ZHITOMIR

ZHITOMIR, city in Zhitomir district, Ukraine. Under Polish rule (until 1792) Jews were not authorized to live in Zhitomir, but some had settled there under the protection of government officials. In 1753 a *blood libel case was brought to court there; two Jews from the surrounding villages were executed and others were compelled to convert. In 1789 the Jewish community numbered 882, about a third of the total population. They comprised innkeepers, merchants, and craftsmen. When the city was annexed by Russia (1792), there were 1,300 Jews, and by 1847 their number had risen to 9,500. During this period, Ḥasidism spread to Zhitomir and *Ze'ev Wolf of Zhitomir was one of the disciples of the *Maggid of Mezhirech. With the establishment of the government-authorized rabbinical seminary there (1847), teachers and pupils of *maskilim* circles gathered in the city; they included H.S. *Slonimski, A.B. *Gottlober, and E. *Zweifel. In 1873 the rabbinical seminary was converted into a seminary for training teachers for the Jewish government schools. This seminary was closed in 1885. The first Jewish vocational school in Zhitomir was established in 1862 and enjoyed a good reputation, but it was closed in 1884 because the authorities believed that its instruction gave the Jews economic superiority over the Christians. *Mendele Mokher Seforim, A. *Paperna, and A. *Goldfaden also lived and studied in Zhitomir, and H.N. *Bialik (who was born in the village of Radi, near Zhitomir) spent his childhood there.

From the 1870s, the community shared in the general decline of the city following dispossession of the region's Polish landowners and the construction of the railroads, which initially bypassed Zhitomir. In 1897 there were 30,748 Jews who formed 46.6% of Zhitomir's total population; their number rose in 1910 to 38,427. Ninety per cent of those engaged in commerce were Jews, as were 60% of the city's craftsmen. In April 1905 pogroms broke out in the city at the government's instigation. The Jewish youth, Zionists and socialists, organized a *self-defense unit and fought with the rioters. About 15 Jews were killed, including the Russian student N. Blinov, who joined the Jewish self-defense action. Ten Jewish youths from the townlet of *Chudnov who were called in to assist the Jews of Zhitomir were murdered on their way there. In January 1919 pogroms were perpetrated by the Ukrainian army and a mob from the neighboring villages; 80 Jews lost their lives and much property was looted. In March 1919, after the soldiers of *Petlyura had captured Zhitomir from the Red Army, riots broke out and 317 Jews were murdered. At the time of the Polish conquest (1920), the Jews suffered from the brutality of the Polish soldiers. As soon as the Soviets gained control of the city, the organized community was liquidated and Jewish life disintegrated. In 1926 there

were 30,000 Jews in the city (38% of the total population).

Many Jews fled from the city during the German occupation (1941). Those who remained, as well as many Jews from the neighboring townlets, were imprisoned in a ghetto and executed on Sept. 19, 1941. After the liberation of the city, thousands of Jews, former inhabitants as well as others, returned. According to the census in 1959, there were about 14,800 Jews (c. 14% of the total population) in Zhitomir, but the real number was probably closer to 25,000. There was a well-kept cemetery and a synagogue with a rabbi. During High Holidays thousands congregated in and around the synagogue. Yiddish was often heard in the streets. The synagogue building was ordered to be destroyed in 1962 to make way for a large apartment house, and the Jewish community rented a new apartment for its needs.

Until 1990, the city had approximately 12,000 Jews. After the Iron Curtain was lifted, thousands immigrated to Israel, the U.S., and Germany. Those that remained established congregations throughout the northern and western Ukraine. Zhitomir serves as the headquarters for 167 official congregations, 29 of which have their own synagogue and 28 that have their own daily Torah study groups. The Jewish community in Zhitomir itself has a synagogue, a community center, a *mikveh*, yeshivas, kindergartens, a day school, a university for men, a library, a soup kitchen, a women's club, a boarding house for boys and for girls, and a cemetery.

[Yehuda Slutsky /

Ruth Beloff (2nd ed.)]

Hebrew Printing

The first Hebrew printing press in Zhitomir was established in 1804 by the wandering printer Ẓevi Hirsch b. Simeon ha-Kohen, who came from *Zolkiew (Zholkva), where he had worked as a typesetter. He had worked in the printing press in the town of *Nowy Dwor, and had subsequently possessed his own press in 1796 in Kopel, and in 1803–04 in Brezitz (Beresty). Ẓevi Hirsch had his printing press in Zhitomir until 1806, and during the three years of its existence at least nine books were published, five of which were ḥasidic and kabbalistic works. In 1847 a second printing press was established there by the three brothers Ḥanina Lipa, Aryeh Leib, and Joshua Heschel Shapira, sons of Samuel Abraham Abba Shapira, the printer in *Slavuta. Until 1862 this was one of the only two Hebrew presses the Russian government permitted to operate in the whole of Russia, the other being in Vilna. This press had 18 hand presses and four additional large presses. In 1851 Aryeh Leib broke away and established his own printing press in Zhitomir. In these two establishments only sacred books of every kind were printed. During the years 1858–64 the press of the two brothers printed a beautiful edition of the Babylonian Talmud together with the *Halakhot* of Isaac *Alfasi, while between 1860 and 1867 Aryeh Leib printed an edition of the Jerusalem Talmud.

In 1865 a Hebrew printing press was established by Abraham Shalom Shadov, and in 1870 another one by Isaac Moses Bakst. In 1888 the Hebrew press of Brodovitz was founded, and in 1891 this passed into the possession of his successors. In c. 1890 a printing press was founded by Joseph Kesselman and in c. 1902 it passed into the possession of his widow Rachel, who entered into partnership with Elijah

Feinberg. In these three presses all kinds of Hebrew and Yiddish books were printed.

[Avraham Yaari]

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