaster?

In a sermon given in the summer of 1648,¹⁴ when the massacres were in full swing, Yisra’el ben Binyamin of Bełżyce spoke extensively on this issue. He focused on the relationship between the Jewish people and the Greeks, using the Zohar to connect the latter with Nogah (Venus).¹⁵ In kabbalistic thought, Nogah is the tongue of the balance measuring Israel’s good deeds and bad. More than that, Nogah can be influenced by the Jews’ actions: when they sin it becomes cruel. So it was the Jews’ sins that had made the Greeks (by which he meant the Orthodox peasants and Cossacks) cruel and so brought about the massacres. He did not, however, specify the nature of the sins, thinking perhaps of a general failure to keep the commandments.¹⁶

Another preacher, Betsal’el ben Shlomo from Slutsk, was prepared to be more specific. Writing sometime after the uprising—it is not clear precisely when—he charged, “Now look, Jews, how great is the punishment for transgression of the Sabbath and for its transgressors . . . bloodshed . . . famine, captivity, and whole regions uprooted . . . in Great Poland, Little Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and [Red] Ruthenia.” He went on to point a finger at those responsible: “Most of those [Jews] who live in villages and run businesses, called *arenda* . . . do not keep the Sabbath for they make their living with the non-Jews, live among them, and pick up their ways.”¹⁷

Berakhiah Bereikh, a preacher in Kraków who fled to Amsterdam in the late 1650s, expanded the list of the sinners in the introduction to his

book of sermons published in 1662.¹⁸ He started with those who taught, studied, and preached using the new intellectual system known as *pil-pul ḥilukim*.¹⁹ He went on to mention transgression of the Sabbath by all those whose “living was from *arenda*—those who leased towns or villages from the nobles, so they could sell there beer, vodka, and mead. On Sabbaths and festivals [they had their] non-Jewish serving girls do the sales . . . some also kept pigs.”²⁰ Other causes of the uprising he found in the sale of rabbinical posts, the employment of uneducated cantors who mismanaged the prayer services, and the popularization of kabbalah in print and on the street.²¹

If the first sermon we mentioned was too vague in finding the causes of the uprising, this one was surely too broad. It is worth noting, however, that in two of these three texts, the same Jewish *arendarze*, whom the peasants blamed for exploiting them, were blamed by the rabbis for living too close to the peasants and so failing to keep the Sabbath. A strange kind of cross-cultural ascription of guilt!

In order to react to the question of responsibility in a rather more sophisticated fashion, some commentators preferred a different explanatory paradigm from the traditional sources: “It is those whom the Lord loves that he punishes.”²² This allowed them to avoid pinning the blame for the tragedy on one group or another in Jewish society because that would have ended up making the victims responsible for their own deaths. Moreover, blaming the survivors would have meant that they were being held directly responsible for the death of their loved ones, which also seems to have been an unacceptable idea. Avraham Ashkenazy gave quite concrete expression to this approach in his chronicle, *Tza’ar bat rabim*: “It was not for their own sins that they were punished but for those of the [whole] generation, in this country or elsewhere.”²³ It was, as usual, Hanover who gave the idea its most comforting expression: “Since the day the Holy Temple was destroyed, the righteous have died for the sins of the generation.”²⁴

Taking all these attempts to make sense of the tragedy together, it seems clear that the religious thinkers did not develop any kind of unified conceptual framework to allow the survivors—and the rest of Polish Jewry—to work through their traumatic experiences. That would be done not in the spiritual realm but in the public sphere.

Social Policy and Its Psychological Benefits

From mid-March to mid-April 1650, the Council of Four Lands, Polish Jewry’s lay leadership, met in special session with leading rabbis to address some of the most important issues facing Polish Jews at that time. Though

the records of the meeting have not survived, contemporary sources do shed some light on the discussions.²⁵

Foremost among them were questions of identification. We have already seen the ruling aimed at ensuring that displaced children knew who their family was. More important than that, however, was a question related to identifying the dead. In order to remarry, Jewish women who had lost their husbands had to prove beyond a doubt that their spouse was, in fact, dead. Jewish law sets a particular evidentiary standard for this. In wartime, with thousands of refugees traveling from place to place, it was extremely difficult to meet it, so there was a danger that after the war, Polish Jewish society would be overwhelmed with a huge number of bitter and angry “grass-widows” (Hebrew, *agunot*). The Council and the rabbis seem to have drawn up regulations to help deal with this issue.²⁶

Another issue to be faced was that of conversion. A great many Jews in Ukraine (and not only there) had either been forced to convert or chosen to do so out of fear. For the most part, this had been to Orthodox Christianity, the religion of the peasants and the Cossacks. Jewish law does not recognize conversions—voluntary or forced—so Jewish society felt a pressing need to have the converts return to the religion of their fathers.²⁷ Less than a month after the Council’s meeting, the new king, Jan Kazimierz, issued a ruling on the matter. Granted at the request of “Our Jewish subjects,” his order permitted all Jews who had converted to Orthodoxy during the war, whether by force or from fear, to return to Judaism without let or hindrance.²⁸ Unfortunately, the text does not make it clear precisely what was meant by the phrase “Our Jewish subjects.” Nonetheless, since the Council not only represented Polish Jews but also had the resources and the manpower to petition the king, it seems most likely that it had sent a delegation to the Royal Court in Warsaw with instructions to obtain such a document.²⁹

A no less momentous decision of the 1650 Council meeting was the establishment of a day of remembrance for the dead—a general day of fasting and prayer for the Jews of Poland-Lithuania. It was to take place each year on the Jewish date, 20 Sivan, which was held to be the day on which the mass murder had begun, the day of the great massacre at Nemyriv. It is not entirely clear who first instituted the fast. The rabbi of Vilnius, Shabtai ha-Kohen, who as a Lithuanian leader would have had no place at the Polish Council, claimed the idea as his. For their part, the Polish rabbis stated that it was they who had first conceived of the general fast.³⁰

This was clearly meant to be a day for the living—and especially the survivors—to remember the dead. The memory it preserved, however, was of a very particular nature for it was not tied solely to the event that had

triggered it. In fact, the anniversary of the Nemyriv massacre, 20 Sivan, was by no means the day on which either the uprising or the mass murder of Jews had begun. That had been several months earlier. Instead, what recommended this date to the rabbis was that it had already been used as a memorial day by Jews some centuries before. It had commemorated the deaths caused by a blood libel at Blois in France in 1171. The memory that the Polish-Lithuanian rabbis were creating was thus one that connected the events of 1648 with the larger continuum of Jewish suffering.

It did not take long for Polish and Lithuanian Jews to begin composing special prayers to be read on that day.³¹ Much of this liturgical poetry did not make a great effort to relate directly to the events of 1648 and inserted only the barest of concrete historical details: the year, the groups involved in killing Jews, the major sites of massacres, and the names of prominent rabbis who were killed. What they emphasized much more were the kinds of atrocities committed on the Jews.

Most of the prayers also included some kind of call for Divine vengeance. On the whole these were not as long or as vehement as those to be found in the prayers composed in the wake of the 1096 Rhineland massacres. Nor were they for the most part directly connected with the prayer for redemption (though that too was usually included). An exception was the elegy written by Yitzhak ben Avraham Moshe Yisra'el, rabbi of Leszno (in Hebrew, Lissa).³² Its final verse reads:

Strengthen the legs of the failing, the sighing and the wailing,
 See the blood of Your servants on your Porphyryion³³ and on the day of
 vengeance have no mercy,
 Spill out your anger, destroy the enemy and avenger,³⁴
 Remember the stoned and the burned, the murdered and the
 strangled.
 Send us the Redeemer and rebuild Jerusalem,
 Let us sink our roots by the water.³⁵

The mention here of those still suffering, who were openly called in other such prayers “survivors,” is a reminder that these were prayers written by and for those who remained alive.

This form of remembrance sat squarely in the medieval tradition of how Ashkenazi Jews memorialized such traumatic events, portraying them typologically as belonging to broad and long-lasting patterns of Jewish experience.³⁶ For the early modern Jews of Poland-Lithuania, however, that seems no longer to have been enough. They wanted prayers that would also express their own specific experiences and suffering.³⁷

The tensions this aroused can be seen in the demands made of Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, rabbi of Kraków, to write a prayer for the dead of Ukraine.

After the Council of Four Lands had established the general fast on 20 Sivan, an enterprising publisher in Kraków asked the rabbi to compose special prayers to be recited on that day so that he (the publisher) could print and sell them. Heller's initial response was to say that nothing really new had happened, so it would be better simply to make a selection of prayers composed in previous generations and use those. This does not seem to have satisfied either the publisher or the community, for a little later the rabbi decided to write some new verses of his own describing the Ukrainian massacres. These he added to a twelfth-century prayer by Eli'ezer ben Natan, a scholar and poet who had written in the wake of the medieval Rhineland massacres.³⁸ He explained that he had changed his mind in order to "go in the ways of peace," which presumably meant to placate the Jews of Kraków.

Even that did not satisfy the Kraków community, by then not only full of refugees and refugee stories but also ravaged by the plague. They went back to Heller and respectfully but firmly asked him to write a prayer specifically for them.³⁹ This time he agreed and wrote an entirely new elegy. Sixty-eight lines long, it was devoted solely to the experiences of the uprising.⁴⁰ Having said that, Heller did not abandon the sense of connection with past tragedies. The poem opened "These will I remember" (in Hebrew, *Eleh ezkerah*), which is also the opening of the famous prayer for the ten great rabbis martyred by the Roman emperor Hadrian, recited every Yom Kippur and Tisha' be-Av, the two major days of repentance and fasting in the Jewish calendar.

Like the other prayers composed for 20 Sivan, the historical framework of Heller's *Eleh ezkerah* was rudimentary, while the descriptions of the atrocities were very detailed indeed. Unlike the other prayers, and perhaps at the request of the Kraków Jews, it devoted significant space to survivor and refugee experience. One verse (i.e., four lines) was devoted to the fate of those taken into slavery by the Tatars, two others to the experience of the refugees in Kraków during the plague. Here are the verses referring to the refugees:

The one called by His name, created, formed, and made for His
glory,⁴¹

Was at first harmed not physically, but in his [worldly] possessions,
So he [fled] before the sword⁴² and made his way across the Vistula,

Poverty awaited him; he hoped for light, darkness came; for strength,
catastrophe came.⁴³

You became a plague for Your people; no disease or disaster passed
them by.⁴⁴

Their splendor was defiled, they went down into the grave, and we did
not learn our lesson.⁴⁵

Buried in fields and forests, neither they nor news of them made it to
town.

There were no boards for coffins, and linen for shrouds was in short
supply.⁴⁶

In the end, the prayers composed for 20 Sivan never fully resolved the tension between the survivors' need for liturgy specific to their experience and the traditional requirement to connect contemporary disasters with those of the past. This probably reflected the needs or desires of the survivors themselves, who wanted prayers that would both express their own experiences and tie them in with the Jewish past. The importance of the latter lay in the feeling that by integrating the massacres into the long history of Jewish suffering, the survivors could see themselves as participants in the cosmic drama of God's relations with His people Israel. All the terrible events and traumas they had undergone were not a sign that God had abandoned them. Quite the reverse: they were living proof of His ongoing relationship with them.

Beyond these theological issues, the special day and prayers recited on it seem also to have provided the kind of psychological crutch that many of those touched by the traumatic events would have needed to move on from their experiences. One of the most important ways of overcoming trauma is to integrate the horrific memories into the survivor's life story.⁴⁷ The fast of 20 Sivan provided a controlled framework for remembering the events and, by its very nature, integrated them into the flow of Jewish life by means of its regular place in the calendar.

The prayers recited on that day presented, in a very stylized way, descriptions of at least some of the horrors of the uprising. This allowed survivors to revisit their memories in the secure setting of the synagogue, with their family and their community around them. The use of communal prayer, together with the refusal to attribute blame to survivors, is significant here because it allowed them to receive the kind of social support that is very important in the process of recovery from wartime trauma.⁴⁸ As we have seen, the connection of the 1648 fast with a medieval one also provided a broad (and comforting) conceptual framework for interpreting

the traumatic events. This would have been yet another source of help in the process of integrating the terrible memories into the way survivors perceived the course of their lives. Finally, setting aside a specific day on which to remember the events presumably also provided survivors with a setting in which to talk about their experiences without embarrassment.⁴⁹

Obviously, the leaders who instituted the fast day knew nothing about the treatment of trauma or the positive psychological benefits that their decision might bring to survivors. They were simply following a tried and tested tradition stretching back into Jewish antiquity.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, when one looks at the speed with which Polish-Lithuanian—and particularly Ukrainian—Jews managed to resume the threads of their lives after the uprising, the kind of psychological help and support that the general fast day gave them can surely not have been a negligible factor.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the establishment of the general fast proved an outstanding success in the Commonwealth.⁵¹ Though by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it seems to have been honored mostly in the breach, its memory continued to reverberate among European Jews until the Holocaust—and even after.⁵²

Even more telling is the fact that the memories of the Khmelnytsky uprising preserved by 20 Sivan were strong enough to overshadow the memories of the terrible events and acts of mass murder committed during the wars that followed it. Jewish popular memory embraced the first and ignored the second, even though, in reality, there was precious little to choose between them. The events of the second round of wars also caused further waves of Jewish refugees, this time not just within the Commonwealth but across Europe and Asia.

The Second Wave of Wars

AFTER THE DISASTERS of 1648 and 1649, the Commonwealth under its new king, Jan Kazimierz, gradually turned the tide in Ukraine. Its successes were both military (victory at the Battle of Berestechko in 1651) and diplomatic (it managed to sever the diplomatic connection between the Cossacks and the Tatars). This was good news for the refugees since conditions quieted down significantly, allowing them to begin returning home. The end of the uprising was signaled when the Cossacks signed a treaty with Moscow at Pereiaslav in 1654, and it looked as if the emergency had been resolved. The price Poland-Lithuania had to pay was bearable: though it lost control of left-bank Ukraine, and Jews were no longer allowed to live and do business there, the vast region of right-bank Ukraine, which was better developed and so created great wealth, remained a part of the Commonwealth.¹

However, the sighs of relief were short-lived. At Pereiaslav, a new Russian-Cossack alliance was formed. Khmelnytsky recognized Tsar Alexis as his overlord, and the tsar promised to recognize left-bank Ukraine as an autonomous Cossack Hetmanate under Khmelnytsky's rule. One consequence was that the Cossack forces would now be available to support the Russian army. Emboldened by this, and hoping to improve his access to the Baltic while simultaneously weakening Sweden, the tsar invaded the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with Cossack units fighting alongside his army. A Cossack incursion into western Ukraine, with some Russian support, also helped pin down Polish troops there, keeping them away from the war in the north.

The Lithuanian army, underfinanced by Warsaw and weakened by the uprising, was unable to resist the Russian advance. First to fall was the town of Smolensk, then Vitebsk and Mahilioŭ (Mogilev). After that,

the army pushed deeper into Lithuania, taking Vilnius on August 8, 1655.² The Jews of Lithuania, though not a political issue as they had been in Ukraine, were still targeted. The Russian soldiers—known for their brutality—viewed them both as a source of money and as Christ-killers, whom they, as Orthodox Christians, should seek to convert at any price. Little surprise then that Lithuanian Jewry played an active role in the defensive actions. They not only helped finance strengthening urban fortifications and provided ammunition and supplies for the soldiers but also took up arms themselves and fought alongside their neighbors.³

While Lithuania was reeling under this attack, the new Swedish king, Charles X Gustav, invaded Poland during March 1655. As a major Baltic power at that time, Sweden had as its most pressing rival Moscow and its ambitions in the Baltic. However, rather than engage his enemy openly, the king preferred to strengthen his position at the expense of a weakened Commonwealth. Sweden's well-trained army, composed to a great extent of mercenary troops, swept Poland before it. Poznań surrendered on July 25, Warsaw fell on September 8, and Kraków was taken on October 19. Totally defeated, King Jan Kazimierz had no choice but to flee the country and hope for a chance to return.⁴

Poland's Jews viewed the Swedish invasion with concern. Any military activity was always dangerous for the civilian population—and they, as a hated religious minority, were also open to attack. In addition, as an urban group, they were relatively wealthy and thus easy pickings. As a result, some Jews chose to flee before trouble reached them. Many, however, returned quite soon, perhaps because the Swedish soldiers, for all the trouble they brought, turned out to be nowhere near as brutal to the Jews as the Cossack or Russian forces.⁵

The winter of 1655 was the moment of change. The Swedish army was besieging the Jasna Góra monastery outside Częstochowa, home to the famous icon known as the "Black Madonna." A handful of monks and some local noblemen managed to lift the siege and save the Madonna. Hailed as a miracle, this event became a rallying call for the remaining Polish forces. The king returned to Poland, traveling to Lviv, where, in April 1656, he held a special ceremony which "crowned" Our Lady of Częstochowa as Queen and Protector of Poland in order to rally his people against the Protestant (Swedish) invader.

Inspired by this, the Polish forces regrouped under the leadership of Hetman Stefan Czarniecki, who led them in a guerilla war to harry, then drive out the Swedes.⁶ For the Jews, this was a terrifying development. The difficult, but manageable, Swedish army was now replaced by Polish

forces, fired up with religious and patriotic fervor. These soldiers vented their anger not just on the Protestant Swedes but on those they saw as traitors for helping them—this meant local Protestants and, of course, Jews. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews were killed, and a mass exodus began. And as if that was not enough, the Cossack and Russian forces pushed west into Crown Poland, taking Lublin in October 1655 and perpetrating a huge massacre of Jews in the town.⁷

As Poland's situation improved, the king assembled a traditional army and began campaigning against the Swedes, who were slowly but surely driven out of the strongholds they had taken. An invasion from the south, under the Transylvanian prince Jerzy Rakoczy, was eventually repulsed. The end came in May 1660, when Poland and Sweden signed a peace agreement in the small town of Oliwa. All in all, it was an advantageous peace for the Commonwealth since, after five years of campaigning, Sweden had made no territorial gains.⁸

It also allowed the king to turn his full attention to the Russian forces. He had managed to break the Cossack-Russian agreement by offering Bogdan Khmelnytsky's successor, his son Iurii, a new agreement. The 1658 Treaty of Hadiach was supposed to establish a Ukrainian polity that would join the Commonwealth as an equal partner with Poland and Lithuania.⁹ Though the plan came to nothing, the Cossacks' agreement with Muscovy was not renewed, which allowed the Polish army to drive back the Orthodox (Russian) invaders toward its eastern border. The war continued sporadically until the Peace of Andrusów was signed in 1667.¹⁰

On one level, it could be said that Poland-Lithuania successfully weathered the storm that began with Khmelnytsky in 1648 and ended in Andrusów some nineteen years later. Despite finding itself in desperate straits more than once, the Commonwealth overcame its enemies and so, with the onset of peace, was able to begin a process of reconstruction. However, the price it had paid for the years of war was incredibly high, so getting the country back on its feet was a very complex operation. Poland-Lithuania's Jews, too, had suffered huge losses during the wars, not the least of which was the number of Jews who had been uprooted from their homes and forced to start new lives elsewhere, often in difficult—not to say traumatic—conditions. Beyond that, many of the refugees displaced by this second wave of wars left the Commonwealth never to come back.¹¹

It is to the experience of these people that we now turn. We will look first at the refugees in the parts of Lithuania under Russian occupation, then at those in the westerly regions where the Swedish and Polish armies fought it out in the second half of the 1650s.

Lithuania: Internal Migration and Flight Abroad

There is little doubt that the Jews of Lithuania feared a Russian invasion, a feeling that must have grown once the campaign got under way. For example, when Smolensk was taken, its Jews tried to hide from the soldiers dressed as Christians, though they were easily discovered because they did not know how to make the sign of the cross. Given the choice to convert or die, some converted, while the rest were bundled into a wooden building and burned alive. In Mahilioŭ, the Russian army gathered the Jews together in a column as if to expel them, but they had not gone far before the accompanying soldiers turned on them and killed them.¹²

A different situation developed in Vitebsk. There, a few hundred Christians and Jews were taken captive and deported to the Russian interior. The two groups developed a close relationship in captivity with the Christians writing to the Polish king as follows:

We, the officials, nobles, and citizens of the Vitebsk region, currently imprisoned in the Land of Muscovy, declare that the Jews of . . . Vitebsk, together with their wives and children were captured by . . . the Russian forces . . . and sent to Muscovy. There, they were [sent] first to Great Novgorod [where they] remained for a few weeks under great guard in a dark dungeon in great misery and suffering. Neither they nor us were given any food by the prince, [who] tormented them with such terrible imprisonment. Quite a few of them—several score—perished and froze to death from all the terrible things they suffered, both there in Great Novgorod and on the road. Later, like the nobles . . . these Jews from Vitebsk were . . . brought to Kazan, where they . . . are [now] being kept in prison. Despite extreme pressure from Moscow, none of the Jews gave in to the . . . threats and converted to Christianity. Rather, as faithful and loyal subjects . . . loving both His Royal Highness and our Republic, they did not let themselves be led astray. They await the grace of God that, by the mercy of His Royal Highness, they might be freed from this Russian imprisonment.¹³

The authors of the petition explained their positive attitude toward the Jews by presenting in great detail the active role Jews had played in defending the town before it fell. In fact, this was not the only group of Jews deported to Moscow. Some were taken to serve as slaves to the Boyars (the Russian nobility); many others were kept for ransom. If the money was not forthcoming when the Boyar needed it, he could sell on the captives to a third party. In this way, a group of Jews from Shklov,

imprisoned in Astrakhan, were sold to Persians and sent to Iran across the Caspian Sea.¹⁴ According to a report that reached Belarus, they were all drowned on the voyage. We know of another group of 50–100 Jewish captives who made it to Iran alive, where they remained for a number of years awaiting ransom.¹⁵

For the most part, however, Lithuanian Jews managed to evade capture and the horrors of imprisonment in the east. Instead, those who could traveled west, looking for a stronghold that would protect them from the invading forces. Quite a number of them chose the relatively large town of Slutsk, owned by Bogusław Radziwiłł, a scion of one of Lithuania's leading magnate dynasties. The appearance there of such a large number of refugees needing help more or less forced the Slutsk community to develop some kind of policy toward them. There is nothing to suggest that what it did was in any way out of the ordinary, so taking a closer look at what happened in the town should shed some light on the ways in which refugees were helped on a local level across the Commonwealth.

The Jewish community in Slutsk was relatively new in 1648. Though there were always religious and social tensions in the town, in the vast majority of cases, relations between the different ethnic and religious groups that lived there were peaceable. In fact, cooperation worked not only in the ordinary sphere of daily life. In her study of the town's preparations in the face of the Russian military advance across Belarus and the threat of an extended siege in 1655, Barbara Pendzich concluded that all the groups in town, including the Jews, cooperated in strengthening the urban defenses and laying in stores of food.¹⁶

Jewish refugees do not seem to have come to Slutsk immediately after the outbreak of the Khmelnytsky uprising in 1648. In fact, the reverse was true. Hanover recounts that the local Jews had fled the town before the Cossacks got there.¹⁷ We do not know precisely when those Jews returned to Slutsk, nor when refugees started to arrive. However, the town council complained that increasing numbers of Jewish women had been peddling bread on the streets since 1652, which might indicate that by that time there were at least some refugees there.¹⁸ By 1655, however, the Slutsk community was home to a significant number, most presumably Jews fleeing the Russian army.¹⁹ Fortunately for them, though Russian forces besieged Slutsk in the fall of 1655, it was one of the few Belarussian towns not to fall.

As normal life resumed, the community had to find a way of dealing with the mass of refugees. The first problem was finding them housing, which it seems to have done by placing them in private homes despite the

resultant crowded conditions. This brought the community into conflict with the town council, which wanted to prevent any growth in the town's Jewish population. In its discussions of May 2, 1655, the council ordered that only Jews whose names appeared in the town register be allowed to live there, stating that "the numbers [of the Slutzk Jewish population] have grown greatly so that four or five families are living in a single house."²⁰

Another tactic the community seems to have adopted was to take over houses previously owned by Christians in return for defaulted loans. On December 13, 1658, Radziwiłł's commissars in Slutzk issued an order banning both local and "foreign" Jews (by which it meant refugees) from acquiring houses and courts outside their designated streets. To judge by the continual growth in the number of Jewish-owned houses in the town in the second half of the seventeenth century, this order was never enforced.²¹

The next issue was to help the refugees make some kind of living. We have seen that Jewish women would take to the streets to sell baked goods. Though no reason is given for this, baking was perhaps one of the few skills that female refugees—particularly widows—could exploit in order to make a living.²² Jewish men got involved in a wider range of mercantile activity, mostly petty trade. In normal times, the Slutzk community itself would have done its best to remove these interlopers. However, in the early 1650s, the Lithuanian Jewish Council had ordered that refugees be integrated as far as possible into the local economy.²³ Doing this brought the community again into confrontation with the town council, which wanted to stop Jews from outside Slutzk from doing business in the town.²⁴

So, as well as having to use scarce communal resources to help the refugees, the community also had to deal with the non-Jewish authorities that would do whatever they could to drive them out. In Slutzk, this took a particularly ugly turn. On July 14, 1657, Bogusław Radziwiłł issued an order stating that he had received information that Jews from various places were thronging into the town and bringing the plague with them. All those "foreign" Jews were to be expelled and any local Jews caught hiding refugees were to be dealt with severely.²⁵ Fortunately for the community, for reasons that are not entirely clear, this order was not carried out.

It was only in the spring of 1659 that an excuse was found finally to get rid of the unwanted Jewish population. On April 17, a local orthodox priest (*protopop*) wrote to Radziwiłł complaining that "a Ukrainian Jew from the [Ukrainian] village of Królewiec . . . became a Christian with his wife and children. . . . After the death of his first wife, he took a second, living as a

Christian for over a decade. . . . Having now come to Slutsk, he, his wife and children born into Christianity have, at the instigation of the rabbis, become Jews with great blasphemy and outrage to God.”²⁶

On hearing the charge, Radziwiłł’s commissars in Slutsk demanded an explanation from the local community. It confidently replied that the convert’s return to Judaism was legal under the 1650 royal ruling mentioned earlier.²⁷ The commissars, however, rejected this claim, arguing that the royal order had not been endorsed by the Sejm and so had no validity on noble estates, like those of the Radziwiłłs. The convert’s return to Judaism was thus deemed illegal.

This provided the pretext necessary, and by early June the expulsion of the “foreign” Jews was under way. On June 7, the Slutsk community was ordered to present the commissars a register of local Jews,²⁸ and on June 9 the order to expel all the others was given.²⁹ It was carefully worded: opening with the description of the case of the convert from Ukraine, it went on to order that all such Jews leave Slutsk. It then admitted that there was, in fact, only one other such Jew in town. This notwithstanding, the order continued: “since the number of wandering Jews has grown both in the town of Slutsk and in other towns in the estates of our noble lord [i.e., Radziwiłł], and since it is difficult to distinguish within this group whether there are other baptized Jews, we hereby order by the will of our Noble Prince that all the foreign Jews, who are not his subjects and legally settled on his estates, leave them by June 24.” This was a very neat transformation of an order pertaining to a specific case into a general expulsion of refugees.

Once again, however, the legislation seems to have been ineffective. New expulsion orders were made a number of times in the early 1660s, and complaints continued to be made of “foreign” Jews thronging the town. This suggests that some refugees had remained there despite the original expulsion order, that others had been expelled but soon returned, and that the stream of new refugees to Slutsk had not stopped. None of these Jews could have lived in the town without the help of the local Jewish community, whose treatment of the refugee issue can only be described as a remarkable success.

If developments in Slutsk shed light on the ways in which early modern Jewish communities in the Commonwealth (and elsewhere) organized to help refugees in the mid-seventeenth century, those in Vilnius point to phenomena that were characteristic only of the situation during the second wave of wars we are looking at here.

One of the refugees, a distinguished rabbi called Moshe Rivkes, has left a detailed description of the flight from Vilnius:

When the enemy began to get close to Vilnius on Wednesday, July 28, 1655, almost the entire community fled for its life and left the town together. Those who had prepared carts and horses for themselves loaded them up with their wives, sons, daughters, and a little of their property, and left. Those who had not done so, left on foot with their families, carrying the little boys on their shoulders. With God's mercy, I met a nobleman's official who had some village carts. I put my family on those and sent them out of town to wait a few miles outside Vilnius. I stayed on there on my own, because I did not yet believe it was dangerous. When evening came, a terrible panic overcame me, and the next day, 29 July, I left with my staff in my right hand, I had my *tefilin* pouch and a book of calendrical law³⁰ in my left . . . I began to have all kinds of thoughts—who knows where my exile will take me. . . . We went as we could . . . and came to the edge of the Žemaitija³¹ region close to the Prussian border. We found no respite there—and so the verse, “He who runs from a lion will meet a bear”³² came true for us. What happened was that a company of Swedish troops arrived. They stripped the very skin off our backs, demanding huge payments every day. In the end, together with some of my family and the rest of the people, I had no choice but to board a sailing ship. We were on our way to Amsterdam.³³

What is important here is not the fact that there was a mass flight of Jews. We saw that in Ukraine. The crucial change was that the new refugees were leaving well ahead of time, which seems to have given them the chance to organize their journey. There is certainly none of the sense of panic and chaos in the text, as there was in Hanover's description of the flight from Izyaslav. The Jews of Vilnius were not the only ones to organize leaving the town before the invasion. The Jews in Pinsk did precisely the same thing.³⁴ Unlike the previous wave of refugees, those fleeing Vilnius and Pinsk also seem to have gone in groups rather than as individuals. One thing that seems to have distinguished Vilnius Jewry from the other Lithuanian communities was that they were not looking for refuge in a nearby town. They were leaving, as Rivkes said, for an unknown destination. As we shall see, group, or even communal, flight seems to have been one of the characteristics of the second wave of refugees, at least in its early stages.

The second noteworthy thing in Rivkes' story is the fact that he, together with many other Jews from Vilnius, was not fleeing just the town but the country itself. Their route took them northwestward from Vilnius toward East Prussia, with its major Baltic ports of Königsberg (Kalinin-grad) and Memel (Klaipėda). Not only Jewish refugees took this route; many of the Catholics and Protestants who were fleeing the wrath of the Orthodox Russian forces made their way there, too.³⁵ Rivkes complained of the depredations of the Swedish forces he met on the road; other refugee groups, so a popular Yiddish song of the day, "An Elegy for the Lithuanian Jews," tells, were robbed by peasants during their flight.³⁶ Once in East Prussia, however, the Christian refugees stayed put until they could return, while a significant number of the Jews sailed for Hamburg or Amsterdam.

The entry of so many Jewish refugees to East Prussia—where they were not officially allowed to live—could not be ignored. The Grand Elector of Brandenburg, Friedrich Wilhelm, who was also Duke of Prussia, initially tried to control the flow by granting them free passage to Memel, presumably to steer them away from Königsberg. Though the order he gave had a pragmatic purpose, its language was generous and so gives the impression that it also expressed some humanitarian feeling. Nonetheless, it could not stem the tide of refugees, many of whom did end up in Königsberg. The wealthier among them seem to have continued doing business in order to survive. The destitute, as always, struggled—hungry and ill.

The Prussian townspeople did not want an influx of Jews, rich or poor, and began to put pressure on Friedrich Wilhelm. Within a few months he had changed his tune entirely. In an order of July 10, 1657, addressed to the Königsberg town council, the duke expelled the Jews from the towns of East Prussia, if not from the duchy as a whole, giving them only three days to leave. The excuse he gave was fear of the plague. While this must have been very real, it is noteworthy that the Christian refugees from Lithuania, who were presumably also a health risk, were not expelled. Despite the order, some Jews remained in the duchy, leading to attempts in the early 1660s to limit them from doing trade or remaining permanently in Königsberg. As the fighting in Lithuania drew to its end later in the decade, the Jews who had not sailed to Hamburg or Amsterdam presumably began to make their way back home.³⁷

Other refugees, like Aharon Shmu'el Kaidonover, another rabbinic scholar from Vilnius, did not aim for East Prussia but traveled westward into the heartlands of Crown Poland. However, like many of the Ukrainian

refugees who had done so before them, those Jews did not find safety. Kaidonover settled in Lublin, where he had to live through the huge massacre of the community by Russian and Cossack troops in the fall of 1655. He managed to escape that, too, fleeing Poland for the German lands.³⁸ Many of the other Lithuanian refugees in western Poland suffered the same fate, finding themselves caught up in the horrors of the war against the Swedes.

Western Poland: Fleeing the War

Writing after the war, Ya'akov ben Yehezki'el ha-Levi, who had, at age eight, fled his home of Złotów (in German, Flatow) together with his father, found it necessary to explain why it was that the Jews had suffered the murderous attentions of the Polish army but not those of the Swedish. He wrote that the Swedish king "has never had Jews under his sovereignty, so he came to Poland and treated them well."³⁹ To that we might add that during the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), the Swedish army had, more than once, used Jewish merchants to supply their forces in the Holy Roman Empire and thus had good reason to treat them fairly.⁴⁰

The commander of the Polish forces, Stefan Czarniecki, felt no such restraints. He viewed his war against the Swedish invaders as a war of religion: he was defending the Catholic heartlands of Poland against the Protestant invader. He turned his wrath on the small Protestant communities that still existed in some Polish towns and, of course, on the Jews, who were viewed in conservative Catholic circles (and not only there) as the archetypal traitors.⁴¹ There is little evidence to suggest that Jews helped the Swedish army in its campaign; in fact, many sources suggest that Jews helped defend their homes against the invaders alongside their neighbors.⁴² The only people to cut a deal with the Swedish king against Poland were members of the nobility itself. The most prominent of these were two Radziwiłł cousins, leading Lithuanian magnates, who signed an agreement supposedly repealing the union between Poland and Lithuania and aligning the latter with Sweden in return for its support in their war against Russia.⁴³

This does not seem to have checked the bloodthirsty rampage of the Polish forces. Though it is hard to estimate precisely how many Jews were killed, the memorial prayers composed in the wake of the fighting did mention each community in which Jewish martyrs had fallen. From these we know that dozens of Jewish centers in Great Poland and Little Poland were attacked, and at least some of their members murdered.⁴⁴

In terms of fleeing their homes, some Jews preferred not to wait to see how the Swedish army might treat them but set out at the first sign of trouble. From the big towns, such as Poznań and Kraków, it was often those who had somewhere to go to or knew that they would be well received who went first. This was not just a Jewish phenomenon. Wealthy Christians also traveled abroad for the duration of the war. For those people who wanted to leave, Jewish or non-Jewish, a family or business connection with the German lands was clearly an advantage. Thus, for example, after the war broke out, Avrom ben Yosef Segal left Poznań, where he lived on a permanent basis, to travel to his hometown of Hanover. A little later, presumably once he had organized matters there, he returned quietly to Poznań, picked up his wife, and returned with her to Lower Saxony.⁴⁵ This had to be done in secret because the Polish communities did not want their richest members to leave since it was they who formed the backbone of the economy not only of the community in general but of the communal institutions in particular. Permission to move away might eventually be granted, but generally at a very great cost.⁴⁶

Another group able to move relatively easily were rabbis—at least the more distinguished among them. The Chief Rabbi of Kraków, Yehoshu'a Heshel,⁴⁷ fled the town, initially for Moravia before eventually ending up in Vienna.⁴⁸ Hayim Bochner, who ran a yeshiva in Kraków, seems to have left the town together with all his students before the Swedish war caught up with him. He, too, ended up in Vienna.⁴⁹ It was not only Kraków rabbis who enjoyed “star status” as refugees: Moshe Rivkes of Vilnius was welcomed into Amsterdam with open arms, as was Shabtai ha-Kohen, also from Vilnius, in the Moravian town of Holešov.⁵⁰

If the flight from the larger towns was of a more individual nature, presumably because most people did not believe that such a place would ever fall to the enemy, the situation in the smaller towns was quite different. Yuda ben Ephraim Hayim of Piła experienced the Swedish wars in a number of such places and tells of his experiences in a personal chronicle written in Hebrew:

When the panic about the war began, we were in Wronki. It got worse every day on account of the Swedish invasion of Poland. . . . So we fled to Grodzisk. When we got there, there was no way through Jews' Street because it was full of carts ready to flee to Silesia. They were completely full [with goods and possessions] and the children—of all ages—were sitting on top of them. They all left together. We stayed in my uncle Zalman's house because our cart was only going to Grodzisk and there

was no teamster to take us any further. After . . . about a week, the news came that there was peace in our land, meaning that the King of Sweden would rule Poland. Things were calm that year, so some of the people began to return. . . .

We stayed at my uncle's . . . until after Passover 1656. . . .⁵¹ Then the Swedish rule over Poland got weak, the Poles attacked them, and they [i.e., the Swedish forces] began to flee the country. . . . The Jews also fled before the sword [going to] every land, scattered and broken. May God protect the survivors. So we [decided] to flee Grodzisk . . . but then we received a message from the lord [of the town] in his castle [ordering] that no-one leave the town. Anyone who dared to do so would lose his residence rights. . . . [As I was not from Grodzisk, I decided to leave anyway.] We traveled all night, in fear of the Lord and in terror of the peasant rabble. . . . We ended up in Lipiny,⁵² where there were twenty-four [Jewish] families from Grodzisk.⁵³

What stands out in this account is the fact that the flight from Grodzisk, which took place early in the war, was planned—just as the flights from Vilnius and Pinsk in Lithuania had been. Evidently the news of the Swedish invasion had reached the community ahead of time, giving it the chance to leave en masse. There was time to hire carts and teamsters, pack up their goods in an orderly manner, and set out before things got too chaotic. Their goal was Silesia, only a few miles to the west—and they traveled there together. Even when they reached their destination, it would seem that the group did not split up entirely—some twenty-five families chose to stay together in Lipiny.

Of course, this did not mean that there were no acts of individual flight and no Jews who preferred to stay in Poland as refugees rather than leave the country. The author of the account himself is one such example (at least until 1656). Nonetheless, this type of organized travel meant that relatively large numbers of Jews could leave Poland and settle in areas that had no real support system to look after them.

There are some signs that these refugees, initially at least, planned eventually to return home. In many cases, however, later developments meant that the flight became permanent and so the mass movement of people formed the basis for the rapid development of Jewish life in Moravia, Bohemia, and the German lands in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁵⁴

The ferocity of the Polish counterattack, particularly the attacks on the Jews, seems to have come as a surprise. At that point, organized flight

was no longer a possibility. As people began really to fear for their lives, it became a case of everyone for him- or herself. However, as Yuda's account shows, once they had reached Silesia, such individuals or families were sometimes able to meet up with the previous wave of refugees who had left just a year earlier.

For the lord of the town, it was the second flight that was problematic enough for him to want to stop it. This suggests that the first group of refugees, who left in organized fashion before the Swedish invasion, had won his acceptance, presumably by promising to return when things quieted down (though there is no documentary basis for this). When it looked as if the town was going to lose its entire Jewish population at the time of the Polish counteroffensive, the lord did what he could to put a stop to the exodus by threatening the Jews who left that they would not be able to come back. Like the leadership of the larger Jewish communities mentioned earlier, he seems to have seen the Jews of the town as an important resource that he did not want to lose—particularly as he faced a period of rebuilding the town and its wealth once the wars were over.

Not all urban authorities were as keen to keep the Jews in the town or to welcome back the Jewish refugees who had left. The town councils, which represented the Christian townspeople who tended to view the Jews as interlopers and unwanted competition, could be very harsh toward them. Such was the case in Olkusz in Little Poland.⁵⁵

Sometime in early 1655—that is, before the Swedish forces entered Little Poland—the Jewish community there seems to have packed up and left for Silesia, where they stayed for about two years. By that time, Czar-niecki had forced the Swedes northward and Little Poland was liberated. The king had also issued a number of decrees allowing all those who had fled the fighting to return to their homes.⁵⁶ Encouraged by this, the Olkusz community decided to come back. They packed up all their goods and chattels a second time, loaded them on thirty barges, and traveled back to the town, presumably along the upper stretch of the Vistula river.⁵⁷

They arrived to a cold welcome. The king's orders notwithstanding, the town gates were locked against them. Not only did the town council refuse to let them in, it sent men armed with clubs to drive them away. After a few days hanging around outside the walls, the Jews decided to leave behind all the property and real estate they owned in the town and return to Silesia.

Sadly for them, that was not the end of the story. While on their way back, they were waylaid by thieves who hijacked their barges and robbed them of everything they had, money, clothes, jewels, horses, and any

other valuables. Completely destitute, the refugee column turned back to Olkusz, hoping, as it stated in its deposition, “to find some compassion.” None was forthcoming. Encamped outside the walls once again, the Olkusz community was exposed not only to the elements and to disease but also to the violence and demands of the soldiers still in the town.

Trying to enter into negotiations with the intransigent town council, the Jews quoted the royal decrees permitting them to return home. Even those did not move the townspeople. At that point, the refugees had little choice but to go to court. They accused the town of Olkusz of endangering their lives, stealing their property, and, most pertinently, failing to honor the royal decrees. Though we do not have the final verdict of the trial, we do know that the Jews were back in the town within the year.⁵⁸

This was clearly an extreme case, but it once again points to the kind of organized and communal flight that seems to have characterized the early period of the Swedish wars. It also raises the final point of the discussion here: the issue of return. Despite the fact that it had fled to Silesia, the Olkusz community clearly wanted to return home as soon as it was safe. They were not the only Jews to feel that way. Though a significant number of the refugees never made it back to the Commonwealth—either by force of circumstances or by choice—many more did return and rebuild their lives. So successful were they that within a generation or two, Polish-Lithuanian Jewry had made up its losses from the wars and found its way to the very heart of the magnate economy, amassing great wealth as it did so. In a very real sense, then, the ways in which the refugees managed to return to their homes, overcome the traumas they had experienced, and pick up the threads of their past existence paved the way for their future success.

Return and Reconstruction

THE PROCESS OF RETURNING HOME after spending time as a refugee was complex. It began with the decision to resume one's former life rather than look for better conditions elsewhere. Once that step had been taken, the returning refugees, together with those who had remained behind, had to rebuild their society—sometimes almost from scratch—which involved dealing with a range of social, economic, and religious problems. Finally, steps needed to be taken toward growth, first to recoup all that had been lost during the wars and then to ensure the community's future development.

The Decision to Return Home

The chaos of wartime conditions meant that there was a constant stream of Jewish refugees, often in the thousands, moving from place to place within the Commonwealth. The organized attempts to flee notwithstanding, this was for the most part a very large, uncontrolled—even uncontrollable—movement of people, often indigent, traumatized, and desperate. For some, even the act of flight did not help. Running from town to town or struggling from the Commonwealth's eastern regions to the heartlands of Crown Poland did not bring them to safety, since the wars that continued to sweep the country engulfed them there too.

In such conditions, the idea of returning home at the earliest opportunity must have seemed an attractive option. A number of different groups took it. The first were those who had fled their hometown but not left the region, the second were those who had traveled great distances but remained within the Commonwealth, and the third were those who had left the country. This last group can itself be divided into two: some

had left the country of their own free will, mostly from western Poland toward Moravia and Silesia, while others had been taken captive and sent eastward to be sold as slaves or ransomed by fellow Jews in the Ottoman Empire.

Each had its own considerations. The refugees with the strongest motivation to return had probably remained reasonably close to home. Captives who had been ransomed but found themselves in the strange surroundings of the Ottoman Empire (where the Jews were not, for the most part, Ashkenazim and spoke the Spanish-based language of Ladino rather than Yiddish) were presumably also very anxious to return home, though that would have been tempered by the high cost and great danger involved in long-distance travel in such difficult times.

The choice facing the refugees whose flight had taken them long distances, either within the Commonwealth or outside it, was whether to try to start a new life where they found themselves or to go back home to pick up the threads of the past. It would seem that many of the Jews who had fled west out of Poland chose not to return, preferring the more settled conditions of the German lands.

What the internal refugees did is much harder to work out. The major demographic sources for the third quarter of the seventeenth century in both Poland and Lithuania are registers of taxpayers.¹ Refugees do not show up in such lists, making it almost impossible to determine not only how many they were but also where they were living. The very rapid growth in the number of Lithuanian Jews in the last quarter of the seventeenth century may possibly reflect the decision of at least some refugees to stay there rather than return to Ukraine or other parts of Poland. Beyond that kind of speculation there is little else to be said.

It is clear, however, that many Jews chose to return home, particularly to Ukraine. This was not always easy. The sheer size of the disaster that had taken place there gave many pause for thought. Parallels were drawn between the destruction in Ukraine (in Hebrew, *Hurban*) with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem—the greatest tragedy in Jewish history.² People began to ask themselves whether one could (or should) return to such a place.

Evidence of this feeling can be found in an entry in the community record book (in Hebrew, *pinkas*) of the Chortkiv community: “As a result of the terrible disasters of 1648 in Ukraine, when the whole region of Podilia was thrown into an uproar, and also because here in Chortkiv . . . false accusations and the wickedness of the local nobility led to a number of Jews being publicly martyred, the Rabbis of the Four Lands ruled that no

Jew should live here.”³ Such an order forbidding the return to Ukraine seems to echo the traditional (though probably unhistorical) view that rabbinical authorities had not allowed Jews to resettle in Spain after the 1492 expulsion.

Apart from this text, however, there is no other evidence that any ban on returning to Ukraine was ever given, and indeed, unlike what happened in Spain, Ukrainian Jews did return home just as soon as the fighting had died down, though this could take a year or more.⁴ They returned to a land ravaged by war, with towns largely destroyed and Jewish communities sometimes quite literally decimated. What that felt like can be seen in an autobiographical vignette written many years later by Me’ir Tarnopoler, who remembered vividly his childhood experience of returning to his hometown of Ternopil’:

In 1648 . . . had the Grace of God not moved my father and one or two other community members to move quickly and flee the fighting, we would probably all have died. We were hurried from town to town and from place to place, in the heat and the cold. . . . When winter came, we went back to our own town. Our houses had been burned down and our property taken over by strangers [i.e., non-Jews]. . . . [We had] many years of sorrow.

While our father was alive, he would look after us, [like a bird] watching over its chicks. . . . [But] after he passed away . . . our daily lives became unbearable.⁵

As well as pointing out the emotional difficulties the refugees suffered in returning to such devastation, this short text also tells of some of the more concrete problems they faced. First and foremost, their economic situation was much worse than it had been before the war. Their property, particularly if it was real estate, was likely to have been destroyed or seriously damaged in the fighting. Other possessions were often stolen or appropriated in their absence. In such conditions, simply surviving from day to day must have been a serious challenge, and with life on a knife-edge, any other problems (such as the loss of a breadwinner as we can see in Tarnopoler’s account) had the most serious consequences.

Reconstruction

Once they had decided to go back, the returnees faced the problem of actually gaining entrance into town. This was not usually an issue in Ukraine, where the Jews’ roles in the urban economy before the war had

been significant enough that their return would not be hindered. It was in the older and better-established towns, particularly those owned by the king, that the burghers would sometimes try to exploit the wartime conditions to get rid of their Jewish competitors. This is what happened in the case of Olkusz. In Vilnius, too, during the Russian occupation, the townspeople wrote to the tsar, requesting that the Jews be removed from the walled town to the suburbs on the far side of the Vilia river.⁶ On the whole, however, these cases were rare—and unsuccessful. Despite the additional suffering they caused to the refugees, it did not take long before the Jews could return to their prewar homes.

Once the Jews were back in town, they had to reconstitute Jewish society. In many towns, the Jewish community administration seems to have been up and running quite quickly.⁷ The next concern was ensuring the community's economic base. This meant getting back as much as possible of the property abandoned when the Jews fled. In many, if not most, cases, buried property was retrieved, and the friends and neighbors to whom the Jews had entrusted their possessions returned them without demur.⁸ However, sometimes things had been stolen and their new owners did not want to give them back. In such cases, the Jews had to go to court for restitution.⁹

Moshe Rosman has studied the first two years of the Jews' return to the Ukrainian town of Dubno on the basis of the urban records. He noted that within weeks of the return of peace, the urban institutions of the town council and the court had reconstituted themselves and were dealing with myriad cases of claims and counterclaims concerning stolen property or damages. Jews did not make up all the plaintiffs. There were many cases of Polish noblemen and townspeople from different ethnic groups trying to get their money or property back (or to hang onto their ill-gotten gains).¹⁰ Jews were also among those accused of stealing property.¹¹

Though religious and ethnic tensions had played a large part in the outburst of violence, the courts seem to have ignored this aspect of events. Whether Jews, Catholics, or Orthodox Christians were involved, the cases were treated purely as civil or criminal matters. Both during and after the period of wars, many thousands of such cases were pursued in every part of Poland-Lithuania, as the refugees struggled to put their lives back together. It is perhaps a sign of Jewish society's confidence in the Commonwealth's legal system that even after the violence they had suffered at the hands of their non-Jewish neighbors, Jews took the time to appear before the court to pursue their claims for justice against them.¹²

This was not just a male phenomenon. Jewish women, many of them widowed by the fighting, could—and did—come before the bench, just like men. The high proportion of widows in society meant that there were more families at whose head stood a woman. In such conditions, women could own houses, run businesses, and manage financial affairs without interference.¹³ This meant that they too often found themselves going to court to reclaim stolen property. Though it does not seem to have been a very common occurrence, there are enough cases to show that it was normal practice.

Here are two examples. On June 26, 1649, Dawidowa Nimizowka of Dubno went to court to get her property back. She had returned with the other refugees to find her possessions stolen and a non-Jew living in her house, so she sued him.¹⁴ In another case following the great massacre in Lublin in the fall of 1655, Marynka, the widow of Israel Ickowicz, took Mikołaj Cioka to court, charging that under cover of the fighting and the plague that followed, he had repeatedly stolen property that belonged to her.¹⁵ We do not have the verdicts in either of these cases, but it is the fact that it was Jewish women who were active in bringing suit that is important here.

The status of widows was also at the root of one of the major social issues the returning refugees had to contend with. On the face of things, it concerned the status of women unable satisfactorily to prove that their husbands were indeed dead. As mentioned earlier, Jewish law demands a high level of certainty in the identification of the dead husband before the wife can formally be declared a widow and thus permitted to remarry. Though there was some leniency on the question of testimony—even the woman herself and non-Jews were acceptable witnesses and hearsay testimony could be heard—the identification itself had to be made within three days of death and had to include incontrovertible evidence as to the corpse's identity. If this was lacking, the woman could not be declared a widow, could not fulfill the customs of mourning, and could not remarry. She was left in a kind of social limbo, still “chained” (Hebrew, *agunah*) to her missing husband.¹⁶

The significance of this issue, however, went far beyond women's status because it also concerned the estate of the missing man. There were at least two parties with interests involved: the woman, who wanted to receive back her marriage portion, and the heirs, who wanted to take possession of their inheritance. Without at least some evidence of the husband's death, the estate could not be touched. Once that was forthcoming, legal determinations were made more difficult by the fact that financial

matters, such as inheritance, were decided according to different evidentiary standards from widowhood. This created a very complex gray area where, in some cases, the wife could receive her payment while the heirs were left with nothing, and others in which the opposite held true.¹⁷

The Jewish judges were thus left with a good deal of room for maneuver. They often needed it as they found themselves trapped between the desire to alleviate the suffering of the *agunot*, the fear that in freeing these women to remarry the judges might be making them adulterers and their children bastards, and the pressures of Jewish society (here in the form of the heirs) that needed to mobilize all its resources in order to survive. As we have seen, the Council of Four Lands and Poland's leading rabbis met in 1650 to try to relieve these tensions, though the fact that their rulings have not survived suggests that they were unsuccessful in doing so.¹⁸ Decisions were thus mostly made on an ad hoc basis, which meant that the future of many Jewish women was dependent on the individual outlook of the various judges making the rulings (who were, of course, all men).¹⁹

Jewish popular memory holds that the rabbis did all they could to help the *agunot*. Recent research has begun to question this and, certainly, many of the written records that survive demonstrate a rather strict approach.²⁰ Sadly, no firsthand account by an *agunah* has survived to tell us of their struggles with the Jewish legal system or of the suffering that their harsh and demeaning social status caused them.

Another socioreligious issue that was extremely difficult to resolve satisfactorily concerned Jews who had converted to Christianity during the wars but wanted to return to Judaism.²¹ Not all converts felt that way; some (perhaps many) preferred to remain Christians. These were not only people on the margins of society. In October 1657, after the end of the Swedish occupation of Kraków, the wealthy Jewish merchant Jakub Palti'el Rubinowicz converted to Catholicism. Though his motivation for doing so is not entirely clear, as Hieronim Rubinkowicz, a Christian, he pursued a successful career among the urban elite in the town of Kazimierz, even becoming a member of the town council.²²

Those who wanted to return to Judaism could find themselves in complicated situations. As we have seen, though the king issued an order in 1650 allowing all Jews converted by force to Orthodox Christianity to return to their ancestral religion, it was not always honored. Beyond that, it did not refer to all conversions. The Jews who were forcibly baptized into Roman Catholicism during Czarniecki's campaigns in western Poland were given no such freedom, which meant that if they did choose to rejoin their community, they did so at their own peril.²³

Acceptance back into the Jewish world was not always automatic. Jewish law mandates that even under duress, it is forbidden for Jews to convert.²⁴ They should rather be martyred. So, following the strict letter of the law, there should have been no converts left to want to return. Nonetheless, given the realities of wartime life, there were many Jews returning from captivity who had converted but now wanted to resume their previous lives. This raised the question of how they should be treated. The great legal authority of the previous century, Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Kraków, had taken an independent line on this question, giving a lenient ruling that forced converts who wanted to return should be accepted unconditionally.²⁵ Many seventeenth-century judges and rabbis seem eagerly to have adopted this approach and allowed all Jewish male converts who wanted to return to do so.²⁶

Those rabbis were, however, evading a very difficult question. Had all the Jews who had converted actually been forced to do so? There had been those who had converted ahead of time in order to avoid trouble. Legally speaking, this counted as a voluntary conversion and was a very serious sin indeed. Perhaps for this reason some rabbis questioned Isserles' position. In a responsum written at the height of the Czarniecki campaign in Great Poland, Hānoch the Preacher ruled that returning converts should be treated with suspicion and forced to undergo penances before being allowed to rejoin Jewish society. It is not clear how influential his ruling was.²⁷

The situation of Jewish women converts, freed from captivity and wanting to return to Judaism, was even more complex. In addition to the issue of the nature of their conversion, married women had to face the question of whether they had willingly had sex with their captors. If that was the case—even if they had agreed to let their captors sleep with them because they feared for their lives—they would be forbidden to their husbands, lose their dowry, and not be accepted back into Jewish society.²⁸ Of course, in most cases it was impossible to determine whether (or under what conditions) a Jewish woman had slept with her captors. Once again, Rabbi Moshe Isserles had provided a lenient ruling, saying that if a woman captive who had been forced to convert returned to Judaism at the first possible opportunity, she was not to be suspected of adultery.²⁹

Nonetheless, some rabbis (and husbands) exerted pressure to have these captive women divorced in their absence.³⁰ In order to receive the divorce in absentia, all the husband had to do was to put in escrow with the court a sum worth the woman's original dowry, which was to be

handed over to her on her return.³¹ As a result, returning women converts often had to face a great deal of suspicion from either their husband or local society or both. This might have persuaded at least some of them that it was better not to return at all.³²

The third challenge facing the returning refugees was resuming their economic life. As the text by Me'ir Tarnopoler suggests, this was often very difficult—at least in the immediate postwar period. The urban markets were in disarray, regional and transregional trade was difficult and dangerous, and the high levels of destruction meant that production levels had fallen dramatically. Fortunately, this was only a temporary problem. As time moved on, production rose and the markets reasserted themselves. Provided they could survive the immediate postwar depression, the returning refugees could expect to go back to making a living at their old occupations—even if not at prewar levels.

The final phenomenon of the immediate postwar years to be examined here brings us back to the courts. As Jewish life began to resume, there was a wave of prosecutions for murder brought by Jewish men and women against those suspected of killing members of their (i.e., the Jews') families. These were criminal prosecutions, and though they noted that the murders had taken place during the war, they did not view that as in any way pertinent to the case at hand. The accused were mostly peasants and townspeople who had taken the law into their own hands and murdered Jews during the chaos created by the fighting. Regular soldiers (Cossacks, etc.) were not charged, presumably because their actions were viewed as legitimate acts of war.³³

Bringing murderers of Jews to trial was known in Ashkenazi Jewish culture as “taking revenge” and was by no means a new phenomenon in the mid-seventeenth century.³⁴ Still, a contemporary authority, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Krokmal, originally from Kraków but living in Moravia during the wars, explained the purpose of this kind of revenge as follows: “If, God Forbid, [we] did not take revenge on the murderer, then Jewish blood would be worthless and people would continue to treat them [i.e., the Jews] in this way. This would endanger every Jew on the roads.”³⁵ In this sense, legal “revenge” was a communal imperative. In fact, in quieter times, these prosecutions were supported by the local community, which sometimes even covered all the costs.³⁶ The postwar depression meant that communal institutions generally did not have the resources to help. In his responsum, Krokmal ruled that the community should only pay if special expenses were incurred, such as hiring a lawyer or giving bribes.

Bringing such a prosecution had implications beyond the communal. First and foremost, it allowed surviving family members the satisfaction of feeling that justice had been done. There was a financial incentive, too. According to the General Privilege of Polish Jewry, renewed by each new Polish king on his accession, anyone convicted of murdering a Jew had to pay a fine, half of which went to the victim's family and the other half to the Royal Treasury.³⁷

The use of the term "revenge" for these acts of prosecution is interesting because it brings them into a kind of dialogue with Jewish liturgy.³⁸ Almost all memorial prayers, whether dealing with contemporary events or with the Jews' suffering in antiquity, include some kind of call for Divine Revenge on the non-Jewish murderers. That vengeance would be seen only at the end of days, so no matter how deeply felt the Jews' belief that God would indeed avenge their suffering, it did not assuage their feelings of anger and helplessness in their present circumstances.

Bracketing the religious passivity of the prayers together with the active prosecution of the murderers under the single rubric of revenge allowed contemporary Jews to feel that their legal actions were in some way an expression of God's will. More than that, it gave them the sense that God was not simply allowing them to suffer year after year until the arrival of the messianic age. Instead He was encouraging Jews to play an active role in their own fate, in which He Himself was taking a hand. There must have been a great deal of satisfaction in that.

In times of great trauma, such as the mid-seventeenth-century wars discussed here, the turn to the courts had an added benefit. Modern research on how individuals overcome traumatic experience suggests that the quest for revenge, which is often expressed in various vengeful fantasies, is not helpful in the healing process:

In the third stage of recovery, the survivor . . . recognizes that the trauma cannot be undone and that her wishes for compensation or revenge can never truly be fulfilled. She also recognizes, however, that holding the perpetrator responsible for his crimes is important not only for her personal well-being but also for the health of the larger society.³⁹

By telescoping the need for revenge with the search for justice, seventeenth-century Jewish society seems to have overcome the dichotomy expressed in this quote. One might even speculate that by providing outlets for revenge in both liturgy and litigation, it allowed the traumatized Jews of

Poland-Lithuania to sublimate their dark fantasies and channel the harmful feelings in directions more conducive to their mental health.

Thus in social, economic, religious, legal, and possibly even psychological terms, the Jewish survivors, rebuilding their shattered lives, also helped create a very solid foundation for the future growth of their communities. This was a process not without tensions and difficulties, and there was much suffering along the way. Still as the 1650s progressed and made way for the 1660s, the Jews of Poland-Lithuania were able to position themselves for future growth and development.

Toward the Future

The decades after the end of the wars saw Polish-Lithuanian Jewry consolidate its position in the towns. Previously, they had often had to live in a cramped Jewish quarter a good distance away from the main market square even in the private, noble-owned towns. As the second half of the seventeenth century progressed, however, Jews began to move into the houses around the market square—any town's economic hub.⁴⁰

Mordechai Nadav found the same phenomenon for the Jews of Pinsk and concluded that flight had actually given the Jews an advantage over the Christians who had remained behind. The latter group lost everything in the various destructions of the town while the Jews—at least those who only fled locally—were able to preserve some of their wealth. In that situation, the poverty-stricken townspeople often turned to agriculture to survive, tending the lands and gardens they had been given around the town. The Jewish community, which had no agricultural land of its own, was left free to move into much more central positions both in the urban markets and within the town itself.⁴¹

This kind of repositioning seems to have been a general phenomenon. One of the mechanisms Jews used to acquire houses previously owned by Christians was to take them in lieu of debts.⁴² Another was to rebuild property at their own expense and take possession until the previous owner could pay his share, by which time it was hard to dislodge them.⁴³ In some cases, the town council responded angrily to this development, but there was little it could do.⁴⁴ Even in Slutsk, where the governors and the town council joined forces to expel the refugees in 1659, the Jews managed to purchase over three-quarters of the houses around the market square over the following twenty-five years.⁴⁵ By the century's end, Jews were clearly a dominant force in the towns, particularly the small towns of

the Commonwealth's eastern regions, whose economy was based largely on the sale of agricultural produce.

The large royal towns of western Poland, particularly Kraków, Poznań, Gdańsk, and Lublin, did not witness this development, presumably because their town councils were strong enough to prevent it. It was in the private towns and the smaller royal towns, where the noble governor had significant freedom of action, that the Jews did particularly well.

Stefan Bidziński, royal governor (in Polish, *starosta*) of the small town of Chęciny in southern Poland, explained why he supported increased Jewish settlement in the introduction to the privilege he granted to the town's Jewish community in 1668:

Jews once lived in . . . Chęciny but were later burnt [out] and destroyed by the Cossack and Swedish invasions—[and others] were forced to flee by the plague. . . . [So,] taking into account . . . the [fact that] the town was later sacked and . . . [the fact] that the Jews were previously settled here, and [taking] particular [note of] the benefits which will accrue [from them] . . . and in order that the Royal incomes (from which the *starostwo* also benefits) should not be lost, I hereby grant them my . . . license to buy empty plots in the market square and on the streets [of the town] and develop them . . . [as well as freedom of trade].⁴⁶

The *starosta* gave two main reasons why he was granting the Jews this very favorable privilege. The first was that their settlement was nothing new; they had lived in Chęciny before the wars. The second was that, in return for letting them develop the town and its markets, he wanted them to create more wealth, which would translate into greater income for both the king and himself as governor.

The first argument was not strong. Though Jews had indeed lived in Chęciny before 1648, their presence had been tiny. In 1629, there had been only 24 Jewish families in the town out of 327.⁴⁷ It was clearly not their prewar contribution to urban life that persuaded Bidziński to entice them back with this privilege. What he really seems to have expected is that the Jews would be a major force in pulling the town out of the slump caused by Cossack and Swedish invasions. They seem to have answered his call. By the mid-eleventh century Jews owned 65 houses in town—17 of these on the market square. This made them a significant proportion of the urban population and helped enrich the town and its governor.⁴⁸

Chęciny was by no means the only town to see Jews returning or immigrating in the wake of the wars. Jews seem to have negotiated terms of settlement, in the form of community privileges, in towns owned or run

by members of the nobility, especially the fabulously wealthy and powerful magnates.⁴⁹ It was this last group above all that had the resources to undertake the processes of reconstruction that were vital for the Commonwealth after so many years of fighting. Having exploited Jewish economic skills to improve the income from their estates in the period before 1648, they quite naturally returned to the Jews when they began to rehabilitate the economic basis of their lands in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁵⁰

Though Polish-Lithuanian Jewry had received a number of potentially knockout blows from 1648 to 1667, it had displayed remarkable resilience. By the time the magnates began to call on them, the processes of community rebuilding and socioeconomic reconstruction were far enough advanced that the Jews were able to take up their invitation. Beyond this, the relative weakness of the non-Jewish townspeople meant that the pre-war economic relationship between magnates and Jews not only resumed but in fact intensified. And since the magnates would become the major political, social, and economic force in Poland-Lithuania for at least the next century, the Jews soon found themselves in a much more comfortable position, able to leave the traumas of the past behind them and move into the future with some confidence.⁵¹

Resolution

IT IS PROBABLY TRUE that there is never a really good solution to a refugee crisis. There is too much suffering on a mass scale and too many attendant problems to allow for satisfactory treatment. Mostly it is a question of responding to urgent problems as they arise and improvising answers on the spot. This certainly seems to have been the case in the seventeenth-century Commonwealth, where there were no strong central authorities, non-Jewish or Jewish, to implement broad principles of policy. Even those bodies that did exist, such as the Jewish regional councils, could not formulate a coherent plan. As masses of indigent Jews entered Lithuania from Ukraine, for example, the Lithuanian Jewish Council issued a string of different legislative orders over a period of years in an attempt to keep a measure of control over the situation. Nothing that they did could achieve that, so different solutions were tried each time. Nonetheless, though it was unable to contain the problem, matters did not seem to spin totally out of control. Perhaps this was the most that could be hoped for.

If truth be told, in face of the terrible losses, population movements, sickness, and poverty suffered by the Jews of the Commonwealth from 1648 to 1667, simply containing the problem was no mean feat. In a conservative estimate, the Jewish population lost some 40,000 people. The deaths were mostly a result of fighting within the war zone and of the after-effects of flight (including sickness and plague). To these must be added the Jews who left the country, either as captives or of their own free will, and those who converted to Christianity, never to return. Altogether, this made up some 10 to 20 percent of the total Jewish population. In Ukraine the losses reached a staggering 40–50 percent.¹

The Jews' financial losses during the wars were vast, too. Much of their property, including real estate, was destroyed in the fighting, with

more abandoned or stolen during their flight. To this should be added the enormous drain of taking to the road for long periods of wartime with little or no income. On top of these individual losses, the authorities levied extraordinary taxes on the Jewish communities, which could also face various demands from the different military forces they encountered.

It was in these conditions that Polish-Lithuanian Jewry had to find some way of dealing with the refugee issue itself. It must have seemed never-ending, for during the period of the wars, there was a constant stream of Jewish refugees, first fleeing the fighting, then looking for somewhere to stay, and finally, in part at least, returning home. These were mostly individuals or families desperately trying to stay alive (though in the early period of the Swedish and Russian wars, some communities organized to leave *en masse*). Mostly poor, and often ill, the refugees became an additional burden on the communities they traveled through or stopped in.

The best solutions seem to have been found on the local level. In individual communities, like Slutzk and Kraków, refugees were taken into private homes and the communal monopoly over economic activity in the town was also relaxed to allow them to work. This was not a perfect solution. The non-Jewish authorities, who wanted to keep the local Jewish population as small as possible, could take measures to get rid of the refugees, leading to great tension. The crowded conditions also posed a health risk and made outbreaks of plague even more serious than they would otherwise have been. Nonetheless, many of the refugees were able to find a place to stay and take stock of their situation before moving on—either back home or out of the country.

Women seem to have played important roles in refugee society, both during their flight and on their return home. This could involve no little personal bravery, as we saw in the case of the refugee woman confronting her husband's murderers in their flight from Ukraine. In fact, women seemed to have faced greater threats of violence than men: in addition to the kinds of violence and murder inflicted on all Jews, Jewish women were also targeted for their bodies, which the mob wanted to defile either through rape or through brutal attacks on their reproductive organs. In addition, they had to deal with serious suspicion, not to say hostility, in male-dominated society, concerning, among other things, their loyalty to their religion and their faithfulness to their husbands. Nonetheless, when it came to reconstituting their and their families' lives in the wake of the uprising, the refugee women were active not only in their economic

activity (a continuation of prewar trends) but also in bringing non-Jewish murderers to justice.

Looking after masses of poor and frightened refugees in the places they found themselves was not cheap. Communal budgets were very often overstretched. Under the weight of outbreaks of plague, like that in Kraków in 1652, they more or less collapsed. A number of communities swallowed their pride and began to send letters or representatives to wealthy communities abroad to raise the money they needed. How much help this was is not entirely clear.

The religious and social issues raised by the wars—and particularly the experience of flight—were also quite intractable. Efforts to bring back converts were only partially successful: a royal order was obtained permitting Jews who had converted to Orthodox Christianity to return, but it did not help converts to Catholicism. On the other hand, the policy of welcoming back returning converts, particularly women, was not universally adopted. The issue of *agunot* proved similarly difficult to resolve satisfactorily. Thus women seem to have faced greater challenges than men. Simply surviving the attacks and, if necessary, returning to Judaism were not enough. On their return home, many continued to suffer under an additional burden of suspicion because they were women, which must have made their reintegration all the more difficult.

In fact, the only policies that seem to have been widely adopted were in the areas of religion and culture. Polish-Lithuanian Jewry did agree to establish a special day of fasting and remembrance, to be held annually on 20 Sivan. It served Jewish society on a number of levels. It provided a controlled and communal way for the many who had suffered traumatic experiences during the wars both to remember what they had gone through and to integrate those memories into their daily experience. By also evoking a medieval blood libel, it allowed the Jews to connect their personal experiences with the long history of Jewish suffering, which formed part of God's relationship with His people, Israel.

In an equally remarkable way, seventeenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Jews also managed to sublimate the natural—but psychologically harmful—desire for revenge on their attackers. Calls for divine vengeance formed part of much of the liturgical poetry composed for the fast of 20 Sivan, as for many Jewish memorial prayers, yet it was expected only at the end of days. However, contemporary Jews had another means of extracting “revenge.” In their culture, this meant doing everything in their power to bring the murderers of their loved ones to justice (as they understood

it). This was an empowering act, which might have helped relieve the feeling of helplessness that accompanies traumatic experiences.

While these measures could not cure the most seriously—that is, pathologically—traumatized, they could go some way toward helping the majority of the Jewish population whose suffering was not so extreme. Perhaps most significantly for the Jews of the time, they provided a sense that the disaster that had overcome them was not a sign that God had abandoned them. Even the seemingly mundane act of bringing the guilty to trial must have seemed somehow to make them part of the Divine plan for vengeance.

While each of the measures discussed here provided only a partial solution to the problems facing the Jews of the Commonwealth, when taken together they seem to have been enough to help survivors get back on their feet relatively quickly. As the ravaged communities filled up with returning refugees, they began expanding into areas of town and sectors of the market previously closed to them. The reason seems to have been that they were able to resume their former lives more quickly than were their non-Jewish neighbors, who proved unable to check the Jews' growth as they had done in the past.

So why were the Jews able to recover more quickly? One possible answer might be found in the act of flight itself. However difficult surviving as a refugee might have been, it was perhaps safer than staying in town as a target for the different armies that came rampaging through. Refugees, particularly those who left in an organized way, might also have been able to save more of their property than the townspeople who were looted on multiple occasions.² This raises the question of whether the losses suffered by the Jews were actually smaller than those of their non-Jewish neighbors. Comparative data from Ukraine are not available, but it seems likely, on the whole, that the local Ruthenian population would not have suffered losses as great as those of the Jews, who were a major (if secondary) target in all the fighting. Organized flight was also very rare there.

Things were different in the western parts of Poland affected by the Swedish war, where, initially at least, Jewish communities were able to plan their responses ahead of time. Demographic data suggest that the total urban population of these regions might have fallen by as much as 70 percent during the wars.³ Since these studies do not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews, it is hard to know precisely what the relative proportions were. However, bearing in mind that Jews did not make up a very significant part of the urban population of Great and Little Poland

before 1648, it might be argued that the brunt of the losses in those regions fell on the non-Jewish townspeople.

Perhaps the major difference between the Jewish and non-Jewish urban populations in the postwar years was also demographic. Beginning sometime in the 1670s, Polish-Lithuanian Jewry entered a period of rapid demographic growth, which allowed it to overcome its wartime losses and expand quickly. It continued throughout the eighteenth century, giving Polish-Lithuanian Jewry a population of some 1,000,000 at the turn of the nineteenth century. For the non-Jewish townspeople, on the other hand, the decades after the Peace of Andrusów were a period of demographic stagnation, which did not end until well into the eighteenth century. This difference cannot be explained by means of survival rates during the war. Rather it was an outcome of the Jewish community's greater success in dealing with the problems raised by the wars and so creating a socioeconomic (and cultural-religious) platform for population growth.

In the end, the partial solutions that Jewish society found to the challenges of the wartime years seem to have been enough. With their help, the shattered communities were able to absorb the refugees and begin the process of rebuilding their lives. That is why when the magnates undertook the task of postwar reconstruction and wanted to use Jews to help them, the communities of the Commonwealth were socially, economically, religiously, and psychologically ready to answer their call.

The secret of the Jews' success seems, then, to have been their ability to adapt to changing conditions, their flexibility under pressure, and their skill in improvising partial solutions to difficult problems. It is particularly noteworthy that while most Jews experienced the traumas of the war years as individuals, families, or small groups, the postwar reconstruction was carried out to a great extent as communities, suggesting that the strength of communal structures and a sense of mutual responsibility were of key importance, too.