In the course of one generation, between 1850 and 1880, the number of registered inhabitants of Warsaw more than doubled, from around 150,000 to ca 300,000. In the same period of time, the number of Jews registered as inhabitants in the Polish capital grew threefold, from below 40,000 to more than 120,000. It formed the largest Jewish settlement in the world, and at the time, surpassed any other Jewish community of European diasporic history. In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, Jews originated from smaller towns and the countryside of the central Polish provinces; later, a steady influx of Jews from the Tsarist Empire added to this internal process of urbanization. As contemporary observers stated from the mid-nineteenth century, they formed an agglomeration of co-existing smaller units, defined by origin, religious persuasion, and cultural choices. Jewish and non-Jewish contemporaries alike were well aware of this extremely dynamic demographic process. Jewish observers worried about the consequences of this dynamism, realizing early on that a more traditional communal set-up of community would be subverted by the sheer number of Jews living in the capital. And in fact, the period between the middle and late nineteenth century offers a number of striking changes in the institutional fabric of the community. During this period, demographic, political and cultural changes heralded the emergence of the first Jewish metropolis, a place which “breaks the cake of custom,” as Robert

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2 Numerous anecdotal references testify to the substantial difference between registered and unregistered inhabitants in Polish towns of the period: the actual number of inhabitants was invariably significantly higher than those registered in the official records, cf. Shatzky, *Geshikhte fun yidn in varshe*, vol. 111, 115. The administrative procedure to become a registered inhabitant remained cumbersome and expensive even after the emancipation of 1861, as a local resident commented in 1902 in the Polish-language weekly *Izraelita*, adding that a third of the Jews living in Warsaw—sometimes for a long period—were not registered, cf. Guesnet, *Polnische Juden*, 42.
Park famously posited in his description of the impact of the large city on its inhabitants. At the same time, Warsaw would be the arena of true metropolitan dialectics and allow traditionalist Jewish communities to thrive, form new alliances and challenge competitors on a whole new level.3

Around 1850, the Jews of Warsaw constituted a young community. The first cemetery had been founded just two generations ago by Shmuel Zbytkower, a wealthy army contractor and banker, on the east bank of the Vistula river due to settlement prohibitions in the Polish capital proper.4 From a couple of thousand Jews living in the Praga suburbs and within the noble precincts, called jurydiki, exempt from the capital's privilegium de non tolerandis judaeis, the Warsaw Jewish community grew into a significant regional center with around forty thousand registered Jewish inhabitants in 1850. The communal leadership would be securely in the hands of the misnagdim, the traditional rabbinical observant community. Their hegemony, though, was challenged by an ever growing hasidic community and a small, but influential group of wealthy Jews—bankers, tax farmers, army contractors and industrialists—who would attempt to adapt the precepts of the German-Jewish reform to the realities of partitioned Poland. At the end of this period, Jewish Warsaw had grown into the largest Jewish settlement in the world, functioning according to its own unique set of rules.5 The Jews formed new types of alliances among themselves and with non-Jews, and inserted themselves into the capital's social fabric and urban landscape. During this period, political challenges of a new kind arose—with episodes like the antisemitic agitation of the journalistic polemic known as the “Jewish War” and the neo-romantic Polish-Jewish rapprochement of 1861. The January Uprising of 1863 against Russian dominion challenged the political identifications of Warsaw Jews, with individual Jews becoming highly visible agents of political contestation. Since the emancipation of 1862, Jews could settle wherever they could afford to buy or to rent, resulting in the emergence of densely populated Jewish neighbourhoods just north of the city center. Thousands, if not tens of thousands of Jews from the Pale of Settlement, know as Litvaks, arrived in Warsaw and found themselves

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5 This administrative entity had come into being as a result of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and therefore was also known as Congress Poland, or Kongresówka, in Polish.