



Yankel's name is known only through his son, Hirsz Jankielewicz: Hirsh son of Yankel. As Hirsh was registered in the above Polish census of 1795 as 62 yrs. old at the time, i.e. born about 1733, his father Yankel could have been born between 1700-1715.

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**Yankel or Jacob** is the earliest known ancestor of the Chavezon family although known only indirectly through his sons' patronymics "Iankielewicz" ("son of Yankel") and Iakobowicz ("son of Jacob"). From the fact that his youngest *known* son Hirsz Iankielewicz (Hirsh son of Yankel) was born around 1733 we may surmise that if Yankel was in his late teens to thirties at the time, then he himself may have been born between 1700-1715. His exact birthplace is not known, but it is likely that it was in or not far from the town where his sons and grandsons lived: Zhagore (Yiddish: Zhager) on the northern border of the ancient Duchy of Lithuania and modern Latvia. Further evidence supports this: he had another son, Lezer Iakobowicz, who was registered in New Zhagore in 1735 and Abram Iakobowicz was possibly a third (born 1740). We may surmise the year of Yankel's death from the birth-date of his grandson, Iankiel Hircowicz, born 1750. As the latter was apparently named after his grandfather, then Yankel's death would have occurred before that year since Ashkenazi custom discourages the naming of children after living relatives. In this way, Yankel's life-story can be built around the years 1700/1715 to 1745/1750.



Even we accept the outside years (1700-1750), 50 years was not a long life even by the standards of the time and it could well have been shorter than that. Historical considerations show that Yankel's early years coincided with a period of great hardship in Zhager: not only famine and plague (1708), but also the Great Northern War between Lithuania's neighbours (1700-1721).<sup>1</sup> When Lithuania itself was finally

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<sup>1</sup> The Great Northern War was undertaken by an alliance of Russia, Denmark and Prussia against Swedish expansionism in eastern Europe and invasion of the Dual Kingdom of Lithuania-Poland (see above map).

dragged into the war directly (1705-1721), northern regions of the country - including Zhager - were invaded by Swedish troops (1710-1715).<sup>2</sup>

However, even after the Great Northern War when the region began to recover economically and new Jewish communities were slowly established throughout Lithuania, the local burghers of Old Zhager (*Store Zhagore*) had the King's commissioner for the region expel most if not all the Jews from the township on the west side of the River Svete (Shventa) in the

year 1731. Although the commissioner in charge of the administration of the townships of this region was responsible for the order, the motivation behind it was a result of the pressure of the local burghers who resented economic competition with the Jewish



Old and New Zhager divided by the River Svete, early 20th cent

community at a period of recovery. If Yankel had lived in the old town, he likely moved to New Zhager (*Nowi Zhagore*) on the other side of the river since it was there that his sons were later registered for tax and thus likely born there. They included Hirsh Iakobowicz (1733- abt.1796), Lezer Iakobowicz (1735-after 1784) and possibly Abram Iakobowicz (1740-1784).

Things improved by 1740 when a mighty Polish grandee with pro-Jewish sympathies by the name of Prince Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (1702-1762) took charge of the townships of the Kaunas region (Siauliai (Shavli), Joniskis, Radziwilliski, Zhagore (Zhager) and Grodziya).<sup>3</sup> Unlike their subjects, the Radziwills were at times Calvinist or Lutheran and were relatively free of anti-Jewish



<sup>2</sup> More details in: Marsha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania – A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945* (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 40-43.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Michał Kazimierz Radziwiłł (1702-1762), i.e. the prince of that name known as "Rybeńko"; cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michal\\_Kazimierz\\_Rybenko\\_Radziwill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michal_Kazimierz_Rybenko_Radziwill). He had close contact with this region first as castellan and then Voivod (duke) of Vilnius (1742, 1744) with the Kaunas area under his control.

prejudice in contrast to the local Catholic hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> Initially, he found the royal estates (Oeconomia) still much impoverished and encouraged Jewish settlement on them for the sake of their development.<sup>5</sup> This was especially true of New Zhager on the right hand side of the river.<sup>6</sup>

Although the new town had been established long before in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is from the time of the expulsion that we find the tradition of two distinct Jewish communities (*kehilot*) each with its own Rabbi, shochet and synagogues.

There was also a physical and social distinction: Old Zhager described by Dov Levin as comprising an overcrowded shtetel with unsanitary conditions, "with Jew



and peasant cramped together" - while New Zhager was planned and laid out by the standards of the Age of Enlightenment with new open market-places occupied entirely by Jews by the year 1790.<sup>7</sup>

The new settlement was more open to modern influences from Ducal Prussia to the south and the Hanseatic Baltic city alliance to the north and west. A few years later in 1746, the same burghers of Old Zhager relented the economic losses of Jewish trade and requested a relaxation of the expulsion order carried out under the previous administration.<sup>8</sup> However, the main Jewish community still continued to be centred in

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D.M. Lipmann, Letoldot Hajehudim Bekaunas t.y.l Zydu istorija Kaune ir Viliampoleje = Zur Geschichte der Juden in Kaunas u. Slabodka (Kedeiniai, 1931; Hebrew), who notes that their power to protect the Jews from expulsion waxed and waned (p. 74 ff).

<sup>5</sup> This policy had its roots among his Radziwilli predecessors : Adam Teller (*Money, Power and Influence - The Jews on the Radziwill Estates in Eighteenth Century Lithuania* (Jerusalem 2006; Hebrew), pp. 46-51.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Teller (*Money, Power and Influence - The Jews on the Radziwill Estates in Eighteenth Century Lithuania* (Jerusalem 2006; Hebrew), pp. 52-3; Dov Levin, *Pinkas Ha-Kehillot Lita: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania from their Foundation Until after the Holocaust* (Jerusalem; Hebrew), 277-278.

<sup>7</sup> Dov Levin, *Pinkas Ha-Kehillot Lita: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania from their Foundation Until after the Holocaust* (Jerusalem; Hebrew), 278, who also ascribes the cholera outbreaks to the conditions in the town.

<sup>8</sup> Teller cites a petition of 1746 where the local burghers requested that a Jew Ber son of Meir be permitted to settle and trade in Old Zhager as the town's economics had suffered following the expulsion of the Jews in 1730 (p 219).

New Zhager where as many as 30 Jewish families are known to have leased property from Prince Michael Casmir Radziwill in 1750<sup>9</sup> around the time of Yankel's presumed death.

The documents do not state Yankel's own occupation. His sons Hirsh and Abram were managers of inns leased from the Radziwills but while it is likely that they learned this trade from their father, it is equally possible that Yankel was a tailor like his other son, Lezer.

While his grandsons by all three sons were registered under the surname "Chavezon" in future Russian census, it is unclear when or why this name was first created. As is well known Jews were obliged by the new Russian authorities to register themselves with official surnames around 1821.<sup>10</sup> Previously individuals had been distinguished only by adding their father's name to their own as a patronymic. It was unusual but not unknown for individuals to be distinguished by their mother's name (matronymic) as in the case of Chavezon (in Yiddish, *Chaveson* = "Chava's son" i.e. "Eve's son"). At one stage, a mother's name Chava must have ceased to be an **unofficial** matronymic used to distinguish one Yankel or Hirsh from another and was adopted as an **official** surname by descendants of all three sons. Since all three branches separately adopted the same official surname (Chavezon) this would perhaps indicate that "Chava's son" was an unofficial matronymic employed from before the official adoption of surnames, i.e. from the period of Yankel's sons or Yankel himself.

In most cases, distinguishing a son by his mother's name occurred either when the father was unknown, had died early or the mother was especially important in society. In this case, however, Yankel himself was **not** unknown since his sons were officially distinguished by their father's name "Yankielowicz" and "Iakobowicz" (their patronymic) in the early Polish census. However, if Yankel had died young, this could account for his sons to be distinguished by their mother's name unofficially in their community, but unfortunately we do not know the name of Yankel's wife in order to say whether she was indeed the family's matriarchal Chava or Eve who passed her

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<sup>9</sup> Teller, p. 58 n. 89. Jews in the Old city were mainly occupied as cobblers, tailors or small traders while those in New Zhager worked in wholesale and export (Dov Levin, p. 278), which included salt, metal, honey, wax and hides and grain (details in: Nancy & Stuart Schoenburg, Lithuanian Jewish Communities, N.Y.-London 1991, 389-390).

<sup>10</sup> A. Beider, A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire (NY, 1993, Avoteynu).

name down to future generations. Moreover, it would make more sense that it did not predate Yankel: for if he had been known unofficially as Chava's son, it is unlikely that his own sons would be known by their grandmother's name, but by their own mother's. So again we may surmise that each of Yankel's sons was unofficially known as Chava's son through their mother, Yankel's wife, and not their grandmother.

Yankel himself is a common ancestor of the Lewis family of Wales-Scotland, the Chaveson-Sheshkin families of Riga Latvia, the Haveson family of Iowa and the Kussman families from USA and UK. In many of them the name Yankel or Jack continued to be handed down over many generations down to modern times.

Continue with his son: Hirsz Iankielewicz