

# Ancestral Jewish Lithuania A Précis

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March 1, 2019

Pagan tribes gathered from Baltic Indo-European speakers about the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The population included both Lithuanians and Latvians. Their social structure was comparable to that of the Celts from 2,000 BCE. The old Baltic tongue was spoken as dialects of Old Prussian and Balt, which then progressed to Lithuanian and Latvian languages.



From the 12<sup>th</sup> century, adjacent regions merged from the former Kievan Rus and Ruthenia; they united with Lithuania. The region also included parts of Belarus, Russia, Poland and Austria. Orthodox Christian and pagan elements later merged within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Some of the wives of Dukes remained Orthodox as opposed to converting to Catholicism.

The monarchy and nobility of the **Khazar Empire** converted to Judaism; legal documents were written in Hebrew. However, when the Russians conquered the Khazar Empire in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish population dispersed. So far, there has been no documentation of the whereabouts of the exodus population. Regional genomics are known, but their DNA trail has been lost. Many theories abound regarding whether the Khazarians married into the Jewish communities in nearby Lithuania. After all, what rural farmer would resist or not welcome a nice young Khazarian Jewish boy offered in marriage for his isolated daughters?

Modern Lithuania began as a tribal association and merged into with Prussia (Eastern Balts) and Lithuania. The tribes united as the **Grand Duchy of Lithuania** in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century; Prussians emerged from the Eastern Balts, and were supported by the Holy Roman Empire to remain Catholic; Livonia emerged as Latvia. Other unoccupied regions became part of Lithuania.







Map of the Kievan Rus and Khazar Empire

Christianization of Lithuania fostered feudalism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Lithuanian old law (Codex) dominated the Grand Duchy. The ruling class spoke Ruthenian, Polish and Latin, and the merchant class spoke both German and Italian. The upper social classes were highly educated at the Universities of Kraków and Prague. Speaking the Lithuanian language was considered patriotic, but the dominance of Ruthenian, Polish and Latin eventually diminished the authority of Lithuanian speakers. Lithuanian was little known in greater Europe.

When the king of Poland, Sigismund I Bona, married an Italian princess, Poland adopted Catholicism. Protestant reform existed only in part of the culture of Lithuania. The educated Jesuit Orders predominated. Mindaugas, was the first ruler of the Grand Duchy; he was crowned as Catholic King of Lithuania in 1253. Teutonic Knights of Prussia pressured Lithuania to remain Roman Catholic. Prussia with the support of the Vatican's Holy Roman Army dominated until the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Mongol invasions devastated the western and southern regions of Lithuania, but Belarus was unharmed. Lithuania defeated the Mongols in 1333-1339, after the death of the Mongol leader, Genghis Great Khan, in 1226. Genghis Khan's sons were corrupt and alcoholic; they were no counterpart for their father's traditions. A new State of Moldavia was created. The final Mongol defeat was 1362, when the army of the Grand Duchy finally defeated the forces of the Golden Horde.

Following the Mongol and the Asian Tatar invasions, a Union of the kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy was created in 1386. The partnership expanded political authority into the largest European polity that extended their land resources from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. A formal ***Union of the Commonwealth of Poland Lithuania*** was created and signed into law in 1569; it was under the authority of a single Polish king and one parliament. This new huge polity succeeded until 1772-1795, when the Commonwealth was invaded and occupied by Russia, Prussia and Austria (Partitions of Poland-Lithuania).



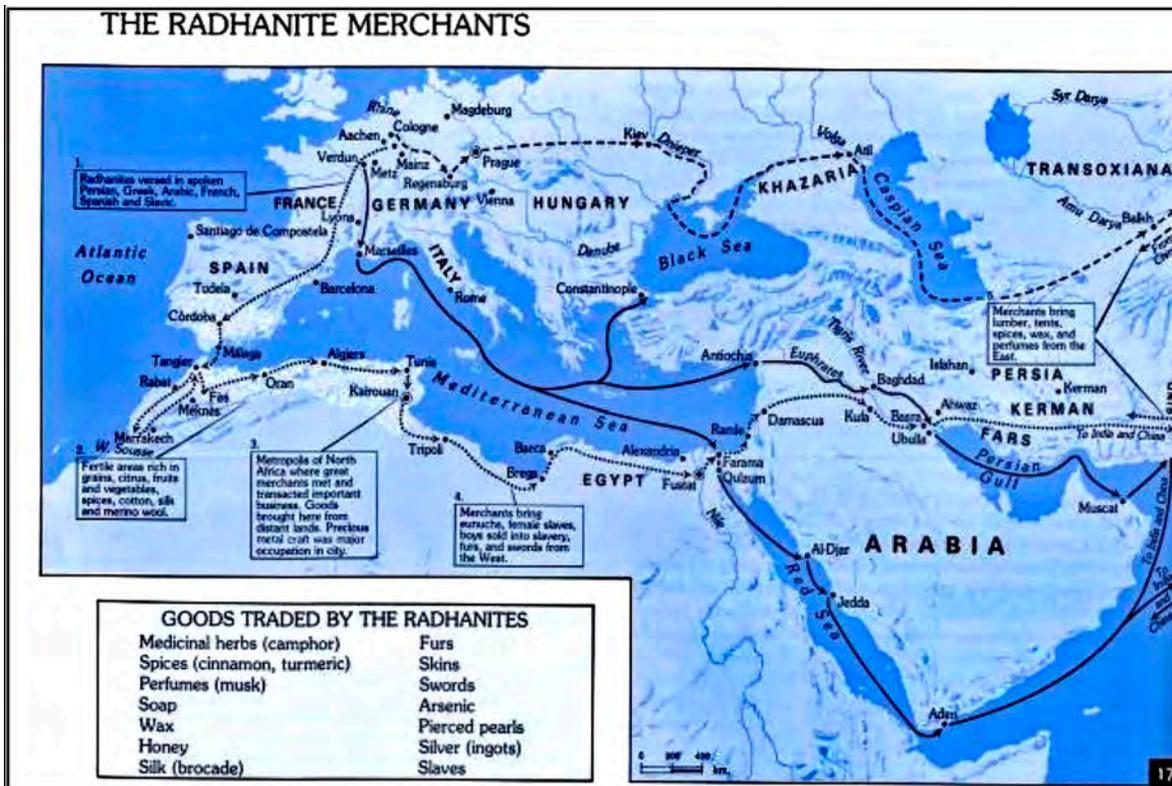
It is asserted that Jewish traders came to Lithuania in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Were those immigrants unaccompanied traders? Or, did they establish small early Jewish communities? I was not able to find links to any documents regarding their history. However, trading prospered and expanded in the Baltic region, Russia, Lithuania and Poland. Early Judeo-Slavic and Germanic speaking traders migrated to Lithuania, and gained access to the region that later became the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Those theories remain uncertain; population migrations are now verified by genomic research methods.

Historically, Jewish migrations closely followed the boundaries of the powerful empires of the Middle East, Mesopotamia, Greek Colonies and the Roman Empire. The underlying reason behind those historical migrations related to the limitations imposed by the Emperors. Jews often were forbidden to own land or enter certain businesses or professions. Jews became traders and benefitted greatly from their broad language skills and trading among other Jewish communities in North Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and Asia via the Silk Routes, as well as Southern Asia via the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea lanes. The early traders were known as **Radhanites**. As a result, Jewish culture and traditions closely followed and often incorporated those of the distant Jewish communities that had been established elsewhere in the known world. Differences among the Jewish communities were based upon locally available

foods, clothing styles and varied languages/dialects. There are estimated to be about 38 dialects of Yiddish, according to their regional locations. Koshering depended upon which foods were available, forbidden meats such as pork, shell fish notwithstanding. Slaughtering methods (Shochet) remain rather consistent worldwide.



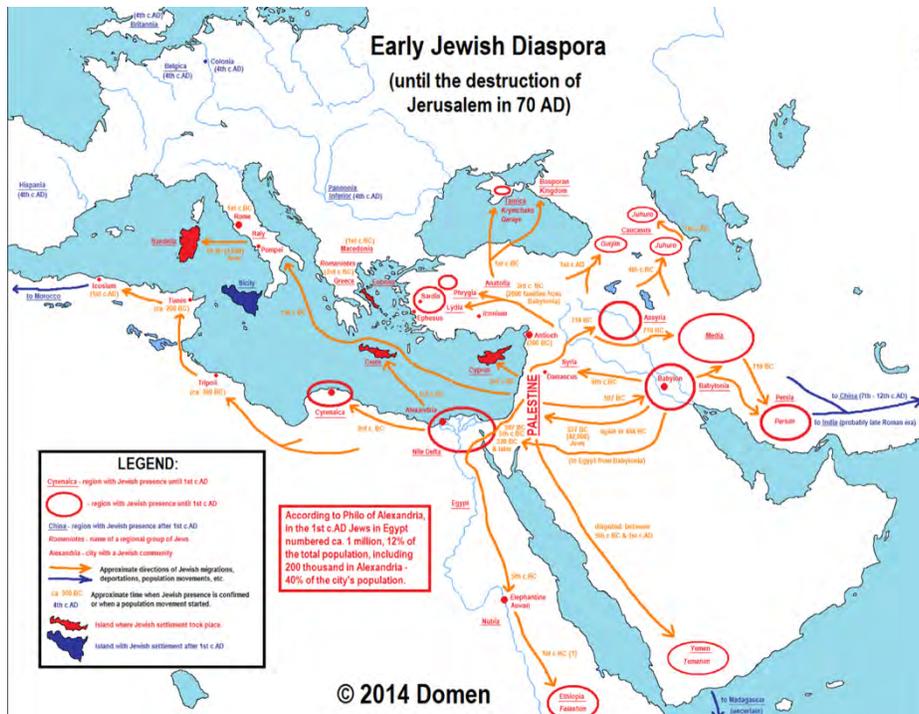
Map of Radhanite Trade Routes



Map of Greek Colonies That Included Jewish Communities



Map of the Jewish Sephardim in the Diaspora from Spain/Portugal

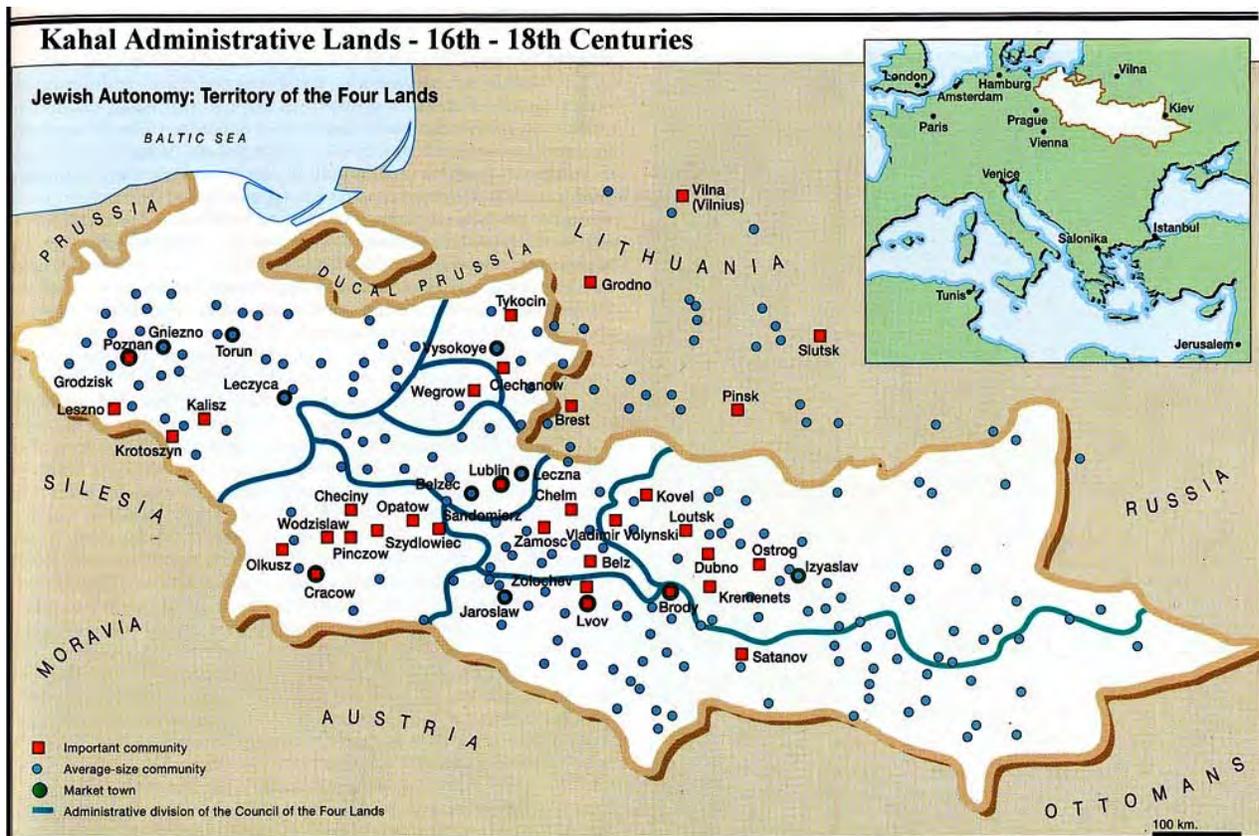


## New Jewish Communities Were Established in China, India, Arabia, North Africa and the Mediterranean Region



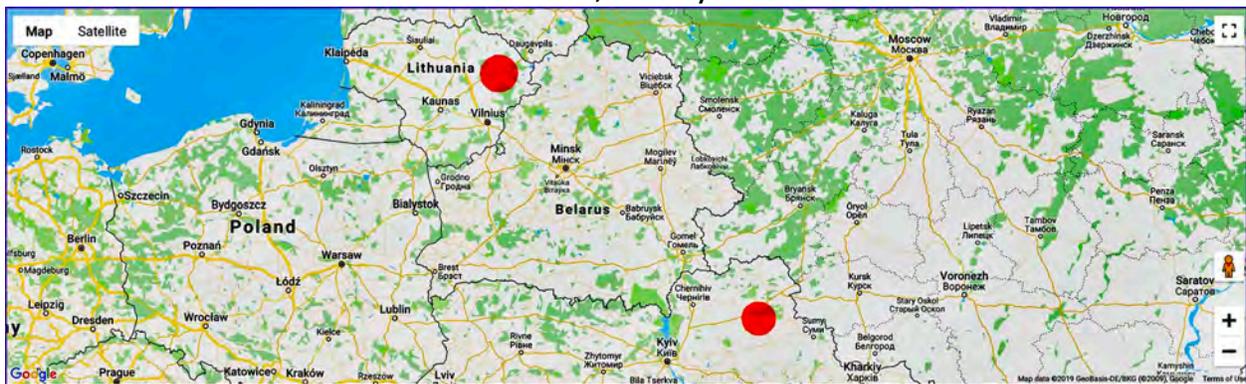
Camel Caravan – Merchant Traders

Special rights and liberties were established in Poland in 1264 by kings Casimir The Great and Boleslaw of Kalisz; Lithuania created a special charter also regulating Jewish communities. Jewish judges were given special authorities in Poland (Voivode) and Lithuania. Initially, regulations were created that were later extended to Lithuania. The Kahals were supervised by a council, known as the Kehilah, that was modelled after the system of ancient Israel at the time of the Second Temple. Supreme authority resided in an appointed senior rabbi, who was selected by the Polish king. The Kahal imposed a singular authority over all matters with the community from birth to death. Decisions included koshering, marriage, circumcision, taxes on sabbath candles and koshering were applied, as well as taxation for the king, military draft and ultimately burial in the Jewish cemetery. Disobedience could result in severe fines imposed by the Courts of the Kahal, disciplines or even excommunication from the Jewish community. The Kahal could deny burial in their cemetery. The authorities were delineated as the Council of the Four Lands and the additional Council of Lithuania. Kahals were finally abolished by Poland, and a bit later in Lithuania. Within Lithuania were famous Rabbinic and Chassidic Yeshivas, such as those schools located in Vilna, Rovno, and Kovno.



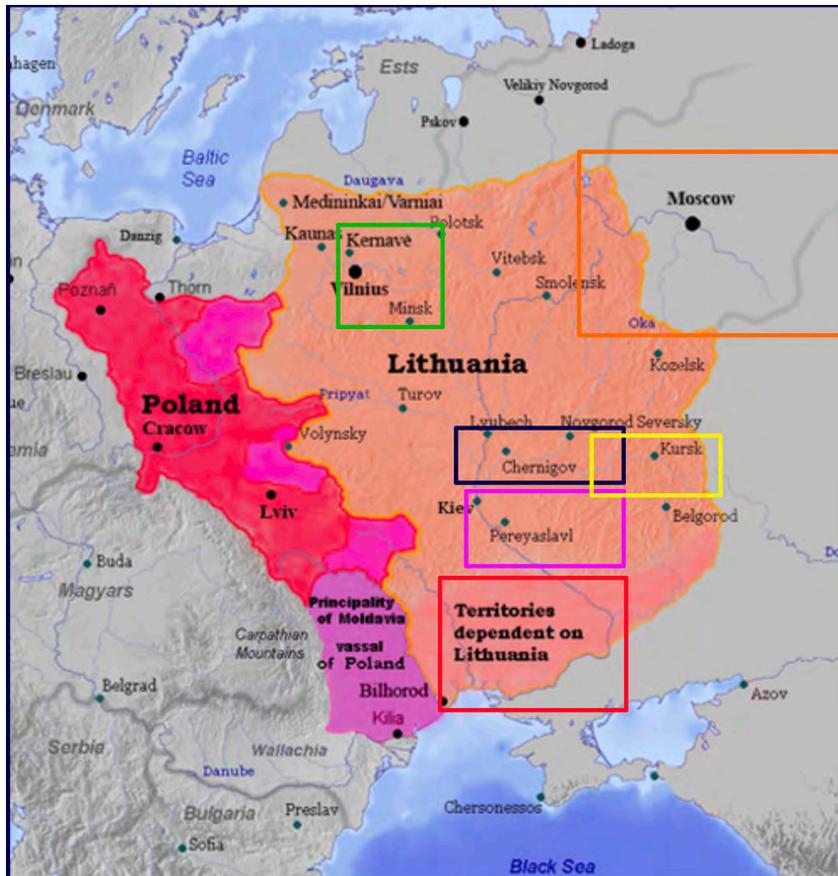
Barnavi, Eli: *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People*, Schocken Books, New York 1994.

### Genomic Research, Family Tree DNA.com



Lithuanian Mutations Identified Our Genetic Origins (Marquee Red Circles)

1. Utena/Utyná, Lithuania
2. Konotop, Russia/Ukraine



Map of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

Towns of the Origin of Cherkinsky Ancestors Identified

During the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Poland Briefly Occupied the Crown of Russia in Moscow



Map of "LITA" (Jewish Lithuania)

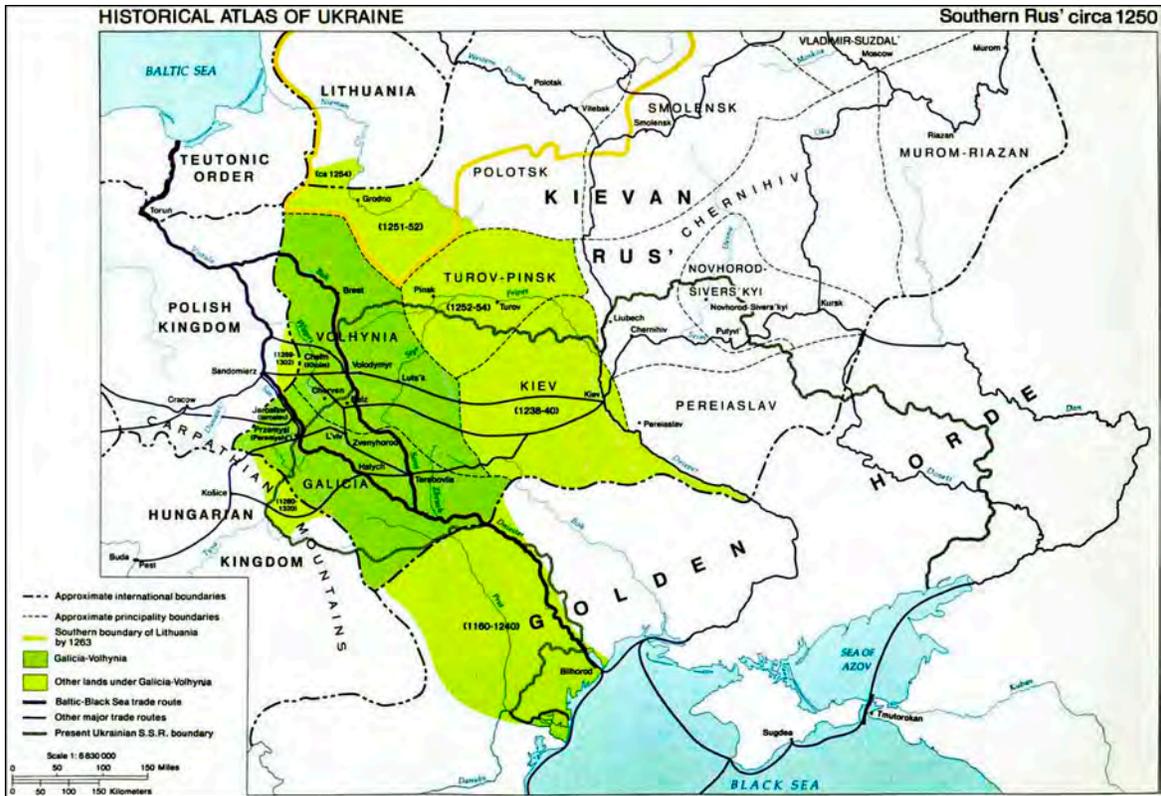


Map of Lithuania & Latvia  
 Region of Utena, Lithuania Identified

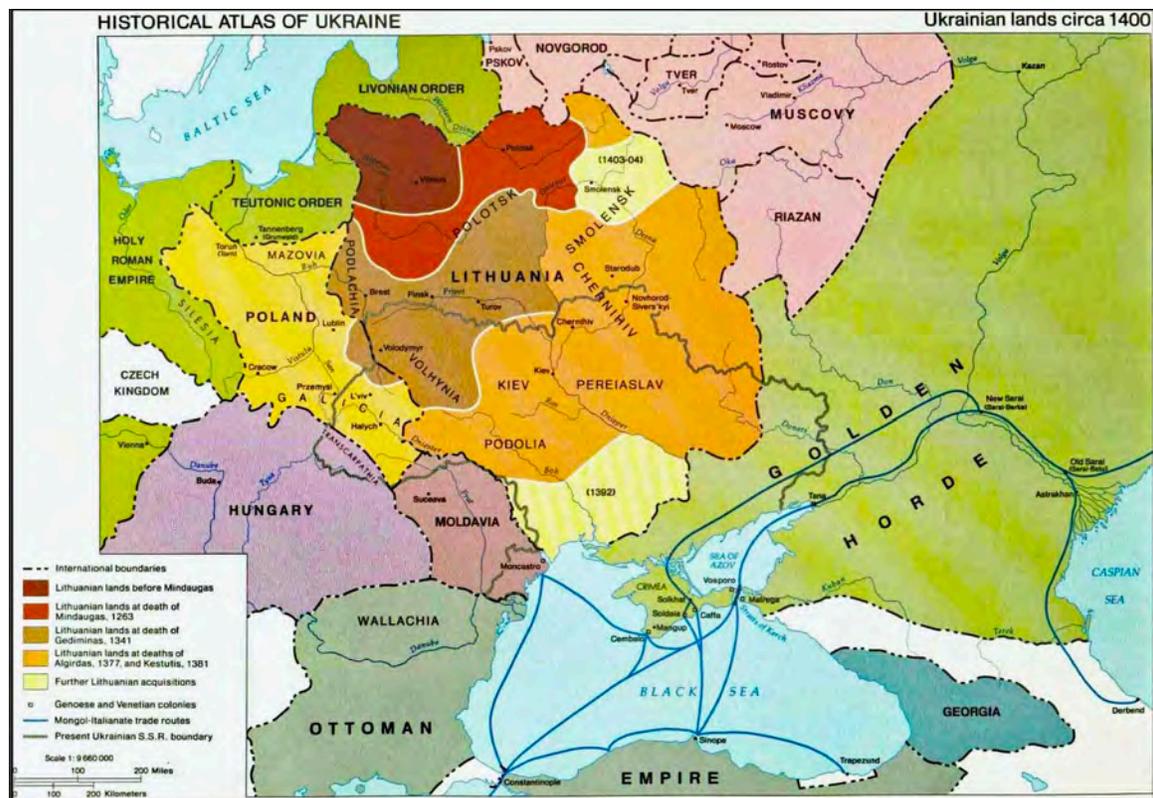
# Early Jewish Settlers, Traders 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Centuries



Amber Road



Map of the Kievan Rus



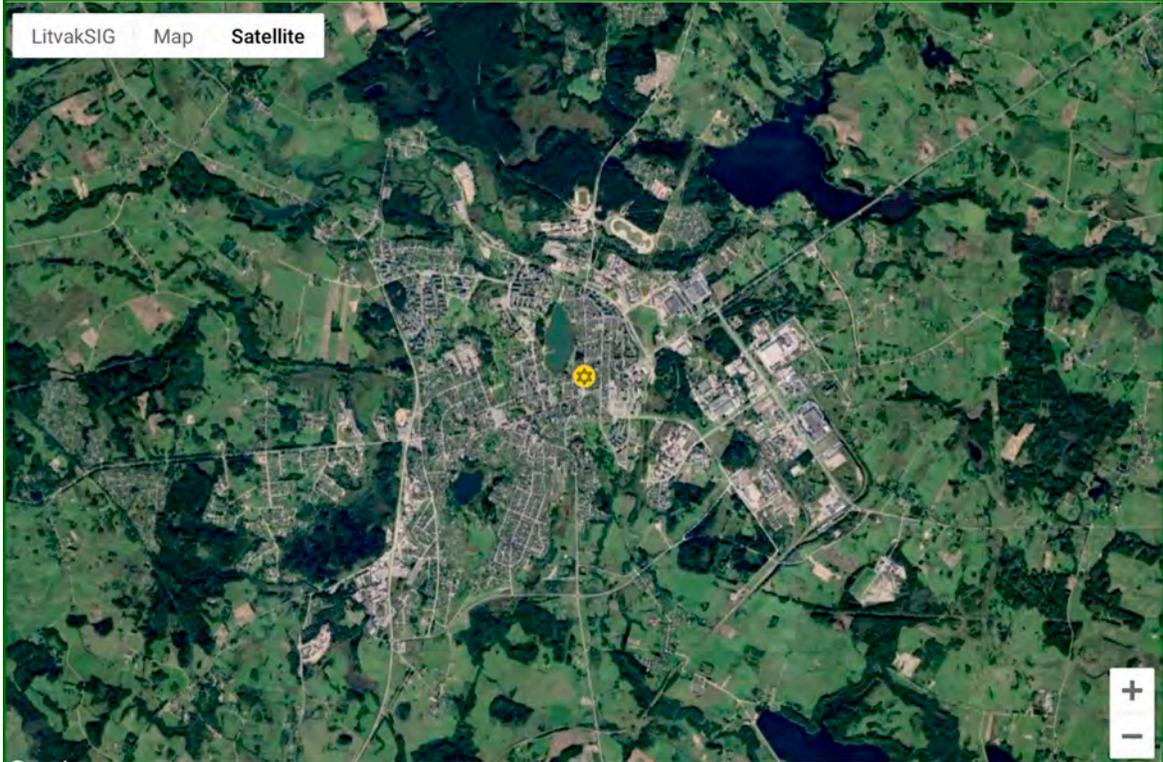
Map of Ukrainian Trade Routes





Utena, Lithuania





Satellite Image of Utena, Lithuania



River of Utena, Lithuania



Orthodox Cheddar



Yeshiva

Karaites



## Confirmation of the Human Genome Our Lithuanian “Connection”

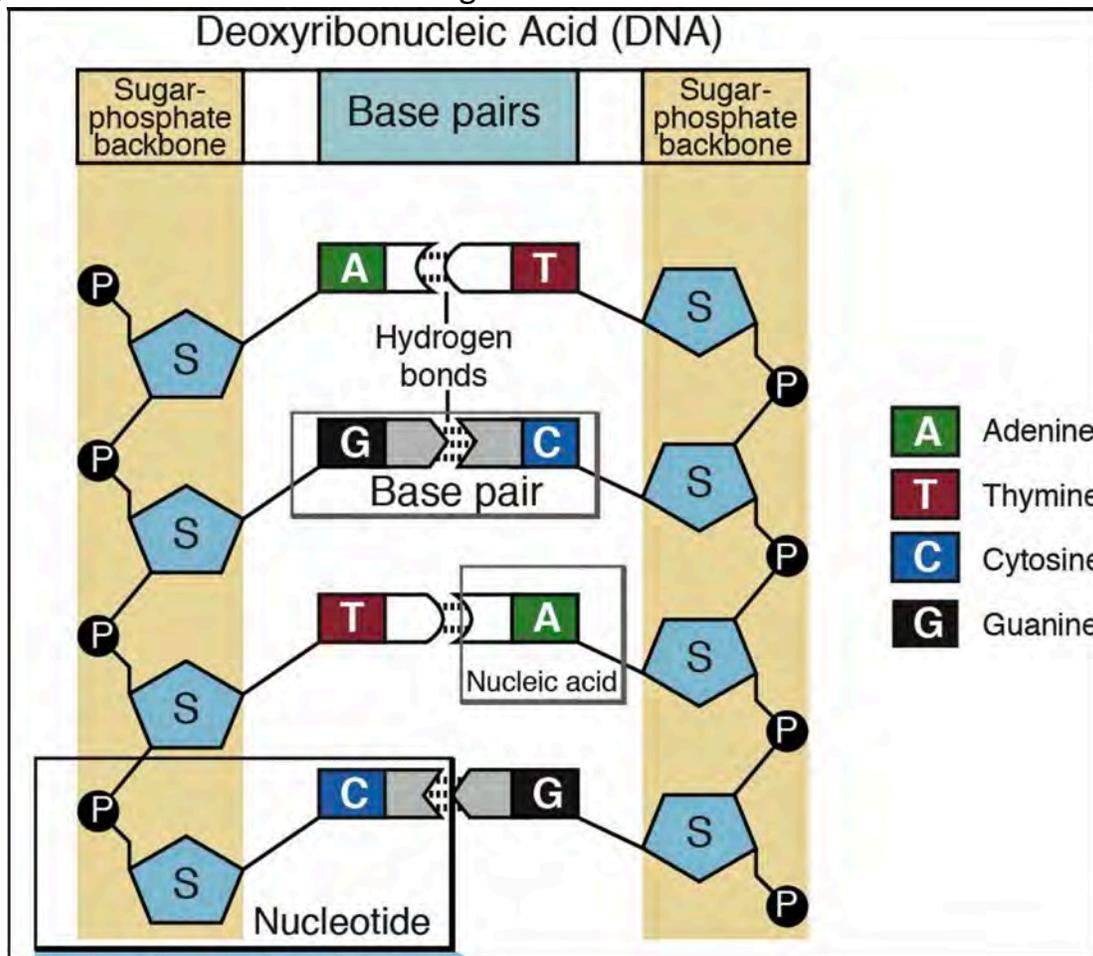
Human DNA analysis at affordable pricing became available for the public about the year 2000. I was weary of this new science because of my inexperience and my real concern about the security of the information. After all, DNA is our unique private signature. No individuals are identical, even twins have DNA differences. Most importantly, I needed to know if my DNA code could be “hacked” by criminals or worse, by a government. I learned that the information was very adequately protected and then proceeded on this fabulous journey of discovery.

Genealogical research began with collecting our oral histories, an imprecise and often erroneous collection of stories (and misinformation). Further precision was sought by delving into official documents and photographs. The written words were not so precise; official documents often contained errors, some were by omission, others by technical mistakes. Digitalization of records in libraries and governmental agencies provided more rapid access to critical documents worldwide. The race to perfection was on...

Due to cost, technical complexity and inexperience, the initial commercial DNA research began by investigating only the genes contained in our 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome. Those genes regulate gender, but not our appearance or functions. The 23<sup>rd</sup> chromosome contains an estimated 1,600 genes, whereas the remaining 22 pairs of chromosome in our genome, our “autosomes,” contain about 20,000 genes that regulate our entire anatomical and physiological “being.” It has become increasingly manifest that our genes regulate our personalities.

My first foray into DNA analysis began with taking a mouth swab and submitting the sample. The test searched for mutations among only 12-allele targets. I studied both the parental Y-DNA from my father’s lineage and the mtDNA (mitochondria) from the X-chromosome) of my mother’s lineage. Both Y & X chromosomes pass the genes from the first modern human (and before) to each successive generation. All cells in our bodies contain almost equal contributions from both parents. Thus, our genome contains 50% of the genes from each parent. This is one exception. In preparation for conception, our gonadal cells split

into ½ or “haploid” and contain only one strand of the chromosomal DNA. The majority of our chromosome are “diploid” containing both strands of the DNA. The double helix of DNA is bound by connecting “nucleotides” that are composed of material with 4 biochemical identities: adenine, thymine, cytosine and guanine. In the process of separating into the haploid condition, mistakes may occur that alter the content or position of those nucleotides. The mistakes are known as mutations and are detectable. Mutations, SNP (single nucleotide polymorphisms) are specific and can be identified, and as well, provide an estimate of the time of their appearance in our genome. By comparison to the larger populations worldwide, the SNPs provided the essential clues to calculate the evolutionary progression of the modern human genome.



Repeated DNA testing resulted in identification of my parental lineage. Each new analysis was deeper and broader. Eventually the full DNA analysis was completed. I chose the Family Tree DNA laboratory at the University of Arizona, Michael Hammer, PhD, because he had developed the most extensive database of Jewish

genomic evidence and his work was the most all-encompassing. More detailed analysis was then available from Moscow by the Y-Full group, who developed the world's most specific DNA analyses through more advanced instrument scanning, a more complete set of biochemical probes and more advanced digital algorithms. All of this advanced data is available online to participants. I have been repeatedly notified as new discoveries were published. The future of DNA genomic research is hopeful regarding gaining further insight into our genomic history, as well as in discovering mutations that influence our health. DNA probes are being developed to scan all of our chromosomes, the autosomes, as well as the more detailed studies of the sex gametes.

It is now estimated that the modern human has evolved over about 500,000 years. We first appeared in Africa, walked out of Africa at least 200,000 years ago, and migrated throughout the world. For further details, please refer to my other manuscripts on this subject. As a result of the publication of the detailed DNA analyses, I have been able to produce an evolutionary index of my genome.

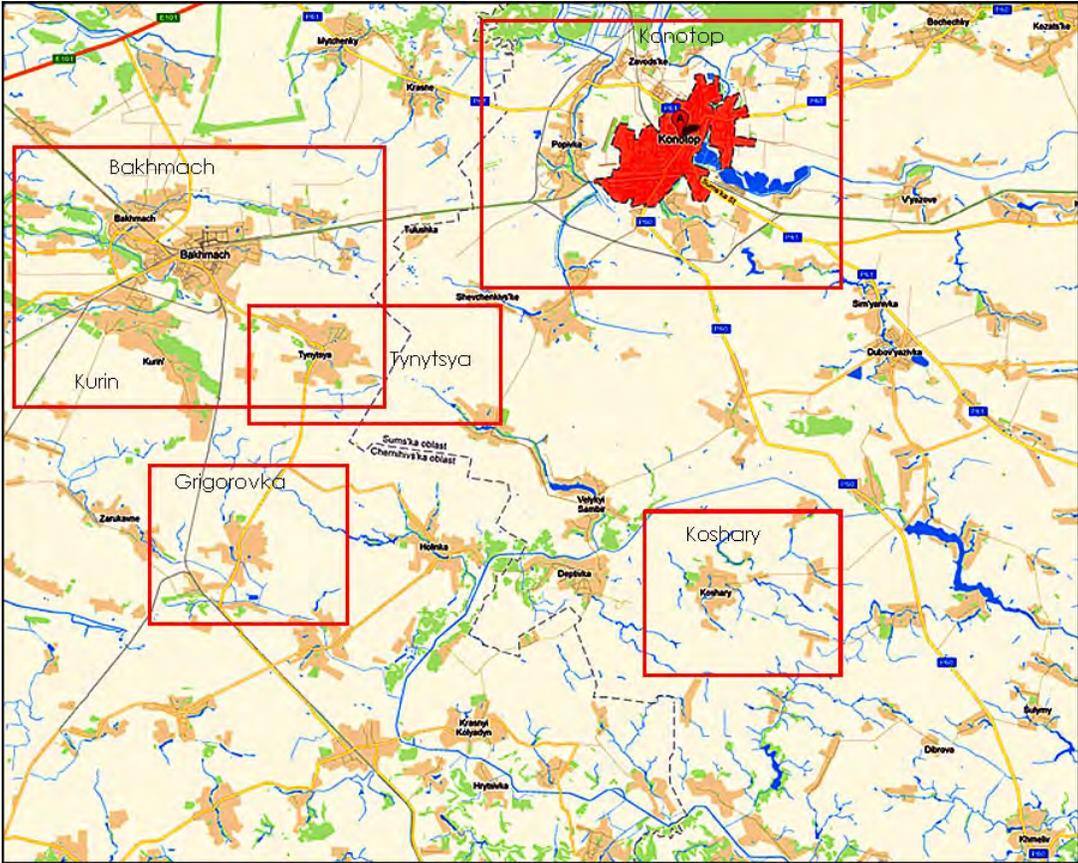
Pertinent to the subject of this document, I can report the following results from the time of my initial family history research:

1. Our first ancestors walked out of Africa about 100,000- 80,000 years ago. They were Black and possessed all of the physical characteristics of Africans. Caucasian skin and blue eyes evolved much more recently in Central Asia and Europe.
2. Those ancestors traversed the Middle East and settled around Central Asia about 80,000m - 60,000 years ago.
3. My paternal DNA has been identified among humans in the region of the Caucasus about 50,000-30,000 years before the present (ybp).'
4. By 15,000 ybp our ancestors were settled in the region of Georgia and North Ossetia, particularly in the Kura Araxes valley, located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.
5. The specific Kura Araxes culture lived in mud-brick houses, plied agricultural fields, husbanded domesticated herds of animals and created a unique pottery.
6. Evidence of the next ancestral settlements was confirmed in Anatolia, present-day Eastern Turkey. Their settlements were part of the Akkadian Empire from about 5,500 BCE – about 8,000 – 7,500 ybp. As

- such our ancestors spoke a dialect of the proto-Semitic language. Thus, we became “Semites”, as are the other descendant ethnicities of the Arabs, Kurds, Phoenicians, Iranians among others. Our religious Patriarch, Abraham, appeared in the same region and about the same time.
7. The Kura Araxes culture can be next traced to Antioch, Syria/Turkey about 3,000 BCE; next appeared in the Southeastern region of the Sea of Galilee. The settlement was within the Hebrew tribal area of the Naphtali.
  8. Further DNA mutations demonstrated the migration of our ancestors as “Ashkenazim” in Europe about 750 CE. Most likely they traversed Northern Italy and eventually settled in Western Europe. As likely traders, the ancestors possibly settled in the region of Cologne, Germany, where numerous trading routes existed ambling Eastward and elsewhere.
  9. We have further more specific mutations dated about the time of 1569, when Poland merged with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the “Commonwealth.”
  10. Detailed documentation of past history, official records, as well as our DNA mutations, are going to be sequenced and studies to complete this fabulous research endeavor. The genomic studies are essential and will include further investigation of the sequences of tandem repeats of our nucleotides (STR), SNPs (unique single mutations) and other specific alterations of chromosomal end targets, epigenetic alleles that control some of the surface features on the chromosomes and which are responsible for the exposure of some of the genes of the folded chromosomes.
  11. Our most recent mutations are dated about 350 years ago, which corresponds to the time that our family history can be documented by official records.

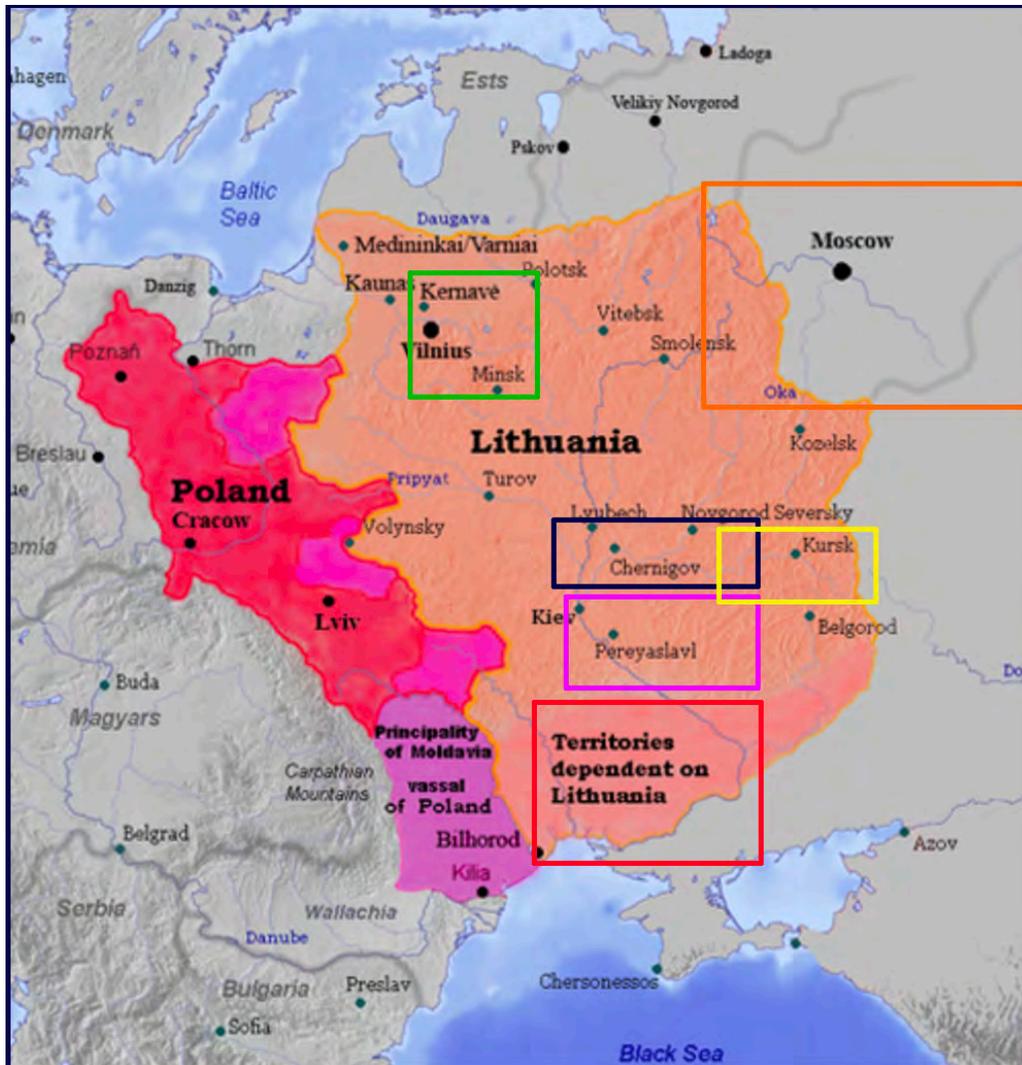
I first learned from older relatives that our paternal forefathers originated in Russia specifically in “Nershenh Gubernya.” Gubernya is defined as a “political State” or Province. However, there is no official/political designation of Nershenh Gubernya. The designation referred to the autonomous segregation of the Jewish communities of Poland since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. I discovered Nezhin was

a city within the region of our ancestral villages, in the district of Konotop (Uyezd). They lived among 5 villages: Konotop, Bakmach, Tynitsia, Kuran and Hrigorovka.





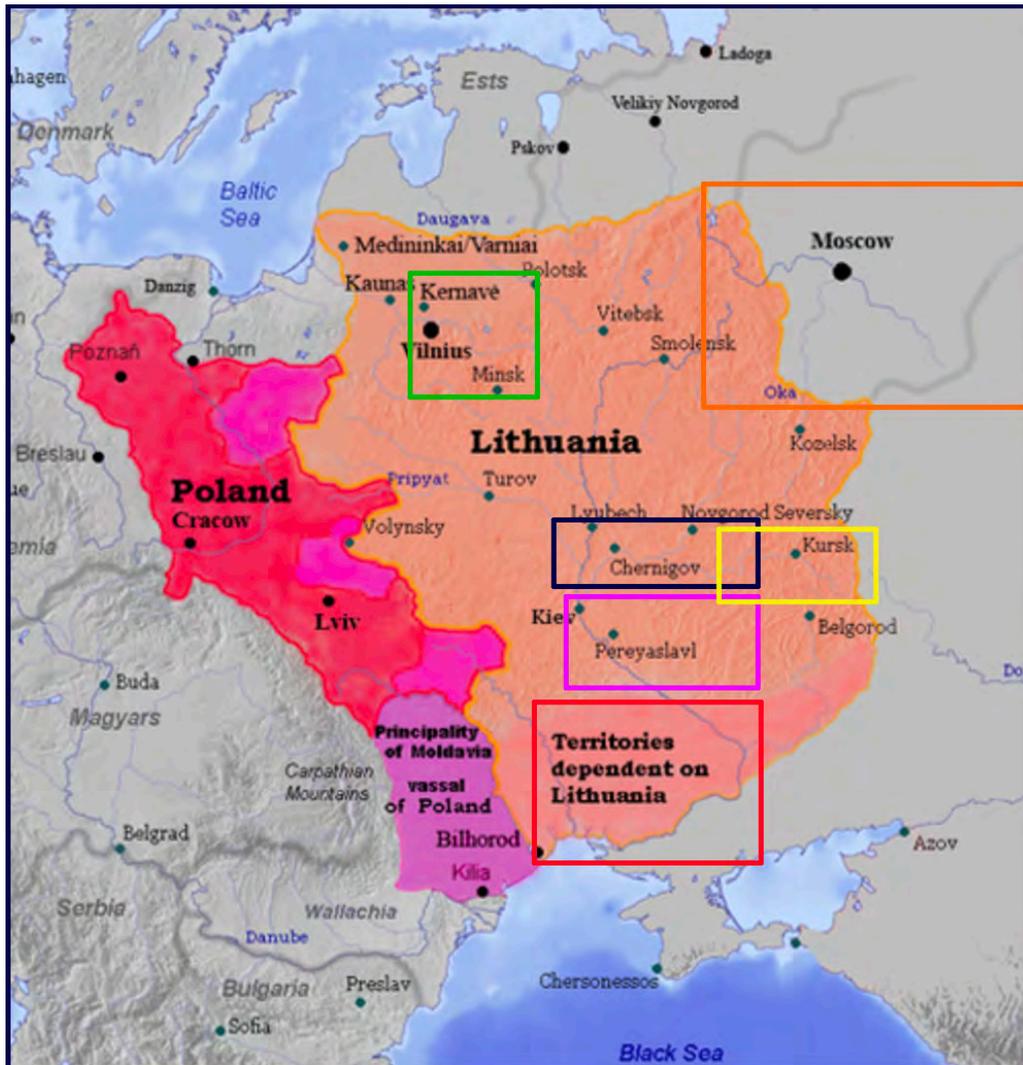
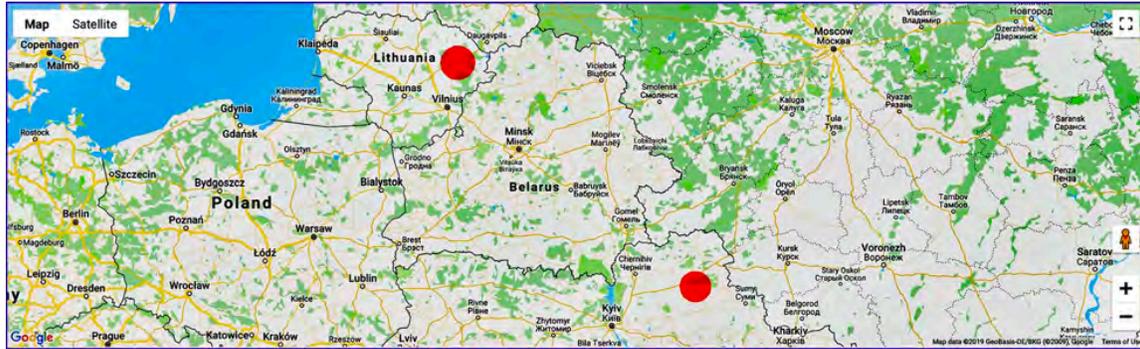
Identifying our ancestral origins in Europe using maps provided me with the best resources. At first, I thought of our Origins as Russian; that is what my relatives told me. Maps demonstrated the region as “Russian Occupied Poland.” More accurately, our origin should have been “Russian Occupied Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania. I noted a confusion among maps because our towns were originally part of the “Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which was the predominant geographic territory of the merged Commonwealth of 1569.



The location of our ancestral towns now lies within the political boundaries of Ukraine. However, at the time of the arrival of our ancestors, the region was part of the expanded territory of Russia. Konotop was established in 1634 by a grant of a Polish king to a loyal military officer. Poland held suzerainty over this region of Russia to the intense objections and military action of the Cossacks. Russia prevailed, so our oral history recorded the family as Russians.

There were 2 alternative opinions among the “informed” researchers. Present-day Ukrainians consider the Northwestern region to be culturally “Belarusian.” Oral history of everyone that I spoke with, who had origins in “Nershenh Gubernya,” told me that they were “Lithuanians.” This cross-identity was very confusing.

This week, I received yet another update from my genomic data results from the Y-Full researchers in Moscow, which identified our ancestral DNA as having another origin in Utena, Lithuania. The Yiddish name of the town is Utyná. The following map images confirm our ancestral origins within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.



In summary, we are Caucasians, Georgians, Anatolians, Israelites. We are Ashkenazim, Lithuanians, Russians, and Americans, all depending upon the timeline of our ancestral history. Shall we call ourselves Yanks, Ruskies, Polaks or Litvaks? I say we are ***mishpokhe***, family, cousins!!!

Robert Sherins