



Money, Power, and Influence in Eighteenth-Century Lithuania: The Jews on the Radziwill Estates

Adam Teller

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It has often been claimed that Jews have a penchant for capitalism and capitalist economic activity. With this book, Adam Teller challenges that assumption. Examining how Jews achieved their extraordinary success within the late feudal economy of the eighteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, he shows that economic success did not necessarily come through any innate entrepreneurial skills, but through identifying and exploiting economic niches in the pre-modern economy—in particular, the monopoly on the sale of grain alcohol.

Jewish economic activity was a key factor in the development of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and it greatly enhanced the incomes, and thereby the social and political status, of the noble magnates, including the powerful Radziwill family. In turn, with the magnate's backing, Jews were able to leverage their own economic success into high status in estate society. Over time, relations within Jewish society began to change, putting less value on learning and pedigree and more on wealth and connections with the estate owners.

This groundbreaking book exemplifies how the study of Jewish economic history can shed light on a crucial mechanism of Jewish social integration. In the Polish-Lithuanian setting, Jews were simultaneously a despised religious minority and key economic players, with a consequent standing that few could afford to ignore.

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