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Kitaigorod: A Profile of a Jewish Shtetl in the Ukraine

Steven Lapidus

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Religion

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

Kitaigorod: A Profile of a Jewish Shtetl in the Ukraine

Steven Lapidus

This study is a profile of the Jewish community of the *shtetl* (rural market town) Kitaigorod in the Podolia region of the Ukraine. The project is based upon the personal memoirs of a former resident of Kitaigorod. In order to place the memoirs into their proper historical perspective, the history of the Jews of Russia is presented, followed by a detailed analysis of the particularities of life in the rural market towns of the Pale of Settlement. The third chapter presents a history and description of Kitaigorod. An analysis of the tensions that arise in the use of primary and secondary source literature in historical research is presented in the next chapter. The value of the memoirs and their contribution to the understanding of pre-World War I Jewish communal life in the Ukraine is addressed as well. Finally, the last chapter contains the memoirs, along with two unpublished oral histories, a translation of an archived deposition on the pogrom in Kitaigorod as well as a translation of a lengthy article on the history of Kitaigorod, written by a former resident. The issues and problems involved in documenting and verifying information on Kitaigorod is addressed in an appendix.

אז דער ריבוננו של עולם שרייבט,
אוודאי אויף העברייאיש,
נאר רעדן רעדט ער אויף יידיש.

-עלי וויזעל

The Master of the Universe obviously writes in Hebrew,
but when He speaks, He speaks in Yiddish.

-Elie Wiesel

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of my maternal grandparents, Benjamin Garfinkel and Ita Mandelkern. To my grandfather, because his personal memoirs have informed me and taught me about where I come from. I feel honoured and privileged to have been able to give life to his words. To my grandmother, because of her courage to emigrate and take on the challenges of life in a new country and culture. Without their wisdom and tenacity, I would not have had the opportunity to live in freedom as I do, and I may not even have had the opportunity to live.

As well, this thesis is dedicated to the memories and the stories of those of Kitaigorod whose voices had been brutally silenced. I hope that this work can help all of us Kitaigoroder better understand from where we come.

And finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of Jeffrey Raymond Dagenbach. This one's for you, Jeff.

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I am also indebted to the staff at the library and archives of the YIVO Center for Jewish Research in New York, as well as the librarians of the Jewish Public Library here in Montreal.

A very special thank-you to my “bosses,” Tannis Arbuckle, Dolores Pushkar, and June Chaikelson. Not only did they take a chance on a young undergraduate many years ago, but throughout my tenure in their employ, they have always been extremely supportive of my academic pursuits. They graciously gave me time off of work, when I needed it, and even more importantly were always encouraging and supportive of my graduate work. And Tannis, thanks for making me a better writer.

Thanks and admiration go to my great-aunt Rosa and great-uncle Shopsa for providing me with much needed information about a world they know so well. I wish them health and long life.

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dinner and “a few bucks.” Thanks to my sister Shari for listening, and for having been the first to pave the way to university, making it easier for me to follow in her footsteps. I hope that I can be the one who paves the way for Alyssa and Ashley.

My friends have all been supportive, and I have always appreciated that. Certain people stand out for proof-reading skills, existential crisis management and enduring patience that rivaled Job’s accomplishments. Thanks to Matthew, Susan, Neil, and Lucie for listening and being supportive. Thanks for sitting through hours of videotape, extensive monologues on any number of dry historical treatises, and for pretending to be fascinated by the detailed minutiae of historical research. And thanks for taking me out, when my sanity was in question.

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Preface

In the autumn of 1961, my maternal grandfather, Mr. Benjamin Garfinkel, wrote his recollections and memories of his youth and early adulthood in his hometown of Kitaigorod, Podolia, Ukraine. He had been born there in 1894 and lived there until 1926, when he, his wife and two daughters emigrated to Canada where he lived until his death in 1974. While he was not an ordained rabbi, he was considered a learned man and was often referred to as reb, a title often used for learned men. And while not a follower of the chasidic movement, he was a direct, seventh generation descendant of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, the founder of chasidism. Some forty years after his arrival in Canada, under the title, *Zichronos Fun Meine Yungere Yahrn*, (Memoirs of My Younger Years), he shared some of his observations and recollections of pre-World War I life in a small, Jewish rural market town (*shtetl*) in the Ukraine. Emigration to the West reduced the size and number of the shtetlach and virtually all of those that remained were destroyed in the Nazi onslaught. Thus, his *Memoirs* provide us with a glimpse on a world that existed for centuries, but is no more.

The *Memoirs* provide a unique and subjective perspective on daily life and experiences in one particular shtetl, Kitaigorod, at the beginning of the twentieth century. I will use them as the focus of a general profile of Jewish life in rural market towns of the Ukraine during this time period. As well I will expand the historical profile to include the most prominent world events which caused indelible change and ultimately the final destruction of these centuries-old Jewish communities and their way of life. The

objective historical focus, whose intent is to place the subjective, personal memoirs into a greater context, will address the general history of Russian Jewry. Subsequent chapters will focus on the particularities of life in the shtetl, followed by a chapter devoted specifically to Kitaigorod. I will then discuss the value of the *Memoirs* and present concluding remarks. Finally, in the second part of the thesis, I will first present the *Memoirs* in their entirety. Following the *Memoirs*, I have included other personal testimonials on Kitaigorod. Two are oral histories, one is a translation of a Yiddish trial deposition regarding the pogrom in Kitaigorod, and the last, a translation of an article on the early twentieth century history of Kitaigorod.

For centuries, the shtetl life had been based upon traditional values and behaviour. While the early twentieth century marked a time of exciting change for the Jews of the shtetl, such as the Russian revolution, emancipation, emigration to the West and the industrial revolution, the *Memoirs* do not address these changes. Rather, they reflect and reminisce on the traditional ways of being of Eastern European Jewry. I will address some of the issues that arose out of the changes that affected the shtetl, as they are part of its historical evolution, however, greater emphasis will be trained on the traditional way of life, in keeping with the focus of the *Memoirs*.

With respect to the use of non-English words and phrases, I have used an English translation wherever possible. In many cases, however, the non-English word either does not have an English equivalent, or if it does it is a cumbersome phrase and not a single word. As well, in some cases, the English word does not convey the valence of the original Yiddish word. In such cases, I have used the non-English term throughout the

thesis. The first, and only the first time such a word is presented, it will be italicized with a definition immediately following in parentheses (or in a footnote, if the definition is lengthy), and it will be listed in the glossary in Appendix B.

With regard to inclusive language, I have tried to use feminine and masculine pronouns wherever possible. However, since the shtetl viewed itself through the eyes of its male inhabitants, in many instances, I limited myself to masculine pronouns. This should be viewed as reflecting the social reality of the shtetl and not as the use of exclusive terminology.

Introduction

Large Jewish communities existed in Eastern Europe since the fourteenth century. They consisted mainly of immigrants from Germany, Italy and France. They had lived in these countries as separate, persecuted minorities, often in government-enforced ghettos. Unlike their *Sephardi*¹ co-religionists in the Iberian peninsula, the Ashkenazi Jews had limited intellectual or social intercourse with the non-Jewish population and thus had already begun the self-focussed, religion- and law-based lifestyle that would be the hallmark of the shtetl. With little outside influence, Jewish intellectual energies were focussed on their primary source of identity, the covenant with God and its corpus of laws, the Torah and Talmud. As the horrors and persecution of the Crusades and Black Death spread throughout Western Europe, the Jews looked to the East for safety. The charter of Boleslav the Pious in 1264, later expanded by Casimir the Great in 1344, guaranteed Jews government protection.² In conjunction with Casimir's desire to expand Poland's mercantile class, an economic skill for which Jews were renowned at that time, the invitation and subsequent migration east began. In fact, there is a legend that when the Jews, fleeing persecution, came to Poland, they were finally able to relax and thus said in Hebrew, "Po-lin," here you may rest.³

¹ Of Spanish-North African descent.

² Meltzer, p. 14.

³ Polin is the Hebrew word for Poland. Zborowski & Herzog, p.33; Ertel, p. 23.

Small Jewish communities had existed in Eastern Europe for centuries before the Western European immigration. Records in Armenia and Georgia described Jewish settlements that dated back to immigrants of the First Temple period (circa sixth century BCE).⁴ As well, Eastern European Jewish communities counted descendants of the Khazar kingdom whose ancestors had converted during the eighth century. Further, there were pre-Ashkenazi⁵ Jews living in the east since the Russian dominion in the tenth century, in what became known as modern Ukraine.⁶ As well, in Poland, and even more so in Russia, the Western European Jews encountered Jews from Near Eastern Asia who had migrated north during the time of the Greek colonization and the Byzantine Empire.⁷

The new migrants joined these small, prosperous Jewish communities of the Azov and Black Seas and thus the era of Eastern Europe as the cradle of Ashkenazi Jewry began.⁸ By 1800, fully half of the world's Jewish population lived in an area of 100 miles by 300 miles, bound by the Vistula on the west, the Dnieper on the east, and the Baltic and Black Seas on the north and south, respectively.⁹ They brought with them, along with their rabbinic and talmudic forms, their own distinctive language, Yiddish. Based on a medieval German dialect as well as some Hebrew words, Yiddish originated in the ghettos of Western Europe, and became the lingua franca of the shtetl.¹⁰

⁴ Greenberg, p. 1.

⁵ Of European descent.

⁶ Pritsak, pp. 3-10; Greenberg, pp. 2-5.

⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 33.

⁸ Ertel, pp. 21-22.

⁹ Meltzer, p. 5.

¹⁰ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 29-34.

As the *Memoirs* focus on a Ukrainian shtetl, the historical overview will be limited to the experiences of the Jews in Russia and will be divided into three parts. The first will address the origins and evolution of the Russian Jewish community from the late eighteenth century until the First World War. This era before the Russian revolution and during the regime of the czars, was marked by anti-Semitic legislation, fear and repression for the Jews of the Russian Empire.

The second period of concern is the First World War and its consequences for the lives of the Ukrainian Jews. Besides the obvious turmoil of war, this period engendered many changes specific to the geopolitical map of Eastern Europe. In fact, one can extend this period as a unit of historical significance, past Armistice Day of November, 1918, well into 1922. This period saw the Bolshevik Revolution, the Ukrainian battle for independence, and a further redrawing of the frontiers which saw the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the loss of Polish territory to Russian control.

The final chapter of the Ukrainian Jews began in 1922, and ended with almost complete and thorough destruction with the invasion of the Nazis, and the Einsatzgruppen, whose forces murdered over 1,000,000 Jews in the Eastern parts of the Southern Soviet Union.

The Early Period of Russian Jewry, 1772 – 1914

The history of the Jews of the Russian Empire began with the first partition of Poland in 1772. Prior to this date, no Jews lived within the borders of Russia, in

conjunction with its interdiction on the “enemies of Christ” having refuge within the country.¹¹ When Russia subsequently received its first Jews, Czarina Catherine II (1762 – 1796) initially welcomed them, hoping to encourage a new mercantile class, in a land with growing peasant classes. By 1780, the Jews had been granted some basic rights under the law.¹² However, this was short-lived with government limitations to the Jews’ freedom beginning soon after.¹³ Further partitions of Poland (in 1793 and 1795) brought more formerly Polish Jews under Russian dominion.

Czars Alexander I (1811 – 1825) and Nicholas I (1825 – 1855) purported to break down Jewish isolation, yet their policies toward the Jews in fact further increased repression and isolation.¹⁴ The early nineteenth century saw the elimination of Jewish occupational and residential freedoms. While the purported aim of these new laws was to help the Jews readjust economically, they in fact only worsened the material status of the Jews. Jews were systematically removed from certain areas and provinces of the Russian Empire, and concentrated into smaller areas. The number of restrictions and repressive laws grew through the reign of Czars Alexander II (1855 - 1881) and Alexander III (1881 – 1894), until a final form of what came to be called the Pale of Settlement was redacted on May 3, 1882 and subsequently came to be referred to as the May Laws. These laws prohibited Jews from residence outside the Pale and even restricted movement from one town to another within its boundaries. These laws remained in effect until March of 1917, when they were repealed by the Provisional Government. Jews were restricted to

¹¹ Dubnow, Vol. 1, p. 306.

¹² Klier & Lambroza, p. 4.

¹³ Dubnow, Vol. 1, p. 315.

¹⁴ Stanislawski, 1983, p. 15.

the fifteen *gubernias* (provinces) on the western edges of the Russian Empire, from Kovno in the north to Podolia and Taurida in the south, the latter bordering on the Black Sea.¹⁵

The corpus of laws concerning the Pale of Settlement affected not only physical locale, but also the Jews' daily life and choices. Since Jews were not permitted to travel outside of the Pale, where most profits and resources were absorbed by the landowners and czar, they often faced economic hardship, and extreme poverty became the norm. Government and state-sponsored positions were closed to Jews. By 1890, there were more than 650 laws which limited the civil and human rights of Jews under Russian dominion.¹⁶ Government law prohibited the Jews from operating or owning the sources of raw material and limited their rights to live on the land. As well, many Russian subjects, including Jews, were restricted from residing in large cities and from free travel.¹⁷

The primary occupations open to Jews were craftsmen and small merchants of dry-goods and produce. Farming was not a traditional Jewish pursuit, and in any event was greatly restricted to Jews. Many rural Jews were innkeepers and landlords' representatives to the peasants. In this latter position, the Jews were required to collect taxes and rent from the peasant lessee. The position of financial officer on behalf of the despised landlord did little to endear the Jews to their Russian compatriots, who often being unable to pay, blamed the immediate source for their financial woes, the Jew. Not

¹⁵ Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, p. 309; Meltzer, p. 211; Greenberg, pp. 29-31.

¹⁶ Meltzer, pp. 212-213.

¹⁷ Meltzer, p. 98.

helping the social integration of the Jews was the occupation of money-lending and pawn-brokering. The resentment of those who owed money directly to a Jewish usurer is self-evident and requires no explanation. Another position available to the Jews was the distilling and selling of alcohol. Since alcoholism was commonplace among the peasants, and the Jews were the primary source of distilled spirits in the communities and villages of the Pale, Jews were often blamed for the drinking problems of the peasants.¹⁸ Many of these occupations engendered hatred and resentment of the Jews by the local inhabitants. However, what was often ignored was that these occupations were not free choices as much as forced ones since so many other positions were closed to Jews.

Jews were also occupied as water-carriers, shoemakers, tailors, and other such crafts. As well, many Jews worked for the community in such positions as rabbis, cantors, synagogue sextons, *mohelim*, *shochetim*¹⁹ and other religious functions. Finally, some Jews cultivated small parcels of land around their homes and kept various animals sometimes to sell the produce, but often to keep it as food for their families.²⁰

Russian officials believed that it was not socioeconomic circumstance, such as poverty or loss of civil rights, that caused Jews to exploit their neighbours financially and to be chronic burdens on society, but rather their very theology demanded it. In fact, the Talmud itself, according to such belief, encouraged the Jews to treat Christians with disdain and animosity. Thus, the reform of the Jews necessitated a reform of their

¹⁸ Baron, pp. 90-91.

¹⁹ A mohel is the man who circumcises infant boys. A shochet slaughters fowl and cattle, ensuring their acceptability for kosher consumption.

²⁰ Meltzer, pp. 80 -96.

religious ideology and an assimilation into general society in order to conquer their antisocial, counterproductive attributes.

Forced army conscription was one of the integrationist policies that threatened Jewish survival. As of 1827, Jews were forcibly drafted into the army for terms of twenty-five years of service. Not only did such service virtually impede observance of Jewish law and ritual (e.g. Sabbath and the observance of dietary laws), but proselytizing took place in the army in an attempt to further integrate the Jews. When Jews began to find ways to evade the draft, Nicholas I then resorted to establishing the cantonist²¹ law later that same year, which demanded that Jewish youth between the ages of 12 and 18 be interned in military training camps until age 18 when they were forcibly conscripted into the army for terms of twenty-five years. These latter were forbidden from speaking Yiddish or practicing their faith and were compelled to attend classes in Christian instruction, with the obvious goal of obliterating their Jewishness.²² This law was finally rescinded in 1859.

By 1881, almost three million Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement, or 12.5% of the population. Of these, over 80% lived in shtetlach, while the balance resided in even more rural areas. Very few Jews lived outside of the Pale, and of these some did so legally and some illegally.

The emancipation of the Russian peasantry and the consequent worsening of the economy of the Pale were among the factors that precipitated a wave of pogroms in 1881. Coupled with a growing Jewish population and the building of railroad networks, the

²¹ Russian term for juvenile conscripts.

²² Stanislawski, 1983, pp. 13-25.

need for “Jewish” occupations became increasingly irrelevant. Goods manufactured or crafted by Jews could be obtained elsewhere and now easily transported throughout the Empire by train. As well, the abolition of serfdom in 1863 led to greater competition for the jobs traditionally held by Jews, such as craftsmen and artisans. Further, the dismantling of the feudal estates obviated the need for Jewish estate administrators.²³ As the economic status of the Pale Jew worsened, it seemed inevitable that financial exploitation of the Gentile population occur and increase. The initial reaction to this exploitation were disorganized attacks on specific businesses, such as money-lenders and the alcohol dealers. However, the convergence of all of these social changes along with the assassination of Czar Alexander II, soon escalated the random attacks into a wave of pogroms. This was the first wave of pogroms in modern Russian history, since the Chmelnitski pogroms of 1648.

From 1879 to 1881, members of the Peoples’ Will, a paramilitary socialist group, attempted to murder Czar Alexander II, because they wanted to overthrow his oppressionist policies towards the peasants. He was fatally wounded on March 1, 1881. Despite admissions by the actual killers of the czar, the press and many government officials adopted the view that the Jews were to blame for the social upheaval which led ultimately to the assassination of Alexander II.

On April 15, 1881, the first pogrom took place in Elisavetgrad, Kherson gubernia. It was believed to be a spontaneous outburst of the Christian population’s anger toward Jewish economic exploitation. The likelihood is that the atmosphere of escalated tension led to the need for a release of anger and violence and the most likely targets were the

²³ Heinze, p. 38.

long-despised Jewish communities, scapegoats of the government and numerous anti-Semitic newspapers. Pogrom followed pogrom throughout the Pale and even into Warsaw.²⁴

The wave of pogroms occurred over a span of three years and affected well over 200 cities, towns and villages. In general, they lasted for a day or two and ranged from minor incidents to great, tragic pillages. In a few cases, atrocities were averted by the intervention of authorities.²⁵ With respect to the area of interest in this study, Aronson²⁶ reported only one pogrom of those years in Podolia and Klier and Lambroza²⁷ reported between five and fifteen. While these numbers are not insignificant, it is clear that Podolia was not at the centre of the violent eruptions. The combination of violent pogroms, lack of economic opportunity and the desire for a more comfortable lifestyle in America, which was perceived to a large extent to be free of anti-Semitism, led to Jewish desires to emigrate.²⁸

While even the czar outwardly expressed shock at the violence of these years, the government continued to restrict and legislate against Jewish liberty in order to protect the Russian populace from the Jewish injustices which were credited as being the cause of the violence.²⁹ Among the new laws was an Imperial proclamation of March 28th, 1891, which decreed that Jews who had formerly been permitted to live in Moscow be expelled from that city. This expulsion prompted the United States government to speak

²⁴ Klier & Lambroza, pp. 38-43.

²⁵ Aronson, pp. 125-144

²⁶ pp. 50-56

²⁷ p. 43

²⁸ Heinze, pp. 35-39.

²⁹ Baron, pp. 53-55.

out and denounce the czar's anti-Semitic agenda, not least of all because those Russian Jews attempting to emigrate would likely end up on American shores.³⁰ In fact, the Russian government, typically reticent to hand out exit visas, removed many obstacles blocking Jewish emigration. Thus began the first marked wave of Jewish emigration to the United States with close to 500,000 arriving from Russia between 1880 and 1900 and another 700,000 from 1900 until 1910.³¹

The years 1903 through 1906 marked the second major wave of pogroms in modern Russian history. The first pogrom exploded in April, 1903, in Kishenev, Bessarabia after accusations of a blood libel were levelled against the Jews after the body of a young Christian boy was found murdered.³² All levels of society, including the clergy, government and police were implicated in inciting the violence and condoning it. In the hallmark of Russian pogroms, Jews were mutilated, tortured, gang-raped and savagely murdered.³³ A second pogrom broke out in Gomel and then a third in Bialystock. Resentment against the czar, the losses during the Russo-Japanese war, workers' strikes and public incitement against the Jews kept the waves of pogroms intermittently alive in various places through 1906, with a particularly intense wave throughout the Pale, including the Kamenets-Podolsk³⁴ area from October 1905 through September, 1906.³⁵

³⁰ Dubnow, Vol. 2, pp. 402-410; Baron, pp. 56-59.

³¹ Baron, pp. 87-88.

³² It was later proven in court that the boy had been killed by relatives for his inheritance. Dubnow, Vol 5, p. 718

³³ Lambroza, in Klier & Lambroza, pp. 196-204; Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, pp. 329-330.

³⁴ District capital of Podolia, some 18 km from Kitaigorod.

³⁵ Dubnov, Vol. 5, pp. 739-745.

Despite public outrage, the predominant consequence of these two waves of pogroms was the increased insecurity felt by the Jewish community. With few exceptions, such widespread, uncontrolled acts of violence had not been witnessed by the Jews of the region in over two centuries. Coupled with the czar's ever-increasing legislative restrictions, life for the shtetl Jews became even more untenable and insecure. Thus another wave of emigration ensued.³⁶

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought many fundamental changes to the Jewish communities of the Pale, more specifically, the Haskalah, political Zionism and socialism.

The Enlightenment of European Jewry grew out of an early eighteenth century German Jewish movement that challenged the hegemony of traditional Jewish teaching and behaviour. Their break with traditional Judaism came with the acceptance of secular and non-Jewish authority as equally valid as Jewish authority. By the middle of the century they had formed a cohesive movement, called the *Haskalah*, which demanded a reform of Judaism according to European principles of behaviour and belief.³⁷ The Haskalah took root in nineteenth century Russia, but evolved in a particularly Russian way in the Pale of the 1800s.³⁸

Their break with the old ways of Eastern European Judaism took the form of a rejection of the parochialism of the Pale. Poverty, restriction and unattained educational opportunities led many in the Pale to look inwardly and narrowly towards their religion to

³⁶ Baron, p. 58.

³⁷ Stanislawski, 1983, pp. 49-50.

³⁸ Seltzer, pp. 566-569.

inspire faith and hope. The frequent result of such a perspective, especially within a community with few external social outlets, created a form of almost obsessive pietism or even puritanism. Much emphasis was placed on the details of ritual. And with little external influence, the Jews of the Pale developed an increasingly insular existence. With increasing trade with the West, Russians in general came to have more contact and knowledge of the evolution of Western thinking and this trickled down into the Jewish communities of the Pale and the desire was born to develop a modern, humanistic Jewish identity without the traditional and sometimes superstitious pietism. The *maskilim* (followers of the Haskalah) believed that there was much to be gained, not only from the knowledge and values of the outside world, but also by throwing off the shackles of this internalized perspective.³⁹

In the aim of opening up the insular shtetlach to the outside world, a cultural war broke out between the maskilim and traditionalist Jews. As the number of maskilim grew, and their allegiance to traditional Judaism waned, the traditionalist camp began to increase its guard against this perceived new threat.⁴⁰ The maskilim, on the other hand, often sided with government regulations. Although the government's intentions were the assimilation of the Jews, by such methods as abolishing rabbinic communal authority and the outlawing of traditional Jewish attire, the Russian maskilim saw the legislation as a means of opening up the shtetlach, especially through reforms to the educational system,

³⁹ Sachar, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Stanislawski, 1983, p. 55.

by introducing secular studies. The maskilim saw this legislation as a means of disseminating and supporting their ideology.⁴¹

Despite their goal of a secularized Jewish community and their antagonism toward the obscurantists, as they labelled the traditionalists, they remained distinctively Jewish. They encouraged the study of the Bible and Jewish history and revived the Hebrew language through speech and literature. While later generations of maskilim abandoned Jewish law, the early Russian maskilim were observant Jews who believed that the Haskalah was Jewish tradition, correctly interpreted. They espoused Jewish tradition as strongly as they believed in secular knowledge and education.⁴²

Amongst the reasons that the Haskalah, while not entirely unsuccessful, did not overtake traditional philosophies in the Pale was that most of its adherents were middle-class and wealthy intellectuals and the Haskalah did not address the pressing issue of poverty amongst the Jews of the Pale. As well, the traditionalist community, often divided along ideological lines, united and coalesced into an orthodoxy of behaviour when confronted with the threat of the Haskalah. This new unification gave even more strength to the traditionalist camp which retained its numerical majority, especially in the shtetlach. The Haskalah found more followers among those living in the city, where the pull of community pressure was less. Further, the military exemption offered to rabbinical students prompted more parents to educate their children in the schools of the Orthodox to save them from being conscripted, instead of the schools of the maskilim.⁴³

⁴¹ Stanislawski, 1983, pp. 47, 82-83.

⁴² Stanislawski, 1983, pp. 110-111; Stanislawski, 1988, pp. 10-11.

⁴³ Stanislawski, 1983, pp. 148-151.

The maskilim were successful in that they sensitized the Jewish communities to some ideas and ideals of the outside world, and perhaps caused them to be less fearful of outside influences.⁴⁴

The rise of nationalism as a political trend in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Germany and Italy) affected the Jewish desire for a nation as well. As well, Zionism arose as an attempt against assimilation. While the maskilim supported secularism, they dreamt of Jewish secularism. When they witnessed assimilation among the Jews, and the loss of Jewish values, many maskilim saw political Zionism as a way to encourage both secularism and Jewishness. Other maskilim doubted in the durability of emancipation, and thus supported nationalist Zionism as an ultimate form of personal liberty. This can be seen in the writings of Dr. Leon Pinsker, a leading maskil who wrote in 1882 in Odessa, at the epicentre of the ravages of the pogroms, that anti-Semitism was so entrenched within the psyche of humanity that the only solution to Jewish persecution is an autonomous Jewish state.⁴⁵ Theodore Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism summed up the varying ideals within his manifesto on Zionism.⁴⁶ This new political ideal provided hope and inspired action towards a concrete goal for many Jews of the Pale. The burgeoning Zionist movement separated into many streams (e.g., Lovers of Zion, Po'alei Zion, Revisionists, etc.) each with different political leanings. Many of these took hold among the youth of the Pale, providing them with productive, social outlets to deal with the frustration and desperation that life in the Pale so often meant.

⁴⁴ Sachar, pp. 200-202.

⁴⁵ Sachar, pp. 261-264.

⁴⁶ c.f. Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, pp. 422-427.

Regardless of their practical influence on the creation of the State of Israel, these movements were valuable in their ramifications on the daily lives and aspirations of the Jews of the Pale.

The third social phenomenon to influence Jewish life in the Russian Empire was, like Zionism, an activist solution to the drudgeries of poverty and prejudice, but on a more universal level, socialism. Marxism and its subsequent variants of socialism addressed many of the issues that plagued the Jews of the Pale. The socialist manifesto called for the equal distribution of capital which obviously appealed to the poverty of most Pale Jews. Furthermore, socialism called for equal civil and human liberties for all citizens, regardless of race or creed. Again, to the Jews of the Russian Empire, the possibility of equal rights was alluring, as many of their day-to-day problems arose out of their restricted freedom. Finally, socialism called for international cooperation, an ideal which many Jews felt would help solidify their soon-to-be-won political emancipation. Initially, socialism was slow to take root in the Pale. The most obvious potential supporters of socialism, the secular maskilim were in fact, being predominantly middle-class, less concerned about the distribution of wealth. Furthermore, shtetl Jews were traditionally wary of engaging in external political struggles. Since Marxism offered a faster route to emancipation than the slower forms of liberalism, it took root among many whose eyes and hearts had been opened to secular ideas and movements by the Haskalah. Along with resentment of the rich and new-found secularism, another important factor of the Jewish growth in socialism was that by 1900, almost 40% of the Jews in the Pale were employed in large factories, and hence proletarian. The socialist promise to eradicate

employer exploitation was of great appeal.⁴⁷ The social history of life in the Pale led many Jews to create uniquely Jewish forms of socialism. It is perhaps telling of the pulls among the Jews of the Pale that in the same year that Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in 1897, the socialist General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia (known as the *Bund*) was born.

The Bund grew out of socialist workers' circles in response to the unique needs of Jewish socialists, such as for example, socialist literature in Yiddish.⁴⁸ The Bund would come to compete with the Zionist movement for the hearts and souls of Jewish youth, and in the Pale, it would fail in this battle. One of the reasons why Zionism was more successful than the Bund, and socialism in general, was that Zionism appropriated Jewish ideals, symbols and history into its ideology, an accomplishment which was much harder to do with socialist ideology.⁴⁹ The Bund's philosophy, however, would continue to influence the Jews of the Pale, despite its reduced numbers, and it would survive to be brought to America by some of its adherents. One of its cultural consequences was a renaissance of Yiddish. While the maskilim derided Yiddish as the shameful language of the ghetto Jew, the Bund elevated it to the sacred language of the proletariat and increased the production of Yiddish literature and poetry. As well, the Bund gave many Pale Jews a new view on life. Many Jews living and working in small, isolated shtetlach now felt themselves a part of an international movement. In fact, the Bund, perhaps more

⁴⁷ Sachar, pp.287-289.

⁴⁸ Meltzer, pp. 225-229.

⁴⁹ Roskies, 1999, p. 8.

effectively accomplished the Haskalah goal of reducing the cultural isolation of the Jews of the Pale than did the Haskalah itself.⁵⁰

The Second Phase of Russian Jewry, 1914 – 1922

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 with which World War I began, the loyalty of the international Jewish community was divided. Many German Jews fought for their fatherland and many of these looked forward to fighting Russia and destroying, or at least retaliating against the land of the pogroms. This sense of divided loyalties, common to the Russian peasants as well, led Russian military authorities to expel civilians from front-line areas, especially the Polish provinces of the Pale. The Russians particularly feared that the Jews, whose language was similar to German could communicate with and guide the enemy.⁵¹

The mass evacuations, estimated at over 6,000,000 people, many of whom were Jews, caused tremendous personal and economic troubles to the evacuees in that the vast majority had to leave at least some part of their meager savings behind. These impoverished refugees came into other Jewish communities in the Pale and required welfare and assistance from already poor, resource-strapped communities. Refugees were sheltered in private homes, synagogues and public institutions. Competition among the entire populace for whatever little food was available added to the already high tensions and animosity towards the Jewish community.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sachar, pp. 294-296.

⁵¹ Dubnov, Vol. V, pp. 833-834.

⁵² Baron, p. 191.

By 1915, 40% of the Pale had been occupied by the German forces, who plundered the occupied territory in order to feed themselves and support their homeland.⁵³ Much precious metal and valuables were confiscated and sent back to support the German economy and war effort, thus further impoverishing the local population, including the Jews. On the other hand, the Germans allowed many Jews to return to their hometowns and villages, not being threatened by Jewish spying as the Russians were. In fact, other than the looting, many Jews reported cordial relationships with the occupying German troops.⁵⁴

While birthrates declined and mortality increased dramatically, the German occupation did relieve some of the Russian anti-Semitic legislation, providing the Jewish community the opportunity for moderate growth. The war years witnessed the founding of a Zionist Hebrew school system, later known as Tarbut and the establishment of a secular Bund-based Yiddishist school structure.⁵⁵

The part of the Pale that had remained under Russian control had been reduced by the German conquest to such an extent that there remained little room for the numbers of evacuees and refugees gathered there. This led to a relaxing of some of the residential restrictions for the Jews of the Pale and some moved into the Russian interior. This move was accompanied by a small number of Russian thinkers denouncing the anti-Semitism of the Imperial government. While neither of these events led to major reforms, they did presage the beginning of a new, yet short-lived, alleviation of restrictions on the Jewish minority.⁵⁶

⁵³ Seltzer, p. 649.

⁵⁴ Baron, p. 192.

⁵⁵ Baron, pp. 194-195.

⁵⁶ Baron, pp. 195-200; Dubnov, Vol. V, p. 837.

As anticipation of the Russian revolution grew in 1917, so too did the aspirations of the Jews of an amelioration of their restricted freedom. The collapse of the Russian aristocracy and the abdication of Czar Nicholas II (1894 – 1917) in March of 1917 led the Provisional Government to declare full civil rights for the Jews of Russia on March 22, 1917.⁵⁷ However, the Provisional Government's weakness, with respect to ending the war along with further agrarian revolts, led to a second revolution, the October Revolt of the Bolsheviks under Lenin.⁵⁸ Many parts of Russia erupted in civil war. Opponents of the Bolsheviks rose up and fought throughout Russia, and some ethnic communities, such as the Ukrainians, fought for independence from Russia. Under such threats, Lenin's Bolsheviks substituted freedom and liberty for repression, dictatorship and assassination of political opponents. The Jews experienced the forced reorganization of their communities and lifestyle and the oppression of harsh communist rule.

However, life in the Ukraine was even more devastating. After the German retreat in December, 1918, Simon Petlura's⁵⁹ Ukrainian independence army rebelled against the former Ukrainian regime and the Ukrainian Peoples' Republic was born. Many parts of the Jewish community supported this new-born republic. First, the Jews had always hated the former Ukrainian regime. Second, the new regime began as a socialist republic, legally granting the Jews rights and a certain amount of cultural autonomy.⁶⁰ And third, many Jews were apprehensive about the new Bolshevik government in Moscow. However, by early 1919 relations between the moderate faction in the Ukrainian independence movement and

⁵⁷ Dubnov, Vol. V, pp. 837-838.

⁵⁸ Seltzer, pp. 649-650; Dubnov, Vol. V, pp. 838-839.

⁵⁹ Simon Petlura was named the Secretary General for Military Affairs for the Ukrainian Central Council in July of 1917 at the age of 37, Friedman, p.32.

⁶⁰ Hunczak, pp. 9-11.

Soviet Russia deteriorated. The more radical elements took control of the movement and introduced more anti-Semitic rhetoric. This change in leadership caused a decline in Jewish support for Ukrainian autonomy. Furthermore, the outbreak of another wave of pogroms in the Ukraine was the decisive factor in colouring the Jewish attitude towards the Ukrainian independence movement. Jewish allegiance turned to the Bolshevik government.⁶¹ The new, right-wing leadership of the Ukrainian independence movement played up the Jewish support of Bolshevism, and, stirring up centuries-old animosities, permitted and encouraged violence against the Jews. Pogroms broke out in Volhynia in January of 1919 and spread throughout the Ukraine and continued through 1921. As well, the end of 1919 saw the White Army of czarist supporters, many Cossack bands, as well as Petlura's forces, travel through the Ukraine on their road to Moscow to defeat the Red Army. Again, the battle cry of these armies was "Hit the Jews – save Russia!"⁶² Poor Jews were killed, the rich held for ransom and women raped at will. As these anti-Bolshevik forces retreated before the overwhelming might of the Red Army, they resumed pogroms along their way back home. From December, 1918, through April, 1921, over 1,200 individual pogroms took place, 530 Jewish communities were affected, including 400 in Kiev, Volhynia and Podolia.⁶³ Of the 95 places affected with 293 pogroms and excesses (smaller-scale pogroms) in Podolia, close to 60% were committed by Petlura's army. The balance were caused by other Ukrainian independence forces and Cossack bands.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Revutsky, pp. 3-5; Altshuler, 1988, pp. 283-284.

⁶² Dubnov, Vol. V, p. 842-3.

⁶³ There were at least 688 individual pogroms, of which only 7 took place outside of the Ukraine, but there is only information on 530 localities, and thus most reports are based on these 530 only. C.f. Gergel, pp. 237-238.

⁶⁴ Gergel, p. 243.

There is contradictory information about the total number of Jews killed in the 1919-21 pogroms. Dubnov reported a total of 60,000 fatalities.⁶⁵ Baron reported over 30,000 killed at the time, but counting those who died later of their wounds or of diseases contracted during the pogroms, as many as 150,000 may have died.⁶⁶ Gergel reported a total of 50,000 to 60,000 killed, of whom over 8,000 were from Podolia.⁶⁷ Finally, Abramsky stated that more reliable estimates place the figure at over 200,000.⁶⁸

The savagery of the pogroms was unlimited. Rape was prevalent and multiple rapes commonplace. In Smotrich, Podolia, Jewish girls were raped by more than ten Cossacks at a time.⁶⁹ In Stepanyzy, fifty women were raped, nine of whom died of their wounds the same day. Jews were thrown into wells and streams to drown. In some cases, children were savagely murdered in front of their parents when their heads were split open against brick walls. The bellies of pregnant women were sliced open in other instances. There were reports of Ukrainian schoolchildren participating in the slaughter by stoning to death those already wounded. Further reports of barbarism included: cutting off of hands, fingers, feet, ears, noses and breasts. As well, thousands of Jews were shot to death. Premeditation was evinced in that in some localities, mass graves had been dug days before the pogrom took place. However, in general, the right to bury the dead was denied and thus bodies remained where they had been killed until the *pogromchiks*⁷⁰ left the town.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Dubnov, Vol. V, p. 844.

⁶⁶ Baron, p. 221.

⁶⁷ Gergel, p. 249.

⁶⁸ As cited in Kochan, p. 64, c.f.: Footnote.

⁶⁹ Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 90.

⁷⁰ Pogromchik referred to participants in pogroms.

⁷¹ Friedman, pp. 7-12.

The Third Period of Russian Jewry, 1922 – 1945

Despite the lofty goals of a utopian society of workers, early Leninist communism, as we shall see later with Stalinist communism, was overwhelmingly preoccupied with consolidation of power, attained through repression, denial of liberties and violence.⁷² Many Jewish merchants and artisans were labeled bourgeois, and hence declassed. This meant the loss of civil rights, the right to vote and the added burden of higher rent and taxes and increased water and electricity rates. Along with financial woes, declassed persons suffered social degradation as well. At the beginning of the governmental restructuring there were opportunities for non-declassed Jews to enter into government positions and educational institutions. As well, many Jews joined the ranks of the communist party, including many former socialist Bund members. Migrations from shtetlach to the larger cities were permitted and many Jews took advantage of this opportunity. The number of Jews in Moscow for example, increased by 52% between 1923 and 1926.⁷³

Besides economic repression, the government in Moscow aimed at the destruction of religion and the Sovietization of ethnic communities. The Jews, especially the more staunchly traditional communities of the shtetlach were obvious targets. Through the establishment of the Commissariat for Jewish National Affairs (abbreviated Evmom) and Evseksiya, both groups of communist Jews, the assault on traditional Jewish life, Hebrew culture and Zionism was waged.

⁷² Levin, 1988, p. 47.

⁷³ Levin, 1988, p. 153-154.

In 1917, most Jews in Russia still lived by traditional structures, such as rabbinic courts, Jewish law and kosher slaughtering. The traditional system with its *kehillah* (community authority) and rabbinic authority were unacceptable to the new Soviet regime. The battle against traditional Jewish life was long and difficult, especially in the shtetlach of the Ukraine. In many cases, the local Evseksiya was forced to use physical force to remove people from synagogues and houses of study so that they could be confiscated by the government and turned to other uses.⁷⁴ The process involved trials where rabbis confessed under coercion to trying to manipulate the population and keeping them ignorant through religious ideology. Traditionalist Jews kept up strong resistance through public denunciations and demonstrations. A communist-oriented Passover Haggadah was developed (1927) where the text to be recited upon the washing of the hands read as follows:

Wash away, workers and peasants, the entire bourgeois filth, wash off the mildew of the ages and say – not a blessing – but a curse: May annihilation overcome all the outdated rabbinic laws and customs, yeshivas and heders which blacken and enslave the people.⁷⁵

The year 1929 marked an increase in Stalinist repression and the virtual success of the government's destruction of public traditional Jewish life, Hebrew culture and Zionism. Rabbis, teachers and religious functionaries were declassified, arrested, exiled and many executed. Some forms of religious life remained, either in an illegal, underground form, such as Lubavitch, or under the auspices of more lenient local commissars, but the bulk had

⁷⁴ Levin, 1988, pp. 71-77.

⁷⁵ Levin, 1988, p. 80.

been eventually repressed.⁷⁶ Zionist groups, seen as counterrevolutionary, and allies of imperialist England suffered even greater repression until they no longer openly existed.

Social restructuring of Jewish communities meant economic upheaval. Traditional shtetl occupations of self-employed artisans and market-traders, classified as bourgeois, fell to government attempts to make these Jews more productive. Many of these former traders, now declassed, had no jobs, lost fortunes in the pogroms, and in some cases their homes and even entire hometowns. While there was some limited success to the plan to transform Jewish society into an agrarian one, most Jews remained in the cities and shtetlach, many of them in abject poverty. As many as 70 to 80% of Russian Jews had no income, and many survived on contributions from relatives overseas or U.S.-based relief agencies, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁷⁷

Lenin's National Economic Policy (1921-7) addressed the overwhelming poverty and allowed for more private ownership (with accompanying higher taxes) and a lessening of restrictions on trade and free-market economy. In some shtetlach, those least harmed by the pogroms, trade began to take place again, but in many, the population continued to live off overseas contributions. Artisans were encouraged to join cooperatives where wealth and raw material were shared, as an acceptable compromise. However, the overriding reality of the shtetl Jew was one of poverty and deprivation.⁷⁸

Stalin's proletarianization plan, begun in 1928, brought many Jewish artisans into government-run factories where they could legally work at their own trades, without

⁷⁶ Levin, 1988, pp. 84-85.

⁷⁷ Levin, 1988, pp. 121, 158. On average, 75.2% of all declassed people in the Ukraine were Jews.

⁷⁸ Levin, 1988, pp. 158-164.

suspicion of being counterrevolutionary. The majority of these people worked in the garment and leather industries. Industrialization led to emigration, not only from the shtetlach to larger cities, but also to cities outside of the Pale of Settlement. Since literacy rates were higher among Jews than most other groups in the Soviet Union, many entered universities, technical colleges and government professions. As well, the Bolshevik emphasis on sexual equality opened the door to opportunities for Jewish women. The move from the shtetl to larger urban areas, the break-up of families in cases where families split up when members moved to different cities for jobs or educational opportunities helped in the destruction of family bonds, one of the links to traditional Jewish life and thus to the increasing secularization and Sovietization of the Jews of the shtetlach.⁷⁹ While many Jews continued to live in poverty in the shtetlach,⁸⁰ the reality for others was defined by the communist goals of collectivization, industrialization (in the cities) and for a small minority, farming in places such as the southern Ukraine, and Birobidzhan in Eastern Asian Russia.

Throughout the post-revolutionary era, while anti-Semitism had been declared a criminal offense in the Soviet Criminal Code in 1918, it continued to survive both on official and unofficial levels.⁸¹ In fact, the pogroms of 1919-21 took place after this law was enacted. Jews continued to experience anti-Semitism, both that inspired by the Bolshevik revolution and the old ethnic hatred of the communities with whom they had lived for centuries.

⁷⁹ Levin, 1988, pp. 243 - 258.

⁸⁰ By 1936, it had become a crime to correspond with relatives abroad, leaving many poor, unemployed Jews with little or no means of support, Levin, 1988, p. 264.

⁸¹ Levin, 1988, p. 260.

As the 1930s progressed, Stalinist repression increased as he consolidated his totalitarian rule over the entire nation. While purges and repression had always been part of his method of government, the mid 1930s witnessed repression on an unprecedented scale. Any minor suspicion of counterrevolutionary act or opinion, real or imagined, was grounds for a rigged trial which led to exile, imprisonment, or death. All dissent or even negative opinion about the government, or one's daily life, could be the cause of one's arrest. Thus Stalin solidified his despotic rule through sheer terror and repression.

These purges directly affected the Jewish community in that thousands of Jewish party members and government officials were removed from their positions. Virtually all major Jewish players in governmental and social cadres had been purged by 1938. Jewish newspapers, Yiddish literary works and scholarly institutes were eliminated. The end of an organized structure of the Jewish Soviet community as a recognized ethnic group was at hand.

Stalin's purges of Jews and anti-fascists gave him the freedom and opportunity to sign the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact on August 23, 1939. In this secret pact Stalin and Hitler divided up the soon-to-be conquered Poland so that the Soviet Union would take over the eastern part. This pact led to suppression of anti-Nazi sentiment in Russia, especially with respect to its anti-Semitism, giving even freer reign to anti-Semitic sentiment within the Soviet Union.⁸²

September, 1939 marked the time of the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland, and 1940, the takeover of the Baltic states along with Bukovina and Bessarabia. Stalin

⁸² Levin, 1988, pp. 312-332.

essentially reproduced his de-Judaization and Sovietization plans to the almost two million Jews newly under his control. There was much border crossing by the Jews. Some eastern Jews, remembering cordial experiences with German soldiers during World War I and a total Soviet information block on Nazi atrocities in western Poland tried to get to the German side, hoping their lot would be better under Hitler than Stalin.⁸³ To the contrary, many Jews under Nazi domination tried to smuggle themselves into Russian territory with the belief that repression would be better than annihilation.

The twenty year period of official repression of their religious freedom coupled with economic and social upheaval and heightening Soviet suppression of the Jewish ethnic identity was the backdrop with which the Jews of the Soviet Union and its occupied territories faced what would be for most of them, their final trial – Nazi occupation.

The German armed forces invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, thus ending their Non-Aggression Pact. Aside from conquest, one of the primary intentions after invasion was the destruction of the Jewish communities, partisans, Communists and Gypsies. To this aim, four *Einsatzgruppen* (A, B, C, and D) were created. *Einsatzgruppen* (special task groups) were large (500 - 900 men) groups of specially trained killers. They entered just after or sometimes simultaneously with the front-line German troops – so urgent was their mission. Then smaller, *Teilkommandos*, split off and were sent into more remote areas to kill the Jews in the smaller communities.⁸⁴ Their task was to round up the Jews and execute them by mass shooting into large pits or ravines. The

⁸³ Hilberg, pp. 315-316.

⁸⁴ Hilberg, p. 293.

Einsatzgruppen enjoyed excellent relations and cooperation with the German army. In fact, the army collaborated in many instances with the Einsatzgruppen, initially by handing Jews over to them, and requesting massacres in particular areas. Eventually, the army, impatient with the length of time the task was taking, took over and began shooting Jews themselves.⁸⁵

As the Einsatzgruppen moved east, they encountered fewer and fewer Jews. There are several reasons why the Nazis found more Jews in the western parts of the USSR than in the east. The communities of the east had the benefit of warnings about Einsatzgruppen activity, were closer to the Russian side of the front-lines, were generally smaller in population than those in the west, and hence there were fewer people who needed to escape over shorter distances. As well, having more time, the Russian army helped evacuate more people in the eastern areas to avoid leaving a workforce behind for the Nazis to exploit.⁸⁶ The Jews in the eastern regions were faced with many obstacles that impeded the majority from fleeing, besides the swiftness of the invasion. A major factor involved in the choice to flee was transportation. Major railway junctions and stations had been targeted by German bombers. Most cars and even horse-drawn wagons had been confiscated by the retreating Russian army, and those with access to a vehicle found the roads clogged with fleeing soldiers and civilians, making progress exceedingly slow. Thus, as was seen throughout occupied Russia, but even more so in the western regions, the only people who were able to flee were the young and healthy.⁸⁷ The older

⁸⁵ Hilberg, pp. 301-304.

⁸⁶ Hilberg, p. 294; Reitlinger, pp. 227-228.

⁸⁷ Altshuler, 1993, p. 95.

were less likely to believe the reports of atrocities, remembering cordial relations with the Germans during World War I, and were generally more reluctant to leave home and flee than the young.⁸⁸ Mrs. Fasman told me that, around the time of the Nazi invasion, before she and her husband fled eastward, she tried to convince her elderly aunt and uncle to join them. Their response was, “We are too old to flee. What harm will the Germans do to old people?” They were shot to death by an *Einsatzkommando* (sub-unit of an *Einsatzgruppe*) at Kamenets-Podolsk in August of 1941.⁸⁹

As the first wave of *Einsatzgruppen* followed closely on the heels of the invasion troops, there had not been enough time to kill every Jew in the newly conquered territories. Often, the *Einsatzgruppen* left areas before their task was complete, being obliged to continue advancing with the front-line troops. Thus, an intermediary lull in the murders, from late 1941 lasted until the spring of 1942.⁹⁰ During the five to six months of the first wave of massacres, between 150,000 and 200,000 Jews in the Ukraine had been killed.⁹¹ *Einsatzgruppe C*, responsible for most of the Ukraine, alone had shot 75,000 Jews by its own report of November 3, 1941.⁹²

During the intermediary stage, the Nazis prepared for the second wave of murders, for there were still two million Jews alive. At this point, the Jews were fully aware of what to expect and therefore the Nazis had to use similar tactics to what they used in Poland to maintain control. They concentrated the Jews into ghettos, created *Judenräte* (Jewish councils under Nazi control), instituted slave labour battalions, required Jews to

⁸⁸ The Jews traditionally saw Germany as a refuge and Russia as the oppressor. Levin, 1968, p. 246.

⁸⁹ Personal communication, December 5th, 1982, Montreal, PQ.

⁹⁰ Hilberg, pp. 296-297.

⁹¹ Levin, 1968, p. 252.

⁹² Hilberg, p. 296.

wear armbands with the Star of David and required the Jews to be registered and listed. As well, once the killings resumed, deception tactics were used, such as the call for resettlement and for voluntary labourers, all of which were ruses to get the Jews to come forward voluntarily to be killed. At this time, Podolia fell under the administration of the Reichkommissariat Ukraine and the Generalkommissar of Volhynia-Podolia. To complete the destruction of these now rear-line communities, Higher SS and Police Leaders took over much of the work of the Einsatzgruppen.⁹³

The second wave of massacres saw the death of a large part of the balance of Soviet Jewry. In this second wave, the Nazis encountered more pragmatic difficulties. Their victims did not go as willingly as during the first, unexpected sweep and they had to use more men to surround entire ghettos before taking their victims to the execution pits. As well, more Jews tried to hide and more armed resistance was encountered.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the second wave proved to be as bloody as the first. It is estimated that between 1 and 1.3 million Jews of the Soviet Union had been killed by the end of 1942.⁹⁵ Pinsk, the last ghetto of the Ukraine, was destroyed in October and November of 1942. Of an estimated pre-war population of 1.5 million Jews in the Ukraine, some 60% were killed, thus, 900,000 people.⁹⁶ Information on the massacres in the Ukraine reached the western Allies during the second sweep. The Dutch communist paper, *De Waarheid* reported in early June of 1942 that, in areas like the Ukraine, "... not a single one has survived. Men, women, children and old people have been exterminated one and all."⁹⁷

⁹³ Hilberg, pp. 341-380; Levin, 1988, pp. 246-247.

⁹⁴ Hilberg, pp. 379-380; c.f. Ehrenberg & Grossman, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁵ Dawidowicz, p. 541; Maksudov, p. 212.

⁹⁶ Hilberg, p. 381.

⁹⁷ Gilbert, 1979, p. 159.

In the nearby gubernia of Volhynia, which was administered by the same bureaucracy as Podolia, the majority of the population was killed in the second sweep. Six percent of the population had been killed by the end of 1941.⁹⁸ However, by the end of 1944, 98.5% of those Jews who had not fled Volhynia in time had been murdered.⁹⁹

The murders of the Jews of the Soviet Union were an experiment for the Nazis. They were the first instances of murder on such a large scale of Jews during the Holocaust. Consequently, they led to innovations in Nazi technique. Due to complaints about the psychological and physical toll that mass killings were having on the Einsatzgruppen members, steps were taken to reduce the negative effects on the men. After an August, 1941 visit to mass execution sites near Minsk, Himmler ordered the creation of gas vans, into which people were to be forced, the doors closed and the carbon-monoxide exhaust piped back into the truck until the victims had died of asphyxiation. This, more “humane” method of murder was to be used on women and children in the East, to reduce the pressures on his men. The use of gas vans, which was only moderately successful, of course led to the installation of permanent gas chambers in death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and Treblinka.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Spector, p. 79.

⁹⁹ Spector, pp. 357-358.

¹⁰⁰ Hilberg, pp. 327-334; Levin, 1988, p. 243.

Life in the Shtetl

A complete sociological analysis of the shtetl is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, I will create a profile of shtetl life that will address the issues raised in the *Memoirs*.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines shtetl as a “little town” as derived from the German word *stadt* meaning town.¹⁰¹ Weinreich also defines shtetl as the diminutive of the Yiddish-German word *stadt*.¹⁰² Webster’s defines shtetl as a Yiddish word meaning small-town community in Eastern Europe.¹⁰³ It is derived from the Middle-High German word *stetel* which is defined as town, city or place,¹⁰⁴ which itself is a diminutive of the Old-High German term *stat*, meaning place.¹⁰⁵ In turn, the Old-High German word *stat* and the Middle-Low German word *stad* are derived from the Old- and Middle-English word *stede* which is now spelled *stead*, meaning locality or place.¹⁰⁶

In Eastern European Jewish culture, the shtetl was a rural market town, often of predominantly Jewish population. While many shtetlach had significant indigenous non-Jewish populations, in most cases, the Jews resided in the shtetl while the majority of the Gentiles lived in even smaller villages¹⁰⁷ on the outskirts of the shtetl, or on farms in the surrounding fields. In fact, the term shtetl came to reflect the Jewish population only. When a shtetl inhabitant used the term “the shtetl” or “my shtetl,” he or she was

¹⁰¹ Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. 15, p. 387.

¹⁰² Weinreich, p. 391.

¹⁰³ Babcock Gove, p. 2108.

¹⁰⁴ Babcock Gove, p. 2108; Schwarz, p. 1601.

¹⁰⁵ Babcock Gove, p. 2108.

¹⁰⁶ Onions, p. 865; Skeat, p. 600; Babcock Gove, p. 2231.

¹⁰⁷ Called *dorf* in Yiddish.

invariably referring uniquely to the Jews of the town, despite the fact that non-Jews may well have lived in the shtetl as well.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, the *dorf* meant only the Gentiles. This tendency to paint the shtetl as uniquely Jewish was a hallmark of the world view of the Jews of the shtetl, as will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusions. On the whole, voluntary contact with the non-Jewish population was limited to trade. And while the term shtetl implied a small-sized town, it could also refer to a locale with a population of several thousand as well. The shtetl was more a way of life than a physical locale, although shtetlach were limited to Eastern Europe and the term was not generally used to describe very large cities, such as Warsaw or Budapest.

The shtetl provided the Jewish communities with an insular opportunity for communal self-determination. Living and being restricted to shtetlach for two centuries permitted the evolution and entrenchment of its values and mores, with limited outside influence. As Zborowski wrote, “The Jewish culture of Eastern Europe reached its most distinctive expression in the small town or village, known as the shtetl.”¹⁰⁹

Despite numerous physical hardships and handicaps, the centuries of shtetl life marked a golden era of Jewish thought, culture and spirituality. The shtetl was the unique source of *chasidism*¹¹⁰ and the place where Ashkenazi customs received their final imprimatur. Innumerable volumes of rabbinic, Hebrew and Yiddish literature originated in the shtetl. And the shtetl played a significant role in modern Zionism, the revival of the Hebrew language and the Haskalah. As well, many social and psychological aspects

¹⁰⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 229.

¹⁰⁹ Zborowski, 1951, p. 352.

¹¹⁰ A movement of joyful, pietistic service to God.

of shtetl life were resilient enough to be brought over the Atlantic to America as parts of the Jewish psyche. Much of American Jewish culture owes its origins to those rural market towns of the Pale of Settlement.¹¹¹

Social Classes

The basic social class dichotomy in the shtetl was that of *prosteh* and *shayneh*. The *shayneh* Yiden or the *shayneleit* were, literally, the “beautiful Jews,” the most prestigious, respected and honoured members of the community. They were also called the *pnei*, the faces of the community. The designation of *shayneh* had nothing to do with physical beauty, but as typical of the shtetl, with intangible, internal qualities. The *shayneh* were those who embodied the most valued characteristics of the shtetl. These were the learned people, the pious ones and the wealthy ones. They were deferred to as the leaders of the community and in accordance with their status were given the most prestigious seats in the synagogue, the *Mizrach*, the Eastern wall. Their status was based on a combination of three factors: knowledge, wealth and *yichus* - family lineage of learned and wealthy people. Scholarship and wealth were the highest aspirations of the Jew in the spiritual and material spheres, respectively, and it stood to reason that the more of each one possessed, the higher one’s status was. Thus, the highest social echelons were composed of a combination of both. And if either one or both of these values were part of one’s family background, it only helped increase one’s importance.

¹¹¹ For example, Gabler (pp. 1-7) hypothesized that the depiction of the “American dream” in Hollywood movies, that of the downtrodden, yet deserving little guy who makes it in the end, is a product of the Jewish movie moguls of the 30s, 40s and 50s having fled the pogroms and poverty of their shtetlach in Eastern Europe.

The primary value was learning and the learned were considered shayneh even in the absence of money. Wealth did not traditionally have the same social power as learning, but due to the pervasive poverty of the shtetl, it ran a close second. But wealth, if not combined with scholarship, had to at least be combined with piety or the support of charitable institutions. A wealthy man who was unlearned, careless in his religious obligations and miserly with his financial contributions to the community was not considered shayneh. Included amongst the shayneleit were religious functionaries such as the rabbis, cantors, scribes, shochetim, and mohelim, as well as those individuals who were renowned for their talmudic knowledge. The prosteh Yiden were all of the rest of the shtetl Jews. The term *hamoyn* (crowd) was also used to designate the prosteh. They were the less learned, the poor, and the workers. There were gradations in each of these groups, in that the closer to either extreme one was, the more prosteh or shayneh one was.

Since a basic tenet of the shtetl was that those who have must share with those who have not,¹¹² the greater one's status, the more obligations one had to the community. The wealthy shayneh were expected to support the community financially. They were called upon when the czar's emissaries or pogromchiks demanded large ransoms from the community. They were expected to donate money so that the poor had food for their *shabbes* (sabbath) table and matzos for Passover. The learned shayneleit were expected to be able to advise the prosteh on religious matters, to study in public places where the prosteh could overhear and benefit thereby and to resolve community disputes. In all of

¹¹² Zborowski & Herzog, p. 423.

these areas, and others the shtetl concept of *noblesse oblige* demanded that the shayneh were expected to offer their services voluntarily and graciously.

The shayneh were expected to present themselves in a dignified manner, as befitted their social status. In fact, one could often easily ascertain who was shayneh or prosteh based on behaviour and dress.¹¹³ The shayneh were expected to dress well and neatly, to speak deliberately and calmly. They did not scream or yell, as the prosteh were permitted to. They did not laugh out loud, nor drink to excess, but acted in all ways with restraint and dignity. One addressed them respectfully and deferred to their opinion. The expectations of them were congruent with their social status as the pnei.¹¹⁴

The Importance of Religious Observance

While the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought changes to the uniformity of religious behaviour in the shtetl, the majority of people still adhered to Jewish law. For those who were not devoutly observant, they minimally maintained certain traditional rites. For example, despite an individual's personal commitment and belief structure, public desecration of shabbes was rare.¹¹⁵ For those who did not live by tradition out of conviction, traditional behaviour was imposed and reinforced by community pressure. The situation was different in the larger cities where social ostracism was a less effective measure of ensuring conformity of behaviour and

¹¹³ The length and cut of one's garment, type of hat, etc., especially within the chasidic community could inform the observer about the person's social status. For a detailed analysis and an example of how this social code was transplanted to America, see Poll, Chapter 7, pp. 59-69.

¹¹⁴ Zborowski, 1951, pp. 353-354; Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 73-81.

¹¹⁵ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 225.

individual expression was more possible than in the shtetlach.¹¹⁶ Combined with more cultural interaction outside the Jewish community, secularization came more quickly and more overtly to the large city. The city of Odessa, for example, a center of Russian Haskalah, was considered a site of non-traditional Jewish behaviour.¹¹⁷ The shtetl Jews referred to Odessa as the “Paris of Russia,” a “City of heretics” where people seldom mentioned God’s name.¹¹⁸ Blatman described, how in Kamenets-Podolsk before the First World War, one could see many Jews smoking and attending cinemas on the sabbath.¹¹⁹ In the shtetl, such desecration of the sabbath would have been much more discrete.¹²⁰ The shtetl was the seat of traditional orthodoxy. Shtetl Jews referred to those who abandoned traditional clothing styles and behaviour as *Deutscher* (Germans). To the shtetl Jews, German Jews were seen as more likely to assimilate and thus the term Deutsch was used to refer to anyone who veered from the traditional path, whether in behaviour or dress.¹²¹ It was mainly after the Revolution that Jews were able to move out of the shtetlach after almost 200 years of residential confinement. It was then that secularization began to make tremendous headway in the shtetl itself.¹²²

Religious behaviour was seen within the paradigm of the covenant with God. This pact, established with Abraham and sealed for all Jews for eternity with Moses at Sinai, a contract between God and the People of Israel, was the guidebook for behaviour,

¹¹⁶ Heinze, pp. 60-61.

¹¹⁷ Stanislawski, 1983, p. 57.

¹¹⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 225.

¹¹⁹ Blatman, pp. 54-55.

¹²⁰ Ain, p. 90.

¹²¹ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 163.

¹²² For a biographical account of how the influences of change and modernity affected one Jewish family who moved from a shtetl to a city in late nineteenth century Russia, see Wengeroff, in Dawidowicz (Ed.), pp. 160-168.

both between humanity and God, and among people. Torah, which literally means law and referred to the Five Books of Moses, came to include under its rubric the totality of Jewish law and wisdom. These laws directed the daily life, habits and behaviour of the shtetl Jew. The Jews were to be God's witnesses on Earth through observance of Torah law. The privileges derived from the covenant were messianic redemption and enjoyment in the world-to-come.¹²³

Thus the primary and most basic social force in the shtetl was *Yiddishkeit*.¹²⁴ Yiddishkeit influenced daily practice, schedules, family structure and behaviour, shtetl occupations and its physical structure. Every shtetl required certain basic elements of Yiddishkeit: a rabbi, cantor, shochet, mohel, synagogue, *bes medresh* (study hall), *cheder* (primary school), *Talmud Torah* (publicly funded primary school) and *mikve* (ritual bath). In larger shtetlach, there were more than one of each of these and possibly a *yeshiva*, a school of higher talmudic learning.¹²⁵

Every shtetl had at least one prominent synagogue, referred to as the *stadt shul*, town synagogue. This was the seat of the town rabbi, who was the official rabbinical leader of the community. Most shtetlach had a number of resident rabbis, some of whom functioned in religious roles, but there was one elected for life and supported by the town administration. The other rabbis functioned as teachers and other religious functionaries (e.g. shochetim, mohelim, rabbinic judges, etc.). Beside the main synagogue was usually a *bes medresh*, affiliated with the synagogue, wherein people took moments to study, or

¹²³ Zborowski, 1951, pp. 354-355.

¹²⁴ Yiddishkeit literally means Judaism, but also refers to the totality of the process and accoutrements of living a traditional Jewish life.

¹²⁵ Ertel, pp. 126-135.

for those with financial support, spent most or large parts of their day steeped in talmudic study.

Depending on the size of the population, there were often other synagogues in town as well. Some of these were established by occupational associations, such as the tailors' or shoemakers' synagogue. Furthermore, particularly in southern Eastern Europe, most shtetlach boasted a number of chasidic synagogues, referred to as a *kloiz* or *shtibl*. If the size of the individual chasidic communities warranted, there would be one synagogue for each group, otherwise two or more would worship together. Thus, it was not uncommon for a small shtetl to boast four or five synagogues, and often more, although invariably, the town synagogue was the largest.¹²⁶

Religion influenced more mundane decisions such as occupational choice, in that the daily life of a traditional Jew was constricted by religious obligations. He was limited to eating only kosher food, was obligated to pray three times daily, requiring proximity to a synagogue or minimally a quiet place to pray. And most prominent in the weekly schedule, he had to be home every Friday afternoon to prepare for the sabbath.

Shabbes

The sabbath was the highlight of the Jewish week, a day of separation from the mundane worries of the chase for *parnosseh* (livelihood), and a day dedicated to God, one's family and rest. The Talmud refers to shabbes as *me'en olam haba* - a taste of the world-to-come. On shabbes, everyone wore their finest clothes, used their best dishes

¹²⁶ Schoenfeld, pp. 81-83.

and ate their most elaborate meals of the week. Mourning and sadness were prohibited and the hungry were invited to eat at another's table. It was an opportunity for the fathers, who often worked long hours during the week, some even travelling out of town from Sunday through Friday, to reacquaint themselves with their children and to hear of what the children had learned in school that week.

Shabbes was the hope of the shtetl Jew - his or her fleeting, yet regular taste of a better life-to-come. Three days prior to shabbes were part of the upcoming one, and the subsequent three days were filled with the holiness of the past one. It was believed that every Jew had an extra soul on shabbes. One might well speculate that if not for the oasis of the shabbes within the sea of the hard day-to-day shtetl life, despair would have been much more commonplace. The shabbes was so vital to Jewish identity and self-preservation that pity was directed to those who did not have a shabbes with which to rejuvenate themselves.¹²⁷

The shabbes meal began with *kiddush*, the sanctification of the day over a glass of wine, followed by the blessing over the *challos*, the twisted loaves of white bread, softer and sweeter than the coarse dark bread of the week. This indulgence in wine and soft bread is symbolic of the luxury of shabbes and of the meal of delicacies to follow. Meals of multiple courses beginning with fish and soup, followed by meat or chicken distinguished the shabbes meal from the scantier, usually meatless meals of the week. Luxuries served a vital purpose in the spiritual life of the shtetl. Luxuries, such as delicacies, fine tableware and wine were ritualized to enhance the shabbes table and to

¹²⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 57, 428-429.

contrast it to the weekday meal. Indulgence distinguished between the holy and profane and thus elevated the meal and the day to a higher spiritual experience.¹²⁸ Songs and melodies, *shabbes zmiros*, were sung toward the end of the meal. One of the transcending effects of *shabbes* was in the knowledge that not only was the entire *shtetl* celebrating *shabbes*, but Jews the world over were as well. This gave the *shtetl* Jew a sense of community and belonging that went beyond his own immediate world and encompassed the international community of Jews.

Study and Learning

Religion occupied a primary place in *shtetl* life and study was the principal manifestation of religious observance. While studying the law in order to be aware of its demands was necessary, study for its own sake was pre-eminently admirable and in fact a *mitzva* (religious obligation) of its own. It was the one obligation that had no specific time or time limit attached to it, and the ideal was for the Jewish man to be occupied with study at all times that he was not performing other rites. The Talmud in *Avos* states that, “There is no free man, save he who is engaged in the study of Torah.”¹²⁹ The majority of the observant Jew’s day should be spent in *Talmud Torah*, studying the Torah. While to the majority of the poverty-stricken *shtetl* Jews, laden with the burden of eking out a meagre living, this remained an unobtainable goal, it nevertheless remained the prototype of the ideal Jew. The highest echelon of the *shtetl*’s social stratification belonged to the learned. To be learned automatically placed one among the elite, the *shayneleit*, enjoying all the honour of the community. Many social mores of the *shtetl* point to this belief.

¹²⁸ Heinze, pp. 5, 15.

¹²⁹ Chapter 6, Mishna 2.

The ideal of male beauty was pale of complexion, bearded, weary-eyed and small-handed, indicating the absence of manual labour. One aspired to marry one's daughter to a learned man, or at least to a man whose lineage included learned men. One deferred to the opinion of the learned in all matters, religious and otherwise.¹³⁰ To those whose economic burden took time away from Torah study, precious free time was devoted to study, and certain times of day, (e.g. in the morning before synagogue, sabbath afternoon) were dedicated without exception to study. As a common shtetl saying went, "Torah is the best of wares."¹³¹

Since scholarship was so admired, it was the primary goal of every shtetl parent for their son to be a scholar. Only if, as he grew, it became apparent that he didn't have the head to be a *talmid chochem* (outstanding Torah scholar), or due to family economic demands, would other occupational options be considered. A boy's relationship to learning began very early. Just days after his birth, cheder boys would visit the infant in his home and recite prayers over his crib to accustom him to the sounds of learning. Furthermore, the beginning of a boy's education was an event of joy, and frequent milestones along the educational road were met with celebrations and ceremonies. For example, at the age of three, when a boy first attended cheder, he was wrapped in a *tallis* (prayer shawl) and "protected" on his way to cheder. There, in the presence of his parents, he would learn to read his first letters, each one followed by a candy so that

¹³⁰ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 87 - 92.

¹³¹ Zborowski, 1949, p. 90.

learning should be sweet to him.¹³² Thus began every boy's entry into the world of education.

Very often, this cheder was located in the *melamed's* (elementary school teacher) home. A room or part of a room was curtained off for the purposes of teaching. Children, mainly boys, from age three through twelve, divided into different groups, all studied in the same room. While the melamed focused on one group, the others would study their lessons. The large number of children, crammed into a small room, all learning different subjects at different levels led to great chaos and noise. To alleviate some of the difficulties in controlling the cheder, many teachers used intimidation techniques, fear and corporal punishment. Few testimonials to the cheder experience omit mention of hitting, slapping, yelling and even whipping with a *kranchik* (cat-o-three tails).¹³³ However, in the eyes of the teacher and parents, not only were these punishments necessary, but since the melamed was teaching the children the ways of God, they were justified. As well, many melamedim hired *belfers* (helpers) to assist in bringing the children to and from cheder for the first few weeks of school, as well as in teaching. The melamed, and even more so the belfer, were invariably indigent. While cheder students paid tuition, it was usually commensurate with their parents' income and the stereotype of the melamed was a man on the threshold of starvation, *a kaptsn in ziben poles* (a poor man in seven edges).¹³⁴

¹³² For a description of other ceremonial milestones, see Shtern, pp. 156-163.

¹³³ Meltzer, p. 121; Shtern, pp. 169-170; Sachs, p. 5; Schoenfeld, p. 47; Zborowski, 1949, p. 94.

¹³⁴ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 225.

For those who could not afford the cheder tuition, and most parents would sacrifice many necessities to get their boy into a cheder, most shtetlach had established a Talmud Torah. This school, funded by public monies, was where orphans without parental support and the extremely poor went. The education was perceived to be inferior to the town's cheders and one would do their utmost to avoid sending a child there.

If by the early teens, the boy showed a good mind and ability for Talmud study, his future education would take place in the yeshiva, an institute of higher education where he would concentrate on the study of Talmud and law. Yeshivas were rarer than the other shtetl institutions because these were usable by a smaller elite. Thus they were more costly to build and maintain while the other institutions were required by everyone in the shtetl and had a broader base of financial support. The shtetl that had a yeshiva received students from the broader surrounding area and the student with the intellectual and financial means to attend yeshiva often found himself forced to travel to another shtetl to find one.¹³⁵

Occupational Life

At the center of the shtetl, as the name implied, was a large open area, the market-place. This was the economic hub of the shtetl. "For without a market all the Jews would starve to death and the peasants would be naked and barefoot. The market is the pulse, the meeting ground, the center of action."¹³⁶ In it were held market days and fairs. While the market days and fairs were both days of trade that attracted vendors and buyers from the shtetl and surrounding villages, market days involved fewer people and were

¹³⁵ Ain, pp. 95-96; Shtern, pp. 152-171; Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 88-104.

¹³⁶ Roskies & Roskies, p. 25.

more frequent. Fairs, *yarid* in Yiddish, were held weekly or bimonthly, and attracted a greater number of people from more distant places in the surrounding area than did market days.¹³⁷ Fairs and markets were the primary occasions for interaction between the Jewish and Gentile communities. Farmers, mainly Gentile, brought their produce and livestock to the fair and sold their stock to the shtetl inhabitants out of the back of their wagons. In turn, they bought from the stores and artisans, whose store fronts ringed the marketplace on all sides.

Typically, every shtetl market had at least one grocery store, dry goods store and hardware store. There was often a bulk store of flour and spices, a haberdashery and a pharmacy. As well, many craftsmen would occupy store fronts around the marketplace, such as tinsmiths, coppersmiths, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, glaziers, joiners, carpenters, potters and bakers. Many of these people would be unable to afford to rent or buy store front property on the marketplace and would ply their trades out of their homes. As well, there were Jews in the shtetl who worked other people's farmland, carried and delivered water from the river or wells and those who worked as wagon-drivers, delivering people and goods from one shtetl to another. Some people were occupied in the retail trade, fetching produce and other products from surrounding villages and other shtetl fairs and markets and bringing it back to sell at home for a profit. Until the nineteenth century, when a law forbade Jews from selling alcohol, many taverns and inns were owned or managed by Jews. If there were someone in the shtetl with enough capital, there would sometimes be an industry in town, such as a tannery, a mill or

¹³⁷ Fairs were large events that involved most everyone in the shtetl. In some larger shtetlach, fairs would occur every few months, for weeks at a time, see for example, Ain p. 87; Schoenfeld, p. 37.

logging company. These industries were often opportunities for local Jewish employment. As well, Jews worked as teachers, butchers, musicians, caterers and bathhouse attendants. There were *luftmenschen* (literally air-men) who acted as brokers or middlemen and *batlanim* who were paid to say prayers on other people's behalf.¹³⁸ In the shtetl, the majority of the artisans were Jews.¹³⁹

It was difficult to make a living in the shtetl, since most of the resources of the Pale went to fill the coffers of the czar and landowners. Thus, poverty and indigence were commonplace, despite the hard and long hours of work. As the title of a chapter in Meltzer's book depicts, "I was, with God's help, a poor man."¹⁴⁰ Tradition helped to alleviate and deter the desperation that poverty can cause. Not only did Judaism offer the promise of a better life in the world-to-come, but its pervasive emphasis on non-physical, transcendent actions, attributes and beliefs offered the people an opportunity to value spiritual ideals that were obtainable despite their material poverty. One could be financially impoverished, yet still aspire and attain the highest goals of Yiddishkeit.

The Home

At the turn of the century, very few, if any shtetlach had electricity or running water. While every shtetl boasted a few wealthier families, with larger homes and hardwood floors, most shtetl homes contained two rooms and sometimes a third. One of these was a kitchen, with a large clay oven that served for cooking purposes and heat in winter. If there were three rooms, the smallest would serve as a bedroom, and the

¹³⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 242-246; Schoendfeld, pp. 23-27; Ain 101-106.

¹³⁹ 92% at the turn of the century in Swislocz, Ain, p. 92; and 90% in pre-WWI Kamenets-Podolsk, Blatman, pp. 52-53.

¹⁴⁰ Meltzer, p. 69.

majority of the house would be taken up by a central room. This room served as a dining room, work area and bedroom for the children, or the entire family, if there were only two rooms. The floor was usually made up of dirt and most household activity took place there. Beds would be piled up in the corners, to be brought out at night, and it was not uncommon for some family members to sleep in the kitchen. As well, most houses had an attic or cellar, or both, used to store preserves, such as pickles, and produce.¹⁴¹

Do you remember the old, dilapidated, cramped house, in which my family lived? Do you remember how cramped it was, how difficult it was to turn around, to find a place where one could feel secure from bumping into the others present at the moment inside the small living room or the smaller kitchen?¹⁴²

The Role of Women

Another important indice of social status was gender. The role of women was circumscribed in the shtetl. Jewish law exempted women from many of the positive requirements of religious ritual, such as daily attendance at synagogue and study. Thus the education of women was not valued the way it was for men. If women learned Hebrew at all, it was to be able to read the prayer-book and rarely in order to understand the prayers. For those girls who attended cheder, they attended for fewer hours and began at later ages than did boys. A girl's most important education was under her mother's tutelage at home, the latter's domain of expertise. Women generally ran the home, partly because the father was frequently absent and partly because this was considered womens' life calling. She was responsible for the *kashrus* (keeping kosher) in the home. While her husband may have known the intricacies of the law in theory, in practicality, few

¹⁴¹ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 361-365.

¹⁴² Briller, p. 283.

shtetl men could distinguish a meat pot from a dairy one. She was not expected to partake in public community issues or disputes. But she was involved in charitable works, such as collecting money for various causes or cooking for the ill or infirm.

Economically, however, she was often an equal partner. It was often the wife who controlled the household income. It was the wife who typically sat at the family's stall in the market or who ran the store so the husband could be free to learn or earn extra money.

While her role was circumscribed and generally private, within her sphere, she reigned supreme. The shtetl saw and expressed itself through the eyes of its male inhabitants, but the woman's role, albeit not of her own choice, was acknowledged as vital to the shtetl, especially since she was the primary person responsible for raising the children, the jewels of the shtetl. Thus each gender saw its own work as indispensable.¹⁴³

Shtetl Organizations and Charity

There were many different organizations in the shtetl which could be classified as occupational or communal. The occupational guilds served to protect the rights and income of its members. They had originally formed as a reaction to the fact that Jews were excluded from non-Jewish guilds, but eventually came to legislate control over commerce within a shtetl to protect the rights of particular groups of workers.¹⁴⁴ In some cases the protection of hometown workers was enacted into Jewish law. For example, there is a law which refers to *schutei chutz* (meat slaughtered in another city), which prohibits the purchase of kosher meat brought in from another town. This law was

¹⁴³ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 124-141; Ertel, pp. 124-126.

¹⁴⁴ Ertel, p. 212; Roskies & Roskies, pp. 184-187.

invoked to protect the income and livelihood of the local shochet, lest he leave the shtetl.¹⁴⁵

Charity was an important social practice and a fundamental mitzva of the shtetl. *Tzedakah*¹⁴⁶ was one of the axes upon which the shtetl community revolved and survived. The majority of the money used to support public institutions in the shtetl was collected through private donation. While everyone was expected to give according to their means upon request, people were also expected to support the community financially without being asked. It was woven into the tapestry of shtetl life. Miserliness, in money or intangibles, such as compassion and knowledge, was frowned upon. While it was considered an honour “to have,” “to give” was even more meritorious. Relatives were expected to offer unsolicited financial help to their poorer kin for necessities, such as school tuition or food. Children were acclimatized to the obligation to be charitable and compassionate by giving charity to the beggars on the streets and by depositing coins in the many *pushkes* (charity boxes) in the house and synagogue. It was appropriate to give charity on every and any occasion: when one received good news, when one received bad news, when one hoped for good tidings, on the sabbath eve, on holiday eve, to honour a birth, a wedding, a bar-mitzva, or for no reason at all. Charity was a human gesture of compassion, which, it was hoped, would invoke the mercy of the Almighty. Thus, tzedakah was especially given on the eve of Yom Kippur, to invoke the mercy of God on this holy day of judgement. As well, it was an especial obligation, over and above the

¹⁴⁵ Ain, p. 92. The law of schutei chutz is applied by the Rabbinical Council of Montreal, to protect the livelihood of local shochetim.

¹⁴⁶ Hebrew word incorporated into Yiddish which literally means justice.

everyday mitzva of tzedakah, to give money to the poor on Purim, and on Passover so they could afford holiday necessities.¹⁴⁷

A consequent of the mitzva of tzedaka was the complex of communal self-help organizations found in every shtetl. Of course, the size of the shtetl determined the number and diversity of these types of organizations, but every shtetl could count at least some of the following organizations.

The *Chevra Kadisha* (Holy Society) was the burial association, present in every shtetl. They were responsible for preparing the body for burial (cleaning and washing it and dressing it in shrouds), carrying the body to the cemetery and attending at the funeral. The family of the deceased paid whatever they could, and the Holy Society absorbed the difference, paying for everything if the family had no money. The Chevra Kadisha was non-profit and when it received payment, it was used to offset the cost of unpaid funerals. No one was ever turned away by the Chevra Kadisha.

With the exception of the Chevra Kadisha, it was assumed that one would turn to relatives for help before turning to one of the public associations. For those, however, who had no relatives, or only poor relatives, the associations would provide support without question.

There was an interest-free loan society, the *Gemilus Chasadim* (*Gemach*). While the money given out by the Gemach was called a loan, repayment was not enforced. If one could repay the loan, he or she was expected to, and if one didn't, it was assumed that he or she were unable to do so.

¹⁴⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 194-202.

The *Hachnasas Orchim* (Welcoming of Guests) provided a place to stay for visitors to the shtetl who knew no one and could not afford to stay at the inn. The *Bais Yesomim* (Home for Orphans) not only provided a home, but also subsidized the Talmud Torah, the free school for orphans and indigent. The *Hachnasas Kalla* (Welcoming the Bride) provided dowries and wedding clothes, and sometimes trousseaus for women with no money. The *Bikkur Cholim* (Visiting the Sick) paid medical expenses and offered visits and comfort to the ill without money or family support. Some shtetlach had a *Malbish Arumim* (Clothing the Naked) society which collected clothes for the needy.¹⁴⁸

As well, many of those who left Eastern Europe established *Landsmanschaften*¹⁴⁹ in their new homes. These organizations, through the collection of membership dues, were able to offer medical expenses and cemetery plots at a time when most individual members could not afford such expenses.

A Rebbe's Visit

The chasidic movement, one of joyful service to God, originated with Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, known as the Besht. He was born in Medzibodzh, Podolia, not far from Kitaigorod. He preached a simple, fundamentalist faith of worship, personal and ecstatic closeness to God. He derided study as elitist and emphasized that sincerity of worship was of greater importance. Thus his appeal was strong among the poor, unlearned of Eastern Europe, particularly Poland, Galicia, Carpathia and the Ukraine.¹⁵⁰ While there were facets of the Jewish community that rejected his beliefs and practices, chasidism

¹⁴⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 203-204, Ain, pp. 92-94, Ertel, pp. 212-217.

¹⁴⁹ A landsman is someone who comes from the same town. Landsmanschaften were associations of people from the same shtetl or nearby shtetl, and took as part of their name the shtetl that they represented.

¹⁵⁰ Sachar, pp. 76-77.

took strong root in the Pale. Through his primary disciple, Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch, chasidism proliferated. There were many chasidic centers, called *hoyses* (courts), where *rebbe*s¹⁵¹ lived throughout the Ukraine.

Those chasidim who did not live in the same shtetl as their rebbe endeavoured to visit him at some point each year, in order to spiritually rejuvenate themselves in his presence, or to request his intercession with heaven on the chasid's behalf. The roads and trains of the Ukraine were filled with chasidim travelling to the rebbe just before major holidays. In some cases, the rebbe would travel to his chasidim and spend a few days in shtetlach with large communities of his followers.

As chasidism separated into different dynasties, certain branches developed many smaller distinct groups, but they all shared similar philosophies and lifestyles as the greater group from which they originated. Amongst the chasidic hoyses within the area of Kitaigorod were two such families of dynasties. The first were the descendants of Rabbi Israel Friedmann of Ruzhin (1797 - 1850). Among his descendants were the rebbes of Sadigora, Stefanesti, Rymanov, Chortkov, Husyatin, Boyan and Chernovitz, all of these shtetlach being in nearby Galicia. The descendants of the Ruzhiner rebbe were renowned for ostentatious displays of wealth. The hoyses were located on large estates, with a synagogue, mikve, stables for horses, servants' quarters, a many-roomed house resembling a palace and a large staff.¹⁵² These rebbes of the House of Ruzhin were not

¹⁵¹ Rebbe refers to the leader of a chasidic dynasty.

¹⁵² Aron, pp. 208-209, 213; Rabinowicz, p. 138. For a description of the Stefanester hoyf, see Sternberg, pp. 119-120.

known for travelling to visit their chasidim, but rather the latter would travel to the hoyf.¹⁵³

The other family of dynasties in the Podolia region were descendants of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Opatow (1748 - 1825). The Apter Rav, as he was known, was considered one of the most potent forces in chasidism of his generation throughout Poland and the Ukraine. He was referred to as the “eldest of the rebbes,” and left behind many well-known and respected works. Amongst his descendants were the rebbes of Medzibodzh, Zinkov, Kopishnitz and Krilovitz. These rebbes lived a much more modest lifestyle and were known for travelling and spending time with their chasidim in various shtetlach.¹⁵⁴ Reb Pinchas’l and Reb Moshele of Zinkov, as well as Reb Yisroel-ne of Medzibodzh were known to travel to Kamenets-Podolsk and other places in Podolia, including Kitaigorod to visit their chasidim.¹⁵⁵

In general, the Ukrainian rebbes were not renowned for their scholarship and their followers believed implicitly in the miraculous powers of the rebbe. Ukrainian hoyfs were known as refuges for the prosteh and uneducated.¹⁵⁶

It was a great occasion of rejoicing when a rebbe came to visit. Most of the shtetl, followers of the particular rebbe or not, would gather in the streets to greet him upon his arrival in town. Whichever synagogue the rebbe prayed in was usually the most crowded. If he visited over a shabbes, which was usually the case, he would “conduct a table.”

¹⁵³ Rabinowicz, p. 138; Bernstein, p. 57. Reb Israel of Ruzhin was arrested in 1838 and upon his release he escaped to Galicia and he and his followers were prohibited from ever returning to Russia. The only visit made to Russia by a rebbe of the House of Ruzhin was by Rabbi Abraham Friedman in 1913 to Zbanitz, Sohn, p. 59; Bernstein, p. 58.

¹⁵⁴ Rabinowicz, p. 203; Sohn, p. 59; Unger, 1955, p. 337.

¹⁵⁵ Sohn, p. 59; Bernstien, p. 58.

¹⁵⁶ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 185.

Praven tish meant that the rebbe would sit at a table, surrounded by dozens, hundreds or even thousands of chasidim, sitting at other tables, or standing. The chasidim would have already eaten and were at the table to be in the holy presence of the rebbe and to hear the words of Torah from the rebbe. One of the principal activities at a tish was the grabbing of *shirayim*. Shirayim were morsels of food blessed by having been touched by the rebbe and thereby imbued with holiness. Shirayim would be distributed either by the rebbe or his aides, or grabbed by the chasidim once the rebbe had given permission, usually by pushing his plate away. Sometimes the rebbe would pour out and distribute glasses of schnapps or beer to everyone present, and it was meritorious to drink these as they had been imbibed with the rebbe's holiness. Tishen were joyous occasions of singing, dancing and drinking. It was a mitzva to eat three meals on shabbes, and the third usually began late in the afternoon, just before sunset. *Shalosh suedos*, as the third meal is called, was imbibed with mystical significance by chasidim and was usually the highlight of the three shabbes tishen. Saturday night, after the sabbath had ended, the rebbe would prav tish at the *Melava Malka*, the meal eaten to prolong the joy of shabbes.

As well, the rebbe's visit was an opportunity for people to have private audiences with the rebbe and to ask for his blessing on any number of problematic issues, such as the health of a family member, business advice, or a blessing for a marital match for one's child. These requests required a donation from the supplicant which helped support the rebbe and his hoyf.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 177-179.

Family Life

The basic unit of shtetl society was the family. No adult was considered complete without a spouse and children. A person was an individual, but gained greater recognition from the larger family unit to which he or she belonged. This in turn was reflected in that each household was a unit but it too had to be an active part of a greater whole, the larger shtetl community.

Marriage was one of the most important milestones in an individual's life. It marked the beginning of true adulthood and the road to one of the most vital mitzvos of all, raising a family. It was believed that upon birth, the *Mezavayg Zevugim*, the Heavenly Matchmaker, assigned everyone their *bashert*, their destined life partner. It was now up to humans to find the bashert. This was often facilitated through the help of the *shadchan* (matchmaker). Many factors went into the decision on pre-arranged shtetl marriages, the least of which was love or physical attraction, although these were not totally ignored. Did both partners come from *yichus* - respectable lineage? Was the groom learned? Was he from a wealthy family? Could the bride's parents offer a substantial dowry, or *kest*?¹⁵⁸ Would she make a good mother and homemaker? Could she work to help support the family to come? After extensive interviews of both parties by both families, negotiations took place to finalize the *tenaim*, the engagement contract.¹⁵⁹ Stipulated in this contract were the amount of money for the dowry, the level and number of years of *kest*, and the wedding gifts to be given to the couple to help ease the financial burden of establishing a new home. Typically, among the middle-classes,

¹⁵⁸ Kest was a commitment on the part of the bride's family to support the new couple for a certain number of years so that the groom could continue his learning.

¹⁵⁹ The *tenaim* were also referred to as the "writing of the conditions." Zborowski & Herzog, p. 277.

the bride was to receive shabbes candlesticks, clothing, bedding (linens) and jewellery and the groom, besides the *naden* (dowry) and kest, a gold watch and a *Shas*, complete set of the Talmud. The final contract was agreed to and the couple was formally engaged to be married. This event was celebrated with food and drink.¹⁶⁰

The wedding day was an occasion of joy in which most of the shtetl participated. Everyone who could, came to the wedding. The ceremony took place under the open sky, usually in the synagogue courtyard, after twilight. The guests gathered, all holding lighted candles, while the groom and bride were separately led to the wedding canopy. The breaking of the wineglass, to commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, marked the end of the solemn ceremony and was greeted with shouts of *mazel tov* (congratulations).

The *badchan*, the master of ceremonies, along with the *klezmer* (musicians), lead the people to the wedding feast. The badchan was responsible for entertaining the guests with ditties and amusing anecdotes and for controlling the flow of the evening. He also called out each wedding gift so all could admire them.¹⁶¹

Physical contact between unmarried and unrelated men and women was prohibited. Thus, the men and women sat at different tables and did not dance together. One exception was the *kosher tantz*, where a man and woman, often the bride and her father-in-law would each hold opposite ends of a piece of cloth and thus dance without physical contact. A man was prohibited from touching his wife when she was menstruating and for the seven days following at which point she would go to immerse

¹⁶⁰ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 274-275; Schoenfeld, pp. 56-57.

¹⁶¹ Ain, pp 98-99.

herself in the mikve. The wedding date was planned so as to not coincide with the bride's menstrual cycle, but if it did, the wedding was not postponed, for that would embarrass the bride by publicizing the fact that she was menstruating. Instead, subtler precautions were taken to ensure that there was no physical contact between bride and groom until she was able to go to mikve, such as ensuring that there were a small child with them at all times. This child, usually a girl, would be young enough to not understand the true purpose of her presence, yet old enough to interfere with any physical intimacy between bride and groom.¹⁶²

Wedding festivities would last long into the night, and often continue through the following week. For an impoverished people who worked long hours, rejoicing and feasting were opportunities not to be minimized. In fact, on one occasion, the author of the *Memoirs*, when asked if he were ready to leave a wedding, responded, "Why should I leave when there is music, dancing, food and drink?"

Relations with the Gentiles

There is discrepant information on the issue of relations between the Jews and the Gentiles in the shtetlach of the Pale. Zborowski stated that "One of the most striking features of this culture is its social isolation from its nearest neighbours."¹⁶³ Other accounts refer to Jewish fears of unpredictable violence at the hands of the local Gentiles, such as on fair days or for no other reason than being found in the non-Jewish parts of

¹⁶² Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 285-288.

¹⁶³ Zborowski, 1951, p. 352.

town.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, some of these same sources and others offer evidence of amicable personal relationships between Jews and Gentiles and lack of fear of violence among the Jews for their physical safety.¹⁶⁵

The source for these discrepant observations lies in the geopolitical history of the area as well as in the social reality. For the sake of brevity, I will limit my analysis of this issue to the area of interest, the Ukraine, and to general statements only.

The first point to be addressed is that the Jews and Ukrainians lived as two political solitudes, side by each. While both groups were victimized by the Russians and later the Soviets, there was little cooperation in fighting the common oppressor. This was due to the fact that while they shared a common view of the end, the means to achieve that end were viewed differently in each community. There were many instances from 1917 through 1920 where the Ukrainian independence movements and governments granted rights and privileges to Jews,¹⁶⁶ however, the alliances within these movements between the liberal and anti-Semitic factions often forced the Jews to oppose such political movements.¹⁶⁷ In many instances, in order to bolster enough support for independence, Ukrainian liberals often chose to align themselves with more right-wing, anti-Semitic elements which increased Ukrainian-Jewish tensions.¹⁶⁸ Further, the central Ukrainian government was unable to control many of the outlying areas under its control.

¹⁶⁴ Schoenfeld, pp. 11-15, 28; Zborowski & Herzog, p. 67; Meltzer, p. 90.

¹⁶⁵ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 153-157; Meltzer, p. 85.

¹⁶⁶ Frankel, pp. 266, 272. In fact, in the 1917-20 Ukrainian National Republic, Yiddish was declared an official language and money was printed bilingually in Ukrainian and Yiddish, Troper & Weinfeld, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ Friedman, pp. 260-261.

¹⁶⁸ The notion that political and economic differences were the source of much Ukrainian-Jewish antagonism can be seen in the circumstances of Carpatho-Ukraine where both communities worked together toward common socio-political and economic goals without external pressures or influence. The result was significantly lower levels of anti-Semitism than in any other part of the Ukraine to the point that the area was considered a model of successful Jewish-Ukrainian cooperation, Baran, pp. 159-160.

While, the government was offering political autonomy for Jews, anarchy and internecine struggle was the rule in the countryside, resulting in peasant uprisings and pogroms.¹⁶⁹ This was the case during the Petlura years. Not only did Petlura use anti-Semitism and pogroms to mobilize his fragmented forces, but to attempt to stop the pogroms would have alienated many of those fighting under him.¹⁷⁰ Discrepant perceptions of history can be seen in that most Ukrainians considered Petlura a national hero and completely uninvolved in the pogroms of 1919-1921, while the Jews deemed him primarily responsible.¹⁷¹ A later example was the general Ukrainian support for Nazi Germany, which while trying to lure Ukrainian support and collaboration promised an independent Ukrainian state free of Russian dominion. This political alliance obviously excluded the Jews.¹⁷²

Relations between the two communities had always been beset by tension. Traditionally, the Gentiles held the Jews responsible for their poverty since Jews had often served as representatives of the hated landowners who levied taxes against the peasants. Further, the Gentiles distrusted the Jews for their refusal to assimilate: they maintained their own distinctive dress, language and customs. Finally, the often repeated myth of the Jew as Christ-killer fuelled the anti-Semitism of the Gentiles.

Patterns that had evolved over centuries of persecution led the shtetl Jew to be wary of outsiders. The Jews were fearful of the Gentiles because of the latter's vocal anti-Semitism and violent periods of pogroms.

¹⁶⁹ Troper & Weinfeld, pp. 7-8; Frankel, pp. 272-273

¹⁷⁰ Kenez, pp. 295-296.

¹⁷¹ Frankel, p.275.

¹⁷² Friedman, pp. 260-265.

However, despite all of these tensions and difficulties, the masses of Jews and Ukrainians shared amicable and friendly personal contacts.¹⁷³ Reports of such contacts appear in many shtetl accounts.¹⁷⁴ So why do some reports claim discordant or at most minimal interaction, or others such as the *Memoirs*, no mention of *goyim* (non-Jews) at all? I believe the source of the discrepant reports lies in the nature of the reminiscent view of the shtetl. I will address this issue in greater detail in the conclusions, but suffice it to say here that the image of the shtetl described in emigrant recollections is a vision of an idealized Jewish society. In this image, the Gentiles are depicted, if at all, only as the perpetrators of pogroms and bloodshed or as mere minor players without any claim to the values that the shtetl upheld.¹⁷⁵ While, some accounts depict positive relations with the Gentiles, in most reminiscences, there is room only for negative accounts or none at all.

Certainly, there were tensions, mistrust, violence and bloodshed. However, I believe that the minority sources that depict Jewish-Gentile relations as generally amicable and interactive, outside of the periods of pogroms, are the more representative. They are, however, outweighed by the more numerous depictions of the shtetl that generally ignore mention of the Gentile inhabitants altogether.

¹⁷³ Friedman, p. 260.

¹⁷⁴ C.f. Kapeliyuk.

¹⁷⁵ Roskies, 1999, p. 61.

Changes to the Shtetl

Changes and profound challenges to the traditional way of life of the shtetl came from several directions. Some challenges came from government-enforced laws, while others developed out of the Jewish community itself.

Amongst the threats that originated from without to the shtetl homeostasis were such laws as the Cantonist law of Nicholas I of 1827, the requirement that rabbis, amongst the least likely to be familiar with the local language, be fluent in the vernacular. At various times, the Russian government tried to prohibit traditional Jewish attire, force Jews to attend Russian schools, or tried to close down cheders and yeshivas for refusing to introduce secular subjects as part of the curriculum, as was the case with the Volozhin Yeshiva in 1879 and again in 1892.¹⁷⁶ Yet, in general, the shtetl survived these incursions by some form of accommodation. In the case of educational rulings, children might attend Russian schools as well as cheder, or Jewish schools would introduce a nominal number of secular subjects to satisfy government requirements.¹⁷⁷ A greater threat to the traditional lifestyle and outlook of the shtetl came from burgeoning Jewish movements and greater interaction with the outside world. Some of these changes were brought into the shtetl by those whose work required travel or whose employment or education was located in a big city and who returned to the shtetl for shabbes or holidays.¹⁷⁸

These changes came through the Haskalah, socialist and Zionist movements. In their own ways, each of these movements challenged the age-old ways of thinking of the

¹⁷⁶ Mendes-Flohr & Reinhartz, pp. 316-317; Zborowski & Herzog, p. 160.

¹⁷⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 160-161.

¹⁷⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 254.

shtetl. Haskalah challenged the closed-mindedness to secular culture and literature, and advocated the use of Hebrew over the traditional language of the shtetl, Yiddish. Socialism and Marxism challenged the political status quo and prompted their adherents to struggle actively for change, a concept foreign to the shtetl pattern of accommodation. And Zionism challenged the notion that home was in Eastern Europe. While not all of these movements directly attacked a life of Torah, they did attack the traditional shtetl view of reality. They encouraged a new perspective on life and the world that demanded an openness to new experience, perhaps the biggest anathema to the shtetl, whose very nature consisted of clinging to age-old patterns. These latter movements, along with growing emigration to the West and post-Revolutionary emancipation formed the greatest incursions on the shtetl perspective. Most of the movements took strongest hold among the younger generation who were more willing to relinquish older value systems.¹⁷⁹

Often, these new value systems led the young to places and experiences outside of their shtetl and to contacts with many different types of people. This in turn frequently led to a weakening or abandoning of the traditional orthodox ways of the shtetl. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a time where secularization and assimilation were becoming more commonplace and performance of religious duties abdicated. This change can be seen in photographs of this era in that one can often see family photos in which women without wigs or kerchiefs¹⁸⁰ and clean-shaven, bare-headed men can be seen beside more traditionally dressed relatives.

¹⁷⁹ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 161-165.

¹⁸⁰ Orthodox law required married women to cover their hair with a wig or a kerchief.

However, as was its typical pattern, in general, the shtetl acculturated to these changes. As Ain wrote, “The older folks were pious but tolerant toward the young generation, which was largely heterodox in its religious views. The young people, too, refrained from publicly offending the religious sensibilities of the orthodox.”¹⁸¹

The Shtetl Perspective

The shtetl had a unique perspective on life derived out of centuries of its existence. Being a people without their own land or dominion, the Jews developed a pattern of adaptation to the reality about them while maintaining their own inner spiritual reality. The primary source of existential sustenance was found in the covenant with God. Not only did the covenant promise a better afterlife, but sadness and tragedy could be understood within the reward and punishment paradigm of the contract with God.¹⁸²

Ultimately, the shtetl Jew believed in and valued rationality and reasonable thought. If life could be approached rationally and reasonably, it could be understood and hence survived. God and His law were seen to be reasonable, and hence an acceptable paradigm for life. Since the Divine Plan was rational, all that took place under its rubric was also rational. There was no fighting reality. Just like the dominion of the czar, one had to adapt to reality.

Inherent in the belief in a rational world was the notion of contradiction. Contradiction did not have to be irrational, and was a part of the shtetl perspective. In fact, contradiction was necessary. One thing could not exist without its opposite. Good could not exist without evil, or at least one could not truly appreciate good, unless one

¹⁸¹ Ain, p. 90.

¹⁸² Zborowski, 1951, pp. 355, 364.

experienced evil. Shabbes could not exist were it not for the weekdays, and the week would be nothing without the sabbath. The shtetl could not function without its individual members yet each person was nothing without the totality of the shtetl. Thus, it was not contrary to the nature of the world that there existed epidemics, fires, hunger and even pogroms. In fact, rationale could be found in the face of tragedy in that it was often ascribed to laxness in piety and religious observance, such as not going to synagogue regularly, not properly observing the sabbath or dietary laws.¹⁸³ Thus hardship and burdens too, were part of God's plan, and while difficult, were in some ways, simply more hurdles to overcome in life. Despondency, to a people who had many reasons to give up, was fought off. One must always try to persevere. The shtetl Jew did not generally aspire to change the order of the cosmos, just to find a peaceful place wherein he could rest his head.¹⁸⁴

For the irreligious Jew, perhaps the lack of belief in God led to a seemingly more active response to shtetl difficulties. The non-believer, albeit the minority in the shtetl, could not rely on hopes of a better afterlife, nor accept hardship as part of God's rational plan for humanity. This individual may perhaps have turned to less transcendent coping methods, such as Zionism, socialism or the Haskalah movement. While not all facets of these movements were irreligious, they nevertheless offered a different approach to facing the hardships of the shtetl other than the traditional pattern of accommodation and solace in faith. In fact, these movements did often attract many of the less religious elements of the shtetl.

¹⁸³ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 223-224.

¹⁸⁴ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 409-410.

Acclimatization to harsh reality, without assimilation into the greater culture was the credo of the shtetl. Since everything was foreseen by God and part of His plan, the Jew could stop trying to fight or control reality, and more productively look for ways to live within it.¹⁸⁵ It was here that the inner spiritual world of the shtetl provided its people with the hope of a better life in the world-to-come. Shtetl Jews could lose themselves in the joy of shabbes and festivals, the beauty of learning Torah and forget their worries while helping a neighbour celebrate a wedding or participate in a rebbe's tish. These were moments of rejuvenation, vital to the ability to persevere.¹⁸⁶ The shtetl Jew accepted that the world contained evil, and that daily life may have been very difficult. However, since there was always hope for a better future, despondency was often fought off. Despite the pain and hardships of life, shtetl Jews tended towards optimism.

The world was a rational world created by a just God for the sake of humanity. Not only must one take in stride whatever God metes out, but within the parameters of the Law, one should enjoy all that one can out of life. The shtetl was a place teeming with life and noise.¹⁸⁷ Thus shtetl Jews took every opportunity to experience joy and gladness. Most recollections of shtetl life, while not denying the hardships thereof, emphasize the joy and beauty of the shtetl. Even the author of the *Memoirs* wrote, "This is how the people of the shtetl Kitarod lived ... and all were content with their lot."

Yet optimism did not mean denial of negative emotions. The shtetl Jew was free with his or her emotions, both glad and sorrowful ones. It was acceptable to cry or fret

¹⁸⁵ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 153.

¹⁸⁶ Zborowski, 1951, p. 364.

¹⁸⁷ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 410-411.

when appropriate. In fact, worrying was considered a sign of true concern and a part of the resolution process. One began by worrying and this would lead to action. On certain occasions, specific emotions were expected. One was expected to cry at a funeral or on Yom Kippur. On the other hand, even if one were in mourning, one was expected to be joyful on shabbes. This implied an element of control. While one was free to experience emotion, emotions were not permitted to run out of control. The ideal was to be a person of restraint. Restraint distinguished between the *prosteh* and the *shayneh*, the Gentiles and the Jews. The *prosteh*, like the peasants, allowed themselves to lose control while the *shayneh* struggled to maintain their control and thus their dignity at all times. Restraint meant allowing emotions to flow, but neither allowing them to go to either extreme nor to last for an overly long period. As in all aspects of life, speech, spending and behaviour, emotions had to occur in moderation.

The shtetl was a highly verbalized society.¹⁸⁸ The emphasis on Talmudic study and its *pilpul* (logical deduction) led to a highly literate society where words and communication were of paramount importance. The Talmud is rife with argument and debate and in the shtetl these were considered part of conversation. Argumentation was the modifying process whereby thoughts and opinions were clarified and strengthened. While respect was always necessary, it was not considered rude to argue one's point of view. In fact, good debating skills were seen as a sign of intellectual ability. Even arguing with God was acceptable, of which the most notable instance were the arguments of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev with God on behalf of the Jewish people.

“Good morning to You, Lord of the Universe!

¹⁸⁸ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 412-413.

I, Levi-Yitzchok, son of Sarah, of Berditchev,
Have come to You in a law-suit
On behalf of Your people Israel.
What have You against Your people Israel?
And why do You oppress Your people Israel?

...
And I, Levi-Yitzchok, son of Sarah, of Berditchev, say:
... I will not stir from here!
An end there must be to this - it must all stop!”¹⁸⁹

The shtetl house was a noisy place. Besides the large number of people competing for small space, there was always constant discussion and debate. Every decision and action was a source of discussion and expression of multiple points of view and opinion. To the outsider, the noisy, loud argumentation may have appeared acrimonious, but to the shtetl Jew, they were all part of civil conversation.¹⁹⁰

Part of the rich, verbal tapestry included names and nicknames. People were often known by their first names only, since family names had not been traditionally used by Jews. To distinguish one person from another with the same first name, a family link was often used. Thus, Yankel’s Raizel was used to distinguish her from Moishe’s Raizel. Once the czar obliged Jews to adopt surnames in the nineteenth century, many people chose names that they liked or names related to their occupation, such as Schneider (tailor), Schumacher (shoemaker), or Glazer (glazier).¹⁹¹

As well, nicknames were often used by the shtetl Jews, amongst themselves, since lastnames never really acquired daily use among the Jews. Some of these were based on physical appearances such as Leib der Roiter (Leib the redhead) or Yankel Hoiker

¹⁸⁹ Ausubel, pp. 726-727.

¹⁹⁰ Zborowski & Herzog, pp. 301-302.

¹⁹¹ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 150; Meltzer, pp. 38-39.

(Yankel the hunchback). Nicknames could also arise from one's habits or idiosyncrasies, often tinged with sarcastic wit. For example, Abramowicz wrote that in his shtetl, one household was kept clean and underwear was changed regularly and they were referred to as the "Czar's household." Anyone who ate lunch at the same time each day was labelled "the prince." There was a poor peddler, who, according to the shtetl stereotype had the eyes of a king, stern and cunning. His nickname was thus, "The Kaiser," his wife's "Her Royal Highness," his son's "The Successor," and his daughter's, "The Little Princess."¹⁹²

The shtetl emphasized the immaterial. While financial comfort did play a prominent role in the hopes and aspirations of these impoverished people, all other valued characteristics of a person were intangible. Knowledge, learning, kindness, compassion, and involvement in holiness were among the most cherished traits by which a life was evaluated. This emphasis on intangibles provided an outlet other than material success to people who had little opportunity for financial improvement. One could be indigent, yet still be a learned man. And the poor learned man was judged to be a better Jew than the wealthy ignoramus.

Life was valued above all else. The most frequent hopes, and that most often asked of a chasidic rebbe was *gezunt un parnosseh*, health and livelihood. As long as one was healthy, most everything else could be dealt with. In accord with Jewish law, with few exceptions, the Law would be broken to save a life.

Another shtetl contradiction was the concept of *ol*, yoke or burden. A burden could also be a joy. Raising children was a burden, yet a joy. Earning a living was a

¹⁹² Roskies & Roskies, pp. 125- 127.

burden, yet admirable if one succeeded. Being a pious Jew was an ol, yet fulfilling. As well, the number of burdens one had was correlated with one's importance. The pnei of the community had to deal with the same problems as the less important shtetl people, yet they had more burdens due to their position as heads of the community, thus they were deemed more important people. The load of burdens served the need to feel fulfilled. Without burdens to overcome, there would be no true satisfaction in a job well done. As was said frequently in the shtetl, "It's hard to be a Jew, and it's good to be a Jew."

Kitaigorod

General Overview

The village of Kitaigorod¹⁹³ lay on the Ternawa (Tarnow) River, which flowed into the Dniester. Found in the southwestern part of the Podolia region of the Ukraine, Kitarod, as it was known in Yiddish, was located at a crossroads of southern Eastern Europe. A short trip south of a few kilometers over the Dniester would lead to Bessarabia and some 25 – 30 kilometers more would lead one across the River Prut into Romania. Galicia lay within fifty kilometers due west. A voyage of 200 kilometers southwest would bring one into the Carpathian mountains of Hungary and to such renowned chasidic centers as Satmar, Sighet and Munkacs.

It was a peaceful town, surrounded on all sides by valleys, streams, ravines and forests. The town lay higher than the surrounding area. Fishing was plentiful and was presumably practiced by the Ukrainians who lived in the numerous surrounding villages.¹⁹⁴

The town had been founded under Polish dominion by Anje Pototski around 1607.¹⁹⁵ Due to the surrounding ravines and the altitude of the town, it was seen as easily defensible and a castle with a moat was built there by Pototski's son, Stanislaw. The castle, remains of which could still be seen at the end of the nineteenth century, was built near where the Catholic church had been erected in 1775. While there was an Orthodox church as well, it is interesting to note that in 1883, the Catholic church counted over two thousand

¹⁹³ Kitaigorod means Chinatown (Kitai = Cathay, Gorod = town). I am unaware of the historical origins of this name.

¹⁹⁴ Kapeliyuk

¹⁹⁵ Sulimierski, Chlebowski, & Walewski, p. 115. This coincides with Kapeliyuk's report that graves in the old Jewish cemetery dated back to 1640.

members, while the Orthodox church counted only 683. This reflected the influence of the former Polish dominion. These church members came from amongst the 3,625 peasants living in the county, including those who lived in Kitaigorod itself. While it is difficult to know exactly how many Jews lived in Kitaigorod, they were always in the majority. *Slownik Geograficzny*¹⁹⁶ listed 239 Jewish families out of a total population of 1,036 people in 1883, hence a clear majority.¹⁹⁷ By 1897, Kapeliyuk reported 1,745 Jews out of a total population of 2,794 persons, hence 62%. Under Polish rule, the Jewish community numbered 489 people in 1765, and 642 in 1847, under the czar.¹⁹⁸

A great fire broke out in 1881 which affected the entire town. Presumably, much of it had been rebuilt after that. By the early twentieth century, there was still no electricity, nor running water in Kitaigorod.

Of its physical structure, certain other details are available. Besides the two churches, the old cemetery and synagogue, there were six windmills, 22 stores and 26 artisans in Kitaigorod. It is not clear how many of these artisans worked out of storefronts and how many out of their homes. It is likely that besides the 22 retail stores, some or most of the artisans had storefronts, which would increase the number of independent shops in Kitaigorod. It can also be assumed, like in every other shtetl, most of these shops were located around the market square.¹⁹⁹ In addition, there were a pharmacist, barber and a doctor. There were at least three cantors, several cheder melamedim and several shochetim. There was a bathhouse and a publicly funded Talmud Torah. There were several butchers,

¹⁹⁶ Sulimierski, Chlebowski, & Walewski, p. 115.

¹⁹⁷ In the *Memoirs*, Mr. Garfinkel mentioned 250 Jewish families. Mokotoff & Amdur Sack listed 1,595 Jews, p. 152.

¹⁹⁸ Kapeliyuk.

¹⁹⁹ Sulimierski, Chlebowski, & Walewski, p. 115; Kapeliyuk.

a caterer, a few bakers and at least one Jewish dairy farmer.

Fairs were held weekly in Kitaigorod, on Sundays. There was also a weekly market day on Tuesdays.

As well as the old synagogue, there was a newer, large wooden synagogue.²⁰⁰ The synagogues in Podolia, including the one in Kitaigorod, had a single constructive theme, resembling the architecture of stone buildings. Lukin and Khaimovitch stated that usually these wooden synagogues would have had a wooden dome over the *bima* (central structure from which services were led), and would have been built in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, according to the typical Polish synagogue style.²⁰¹ Besides this stadt-shul, there were three chasidic shuls, the Sadigerer Kloiz, the Husiatiner kloiz and the Zinkover kloiz. Aside from these three chasidic communities, there were also sizeable Medzibodzher, Krilovitzer and Chortkover communities.

Having such numerous chasidic groups, Kitaigorod received sporadic visits from chasidic rebbes to their shtetl. All of the rebbes who visited Kitaigorod were descendants of Reb Meshullam Zusya of Zinkov (1813 – 1864), the Apter Rav's grandson, who had thousands of followers throughout Podolia and Bessarabia.²⁰² Four of his sons were prominent in continuing his dynasty. His son Shmuel took over his leadership in the town of Krilovitz, but died at a young age in 1862. The latter's brother, Reb Yechiel (1843 – 1916) took over the mantle of leadership, and was amongst those rebbes who made frequent visits to Kitaigorod. At Yechiel's death, a son of Shmuel's Yitzchak Meir

²⁰⁰ *Memoirs*

²⁰¹ Lukin & Khaimovitch, p. 52.

²⁰² Alfasi, 1995, p. 217.

took over and at the latter's death his son Menachem Nachum took over, but moved his seat to the shtetl of Lutzk, and thus ended the Krilovitzer dynasty.²⁰³

Another son of Meshulam Zusya's was Abraham Joshua of Medzibodzh (1832 – 1881). His son, Israel Shalom Joseph (1853 – 1911) was known as Reb Yisroel-ne and visited Kitaigorod. His leadership was taken over by his son, Abraham Joshua of Tarnopol, who was killed by the Nazis in 1943. The group was taken over by another of Israel Shalom Joseph's sons, Yitzchak Meir who eventually moved the center to Israel in 1936.²⁰⁴

A fourth son of Meshulam Zusya was Chaim Menachem of Zinkov (1837 – 1893). He was considered one of the most prominent rebbes in Russia, and whose opinion held tremendous influence. He had chasidim throughout Podolia and Bessarabia. Upon his death, leadership in Zinkov fell to his two sons, Reb Moshele (1879 – 1926) and Reb Pinchas'l (1872 – 1916), whose visit to Kitaigorod is discussed in detail in the *Memoirs*. Reb Moshele served as leader of his father's bes medresh in Zinkov, and Reb Pinchas'l traveled more often to the outlying communities of followers. Upon both of their death's, leadership passed to Reb Moshele's son, Chaim Menachem of Zinkov (1898 – 1990) who eventually settled in Israel, and thus ensured the survival of the Zinkover dynasty.²⁰⁵

Outside of the period of pogroms, the Kitaigoroder Jews seemed to have had amicable relations with the non-Jews of the area. The Jews had their loyal customers and the Gentiles, their trusted Jewish craftsmen. They would exchange gifts on joyous family occasions such as weddings. Kapeliyuk reported how they lived side by side, each aware of

²⁰³ Rabinowicz, p. 203; Alfasi, 1995, p. 217, 219.

²⁰⁴ Alfasi, 1995, p. 217, 219; Alfasi, 1986, pp. 91-92; Rabinowicz, pp. 202-203; Unger, 1969, pp. 12-13.

²⁰⁵ Alfasi, 1986, p. 613.

the strengths and weaknesses of each other. In fact, he also reported two incidents, early in the twentieth century where the Jews were protected by the local Gentiles. In one case, a government official tried to encourage strife between the Jews and the Gentiles and the latter refused to take up the cause, and the official was forced to leave town, unsuccessful in his mission. On another occasion, when some ruffians attacked a Jew at the yard, some villagers came to the Jew's rescue and drove the attackers out of town.

History of World War I

Kitaigorod was not damaged during the First World War. While shooting and canon fire could be heard, the town was never under direct attack. Reports of the expulsion of Jews from border areas reached the town and fear of expulsion caused a political schism in the shtetl. The minority, those who supported Russia, were presumably more fearful of the Austro-Hungarians and the Germans than the threat of expulsion deeper inland. The majority, however, hoped for the victory of Kaiser Wilhelm and Emperor Franz Jozef. This support was due presumably to the reputation of the Hapsburg emperor to social and legal equality.²⁰⁶ In typical shtetl fashion, these debates took place at every opportunity: between services in the synagogue, shabbes afternoons and at the rabbi's home. They would glean information from the pages of the newspaper delivered to the town pharmacist.

It would seem that Kitaigorod, although not damaged, was taken over by Central Power troops. The town was not evacuated by the Russians, which it would have been, being a border town so close to Galicia, if the Russians had control over it. As well,

²⁰⁶ In 1867, Franz Jozef extended full equality to all people, including Jews in areas such as occupation and residence. He had a positive reputation in Jewish communities in Galicia and elsewhere. Sachar, p. 113.

Kapeliyuk reported lines of wounded Germans, Austrians and Hungarians filing through Kitaigorod on their retreat during the winter of 1917-18.

By the summer of 1917, reports began to reach Kitaigorod of the fall of Czar Nicholas. Rumours of a new republic with equal rights for all reached Kitarod as well. The youth were amongst the first to celebrate this socialist victory. And not long after, the first reports of the pogroms through the Ukraine filtered through and the townspeople prepared for the worst.

The Pogrom of June, 1919

Messages of support came from the neighbouring Ukrainian villages, but these did little to assuage the anxiety of the Jews of Kitaigorod. Bolshevik authorities came into Kitaigorod, but mass disorganization and rebellions made it difficult for the Soviets to maintain control in the Ukraine. On Shavuos eve, 5679, June 10th, 1919, the Bolshevik army fled and Kitaigorod was left open to the armies of the Ukrainian independence movement.

The Jews knew what this meant and the initial reaction was to flee. However, it soon dawned on them that no other shtetl was any safer and the only place of refuge, the capital, would require lengthy travel on the open road, an invitation to attack. Thus, they remained in Kitaigorod, bracing themselves for the onslaught. It came soon after. The shtetl was occupied by a unit of approximately fourteen soldiers of Petlura's Ukrainian Peoples' Republic, under the command of the twenty-five year-old Washchinski.²⁰⁷ The accounts vary as to how long the pogromchiks occupied the town before the pogrom and on

²⁰⁷ Melamed; Kapeliyuk. The unfolding of the pogrom in Kitaigorod followed the typical pattern as described in Kenez, pp. 298-300.

which dates the pogrom actually took place. By most accounts, the majority of the killings took place over a two-day period sometime between the 10th and 15th of June, 1919.²⁰⁸

Upon their arrival in Kitaigorod, the pogromchiks took over a large house in the shtetl and turned it into their headquarters, the center of the terror that now affected the town. During the time of the occupation of Kitaigorod, the Jews lived in fear of their lives. Everyone avoided being outside as much as possible and when necessary moved quickly through the streets. Most reports concur that the pogromchiks demanded that the Jews collect large sums of money to be handed over to them.²⁰⁹

Eventually the pogromchiks were no longer satisfied with demanding contributions and looting. The killing began with the murder of a few individuals on the night or day before the wholesale murders began.²¹⁰ The killing was savage and unrestrained. People were beaten to death, stabbed with sabers, shot and decapitated. Hand grenades were used to inflict more pain.²¹¹ Children were killed before their parents' eyes and parents before their children. When one mother pleaded that her children be spared, eyewitnesses testified that the commander laughed and said, "The Jews must be put to death with all their progeny."²¹² Mrs. Melamed testified about a woman whose hair was tied to a horse and dragged through the streets of the town with her child in her arms, after which both were shot. Kapeliyuk described the slaughter of the shochet and his wife, both in their seventies along with the 72 year-old cantor. People hid inside houses,²¹³ especially in attics.²¹⁴ The

²⁰⁸ Pravda; Kapeliyuk; Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 84; Wiesenthal, p. 129.

²⁰⁹ Fasman; Kapeliyuk; Melamed; Pravda.

²¹⁰ Kapeliyuk; Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 84.

²¹¹ Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 88.

²¹² Friedman, p. 10; Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 88.

²¹³ Melamed; Fasman.

²¹⁴ Pravda; Kapeliyuk.

next day scores of bodies were strewn throughout the streets and alleys of Kitaigorod.

Kapeliyuk reported bodies sliced open and skulls smashed.

Most of the victims were found in the streets because for some reason the pogromchiks did not generally kill people in their homes, but pulled them outside to kill them.²¹⁵

Stores and homes had been looted. Windows had been smashed and doors broken. Clothing and household utensils littered the streets and there was a snowfall of feathers from the sliced open pillows and eiderdowns. Just before leaving the shtetl, the pogromchiks had wanted to set fire to the shtetl, but were convinced otherwise by the Gentile villagers for fear that the fire might spread and engulf their homes.²¹⁶

Eventually wagons were rented from the villagers and the dead were brought to the cemetery for burial. As Kapeliyuk wrote, at the cemetery, the rabbi of Kitaigorod refused to recite the *Tzidduk Hadin*, the part of the funeral service which emphasizes the justness of the Divine judgement. He obviously did not believe this judgement to have been just.

The actual total number of victims of the pogrom in Kitaigorod cannot be accurately determined, although the number lies between 72 and 85. One report listed two men killed on the night of June 13th and seventy-two people killed on the night of June 14th, including thirty-seven women and sixteen injured.²¹⁷ Another report listed eighty-five killed.²¹⁸ Wiesenthal listed seventy-three killed and sixteen wounded.²¹⁹ Mrs. Melamed testified to the number of deaths being approximately eighty, and Mrs. Pravda stated that between

²¹⁵ Fasman; Kapeliyuk.

²¹⁶ Fasman; Kapeliyuk.

²¹⁷ Committee of Jewish Delegations, p. 84.

²¹⁸ Chazanovitch, p. 70.

²¹⁹ Wiesenthal, p. 129.

eighty-three and eighty-five people were murdered. Kapeliyuk placed the number of dead at eighty-four. Finally, Shifrin reported that 75 people were killed.²²⁰

From Shifrin's article, the only one to list the names and ages of the dead, which counted 37 men, 36 women and one unidentified person, the following statistics can be gleaned. The ages of the victims ranged from 13 months (the child shot after being dragged with his mother through the streets by a horse) to 85 years. Of these, 11 were under the age of twenty, and 7 were aged over seventy.

Gergel reported a tendency of the pogromchiks in the Ukraine to focus on killing men over women (76%) and those aged between 17 and 50 (63%).²²¹ This trend was partially observed in Kitaigorod, where 63% of the victims were between the ages of 17 and 50, however, fully half of the victims were female.²²²

The murder of the four Melamedman family members is connected with the Garfinkel family. Mr. Garfinkel's brother-in-law, Chaim Hirsh Shapiro was one of the wealthier men in town, and was thus singled out by the pogromchiks to be murdered. However, having been forewarned, he had escaped and hidden. When the pogromchiks arrived and did not find their intended victim, they took vengeance on the Melamedman family who lived next door.²²³

The Garfinkel family themselves were not unaffected by death. His uncle, Chaim Garfinkel, aged 44, had been hiding in a cellar with his wife Menyeh and their five children.

²²⁰ Newspaper article found in the archives of the Progressive Kitaigoroder Podolier Society, in the YIVO Archives, New York. The article is a photocopy, without a date or the name of the newspaper. It was written by N. Shifrin, a Copenhagen correspondent.

²²¹ Gergel, pp. 250-251.

²²² These statistics were computed based on Shifrin's list of the names and ages of the victims.

²²³ Fasman.

An acquaintance of Chaim's, who knew the location of the trap door into the cellar came by and called them out, thinking it was safe. Chaim, Menyeh and their two eldest children, Nisson, aged 22, and Chava, 19, emerged. They were pounced upon by the pogromchiks and killed. Their youngest children, hearing the carnage were too frightened to leave the cellar. They remained until the following morning when they discovered the bodies of their murdered family members; their mother's head severed completely from her body.

Post-pogrom justice was elusive. In her deposition, Mrs. Melamedman testified that Commandant Washchinski and five pogromchiks had been arrested in the nearby shtetl of Dinovitz. While all six were condemned to death, the sentence was never carried out and in fact all were released and lived freely. This is corroborated by the Committee of Jewish Delegations, where they report that Commandant Washchinski lived freely as an officer of the Third Dismounted Division at Dinovitz. As well, another two pogromchiks, Gorodetzky and Romanuk, lived freely in Kitaigorod, despite petitions to arrest the latter.²²⁴

The Holocaust Period

Extensive research on the details of the fate of the Jews of Kitaigorod during the Holocaust has revealed no direct references to Kitaigorod itself. Thus, I will present information on the fate of nearby communities, including Kamenets-Podolsk, the district capital, as well as several small shtetlach located close to Kitaigorod. The Nazis invaded Podolia within a day of their invasion of the Soviet Union, thus greatly limiting much chance of flight or evacuation.

The Jews of the Ukraine were killed by mass shootings, like most of the Jews of

²²⁴ Committee of Jewish Delegations, pp. 95-96.

the USSR. The Jewish communities of Podolia fell under the control of Einsatzgruppe C. The southern edge of their territory of control was north of the Czernowitz-Moghilev-Podolsk line, placing Kitaigorod just within its area of control.²²⁵

There were reports of large-scale massacres in Podolia during the first wave of Einsatzgruppen activity, including in Kamenets-Podolsk in the summer and fall of 1941.²²⁶ However, by the beginning of July, 1941, forward units of Einsatzgruppe C had already reached the eastern edges of the Ukraine in towns such as Berditchev, Vinnitsa and Zhitomir, some 120 km east of Kitaigorod, thus many communities of Podolia were still extant and fated to suffer through the second wave of killings.²²⁷

I will address the two waves separately, because it is possible the Jews of Kitaigorod were killed during either or both waves. A ghetto had been set up in Kamenets-Podolsk during the first sweep and tens of thousands of local Jews from Kamenets-Podolsk and surrounding towns were herded into it. A number of local Jews had already evacuated with the Red army.²²⁸ Gutman reported that 23,430 Jews had lived in Kamenets-Podolsk in 1914, and fewer than 13,000 had remained by 1926.²²⁹ Furthermore, Blatman wrote that only 10,000 Jews still lived there in 1939 at the outbreak of World War II.²³⁰ Out of these 10,000 remaining, it is unclear how many were evacuated to the east.

Included in the ghettos in the Kamenets-Podolsk area were thousands of deportees

²²⁵ Affidavit of O. Ohlendorf before the International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg, April 24, 1947, NO-2890, p.3.

²²⁶ Gilbert, 1988, pp. 68, 76.

²²⁷ Reitlinger, p. 230.

²²⁸ Blatman, pp. 46-47; Sohn, p. 100.

²²⁹ Gutman, p. 1098.

²³⁰ Blatman, pp. 46, 52.

from Hungary. These Jews had fled to Hungary from Poland, Belgium and Holland. They did not have Hungarian citizenship and when the Hungarians participated in the German conquest of parts of the Ukraine, they deported 14,000 of these unwanted foreign nationals to Kamenets-Podolsk.²³¹ The Nazis were unprepared to deal with such large numbers of new deportees and the decision was taken to kill them within days of their arrival in the ghetto.²³² These foreign nationals, along with some local Podolian Jews were shot to death in anti-tank craters on August 27th, 28th and 29th, 1941 on the outskirts of Kamenets-Podolsk. The total number of victims as reported by Higher SS and Police Leader Franz Jaeckeln to his superiors in Berlin was 23,600.²³³ In order to ascertain how many of these victims were residents of Kamenets-Podolsk, I examined other reports of how many of these victims were Hungarian deportees. Gilbert reported that 11,000 were deportees from Hungary,²³⁴ Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality reported 11,000²³⁵ as well, and Sohn, a Hungarian survivor of Kamenets-Podolsk reported that 8,000 were foreign nationals (6,000 from Hungary and 2,000 from Bessarabia).²³⁶ Thus, somewhere between 9,000 and 15,000 local Jews were amongst the victims on those days. Since the number of Jews in Kamenets-Podolsk on the eve of war was around 10,000, of whom some had evacuated east, and secondly, not everyone in Kamenets-Podolsk was killed in that first Aktion, the numbers of 9,000 to 15,000 local Jewish victims must have included people from towns and shtetlach other than

²³¹ Braham, pp. 134-140.

²³² Kramer & Headland, p. 288.

²³³ Operational Situation Report, USSR, #80. See, Arad, Krakowski, & Spector, pp. 128-129, for English translation.

²³⁴ Gilbert, 1986, p. 186.

²³⁵ Office of Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, p. 211.

²³⁶ Sohn, p. 100.

Kamenets-Podolsk alone. This conclusion is further supported in documents from the Khmel'nitskiy State Archives which aver that 12,000 out of the 23,000 in total killed on that day were Podolian Jews, and that they came both from Kamenets-Podolsk and neighbouring towns.²³⁷ Thus, it was possible that some unknown number of Jews from Kitaigorod were among the victims of the Aktion at the end of August, 1941.²³⁸ A Hungarian Jewish witness to the August Aktion in Kamenets-Podolsk related that:

These people they ordered to take off all their clothes, they were put in order, and then they were all naked. They were sent to these ditches and SS men, some of them drunk, some of them sober, and some of them photographing, it seems, these people numbering about three hundred to four hundred, I don't know the exact number, were all executed and most of them only got hurt and got buried alive. Quicklime was brought there too, four or five trucks of quicklime.

Firstly, after the shooting we were ordered to put some earth back on the bodies, some of them were still crying for help. We put the earth back on the bodies and then the trucks were emptied of the quicklime.

I am talking about people who are all Jews, no exception. There were some Christians who were trying to hide some Jews and they were hanged.²³⁹

Podolia was to face the second sweep of Nazi massacres beginning in the summer of 1942 and continuing as late as 1944. In the area of Kamenets-Podolsk, the Khmel'nitskiy State Archives published reports of other mass shootings in July 1942 (53 victims), November 1942 (4,000 victims), February 1943 (2,000 victims) and March

²³⁷ Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR Institute of State and Law, p. 160.

²³⁸ There is another reference of interest on this point. The International Military Tribunal in its indictment stated that 31,000 Jews had been killed at Kamenets-Podolsk. No date, however is given for the statistic. It may be referring to a Nuremberg estimate of the total number of Jews killed in Kamenets-Podolsk throughout the war years. International Military tribunal, p. 49.

²³⁹ Gilbert, 1986, pp. 187-188.

1943 (91 victims).²⁴⁰ As well, they reported a mass grave of 500 Jewish children, between the ages of four and eight, whom, exhumation proved, had been buried alive. Autopsies revealed that very few had actually been shot and even fewer fatally. Finally, they reported at least one more mass execution of foreign nationals deported to Kamenets-Podolsk.²⁴¹

There is another reference to the fact that people shot in Kamenets-Podolsk were not all residents of this city. Of the killings in Kamenets-Podolsk, Gendarmeriemeister Fritz Jacob told his superior Generalleutnant Querner, on June 21st, 1942:

We are having a proper clear-out of course, especially among the Jews... We are not asleep here. Three of four Aktionen a week. Once gipsies (sic) and another time Jews, partisans and other riff-raff... Well, the little Yids we have living here in Kamenets-Podolsk are only a tiny percentage of the 24,000. The little Yids living in the district are likewise among our select clientele. We are pressing on without pangs of conscience, and then: "...the waves cover them up, the world is at peace."²⁴²

It can be assumed that some number of Kitaigoroder Jews were killed along with the Jews of Kamenets-Podolsk. First, the killings in Kamenets-Podolsk included thousands from the surrounding towns, of which Kitaigorod was one. Second, some Jews from Kitaigorod may have moved to Kamenets-Podolsk thinking they might be safer in a larger town. And third, it is possible that some Jews from Kitaigorod had been forcibly moved to the ghetto in Kamenets-Podolsk.

²⁴⁰ These numbers combined with the 1941 number of victims far surpasses the Jewish population of Kamenets-Podolsk, thus these numbers must include victims who were not from Kamenets-Podolsk, but from nearby localities.

²⁴¹ Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR Institute of State and Law, pp. 159-161.

²⁴² Schoenberner, p. 88.

During the second wave of Einsatzgruppen activity, in the summer of 1942, there is direct evidence of the fate of two nearby small shtetlach, Studenitsa and Stara Ushitza, both located within 40 kilometers of Kitaigorod. Captain Salog, commander of a police squad in the Kamenets-Podolsk area was a participant in the shootings of the Jews of Studenitsa and Stara Ushitza. One morning, in the late summer of 1942, the Jews of Stara Ushitza were told to prepare themselves for deportation to Kamenets-Podolsk.²⁴³ Some people tried to save themselves and were discovered hiding in well-equipped bunkers and were forced to join in the evacuation. The old and the sick were carried by family members or by other Jews on the orders of the police. Those who were reluctant were beaten with rifle butts and clubs. The Jews were marched in columns through the town, guarded by some forty soldiers and policemen. As the column left the city, crying and prayers could be heard. About 1.5 kilometers outside of town, the column was met by the district commissar and turned towards the execution pit. Once the Jews saw the 12 X 6 meter ditch, they knew what awaited them, and began destroying their valuables so the enemy would not profit from them. Everyone was stripped naked and five at a time were led to the edge of the pit, forced to lie on top of the bodies of those already killed and were shot with a bullet in the neck at point-blank range. While the rule was death by fives, in some cases, families of six or seven people insisted on being killed together. Meanwhile, Nazi officers encouraged their men, sometimes laughing, sometimes stone-faced. There were threats and curses from the condemned. A child was thrown into the

²⁴³ The memorial to the Jews of Stara Ushitza, erected at the Baron de Hirsch cemetery by the Yishitzer Young Men's Benefit Association of Montreal, lists the date of the murders as the 9th of Av 5702 (July 23, 1942).

air and shot while still in midair. A few young women spit in the faces of an SS-man. Two men tried to escape by running through the cordon, but both were shot and killed. Families and friends hugged and kissed while being led to the execution pit. One man was ordered to run along the edge of the pit so that the killers could have some fun. There were also those who did not die immediately and continued moving for some minutes under other corpses that fell on top. This execution took four hours and approximately 400 Jews had been murdered. Once the Jews of Stara Ushitza had been killed, the same procedure was repeated for the Jews of Studenitsa.²⁴⁴

Other information on shtetlach in Podolia comes from *Kamenets-Podolsk Usevivatah*, the memorial book for the region's shtetlach. Ten surrounding towns are listed for which information on the war years is provided for only two of them. In the shtetl Dinovitz, 3,000 Jews were killed on May 2, 1942. They had been forced into a cave, the exits stopped up and they were left there to die of suffocation and starvation.²⁴⁵ With respect to the shtetl of Zamichov, there are no details on the date or number of people killed. The only information provided is that the Jews of Zamichov were forced to dig a mass grave on the outskirts of the shtetl and then shot.²⁴⁶ In the shtetl Orinin, about 20 kilometers from Kitaigorod, the fewer than 100 Jewish families were killed and the shtetl was not rebuilt after the war.²⁴⁷

Since many other communities in Podolia suffered similar executions as the Jews of Stara Ushitza and Studenitsa during the second wave of Einsatzgruppen sweeps, and

²⁴⁴ Ehrenberg & Grossman, pp. 530-537.

²⁴⁵ Rosen, p. 142.

²⁴⁶ Hezri, p. 160.

²⁴⁷ Sohn, p. 72.

that both of these shtetlach were in close proximity to Kitaigorod, it is quite likely that the remaining Jews of Kitaigorod were shot en masse on one day in the summer of 1942 in or near their shtetl. This view is further corroborated by personal statements of Mr. Shopsah Fasman (a native of Studenitsa) and Mrs. Rosa Fasman (a native of Kitaigorod) who both stated that the majority of the Jews of their respective hometowns were not deported elsewhere, but were killed in their own shtetlach. They also stated that upon their return after the war (they had fled into Uzbekistan), there were few survivors of Kitaigorod and no Jews returned to the town.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ Personal communication, December 29th, 1999, New York City. Furthermore, the *Black Book of Localities Whose Jewish Population was Exterminated by the Nazis* listed Kitaigorod, Podolia, as a community that had been destroyed, but provided no further details, p. 433.

Conclusions

This thesis is a profile of the Eastern European shtetl in a general sense and more specifically of one shtetl in particular. The genesis of this study was in the *Memoirs of My Younger Years* and the emphasis to research Kitaigorod came from the need to present these memoirs in their proper perspective. Thus my conclusion will address four issues. First, I will discuss some of the issues that arise out of reminiscence literature in general. Second, I will address the particular issues of Jewish reminiscence, especially as it relates to Eastern Europe. Third, I will give an overview of shtetl literature, and finally, I will discuss the value of Mr. Garfinkel's memoirs in light of the research on reminiscence and the literature on the shtetl in general.

Reminiscence Literature

The issues that arise out of research on individual reminiscence are multidisciplinary. I will therefore briefly summarize some of the current views of psychology and sociology. Reminiscence has been studied within the field of psychology as a general concomitant of the aging process. Hagberg postulated that reminiscence in old age is a formative process. It is essential to maintaining a self-identity based upon the content of one's life history or biography. "One's position in old age is as much as possible a preservation and fulfillment of one's earlier life content."²⁴⁹ "Is it any wonder that with so many contemporaries dead and so many signposts obliterated, a lot of

²⁴⁹ Hagberg, pp. 61-62.

thought and energy goes into repeating who you are?”²⁵⁰ Hagberg further noted that reminiscence among the old usually fixates on youth and adolescence and that the appearance of events in the mind is more important to the autobiographer than the actual details of reality.²⁵¹

Other researchers of reminiscence hypothesized that telling one’s story helps one feel good about oneself and implicitly creates a condition wherein the writer creates a sense of value for his or her life. It leads to a feeling of empowerment, that life has some important meaning.²⁵²

In regards to the social construction of memory, Meacham argued that when an individual tells his or her story, those around that person can question the accuracy or validity of that story. However, when many stories are told of the same events, each one supports and validates the other. Thus, memory is better understood as a social process rather than an individual one.²⁵³

Finally, social scientists have argued that reminiscence is as much about the current situation and audience as the past and the autobiographer. “Each story has a storyteller who chooses to tell a particular story from among a number of stories and to tell it in a particular way, to a particular person, in a particular setting.”²⁵⁴ “But the conclusion we must draw is that history throws light not on ‘objective’ events, but on the persons who write it; it illuminates not the past, but the present. And that is no doubt

²⁵⁰ Blythe, p. 12.

²⁵¹ Hagberg, pp. 62, 70.

²⁵² Thorsheim & Roberts, p. 194

²⁵³ Meacham, pp. 43, 37.

²⁵⁴ Viney, p. 244.

why each generation finds it necessary to write its histories afresh.”²⁵⁵

The telling of the story has particular nuances for Eastern European emigrant Jews. Since 1945, it has become a story about a world destroyed, written by people whose homes and roots no longer exist in physical reality. Thus the telling of the story has become both personal and collective and joins the ranks of the Jewish liturgy of destruction.

Jewish Reminiscence

Like general forms of reminiscence, Jewish reminiscence tries to create a past story that has implications for current self-understanding.²⁵⁶ However, added to this, Jewish reminiscence has particular valence due to the course of Jewish history and Jewish forms of remembering. Jewish history is replete with stories of massacres, martyrs, expulsions and catastrophes. Jewish commemoration demands not only mourning, but rational explanation as well. Thus, many tragedies in Jewish history have been seen to be some part of a divine plan.²⁵⁷ Within Judaism, tragedy and destruction are seen within the history and meaning of the covenant.²⁵⁸

The archetype of Jewish catastrophe is seen in the *Churban HaBa'is*, the destruction of the temples in Jerusalem and the subsequent diasporas which have been seen to be the root-cause of much of Jewish suffering through the millennia. In fact, to the set of lamentations recited in commemoration of the temples' destructions have been added dirges that reflected upon later catastrophes in Jewish history. A people with such

²⁵⁵ Walsh, p. 109.

²⁵⁶ Roskies, 1999, p. 44.

²⁵⁷ Zborowski, 1951, p. 355.

²⁵⁸ Roskies, 1999, p. 15.

a long history of bloodshed and exile have developed complex modes of mourning to deal with the tragedies that have befallen them.²⁵⁹ Thus, a primary act of Jews who have left a temporal space was to create modified ways of remembering that reflect the archetypes of Jewish destruction as well as the specifics of the particular era being commemorated. With respect to the shtetl experience, this process began in the 1880s as emigration, both out of the shtetlach and away from Eastern Europe is general, led to a dying out of the old ways, language and social behaviour, and thus the search for a “usable Jewish past” was born.²⁶⁰ The usable Jewish past combines all of the features of reminiscence in general as well as Jewish archetypes of destruction. The past is idealized and romanticized. The harsher details of the world commemorated, with the exception of the description of the destruction, if there was one, are often softened or ignored. With the goal of turning the past into a model for the present and future, certain liberties are taken to ensure that the projected image conforms to the speaker’s current ideals.

The need to remember the “old country” was driven by the fact that it was disappearing and after the Holocaust, had virtually disappeared entirely. The shtetl could be brought back to life by remembering it, especially by its former residents telling their stories. Great writers, too, such as Sholem Aleichem, played a role, in that, “...for American Jews, the whole of Eastern Europe had been turned into a single *lieu de mémoire*, or memory-site, called a shtetl.”²⁶¹ Autobiography came to play a significant role in recreating the history of the shtetl by redrawing and representing the past of a

²⁵⁹ Roskies, 1988, pp. 4-5.

²⁶⁰ Roskies, 1999, p. 9.

²⁶¹ Roskies, 1999, p. 12.

world destroyed.²⁶²

This pattern of personal recollection in order to illuminate the past, recreate a present, as well as mourn the destroyed communities of Eastern Europe by Eastern European Jews continues. “Typically, the stimulus for the writing of a Jewish memoir was the precipitous end of an era, usually as a result of catastrophe. Jews sat down to write with a sense of longing, once the foundations of society as they knew it had been fundamentally altered.”²⁶³

Furthermore, the mourning of the past, using archetypes of destruction, does not always directly address or even reflect the process of destruction itself. The very fact that the nature of the writing is reminiscent implicitly reflects the destruction, and thus the writing often stops short of actually describing the end. Furthermore, sometimes the history of the destruction is deliberately written separately from the history of the idealized locale, perhaps so as not to taint the positiveness of the created image. On the other hand, sometimes the two are combined together to increase the dramatic effect of the loss by including the story of the destruction. These writings on the shtetl may contain any or all of the following assumptions, whereby individual experience is read into collective history: “The ghetto-existence better left behind; the Jewish body politic under siege; the idealized Heimat, the local old country homeland arrested in time; as paradise lost; and finally as the staging ground for Jewish mass martyrdom.”²⁶⁴

Furthermore, Roskies described other characteristics of the literature on the shtetl

²⁶² Roskies, 1999, pp. 12-13.

²⁶³ Roskies, 1984, p. 134.

²⁶⁴ Roskies, 1999, p. 43.

in Jewish collective memory which can be seen particularly in Mr. Garfinkel's *Memoirs*. The shtetl was recreated as a quaint, little town with a shining sun. It came to be seen as "an imagined community of tolerant, educated, and productive citizens."²⁶⁵ It seemed to lay outside of time and space, being itself a hero and protagonist of Jewish tenacity and survival. Even the poverty came to be redefined as positive.²⁶⁶

For many former residents, living as tourists in their new homes, shtetl recollections were a means of expressing their own estrangement in a new culture.²⁶⁷ For some, the shtetl was represented as an independent, Jewish, autonomous community. They depict it as self-empowered and oblivious to the world around them, existing almost in isolation.²⁶⁸ This phenomenon explains the lack of negativity in many shtetl recollections and the omission of mention of the non-Jewish population of the shtetl in many other accounts. The irony, of course, lies in the fact that the Jews of the shtetlach of the Pale were powerless to determine their own realities and were victimized by the authorities and landowners. But once emigration and destruction fell upon the shtetl, it was reborn in myth. As Roskies wrote, "The shtetl is dead. Long live the shtetl."²⁶⁹

General Overview of the Shtetl Literature

One of the most striking features of published literature on the shtetl is the depiction of shtetl life as a contented existence. Before, I began my research, my sense of the shtetl was of a difficult, poverty-stricken life without any modern amenities perched precariously on the edge of constant, unpredictable violence. And for those who survived the violence

²⁶⁵ Roskies, 1999, p. 41.

²⁶⁶ Roskies, 1999, pp.41-59.

²⁶⁷ Roskies, 1999, p. 42.

²⁶⁸ Roskies, 1999, p. 44.

²⁶⁹ Roskies, 1999, p. 64.

and did not leave their shtetlach, their end came at gunpoint before a mass grave. However, reading through many recollections of the shtetl and academic works, while the dry historical facts of the shtetl were not unlike what I have described, the daily reality was much richer and often satisfying.

Many of the published memoirs of the shtetl, although acknowledging the difficulties of life, in particular the poverty and violence, paint an otherwise overwhelmingly positive portrait. No doubt some of this imagery is due to the nature of reminiscence as discussed above. However, one cannot write off all positiveness as artifacts of memory. Furthermore, even the academic works cited in this study depict much contentment in shtetl life.

While I presented the concept of *ol*, burden and its relationship to contentment as a shtetl characteristic, in many ways, it is a universal concept. Contentment is a state of satisfaction, of accepting and being happy with one's lot. Certainly, in the shtetl, as is evidenced in much of the literature, most people were not content with their material positions. However, and this is where the shtetl's perspective was protective, the shtetl Jews more strongly emphasized intangibles, such as knowledge, wisdom, piety and compassion (a "Jewish heart"). Whether this stress on abstract notions created a greater sense of comfort with their material poverty, or the financial discomfort encouraged an emphasis on other sources of satisfaction cannot be determined. However, this approach to life was successful in that individuals were able to find solace and satisfaction in accomplishing goals which were attainable, despite the lack of material resources. Study was one of these intangibles that offered an escape from the daily struggle. "Poor Jews,

whose children knew only the taste of potatoes on Sunday, potatoes on Monday, potatoes on Tuesday, sat there like intellectual magnates. They possessed whole treasures of thought, a wealth of information, of ideas and sayings of many ages.”²⁷⁰

One of the factors that facilitated this attitude was Yiddishkeit. Both the obligations of a pious life as well as the characteristics valued and engendered by a religious life shifted the shtetl Jew’s focus away from the material and toward the transcendent. “The sense of the transcendent is the heart of culture, the very essence of humanity. A civilization that is devoted exclusively to the utilitarian is at bottom not different from barbarism. The world is sustained by unworldliness.”²⁷¹ Hardship in this life would be repaid in luxury and comfort in the World-to-Come. Perhaps the difficulties of shtetl life partly explain the popularity of religious observance. Emancipation, socialism and many of the Zionist groups caused great incursions on the conformity to Jewish law. Perhaps, because both of these offered the Jews other roads to satisfaction with their material lot, they effected a reduction in reliance on religion as the source of hope and satisfaction. The same trend, away from religious behaviour, has been seen among the emigrants and their descendents. Perhaps the affluence of North American society and its consequent reduction in religious practice is evidence of how religion helped to stave off material desperation in the shtetl. Availability and abundance in America blurred the distinction between luxury and necessity. In fact, the American drive for success turned luxuries into necessities. As the use of luxuries was so vital in enhancing spirituality in the shtetl, its declining distinction in American society caused a spiritual decline in the importance of the shabbes and holidays

²⁷⁰ Heschel, p.43.

²⁷¹ Heschel, p. 55.

among the emigrant Jews. As luxury foods and delicacies lost significance, so too did the festivals that they had formerly enhanced. Heinze referred to this process as the “banality of luxury.”²⁷² “The strictly religious Jew in America could not revive the declining significance of the luxury whose symbolic effect had come from its trait of material superiority in a setting of poverty.”²⁷³ The need for spirituality and redemption were obviated by American abundance, causing a decreased need for Torah as the guiding principle of Jewish life.²⁷⁴ In fact many Eastern European rabbinic leaders often justified their refusal to emigrate by stating that while physical life was threatened in Europe, the Jewish soul was safer there than it was in America.

The Memoirs

Before commenting on the general nature of the *Memoirs*, I will summarize some of the points mentioned above. Remembering is a complex process that involves much more than simply relating the past. Psychological research tells us that people reconstruct their pasts in order to solidify their identity and to empower themselves by reminding themselves and those around them how and what they have lived. Analyses of collective reminiscing in a Jewish context illuminate the practice of remembering on an historical continuum. It is a process of trying to find meaning in the face of destruction and recreating a usable past that can place personal experience within the context of collective memory, often within the paradigm of the covenant with God. It is a form of mourning and commemoration that tries as well to create an image of an ideal life, suitable as a

²⁷² Heinze, p. 64.

²⁷³ Heinze, p. 65.

²⁷⁴ Heinze, pp. 40-41.

model for the present and future.

It is important to assert that none of these researchers or theorists have implied that reminiscence is falsehood. Much of what is remembered is true and accurate. However, memory is selective and the intended goal of a literary creation drives the author to choose what to omit, what to write and how to write it.²⁷⁵ What the reader of reminiscence literature must keep in mind, however, is that such writings are multi-layered and some of the intentions that drive reminiscence have as much to do with recreating an image of the present through the past as with a pure retelling of the story. It is not the facts that may mislead the reader. If there are inaccuracies, they are visible in the nuances of their presentation. Further, of greater impact on skewing the image is what is not mentioned, what is omitted from the reminiscence. Thus a knowledge of the objective history as well as the issues implicated in the understanding of personal narrative will help balance the perception of a subjective memoir. Nevertheless, personal reminiscences remain an invaluable source of eye-witness information on the shtetl.

Before discussing the value of the *Memoirs* and what they offer to the literature on the shtetl, they must be examined in light of the analyses and theories presented earlier in this chapter on reminiscence and shtetl memories.

The tone throughout the *Memoirs* is of contentment and pride beginning with the first sentence, "I will write about the joy..." There is very little negativity in the *Memoirs*. Although they were written many years after the pogrom to which Mr.

²⁷⁵ This is especially true in memoirs about catastrophes, such as in Holocaust testimonials. For an analysis of how selective memory, the affective nature of the past experience, and current context influence recall of an historical tragedy, see Goldschlager, pp. 9-39.

Garfinkel was an eyewitness, and the Holocaust – events that claimed lives from his family, there is no mention of either event. The only cue to hardship is a brief mention of how some people found it difficult to make a living in the shtetl. Implicit in his writing are many of the characteristics that Roskies identified. Mr. Garfinkel referred to Kitaigorod as the old country, praised the pervasive piety of the populace and wrote of how everyone was content with their lot. There is not one mention of the Gentile population of Kitaigorod. His tone is often wistful – expressing a longing for a “paradise lost.”

From a psychological perspective, the *Memoirs* fit into the theories mentioned. Mr. Garfinkel was 67 years old when he wrote his memoirs. His looking to the past was further encouraged by the fact that despite having lived in Montreal for close to 50 years, he never acculturated to Canadian society. Never having learned English or French left him cut off, not only from much of the culture around him, but also from his grandchildren who spoke no Yiddish. He was driven by a need to explain who he was and where he came from. For him, as for many older people, the highlights of his life were his youth and adolescence. Focussing his memoirs on Kitaigorod was even more important for him because his lack of integration into Canadian society meant that the place where he had felt the most comfortable and effective was his shtetl. The stories that he chose to leave to his descendants as his legacy were those of the world in which he had functioned best. Further, if I examine Mr. Garfinkel’s intentions in writing his *Memoirs* in light of theories of Jewish reminiscence, his choice to ignore the destruction of his shtetl, along with other harsh realities of life in Kitaigorod reflect his drive to colour the

history of his shtetl in a positive light. Certainly he would not have denied the tragedy of the destruction of his shtetl, but he chose not to include direct reference to it in his *Memoirs*. The very nature of the writing of reminiscence evokes the idea of something lost. And Mr. Garfinkel chose to leave the loss to the level of an implicit thought. Thus, one must keep in mind all the caveats discussed previously when reading his *Memoirs*.

The *Memoirs* provide us with an intimate picture of daily life in Kitaigorod. The details are specific to Kitaigorod, yet the overall perception reflects other recollections and academic assessments of shtetl life. There are detailed descriptions of the many events that took place there, such as weddings and visits from chasidic rebbes. There is detail on the fare available in local restaurants and bakeries. There is a list of the occupations of the Jews, the community institutions and descriptions of some of the personalities of Kitaigorod. There is virtually no historical information, but such information is readily available in the literature. The value of the *Memoirs* lies in its specifics, its details of what people and events made Kitaigorod unique. If the *Memoirs* had been focussed on the history of Kitaigorod, perhaps they would not have the original contribution to the literature that they do in their more intimate details of everyday life.

My first task in this thesis was translating the *Memoirs*. Thus, it was the first chapter that I wrote. My initial reaction was some disappointment specifically because they offered little verifiable, historical information. Once, however, I began my research into the academic literature on the shtetl, the value of the *Memoirs* grew tremendously. Instead of repeating what already exists, they provide a unique, personal perspective. This unique contribution is far more valuable in the case of a world that does not exist anymore but that

is already generally documented.

The *Memoirs* out of context are far less informative than they are after building the history of the shtetl. It is for this reason that they are presented in the last chapter. Much of the history, culture and religious beliefs and practices of Eastern European Jewry are implied and subsumed in the *Memoirs*. A prior understanding of the shtetl is vital for a truly informative reading of the *Memoirs*. The importance of religious behaviour, conformity, and the impact of the chasidic movement on the shtetl are but three of the factors that underlie a true comprehension of Mr. Garfinkel's recollections.

Another subsumed shtetl belief that comes out implicitly in the *Memoirs*, is that of blessing, *bracha*. A blessing was the hope of improvement of one's lot. This concept comes out strongest in the chapter on the rebbe's visit. There are many statements which reflect the importance of being blessed in this chapter. The people all wanted to greet the rebbe, because it was both an honour and a blessing. As well, the people waited outside the lodging upon his departure for a blessing. Finally, those waiting hoped to receive a coin blessed by the rebbe which would be saved and kept as an amulet against negative occurrences. While the concept of blessing comes out rather clearly in this chapter, there are still cultural and religious subtleties that the uninformed reader would miss.

Zborowski wrote that in the shtetl one could see, "the indivisibility of secular and religious pursuits within the Jewish community."²⁷⁶ There were no uniquely secular activities. Work was necessary in order to provide money to educate a child, for shabbes delicacies or to allow time for studying the Torah. The co-mingling of honour and food was

²⁷⁶ Zborowski, 1951, p. 352.

an example of this indivisibility of holy and profane in the shtetl. The meals that were eaten at a wedding, during a rebbe's visit, at the weekly shabbes, and on religious holidays were not just supper. They were elevated to the status of religious events, called *seudos mitzva*. These latter evinced the importance of food as a form of service to God, as the table became an altar and the food an offering. "The purpose was to ennoble the common, to endow worldly things with hieratic beauty."²⁷⁷ The world-to-come could be physically tasted in the rich delicacies used to celebrate religious occasions. In fact, chasidim believed that there was a mystical union between food and spiritual redemption.²⁷⁸

Furthermore, food was also a factor in personal pride. At a wedding, for example, not only did one urge guests to eat as much as they wanted and more, but it was a matter of pride to send everyone home with a small care package.²⁷⁹ The constant fear of hunger encouraged the centrality of food in pride and religious performance. These implications of food for purposes other than simply sustenance can be seen throughout parts of the *Memoirs*.

In this vein, the *Memoirs* fit into the pattern of other testimonials to the shtetl, in their emphasis on the positiveness and richness of shtetl life. Awareness of the nature of reminiscence literature is necessary for a greater comprehension of the *Memoirs*. On the surface, the *Memoirs* offer a detailed tapestry of Kitaigorod. Beneath the surface, they are a rich testament to the culture of the shtetl as a whole.

²⁷⁷ Heschel, p. 20.

²⁷⁸ Heinze, pp. 40, 54.

²⁷⁹ Zborowski & Herzog, p. 284.

The final word in this thesis goes to the American Jewish philosopher and scion of the Apter Rav, Abraham Joshua Heschel:

To appraise adequately the East European period in Jewish history, I had to inquire into the life-feeling and life-style of the people. This led to the conclusion that in this period our people attained the highest degree of inwardness. I feel justified in saying that it was the golden period in Jewish history, in the history of the Jewish soul.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Heschel, pp. 9-10.

Personal Testimonies

Memoirs of My Younger Years²⁸¹

I will write about the joy we felt in my shtetl, Kitaigorod,²⁸² when a rabbi, ז"ל,²⁸³ a *Guter Yid*,²⁸⁴ as we used to say in the olden days, would come on one shabbes and stay the entire week.

I come from my shtetl, Kitarod, where I was born in the year 1894. Sixty years ago, when I lived there, it was not a very large shtetl. It was a shtetl like all the other shtetlach in the Ushitza²⁸⁵ district of the Podolia gubernia of the Ukraine, not far, about 18 *verst*²⁸⁶ from the large city of Kamenets-Podolok.²⁸⁷

Some 250 Jewish families lived in my shtetl Kitaigorod. As well, in the shtetl, there were all the aspects of Judaism necessary for a Jewish community. There were four mikvaos and a large wooden synagogue, that was cold since there was no source of heat. All the workers of the shtetl prayed there, even in winter, in the great cold. On the side of the synagogue there was a little synagogue²⁸⁸ which had an oven, and people would go in there and warm up for a few minutes. In the little synagogue, both summer and winter, the first service began shabbes morning at six o'clock. Besides the large synagogue, there

²⁸¹ The original manuscript was written on 42 6.5 X 8 inches sheets.

²⁸² Kitaigorod is the English spelling of the Russian name of the town. In Yiddish, it is called Kitarod. I use both names throughout the document, in accordance with the original text.

²⁸³ ז"ל is an acronym for *zichrono levracha* – may his memory be for a blessing.

²⁸⁴ Guter Yid literally means Good Jew and refers to a chasidic rebbe (leader).

²⁸⁵ Ushitza is the English spelling of the Russian name. In Yiddish it was called Yishitze.

²⁸⁶ A verst is a Russian unit of distance equal to 1.1 kilometers.

²⁸⁷ Kamienec-Podolski in Russian, and often referred to as simply Kamenets in Yiddish.

²⁸⁸ Presumably the bes medresh, the study hall.

were three other synagogues with sections where women prayed.²⁸⁹ There was a kloiz referred to as the Sadigerer kloiz, and which was also called Benyumin's kloiz. As well, there was the Husiatiner kloiz with a women's section, which was also called Yitzchok-Leib's kloiz, and another synagogue, the Zinkover kloiz which also had a women's section. There were two rabbis. There were teachers who studied a folio of *Gemara* (Talmud) with *Tosefos*²⁹⁰ and *Bartenura*²⁹¹ with the older students. There were also teachers who studied Gemara along with a chapter of *Mishna*,²⁹² Psalms and verses from Isaiah and Jeremiah.²⁹³ As well, there were teachers who taught young boys *chumash*²⁹⁴ with *Rashi's*²⁹⁵ commentaries along with the translation of some prayers. As well there were primary teachers who taught the children who were just beginning cheder. They were taught the *alef-bais* (alphabet) as well as to say the *Modeh Ani* (prayer upon awakening), as well as to make a blessing over various foods.

There were three shochetim, of whom some slaughtered chicken and fowl and some slaughtered cattle,²⁹⁶ very pious Jews. There were also *shammashim* (synagogue

²⁸⁹ According to Orthodox law, men and women must sit separately in synagogue. Mr. Garfinkel referred to *synagogues for women*. This term refers to synagogues which had a special section for women to sit in, and not to a synagogue devoted only to women worshipers. It simply distinguishes between synagogues where there was room for women, and those that did not allow women in at all.

²⁹⁰ Tosefos refers to the commentaries of the Tosafists, advanced talmudic commentators of Germany and Northern France.

²⁹¹ Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura: fifteenth century Italian talmudist and commentator. Rabbi Bartenura was a mishna, and not a gemara commentator. Perhaps Mr. Garfinkel meant to refer to Rashi's talmud commentary in this instance.

²⁹² The mishna a first to third century rabbinic work and the basis of the talmud.

²⁹³ The study of gemara with commentaries was a more academic and demanding pursuit. The latter group who studied gemara and mishna were studying at an easier level.

²⁹⁴ Five Books of Moses, Pentateuch.

²⁹⁵ Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki: 11th century French commentator on bible and talmud. Considered greatest of all commentators.

²⁹⁶ There are pragmatic differences in the slaughtering of fowl as opposed to larger animals, such as cows and sheep. Hence some ritual slaughterers were trained in only one type of slaughter and some in both.

sextons), and cantors, singers and good *ba'alei-tefilos* (prayer leaders). There was a Talmud Torah with good teachers and *lehavdil*²⁹⁷ a bathhouse with an attendant who was always available because he lived in the attached apartment. So far I have written about the spiritual needs of the shtetl. And now I will speak of the occupations people held in order to make a living. There were grain merchants and shopkeepers, dealers in dry goods, furnishing goods, grocery store owners and middlemen who used to buy leather. As well, there were shop-owners who used to go to the fairs in different shtetlach, because from our weekly Sunday fair (Tuesday was market day) it was difficult for many shopkeepers to make a living, therefore during the week, they would go to fairs in different shtetlach. As well, there were businessmen and butchers who would go to the neighbouring villages around our shtetl to buy an animal, a pelt, eggs or other foods. As well, there were various workers, such as tailors, shoe-makers, carpenters, glaziers, tinsmiths, blacksmiths, smiths, bread-bakers, bagel-makers and wagon-drivers who would travel daily to Kamenets. There were store-owners who would travel to buy merchandise for their stores; and even water-carriers, because it was difficult to bring water from the well. And this was the way of many Jews who used to deal in produce. Many of them used to send their fruit to Kamenets. And many used to sit in their stalls and sell various fruit, by the pound, to the Jews in the shtetl. As well, there was no lack of Jews who were idle. This is how the people of the shtetl Kitarod lived, made weddings, had children and grandchildren and all were content with their lot.

- 2 -

I am considering how to write of my youthful recollections of the time when a

²⁹⁷ Term used to differentiate the profane from the holy.

rebbe came to visit and the joy that was felt in the shtetl. Several rebbes used to come to our shtetl and in one year three or four might come. Rabbi Yechiel-ne, z"l, from the city of Krilovitz used to come to our shtetl as well as Reb Yisroel-ne, z"l, from the town of Medzibodzh. Reb Pinchas'l, z"l, from the town of Zinkov would also come and sometimes he was accompanied by his brother Reb Moshele of Zinkov. Since Reb Pinchas'l had a lot of chasidim who were interested in bringing him to visit, he came once a year, more regularly than any of the other rebbes. I will list the Zinkover chasidim who worked to bring the rebbe, Reb Pinchas'l to Kitaigorod: Chaim Baruch Reizler, Ze'ev Kleitmann, Meir Shtillvasser, Mordechai Beirish, Chaim Cohen, Yosef Mortchik, Ozer Shtecher, Kalman Melamed, Nachman Mailmann,²⁹⁸ Isser Einbinder – they are all with the True One, may they rest in peace.

These several chasidim would contact the rebbe, Reb Pinchas'l. They used to write to him to determine the shabbes on which he would visit. He used to arrive on Friday morning and would leave the following Thursday for his home in Zinkov. He would always come on a shabbes in the summertime, either before or after Shavuos. The chasidim of the shtetl would reserve an inn (lodging) and a servant to bake and cook for the whole week. The lodging chosen was almost always the *Gershonke*. The owner was named Gershon and the inn was named after him. This was a very beautiful house with two separate wings connected by a long corridor. They would reserve half of the house for the rebbe's visit. He would leave Zinkov on Thursday in a carriage with two *gabbaim* (aides), and they would stop and spend the night somewhere along the way, and then continue onto the shtetl on Friday morning. The rebbe would send a driver on horseback

²⁹⁸ Nachman Mailmann was a cousin of Mr. Garfinkel.

to announce his arrival. At this point, the Zinkover chasidim of the shtetl went out in two covered carriages to greet the rebbe.²⁹⁹ Once he arrived in the shtetl, it didn't take long for things to become lively. The Jews would go to the inn to greet and welcome the rebbe.

After candle-lighting, all of the Jews who were going to synagogue, would go to the lodging and escort the rebbe to synagogue. As soon as he appeared at the door of the house a melee began among those waiting to wish him a *sholem aleichem* ("Peace be unto you") as everyone tried to be the first. Don't ask what kind of confusion reigned in the large synagogue for the Friday night services. All the Jews had already accepted the shabbes³⁰⁰ and were now in the street. The entire community came out to see the rebbe: all the women, their daughters and small children. They went into Rav³⁰¹ Berele Lerner's, o"h,³⁰² house since the latter's house was near the synagogue.³⁰³ The Rav came outside and wished the rebbe peace and they went into the synagogue with the entire crowd.

In our shtetl, there were some good singers and a good ba'al tefillah, Leibush Shpeitler, o"h, who was as well, a Zinkover chasid. We selected him to lead the Friday night services – that was something to hear – and thus we completed the services. Since the crowd was large, we made a pathway for the rebbe and he personally wished everyone a *Gut Shabbes* (Good Sabbath). Then we accompanied him back to the inn. Then the

²⁹⁹ Schoenfeld (p. 78) described the custom of chasidim traveling towards the rebbe to greet him.

³⁰⁰ Accepting the shabbes means that one has taken upon oneself the prohibitions of the shabbes.

³⁰¹ Rav is the Hebrew title for an ordained rabbi.

³⁰² Acronym for *olev hashalom*, meaning may peace be upon him.

³⁰³ Presumably since many people were in one synagogue to be with the rebbe, the men took over the women's section, for lack of room, and thus the women had no place in the synagogue. For this reason they gathered at the house next door. Rav Lerner was Mr. Garfinkel's brother-in-law, and may possibly have been the town rabbi. Mr. Garfinkel refers to him as the Rav, which title was usually reserved for the town rabbi, and his house was right next door to the town shul, which was typically the home of the town rabbi.

people went home to make Kiddush and to eat. Afterwards, many people went to the inn and accompanied the rebbe to his tish³⁰⁴. This tish took place in Benyumin's kloiz since it was a large place. They had set out large covered tables and the chasidim sat down around the tables. The kloiz was so full of people that there remained only place to stand. The rebbe began singing *Sholem Aleichem*³⁰⁵ and then made Kiddush. Despite the large number of people in the kloiz, it was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. Once the rebbe had eaten, the gabbaim shared small pieces of challa with all who were sitting at the tish and thus the chasidim all grabbed shirayim. Afterwards, the rebbe distributed a glass of beer to everyone present.

Since all of the people had come from their houses after having eaten and but not having *bentsched*, the rebbe *bentsched mezumen*.³⁰⁶ Afterwards, we began singing – chasidim and *chazanim*³⁰⁷ – Yossele chazan and Leibushel chazan. We danced with such zeal that if the rebbe hadn't stopped us, we would have danced until the next day. Afterwards, the rebbe and his two attendants returned to the lodging for the night.

On shabbes morning, the rebbe prayed in the Zinkover kloiz. After services, there was a large *kiddush*.³⁰⁸ Every chasid had donated some liquor and sent his child to bring kugel and other food. There was no fear that the food wouldn't be kosher, since at the rabbi's and at the shochet's and at the wagon-driver's and at the water-carrier's, all was

³⁰⁴ *Tish* literally means table, and in this context it refers to the gathering led by a chasidic leader, wherein, his chasidim gather around him as he sits at the head of the table.

³⁰⁵ A song which is sung at the beginning of the shabbes meal, before kiddush.

³⁰⁶ *Bentsch* literally means bless. In this circumstance, it refers to the grace after meals, which the people did not recite at home so as to be able to recite it with the rebbe. When three or more men are present at a table (called a *mezumen*), a special invitational introduction is added.

³⁰⁷ A *chazan* is a cantor.

³⁰⁸ In this instance, *kiddush* refers to a small reception where food was served. It is called *kiddush*, because it begins with the recitation of *kiddush*, the sanctification of the day.

kosher. Because in the old country, everyone was pious, whether man or woman.³⁰⁹ The rebbe ate shabbes lunch alone at the inn.

On shabbes evening, the rebbe conducted shalosh seudos in the same kloiz where he led the tish on Friday night. Shalosh seudos was an event with a lot of singing and not very much food, but did we sing! Afterward, everyone prayed the evening service. The rebbe made *havdalah*³¹⁰ and we sang *hamavdil*³¹¹ with a beautiful melody. At around 11 o'clock at night, provisions were brought to the inn in order to hold a melaveh malka and there we enjoyed singing and dancing until late in the night.

During the weekdays, chasidim gathered at the lodging with their wives and children to see the rebbe, to receive a blessing from him for health and livelihood along with a coin.³¹² The rebbe gave money and a drink of liquor to those chasidim who had waited all day at the lodging hoping for him to appear and give them his blessings. We held morning and evening services at the lodging all that week. The people would stay late in the night, eating and drinking, since for everyone in the shtetl, whether a chasid of the rebbe or not, it was a joyful week with eating, drinking, singing and dancing. So it went until Thursday. In the morning, we prayed and ate a small snack with the rebbe and his two aides. We packed up all the rebbe's belongings and gave them to the driver who had stayed around the whole week. The rebbe then came outside with his two gabbaim, preparing to leave while the entire shtetl stood outside – everyone – old and young, men

³⁰⁹ For an orthodox Jew to be permitted to eat food from someone's home, he or she must be assured that the food is kosher. The custom today in many communities is to only allow food from a reputable caterer into a synagogue. Mr. Garfinkel is explaining how this was not a concern in his day.

³¹⁰ A blessing over a cup of wine to sanctify the conclusion of shabbes.

³¹¹ Hamavdil, which means to differentiate, is a song sung at the conclusion of the sabbath.

³¹² The coin would have been blessed by the rebbe and kept as an amulet. Zborowski & Herzog, p. 172.

and women and children. The Rebbe stood upon his carriage and blessed all the Jews in the town with health, beneficence and success and to be relieved of all misfortune while he waved his hand over the people and said goodbye. The driver then prodded the horse, and whosoever was able, followed the carriage as far as the nearest village. Some chasidim accompanied their rebbe, Reb Pinchas'l, z"l, home to Zinkov.³¹³ And all the people in the shtetl wished each other a *Leiben ibur yahr* (another year of life) and that all should live to enjoy another joyful week, when the rebbe will come visit on a shabbes again.

All of the above events happened before the First World War.

Shloime der Krist

In my shtetl, Kitaigorod, Podolia gubernia, there was a Jew whom we called *Shloime der Krist* – Shloime the Christian. This did not mean, Heaven Forbid, that he was an irreligious man; on the contrary, he was indeed someone who lived a holy life. I, myself, do not remember why he was called by such a nickname and no one ever explained the reason to me. Like myself, many others did not know when he had received the nickname, “The Christian.” He had been about fifteen years old when his father, Yankel, the village shammes left for the town of Dinovitz, some thirty verst from us. There, he gave his son to the Dinovitzer musical band to be a drummer. The Dinovitzer musicians were renowned for their playing in the whole Podolia gubernia. They would come to our shtetl to play at weddings. Shloime once came to Kitarod with a few

³¹³ It was customary to accompany a guest a short distance on his return home, and the more so an honoured a guest as a rebbe.

members of his band to play at a wedding and wore a hat with a shiny visor. Sixty years ago in our small shtetlach, we were so religious in those early years that it was a sin for Shloime the town shammes³¹⁴ to have a son wear a hat with a shiny visor, and therefore he was given the nickname, Shloime der Krist.

His father, Yankel the shammes, was also the bathhouse attendant of the town bath and lived there all his years. After his father Yankel died, Shloime quit playing music and also became the town shammes. Soon after, he in fact married a Kitaigorodeh woman. She was a daughter of Sarah-ne and Moishe Chezkiel's.³¹⁵ She was a widow all her life (sic) and used to sit on a stool and sold fruit. The daughter whom Shloime married was named Miriam – and we called her the *martzitzyeh* (the market-sitter). He had two children with her, a son named Sholem Mendel, and a daughter whose name I do not remember. However, several years after the marriage, he divorced her and the *martzitzyeh* and her two children were supported by her mother, Sarah-ne, who sold various fruit. She used to prepare cocoa and sell it. She always had a samovar with fresh cocoa.

Since his divorce, Der Shloime had had many jobs, but little success. He was shammes, a bathhouse attendant, a shoemaker, a water-fetcher, and a choir member under Yosseleh the chazan. He also worked at the Chevra Kadisha and as a village constable in the Jewish town of Stara Ushitza (Yishitze). Despite all of his jobs, he, his wife and

³¹⁴ Sic. However, Mr. Garfinkel obviously meant Yankel, Shloime's father and the town shammes. This error in the manuscript is probably due to the fact that, as Mr. Garfinkel will explain, Shloime himself became the town shames upon his father's death.

³¹⁵ This name variant was used to differentiate two different Moishes. The one referred to here was related to Chezkiel. It would be correct English to write Chezkiel's Moishe, but I have kept to the accepted Yiddish style.

children could have died of hunger ten times a day. The reason for this was that since then he had taken another bride from a shtetl not far from us called Smotrich, and had several children with her. But she was an ill woman, no one should speak of such things – she was mentally ill, even staying in an insane asylum in the city of Vinnitsa on a few occasions. She used to go there for short periods and then come back. After a few years, she became ill again and was sent back to Vinnitsa. You can only imagine what kind of home life they had. The children used to walk around naked, barefoot, hungry, and tired. We, in the town, did not spare them anything since their father, Der Shloime, was not himself a great bargain. He was a man of many trades, but few blessings. As well, he liked to drink.

In our shtetl, there was a woman named Miriam Tuviah's. She was an outstanding baker. One could smell her bread throughout the entire shtetl. She would bake loaves of challa, cookies, kasha pancakes with poppy seeds, which everyone loved, and a lot of other good things. And with all that, she would sell a glass of liquor which we could get in the winter to warm up. And you could even get a good and tasty stew which had a nice piece of meat in it, or chicken with good *helzel*³¹⁶ or with a chicken thigh.

Shloime was such a successful wage-earner that he used to have a saying. When he left a wedding or a *bris* (circumcision and the celebration of it), since he was still the town shammas, the parents would ask him if he made any money at the celebration. He used to, answer, "I am bringing more back home than I brought to the celebration." But

³¹⁶ Helzel was made by stuffing the skin that was around the neck of the chicken and baking or stewing it.

he brought nothing home. He would bring everything to the baker, Miriam Tuviah's, since he was a respected guest there. He had already brought the a bit of liquor with what to eat, which I have already listed. And even if we wanted to eat *knishes*³¹⁷ or *varenikes* (dumplings), we could get them there, but, well, you already understand what I mean.

Nothing was left over for the family so the town rabbi with another townsperson grabbed Shloime the shammes – everyone already knew that he could be found at the baker's, Miriam Tuviah's. This is how a man lived his life, married twice, brought two children into the world who suffered with problems and misery. And during the First World War, he took himself from our shtetl Kitarod, and went to another town, not far from us, Zbanitz. I cannot say how he lived there. Only when the war ended did Der Shloime, o'h, die a natural death, and was in fact brought to burial in the Zbanitzer cemetery and no one knew whatever happened to his family.

A Wedding in the Shtetl

Now I will describe how people conducted weddings in the small shtetlach of the Ukraine; how, forty to fifty years ago, we held a wedding in my shtetl, Kitaigorod, Podolia gubernia. And I will mention here that the bride and groom were both from Kitaigorod. First of all, there was a match set up by a matchmaker, and with luck, the match worked. The shadchan haggled with the in-laws (the parents of the bride) about the matchmaking fees. In the old country, people used to give dowries, that is when the bride's father pledged to pay 500 or 400 or 300 rubles to the groom. Another thing – I am

³¹⁷ Pastry stuffed with savoury filling.

not describing a rich or a poor wedding, but an average wedding. Once the matchmaker was satisfied with the fees, the engagement contract was signed at a festive meal. Besides inviting family from both sides, they called the rabbi and the cantor and the people from the kloiz the father-in-law worshipped in. As well, the shammes spoke at the meal since he acted as an agent. The engagement contract was written entirely according to law. The rabbi wrote it out and the cantor read it aloud. All was written in it, for example how much the dowry will be, the date of the wedding,³¹⁸ the clothes to be bought, who the rabbi, cantor, and shammes will be. And then they broke a plate. The groom's mother and the bride's mother grabbed hold of a plate and threw it to the floor and it broke³¹⁹ and everyone cried mazel tov.³²⁰ And afterwards, they ate a meal of good tidings and the cantor Yitzchak Leib or Aaron Meir made *mi-sheberachs* (prayers for well-being) and earned a few rubles for each prayer.

Then the wedding preparations began. The bride's mother prepared bedding, towels, sheets and various linens which a good housewife would need. They would bring a band from Dinovitz called Leibka to perform at the wedding. They bargained them down to ten rubles per musician, and then discussed with the musicians the details of the date of the wedding, and the number of musicians the family desired. They left a security deposit – a silver spoon or a silver goblet. And thus the contract was closed. Most weddings were held in one of Tzeitlin's two halls, usually the larger one, or at Eta, the

³¹⁸ Zborowski & Herzog (p. 277) wrote that the custom in many places was to set the wedding date after the tenaim were signed and was not part of the contract.

³¹⁹ Breaking of a plate signified the indestructibility of the contract, and was believed to ward off the evil eye.

³²⁰ Mazel tov has come to mean congratulations, but the literal meaning is good constellation. The implication being that the event should take place under a good astrological omen.

kettle-maker's, large house.

The clothes for the wedding had been bought six weeks in advance. Both sides travelled to Kamenets and had the bride's clothes and wedding clothes made and the garland and all the necessary items for the wedding. A wedding lasted from one shabbes until after the next shabbes and the entire week was referred to as the wedding week. The groom sent invitations to all of the young men and women to come on the first shabbes during the day to the bride's home for a *forshpiel* (small reception). This was a way to honour the bride and groom. There was food – strudel, crackers, knishes, sugar-frosted loaves of bread and other provisions. Musicians were brought in for the *tantzevelnia vertsher* (“dancing” supper) and we danced half the night.³²¹

Shabbes morning, a large crowd led the groom into the synagogue. As well, they led the groom's mother, and mother-in-law, to the large town shul with a large number of women. The groom was called to the Torah, and after the reading of the *parsha* (weekly Torah portion), all of the women threw gingerbread, nuts and candies.³²² After services, the two fathers invited all the family home for kiddush with cake, brandy, *tzimmes*³²³ and lots to eat. During the day on shabbes, all of the young people gathered at the bride's home, whether they were from the groom's side or the bride's side, for another *forshpiel*.

Weddings could take place anytime on Tuesday or Wednesday.³²⁴ Most weddings

³²¹ Although not explicitly mentioned, this supper took place after shabbes was over. The presence of musicians makes it clear that it could not have taken place on shabbes.

³²² The throwing of candies and nuts was meant to signify that the newlyweds should have a sweet life together.

³²³ Tzimmes is a stew of carrots and prunes.

³²⁴ According to some Jewish customs, Tuesday is the preferred day for a wedding. In Genesis, after each day of creation, the Bible relates that God deemed each day good. However, on Tuesday, the statement, “And it was good,” is repeated twice. Hence, it is seen as a good omen for a wedding day.

in Kitarod were held on Wednesday since Tuesday was fair day in the shtetl. As of Sunday, the bride's family began to prepare the wedding feast. The servants began to prepare various baked goods: strudel, cakes, flat cakes, and challos. They acquired the services of the best butcher, who in our town, was the butcher Moishe Hilk's, o"h. He would slaughter the best animals for us. They would take the meat by the *aka*,³²⁵ 50 *aka*, of meat, as well as chickens. Then the day of the wedding arrived and thus the real work. The shammashim, Shloime Krist and Ya'acov Leib would bring the long tables, benches and big flood lamps from the town shul. On one occasion, they brought out a wide tarp to cover some of the tables like a roof. This would sometimes be used at other weddings. During the day the shammes would bring out the extra table flaps that were needed for the supper.

Afterwards, at around 2 o'clock, there was a reception for the bride's side, her younger family, parents, sisters, brothers, uncles and aunts. They ate and drank. Musicians came and sang to each of the parents separately and they danced *freilichs* (lively dances). Then the guests began to arrive and they guided the bride from the town square to the hall where the wedding would take place. The musicians played and the town children ran into the hall. We had begun to dance quadrilles, the scissors dance, waltzes and Bulgar dances. The musicians were paid for each dance. The musicians left the wedding-place and went to the groom's house to play for the family and then they returned to play at the groom's table. Afterwards, the *kabbolos-ponim* (reception) began and the groom was brought to the bride by the rabbi and cantor and all the men. People

³²⁵ An *aka* is a Russian weight equivalent to approximately 3 lbs.

were honoured with a piece of cake and a toast. The rabbi and cantor wrote out the *kesuva* (wedding contract). They sat at the head table near the groom. Then the witnesses signed their names to the *kesuva*. Soon after the bride's mother, groom's mother and all the women from the *kabbolos ponim* came in. The men got up from the tables and went into another room. The groom remained at his place while the women stood around the tables and were given cake and whiskey. Then the women went back to the other hall while the men, along with the two fathers brought the groom into the hall to veil the bride. Meanwhile, the bride had been seated on a stool in the hall while the *Dinovitzer badchan*, *Yisroel-kel*, sang to the bride and it was heart-rending. He said *mussar* (ethical exhortations) in rhyme. Soon after, the *shammes* yelled, "Make way, the groom is coming." They handed the groom the veil and he covered the bride's face. Then they guided the groom into another room and the fiddler and the *badchan* serenaded him. Afterwards, the groom's father took away the watch, the ring and whatever jewellery he was wearing. They put a *kittel* (white robe signifying purity) on him to go to the canopy, under which the ceremony took place. The musicians would begin to play a beautiful march and the two fathers conducted the groom to the canopy while all the men followed holding lighted candles aloft. The mothers brought the bride, covered up by the veil, and led her to the canopy with candles in their hands. And all the womenfolk followed. They, their younger children and older ones also followed the procession in the street to reach the canopy outside of the town shul. The housewives also came out of their houses with large candles to see the bride and groom proceed to the canopy. The canopy, set up outdoors, where the ceremony would take place, was all ready outside.

The rabbi, cantor and shammes were in place, along with the men holding up the poles for the canopy. The groom was led under the canopy and the cantor sang “*Boruch Haba*” and “*Mi Adir al hakol.*”³²⁶ The bride was waiting near Yitzchok Leib’s bes medresh and waited for the male ushers to come fetch her and her bridal party. The musicians played while the ushers led the bride around the groom.³²⁷ The shammes filled a cup with wine and handed it to the rabbi. The rabbi performed the marriage ceremony according to the laws of Moses and Israel. Afterwards, the groom placed the ring onto the bride’s finger and the cantor read the marriage contract aloud, and recited the *sheva brachos*.³²⁸ Then the groom broke the glass and from all sides people began to shout mazel tov while the musicians began to play. The heavens themselves split while the Dinovitzer musician, Yechiel-kel, played.

Both mothers, of the bride and of the groom, were joyful, dancing ladies. They both took each other by the hand, the other hand on each other’s dress and they danced.³²⁹ The bride and groom entered the hall³³⁰ with both fathers and were greeted with a big dance, a big sugar-frosted challah, and two large silver candelabra held aloft. People threw confetti, stood up and yelled mazel tov. The musicians played and the mothers danced until the bride and groom and the fathers came into the hall.

³²⁶ These are the two beginning parts of the marriage ceremony.

³²⁷ It is customary for the bride to be led in a circle around the groom seven times.

³²⁸ There are seven special blessings read at the marriage ceremony, as well after all meals eaten with the bride and groom for seven days, called sheva brochos (sheva meaning seven).

³²⁹ The quarreling dance was a mock fight of the new mothers-in-law who pretended to grimace and lunge at each other before embracing, signifying their pleasure at the match. Zborowski & Herzog, p. 284.

³³⁰ Soon after the ceremony, the bride and groom are led off to the *yichud* (alone) room to be alone with each other for their first time. They usually spent a few minutes there and then returned to the reception.

The Meal

Every male had to wash.³³¹ The shammashim stood with large containers near a big tub of water with handles along its length. Men and women sat separately; only the bride and groom sat together at the men's tables, on the condition that she be a kosher bride. If not, then the bride and groom sat apart; the groom with the men and the bride with the women.³³² The rabbi sat at the head, near the groom, the groom's father near the bride. The shammashim served fish, soup, meat and tzimmes. Two people ate off of one plate or bowl. The shammes would shout, "Two of you to a plate," and sometimes make a mistake and yell in jest, "Two plates per person." We drank spirits, not soda, before or after the fish from a glass or a bottle. Everyone took their own because there were no bartenders. We served ourselves as much wine as beer as we wanted. We took beer straight from the keg, and we indeed became very happy! We had to drink because we had to dance all night. Afterwards, the cantor had to recite the mi-sheberachs and was paid for each one.

Afterwards, they bentsched and they recited the sheva brachos. I once heard Yosseleh the chazan recite sheva brachos, not with the usual tune but with a cheerful melody and I will never forget this. Meanwhile, the entire crowd – men and women – danced. Since he was an excellent and loud singer, while he sang a merry tune, we were able to dance faster than to the musicians' song, although when dancing we could not

³³¹ Before partaking of bread, Orthodox law requires that one ritually wash one's hands with water. This action is often referred to simply as "washing". While women are obligated to wash, as well, Mr. Garfinkel specifically referred to men washing. Perhaps he only referred to men washing is because he was about to describe what happened on the men's side only.

³³² This is an interesting observation because sitting the bride at a different place if she is menstrual would make the fact known to the public, and the hallmark of the menstrual laws is privacy.

hear the sheva brachos. Since he wasn't employed as a cantor by any kloiz, he wasn't hired for weddings. Only Aaron Meir and Yitzchok Leib used to be regular cantors.

Afterwards they began to call out the wedding gifts. Both fathers and mothers, the bride and groom sat at the head table. Yisroelnik the badchan stood on a bench and began to shout, "Groom's family, bride's family, come in to see the wedding gifts." He would announce that the groom's father and mother have given a golden cup and the bride's mother and father gave two silver candlesticks and a tallis as gifts.³³³ The father-in-law usually gave a lot of cash as a gift. "And this one gave a smaller amount of cash," and so on until they were done with all the gifts. Afterwards, out of the gifts, they put money aside, according to the percentage of the cash collected with which to pay the rabbi, cantor and shammes. Then, they removed the tables, and the benches and the badchan invited people to dance with the bride. He would call out to each father and each one would take a piece of cloth and the bride would take the other end while the musicians played lively dances. This was how they danced with the bride.³³⁴ The fathers paid the musicians and the badchan and everyone would dance all night. And as day began to dawn, the people accompanied both sets of parents to their homes with the musicians and continued dancing and woke the whole shtetl from their sleep. Afterwards, they ate a small meal which was the first get-together for both sides of the family.

I will now write about a particular type of woman in my shtetl, Kitarod, Podolia gubernia. This woman was called Rivka Bella's, o'h. Her husband was called Benyumin

³³³ These were standard gifts and the candlesticks were often family heirlooms.

³³⁴ Kosher tantz.

Aaron. She was a daughter of chasidic Jews and the family's piety was beyond question. They called him,³³⁵ in the shtetl, by various names: Uncle Aaron, the Old Aaron and he was also called Aaron the Shmulicher. The Old Aaron had only daughters: a daughter Feiga, who was Mordechai Eliezer's wife, and a daughter Surel who used to sell various dishes and her husband whose name I do not remember, and a daughter Rivka, about whom I will write, and a daughter Miriam, in Bessarabia. Uncle Aaron was a very religious man, knew a bit of learning, and was a chasid of Rebbe Yechiel-ne, z"l, of the town of Krilovitz. He would go, every year, on the High Holydays, to Krilovitz by foot, there and back. They used to say that he counted each step. It was quite far from our shtetl to Krilovitz, about 35 to 40 verst. It was a great mitzva for him to make a pilgrimage³³⁶ to the rebbe for the holidays. Also, he was *ba'al koreh* (the Torah reader) all year in Benyumin's kloiz and one of the best Torah-readers. He could also calculate time to the minute by the sun, and in the shtetl, we would set our watches according to his calculations. He lived the life of a typical old man. The daughter Rivka inherited a lot of good qualities from her father. She was like those women whom one would call *tzadekes*,³³⁷ a trustworthy woman with good sense. She took care of bedridden women, the poor and orphaned. Almost every week, one would see Rivka and another woman going around for contributions for various causes. She herself was very poor.

³³⁵ The subject of this sentence is Rivka Bella's father.

³³⁶ Mr. Garfinkel wrote that "it was a great mitzva for him to be *oleh regel*." *Oleh regel* means a pilgrimage by foot, and it originates in the Bible in reference to the three yearly pilgrimage festivals when Jews were required to walk to Jerusalem. A pilgrimage by foot is considered one of the highest forms of honour and respect.

³³⁷ A saintly, righteous woman.

Yosele the Chazan

In our shtetl, Kitaigorod, Podolia gubernia, there was a cantor who was known as Yosele the chazan. He was indeed one of the best and finest prayer-leaders, as well as being a good singer. As it is now the time of the High Holidays of the year 5720 (1961 CE),³³⁸ I will write about him, how fine a person he was, and what kind of cantor Yosele was. He was a native of Galicia which at that time belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His shtetl was not far from the Russian border, near the towns of Husyatyn and Chemerovitch and he married a Chemerovitcher woman. That is how he came to our shtetl, Kitarod, as a cantor in the large Sadigerer kloiz which was called Benyumintze's kloiz. When he came to Kitarod, he was already a family man with three children; two sons named Yitzchok and Zalman, and a daughter Sarah. In the Sadigerer kloiz, Yitzchok Leib was the regular cantor and he left and became the cantor in the large Husiatiner kloiz which they called the bes medresh where learned Jews sat and studied, day and night. People studied by themselves and there was also public teaching of chumash with Rashi's commentaries, as well as the rest of the Bible. As well, in our town, there was a Jew named Moishela Dudis who used to teach publicly in the bes medresh and the whole shtetl would go listen to his lectures.

The onetime congregants, Benyumin Mailmann, Fishel Tzalts, Itzi Kop, Yeshiah

³³⁸ The reason that the holidays reminded Mr. Garfinkel about Yosele Chazan, as will be explained later, is that the latter's main job was to lead the prayers on the High Holidays.

Mintzer, Leibush Marianifker, and others, travelled to the Sadigerer rebbe³³⁹ to speak with him about a cantor. The rebbe told them that Yosele the chazan was in Chemerovitch and was looking for a position. He was willing to go to the town of Kitarod as a regular cantor, but only in the big kloiz, and not as town cantor, because the town cantor was Yankel the chazan. Every year, Yosele used to lead the prayers on the High Holidays with several choir-singers. He always had the best singers from amongst us in the shtetl. He used to have, singing with him, Yankel Goldes who went off to be a cantor in a synagogue in New York City for many years, and the Bubbe Chava's son, Avraham who then went to Kharkov and got married. He also had Wolf, who was a brother-in-law of Fishel Hilks who became a cantor in Kamenets at the new place, Hocksman's kloiz. As well, he had Yitzikel Chaim Yosilt, the doctor's son; we called him Yitzikel the hunchback; Moishe Shimon Avigdor's, and also his own two sons, Yitzikel and Zalmaneh. All of these, whom I remember, used to sing for many years. He also had a chorist, Meshulem Feritzes. These were among the best singers. When he, Yosele, would sing a prayer or a march, or sing out his prayers on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, with them, it was a pleasure. During his rendition of *malchios, zichronos, and shofros*,³⁴⁰ one could sit into the night, listening without squirming. The same was true of his singing, with the choir, of *hayom haras olam* and *unisaneh tokef*.³⁴¹ Their singing of *hayom tiamtzenu*³⁴² with an upbeat leitmotif and other melodies were indeed something to hear. And on this note, I should say that we would sit patiently for a good

³³⁹ Rabbi Aaron Friedman of Sadigora (1877 – 1913), Rabinowicz, p. 135.

³⁴⁰ Prayers recited before the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashana.

³⁴¹ These two awe-inspiring prayers are recited on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

³⁴² Parts of the musaf (additional) service on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

chazan, since he was really loved by the whole town.

We used to call out to him, “Yosele the *meshuganer*,”³⁴³ since he had many odd behaviours. Just as he was a great chazan, so too was he a very pious Jew. He wore a large, beautiful beard and long, curled *peyos*.³⁴⁴ They looked like stiff, little bottles.³⁴⁵ He would usually walk around, wearing a dirty scarf, summer and winter. He would pray daily in the bes medresh, until three o’clock in the afternoon. He would constantly wear his tallis and *tefilin*.³⁴⁶ He would go to the baker’s, Miriam Tuviah’s, which wasn’t far to go for a glass of liquor and to eat a buckwheat pancake. Once satisfied, he would return to the bes medresh and put his tallis and tefilin back on and continue studying and praying. At that time, I studied with Itzek Leben in cheder, and when the teacher had to leave for a bris or something like that, I, and several students would go into the bes medresh and heard Yosele the chazan’s prayers. He sat on a stool and swayed and sang – it was truly a pleasure to hear.

He lived in the same house as Hersh Berel Leib’s, who traded in fish. On the other side lived Berel’s grandfather. He was from the Einbinder family, and a neighbour of Yosele the chazan.

Quickly following *Tisha b’av*,³⁴⁷ he would gather his choir together and begin to practice all the prayers for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The neighbours could not

³⁴³ Meshuganer is Yiddish for crazy one, odd one.

³⁴⁴ Peyos are sidecurls distinctively grown long among Orthodox Jews.

³⁴⁵ Galitsianer Jews were known were wearing tightly curled peyos like corkscrews, Zborowski & Herzog, p. 283.

³⁴⁶ Phylacteries. Special leather boxes worn around the head and arm, usually for morning services only. It was considered especially pious to wear them all day long.

³⁴⁷ Ninth day of the month of Av which commemorates the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem. It falls two months before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

continue with their outside work, and used to sit near the outhouse and listen to the wonderful melodies that came out of his mouth. I remember the commotion in town on the shabbes (Saturday) night, the first night of *selichos*.³⁴⁸ The worshipers from the main synagogue, and from the bes medresh, and also the Zinkover kloiz, and everybody from the shtetl would go into the big kloiz (the Sadigerer kloiz) to recite selichos with Yosele the chazan and to hear his melodies for the first (night of) selichos.

I will now relate a few stories about Yosele the chazan. Der Yosele was an avid chasid of the Chortkover rebbe, o”h, z”l. He once travelled to the Chortkover rebbe³⁴⁹ for a shabbes and led the prayers. Everyone in Chortkov was pleased with his performance. Once, unfortunately, when the rebbe was struck with a serious illness, a letter was sent from Chortkov to us in the shtetl since there were several chasidim of the rebbe in our shtetl, asking that Yosele the chazan should recite Psalms and pray to the Master of the Universe for the rebbe’s complete recovery back to good health. He gathered together all the chasidim in the shtetl, Husiatiner, Sadigerer, Chortkover, Zinkover and also Medzibodzher, along with old Jews who had free time on an ordinary Wednesday to join with him to recite Psalms. Even store owners could go in to recite Psalms with the whole crowd since on an ordinary Wednesday, there might be buyers or not. The storeowners didn’t even lock up their shops, but left a sign saying that the store was closed for business. When the chazan saw so many people in the kloiz, he stood up by the lectern and recited one verse at a time, followed by the congregation. And he put all of his

³⁴⁸ Selichos are penitential prayers which are recited every night for about a week before Rosh Hashana and during Yom Kippur. The first night of selichos is almost always the Saturday night before Rosh Hashana, and often is an occasion for long, cantorial concerts.

³⁴⁹ Rabbi Israel Friedman of Chortkov (1854 – 1934), Encyclopedia Judaica, Intro-Index, p. 162.

cantorial skills into the Psalm singing and to maintaining the melody. For several years, the attendees would remember Yosele's saying of Psalms in order to plead for a complete recovery for the rebbe.

Two Parts

Yosele the chazan, along with the sexton and congregants, would gather just before the High Holidays to choose a good *ba'al shacharis* (prayer-leader for the morning service). He used to say that a good prayer-leader for the morning service would allow him to lead *musaf* (the additional service) with the best cantorial flair. For *shacharis* (morning service), he suggested Aaron Meir Melamed, Velvel Frimes, Yeshaya Mintzer, or Ozer Shtecher.

Once, on Yom Kippur, when he was leading the prayers, there was an incident. We had finished praying *mincha* (afternoon service) on Yom Kippur, and Yosele put on his coat and scarf, went outside and walked off. The people waited while he was gone, and it became late and it was time to say *Ne'ila* (the special Yom Kippur additional service) and Yosele was still not back. The people were prepared to wait a bit, since he had probably gone to give water to his cow from which the *chazante* (his wife) used to produce dairy products to sell to the people in the shtetl. He was away for some time and when he came back into the kloiz, the whole crowd was very upset with him, since it was already late. Several congregants approached him – Moishe Hilks, Yisroel Laines, Avraham Mintzer, Chaim Letzes, Berel Matziles, Yankel Rosner, Fishel Hilks, Chaim Yosel the barber, and the doctor – and told him what they thought about his going off for a long time, while people were fasting and waiting to pray *Ne'ila*. He quickly put on his

kittel and tallis and began to pray with a quick melody and the people began to bang on their stands to indicate that he should speed up even more. He heard nothing, until he got to selichos and the *shalosh esrei midos* (thirteen attributes). At that point, he looked around and saw how the people were relaxing somewhat and began the *shmoneh esrei* (silent devotion), *ata nosein yad laposhi'im* and *ata hivdalta*³⁵⁰ with cantorial feeling and no one budged from their seats. We arrived home a half hour later than all the other shuls but we were pleased with his rendition of Ne'ila.

He would regularly keep the people, whether Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur, until half past three in the afternoon. He liked that people came to hear his praying so he would look to the door and see that Mashke Melamed, Peschya Schneider, Feivush Schnitzer, Chaim Shuster, Yaakov Aaron Leib Sirkes, Yisroel Starusta,³⁵¹ Ben Tzion Rodman, and Yechezkiel Blecher would come from the big shul. When he prayed, it was something to hear. My Uncle Mordechai Andeles, who did not like his odd behaviours, once told Yosele that he would go to the big shul where other Jews went. Yosele answered, "How could you abandon such a chazan who is an exquisite ray of sunshine to listen to?"

As well, he had a good trait, in that during the day after Yom Kippur, called Name of God Day,³⁵² he would share liquor and cake with the people who prayed with him and even Jews from other shuls. And they wished for him that he pray for a good year for the entirety of the people of Israel.

³⁵⁰ The latter two prayers are parts of the silent devotion.

³⁵¹ It is unclear from the manuscript if Starusta is this man's last name, or if this man was the shtetl starusta.

³⁵² The designation of the day following Yom Kippur as the "Name of God Day" is unclear. I checked several references, including Kitov's *Sefer HaToda'ah* without any success.

Deposition of Mrs. Rivka Melamed^{353 354}

I am offering this deposition in order to help Mr. Schwartzbard³⁵⁵ in his trial in Paris.

The pogrom took place in June, 1919. Fourteen Petlura soldiers came into Kitaigorod, under the leadership of Washchinski. For two weeks, they demanded contributions, terrorized the inhabitants, plundered, looted and robbed. The real pogrom took place over the last two days of their stay in Kitaigorod. In all, there were about eighty deaths and many wounded, out of a Jewish population of a few hundred families. It was the bloodiest pogrom of all.

I was a fourteen year-old girl with an older brother, three younger sisters and brother and parents in the house with the doors and windows shut on that ill-fated day, when suddenly the pogromchiks broke a window and came into the house. We all ran out into the street and each ran to the valley beside the town to save ourselves. The soldiers shot after

³⁵³ This testimony is a summary translation of Mrs. Melamed's deposition found in the Tcherikower Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, NY, File 362, 32988-32993, dated 1927. Translated from the Yiddish by S. Lapidus.

³⁵⁴ Mrs. Fasman who lived next door to the Melamedman family as of the age of nine, claimed that Rivka Melamed was killed during the pogrom and that her sister, Rachel was the one who offered the deposition. Shifrin, as well, listed a Rivka Melamedman as one of the dead of the pogrom. The Committee of Jewish Delegations makes a reference to an incident in this deposition and cites the author as Mrs. E. A. Melamedman. However, the deposition is signed by one Rivka Melamed. While, there is clearly some discrepant information in terms of the deposer's first name, I am sufficiently convinced that this testimony is the one referred to in all of the above sources. Furthermore, Mrs. Fasman reported that the Melamedman woman who gave a deposition had lost a hand in the pogrom, which is the case with this deposition. Finally, it seems that Mrs. Melamed shortened her name from Melamedman. Thus, when referring to her or her deposition I refer to her as Melamed, and otherwise, in accordance with Mrs. Fasman and Shifrin, her family name is referred to as Melamedman.

³⁵⁵ Sholem Schwartzbard, a former native of the Ukraine living in Paris, assassinated Simon Petlura on the streets of Paris in May, 1926. Being unable to reconcile Petlura's responsibility for the massacres with his freedom in Paris, Schwartzbard shot him. He was tried and found not guilty in November, 1927, the jury concluding that he had been compelled by history to his actions. (Dubnov, Vol V, pp. 844-5).

us, but no one was hit. Then the commandant came from the other side, and shot at us trying to force us back toward town.

I was near my mother and realized in horror that my father, Berel Melamedman, aged 42, thirty steps away, had fallen to the ground, shot to death. A little farther from him, and also on the ground, was my elder brother Chaim, 17, also shot to death. Near me, also shot to death was my mother, Nechamah, 36 years old; and I, also hit by a bullet, had fallen near my dead mother. I instinctively realized that I had only been wounded and that it would be sensible for me to lie there as though dead and that is the state I was in for a few hours. The following is very difficult to describe on paper: Two soldiers came close to us and I heard one say, "It appears that she is still alive. We should shoot her again." The other replied, "No, she is probably already dead. Let us save the bullet to kill a living Jew."

Eventually, I received medical care, and my right hand was amputated by Christian doctors, who had come to town to offer medical help.

After the pogrom, a terrible fear fell upon the people in the shtetl, that the bandits would return to kill the remaining Jews. Some Jews from Kitaigorod detailed the tragedy to the Jewish minister Pinchas Krasni³⁵⁶ in Kamenets, who tried to reassure them not to be frightened anymore and that the perpetrators would be arrested. And so it happened that six pogromchiks were found in the shtetl Dinovitz and they were arrested and sent to Kamenets. The commandant Washchinski was amongst those arrested. They summoned eighty-five Jewish witnesses from Kitaigorod and approximately forty Christian witnesses and all testified to the defendants' guilt. The latter were sentenced to be shot. We were

³⁵⁶ Pinchas Krasny replaced Abraham Revutsky as the minister of Jewish affairs in the Ukrainian independence government in February, 1919. Frankel, p. 266; Altshuler, 1998, p. 284.

pleased to see some vengeance brought against our enemies. How sad it was for us that for some reason, several days later, we saw the same commandant and his soldiers strolling in the streets, free. We realized that the whole trial had been a show.

Some time later, two of my uncles came across Commandant Washchinski walking free in the streets of Kamenets. They reported him to the Polish police who brought him before the chief of police. Once there, the commandant produced a document signed by Petlura himself, stating that Washchinski could not be arrested for his complicity in the pogroms.

There were other deaths in my family: my 83 year-old grandmother, a 40-something year-old aunt, a 27 year-old uncle,³⁵⁷ and two cousins, one 17 years old³⁵⁸ and one 10 months old.³⁵⁹ This child had been shot while her mother was holding her. The mother was also shot, but fortunately not killed. The previous day, this same woman had been tied by her hair to a horse and she was dragged like that by a rider through the streets. Fortunately, her hair came loose, the horse rode off and she remained alive, lying in the street.

These are a few of the dry facts of this bloody chapter which we call the pogrom in Kitaigorod, only a small segment of the large murderous, bloody time of Petlura's horrible massacres.

³⁵⁷ Isser Melamedman (Shifrin).

³⁵⁸ Shulamis Melamedman (Shifrin).

³⁵⁹ Shmulik Taback (Shifrin).

I thank you, and hope that my person (sic) can be a *corpus delecti* against Petlura and on Schwartzbard's behalf, and I also wish for you a quick verdict.

With much respect,

Rivka Melamed.

Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Fasman

At different times throughout 1918-1919, the remains of different bands, including Petlura's troops passed through Kitaigorod. Looting and random killings were a normal part of these "passages." Usually, the Jews tried to hide in attics, and some would take their families to the nearby Ukrainian villages to hide in the houses of friendly non-Jews.

One day a large group of bandits showed up in the shtetl. They gathered all the Jews and announced that the Jews would have to collect enough clothing to dress all the bandits from head to toe. They wanted everything: boots, suits, coats, hats.

The Jews did what they could, but they couldn't do enough to please the bandits. My parents did not have any clothing to give, so my mother gave away the only valuable item the family had – a small golden chain, which had been meant all along for the oldest daughter, Ita.³⁶⁰

The bandits stayed in the shtetl for about a week, terrorizing the Jews.

On Sunday the bandits called the local Gentiles to the church and asked for their advice on what to do with the Jews. Two options were considered: to kill them all or to burn down the shtetl. The non-Jews chose to have the Jews killed, because burning of the shtetl was too risky as the fire might have spread to their own houses in the nearby villages.

As rumors about that meeting reached the Jews they rushed to look for places to

³⁶⁰ Mr. Garfinkel's future wife.

hide. Aunt Surka grabbed my older sister, Tuba and me and ran to the outskirts of Kitaigorod where the poorest Jews lived. We came to the house of a woman who baked and cooked for weddings. The three of us got under a table by the window and spent the whole night there listening to what was happening outside through the open window.

From outside we heard lots of screaming and shooting. We heard someone being chased by the bandits running by the house and several seconds later, shots were heard.

By dawn the street calmed down somewhat and we dared to walk out. We saw dead bodies being picked up off the streets and put on horse-drawn carts to be carried away. We saw people looking for their family members among the dead on the streets and on the carts.

Apparently, for some reason, the bandits did not shoot people inside the houses. Instead, they would pull people out to the street and shoot them there.

When I got to my house, I saw the bodies of our next door neighbors in front of it – the parents and two children. I was 8 or 9 years old at the time and thought that they were asleep. Soon enough someone explained to me what had actually happened.

But the ordeal was not yet over. The shtetl was in total chaos. People were running in all directions trying to find a safer place. My father, Shmiel overheard a conversation of some non-Jews participating in the pogrom as they were passing by his house. They were talking about going after Chaim-Hersh, aunt Surka's husband.

Having heard that, Shmiel rushed through some back yards to Chaim-Hersh's house to warn him and his family. Shmiel actually managed to get there before the bandits, only to find out that Chaim-Hersh had gotten away and hidden somewhere.

When the bandits arrived a few minutes later and found out that Chaim-Hersh was not there they got very angry and instead they killed Chaim-Hersh's next door neighbors, the Melamedmans: Berel and Nehama, their son Chaim and daughter Rivka. Their other daughter Ruhale survived, but lost a hand. Later on she got to America and testified in some trial or hearing as a pogrom victim.³⁶¹ She worked for the U.S. government for many years. Many of the surviving Melamedmans ended up in the U.S., as did the Mintzers.

My aunt Hasheiva, Hinda's sister, mother of Hantzia who lives in Khmelnitzky, in the mad search for family members and safer places, came to our house. Having found nobody in the house she went to the basement and stayed there through the pogrom. That is how she survived.

Some Kitaigorod Jews ran to the nearby shtetl Studenitsa to hide out. The bandits learned about it and went to Studenitsa to demand that all the Kitaigorod Jews be turned over to them. They also demanded that a certain amount of food and valuables be collected for them. Meanwhile one of the Studenitsa Jews secretly crossed the Dniester River into Romania and told the local authorities what was about to happen in Studenitsa. A representative of the Romanian authorities (police? army?) came to Studenitsa on a rowboat and told the bandits that he had big guns on the other bank of the river and he would not hesitate to use them to stop any trouble in Studenitsa. That warning was enough for the bandits to leave Studenitsa and retreat to Kitaigorod. Upon the retreat, the non-Jews of Studenitsa gave back to the Jews all the food and things that had been taken from them. The Gentiles deserved some credit for this action.

³⁶¹ Mrs. Fasman is referring to the testimony of Mrs. Rivka Melamed which can be found on page 128.

My cousin, Ihil Mandelkern, lived in America at that time. When he learned about the pogrom he organized a collection and led a group of people to Kitaigorod. They identified children who had been orphaned or crippled in the pogrom and helped them to get to America.

Addendum

During a December 29, 1999 visit with Mr. and Mrs. Fasman, I gleaned the following further details on the pogrom. There were 10 to 12 soldiers detached to Kitaigorod, which at that time was still not under communist control. Most of the pogromchiks were from Kitaigorod or nearby villages. In many cases, the Jews had been killed by their neighbours. Mrs. Fasman, her sister, and aunt were fact hiding with a number of other people. The shooting began in the evening at around 6 to 7 o'clock. Finally, Mr. Fasman described how in Studenitsa, during the aborted pogrom, the pogromchiks played music in the shtetl.

Oral Testimony of Mrs. Claire Pravda

The bandits came into the shtetl on Friday.³⁶² They took over a large house and demanded that a committee be struck to gather boots, clothing and money. There were about 14-15 soldiers. They surrounded the town so that no one could leave. On Friday night, they killed two people and two more were killed on Saturday night. By Sunday, the committee had collected a lot of money. On Sunday night, the bandits began shooting people in the streets. I was hiding in our house, under the table. When the bandits went into an alley near our house, we could hear them talking and so my father, my sister Ita³⁶³ and I climbed the ladder into the attic, pulled the ladder up after ourselves and hid there. We then hid in the chimney.

Since our family was gathered in different places, and my father was a nervous, impatient person, he went out to look for his other children. We didn't know who was still alive. He saw a lot of victims in the streets. He was spotted by a soldier who yelled at him to stop. When he didn't, the soldier shot at him, but he ran off and wasn't hit. He ran to Surka's cellar (his sister-in-law) but no one was there. He later found out that Surka, and Rosa³⁶⁴ had gone to the edge of town assuming the bandits wouldn't go out there since it was the poorer section of town. They tended to stay in the nicer parts of town, where there was more money.

³⁶² Probably June 10th, 1919.

³⁶³ Mr. Garfinkel's future wife.

³⁶⁴ Mrs. Fasman.

Eventually, when all quieted down, we came out of hiding. My neighbour, a girl, had her hands all cut up. Medical help came from another town, and after the pogrom, wagons came to collect the dead. The pogromchiks came back and we fled to the forest. They only stayed a day and so we returned to the town.

The local stores had been looted by the peasants upon invitation of the pogromchiks. They took away everything they could carry. Everyone was demoralized and my father decided to leave Kitaigorod for good. And so on Monday, we walked many miles to Studenitsa (a neighbouring shtetl). We went to Shopsah's³⁶⁵ family because my father knew them. We stayed in Studenitsa until we heard that all was quiet again in Kitaigorod and then we walked back.

A committee came from Kamenets-Podolsk to organize medical help and some relief and food. There were between 83 and 85 people killed. Some 250 families had lived in Kitaigorod. After the pogrom, a lot of people began to decide to leave for America. People felt that there was nothing to stay for. People went to Canada, the United States, Argentina, and Australia. More than half the shtetl left.

Then the communists came in and confiscated people's wares and savings. They actually came to my father, who was so poor, and broke the walls searching for valuables. We lived in a three-family house, with a ladder between each part of the house. We had no running water—we had to get it from the well.

At that time, it wasn't so hard to leave, because the government was all disorganized. Eventually they cracked down on emigration. We had to leave at night. My

³⁶⁵ Mrs. Fasman's future husband.

father had to hire a peasant guide to take us illegally across the Dniester at night. We couldn't tell anyone we were leaving. I couldn't even say goodbye to my friends, or my sister Rosa – Rosa didn't come with us. She didn't want to leave Surka, with whom she lived. "Maybe I'll come soon, but I cannot leave Aunt Surka now," she said. We spent a year in Bucharest before we could try to get a visa. And then, the quota for Jews in the United States was full, so we came to Canada. While we were in Bucharest, my father didn't work, and we were supported by my sister Tillie, who lived in New York and sent us money. My sister Ray and brother Benny were already in New York with Tillie. I was in Bucharest with my father, and my sisters Frieda and Betty. Rosa stayed with Aunt Surka and Uncle Chaim-Hirsh and my eldest sister Ita was married³⁶⁶ and had two children. They came to Canada later.

³⁶⁶ To Mr. Garfinkel.

The Rabbi Refused to Recite the Funeral Service³⁶⁷

Menachem Kapeliyuk

Kitaigorod: a town in the district of Ushitza, in the province of Podolia, sitting on the Tarnow River, which flows into the Dniester. At the time of Polish rule, in 1765, the shtetl counted 489 Jews. During the days of Russian authority, in 1847, there were 642 Jews and in 1897, there were 1,745 Jews from among a total number of inhabitants of 2,794.

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A quiet tranquility lies upon the Podolier town in the Ukraine. Surrounded on three sides by valleys, streams and ravines, full of water and fish, the shtetl sits above these valleys, a fountain rimmed with leafy, shaded trees, forests and thickets – with Ukrainian villages, large and small, scattered among large, spacious fields of dark, grassy lands.

The city had been established for many years. As a reminder of long-gone days is the old cemetery, where most graves, grey-black and fallen over, after long scrutiny, reveal dates of 5400 – 5500.³⁶⁸ This same cemetery, surrounded by remnants of a wooden fence, sunken and bent, could be seen near the old synagogue, built, according to

³⁶⁷ This article originally appeared in the newspaper *Ha'arertz* on August 9, 1928, in Hebrew, entitled *Ha'Ayarah (The Shtetl)*. It was reprinted in the memorial book, *Kamenets-Podolsk Usevivatah*, (Rosen, Sharig, & Bernstein, 1965, pp. 234-244). It was translated by S. Lapidus from the memorial book chapter. Since the article was originally written before the destruction of Kitaigorod, the use of the present is appropriate. Furthermore, the parentheses and quotation marks in the text are from the original author.

³⁶⁸ 5400 – 5500 on the Jewish calendar refers to 1640 – 1740 CE.

legend, after the incident with the Polish *poretz* (landowner), owner of ravines and properties in the city, Shtara, the large Ukrainian village.

In the spring when the muds dried up and the lanes softened, the youth of the shtetl would stroll to the village, sit in the shade of the poplars, pick the scented white cherries without the goyim seeing, and at the beginning of summer – the sour grapes.

The Jews enjoyed good neighbourly relations with the Gentiles of the village. Every Jew, whether merchant, shopkeeper or artisan, had his loyal customers and every Gentile had his loyal, trustworthy Jew. And not only with respect to business matters, but on joyous occasions as well. When the Jew would marry off his son, the non-Jewish friend would send gifts of his land, such as fruit from his garden and fields. As well he would send a turkey with white plumage (it was believed among the non-Jews not to send a dark-coloured turkey to Jews) that had been raised as the cock's mate. The Jew would reciprocate by sending multi-coloured Russian fabrics as a gift to the Ukrainian's wife, and a bottle of "96" brandy, sealed with the royal clay seal with a coin in its cork.

The Gentiles believed in Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes³⁶⁹ whom they called the Soviet Meurka and many stories and legends about his miraculous works on Ukrainian soil still abounded. If a child of the village were ill, they would come to the cantor of the shtetl, put money into the Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes pushke for him to intercede on their behalf and save the child. Among the old women of the shtetl there was one who was well-known. She was called to the ill after the doctors and rebbes failed. She was bent over, almost in half, with dim eyes. She would stir grasses and poisons in water and whisper

³⁶⁹ Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes's spirit was believed to help with miracles, and was often invoked in the case of illness, or of a missing person.

spells. Those who believed in her would say that if her laughter could not bring about a cure, neither could her dark side.

Thus were the lives of them, side by side – the Jewish shtetl and the Ukrainian village. Each knew the strengths and weaknesses of each other and it seems they accepted them without complaint. At the beginning of 1905, an order came down from on high to cause strife among the Jews, and one of the leaders from the district city³⁷⁰ came to preach and explain the “nature” of the Jew. The people of the village whispered and said, “This is not the place,” and not long after, he left town. One day, someone from a far-off village came to the weekly fair in the shtetl to attack some Jews. Some villagers came to the aid of the Jews, hit and beat up the attackers and shamefully chased them beyond the town limits. Over the years, the shameful defeat that they received at the hands of the Jews and their allies became engraved on the memories of the attackers.

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Throughout the period of the First World War, the shtetl was not damaged. Over the fields, near and far, the dim sounds of cannons and shooting broke through the silent night. When reports of the expulsion of Jews from places near the German border reached the shtetl, people trembled with great fear. And thus the shtetl was divided into two camps: the first, the larger, were those of Uncle Willie’s side (Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany) and the Austrian Franz Jozef (Uncle Ephraim Yosef), and the second, the smaller, those who believed in Auntie Raizel (Russia). And the war spread out between

³⁷⁰ Presumably Kamenets-Podolsk.

these two camps, arguments and comparisons made at every opportunity: between the afternoon and evenings prayers, summer afternoons, Sabbaths, and those long winter nights. When they would visit the rabbi's home or some other important person's home for a glass of something hot, political discussions would take place. They would bring the one newspaper to which the shtetl druggist subscribed, and read it, hoping to find some words of truth – if only they knew how to read it.³⁷¹

They would read between the lines (no one paid attention to what was literally written) and gleaned information on the conditions of the front lines and tried to foresee the near future. And thus each of the two camps were encouraged by what they read between the lines, each according to his desire and satisfaction (i.e. they read what they wanted to read). And each won their argument, until one day a change, never before experienced fell upon the shtetl.

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On one of the last days of summer, the “*strozniks*” (police), armed for destruction were removed. Rumours exploded that Czar Nikolaika had been deposed and a republic would follow and the Jews would be given equal rights.

A few days later, the emptiness of the shtetl was filled with the singing of the Marseillaise by the young men and women. Over the following weeks and months there was no interruption in the singing of this first song of freedom. It was accompanied by other revolutionary songs, by the youth who sang these songs with full hearts. On the

³⁷¹ It was common among the shtetl Jews, who lived their lives in Yiddish, to be illiterate in the local language.

first of May, the youth gathered together, men and women, and traveled to the district city to celebrate this day, and returned from there joyful and full of hope.

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Some months passed. In the middle of winter, when the snow was heaped up in huge piles against the sides of houses, the currents of events and changes affected the shtetl, and the soon-to-be Bolsheviks (a word which at that time still sounded strange and different) grabbed hold of the reins of power. Sayings burst out about them. They were going to uproot the evil from its roots and create full equality for all, great and small. Some people praised them to the heavens, while others mocked them and said that they wouldn't be able to change nature, and they would come to bang their heads against the hard rock of the entrenched nature of humanity. The shtetl did not have an opportunity to benefit from their improvements, because one bright morning, towards the end of winter, the townspeople saw the streets filled with wounded Germans in steel helmets, Austrians with their heads wrapped in bandages, and red-faced Hungarian refugees moaning and grieving in their language. The former policemen returned to the town.

Not many days passed when the soldiers of *Ashkenaz* (Germany) and the sons of *Kria* (nickname for Jewish citizens of Austria) began to return home. Subsequently, the crowns of Kaiser Wilhelm and the King of Austria fell, one after the other. And one bright day, the Ukrainian village was emptied of its soldiers and the police disappeared as well.

When the rumours began about the tumult, massacres and pogroms at the hands of the Cossacks and Haidamaks³⁷² of the Batku, of Petlura and his henchmen, a dark cloud fell upon the shtetl. Things began in gradations. At the beginning, they counted the murdered *arnadarim* (nickname for village Jews), the Jews killed on their way to local fairs, and then in pogroms. Fearful and threatening was this short-lived episode, which took place immediately before Passover. At the end of the season of the snows, when the first breakthroughs of spring were felt, information about the pogrom in Proskurov,³⁷³ where over three thousand people were killed, arrived in the shtetl. Within the recounting of the horrors, the names Petlura, Semosenko³⁷⁴ and Tiutiunik³⁷⁵ were mentioned. They were but a part of the whole series of events, and faces went white upon hearing these names.

And since Proskurov was not very far from the shtetl, we knew within a few days all the details of what happened there on that fateful Sabbath afternoon, at a time when the Jews of the city were out leisurely strolling. With the delivery of the details of the events, with the first news, it was clear that they were straightforward, and that there were no exaggerations. To the contrary, the reality was as fearful and frightening as the stories.

³⁷² Haidamaks were Ukrainian irregulars (i.e., soldiers who did not belong to any particular unit or army).

³⁷³ Between 2,000 and 5,000 Jews were killed in a pogrom in Proskurov in February, 1919. "Jewish historians agreed that Proskurov was responsible for the 'Great Fear' which swept through every shtetl in the spring of 1919." Friedman, pp. 126, 139.

³⁷⁴ Semosenko was the twenty-three year-old commander of the 3rd Haidamak Regiment, the forces responsible for the pogrom in Proskurov. He has been described as a degenerate sadist, Friedman, p. 126.

³⁷⁵ General George Tiutiunik was a chief military aide of Simon Petlura, Friedman, p. 293.

During the weekdays, the list of slaughtered and massacred Jewish communities of the Ukraine grew. It was a trying time for everyone. When a man returned home from the morning service or evening prayers in the synagogue, fear, terror and sorrow could be seen in his eyes and darkened countenance. When questioned, his answer was short at the beginning – everyone knew about what happened to the Jewish city – then he spoke of the number of killed and wounded, and afterward, he spoke of their suffering and torture. And the women moaned and cried, and the small children saw their fathers' faces and heard their mothers' cries. From the mouths of fathers and mothers came the words, "Save us for the sake of the babies who are without sin...."

Clouds of fear and dread of the future pierced the shtetl and the inhabitants walked around like shadows. Relations with the neighbouring village were not affected. In fact, promises came from the other side that they would not allow any disturbance in our quiet shtetl; nonetheless promises did little to console them. And on a Tuesday, the weekly fair day, some Gentile no-goodniks wanted to taunt someone and stole something from a shopkeeper. It was almost as though this "transaction" were an agreement; for the shopkeeper intentionally paid no attention so as not to give any reason to affect the traditional friendliness between the shtetl and the Gentile village.

Two to three weeks later, the Big Ones (Jewish nickname for the Bolsheviks) came into the shtetl. Both they and the townspeople knew that they would not be around for long. The war years had been difficult for the Revolutionary Government because of Koltchok, Wyodnitch and other White generals, the unification of Czechoslovakia and finally Petlura, his *atamans*³⁷⁶ and band leaders, as well as the Polish armies. All of these made it difficult for the Bolsheviks to maintain control throughout large parts of the Ukraine.

On the eve of Shavuos, which fell on the weekly fair day, a disturbance suddenly broke out. The army which had been commanded to be on the alert, came into the market square and began to seize the farmers' wagons in order to transport the soldiers and supplies out of town. The farmers whipped their horses and hastily rode through the alleys back to their villages to avoid having their wagons requisitioned by the thieving soldiers. Some angry soldiers pursued and wounded people by hitting them with the butt of their rifles. The wounded filled the market square. Shopkeepers closed their stores and shutters and within minutes there was not a soul in the market. How odd it was to see the market so quiet and desolate when minutes earlier it had been bustling and full of wagons, buyers and sellers, traders, Jewish women walking around with their baskets full, pulling children behind them. Emptiness and desolation were all around, and only the dogs who used to run quickly on the sides of the streets, out of fear of a stone thrown at them by a farmer or passerby, were now free to fearlessly wander through the marketplace

³⁷⁶ An ataman is a Ukrainian term for a leader of a Cossack village or military force.

and to sniff through the scattered straw and leftover fruits and vegetables abandoned by the fleeing villagers. The braided challos, prepared specifically for the holiday of Shavuos were lying near the ovens, looking as though they had been placed there in error. The simmering of the food on the cooking stove sounded like the speech of an irritable person announcing bad news. And when the pots finally boiled over, there was no homemaker for she had mournfully left in fear of the soldiers coming to her home as though what was going on in the kitchen in honour of the festival had nothing to do with her.

In many houses, people were packing up their belongings and household utensils. However, once they had packed up their pillows, cushions and most pressing articles, they stopped, stood before their tied-up bundles and asked the implicit, yet obvious question: where to? To escape to one of the other shtetlach? Wasn't it obvious that the fate of one was the fate of all and that it was just a question of sooner or later? There was one place of refuge – the district city, since the Ukrainian authorities chose it as the capital. There, in the capital it was said with certainty, one could escape all suffering. However, how to get there when the road is full of danger, with bands of Haidamaks and murderers? Not one Jew went on this road of cruelty, torture and death, and a fearful pall fell upon the shtetl and filled every corner.

The “Night of Guarding”³⁷⁷ was the very first night of the Shavuos holiday. Not only did the elderly and the God-fearers stay up for the all-night Torah study – called

³⁷⁷ The term used in the original is *leil shimurim* which is a term for the first two nights of Passover, indicating that no harm can befall one, because it is a night of guarding by God. Presumably, the author is using this term in this context, with quotation marks, as a form of ironic comment, because this night, the Jews were on guard.

Tikkun Shavuos –³⁷⁸ but everyone, from young to old. Even the young children did not take off their clothes. By morning, shots were heard from one of the valleys that surrounded the shtetl. These shots came from a caravan of drunken, savage Haidamaks. More shots accompanied the voices of the caravan, boasting of the blood of the shtetl inhabitants who were trembling at home behind closed and locked doors.

The unit that entered and occupied the shtetl numbered several tens of people. An announcement was made that the conquest was in the name of the Peoples' Ukrainian Republic, and it included a demand that the inhabitants cede their arms to the authority of the commander. The commander was a young man of about twenty-five, who wore his pants tucked into his gleaming, polished boots. He was tall and thin, with an evil, sickly pallor. His thin, angry lips would move distinctly when he spoke. The commander called to the *starusta* (a representative to the authorities)³⁷⁹ and ordered him to surrender all the weapons in the shtetl, for according to the commander's information (and here he was wrong) there were a lot. The *starusta*, a Jew of about sixty-five years of age who had been the official representative of the shtetl for four decades and was trusted by the authorities responded, "I assure you that you have no weapons to fear and none will be found in my town. I assure you that this is the truth and no other." 'I assure you' – he said this only referring to olden days. During times of trouble, it wouldn't hold true. Abuse and insults, accompanied by blows and pushes were his answer. "Come, old dog, let us search and check and see if we can trust your words, lies and falsehoods."

³⁷⁸ This is the correct term for the first night of Shavuos, where the custom was that the men, with the exception of the very young and very old, stay up all night, studying Torah.

³⁷⁹ A *starusta* was the non-elected mayor named by the regional authorities. Ertel, p. 214, footnote #6.

First, they went to the synagogue, checked the Holy Ark, checked the Torah scrolls, moved planks from various places on the floor to examine underneath them. In particular, they were interested in the square depression in the floor, where the cantor would stand before the Ark to fulfill the words of the verse in Psalms (Chapter 130, verse 1), “Out of the depths I called to you Lord.” Two soldiers stood there, chopped and broke through the floor, dug and investigated carefully, until their hair was disheveled and their brows moist with sweat. After, when their searches, explorations and endeavours had all been for naught, the curses, insults and abuses continued.

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The next morning the commander called the starusta along with two prominent townspeople and told them, in brief, “It is your responsibility to collect 2,000 rubles by three o’clock this afternoon as retribution money.” When people came and pled on behalf of the small, poor shtetl to rescind this decree or at least reduce the total as much as possible, the commander struck them with his whip once or twice. They were shoved, insulted and terrified until they ran to escape the commander’s office.

Like a cruel arrow, the words of the commander pierced through the entire shtetl and it was a point of discussion and fear for everyone. However, a ray of hope shone through: perhaps their intention was only to loot and not to kill.

Two Jews went out to collect this large sum of money, one a prominent and respected member of the community, and the other a distinguished pious man, respected and well-liked, whose counsel was heeded in the community. First, they turned to the

wealthy. Most of these gave only after complaints and groans. However, some were obstinate and refused. Some bargained in order to reduce the sum asked of them. When someone was overly recalcitrant, the pious man would gently try to reason with them, “Sir, we are not here to bargain and deliberate before you. Give the ransom for your life. Are not Petlura’s henchmen before us?” And those few words were sufficient to cause the recalcitrant person to rise and with a dark, cloudy face, donate the sum into their hands. When the time came to bring the “contribution” to the commander, the sum was still not totally collected. And so these two men returned to each house and received from each person whatever more they could afford and kopeck by kopeck, with intensive effort and labour, they gathered the total sum and brought it to the commander. They found him sitting in one of his soldier’s offices, blind, stinking drunk. The two Jews were not even asked in; the deputy commander, vile and insulting, stepped out, and took the money.

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The commander and his deputy took over one of the nicest and most spacious houses in the shtetl that had been built shortly before the war. The best restaurant in town supplied them with extensive meals charged to the community and after each meal the commander would ride on his horse through the streets of the city.

On one of these rides, a new order was given, like all the others, in the morning. The commander desired a suit woven out of an expensive material only obtainable before the war. They tried to satisfy him with a different suit, a beautiful suit, but he yelled,

“This one and no other.” On every attempt to interest him in something else, he responded with terrifying insults and abuses. They began to search in wardrobes and valises until in one home they found clothing woven with a similar fabric to the commander’s desires, and the entire shtetl breathed with some relief.

One evening, the starusta was given an order to organize a watch from among the townspeople. Near morning, several rifle shots were heard. The people hurried and rushed from their beds for everyone slept fully dressed, and it became known that the watchmen who patrolled the shtetl streets had been happened upon and were shot. One had been killed and the others who didn’t have enough time to escape had been wounded, some seriously and some lightly. Afterwards, the band members went straight to the stores in the market square and plundered money and jewels. They killed a young man who was known in the shtetl for his wisdom and learning, who was liked by everyone, kind to all people and referred to as a man of good cheer by his neighbours. The events of that night crushed our hearts. Everyone worried and felt that the fearful fate we dreaded was approaching ever more quickly.

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The cloth for the commander’s suit had been given to one of the finest tailors in the shtetl. This was not a casual concern. The tailor begged for mercy and referred to the verse that says that one may not surrender anyone to the killers. “What if my work will not find favour in the eyes of the commander?” asked the tailor. He argued that if so, that would be ceding his life, “And I, a father of small children....” However, the elders of

the community sat with him and explained, explained again and argued that the lives of tens and hundreds of people were now depending on him, the tailor. After these many words of persuasion, there was a long silence from the tailor. His silence and reflection were taken as agreement.

“Sweep the streets, cleanliness is good.” That was the newest order to befall the people of the shtetl. Men and women, boys and girls went out to sweep the streets. They swept the lots in front of their homes until the middle of the street, and a blinding cloud of dust rose up. And from within this cloud of dust, they heard the hoofsteps of the commander’s horse, and they could tell that he was angry. Hearts began to beat faster, the men expected the worst, the *tz’ena ur’ena* women³⁸⁰ and the *Sarah bas tovim* girls³⁸¹ began to speak and whisper through their lips, “Master of the Universe, merciful and compassionate Father, may his end be like that of Haman the wicked.”³⁸²

Six Haidamaks with hardened faces and bloodthirsty eyes went from house to house to see if their last order had been carried out to their satisfaction. Not one of the places they examined satisfied them, and they would go into the house and beat the man of the house, his wife and children with murderous lashes of their whips. Screams and cries of terror mixed with the vulgar curses and insults of these vicious men filled the air. What a strange assignment of this terrifying ruler of the shtetl, that resulted in sweeping the streets clean of people whose weak cries, here and there, could be heard and filled the hollow silence.

³⁸⁰ Ts-ena ur-ena was a Yiddish translation of Bible stories for women.

³⁸¹ Sarah bas Tovim was the author of a book of supplications for women. Thus Sarah bas Tovim girls refers to women who were reciting supplications and prayers for mercy.

³⁸² Haman the Wicked was the evil protagonist in the story of Purim. The book of Esther describes how he was hanged.

And if someone were to pass through the unusually clean streets of the shtetl, and see the townspeople whose every step and movement were filled with fear and dread, he would ask himself: to what purpose this cleanliness?

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“Twenty thousand Nickolaibim (the Russian currency, named after the last czar, was much more valuable than the Ukrainian currency) in the span of three hours – no later!” It was obvious to everyone that this new demand was just a pretext, for in essence, the Petlura men wanted one of their requests to be unfulfilled. In fact, some even said, that perhaps it would not be worth all that trouble and effort to collect the money. Nonetheless, the two people who had amassed the first “contribution” went out again and began another collection.

Throughout that day the Haidamaks were eating and drinking excessively. It was sufficient just once to hear their unrestrained shouts and words and their vile songs and melodies.

Individual attacks on passing Jews did not cease that day. The townspeople began to hide, some in cellars, some in attics and some in other hiding places. The houses on the main streets were virtually empty of inhabitants, the latter having hidden with the women in the narrow side alleys, the habitat of the wretched poor. Their hope was that the killers would not find them there. And thus the smaller houses were filled, their sloping attics full of straw, now crammed with men and women, children and infants, until there was no more room. There were also those who went and asked for refuge in

the Gentile village, however, the villagers refused out of fear of getting caught. Thus, not one Gentile defended the Jews or offered one refuge in his home. Each Jew had a small bundle with money called “soul’s ransom.” Wealthy people gave sums of money to their poor relations to be used as “life-redemption” should the killers arrive.

A full moon shone its light on the silent shtetl. Elderly Jews made efforts to go through the streets quickly. A young woman, with her child in her arms, wrapped in a long, black winter shawl, was walking with small, but hurried steps to reach one of the out-of-the-way alleys. She looked behind herself frequently with frightened eyes. She walked slowly past a black dog with a limp tail which was examining and sniffing the clean ground.

Screams and crying were heard. A soldier with his gun pointed Words of pleading and begging cut short by weeping and lamenting... The groans of death and defeat with the flowing of blood.

A great scream of “Oh woe” came out of one house. The father went outside and was wounded and beaten by a large group. Without any strength left, he fell. The Haidamaks rolled him over and dragged him around. Suddenly, one of the soldiers shouted, “Comrades, how long are we going to busy ourselves with this one Jew? Is there not much work to be done? And as you know, time is being wasted.” At that moment, he stabbed the victim in the chest with his sword and the blood flowed freely. The deadly battle continued. The fleeing family members were chased by the killers. Screams of terror of those trying to escape and the vehement, vile curses of the

murderers... Frequent shots, screams, moans and victims falling with arms and legs splayed on their backs or stomachs...

And thus they killed the old shochet and his wife, who were both in their seventies. They had been lying in their beds and were certain that in bed, the elderly and sick would be spared. The Haidamaks came in, took them down from their beds and dragged them outside and slaughtered them with the shochet's long, razor-sharp slaughtering knife.

They came upon the young man who had been responsible for preparing food and other necessities for the soldiers of the band. "Have I not done all I could to provide for your needs? Have mercy on my life. I have just married and have a child." "In honour of all your troubles on our behalf, you deserve a nice death," responded the murderers. And two Haidamaks stood, one at his back and one at his chest, rifles ready. Thus, the victim was between the two, as their roaring, mocking laughter mingled with his cries of mercy, "Spare my life!" – until shots from both rifles burst out at the same instant and he fell to the ground and blood flowed from both wounds until he was lying in a large pool of his own blood.

The seventy-two year-old cantor came out of his hiding place in the attic of his home and he was dragged him by his beard and gray peyos. One of the killers took him and tied his hands. The cantor began to beg for his life, half in Yiddish and half in Ukrainian. They lifted him up and threw his body to the ground. He raised his weakened

voice in tears and said the *Vidui*.³⁸³ Immediately following, they fell upon him and a large group stabbed and sliced him with their sabers.

Windowpanes were smashed and doors broken. Screams, cries, howls, the final groans of the dying, curses and rifle shots filled the emptiness of the shtetl that night. Gentiles, who had been neighbours, came from near and far into the empty houses and filled their bags with whatever they could find.

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Morning found the shtetl strewn with slain bodies lying in pools of their own blood that were flowing and coagulating in the light and heat of the sun. The cries and wailing of the women were like those of half-crazed people as they hit their heads and beat upon their hearts. At the corner of a street was a man with a leg wound who was in the last twitches of death, with gray matter seeping out of his split skull. Not far from him lay his mother-in-law, an old woman, with blood wrapped around her head like a turban. Her mouth, wide-open in startled terror, was missing teeth. And near her right eye was a deep cleft. Here and there people lay, on their stomachs or backs, hands folded under them, male and female, old and young.

Many victims were found slain in the alleys of the shtetl where the houses had been full of people seeking safety and refuge and thought themselves safe from the savagery. Here lay a man, his wife, son and daughter, placed side by side – their hands and legs joined and clasped together. Their heads were split open, faces swollen and the blood circling their heads had coagulated and dried. And there, not far away, close to the

³⁸³ Penitential prayer for forgiveness to be said on the threshold of death.

edge of a house, bent over and slipping off, lay, a youth of nineteen with his eyes open and his chest cavity sliced open. A young woman with a deep, red and black wound lay not far from him. The tresses of her long, golden hair were spread over her pale face. From afar she looked as though she were sleeping.

Near the fence lay the water-carrier, his black beard full of dripping globs of blood. His face had been so badly beaten that there was no way to distinguish his eyes, nose or lips.

In the same house, next door to the commander, they found the woman of the household, killed on the outside threshold, and her seventeen year-old daughter was laid out beside her, her left eye blown out by a bullet. Lying beside her was a boy, his face soft and innocent as he had been in life, covered and wrapped in a blanket as though asleep, except the red pillow was his blood.

Eighty-four victims fell to the killers during the night. Before leaving the shtetl they wanted to set fire to it, but the farmers and Ukrainians stopped their vengeful attempt, lest the fire spread to the Gentile village. The shtetl had been plundered and violated. There was a snowfall of feathers outside, and utensils and rolled-up garments that had fallen out of the sacks used to plunder, littered the streets. Windows were shattered, doors broken and removed.

Everywhere there was death, destruction, ruin and wailing.

After hours of trembling cries, swooning and tearing of garments³⁸⁴ of fathers and mothers, the rabbi began to mumble, “Enough. We must bury the dead of Israel.” They went and rented several wagons from the Gentile village.

Several pairs of people from the Chevra Kadisha placed the slain who had been gathered in the market square onto the wagons. Thus, the pile of dead on the wagons grew. Hands, legs and heads dangled out of the wagons. All surviving inhabitants of the shtetl, from youngest to oldest, gathered around the wagons, loaded with their butchered fathers, mothers and children. The wailing and sobbing increased and it became a place of trembling and shaking. All the cantor had to do while reciting the *El mole rachamim*,³⁸⁵ was to mention the name of each victim for the wailing of the latter’s family to overpower the other voices of bitter crying and mourning.

The shtetl rabbi, a young man with a refined face, whose black beard added beauty to his distinguished appearance, arranged the order of the burial ceremonies of the holy ones in the cemetery. He read out the prayers and chapters of Psalms. With great effort, he continued to recite the required prayers.

When it came time to recite the Tzidduk Hadin he stood silently for a long time. Everyone waited for him to recite the verse, “God gave, God took away, blessed be the name of the Lord,”³⁸⁶ but the rabbi continued to stand there and not a sound was heard.

He cleared his throat as though preparing to continue the prayers, however, the assembly heard different words coming out of the rabbi’s mouth than they had expected:

³⁸⁴ The rending of garments was a traditional symbol of mourning.

³⁸⁵ “God, full of mercy,” are the opening words of a memorial prayer.

³⁸⁶ Job 1:21. A verse included in the memorial service which emphasizes that God’s decision was fair, and ends by praising God.

“I cannot recite the Tzidduk Hadin, and I will not recite the Tzidduk Hadin” and while saying this he pointed to the tens of mounds of fresh earth that covered the graves of the slaughtered victims.

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Appendix A

Comments on Documenting Kitaigorod

There were several towns named Kitaigorod in the Ukraine. Vasmer listed six,³⁸⁷ *Shtetl Seeker*³⁸⁸ listed four and Cohen listed two.³⁸⁹ However, in each case, there was only one entry which could be the correct one. Usually, the appropriate entry mentioned proximity to Kamenets-Podolsk, and in the case of Vasmer, only one entry was listed as being on the Ternawa River. Thus, I was able to ascertain that the information used referred to the correct Kitaigorod.³⁹⁰

With respect to documentation on the history of Kitaigorod, again, each reference contained some confirmation before being used. The entry in *Slownik Geograficzny* listed Kitaigorod on the Ternawa, as well as being close to Kamenets-Podolsk. The two unpublished testimonies, along with Mrs. Melamed's deposition are valid in that all three women are known to have lived in the Kitaigorod in question. The published references to the pogrom in Kitaigorod (e.g. Friedman, Committee of Jewish Delegations) contained at least one reference to an incident recorded in other verifiable references to Kitaigorod. Further, Kapeliyuk's article mentions the Ternawa River as well as other verifiable incidents found in the oral histories and court deposition.

Finally, the Kitaigorod in question was the only one in Podolia. Many of the references used mentioned Podolia (e.g. Mrs. Melamed's deposition in the Tcherikower

³⁸⁷ Vasmer, p. 176

³⁸⁸ <http://www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/loctown.htm>

³⁸⁹ Cohen, p. 35.

³⁹⁰ Osherowitch's volume on shtetlach had no reference to Kitaigorod at all. Osherowitch and Lestschinsky's 1961 publication on Jews in the Ukraine also provided no information on Kitaigorod.

archives had the word Podolia in the title).

I used only one unsubstantiated published document – the article by Shifrin that listed the names and ages of 74 victims of the pogrom. I chose to use this article for the following reasons. First, it was found in the YIVO archives of the Progressive Kitaigoroder Podolier Benevolent Society. Second, in the introduction Shifrin referred to this Kitaigorod as being in Podolia. Third, eight of the listed names can be verified as accurate. Therefore, despite the incomplete citation, I chose to accept this as a valid, accurate reference.

In order to complete the citation, I consulted several lexicons of Yiddish writers and journalists, in order to begin first by identifying Shifrin. However, his name did not appear in either of the following: Niger and Shtaski's 8-volume lexicon, nor Raizen's 4-volume lexicon. Nor was this name found in Kagan's lexicon, in which he included well-known pseudonyms. However, either Shifrin is an unknown pseudonym, or perhaps this correspondent was not a journalist or writer by profession.

One other method of corroboration that I used was to see if I could find any references to any of the people whose full names were mentioned in the *Memoirs*. I compiled a list of first and lastnames and consulted the two sources of names of people from Kitaigorod that I had. One was Shifrin's list of pogrom victims, and the other was the list of commemorations in the memorial book for Kamenets-Podolsk and the surrounding towns. The latter list however, is far from complete. Only 134 names are listed, out of more than 27,000 Jews who lived in all of the 9 towns (plus Kamenets-Podolsk) on the eve of World War II. As well, not every name in the memorial book is

one of a Holocaust victim. Some people are listed as having died before the war, and others elsewhere. The only name that I found was that of Isser Einbinder, on page 253 of the memorial book, and page 106 in this study.

Finally, Kapeliyuk described the death, during the pogrom, of a cantor in his seventies with his wife. Among the cantors listed in the Memoirs was Yitzchok Leib (no lastname). One of the two male pogrom victims over 70 listed in Shifrin was a Yitzchok Leib Zeitel who was killed along with his wife. Perhaps this man was the cantor in the Husiatiner kloiz.

Appendix B

Glossary

Quotation marks indicate the literal translation of a word. Unless otherwise mentioned, words are of Hebrew or Yiddish origin. Where the plural differs significantly from the singular form, I have provided the plural as well.

- Aka:** Russian weight of approximately 3 lbs.
Alef-bais: Hebrew/Yiddish alphabet
Arnadarim: nickname for village Jews
Ashkenaz: Germany
Ashkenazic: of European-Jewish descent
Ata hivdalta: part of Yom Kippur service
Ata noseim yad laposhi'im: part of Yom Kippur service
Ataman: Ukrainian term for a leader of a Cossack village or military force
Ba'al koreh: the one who reads from the Torah
Ba'al shacharis: leader of the morning service
Ba'al Shem Tov (Besht): founder of chasdism
Ba'al tefila (pl. ba'alei tefila): prayer leader
Badchan: wedding jester and master of ceremonies
Bais yesomim: home or fund for orphans
Bartenura: Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura, a fifteenth century Italian talmudist and commentator.
Bashert: Destined life partner
Batlan (pl. batlanim): one who is paid to pray on another's behalf for money
Belfer: aide in a primary school (cheder)
Bentsch: bless; more specifically, to recite the Grace after Meals
Bentsch mezumen: to recite the Grace after Meals in a quorum of at least three men
Bes medresh: study hall
Bikkur cholim: "visiting the sick"; committee to help or raise funds for the ill
Bima: central dais in the synagogue from which services are led
Boruch Haba: "Blessed be he who comes"; beginning of wedding ceremony
Bracha: blessing, benediction.
Bris: ceremony and/or celebration of the circumcision of an infant boy
Bund: socialist General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia
Chasid (pl: chasidim): follower of an Orthodox movement that preached simplicity and joy of service to God
Chazan (pl. chazanim): cantor
Chazante: cantor's wife
Cheder: primary school

Chevra kadisha: “Holy Society”; burial society
Chumah: Five Books of Moses, Pentateuch
Churban HaBa’is: destruction of the temples in Jerusalem
Deutsch: (pl. Deutscher) “German,” term used to describe assimilated Jew
Dorf: village
Einsatzgruppe: “Special Action Squad”; German term for mobile killing units that followed the front-line German forces into occupied Russia
Einsatzkommando: smaller sub-unit of an einsatzgruppe, but larger than a teilkommando
El mole rachamim: “God, full of mercy” the opening words of a memorial prayer
Forshpiel: small reception
Freilichs: lively dances
Gabbai: aide
Gemara: Talmud
Gemilus chasadim (Gemach): interest-free loan society
Gershonke: particular to Kitaigorod. Lodging named after the owner Gershon
Gezunt un parnosseh: health and livelihood
Goy (pl. goyim): non-Jew
Gubernia: Russian term for province or region
Gut shabbes: “Good Sabbath”
Guter Yid: “Good Jew”, refers to a chasidic rebbe
Hachnasas kalla: “welcoming the bride” fund to provide dowries, clothing and other wedding necessities for poor brides.
Hachnasas orchim: “welcoming the guest” organization to offer free housing to guests in the shtetl
Haidamak: Ukrainian term irregulars (i.e., soldiers who did not belong to any particular unit or army).
Hamavdil: song sung at the conclusion of the sabbath
Hamoyne: crowd
Haskalah: Enlightenment movement
Havdalah: prayer recited at the end of the sabbath
Hayom haras olam: part of the Rosh Hashana service
Hayom tiamtzenu: part of the Rosh Hashana service
Heimat: German, hometown
Helzel: skin of chicken neck, stuffed and roasted
Judenrat: German term for Jewish community councils set up by the Nazis
Kabbalos ponim: the veiling of the bride
Kashrus: the practice of keeping a kosher home
Kehillah: community authority
Kest: agreement by the bride’s parents to support the newlyweds for a period of time
Kesuva: marriage contract
Kittel: white cotton robe worn over the clothing for religious purposes such as Yom Kippur or a wedding. Symbolizes purity.
Klezmer: musicians

Kloiz: small synagogue
Knish: baked filled pastry
Kosher tantz: dance where a man and woman each hold a piece of cloth thereby avoiding physical contact
Kranchik: cat-o-three tails
Kria: nickname for Austria
Landsmanschaft: organization of people who were born in the same locale in eastern Europe, now living in the West
Lehavidil: term used to differentiate between the holy and the profane
Leiben iben yahr: “May you live another year of life.”
Luftmensch: “air man” a broker or a middleman
Malbish arumim: “clothing the naked” organization that provided clothing for the needy
Malchios, zichronos, shofros: Rosh Hashana prayers which were preludes to the blowing of the shofar
Martzitzyeh: market-sitter
Maskil: follower of the Haskalah, an Enlightened Jew
Mazel tov: congratulations
Melamed (pl. melamedim): primary school teacher
Melava Malka: Saturday night meal to prolong the joy of the sabbath
Meshuganer: crazy one
Mezavayg Zevugim: Heavenly Matchmaker
Mi Adir al Hakol: “Who is greater than all?” part of wedding ceremony
Mikve (Pl. mikvaos): ritual immersion pool
Mincha: afternoon service
Mi-sheberach: prayer for well-being
Mishna: earliest part of the talmud
Mitzva: religious obligation; good deed
Mizrach: Eastern wall of the synagogue; those who sit against the eastern wall
Modeh Ani: “I thank you” prayer of thanksgiving recited upon awakening
Mohel (mohelim): ritual circumciser
Musaf: additional service recited after the morning service on sabbaths and holidays
Mussar: ethical admonishments
Naden: dowry
Ne’ila: extra service recited once yearly on Yom Kippur afternoon
O”h (Olav hashsalom): may peace be upon him/her; may they rest in peace
Ol: burden, yoke
Oleh regel: pilgrimage by foot
Parsha: weekly portion of the torah read publicly in synagogue
Peyos: sidecurls worn distinctively long among Orthodox Jews
Pnei: “faces” the elite of the community; its leaders
Pogromchik: of Slavic origin for one who participated in a pogrom
Poretz: landowner
Praven tish: “conduct a table” term for a chasidic gathering at which the rebbe sits at the

table, with his chasidim surrounding him

Prosteh: common, ordinary. Term for the non-elite Jews of the shtetl

Pushke: coin box for charity

Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes: religious figure whose memory is associated with miraculous powers

Rav: rabbi

Rashi: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki: 11th century French commentator on bible and talmud. Considered greatest of all commentators.

Rebbe: leader of a chasidic dynasty. Usually dynamic, and venerated by his followers.

Schutei chutz: ritual slaughterers from another city

Selichos: penitential prayers which begin approximately one week before Rosh Hashana and continue through Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur

Sephardi: Jew of Spanish-North African descent

Seudas mitzva: a meal celebrating or commemorating a religious event

Shabbes: sabbath

Shacharis: morning service

Shadchan: matchmaker

Shalosh esrei midos: "Thirteen attributes" A solemn part of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur services which describes the attributes of God

Shalosh seudos: third of three sabbath meals

Shammes (Pl. shammashim): synagogue sexton

Shas: complete edition of the Talmud

Shayne, shayneleit "beautiful, beautiful people" the elite of the shtetl

Shirayim: "portions" food from a chasidic rebbe's plate believed to be holy distributed to his followers

Shmoneh esrei: silent devotional prayer, usually the central prayer of a service

Shochet (Pl. shochetim): ritual slaughterer

Sholem aleichem: "Peace be unto you" greeting or name of song sung at the Friday night meal

Shtetl (Pl. shtetlach): rural market town

Shtibl (Pl. shtiblach): small chasidic synagogue

Stadt: German word for town

Stadt shul: town synagogue

Starusta: Slavic term for Jewish representative to the local authorities

Stroznik: Slavic term for police

Tallis: prayer shawl

Talmid chochem: outstanding talmudic scholar

Talmud Torah: "learning Torah" publicly-funded school for the poor and orphaned; the act of studying Torah

Tantzevelnia vertsher: "dancing supper" meal eaten before the wedding to celebrate a marriage

Tefilin: phylacteries; leather boxes tied to arm and head as part of weekday morning services

Teilkommando: German term for smaller unit within an Einsatzgruppe

Tenaim: engagement contract
Tikkun shavuos: all-night study vigil on the first night of the holiday of shavuos
Tish: table; chasidic gathering around the rebbe
Tisha b'Av: ninth day of the month of Av; commemorates the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem
Torah: five books of Moses; the totality of Jewish law
Tosefos: commentaries of the Tosafists, advanced talmudic commentators of Germany and Northern France.
Tz'ena Ur'ena: book of bible stories in Yiddish for women
Tzadekes: pious and righteous woman
Tzedakah: charity
Tzidduk Hadin: part of funeral service that emphasizes the fairness of the Divine will
Tzimmes: a stew of carrots and often prunes or raisins
Unisaneh tokef: solemn and central part of Yom Kippur service
Varenike: stuffed dumpling
Verst: Russian unit of distance equaling approximately 1.1 km
Vidui: penitential prayer recited on Yom Kippur and just before death
Yarid: fair
Yeshiva: school of higher Talmudic learning
Yichus: family lineage
Yid (Pl. Yiden): Jew
Yiddishkeit: Judaism; the totality of objects and practices involved in living a Jewish life
Z'l (zichrono levracha): "May his memory be for a blessing"
Zmiros: songs