JEWISH CEMETERIES IN BELARUS

REPORT

2017
We express our deep gratitude for all their assistance and advice to the following:

**Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus**

**Embassy of the United States of America to the Republic of Belarus**

**Union of Religious Jewish Congregations of Belarus**

and to the Jewish communities of Brest, Homel, Hrodna, Mahilyow, Minsk and Vicebsk.

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ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative

The ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative was set up as a German non-profit foundation in 2015 with the core objective of protecting and preserving Jewish cemetery sites across the European continent through the delineation of cemetery boundaries and construction of perimeter walls and fences.

The foundation has created a strong and sustainable administrative and research structure and formed standardized models for engineering and Halachic methodology and cost effectiveness which are rolled out across Europe as the largest Jewish cemetery protection and research organisation in the world. As of 2017, the ESJF has already fenced some 100 sites in six European countries and conducted on site historical surveys at more than 1,500 Jewish cemeteries.

The project’s mission is to protect the largest number of cemeteries in the shortest possible time in the most efficient and transparent manner according to the strictest Halachic and engineering criteria. The ESJF project has begun the process of physically protecting Jewish burial sites in Europe, most particularly in places where Jewish communities were wiped out in the Holocaust.

We are honoured and delighted to have been invited by the US Commission for America’s Heritage Abroad to conduct this national survey of Jewish cemeteries in Belarus. These regions have never before seen a comprehensive listing of such sites and in common with other areas of Eastern Europe already surveyed by the ESJF, our collective mission has vastly increased the number of known and identified sites in Belarus. This document has obvious academic and educational value and considerably adds to historical data available in this field of Jewish heritage in Eastern Europe. We are conscious that it is also the first step to the physical protection of these sites.

Philip Carmel  
Chief Executive Officer  
ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative  
Kyiv, Ukraine, 2017
HISTORICAL JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN BELARUS

The arrival of Jews on the territory of modern Belarus has been little studied. A number of authors have claimed that a Jewish presence appeared in these regions as early as the 7th century. Other researchers mention the migration of Jews from Kievan Rus' in the 12th century. However, no scientific consensus has been reached so far on this issue. The only element which appears not to be a source of dispute is that this early Jewish population of the region was neither Ashkenazic, nor did it emanate from German or Polish lands.

In the middle of the 13th century, the area of the modern Belarusian state was occupied by the principalities of Polotsk and Turovo-Pinsk, as well as vassal states of the Golden Horde - originally a Mongol and later, Turkicized state - and Chornaya Rus' (Novogradok). At the beginning of the 14th century, the territory of the Polotsk principality became part of the Kingdom of Lithuania. During this period, the principalities of Vitebsk, Zaslavl, Minsk, Mstislav and Slutsk emerged. As from 1371, the entire territory of modern Belarus was already under the control of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which continued to expand as a result of the incorporation of territorial possessions from the Golden Horde. The culture and language of these incorporated lands provided a basis for the formation of Grand Duchy of Lithuania culture, as well as its state laws (Statutes of Lithuania).

From 1324 to 1345, the Grand Duke Gedimin called upon representatives of various ethnic and religious groups from a number of European cities to settle in the territories under his jurisdiction while maintaining their religious and legal rights, as well as receiving a number of privileges, such as temporary tax exemption. This invitation primarily referred to craftsmen and merchants. It is assumed that among other groups Ashkenazic Jews also responded positively to his invitation, although they were not specifically mentioned in the letters. It was during this same period that Gedimin decided to Christianize Lithuania from its original paganism, bringing the Grand Duchy of Lithuania closer to the cultural and commercial turnover in the region. From the end of the 14th century, there is reliable evidence of the existence of Jewish communities in Brest and Grodno, to which the Grand Duke Vytautas granted privileges in the charters of 1388 and 1389.
From 1385, attempts began to unify the Grand Duchy of Lithuania with the Kingdom of Poland, first on the basis of a dynastic union and then through the creation of general supra-governmental bodies. At the time, the Lithuanian nobility were looking for reliable allies to help them defend their vast lands from Tatar nomads and from the Grand Duchy of Moscow, which were often military allies. The Grand Duchy of Moscow had already seized Smolensk in 1522, a region which had once belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as several other parts of the eastern lands of modern Belarus which passed from hand to hand. In the midst of the Livonian War, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was established in 1569, with an elected monarch, the Sejm (parliament) and a common monetary system. Following the unification, the Commonwealth managed not only to regain the lands that had been seized earlier by Moscow, but also to conduct an active foreign policy in other areas.

**Jews Under Grand Duchy of Lithuania**

In 1495, Grand Duke Alexander Jagellon expelled the Jews from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The expulsion lasted until 1503 and was implemented for a number of reasons, including the Prince’s unwillingness to repay his debts. Alexander was to later allow the Jews to return and to regain their property by judicial means.

Despite religious and property tensions, the 16th century was characterized by relative religious peace, which led to numerous conversions of Jews to Christianity, interfaith marriages and the expansion of the area of residence for Jews. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in general, and particularly in its Lithuanian regions, Jewish refugees fleeing from other parts of Europe were able to find shelter.

In the 16th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth granted Jews the right of self-government. This traditional form of community organization, known as the kahal,
was an autonomous Jewish administrative unit, with its own budget, legal structure and administration.

In Poland, Jewish self-government was reflected in the emergence of the Council of the Four Lands (Vaad Arba Aratzot); the four lands being Greater Poland (with its capital in Posnan), Lesser Poland (Krakow), Chervonnaya Rus’ (Lvov) and Volyn (Ostrog or Kremenchet). The initial function of the Vaad was the apportionment of tax levels between the communities of the country. Congresses of the Vaad were held during major fairs, when community representatives gathered together with merchants in the main towns and cities of the region.

In Lithuanian lands, this tax distribution was carried out by the representatives of Lithuanian communities first in the framework of the Polish congresses of the Council of the Four Lands and only in 1623, at the Congress in Brest, by a new autonomous Lithuanian entity known as the Council of the Main Communities of the Lithuanian Land.

This Council existed until 1764 and protocols of its 33 meetings were preserved. Initially, the Lithuanian Council included three "main" communities - Brest, Grodno and Pinsk, to which smaller communities were subordinated. From 1652, Vilno, and from 1691, Slutsk, also figure among these "main" communities.

Here, in the records of the meetings of the Council of the Main Communities of the Lithuanian Land that many communities were mentioned for the first time, with the population and financial condition of the community concluded from the tax levy assigned to it. However, the activities of the Council were not limited to tax collection, but covered almost all aspects of the social and religious life of Lithuanian Jewry; education, trade and rent, ownership and settlement rights, fighting heresies, solving inter-community conflicts. The Lithuanian Council, like the Council of the Four Lands, was officially abolished by the Sejm decree of 1764 in connection with the reforms of
Stanislaw August Poniatowski who as King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania introduced a new system of taxation for Jews residing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The events connected with the Cossack uprising of Khmelnitsky (1648-1657) affected the south and south-east of modern Belarus. The Cossacks seized such large cities as Mozyr, Turov, Pinsk, Brest and Bobruisk, but not for a protracted time. The number of Jews murdered during this period on the entire territory where the uprising took place is estimated by Shaul Stamper at around 20,000 people. The calculations are complicated by the fact that in 1654-1667 the Russian-Polish War began, where the Moscow Kingdom acted as an ally of Khmelnitsky. During this war, the territories under study were either captured or severely damaged by hostilities between Polish, Russian and Swedish troops. The latter entered the war against the Polish Republic (1655-1660) and in the following year - against the Kingdom of Moscow (1656-1658). The Swedish King Karl X and the Great Hetman of Lithuania Janusz Radziwill signed the Keidan union, according to which the GDL withdrew from Poland and became part of the federation with Sweden. All this period is connected with large-scale devastation and violence in the region, which hit hard on Jews. A number of researchers find signs of a religious war in this series of military and social conflicts.

**Jewish Intellectual Movements and Spiritual Life**

The Khmelnitsky uprising not only severely affected the numbers of Jews on the territory of modern Belarus, but also had a profound impact on its intellectual history.

The Khmelnitsky massacres of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe in 1648-49 are considered by many historians to be the cause of the decline of the center of Jewish scholarship in Poland. From the 16th to the mid-17th centuries, Poland was the most powerful center of Jewish scholarship in Europe, associated with a range of outstanding rabbis, including Yaakov Pollack and Shalom Shachna, who introduced a new method of studying the Talmud, known as *pilpul* and Shlomo Luria, Moshe Isserles, and later Yoel Sirkes and David Segal, who authored leading halachic works and responsa of the period Additionally, many new large yeshivas emerged - in Krakow, Lublin, Lvov, Brest, Slutsk, Ostrog and Medzhibozh. After the Khmelnitsky uprising and following the economic and demographic decline of the communities of these regions, the intellectual center of Eastern European Jewry moved to the growing communities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. A new, “Litvak” center emerged in Vilno, in the circle of Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman, widely referred to in Jewish literature as “The Gaon of Vilna” (1720-1797).

The Gaon was not only an outstanding rabbinical scholar but also a mystic and was familiar with a number of secular sciences, including astronomy and mathematics. He introduced a method of study based on a simple interpretation of the rabbinical text *peshat*. This method brought to life a new movement of Lithuanian yeshivas, the first and most famous of which was founded by the closest pupil of the Gaon of Vilna, Hayim
of Volozhin. The Volozhin yeshiva existed from 1802 to 1892 and became not only an *alma mater* of many outstanding Jewish intellectuals, but also a model for many other yeshivas that arose on the territory of modern Belarus and Lithuania in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Mir, Ponevezh, Slabodka, Kelm, Telz and others.

A unique phenomenon which arose on Belarusian territories in the environment of Lithuanian yeshivas was the Musar movement. The Hebrew word "musar" means "moral conduct". Within the framework of this movement, the moral improvement of a person, both in relation to other people, and in relation to himself, was considered of particular importance. This improvement is achieved through a number of psychological and meditative practices. The founder of the movement was Israel Salanter (1809-1883), and the most famous educational institution where this system was implemented, was the Novogrudok yeshiva (Jewish name - Novardok), opened in 1896 by a pupil of Israel Salanter, Yosef Yosel Horowitz, known as the "Alter of Novardok". At the beginning of the 20th century, branches of this yeshiva existed in many large cities of Poland and Russia.

Running parallel to this religious intellectual movement based on the yeshiva, the territory of modern Belarus in the late 18th century was also the scene of a struggle between the "Litvaks", supporters of the Gaon of Vilna and his circle, and the Hasidic movement. Hasidism emerged as a mass Jewish mystical and revivalist movement that arose in the middle of the 18th century on the territory of Ukraine (Podolia, Galicia, Volyn). Its founder was Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name"), abbreviated - Besht (circa 1700-1760). This movement, incorporating the basic ideas of Jewish mysticism, sought to transform the elitist theosophical concepts of Kabbalah into an existential and practical doctrine, thus making the mystical worldview closer to the broad masses. It main proclaimed value therefore was not Talmudic scholarship, but rather a sincere experience of close proximity to God, a "service to God in joy" through everyday physical practices, accessible even to uneducated people.

Although clearly Ukrainian in origin, according to the "Shivchei Ha'Besht", the Baal Shem Tov maintained contacts with the Belarusian communities and his son, Zvi Hirsch, married and was buried in Pinsk.

After the death of the Besht, the leadership of the movement passed to Dov Ber of Mezhirich, known as “The Great Maggid”. After his death in 1772, a number of his outstanding students moved to Belarus to plant a new movement of Hasidism there. Among these we have Menahem Mendel of Vitebsk, Avraham of Kalisk, Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, Aaron of Karlin, Hayim Haikel of Amdur and others.

The new movement aroused the sharp opposition of the Gaon of Vilna and his immediate supporters. The main points of this criticism were the shift of emphasis from Talmudic scholarship to mystical enlightenment, which for the Litvaks looked like monstrous ignorance; the claims of the Hasidic leaders to community status, social practices introduced by Hasidim, such as ecstatic prayer, as well as some changes in customs, in particular, in the practice of ritual slaughter (*shechita*). All this led to a
series of local conflicts (for example, in Shklov in 1770-71), which caused the Gaon of Vilna to proclaim a herem (excommunication) of the followers of the new movement in 1772. This was followed by a number of other bans, although the impact of these excommunications on the Hasidic communities was minimal.

Socially, the main innovation of the movement is the emergence of the spiritual leaders of the Hasidic communities, the tzaddikim ("righteous ones"), who bore the spiritual responsibility for both the souls and the material situation of their Hasidic followers. Living in different cities, these followers visited the tzaddik several times a year, when they listened to the teacher's instructions and received blessings. This is how the Hasidic courts developed, hosting from several hundred to several thousand pilgrims. From the late 18th - early 19th centuries, the practice of transferring the leadership of Hasidic communities by inheritance was formed. A number of Hasidic dynasties arose. By the end of the 19th century, the main Hasidic dynasties operating on the territory of modern Belarus were: in Western Belarus - Karlin and the dynasties originating from it: Karlin-Stolin, Koidanov, Lyakhovich and Slonim, as well as an early dynasty of Indura and a smaller one, the court of the Volyn dynasty of Kashivka in David Haradok. In Eastern Belarus, we note the Hasidism of Habad, in particular, its main dynasty, Habad-Lubavitch and the smaller ones: Kopust, Strashula, Bobruisk, Lyady. Another dynasty was that of Chernobyl, with courts in Bralin and Loyev. Most of these dynasties survived the Holocaust and moved their centers to the United States and Israel, where they are still active today.

Visits to the tzaddik also often included the practice of pilgrimage to the graves of the righteous, which can now be seen in Jewish cemeteries in Belarus (Stolin, Slonim, Pinsk, Indura, Starasellie, Babruysk and others). According to Hasidic teaching, prayer on the grave of the tzaddik has a special power to bring the soul into direct contact with the tzaddik. Often, notes with the names and requests that, during the life of the righteous, were passed on to him along with a certain amount of money "for the ransom of the soul," are left on the grave, and money is dropped into a charity box. Originating in the Hasidic environment, this custom later spread to the graves of prominent rabbis (for example, in Radun').

The conflict between Lithuanian Judaism and Hasidism in Belarusian lands in the early 19th century ultimately came to naught, giving way to another conflict - the confrontation between traditional Judaism and the Jewish enlightenment, known as the Haskalah.

In the second half of the 18th century, Jewish intellectual circles, interested in European science, arose on the territory of Belarus. One of the outstanding figures of the early Haskalah - Solomon Maimon – was born in the village of Zhukov Borok near Mir in 1753. Before heading to Koenigsberg, and later to Berlin, and to becoming one of the founders of the Berlin Haskalah, he spent many years wandering around the lands of Belarus (Mahilna, Ivyanets, Mir).
One of the most outstanding circles of the early Haskala arose in Shklov after its annexation to the Russian Empire in 1772, at the court of the merchant, Yehoshua Zeitlin. At his estate, Ustye, Baruch Schick wrote a number of pioneering works in Hebrew on mathematics, anatomy and astronomy. Menachem Mendel Lefin, one of the founders of the Galician Haskalah, wrote a book on ethics. Natives of this circle (Natan Notkin, I. Nevahovich) became the founders of the Jewish community of St. Petersburg.

PARTITIONS OF THE POLISH-LITHUANIAN COMMONWEALTH.
BELARUSIAN TERRITORIES UNDER RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Wars, internal political problems and the growth of the power of the surrounding countries led to the annexation in 1772 of Polish lands by the Austrian Empire, Prussia and the Russian Empire. Russia annexed the following Belarusian territories: all Mstislav voivodeship and significant parts of Vitebsk and Polotsk (modern Vicebsk, Homel and Mahilyow regions). After the Second Partition of Poland in 1793, the Minsk, eastern parts of the Vilna, Novogrudok, Beresteyka, and Volyn voivodeships were included into the Russian Empire. These were the territories of modern Vicebsk, Homel and most of Minsk regions.
After the Second Partition of Poland in 1794, an uprising broke out under the leadership of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a veteran of the American War of Independence. In this and in subsequent uprisings, Jews often took part, as individuals, territorial Jewish defense units and even as entire national military units.

The Third Partition of Poland in 1795 brought about almost the entire remaining territory of modern Belarus into the Russian Empire, with the exception of the territory to the north-west of Grodno region (belonged to Prussia). In 1807, this territory became part of the Duchy of Warsaw, established with the support of Napoleon on the basis of the Treaty of Tilsit. Nevertheless, after the defeat of Napoleon, by the decision of the Vienna Congress of 1814-1815, all the Belarusian lands were already part of the Russian Empire. Despite the disappearance of Poland during the 19th century, there were two large-scale attempts to restore statehood, namely the November uprising (1830-1831) and the January uprising (1863-1864) in which Jews also took an active part.

Until 1772, Jews were forbidden to settle in the Russian Empire. But by the late 18th century, a huge part of the former Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire, with a large number of Jews residing on those territories. At first, the state did not interfere in the community life of the Jews, but they were forbidden to move to Russia's internal provinces. In 1791, the so-called "Pale of Settlement" (the term itself appeared only in 1835) was de facto established, outside of which Jews were forbidden to settle. The entire territory of modern Belarus was within this "Pale of Settlement".

Pale of Settlement by Jewish Population (1835-1917) The "Pale of Settlement" was quite mobile. For example, the Jews also got the right to settle in the newly annexed lands previously owned by Cossacks, Tatars, Moldavians and Turks - evidently with the goal of speeding up the colonization and development of these territories - and later in Courland (under Paul I). Some separate cities, towns and villages could be excluded from the Pale of Settlement for a certain period of time. For the most part of the 19th century, Jews were forbidden to live in villages (it was believed that Jews had a negative
impact on the socio-economic situation in the countryside) and large cities. These restrictions at different times did not apply to such categories of Jews: doctors, merchants of the first guild, educated Jews, those who had served in the army, artisans, Karaites, Bukhara and Mountain Jews. The right to live permanently beyond the boundaries of the Pale of Settlement was granted to some categories of Jews only following the reforms of Tsar Alexander II in the years 1859-1880. In fact, the Pale of Settlement as a legal fact was destroyed by the realities of the First World War.

So the Russian Empire's policy on Jews was not homogeneous. In some periods, there were attempts to provide Jews with access to technical and higher education, and even during the periods of stricter discrimination, certain categories of "useful" Jews were not affected by the Pale line. The economic models common to the Jewish population were perceived by the tsarist government as harmful or unnecessary for the economy. To a large extent, the state policy consisted in various attempts to make the Jews "productive" and more loyal to the authorities, while the religion, culture, social practices and the language of the Jews were perceived as obstacles to this goal.

From 1827, Jews had to serve in the Russian army. The kahals were obliged to provide recruits for military service. Initially, the recruits had to serve in the army for up to 25 years, mainly without the possibility of observing religious rites. Although later the term was reduced, military service was considered a real tragedy, and usually the least protected children of the community were sent to the army. Among other tasks, this decree pursued assimilatory goals.

From 1835, Jews were given the right of perpetual use of land and were allowed to buy land from the state for agricultural activities, provided that Jews would not hire Christian workers. Also, Jewish farmers were given temporary tax and recruit benefits. With this decree, the Russian government sought to engage Jews in the same occupations as the surrounding Christian population.

In 1844, the kahals were officially abolished. Despite the fact that the Jews continued to live in communities, now their domestic legislation was abolished, and they were directly subordinated to the imperial power and its institutions. In 1847, the Russian government created schools to train "government rabbis", graduates of which were allowed to enter universities. Often this proved unacceptable to many communities and created a situation whereby the community had two rabbis simultaneously – a "spiritual" rabbi, hired by the community, and the state one. Also, many graduates of state rabbinical colleges entered the universities mainly in medical and law faculties, which allowed them to have private practice.

After Alexander II came to power in 1855, an epoch of reforms began, some of which directly related to the Jews. In 1855-56, Jews were allowed to be accepted to the civil service which gave them the right to live outside the Pale of Settlement. Jews were equalized with other peoples in matters of military service, the institution of cantonists (forced recruitment of children from the age of 7) was abolished. In 1862, a law was issued which prohibited the baptizing of Jews under the age of 14 without
parental consent. In 1864, a decree was issued authorizing permission to study in gymnasiums for children of all classes and of any religion. In 1879, all Jews with higher education, as well as pharmacists, obstetricians and dentists received the right of universal residence in the Empire, along with merchants of the first guild. The next tsar, Alexander III, abolished many reforms of his predecessor, and generally implemented a much more conservative and authoritarian policy.

Several pogroms took place in the Russian Empire as from the first quarter of the 19th century, but they normally did not lead to deaths. The wave of pogroms swept through the Empire after the assassination of Alexander II on March 1, 1881, and according to researchers it was one of the symptoms of the crisis of a traditional society. The figure of the tsar was sacred in the socio-religious views, so the news of the death of the emperor and the reference to the Jew as one of the killers had an explosive effect, and the traditional law enforcement agencies simply could not cope with the massive street riots. The pogroms of the 1880s were fundamentally different from the pogroms of the beginning of the 20th century, when the authorities did not interfere in what was happening, or they acted de facto on the side of the pogromists. Nevertheless, pogroms provoked a wave of emigration, in particular to the US, as well as the intensification of Jewish political life, the emergence of Jewish socialism and Zionism, the growth of their popularity in the region.

On April 6-7, 1903, a pogrom took place in Kishinev, which struck contemporaries by its cruelty - about 50 people were murdered, and over 500 wounded. The pogrom was associated with the blood libel and fell at the celebration of Easter. The next wave of pogroms was connected with the revolutionary events of 1905-1907, when the factor of political opposition of pro-government and reactionary groups, military and police on the one hand, and detachments of revolutionaries and Jewish self-defense units on the other, came to the fore. At the beginning of the revolutionary events, and especially after the publication of the Manifesto on October 17 (the political concessions of the Tsar to the strikers’ demands), a wave of pogroms swept the Pale, but pogroms were also carried out outside its borders, and revolutionaries, students, and intellectuals were slaughtered on sociopolitical grounds. In 1906, there was a major pogrom in Gomel.

**The First World War**

The day before the beginning of WWI, martial law was imposed in the western provinces of the Russian Empire, and restrictions on personal, economic and political rights were introduced. Jews were often suspected of espionage in favor of the German and Austro-Hungarian armies, which led to either unorganized violence or deportations from front-line zones. For example, the "Great Retreat" of the Russian army in 1915 was accompanied by the intentional destruction of production facilities and infrastructure, large-scale migration, anti-Jewish riots and pogroms that were committed either by retreating demoralized troops or by local populations in conditions of anarchy. In 1916, the Russian side made several attempts to launch the offensive, but for the most part the front stabilized on the line of Dvinsk-Postavy-
Smarhon-Baranovichy-Pinsk. Occupied by the German army, the territories of Belarus were part of the Ober Ost and were under the jurisdiction of the military command, which sought to provide a strong rear, so the infrastructure was restored and expanded.

After the February Revolution in 1917, various national and other political movements intensified in the Russian Empire, and the October Revolution served as a signal for the proclamation of a number of state entities. Southern regions of modern Belarus, namely Brest, Pinsk, Mozyr, and Gomel were part of the newly created Ukrainian National Republic and the "Ukrainian state" of Skoropadsky, which were allied to Germany. The Belarusian People's Republic was proclaimed in 1918 and its authority, substantially limited by the German command, related almost exclusively to cultural issues. Nevertheless, this Belarus national political entity claimed the territory superior to the entire perimeter of the border of modern Belarus, and guaranteed to Jews a wide range of rights.

One of the most influential Jewish parties of the former Pale of Settlement was the General Jewish Labor Union in Lithuania, Poland and Russia, which in 1898 was one of the co-founders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. It was within this party that a group of Bolsheviks appeared in 1903, and in 1912 they already represented a separate structure.

During the Russian Civil War of 1917-22, more pogroms took place, and the authority was exercised by the "Atamans" - commanders of irregular military and gangster formations. One such Ataman was Stanislav Bulak-Balakhovich, who at first fought on the side of the Bolsheviks. Because of his excessive cruelty and high levels of corruption in his units, the Bolsheviks arrested him, but he escaped arrest, moving to the side of the White anti-revolutionary forces. In 1920, Balakhovich switched to the side of Poland and its allies. After the conclusion of peace between Poland and the Bolsheviks, the Poles used Balakhovich for subversive activities in the Soviet part of Belarus. Balakhovich in this period supported the Belarusian national movement. Detachments of Bulak-Balakhovich can hardly be called an army, rather it was a large armed gang, without a definite ideology. Their political orientation depended on who was ready to provide weapons and supplies, and the war was a way of survival and earning money. At the end of 1920, Balakhovich moved to Poland. During the Nazi occupation, he tried to form a partisan detachment to fight the Nazis, but was killed in 1940.

The Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus (SSRB) as part of the Soviet Union, was proclaimed in Smolensk on January 1-2, 1919, and included the eastern part of the Vilno, Vitebsk (without the northwestern part), Grodno, Mogilev, Minsk, the western part of Smolensk, the northern part of the Chernigov gubernias, as well as part of the Suwalk province (north-west of Grodno). In February 1919, the Lithuanian-Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was formed on the territories captured by the Red Army, by the merger of the SSRB and the Lithuanian Soviet Republic.
Military and diplomatic upheavals led in 1920 to the SSRB losing the western, northwestern and eastern territories and consisted of the Minsk province, without several districts, as well as the Vilno and Grodno provinces. The territories along the line Grodno – Shchuchin - Smorgon – Oshmyany – Molodechno - Braslaw passed de jure to Lithuania, but de facto were under the control of Poland and its satellite, the Republic of Central Lithuania, which was sealed by the Treaty of Riga of 1921.

In 1922, the SSRB became one of the founders of the USSR and it is this moment that is considered to be the moment of official consolidation of the name of the BSSR.

**Jews under Soviet Rule:**

**The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic**

Regional differences, important in the context of the functioning of the Jewish community, existed even before the interwar period. In particular, we are talking about the differences between the western and eastern regions, which were the result of a certain state policy and belonging to different state formations in the 18th – 19th centuries. Nevertheless, it was the interwar period that determined a number of distinctive features of these two regions of Belarus. In the territories which became part of the BSSR, the Jews had broad cultural autonomy, and Yiddish was recognized as one of the official languages of the republic. On the other hand, before the "New Economic Policy" (NEP - a transition from the policy of "military communism" towards partial liberalization of economic life in the period 1921-1927), and also after its collapse, a huge mass of the Jewish population was alienated from traditional ways of earning, which were criminalized. These "non-labor" layers of the population were also limited in political and social rights, as the Soviet regime was aimed at promoting the working population and discrimination of "exploitative" elements.

One of the ways to obtain the full range of rights, including the right to free education, was labor activity, in particular collective work on the land, which was encouraged by the government (cooperatives and artels). We should also mention the anti-religious stance of the authorities and pro-governmental Jewish organizations, as well as the existence of a network of underground Zionist and religious educational institutions, underground synagogues and prayer houses.

In 1936-1938, Polish and Yiddish lost the status of state languages in the BSSR. Educational institutions switched to the Russian language or introduced bilingualism. Large-scale arrests of representatives of "disloyal" nationalities took place (in particular Poles who were suspected of espionage).

The practice of burying Jews in communal cemeteries, either in a separate sector or without it, was widely spread. This was facilitated by the absence of Christian symbols. Traditional Jewish symbols were often absent, the five-pointed star replaced both the cross and the Star of David – in this matter eastern Belarus is fundamentally different from the western one, where the break with the religious tradition was not that long. Secularization of the Jews of Western Belarus after WWII was hindered by the
discriminatory policies of the Soviet leadership, as well as the transition to a policy of moderate support for Orthodoxy in these regions – to oppose the influence of Roman and Greek Catholics.

**Jews Under the Second Polish Republic**

In the territories that were part of Poland, relative political and economic freedom remained which nevertheless was followed by periods of political repressions and campaigns to boycott Jewish producers and distributors. Several secular school systems operated here, namely Tarbut, the Yiddish network CYSO, and Yavne. Nevertheless, it was the Polish Republic where important Jewish academic and cultural institutions, for example YIVO, were formed. It is also important to mention the private religious schools and Jewish cinematography, which produced movies to be shown in Europe and the US.

In the sphere of culture and education, the Polish state first carried out a policy of supporting cultural and communal life of national minorities. In May 1926, a military coup took place in Poland, and Józef Piłsudski, a former Social Democrat, a supporter of federalization and Prometheism, came to power. However, he did not risk implementing his program. So the country was ruled by a conservative authoritarian regime, which conducted repressions primarily on a political level, and was in alliance with a part of the national elites. Yet this regime opposed pro-Soviet and pro-German groups, Communists, and Jewish national democrats, who were becoming more and more antisemitic. After the death of Piłsudski in 1935, negative trends in the republic only intensified.

In this situation, the liberal and conservative Jewish parties supported the government, while the Zionist parties and organizations were building up infrastructure to train colonists to Palestine, and the socialist parties were opposed to both the government and antisemitic groups.

From 1914 to 1917, the Polish Bund became a separate party, which managed to preserve and multiply the achievements of the All-Russian organization. The youth organization Tsukunft (Future) operated; so did the network of schools and libraries, public and sports organizations (including women’s organizations), trade union cells, etc.

**The Second World War and the Holocaust**

All this came to an end in 1939, when the Polish Republic was occupied and divided between the Third Reich (September 1 - October 6, 1939) and the USSR (September 17-29, 1939). This was in accordance with the Secret Additional Protocol to the Non-Aggression Pact signed between the USSR and the Third Reich (August 23, 1939), which defined the "spheres of interests" of the parties in the territory of the Republic of Poland. Annexed to the Ukrainian SSR and BSSR were the western territories of
modern Ukraine and Belarus, as well as the territory of modern Poland, for example, Bialystok. In addition to political repressions in the occupied and annexed territories, the Soviet regime carried out repressions in the economic and religious spheres (the only partial exception were loyal Christian Orthodox institutions). In the Jewish context, it is also important to mention specific repressions against Zionist organizations.

In 1941, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union and by July 1941, the entire territory of modern Belarus was under German control. A significant western part, which before 1939 belonged to the Polish Republic, namely the cities of Lomza, Grajewo, Białystok, Sokółka, Bielsk - all in modern Poland, as well as the cities of Grodno and Volkovysk – in modern Belarus - were directly incorporated into the Reich and received the name of Białystok District (Bezirk Białystok). The southern border zone of Polissya (with Brest, Kobrin, Pinsk, Slonim, Petrikov, Mozyr, Rechitsa and Bragin) became part of the "Ukraine Reich Commission". The greater part of the territories was under the jurisdiction of "Ostland Reich Commission" (General District "Belorutenia"). The smallest part - the north-western frontier part of the Vileika region of the BSSR - was part of the general secretariat of Lithuania. The front zones were subordinated to the military command (Army Group Center).

The anti-Jewish policy of the Nazi occupying regime was significantly different in the territories that were included in different administrative units. However, it is still possible to single out some general scheme. Having occupied a certain locality, the German administration tried to provoke or initiate a Jewish pogrom. The members of local ultra-right groups were involved, anti-Jewish propaganda unfolded, the central point of which was the accusation of Jews in complicity with the Soviet repressive apparatus. The fact is that when the Red Army retreated and the authorities were evacuated, all prisoners were killed in Soviet jails. The Germans made Jews exhume the dead bodies for identification by relatives and neighbors, so that they were portrayed in front of grief-stricken people as original accomplices of all that had happened. The pogroms were beneficial to the Germans for several reasons: to portray violence against Jews as the revenge of the local population, to demonstrate their rule as a release from oppression, and to force the Jews themselves to expect the German authorities to protect them from the pogroms.

The next step was the shooting of those categories of Jews from which the Nazis expected resistance - healthy men, Communists, Komsomol members, etc. Then followed the setting up of ghettos, where the Jews were concentrated in one settlement, camp or several blocks of the settlement. Over time, the Nazis abandoned the use of regular military units in "actions" and in the protection of "special objects" (camps), since this had a very detrimental effect on morale and discipline. For this reason, in order to fulfill such tasks in the future, either ideologically prepared units (Einsatzgruppen) or police formations recruited from the local nationalists were engaged. The shootings were often carried out on the territory of the cemetery or near a natural ravine. The cemeteries themselves were destroyed more for pragmatic purposes - the tombstones were used in the construction of important facilities, for example, military roads.
In the eastern regions - the war front and Ostland - mass shootings were typical. In the western territories, in particular those that bordered directly onto the Third Reich, ghettoization, forced labor and deportation to death camps were characteristic.

The forms of Jewish resistance were diverse. The most vivid manifestations were participation in the partisan movement and uprisings in ghettos. Major uprisings were recorded in such cities as Glubokoye, Kamenets, Kletsk, Kobrin, Nesvizh, Novogrudk, Mir and Tuchin. During the retreat of the Wehrmacht troops, in many places of massacre the victims' bodies were destroyed by chemical and thermal methods. Exhumation teams were usually shot after the completion of work.

**POST-WAR PERIOD AND INDEPENDENT BELARUS**

After the retreat of German troops from the territory of Belarus, a Soviet Extraordinary State Commission for the establishment and investigation of the atrocities of the German fascist invaders and their accomplices operated in these areas. This commission established the primary (approximate and incomplete) data on mass graves and the circumstances of mass killings.

According to the 1959 census, there were 150,084 (1.86%) Jews then living in Belarus. After the war, monuments were erected in the places of the most numerous massacres, without mentioning the nationality or religion of the victims. Many cemeteries were demolished and turned into parks and tombstones were used as construction materials. The demolition of Jewish cemeteries by Soviet authorities is considered to be one of the manifestations of state antisemitism, but sometimes it was a pragmatic attitude to the urban and rural space in the absence of a large number of Jewish citizens.

In the late 1980s, within the framework of the Perestroika policy, the national-democratic movement was rising. In 1990-1991 a declaration on the sovereignty of Belarus was written and ratified. In 1991, with the participation of the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, an agreement was signed dissolving the Soviet Union and leading to the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Belarus became an independent state, opening its borders. A mass wave of Jewish emigration to Israel, Germany and the U.S. had a decisive influence on the Jewish population of Belarus which fell from 111,977 (1.10%) in 1989 to 27,798 (0.28%) in 1999.

As of 2009, there were 12,926 Jews living in Belarus, making up 0.14% of the population. Functioning Jewish communities continue to exist in all the regional centres of Brest, Homel, Hrodna, Mahilyow, Minsk and Viciebsk, as well as in other major cities such as Babruysk, Pinsk and Slutsk.
SURVEYS ON THE JEWISH CEMETERIES OF BELARUS:
METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

CREATING A WORKING NATIONAL REGISTER OF CEMETERY SITES

In Belarus, as in most post-Soviet countries, there has been no single recognized register of Jewish cemeteries. With no formalized government policy on preservation and registration of Jewish burial grounds, this task has tended to fall on Jewish communities, various public organizations and individuals. Accordingly, these communities and organizations, international academic institutions and individual enthusiasts have their own versions of such lists. Such lists have not been comprehensive and contain certain inaccuracies.

The project set itself an ambitious objective: to find, visit and produce an initial description of all Jewish cemeteries of Belarus, both preserved and demolished, with no exceptions or omissions. In turn, this required collecting all the information available on Jewish cemeteries in Belarus from a wide range of sources, comparing it, and forming a primary list of cemeteries, which was subsequently submitted to further verification by field-based teams.

The task was complicated by the fact that during the second half of the 20th century more than a quarter of Jewish cemeteries on the current territory of the Republic of Belarus were physically wiped off the map, and the gravestones were removed or stolen. As a rule, such cemeteries do not appear in existing databases. The only way to find and localize such a cemetery has therefore been to work with historical sources. Such a detailed research on the historical source material on the Jewish cemeteries of Belarus has not been conducted before.

These parameters formed the specifics of the project. At its preparatory stage, it was necessary to conduct a separate study, the task of which was to identify all the Jewish cemeteries which were somehow mentioned in the literature about the cities, towns, villages and shtetls of Belarus. The result of this study provided a list of 717 specific sites and was utilized as core material for the field work. The field team physically located and surveyed 401 of these Jewish cemetery sites.

Respectively, the sources we used in this survey fall into two categories: a) the available databases of Jewish cemeteries in Belarus, and b) historical sources, memoirs and studies containing information on Jewish cemeteries.
** Sources and Databases **

International academic projects on the Jewish cemeteries of Eastern Europe. Among these, the most important and complete was the Virtual Shtetl database, a joint project of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews “Polin”, and the Jewish Historical Institute, both of Warsaw. This database contains complete and very accurate information on the history and current status of over a thousand Jewish burial places on the territories which at one or more periods were part of Poland, or were located in its zone of influence. Among these are 156 Jewish cemeteries which today are located in Belarus. However, this database practically does not cover the territory of today’s eastern regions of Belarus. An important work was also undertaken by the Sefer Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization (Moscow), which conducts student summer schools to study and catalogue Belarusian Jewish cemeteries. The partial catalogues of Zhaldodok, Liepel, Hlybokae and Beshankovichy cemeteries were prepared and edited since 2012 by the Sefer Center. The Shtetl Routes database of Brama Grodskaya - Teatr NN in Lublin, Poland, also provided critical resource material for this project.

International projects on Jewish genealogy, which also refer to Jewish cemeteries. An example of such a database is the International Jewish Cemetery Project, created by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. Formally, it contains information on 383 Jewish cemeteries on the territory of Belarus, but to date more than a half of the information is inaccurate or incomplete. Nevertheless, it is this database which includes information about individual restoration projects and the cataloging of specific cemeteries, initiated by descendants of people buried there. In terms therefore of an updated status report on specific sites, the importance of such information for this survey is difficult to overestimate.

Local research or memorial projects conducted under the patronage of local Jewish communities or organizations in Belarus. A successful example of this has been the project of the Mahilyow Jewish community, known as "Bond of Life" ("Uzel Zhizni"), led by Ida Shenderovich. Within the framework of this project, the cemeteries of Bychaw, Dashkawka, Drybin, Sukhary, Rasna, Chausy, Shklow and Mahilyow were catalogued.

Engineering projects for the restoration of cemeteries and the construction of fences, among which the project of Dr. Michael Lozman (USA) is singled out. The Jewish cemeteries of Kamenka, Uselyub, Rubiazhavichy, Svir, Sapotskin, Indura, Lunna, Sharashova, Antopal and Kuranets were fenced by Dr. Lozman with the help of groups of Jewish students from various institutions in the USA.

Finally, it is necessary to mention the private database of the Minsk historian, Alexei Yeremenko, who has visited and surveyed about 300 Jewish cemeteries in Belarus as from the year 2000 to the present day. Despite a number of inaccuracies, the information provided by him was of notable value, primarily because it was based, inter alia, on personal interviews with locals with direct memory of the physical presence of pre-war Jewish communities in their localities and who remembered the
whereabouts and fate of the Jewish cemeteries. Unfortunately, this source is being slowly lost to us. Yeremenko’s database and photographic resource proved invaluable in the geographical identification of most sites.

**HISTORICAL SOURCES**

In terms of the preservation of historical source material, there are profound differences between the situation in the western and eastern regions of present-day Belarus. Western regions of Belarus, which until 1939 formed part of the Polish Republic (Hrodna and Brest regions, parts of Minsk and Vitebsk regions) were well studied, in particular by Polish historians. A comparatively large amount of source material is available on the history of specific Jewish communities in these regions.

Emigration processes have also played their role in this. Many Jews from the towns and cities of present-day Western Belarus emigrated before the Second World War mainly to North and South America and Palestine, forming landsmanschaften in their new countries. Later, these immigrants were to become the authors of numerous memorial books dedicated to their native towns and villages - the so-called Sifrei Zikaron, or Yizkor books. These works provide extremely detailed collections of memoirs in Hebrew or Yiddish about the life of their native settlements in the 1920s and 30s, subsequently compiled and published in the post-war period. Critically, these publications generally contain chapters describing in detail all the Jewish cemeteries in the area.

Quite often, a so-called "memory map" is attached to these Sifrei Zikaron, such as a map of the shtetl drawn from memory, marking the most important objects in the town. The cemeteries, one of the key components of community life, are usually marked in great detail. Here, we also find the old cemeteries, which had been closed or destroyed before the war or mass emigration, and were not marked on topographic maps. In such cases, memory maps are the only source that helps localize these burial grounds.

Yet in Eastern Belarus, which from 1919 till 1991 was part of the Soviet Union, the history of Jewish communities (especially small ones) remains very poorly studied. During the 20th century, as a result of war, enforced assimilation, lack of community identity and cohesion of Jewish communities, historical memory was almost lost, while many of the most important community documents, including archival records, were destroyed. Obtaining any information apart from the scanty population statistics today requires either detailed archival work (impossible within the limited timescale of the project) or turning to oral history, represented by interviews with Holocaust survivors, which often contain memories of the pre-war life in the settlements.

Another form of resource on the communities specifically of Eastern Belarus is traditional Jewish literature - primarily the rich hagiographic and memoir literature of Habad Hasidism. With almost no other sources available in this region, the only evidence of the existence of a community in certain settlements during the 18th-early
19th centuries was often the fact that either a rabbi or mentor of this movement operated in this community.

Further important circumstantial evidence in favor of the presence or absence of a cemetery is the time when the community was founded and the presence of community structures (synagogue, rabbi, etc.) in the town, as well as the peak level of Jewish population (usually based on Russian census figures of 1897 or adjoining years). Given all these difficulties, ultimately, it was decided to collect information about all known settlements in current-day Eastern Belarus which had populations of over a hundred Jewish residents according to the census of 1897, and to include these in the initial search sheet.

Still, it is the view of the authors of this report that further detailed research is required specifically in the Mahilyow and Homel regions of Eastern Belarus.

**HISTORICAL MAPS**

Topographic maps of the 1860s-1930s were an invaluable resource in the detection and localization of Jewish cemeteries and the identification of their pre-war land plots and perimeters. Polish, Russian and Soviet military topographic maps with scales of 1:100,000 mark non-Christian burial grounds with special distinguishing signs, a T-shape in Polish maps and a sort of mirror image of the numeral one in Russian maps. Maps with scales of 1:75,000 and larger allow also to establish the exact shape and perimeter of the land plot occupied by the cemetery. In a number of cases, gates, pre-burial houses and keeper's lodges are also visible.

**The ESIF study utilized:**

- Topographic maps of the Polish Military Geographic Institute (*Wojskowego Instytutu Geograficznego (WIG)*, 1919 - 1939), scales of 1:100,000 and 1:50,000, covering the territory of the Second Polish Republic and its border areas;

- The Map of the Western Frontier Region produced by the Corps of Military Topographers of the Army of the Russian Empire (*Корпус военных топографов Российской императорской армии*) and subsequently, of the Soviet Union, on a scale of 1:42,000, which was published from the 1880s up to the First World War, and subsequently updated and reprinted until the late 1930s. These extensive maps cover most of the territory of modern Belarus, except for the east of Mahilyow region and most of the Homel region.

- The map of the Office of Military Topographers of the General Staff of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army, (*Военно-топографическая служба Генштаба Рабоче-крестьянской Красной армии (РККА)*) 1937-1941, on a scale of 1:100,000, used during the Second World War.
In some cases, it was necessary to refer to the Schubert’s Russian military topographical map with a scale of three versts (a Russian unit of distance equal to 1.067 kilometers, or 0.6629 mile) in an inch, which was issued in the 1860s and covered the entire territory of modern Belarus.

These mapping resources enabled the establishment not only of the location and pre-war perimeters of the burial grounds, but also the discovery of a number of previously unknown Jewish cemeteries. Most of the cemeteries, found in this way, were already demolished, but some have been perfectly preserved. These include, for example, the new cemetery in Syanno and the old cemetery in Starobin. The fact that they had not been included in any of the existing lists very accurately characterizes the state of research to date.

**FIELD RESEARCH**

With the purpose of verifying the collected information and conducting the field surveys, six field teams were assembled. The tasks of these field teams included:

1. Locating the Jewish cemetery by address and GPS coordinates identified during the preparatory phase, or interviewing respondents, in such cases where addresses were unavailable or where the presence of a cemetery in the area required additional verification.
2. Determining the exact location of the object and its GPS coordinates.
3. Establishing cemetery perimeters and marking borders on Google maps.
4. Primary description of the cemetery (address, degree of preservation of the object, initial dating, identification of necessary engineering works, assessment of threat levels, etc.).
5. Site photography.

Completed standardized survey forms, maps and photographs were sent digitally, with the aid of a specially developed information processing system, to the coordination center for the project (ESJF Kyiv office), where collation and processing of data was carried out.

Initial fieldwork took place in July-September 2017. Working in the summer months presented the difficulty of physically collecting material during a period of vegetation abundance, which sometimes made cemetery access problematic. In some cases, excess vegetation precluded the possibility to exactly locate cemetery evidence, or to significantly hamper photographic material. Where this occurred, teams were re-sent into certain locations in the fall.
INFORMATION PROCESSING

The short duration of the project coupled with vast amounts of material naturally implied high risk of error. Consequently, all the information received required constant verification and control, most importantly with regard to the correspondence of cemetery addresses, GPS coordinates, photographs and primary descriptions.

EPIGRAPHICAL DATING

Any brief information about a Jewish cemetery necessitates the dating of the object. This testifies to the historical and cultural value of the object, and places the cemetery into historical context and turns it into an important (and often, only) source which narrates the life of the destroyed community.

The date of the founding of Jewish cemeteries in Belarus is known only in some very rare cases. Most often, this refers to the "new" cemeteries that arose during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and only if the history of the community was well documented. The period of the founding of older cemeteries, as a rule, is unknown and generally lost in local legend.

The only reliable method to date a Jewish cemetery is by epigraphic study: determining the dates of the oldest and the latest surviving tombstones. Unfortunately, individual epigraphic study on about 400 cemeteries goes far beyond the timescale, possibilities and tasks of this project. Therefore, with regard to the dating of cemeteries, this research cannot be viewed as solely independent. In a number of cases, we have used previously-conducted studies (primarily, the research of the Virtual Shtetl expeditions led by Dr. Krzysztof Belyawsky, as well as the studies of the Sefer Center, etc.). In such cases where studies were not carried out, we listed an approximate dating, based on the photographs of surviving tombstones obtained during the field work.

Only in certain cases were we able to conduct vigorous and localized epigraphic study. In a particularly notable example, the ESJF located four tombstones from the 17th century, including one from 1646, which is now known to be the earliest surviving tombstone on the territory of Belarus, pre-dating the previous discovery by some fifty years.

LOCATION DATING

In some cases, the very location of the cemetery can assist in approximate dating. In the traditional shtetls of Eastern Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, a tradition had formed to site the plots for the cemeteries above a river or lake or sometimes, separated from the town by a river, or beyond the town limits but not far from the center of the town and preferably in direct line of sight from the synagogue. With the
extension of urban areas, many of these cemeteries ultimately became located in the center of the settlements and in close proximity to synagogue courts (schulhoyfn) and sometimes even directly adjacent to them. This is true of, for example, the old cemeteries in Antopal, Iwy, Karelichy, Kamyanets, Smarhon, David-Haradok, etc. Most often, these cemeteries were closed and partially destroyed well before the Second World War. Up to now, cemeteries of this type have mostly not been preserved (one of the rare examples of preserved cemetery of this type is the old cemetery in Lyskava) and it has been impossible to date them epigraphically. In these cases, the very location of the site indicates that the cemetery was founded shortly after the emergence of the community, and therefore most likely in the 17th-18th centuries.

In the 19th century, when an old cemetery was filled, the community generally purchased a new plot, usually just outside the settlement. Accordingly, the period of the appearance of the “new” cemetery quite often (though not always) coincides with the period of passage of the settlement boundary in the vicinity of the cemetery. Later, of course, these settlements developed and the cemeteries appeared inside the boundaries.

In the late 19th century up to the outbreak of the Second World War, the practice arose to purchase plots for new cemeteries far enough beyond the settlement limits and usually close to important routes. Cemeteries of this type, as a rule, remain outside of urban development today. Examples of these are the demolished “new” cemeteries of Sharashovo, Malech, the third cemetery in Antopal (on the route to Detkavichy), etc. This particular location type is therefore clear evidence of a later foundation of a cemetery, most often during the early 20th century.

Thus, there emerges a general pattern whereby the closer a cemetery is to the historical center of a settlement, the earlier its foundation. There are of course, exceptions to this rule - for example, the “old” cemetery in Dawhinava with tombstones from 1734, which is one kilometer outside the northern boundaries of the settlement, while the “new” cemetery in Dawhinava, from the mid-19th century, is located much closer to the center of the settlement.

**Geographical Naming**

Throughout the project, settlement names were identified (and are in this report) by their Belarusian-language equivalents. All geographical names (except streets) are filed in English according to the English phonetic transcription from Belarusian.

In addition to the current Belarusian names of settlements, we found it necessary to also indicate the Russian and Polish names, which had at various times historical sovereignty on the territory and were used by the Jewish communities themselves. Polish and Russian names are filed in modern spelling in both their original form and in English transliteration. Where place names are referred to in a pre-20th century context, they are called by the contemporary name, rather than a current modern-day Belarusian equivalent.
As for what we have termed the “Hebrew”, or Jewish, names of the settlements, there is no accepted normative spelling of the names of Belarusian settlements. Among the different variants of spelling of these names, preference was given to the most commonly used contemporary names by local Jewish populations, that is, the one most frequently mentioned in the Jewish literature of the time. Sometimes, this form reflects the normative spelling in Yiddish as determined by the YIVO Institute (Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut יידישערװיסנשאַפֿטלעכער אינסטיטוט), in other cases, this is closer to modern Hebrew transcription, and sometimes this is an intermediate version.

**History of the Communities**

The emergence, existence and destruction of cemeteries are integral parts of the history of the Jewish communities which used them. With practically no historical data available on many Jewish communities in Belarus, the cemeteries have become often the only source of reliable information about the appearance, size and social institutions of these communities. And vice versa. Quite often, all we know about the cemetery is the period of the formation and the size of the community that used it; the time of its destruction and the names and dates of death of the outstanding members of this community, who were buried there.

Thus, we regarded it as imperative to include in the cemetery survey a brief historical reference about the community to which this cemetery belonged.

The search and selection of relevant information for such a reference also presented a rather complex task. When selecting information, we focused on the following points:

- the period during which the community first appeared (which is usually the lower boundary of the period of the appearance of the cemetery);
- the size of the community at different periods of its existence, including the largest recorded number (usually by the Russian census of 1897 or in the 1910s);
- the key social institutions of the community;
- the fate of the community during and after the Holocaust;
- outstanding cultural and historical events, as well as individuals associated with the community (the emergence of large intellectual centers, yeshivas and Hasidic courts, as well as prominent natives).

Until today, there has been no single comprehensive work which has included such information on more than 400 Jewish towns in Belarus.
The following key reference material was used in the preparation of this publication:


A full list of sources utilized in the production of this publication follows at the end of this volume.

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ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative
Kyiv 2017
AN ONGOING THREAT TO THE PRESERVATION OF JEWISH HERITAGE

The Jewish Cemeteries of Belarus – Status Report 2017

While the practical activity involved in the preparation of this report involved historical research and site surveys, the real objective of the project was to collect information for the subsequent preservation and fencing of all Jewish cemeteries located on the territory of the Republic of Belarus. Cemeteries were classified into the following eight categories:

1. Protected and fenced cemeteries.
2. Protected and fenced Jewish sections in municipal cemeteries.
3. Ongoing or finished ESJF projects.
4. Unprotected Jewish sections in municipal cemeteries.
5. Unprotected and unfenced Jewish cemeteries.
6. Unprotected and unfenced Jewish cemeteries under immediate threat.
7. Demolished but not overbuilt Jewish cemeteries.
8. Demolished and overbuilt Jewish cemeteries.

The number of cemeteries surveyed during the project in each category reflects the situation of the Jewish cemeteries in the Republic of Belarus as of the end of 2017.
OVERALL RESULTS

The results of this classification are reflected in the following diagram:

Belarus Jewish cemeteries
401 cemetery

1. Protected and fenced Jewish cemeteries
2. Protected and fenced Jewish sections on municipal cemeteries
3. Ongoing or finished ESJF projects
4. Unprotected or unfenced Jewish sections on municipal cemeteries
5. Unprotected or unfenced Jewish cemeteries
6. Unprotected or unfenced Jewish cemeteries with are in danger
7. Demolished, but not overbuilt Jewish cemeteries
8. Demolished and overbuilt Jewish cemeteries

1. Seventy Jewish cemeteries in Belarus out of 401 surveyed sites are surrounded by at least a minimal form of fencing marking the territory and offering some level of protection.

This number represents 18% of the total in the country. It includes cemeteries surrounded by metal or concrete fencing of at least a height of 1m20, (Ashmyany, Barysaw Old, Radashkovichy, etc.), as well as those with symbolic low masonry or wooden fencing which demarcate the site but do not ostensibly provide physical protection from vandalism, theft or desecration (Kleck, Narach, Svir, Kapyl and others).
2. Only two sites in Belarus, at Slutsk and Smalyavichy, both in Minsk region, were identified in this national survey as protected and fenced Jewish sections in municipal cemeteries.

These sections are a post-war phenomenon which arose in conditions of assimilation and secularization of the traditional communities in the USSR. Such sections very rarely have their own fencing within the totality of the municipal cemetery.

3. During the course of 2017, the ESJF European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative began physical protection and fencing work in Belarus and completed a single pilot project at the Chachersk New Cemetery (located in the nearby village of Novozakharpolye, Homel region).

Additional preparatory work has also been carried out at a number of other sites in advance of construction work in 2018.

Taken together, these above three categories, collectively representing 73 sites (22% of the total in Belarus), can be considered as protected and therefore do not require urgent fencing works.
4. Seventeen Jewish burial sites on the territory of Belarus were recorded by our survey teams as Jewish sections in municipal cemeteries which do not have their own fencing.

As a rule, these sections are separated from non-Jewish graves only by pathways between sections. In the conditions of demographic growth in these settlements on the one hand, and the severely reduced or no-longer existent Jewish populations on the other, there remains a direct threat of these sections being superceded by non-Jewish burials in these areas. Current Belarusian legislation makes any construction, including fencing, on the territory of operating municipal cemeteries extremely difficult. Nevertheless, in each specific case, the situation must be checked for compliance with halachic norms.

Photo: Pinsk

5. The survey noted 102 Jewish cemeteries, or slightly more than a quarter of all those in Belarus, to be what we have termed unprotected and unfenced Jewish cemeteries, which face potential, if not necessarily immediate destruction.

This particular category is the most common pertaining to the situation of Jewish cemeteries in Belarus. These burial grounds are generally abandoned, do not have even symbolic fencing or demarcation and are totally neglected. Many were seriously damaged during the Second World War but somehow survived into the post-war period, with at least some of their tombstones preserved. In certain cases, the land plot on which the cemetery is located is not indicated in local cadastral maps as a burial ground. Consequently, these sites do not have any protection from potential construction projects, agricultural, commercial or domestic usage. While they may not
yet be under immediate development, they are unprotected from any potential claims to their territory.

6. Some 17% of the total, or 67 cemeteries, were defined by the survey as unprotected and unfenced Jewish cemeteries, which are under urgent and immediate threat.

These unfenced Jewish cemeteries are located either in zones of residential, industrial or commercial development or active agricultural land use. Among these is a separate group of Jewish cemeteries whose territory is directly threatened by replacement by non-Jewish burials or where there has already been encroachment of non-Jewish burials on the cemetery territory. The most egregious examples of this phenomenon were found at Bykhaw and Krichav in Mahilyow region and at Hrozava in Minsk region. Before the Second World War, these cemeteries belonged to Jewish communities. In the post-war period, the communities either ceased to exist or were critically reduced in population. The cemeteries were completely or partially appropriated by the state, and Christian burials took place on their territories - either on separate and destroyed sections of the Jewish cemetery, or throughout its territory on unused plots.

In another group of cases, the territory of the cemetery is currently divided by private households. Separate cemetery plots therefore currently appear to be part of household yards or vegetable gardens. For example, at Budslaw in Minsk region, the cemetery site is today occupied by the backyard of an adjoining household and is used as a site for wood chopping. Similarly, in Razhanka, Hrodna region, parts of the cemetery are today used as an apple orchard.
7. 47 cemeteries (12% of the total) have been obliterated at ground level, but are not overbuilt.

In most of these cases, these sites were destroyed above ground not for the construction or other utilization of the site, but rather for the secondary use of Jewish tombstones. Stone is a rare and expensive building material in the heavily forested country of Belarus, where building material is traditionally of wood. During the German occupation during WWII, Nazi local authorities adopted the practice of using Jewish tombstones as a cheap and available material for paving roads, building foundations and other construction needs. In this sense, the wanton and deliberate destruction of Jewish cemeteries during WWII was not only ideological, but also practical – as a cheap and available resource of building materials. In the post-war period, this practice was continued by the Soviet local authorities and often directly or indirectly associated with state-sponsored antisemitism. As Jewish communities disappeared from Belarusian towns and villages, local residents also adopted this practice. The tombstones from abandoned Jewish cemeteries were gradually removed and used for household needs, the construction of foundations, steps, bridges and roads. Even today, while ostensibly illegal, this practice continues and still represents a serious threat to the surviving objects. In other cases within this category are found the cemeteries which were demolished with the specific intention of site development, but which was not ultimately realized. For example, the cemetery of Astryna was demolished in order to build a stadium, but this municipal plan was not carried out, and the site is today used for cattle grazing. These areas are now most often rural or urban wastelands, used for a razing cattle, waste dumps or for arable farming. Sometimes such a plot, overgrown with trees, is used as a local park (Novaya Mysh). Cemeteries of this category, without any visible preserved signs of the Jewish burial ground, are therefore under the most serious threat. They require urgent delineation, fencing and demarcation as Jewish cemeteries.

Categories 4, 5, 6 and 7 listed above form a total of 235 cemeteries (58% of all Belarusian Jewish cemeteries) and require protection and fencing. It is likely that if this action is not performed in the near future, these sites will disappear.
According to our survey findings, 93 Jewish cemeteries in Belarus (23%) are already lost.

These sites have been completely demolished, with their territories used for residential housing (Byaroza, Malaryta, Dzyarzhinsk, Sinyavka, Maladzyechna, Smarhon', etc.), kindergartens and schools (Malech, Antopal, Kosava, Lyakhavichy et al), factories or other industrial use (Khomsk, Hantsavichy, et al) commercial use (Ivanava, Slonim et al), entertainment (Lyakhavichy New Cemetery), parks and recreation (Berazino Old, Lahoyks, Pleschanitsy, Nyasvizh, Iwye, etc.), stadiums (Brest, Minsk, Hrodna, Adelsk, etc.) or other use.
REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Amount of Jewish cemeteries in the six regions of the Republic of Belarus are represented in next six diagrams:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Cemeteries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brest</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homel</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrodna</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahilyow</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsk</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicebsk</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparative analysis of statistics on these six regions allows the following two conclusions to be drawn.

1. Brest region demonstrates an extremely high number of demolished cemeteries and a very low number of protected cemeteries. 68% of all Jewish cemeteries within the boundaries of the modern Brest region, or 48 objects, have been demolished without any visible trace. This number is more than twice the average for all other regions, as can be seen from the following graph:
Of these 48 cemeteries, the territories of 26 are overbuilt, while 22 are not, meaning that in the latter case, their territories can be protected and fenced. Conversely, the other 37% of Brest region cemeteries are essentially irretrievably lost. This indicator, in turn, also twice exceeds the average for other regions. The reasons for this strange anomaly are unclear but we can make several assumptions. The Brest region of the Belarus Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was formed in 1939 and since 1954 it has existed in its present borders. Specific decisions regarding the demolition or preservation of Jewish cemeteries in the post-war BSSR depended on the nature of the specific local and regional heads of the Soviet administration. We can therefore posit that in the post-war period, individual or collective personnel management decisions were conducive in facilitating policies of widespread demolition of Jewish cemeteries in the given region, at least in places where there were no existing Jewish communities. Another possible reason for such strange statistics lies in the history of the demolition of Jewish cemeteries during the German occupation. In this case, it is necessary to turn to the difference between Brest and the nearest Hrodna region during this period. The Brest region, like most territories of modern-day Belarus, including the eastern part of the Hrodna region, were absorbed into the Reichskommisariat "Ostland", while the western part of the Hrodna region (the former Bialystok region) was included in the so-called "Bezirk Bialystok". Nazi policies towards Jewish cemeteries in various administrative units of the Reich could be different, but in this case, the statistical anomaly between the Brest region and the rest of today’s Belarus is difficult to explain. Another possible reason for such anomaly is the relatively high degree of preservation of various historical sources about the communities of Brest region. It is therefore possible that these sources enabled the compilation of a more complete listing of cemeteries of the region, including the old, abandoned and partially destroyed sites from before the Second World War. Accounting for such objects here in Brest (based on information which was not available from other regions) could lead to the indicated deviations in the statistics. In any case, these issues can and should be investigated in greater detail.

2. The Minsk region, by contrast, has a very high index of the number of preserved and fenced Jewish cemeteries. This figure is 27% of the total number of sites, or 22 objects. The two fenced Jewish sections in municipal cemeteries found in Belarus by the ESJF survey during the project, are also located in the Minsk region. Of the 24 Jewish cemeteries in the Minsk region that are fenced, 13 were fenced after 1991 and 11 earlier. Most likely, the proximity to Minsk, the capital of Belarus, played its role, where both under the independent Republic of Belarus and in the post-war Soviet period, this was the largest and most active Jewish community in the country. Inter alia, this fact possibly also influenced the Soviet administration of the Minsk region.
**Western and Eastern Belarus**

There is a clearly different political history of Western Belarus, which formed part of the Polish Republic from 1919 to 1939 and preserved the traditional Jewish communities during this period, being annexed by the Soviet Union only in 1939, from that of Eastern Belarus, which was already part of the USSR from 1919. This makes interesting comparison of the statistics on the preservation and protection of Jewish cemeteries in these two regions. In regions of present-day Western Belarus, we refer to territories that were part of the Second Polish Republic, notably, the Hrodna and Brest regions, as well as six western districts of the Minsk region and six western districts of the Viciebsk region. For the purposes of this study, Eastern Belarus can be termed as the totality of the Mahilyow and Homel regions, 16 districts of Minsk and 14 districts of Viciebsk, forming part of the BSSR. Differentiated statistics are therefore displayed here for these two regions in the following diagrams:

The data here presented allows us to make three rather unexpected conclusions.

1. There is a fundamental difference in the percentage of demolished cemeteries in these two regions in favor of Eastern Belarus. In Western Belarus, 43% of sites are demolished, whereas the figure is only 27% in Eastern Belarus. However, this difference has a very simple explanation. As already mentioned above, the history of the communities of Western Belarus is much better documented. Using various sources, we were able to obtain much more information regarding the demolished cemeteries of Western Belarus. In Eastern Belarus, information about many demolished cemeteries simply has not been preserved for the historical record. The
cemeteries that we know about today in these regions are, in the first place, the preserved sites.

2. There is an obvious difference in the number of Jewish sectors in municipal cemeteries between the two parts of modern-day Belarus. In the eastern areas, this number represents only 8% of the total number of Jewish cemeteries, whereas in Western Belarus, the number of recorded objects of this type is negligible: only two Jewish sections, or just 1%. This indicates a curious regional difference. It seems that in post-war Belarus the common Soviet practice of creating Jewish sectors in municipal cemeteries existed exclusively in the eastern regions, i.e. in the parts that were already part of the Soviet Union prior to WWII. This exactly mirrors a similar disparity between western and eastern regions of neighboring Ukraine. In Western Belarus, the surviving Jewish communities preferred a different practice, not common for Soviet territory, whereby new and separated Jewish cemeteries arose around WWII Nazi mass killing sites. Soviet authority, aimed at assimilation of communities, opposed this trend throughout the Soviet Union. Obviously, the key factor in Western Belarus was community identity, which was very strong in the early post-war years when this practice was born. In Eastern Belarus, the processes of assimilation by 1945 significantly weakened this identity, and the Soviet practice of common municipal cemeteries became widespread.

3. The above findings notwithstanding, the most striking conclusion from the data provided from the surveys is that the overall situation with regard to the preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Western and Eastern Belarus is almost identical. The reasons for this are in the general fate of Jewish cemeteries during the Second World War or in the post-war period. As already mentioned, most of the territory of Belarus, both Western and Eastern, was part of the Reichskommissariat «Ostland», that is, it had a single administration. Consequently, the policy towards the Jewish cemeteries in these two regions was identical. Still more likely is that seventy years of common destiny under Soviet rule in both Western and Eastern Belarus, have brought to naught most of the fundamental differences between these regions. The situation that we observed in these surveys was primarily formed precisely during this period.
KEY FINDINGS

- At least a quarter of all the cemeteries that once existed on the territory of modern-day Belarus have been destroyed.

- At least two thirds of those remaining require urgent demarcation and fencing to ensure their preservation.

- No more than a quarter of all sites which ever existed in Belarus have any form of protection whatsoever.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The physical protection of Jewish heritage in Belarus requires an urgent plan of action based on the coordinated fencing of cemeteries across the country.

- It would appear that minimal or token fencing based on clearly visible demarcation of cemetery boundaries provides effective protection for Jewish cemeteries in Belarus.

- Given a situation where almost 300 sites require fencing in Belarus, it is reasonable to assume that such fencing protection could be achieved within a relatively short timeframe. The likely costs of fencing cemetery sites – taking into account variables of size, gradient and condition – should not exceed an average cost per site of $30,000. Therefore, it remains a feasible objective to physically protect all the threatened Jewish cemeteries in Belarus as part of a comprehensive protection initiative for a cost which we estimate should not exceed $10,000,000 at 2017 pricing.
Glossary of Terms

Terms pertaining to the cemetery sites and the history of Jewish communities in these regions, sometimes utilise the original language, written in Anglicized form. A glossary of such terms is included below.

Admor (Hebrew anacronym): Hasidic leader - meaning “Our lord, our teacher, our rabbi”. See, Rebbe.

Aktion (German): A term often utilised to denote coordinated killing operations, or deportations of Jews, by Nazi German military units, in the occupied areas of Europe, during WWII.

artel (Russian): A cooperative association that existed during the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Especially prevalent from the time of the emancipation of the Russian serfs (1861), until the 1950s. In the later Soviet period (1960s–1980s), the term was mostly phased out with the complete monopolization of the Soviet economy by the state.

beit midrash, batei midrash pl. (Hebrew): House, or room for the study of religious texts.


bimah (Hebrew): A reading table, lectern or podium, usually placed in the center of a synagogue, from where the Torah, and in some synagogues, prayers, are read.

blood libel: The false and maliciously perpetuated accusation that the Jewish people use the blood of Christians for religious purposes.

BSSR: The Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, a client state of the Soviet Union. It existed from 1922 to 1991 as one of fifteen constituent republics of the USSR.

**Forstadt** *(German)*: A settlement created outside the city walls, sometimes enclosed, and usually situated in front of a town, or city.

**gadol, gedolim pl.** *(Hebrew)*: Meaning ‘big’ or ‘great’. The term is used to refer to the most revered rabbis of the generation.

**gadol hador** *(Hebrew)*: Refers to the rabbi who is the greatest of the generation. See gadol.

**genizah** *(Hebrew)*: A storage area in a synagogue, or cemetery, designated for the temporary storage of worn-out Hebrew-language books and papers on religious topics. They are placed here prior to burial in a Jewish cemetery.

**ghetto** *(Italian)*: Areas established by the Nazis, to confine the Jewish population into tightly-packed areas in the cities or towns of occupied Europe. The Nazis most often referred to these areas as Jüdischer Wohnbezirk, or Wohngebiet der Juden, both of which translate as “Jewish quarter”. These Nazi ghettos sometimes coincided with traditional Jewish ghettos and Jewish quarters, which were established pre-German occupation.

**Gordonia**: A Zionist youth movement, founded in Poland in 1925, and based on the beliefs of Aaron David Gordon. These included that the salvation of the Land of Israel and the Jewish people would come through participation in manual labor and the revival of the Hebrew language.

**Hashomer Hatzair** *(Hebrew)*: A Socialist-Zionist, secular Jewish youth movement founded in 1913, in Galicia, Austria-Hungary.

**Hasid, Hasidim pl., Hasidic adj., Hasidism movement** *(Hebrew)*: All refer to membership of, or the movement of, Jewish revivalism which spread across Eastern Europe from the end of the 18th century, until the present day. It is typified by an adherence to a major spiritual/religious leader, or personality, known as an Admor, or Rebbe and often named after the town, or settlement, where the movement was based.

**Haskalah** *(Hebrew)*: An intellectual movement, which grew among the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. It arose as a defined ideological worldview during the 1770s and ended around 1881, with the rise of Jewish nationalism. The Haskalah promoted rationalism, liberalism, freedom of thought and enquiry, and is largely perceived as the Jewish variant of the Enlightenment.

**Hechalutz** *(Hebrew)*: A Jewish youth movement that trained young people for agricultural settlement in the Land of Israel. It became an umbrella organization for
the pioneering Zionist youth movements. It was founded by Eliezer Joffe in America in 1905. Russian leaders of the organization included Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (the second President of Israel), and David Ben-Gurion (the first Prime Minister of Israel).

**heder, haderim pl.** *(Hebrew, Yiddish)*: A traditional Jewish elementary school teaching the basics of Judaism and the Hebrew language.

**herem** *(Hebrew)*: Ban, commercial or social boycott, or order of excommunication.

**Hevra Kadisha**: Jewish burial society.

**Judenrat** *(German)*: Jewish councils set up by German occupying forces in WWII to ensure that Nazi orders and regulations, regarding the Jewish population, were implemented.

**kahal** *(Hebrew)*: The religious, organizational structure of a Jewish community.

**kalte schul** *(Yiddish)*: The large, or great synagogue of a town. Literally, the cold synagogue. Often too expensive to heat in winter because of its imposing stone structure, so prayers were held in smaller, wooden structures, or houses, at this time.

**kloyz, kloyzn pl.** *(Yiddish)*: A house where scholars assembled — a place of study intended for adult male scholars. Usually a private house of study, existing separately from the institutions of the community and financed by a patron.

**maggid, maggidim, pl.** *(Hebrew)*: An itinerant Jewish preacher.

**mashgiach ruchani** *(Hebrew)*: A spiritual instructor in a yeshiva, generally of the Mussar movement.

**Maskil, Maskilim pl.** *(Hebrew)*: Term used to describe an adherent of the Haskalah movement. See Haskalah.

**matzevah, matzevot pl.** *(Hebrew)*: Gravestone, or grave marking, from the Hebrew verb «to erect».

**melamed** *(Hebrew, Yiddish)*: A religious teacher, or instructor of children, sometimes privately engaged.

**menorah** *(Hebrew)*: The seven-branched candelabra used in the Temple of Jerusalem, or the eight or nine-branched candelabra used for the festival of Hanukkah.
**mikve, or mikva** (*Hebrew*): A Jewish ritual bath.

**minyan** (*Hebrew*): A quorum of ten men required for communal Jewish prayer. Also, a prayer group.

**Mitnaged, Mitnagdim pl.** (*Hebrew*): Orthodox Ashkenazic non-Hasidic Jews, or those opposed to Hasidism. Centred in Lithuanian and Belarussian yeshivot.

**Mizrachi** (*Hebrew*): Religious Zionist movement, founded in 1902, in Vilnius.

**Mussar** (*Hebrew*): A Jewish ethical, educational and cultural movement that developed in the 19th century in Lithuania, particularly among Orthodox Lithuanian non-Hasidic Jews. The Hebrew term Mussar is from the book of Proverbs 1:2 meaning ‘moral conduct, instruction, or discipline’. The term was used by the Mussar movement to refer to efforts to further ethical and spiritual discipline.

**netilat yadayim**: (*Hebrew*) Ritual handwashing, such as before eating bread, or prior to prayer.

**ohel, ohelim pl.** (*Hebrew*): A structure covering the gravesite of an important religious personality, usually Hassidic, and sometimes taking the form of a mausoleum. Literally, ‘a tent’.

**pinkas, pinkasim pl.** (*Hebrew*): Community notebooks, or registers, or chronicle of community events.

**Poalei Zion**: (*Hebrew*): A movement of Marxist Zionist Jewish workers formed at the turn of the 20th century in Eastern and Western Europe.

**pogrom** (*Russian*): A violent riot aimed at the massacre or persecution of an ethnic or religious group, particularly a riot aimed at the massacre, or persecution, of Jews. The term originally entered the English language in order to describe 19th and 20th century attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire, mostly within the Pale of Settlement, in what would become Ukraine, Belarus and Poland.

**posek** (*Hebrew*): Jewish religious legal, expert in halachic matters.

**Rebbe** (*Yiddish*): Derived from the Hebrew word rabbi, meaning “master, teacher, or mentor”. Like the title “rabbi”, it refers to teachers of Torah. Mostly used by Hasidim to
refer to the leader of a Hasidic movement. See **Admor**.

**schul** (*Yiddish*): Synagogue

**schulhoyf** (*Yiddish*): Synagogue yard containing one, or more, prayer houses.

**shtadlan** (*Yiddish*): An intercessor figure who represented the interests of the local Jewish community, negotiating for the safety and benefit of Jews with the authorities in power. The process of Jewish intercession is known as shtadlanut.

**shtetl** (*Yiddish*): A certain type of Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe, generally within the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire, where Jews made up the vast majority of the local population.

**shtiebel, stieblach pl.** (*Yiddish*): The room, or house hosting small prayer gatherings. An alternative, often Hasidic, to official, or more formal synagogues.

**Shoah** (*Hebrew*): The Holocaust, the genocide of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators. The word means “destruction” in Hebrew and is interchangeable with Holocaust in common usage.

**Shulchan Aruch** (*Hebrew*): The most widely consulted of the various legal codes in Judaism. Authored in Safed, Israel, by Joseph Karo in 1563. Together with its commentaries, it is the most widely accepted compilation of Jewish law ever written.

**SSRB**: The Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus, an early republic in the territory of Belarus after the collapse of the Russian Empire as a result of the October Revolution.

**talmud torah** (*Hebrew*): Jewish elementary schools imparting only Jewish and religious instruction and texts. See **heder**.

**tarbut** (*Hebrew*): A network of Hebrew-language, Zionist schools.

**tziyun** (*Hebrew*): Grave marker, often a monument and sometimes in the form of a grave, indicating the burial of an important personality, usually a rabbi, at a Jewish cemetery. The tziyun is not necessarily on the actual site of the burial.

**Va’ad** (*Hebrew*): A Jewish community council, sometimes a committee of rabbis.
**Wehrmacht** *(German)*: The unified army of Nazi Germany.

**yeshiva, yeshivot pl.** *(Hebrew)*: Jewish educational insitution focussing on the study of religious texts, principally, the Talmud.

**YIVO** *(Yiddish, abbr.)*: The Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut (Yiddish Scientific Institute). Set up in 1925 in Wilno (now Vilnius) in the Second Polish Republic (now Vilnius, Lithuania). An organization that preserves, studies and teaches the cultural history of Jewish life throughout Eastern Europe, Germany and Russia and other studies related to Yiddish. The English name of the organization was changed to the Institute for Jewish Research, subsequent to its relocation to New York City, although it is primarily known by its Yiddish name. It still serves as the de facto recognized language authority, of the Yiddish language.

**Yizkor** *(Hebrew)*: A memorial prayer recited on Jewish festivals, a call to memory.

**Yizkor book**, a collection of memories, generally of a Jewish town, or settlement.
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LIST OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN BELARUS

1. PROTECTED AND FENCED JEWISH CEMETERIES

BREST
Kobryn New Cemetery, Lyskava Old Cemetery, Mikashevishe, Motal' Old Cemetery, Pinsk Parkovaya Street Cemetery, Pružany.

HOMEL
Brahin, Kapatkevichy, Lenin, Narowlia New Cemetery, Parychy, Pyetrykaw, Rechytza, Streshyn, Yel’sk Old Cemetery, Yel’sk New Cemetery, Zhytkavichy.

HRODNA

MAHILYOW
Asipovichy, Babruysk New Cemetery, Byalynichy, Cherykaw, Hlusk New Cemetery, Horki, Kastsyuakovichy, Khotsimsk, Klimavichy, Krasnapolle New Cemetery, Kruhlaye, Mahilyow.

MINSK

VICEBSK

2. PROTECTED JEWISH SECTIONS INSIDE MUNICIPAL CEMETERIES

MINSK
Slutsk Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Smalyavichy Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section).
3. COMPLETED OR ONGOING ESJF PROJECTS

HOMEL
Chachersk New Cemetery.

4. UNPROTECTED AND/OR THREATENED JEWISH SECTIONS INSIDE MUNICIPAL CEMETERIES

BREST
Pinsk Posenichy Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Pinsk Spokoynoe Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section).

HOMEL
Hoiniki Beregovoho Street Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Hoiniki Karl Marx Street Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Homel Osovtzy Cemetery (Jewish Section), Kalinkavichy Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Mazyr Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Svetlahorsk Mucipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Uvaravichy Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Zhlobin Molodezhnnoe Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section).

MINSK
Berazino Municipal Cemetery (Jewish Section), Minsk Vostochnoye Cemetery (Jewish Section).

VICEBSK
Polatsk Krasnoe Cemetery (Jewish Section).

5. UNFENCED JEWISH CEMETERIES, OR SEVERELY DAMAGED OR OLD FENCING

BREST
Damachava, Haradzishcha, Kosava New Cemetery, Lakhva, Lyskava New Cemetery, Palonka, Ruzhany, Tamashowka, Vowchyn.

HOMEL
Loyew, Ptsich, Rahachow, Shchadryn, Skarodnaye, Staryya Zhuravichy.

HRODNA
Aharodniki, Belitsa, Dzyalyatsichy, Dzyarechyn, Halshany, Indura, Izabelin, Kamenka, Kreva, Lunna New Cemetery, Malaya Lapenitsa, Masty Levyya, Mscibava, Novy Dvor,
Pieski, Porazava, Ros', Svislach, Traby, Tsyryn, Turets, Uselyub, Vawkavysk, Vowpa, Zaleski, Zhaludok.

MAHILYOW

MINSK
Abchuha, Babownia, Bahushevichy, Chernewka, Dukora, Haradok, Kamen’, Kraysk, Kryvichy, Lebedzeva, Pahost (Salihorsk district), Shatsak, Svir, Syaliba, Uretcha, Vishnyeva, Zaskavichy, Zembin.

VICEBSK

6. UNFENCED JEWISH CEMETERIES, REQUIRING URGENT FENCING

BREST

HOMEL
Lelchytsy, Pobalava, Tsikhinichy, Turaw, Vetka.

HRODNA
Aziarnitsa, Bakshty, Halynka (Hrodna district) Old Cemetery, Halynka (Hrodna district) New Cemetery, Halynka (Zelva district), Lipnishki, Orlia, Sapotskin, Shchuchyn, Soly, Vyalikava Byerastavitsa, Zhuprany.

MAHILYOW
Bialynkavichy, Bykhaw, Dashkawka, Drybin, Krychaw, Malyatsichy, Milaslavichy, Mscislaw, Rodnya, Slawharad, Zaviarezha.

MINSK
Budslaw, Dzedzilavichy, Dzerawnaya, Halopenichy, Hrozava, Ivyanets New Cemetery, Krasnaye, Losha, Pahost (Berazino district), Pukhavichy, Smilavichy, Starobin Old Cemetery, Tsimkavichy, Uzlyany, Zaslawye.

VICEBSK
Astrowna, Babinavichy, Beshankovichy, Chareya, Dzisna New Cemetery, Liozna, Krasnaluki, Pyshna, Sharkawshchyna, Selischa, Syanno Old Cemetery, Vidzy, Yanavichy.
7. **DESTROYED BUT NOT OVERBUILT JEWISH CEMETERIES**

**BREST**

**HOMEL**
Peradavaya, Skryhalaw.

**HRODNA**
Azyory, Astryna, Dvarets, Nyahnevichy.

**MAHILYOW**
Haishyn, Halowchyn, Haradok, Liubonichy, Naprasnawka, Starasellie.

**MINSK**
Ivyanets Old Cemetery, Minsk Kollektornaya Street Cemetery, Samakhvalavichy, Snow New Cemetery.

**VICEBSK**

8. **DESTROYED AND OVERBUILT JEWISH CEMETERIES**

**BREST**

**HOMEL**
Chachersk Old Cemetery, Haradzets, Hoiniki Semidesyatiletiya Oktyabrya Street Cemetery, Homel Sozhskaya Street Cemetery, Homel Selyanskaya Street Cemetery, Homel Landysheva Street Cemetery, Kholmech, Narowlia Old Cemetery.
HRODNA

MAHILYOW
Babruysk Old Cemetery, Hlusk Old Cemetery, Krasnapolle Old Cemetery, Klichaw, Lapichy, Sialets, Zabyalyshyn.

MINSK

VICEBSK
Braslaw Old Cemetery, Sirocina, Slabodka, Smalyany, Orsha Old Cemetery, Polatsk Lokomotiv Stadium Cemetery, Talachyn Old Cemetery, Vicebsk Putna Street Cemetery, Vicebsk Luchesskoye Cemetery, Vicebsk Akademika Pavlova Street Cemetery.