

Soviet “Modernizing” Strategies towards Jews in the Ukrainian Town of Berdychiv¹

by Bozhena Kozakevych

Berdychiv, a traditional center of Jewish culture and religion, was subjected to an intense “modernization” drive after the Soviet seizure of power. The Bolsheviks aimed to create a new society by tearing down old social structures and replacing them with secular, socialist alternatives. But in the early years of the Soviet Union, the question of how to realize this project was still a matter of experimentation. This paper discusses the sovietization efforts in Berdychiv during the 1920s and looks at how they transformed the town. It does so by focusing on the Soviet nationalities and religion policies with respect to the Jewish population, Berdychiv’s largest ethnic group. It argues that the early Soviet leadership managed to create a Jewish proletarian culture and forced a rift between the generations, thus causing lasting changes in the town’s social fabric.

Key words: Berdychiv; sovietization; Soviet Jewish history; Soviet religious and nationalities policy; social transformation; Jewish town

doi: 10.55337/SQMW9346

Introduction

Every anti-Semite smirks when he hears the word ‘Berdychiv.’ Berdychiv is synonymous with Jewish trade, the bourgeoisie, a nest of speculators, a city where one can live on trade and trickery [...]. What does an ordinary resident know about Berdychiv? Nothing more than the fact that he was born in Berdychiv, got married there, or spent a good part of his life there. This sort of thing one does not proclaim aloud.²

This was how the Soviet writer Vasilii Grossman commemorated his hometown. While general knowledge regarding this place seemed to be quite limited in Soviet society, certain cultural impressions had taken hold. In his essay for the magazine *Ogonek (The Flame)*, entitled “*Berdichev ne v shutku, a v serěz*” (“Take Berdychiv Seriously, Not as a Joke”), Grossman investigated the Jewish character of the city, its stereotypes, as well as the process of social transformation that had taken place in the period prior to 1929.³

Located in central Ukraine, some 200 kms southwest of Kyiv, Berdychiv was a town with a majority Jewish population. Like many such places, it would undergo sovietization at the hands of the Bolshevik authorities, who undertook the task of breaking centuries-old established social structures and traditions. Using

Berdychiv as a lens, this article intends to illuminate the Soviet transformation processes of the 1920s regarding the Jewish population. In connection with the sovietization measures in social and cultural life, including the secularization and anti-religious campaigns, this paper further serves to illustrate the metamorphosis of a small town in the Soviet periphery, while suggesting greater contextual implications. Using local source material, the correlation between central politics and the introduction of policies under specific regional conditions will also be investigated.

Several factors distinguished Berdychiv from other similar sized towns in this region. Among those were its distinct history, especially the myths surrounding it, as well as the prominent personalities who had been born and resided in the town, or spent certain stages of their lives there. For such individuals, Berdychiv represents a “space” in their oeuvre. Sholem Aleichem, for instance, described Berdychiv’s atmosphere as that of a provincial Jewish small town in the second half of the 19th century. His *Letters of Menachem Mendel*, set in Berdychiv, were later adapted into the film *Jidische Glikn* (“Jewish Luck”, 1925) by Alexis Granowsky, with a cast of Yiddish-speaking actors from the Soviet theater scene. The film was produced as part of the authorities’ drive to promote national languages and culture under the Soviet nationalities policies of *korenizatsiya*. At the same time, it provides an invaluable source that documents Berdychiv’s cityscape during the 1920s, immersing the viewer within a close approximation of Berdychiv’s cultural atmosphere in the late 1800s.⁴ Throughout the film, the suffering of ordinary Jewish subjects in the Russian Empire is contrasted with their life in the Soviet Union.⁵

The imaginary representations of Berdychiv raised certain expectations. Israel Joshua Singer, the Yiddish-language writer and journalist, visited the Soviet Union between the end of 1926 and the start of 1927, to report for the New York-based socialist Yiddish language newspaper *Vorverts* (“Forward”). His reporting catered to Yiddish-speaking readers from Vilnius (Wilna), Warsaw, and New York. Singer not only visited larger cities like Moscow, as was commonplace for Western journalists in the 1920s, but also toured provincial towns like Berdychiv. His 1928 travelogue about Berdychiv resembles those creative accounts in search of an imaginary small, east European Jewish town, or *Shtetl*. For example, the author speaks of a baggage attendant at the train station who, while unremarkably dressed and speaking Russian, for Singer represented a “particularly Yiddish luster.” As he walked through the city, he searched for the remains of the *Shtetl* entangled within the Soviet reality.⁶

The literary representation of the cityscape contributed to the establishment and consolidation of a myth surrounding the town. In memoirs, literature, and film, Berdychiv is presented as one of the most “Jewish” small towns in the Russian Empire, and later as one of the principal Jewish cities in the Soviet Union. Berdychiv

became the embodiment of an archetypal *Shtetl*, with a touch of provincial charm and backwardness completing this image. In Berdychiv, reality and the imaginary became interwoven, and its literary space became indistinguishable and inseparable from its historical counterpart, therefore, the “literary Berdychiv” must also remain in focus when conducting historical research.⁷ In all likelihood, Berdychiv’s image as a quintessential Jewish Shtetl also influenced local policymakers as they sought to promote the town’s integration into the Soviet modernization project.

Berdychiv in the Russian Empire

To better understand the transformations within the Jewish ethnic-religious communities after the Bolshevik seizure of power, it is instructive to look back two centuries at the situation of Jews within the Russian Empire. This is important since Soviet policies towards the Jewish population in the 1920s were designed as antithetical to the imperial policies.

Berdychiv became a part of the Russian Empire following the second partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1793.⁸ One year prior, a decree by Tsarina Catherine II had banned Jews from settling in the imperial interior. This decree led to the creation of the “Pale of Settlement”, which would remain in place until 1914, when the violent divisions of the First World War brought it to an end. The right for Jews to work and settle was thus limited to the western periphery of the Russian Empire, a territory that today encompasses parts of Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, and western Russia.⁹ With the partitions of Poland-Lithuania, the Russian Empire not only acquired extensive new territories, but also new subjects. Besides Poles and Lithuanians, more than one million Jews came under Russian rule. Prior to this, Jews had been forbidden to settle in the Russian Empire.¹⁰ Imperial Russian policy toward the Jewish population subsequently oscillated between attempts at assimilation and efforts to segregate them from their gentile neighbors.¹¹

Before the 20th century, the majority of the Jewish population lived in small towns, called *miasteczko* in Polish, *mistechko* in Ukrainian, and *mestechko* in Russian, now generally referred to as *Shtetl*.¹² Between the 1790s and the 1840s, *Shtetls* were market towns with primarily Jewish residents. Historically these towns had remained part of the feudal holdings of Polish magnates, however, their incorporation into the state administrative structure, the construction of state institutions, and their acquisition from the Polish nobility was already underway during this period. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern terms this era “the golden age of the *Shtetl*,” the time when their former lords – the Polish magnates – gradually lost power and their new rulers – Russian officials – were beginning to build new administrative power structures.¹³ In a similarly vein, Magazanik, the protagonist of Grossman’s short story *In the Town of Berdichev* assesses the events that took place a century later, between the 1917 October Revolution and the Bolshevik

consolidation of power in 1921. For him, the best time for ordinary people is when one ruler has departed and the next one is yet to come: no requisitioning, no paying contributions, no pogroms.¹⁴

Nevertheless, the Polish magnates did not lose their influence upon Berdychiv overnight following its incorporation into the Russian Empire. During this time, the city was initially still under the feudal suzerainty of Michał Radziwiłł, a nobleman of Lithuanian-Belarusian origin. Gradually, however, control of the town and the region were transferred to the Russian administration. Initially, Berdychiv was part of Volhynia province (*Guberniya*) and in 1804, during the process of restructuring, it was assigned to Kyiv province, where it remained until its incorporation into the Zhytomyr Oblast in 1937.¹⁵ Berdychiv remained an important location for the Polish nobility during this period. Throughout the 1820s, a secret Polish regional organization, *Narodowe Towarzystwo Patriotyczne* (the National Patriotic Society), operated in Berdychiv. One of their primary goals was the restoration of the Polish state.¹⁶ The Polish Uprising of 1830–1831 finally forced the transfer of Berdychiv from private hands to full imperial control. The anti-Polish measures enacted after the revolt pushed back the influence of the magnates and big landowners, forcing Jews, to a certain extent, to “choose” between Russia and Poland.¹⁷

The era termed the “Golden Age” by Petrovsky-Shtern was indeed Berdychiv’s heyday. The town’s development into a trade center coincided with the emergence of Hassidism. This mystical stream of Judaism, which developed in Podolia in the mid 18th century, was aimed primarily at the ordinary Jewish citizenry. In 1785, Levi Yitzhak ben Meirvas became the local Rabbi in Berdychiv. Yitzhak was a defender of the ordinary people, which made him a popular figure, but was also a talented polemicist, with his most influential works being published during his time as Rabbi in Berdychiv. While the city had produced several prominent Rabbis, it was Yitzhak who transformed it into a regional center of Hasidic life. The founding of the first printing house in the 1790s consolidated its reputation as a center of religious learning.¹⁸ Berdychiv was not only a major center for Hassidic Jews, for whom Yitzhak’s grave later became an important cultural and religious site, but also for Catholics, who made pilgrimages to the town to visit the icon of Our Lady of Berdychiv, which was supposedly imbued with holy powers. Orthodox Christians also journeyed to the city to visit the icon of Saint Nicholas.¹⁹ Beside its convenient location at the crossroads between Western Europe and the interior of the Russian Empire, the yearly fairs further helped facilitate Berdychiv’s development into a hub of commerce.²⁰

With the completion of the railway between Kyiv and Zhmerynka in 1870, however, Berdychiv started to lose its importance as a commercial center, leading to the impoverishment of the population and the city’s relegation to a provincial status.²¹ The rising poverty among the citizenry was depicted in various photographs taken by S. An-Ski’s (Shloyme Zanyl Rappoport) during his

ethnographic expedition in 1913.²² The small dilapidated wooden houses of the Zahrebel'ye district (on the left bank of the river Hnylopyat), mostly inhabited by craftsman and peddlers, stood in particularly stark contrast to the bourgeois homes in the *Staryy Gorod* (Old Town) and the majestic buildings of the Choral Synagogue and the Orthodox Cathedrals.²³

At the dawn of the 20th century, the dominant, colloquial language in Berdychiv was still Yiddish, while Russian was mainly spoken in the *Novyy Gorod* (New Town) quarter. This quarter was primarily inhabited by the merchant class, industrialists, and intellectuals. The Jewish writer Vladimir Zhabotinskiy portrayed Berdychiv in his autobiographical novel as follows:

I visited Berdychiv at the beginning of the century. There, I encountered the Orthodox porter at the train station, who spoke better Yiddish than I did, intoning the correct Jewish melody. But then, it was indeed the most Jewish city of all the Ukrainian cities, and with a great degree of certainty I can say that this was also the case during my mother's childhood [in Berdychiv].²⁴

Following a wave of pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century, the Zionist movement began gaining support and political leverage among the Jewish population of the Russian Empire. Zionists in Berdychiv, as well as everywhere else in the empire, were themselves under the influence of Asher Ginzburg (Achad Ha'am), an intellectual from Odessa. In contrast to the father of modern political Zionism, Theodor Herzl (Binyamin Ze'ev), Ginzburg did not argue for the recreation of the (biblical) Jewish state, but rather for a secular one, where the Hebraic culture would take central focus. As a precursor for this new state, he advocated for a spiritual center in Palestine.²⁵ Alongside Zionism, the secular Jewish socialist party, or Bund, grew in popularity in Berdychiv. Known by its full name as the General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, the Bund constituted a union of all Jewish (Yiddish-speaking) workers in the Russian Empire. Its main objective, besides improving working conditions, was to gain recognition for the Jewish people as a distinctive nation.²⁶ This politicization of Jewish life became obvious during the 1905 Russian Revolution, when a series of demonstrations broke out in Berdychiv.²⁷ This led to several arrests, primarily targeting the Bund members. However, unlike in many other cities in the empire, no pogroms took place in Berdychiv at the time.²⁸

Berdychiv 1917-1920

During the First World War, combat operations took place in Galicia and western Volhynia. Since Berdychiv was close to the frontlines, it was affected by the increased military presence and waves of refugees that resulted in a worsening of the general living conditions in the town. The 1917 February Revolution, and the subsequent abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, were received with much jubilation

from the workers in the city. The statue of Tsar Alexander II was promptly torn down,²⁹ while the first workers' council had already been established by 9 March.³⁰

Before examining the Soviet nationality and religious policies, as applied to the sovietization of Berdychiv's Jews, the political and military unrest in the city must be briefly discussed. The October Revolution unleashed a wave of discontent across the country followed by military conflicts between differing political camps. Berdychiv was no exception, with the city's administration remaining in constant flux, undergoing several changes of governing regime that even overlapped at times. What follows is a chronological sketch of these changes between 1917 and 1920: a governing pact between the Bolsheviks and the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR), which lasted four weeks; the UPR alone, which lasted six weeks, the Bolsheviks, who retained power for two weeks; Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyy's Ukrainian State, established with German military support and held the city for seven months; the Directorate of the UPR, which lasted two and half months; a restored Bolshevik regime, that lasted six months; a restored UPR regime, supported by the Army of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, which lasted one month; the Bolsheviks, for another two months; the UPR, albeit only for a mere five days; the Bolsheviks for another four months followed, again, by the UPR, in alliance with Poland, for approximately two months.³¹ Besides these belligerents, the Whites and the peasant movement were also active in the region but never took control of the town itself. Only with the Treaty of Riga, signed in March 1921, was a stable Bolshevik administration finally established within the city.

While this brief outline does not give any indication of the mood of the city's inhabitants, it clearly illustrates the temporary nature of the city's administrations during the civil war period.³² The frontline correspondent from Zafrontovoye Byuro, a Bolshevik agency coordinating actions in the rear of Denikin's Army, reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Ukraine on the mood in Berdychiv:

With regard to Berdychiv and the surroundings, the military situation is unclear, even more so with regard to the underground fighting. The situation appears as such: Today one power leaves, only to return the day after. In the region, there is practically no administration: neither Galician, nor ours, and nothing from Denikin either. The mood of the city's inhabitants, including the workers, resembles that of apathetic speculators.³³

These constant changes of power, also led to a growing level of uncertainty among the populace with violence quickly becoming a part of daily life in Berdychiv.³⁴ In 1917, for the first time in its modern history, a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms swept across the city. Prior to this, its demographic status, having one of the proportionally highest Jewish population anywhere in the Russian Empire at around 80%, had spared previously Berdychiv from pogroms in 1881 and 1905.³⁵ However, those that took place between 1917 and 1920 were perpetuated by outsiders,

including all of the civil war's belligerents: soldiers of the UPR, the Directorate, the Red Army, and the Polish Army.³⁶ According to an eyewitness report, the pogrom that took place on 5 January 1919, for example, was perpetrated by a unit of UPR military personnel (*Kurin smerti*):

Later it became clear that pogroms of a similar fashion took place in the town. The [military] unit moved slowly along the main streets of the town. Small groups broke off from the larger group and rampantly stormed into houses. Most of the time robberies were carried out. Less often a heist proved to be unsatisfactory, and women were raped, and men were beaten. In exceptional circumstances people were murdered.³⁷

The same report also indicates that after the unit had moved on, local criminal elements continued to perpetuate the violence, which went on late into the night.³⁸ This traumatic experience left a strong impression on the local Jews, with memories of the pogrom's extreme violence being passed down through families, as interviews carried out by the Shoah Foundation corroborate.³⁹

With the establishment of Soviet power in 1920, the town gradually entered an era of relative normality and political calm, as well as a series of social transformations. These transformations were slowly implemented within a highly precarious socio-economic situation, which had followed in the wake of the havoc created by the Great War and Russian Civil War. However, the number of Berdychiv's residents remained relatively stable (53,351 in 1897 and 55,556 in 1926). Conversely, the Jewish population had dramatically declined from around 80%, according to the 1897 imperial census,⁴⁰ to only 55%, based on the first Soviet census conducted in 1926.⁴¹ This decline can be explained by several factors. First and foremost, Jewish residents had been moving out of the city not only because of the pogroms but also as a result of the dissolution of the Pale of Settlement. The latter meant that for the first time since the Pale's formation in 1792, Jews could move anywhere without special authorization. Another key factor was the poor economic state small towns like Berdychiv found themselves in the aftermath of the civil war. However, while many of Berdychiv's Jews had certainly emigrated en masse to Western Europe and North America in the late 19th century, the Soviet Union constrained opportunities for overseas migration.⁴² As a consequence, large regional cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, or Moscow quickly became destinations of choice, offering better opportunities for work and career choices.

Another factor that resulted in the decreasing number of Jewish residents was a provision within the 1926 Soviet census questionnaire that allowed respondents to enter their own preferred *narodnost* (ethnicity), rather than choose from a pre-set list.⁴³ This meant that those individuals who no longer wanted to be officially identified with Judaism – stemming either from their experiences of the pogroms, a desire to escape general anti-Semitic prejudices, or simply in seeking an easier means of blending into the new Soviet society – could record themselves

as members of another group, mainly Ukrainian or Russian. Frequent changes of given names among Jews at this time served the same objective. For instance, Nina (Malka) Kordash Blimes, who lived in Berdychiv during the interwar period, recalled that in her school application her parents, wishing to hide their daughter's Jewish background, changed her name from "Malka" to the more Ukrainian sounding "Mina." This was later changed to "Nina", due to an oversight by a clerk at the registrar's office (*pasportnyy stol*).⁴⁴

Korenizatsiya and Social Transformation in Berdychiv during the 1920s

The 1920s in the Soviet Union were in many aspects a decade of experimentation and social upheaval as the Bolsheviks sought to sovietize all aspects of public and private life. Terry Martin has identified the following as being the primary goals of Soviet "modernization": industrialization, urbanization, secularization, universal education, and literacy.⁴⁵ Yuri Slezkine describes this process more graphically: "Modernization means that everyone will become urban, mobile, literate, eloquent, active-minded, and hard-working and professionally flexible."⁴⁶ With regard to the Jewish question, Petrovsky-Shtern has concluded that for Lenin, as for most Russian imperial policy-makers, modernizing Jews meant assimilating them. However, in the eyes of the Bolshevik leader, assimilation was not intended to force Jews into the fold of an imperialistic Russian cultural hegemony, but rather transform them into citizens of a new proletarian socialist society.⁴⁷

Like the New Economic Policy (NEP) of the 1920s, the promotion of national languages and cultures (*korenizatsiya*) was intended above all to unify society in the socialist sense. From the very beginning, these policies aimed to aid with the economic recovery of the country, help consolidate Bolshevik power over society, and encourage the population to build the socialist order.⁴⁸ The Soviet nationalities policy of the 1920s can thus be seen as an effective tool for the homogenization of Soviet society, a precondition for the creation of the new Soviet man.⁴⁹ Indeed, the following passage from the draft program for the Russian Communist Party from 23 February 1919 illustrates the logic behind the implementation of *korenizatsiya*:

*Within the nationalities question lies the politics of the proletariat [...] in contrast to unrealizable imperial proclamations of the bourgeois-democratic equality of nations, in the unwavering realization of the convergence and consolidation of the workers and peasantry of all nations in their revolutionary fight to destroy the bourgeoisie. The realization of this goal requires the unconditional liberation of the oppressed or otherwise disadvantaged nations to whom the right to secede should be granted, as a guarantee that the mistrust of the working classes of the nations [...] will be completely driven out and replaced by a voluntary and conscious unification.*⁵⁰

Nationalities and religious policies were directly connected with the secularization, general education and literacy drives targeting the broad population.

The development of Jewish proletarian culture was to be a preliminary step which would serve towards complete Jewish integration, or even assimilation, into Soviet society. This culture was to be built using the Yiddish language as a basis. Yiddish, as “the language of the working people” was to be promoted in schools, the press, and on a cultural level. Hebrew, by contrast, was supposedly a “bourgeois” language and was to be removed from the public sphere.⁵¹ Yet, in official Soviet documents, as in those from the Russian Empire, one can hardly find any reference to either Hebrew or Yiddish. Instead, civil servants used the formulation “Jewish language” (*yevreyskiy yazyk*).⁵² Since Yiddish was the recognized medium of *korenizatsiya* policies directed at the Jewish population, the authorities saw it as the only “Jewish language” possible.

Two Soviet bodies dealing with Jewish affairs were established in 1918: the Jewish Commission (*Yevkom*) under the umbrella of the Commission for National Affairs (headed by Joseph Stalin at the time) and the much more active Jewish section of the Communist Party (*Yevseksiya*).⁵³ The meeting minutes for the Berdychiv *Yevseksiya* show that its primary task was to exert influence upon the Jewish population of the town in order to include them within the Soviet project.⁵⁴ As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, many former Bundists were engaged in the *Yevseksiya*’s activities in Berdychiv. The main reason for this was the fact that most Bolsheviki had a dismal, or non-existent, comprehension of Yiddish, while those previously associated with the Bund had deep connections to local Jewish communities.⁵⁵ Indeed, the 1926–1927 report from the Berdychiv *Yevseksiya* mentioned that the party cells’ (*partyacheyki*) work in Yiddish had helped “mobilize” former non-party members to join the party.⁵⁶ Such reports need to be evaluated with caution, however. The party organs often included what was expected of them in their documentation. The growth of party membership in Berdychiv can also be explained in other terms. The citizenry recognized the permanence of the new power structures, and party membership was valued as a chance to enhance career opportunities. Israel Singer’s travel report accurately captures the mood of Berdychiv’s Jews in 1927, observing that the younger generation was much more capable of coming to terms with the Soviet system and accommodating themselves within it.⁵⁷ Becoming a member of the party could thus also be seen as an adaptation strategy.

The *Yevseksiya* gained control over all aspects of life and was responsible for building new social structures that would replace those destroyed in 1918. Propaganda delivered in one’s native language was viewed as key to this success and was spread via different media. Along with Yiddish newspapers such as *Der Emes* (The Truth) and *Stern* (Star), a new local paper *Die Vokh* (The Week) began publication in 1926. Prior to its founding, only a single page in the local Ukrainian language newspaper *Radyanskyi Shlyakh* (The Soviet Path) was printed in Yiddish.⁵⁸

However, the press was hardly the main source of daily information for the

majority of the population. While the 1926 census reported a rise in the literacy rate (gramotnost) by 17% since the 1897 census, literacy still remained relatively low at only 61.24%.⁵⁹ Since literacy at the time referred to the ability to “decipher printed words, at least by syllable, and [...] write one’s family name,”⁶⁰ one may doubt whether the Soviet press actually reached this percentage of the population. The relative successes of the Soviet literacy campaign came about in the wake of an ambitious education reform, which included the construction of a kindergarten and primary school network, as well as evening courses for adults. In Berdychiv during the 1920s, an array of evening courses were offered to workers. In 1926, 956 Jewish workers attended 35 Likbez-sites: educational institutions dedicated to the eradication of illiteracy.⁶¹ These institutions were also sites of ideological re-education and distributed communist content in order to create loyal Soviet citizens.

Similarly, recreational locations were transformed into sites of Soviet ideological education. During the regular meetings of non-political workers’ clubs, Communist Party presentations and anti-religious seminars also took place. In Berdychiv, three such clubs were established in 1926 while Komsomol organizations were set up in the factories.⁶² Thus, these clubs were simultaneously transformed into spaces of enlightenment, propaganda and leisure. Their multifunctionality is illustrated in the following excerpt from Singer’s travelogue:

*Inside the club things are cramped, it is simply not possible to move around. Boys, girls, hundreds, thousands fill the rooms, stairs, noise, chatter, laughter, singing. The entirety of Berdychiv’s old happiness is to be found in the club. Some come to attend lectures, others to play domino, some come for the buffet and even some come here for a rendezvous. The best place for all of this is the club.*⁶³

However, the Bolsheviks’ campaigns continued to struggle owing to a lack of agitators with a strong grasp of Yiddish. Besides the *Yevsovparkshkola* (Yiddish Soviet Party School), Yiddish-language “mobile Schools” (*peredvizhnyye shkoly*) were instituted to train party cadre in small cities such as Berdychiv.⁶⁴

The Soviet campaign against anti-Semitism was another crucial method of winning the sympathy of the Jewish population. As the program draft of the Russian Communist Party quoted above indicates, the party had promised oppressed ethnic groups that the Soviet authorities would work to resolve their plight. Investigations were promptly launched into the causes of the Berdychiv pogroms of 1917–20 but no legal convictions were ever made.⁶⁵ It is hard to tell how pertinent such campaigns were to the local population. When interviewed, contemporaries tend to claim that anti-Semitism did not exist at the time, often repeating the Soviet slogan of “the friendship of the peoples.” This indicates that such slogans were part of the school curriculum and were forced upon the students (after all, the interviewees from Berdychiv studied for this article were schoolchildren in the period under

discussion).⁶⁶ In retrospect, the interwar period stood out in stark contrast to the stories heard from parents and relatives about their experiences of the pogroms between 1917 and 1920, the traumatic experiences of the German occupation, and the institutionalized covert anti-Semitism following the Second World War. Nevertheless, as the opening quote from Grossman, illustrated, ordinary everyday prejudices did not cease with the state-initiated campaign against anti-Semitism.

For the broader Jewish population, the complete recreation of society under the Bolsheviks was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, new career opportunities opened up as old employment restrictions were abolished, yet many Jews also fell into the category of *lishentsy*, or disfranchised. In the period between 1918 and 1936, this term was used to define people deprived of their voting rights, which included merchants, businessmen, hired employees, and clergy.⁶⁷ The Jewish population was disproportionately affected by this ruling, as many traditional professions practiced by Jews, such as banking and trading, fell into categories not tolerated by the Soviets. As such, in the Berdychiv district (*okrug*), a quarter of the Jewish population above 18 years of age fell under this category in 1927.⁶⁸ The authorities paid particular attention to craftsmen, trying to employ them in state-owned enterprises.⁶⁹ However, most craftsmen kept taking on small private contracts in addition to their state-owned company jobs in order to keep their families financially solvent.⁷⁰ According to eye-witnesses interviewed by the Shoah Foundation, this was still the case well into the 1930s, long after the NEP had been abolished.⁷¹

At the same time, the authorities tried to resettle the “declassified” Jewish citizens of Berdychiv (the destitute, the mercantile class, and clergy) in newly founded agricultural colonies.⁷² A local “Society for the Settlement of Toiling Jews on the Land” (OZET, *Obshchestvo zemleustroystva yevreyskikh trudyashchykhsya*) was established in Berdychiv in 1925. This body was tasked with the resettlement of Jewish residents to the countryside and their integration into the agricultural sector.⁷³ After the establishment of the Autonomous Jewish District in the Soviet Far East in 1928 – known as Birobidzhan after 1931 – the main task of OZET in Berdychiv was to promote Jewish resettlement. In 1931, a local branch of the KomZET, the “Committee for the Agricultural Settlement of Jews,” was established in Berdychiv that worked on a par with OZET.⁷⁴ This was a very unpopular venture, however. According to a 1931 KomZET report, only one person volunteered for resettlement, whom the resettlement agency moreover categorized as “not trustworthy.”⁷⁵ The Birobidzhan district, aptly described as “pseudozionism” by Arno Lustiger, was meant to create an alternative to the increasingly popular Zionist project of an independent Jewish state. This itself had been preceded by the creation of Jewish districts (*rayons*) and *kolkhozes* on the Crimean Peninsula, which had often met with outrage from the local inhabitants.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the uprooting and resettlement of the Jewish population was meant to destroy the old

social structures in the Soviet periphery.

In his examination of the Soviet Jewish population just before the Second World War, Frank Grüner identifies three groups: Jews who lived in urban centers outside of the former Pale of Settlement, and who were largely assimilated; those who lived in the big cities within the former Pale of Settlement, who often demonstrated some assimilatory tendencies but were still connected with Jewish tradition; and those who remained living within the old social structures in the traditional Jewish majority small towns (*mistechka*). Grüner defines assimilation as the abandonment of the Yiddish language and Jewish cultural and religious traditions as well as marriage to non-Jewish partners.⁷⁷ Berdychiv was one of those small towns where the transformation process among the Jewish population and their adaptation to the new Soviet reality took much longer than in the larger cities. The resettlement of part of the population, especially those who clung to the traditional ways of life, could potentially expedite the sovietization of the rest of the inhabitants.⁷⁸ This project, whether in Berdychiv or the elsewhere in the Soviet Union, remained generally unsuccessful, however.

Anti-Religious Campaigns and Secularization

A key waypoint along the path towards Jewish “modernization” was their secularization. Lenin regarded the Jews of the Russian Empire as “the most oppressed nation in the world.” Consequently, in order to be recognized within the processes and structures of modernity, Jews needed to activity forsake their Eastern European identity and integrate into the socialist revolution. Indeed, Lenin positively regarded Western European Jews for their social integration into the mainstream cultures in which they lived.⁷⁹ As Michael Brenner observes, for the majority of Western European Jews, Judaism was above all a confession, while their national political allegiances aligned with the majority population. By contrasts, for the Jews of the Russian Empire “Jewishness” had also evolved into a form of ethnic identity.⁸⁰ For Lenin, this meant that the central aspect of proletarian Jewish culture was to be their liberation from religion.

Within Soviet policies regarding religion, Wolfgang Heller differentiates two strategies: evolutionary and interventionist. Proponents of the first approach argued that the religious question was the same as the nationalities question, and the issue would resolve itself with the change in socio-economic conditions. Thus, no state intervention was necessary. The so-called interventionist strategy, by contrast, advocated the right of the state to attack religious institutions and make use of anti-religious propaganda.⁸¹ Lenin’s own view that “Religion is a private matter” presented him as an adherent of the evolutionist strategy. However, when looking at the religious policies implemented by the Bolsheviks throughout the 1920s, it becomes apparent that the interventionist strategy prevailed from the outset.⁸²

The legal foundation for the state's new policies was established on 23 January 1918 under the decree of the Council of People's Commissars on the separation of church and state as well as church and schools. All religions were put on the same legal footing, with the preeminence of the Russian Orthodox Church being formally abolished. The state also took control over much of the social domains previously overseen by religious bodies, such as the issuing of birth and wedding certificates or divorces. Furthermore, religious organizations could no longer be regarded as a legal entity, own property, or levy their own taxes. This their long-established financial foundations were promptly eroded. Religion itself was to be actively removed from public life and pushed into the personal and private sphere.⁸³

The 1918 decree also meant that religious communities could no longer run their own schools. Consequently, schools in Berdychiv had all been administratively reorganized by 1922. Within the town, there were 14 education institutions: six Ukrainian, four Jewish, two Polish, and two Russian. This only meant that the language of instruction was in the aforementioned languages, otherwise they had a unified curriculum – unlike in the imperial period, religious education was no longer incorporated into curricula.⁸⁴ During the korenizatsiya period, however, emphasis shifted from religion to national identity in the spirit of Stalin's maxim "national in form, socialist in content." Only a few underground religious educational institutions remained intact. For example, a rabbi from Bratslav organized a secret Yeshiva network. This Jewish educational institution, which was dedicated to teaching the Torah to mostly male students, existed underground in Berdychiv until it was uncovered by the authorities in 1938.⁸⁵

The state's pressure on religious communities continued to increase. Every community was required to be approved by the district Executive Committee's subdivision for cults. A contract between this agency and the religious community had to be signed, their rights and obligations listed as line-item, and the name of each individual member registered.⁸⁶ Thus this administrative agency achieved a great deal of control over local religious groups as well as the power to dissolve any one of them at any time. Religious communal property was also nationalized and put at the congregation's disposal for approved uses.⁸⁷ In addition, any religious items deemed to have cultural or material value were often confiscated and turned over to the museum of local history.⁸⁸ This demonstration of power had a symbolic character: objects used for religious services were deemed "relics of the past" and transferred to the museum which subsequently became a site of anti-religious propaganda, where seminars were held and anti-religious tours offered.⁸⁹

The antireligious campaign also made its way into the press. In a 1924 article published in the newspaper *Arbayter shtime* (Worker's Voice), a short report described a worker's assembly in a tannery where they discussed working conditions. At that time, the workweek consisted of six days with Sundays off. One Jewish worker suggested having Saturday off, indicating that it was written so in

the Torah. Other workers supposedly rejected this proposal in unison because they wanted to have their free day along with all other workers.⁹⁰ Regardless of whether this event really took place or not, the message was clear: religious rules had no application in the new Soviet society. The following quote from the same newspaper demonstrates the logic behind the antireligious campaigns and the argumentation as to why workers should be atheists:

One thing is clear: from year to year the worker is becoming ever freer from the shackles of religion, of which he was a prisoner for years; from year to year the worker better understands that religion and class struggle, religion and revolution, religion and communism are not friends, they are bitter enemies [...]; Less than a tenth of workers will still meet this year in the Synagogues [...] Slowly he [the worker] is tearing apart the chains of religion, slowly the feeling of faith, its rites and superstition, become poisoned inside him.⁹¹

In the same article, techniques for combating faith were also put forward, including the “organization of a mass demonstration of children, the unpoised red young talents, in the first days of Rosh Hashanah.”⁹² Antireligious events targeting children on religious holidays would become a Soviet tradition meant to protect the young from religious influence.

Consequently, attendance numbers for the city’s synagogue plummeted. The most common explanation put forward in the “religious community resignation petition” was: “Because I am a worker.”⁹³ It cannot be determined if these resignations were due to atheistic convictions or the desire not to jeopardize career opportunities. At any rate, this did give the Department for Cults a pretext for closing down houses of worship. With the resolution on religious organizations of the All-Russian Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars of 8 April 1929, the campaign against religion was intensified and many houses of worship were closed or repurposed. This included the Choral synagogue in Berdychiv that was turned into a workers’ club.⁹⁴

There is evidence pointing to a privatization of religious practice among Berdychiv’s Jews under Soviet rule. Those interviewed by the Shoah Foundation commented that their parents rarely went to the synagogue and Jewish holidays were celebrated only at home. It is also important to note the difference between generations: while the older generations held on to the religious traditions, those who were then of working age either conducted their religious affairs in private or ceased practicing altogether.⁹⁵ The following excerpt from an interview with Raisa Galperina clearly illustrates the schism which began to form between the generations:

We still celebrate all the holidays. I remember when I pulled out all the dishes, because on other days of the year it is forbidden to use these Passover dishes. Of course, we didn’t have any bread at home, either. When grandmother came to visit, she inspected everything, to see if there was a bread crumb hiding

somewhere. She was a warden who knew well that there was nothing at all at home. She was more religious than my mother. She went to church⁹⁶ but you couldn't really say that she ... [was religious]. I don't really know what it means to be religious or unreligious. In Soviet times, people just couldn't be really religious. I wouldn't say that they were persecuted, but it just didn't really play much of a role. On my mom's side there were six daughters and one son. I don't recall what they all did, but they all worked. It's really hard for me to say if they were especially religious.⁹⁷

This break with religion, which simultaneously meant a break with the traditional way of life, should therefore be regarded as the cornerstone of the Soviet Jewish community's transformation process.

Concluding Remarks

How was the cityscape of Berdychiv impacted by Soviet power? How effective was the process of sovietization in the city? A quote from Singer's 1927 travelogue provides some answers:

Now merchants, landowners, small shopkeepers and chargés d'affaires all are in a foul mood. Unions make them pull their hair out. International trade is impossible, the transportation of smuggled goods across the border is also impossible. There are no longer any large tannery owners – they have either moved away, run away, have lost everything, or sit in jail. Now, no one needs an agent or negotiator. Large tanneries no longer belong to their rich proprietors – they have all lost their humor [...]The city of Berdychiv has always been Jewish, but now it is even more Jewish than it used to be. On the street Yiddish is still spoken and the street signs are in Ukrainian and Yiddish [...]⁹⁸

Berdychiv can be seen as a stand-in for many other provincial cities with a Jewish majority population, during the first Soviet decade. A small town with its centuries-old social structures was more difficult to sovietize than a big city with a faster pace of life and constantly changing population structure. Nevertheless, Berdychiv did become culturally more Soviet over the course of the 1920s.⁹⁹

Soviet policies towards the Jewish population, based upon a complete rejection of the policies of the Russian Empire, also brought fundamental change to the town's social structures and traditions. For younger generations, this meant a break with the customs and habits of their grandparents. The Berdychiv of this period was therefore one with two faces: the new Soviet Berdychiv with children who participated in anti-religious rallies on Jewish holidays, and the old Berdychiv, where Jews went to pray in the synagogue during these very demonstrations. These two cityscapes would merge into a new city, one which would become ever more integrated into the Soviet project.

The promotion – or rather, creation – of proletarian secular Jewish culture, the political indoctrination of the population, the professional restructuring as well as the aggressive anti-religious state policies were all intended to acculturate the Jews

into Soviet mass-society. Despite initial financial difficulties and a lack of personnel in educational and administrative institutions, the Soviet authorities managed to establish new public bodies tasked with the transformation of urban society. The internalization of Soviet content soon became a survival strategy for Berdychiv's Jews – even if not yet on the scale of the 1930s. The year 1929 therefore marked a turning point for Soviet internal politics as social transformation began to be enforced with extreme pressure and brutality. Consequently, the destruction of the old structures and traditions begun in the 1920s gained momentum and intensity. Stalinism also engendered further transformations within the Jewish community of Berdychiv, before the horrors of the German occupation ultimately brought its centuries-old history to a sad end.

About the author

Bozhena Kozakevych is a PhD student and lecturer in Ukrainian and Eastern European history and culture at the chair “Entangled History of Ukraine” at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), where she is currently working on her dissertation entitled “Jews and Christians: Soviet Religious Policy in Multiethnic Berdychiv (1921–1964).” Prior to this, she was engaged in the project “Protecting memory”, undertaken on behalf of the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin), which aimed to transform the neglected and forgotten mass graves of Jews and Roma in Ukraine into informative and dignified places of remembrance. Kozakevych also holds two master's degrees in German language and literature, received from the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv in 2012, and in the Culture and History of Central and Eastern Europe, awarded by the European-University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) in 2017.

Endnotes

- 1 *Translated from German by Jesse Lillefeld.*
- 2 Vasiliy Grossman, “Berdichev ne v shutku, a v serēz” [“Take Berdychiv Seriously, Not as a Joke“], *Ogonek [The Flame]*, 51–52 (1929), 12. [Author’s translation: unless otherwise noted all translations are the author’s own.]
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Myron Chernenko, *Krasnaya zvezda, zheltaya zvezda. Kinematograficheskaya istoriya yevreystva v Rossii [Red Star, Yellow Star: A Cinematographic History of Jews in Russia]* (Moskva: Text, 2006), 19–23.
- 5 Other such accounts discussing life in Berdychiv at the beginning of the 20th century included those by the Polish author Jerzy Stępmowski and Jewish writer Vladimir Zhabotinskiy. Interwar Soviet Berdychiv also served as a setting for Vasiliy Grossman. His work *In the Town of Berdichev (“V gorode Berdicheve”)* became the basis for Alexander Askoldov’s film “Commissar” (1967). The film was subsequently banned by Soviet censors – only to finally be publicly released in 1987. After the Second World War, the author Friedrich Gorenstein also wrote about the town, focusing on the daily life of one local Jewish family in the aftermath of the Holocaust.
- 6 Israel Joshua Singer, *Nay Rusland (bilder fun a rayze) [New Russia (Pictures from a Journey)]* (Wilno: Wydawnictwo Wilenskie, 1928), 236–244.
- 7 For more on the *Shtetl* myth, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl. A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).
- 8 Anatoliy Horobchuk, *Y evreyskiye svyatyni Berdicheva. Ekskurs v proshloye, rasskaz o nastoyashchem [Berdychiv’s Jewish Holy Sites. An Excursion into the Past, a Story about the Present]* (Zhytomyr: Ruta, 2013), 31.
- 9 Michael Brenner, *Kleine jüdische Geschichte [A Short History of the Jews]* (München: C. H. Beck, 2019), 205.
- 10 For more on this topic, see John D. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews. The Origins of the “Jewish Question” in Russia, 1772–1825* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).
- 11 *Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiyskoy imperii [Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire]*, Vol. 11 (Peterburg: V Tipografii Otdeleniya Sobstvennoy E. I. V. Kantseliarii, 1836), 731–736.
- 12 Petrovsky-Shtern has investigated the designation of Eastern European market towns in private ownership of the Polish magnates with a majority Jewish population as *Shtetls*. He concludes that it was not a period self-applied term, rather a term used to describe them from a contemporary perspective.
- 13 Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl*, 13–17.
- 14 Vasiliy Grossman, *V gorode Berdicheve [In the Town of Berdychiv]*. Available at https://booksafe.net/read/grossman_vasiliy-v_gorode_berdicheve-207662.html#p1 (accessed 04/06/2021).
- 15 *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii 1897. Kiyevskaya guberniya [The First Universal Census of the Russian Empire, 1897. Kiev Province]*, Vol. 16 (Moskva: Tipografiya kn. V. P. Meshcherskago, 1904), 3.
- 16 Marian B Michalik, Eugeniusz Duraczyński, *Kronika powstań polskich 1794-1944 [Chronicle of the Polish Uprisings]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Kronika, 1994), 88.
- 17 Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl*, 16–18.
- 18 Ibid.

- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Horobchuk, *Yevreyskiye svyatyni Berdicheva*, 44.
- 21 Ibid, 50.
- 22 Irina Seergeeva, *Archivnoye naslediyе Semena An-skogo v fondakh Natsionalnoy biblioteki Ukrainy imeni V. I. Vernadskogo* [*The Archival Legacy of Semen An-skii in the Collections of the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine*] (Kyiv: Dukh i litera, 2006).
- 23 Horobchuk, *Yevreyskiye svyatyni Berdicheva*, 40.
- 24 Vladimir Zhabotinsky, *Povest moikh dney* [The Story of My Days], translated from Hebrew by N. Bartman (Jerusalem: Biblioteka-Aliya, 1985), 1.
- 25 Brenner, *Kleine jüdische Geschichte*, 238 – 240.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Gershon David Hundert (ed.), *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).
- 28 Zionistische Hilfsfonds in London (ed.), *Die Judenpogrome in Russland* [*The Jewish Pogroms in Russia*] (Köln: Jüdischer Verlag, 1910).
- 29 *Radyanskyi shlyakh* [The Soviet Path], 200 (10761), 20 December 1977.
- 30 *Yuzhnoye slovo* [The Southern Word], no. 5, 10 March 1917.
- 31 *Grazhdanskaya voyna na Ukraine. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov v trekh tomach, cheterëkh knigakh* [The Civil War in Ukraine], Vol. 1, Book 2 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1967).
- 32 Ibid., 120.
- 33 The word *spekulantskiy* implies speculation in the city’s economic life. *Grazhdanskaya voyna na Ukraine*, 125.
- 34 On the experience of violence between 1917 and 1921 see Felix Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens. Gewalträume und Gruppenmilitanz in der Ukraine 1905–1933* [*Spaces of Horror. Spaces of Violence and Group Militancy in Ukraine, 1905–1933*] (Hamburg: Herder-Institut, 2012), 147–190.
- 35 *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii 1897*, 100–101.
- 36 Henry Abramson, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 141.
- 37 *Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Zhytomyrskoi oblasti* [State Archive of Zhytomyr Oblast] (DAZhO), f. 3050, op. 1, spr. 267, ark. 557.
- 38 Ibid., ark. 557.
- 39 *USC Shoah Foundation* (USC VHA), Galperina Interview 41486; Blimes-Kordash Interview 38524.
- 40 *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii 1897*, 100 – 101.
- 41 *Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya 1926 goda. Ukrainskaya sovetskaya respublika, pravoberezhnyy podrayon, levoberezhnyy podrayon, narodnost', rodnoy yazyk, vozrast, gramotnost'* [All-Union Census of 1926], Vol. 12 (Moskva: Mospoligraf, 1928), 17.
- 42 Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 140–160, 209–220.
- 43 More on the problematic nature of this census in Olena Palko’s article in this issue.
- 44 USC VHA Kordash, Interview 38524.
- 45 Terry Martin, “Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism”, in *Stalinism. New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London-New York: Routledge, 2000), 348.
- 46 Slezkine, *The Jewish century*, 24.

- 47 Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Lenin's Jewish Question* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 78.
- 48 Antony Polonsky, "Jews and Communism in the Soviet Union and Poland", in *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. Jack Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 147–167.
- 49 Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2005).
- 50 *Leninskiy sbornik* [Collected Works by Lenin], Vol. 3 (Moskva-Petrograd: MCMXXV, 1925), 485.
- 51 Arno Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden* [Red Book: Stalin and the Jews] (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1998), 64–67.
- 52 *Tsentralnyi Derzhavnyi Istorychnyi Arkhiv Ukrainy v Kyievi* [Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Kyiv] (TsDIAUK), f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 16–18.
- 53 Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden*, 65–67.
- 54 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 14–19.
- 55 Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden*, 65.
- 56 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 15.
- 57 Singer, *Nay Rusland*, 240–244.
- 58 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 19.
- 59 *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis naseleniya Rossiyskoy imperii 1897 1897*, 8; *Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya 1926 goda*, 17.
- 60 Nikolay Vorobëv, *Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya 17 dekabrya 1926 goda* [The All-Union Census of December 17, 1926] (Moskva: Soyuzorguchet, 1938), 33.
- 61 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 18.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Singer, *Nay Rusland*, 240.
- 64 TsDIAUK, f. 2030, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 16.
- 65 *Derzhavnyi Arkhiv mista Kyieva* [State Archive of the City of Kyiv] (DAK), f. 3050, op. 1, spr. 79, ark. 39.
- 66 USC VHA Sharinska Interview 28818; Kordash Interview 38524; Vanshelboim Interview 27225
- 67 Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden*, 65–68.
- 68 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 16.
- 69 Ibid., ark. 18.
- 70 USC VHA Sharinska Interview 28818; Kordash Interview 38524.
- 71 USC VHA Sharinska Interview 28818; Burmenko Interview 28037; Galperina Interview 41486; Kleiner Interview 25251.
- 72 DAZhO, f. 118, op. 1, spr. 482, ark. 3.
- 73 TsDIAUK, f. 129, op. 1, spr. 353, ark. 20.
- 74 Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden*, 74–75.
- 75 DAZhO, f. 118, op. 1, spr. 482, ark. 3
- 76 Lustiger, *Rotbuch: Stalin und die Juden*, 75–76.
- 77 Frank Grüner, *Patrioten und Kosmopoliten. Juden im Sowjetstaat 1941–1953* [Patriots and Cosmopolitans. Jews in the Soviet State, 1941–1953] (Köln – Weimar – Wien: Böhlau, 2008), 30–31.

- 78 DAZhO, f. 118, op. 1, spr. 482, ark. 3.
- 79 Petrovsky-Shtern, *Lenin's Jewish Question*, 77–80.
- 80 Brenner, *Kleine jüdische Geschichte*, 262. It must be pointed out that this thesis is a generalization and may not apply in all cases. The trend of adapting to Russian society, and above all integrating into Russian culture, as a means of escaping Jewish provincial life in the Russian Empire was already evident in the latter half of the 19th century. For more on this topic, see Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 139–147.
- 81 Wolfgang Heller, “Die Russische Orthodoxe Kirche 1917–1941” [The Russian Orthodox Church, 1917–1941], in *Politik und Religion in der Sowjetunion 1917 – 1941* [Politics and Religion in the Soviet Union, 1917–1941], ed. Christoph Gassenschmidt and Ralph Tuchtenhagen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), 7–10.
- 82 Vladimir Lenin, *Über die Religion* [On Religion] (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1981), 35–44, 53–66.
- 83 *Sobraniie uzakonenyi* (SU) RSFSR [Collection of the Laws and Regulations of the Workers and Peasants Government] (Moskva, 1918), no. 18, 236.
- 84 Horobchuk, *Yevreyskiye svyatyni Berdicheva*, 35.
- 85 Nora Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 275.
- 86 DAZhO f. 407, op. 1, spr. 484, ark. 5–6.
- 87 DAZhO f. 407, op. 1, spr. 922, ark. 35.
- 88 DAZhO f. 621, op. 1, spr. 15, ark. 176.
- 89 DAZhO f. 621, op. 1, spr. 15, ark. 178.
- 90 *Arbayter shtime* [Worker's Voice], no. 1, 1924.
- 91 *Arbayter shtime*, no. 3, 1924.
- 92 Ibid; Rosh Hashanah is the first of the Jewish High Holy Days.
- 93 DAZhO f. 407, op. 1, spr. 918, ark. 5.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 USC VHA Sharinska Interview 28818; Burmenko Interview 28037; Galperina Interview 41486; Kleiner Interview 25251.
- 96 The interviewee uses the word *tserkov* (church), although it is quite clear from the context that she meant a synagogue.
- 97 USC VHA Galperina Interview 41486.
- 98 Singer, *Nay Rusland*, 239.
- 99 On Soviet transformation in the Belarusian capital Minsk, see Elissa Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews. The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).