

The original article in Russian can be found here - [LINK](#)

**The article is about Trofim Fedorovich Verkhola (1883-1922), a Ukrainian social democrat, educator, artist, and activist and a defender of the Jews during the 1919 Proskurov Pogrom.**

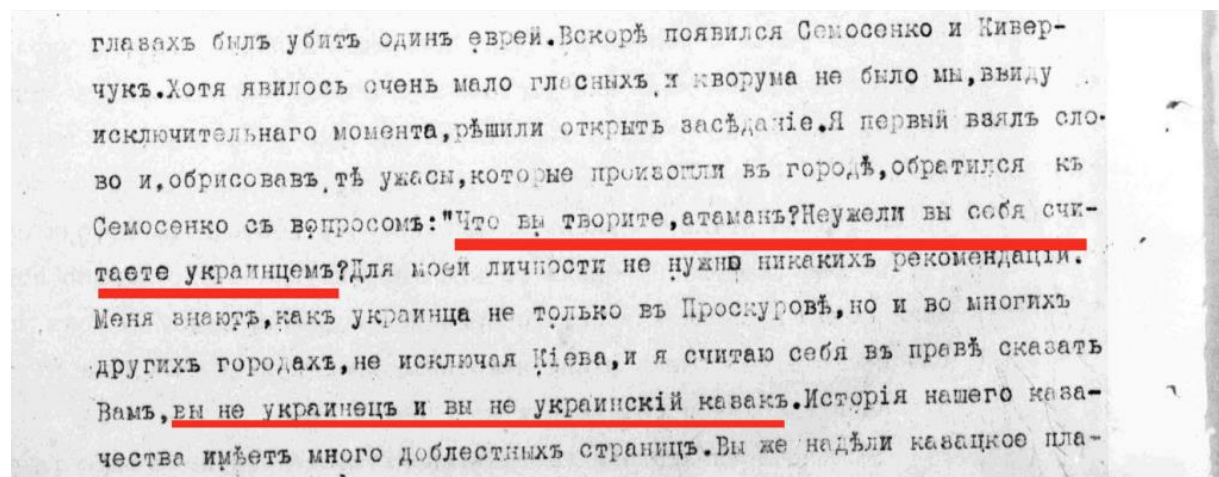


In the XX century before the Holocaust, exactly 100 years ago in the city of Proskurov there was a tragic Jewish pogrom - a massacre of Jews. In this notorious "Proskurov massacre" there were executioners, but there was also a real Ukrainian hero, who is almost forgotten today.

More than 1,600 Jews were tortured to death by the Zaporizhzhya Cossacks of the Ukrainian People's Republic named after Simon Petlyura. By order of Ataman Ivan Semesenko, the Cossacks of the brigade did not rob, but murdered all Jews without exception, whole Jewish families, including the elderly, women and children. The peak of the massacre fell on Shabbat, when the Jews rested on February 15, 1919, which lasted three and a half hours. Isolated attacks still occurred over the next two days.

A local Ukrainian public figure, Trofim Fedorovich Verkhola (1883-1922), a Ukrainian social democrat, teacher, artist, and educational activist, rebelled against this massacre of

peaceful civilians. Verkhola was at the beginning of the Ukrainian national revival of Proskurov. After the revolution of 1917, he was elected deputy of the city council, chairman of the society "Prosvita" ("education") and a deputy of the Constituent Assembly of Russia. For some time he was even the mayor of Proskurov.



Verkhola had many years of good relations with local Jews. They recalled a funny episode: "After the overthrow of tsarism, he prepared the first Ukrainian demonstration in March 1917. Preparations for the demonstration took place on Saturday, when all the shops of the city were closed because of Shabbat, however Verkhola successfully negotiated with local Jews and they gave him yellow and blue fabrics for sewing Ukrainian flags".

During the reign of Hetman Skoropadsky, he was arrested by the Austro-Hungarian military authorities and sent for trial in Lviv. After the abolition of the hetman and the establishment of the power of Simon Petlyura, Trofim Verkhola returned to Proskurov on February 12, 1919. It was just three days before the pogrom.

When Verkhola heard about the massacre of Jews, he went to the streets of the city. He saw the slaughtered people at many houses. Verkhola immediatly began to collect medicines for the wounded in the pharmacies of the city.

On the next morning, February 16, Verkhola convened an emergency meeting of the city council, which was attended by ataman Semesenko and his assistant, military commandant Kiverchuk. Right outside the Verkhola City Hall, he saw Cossacks killing a Jew. Verkhola ordered to immediately stop the massacre in Proskurov, and to return the Cossacks of Semesenko from the neighboring town of Felshtyn, where they were sent for a new massacres of Jews.

Trofim Verkhola said straight into the eyes of the pogrom commander: "What are you doing, Ataman?! You are not Ukrainian or Ukrainian Cossack. "

Verkhola ordered to stop the pogrom "for the honor of Ukraine."

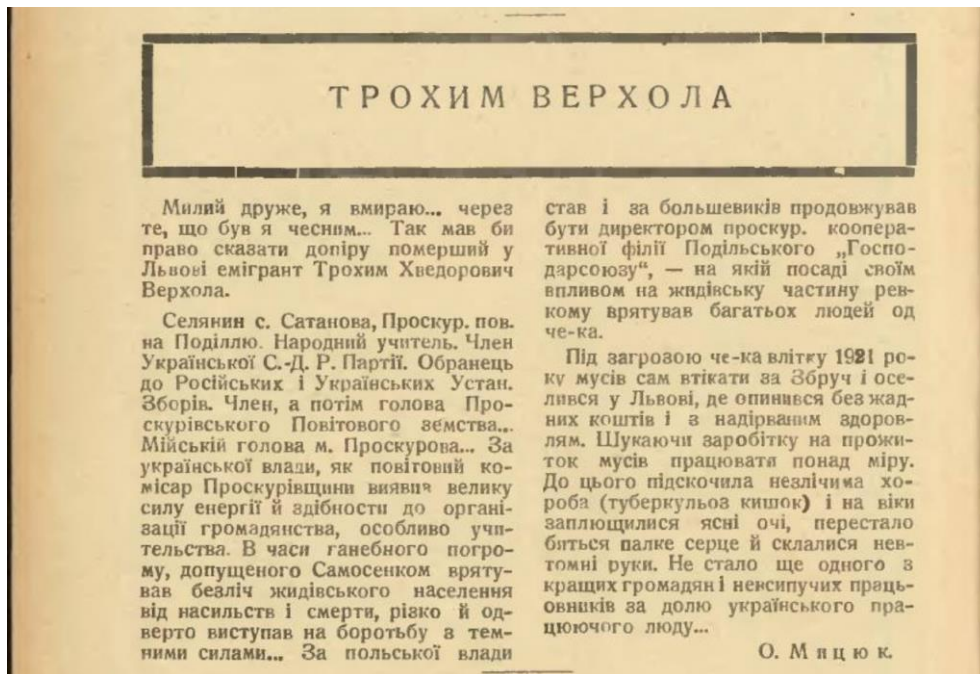
Semesenko denied the fact of the massacre. He said: "I ordered the extermination of the Bolsheviks, and if among the Jews there are old men, women and children - Bolsheviks, then it is their fault, not mine." Ataman Semesenko arrested Verkhola and wanted to shoot him, but then, at the request of local Ukrainian politicians, the deputy was released.

It is worth noting that the pogrom in Proskurov was discontinued after local Ukrainian activists sent an urgent telegram to Eugen Konovalets, the corps commander of the Ukrainian army. The future head of the OUN sent an urgent order to the ataman Semesenko to immediately stop the massacre.



Unfortunately, the head of the UNR, Simon Petlyura, did not punish Ataman Semesenko for the mass murder of Jews. Semesenko was shot in early 1920 for failing to comply with orders from Petlyura.

Trofim Verkhola remained a Ukrainian public figure in Proskurov in 1919-1920. The Jews always recalled with gratitude how Verkhola helped the victims of the pogrom and defended the Jews. Escaping from the Bolsheviks, Verkhola fled to Lviv in 1921. The local Jews helped him financially, but Trofim was already seriously ill with tuberculosis. He died in 1922 in Lviv at the age of 39.



Memories about Verkhola have belonged to the Ukrainian social and educational activist Natalya Doroshenko-Savchenko (1888-1974). She lived in Proskurov in 1913-17, along with Trofim Verkhola and took an active part in local and national life. In 1921 she moved to Lviv, where she was the librarian of the society "Prosvita" until 1939. Later she, with her family emigrated to the United States. Her memories were published in the magazine "Freedom" ("Svoboda", New York, 12/25/1955) and were called "The Beginning of the National Revolution on Proskurovshchina".

"T. Verkhola became the soul of the Society. He was a man of incredible energy, extremely agile, and also completely committed to the cause. He was also an outstanding artist. In addition, he was popular among the peasants of Proskurovshchina because originated from Satanov peasants. The Jewish population was also in good relations with him. When the Jewish pogrom in Proskurov suddenly broke out in 1919, Verkhola put a lot of effort into stopping it. Grateful Jews helped him during his emigration in Lviv when he was already seriously ill. "

The name Trofim Verkhola is indicated on a Jewish monument to the victims of the pogrom in Proskurov.

Kiev Rabbi Moshe Reuven Asman held a memorial prayer near this monument to the victims of the pogrom, and then on February 21, 2019 addressed a letter to the Khmelnytsky mayor Alexander Simchishin.

כ"ה

**ВСЕУКРАЇНСЬКИЙ КОНГРЕС ІУДЕЙСЬКИХ РЕЛІГІЙНИХ ГРОМАД**  
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**МІСЬКОМУ ГОЛОВІ М. ХМЕЛЬНИЦЬКИЙ  
СИМЧИШИНУ О.С.**

**ШАНОВНИЙ ОЛЕКСАНДРЕ СЕРГІЙОВИЧУ!**

Вчора я побував у Вашому місті і взяв участь у поминальній молитві на честь жертв єврейського погрому в м. Проскурів, який забрав життя понад 1600 людей 100 років тому. Схиляючи голови у скорботі за загиблими євреями міста, я вважаю дуже важливим вшанувати пам'ять тих українських праведників, які захищали і рятували євреїв під час різанини.

З історії відомі їхні імена. Священик Клементій Качуровський і судовий чиновник Леон Бієнко переховували євреїв, закликали зупинити вбивства, але обидва загинули від рук погромників. Відомий міський лікар Сергій Полозов ховав групу євреїв у себе вдома і надавав допомогу пораненим. Український вчитель, художник і депутат Трохим Верхола доклав величезних зусиль, щоб припинити погром «заради честі України». Верхола під загрозою арешту і розстрілу кинув прямо в обличчя отаману Семесенко – ініціатору погрому, такі слова: «Що ви творите, отаман?! Ви не українець і не український козак!»

Я пропоную міській раді Хмельницького розглянути можливість присвоєння імен цих українських героїв вулицям, площам або іншим міським об'єктам. Їхні імена повинні бути увічнені в вашому місті, щоб благородні вчинки цих праведників, які рятували життя інших людей, були прикладом для майбутніх поколінь в ім'я миру і процвітання України.

З повагою і благословенням,  
Головний Рабин України та Києва

  
Моше Реувен Асман

Rabbi Asman suggested assigning the names of Trofim Verkhola and the other Ukrainian heroes, who defended the Jews during the pogrom, to the streets in the city of Proskurov. the Jews. "The names of these people should be immortalized in your city so that the noble

actions of these righteous people who saved the lives of other people were an example for future generations in the name of peace and prosperity of Ukraine,” wrote Asman. Unfortunately, still no photo of Trofim Verkhola, this best representative of the Ukrainian people has been found anywhere. I hope that the street in the modern city of Khmelnytsky will some day be named in honor of the righteous and Ukrainian intellectual Trofim Verkhola.

The author thanks the accomplished archivist, Nadezhda Lipes, and the Lviv historian, Andrey Usach, for the information provided on Trofim Verkhola.

Text: Shimon Briman (Israel)

Photo: archival documents on pogrom from the State Archives of the Khmelnytsky region; the monument to pogrom victims

Thanks to E. Sheinman for translating this article.