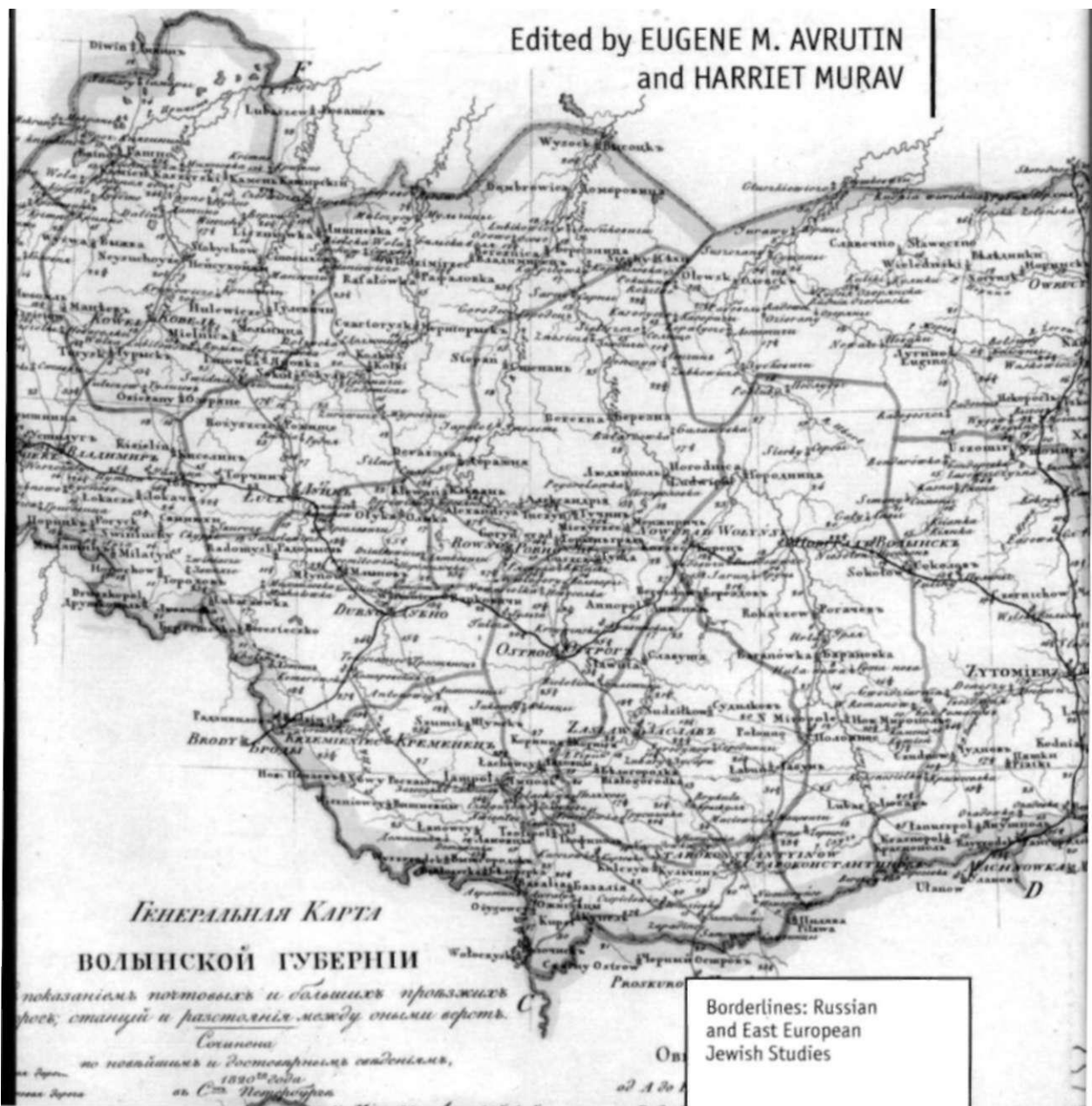


# <JEWS IN THE EAST EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS

Essays in Honor of John D. Klier





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Essays in Honor of John D. Klier

Edited by EUGENE M. AVRUTIN  
and HARRIET MURAV

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**BORDERLINES:  
RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN JEWISH STUDIES**

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## 9. Shots in the Back

### On the Origin of the Anti-Jewish Pogroms of 1918–1921

*Oleg Budnitskii*

The pogroms of the Russian Civil War period (1918–1921) were the most serious outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe between the Khmelnytsky Uprising of 1648 and the Holocaust. In 1918–1921, in the Ukraine alone, there were over 1,500 pogroms and “excesses” in about 1,300 localities. According to various estimates, from fifty to sixty thousand to two hundred thousand Jews were killed or mortally wounded. Another two hundred thousand were injured and mutilated. Many thousands of women were raped. About fifty thousand women were widowed, and three hundred thousand children orphaned.<sup>1</sup> The information on the pogroms and their victims was collected more or less systematically from May 1919 on,<sup>2</sup> but the precise number of casualties will never be known.

Given the pogroms’ unprecedented scope and cruelty, it is understandable that witnesses at the time and later historians have sought to understand the motivation of the perpetrators. The following motives were the most favored:

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<sup>1</sup> Salo Baron calculated that the number of victims “easily” exceeded fifty thousand (*The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, 2d ed. [New York, 1975], 184); Nora Levin gives the number of fifty to sixty thousand (*The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* [New York, 1988], 1:49); S. Ettinger cites seventy-five thousand (H. H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* [Cambridge, MA, 1976], 954). N. Gergel, “The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918–21,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 6 (1951), 251; and S. Gusev-Orenburgskii in his *Kniga o evreiskikh pogromakh na Ukraine v 1919 g.* (Petrograd, n. d.), 14, speak about one hundred thousand fatalities. Finally, the number of two hundred thousand victims is cited in Iurii Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1929), 55. See also Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York, 1995), 112; “Pogromy,” *Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopediia* 6 (Jerusalem, 1992), 569–75; and “Ukraina,” *ibid.*, 8:1226. Gergel considered that the figure of fifty to sixty thousand Jewish dead due to pogroms could be documented, but he noted that, considering the lack of precise data, the actual number could well be twice that figure. The author of a recent study on the “Jewish question” in the Ukraine accepts the relatively lower figures for those who were killed or perished from pogroms (Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920* [Cambridge, MA, 1999], 110).

<sup>2</sup> David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 138–40.

retribution for Jewish participation in Bolshevism and the “destruction of Russia”; well-established economic antagonism, aggravated by war and revolution; a criminal desire to plunder and rob; and, on a more specific level, the “incorrect” voting of the Jewish parties in the Ukrainian Rada on the issue of Ukraine’s independence. A recurrent motif was the claim that shots were fired at retreating troops from the windows of the Jewish apartments and houses. This theme is the focus of this chapter.

For the most part, these diverse and contradictory explanations represent an effort to rationalize the irrational. There is something clearly amiss in the syllogism that if Trotsky heads the Red Army, then it is necessary to chop off the arms of a shoemaker from some shtetl, to rape his wife, and to smash in the head of his child. Likewise, if the Jewish socialist parties vote “wrongly” in the Rada, how does blame extend to the voters for religious parties or, as was mostly the case, the apolitical majority who had no interest in politics and did not bother to vote at all? If some Jews want to prove their loyalty by fighting in the ranks of the Whites against the Bolsheviks, why are qualified candidates denied officer rank, in a sort of reverse political correctness? Why, if the Jews are responsible for Bolshevism, do members of the nascent Red Army engage in pogroms at the slightest loosening of discipline?

In the 1920s and 1930s, historians sought to explain pogroms carried out by the Whites by emphasizing that they were monarchists and “counterrevolutionaries.” Such a characterization of the White movement itself is very dubious,<sup>3</sup> but even if it were true, the conservatism or monarchism of individual political or military leaders need not necessarily lead them to espouse anti-Jewish violence. The followers of the Ukrainian leader Simon Vasil’evich Petliura declared themselves republicans and socialists, but their troops in the field carried out some of the most ghastly pogroms. Clearly the nature of the pogroms of 1918–1920 is best understood by viewing them in both a short- and a long-term perspective.

The scholar Joseph Schechtman, a contemporary of the events he was investigating, was one of the first to insist that “the Jewish pogroms of the Volunteer Army period were of a *purely military nature* . . . They were promulgated exclusively by the *regular regiments of the Volunteer Army*.”<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, a general characterization of the pogroms as an essentially military phenomenon can be made of nearly all the pogroms of the Civil War, whether carried out by the troops of the Directory, the Red Army, the followers of Nikifor Aleksandrovich Grigor’ev, the brigades of Stanislav Nikodimovich

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<sup>3</sup> See Oleg Budnitskii, “Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, 4 (2001): 751–72.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph B. Schechtman, *Pogromy Dobrovol’cheskoi armii na Ukraine (k istorii antisemitizma na Ukraine v 1919–1920 gg.)* (Berlin, 1932), 153.

Bulak-Balakhovich, or miscellaneous armed bands. The term “pogrom” itself is not quite fit to describe the anti-Jewish violence of the Civil War era. In the “classic” definition, pogroms are seen as more or less spontaneous outbreaks of violence against the Jews carried out by civilian groups. Despite the subsequent identification of “Cossacks” and pogroms, in prerevolutionary Russia, the role of the military was the *suppression* of pogroms.<sup>5</sup> In the Civil War period, the civilian population, almost invariably peasants, joined in the looting only after it had been initiated by armed troops.

It is important to note that a considerable percentage, if not the majority, of the combatants in the Russian Civil War who had served in the Imperial Russian Army were veterans of World War I.<sup>6</sup> Recall that about fifteen million persons were recruited into the Russian military during the war. Consequently, two factors must be kept in mind when considering the “military” aspect of the Civil War pogroms. The first is the general attitude toward the Jews of the leaders of the Russian army in the prewar period. The second is the experience of the Russian army and the Jews during the war itself.

The author of a relatively recently published study of the Jews in the Russian army, Yohanan Mironovich Petrovsky-Shtern, writes, the “Russian army has attained a reputation of an unequivocally antisemitic, if not the most antisemitic, institution in prerevolutionary Russia.” According to the author, however, the “widely-held opinion, accepted at face value by the Russian and Jewish historians, requires a decisive revision.”<sup>7</sup> In my opinion, on the contrary, the evidence of Petrovsky-Shtern’s own research undermines his “revisionist” conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I. Michael Aronson, “The Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia in 1881,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John Doyle Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge, 1992), 55; Shlomo Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1903–1906,” in *Pogroms*, 209, 217; at the same time, as Shlomo Lambroza noted, “the action of troops and police usually depended upon the conviction of their superior officers. At times troops and police halted pogroms, at other time they joined in the looting and murdering” (“Pogroms of 1903–1906,” 218).

<sup>6</sup> As is generally known, the White movement was a movement of army men. Almost all White officers took part in World War I. So did those of the Red Army, which had seventy to seventy-five thousand former officers of tsarist and provisional government armies. These officers accounted for the vast majority of middle and supreme command (A. G. Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty na sluzhbe Respubliki sovetov, 1917–1920* (Moscow, 1988), 210, 214). It is not surprising that the most famous atamans of the Civil War, who excelled all others in exterminating Jews, were low-ranking officers of the Imperial Russian Army: Grigor’ev, Zeleny (real name—Daniil Ilyich Terpilov), Ivan Semesenko, Il’ko Timofeevich Struck, Ivan Galaka (real name—Ivan Alexeevich Vasil’chikov) and others. Some of them, like Grigor’ev and Galaka, served for some period of time in the Red Army.

<sup>7</sup> Y. Petrovskii-Shtern [Yohanan Petrovsky-Stern], *Evrei v russkoi armii, 1827–1914* (Moscow, 2003), 298.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, 297, 344–51; O. V. Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belymi* (Moscow, 2005), 158–64; and Dzh. [John] D. Klier, “Kazaki i pogromy,” in *Mirovoi krizis*



Jews were constantly under suspicion in the army. They were suspected of the absence of patriotism, connivance with their coreligionists, negligent service. The Jews and Catholics (i.e., Poles) were not allowed to occupy positions as scribes, telegraphists, draftsmen, conductors, machinists, millers, gunsmiths, and examiners of military warehouses; and they were not drafted into engineering corps, pharmacy and veterinary attendants, or as doctors and their assistants in the western military regions and fortress garrisons.<sup>9</sup> It is not hard to notice that the Jews were viewed as potential traitors, saboteurs, and swindlers. They were barred from positions that involved access to material valuables, military equipment, and classified information. There was serious discussion within the army of ending the military recruitment of Jews as a justification for denying them full civil rights.<sup>10</sup>

At the outbreak of World War I, the whole Jewish population was placed under suspicion by the High Command. The Jews were a priori considered disloyal, predisposed to betrayal and espionage for the enemy. The spy mania reached a truly pathological scale. Accusations spread that Jews "communicate with the enemy by means of subterranean telephones and airplanes and provide them with gold and provisions." According to one version, the Jews tied gold to goose feathers, and the birds carried it to the enemy; according to another avian theory, poultry was stuffed with gold, then shipped off to Germany. In Bereznitsy (Volynia province), a priest informed his parishioners that the Jews were spies and that a telephone had been found in a cow's belly that they had fashioned to communicate with the enemy.<sup>11</sup> The authorities received denunciations from informants that the Jews were sending dispatches to Germany "in the eggs of hens of valuable kinds" or that the Jews of Vilna were using "cellars and slums" to store pans for use in smelting artillery shells for the enemy.<sup>12</sup> The Jews were purportedly trying to transfer a million and a half rubles in gold to the Germans, having hidden them in a coffin; a Jewish miller allegedly contacted the Austrians by means of a telephone installed in his cellar; others cut Russian telephone wires or connected them to the Austrian ones; the Jews used fires and light signals to transmit information to

1914–1920 godov i sud'ba vostochnoevropeiskogo evreistva, ed. O. V. Budnitskii et al. (Moscow, 2005), 53.

<sup>9</sup> Petrovskii-Shtern, *Evrei*, 321–22, 324.

<sup>10</sup> A. Litvin, ed., "General'ny i evrei," *Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta* 4, 22 (2000): 273–85; Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb, IL, 2003), 118–19; and Klier, "Kazaki i pogromy," 53.

<sup>11</sup> "Iz 'chernoii knigi' rossiiskogo evreistva: Materialy dlia istorii voiny 1914–1915 g.," *Evreiskaia starina*, no. 10 (1918): 269.

<sup>12</sup> S. Nelipovich, "V poiskakh vnutrennego vruga: Deportatsionnaia politika Rossii," in *Pervaia mirovaia voina i uchastie v nei Rossii (1914–1918): Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii* (Moscow, 1997), 61.

the enemy; they signaled from windows of their own houses, from trees and rooftops, disclosing to the enemy the positions of Russian troops; the Jews made plans to organize a mutiny in Kronshtadt and tried to deliver the plan of the mutiny to the Germans in Danzig, having thrown a sealed bottle with a message into the sea. The fantastical charges were boundless.<sup>13</sup> In Petrograd, the choral synagogue and the apartment of its chairman of the board, Mark Abramovich Varshavskii, were searched. Spy hunters were looking for an "apparatus to communicate with the enemy via wireless telegraph."<sup>14</sup>

The policy of persecuting Jews reflected more than the well-documented personal antisemitism of the army's commander in chief, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, and especially his chief of staff, General Nikolai Nikolaevich Yanushkevich.<sup>15</sup> This policy was stipulated by the theory of military statistics; the officers were inundated with information on the harmful and suspicious elements within the population while in military schools and academies.<sup>16</sup> Theory substantiated the prejudices that most Orthodox Russians had imbibed since their early childhood. The Jews were adherents of a different faith that rejected Christ; they were exploiters who did not plow and did not sow but managed to extract profit as if from the air itself; they were troublemakers who undermined the power of the tsar and the very foundations of Russian life. They were the embodiment of the alien and the hostile.<sup>17</sup>

In the Pale of Settlement, where most of the draftees had never been before, this last element especially caught the eye. The Jews spoke a different language, they dressed strangely, their customs were bizarre and suspicious. They easily fit the role of those who could be held respon-

<sup>13</sup> S. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I* (New York, 2003), 3–4. Henceforth, the book of S. A. An-sky (alias Shlomo-Zainvl Rapoport), *The Destruction of Galicia*, published posthumously in Yiddish as *Khurbn Galitsye* (Vilna, 1921), is cited from the English translation. We also used fragments of the original Russian manuscript of *Khurbn Galitsye* located at the Vernadsky Ukrainian Academic Library in Kiev. Irina Sergeeva and Victoria Mochalova kindly presented a copy of An-sky's manuscript to me.

<sup>14</sup> D. A. El'iashevich, *Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii 1797–1917: Ocherki istorii tsenzury* (St. Petersburg and Jerusalem, 1999), 500; S. Dubnov, *Kniga zhizni* (St. Petersburg, 1998), 348.

<sup>15</sup> Klier, "Kazaki i pogromy," 53–55; Semen Goldin, "Russkoe komandovanie i evrei vo vremia Pervoi mirovoi voyny: prichiny formirovaniia negativnogo stereotipa," in *Mirovoi krizis 1914–1920 godov*, 29–46.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford, 2001), 115.

<sup>17</sup> On antisemitism in Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdru krasnymi i belymi*, 37–41.

sible for both military failures and economic troubles. At the same time, they were absolutely vulnerable. The commanders justified setbacks by citing Jewish "betrayal" and sanctioned violence toward the Jews. The limits of this violence were determined individually in each specific case.

Anti-Jewish violence proliferated from the very first days of World War I, breaking out from *below*, even *before* official sanctions from the military authorities. The period of mobilization, when the troops were concentrated at railway junctions, was marked with a series of attacks on Jews.<sup>18</sup> Attacks occurred later as well, as in August 1915, when the Kherson governor reported "insignificant" disturbances as the reservists were being drafted. This classification included beatings administered by draftees to "Jewish passers-by," the "causing" of two light knife wounds to the Jew Warshavsky, and the stoning of windows in houses that belonged to Jews.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, these were merely trifles compared to the things that were unfolding along the front at the same time.

The Russian High Command ordered mass deportations of Jews from the front line as preventive measures against Jewish espionage and treason. About 250,000 people were deported, and another 350,000 fled to the interior of the country to escape the advancing Germans.<sup>20</sup> Not only Jews were deported. The same fate was shared by Germans, Gypsies, Hungarians, and Turks.<sup>21</sup> The deportations went hand in hand with violence. Suspected Jewish espionage and sympathy with the enemy led to speedy courts-martial with predetermined verdicts. Typically, the problem was dealt with well before it reached a court. As one military judge informed Prince Pavel Dmitrievich Dolgorukov, he "has not had to sign a single death warrant [in cases of "Jewish espionage"—O.B.], since every regimental commander hangs those who look like spies to

<sup>18</sup> Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 14. The "recruitment pogrom" was a tradition dating at least to 1904. See Lambroza, "The Pogroms of 1903–1906," 213–16.

<sup>19</sup> D. Amanzholova, ed., *Evreiskie pogromy v Rossiiskoi imperii, 1900–1916* (Moscow, 1998), 231.

<sup>20</sup> According to Mordechai Altshuler's calculations, five hundred to six hundred thousand Jews were deported and evicted in the course of the war ("Russia and Her Jews: The Impact of the 1914 War," *Wiener Library Bulletin* 27, 30/31 [1973]: 14). Jonathan Frankel believes that this figure reached one million by the end of 1915 (see his edited volume *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: An Annual*, 4: *The Jews and the European Crisis, 1914–1921* [Bloomington, IN, 1988]: 6). The most recent studies on the topic are Eric Lohr, "The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I," *Russian Review* 60, 3 (2001): 404–19; Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 137–45; Lor [Lohr], "Novye dokumenty o Rossiiskoi armii i evreiakh vo vremena pervoi mirovoi voiny," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta* 8, 26 (2003): 245–68; and G. Z. Ioffe, "Vyselenie evreev iz prifrontovoi polosy v 1915 gody," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 9 (2001): 85–96.

<sup>21</sup> Nelipovich, "V poiskakh vnutrennego vraga," 59; Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*, 121–37, 150–54.

them without the services of the court."<sup>22</sup> According to German sources, over one hundred Jews were executed for suspected espionage in the first weeks of the war.<sup>23</sup> It is quite probable that the total number of victims was much higher. According to a Red Cross worker, several dozen Jews were hanged in Ivangorod alone; but, as he recorded in his diary, "evidently, espionage still seems to flourish among them."<sup>24</sup>

What were the grounds for holding Jews guilty of espionage and treason? Did any factors operate here besides prejudice? It was clearly nonsensical to accuse the Jewish population in its entirety of espionage and collaboration with the enemy and to engage in the preventive deportation of hundreds of thousands of people, including women and children. But were there any real foundations for this policy, as detrimental as it was to the inner stability of the empire? One can hardly doubt the existence of enemy agents among the Jewish population, especially in the border regions. It is also a foregone conclusion that many Jews did not harbor patriotic sentiments toward their unkind Motherland. However, there is a huge distance between dislike and serving the enemy. How many people in fact traversed the distance? This is hard to estimate for at least two reasons. First, espionage suspects were frequently executed without any legal procedures. Second, data based on the indictments issued by courts-martial, which took place in the absence of any legal defense, with the defendants often incapable of speaking Russian and understanding the nature of the charges against them, are hardly indicative. When cases involving Jews were heard by proper military regimental courts with defenders, they almost inevitably ended in acquittal in the absence of any credible evidence.<sup>25</sup>

The deportations were often accompanied by rape, pillage, and pogroms. Looting often occurred under the guise of "requisitioning" and was de facto sanctioned from above. The Staff of the Fourth Army of the Southwestern Front responded to an inquiry about the "procedure of requisitioning in the theater of military action and in the threatened regions": "From the kikes take everything."<sup>26</sup>

It is revealing that the chronicle of the devastation of the Jewish population of Lithuania and Belorussia in the summer and fall of 1915 differs little from

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<sup>22</sup> *S'ezdy i konferentsii Konstitutsionno-demokraticheskoi partii*, vol. 3, book 1 (Moscow, 2000), 146.

<sup>23</sup> S. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison, 1982), 143.

<sup>24</sup> N. N. Vrangeli [Wrangel], baron, *Dni skorbi: Dnevnik 1914-1915 godov* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 77. Entry of 29 October 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Ia. G. Frumkin, *Iz istorii russkogo evreistva. Kniga o russkom evreistve ot 1860-kh godov do revoliutsii 1917 g.* (Jerusalem, Moscow, and Minsk, 2002), 93.

<sup>26</sup> Nelipovich, "V poiskakh vnutrennego vruga," 60-61.

the reports on the pogroms during the Civil War. The pillage and pogroms were mostly perpetrated by the Cossacks and dragoons. In the Kovno region, fifteen localities suffered from pogroms in July 1915. The dragoons killed a Jewish miller and his son near the shtetl of Onikshty for their refusal to surrender the wife and daughter and raped the fourteen-year-old Alta Schmidt near Vol'niki.<sup>27</sup>

In the Vilna region, nineteen shtetls were demolished in August–September 1915. A shtetl called Smorgon' suffered the most. The Cossacks raped women in the synagogue and killed several people. Violence stopped only when the *pogromshchiki* clashed with Jewish soldiers. During the deportations, a certain Leiba Sobol' told a Cossack officer that he could not leave his sick and senile father. The officer promptly shot the old Sobol' and declared that his son was now free to leave Smorgon'. The Cossacks set houses on fire both in Smorgon' and in other places. Some Jews were burnt alive.<sup>28</sup>

The wave of pogroms rolled over Minsk, Volynia, and Grodno provinces. Local peasants took part in the looting of Jewish belongings, just like in Ukraine in 1919. Again, it was mostly the Cossacks who distinguished themselves. Rape was commonplace, and murder was not infrequent. In Lemeshevichi (Pinsk district) three twelve-year-old girls and an eleven-year-old were raped; in Lebedev (Vilno province), most of the rape victims were old women, including some over seventy years of age. In the village of Bereznovka (Borisov district), ten Cossacks raped a seventy-two-year-old woman. Sometimes the raped women were murdered. According to intelligence reports of the Department of Police, all the shtetls and nearly all villages where Jews resided in the western part of Borisov district (Minsk province) were pillaged in September 1915. Cossacks did most of the looting, although mounted uhlans also did their share of robbery and murder. Local peasants took the most active part in pillage and instigation of pillage. The troops imposed "contributions" and demanded under the threat of death deliveries of tobacco and cigarettes.<sup>29</sup>

In Grodno, the population hid in the cellars during fighting with the Germans. Cossacks roamed the city, sticking spades in the earth to find those in hiding. The narrator (Bronislava Brzhenkovskaya) was wounded by a Cossack spade. She was dragged out of the cellar and brought to an officer with the following accusation: "The kikes hide in the cellars and shoot at us." The officer gave orders that all the hiding Jews be hauled out of the cellars and killed, and his orders were followed. When it transpired that the wounded Brzhenkovskaya was Polish, she was freed.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "Iz 'chernoï knigi," 274–77.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 282–83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 292–95; *Evreiskie pogromy v Rossiiskoi imperii*, 233–39.

<sup>30</sup> "Iz 'chernoï knigi," 290–91.

The violence that the Jews of Galicia, these “alien kikes,” suffered at the hands of the Russian army far surpassed the ordeal of the Russian Jews. After the Russians invaded Galicia in August 1914, pogroms of varying degrees of destruction and cruelty occurred in Brody, Radzivilov, L’vov, Sokal, and other cities and shtetls. Again, the Cossacks were the most violent. After the establishment of a “normal” occupational regime, the violence subsided, as a rule.<sup>31</sup>

Descriptions of attacks on the Jewish shtetls through which the Russian army passed during the Brusilov Offensive in the spring and summer of 1916 differ little from the pogrom chronicles of 1919. In Buchach, a Jewish soldier of the Russian army witnessed a ten-year-old boy with broken arms, lying next to his mother with a smashed skull and sundered legs, a corpse of a woman raped and then beaten to death, men with smashed heads and gouged eyes, of smothered and burnt bodies.

From the shtetl of Monastyrzhisk, taken over by the Russian army for the second time, all the Jews escaped except for three insane people and one paralyzed person. The last, a man of about sixty, owned several estates. When the Cossacks first stormed into town, they told the man, “You kike, under the Austrians, you were allowed to own land, under the Russians you will eat earth.” He was forced to crawl on all fours and dig his nose into the soil, prodded on by whipping. The next day, he was paralyzed.<sup>32</sup>

Humiliation accompanied the violence. In Buchach, soldiers tossed Torah scrolls out of twenty-three synagogues. Altogether, the author of the memoir gathered four poods (about sixty-five kilograms) of Torah scrolls in fifteen towns of Galicia and Bukovina ravaged by the Russian troops. In Monastyrzhisk, one of the synagogues was fashioned into an infirmary, while the other one was used for sewage. A Jewish cemetery was destroyed: graves were opened, marble monuments broken, and the fence around the common grave of German Jewish soldiers smashed.<sup>33</sup>

Wartime antisemitic propaganda effectively molded the image of an alien enemy within and without. In this way, violence against the Jewish population was de facto legalized. Anti-Jewish violence became a common and accepted undertaking for the military. The “model” of the *military pogroms* of the Civil War era was tested well in advance of the Civil War.

<sup>31</sup> Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 68–73, 78, 101, 138, 143–44, 158–59, 165–66, etc. See also *The Jews in the Eastern War Zone* (New York, 1916).

<sup>32</sup> Abba Lev, “Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev v krovavye gody mirovoi voiny (Otryvok iz dnevnika),” *Evreiskaia letopis’ 3* (Leningrad and Moscow, 1924), 174–76. About the author of the cited memoirs, see Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 80–81.

<sup>33</sup> Abba Lev, “Razgrom galitsiiskikh evreev,” 174–76.



The February Revolution of 1917 brought equality to the Jews, including the right to become officers. Attitudes toward them in the army, however, changed little.

Soon after the revolution, *Evreiskaia nedelia* (Jewish Week) proclaimed, "today's army is not an army in the typical sense. It is an army of the people, in the full sense of the word . . . The future of Russia, and we with her, are experiencing the dawn of a new, fortunate era where happiness and freedom are being reborn."<sup>34</sup>

This patriotic fervor would, however, soon cool. The "people's" army still bore the prejudices shared by the masses and the military in general. News of the acceptance of a large number of Jews into the officer corps resulted in the adopting of a resolution among a council of soldier's and officer's delegates of a certain regiment expressing their reluctance to "have Jews as officers in light of their incompetence . . . [which,] relying on the rule that no officer can be accepted to the regiment without the agreement of all officers, compelled them to warn the new Jewish officers that such promotions would not be accepted by the regiment in question."<sup>35</sup>

In another regiment, seventy-four Jewish soldiers were arrested under the suspicion of sympathizing with two deserters.<sup>36</sup> One of the recent Jewish graduates from the Aleksandrovskii Academy, as a result of discrimination against him on the part of his Orthodox comrades and in light of his belief that "Jewish officers will not be able to overcome the antisemitism ingrained in the soldiers," wrote a report to Alexandre Fedorovich Kerenskii requesting to be sent to the front as a common soldier.<sup>37</sup> Solomon Pozner, citing antisemitism in the divisions quartered in Odessa and Pskov, and noting the generally negative attitude in army circles towards Jews, claimed, "It was and so remains—antisemitism in the army."<sup>38</sup>

The image of the Jews as traitors and spies became firmly settled in the mind of the average citizen, and especially in the minds of the military. The archetypal act of treason, the symbolic "stab in the back," materialized in the motif of gunshots fired at retreating forces. These "shots" were variously heard by the Petliurists, by troops of the Volunteer Army, and even by the Reds. The identity of the Jewish perpetrators varied according to circumstances: they might be Bolsheviks or counterrevolutionaries, bourgeoisie or commissars.

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<sup>34</sup> L. Sh—g, "Pred novoi eroi," *Evreiskaia nedelia*, no. 10–11 (14 March 1917): 5–7.

<sup>35</sup> O. Z., "Osoboe mnenie osobogo polka," *Evreiskaia nedelia*, no. 22 (4 June 1917): 7.

<sup>36</sup> "Khronika," *Evreiskaia nedelia*, no. 22 (4 June 1917): 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Evreiskaia nedelia*, no. 22 (4 June 1917): 30.

<sup>38</sup> S. Pozner, "Antisemitizm v armii," *Evreiskaia nedelia*, no. 34 (27 August 1917): 2. By the second half of May, the military censors had noticed the displeasure of the masses, who had come to believe that "German dominance" had been replaced by a "Jewish" version. Many officers believed that the Jews were planning to seize power (see M. Frenkin, *Russkaia armiiia i revoliutsiia, 1917–1918* [Munich, 1978], 250).

This motif had established firm roots in the tradition of civilian pogroms. On a number of occasions during the pogroms of 1881–1882, Jews were accused of firing into crowds with revolvers. Such actions apparently broke the unwritten rule of these events that Jews were “allowed” to resist with physical force, but the use of firearms violated the rules of the game. Local authorities reported that when the use of firearms was reported, “the crowd went wild.” It was on such occasions that the few Jewish fatalities of the 1881–1882 period typically occurred. Likewise, the “political pogroms” during the October Days of 1905 were often triggered by shots reportedly fired on a crowd of loyalist demonstrators.

While the main outlines of the motif remained the same, a striking innovation during the war was the feminization of the identity of the gunman—or, rather, gun-woman. Thus a shot purportedly fired at Russian troops by a Jewish girl typically triggered pogroms in Galicia during World War I. In Brody, the daughter of a local hotel owner allegedly fired at Cossacks. The troops murdered the girl and four male Jews and torched part of the city. It was later established that there had been no gunfire, and that no Cossacks were either killed or wounded. In L'vov, in response to “a shot fired by a Jewess from her window,” eighteen Jews were murdered and a Jewish block of houses looted. Such “shots” served as signals for the beginning of pogroms in a dozen other places. A member of the State Duma and the organizer of a frontline medical corps, Igor' Petrovich Demidov, reported to Semen Akimovich An-sky that in each town where such incidents were reported, the “shot of the Jewess” was invariably fired from the window of the residence that housed the best shop in town.<sup>39</sup>

Demidov implied that the “shot in the back” was basically a pretext for robbery and looting. In my opinion, the reality may have been both simpler and more complex. The gunshot from behind is a “materialization” of treason already anticipated, and a shot fired by a woman indicates a double treachery. This is a “wandering” motif that emerges at different times under varying circumstances. One might note the widespread legends of female sharpshooters that became so widespread during the First Chechen War and even provided the storyline for a popular Russian film, *Blokpost* (The Blockhouse).<sup>40</sup> Equally well known were legends of the so-called “White Pantyhose,” the young female snipers from the Baltic states of the former Soviet Union, who fought on the side of the Chechen separatists during the First Chechen War. No one has ever

<sup>39</sup> Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, 68–70, 88; S. A. An-sky, “Razrushenie Galitsii” (manuscript).

<sup>40</sup> The plot of *The Blockhouse* centers on a Chechen girl who procures the sexual services of her sister, who had previously been “spoilt” (raped) by Russian soldiers. The soldiers pay with the hardest currency in the Caucasus—gun cartridges. The young souteneuse, who also happens to be a sniper, then uses the cartridges to kill her clients.



seen or identified any such Baltic sharpshooters in Chechnya, but this did not deter some Russian newspapers from treating their existence as proven fact.

The gunshots of Jewish snipers continued to be heard by members of various armed groups as the Great War merged into the Civil War. While staging a panicked retreat in the spring of 1918 under the blows of the German army, Red Army soldiers responsible for several pogroms in the northern districts of Chernigov province claimed that the “kikes shoot down the Red Army,” that they are “all counterrevolutionaries,” and that they enthusiastically welcome the Germans.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, an instructor of the military commissariat in Kursk by the name of Fomin reported to Moscow that members of a Jewish self-defense unit had fired at the retreating Red Army men.<sup>42</sup>

Not only Russians heard gunshots. In Pińsk, on 5 April 1919, Polish legionnaires arrested participants in a local meeting of Zionists, who were discussing the distribution of the aid they received from the United States. Almost all of those arrested (thirty-seven or thirty-five, according to different sources) were taken to the marketplace and machine-gunned. According to the official version, spread by the Polish Telegraph Agency, “even as the city was being taken over, gunshots rained down in the dusk on the advancing uhlans in different districts from the windows of Jewish houses.” The meeting was purportedly a gathering of Bolsheviks, and the Poles had found “tremendous stores of weaponry.”<sup>43</sup>

The soldiers of Petliura, in turn, were assured at the beginning of 1919 that the Jews “created their own special regiments, that they support the old regime and fight for the landowners, that they were firing from the windows at the rebelling people, and even scalded the insurgent masses with boiling water from their windows.”<sup>44</sup>

While units of the volunteer army and the Bolsheviks fought over Kiev in October 1919, rumors spread among the Whites, who apparently possessed more imagination than the Ukrainian peasants who formed the backbone of Petliura’s forces, that the Jews poured not only boiling water but also sulfuric acid over “our nurses.” An officer “with a university badge on his lapel”

<sup>41</sup> M. Ionovich, “Na krasnom fronte,” *Rassvet*, no. 18 (26 May 1918): 9.

<sup>42</sup> I. M. Cherkover, *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraïne, 1917–1918* (Berlin, 1923), 152–53; S. Agurskii, *Evreiskii rabochii v kommunisticheskom dvizhenii (1917–1921)* (Minsk, 1926), 152.

<sup>43</sup> “Zverstva poliakov v Pinske,” *Khronika evreiskoi zhizni*, no. 16 (9 May 1919): 10–13. The “Pro-Polish” version of the event is in Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (London, 1972), 47–48. Murders of Jews also marked the occupation of Vilno by Polish troops in April 1919 (Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star*, 240).

<sup>44</sup> Iv. Nazhivin, *Zapiski o revoliutsii* (Vienna, 1921), 179, 196.

declared that the “kikes cut up our soldiers, throw boiling water and *burning* tar over the nurses, and help the Bolsheviks.”<sup>45</sup>

Immediately after the Whites’ return to Kiev, a local newspaper, *Vechernye ogni* (Evening Fires), published a list of houses and apartments from which Jews had fired at troops of the retreating volunteer army and poured sulfuric acid and boiling water over them. A special commission checked the addresses on the list and refuted the newspaper’s information. It might seem that any rational evaluation would have seen the incongruous nature of these charges without the need to verify addresses: events were not unfolding in a medieval fortress, nor at the time of the Tatar Yoke. Given the circumstances, gunshots from the windows of one’s *own* house could only signal the shooter’s extreme foolishness, or some suicidal impulse.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, further investigations were conducted in order to establish that puffs of smoke emanating from the windows of Jewish apartments in Kiev were caused by ricocheting bullets rather than fusillades fired by the residents.

The commander of a Red Army regiment, fighting its way through the Polish-held town of Białystok at the end of August 1920, reported that he “was forced to fight more with the population of Białystok than with the Polish troops, while the Jewish population took an active part in the hostilities.”<sup>47</sup> Most likely, this was the echo of the stereotype deeply etched onto the minds of the Russian military, regardless of the uniform they happened to wear, of Jewish “shots in the back.” All the political intelligence reports arising from the Soviet-Polish War indicate that the Jewish population supported only the Reds.

Only in the bitterness of defeat and exile did some participants in the Civil War reconsider the “shots in the back” syndrome. In his memoirs, the former commander in chief of the volunteer army, General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, acknowledged that “alongside actual facts, there were simulations—to cover up violence already committed—that the notorious gunshots were often of ‘Christian,’ and sometimes even of mythical origin. But mutual hatred dimmed minds, any hostile action from the Jews was *objectively* possible, and the masses accepted all the accusations—whether true or false—at face value.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> V. A. Poliakov, “Zhutkie dni na Ukraine,” *Evreiskaia letopis’ 2* (Petrograd and Moscow, 1923): 21–23. A nurse was brought to Slobodka, where the Whites were stationed. The nurse had allegedly been showered with sulfuric acid by “zhidy.” It soon transpired that she had toppled a cistern of boiling water onto herself (*ibid.*, 32–33). But such a banality was of little interest to anyone.

<sup>46</sup> V. A. Poliakov, “Pytka strakhom,” *Evreiskaia letopis’*, 3:61.

<sup>47</sup> *Pol’sko-sovetskaia voina 1919–1920 (Ranee ne opublikovannye dokumenty i materialy)*, pt. 2 (Moscow, 1994), 5–6.

<sup>48</sup> A. I. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty*, vols. 4–5 (Moscow, 2003), 5:538–39.

The theoretically *possible*, when the military of all sides came in contact with Jews, was often transformed into the *actual*. For example, several Petliurists encountered a Jewish tailor with two daughters, fourteen and eleven years old. Having noticed that the older daughter was carrying scissors, they accused the girls of severing telegraph wires, and promptly cut their tongues, gouged out their eyes, and murdered them.<sup>49</sup> White officers killed a Jewish university student and his wife “for espionage” when they found he was carrying a small address book. The student was an associate of one of the Kiev newspapers who had left the city at the time of the Bolshevik occupation. When the student and his wife hurried back to “liberated” Kiev, they encountered the volunteer army . . . and their fate.<sup>50</sup>

The classic literary depiction of the Civil War, Isaac Emmanuilovich Babel’s *Red Cavalry*, includes in the story “Berestechko” a matter-of-fact description of the Cossack way of dealing with “espionage” invariably committed by a Jew. “Right under my windows several Cossacks were executing an old Jew with a silver beard for espionage. The old man squealed and tried to break loose. Then Kudria from the machine-gun team took his head and placed it under his arm. The Jew went quiet and steadied his feet apart. Kudria took out a dagger with his right hand, and carefully slaughtered the old man, without getting any of the blood on himself.”<sup>51</sup>

When considering the causes of anti-Jewish pogroms during the Civil War, one must not underemphasize the large number of contributing factors. There was the socioeconomic rivalry between the Jews and the local population, exacerbated by the privations of wartime. Antisemitism featured as the trump card in anti-Bolshevik propaganda and as a sincere conviction of many adversaries of Bolshevism who genuinely regarded it as the brainchild of the Jewry.<sup>52</sup> Cossacks in the service of the anti-Bolshevik cause—and sometimes the Bolshevik forces as well—seized the opportunity for rampage and plunder presented by the “fog of war.”

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<sup>49</sup> Ia. Lobach, “Ovruch-Korosten’ (Iz pogromnoi epopei na Ukraine),” *Khronika evreiskoi zhizni* 6–7 (February 28, 1919): 24.

<sup>50</sup> V. A. Poliakov, “Zhutkie dni na Ukraine,” 25.

<sup>51</sup> Isaac Babel, “Konarmiiia,” in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2 vols. (Moscow 2002), 1:349. The short story *Berestechko* was dated “Berestechko, August 1920.” On the attitudes of the “red Cossacks” toward Jews as well as the Red Army in general, see Oleg Budnitskii, “The ‘Jewish Battalions’ in the Red Army,” in *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience*, ed. Zvi Gitelman and Yaacov Ro’i (Lanham, MD, 2007), 15–35; and Budnitskii, “The Reds and the Jews, or the Comrades in Arms of the Military Reporter Liutov,” in *The Enigma of Isaac Babel: Biography, History, Context*, ed. Gregory Freidin (Stanford, CA, 2009), 65–81.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920* (Berkeley, CA, 1977), 176–77; Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” in *Pogroms*, 310–11.

But another factor cannot be discounted: a deeply rooted Orthodox Christian image of the Jews as a treacherous tribe that had betrayed Christ and, given a chance, was prepared to betray Russia and collude with the heathen and alien. This image of traitors was colored with additional hues during World War I. The legend of the “shot in the back” was the concrete expression of these ingrained fears and prejudices. Throughout the war years, the army was subjected to the most intense antisemitic propaganda and, for the first time, obtained a de facto license for violence specifically against Jews. It is not surprising that the seed fell on receptive soil. The Jewish pogroms of 1918–1920 were the zenith and direct continuation of the anti-Jewish violence that started in August 1914.

*Translated by Eugene Budnitsky*

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