Unequal Opportunities
The Economic Possibilities Open to Jewish Women in 18th Century Poland-Lithuania

Adam Teller, University of Haifa, Israel

ABSTRACT:
This presentation is for the following text(s):

- Supplication
- The Meeting of The Holy Council [of the Lithuanian Land] at Mir, November-December 1751

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop
Supplication
Suplika
Bunim Szlomowicz, 18th Century
Translated by Adam Teller, University of Haifa, Israel

Mighty and Honourable Lord Podczaszy of Kalisz, My Gracious Lord and Benefactor.

I, poor, miserable and vexed man, citizen of Sluck, of a respectable and wealthy family here for many generations, [have been] completely broken and brought to ruin by an evil woman, who is simply driving me to my death. I am in need of assistance and having no-one to turn to but the Lord God and my Most Gracious Lord and Benefactor, appeal to you and request pious justice for these reasons and causes.

1. The dowry document to the value of 500 zloties which she produced was incorrectly drawn up in a village by her relative, since, when a man marries a Jewish widow, she has to give him 200 zloties. According to the Law of Moses, there is absolutely no need for her to give a dowry, but for the general good of the married state, the Rabbis found it [right] for the widow to give 100 zloties. The husband makes an adjustment of the second hundred zloties out of goodwill. She deserves only 200 Lithuanian zloties on the basis of a good emissary [?], witness to the signature and the husband.

2. The Kahal's decree of two years ago that were I to beat her as she pretended [I had], I should pay her 1300 zloties, came out against this as yet undiscovered slanderer who had maliciously accused me of beating her and wounding her. She then had to take an oath that she would not scold me and I had to swear that I would not beat her. Since she was willing to take her oath and I was not, I had to pay her a fine of 1000 zl., as well as 100 Lithuanian Kopa dowry and an extra-dowry payment of 50 zl. This comes to 1300 zloties. Then, having come to our agreement, we took our mutual oaths and have lived together peacefully till no. Then, the promised 1000 zl. was annulled.

3. She gave me nothing at all as a dowry. In particular, [there was]a waistcoat which she still has, [and which] she had valued at 100 zl., as well as two promissory notes drawn on two Jews from Ruthenia to the value of 100 Lithuanian Kopa; this I am ready to return to her. I have a written document and witnesses to prove that when she was in
Minsk on her way to [our] wedding, she borrowed a few zloty for food and also to pay
the driver who brought her [here]; I had to pay this from my own pouch.; Her relative
Liman Dawydowicz can testify to this.

4. Concerning the apartment in my father's house which I bought, I paid for it with [the
income] from my hard-earned labour, which I can prove with documents.

I had 45 Taler Bity in cash, which makes zl. 300
I sold a copper kettle worth 400 zl. For zl. 500
I sold two silver strips for zl. 130
I sold my daughter's coral and pearl [beads] for zl. 60
Two of my clothes, i.e. a vest and a coat for zl. 120
I sold my books in Radoszkiewica and here in Sluck for zl. 330
A certain pawn which I had already redeemed for the
debt owed by my father to a townswoman
from Saskiewicz zl. 150
Which makes in total zl. 1590

With this money I paid my father's debts, as specified below, viz.
To the noble Mr. Maior
To the noble Mr. Boriszewski
To the noble Mr. Korodnicz
To the noble Mr. Benkin
To the noble Mr. Nieczkowski
To a townswoman from Saskiewicz.

All these debts added up to a capital sum of 1,600 zloties, as a proof of which I have
receipts from each of the noble gentlemen. This is apart from the interest which I paid to
these gentlemen from the [fruit of] my labor [to the tune] of 300 zl.

5. As to the deeds and virtue of this woman, which I only discovered after marrying her, I
must now write to my gracious Lord and Benefactor for [his] information.

The Evil Deeds of My Wife Pozia

1. While she was living with her first husband in Ruthenia, he traded with another Jew for
six jars of vodka. On account of a dispute between them, she out of her vindictive spite
[?], took all the jars and secretly poured the vodka onto the floor. She should have been
severely punished by the manorial court, [but] fled to her mother's in Holowczyno,
having first robbed her husband. It was with great difficulty that he got his goods back.
Having found out [what kind of a person] she was and after further misdeeds and
misdemeanors, he gave her a letter of divorce and sent her away without the dowry.

2. Since she was sent to Smolany in disgrace, on the way she stayed overnight in a village
with the Wojt (mayor) – a kindly and prosperous man. Then, in her usual way of causing
people trouble, she trumped up a charge against this man that he had robbed her of a
few hundred zloties. The local manor ordered him and his household to take an oath [that the charges were false]. Since he never took the oath, he had to settle with her to the sum of 30 Lithuanian Kopa.

3. When she was still [living] in her grandfather's home, he kept her cousin as his housekeeper, since he trusted her in all respects. He did not view her [i.e. Pozia] as a virtuous woman. In an attack of spite, she invented a charge of adultery against her female relative. She gave a Jewish rustic cloth for a robe and he testified that the good-hearted woman [had done] this deed. When it came out that this Pozia had purchased the witness, both she and the witness received a very heavy fine from the Jewish elders of the Bialorussian Region[al Council]. She had been engaged to a certain widower from Mohilew. He very soon found out about her virtue, fled to Bychow and got married there [to someone else]. Myself, all unknowing, The Lord God punished; I did not bring a friend or a shepherd into my home, but a wolf. She does not behave honorably and the blessings which we had previously [enjoyed] are gone - the saloon [trade] and property have vanished from my father's house.

4. In addition, in her spite she not only scolds, rebukes, and beats my children from my first marriage, but my daughter did not even have to say a word against her before she spitefully poured something into her mouth while she slept... drink; the girl almost choked and was ill for a number of weeks.

5. She wanted to bring about the death of my father in order to take control of everything. She paid sorcerers to kill him, but since they knew him of old as a kindy man, they did not want to kill him completely. The spell they put upon him almost [worked] but did not take him out of this world.

6. Seeing that she had not killed him with witchcraft, she made up her mind to buy arsenic, ostensibly for mice, and poured it into my father's meal plate. This almost killed him and two children who were staying with him... sees that she does evil deeds when protected.

Since it is hard to put down on paper all her misdeeds, our Gracious Lord and Benefactor, you can know her [true nature] from [the fact] that, though I was innocent, she had me locked up in the dungeon on Rosh Hashanah, precisely... [when] Christians take pity on Jews and have them set free for the holiday; since she has no fear of God, she did not do so.

I bring it to the attention and pious wisdom of My most Gracious Lord that due to this prostitute and trollop, from whom I do not have children, I who am settled here, have to wander the world begging for bread. I have two daughters to marry off, and I do not have even a piece of bread to put in my mouth. Thus has she ruined me and this shameful woman is going to take away the apartment which I bought with the sweat of my brow, and not let me in there.

She might have witchcraft, but I, shedding my bitter tears for Divine Mercy, request that
she be tried for her evil deeds and finally expelled from the city. And I and my father, as faithful burghers and local subjects for ages, retaining our possessions, will be obliged to pray to the Divine Majesty for many happy years of rule [for your Lordship].

My most Gracious Lord and Benefactor, I [remain] your lowest footstool,

Bunim Szlomowicz, Citizen of Sluck

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop
EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources

Volume 3: Gender, Family, and Social Structures, 2006, Wesleyan University,
Middletown, CT

Suplika
Supplication
Bunim Szlomowicz, 18th Century

Prepared by Adam Teller, University of Haifa, Israel

Wielmożny Mościwy Panie Podczaszy Kaliski Panie a Panie moy Miłościwy y Dobrodzieiu.

Ja ubogi a mizernie utrapiroń człek z dziadow pradziadow obywatel tuteyszy słucki z zacnego y bogatego domu. A przez złą zoną wniwecz obrucny y do szcetenu zgubiony owa zgola ginac mi sie przychodzi. Ratunku potrzebuię a nie maiąc się do kogo iedną do Pana Boga a do Wmsci MM Pana y Dobrodzieiu uciekam się a prosze pobożnej sprawiedliwosci z tych miar y przyczyn.

1. Že list wianowany ktory ona pokazuie na złotych 500 nie prawnie na wsi pisany sialo krewny iej, gdy wdowka żydowka za żone poymuiac by mu y 200 wniosła. Według prawa Møyżeszego wiana całe nie przynależy oney dawac y zapisywac lecz dla pokoia pospolitego w stanie małżenskim wynalezli Rabinowie zapisywac wddie 100 złota. Drugi zas 100 złotych mąż z dobrej swej woli czyni oprawe nalezy iej tylko 200 zł litewskie według poslem ź y rek y menża.

2. Dekrett kahałowy od lat 2 ferowany ze gdybym ią bił iako udała abym jej zapłacił 1300 zł, ten wypały ieszcze iako przeciwy niedoznaney ieszcze potwarce ktoraz myślając biegała skarżyc iakobym ią bił kalezał. Miała tedy ona przysióndz, abymic nie lâiała a iam miał przysiądz, abym ią nie bił, a gdyby one przysięngę swoia wyconała, a iabym nie chciał wykonac, mam 1000 zł sztroff oney zaplacic, z osobna 100 Kop Lit wiana a przy wianku zł 50. Co wynasza zł 1300. Zgodziwszy sie tedy między sobą oboiesmynie przysięgali y dotychczas spokojnie, mieszkał, ten tedy 1000 zł. zaręckie całe kasowany.

3. Posagu mi całe nic niedała. Szczegulną kabat ktury y teraz u siebie ma, szacowała go, byla w złotych 100, a do tego dwa mamrany na 2 Żydów na Rusi mieszkaia, na 100 Kop Lit, y te wrocic jej gotowem. Na dowod tego mam document listowne a do tego świadki że ona do mnie na wesele iadąc w Minsku na strawa kilka złotych pożywiała a w ostatku y za fure furmanow ktory ia przywioz ią z swego worku zaplacic musialem.
Niech jej krewny Liman Dawydowicz na to świadczy.

4. Co się zas tycze czensci domu oycowskiego com kupił, to za moie krwawe prace kupiłem, co dokumentalnie dowiade

| Gotowych pieniedzy miałem talery bitych 45 czyni tynff? | zł. 300 |
| Kocioł miedzi[ny] złotych 400 kosztujący sprzedałem | zł. 500 |
| Pasow srebrnych dwa sprzedałem za | zł. 130 |
| Korale z perłami corki mej sprzedałem za | zł. 60 |
| Sukien moich pare to jest szubke y zupan za | zł. 120 |
| Xiąg moich sprzedałem w Radoszkiewicach y tu w | zł. 330 |
| Słucku za | zł. 300 |
| Zastawę pewną ktorom iuż zrencył w długu oyca mego | zł. 150 |
| Mieszczanca saskiewiczowej winnego | zł. 1590 |
| Co wszystkigo wynasza | zł. 1590 |

Temym pieniedzmi opłacał długi rodzica mego niżey specificowanym iako to:

Imsci Panu Maiorowi
Imsci Panu Boriszewskiemu
Imsci Panu Korodniczemu
Imsci Panu Benkinowi
Imsci Panu Nieczkowskiemu
Mieszczance Saskiewiczowej

Ktore te długi wszystkie kapitalnej summy wynaszali zł. 1600 iako na dowod mam od kazdego z ich Msciow kwity, oprocz prowiziey ktorom tymże Ich Msciom płaci z pracy moiej zł. 300.

5. Do uczynków zas y cnoty oney ktorom dopiro po ojenisnii się z nią dowiedział, musze niekture wypisac do wiadomosci WMMM Pana y Dobrodzieia.

Złe uczynki Żony moiey Pozy[?]

1. Mieszkaiąc s pierwszym menżem swym na Rusi, który z drugim Żydem handlujàc, mieli gorzałki Kuff 6 a dla nieiakiego miedzy niemi zwady, ona ze złosci swej powyrywawszy z wszystkich kuff go idzie[??] gorzałkę tajemnię wszystko na ziemie wypusciła. Miał i a tedy dwor za to sondzic surowie, uciekła do Matki swej do Holowczyna, męża okradszy. Z wielką tedy trudnością odyşkàł mąż swoje do siebie a ią doswiadczywszą i po inszych postempkach y nierządkach dawszy list rozwodny wpendził ią od siebie bez wiana.


3. Gdy ieszcze w domu dziada swego była, który miał cios[?]eczna iey siostrę w domu
swym za gospodynią, ktorej sie we wszystkim zwierzył. A iey iako cnotliwej nie
dowierał. Ona na przekorz [?] ze złosci swey na krewną swojâ zmysliła cudzołotwo.
Dawszy parobkowi żydowskemu na kantusz sukna świadczył ten uczynek na poczciwa
białogłówę. Aże się to pokazało że ona Pozia świadka przekupiła, ona tedy z świadom
od starszyny Báło Ruskiey wielki sztrof odniesli. Zarenczyła się była za nieiakiego
wdowca Mohilewskiego. Ten iak prendko się dowiadal o jej cnocie, uniknuł do
Bychowa y tam się ożenił.

Mnie zas iako nie wiadomie, Pan Bog skarał, nie przacielem, nie pasterza ale wilka do
doumu [domu] swego wprowadził ten uczynek na poczciwa
bialoglow. Aże się to pokazało że ona Pozia swiadka przekupiła, ona tedy z świadom
od starszyny Báło Ruskiey wielki sztrof odniesli. Zarenczyła się była za nieiakiego
wdowca Mohilewskiego. Ten iak prendko się dowiadal o jej cnocie, uniknuł do
Bychowa y tam się ożenił.

4. A do tego ze złosci swey nie tylko lątac, besztaćcą y bijąc dzieci moie z pierwszą żoną
splodzone po kilka krotnym nie musiała dziewczyna moia nie cos przemowic przeciwo
niey, ona zezlosci swey spiacej dziewcinie pełną gembą naplicała czego... y pisac
[piąc?], mało się dziewczyna nie zatchnęła, kilka niedziel chorowac przez to musiała.

Rodzica megò o smierc przyprawic chciała, aby do wszystek opanowała. Czarownikow
naowny zacjała aby go umorzyli ażego go zdawnia za poczciwego znałcy niechcieli całe umorzyć,
iednak trząc na niego byli narzucili że mal y przez to z świata niezszedł.

6. Widzac ona że go czarami nie umorzył, kazała sobie arseniku kupic rzekomu na myszy a
potrawe rodzica mego wspawasy przez co on y dwoie dzieck przy nim naiadszy sie mal
niego umierali .. widzi że zle uadała się w protekcja.

Bo trudne iey wszystkie uczynki czyniące wypisac tylko w tym nasz mose Panie y
dobrodzieję moj miłośćwi ią doznasz że ona mie nie winnie na tak wielkie swiento na
trombki kazała do turmy zaprowadzić przecie .. Chrześcijanę nad Żydami małą
miłoserdzie y na takie święto z niewoli wypuszczaią gdyby ona Bogaboyną była to by tego
nie czyniła.

Do uwagi tedy pobożnego rozsądku WMMMM Pana y dobrodzieja podaie jezeli dla tcy
nierządnicy zawoloki [?] z kturą y dzieci nie mam, ja z dziadow moych osiadły mam od
dzieck pierwszey mey zona wswiał [wswiat?] ozebranym chlebie powlec się. Dwoie
corek mam na wydaniu za mąż a nie mam czym nawet kawalek chleba w gembę wlożyc.
Tak mie ża żona zgubila a nawet y domu czensc kturom za swą krawawą pracę kupił ma
mi to niecnotliwa odherac y mnie do niego nie przypuszać.

Jezeli ona przez czary ale ia przez Miłoserdzie Boskie krawawemi łzami oblewaiono sie
proszę aby ona według uczynków iey była sądzona, a w ostatk y z miasta wypendzona. A
ia y rodzic moy iako wierni mieszczanie y poddani tuteysi z wieku przy swey własności
zostawszy Maiestat Boski błagac powinni bendziemy za szczêśliwe dugoletne
panowanie.
W. Msci Pana y Dobrodzieia moiego miłościwego naynizszy podnożek Bunim Szłomowicz obywatel słucki.

**Archive:** Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych w Warszawie, Archiwum Radziwillowie XXIII, 137, pp. 114-115

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop
"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Earlier wise men and rabbis have deliberated on regulations and made added restrictions [to the law] to prevent women from going to the houses of non-Jews with various merchandise as mentioned in various previous councils. Now many years have gone by and generations passed – it is almost thirty years since the Council of the Land last met. For that reason many transgressors have appeared in all the communities and abandoned their womenfolk to making their living and supporting their families by doing this - their sons are almost considered bastards (mamzerim). Moreover, through their inconsiderate attitude they are harming the incomes of various householders and merchants in all the other communities. The community is unable to punish them since they make up the vast majority of the population. They have connections with the nobility in its palaces and courts. Moreover, they trespass [on others’ business] and commit sins in profaning the Sabbaths and festivals until they [profane] the whole Jewish religion, as we have all seen for ourselves.

For this reason we have come with the full force of our regulation together with the heavenly court: From today on, no woman shall take any merchandise to the houses of non-Jews, or priests and noblemen – not even in groups of two or three, for any reason. And all the communities must take care to ensure that this bad custom is done away with. And there should no women peddlers called tendlerke in any community in Lithuania. All the shopkeepers should be threatened with a great ban if they give them any merchandise from their shops. The merchants too should not give them any merchandise. Supervisors should be appointed in all the cities where they are to ensure that no woman should go with any merchandise to the houses of non-Jews for any reason whatever, in order to uproot and destroy this evil custom, so that the name of tendlerke should be mentioned no more. They should be pushed away, expelled, and
excommunicated from every Jewish community, their engagements should be stopped, and of course, their sons should not be circumcised, marriages not arranged for them, and [no-one should] stand close to them until they agree to give up this livelihood. It should not be possible even to talk about some woman going to non-Jewish houses, let alone for it to happen. And should any householder see a tendlerke, he may take her merchandise for himself without consulting any rabbi, leader, or judge, and [he may] of course cause her any harm, destroy or damage her goods in whatever way he can, doing whatever he wants. Moreover, the community leaders and judges in all the communities must back him up, help and support him to keep the goods of the tendlerke. And should anyone not support the householder, even by remaining passive, the householder may take a copy of this ruling, refuse to pay his communal taxes, to go to the tax-assessors and to declare his business tax, paying nothing until the tendlerke is tried and her goods given to him as unclaimed items. The beadles must obey this individual without consulting any rabbi, leader, or judge, under threat of losing their post, and transfer the tendlerke’s goods to the householder. Even if another householder or merchant shows that the goods were his and that he gave them to the tendlerke, this is not a valid claim, and the goods should remain with the householder as unclaimed items.

On every occasion on which the New Moon is blessed [in synagogue], one of the beadles should make [public] announcement that no merchant or shopkeeper should give any merchandise to a tendlerke - it is as though he has thrown his money away. On every Rosh Hashanah before the shofar is blown he must proclaim in the Great Synagogue that no woman shall go to the houses of non-Jews.

"Who knows but that God may turn and relent?" And he will gather our dispersed [people] speedily in our days. Amen. Selah.

This proclamation has validity and force from us, the leaders, elders, officers, heads of the Lithuanian Council, May Our Redeemer Protect it. Monday, 4th Kislev 5512 (22/11/1751), at the Holy Council of the Mir Community May Our Redeemer Protect it.

Signed Israel son of Yona Kahana z’l from Brisk
Signed David son of the Rabbi Moshe Yitzhak z’l from Brisk
Signed Zvi Hirsh son of the Wise Rabbi Dober z’l from Pinsk
Signed Yishay' son of Yitzhak z’l from Horodna
Signed Shlomo son of the Rabbi Haim son of the Wise Rabbi z’l from Horodna
Signed Avraham son of Yitzhak Isaac z’l from Pinsk
Signed Yehuda known as Leib Neides son of Yitzhak from Pinsk
Signed David son of Barukh Halevi from Vilna
Signed Eli’ son of Moshe Meisels from Pinsk, presently in Vilna
Signed Yehuda Yudel son of Abraham Halevi Horowitz z’l from Sluck
Signed Asher Zelig son of the Wise Rabbi Yosef z’l Frenkel, Scribe and Judge from Sluck
ועץ קודהש בקהלת הכהוש מיר
Va'ad kodesh bekehilot hakodesh Mir behodesh Heshvan Tkí`v, 1751/ג'שת"ב

 Prepared by Adam Teller, University of Haifa, Israel
נאום ישראלי ובו "היה חברנו" מ"ה" מועות י}"ל מבריסק
נאום כיב ירוש ברבר בינין מ"ה" דובער "ל מבריסק
נאום שיש" שב"א" כוהן י}"ל מבריסקה
נאום שלמה בחבר משה י}"ל פנקסנא
נאום אברום בנו"ז" רחמן י}"ל מבריסק
נאום יהודה חכם יש יירדיש ב"א" כוהן י}"ל מבריסק
נאום וד בר"א" מ"ה" ברוך הלוי מוהוליא
נאום אל" כוהן משי מירליו מפנקס ה"ה מוהוליא
נאום יהודה יידל בקח מ"ה" אברום בן רחל ויוהון גולד" ממלוזק
נאום ישראל ד"ל יהודי בברק מג"ה" היו"ז" פ"יינב"ל" מ"ל ממלוזק

mahor: ש"דובנוב (טור), פנקס מדינת ליטא, ברלין 1925, עמי'257-258

Publisher: S. Dubnow (ed.), Pinkas Medinat Lita, Berlin 1925

Copyright © 2012 Early Modern Workshop