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ADAPTATION PRACTICES AND FORMS OF STRUGGLE IN JEWISH COMMUNITIES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW IN SOVIET UKRAINE (1920S – 1930S)

By Tetiana Savchuk

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the reconstruction of the ways of adaptation of the Jews to the Soviet anti-religious experiments and the definition of forms of counteraction to these attacks during the 1920s and 1930s. There is insufficient research in the historiography of the struggle of Jews for the preservation of their religious worldview. The development of historiography shows a certain imbalance in the studies of the methods and extent of anti-church policy while ignoring the reaction of believers to the Bolshevik experiments. Based on archival documents of the Soviet secret services (not previously introduced into scientific circulation) and memoirs, it is shown that the interweaving of religious norms and the daily life of the Jews contributed to the preservation of the religious worldview and was an important internal motivation to oppose anti-religious values. In the 1920s, in the absence of total control, communities boldly dared to resist, opposing the idea of a day off on Sunday, sabotaging community registration, engaging in bureaucratic red tape that accompanied community interaction with the authorities on construction, renovation, or closure of synagogues. Attempts to resist control over the religious life of believers were responded by repressive actions of authorities and could not be long-lasting and large-scale. However, even the documents of the second half of the 1920s convey such resistance. In the 1930s, the closure of synagogues forced communities to adapt to new realities. In-home prayer meetings, which contributed to the preservation of religiosity, were held clandestinely in the 1930s. The so-called “migration” of synagogues began when the authorities closed a synagogue in one place, and the believers, renting a house, opened it in another place. The counteraction of the processes of secularization was the activity of Jewish preachers—*maggids*, who visited synagogues and delivered speeches about the need to preserve the religious worldview. Despite continuous control, authorities were unable to stop these actions in the 1930s. The system of spiritual education has undergone significant changes. Jewish worshippers were forced to adapt their religious rites to the realities of life. Adaptation practices and forms of struggle for the preservation of Judaism contributed to the preservation of the religious identity of the Jews in Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s.

Key words: rabbi, Jewish clergy, Soviet Ukraine, Soviet power, synagogue, religious worldview, anti-religious policy, forms of counteraction, *maggid*.

Introduction

The occupation of Ukrainian lands by the Bolshevik forces marked the beginning of not only political and socio-economic experiments, but also led to the large-scale introduction of materialist values and anti-church/anti-religious ideology. In fact, there was an acute struggle between the two worldviews in society. Despite the destructive influence of Soviet policy on community ministries, repression against the clergy in the 1930s, and the total extermination of the Jews by the Nazis during the Soviet-German war, 35 Jewish communities were able to officially register in the regions of the USSR (excluding Western Ukraine) in 1948.¹ This revival of religious life could not have happened without the preservation of religious views and the struggle of the Jews for their distinctive spiritual world on the eve of the Second World War. The analysis and evaluation of counteraction to anti-religious attack and adaptation practices is a socially important task, as it leads to the understanding of the peculiarities of Jewish identity, the processes of counteracting secularization, and assimilation in Soviet Ukraine.

The question of adaptive practices and the struggle to preserve the religious worldview of the Jews has not yet been the subject of special consideration in historiography. Historical science lacks research on the religious life of the Jews in the 1920s and 1930s, in contrast to works on the history of Jewish communities in the pre-revolutionary period. The authors of the studies on the history of the Jewish people in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s chose the socio-economic situation of the Jews, the activities of political and public organizations, and the repression against members of the Jewish minority as the subject of their research.²

¹ П. М. Бондарчук, *Релігійні течії в радянській Україні (середина 1940-х – середина 1980-х років). Історико-релігійнознавче дослідження* (Київ: Інститут історії України НАН України, 2019), pp. 90–91. [P. M. Bondarchuk, *Religious Currents in Soviet Ukraine (mid-1940s – mid-1980s). Historical and Religious Studies*].

² В. О. Доценко, *Об'єднатися щоб вижити: єврейський громадський рух в Україні (60-ті pp. XIX ст. – 30-ті pp. XX ст.): монографія* (Вінниця: ТОВ “Нілан-ЛТД”, 2014), pp. 200–300. [V. O. Dotsenko, *Unite to Survive: Jewish public motion in Ukraine (of 60th XIX – 30th XX century): monograph*]; О. В. Козерод, *Євреї України в 1921–1929: монографія* (Варшава: European World Publishing, 2019), pp. 10–320. [O. V. Kozerod, *Jews of Ukraine in 1921–1929: monograph*]; М. Лутай, *Євреї на Житомирщині: історія і сьогодення* (Житомир: Видавництво ЖДУ імені Івана Франка, 2011), pp. 20–25. [M. Lutai, *Jews in the Zhytomyr Region: History and Present*]; О. Я. Найман, *Історія євреїв України* (Київ: Академія історії та

Academic discourse also touched on the mechanisms and forms of the anti-religious policy of the government. O. Vitrynska³, A. Kerzhner⁴, O. Krichker⁵, V. Chentsov⁶ are the authors of sporadic works devoted to various aspects of the anti-Jewish policy of the Soviet government. L. Hrynevych and V. Hrynevych, identifying the main trends in the development of Jewish life in the period of the new economic policy, drew attention to the presence of counteraction to the anti-religious policy among Jewish worshippers and the clergy. To confirm their thesis, scholars cited the fact that the All-Union conference was held in Korosten in 1926; its participants demanded the free practice of their religion. A peculiar form of the struggle, according to scholars, was the non-attendance of public schools by 38,000 Jewish children and their education in underground Jewish religious institutions in the mid-1920s.⁷

The analysis of the national historiography shows a certain imbalance in addressing the worldview conflict. If the stages and extent of the anti-church policy of authorities were reflected in literature, the second participant in the worldview confrontation—believers and ministers—remained in the pages of scientific works mostly as a voiceless object.

The aim of the article is to reconstruct the ways in which the Jews adapted to Soviet anti-religious experiments and to identify forms of counteraction to the anti-religious attack by Jewish believers during the 1920s and 1930s.

культури євреїв України ім. Шимона Дубнова, 2003), pp. 400–439. [O. Y. Naiman, *History of the Jews of Ukraine*]; Б. З. Непомнящий, *Херсон єврейський. Трагедии и судьбы* (Херсон: Олди-плюс, 2004), pp. 48–90. [B. Z. Nepomnyaschiy, *Jewish Kherson. Tragedies and destinies*]; В. С. Орлянський, *Євреї України в 20–30 роки ХХ сторіччя: соціально-політичний аспект* (Запоріжжя: ЗДТУ, 2000), pp. 5–240. [V. S. Orlianskyi, *Jews of Ukraine in the 20-30s of the XX century: socio-political aspect*]; Л. Якубова, *Повсякденне життя етнічних меншин радянської України у міжвоєнну добу* (Київ: Інститут історії України, 2011), pp. 180–202. [L. Yakubova, *Everyday Life of the Ethnic Minorities of Soviet Ukraine during the Interwar Period*].

³ О. В. Вітринська, *Політика радянської влади щодо юдаїзму в Україні в 1921–1929 роках* (Харків, 2016), pp. 2–254. [O. V. Vitrynska, *The policy of the Soviet government towards Judaism in Ukraine in 1921–1929*].

⁴ А. Кержнер, “Релігійне життя. Хасидизм”, *Нарис з історії та культури євреїв України* (Київ: Дух і Літера, 2009), pp. 272–273. [A. Kerzhner, “Religious life. Hasidism”, *Essay on the History and Culture of the Jews of Ukraine*].

⁵ О. Крічкер, “Боротьба радянської влади за витіснення релігійної свідомості з традиційного життя єврейських громад у 1920-х рр. (на прикладі містечок Правобережної України)”, *Гілея: Науковий вісник. Збірник наукових праць* 48 (6) (2011), pp. 127–132. [O. Krichker, “The struggle of the Soviet government for the displacement of religious consciousness from the traditional life of Jewish communities in the 1920s (on the example of the towns of Right-Bank Ukraine)”, *Gileya: Scientific Herald. Collection of scientific works*].

⁶ В. В. Ченцов, “Штрихи до портрета одного в’язня (Л. З. Шнеєрсон)”, *3 архіви ВУЧК-ГПУ-НКВД-КГБ* 1/2 (1997), pp. 227–239. [V. V. Chentsov, “Touches to the portrait of a prisoner (L. Z. Schneerson)”, *From the archives of the VUCHK-GPU-NKVD-KGB*].

⁷ В. Гриневич, Л. Гриневич, “Євреї УСРР у міжвоєнний період”, *Нарис з історії та культури євреїв України* (Київ: Дух і Літера, 2009), pp. 154–155. [V. Hrynevych, L. Hrynevych, “Jews of the USSR in the interwar period”, *Essay on the history and culture of the Jews of Ukraine*].

Jewish Communities' Counteraction to the Anti-religious Policy of Authorities

With the occupation of Ukraine by Bolshevik troops from Russia and the absence of an all-out attack on religious freedom, Jewish communities resolutely defended their religious positions. In 1922, they opposed the idea of a day off on Sunday, as this law sanctioned the work of Jews on Saturday, the day of rest.⁸

Some communities boldly dared to meet spiritual needs without registering the statute in the administrative department of the *Okruha* Executive Committee. In 1925, such “stubborn” commissioners from Jewish and Orthodox communities were prosecuted in the Vinnytsia Okruha. The Vinnytsia Okruha Administrative Department decided to prosecute a representative of a religious community from the Dashiv district. The case reached the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs of Ukraine, which in its letter ordered the administrative department of the Vinnytsia Okruha Executive Committee to bring the commissioners to justice for the “stubborn refusal to register the community up until the last moment.”⁹

Similar cases of resistance to community registration are found in the city of Khmilnyk and Novokostiantyniv in the Vinnytsia Okruha. Despite repeated appeals from the District Executive Committee about the need to register communities, believers avoided this and continued their meetings,¹⁰ feeling that community registration would lead to total control over them. The community representative at the Hefter Synagogue in Vinnytsia, even after registering the charter, did not submit lists of community members.¹¹

Certainly, these attempts to resist control over the religious life of believers was threatened by repressive actions from authorities and could not be continuous and massive. However, even documents from the second half of the 1920s convey such resistance. On October 6, 1927, the head of the Administration of Religious Affairs of the Vinnytsia Okruha Administrative Department received a letter with the signature “Rabkor” (people’s correspondent). The anonymous author reported in his letter that there were four small synagogues near the large synagogue on Yerusalimka Street in Vinnytsia, and that they were not registered at the department. It also claimed that there was another large synagogue in the same Jewish quarter, accompanied by a small one—both unregistered. “Rabkor” asked that

⁸ С. М. Бояренцев, “Єврейська община в Полтаві”, http://poltavahistory.inf.ua/history15_u.html, accessed 25 October 2021. [S. M. Voiaarentsev, “Jewish community in Poltava”].

⁹ *Державний архів Вінницької області*. Ф.Р. 196. Оп. 1. Спр. 1389. Арк. 75. [*State Archive of Vinnytsia Region*].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, арк. 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, арк. 152–153.

the commissioners from the synagogues be brought to justice.¹² The analysis of the document shows that the communities tried to avoid unwanted control, but the country developed a system of denunciation, which did not allow these manifestations of “disobedience” to be unnoticed by authorities.

Religious communities were subjected to bureaucratic red tape, which accompanied communication between communities and authorities on building or reconstructing synagogues. Having not received a positive decision on the issue at the local level, the communities even applied to the NKVD for permission. It is known that from January 1, 1926 - March 1, 1927, two Jewish communities in the USSR were allowed to complete the construction of synagogues.¹³

The Struggle of Two Worldviews

The impulses of the struggle for the unhindered existence of communities were reflected in the daily life of Jews. The value of a synagogue was not limited to the observance of religious norms. Synagogues were a place of communication and learning the news, especially in rural areas. Even M. Stein, in his book *Shtetl in the Revolution. Essays* (1926), tried to show the reconstruction of Jewish life according to the Soviet style in the colony of Novozlatopil in the Zaporizhia Okruha, in which he was forced to admit that the square in front of a synagogue served as a gathering place for the elderly and the young. It was the place where people shared conversations about politics, the economy, and taxes. House of culture was also built near synagogues.¹⁴ Of course, the processes of assimilation and anti-religious policy did produce desired results for authorities, but, especially in the 1920s, the Jews continued to observe the religious traditions in everyday life.

A story of an individual family illustrates the strong intertwining of religious traditions and everyday life, while also illustrating the existence of an acute struggle for the souls of the people in Soviet Ukraine. Nuhim Bohman, born in 1921 in Volodarsk-Volynskii, recalled in his memoirs that on the eve of Pesach, the house was cleaned, matzo was baked, geese were slaughtered, and Pesach tableware was prepared. The boys were so interested in this

¹² Ibid., арк. 305.

¹³ Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України. Ф. 5. Оп. 3. Спр. 1064. Арк. 13. [Central State Archive of the highest authorities of Ukraine].

¹⁴ М. Штейн, “Колония Новозлатополь”, *Еврейское местечко в революции: очерки* (Москва: Государственное издательство, 1926), р. 142. [M. Shtein, “Colony Novozlatopol”, *Jewish place in the revolution: essays*].

preparation for the holiday that they left their games and became “interested spectators of these exciting events, getting in the way and disturbing the adults.”¹⁵

N. Bohman was not even 10 years old then, but his family’s religious traditions were engraved in his memory forever. N. Bohman's recollection of all four synagogues in Volodarsk being overcrowded on Saturdays and during Jewish holidays is important. This religiosity has been the subject of strong anti-religious propaganda. From the first days of school, pupils were persistently taught the basics of atheism. However, these ideas could not be more convincing than the traditions of everyday life. To overcome the religious worldview of children and their relationship with pious relatives, schools organized campaigns aimed at humiliating religious children. N. Bohman recalls how on Orthodox Easter everyone who went to church and ate painted eggs was “identified by mutual denunciations,” and their faces along with their names were painted on colored paper eggs and placed in a wall newspaper. According to N. Bohman, no suggestions or morals could achieve greater results. “We crowded around the newspaper, had a lot of fun recognizing our peers, we were not denouncing them, we were laughing at them, and, apparently, it worked,” (underlined by the author).¹⁶

The effectiveness of such brutal actions, during which the religious child felt like an outcast, an object of ridicule, soon became apparent. When the authorities eventually closed all four synagogues, it was the teenagers who tried to explain to the elderly that they were released from the “opium.”¹⁷ N. Bohman’s parents and grandmothers stopped attending the synagogue. In the 1930s, only the grandfather of N. Bohman’s family regularly continued to take part in the life of the “most honourable” fourth synagogue up until his death. However, the observance of the Sabbath and religious holidays remained a part of this Jewish family.¹⁸

The tradition of in-home prayer meetings contributed to the preservation of religiosity. Among the documents of the Vinnytsia Okruha Administrative Department, there are letters requesting permission to hold prayer meetings at home, in particular on the occasion of major Jewish holidays from September 27 to October 22—i.e., during the Jewish New Year celebrations, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.¹⁹ It is noteworthy that in a statement dated September 23, 1927, G. Gringruz, requesting permission to meet for prayer, emphasized the observance

¹⁵ Н. Бохман, *Семейная книга* (Київ: Дух і Літера, 2019), p. 15. [N. Bokhman, *Family book*].

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁹ *Державний архів Вінницької області*. Ф.Р. 196. Оп. 1. Спр. 1389. Арк. 232–233. [*State Archive of Vinnytsia Region*].

of the old custom and, just in case, attached the last year's permission.²⁰ In addition, since it was very cold in the synagogue, believers later asked for permission to gather at home on Saturdays as well.²¹ The request of A. Landa, who wanted to gather believers for prayers at his house, also received a positive decision.²²

The activity of Jewish preachers—*maggids*, who visited synagogues and delivered speeches on the need to preserve the religious worldview, was a form of counteraction to the processes of secularization. The Okruha bureau of national minorities reacted to their actions in the Zaporizhia Okruha by deciding on October 24, 1927, to ask the Okruha Executive Committee to strengthen control over the activities of *maggids*.²³

However, surveillance did not stop Jewish preachers. In the 1930s, *maggids* from Kharkiv, Kremenchuk, and Dnipropetrovsk repeatedly visited the synagogue at 12 Gogol Street in Poltava. In 1938, five *maggids* visited the Poltava synagogue. At the meeting, they read and interpreted the Talmud. The synagogue collected donations for preaching, which called for the strengthening of Judaism and the community by the Jews.²⁴

In the 1930s, the social role of a synagogue intensified. Socio-economic transformations have led to significant changes in people's lives. The Jews, when changing their place of residence and migrating across the country, often looked for new friends, advice, and help in a synagogue. This thesis can be illustrated by a life story of a former rabbi from Berdychiv, Z. Brailowsky, who was forced to look for a place to live and work in different cities of Ukraine. The acquaintances from the synagogue in Kyiv helped him and provided him with a house for a while.²⁵

In addition, synagogues continued to provide material support to their believers. Rabbis often had extensive connections with various charities abroad. Having a strong reputation, they could count on the trust of believers and became intermediaries in receiving remittances and parcels for the Jews who were in difficult circumstances.²⁶ Thus, the social ministry of

²⁰ Ibid., арк. 234.

²¹ Ibid., арк. 404.

²² Ibid., арк. 231.

²³ *Державний архів Запорізької області*. Ф.Р. 576. Оп. 1. Спр. 27. Арк. 48. [*State Archive of the Zaporizhzhia Region*].

²⁴ *Архів Управління Служби безпеки України в Полтавській області*. Ф. 7. Оп. 1. Спр. 13984. Арк. 88–89, 254–255. [*Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine in Poltava region*].

²⁵ *Державний архів Житомирської області*. Ф.Р. 5013. Оп. 2. Спр. 14727. Арк. 9, 59. [*State Archives of Zhytomyr Region*].

²⁶ *Архів Управління Служби безпеки України в Полтавській області*. Ф. 7. Оп. 1. Спр. 13984. Арк. 85. [*Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine in Poltava region*].

Jewish communities was a factor of strengthening Jewish ties with a synagogue and intensification of religious beliefs.

Adaptation of Religious Life to New Socio-political Realities

Socio-economic experiments of authorities could not but influence the peculiarities of the observance of religious norms by the Jews. Jewish worshippers, adapting to the new life realities, were forced to adjust religious rites. Adherence to religious norms, but with some changes, reflects the daily life of the Jews during the genocide committed by Soviet powers—the *Holodomor* of 1932-1933. It is noteworthy that even under the conditions of significant destabilization of an ordinary life, a Jewish person from the town of Tomashpil in the Vinnytsia region came to Rabbi D. Lieberman in Brailiv, more than 100 km away, to allow her to perform the religious custom “*halizah*.”²⁷ This was a Jewish religious rite that freed the childless widow and brother of her deceased husband from having to marry each other. The custom was to be performed in the presence of the deceased man’s brother. Under circumstances unknown to us, he could not come to the rabbi. For Rabbi D. Lieberman, this practice of performing the rite in absentia was new, and he appealed to another rabbi from Kyiv to recognize the legality of performing it on behalf of the missing person and received approval.²⁸

Other religious customs also underwent changes. The documents provide information about the Jewish rite of circumcision. Traditionally, after this action, the child’s parents organized a party, inviting many guests. However, this rite in Soviet Ukraine was already secretive and not disclosed. This explains the statement of one of Koziatyn’s Jewish worshippers during an interrogation in 1939, that the last circumcision, in his opinion, occurred in 1936.²⁹

The question of the need to perform the rite of circumcision became a source of conflict in the family of M. Rahman in Vinnytsia. M. Rahman had anti-religious sentiments and did not want his son to agree to the circumcision of his child, which was insisted on by the female part of the family and Rabbi J. Ingerleib. In the absence of the child’s father at home, the rabbi performed the custom of circumcision, although traditionally the father had to

²⁷ Державний архів Вінницької області. Ф.Р. 6023. Оп. 4. Спр. 27643. Т. 3. Арк. 52. [State Archive of Vinnytsia Region].

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., арк. 116.

participate in it.³⁰ Interestingly, one of the arguments in favor of this rite was the rabbi's mention that even communists perform circumcision.³¹ We can assume that the representatives of the party who wanted to circumcise their children as a symbol of belonging to the Jewish nationality secretly addressed the rabbi.

The system of spiritual education has undergone significant adaptation practices. The Bolshevik authorities also banned the activities of the *yeshivas* and *cheders*. Jewish children could receive spiritual education only illegally. In the city of Kremenchuk, there was an underground *yeshiva* in the 1920s.³² Even before the mass political repressions of 1937–1939, the Jews managed to preserve their children's religious education in some cities. In 1939, in Berdychiv, the punitive agency discovered the existence of a seminary in the synagogue on Staro-Judeyska Street. The seminary trained 15 boys aged from 13 to 19. In our opinion, not just religious ideas attracted teenagers. Given the difficult financial situation in the country, three meals a day during studying was an additional motivation for poor adolescents to attend classes.³³

Documents of the Soviet secret services declare the existence of religious schools in other cities of Ukraine as well, but this information cannot be accepted unambiguously and requires double verification. In Poltava, for example, authorities considered reading and interpretation of the Talmud between praying as an activity of an illegal school, which “aimed at instilling anti-Soviet nationalist views in Jewish youth and teaching them the Hebrew language.”³⁴

A separate page in the history of the struggle of Jewish believers for the observance of religious laws is the struggle for the observance of the preparation of matzo. In Soviet times, especially in the 1930s, this issue was acute. The policy of the nationalization of enterprises made it impossible to operate private mills and bakeries. For every willing Jew to eat kosher matzo on *Pesach*, Rabbi L. Schneerson from Dnipropetrovsk went to Kharkiv, where he met with the People's Commissars, as the Rabbi's wife recalls in her memoirs. The Rabbi also tried to resolve the issue of kosher matzo during a meeting in Moscow with M. Kalinin, chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union. All these negotiations

³⁰ Ibid., арк. 197.

³¹ Ibid.

³² И. Ф. Твердохлеб, *Евреи Кременчука. Исторический очерк* (Кременчуг: “Пирамида”, 2004), р. 51. [I. F. Tverdohleb, *Jews of Kremenchuk. Historical sketch*].

³³ *Державний архів Житомирської області*. Ф.Р. 5013. Оп. 2. Спр. 14727. Арк. 58–61. [*State Archives of Zhytomyr Region*].

³⁴ *Архів Управління Служби безпеки України в Полтавській області*. Ф. 7. Оп. 1. Спр. 13984. Арк. 2. [*Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine in Poltava region*].

yielded results and matzo was prepared for the Jewish worshippers in compliance with all traditions. The preciseness and scrupulousness in the observance of religious laws in making matzo are impressive. Officials from the communities made two mills kosher. Special persons— *mashgiachs*—controlled the activities at the mills. A letter was sent to the Okruha Executive Committee with a list of 10 requirements that mill and bakery workers had to comply with. If the dough was on the table for more than the set time, it was given to the bakery for other needs. This regulated process and the degree of fidelity to religious principles and traditions did not coincide with the statements made in the newspapers about the decline of Judaism. Believers from all over Ukraine, Belarus, Moscow, and Leningrad went to Dnipropetrovsk for matzo.³⁵

Worshippers also appealed to relatives abroad, asking for flour to make matzo.³⁶ This issue was especially acute during the *Holodomor*. In 1933, the believers of the Poltava community of *misnagdims* received parcels of flour from the London Charitable Society to make matzo.³⁷ The attitude of the people to the observance of religious laws voiced the strength of religious ideas and traditions, even during the famine.

The social significance of the synagogues did not fit into the paradigm of the totalitarian regime that started to form. From the late 1920s, Soviet authorities set a course for the mass closure of places of worship. In some *okruhas*, believers launched a struggle to preserve communities. A researcher of the history of the Jewish people, O. Kozherod, found that in Kremenchuk, 984 Jewish worshippers signed a complaint in which they opposed the closure of the *mikvah* and the synagogue in 1927. This struggle was not successful.³⁸ In Vinnytsia, the closure of the synagogue outraged believers and resulted in a struggle to continue its activities.³⁹

It was difficult for worshippers to resist the state's anti-religious system, so they sought other means of preserving their community. With the closure of the synagogue in one place, believers moved their community to another one. The worshippers of the *Beit Hamidrash Hayashán* Synagogue in Dnipropetrovsk demonstrated an example of steadfastness when

³⁵ “Воспоминания ребецн Ханы Шнеерсон”, *Еврейская улица* 5 (2013), p. 10. [“Memories of Rebetsn Khana Schneerson”, *Jewish Street*].

³⁶ *Архів Управління Служби безпеки України в Полтавській області*. Ф. 7. Оп. 1. Спр. 13984. Арк. 178. [Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine in Poltava region].

³⁷ *Ibid.*, арк. 226.

³⁸ О. В. Козерод, *Євреї України в 1921–1929: монографія* (Варшава: European World Publishing, 2019), p. 183. [O. V. Kozherod, *Jews of Ukraine in 1921–1929: monograph*, p. 183].

³⁹ *Державний архів Вінницької області*. Ф.Р. 6023. Оп. 4. Спр. 27643. Т. 3. Арк. 206. [State Archive of Vinnytsia Region].

their synagogue, located at 4 Jevreiska Street, was closed in 1928. The believers continued to gather in another place, which was closed for the second time in April 1929, along with the *Choralna* Synagogue. For the third time, this synagogue, now located at 20 Frunze Street, was closed in 1932. The last decision to close the synagogue, which was already located at 3 Mostova Street, was made on March 21, 1934.⁴⁰

The official closing of synagogues did not stop believers. The Jews could fulfill religious norms and satisfy their spiritual needs at home. A gathering of 10 men was enough. Prayer meetings in believers' apartments or rented premises played an important role in religious practice during the 1930s, which was already destructive in nature. For example, in the urban-type settlement of Brailiv in the Vinnytsia region in 1939, 15-20 believers gathered in apartments that were rented for religious purposes. The initiators and those responsible for the lease were the ministers—a butcher, a former *melamed* and two other Jewish worshippers.

⁴¹ Of course, these believers did not ask for permission, because they understood that authorities had officially closed their community and would ban such prayer meetings. When the village council sealed the apartment, they continued to hold illegal meetings elsewhere.⁴²

Believers in the city of Koziatyn gathered up to 15 people on weekdays and up to 30 people on Saturdays in the apartment rented for 600 rubles. They could also gather for praying at homes of faithful Jews, who were given a monthly payment.⁴³

The wife of Dnipropetrovsk Rabbi L. Schneerson, H. Schneerson, recalls the circumstances of the celebration of Purim and the observance of the conspiracy:

We had a wonderful company at Purim, we celebrated until six in the morning. In addition to the elderly, there were several young men, including high school and university students, who were strictly prohibited to participate in such events. My husband was reciting the Torah, passionately uttering the words, and those present were overwhelmed with joy and devotion to him. The party also included dancing, something they were afraid to even think about at that time. People did not want to leave—it was difficult for them to part with their rabbi. [...] When, eventually, they started to leave, they didn't go all at once, but in groups of two or three, so as not to attract too much attention.⁴⁴

Conclusion

⁴⁰ А. В. Лошак, В. С. Старостин, *Синагоги Екатеринослава* (Дніпро: Герда, 2019), р. 59. [A. V. Loshak, V. S. Starostin, *Synagogues of Yekaterinoslav*].

⁴¹ *Державний архів Вінницької області*. Ф.Р. 6023. Оп. 4. Спр. 27643. Т. 3. Арк. 48. [*State Archive of Vinnytsia Region*].

⁴² *Ibid.*, арк. 50.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, арк. 93–95.

⁴⁴ “Воспоминания ребецн Ханы Шнеерсон”, р. 10. [“Memories of Rebetsn Khana Schneerson”].

The religious life of the Jews underwent significant destabilization and destructive changes in the 1920s-1930s. The communities meet the secularizing tendencies and anti-religious policies with the adaptive religious practices and the struggle to preserve Judaism. They opposed the registration, strived to control authorities, tried to resolve the issue of preservation and reconstruction of synagogues, appealing to the authorities at various levels. With the intertwining of religious traditions and the daily life of the Jews, the social functions of the synagogue led to the preservation of Jewish ties with religious centres. In the 1920s, in the absence of total control, forms of counteraction yielded results and delayed the defeat of Jewish communities. In the 1930s, large-scale repressive policies forced the Jews to seek ways to adapt to new socio-political realities. Reverence for religious holidays and traditions continued without visiting synagogues. In the second half of the 1930s, in-home prayer meetings were clandestine, and religious rites underwent some changes. These adaptive practices and the counteraction to anti-church, Bolshevik policies enabled those Jewish believers, who managed to escape the Holocaust, to continue their religious life after the Second World War.

The problem of counteraction of the Jews to anti-religious policy and processes of secularization covered in the article will hopefully contribute to the understanding of the issues of Jewish identity in Soviet Ukraine in the interdependence of all its components.