their parliamentary role declined sharply and the number of meetings and amount of legislation that was passed dropped markedly. Contemporary reports of the Council of Four Lands tell of stormy debates rendered unwieldy by endless discussions of procedural matters regarding the relative standing of different participants. Complaints also began to be heard of corruption; some council leaders were accused of misappropriating funds.

The eighteenth century also saw the Polish–Lithuanian councils taking on ever increasing amounts of debt to non-Jewish bodies. This was largely in the form of long-term, low-interest loans (Pol., *widerkaft*) taken mostly from church institutions but also from magnates. The reasons for this phenomenon are not absolutely clear: it may have been a means of balancing accounts in difficult times or could have been an attempt by the councils to act as banks that sold annuities to those in need. On their abolition in 1764, the Polish–Lithuanian councils owed 2,305,111 zlotys, with annual interest of 196,478 zlotys (see Table 1).

Despite the fact that authorized office holders enjoyed significant income from the councils, the Polish–Lithuanian authorities in general had a largely negative opinion of them. Individual noblemen put pressure on the councils to reduce the assessment of the Jewish communities in the towns they owned. The Sejm and Sejmiki, which viewed the councils just as a means of assessing the Jewish poll tax, treated with hostility the fact that Jewish organizations collected money for their own purposes, arguing that all income from Jews should go directly to the state. This was meant to allow a significant rise in income from the Jewish poll tax. The Sejm established commissions to deal with the functioning of the Council of Four Lands in 1739 and 1753, but they were largely ineffectual.

**Abolition.** The increasing popularity of state centralization in the eighteenth century meant that bodies representing different groups within the state were considered unnecessary. The first of the councils to be thus affected was that of Moravian Jewry in 1754. In that year, Empress Maria Theresa established a committee on Jewish affairs, which published regulations titled *Die General-Polizei-Prozess- und Kommerzialordnung.* It served to reduce Jewish autonomy and effectively abolished the council. In 1764, with the accession of Poland’s last king, Stanisław August Poniatowski, a decision was taken to reorganize the Jewish poll tax: the state held a Jewish census in 1764–1765 and on its basis determined the size and distribution of the payments. The councils, rendered redundant by the new policy, were officially abolished.

The consequent demand for the immediate repayment of the large sums of capital taken as loans by the councils led to a major debt crisis and the establishment by the Sejm of a commission to liquidate Jewish debts. The issue was not finally resolved for decades. Though the Council of Four Lands never met after 1764, there is some evidence that regional representatives did meet in councils sporadically during the last third of the eighteenth century. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the councils were a thing of the past.

In later centuries, there were various attempts to set up Jewish Councils and Congresses to deal with various aspects of Jewish communal and cultural autonomy in Eastern Europe. Prominent among these were the Jewish Congress in nineteenth-century Hungary, which was established to redefine the status of the Hungarian Jewish communities, and the Jewish Councils of interwar Lithuania and the short-lived Ukrainian Republic, whose goal was to act as the representative bodies of the Jewish minorities in those states. These were short-lived bodies in comparison with their early modern predecessors and had only limited influence, their most important achievement being the tripartite division of Jewish communities by the Hungarian Congress in the late 1860s. [See Jewish Congress.]

In the early twentieth century, those East European Jews who supported Jewish national rights, particularly Diaspora nationalists such as Simon Dubnow, pointed to the councils as models of Jewish national autonomy in premodern times. This anachronistic view colored historical treatments of the councils during most of the twentieth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Capital (in zlotys)</th>
<th>Annual Interest (in zlotys)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council of Four Lands</td>
<td>171,493</td>
<td>17,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Poland</td>
<td>427,220</td>
<td>39,079</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandomierz-Kraków (Little Poland)</td>
<td>288,616</td>
<td>34,218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chełm-Belz</td>
<td>107,399</td>
<td>19,518</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rus’-Bracław</td>
<td>216,624</td>
<td>32,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volhynia-Kiev</td>
<td>740,761</td>
<td>9,723</td>
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<tr>
<td>Podolia</td>
<td>31,678</td>
<td>5,461</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lublin</td>
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<td>16,172</td>
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<td>Przemyśl</td>
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<td>3,192</td>
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<td>Ostróg</td>
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<td>9,663</td>
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<tr>
<td>Włodzimierz</td>
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<td>Węgrów</td>
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<td>Zamość</td>
<td>44,487</td>
<td>6,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,305,111</strong></td>
<td><strong>196,478</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Schiper (1932), p. 17. Totals may not add due to rounding.