

Pogromchik

THE ASSASSINATION OF SIMON PETLURA

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control, there was no trace of brutality. Elsewhere, the situation was different. "Instinctively," "in an elementary manner," "from divine inspiration," the Tsarists and other anti-Semites turned against their own supporters.

"It was only natural," Colonel Shadrin declared, "that these troops, thoroughly demoralized by Jewish propaganda, after having adhered to the rebellion and shooting officers, would become a band of pillagers and assassins."²¹

On side streets where only later the Ukrainian regulars restored order, Jews were found murdered in bed or half-nude in the streets. Many helpless Gentiles suffered as well, including the local priest Father Kokharovsky, who was struck down at the door of his own church while bearing the crucifix and pleading for mercy. Of the slain, onetime militia officer Peter Titloun remarked callously, "If the majority of victims were of the Jewish religion, it was that the Israelite elements were especially sympathetic with the Bolsheviks."²²

In short, the Ukrainians claimed that a maximum of six hundred men handily routed a force at least three times as large, that their enemies were commanded by a woman who bragged of killing six hundred persons in a town which was not yet controlled by the Reds, that the frustrated revolutionaries in Proskurov turned against and slaughtered their own supporters, that all of this was excusable, for "if the revolt had succeeded all that happened to the Jews would have happened to the Christian population."²³ The massacre of innocents was regrettable, but there would have been no killing if there had been no revolution in Proskurov.

There was a smattering of truth to the charge that someone was laying the foundation for a Bolshevik takeover in Proskurov. There were pro-Bolshevik elements in practically every city in Russia. In Proskurov, however, the two acknowledged leaders of the movement were Gentiles named Tkachuk and Dubrovnin. Even among the railway workers (who numbered only eighty able-bodied men) and the Social Revolutionaries, the leaders were non-Jews.²⁴

There may have been Jews in leadership positions among other workers' and self-help units, but this was not remarkable, as Jews were represented among the intimates of Semosenko as well. A Jew named Rochman or Rochmananko was a trusted lieutenant of Semosenko. A man of low intellect, Rochmananko claimed to be a Hebrew teacher. He was especially helpful in pointing out wealthier Jews from whom money could be extorted. Later, he was to participate in the special inquiry about Proskurov along with another Jewish collaborator named Frazer. Both men were lackeys of the nationalist pogromchiks. A third Jew, known only as "the Haidamak Ballerina," supposedly entertained the Semosenkists during their stay in Proskurov.²⁵

Loyalty was an elastic thing for such criminals and intriguers. There were even some Petlurists on the planning staff of the Bolsheviks, men who had penetrated the top levels of the Socialists and Bolsheviks in Proskurov. These *agents provocateurs* manipulated the revolutionary youth like marionettes, egging them on to acts of violence which would justify making a pogrom. For however much the Bolsheviks may have wanted to take power in the town in February, they were woefully unprepared for the venture.²⁶

The Jewish version of events at Proskurov was radically different. On October 24, 1927, the Assize Court listened to Haia Greenberg, a survivor of the pogrom, who related her story in a barely audible whisper. Twenty-nine years old, thin, with curly black hair done in the bobbed fashion of the day, the young medical student in her trim blue suit looked more like an American stenographer. Miss Greenberg had worked as a nurse in a Danish Red Cross detachment in the Ukraine for the first six months of 1919.

The Ataman Semosenko, she charged, was "Petlura's right-hand man." On February 6, he had warned the Jewish community:

I call on the population to cease its anarchist demonstrations for I am sufficiently strong to fight you. I especially warn the Jew of that.

Know that you are a people disliked by all nations, yet you cause such trouble to Christian people. Do you not want to live? Have you no pity on your own people?

So long as you are not attacked, keep quiet. Wretched nation, bringing trouble on innocent Gentiles.²⁷

Then, having demanded a "contribution" of 300,000 rubles from the Jewish community as atonement for its pro-Bolshevik sympathies, Semosenko went to the town council and told them that he had given orders that all Jews, adults and children, should be killed so that "no more Bolsheviks" would grow up.²⁸ When one of his own compatriots suggested that this course was extreme, Semosenko threatened to have him shot.

Despite all warning signs, the Jews of Proskurov were taken by surprise when the pogromchiks struck on the Sabbath eve of February 14. A popular legend among the people was that the "Tzaddik" [holy man] Reb Leibel had blessed this city of peace and said that no pogromchik would cross its threshold. Throughout the Tsarist times of troubles, this had held true. Magically, Proskurov had never suffered pogroms. As a result, when red-capped Haidamaks cordoned off the Jewish quarter that Friday afternoon, Jewish children were playing in the streets, women were preparing the Sabbath meal, and men were at the synagogue, seemingly oblivious to the danger about them.

What followed was cold-blooded, calculated murder, street by street, house by house. Five or ten men would enter a house, killing all within and leaving those who tried to bribe them clutching blood-stained currency.²⁹ The Cossacks burst into the synagogue and butchered all but one of the Jews who had remained inside.³⁰ They even turned their machine guns on the one hospital in town.

"I was at home, with my parents," Haia Greenberg testified. "I had to leave on February 16, to take my examinations. The pogrom broke out on February 15. Everything had been organized. That Friday at 4:30, I was leaving the

doctor's office when I was frightened by the Haidamaks of the 3rd Regiment, with their red hats which distinguished them from other Haidamaks. Uttering savage cries, they made for the streets of Proskurov which were most populated by Jews. It was only the next day, shortly before noon, that the first victims could be recovered. The first was Mlle. Wartemberg, a friend of mine whom I had questioned about anatomy just that Friday. She had been killed by a bullet fired by a Haidamak on horseback who passed by her window."³¹

As the Cossacks roamed the streets, drinking and singing, the Jews organized makeshift hospitals. Miss Greenberg assisted Drs. Gaviev and Poldsev under the flag of the Danish Red Cross at the home of her grandparents. There, she encountered victims of the pogrom who had been left in the streets overnight. Some were so badly frostbitten that it was difficult to decide whether to treat wounds or frostbite first. Lacking decent supplies, Haia Greenberg "gave them a swallow of hot tea to revive them a little."

There were other victims, like Mlle. Kisis, a girl of nineteen whose breast wounds were so severe the doctors actually considered amputation to save her life. Eight members of the girl's family had been attacked, including a seven-year-old brother who was stabbed in the back, another brother slashed in the neck, and her mother who was one of the first fatalities.

There were the two sisters, twelve and fourteen years of age, who straggled into the "hospital" that first day. The younger one died in her sister's arms during the night. And the girl of fourteen who came with four fingers slashed away, her hand a gangrenous mess. She ended up in an insane asylum. And the terrified girl of nineteen who ran a fever for more than two weeks. Everyone, including the nurses, appeared to her to be Haidamak rapists. And the five-year-old boy who contracted meningitis from his wounds and died "in terrible suffering."

And the woman who was brought in Monday night with

her teen-aged daughter. The mother had been shot in the throat and could not swallow. She died in Nurse Greenberg's arms and her body was moved to the kitchen. The next day, the daughter flung herself hysterically over the litter of her mother. Then calmly she took her mother's coat and walked into another room saying, "Come, Mama, we will go to the synagogue. We will go to pray for you." The girl had lost her reason.

And the three-year-old boy who was always silent—his mother too had been killed in the pogrom. Miss Greenberg tried to befriend him, caress him, but he would not speak. Only after two days did he tell her how he had given a last kiss to his dead mama. And the woman who came to the house with a baby of three weeks. She told how the Ukrainians crashed through her window and lanced the little child upon a pike. Haia Greenberg tried to treat the baby, to feed it milk mixed with water, but she failed.

"The cries given out by that baby, I will never forget them. I cannot forget the little infant who always cried and whom I could not save. I was only in my first year of medicine. I was incapable of doing something useful. The baby . . . the little baby . . ." She sobbed as she repeated the word.³²

The tales of atrocity were endless. The students Shomstein and Kulisher who were shot by Semosenko's aide Kiverchuk as they ran about the streets trying to tend to the wounded. The young girl who had been stabbed repeatedly in her buttocks. The two-month-old baby whose hands were a mass of lacerations. The five-year-old who had been pierced through and through with spears. The old man Krochak who had been pitched out of a window by his beard. The thirteen-year-old boy who became deaf as a consequence of his wounds. His brother, who received eleven wounds in his stomach and was left for dead by the side of their slain mother. The paralyzed son of a rabbi, murdered as he lay helpless in bed. The two young children who were cast alive into a fire.



Haia Greenberg, the young nurse who gave dramatic testimony on the pogrom at Proskurov.
(YIVO Tcherikover Archive)

And then there were the survivors, the endless list of survivors, whose names appeared in the reports of the Danish Red Cross with the accompanying phrases "two wounds to the head made by bayonet," "wounds to the posterior and left wrist," "contusions and bayonet wounds to the feet," and one entry which read "twenty-eight wounds in the breast, back, hands and feet."³³

Haia Greenberg continued: "A terrible memory for me were the sleds which passed Tuesday morning and which the peasants brought to take away the cadavers from the streets where they had been since Saturday. On their return I saw the same sleds with corpses piled high, several corpses, with now a hand or a drooping breast, or a leg, or the head. The snow was red from the blood. I shall never forget the reddened snow sleds filled with the hacked bodies going to the cemetery to deposit their sad burden in a common pit."³⁴

In fact, it was not until the first of the week that Semosenko permitted the Jews to bury their dead, although sixty peasant carts had been brought into the city the previous Thursday night by Kiverchuk specifically for such a purpose. According to reports of the Danish Red Cross, barrister A.I. Hillerson, and the Comité des Délégations Juives, the bodies lay where they had fallen and rotted in the following forty-eight-hour period. Some were even found gnawed by roving swine. Others were found with as many as thirty-six wounds, beheaded, their eyes gouged out. The bayoneted dead lay in their houses, fifteen in the house of Averbach, twenty-one in the house of Semelman, six in the house of Blechman, eight in the house of Krochak, twenty-five in the house of Kligerman, silent witnesses to pillaging which continued unabated through the weekend.

The lights which were not extinguished in Jewish homes served as beacons for the plunderers, who occasionally entered a Gentile house by mistake. When the dead were finally carted away for burial, the gaping trench which had been dug for the task near a brewery proved inadequate. Three additional pits were required as more victims were cast into nameless, common graves. The macabre procession of sleds did not end until 4:00 A.M. on Tuesday.

Even at the "cemetery," the atrocities did not cease. Peasant workmen rifled the clothes of the dead in quest of valuables. A number of corpses were found without fingers which once had borne wedding bands. Some of the dead were more than eighty years old.³⁵

"Oh, no! No!" the little nurse screamed from the witness box, her shoulders shaking. "I cannot go on! They are before my eyes!"

She made a gesture as if to brush away the images of slaughter. Handkerchiefs appeared among the spectators. There was an epidemic of coughing and clearing of throats. Even the attorneys were silent. In the prisoner's dock, Schwartzbard was crying, shaking his head in a gesture of frustration.

Suddenly Miss Greenberg's grief turned to fury. "Petlura knew what Semosenko was doing!" she shrieked. "Semosenko was only the instrument who carried out Petlura's will." He had boasted that by exterminating Jews he was saving the Ukraine and would be rewarded for his efforts. "After the pogrom he was not punished. A commission was appointed to investigate, but Semosenko dispersed its members by force, saying that there was very little to make such a fuss about! He continued his terrible work!"

Under cross-examination by Public Prosecutor Reynaud, Miss Greenberg stood firm. "Petlura was responsible! Even Ukrainian officers said so! His soldiers killed our people, shouting his name. One regiment had a band and it played while knives fell on the heads of innocent babies! Petlura could have stopped it, but he wouldn't listen to our pleas!"

Still, what proof was there that Petlura had been even remotely connected with the tragedy at Proskurov?

"We hoped, all the world hoped," the witness stammered, "after the pogroms that Hetman Petlura would investigate and punish the author, namely Semosenko. Nothing was done."

Hardly conclusive evidence of culpability, insisted Reynaud.

"Personally, I never met Petlura," Miss Greenberg explained. "I never saw him. I have the conviction, and my conviction is not only that of the Jewish population which was persecuted, but also of Ukrainian officers who lodged under our roofs. Petlura was responsible. Semosenko told them himself."³⁶

"You have impugned nothing in her testimony," said Torrès.

"You are wrong!" This time it was Campinchi, working in tandem with the Public Prosecutor. Torrès could bring fifty or even one hundred thousand witnesses like Miss Greenberg to tell what happened in the pogroms, but this still would not establish Petlura's involvement. On the contrary, the prosecution possessed more than four hundred

written depositions from colleagues of the Holovni Ataman to the effect that he was a good friend of the Jews and in no way responsible for the murders.

"I am compelled to protest against those who brand the pogroms as the official teachings of the Ukrainian government," said Campinchi. "We all know how much the entire population was affected, how there were victims among all nationalities. But let me say here and now, it has *not* been demonstrated that Petlura gave any orders directing the pogroms. Miss Greenberg's 'proof' seems to me to be sketchy once more."

"But the murderers were his Zaporoghian Cossacks!" Torrès snapped. "Zaporoghian! And Haidamaks! *That* proves it!"

Haia Greenberg reaffirmed her position. "I repeat that the responsibility for the murders was without doubt Petlura's, personally, not only for the Jews but for all the others. The soldiers killed and shot with the cry, 'Long live our little father Petlura!' The least word from Petlura would have sufficed to stop the massacres."³⁷

From the welter of testimony about Proskurov, the following story emerged: On Sunday, February 16, 1919, while the surviving Jews trembled behind shuttered windows, Ataman Semosenko issued another decree to "the population of the town and district of Proskurov." The incidents of the previous two days he blamed on "some irresponsible men without honor or conscience," men who, according to precise information reaching Semosenko, were "of the Jewish nation."

The commander lamented that through their zeal to restore order, the Cossacks had killed "many innocent persons," but "nothing can be accomplished without making mistakes." The blood of the innocents, he charged, would ever be a curse on the heads of "those who have acted as *provocateurs* and adventurers." More, they would serve as a deterrent to those who might attempt to bring discord to

Proskurov, to foment rebellion against the lawful authorities. "I shall stop at nothing to keep the peace," he concluded.³⁸

On February 22, Semosenko again warned the populace that he knew there were many Bolshevik agitators among them. The Jews tried to forestall another pogrom by offering him additional ransom. When the veiled threats from army headquarters persisted, the leaders of the Jewish community called a public meeting to decide upon a course of action. The result was that on February 27, 1919, Semosenko issued Order Number Sixteen, dropping the pretense of a general directive and warning:

Jews!

Information has reached me that yesterday you wished to organize a meeting in Alexander Street to consider the question of seizing the power and that in four days you are preparing a rising similar to that which you attempted on February 14/15. I warn you that at present I have under my orders about 10,000 reliable Ukrainian men. I also have enough artillery and machine guns and the rising will be put down by a firm hand.

I declare a state of reinforced protection in the town of Proskurov. Traffic in the town is allowed up to 6:00 P.M. only.

Performances in theatres and cinemas are forbidden. In daytime not more than two persons may walk together and it is forbidden to stop at street corners or near your houses. Persons contravening this order will be shot without trial. I request Colonel Rogulski of the police of the town of Proskurov to send reinforced patrols all over the town at night and to arrest anybody who should disobey this order and punish him as said above.

(signed) Semosenko
Commander of the Principal
Ataman Petlura Zaporog Cossacks
Brigade of the Ukrainian Army³⁹

inquiry into the "provocation." Not surprisingly, this group placed the blame on the Jews.

Russian Jews were accustomed to such "justice." The Tsars had claimed Jewish provocation whenever the Black Hundreds struck at Jewish communities—provocation in the form of ritual murder, host desecration, or revolutionary activity. In 1919, Jewish provocation in the Ukraine consisted of being alive.

Notes

1. For Schwartzbard's account of what transpired in Austria, see his statement, File 460, 38560-65, Tcherikover Archive, and *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 1, p.94.
2. File 505, 41936 and 41937-44, and File 443, 37708 and 37710, Tcherikover Archive.
3. Deposition of Lt. Col. Dukacinski to Col. La Vergne, Sept. 4, 1917, 38089, File 451, Tcherikover Archive.
4. Deposition of Ilie Teper, December, 1926, File 469, 38978-80, Tcherikover Archive.
5. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 1, pp.97,100,101,126.
6. *Jewish Independent*, June 4, 1926, p.1. A good friend, Pierre Ramus (Rudolf Grossmann) wrote Torrès that it would be wrong to equate Schwartzbard's views with those of the Bolsheviks. In a letter dated October 8, 1927, Ramus said that Schwartzbard was inspired by the ideas of Tolstoy and Peter Kropotkin. File 463, 38693-4, Tcherikover Archive.
7. For Schwartzbard's unhappy moments in the Red Guards see *In krig mit zich aleyh*, pp.76-77 and 238-39.
8. *Figaro*, October 20, 1927, p.1.
9. For the accounts of the eyewitnesses, see *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, pp.90-100 (Bougdadjan), 101-111 (Smith), 115-118 (de Trobriant), 120 (Gelma) and 122 (Belat).
10. Initial reference to Dr. Paul's report appears in *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 1, p.50. The Coroner's complete testimony may be found in fasc. 2, pp.54-93.

11. An additional factor which may have contributed to the downward path of the bullets was that (as all witnesses testified) Schwartzbard was standing on the curb, a few inches higher than Petlura in the street. For Torrès' arguments about position, see *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, pp.60-62, 70-73, and 93.
12. The stenographic report indicated that Torrès said, "I have a gun for a demonstration." Demonstration was noted without comment. A more elaborate description appeared in *Cleveland Press*, October 19, 1927, p.15, and *The Times* of London, October 20, 1927, p.15.
13. *Figaro*, October 20, 1927, p.2.
14. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, pp.125-7.
15. For Tokhary's complete testimony, see *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, pp.127-147. See also verbatim extracts in *Figaro*, October 20, 1927, p.2, and *The Times* of London, October 20, 1927, p.13.
16. *Jewish Chronicle*, October 21, 1927, p.27.
17. Testimony of Col. Nesterenko, *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, p.152.
18. See deposition of Col. Michael Shadrin, Jan. 31, 1927, File 449, 37843-37863, Tcherikover Archive. General Mykola Chapoval pinpointed another villain, a man named Niboutioff. Testimony of Chapoval, *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 2, p.178.
19. According to Officer Titlouk, the police were helpless because their own superiors were in league with the Bolsheviks. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 5, p.73.
20. Deposition of Col. Boutakiv, October 18, 1927, File 488, 39779-86, Tcherikover Archive.
21. Deposition of Col. Shadrin, File 449, p.18, Tcherikover Archive.
22. Deposition of Titlouk, File 451, No. 38061-2, Tcherikover Archive.
23. Concerning the prospective Bolshevik uprising in Proskurov, see Iv. Alekseev, *Iz vospominanii levogo esera (Podpol'naiia rabota na Ukraine)* (Moscow: Glavpolitprosvet, 1922), pp.34-35. As for the fantastic story of how the city was "saved"

- from the Bolsheviks, see also Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer pogromen* pp.128-29.
24. Deposition of Dr. Marjan Stavinsky, September 26, 1927, File 361, 32941-32950, Tcherikover Archive.
25. A.N. Hillerson, *Postupilo w redaktzie doklad*, Report on the Proskurov Pogrom, File 180, Tcherikover Archive.
26. *Protokol vegn Proskurov* by A. Yoffe, File 72, Tcherikover Archive. See also Report of the Proskurov *Kehilla Rat* "Tzu der idishe befelkerung," 1920, File 381, Tcherikover Archive. For additional depositions, reports and documents on Proskurov, consult Files 358, 359, 360 and 416, Tcherikover Archives.
27. File 453, 38195, Tcherikover Archive.
28. "The Schwartzbard Case," *Jewish Chronicle*, October 28, 1927, p.36. See also Schechuman, *et al*, *The Pogroms in the Ukraine*, p.187.
29. Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, *Pozoga, wspomnienia z Wolynia, 1917-1920* (Krakow, 1927), pp.289-91.
30. Only one aged Jew, named Shlomo Rosenfeld, offered any resistance. He was immediately murdered. The sole survivor of the massacre in the synagogue was a young boy who hid in the loft. Subsequently he was beaten on the streets by the Cossacks and went mad. See Testimony of Leib Kosovoy in Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer pogromen*, p.123.
31. For Miss Greenberg's testimony, see *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6, pp.74-106. She was not the first Jew to testify about Proskurov. Immediately before, Ruben Grinberg, director of a special relief committee for emigrant Jews from Russia, had testified that responsibility for the massacre, where Grinberg had lived as a child, rested with the Petlurists and their commanders. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6, pp.3-5.
32. These grotesque tales are recalled in Miss Greenberg's testimony, pp.74-84, *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6. Again, the newspaper accounts add a human dimension lacking in the stenographic record. *Figaro*, October 25, 1927, p.2.
33. Reports of the Danish Red Cross and A.I. Hillerson substantiate these and other atrocities, including assaults on girls who "looked Jewish." Perhaps most disgusting was the activity of

- a Dr. Skornik, who refused to supply Jews with bandages. The head of the local Red Cross was later found among the pogromists. When someone pointed out the incongruity of killing while wearing the armband of such an organization, he ripped off the marker and continued plundering. See A.I. Hillerson, *Le pogrome de Proskurov*, report to the Kiev Central Committee for the Relief of Pogrom Victims, File 466, 38862-88, Tcherikover Archives; *Les pogromes en Ukraine sous les gouvernements ukrainiens (1917-1920)* (Paris: Comité des Délégations Juives, 1927), pp.54-55; Haifetz, *The Slaughter of the Jews*, pp.202-227; Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer pogromen*, pp. 121-138; and *Pogromen in Proskurov, 1919-1924*, File 521, Tcherikover Archive. The reports of Drs. Goloubev and Hornstein for the Danish Red Cross may be found in File 407, 35340-45, Tcherikover Archive.
34. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6, p.79. See also *New York Times*, October 25, 1927, p.5.
35. See eyewitness accounts, diaries, and documents from Proskurov survivors Neiman Teplik, Sholom Bisselman, and Dr. E.F. Feinblit, File 409, Tcherikover Archive. Testified one girl, "It was a bloodbath. The whole place has been turned into a cemetery." File 411, 35682, Tcherikover Archive.
36. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6, p.85. See also *New York Times*, October 25, 1927, p.5; *Jewish Chronicle*, October 28, 1927, p.36; and *Il Temps*, October 26, 1927, p.2.
37. *Notes Sténographiques*, fasc. 6, pp.88-106. See also *Figaro*, October 26, 1927, p.2; and *Il Temps*, October 26, 1927, p.2.
38. File 398, 35044, Tcherikover Archive.
39. Schechtman, *et al*, *The Pogroms in the Ukraine*, p.189.
40. Deposition of Shlomo Shreiman in Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer Pogromen*, p.128.
41. Several appeals were sent to the Holovni Ataman, who "deliberately avoided looking in on the scene." See Abraham Revtzky, *In di shvere tog ofn Ukraine* (Berlin: Judischer Literarischer Verlag, 1924) p.288.
42. Tcherikover, *Di Ukrainer Pogromen*, p.133.
43. *Les pogromes en Ukraine*, Annex, pp.51-53.

44. Zvi Zekzer, "Di toyte shtot," in Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer pogromen*, p.136.
45. The letter appeared in St. Louis, New Orleans, Ft. Worth, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia and various Jewish newspapers. See Julian Batchinsky, *et al*, *The Jewish Pogroms in Ukraine* (Washington: Friend of Ukraine, 1919), p.7.
46. Tcherikover, *Di ukrainer pogromen*, pp.158-59; Gumener, *A kapitl Ukraine*, p.31; and Solomon Goldelman, *In goles bay di Ukrainer*, p.41.