

terwards. Jews involved in the wedding were also tried on the account of proselytism, but, to their defense, they claimed their ignorance of the fact that the woman was in fact a former Christian and were acquitted. But the fact that they needed to defend themselves highlights the continuous vulnerability and danger associated with accepting proselytes.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, another woman, Maryna Dawidowa of Vitebsk, a town in the eastern territories of present-day Belarus, was also tried and convicted of apostasy in Dubno. Unlike Wojciechówna, Dawidowa did not recant her beliefs and died a martyr's death.<sup>52</sup> According to records of the trial, after the death of her husband, Dawid Syrowajec, Maryna Dawidowa decided to "accept the Jewish faith." A formal conversion is never mentioned in the extant records. Having made this decision, she left her native Vitebsk on a horse, and about 50 miles away from her home town, so the court record states, she began to introduce herself as a Jewish woman. As she testified during her trial, she had received help from Jews until she reached the town of Dubno. In Dubno, she was arrested for apostasy, but it is not known who denounced her. She was asked whether she was willing to return to the Christian faith, but she steadfastly refused, stating "I do not want [to return to the Christian faith] and I am ready to die in the Jewish religion for the living God, because it is a better religion than your Christian religion, because your religion is false."<sup>53</sup> She was tortured but maintained her stance. This defiance brought a cruel death sentence. She was burned alive at the stake after having had three pieces of her body ripped off, presumably as a symbol of the Trinity.

A multilayered case of Abram Michelevich, a Jew from Mohilev, and his Christian partner, Paraska Daniłowna, tried and executed in Mohilev in 1748, is yet another example of Christian conversions to Judaism in premodern Poland. The list of charges ranged from infanticide (they abandoned their newborn child) and adultery (as a relationship between a Jew and a Christian was regarded) to Paraska's charge of apostasy and Abram's of proselytizing.<sup>54</sup>

But, it was a 1753 case in Wilno that may have provided material for the *ger żedek* legend. On May 29, 1753, the Lithuanian Tribunal condemned to death by burning a Croat man, Rafał Sentimani, for having converted from Catholicism to Judaism.<sup>55</sup> According to the decree, Sentimani, born of Catholic parents and educated in Catholic religion, began having doubts at the age of 12, and eventually "dared to invalidate what the Christian world values as priceless, [i.e.,] the holy baptism, by performing a disgusting ceremony according to Jewish rites," likely a

51. *Arkhiv Iugo-Zapadnoi Rossii*, 1/5:270.

52. *Arkhiv Iugo-Zapadnoi Rossii*, 1/5:267–69.

53. *Arkhiv Iugo-Zapadnoi Rossii*, 1/5:270.

54. *Istoriko-Iuridicheskie Materialy Izvlechennye Iz Aktov Knug Gubernii Vitebskoi i Mogilevskoi Khraniashchikhsia V Tsentralnom Arkhive V Vitebske i Izdannye Pod Redaktsiei Arkhivariusa Sego Arkhiva Sozonova*, ed. Sozonov, 32 vols. (Vitebsk: 1884), 15:229–38. See also Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 4.

55. The document is published in Adam Kaźmierczyk, ed., *Żydzi Polscy 1648–1772: Źródła*, vol. 6, *Studia Judaica Cracoviensia* (Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński Katedra Judaistyki, 2001), 187–89.