



	TOWN	DISTRICT	PROVINCE	COUNTRY
BEF. WWI	(C. 1900) PIASKI	VOLKOVYSK	GRODNO	RUSSIAN EMPIRE 
BET. THE WARS	(C. 1930) PIASKI	WOLKOWYSK	BIALYSTOK	POLAND 
AFTER WWII	(C. 1950) PESKI			SOVIET UNION 
TODAY	(C. 2000) PESKI			BELARUS 

Source: Piesk & Most; Jehuda Borowski

THE HISTORY OF PIESK

It is believed that Piesk already existed in the 12th—13th century and served as a bastion protecting the borders of the Principality of Kiev. After the disintegration of the Principality, in the second half of the 12th century, Piesk, together with the district capital Volkovysk, were alternately conquered by the Princes of Volhyn and Lithuania.

In the middle of the 13th century it belonged to Lithuania, Sweden, and was held by Poland that united with Lithuania in 1569. Piesk remained under Polish occupation until 1795 – i.e. until the Third Partition of Poland, when Russia annexed it. In 1920, Piesk was returned to Poland, but in 1939 Russia again annexed it.

Piesk developed, apparently, in the 13th– 14th centuries, at the time when Grodno is first mentioned as the district capital.

At the time of the Lithuanian and Polish Princes, the entire district of Grodno was being populated. Volkovysk, the district capital, existed already in the 11th century. It can therefore be assumed that settlements were established to the north and the west of Volkovysk up to the Neman and beyond, as the river was very important to the rulers. The distance between Volkovysk and the Neman, at Mosti, is 30 km. Piesk lies on the crossroads between Volkovysk and Most. It is therefore likely that Piesk was established with the first settlements in the region.

HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF PIESK AND OF THE VOLKOVYSK DISTRICT

Jews are first mentioned in the Volkovysk district in a document of the year 1177. As Piesk is the first settlement to the northwest of Volkovysk, distant only 22 km. and there was no other Jewish settlement to the northwest between Volkovysk and Piesk, it may be assumed that the Jews mentioned in the 1177 document included those of Piesk. Moreover, in the Four Country Committee Register, the entry of June 23, 1533, says that King Zygmund I requests all the authorities in the Principality of Lithuania to assist the commercial agent of the Queen, a Jew by the name of Ben-Matityahu, who was involved in some dispute. From this we may learn that Jews were living in the entire area, including Piesk, and that the King was favorably included towards them.

According to the sources of Regeste I Zapinski, it was decreed, in the year 177, to levy, due to the danger of war: 12 groschen from every Jew.

In the Four-Country Committee Register, mention is made of the tax levied from every Jew, which was transferred to the Lithuanian "Knaz," in the years 1680-1693. According to this same source, there were 4781 Jews in the Volkovysk district in the year 1766.

In the year 1847, the number of Jews in the Volkovysk district was 5946, distributed over the following localities:

Volkovysk	1,429
Svisloch	997
Zelbian	856
Piesk	662
Ya Labko	372
Amstivba	303
Prazova	397
Isobelin	297

Rash	287
Liskova	232
La Finizte	88
Navi da Bar [Nowy Dwor]	53

This table shows that, after Volkovysk, the district capital, Piesk had the third largest Jewish community.

In the year 1847, the number of Jews in Piesk was 622, while, by the year 1897, it had grown to 1615. In other words, their number increased by some 60% within 50 years. This appears to prove that the end of the 19th century was a period of prosperity for Piesk.

In the year 1897, the figures of the general population and of the Jewish population were as follows:

	GENERAL POPULATION	JEWISH POPULATION
Svisloch	3099	2086
Zelwa	2803	1844
Piesk	2396	1615
Prozova	2028	931
Yalavka	1311	743
Isobelin	963	454
Amstibova	1228	389
Navi da Bar [Nowy Dwor]	1481	183
Zelbian	600	81
Liskova	876	658

At the beginning of the 20th century, the oppression of the Jews of Piesk intensified, as a result of the abortive uprising of 1905. Many Jews of Mosti and Piesk, who had participated in the uprising were arrested and deported to Siberia. Many youngsters fled to Western Europe and to the United States. In 1906, a pogrom took place in Bialystok. It is most likely that it was initiated by the authorities. Much Jewish blood was spilled, and many searched for ways to escape from the reign of terror in Russia. Some of the Jews emigrated to Western Europe, others to South Africa and to the United States, some to South America.

The emigrants encountered problems of adjustment, but believed that their condition would improve, and they preferred to bring their families over, rather than to return to Russia. During 23 years, from 1897 until 1920, the economic and social position of the Jews deteriorated. At the same time, the number of Jews in Piesk decreased by some 30%, from 1615 to 1162, despite the fact that the natural increase among the Jews was high during that period, as almost every Jewish home counted 6—8 children. Towards World War I, the number of Jewish communities was 14, i.e. the situation had remained stable over the last 100 years. On the other hand, the number of Christian localities had substantially increased and reached almost one thousand.

The Jews came to the realization that there was no room for them in Russia. They continued to emigrate to various countries, but also found another solution: a halutzic movement was founded, whose members started going to Israel.