

The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1919
Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919

Elias Tcherikower

(New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1965)

Introductory Note: The document which follows is extracted from the most detailed scholarly study to date of the terrible Ukrainian pogroms in 1919, published in Yiddish by the YIVO Institute in 1965. I have commissioned this translation as part of my continuing effort to provide more historical context to our family's flight from the Ukraine eight decades ago.

The translated text describes the activities of Zeleny, one of the atamans (headmen) loosely associated with the Ukrainian nationalist military leader Simon Petlura. It was Zeleny's forces which perpetrated the bloody August 1919 pogrom in our family's hometown of Pogrebishche. That pogrom is described in some detail in this document. That pogrom also marked the coup de grâce for the Nachshen family in Pogrebishche — my Zaida Jack survived only because the pogromchiks left him for dead as he lay in his bed with typhus, while most of the rest of the Nachshens fled to the nearby city of Berdichev. Among the 350-400 dead were two of Avrum Nachshen's brothers-in-law. Zaida Jack escaped to Bessarabia, in Romania, in January 1920 following his recovery.

I would like to thank Janie Respitz of Montreal for preparing the translation. I would also like to thank Professor Gerald Tulchinsky of Queen's University for making the connection with Janie, as well as my cousin Jennifer Nachshen for introducing me to Professor Tulchinsky. Finally, I would like to thank my secretary Mylène Farand for typing the successive revisions to this translation.

NB: In order to assist the reader, I have made certain stylistic changes to the translation, added some sub-headings and a few words in square parentheses, and inserted several explanatory footnotes. Any errors in these changes or additions are my responsibility alone.

Gary Nachshen
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**Elias Tcherikower, *Di ukrainer pogromen in yor 1919*
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Chapter XI. Ataman Zeleny 1919

We have already mentioned the name Ataman Zeleny more than once, as the central figure in the uprisings around Kiev. Zeleny appeared at the same time as Atamans Angel, Sokolovski, and Struk, but he played a much more important role than they did. He had greater organizational skills and more ambition. He surrounded himself with a larger group of rebels and spread himself over a wider territory. Ataman Grigoriev, who began the large uprising in May, strove harder than Zeleny, but his rule did not last long. He was quickly liquidated, while Zeleny's uprising lasted from the end of March until September 1919. Zeleny was the prototypical representative of the rebel movement from the Ukrainian villages of this period. In radical nationalist Ukrainian circles he is portrayed as a sort of romantic figure, and he even managed to become the hero of a somewhat biographical novel.

Origins

Zeleny was the son of a poor peasant, a carpenter from the village of Tripoliye, on the Dnieper [River], about 40 kilometres from Kiev. This area produced many partisan fighters for the various uprisings in the Ukraine. His real name was Danilo Trepilo. Zeleny, which means green in Russian, was the nickname he received during the days of the Hetman,¹ since he spent time hiding in the green valleys near his village. This would remain his pseudonym. Green, the colour of the fields and forests, became the symbolic colour of the peasant uprisings.

Zeleny had a difficult life. As a child he was a shepherd, graduated from the village school and later became a carpenter in the Kiev train yards. He participated in the revolutionary movement and became a member of the Russian S.R. Party.² He soon left that party to join one of the first groups of the Ukrainian S.R. He was arrested and sent to the province of Archangel, and then became a soldier for the duration of the [First World] War. On the front, he quietly spread revolutionary propaganda.

When the [Russian] Revolution broke out, he organized Ukrainian soldiers and formed separate Ukrainian divisions. He was sent as a delegate to the Ukrainian military conference in Kiev. From the front he returned to his village. In these times of the Hetman and the Germans, Zeleny led a propaganda campaign among the peasants for an uprising. He had to hide from the Germans who were after him. He became very popular among the peasants, who admired him as a folk hero. During the uprising of the Directory,³ he organized one of the first partisan divisions and was the first to arrive in Kiev. However, Zeleny's force was not permitted to capture Kiev, and he angrily returned to Tripoliye. He adopted a radical stance. He did not think highly of the Directory; he did not regard it as the true voice of the peasants.

Early 1919

The above description of Zeleny's life, as depicted in the aforementioned novel, cannot be taken as a completely reliable source due to its fictional nature, if we compare it to other sources. The author, who actually worked with Zeleny, reports that at the workers' congress in Kiev, end of January, Zeleny and his followers came out strongly against the Directory, and Zeleny was looking for support from European generals. Zeleny started complaining: "It's better to side with the Reds."

Immediately after, a representative from Petlura's headquarters arrived demanding that Zeleny and his force return immediately to the front. Zeleny refused: "Yes, a rebellion against a rebellion." By this time Zeleny had a huge following, and was chosen by the group to be their ataman.

¹ Through most of 1918, the Ukraine was governed by Paul Skoropadsky, a puppet of the occupying German army who styled himself "Hetman" after the title used by a series of 17th and 18th Century Ukrainian Cossack leaders.

² The Socialist Revolutionary Party, a radical peasant-based party.

³ The five-man junta of Ukrainian nationalist leaders, including Simon Petlura, which ousted the Hetman from power in December 1918 after the November 11, 1918 surrender of his German backers.

Petlura reprimanded Zeleny, and as a result Zeleny joined the Bolsheviks. From another source, we know that Zeleny took part in Bolshevik battles against the Directory in the region of Vashilkov-Fastov.

In a description of the struggle against Zeleny, an eyewitness, a Bolshevik peasant who came from the same area as Zeleny, recalls that Zeleny was an excellent orator and had a tremendous influence on the peasants “who made him into a God”.

When Zeleny joined the Bolsheviks, he demanded that the authorities in the Ukraine join together with the Ukrainian Left S.R. This demand was rejected, leaving Zeleny angry. At this point, he stepped aside and declared neutrality in the ongoing struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Directory. He quickly tore away from the Bolsheviks, becoming their bitter enemy, and pushed the Red Army out of Tripoliye. In the area around Kiev, the unhappy peasants began to rally around Zeleny.

From the beginning, Zeleny was determined to capture Kiev and chase out the authorities. He began his first operations in this direction towards the end of March. This is what Zeleny himself had to say: “I joined forces with Ataman Struk, and with Bahunski, the commander of the Bolshevik regiment in Zolotonishe. At the same time, Ataman Angel appeared in the Chernigover district and Mikhno (not to be confused with Makhno) appeared in Poltavar. At a general conference in Perioslav, a plan was worked out for an assault on Kiev from various sides. Because of a betrayal by Bahunski, the plan fell through. Angel had suffered a defeat earlier and ran to me.” The driving spirit behind this combined assault on Kiev was Zeleny and his group, based in Tripoliye. Abukhov, Struk, and the rest played secondary roles.

Zeleny attacked a series of villages around Kiev. At the beginning of April, he organized an assault on Vashilkov. Connected to these operations were uprisings in Mezhygoriye, 18 kilometres from Kiev, and in Kureniovke, a suburb of Kiev.

The Bolsheviks quickly recognized a dangerous enemy in Zeleny. On April 1 a decree came down from Christian Rakovsky⁴ and People’s Commissar Podvoysky, blaming Zeleny for organizing a force, in the region of Vashilkov, that was terrorizing the population and leading hostile agitation against the Jews, as well as organizing an uprising against the authorities. Because of this, the “thief and bandit Zeleny” was declared an outlaw. A few days later, similar verdicts were handed down against Zeleny’s “helpers” Batrak, Skolovsky and Orlovski.

The Bolsheviks launched a punitive expedition against Zeleny, falling directly upon the nest of his conspiracy, burning many peasant homes in the village of Tripoliye. This had the effect of oil on a fire. Since many peasants supported Zeleny, a battle began. The Bolsheviks suffered a great defeat. Many were killed and drowned in the Dnieper. A short time later, Tripoliye was captured by the Soviet military. The Bolsheviks were still after Zeleny, but he managed to hide in the tall grasses and fields along the Dnieper.

⁴ The leader of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who were then jostling for control of the wartorn Ukraine with the Directory and various other groupings.

Mid-1919

A few months later, out he swam. By the end of June 1919, he had gathered together a new, large group of rebels, and he attacked the Bolsheviks. A stronger Red Army division, made up of workers and “Komsomolitzes”, was sent out against him, about 3,000 men in all. A real battle between Tripoliye and Obuchov erupted, lasting two days. The Bolsheviks suffered a difficult defeat, leaving behind many dead, and finding safety on the opposite bank of the Dnieper. Zeleny and his men took many prisoners.

An earlier account of what took place in Tripoliye describes how Zeleny treated his Bolshevik captives. A large group of about 800 prisoners was brought to Tripoliye and divided into two separate groups. The first group consisted of Communists and Jews. They were led to the Dnieper, where some were shot and some were drowned. The second group was made up of Red Army Christians. They were brought to a meeting where Zeleny made a speech: “We do not need Jewish power. It is our Ukraine, our bread.”

Zeleny’s great success is demonstrated by the fact that he attracted more and more followers. The peasants of Tripoliye neglected their work. “The people were nourished in the kitchens of Zeleny’s soldiers.” Zeleny struck a special food committee “where there was even white bread”.

By July-August, Zeleny had the largest rebel following in the Ukraine, if we put aside [the anarchist Nestor] Makhno, who represented a different trend in the insurrectionary movement. Zeleny’s operations attracted followers from the entire region of Kiev Province (Kiev, Vashilkov, Kaniev, Tarashta, Skvira, some from Uman, Lipovets, Berdichev and neighbouring regions on the other bank of the Dnieper).

Ataman Diatchenko worked alongside Zeleny, leading the so-called “Third Peasant Uprising Division”. This time also saw the appearance of the “independent” Yuri Mazurenko. The number of rebels in Zeleny’s camp was growing. According to Bolshevik descriptions of events in Tripoliye, Zeleny’s group numbered 25,000. This, however, is a gross exaggeration. From a Jewish account from Zhashkov, where Zeleny passed through in August, his camp is estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000. Zeleny himself recounted that at the start of his second march against the Bolsheviks, he had with him about 3,000 men, divided into a few battalions with a few machine guns. Not all of his men carried weapons. Except for his core group, many of these rebels were simple peasants armed only with scythes and axes.

The struggle between Zeleny and the Bolsheviks took on more and more of a bitter character. Zeleny continually evaded capture. In July he attacked Ruzhitsev near Tripoliye, once again killing many Red Army soldiers. He then commandeered a steamship and raced to Perioslav in Poltava province, on the other bank of the Dnieper, in order to confiscate a large sum of money. He was chased out by the Bolsheviks and returned to the Right Bank of the Ukraine, arriving in Kaharlik. There the peasants did not like him and refused him entry.

Under the circumstances, the Soviet government decided to liquidate Zeleny. A military division of a few thousand men was set up. Among them were many Red military students, under the leadership of Podvoysky himself, the People’s Commissar of War. They had artillery and armoured boats on the Dnieper. The Bolsheviks blocked his way on three sides from Obukhov, from Kaniev-Kahorlik and from the Dnieper, and attempted to capture him. A bitter battle broke out between Obukhov and Tripoliye that lasted four days. Zeleny

suffered defeat, but then raced over to the western side of Kiev Province. En route, he clashed with Stavitshche. In the course of the battles, many of his men died.

Dragging along a few hundred wounded men, he set out toward Uman. At the same time, not far from Uman, a struggle began between the Bolsheviks and the Atamans Sokol, Sokolovsky and others who had previously taken the city for a few days. The latter carried out a slaughter of the Jews and were then ejected. Thanks to Zeleny's help, Uman was captured once again. Also arriving on the scene was Ataman Tiutiunik, who had previously helped Ataman Grigoriev and had now joined Petlura's army.

By mid-August, all the atamans had entered the city. At the time, two anti-Bolshevik armies were marching on Kiev, Denikin's from the east and Petlura's from the west.⁵ There was a race to see who would capture the capital first. Zeleny left the Uman district and chased away both atamans. Upon his arrival in Kiev, he allowed Petlura's army to capture the city (August 31), a half day before Denikin. Zeleny was once again not destined to hold Kiev; that same day, Denikin's army pushed out Petlura's divisions and Zeleny was forced to flee. Petlura's command put forth a condition to Zeleny, that he fold his separate operation and join forces with the Ukrainian army.

Zeleny did not wish to be swallowed up. He claimed the Ukrainian command was wrong and questioned the political course set by the Directory. Come September, Zeleny arrived in Kamanets and had a discussion with Petlura. He was well-received, but still refused to join the Ukrainian army. In Petlura's headquarters, Zeleny was considered too left-wing, a bit of an anarchist and a non-conformist, loyal only to himself. Yuri Mazurenko provides this information about Zeleny's meeting with Petlura in Kamanets: "Zeleny remained attached to his independent position; he did not reach an agreement with Petlura and began to speak out publicly against Denikin." In an interview in a Kamanets newspaper, Zeleny said: "I came to Kamanets to reach an agreement with the high command, not for political purposes. I don't belong to any political party, and I represent one opinion to free the Ukraine from its enemies."

After leaving Kamanets, Zeleny returned to his region. Only a few rebels remained with him, and with them he began a partisan battle against Denikin's soldiers; he established a blockade around Kiev and did not allow any goods through. "Meanwhile we cannot explain why the army of the Directory is stopping them from fighting Denikin's forces," said Zeleny, "while we are battling Denikin's forces."

Soon after this battle, Zeleny was killed in a battle with the Whites near his village, in September 1919. Some sources tell us that Denikin's forces in Kiev wanted to join with Zeleny and win him over as they had done with Struk. The following is what General Denikin wrote in his memoirs: "Our Kiev-based organization, on its own initiative, joined with Zeleny's headquarters in Tripoliye. Some officers went to Zeleny to negotiate, but nothing significant came of this."

The Soviet press wrote that Zeleny belonged to the "Independents" and was a sometime Ukrainian S.R. Actually, he did not join any party; we know this from his own declarations and from other sources. He was also never connected to Petlura's organization, although at certain moments he operated together with Petlura's agents (Angel and

⁵ General Anton Denikin was the leader of the Volunteer, or White, Army, the Bolshevik Red Army's principal adversary in the Russian Civil War which raged from 1918 to 1921.

Tiutiunik). If need be, Zeleny would shoot both Denikin's and Petlura's men. He claimed to be an independent partisan leader; he also had his own definition of authority: "The authorities must listen to the people. Even though our people are not quite sure how to achieve their goal, they will not lay down arms until the fight is over." This was a primitive, foggy people power concept attributed to Zeleny. He believed the rebels should have a Soviet council without Communism. Zeleny went as far as calling his principal military unit the "First Soviet Kiev Division". However, this did not stop him from being a bitter enemy of the [Bolshevik] Soviet government. As with all the other atamans, it is hard to ascertain exactly what type of positive programme Zeleny had in mind. He never actually printed any appeals or commands.

Only once did Zeleny actually articulate his ideas. In mid-August, he was called to a City Council meeting in Uman with other atamans and leaders of rebel forces. The following is a description of that meeting, which took place in a large municipal auditorium:

"After greetings from the chairman, Tiutiunik gave a speech...In those days he was one of the leaders of the regular Ukrainian army, and like others, he saw himself as a representative of the Directory. In a beautiful speech delivered in Ukrainian, Tiutiunik welcomed the head of the insurrectionary division, Zeleny, and went on to describe the great achievements of the rebel forces which had helped the Directory free a significant part of the Ukraine from the Bolsheviks. Tiutiunik went on to say that the Directory was promoting Parliamentarianism. Zeleny stood to respond. He was of medium height with a true 'Goyish' appearance, a trim beard and laden with weapons from head to toe ...In his response, also in Ukrainian, Zeleny stressed that the rebels did not espouse Parliamentarianism, but supported the idea of a Soviet council. This idea was also supported by Rudenko, the editor of Selospilka (a newspaper that had just appeared in Uman as the official organ of the rebels). Neither Tiutiunik nor Zeleny mentioned the Jews."

Incidentally, a few days after this City Council meeting a peasant conference took place in the Uman district; this group was split in conflict between two ideologies. The conference ended in favour of Parliamentary democracy and against Soviet principles.

Zeleny and the Jews

How did Zeleny treat the Jews during his uprisings? His first encounter with the Jewish population was in December 1918, during the uprising against the Hetman. While he and his partisans were en route to Kiev, they passed through the town of Borispol. A delegation of town representatives came to him, among them a Jew. An eyewitness reported that Zeleny gave a long speech to this delegation, developing his programme and formulating his position on the Jewish question:

"I am neither a Jew-lover nor a Jew-hater. It is not because of hatred that we do not take Jews into our ranks. We are fighting for freedom and land; with freedom every resident of the Ukraine will benefit, but the land belongs only to the Ukrainians. The Jews certainly cannot take offence at this. The Jew does not need land. The Jew does not want to toil, just as the Jew does not want to fight a war... A Jew needs freedom, and he will get it."

Let him do as much business as his heart desires, as long as it is of honest and respectable character. In return for the freedom we will bring to the Jews, they should help us out with money."

When Zeleny was about to enter Kiev in December 1918, Jewish socialist activists played a role in influencing the decision of the German soldiers' commission that Zeleny's undisciplined partisan fighters should not be permitted into the city, only divisions of the regular Ukrainian army. The Directory accepted these specific conditions from the Germans and the "Sichevikes" entered Kiev.

By now, there was fear among the Jewish leadership that upon their arrival in Kiev, Zeleny and his men would lead a pogrom against the bourgeoisie, meaning the Jews. The foundation to this fear had a Ukrainian source. In the memoirs of a Ukrainian activist, we read: "It took a lot of energy not to allow Zeleny to carry out a pogrom in Kiev. They promised us we could spend three days robbing the bourgeoisie...If not for the Galician soldiers it most probably would have happened," wrote the author. Zeleny felt that he had been wronged. At the Governor's Peasant Conference in Kiev, January 1919, he openly complained that his achievement of capturing Kiev was insufficiently appreciated, since his partisans had not been allowed to enter the city.

The chauvinistic tone of Zeleny and his men brought terrible hatred to the city and to the Jews. Zeleny's biographer tells how once in a letter to the Ukrainian army commander he wrote: "We must annihilate the cities of the Ukraine because they are strange to us and hateful toward us." Translated into the language of the rebels, this meant: Start pogroms against the Jews!

In the majority of the towns captured by Zeleny's men, mass robbery took place, usually though not always accompanied by killing. The Jewish population had to supply the rebels with everything: food, clothing, money and various other items. The Jews lived in tremendous fear of Zeleny's operations, which took place in the heart of the Ukraine's Jewish area.

A Jewish resident of Zeleny's hometown, Tripoliye, recounted that there were about 1,000 Jews in the village. Zeleny did not allow his bandits to carry out a pogrom there, but he gave them a free hand in many other Jewish towns or *shtetlach*. By the beginning of April, his close associate Batrak captured the town of Vashilkov. By the end of March, the first peasant uprising had begun in the villages surrounding Vashilkov. The local guards, the Red Hundreds, stood up to the insurrectionists. The latter attacked and killed the Jewish Communist Faktorovitch, who was sent from Kiev to organize local defence, and another Jew, Lipa, the food commissar.

They began to ring church bells in the surrounding villages, calling the people to war against "the commune and the Jews". Masses of peasants gathered with scythes and axes. Zeleny and his forces carried out a massacre in Vashilkov on April 6 and 7. According to information, this particular attack was not of an especially anti-Jewish character. The peasants demanded that if the Jews turned over the Communists, they would be left alone. In the end, besides all the Communists, both Christians and Jews, about 30 Jews were killed from the general population; the town was also pillaged. In Vashilkov, a call was sent out from the "Ukrainian Uprising Revolutionary Committee", signed by Chairman Dragomiretsky, against the Bolsheviks, calling for a Soviet Independent Ukraine.

Dragomiretsky was the leader of the “Independents”, and we see that they helped out during these events in Vashilkov.

Zeleny’s men attacked the town of Rizhichev, near Tripoliye, three times. Just before Passover, they imposed a ”contributzie” and robbed and killed the Jews; they returned twice in July. On July 13, they drove 500 Jews out of town and threatened to shoot them if they did not hand over their money. They sacked the entire town, killed 20 Jews and wounded many more.

Around the same time, Zeleny’s men entered the town of Kaharlik. The first time they were there, in March, the Jews had been spared. This time, they attacked the Jewish population, robbing, beating and killing 25 Jews. In mid-July, Zeleny’s force attacked Perioslav, carrying out a pogrom which lasted four days. Besides mass robbery, they beat numerous Jews, raped Jewish women, and left 20 dead. After the fourth day, Zeleny issued a command to halt the pogrom and hand over the guilty to the courts. “But,” writes an eyewitness from Perioslav, “nobody believed in the sincerity of this command.” Zeleny spoke out at meetings about peaceful, amicable relations between Jews and non-Jews, all the while poking fun at Jewish commissars who he blamed for taking away work from Ukrainians and for sending Ukrainian bread to Russia by the pound and getting “Kerenskes” (worthless currency) in return.

At the beginning of August, Zeleny arrived in Zhashkov, in the Tarashcher region, with a large camp. They herded all the Jews into the synagogue, took 80 hostages, and demanded 1 million rubles from the town’s population. If they did not deliver the ransom, the hostages would be shot. The Jews managed to pay 100,000 rubles; some Jews were killed and some Jewish women were raped. The Jewish community was happy to have gotten off [relatively] easy. An eyewitness from Zhashkov recounted: “Zeleny’s men did not bother the Jews.”

Things did not go as smoothly in the neighbouring town of Yustingrad-Sokolovke, in the Lipovetz region. This town had a large Jewish community, about 1,000 families (600 non-Jewish families). A few days before Tisha B’Av, Zeleny arrived with a large group of a few thousand rebels. As soon as they entered the town, they killed Reb Pinkhas Rabinovitch (known as Reb Pikhasl). “Early the next morning,” recounted an eyewitness, “they chased the Jews into the Talner study house, demanded one million rubles, and took 150 young people hostage. A specially-appointed commission was selected to go around town to collect the money. The town was so impoverished from previous attacks by other mobs that they could not collect the entire amount. Meanwhile, the bandits began to kill Jews. Finally, the Jews were able to borrow 200,000 rubles from the local peasants to save the town. This was a far cry from the demanded million. Zeleny’s assistant arrived, placed a machine gun on the table and demanded another 20,000 rubles in gold. He then brought out the hostages and ordered they be beaten with swords and whips.” “Blood flowed like water,” recounted an eyewitness, “this procedure was repeated three times with ten minute breaks in between. Finally, Zeleny took the surviving 143 hostages, led them to the edge of town, and shot all except one.”

Another witness said this about the murder:

“The next day, Zeleny and his men left town, taking the young hostages with them... We assumed nothing would happen to them because Zeleny had arrested young people from another town, eventually freeing them with a

firm warning not to join the Bolsheviks. But G-d did not take pity on these young people from Yustingrad; Zeleny killed them all. The poor souls offered to join Zeleny's struggle, but this murderer merely laughed them off."

This mass murder of Jewish youth spread a horrific panic throughout the Jewish population of the entire region. Soon after, news arrived in Uman that Zeleny was on his way. This was the beginning of August, and a great fear befell the Uman Jewish community. The city had recently experienced the slaughter of Atamans Sokol, Stetsyure and Nikolsky. "The feelings of dejection and helplessness", explained a survivor, "were so great that the Jews of Uman started a rumour that there were 50 American battalions in Kiev who were going to protect them from pogroms. The only hope was that the Americans would arrive before the gangs."

Zeleny arrived a few days later. On the way to Uman, Zeleny's men carried out a series of smaller pogroms in the towns of Abukhov and Khodorov and in the villages of Vasilitchna, Skali, Sologubovke, Shamrayevke and others, all in Kiev Province. A few of these pogroms were carried out with other atamans, mostly with Sokolov.

The Pogrebishche Pogrom, August 1919

While Zeleny tried to make his way from Uman to Kiev, apparently by way of the Kazatin train line, a portion of his group fell upon Pogrebishche, a town in the Berdichev region which counted among its population 1,800 Jewish souls. At this time in Berdichev, Petlura's forces occupied the surrounding area. His army was also moving toward Kiev, forcing the Bolsheviks to give way step by step. On August 17, a Ukrainian division entered Kiev. The Jews, frightened of a pogrom, sent a delegation accompanied by musicians to the Ukrainians. There had been an effective Jewish self-defence force in Pogrebishche, formed to protect the Jews against pogroms. The Ukrainian commander subsequently disarmed the Jews so that they would not be able to defend themselves against the inevitable pogroms he knew were coming. A few days later, on August 22, the Ukrainian division left town and a band of more than 1,000 men tore through. Within a few hours they slaughtered and killed 350-400 Jews, wounding more than 100.

According to a report prepared by the leader of the Pogrebishche Jewish community, these bandits belonged to Zeleny. Other reports show that Sokolov's force was also involved, as well as local peasants who had wanted to attack the Jews for quite some time but feared the Jewish self-defence organization. A small remnant of the self-defence group hid behind the town, in an attempt to fight off the bandits, but they could not handle such a large group of fighters. The following stories illustrate dramatic episodes from the Pogrebishche slaughter.

"They conducted a pogrom with all the details," explained the chairman of the Jewish community. "They robbed, raped and killed. They did not only want our possessions, but our souls as well. They removed people from cellars and attics and killed them...Neither old nor young were spared...Among the dead were a ninety year old *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) named Mazisuk, and Binyomin Frenkel, who was 100 years old. These old Jews were killed for 'Communist crimes'."

Another eyewitness recalled that the daughter of a local businessman, a learned man and a respected Sadagora Hasid, wrestled with a soldier who was about to rape her daughter.

“Khaya-Leah, the young girl’s mother, came in like the wind. She approached the soldier and began to hit him...Unaware of the hard blow she received from the angry soldier, she quickly got up and together with her daughter began to wrestle the soldier. She threw herself at the murderer like a wild tigress. While he held the girl firmly, she began to bite his hands while tearing, throwing and hitting... “I will not let you ruin my child,” she screamed. “Money, how much do you want? Anything but not my daughter, under no circumstances!” “Fine,” agreed the tired soldier. “Give me money, and I will leave your daughter alone.” But the Jewish mother had no money. She took the soldier to her brother, but he too had no money as another bandit had just robbed him. The soldier flew into a furious rage, killing the brother and his two sons. “This is what you get for not letting me have your daughter,” yelled the soldier. The wife of one of the murdered sons wanted to take revenge on his aunt. She had to hide from ‘people’s eyes’.”

The Jewish woman paid a big price for her daughter’s honour. The same eyewitness told of yet another case: a young man, Beryl Avrum Henkels, lay in a secret hiding place and saw with his own eyes how fifteen souls, all members of his family, were murdered. When the bandits left, he emerged and began running through the town screaming with wild laughter: “Shma Yisroel, Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One. A nice G-d we have here...we should really take pride in Him...” The young man eventually calmed down and a few weeks later returned to his daily business, but at times, one could see on his face a reminder of the time he screamed ‘Shma Yisroel’. “It is quite remarkable,” added the witness, “that those who survived and witnessed these atrocities did not go completely mad.”

The pogrom in Pogrebishche left a horrible scar on the whole surrounding area. The local Jewish community sent a telegram to Kamenets, to the Ukrainian government’s Minister of Jewish Affairs Krasny,⁶ and sent a delegation to the county commissioners in Berdichev (this region was under the control of the Directory). They requested at least one wagon to be sent to transport the wounded. In the official report, it was not stated that Zeleny was responsible for this pogrom; it mentioned only “a passing echelon of bandits”. In some accounts it is not clear who was directly responsible, but the most authoritative account, written by the chairman of the Jewish community, states specifically that this was the work of Zeleny. He even claimed that Zeleny himself was in town, and at a certain point, ordered the bandits to stop, so they could continue on their way. Others wrote that the soldiers were girded in green belts, barefoot, with wild faces. It is difficult to confirm if Zeleny himself was actually in Pogrebishche, because we do know that only a couple of days later he was present in Kiev with some of his principal associates. We can confirm, however, that one of his forces played an active role in the Pogrebishche pogrom.

In the official organ of the Ukrainian S.R., *Trudova Hramada* (*Labour Community*), a passionate article was published about Ataman Zeleny, categorically denying that he had anything to do with the pogroms. “The opposite is true,” wrote the author of this article, “he would take repressive action against the ‘pogromchiks’... He had remained with his army in the area of Tripoliye for seven months, therefore making him unable to carry out any of these horrific acts against the Jews, or against the rest of the peaceful population. True, some of his bandits complained that Jews held too much power and should be beaten, but they were easily convinced that it was not right to attack the unarmed. You could indicate,” added the author, “when looking at the excessive behaviour connected to the performance of Zeleny’s men in Yustingrad, Pogrebishche and other places, the pogrom elements that began to

⁶ Pursuant to its stated policy of “national cultural autonomy” for minorities, the Directory designated a series of Ministers of Jewish Affairs, but they had no real power or influence.

infiltrate his troops were the guilty ones. An example of a guilty infiltrator is Globuiev, the brother of the well-known Kiev Black Hundreds officer from the Czarist army, who had earlier fought with Struk and then joined Zeleny using a false name.” This is how the S.R. newspaper tried to clear the name of one of the biggest atamans, leader of many pogroms.

In truth, leading pogroms against the Jews was not the main purpose behind Zeleny’s operation, as it was for Struk and even Sokolovsky. He just happened to route his insurrection through certain unlucky Jewish towns.

Zeleny’s name and personality became so popular among the Ukrainian rebels that right after his death, in 1920, an insurrectionary group was named for him. This group had a totally anti-Semitic character, without any pretense of radical ideology.

Other Atrocities

At the end of March – beginning of April 1919, there was an event just outside of Kiev that can be directly connected to Zeleny’s force. In a series of attacks during his first attempt to capture Kiev, thanks to his agitation an anti-Bolshevik movement arose in the surrounding villages. The centres of this movement were found in Petrivitzi, Vishgorod and Mezhygoriye on the Dnieper; from there you could practically touch Kiev. In these insurrectionary operations, a man named Klimenko was working closely with Zeleny. He was also connected to Struk. This is how they were able to create one front, Mezhygoriye, Tripoliye, Chernobyl. Zeleny’s group stood as a pillar of this movement.

Rumours began to spread throughout the villages that the fall of Kiev was only days away. This would bring an end to “Jewish power”, and the feeling was that all Jews in the area should be exterminated. Thanks to the intervention of the Soviet authorities, this plan was not realized. This was the time that the Mezhygoriye tragedy took place.

The rebels attacked ships sailing on the Dnieper. With great evil, they drowned approximately 100 Jewish passengers, 40 on the ship *Baron Ginsburg* and 54 on the *Cossack*. A Jewish woman, the only survivor of the first ship, gave testimony.

The *Baron Ginsburg* was carrying three Jews who were transporting sugar from Sukholutch to Kiev, as well as other passengers. On April 7, about halfway into the journey, bandits attacked the ship. First they separated the Christians and the Jews, throwing the Jews into the river. Jewish men and women were murdered in front of her eyes. “After, they threw me in too”, said the survivor. “I lost consciousness, and I don’t recall how I returned to land. I climbed out of the river onto a swampy island, and just lay there for two days and two nights. Luckily, two peasants passed in a small boat and took me off the island, back to the mainland, to a village called Mezhygoriye. I entered into the corridor of a convent and hid under the stairs. I don’t know how long I lay there, but I woke up as a nun was trying to revive me. The nun took pity on me and took me to her small room. She gave me some warm milk to drink. Remaining in the convent or going into the village were too dangerous. I hid for a while in a pigsty in the courtyard of the convent. A peasant who worked with the pigs found me and asked me to leave because he too was afraid of the bandits.”

The woman left the convent and hid in various places over the next five or six days. “From stall to stall, from hole to hole, I don’t know where I was or what I ate. And if I did know what I ate, I would not know what it is called. That is how I was saved. The village

was swarming with bandits. I heard shooting and screaming, and late at night the playing of harmonicas and the singing of happy songs.”

A ritual slaughterer (*shochet*) from Chernobyl recounted the events that took place on the second ship, the *Cossack*. On April 7, he was traveling from Chernobyl to Kiev when bandits attacked the boat, removed all the Jews and brought them to the guesthouse of the same convent in Mezhygoriye. At a meeting, the older peasants spoke out against the killing of the Jews, but the younger ones claimed: “This is the time... we should drown and kill the Jews in all of the Ukraine, and Petrivitzi should not lag behind.” This was how the night passed. The survivor recounted: “We saw we were lost; we prayed, some said ‘Vidui’ (confession of sins as on Yom Kippur). We said good-bye to each other and went off to hide in corners, each one with his own thoughts. Each Jew wrote a will and handed it to an old Jewish woman. We believed they would have pity on her. All the captured Jews were put back on the boat and thrown into the river. When it was my turn I shouted ‘Shma Yisroel’ and jumped on my own into the water. I have no recollection of how long I thrashed about in the water, or what power saved me. I made it to shore. A peasant took pity on me and gave me his old rags to wear. He permitted me to warm up near the oven. Suddenly, the bandits reappeared. I jumped out the window and ran away.” The survivor hid in the forest and swamp, and came to a factory where the workers saved him.

A few days later, an uprising broke out, led by Kimenko, in Kureniovke, a suburb of Kiev. On April 10, a few hundred bandits ran into town shouting: “Kill the Jews in the name of the Orthodox faith!” They attacked Jewish homes and shops. They captured more than 100 Jewish women and children, turned them over to the local militia, and shot them through the window. Meanwhile, twenty Jews were dead, fifteen wounded. The local militia was apparently helping the bandits. The material tells us that local petty bourgeoisie and workers were also encouraging the bandits. “Hold on friends, soon we will receive help from the city!”

A Jewish medical student from the nearby Red Cross hospital told how he was arrested with a group of armed workers: “There was a command from the district to arrest all the Jews, Communists and Bolsheviks, and bring them to slaughter.” They accused the Jews of running communes. They claimed that in the days of the Czar a bread cost two kopecks, under the Hetman one and a half rubles, about the same under Petlura, and now twenty rubles. “If we slaughter all the ‘Zhids’ (dirty Jews) today, we will bring an end to the communes.”

The Soviet authorities were shocked that the uprising had reached Kiev. That same day, they chased out the insurgents and arrested or killed many of their accomplices in the city. The Soviet press called the uprising “a black monarchist conspiracy”; in fact this was yet another link to the chain of uprisings around Kiev. In the city, all were amazed that the first one to be shot by the Cheka ([the Bolshevik] secret police), for organizing and participating in the counter-revolutionary uprising in Kureniovke, was Dr. Sh. Kotlenko, a Jew.