

*To the memory of  
John Doyle Klier*

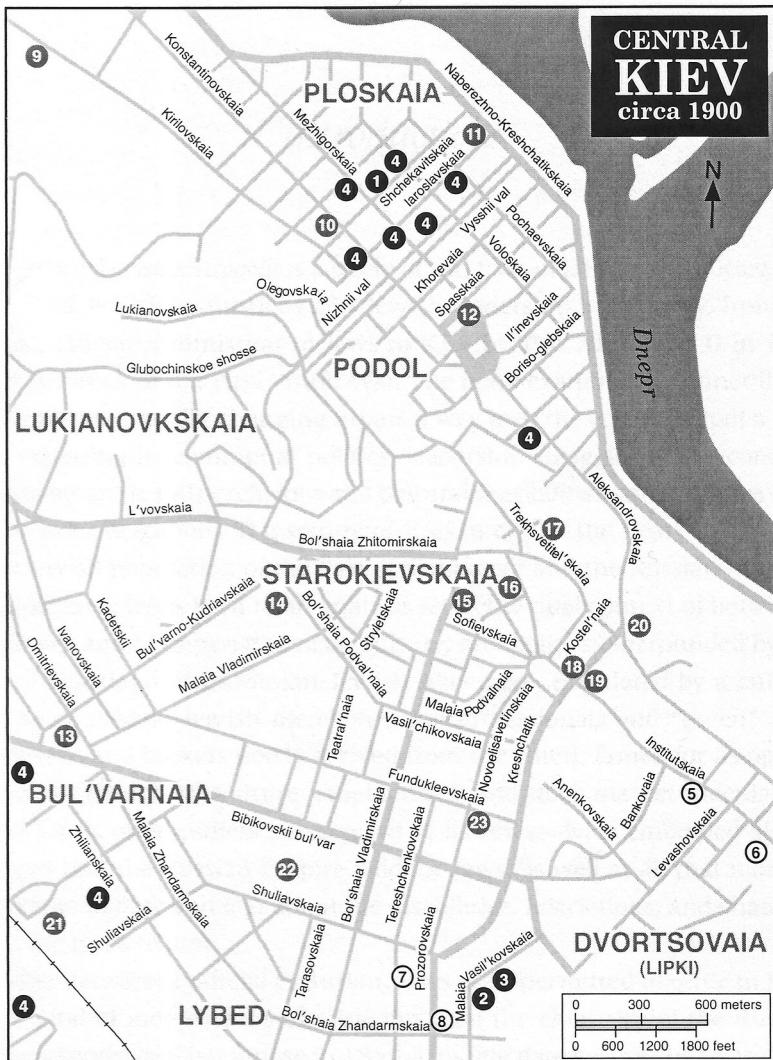
## THE JEWISH PALE OF SETTLEMENT IN RUSSIA, 1835 - 1917



Map 1. The Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia, 1835-1917. From Sir Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of Jewish History*, © Sir Martin Gilbert (2010), Routledge, reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK.



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Central Kiev, c. 1900. Cartography by Margaret Seiler, based on map in The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe.

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# Acknowledgments

This book is based on my second doctoral dissertation, defended at Brandeis University in 2008. I really appreciate the generous advice and support of a number of individuals and organizations during my work on the book. First and foremost, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to my thesis adviser, Professor Antony Polonsky. He brought me to Brandeis as a doctoral student, which allowed me to successfully pursue my academic career in the United States. His lectures, advice, and our scholarly conversations helped me gain a deeper understanding of Western historiography, which has had a major influence on my work. I would also like to thank Professor Polonsky for his intensive review and careful editing of this work, as well as his wife Arlene, to whom I am grateful for her many improvements to the text. Professor Marcus Levitt of the University of Southern California was kind enough to edit several chapters of this work, for which I am very grateful.

The excellent lectures of Brandeis University Professors Jonathan D. Sarna and Benjamin Ravid deepened and widened my knowledge of Jewish history. Professor Sarna's academic support, interest in my work, and personal encouragement gave me confidence in my scholarship and inspired my work on my dissertation and this book.

The thoughtful advice, recommendations, and comments of the late Professor John Doyle Klier helped shape this work. I had the good fortune to meet Professor Klier in 1991 in the Kiev archives at the beginning of my academic career. He had a major influence on my formation as a scholar and helped me many times during my academic career. Professor Klier was the external reader for my first doctoral dissertation in 1996 at the Russian State University of Humanities in Moscow, and he provided comments and corrections for four chapters of my second dissertation before his untimely death in 2007.

I really appreciate all the help and encouragement of Professor Maxim D. Shrayer. Professor Shrayer encouraged me to publish this book with Academic Studies Press and found financial support for its publication. The publication of this book was also supported by a publication grant from Millersville University. I want to give special thanks to the Faculty Grant Committee, the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Diane Umble, and the Chair of the History Department, Professor Ronald Frankum for their support for the preparation of my book and their encouragement of my work.

I began to gather materials for this book while I was a Eugene and Daymel Shklar Fellow at the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University in the fall of 2002. My conversations with Professor Roman Szporluk and Dr. Lubomyr Hajda guided the formulation of this work's main ideas. My access to Harvard University's libraries, which I had during this scholarship, and later during the years of my association with the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (HURI), gave me access to many important sources for this work.

I would like to thank my colleagues Simon Rabinovitch and Natan Meir for their suggestions and advice. Natan Meir's book, *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: A History, 1859–1914*, and several of his articles became important sources for this text.

My visits to Kiev and YIVO archives and libraries were made possible due to the generous support of a number of American institutions and organizations. I received the Natalie and Mendel Racolin Memorial Fellowship at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, two grants from the Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, an IREX (The International Research and Exchanges Board) grant, a Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Faculty Professional Development Council grant, a Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation grant, and several grants from Brandeis University. I really appreciate this generous financial support for my research.

The late Mrs. Alla Spektor, who was an archivist at the Center for Studies of the History and Culture of East European Jewry in Kiev, generously helped my research in the Kiev archives. I am very thankful for the advice of Mr. Mikhail Kalnitsky, a senior scholar at the Center,

whose works brought to light many unknown aspects of the history of Kiev and its Jewish community. I would like to express my gratitude to the Director of the Center for Studies of the History and Culture of East European Jewry, Leonid Finberg, and to Mr. Kalnitsky for their permission to use illustrations from their collections in this book.

I really appreciate the endless support of my parents, Michael Khiterer and Ludmila Brovarnik, and their encouragement of my education and my work on this book. Finally, I must give my heartfelt thanks to my husband James E. Danaher, who is the indefatigable editor of my writings, and who cheerfully supported me throughout all my trials and tribulations in completing this monograph.

Without this scholarly, financial, moral, and practical support, this work would certainly not have been possible. Thanks to you all!

# Abbreviations

CAHJP—The Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People,  
Jerusalem

DAKO—The State Archive of the Kiev Region

DAMK—The State Archive of the City of Kiev

GARF—The State Archive of the Russian Federation

PSZ—Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii (The Complete  
Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire)

RGIA, St. Petersburg—Russian State Historical Archive, St.  
Petersburg

RGVIA—Russian State Military Historical Archive

TsDAKFFD U—The Central State Archive of Film, Photo, Sound  
Documents of Ukraine

TsDIAK U—The Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in the  
City Kiev

YIVO—YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York

# A Note on Dates, Spelling, and Names

Pre-revolutionary dates in this book are given in the “Old Style.” In conformity with academic practice, pre-revolutionary Russian orthography has been modernized. Transliterations follow the Library of Congress method, except where a common usage in English is well-established.

In the text I use “Sholom Aleichem.” In notes, I refer to the famed writer with his name as spelled in the title page of the cited work; thus “Sholem Aleichem” also appears.

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# Introduction

Only serpents slip their skin  
While their souls remain unchanged  
Alas, in us the soul constantly changes  
While the body cannot alter.

—Nikolai Gumilev

You cannot understand Russia with logic,  
A common yardstick cannot measure it:  
It is unique—  
You can only believe in Russia.

—Fedor Ivanovich Tiutchev

**M**y memories of Kiev are mixed: love and nostalgia for my native city, where five generations of my family lived, beginning with my maternal great-great grandparents who settled in the city in the late nineteenth century; and, simultaneously, bitter recollections of my encounters with anti-Semitism, which I faced many times when I lived there. I believe many Kievan Jews have shared my feelings. Kiev, like the Roman God Janus, has always had two faces turned toward Jews: one smiling and beckoning them to the city with far better conditions than in the overcrowded shtetls of the Pale of Settlement, commercial

and business opportunities, the possibility of a good education, and a vibrant cultural life; the other face snarling, “Go away, Yids, or you will be killed, you will find your death in Kiev.” This was no idle threat. Violence struck Jews many times in the city, beginning in Kievan Rus’ and up to the present day. Jews have paid a high price for the right to live in Kiev.

My family was no exception to this rule. My great-great grandparents first achieved financial success in Kiev—they had a store on the city’s central street, Kreshchatik, where they sold sterling silver. But their wealth became the cause of their demise. During the civil war in Ukraine (1918–1920), their store was robbed three times; the third time, the pogrom-makers, upset at finding an empty store, killed them. My grandmother told me that her grandparents were killed by *petliurovtsy* (members of the Ukrainian National Army), but neither she, nor her mother, were in Kiev at the time. She heard this story a few years later, from her grandparents’ neighbors. Hence my great-great grandparents could have been murdered by any of the various bandits roaming Ukraine in those years.

What was Kiev for the Jews? A Jewish city, with one of the wealthiest and largest Jewish communities in the Russian Empire and a multitude of Jewish organizations and institutions? Or *Yehupets* (i.e., Egypt, as Sholom Aleichem calls the city in his works), the place with the worst Judeophobia and anti-Semitism in Russia, and the most severe persecution of Jews by the authorities?

I know the term *Yehupets* may be new and surprising for Western readers, but it best characterizes one of the city’s two faces and its nature and attitude toward Jews. I therefore use this term with the hope that it will be associated with the history of Jews in Kiev in future historical literature. Sholom Aleichem, who lived there for more than a decade, referred to Kiev as *Yehupets*, recalling the biblical account of the brutal enslavement of the Hebrews. Just as the Hebrews had suffered in Egypt under the pharaohs, so Kiev Jews suffered under their local “pharaohs,” as policemen were called in Russian slang.<sup>1</sup> In Kiev,

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<sup>1</sup> Hryhorii Hryhoriev, *U staromu Kyevi* (Kiev: Radians’kyi pys’mennyk, 1961), 65.

the police were continuously hunting for illegal Jews, and made weekly night round-ups of them.<sup>2</sup> (Kiev was outside of the Pale of Settlement, and only certain categories of Jews were officially allowed to live there.) The local authorities required the Jewish community to pay the police to perform this task from the basket tax funds. If the police detected illegal Jews in Kiev, they immediately expelled them from the city. Local officials worked hard to re-categorize some legal Jews as illegal, and thereby expel them. However, the authorities' efforts to decrease Kiev's Jewish population failed, as the desperate poverty of the Pale swept in wave after wave of Jewish migrants. Thus, the Jewish population of Kiev increased steadily, from the beginning of the 1860s to the February 1917 Revolution.

However, we can understand the complexity of the history of Jews in Kiev only in the context of the city's long and complicated history.

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KIEV HISTORY

I believe that some old cities change their soul and national character many times during their existence. One such is my native city, Kiev. Kievan Jewry also changed its features many times along with the city.

Kiev is a city with a thousand-year history. The city has been ruled by the Khazars, Normans (i.e., Norsemen), Slavic princes, Tatars, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, again the Soviet Union, and finally by independent Ukraine. Kiev became the capital of the Kievan Rus' state in the ninth century. In 1240, the Mongols occupied Kiev, and the Kievan Rus' rulers lost their independence. The Mongol occupation led to a degradation of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the city. In 1362, Kiev was occupied by the Lithuanian State. After the Union of Lublin of Poland and Lithuania in 1569, Kiev became part of the Poland-Lithuanian State, and was the principal city of the Kiev *Voevodstvo* (administrative-territorial unit) from 1470 to 1700. As a result of the Ukrainian war for liberation from Poland, Left Bank Ukraine and Kiev became part of the Russian Empire in 1654. From 1654 to 1700, Kiev was under Hetman

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2 “Za proshlyi god,” *Voskhod* 1 (1897): 43–45; 1 (1898): 49–50; 1 (1899): 35.

(Ukrainian political leader) rule, the Hetman being appointed by the Russian tsar. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, rule by a Russian-appointed governor was established in Kiev. During this period, Kiev was the main city of Kiev province. In 1832, the office of governor-general was established in Kiev, and it became the main city of the southwestern region of the Russian Empire, which included the three provinces of Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia. All these political transformations were reflected in the changing outlook, character, and spirit of the city. We cannot talk about one Jewish community in Kiev. Instead, there was a sequence of different Jewish communities that were established in different historical periods after the repeated expulsions of Kiev's Jews. Each of these Jewish communities was very different in their origin and character.

According to some Western scholars, Kiev was established sometime between the eighth and the first half of the ninth century by Khazarian Jews, and originally had the typical features of a Central Asian city. Khazarian Jews were Turkic by origin. Thus, the first Jewish community in Kiev was formed by non-Ashkenazic, Khazarian Jews. Omeljan Pritsak believes that these pre-Ashkenazic Jews lived in Kiev and Eastern Europe before their expulsion by the Lithuanian Grand Prince Alexander in 1495.<sup>3</sup> The Ashkenazic Jews, who came from Poland, first settled in Kiev during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

## HISTORICAL GOALS, PROBLEMS, AND METHODS

This book describes the history of Jews in Kiev from the foundation of the first Jewish community in the tenth century until the February Revolution of 1917. Kiev's Jewish community was one of the largest in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1913, over eighty thousand Jews lived in Kiev. My work focuses on the social and economic history of Kiev Jewry, and provides biographical sketches

<sup>3</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, "The Pre-Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe in Relation to the Khazars, the Rus' and the Lithuanians," in *Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Historical Perspective*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj and Howard Aster (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1988), 15–16.

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