

8-2020

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Recommended Citation

Yelenskyi, Viktor (2020) "The Resurrection of Jewish Religion at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries: The Case of Ukraine," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 6 , Article 7. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss6/7>

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THE RESURRECTION OF JEWISH RELIGION AT THE TURN OF 20th AND 21st CENTURIES: THE CASE OF UKRAINE

By Viktor Yelenskyi

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Abstract

The article deals with the complexities of Judaism's revival in Ukraine, where Jews have enriched the Jewish civilization with Hasidism, gifted the Jewish world with a whole plethora of outstanding Jewish figures and a remarkable cultural heritage both tangible and intangible, and where their religion underwent a monstrous destruction during the Holocaust and the Soviet anti-religious persecutions. Today's Judaism in Ukraine is a complex mixture of at least six decisive components. That is, (i) more than 20 centuries of the Judaism's history in Ukrainian lands; (ii) the "great religious comeback," which unfolded in the world in the late 1970s; (iii) the religious revival in the space which was subject to a quasi-theistic experiment; (iv) the "upheaval of identities" within the new independent countries; (v) the religious-conservative rise among the World Jewry, and (vi) amazing activity of Israeli and the US-based Jewish religious centers, primarily of Chabad-Lubavitch. Despite the extremely intensive emigration of Jews from Ukraine, which peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Judaism has a considerable demographic base in Ukraine. It includes an "ethnic core," an enlarged Jewish population, and a community of non-Jews seeking to immerse themselves into the Jewish civilization.

Keywords:

Judaism, Ukraine, Jewish religious revival.

Introduction

The current resurrection of Judaism in Ukraine is insufficiently studied against the background of scholars' interest in the religious revival among the Ukrainian Eastern Orthodox, Catholics, and Evangelicals. Although in general, after Ukraine gained its independence, Judaica Ukrainica is making significant progress, the religious life of the

Ukrainian Jewish community is still a “missing dimension” for studies of religion in Ukraine. Suffice it to say that in the academic journal *Ukrainian Studies of Religion* between 1996-2013 less than 3% of all articles addressed the Jewish religion in Ukraine.¹ Among the scholars who study modern Ukrainian Judaism, there are just a few names: Ihor Turov, Anatolyi Podolskyi, Oleg Kozerod, Anna Maria Basauri Zuzina, Valeria Androsova, Larissa Moslalenko, and Zoya Shved. Despite the fact that occasionally religious processes are discussed in the books and writings on the Jewish community’s life (Zeev Khanin, Vitalyi Nakhmanovych, Josef Zisels, Vyacheslav Likhachev, Michail Chlenov, Semen Charnyi) or touched upon in surveys on post-Soviet Jewry migration to Israel or the United States (Zvi Gitelman, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern), scholarly output in the field seems to be quite insufficient. Meanwhile, after seemingly complete annihilation, Judaism is increasingly manifesting itself on the Ukrainian soil, where it has been rooted for more than two thousand years.

The Fate of Judaism in Ukraine: Historical Preamble

The earliest mention of Judaism in the territory of present-day Ukraine dates back to the 2nd century B.C.E. The bearers of this world's oldest monotheistic religion were Jews who settled in the Crimea and the northern coast of the Black Sea and were strongly influenced by Hellenistic culture.² From the Crimea and the Caucasus, Jews moved to the lower reaches of the Volga and the Don, where the Turkic tribes established the Khazar Khaganate. In the 8th century, part of the Khazar elite adopted Judaism, and in the late 8th and 9th centuries Judaism became the dominant religion of the Khaganate.

References to Jewish merchants visiting the Slavic lands date back to the 9th and 10th centuries. Several sources mention the Jewish presence in medieval Kyiv. There is a testimony on the disputes between the founder of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra Theodosius and local Jews, about Jewish quarters in Kyiv in the 12th century. Medieval texts also reported about Jewish Talmudists and connoisseurs of Kabala Moses of Kyiv, Isa of Chernihiv, and Isaac of the Rus’.³ The chronicles and Jewish documents also mention the Jewish presence in the Galicia-Volyn Kingdom.

¹ Анна Марія Басаурі Зюзіна, “Академічне дослідження іудаїзму в незалежній Україні.” *Філософська думка*. 2013. №3, 69.

² See in this regard comprehensive study of Jewish manumissions (the act of an owner freeing their slaves) in the Bosphorus Kingdom, which was located on the territory of the nowadays Crimea. See, Elizabeth Leigh Gibson. *The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosphorus Kingdom*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

³ Ігор Карась, “Становище єврейського населення у Давньоруській державі в IX–XIII ст.” *Записки Львівського медієвістичного клубу*. 2017. Випуск № 2, 25-33.

The newer stage in the development of Judaism in the territory of modern Ukraine is connected with the resettlement of Ashkenazi Jews from Germany, expelled by Emperor Maximilian I. In 1356 there was the earliest mention of the Jewish community in Lviv, in 1404 – in Drohobych, in 1410–in Lutsk, in 1423–in Volodymyr-Volynskyi, in 1465–in Kamyanets-Podilsky, in 1472–in Dolyna, in 1498–in Lyubachev, in 1500–in Buchach and Medzhybizh.

The life of the Jewish community was regulated by Qahal (which existed until 1844), a self-governing and judicial body, which had the exclusive right to control the Jewish community's way of life and communication with the state authorities. In the West Ukrainian lands under the Habsburg monarchy's rule, at the end of the 18th century, the Qahal was reformed and the Jewish community of the region was headed by a Chief Rabbi, who was the Empress' appointee. He also headed the Jewish Directorate, which was elected at the district meeting. Galicia's first supreme rabbi became the Talmudist Arie Leib Bernstein of Brody (1708-1788).

After the Union of Lublin (1569), which united the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into one Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the presence of Jews in Ukraine expanded. By the end of the 16th century, Jews had founded 79 towns and built a large number of synagogues, including so-called synagogues-fortresses, which were able to withstand a long siege of the enemy (in Lutsk, Zhovkva, Shargorod, Terebovl, Ternopil, Luboml', etc.).⁴

Between 1569 and 1648, the number of Jews in Ukraine increased from 4,000 to more than 51,000. The integration of Jews into the system of latifundium, when lands came to be mainly concentrated in vast estates owned by a small number of magnate families, made the Ukrainian Jewry hostages to a sharp conflict between the Polish nobility and the Ukrainian peasantry. Together with the Polish landowners, Jews became the main victims of the 1648-1654 Bohdan Khmelnytsky Uprising.⁵

The tragedy of the Ukrainian Jewry of the 17th and 18th centuries led to active religious pursuits engraved in prayer elegies strengthened messianic expectations, and support for the movement of Rabbi Sabbatai Zevi, who claimed to be a long-awaited Messiah, and to the rise of a sect led by Jacob Frank who, in turn, claimed to be the reincarnation of the Sabbatai Zevi and of the Biblical patriarch Jacob, as well. Under the

⁴ Е.А. Котляр, “Каменные синагоги-крепости Украины XVI — XVIII вв.” *Истоки: Вестник Народного университета еврейской культуры Восточной Украины*. № 3. (Харьков: Еврейский мир, 1998): 8-22.

⁵ See, among others: Zenon E. Kohut. “The Khmelnytsky Uprising, the Image of Jews, and the Shaping of Ukrainian Historical Memory.” *Jewish History*. 2003. Vol. 17: 141-163.

direct influence of these events in the Ukrainian region of Podillya, a spiritual revivalist and mystical movement was formed— Hasidism, which largely determines the religious life of the world Jewry to this day. Its founder, Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer known as Baal Shem Tov, and abbreviated as BeShT (1700-1760), gathered around him some followers who spread widely his teaching throughout Eastern Europe.

Hasidism was embraced by the Jewish communities of Right Bank Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, Romania and Lithuania, and a number of Ukrainian towns became widely known as centers of Jewish religious life. The spiritual leaders of Hasidism attracted thousands of Jews who went to the courts of Hasidic *tzadik* (righteous) in search of wisdom and spiritual perfection.⁶ The names of the towns where these courts were based--Sadgora, Berdichiv, Polonne, Medzhibizh, Zolochiv, Proskuriv and many others--were depicted in the names of Hasidic dynasties, many of which still exist today.

The religious life of the Jews of Ukraine took place against the background of various official restrictions, persecution by the clergy, and so-called "blood libels"—accusations of using the blood of murdered Christian children for ritual purposes that resulted in the execution of the accused (e.g., in Zaslavl' (1747), Zhytomyr (1753), Yampol' (1756), Lutsk (1764)).

Oppressions did not stop even within the “enlightened” 19th century; the permanent residency of Jews in the Russian Empire was allowed only in the “Pale of Settlement.”⁷ Additionally, they were subject to the “Jewish quota,” limiting the number of Jews in educational establishments,⁸ and the vast majority of Jews in Ukraine learnt the basics of Judaism and the Hebrew language in traditional elementary schools (*cheiders*).

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, a number of restrictive decrees and official regulations concerning Jews were adopted, including a ban on building synagogues near churches, a special tax on kosher meat, Sabbath candles, and the sewing of Jewish clothing.⁹

At the same time, part of Jewish economic and social elite supported the *Haskalah*—a movement for Jewish Enlightenment and emancipation, social and cultural renewal, and

⁶ С.М. Дубнов. *Краткая история евреев*. (Москва: Юрайт), 103.

⁷ Pale of Settlement was the area in Russian Empire with varying borders that existed from 1791 to 1917, in which permanent residency by Jews was allowed and beyond which Jewish residency, permanent or temporary, was mostly forbidden. The Pale of Settlement included all but the Kharkiv Ukrainian *gubernia* under the Russian Imperial rule.

⁸ “Jewish quota” existed in Russian Empire from 1887 to 1917. According to the regulation of the Ministry of Education (1887) the share of Jewish students in state educational establishments should be no more than 10% percent in cities where Jews were allowed to live, 5% in other cities, and 3 percent in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

⁹ Michael Stanislawski. *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

integration into surrounding societies with parallel preservation of Jewish identity and uniqueness. Lviv became the main center of *Haskalah* in Austrian Galicia, while Odessa appeared as an important local point for *Haskalah* activists (*maskilim*) attraction in the Russian Empire.¹⁰

Despite the fact that in 1816 a group of rabbis proclaimed a *herem* (excommunication) to Lviv's *maskilim* (enlighteners), in 1822 the Jewish educators established a boarding school for Jews in the Ukrainian town of Uman, and in 1826 they inaugurated such a school in Odessa. The monopoly of Judaism in Jewish education was undermined by the establishment of state schools for Jews "in a spirit contrary to the Talmudist teaching" (1844), and later, by the craft schools and teachers' institutes for Jews.

After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (1881), the government strengthened the legal provisions against Jews; a ban on certain professions was introduced, Jews were not admitted to some Universities at all; with the connivance of the authorities, Jewish *pogroms* (massacres) swept through the country. *Pogroms* became especially brutal during the 1905 Revolution, when Black-Hundred squads committed a terrible massacre in a number of Ukrainian cities and towns. An event that shook and disturbed conscience of the broad strata of public within and outside the Russian Empire was the notorious Beilis trial—the accusation of Menahem Mendel Beilis, a Jew from Kyiv, of ritual murder in 1911.¹¹ Ukrainian writers and public figures, such as Volodymyr Vinnitchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky, Mykhailo Hrushevsky,¹² and others, strongly condemned this anti-Semitic action.

Discrimination, persecution, and overcrowding of the Ukrainian Jews in the cities led to both Jewish emigration¹³ and active interest of the young Jews in radical ideologies, and later to their involvement in political parties. Jewish intellectuals were rather critical toward the traditional religious culture, which they associated with ignorance, archaism, and humiliation.¹⁴

¹⁰ Jonathan Webber. *Rediscovering Traces of Memory: The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Robert Weinberg. "Connecting the Dots: Jewish Mysticism, Ritual Murder, and the Trial of Mendel Beilis." Eugene M. Avrutin et al (eds.) *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond: New Histories of an Old Accusation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

¹² Михайло Грушевський. "По кошмарі." *Літературно-науковий вісник*. 1913. Т. 64. Кн. 11: 268-271.

¹³ Within 1881-1914 1.5 million Jews emigrated from the "Pale of Settlement" to the USA only. See, Andrew Godley. *Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York and London 1880-1914*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Table 5.1 and others.

¹⁴ Михайло Глухман. " 'Паралельні світи': порівняльний аналіз українського і єврейського національних проєктів початку ХХ століття (на прикладі Правобережної України)" *Judaica Ukrainica*. Volume 2 (2013), 109-110.

At the same time, another tendency could be traced among the Jewish revolutionaries, namely the aspiration to find in religious teaching not only justification, but a direct call on Jewish people to fight for a fair restructuring of social life.¹⁵ They also believed that it was religious motives and symbols, the "value language of the Prophets," that were the best way to reach the broader Jewish masses that were influenced by Judaism. In fact, despite the rather intense politicization of 2.5 million of the Ukrainian Jewry,¹⁶ the vast majority of Jews were tightly bound to the traditional Jewish community, whose everyday life was deeply penetrated by the spiritual and ethical ethos of Judaism.

Crushed, Devastated, Bleeding but Still Alive: Dramas and Tragedies of Jewish Religion in Ukraine in the 20th Century

In 1917 "*Yiddishland*" was shaken by the two Revolutions and subsequent "war of all against all." Although the military actions, which covered Ukraine in 1917–1921 and were accompanied by horrific pogroms and terrible casualties,¹⁷ could not but exacerbate religious feelings, the process of secularization was developing rapidly. Radical Jewish youth took an active part in the destruction of what was associated with the Pale of Settlement. The traditions and customs sanctified by religion were also deeply shattered. This breakage with the heavy burden of the past took forms specific to those years: offensive campaigns against rabbis, demonstrative attendance of working places on Shabbat (Saturdays) and days of the most respected religious holidays, and reorganization of synagogues into working clubs and secular schools. *Komsomol* members held show trials over religion, carried at Pesach scarecrows of rabbis through the streets, and enthusiastically redesigned the millennial-long holidays in a new way.¹⁸

Attempts to break once and for all with the past were also typical for the Zionists with a socialist orientation. They saw their own future and the future of Jewish people hinging on

¹⁵ Ezra Mendelsohn. *Class struggle in the Pale. The formative years of the Jewish workers' movement in Tsarist Russia*. (Cambridge, 1970), 104.

¹⁶ "Украина. Евреи в населенных украинцами регионах Российской и Австрийской империй (конец 18 в.– 1914 г.)." *Электронная еврейская энциклопедия*. <https://eleven.co.il/diaspora/regions-and-countries/15409/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

¹⁷ Zvi Gitelman argues that in those times in the territory of former Russian Empire there were two thousands pogrom whose number of victims, by the most conservative estimates, amounted to 30 thousand Jews while half a million Jews were left without a roof over their heads. - Zvi Gitelman. *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics*. (Princeton, 1972), 160-168. Some authors estimated the then loss of Ukrainian Jewry at 75,000 people. See, *Еврейские погромы 1917-1921 гг.* (Москва, 1926); Чериковер И.М. *Антисемитизм и погромы на Украине 1917-1918 гг.* (Берлин, 1923); С. Гусев-Оренбургский, *Книга о еврейских погромах на Украине 1919 г.* (Москва, 1923).

¹⁸ *Еврейское местечко в революции / Очерки под ред. В.Г. Тана-Богораза*. М., 1926, 81; Фрумкина М. (Эстер) *Долой раввинов*. (Москва, 1923), 20-24.

clearing the backlog of obsolete traditions and layering from the time of *Galut* (exile of Jewish people from their Homeland), and a return to the agricultural work, to a healthy lifestyle, building a just society in *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel).

The foundations of everyday life of the Jewish population in Ukraine were rapidly destroyed. First of all, the small Jewish towns (*shtetl*) were exsanguinated, tens of thousands Jews were killed, almost all private enterprises were nationalized, and Jews left their *shtetl* en masses, moving to large cities. In 1897, 415,000 Jews lived in 21 large Ukrainian cities while in 1923 764,000 did (50% of all Ukrainian Jewry). Jews were increasingly entering into mixed marriages, a phenomenon that was extremely rare before among the Ukrainian Jews. Suffice it to say that the religious requirement, according to which the relatives of a woman who married a non-Jew, performed a memorial rite on her as if she had died, was strictly observed in many *shtetl*. However, in 1925, 4.2% of Jewish men and 4.7% of Jewish women in Ukraine were married in mixed marriages, in 1927 - 5.0% and 5.5% respectively.¹⁹

The life prospects of most townspeople, limited to the so-called "Jewish professions," ceased to be fatal, the share of industrial workers and clerks in the total Jewish population grew; between 1924 and 1930, 162 Jewish agricultural settlements were founded (it is necessary to take into account that according to the 1897 Russian Empire census only 2.5% of Jews within the Pale of Settlement were employed in agriculture as compared to 53% of non-Jews).²⁰ An important secularizing factor was the Jews' involvement in the Soviet governmental apparatus. In 1925 they accounted for 25% of the Communist party and Soviet state functionaries, 26.7% of the total number of employees in economic and financial establishments.²¹ Additionally, intensely Jewish cultural and educational institutions were opened, three autonomous districts were created, Jewish councils existed in 77 villages and 69 towns (1929), and 46 courts carried out law proceedings in the Yiddish language.²²

At the same time, the traditional centers of Jewish culture, education, and upbringing - *heiders* and *Talmud-Torah*, not to mention private schools and gymnasiums (high schools) - were very harshly eradicated. The authorities attacked the very foundations of the Jewish civilization. Since the early 1920s, they began displacing the language of Hebrew, the liturgical language that united Jews from different countries; and already at that time it began

¹⁹ Ю. Ларин. *Евреи и антисемитизм в СССР*. (Москва—Ленинград, 1929), 56-58.

²⁰ Б. Я. Каган, *Сталиндорф. 5 лет еврейского национального района на Днепропетровщине*. (Київ: 1935); И. Кантор *Еврейское землеустройство на Украине*. (Москва, 1929); П. С. Коршунов. *Еврейское переселение в Крым (могут ли евреи работать на земле?)*. (Симферополь, 1929).

²¹ Н. Aster & P.J. Potichnij, *Jewish-Ukrainian Relations: Two Solitudes*. 2-d ed. (Oakville-New York-London, 1987), 27.

²² In 1924/25 academic year 342 schools in Ukraine provided lessons in Yiddish while in 1929/30-786.

to be reborn as a language of communication. The teaching of Hebrew in Jewish schools was expressly forbidden.²³

The research carried out by ethnographers within the former Pale of Settlement (1923) gave the following results: 28.4% of the surveyed Jews considered themselves religious, 18.6% considered themselves “semi-religious” and 52.7% as non-religious. At the same time, only for 8.7% the day of rest was Sunday, for the rest of them it was Saturday.²⁴ This means that although a significant proportion of Jews considered themselves secular, they maintained their Jewishness which meant the preservation of Jewish way of everyday life with the Jewish calendar, dietary requirement, customs, and among others, their commitment to the holy Jewish day of rest, namely Shabbat. All these “identity marks” are deeply rooted in Jewish religion.

In 1924, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of Ukraine informed the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine of 1,026 Jewish religious communities and even gave the exact number of the Jewish believers—138,583 (possibly active members who were included in the lists compiled by the local authorities).²⁵ These numbers meant, first, that the synagogues were strictly controlled by the Soviet authorities (they kept name-lists of every parishioner who more or less actively attended synagogue's worship). Secondly, these numbers indicated that the synagogue's activists were still quite numerous at the time.

In 1928 Stalin proclaimed that “...the more we advance the greater will be resistance of the capitalist elements and the sharper will be the class struggle [...] It never has been and never will be the case that a dying class surrenders its position voluntarily without attempting to organize resistance.”²⁶ This concept led to a campaign of violence against “the remnants of exploitative classes and their accomplices,” as well as a devastating attack on religion. Along with cathedrals and churches, the officials intensively closed synagogues and Jewish prayer houses. Shattering blows were inflicted on the spiritual centers of Judaism, while during the second half of the 1930s secular Jewish social, cultural, and educational hotbeds were also destroyed.

²³ Постанова Наркомосвіти УСРР (серпень 1922 р.) // *Еврейские вести*. January 1994.

²⁴ *Еврейское местечко в революции*. (Москва, 1926), 196.

²⁵ *Central State Archives of Supreme Authorities and Governments of Ukraine*. Storage 5. Inventory 2. Case 195. Page 51(reverse side).

²⁶ И. Сталин, *Сочинения*. Т. 11. (Москва: Политиздат, 1947), 171.

Jewish organizations, educational and scientific institutions in the western Ukrainian lands annexed to the USSR in 1939-1940 were hastily disbanded, and thousands of Jews--the so-called "unreliable elements"--were arrested or deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan.²⁷

The Second World War was a horrendous crucible for the European Jewry and, particularly, for the Jews of Ukraine. More than 900,000 Ukrainian Jews died in the Holocaust,²⁸ and Jewish life almost completely disappeared from many cities and towns, which for centuries were the centers of Jewish culture, art and social life.²⁹ The Nazis almost completely eliminated a unique ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious group, the Krymchaks.

As an Israeli historian, the former Soviet partisan and director of Yad Washem (1972-1993), Yitzhak Arad, notes, Jewish sources reported very little on Judaism's religious matters in occupied territories of the USSR. Nevertheless, he assumes that any observant Jew would have done everything in his or her power to follow religious norms and rituals.³⁰

The warming that took place after 1943 in relations between the Soviet state and religious organizations, mainly the Russian Orthodox Church, had little effect on Jewish communities. Moreover, after World War II an anti-cosmopolitan campaign was launched which rattled Jewish intelligentsia. It was condemned as "rootless cosmopolitans," "singers of Talmudic archaism," and "shtetl dullness." The whole constellation of Jewish intellectuals, theater critics, Yiddish-speaking poets, and public figures were repressed.³¹ Additionally, a group of prominent doctors, predominantly Jewish, were accused of a conspiracy to assassinate Soviet leaders (the notorious 1953 "Doctors Plot").³²

Even with dignity, by tradition, burying the victims of Hitlerism proved to be impossible: the authorities denied the right to restore national symbols on gravestones and indicate the ethnicity of the buried. Until recently, there were tombstones in Ukraine with the Mogen-David (Shield of David), where the sixth ray of the hexagonal star was erased and turned into a Soviet five-pointed star--the vivid symbol of a crushed national dignity, blasphemy over the memory of Nazi's victims, and the apogee of the "Soviet patriotism."

²⁷ *Очерк истории еврейского народа*. Т.2. (Иерусалим, 1979), 651.

²⁸ Paul Robert, Magocsi. *A History of Ukraine*. (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 633.

²⁹ Gary Mokotoff, Sallyann Amdur Sack. *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust* (2nd revised ed.). (Bergenfield, N.J.: Avotaynu, 2002).

³⁰ Yitzhak Arad. *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*. (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2009), 473

³¹ On Anti-Semitism in the USSR after II World War see, Gennadi Kostyrchenko. "The Genesis of Establishment Anti-Semitism in the USSR: The Black Years, 1948-1953," in, Zvi Gitelman and Yaacov Ro'i (eds.) *Revolution, Repression, and Revival: The Soviet Jewish Experience*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 179-192.

³² Геннадий Костырченко. *Сталин против 'космополитов'. Власть и еврейская интеллигенция в СССР*. (Москва: РОССПЭН, 2009), 259-260.

When in the first years of Ukraine's independence a large-scale search for places of mass executions of Jews began, it became clear that among the 530 places discovered, a significant part was in a bleak abandoned state.³³ At the same time, the creation of the State of Israel (1948) contributed to a serious rise in the national consciousness of the Ukrainian Jews, the formation of a movement for repatriation to the historical homeland, as well a call for more dignified conditions of a national and religious development in the USSR.

In 1958, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev personally initiated a large-scale anti-religious campaign which included mass closures of churches, synagogues, monasteries, convents, and seminaries, as well as a restriction of parental rights for teaching religion to their children and a ban on the presence of children at church services. The campaign was based on the utopian plans to build a nonreligious communist society by 1980 with an extremely unscientific (even from the point of view of Marxism) perception of religion as a sad and harmful relic in the social fabric of Soviet society, which could function thanks to foreign aid, the dexterity and cunning of church figures, and serious errors of atheistic propaganda. In Ukraine, that campaign took extremely violent forms and dealt a crushing blow to all faiths and religious communities.

As for the Jewish religion, a large number of critical pieces and accusatory letters were published in the Ukrainian press, which accused the synagogue's activists as selfish and abusive, of maintaining vicious relations with believers abroad, and other sins. The Soviet propaganda aimed to discredit the Jewish religion by depicting Judaism as an immoral, "money-oriented" faith; declaring that Judaism breeds hatred and enmity to other religions since it proclaims Jews as "the chosen people;" charging that Judaism demands allegiance to the alien State (the State of Israel).³⁴

Synagogues in Lviv, Mykolaiv, Kherson and other cities of Ukraine were closed under the pretext of "systematic violations of legislation on religious cults." During 1959-1961, 24 Jewish religious communities were closed, only 43 out of 149 *minyans*³⁵ remained; only 10 out of 30 rabbis continued their activities.³⁶

After Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign was curtailed, only 14 synagogues operated in Ukraine and that number remained unchanged until the late 1980s.³⁷ In 1964, the

³³ *Еврейские вести*. 1991. Апрель.

³⁴ Harry G. Shaffer. *The Soviet Treatment of Jews*. (New York: Praeger, 1974), 15-18.

³⁵ *Minyan* is a quorum of ten Jewish males of the age 13 and older required for certain religious obligations. In Soviet documents *minyan* often referred to a group of observant Jews who more or less regularly gathered for religious services, often in each other's homes.

³⁶ *Єврейська історія та культура в Україні*. (Київ: 1997), 20.

³⁷ М. Мицель, *Общины иудейского вероисповедания в Украине (Киев, Львов: 1945-*

Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR estimated the number of active practitioners of Judaism at about 30,000 people.³⁸ Naturally, the available number of synagogues could not satisfy the spiritual needs of all these people. Therefore, in Ukraine, there were also dozens of unofficial *minyans*. Their official status was not formalized by the authorities. Normally, members of *minyans* did not seek it: for many such communities established by older believers, the procedures associated with registration were too troublesome, sometimes unbearable.

The Israeli-Arab war of 1967 facilitated the rise of national consciousness of the Soviet Jews but worsened their situation. Extremely active anti-Zionist propaganda was unfolding in the country, the content of which became offensive to all Jews without exception. The emigration of Jews to the West and Israel further aggravated the situation. All this led to a tightening of control over synagogues by the authorities as an “object of Zionist influence.”

Jewish Religion in Ukraine on the Eve of the Fall of the Soviet Union

As a result of the above policies, the leadership of the synagogues became dominated mainly by elderly people loyal to the regime and controlled by the local authorities and KGB. For such people, religious activism was an opportunity to realize their still significant social potential and often their administrative or life experience. Additionally, a good majority of synagogues' activists had very superficial knowledge of Judaism. For example, among the synagogue activists I interviewed in 1988, almost one third did not attend a synagogue at all before retirement, more than half did so only on religious holidays and only every tenth on Saturday and then more often.³⁹

The most common type of parishioner at a synagogue became an elderly man, who felt an acute need to expand social ties, sharply narrowed after retirement, and increase interaction with people of the same age and ethnicity. The lives of the vast majority of such people had been repeatedly subjected to a thorough, even steep, breakage. Moving from a *shtetl* to a large city, working at an industrial enterprise, the powerful indoctrination by the Soviet ideological machine, military service or evacuation during World War II, the death of relatives and friends--all of these had been experienced to varying degrees by each of them. They painfully restored those fragments of their Jewish upbringing and religious beliefs that

1981 гг.). (Київ, 1998).

³⁸ *Central State Archives of Supreme Authorities and Governments of Ukraine*. Storage 4648. Inventory 2. Case 425. Page 9.

³⁹ В. Еленский. *Иудаизм на Украине. Исторический очерк*. (Київ.: Знання, 1991), 46-47.

were embedded in them by the family and the semi-legal *melamed* (a religious teacher) during their childhood. The assessment of the chief rabbi of the Moscow Choral Synagogue, Adolph Shayevich (“even the aged Jews, those who are, say, seventy, sometimes know only the basics of Judaism, and sometimes even less”),⁴⁰ can be applied to the parishioners of the Ukrainian synagogues of that time.

The exception was the Jews in those Ukrainian lands that became part of the USSR in 1939-1940 and 1945. Here devotion to national and religious traditions was not tested by antireligious campaigns and repressions in the 1920s and 1930s. The Jews who survived World War II and their descendants preserved much of their traditional way of life, the major events of which were invariably sanctified by means of a synagogue. This was especially noticeable in Transcarpathia, which became part of the USSR only in 1945. The extremely thinned Jewish population of the region had nine religious communities, with which almost every family was connected in one way or another.

In general, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, no sermons were delivered in the Ukrainian synagogues. Worship was limited to the Torah readings, and not all synagogues, even on Saturdays, managed to gather *minyan*.⁴¹ In the Kyiv synagogue, the largest in Ukraine, for example, for a long time there was no rabbi, and parishioners did not receive instruction on the religious teachings, rituals, and everyday life. The situation in Odessa was about the same. In Dnipropetrovsk, Simferopol, Vinnytsia, and in many small towns in Ukraine, Jewish places of worship were attended exclusively by the elderly, and religious life there was barely alive. In the synagogues of Ukraine almost no marriage rites were performed, very rarely circumcision and *Bar Mitzvah* (a Jewish ritual of passage for the boy who reaches the age of 13 and becomes accountable for his actions). Much more consistently performed were rituals associated with the funeral and commemoration cycle. However, even burial rites were sometimes very far from the traditional religious prescriptions.

When a group of scholars, members of the independent Jewish movement, interviewed 1,209 Jewish respondents in various cities of the Soviet Union in 1976, only 7% of them identified themselves as believers, the followers of Judaism. 53% of the respondents

⁴⁰ *Московские новости*. 1988. №4. Adolf Shaevich himself, despite growing up in the administrative center of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast had no basic knowledge of the Jewish religion until his age of 35. See his interview to Mark Smirnov: “Евреи в субботу на митинги не ходят”. 4 апреля 2013 г. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130703220827/http://religo.ru/journal/18805> Accessed 06/01/2020

⁴¹ On the realities of synagogues’ life of that time, see the road sketches, in Таяр И., *Синагога – разгромленная, но непокоренная*. (Иерусалим: Библиотека Алия, 1987), 144-209.

showed respect for religion, but did not want to join it, 32% of them said they had no interest in religion, 3% of the respondents believed that religion needed to be fought with.⁴²

“In the spring of 1985, my wife brought me to the synagogue for the first time,” wrote American historian Johann Petrovsky-Stern, who grew up in an intellectual Jewish family in Kyiv. I had never been to a synagogue before, moreover, I had never seen one ‘Judaism brings us back to the ghetto,’—my father said. For him, the ‘ghetto’ was synonymous with all the limited, alienated, conservative, backward, slavish, thoughtless and unobtrusive; in short, it was something bad.”⁴³

A study of the religiosity of Jewish emigration to the United States during the Gorbachev’s perestroika found that only 8% of those surveyed considered themselves religious.⁴⁴ Even decades after leaving the republics of the former Soviet Union, as surveys in Israel, in the United States and Western Europe prove, the “post-Soviet” Jews remained the most secularized group. For example, a survey of this category of current Israelis conducted in the late 2014-early 2015 by the Pew Research Center found that 81% of Jews born in the former Soviet Union identified themselves as secular Jews as compared to 49% of all Israeli Jews. One tenth of all Jews from the former Soviet Union lived with non-Jewish spouses or partners, as compared with only 2% of all Israelis. Almost 80% of them believed that the State should not interfere in religious affairs, turn *Halakhah*—a traditional Jewish law—into a State law, and ban public transportation on Saturdays. Among other Israelis, such views were much less common. Among the first generation of Jews from the USSR, 55% of them believed in God; among the second generation 70%, while among all Israelis 77%. About 24% of the first generation of “post-Soviet” Jews followed traditional dietary rules (*kashrut*), in the second generation, half of all the questioned, while among all Israelis Jews, as many as 63%.⁴⁵

In the end of 20th century the Ukrainian Jewry found itself the most detached from their traditions in comparison with other ethnic groups. According to the scale of preservation of national traditions provided by the Institute of Sociology at the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine for the study of eight ethnic groups in the early 1990s, Jews

⁴² М. Членов, “Баалей-Тешува в независимом еврейском движении в Москве в 1970-1980-х гг.” *Евразийский еврейский ежегодник*. 5766.2005/2006. (Киев: Евразийский еврейский конгресс, 2006), 147.

⁴³ Йоханан Петровський-Штерн. *Українці і євреї: простір взаємодії. Інавгураційна лекція з нагоди присвоєння звання почесного доктора Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія», прочитана двадцятого січня дві тисячі чотирнадцятого року*. (Київ: Дух і Літера, 2014), 8.

⁴⁴ Zvi Gitelman. “Glasnost, Perestroika and Anti-Semitism” *Foreign Affairs*. Spring 1991, 144.

⁴⁵ *Israel’s Religiously Divided Society. Deep gulfs among Jews, as well as between Jews and Arabs, over political values and religion’s role in public life*. Pew Research Center, 2016, 105.

spoke the national language, celebrated religious holidays, sang national songs, told national tales and prepared national dishes, and discussed the events of national history and culture much less than other ethnicities in Ukraine (although the surveyed Jews said they turned to the issue of Jewish identity, history and culture with the members of their families sufficiently more often than their parents). Although the Ukrainian Jews were quite active in defending the religious autonomy of ethnic minorities, they did not consider religion as a determining factor of their Jewishness. Similarly, religious activity was not attractive to the vast majority of the surveyed Jews.⁴⁶

At the same time, though it might sound paradoxical, a synagogue in this period appeared to be a more universal Jewish institution in Ukraine than ever before. Indeed, in those times all other Jewish institutions--namely, theaters, clubs, universities, research centers, schools, mass media, or any other structures--were wiped out completely. National identification was officially carried out through the notorious "fifth entry,"⁴⁷ while unofficially within the circle of family, friends, and relatives, and through the synagogue. Therefore, during the days of especially respected holidays, synagogues of large Ukrainian cities and the streets surrounding them turned out to be filled with the Jewish public, which as a whole did not have any elementary religious ideas, but a very strong ethnic motivation. A synagogue, as the only Jewish institute, performed a variety of functions: it discussed specific ethnic problems, planned marriages, and made acquaintances; additionally, there was an exchange of literature, etc. at the synagogue.

However, the overall condition of the Ukrainian synagogues, dissatisfaction of many Jews with the intensity and dynamics of the officially sanctioned religious life largely catalyzed the emergence of parallel structures in Judaism. In the 1970's and 1980's, young and active Jews set up groups for studying Hebrew, Jewish history, religion, and culture. Usually, they were professionals, mostly in technology and engineering, as admission to the

⁴⁶ Ю. Саенко Ю, "Социокультурные ориентации украинского еврейства." *Ейникайт*. 1993. №2.

⁴⁷ According to the Soviet passport system passport of the Soviet citizen contained the information of his or her ethnicity (*nationalnost'*). The *nationalnost'* was indicated in the fifth entry of the personal blank list. In its turn, *nationalnost'* was based not over the personal identity but on the ethnicity of the parents (or one of them). If their nationality was different, the citizen had the right to choose nationality of the father or mother reaching the age of 16. After that it was no longer their right to change nationality. At the same time, a person could determine his or her nationality only from the officially recognized List of Nationalities of the USSR. If, say, a young man or woman born in the family of a Kazakh father and an Estonian mother but grew up and was brought up surrounded by, conditionally speaking, Moldovans, spoke Moldavian and felt himself or herself as Moldavian, he or she still had to choose between Kazakh or Estonian ethnicity (*nationalnost'*). Since being recorded as a "Jew" in a Soviet passport meant trouble for the bearer of that passport, such as restrictions on admission to university or obtaining a prestigious job, some Jews sought to write in their passport less problematic *nationalnost'*. But not many managed to do so. On this occasion, the Jews bitterly joked that they were "the invalids of the fifth entry," that is, they had limited rights due to the mention of their Jewishness in the fifth entry.

humanities and social sciences at Soviet universities was more strictly controlled by the authorities and was therefore immeasurably more problematic for Jews.

The range of cultural preferences and levels of Jewish consciousness and religiosity of these men and women were extremely wide: from people who were painfully aware of their isolation from national roots and sought to bridge this gap, to deep, almost fanatical believers; from those who simply wanted to communicate in the language of their ancestors to active participants in the human rights movement; from consistent supporters of cultural and national autonomy to uncompromising Zionists. At the same time, the activists of the Jewish human rights movement were gradually turning from complete religious indifference to deep interest in religion. The very existence of young people who defiantly revealed their Jewish identity was seen by the authorities as a threat. But persecution only consolidated Jewish activists and encouraged them to defend their national, cultural, and religious rights. Thus, even those who did not contemplate criticizing the Soviet regime appeared in the ranks of human rights activists. Members of such groups and *minyan* in large cities came into contacts with correspondents of foreign media, tourists, and representatives of various foreign Jewish centers and organizations, which usually led to repressive actions by the authorities.

The proportion of *refuseniks*⁴⁸ or rejectors was very high in the structures under consideration (a neologism that was often used in Western languages without translation and was known to anyone who was even slightly familiar with the problems of the Soviet Jewry). They were not afraid of confrontation with the authorities, and the political element in the activities of some groups, conceived as purely national and religious, was quite significant. These people had already "burned bridges" and were not afraid of confrontation with the authorities; thus, the political element in the activities of some groups conceived as purely national and religious was quite significant. By the end of 1979, in Kyiv alone, the number of *refuseniks* reached 2,000. By April 1980, their number increased due to very strict rules for obtaining a permit to emigrate, it began to be issued only on calls from parents and children. In 1979-1983 ten Kyivan *refuseniks* were imprisoned.⁴⁹

Meanwhile since the late 1970s the world was witnessing the so-called "great return of religions." Along with the "Islamic upsurge," Catholic participation in the "third wave of democratization" (as Samuel Huntington put it), the growth of the Christian Right in the United States, the impressive evangelical boom in Latin America, these years were marked

⁴⁸ Refusenik – an unofficial term for Soviet Jews who were denied permission to emigrate, predominantly to Israel, by the Soviet authorities.

⁴⁹ "Хроника текущих событий". Вып. 56. С. 98. *Еврейское движение за выезд в Израиль* <http://old.memo.ru/history/diss/books/alexewa/chapter10.htm> Accessed 06/01/2020.

by the so-called *baalei t'shuva* movement (in Hebrew 'masters of return'), namely, the movement of the young Jews who had not been raised in the Jewish Orthodox milieu, but chose to become involved in traditional Jewish religious life.⁵⁰

M. Herbert Danzger, who studied Jewish "returnees" in the United States and in Ukraine, particularly in Kyiv, pointed to different socio-cultural contexts of religious return in these countries. The Ukrainian Jews seem much more secularly and less Jewishly educated, even as they were much more self-directed and driven than their American counterparts. During the Soviet period it took heroic efforts for Jews to identify themselves with religion in general and the Jewish people in particular. Kyiv Jews went through the two-stage return for young Kyiv Jews, namely, the awareness of one's Jewishness, and then the appeal to Judaism, without which such awareness would be very problematic.⁵¹

Such "returns" occurred against the background of a general growing interest in identities and an increasing appeal to the religion of the Ukrainian majority, among which the Jews lived. As religion was turning into an increasingly strong marker of belonging to an ethnic community and a tool for national mobilization, the increasingly intensive involvement in religious life became a means for many Jews to define themselves in the context of radical social transformation and rapidly changing post-Soviet society.

At the same time, as a result of the destruction of Jewish education and upbringing, the dramatic spiritual gap between generations of Jews and the brokenness of tradition, Jewish youth sometimes turned to Christianity in their existential search for meaning. A number of writers, artists, composers and scholars, Jews by origin, deeply and consciously received baptism in the Russian Orthodox Church, and some of them, for instance Alexander Men (1935-1990) and George Edelstein⁵² (b.1932), were ordained as priests of the Russian Orthodox Church. The researcher of this phenomenon, Judith Kornblat, noted that the minority of those who in their religious searches turned to Eastern Orthodoxy could not be considered as religious converts because, as a matter of fact, they did not change religion and did not betray Judaism, to which they never belonged.⁵³

⁵⁰ George R. Wilkes, "Jewish renewal" in *Modern Judaism*. Ed. by Nicholas de Lange and Miri Freud-Kandel. (Oxford University Press, 2005), 114-126.

⁵¹ M. Herbert Danzger. "The 'Return' to Traditional Judaism at the End of the Twentieth Century: Cross-Cultural Comparisons". *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*. Edited by Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 506-507 and others.

⁵² His son Yuli-Yoel Edelstein (b. 1958, Chernivtsi, Ukraine) is a prominent Israeli politician, the 16th Speaker of the Knesset and Minister of Health since 2020.

⁵³ Judith Deutsch Kornblatt. *Doubly Chosen. Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church*. (Madison, WI: Wisconsinpress, 2004), 8.

Healing the Wounds: Judaism in Contemporary Ukraine

The real rebirth of Jewish life, including the religious revival, was enabled by the politics of *perestroika*, a growing struggle for the democratic freedoms and human rights, for religious liberty, and later, the attainment of independence by Ukraine. Ukrainian statehood, despite certain pessimistic forecasts,⁵⁴ led to a rather dynamic development of Jewish social, political, cultural, and religious life. Ukrainian independence delivered a tangible blow to the stereotype, quite common in the West, of “Ukrainians as anti-Semites,” and largely destroyed such clichés in Israel.⁵⁵ And although surveys documented a constant increase in the social distance between Ukrainian and other ethnic groups that took place around the 1990-2000s time frame, this was not an outbreak of xenophobia, but rather a certain period of increasing self-awareness accompanied by the drawing of demarcation lines in relation to “others.” In about 2007, the social distance towards Jews began to decrease, and in 2014, after the Revolution of Dignity and Russian aggression against Ukraine, these tendencies, namely, the reduction of social distance and attitude towards Jews (as well as towards some other ethnic groups, first of all to the Crimean Tatars) improved.⁵⁶

A dynamic development of Jewish religious life in Ukraine was facilitated by the position of the Ukrainian state, which at the highest level, in the person of its then president, Leonid Kravchuk, apologized to Jews for all injustices committed against them on Ukrainian soil.⁵⁷ The relations between Ukraine and Israel in various fields were also developing rapidly. Additionally, the World Jewry appreciated the fact that in 1991 Ukraine was one of the countries that initiated the repeal of the bitterly contested statement in the UN General Assembly resolution (1975), which defined “Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ In particular, a prominent Jewish historian, Shimon Dubnov, argued that the rise of national consciousness and "national passions" of peoples, among whom Jews live, normally worsens the attitude of these peoples towards Jews. Дубнов С.М., Динур Б.-Ц. *Две концепции еврейского национального возрождения*. (Иерусалим: Библиотека Алия, 1990), 101.

⁵⁵ Зеев Ханин. “Как разделились симпатии «русской улицы» в конфликте Украина-Россия” <http://vaadua.org/news/zeev-hanin-kak-razdelilis-simpatii-russkoj-ulicy-v-konflikte-ukraina-rossiya> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁵⁶ Вячеслав Лихачев. “Уровень антисемитизма в Украине – падает или растёт?” <http://vaadua.org/news/vyacheslav-lihachev-uroven-antisemitizma-v-ukraine-padaet-ili-rastet> Accessed 06/01/2020; В. Р. Нахманович. “Єврейське питання в Україні: ставлення населення” in *Розвиток і взаємодія єврейських громад на європейському просторі*. (Київ.: Інститут політичних і етнонаціональних досліджень ім. І. Ф. Кураса НАН України, 2017), 386-481.

⁵⁷ “Председатель Верховного Совета Украины Леонид Кравчук: ‘Шолом алейхем тайере идн!’” *Возрождение*. 1991. Октябрь.

⁵⁸ “260 General Assembly Resolution 46-86- Revocation of Resolution 3379- 16 December 1991- and statement by President Herzog” <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook8/pages/260%20general%20assembly%20resolution%2046-86-%20revocation.aspx> Accessed 06/01/2020.

No less important for the revival of the Jewish religion in Ukraine was the clearly Judophilic stance of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, public opinion leaders, and former Ukrainian dissidents, who together with Jewish dissidents served sentences in Brezhnev's camps, such as Yevhen Sverstyuk, Mirosлав Marinovych, Zinovyi Antonyuk, and others.⁵⁹ The overwhelming majority of Ukrainian intellectuals,⁶⁰ the most influential political forces, and leading religious figures⁶¹ were quite strongly opposed to anti-Semitic actions, in whatever form they might manifest themselves.

Since the 1990s, Jewish life in Ukraine has become more intense. Hundreds of Jewish organizations, societies and centers—religious, educational, charity funds, historical, memorial, cultural, sports, human rights, pre-schooling, as well as mass media—have been established in the country.⁶² The attitude towards the study and teaching of Jewish civilization has changed radically. This theme was practically non-existent in the Soviet scientific and educational discourse. On the other hand, during 1958-1989 in Ukraine, 207 titles of anti-Zionist literature were issued with a total circulation of 4,874,000 copies (405 and 17,200,000 respectively, throughout the entire USSR).⁶³ The vast majority of these publications was highly politicized and literally demonized Judaism. And since Judaism is a phenomenon where ethnic and faith constituents were inextricably linked, and this religion crystallized as a centuries-old religious experience of the Jewish people, a way of life that reflected in a very unique form the evolution of Jewish social and historical institutions, such propaganda had not only anti-religious, but also anti-national character. After independence,

⁵⁹ Yevhen Sverstyuk wrote from the Soviet camp in 1977 “[t]hat even a single fact of solidarity between Ukrainian and Jewish prisoners of conscience overlapped a hundred obscure facts about Ukrainian-Jewish misunderstandings. “Ukrainians are inspired by the miracle of the revival of Israel, the miracle of endurance of the people through thousands of persecutions have kept their spirit and carried the will for a free life. “And you once fought like Israel, my Ukraine”, - Lesya Ukrayinka's voice is heard. “And you will rise again, as Israel has risen”, echoes in our hearts”. Quotation from: *Слово*. 1990. Листопад.

⁶⁰ “Проти ксенофобії, за європейську Україну.” *Львівська газета*. 14 липня 2005 року.

⁶¹ See, among others, “Спільне звернення до віруючих та усього українського суспільства» Глави Української Греко-Католицької церкви Блаженнішого Святослава (Шевчука) та Головного рабина Києва та України Якова Дов Блайха з приводу антисемітської промови священика Михайла Арсенича (грудень 2013 р.)” https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/confessional/religious_relations/54616/ Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁶² Association of Jewish organization and communities of Ukraine (Vaad) in the beginning of 2019 was made up of 266 organizations. See, “Общинный отчет «Деятельность Ваад Украины в 2018 г.»” http://vaadua.org/sites/default/files/files/%D0%9E%D1%82%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82%20%D0%92%D0%B0%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B0%202018%20%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4_%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%9C%D0%91_%D0%98%D0%97-2_%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%20%D0%B8%20%D1%81%D1%84%D1%83.pdf; Accessed 06/01/2020; United Jewish organization of Ukraine – 140. <https://jew.org.ua/partnership> Accessed 06/01/2020; Confederation of Jewish organization of Ukraine – six. <https://jcu.org.ua/organizations> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁶³ С. Авербух, “Антисіоністська кампанія на Україні 1967-1990 рр. *Еврейские вестни*. 1993. Октябрь.

Ukrainian Judaica began to take shape in the country--that is historical, philosophical, sociological, religious, cultural, and anthropological studies of the Jewish civilization in Ukraine.

Jewish studies started to be taught at the International Solomon University in Kyiv and Kharkiv where additionally the International Center for Khazar Studies was inaugurated, and at the Kyiv-Mohila Academy where the graduate certificate program in Judaica provided an opportunity for doctoral students enrolled at the Academy to acquire an interdisciplinary grounding in Judaic Studies. In 2003, the South-Ukrainian Jewish University “Chabad-Odessa” was found with the assistance of the Odessa Jewish Community. The university focuses on finance, social science, and humanities with special reference to Jewish history, culture, and religion. At Donetsk University, the teaching of Judaism is carried out in the Laboratory for the Study of Jewish culture, and some courses in Judaism are taught at universities of Lviv, Simferopol, Chernivtsi, Zaporizhia, Mykolaiv, and other cities. In addition, there is a department of Jewish history and culture at the Institute of Ethno-National and Political Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; research is carried out at the Institute of Judaism and the All-Ukrainian Center for the Study of Holocaust History and in the Regional Research Center for the Study of the Southern Ukraine Jewish population at Zaporizhia University. Since 2000, the Ministry of Education of Ukraine has introduced a special course "History of the Holocaust," which is taught at many Ukrainian universities.⁶⁴ In addition, 1,246 secondary school students studied Hebrew at the beginning of this century.⁶⁵

An important place in the revival of Jewish religious and social life involves proper refurbishment of the holy places of Judaism, the graves of prominent *tzaddiks*, rabbis, and connoisseurs of the Jewish Law. In Ukrainian land, many notables were buried: Israel Besht in Medzhibizh, Shneur Zalman (Alter Rebbe) in Gadjach, Levy Itzhok in Berdychiv, Nachman Bratslavsky in Uman, and others. Graves of outstanding zealots of Judaism are in Kyiv, Bukovina, Chernigiv, Podillya, Transcarpathia, and many other regions of the country. Although Jews from different countries visit dozens of graves in different regions of Ukraine, the most famous and popular is the pilgrimage to the tomb of Nachman of Bratslav (Breslov) in Uman (1772-1810). The pilgrimage to Reb Nachman's grave is one of the central religious

⁶⁴ “Преподавание истории Холокоста на постсоветском пространстве” in *Евроазиатский еврейский ежегодник*. 2003. (Київ.: Дух і Літера, 2004), 75.

⁶⁵ Володимир Трошинський. “Впроваджуючи європейські гуманітарні стандарти (Основні правові та організаційні засади виконання в Україні положень Рамкової конвенції про захист національних меншин).” <http://www.saske.sk/cas/3-2001/troscinskij.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

practices of the Bratslav Hasids. Thousands of Hasids were making pilgrimage until the mid-1920s, and in the late 1980s this practice was resumed. Each of the Brazlava Hasidim must visit the *tzaddik's* grave at least once during his lifetime; some of them make pilgrimages every year.⁶⁶ While in 1988 no more than 800 Hasidim pilgrims arrived to worship Nachman's remains, in 2019 there were about 40,000 of them.⁶⁷

As of the beginning of 2020, more than 300 Jewish religious organizations were established in Ukraine and 78 clerics served in religious communities (more than 30% of them were foreigners). Religious communities founded three general education schools and 58 Sunday schools (it should be noted that the religious organizations in Ukraine obtained the right to establish general education schools only in 2015).

Almost 40% of all Jewish religious organizations belong to the Chabad-Lubavitch movement (CHaBaD--an acronym formed from three Hebrew words –*Chochmah*–wisdom, *Binah*–understanding, *Da'at*–knowledge. Chabad is believed to be the most powerful, influential, and active fraction in modern Hassidism, which combined the emotional sensitivity of Israel Besht's teaching and rabbinic knowledge).

About a quarter of Jewish religious communities belong to the Association of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, one in seven to Progressive Judaism, and thirteen organizations are under the auspices of the All-Ukrainian Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations. Almost one-fifth of all Jewish organizations in Ukraine operate autonomously, without allegiance to any particular religious center.⁶⁸

In addition, there are more than five dozen communities of Messianic Judaism and Judeo-Christian congregation in Ukraine. In fact, these communities are not Judaic, but Evangelical, focusing on missions among the Jews. Orthodox Jews take the threat of such a mission to their flock extremely seriously.⁶⁹ In order to fight against the Christian mission among Jews, the anti-missionary *Magen League* was established in Ukraine. Some years ago,

⁶⁶ Alla Marchenko. "Hasidic Pilgrimage as a Cultural Performance: The Case of Contemporary Ukraine." *Judaica Ukrainica*. 3 (2014), 60-78.

⁶⁷ "Рош ха-Шана в Умані. Як Україна приймає тисячі паломників-хасидів у 2019 році." <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/rosh-ha-shana-v-umani-2019-yak-ukrajina-zustrichaye-hasidiv-novini-ukrajini-50045521.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁶⁸ "Кількість релігійних організацій, які діють в областях України станом на 1 січня 2020 року". Форма №1. *Поточний архів Міністерства культури та інформаційної політики*.

⁶⁹ "Снова «Евреи за Иисуса»" *Еврейская газета*. №22. 2001. Июнь; "Создана Лига «Маген» Украина" *Еврейский Обзоратель*. №16/19. 2001. Декабрь.

in several cities of Ukraine during the celebration of Purim, Orthodox Jews clashed with Judeo-Christian missionaries.⁷⁰

The majority of Jewish organizations in Ukraine (though not all of them) are guided by one of the Jewish umbrella organizations (*Waad*--Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities--, United Jewish Community of Ukraine, Confederation of Jewish Organizations of Ukraine, All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress). However, there is rivalry between the leading Jewish organizations; sometimes it is even quite tough. Conflicts unfold around the aspirations and efforts of various leaders or Jewish institutions to be monopolistic representatives of the entire Jewish community of Ukraine, both on the external and internal stages. Naturally, there is also competition among religious institutions and religious leaders; suffice it to say that in the 2000s, four rabbis at once held the title of Chief Rabbi of Ukraine. They were Azriel Haikin, who served as the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine, Chairman of the Rabbinate and Rabbinate Court of the Chabad in Ukraine from 2003 to 2008; Yakov Dov Bleich, Chairman of the Association of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine; Olexander Dukhovnyi, Chief Rabbi of the communities of Progressive Judaism, and Moshe Reuven Azman, Chief Rabbi of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress, proclaimed also the Chief Rabbi of Ukraine in September 2005. It should be noted that this situation is not unique. The Jewish community in the diaspora has never had a rigid hierarchical vertical structure, and in Israel, as is known, there are two Chief Rabbis, Ashkenazi and Sephardic. Sometimes the lack of monolithic unity hindered the consolidation of religious Jewry, sometimes, on the contrary, it facilitated the revitalization of the Jewish religious life. In any case, as William Fletcher argues, the lack of a rigid power hierarchy within Jewish religious milieu prevented the Soviet leaders from successful manipulation of Jewish clergy in the international arena, sought both to achieve Soviet foreign policy goals and to neutralize the campaign for defending the Soviet Jewry rights in the West.⁷¹

In addition, religious pluralism and competition have become key features of Ukraine's religious landscape, where no Church or religious organization is able to monopolistically dominate, impose its agenda on the state and society, and demand government structures to discriminate against their competitors. This has long substantially differentiated Ukraine's religious situation from most countries of the former Soviet Union

⁷⁰ “Євреї Києва надали СБУ інформацію про провокаційні дії юдеохристиянських місіонерів” *Хрещатик*. 11 лютого 2008.

⁷¹ William C. Fletcher. “Religion and Soviet Foreign Policy: A Functional Survey” *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe* (Bohdan R. Bociurkiv and John W. Strong, eds.) (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1975), 176.

(with the exception of Baltic States), as well as from a number of countries where Eastern Orthodoxy is the majority religion. In particular, the elaborated *Government Restriction Index* by the Pew Research Center, which estimates the degree of state interference in religious affairs (the less the better), shows that at the end of 2017 Ukraine was 3.8, as compared to 4.2 for Serbia, 4.3 for Greece, 4.4 for Moldova, 4.8 for Romania, 5.3 for Bulgaria, 6.4 for Belarus and 8.1 for Russia.⁷²

In general, the post-Soviet Ukrainian Jewry confronted problems quite similar to those faced by religious organizations of other faiths, such as shortage of religious buildings, difficulties with the return of property, and lack of educated spiritual leaders able to cope with the challenges of time. But often these problems were even more acute than for other religious groups, such as the return of synagogues. Because of the specific architecture, synagogues could be more easily turned into non-sacral uses than Christian cathedrals, thus the Soviet authorities widely used them. The largest synagogues in Kyiv were converted into a film theater (Synagogue of merchants), a puppet theatre (Brotsky synagogue), and a club for railway workers (Baryshpolsky synagogue); the Choral Synagogue of Uzhgorod, erected in 1794 in the Moorish style, was turned into a philharmonic hall, the Choral Synagogue of Poltava to the House of Culture of Trade Unions, the Choral Synagogue of Odessa to the Faculty of Physical Education at the Pedagogical Institute, the Choral Synagogue of Berdychiv to the Club of Godless People, the Choral synagogue of Drohobych was transformed into a stable, then into warehouses, the Choral synagogue of Khmelnytsky into a gym, the synagogue of Krivyi Rig into a flying club, the Kharkov Choral synagogue into a Jewish workers' club. One way or another, other Jewish religious buildings, which were not destroyed in the 1930s or during the Second World War, had such destinies (although the destruction of religious buildings continued during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign and even during Brezhnev's time).

The issue of restitution of Jewish religious property was accompanied by bureaucratic delays almost every time, and difficulty finding solutions as to where this or that secular institution which stood there should be moved. The first steps in the revival of Jewish religious life were accompanied by specific problems related to the condition of Jewish cemeteries (or their absence), the need for ritual pools (*mikveh*), and the sacredness of the day of Sabbath. While drafting the new version of the 1991 "Freedom of Conscience and

⁷² "A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World." *Pew Research Center*, July 15, 2019, 94-95. // file:///C:/Users/home/Downloads/Restrictions_X_WEB_7-15_FULL-VERSION-1%20(6).pdf Accessed 06/01/2020.

Religious Organizations Law,” the representatives of Jewish religious organizations succeeded in ensuring in the draft a demand for observant Jews concerning the day off on Saturday.⁷³

Another problematic issue was the conflict that escalated in early 2007 between Jewish communities on the one hand and museums and archivists on the other, around the Torah scrolls stored in state institutions.⁷⁴ The problem was exacerbated by the fact that, according to the Jewish law, the Torah scrolls, which had fallen into disrepair, were to be solemnly buried in a cemetery, which was difficult for the archivists to accept.

To address all of these very special problems in religious life, the Chabad movement was established in September 2003 with the Chief Rabbinate headed by Rabbi Azrieli Haikin. The Rabbinate was to become the main Jewish spiritual authority in Ukraine, making the final decision on controversial issues of Jewish religious law (*Halakhah*). The Rabbinate had to deal with the most difficult issues concerning the person’s Jewishness, observation of *kashrut* (dietary laws), marital relations, and others. Ariel Haikin became Chairman of the Rabbinical Court, which was called upon to resolve conflicts regarding religious worship, public spaces (first of all, maintenance of *mikveh*), the suitability or unsuitability of products for *kosher* use, and the like. Of utmost importance from the point of view of the *Halakha* are questions related to the identity of the person, whether he or she is Jewish according to the Jewish law, or whether his or her conversion to Judaism is valid, or whether his or her marriage or divorce are legitimate. These matters take on exceptional seriousness because according to the Israeli Laws, marriage and family relations are the exclusive prerogative of the Rabbinate. Even if a divorced woman went to Israel while her ex-husband stayed in Ukraine, their divorce must be in accordance with the *Halakha*. The man must give the woman a special divorce letter (*gett*), otherwise she will not be able to marry once again and adultery regulations can still be applied to her. In case of her husband’s death, a childless widow has to marry her deceased husband’s brother. In order to avoid this duty, the widow must normally go to a special ceremony (*halitzah*) before the Rabbinate. Despite the complexity of the issues, Jewish religious people addressed them to the Rabbinate in the end. Chabad rabbis in Ukraine decided to take the path of decentralization of religious structures, not to prolong the activities of the Rabbinate and not to replace the Chief Rabbi, the

⁷³ Михаил Эйвин. “Новый шаг к демократии” *Еврейский обозреватель*. № 17 (132). Сентябрь 2006 (5766 Элул).

⁷⁴ “Заявление Главного раввина Украины Азриэля Хайкина о ситуации с возвращением Свитков Торы еврейским общинам Украины (март 2007 г.)” http://www.rabbinate.org.ua/ru/docs.php?show_doc=8 Accessed 06/01/2020.

successor of Azriel Haikin, when he left Ukraine in 2008, at the age of 70. In fact, in this time the Rabbinate Court has ceased to function as well, and in the most difficult cases requiring serious *halakha* expertise, the Ukrainian Chabad rabbis started to invite authoritative colleagues from abroad, mostly from Israel.

Meanwhile, the extensive educational activities of Jewish cultural, educational, and religious structures have led to a serious increase in national consciousness and awareness of Jewish history and spiritual traditions among the Ukrainian Jewry. Joint celebrations of Jewish holidays and a radical increase in information about the Jewish civilization and the life of the State of Israel have helped to attract a sufficient number of Jews to the Jewish life in its various forms, not only in large cities, but also in small settlements. According to Josef Zisels, Chairman of the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine, in every Ukrainian city with the Jews population of over 1,000 Jews have an opportunity to receive a certain level of Jewish education through already existing Jewish institutions.

Accordingly, the synagogue has ceased to be the sole center of the manifestation of Jewish identity. Already in the early 2000s, religious communities comprised only an eighth of all Jewish organizations in Kyiv; others were scientific and educational, cultural, charitable, memorial centers, centers of public life, libraries, sports associations, student unions. But although the synagogue ceased to be a universal Jewish institution, it remained one of the most important components of the Jewish community's institutional infrastructure. It made a successful attempt to become the core of the Jewish community and the center of gravity for other Jewish institutions. In addition, no single synagogue in Ukraine limited its activity to purely religious matters, but promoted charitable, cultural, youth, educational and other projects.

However, the interruption of the Jewish religious tradition could not be restored without outside support. During the 20th century, not only did hundreds of thousands of Jews leave Ukraine, but even institutions such as the center of memory about "*Yiddishland*," which once existed here. Among others that appeared outside Ukraine were the headquarters of all those Hassidic dynasties, which had formed the uniqueness of the Jewish religious culture of Ukraine. The New York district of Brooklyn became the center of the Lubavitch, Burshtyn, Hornostaipil (now a village next to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone), Zhidivskoi, Kosyv, Lutsk, Olesko Hassidic dynasties; the town of Ramapo (New York) became the center of Berdychiv and Skver Hassids (from the small town of Skvira near Kyiv); Jerusalem, Ashdod, Bnei-Brak, and other Israeli cities and towns turned into the centers of Hassidic movements, which came out from the Ukrainian towns and settlements of Beregovo, Boyany, Bratslav,

Nadvirna, Sadgora, Peremyshlany, Kamenka and Kamenka-Buska, Savran', Makhnovka, and others.⁷⁵

One of the first, who came back to Ukraine in 1990 and since then has remained in Kyiv, was Rabbi Jacob Dov Bleich, an envoy of the New York and Givat Zeev-based Carlin-Stolin Hassid community. In a relatively short period of time he managed not only to implement serious infrastructure projects for the Kyiv Jewish community and establish a reliable system of education of children and adults in the basics of Judaism, but he also gained popularity in the public sphere. In the early 1990s, Yakov Dov Bleich became the face of Jewish religion for the wider Ukrainian public, a participant in a large number of official events, and a welcome guest on Ukrainian television.

When the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations were established in 1996, Yakov Dov Bleich became the only representative of the rather heterogeneous environment of Ukrainian Judaism in this respected body. As a member of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, Yakov Dov Bleich has made a serious contribution to the advocacy of Ukraine before European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg, and in promoting the cause of Ukraine and strengthening ties between Ukrainian religious organizations and public and religious circles of the United States, Israel, and the Netherlands.⁷⁶ For several years, Yakov Dov Bleich was among the top of 100 most influential Ukrainians.⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the Chabad movement was incomparably more active than all other Jewish religious centers in the entire post-Soviet space. "Hasidism of mind" by Shneur Zalman, based on the synthesis of sincere faith and religious philosophy, was considered a reliable means of returning to Jewish values for assimilated and secularized post-Soviet Jews.

⁷⁵ At least some of these Hassidic communities adhere to very strict religious prescriptions in all spheres of life - social, economic, sexual ethics, upbringing of children, the nature of relations with "outsiders," etc., and maintain effective social control over their members. See, among others, Solomon Poll. *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg: A Study in the Sociology of Religion*. (Transaction Publishers, 2004).

⁷⁶ "Депутати Європарламенту і Рада Церков обговорили роль релігії в суспільстві." <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/events/uccro-european-parliament-mer-conference-kyiv>; Accessed 06/01/2020 "Делегація Всеукраїнської Ради Церков провела зустріч зі спікером Кнесету Ізраїлю." <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/events/uccro-in-knesset-2019> Accessed 06/01/2020 ; "Делегація Ради Церков відвідує Нідерланди з метою популяризації України." <https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/32361-delegaciya-radi-cerkov-vidviduye-niderlandi-z-metoyu-populyarizaciyi-ukrayini.html> Accessed 06/01/2020; "Делегація Всеукраїнської Ради Церков у Канаді та США провела низку зустрічей на високому рівні." <https://vrciro.org.ua/ua/events/delegaciya-vseukrayinskoyi-rady-cerkov-u-kanadi-ta-ssha-provela-nyzku-zustrichey-na-vysokomu-rivni> Accessed 06/01/2020; "Підсумкове комюніке з приводу візиту делегації Всеукраїнської Ради Церков до Брюсселю (6-7 березня 2013 р.)" <https://www.irs.in.ua/ua/pidsumkove-komyunike-z-privodu-vizitu-delegaciji-vseukrajinskoji-radi-cerkov-do-bryusselyu-6-7-bereznya-2013-r> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁷⁷ "100 самых влиятельных украинцев." https://focus.ua/files/2016/txt/12/23/15_50.jpg Accessed 06/01/2020.

Some journalists even coined a new term to describe the situation in Ukrainian Judaism: *Chabadization*.⁷⁸ Emissaries of the 7th Lubavitcher rebbe (*shlukhim*) Menachem Mendel Schneerson (born in 1902 in Mykolaiv, now Ukraine, died in 1994 in New York), founded Chabad communities in Kyiv (Dov-Ber Karasik), Kharkiv (Moshe Moskovich), Odesa (Ishai Gisser), Kherson (Abraham Wolf), Dnipropetrovsk (Shmuel Kamenetsky), Zhitomir (Shmuel Plotkin), Chernivtsi (Menachem Mendel Glicenstein), Zaporizhia (Nohum Erentroy), Mariupol (Menachem Mendel Cohen), Uzhgorod (Menachem Mendel Tayhman), Mykolaiv (Sholom Gotlib) and in other cities and towns of Ukraine. Quite often the emissaries of Lubavitcher rabbi started their mission in the localities, where the Jewish presence was hardly felt any more and there were no signs of organized Jewish cultural and religious life and even there “where rabbi has never stepped foot on.”

The *shlukhim* began their missionary work among the Ukrainian Jews with great enthusiasm and in a way that had not been practiced here before. They went on missionary visits from house to house, organized the work of mobile synagogues, set up the Torah studies for adults and children, arranged crowded meetings during religious festivals, celebrations on the occasion of the end of Torah Scroll creation, and affixation of *mezuzahs* (a piece of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah) on doorways of their followers. *Shlukhim* tried to turn every Saturday into family events (bar mitzvahs, weddings, even birthdays) not to mention the most respected religious festivities into a missionary event. In the largest cities, Chabad resorted to so-called *tefillin* campaigns. That is, Jews in crowded streets were offered to wear *tefillin* - two black leather boxes, which contain parchment with the Torah texts, and which are worn by observant Jews during prayers.

At the same time, the Chabad infrastructure was growing exceptionally fast. The dynamics of this transformation, in many ways typical for the Jewish religious life in Ukraine, can be traced to the city of Zhitomir (the population is 265,000, Jews are about 6,000). In 1994, Rabbi Shlomo Wilhelm, an envoy of the Lubavitcher Rabbi, arrived there. Two years later, a kindergarten, *Or Avner* School and *Hesed Shlomo* Charitable Centre opened in the community. Then a college for girls—*Mahon Haya Mushka*, a college for boys—*yeshiva Menachem*, the Talmud-Tora *Heyder Yaldei Menachem*, a Jewish women's club, a

⁷⁸ ШИМОН БРИМАН. “Раввины Украины: Борьба за влияние” Москва-Ерушалаим. 2019. № 63. <http://www.moscow-jerusalem.ru/politika/ravviny-ukrainy-borba-za-vliyanie/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

Jewish library, a charity canteen, and a social rehabilitation center for Jewish children *Alum* were created.⁷⁹

A similar sequence of actions characterized the activity of *slukhim* in other cities: the consolidation of Jews, the revival of the Jewish community's life if such life already existed at that time, developing of a social network and personal ties with local elites, strengthening of the rabbi's presence in public space, and supporting the Jewish religious, educational, cultural, and charitable structures. In fact, Menahem Mendel Schneerson attached great importance to the return of his movement to the land from which he once emigrated, and this greatly distinguishes Chabad from a number of other Hassidic dynasties (except, perhaps, Carlin-Stolin and Skver Hassids), who did not pay much attention to religious education among the "people upon the road," that is, the Jewish who, in their view, in the near future would completely leave the former Soviet Union.⁸⁰

Over the past two decades, Jewish rabbis have become prominent figures in the public sphere, and the most influential of them have even become part of the Ukrainian establishment. In 2007, Rabbis Yakov Dov Bleich and Shmuel Kaminetsky, along with the US and Russian ambassadors and major businessmen, were ranked among the 15 foreigners living permanently in Ukraine and most influential in the social, political, and economic life of the country.⁸¹ The Chief Rabbi of Dnipro, Shmuel Kaminetsky, who enjoyed serious support from the billionaire Victor Pinchuk, the son-in-law of the third Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and who used to visit the Presidential Office from time to time "for a cup of tea," has not lost his influence even after the change of power. Three out of six Ukrainian dollar billionaires, Gennady Bogolyubov, (with a fortune of \$2,6 billion), Igor Kolomoyskyi (\$2,3 billion), Victor Pinchuk (\$1,9 billion) and a number of millionaires are active members of his community.⁸² The Jewish businessmen claimed that Shmuel Kaminetsky acted as a mediator in financial and business disputes between Jewish entrepreneurs.⁸³ The fourth-largest Ukrainian city of Dnipro (from 1926 to 2016 it was named Dnipropetrovsk) quickly

⁷⁹ "Головний рабин Житомира та Західної України Шломо Вільгельм—про сьогоднішнього, проблеми та роль синагоги у збереженні і відтворенні єврейського життя." <https://www.religion.in.ua/main/interview/28999-golovnij-rabin-zhitomira-ta-zaxidnoyi-ukrayini-shlomo-vilgelm-pro-sogodennya-problemi-ta-rol-sinagogi-u-zberezhenni-i-vidtvorenni-yevrejskogo-zhittya.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸⁰ Семен Чарный. "Иудаизм на просторах СНГ." *Евроазиатский еврейский ежегодник*. 5766.2005/2006.— Киев: Евроазиатский еврейский конгресс, 2006, 75.

⁸¹ "Агенты влияния на Украину" <https://focus.ua/politics/14671> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸² Катерина Шаповал. "Російські євреї зомбовані телебаченням. Шмуель Камінецький розповідає про розкол між українськими і російськими євреями". *Нове время*. 2 жовтня 2015 <https://nv.ua/ukr/publications/rebe-poslav-mene-sjudi-shchob-jevreji-buli-shchaslivi-shmuel-kaminetskij-mirkuje-pro-mistsevih-bagatijiv-i-bidnjakiv-73265.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸³ Walter Ruby. "Ukrainian rabbi sees decline in power." <https://www.jta.org/2005/01/23/lifestyle/ukrainian-rabbi-sees-decline-in-power> Accessed 06/01/2020.

became a center of Jewish social and religious life on an all-Ukrainian scale. The Dnipro's billionaires opened the Menorah complex there in 2012, which claimed to be the world's largest Jewish community center. The complex, which included the Golden Rose Synagogue and Holocaust museum, consisted of seven towers that represented the Menorah of the Jerusalem Temple. The highest 20-story tower reached 77 meters; the total area of the center was over 50,000 m².⁸⁴

From time to time Chabad rabbis tried to "friendly absorb" all other fractions of Orthodox Judaism both in Ukraine and in other post-Soviet countries. Sometimes it led to the so-called "Rabbinical Wars," which, however, rarely went beyond the Jewish communities. Tensions related to competition between rabbis for influence on political and state elites became more public. So, when in 2019 Volodymyr Zelensky, a Jew by origin, became the 6th President of Ukraine, he held traditional Head-of-State meetings with the Ukrainian religious leaders; however, for his meeting with Jewish rabbis, only representatives of Chabad were invited.⁸⁵ This caused discontent among the other rabbis, in particular of Rabbi Jacob Dov Bleich. On the 78th anniversary of the shootings of Jews by the Hitlerites in Kyiv's Babyn Yar, Rabbi Bleich strongly criticized President Zelensky, who, in his opinion, did not honor the memory of the victims.⁸⁶ In turn, Chabad rabbis insisted that President Zelensky honored the memory of the victims of the Babyn Yar Holocaust "in private" and in a very harsh tone condemned Rabbi Bleich.⁸⁷

The religious practices introduced by the emissaries of the Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbi, as well as by representatives of other foreign Jewish religious centers, were very different from those that existed in the religious life of Jews in post-Soviet Ukraine. They seemed to be too rigid and little known even to synagogues' elders who were considered in their communities as the custodians of old customs and religious behavioral norms. The deformations, to which the ritual and cult sphere of Judaism was subjected during the Soviet times, were perceived by some of them as something normative. In addition, as Jewish settlements were dispersing more and more, Ukrainians dominated in their referent groups.

⁸⁴ "У Дніпропетровську відкрито найбільший у світі єврейський центр 'Менора'." *День*. 17 жовтня 2012. <https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/news/111112-u-dnipropetrovsku-vidkrito-naybilshiy-u-sviti-ievreyskiy-centr-menora> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸⁵ "Зеленський на зустрічі з рабинами попросив підтримати його ініціативу про діалог із жителями окупованої частини Донбасу та Криму." <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/585717.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸⁶ "Рабин Блайх звинуватив Зеленського у відсутності в Бабиному Яру в роковини." *Україна молода*. 30 вересня 2019 року. <https://umoloda.kyiv.ua/number/0/2006/137877/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁸⁷ "Объединенная еврейская община Украины выражает протест против заявления Блайха на марше памяти в Киеве". <https://jewishnews.com.ua/society/oeou-vyirazhaet-protest-protiv-zayavlenij-blajxa-na-marshe-pamyati-v-kieve> Accessed 06/01/2020.

This has had a very serious impact on the funeral rituals, (lack of) observance of Saturday rest, *kashrut* rules, and the like. Aged Jews, informants for anthropologists who conducted field research in the Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi, expressed outrage at the overly strict approach of the young Israeli rabbi toward the ritual restrictions in everyday life. They also criticized his colleagues for the demand to bury the deceased woman with a covered face according to the Judaism's funeral rite, but contrary to the traditions that had developed in the community under the influence of the long coexistence of Jews and Ukrainians.⁸⁸

A somewhat lower adaptive threshold for the entry into religious life has been offered to the secularized post-Soviet Jews by progressive Judaism. Its communities in Ukraine were also founded largely thanks to the efforts of foreign centers. Reformed Judaism did not receive much support in Ukraine at the time. The Jewish Enlightenment movement in Ukraine which acquired specific features in Galicia (the famous "Galician *Haskalah*") did not follow the path of the German *Haskalah*. The high concentration of the Jewish population in Galicia (about 12% at the beginning of the 20th century) and the high authority of rabbis and strong resistance of powerful Hassidic movement prevented the wide spread of Reformed Judaism.

Reformed Judaism did not become a truly popular phenomenon among the Jews within the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. Noting the interest of an increasing number of young Ukrainian Jews in modernist movements in Judaism, it would be premature to talk about its radical spread even nowadays. The most vivid example in Reformed Judaism in contemporary Ukrainian modern Judaism is the Religious Association of Progressive Judaism Communities in Ukraine, which dates back to the "*ha Tikva*" ("Hope") congregation founded in Kyiv in the early 1990s by young Jewish enthusiasts. The association, which is a member of the World Union of Progressive Judaism, includes more than forty communities; about 12 to 13 thousand people participate in the community programs on the regular basis. Since 1999, communities of Progressive Judaism in Ukraine have been headed by Rabbi Olexander Dukhovnyi.

Later, in 2006, the representative office of *Midreshet Erushalaym*, an Israeli organization engaged in educational activity within the framework of another branch of modern Judaism, namely, the Conservative Judaism Movement, was established in Ukraine,

⁸⁸ Марія Каспіна. "Народный иудаизм: варианты религиозных практик (по материалам экспедиций к евреям Украины и Молдавии, 2004–2011). "Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом. 2015. № 3 (33), 20-21.

and the Educational and Cultural Center of the Conservative Judaism Movement was opened in Kyiv.

Conclusions and Perspectives

Thus, Judaism in Ukraine in the 21st century is a phenomenon that has been decisively influenced by at least six major factors. Firstly, it is the history of Jewish religion in the Ukrainian land, which is marked by such unique phenomena as Hasidism, Galician *Haskalah*, incomparable Yiddish civilization, and other fundamental spiritual processes, without which the world Jewish culture cannot be imagined.

Secondly, it is a process of desecularization, which has spread all over the world since the 1970s and returned religion to the public sphere as a powerful factor of political and ethnic mobilization. Religion has triumphantly outlived both nationalisms and totalitarian regimes, which tried to become religions themselves.

Thirdly, it is a massive religious revival in a vast land, from the Elbe River to the Kamchatka Peninsula, which for many decades has been the object of a quasi-atheistic experiment.

Fourthly, it is the rise of national consciousness and the multiple increase of interest in identities in the newly independent states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia, including, to a special extent, Ukraine.

Fifthly, it is a conservative turn and appeal to the Orthodox Judaism of a large number of Jews across the globe who grew up in secular families and who chose to return to their Jewishness through the acceptance of fairly strict religious norms.

Finally, it is a striking, even aggressive missionary activity among the Ukrainian Jews of foreign Jewish religious centers' emissaries, especially those of Chabad-Lubavitch movement.

At the same time, the future of Judaism in Ukraine largely depends on the Ukrainian Jewry demographic composition. Despite the fact that some Jewish intellectuals consider the separation of "Jewish religion" from "Jewish nationality" as an extremely important tool for the consolidation of the World Jewry and for deepening self-consciousness of all Jews, the perception of Judaism as a decisive factor of Jewishness is still a mainstream direction within the Jewish social thought.

Meanwhile, from 1989-2005, 301,000 Jews emigrated from Ukraine. Almost half of them went to Israel, 26% to Germany, 20% to the USA.⁸⁹ In the following years of emigration, the flow of Jews decreased dramatically; in 2005, only 681 Jews left Ukraine, but the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the war unleashed by Russia in the East of Ukraine again led to the increase of Jewish emigration. The war forced more than two million people to leave their homes; 1,177 thousand of them became internally displaced persons and 760,000 went outside the country.⁹⁰ As a result, in 2014 Ukraine was ranked ninth largest country in terms of the number of internally displaced persons;⁹¹ opinion polls showed that more than half of the respondents in Donetsk and Luhansk and one of five in Kyiv had families, friends, and relatives among the refugees.⁹² Most of the Jewish community left Donetsk with the beginning of hostilities, where pro-Russian gunmen killed George Zilberbord, a member of the Jewish Community Board of Trustees. Most Jews from Donetsk moved to Kyiv, 545 of them emigrated during 2014 to Israel.⁹³ In 2015, at the initiative of Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman and with the support of Ukrainian and foreign philanthropists, near Kyiv, next to the founder of the Chernobyl Hassidic dynasty Rabbi Mordechai Twersky (1770–1837) burial place, a settlement was built for Jews-refugees from the war zone in Donbas.⁹⁴ The name of the village is borrowed from Sholom Aleichem's play “Tevye the Dairyman.” The residents of the village adhere to the Jewish way of life and the prescriptions of Judaism in a fairly strict version. The Jewish public figure Uriel Stern hopes that Anativka will become a symbol of the Jewish moral spirit.⁹⁵

At the same time, demographers, Jewish scholars, and religious figures claim that the number of Jews in Ukraine is much higher than is believed. They draw attention to the fact that the increase in Jewish cultural and religious life in a given city leads to a noticeable

⁸⁹ Йосиф Зисельс. “Динамика численности еврейского населения Украины.” <http://www.vaadua.org/analitika/dinamika-chislenosti-evreyskogo-naseleniya-ukrainy> Accessed 06/01/2020

⁹⁰ “Ukraine IDP Figures Analysis”// <http://www.internal-displacement.org/europe-the-caucasus-and-central-asia/ukraine/figures-analysis/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁹¹ “UN names Ukraine ninth in the world by the number of internally displaced persons”, <https://uawire.org/un-names-ukraine-ninth-in-the-world-by-the-number-of-internally-displaced-persons> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁹² *Migration and the Ukraine Crisis. A Two-Country Perspective*. Ed. by Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Greta Uehling. (Bristol, England, E-International Relations, 2017), 33.

⁹³ “Количество евреев, желающих вернуться из Украины в Израиль, выросло втрое.” <https://tsn.ua/ru/ukrayina/kolichestvo-evreev-zhelayuschih-vernutsya-iz-ukrainy-v-izrail-vyroslo-vtroe-402446.html> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁹⁴ “Как евреи создали на пустыре под Киевом маленький Израиль для временных переселенцев из Крыма и зоны АТО.” <https://idps.in.ua/2016/06/17/kak-evrei-sozdali-na-pustyire-pod-kievom-malenkiy-izrail-dlya-vremennyih-pereselentsev-iz-kryima-i-zonyi-ato/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

⁹⁵ “Евреи Донбасса. Война и мир.” *Лехаим*. 4 октября 2015. <https://lechaim.ru/events/evrei-donbassa-voyna-i-mir/> Accessed 06/01/2020.

increase in the local community at the expense of those who have not previously mentioned their Jewish roots.

Experts argue that in Ukraine, as in other post-Soviet countries, there is the so-called Jewish "ethnic core" (for Ukraine it was 50,000 at the beginning of 2019) and "enlarged Jewish population." Israeli social psychologist, Elizer Feldman, attributes to this "enlarged Jewish population" a large community of "supporters of the Jewish people" he discovered in Ukraine. People, who feel that they belong to this community, willingly attend Jewish events, have some signs of Jewish identity, although they have little understanding why they are Jews. He even calls the community of these people "multi-millionth," although other researchers estimate it more modestly—as 1.4-1.5 in regard to the "ethnic core,"⁹⁶ namely the "enlarged Jewish population" is about 70,000-75,000 (50,000 x 1.4-1.5).

To this number should be added a group of Jews who returned to Ukraine after emigration. Some of them live in "two countries" at the same time, some of them have returned forever, including Israelis who permanently or temporarily live in Ukraine. According to the estimation of the Ambassador of Israel to Ukraine, there are 45,000 Israelis staying here every single day.⁹⁷

In addition, in recent years, a phenomenon has emerged in Ukrainian public life, which can be conventionally called "intellectual" or "cultural" *giyur*.⁹⁸ Intellectual or cultural *giyur* is a conditional term coined to describe the situation when non-Jews immerse themselves into the Jewish civilization through inclusion to the Jewish culture in the broadest sense of the term: studying the Jewish history, Hebrew, customs, cuisine, participating in Jewish events, etc.

The leaders of Jewish centers and communities in Ukraine are quite optimistic about the future of the Jewish religion in Ukraine.⁹⁹ They emphasize that they do not see a decrease in the number of Jews participating in the religious life of their communities. Moreover, they observe an increase in the number of young people and their very active participation in programs implemented by Jewish communities. To the Jews, who take part in them, are

⁹⁶ Владимир (Зеэв) Ханин. "Социологические и политологические аспекты полемики о еврейской демографии постсоветской Евразии." Велвл Чернин, Владимир (Зеэв) Ханин (ред.) *Евреи Европы и Азии: состояние, наследие и перспективы. Сборник научных и публицистических статей*. Том 1 (2018-2019/5779). (Евро-Азиатский Еврейский Конгресс, 2019), 50-52.

⁹⁷ Владимир (Зеэв) Ханин. "Израильская диаспора в Украине: структура, динамика и идентичность" *Judaica Ukrainica* 3 (2014): 84.

⁹⁸ *Giyur* is the process by which non-Jews adopt the Jewish religion and become members of the Jewish community.

⁹⁹ Author's interview with the Chief Rabbi of Chabad in Kyiv Rabbi Jonathan Binyamin Markovitch. May 27, 2020.

added non-Jews— members of their families as well as friends and colleagues who have no Jewish roots at all. Obviously, Ukraine, which enriched the Jewish civilization with Hasidism, gave it a whole plethora of outstanding Jewish figures and remarkable cultural heritage both tangible and intangible, even after the Holocaust and other tragedies of the 20th century. It has not lost its role as an important center of the Jewish religion.

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